

**For discussion on
24 January 2017**

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Policy Address 2017

Policy Initiatives of the Food and Health Bureau

Vision

The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) is committed to building a healthy society and formulating related policies under its ambit. On the food safety and environmental hygiene fronts, we will continue to ensure food safety and provide a clean and hygienic environment to promote public health and raise the living standards of our citizens.

New Initiatives

Public Markets

2. The Government will build sizable public markets in new development areas (NDAs) and has initially identified suitable sites in the Tung Chung New Town Extension Area and Hung Shui Kiu NDA. The Government will continue to identify suitable sites in other NDAs. We hope that the two new strategically located public markets can be developed into large-scale markets in their respective regions. In other words, the markets are intended to serve not only Tung Chung New Town Extension and Hung Shui Kiu NDA but also the whole Tung Chung and Tin Shui Wai areas. In addition, we will continue to enhance the hardware of a number of existing public markets, including reprovisioning, reconfiguration and upgrading of facilities, etc. We will also take forward progressively the installation of air-conditioning in public markets which have obtained overwhelming support from tenants (totalling 10 markets at present¹). We will endeavour to deliver hardware

¹ On 1 July 2015, the Government lowered the threshold of tenants' support for the retrofitting of air-conditioning systems in public markets from 85% to 80%. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has since consulted the Market Management Consultative Committees (MMCCs) of those public markets without air-conditioning. In the event, the MMCCs of 27 markets/ cooked food centres/cooked food markets indicate support for conducting the questionnaire surveys. Based on the results of the questionnaire surveys, there are seven markets where sufficient (i.e. at least 80%) tenants support for the retrofitting of air-conditioning facilities has been obtained. Together with the three cases in which sufficient tenant support to carry out retrofitting of air-conditioning facilities has been obtained vide a questionnaire survey conducted before

and management enhancement in parallel with a view to revitalising and modernising the operation and management of markets, so as to ensure that the enhancement measures are sustainable.

Enhancing Animal Welfare

3. Over the years, the Government has been adopting a multi-pronged approach towards animal welfare, including disseminating messages that help promote care for animals and responsible pet ownership through various community education and promotion programmes, as well as preventing and combating acts of animal cruelty. To regulate animal trading properly, the Government has amended the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Animal Traders) Regulations (Cap. 139B) to better regulate animal trading, as well as breeding and trading of dogs. In the past few months, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has started the relevant preparatory work, with a view to implementing the new regulatory control on 20 March this year.

4. In addition, the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights was formed at the end of last year. Issues to be discussed, including promoting responsible pet ownership and reviewing existing legislations related to animal welfare, are consistent with our policy objectives.

Keep Clean Campaign

5. The Government launched the two-month “Keep Clean 2015 @ Hong Kong: Our Home” campaign in August 2015. Having reviewed the merits of the exercise, the Government has put in place a regular meeting mechanism with the Chairmen and Vice-chairmen of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Committee of the District Councils to keep track of the latest environmental hygiene situations on the ground and key areas requiring attention, thereby allowing us to review and adjust our strategies in addressing district environmental hygiene issues in a timely manner. The last meeting was held on 20 September last year. Issues discussed at the meeting included the installation of Internet Protocol (IP) cameras at refuse dumping blackspots to enhance surveillance on illegal dumping of refuse and plan more effective enforcement actions. The pilot scheme has commenced since 30 December last year, whereby IP cameras had been installed at six fly-tipping blackspots in Central & Western, Sham Shui Po and Yuen Long Districts. The initial responses to the pilot scheme from the three Districts were positive. On 10 January this year, we briefed the Panel on the outcomes and follow-up actions of these meetings. The Government will provide an additional funding of \$119 million annually to intensify the cleansing of the environment, particularly targeting on hygiene blackspots and mosquito prevention and control work. In addition, the Government will step up the law enforcement prosecution efforts.

the support threshold is lowered, the Government is actively taking forward the follow-up work on the ten cases.

Revitalisation of Farmland

6. According to the New Agriculture Policy announced in 2016, FHB and the Development Bureau will jointly commission a consultancy study to identify the location of relatively large areas of quality agricultural land as Agricultural Priority Areas (APAs), and explore how to formulate suitable policies and measures to provide incentives to encourage owners to put fallow agricultural and into long-term agricultural use, with a view to promoting sustainable development of local agriculture.

On-going Initiatives

Columbarium Policy

7. To cater for the growing demand for columbaria from the public, the Government has adopted a three-pronged approach namely, increasing the supply of public niches, promoting green burial and regulating private columbaria.

8. To increase the supply of public niches, the Government has been actively promoting the district-based columbarium development scheme, under which 24 potential sites in 18 districts have been identified. The Government has largely completed the initial studies. We have been consulting the respective District Councils on the development of the sites since the second quarter of 2011. Hitherto, we have consulted nine District Councils on 14 projects² respectively. Together, the 14 projects can provide a total of about 590 000 new niches (representing two-thirds of the total number of new niches under planning). The Government will continue to consult the District Councils on the remaining projects to fortify the supply of public niches in the coming 15 years.

9. In the interest of sustainability, the Government is taking active steps to promote “green burial” by encouraging the public to use a more environmental-friendly and sustainable way for handling ashes of the deceased, including scattering the ashes in Gardens of Remembrance (GoRs) or at sea. The Government launched a new round of publicity and promotion efforts last year to promote green burial, including posters and promotional videos, as well as a major public education and publicity event at Kowloon Park Piazza. In recent years, there has been an upward trend in the percentage of choosing green burial for the deceased by their families. In 2016, the FEHD handled more than 4 900 green burial cases, accounting for about 10.5% of the total number of deaths in Hong Kong, which was a

² The 14 projects are respectively located in Cheung Chau, Diamond Hill, Wo Hop Shek, Tsang Tsui, Tsing Tsuen Road, Sandy Ridge, Cape Collinson, Wong Nai Chung Road, Shek Mun, Kwai Chung (two sites), Lai Chi Yuen and Siu Ho Wan (two sites).

significant increase compared with about 4.6% in 2010.

10. To address the long-standing problems caused by the operation of unauthorised private columbaria, the Government introduced the previous Private Columbaria Bill (the Bill) into the LegCo on 25 June 2014. Although the resumption of the second reading of the Bill was derailed by filibustering on another bill in the last LegCo, the Government re-introduced the Bill to the current LegCo on 23 November last year. The re-introduced Bill, which is based on the Bill previously submitted, has incorporated a total of 547 proposed Committee Stage Amendments (CSAs)³ supported by the previous LegCo Bills Committee. Securing an early enactment of the Bill for implementing a licensing scheme as soon as possible to regulate private columbaria represents a cross-party consensus. We will continue to render full support to the LegCo in the scrutiny process and hope that the LegCo will support the early enactment of the Bill. While we will not under-estimate the difficulty of putting right the historical legacy, we also understand that we must continue to work together with the LegCo to face the challenges ahead.

Assistance to Hawkers

11. In June 2013, the Government implemented an assistance scheme in 43 fixed-pitch hawker areas to reduce fire risks. As at the end of 2015, 496 hawker stalls which were located directly in front of staircase discharge points of adjacent buildings or obstructing emergency vehicular access had been relocated. Regarding on-site reconstruction to meet specific fire service requirements, the Government will continue to communicate with hawkers in hawker areas and encourage them to make decisions early, i.e. either applying for reconstruction of their stalls or surrendering their licences for an ex-gratia payment. We are monitoring closely the implementation of the assistance scheme.

New Agriculture Policy

12. The New Agriculture Policy is making good progress. The key initiatives include the establishment of an Agricultural Park (Agri-Park) to help nurture agro-technology and agro-business management, as well as to facilitate knowledge transfer with a view to enhancing productivity. The consultant we have engaged has largely completed the engineering feasibility study on the boundary of and infrastructure within the Agri-Park. For the next stage of work, we are recruiting another consultant to undertake the work of investigation, design and construction for the Agri-Park, on the basis of the recommendation of the engineering feasibility study.

³ The previous LegCo Bills Committee held 35 meetings (including meetings with deputation representatives to receive their views) within two years. After comprehensive, extensive and in-depth deliberations, the Bills Committee and the Government reached consensus on a total of 547 CSAs.

13. The \$500 million Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund (SADF) was launched in late 2016 to provide funding support for the modernization and sustainable development of local agriculture. SADF aims at supporting application-oriented projects that would enhance agricultural productivity and output, or help farmers switch to sustainable or high value-added operations so as to raise the overall competitiveness of the sector. In addition, the Farm Improvement Scheme (FIS) under SADF provides direct grants to support eligible local farmers to acquire mechanized farming equipment and materials.

Future of the Live Poultry Trade

14. Recently, avian influenza (AI) cases have been found around the world, and in some places millions of live poultry had to be destroyed. In Hong Kong, AI virus was detected on different occasions last year in dead wild birds and in bird dropping samples from Mai Po Nature Reserve, as well as in environmental samples taken from a public market. In this winter, four cases of human infection with H7N9 AI from the Mainland have been reported. The above situation shows that we must stay vigilant and endeavour to enhance the work on AI prevention and monitoring to guard against the risk of AI outbreaks in Hong Kong.

15. The Government is conducting a consultancy study on the future of the live poultry trade including whether the sale of live poultry should continue in Hong Kong. The study will soon be completed. Thereafter, we will consult the public on the recommendations of the consultant and formulate the relevant policies.

Sustainable Fisheries Development

16. The Government has been supporting the local fisheries industry towards sustainable development. We set up in 2014 a \$500 million Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund (SFDF) to help fishermen adopt a sustainable and high value-added operation mode and to provide funding for programmes and research. So far, SFDF has approved seven projects, including those on improving aquaculture and fisheries-related ecotourism, with a total commitment of about \$37 million. We will continue to encourage the industry to make use of SFDF to enhance its overall competitiveness.

Setting up a Control Scheme for the Trading of Toothfish in Hong Kong

17. The trade volume and commercial activities in relation to toothfish in Hong Kong have been increasing over the years. We have proposed to introduce a new piece of legislation to provide for a control scheme for the trading of toothfish to meet the requirements of the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources with a view to attaining the objective of protecting Antarctic marine living resources. Preparation for the proposed legislation is in progress and the draft legislation is expected to be introduced into the LegCo within the 2017/18 legislative session.

Testing and Transportation Hub for Competition Horses

18. The Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) is collaborating with Mainland authorities on the development of HKJC's Guangzhou Horse Training Centre in Conghua, Guangzhou, as a training venue for Hong Kong's competition horses. To enable the frequent movement of horses between the two places whilst ensuring that their health status is being maintained at the same level, an "equine disease-free zone" in Conghua will be established through close cooperation between Hong Kong and the relevant Mainland authorities. The quarantine procedures for cross-boundary movement will also be enhanced. Meanwhile, we are actively upgrading the testing services for equine infectious diseases at the Tai Lung Veterinary Laboratory of AFCD. This would help enhance Hong Kong's capability in testing equine infectious diseases, and facilitate Hong Kong's development into a testing centre of infectious diseases and a transportation hub for international competition horses, thereby bringing added room for further development of the related industries.

Amending the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance

19. Following the passage of the Veterinary Surgeons Registration (Amendment) Ordinance 2015 at LegCo and after consulting the veterinary profession, we will draw up the regulation on the election of members from the profession to the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong and submit the subsidiary legislation to the LegCo for its scrutiny.

Food Safety

20. Safeguarding food safety has always been a priority of the Government. Globalisation and trade liberalisation help diversify our food sources. However, this also poses challenges to food safety control. We will continue to strengthen the gate-keeping function of our food safety system through updating food safety standards, improving existing food import control and food surveillance efforts and optimising testing facilities.

21. We will continue to review and update the existing standards on food safety with reference to international practices and in view of the local situation. In this regard, we will put forth legislative proposals in respect of the regulation of the safety and quality standards of edible fats and oils. The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) will conduct studies on "cooking oils in use" with a view to developing guidelines on good practices on such oils for the trade. We will initiate public consultation on strengthening the regulation of the levels of metallic contamination in food for better alignment with international standards. In addition, we will continue to study the latest development on the regulation of nutrition and health claims for formula products and prepackaged food for infants and young children under the age of 36 months.

22. In terms of hardware, the CFS will continue to improve existing food import control and food surveillance efforts through such measures as increasing manpower and enhancing information technology management systems. Besides, the Government Laboratory is assessing site options and studying the feasibility of reprovisioning and expanding its Food Safety Laboratory to enhance operational efficiency and testing capability so as to further safeguard food safety in Hong Kong.

23. On promoting healthy diet, we will continue to work closely with the Committee on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food to implement a series of projects on the reduction of salt and sugar. These include initiatives to continue to promote reduction of salt and sugar in pre-primary institutions and schools, continue to implement the “calorie” indication pilot scheme at staff canteens of public hospitals, and promote a front-of-pack low-salt / low-sugar labelling scheme for pre-packaged food, which will help consumers identify low-salt / low-sugar products easily.

Advice Sought

24. Members are invited to note and comment on the content of this paper.

Food and Health Bureau
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