

Submission to the Legislative Council  
Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene Panel  
on Proposed Extendable Arrangement for Public Niches

The Government proposes to introduce, starting from the coming allocation exercise, an extendable arrangement in the allocation of public niches, i.e. an initial interment period of 20 years followed by extension every 10 years on payment of the prevailing prescribed fees. The Working Group on Green Burial and Related Matters under the Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene **fully supports** the Government's proposal. The paradigm shift towards recycling public niches is an available means to optimise public niche use amidst meeting growing public demand.

The number of deaths in Hong Kong has been increasing steadily in the last few decades. As forecasted by the Census and Statistics Department, this trend will continue, with an annual number of about 45 000 currently to over 70 000 in the 20 years' time. Currently, despite the efforts in promoting green burial, the mainstream mode of handling ashes remains to be depositing cremated ashes of the deceased in columbarium facilities, and hence the demand for niches is earnest. Further, as the niches are seldom reused once allocated, the cumulative impact to land is severe. In face of the indisputable fact that land is scarce in Hong Kong, the Government's proposal can properly address the issue at stake and make the best use of land resources. In addition to implementing the extendable arrangement in new public niches for allocation, consideration could also be given to extend the arrangement to existing public niches at a suitable juncture when society has widely accepted the extendable arrangement. In order to handle the ashes with dignity and respect, the society must be given a sufficient buffer period such that the descendants of the deceased can choose to extend the interment period or claim back the ashes as per their wishes. Also, the extendable arrangement is not unique to FEHD's niches, as the columbaria in private cemeteries or in the private sector are also moving in this direction and there is no lack of similar arrangement practised in Macau and some cities of the Mainland.

Lastly, while the implementation of extendable arrangement may soothe the pressure of niche demand in the future, the Government should spare no efforts in promoting green burial, which is the more sustainable way of handling ashes. The Working Group is pleased to see that around 14.3% of total deaths in Hong Kong adopted green burial in 2017. With further collaboration with non-governmental organizations and the change in mindset in time, it is hoped that more and more people

will opt for green burial.

**Working Group on Green Burial and Related Matters  
under the Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene  
May 2018**