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Panel on Environmental Affairs

Meeting on 28 January 2019

**Background brief on management of wild pigs in Hong Kong
prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat**

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the management of wild pigs in Hong Kong. It also gives a brief account of the major views and concerns expressed by Members when related issues were discussed by relevant committees of the Legislative Council.

Background

Wild pigs in Hong Kong

2. Wild pigs are the largest terrestrial mammals among the native wild animals in Hong Kong.¹ They are widely distributed in habitats like forests, grasslands and farm areas in the territory. If they can easily acquire food from human feeding or food remains in litterbins, they may become habituated to search for food in residential or public areas. While wild pigs are generally secretive and wary of human contact, they may become aggressive and attack humans if provoked or threatened.²

¹ In other parts of the world, such as European countries, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and some countries in Southeast Asia, wild pigs are generally categorized as "pests".

² According to the Administration, there was no human death caused by wild pigs in Hong Kong in the five financial years of 2013-2014 to 2017-2018. There are 1, 2 and 4 injury

3. Under the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170), no person shall, except in accordance with a special permit, hunt wild pigs and other wild animals by means of hunting appliance such as a live decoy or the emission of recorded noises, any pitfall, any arms; or any hunting appliance other than a hunting appliance approved by the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation, or has in his possession of any hunting appliance other than a hunting appliance approved by the Director. Any person who contravenes the above shall be liable on conviction to a fine of \$50,000.

Handling wild pig nuisance

Wild pig catching and hunting

4. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") received 679 reports on wild pig sighting or nuisance from January to October 2018.³ Upon receipt of reports about wild pigs being injured, trapped in urban areas or having appeared in residential areas causing nuisance,⁴ AFCD will deploy staff to the scene to handle the situation. AFCD's veterinary officers will also be deployed to the scene to assist in catching the wild pigs with tranquiliser dart guns if necessary.⁵ If circumstances warrant, the wild pigs

cases in the financial years of 2013-2014, 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 (up to January 2018) respectively.

³ The number of reports on wild pig sighting or nuisance with breakdown by district: Central and Western Districts (70), Wanchai (69), Eastern District (42), Southern District (173), Yau Tsim Mong (0), Sham Shui Po (2), Kowloon City (7), Wong Tai Sin (9), Kwun Tong (8), Kwai Tsing (8), Tsuen Wan (36), Tuen Mun (38), Yuen Long (10), North (26), Tai Po (40), Shatin (50), Sai Kung (86) and Islands (5).

⁴ Currently, if members of the public are disturbed by wild pigs or find any wild pig injured or trapped, or straying in urban areas, they may call 1823 to notify the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department for follow-up actions. When a wild pig is posing immediate threats to life and property, the Police should be called for emergency assistance.

⁵ According to the Administration, the tranquiliser dart guns are used according to the circumstances at scene. Since the general anaesthetics has to take about five to 20 minutes to maximize its efficacy, wild pigs may flee immediately after being darted with anaesthetics, and pose danger to the public, and then it will become more difficult to capture them. Only if there are wild pigs injured or trapped in urban areas, the situation at scene warrants and the wild pigs are unable to leave the scene by themselves, AFCD will deploy vets to capture them with anaesthetics. For those wild pigs which stray in urban areas and have not caused perpetual nuisance or damage, if it is confirmed that they are in good health condition, AFCD will relocate them in countryside areas that are remote from residential areas.

caught will be released in suitable remote locations such as country parks.⁶ Separately, there are two wild pig hunting teams formed by civilian volunteers ("the civilian hunting teams"), which are responsible for conducting wild pig hunting operations when notified by AFCD.⁷

5. To enhance protection for public safety, AFCD will also conduct investigation at sites where wild pigs occur regularly and provide advice on preventive measures to the affected members of public, relevant property management offices and government departments. If any environmental hygiene problem is identified, AFCD will refer the case to the relevant departments to follow up.

Controlling the wild pig population

6. In response to different public opinions regarding the method of handling the wild pig nuisance, AFCD is adopting a "Sedate, Capture and Relocate" approach on a trial basis to cope with the problem. In late 2017, AFCD launched a two-year pilot study for the contraception of wild pigs in Hong Kong with a view to evaluating the effectiveness of an immune-contraceptive vaccine (namely, GonaConTM) to control the population of wild pigs habituated to feeding and causing nuisance to the public. According to the Administration, the expenditure involved in this pilot scheme in the financial year 2017-2018 is \$1.79 million whereas a provision of \$3.5 million has been earmarked for the pilot scheme in 2018-2019.

Other measures

7. AFCD conducts publicity and education programmes from time to time, including promotion on TV and radio, fun day, roving exhibitions, public lectures and visits, etc. to publicize the negative impacts of feeding wild animals.

⁶ AFCD uses satellite tracking technology to monitor the activities of wild pigs and their migratory routes after they have been released back to the wild.

⁷ AFCD has issued Special Permits to the civilian hunting teams for wild pig hunting. The Special Permits are valid for a year. One of the conditions of AFCD's Special Permits is that the permit holder and the approved hunting team members shall obtain valid arms licences issued by the Commissioner of Police and shall fully comply with the licence conditions thereunder before they can take part in hunting operations. All hunting team members have to undergo and pass the Police's standard firearms qualification test in order to obtain the arms licences. The hunting teams must comply with the requirements of AFCD and the Police of taking safety measures to prevent accidents and injury incidents. They also have to take out adequate accident insurance in order to provide proper accident protection. No expenditure of AFCD is incurred by the hunting operations.

In addition, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD") has been taking the advice of AFCD to conduct improvement works for facilities that are prone to wildlife raids. Examples include the installation of metal swing doors at village-type refuse collection and recycling points and erecting bollards or parapets at bin sites to prevent the knocking down of refuse and recycling bins by wildlife, such as wild pigs. Furthermore, AFCD is setting up a working group and commissioning a consultancy study on improvements in the design of refuse collection and recycling points, refuse bins, litter containers and recycling bins against wildlife raids.

Review of wild pig management strategies

8. To facilitate the control of wild pig population and reduce conflict between human and wild pigs, the Administration has indicated that it will review the procedures of handling wild pig nuisance cases, and invite local and overseas wildlife experts and ecologists to share experience and provide advice to establish a more comprehensive wild pig management action plan.

Major views and concerns expressed by Members

9. As incidents in which wild pigs foraging food strayed near residential areas and caused nuisances to the public have occurred from time to time, and in view of the increasing number of related complaints received by AFCD (i.e. from 294 cases in 2013 to 738 cases in 2017), Members have raised questions about the management of wild pigs during examination of the Estimates of Expenditures in recent years. The major views and concerns expressed by Members on related matters are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Measures to reduce nuisance caused by wild pigs to the public

10. Members requested the Administration to formulate effective measures to reduce the appearance of wild pigs in the vicinity of residential areas and farms, so as to enhance the protection of the personal safety of the public, avoid damage to agricultural produce and maintain environmental hygiene. They also enquired whether the Administration had any statistics on the number of wild pigs across the territory for the purpose of formulating wild pig management strategies.

11. The Administration advised that in late 2017, AFCD launched a two-year pilot study for the contraception of wild pigs in Hong Kong. In the study, AFCD's contractor would deploy veterinarians to capture wild pigs using

tranquiliser dart guns, administer contraceptive vaccine, implant microchip and install global positioning system transmitter to suitable wild pigs in good body conditions. The wild pigs would then be released back to the countryside. As at April 2018, 14 wild pigs (all of which were caught on Hong Kong Island) had been treated with GonaConTM, with no side effects or other adverse reactions observed. AFCD was planning to extend the pilot scheme to other districts of Hong Kong and would continue to monitor the wild pig populations concerned to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme.

12. The Administration stressed that the most effective way to reduce the appearance of wild pigs in residential areas was to stop feeding them. This was because the public's feeding would wrongly impress the wild pigs that there was stable food supply and attract them to appear regularly near urban or residential areas. AFCD was conducting a series of publicity and education programmes, including promotion on TV and radio, fun day, roving exhibitions, public lectures and visits, etc. to publicize the negative impacts of feeding wild animals. AFCD had also set up a YouTube Channel and Facebook fan page, and launched Announcements in the Public Interest together with a series of micro-movies titled "Don't Feed Wild Animals and Feral Pigeons" to inform the public about the negative consequences of feeding wild pigs, monkeys and feral pigeons, etc.

13. According to the Administration, AFCD did not have statistics on the number of wild pigs across the territory due to the technical difficulty to compile such statistics, given that wild pigs were generally solitary or in small group, secretive, very widespread, and had large home range. In the past, wild pigs were mostly recorded in the New Territories. AFCD's infrared camera surveys had revealed that wild pigs were now found on Hong Kong Island, in Kowloon and on outlying islands as well.

Wild pig hunting operations

14. Some members were concerned about the frequent operations conducted by the civilian hunting teams in previous years and queried whether the Administration had examined the necessity of carrying out such operations.⁸ There was also a suggestion of transferring the task of hunting wild pigs to AFCD and/or the Police to ensure that the hunting operations were carried out by public officers according to stringent, disciplined and safe procedures.

⁸ The numbers of wild pig hunting operations in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 are 94, 26, 50 and 61 respectively, whereas the numbers of wild pigs caught in the corresponding years above are 55, 17, 44 and 45. The hunting operations have been suspended since early 2017.

15. The Administration stressed that only when there were confirmed public reports of damage caused by wild pigs or they were threatening human safety and property on a frequent basis, and preventive and other kinds of measures were not effective would AFCD notify the civilian hunting teams to conduct hunting operations. Since AFCD was now conducting a comprehensive review of the strategies and measures for the management of wild pigs, hunting operations had been suspended since early 2017 until completion of the review, and all cases in relation to wild pigs were currently attended to by AFCD officers on the scene.

16. As regards the procedures for such operations, the Administration advised that upon receipt of notification, hunting team members would be sent to the scene. Confirming to arrange hunting operations, the hunting team would inform AFCD in writing, which would relay the information to the relevant department(s) and the District Office concerned, so that they could inform the villagers/residents in the vicinity as soon as possible. The hunting team should also put up an application to the Police Station concerned at least two working days in advance, stating in detail the arrangements of the wild pig hunting operation, such as the date, time, hunting area, and the list of hunting team members who would participate in the hunting operation, etc. The hunting team should obtain prior written approval from the Police (Divisional Commander) before conducting the hunting operation on the date, time and venue as approved by the Police. The District Office concerned would also inform local villagers/residents of the hunting operation details for safeguarding public safety. Besides, hunting operations were not allowed to be carried out on Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays. After each operation, the hunting team leader should submit reports to AFCD and the Police for record purpose.

Council questions

17. At the Council meetings of 9 July 2014, 21 March 2018 and 9 January 2019, Hon Claudia MO, Hon Jeffrey LAM and Hon Regina IP raised questions relating to the management of wild pigs. The questions and the Administration's replies are hyperlinked in the **Appendix**.

Latest development

18. At the meeting of the Panel on Environmental Affairs on 28 January 2019, the Administration will consult members on the way forward for wild pig management strategies.

Relevant papers

19. A list of relevant papers is set out in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
22 January 2019

Management of wild pigs in Hong Kong

List of relevant papers

Date of meeting	Event	Paper
5 April 2017	Special meeting of the Finance Committee for examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2017-2018	Supplementary written question raised by a Member and the Administration's reply (Reply serial number: S-ENB01)
28 June 2017	Motion on "Safeguarding animal rights" moved by Hon KWONG Chun-yu at the Council meeting	Wording of the motion passed (Paragraph (8) is relevant to handling of wild pigs) Progress report on the motion (Paragraphs 42 to 45 are relevant to handling of wild pigs)
17 April 2018	Special meeting of the Finance Committee for examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2018-2019	Written questions raised by Members and the Administration's replies (Reply serial numbers: ENB019 , 024 and 224)

Hyperlinks to relevant Council questions:

Date	Council Question
9 July 2014	Press release on Council question (written) raised by Hon Claudia MO
21 March 2018	Press release on Council question (written) raised by Hon Jeffrey LAM
9 January 2019	Press release on Council question (written) raised by Hon Regina IP