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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Background Brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 12 February 2019**

**Government's efforts to assist the development
of the fisheries industry**

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Administration's efforts to assist the sustainable development of the fisheries industry and summarizes major views and concerns of members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") on the subject.

Background

Fisheries industry in Hong Kong

2. The fisheries industry in Hong Kong comprises capture fisheries and aquaculture fisheries. The industry makes an important contribution to Hong Kong by maintaining a steady supply of fresh and quality fish products to local consumers.

3. According to the Administration, the fisheries industry has been facing increasing challenges, most notably the lack of manpower due to an aging workforce in both the capture and aquaculture fisheries; impact of reduced areas in the Hong Kong waters due to marine works projects and decline in marine resources affecting the operation and income of Hong Kong's capture fisherman; shortened period for capture fisherman's operation in the South China Sea due to

fishing moratorium; threats to the production of marine fish culture arising from global climate change that increases the chance of inclement weather and red tides; and severe competition from imported aquatic products in the market, etc.

4. In 2010, the Committee on Sustainable Fisheries ("CSF"), which was established by the Government to study the long-term goals, the direction and feasible options for sustainable development of the local fisheries industry, recommended among others that the Government should assist the fisheries industry in developing or switching to modernized and sustainable modes of operation through the provision of technical and financial support. Taking on board the recommendations of CSF and noting the challenges faced by the fisheries industry, the Administration considers that the industry's future lies not in pursuing increase in productivity, but in modernizing their operations to enhance efficiency and switching to high value-added operation/products in order to attain a suitable mode of development.

Measures to assist fishermen to switch to sustainable operations

5. In order to restore the seabed and depleted marine resources, the Administration has implemented a basket of fisheries management measures including prohibiting the use of trawling devices for fishing in Hong Kong waters ("trawl ban"). With the passage of the Fisheries Protection (Specification of Apparatus) (Amendment) Notice 2011, the trawl ban came into force on 31 December 2012.

6. To assist the fisheries industry, in particular fishermen affected by the trawl ban, to switch to other sustainable modes of fishing operations, the Administration has been providing the following support services:

- (a) increasing the approved commitment for the Fisheries Development Loan Fund for the successful applicants to make use of the one-off loans for building new fishing vessels to continue their fishing operations in distant waters outside Hong Kong;
- (b) providing tailor-made, free training courses to local fishermen to help upgrade their knowledge and skills such that they are better placed to explore opportunities of switching to other sustainable operations, e.g. aquaculture, recreational fisheries and fisheries-related eco-tourism business;

- (c) establishing the HK\$500 million Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund ("SFDF") to provide financial assistance for carrying out research and development programmes that will help improve the operating environment and enhance the overall competitiveness of the industry;
- (d) inviting applications for the granting of new marine fish culture licences under a pilot scheme in some fish culture zones with surplus carrying capacity; and
- (e) working closely with the fisheries industry to develop and promote the brand of local quality fisheries products, including expanding the marketing networks, through participating in and organizing various promotional activities (such as the annual Farmfest), in order to improve the business environment of local fisheries products.

Members' major views and concerns

7. Members' major views and concerns on relevant issues are summarized below.

Sustainable development of the fisheries industry

8. Some members held the view that the Administration should take the initiatives to implement practical and concrete measures (e.g. improving water quality in the harbour, exploring and improving fishing technologies, providing skills training for fishermen etc.) to steer and promote the sustainable development of the fisheries industry rather than relying on the fishermen community to come up with project proposals. There was also a view that the policies of other bureaux were not compatible with the existing agriculture and fisheries policy, and the Administration should introduce complementary policy measures to facilitate the sustainable development of the fisheries industry.

9. According to the Administration, CSF had formulated a policy blueprint to promote the sustainable development of the local fisheries industry and the Administration had been implementing a basket of fisheries management measures as recommended by CSF, including the trawl ban and registration of local fishing vessels to control fishing effort. Having reviewed the changes in circumstances since the imposition of a moratorium on issuing new fish culture licences in 1990, the Administration had decided to issue new licences in three fish culture zones with surplus carrying capacity.

10. The Administration further advised that it had implemented other support measures to help the industry develop towards high-value operations. These measures included (a) providing free and tailor-made training courses and seminars to assist fishermen in developing sustainable fisheries and related operations, (b) implementing a phytoplankton monitoring programme to enable early detection of the formation of red tides and issuance of timely warnings and (c) conducting adaptive studies on fish husbandry practices and new culture species and transferring the technology and skills to fish farmers.

11. There was a suggestion that the Administration should set long-term goals for the sustainable development of the fisheries industry, such as adopting large-scale mariculture operations in the deep waters offshore. According to the Administration, taking into account the global depletion of fishing resources, it had implemented various measures to help fishermen switch from capture fisheries to aquaculture fisheries. It should be noted that six SFDF-funded projects sought to promote the development of aquaculture. Regarding the suggestion on exploring mariculture opportunities in deep waters offshore, the Administration advised that to provide more room for the development of the mariculture industry, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") had commissioned a consultancy study on identifying potential sites for designating as new fish culture zones for the long-term development of the mariculture sector.

Management of SFDF

12. Some members opined that SFDF had not been put to optimal use and there was room for improvement in the management of SFDF. There was a view that the Administration should approve and fund a few more projects despite the similarity in nature of some of the projects. The Administration advised that for optimal usage of resources, SFDF would not fund projects of similar nature but the SFDF Advisory Committee would consider the merits of individual application having regard to the application's unique focus and target.

13. A query was raised as to whether SFDF could benefit the targeted fisheries community, since the types of projects that might be funded under SFDF could demand a high level of professional input from applicants (e.g. developing new technology for aquaculture fisheries). Some members expressed worries that most of the successful applicants would be academic institutions and environmental organizations which were more experienced than the fishermen in funding application and project bidding, and the projects supported by SFDF would be biased towards conservation of marine resources instead of the development of the fisheries industry. Some other members

were concerned whether the assessment criteria for SFDF were too stringent, thereby discouraging potential applicants from making applications.

14. According to the Administration, AFCD had so far received more than 20 applications, and as at end-October 2017, a total of eight applications had been approved upon the recommendation of the SFDF Advisory Committee. Two vetting committees overseen by the SFDF Advisory Committee had been formed to consider and vet funding applications against a set of assessment criteria. The major consideration was whether the proposed projects could contribute to fostering the sustainable development and enhancing the overall competitiveness of the fisheries industry, with such initiatives bringing benefits to the operations of the local fisheries community as a whole. The Administration assured members that the approved projects would not be biased towards certain areas of projects. Some funded projects had already shown encouraging preliminary results.

Enforcement against illegal fishing activities

15. Concern was raised that despite the implementation of the trawl ban in Hong Kong waters since December 2012, some Mainland fishing vessels still carried out illegal trawling activities in Hong Kong waters from time to time. Some members questioned the effectiveness of the enforcement actions taken by the authorities against illegal trawling, and requested the Administration to step up the relevant enforcement work.

16. According to the Administration, the existing strategies and measures were effective in combating illegal fishing activities. Taking a leading role in combating illegal fishing activities including trawling, AFCD had been maintaining close collaboration with the Marine Police to pursue joint-operations as appropriate. With several teams of AFCD staff deployed to conduct territory-wide patrols and inspections in Hong Kong waters, AFCD and the Marine Police had been deploying their resources flexibly having regard to the actual circumstances on the spot. AFCD also kept in touch with fishermen groups to widen its access to information that would help combat illegal fishing activities more effectively.

Latest development

17. The Administration will brief members on its measures to assist the development of mariculture at the meeting on 12 February 2019.

Relevant papers

18. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Appendix

Relevant papers on development of the fisheries industry

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	2.3.2016	<u>Written question raised by Hon Steven HO on "Sustainable development of agriculture and fisheries which are affected by development projects"</u>
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	10.5.2016 (Item V)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
	14.11.2017 (Item VI)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>

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