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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 29 October 2019, at 8:30 am
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex

- Members present** : Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan (Deputy Chairman)
Prof Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long, SBS, JP
Hon Claudia MO
Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS
Hon CHAN Chi-chuen
Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP
Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, SBS, JP
Ir Dr Hon LO Wai-kwok, SBS, MH, JP
Hon Andrew WAN Siu-kin
Hon HO Kai-ming
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP
Hon SHIU Ka-chun
Hon Wilson OR Chong-shing, MH
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan, JP
Hon Kenneth LAU Ip-keung, BBS, MH, JP
Hon AU Nok-hin
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP
Hon Tony TSE Wai-chuen, BBS
Hon CHAN Hoi-yan
- Members attending** : Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, GBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, SBS, MH, JP
- Members absent** : Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, SBS, JP
Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP

Hon CHU Hoi-dick
Dr Hon Pierre CHAN
Hon HUI Chi-fung
Hon LAU Kwok-fan, MH

Public Officers : Item I
attending

Professor Sophia CHAN Siu-chee, JP
Secretary for Food and Health

Mr Philip YUNG Wai-hung, JP
Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Food)

Dr CHUI Tak-yi, JP
Under Secretary for Food and Health

Mr Daniel CHENG Chung-wai, JP
Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 1

Miss Erica NG Lai-man, JP
Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 2

Miss Vivian LAU Lee-kwan, JP
Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Dr Philip HO Yuk-yin, JP
Controller, Centre for Food Safety
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Dr LEUNG Siu-fai, JP
Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Dr SIN Wai-mei, JP
Government Chemist
Government Laboratory

Clerk in : Miss Josephine SO
attendance : Chief Council Secretary (2) 2

Staff in : Ms Wendy LO
attendance : Senior Council Secretary (2) 2

Mr Clement HAU
Council Secretary (2) 2

Miss Cally LAI
Legislative Assistant (2) 2

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I. Briefing by the Secretary for Food and Health on the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address

(LC Paper No. CB(2)43/19-20(01), The Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address and The Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address Supplement)

Secretary for Food and Health ("SFH") briefed members on the policy initiatives set out in the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address in relation to the policy portfolio of the Food and Health Bureau ("FHB") concerning agriculture, fisheries, food safety, veterinary public health and environmental hygiene as well as FHB's progress in implementing major ongoing initiatives, details of which were provided in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)43/19-20(01)).

(Post-meeting note: The speaking note of SFH (Chinese version only), which was tabled at the meeting, was issued vide LC Paper No. CB(2)89/19-20 on 29 October 2019.)

Provision and management of public markets

2. Dr KWOK Ka-ki, Ir Dr LO Wai-kiwok, Mr Andrew WAN said that there was strong demand from the public for the provision of new public markets. They expressed dissatisfaction with the Administration's progress in taking forward new public market projects. Mr WAN considered that the Administration should build two new public markets in Tin Shui Wai to meet residents' needs in the long run (i.e. one each in Tin Shui Wai North and Tin Shui Wai South). He asked about the latest position of the proposed construction of a public market near Tin Shui Wai West Rail Station and whether the Administration would consider building another public market in the northern part of Tin Shui Wai.

3. Dr KWOK Ka-ki and Mr Wilson OR enquired about the Administration's plan and timetable for providing new public markets in various districts. Ir Dr LO Wai-kiwok suggested that the Administration should make reference to the design and operation mode of existing public markets with high patronage (e.g. Kowloon City Market and Tai Po Hui Market) in planning public market projects in new development areas.

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4. Noting that the Administration planned to build a temporary market at the open space adjacent to Tin Sau Road Park, Mr Andrew WAN asked whether consideration would be given to building another temporary market in the open space near Tin Fuk Road.

5. SFH made the following responses:

- (a) the Administration was pressing ahead with the building of new markets in Tin Shui Wai and Tung Chung Town Centre, as well as planning for a new market in Kwu Tung North New Development Area. The Administration would also complete the study on site selection for the Tseung Kwan O new market shortly. District Councils ("DCs") would be consulted as soon as possible following the commencement of the new DC term in 2020. Currently, the Administration was taking forward a total of seven new public market projects in various districts;
- (b) it was announced in the Chief Executive's 2018 Policy Address that a new public market would be built near Tin Shui Wai West Rail Station. Given the time required for building a market and to enable the public to benefit early, the Administration had announced that a temporary market would be built at the open space adjacent to Tin Sau Road Park using the Modular Integrated Construction method. This market was expected to be completed and commissioned by the end of 2020 at the soonest;
- (c) the Administration would take into account the needs of local residents, the progress of new public market development projects in respective districts and the availability of suitable sites for provision of public markets, in considering whether, as an interim measure, temporary markets should be provided. While the Administration had no plan at this stage to build temporary markets in other districts than Tin Shui Wai, it would listen to the views from stakeholders on the planning of public market projects and consolidate the experience gained from the temporary market project in Tin Shui Wai; and
- (d) apart from implementing new public market projects, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD") was proceeding full steam ahead with the refurbishment and improvement works of varying scales in the existing public markets covered by the Market Modernization Programme, with a view to improving their operating environment.

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6. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan expressed concern that the Administration had yet to identify a suitable site in Tseung Kwan O for the construction of public market since its announcement of such a plan in 2018. SFH advised that the Administration would complete the study on site selection for the Tseung Kwan O new market shortly and make announcement accordingly. The relevant DC would be consulted following the commencement of the new DC term in 2020.

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7. The Chairman requested the Administration to provide details of the implementation progress of each of the seven new public market projects (including (a) when and how the design and layout plans were/would be drawn up, (b) their scope of development, (c) at what stages were such markets being developed, and (d) the anticipated date of completion of each of the proposed projects).

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8. In relation to the temporary market to be built at the open space adjacent to Tin Sau Road Park, Mr SHIU Ka-chun requested the Administration to provide information on (a) the mode of operation to be adopted (e.g. whether the management and operation of the temporary market would be outsourced to private firm(s)) and measures to be adopted by the Administration to prevent monopolization of the stalls situated in the temporary market; and (b) whether the Administration would consider setting up an advisory committee comprising members of the local communities, in order to monitor and assess the operating effectiveness of the temporary market.

9. While expressing support for the provision of a temporary market in Tin Shui Wai, Mr SHIU Ka-fai expressed disappointment with FEHD's work progress in taking forward the construction of new markets as well as the refurbishment of existing markets. In his view, the Administration should consider separating the tender for the refurbishment works, so as to enlist more contractors to participate in this area of work with a view to expediting the overall progress. SFH responded that FEHD would strive to complete the construction of the temporary market as early as practicable.

10. Mr Tony TSE expressed support for the Administration's plan to introduce a new operation mode on a trial basis, which would mainly reform the leasing and management systems of public markets with a view to enhancing business vibrancy and meeting the needs of residents. He suggested that the Administration should also consider applying technologies to improve the daily operation and facilities management of public markets. SFH responded that FEHD would explore wider use of technology in various areas, including the management of public markets.

Issues relating to food supply and food safety

Follow-up work in response to outbreaks of African Swine Fever ("ASF")

11. Ms CHAN Hoi-yan said that despite the implementation of enhanced measures (e.g. the daily clearance arrangement in slaughterhouses) to prevent the spread of ASF in Hong Kong, the supply of live pigs from the Mainland remained on the low side. According to information from the Administration, the average daily supply of local and Mainland live pigs had dropped significantly from 4 387 heads in October 2018 to around 1 700 heads in September 2019. Ms CHAN, Mr SHIU Ka-fai and Mr Wilson OR were concerned that the average retail price of fresh pork had surged (to nearly \$140 per catty) as a result of a reduced supply of Mainland live pigs, affecting people's livelihood and the trade's operation. They enquired about the measures adopted/to be adopted by the Administration to increase the supply of Mainland live pigs so as to help stabilize the price of fresh pork. Ms CHAN suggested that the Administration should explore with the Mainland authorities the feasibility of increasing the number of pig farms eligible for supplying live pigs to Hong Kong.

12. SFH responded that the Administration noted the situation and had relayed to the Mainland authorities concerned the wish of the trade and the public for increasing the supply of live pigs. While the Mainland authorities had strived to maintain supply of live pigs to Hong Kong, the overall production and supply of live pigs on the Mainland had also been greatly affected by the outbreaks of ASF. In recent months, the supply of live pigs from the Mainland maintained at some 1 500 heads per day. The Administration hoped that the supply would increase gradually after the risk of ASF on the Mainland had been lessened. As for the exploration of other sources of live pig supply, the trade had earlier proposed to import live pigs from other countries e.g. Thailand. The Administration was open-minded about the proposal and would continue to listen to stakeholders' views on this issue.

13. Mr SHIU Ka-fai said that apart from following up on the supply of Mainland live pigs, the Administration should step up liaison with the Mainland authorities regarding the import arrangements of hairy crabs and the resumption of supply of live poultry from the Mainland.

14. The Chairman said that since the supply of Mainland live pigs was on the low side and the importation of and live chickens had been suspended, the Administration should consider issuing new Livestock Keeping Licences for local farmers to operate livestock and poultry farms, with a view to increasing the local supply. The Chairman was also concerned that the supply of imported livestock including pigs, cattle and goats was

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monopolized by a few import and distributing agents. In his view, the Administration should consider increasing market competition, by allowing wholesalers/buyers to purchase livestock direct from Mainland registered farms for sale in the Hong Kong market.

Food safety issues

15. The Deputy Chairman said that it was reported that the Police had used tear gas rounds to disperse protesters in a recent demonstration taking place near the Yau Ma Tei Wholesale Fruit Market ("YMTWFM"). She asked whether the Centre for Food Safety ("CFS") had collected fresh fruit samples from YMTWFM after the Police's dispersal operations for testing of harmful substances to ascertain whether the fruits had been contaminated by tear gas chemicals/residues and were still safe for human consumption. Mr SHIU Ka-chun said that he had bought three pears from YMTWFM on the day immediately after the Police's dispersal operations. He was concerned whether the pears were safe to eat.

16. The Chairman asked whether CFS had taken fruit samples from YMTWFM for testing under its routine Food Surveillance Programme ("FSP"). Mr SHIU Ka-fai opined that to address public concerns over food safety, CFS should, shortly after the Police's deployment of tear gas rounds in dispersal operations, take samples of fresh fruits from markets located in/near affected areas for testing of harmful substances. Mr Steven HO echoed with Mr SHIU's view, adding that the test results should be made available to the Police for its reference.

17. SFH responded that in general, contaminants on the surface of some types of food, such as fruits or vegetables, could be reduced by rinsing the food under running water. However, for the sake of prudence, food suspected to have been contaminated or showing abnormality should not be consumed. SFH and Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene ("DFEH") added that samples of fresh fruit were regularly collected at the import, wholesale and retail levels for testing under FSP.

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18. At members' request, the Administration would revert to the Panel on whether CFS would collect fresh fruit samples from markets located in or close to areas where the Police had deployed tear gas rounds in dispersal operations (in particular, from YMTWFM) for testing of harmful substances to ascertain whether the fruits had been contaminated by tear gas chemicals/residues and whether the fruits were safe for human consumption.

19. The Deputy Chairman expressed concern that according to media reports, the sea water at Causeway Bay Typhoon Shelter and near Aberdeen had turned blue in the afternoon of 28 October 2019. She wondered whether

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the dyed/coloured water sprayed out by the Police's Specialised Crowd Management Vehicles in recent dispersal operations was the cause of the pollution. SFH advised that according to information provided by the Police, the dyed/coloured water sprayed out by the Police's Specialised Crowd Management Vehicles did not contain any toxic substances.

20. Mr Steven HO said that the Administration should look into the case as referred to by the Deputy Chairman and assess the impact of dyed/coloured water on water quality (if discharged to the sea) taking into account the influence of water current.

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21. At members' request, the Administration would revert to the Panel on whether the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") and relevant departments would conduct inspections and studies to find out if the sea water at Causeway Bay Typhoon Shelter and near Aberdeen was polluted by dyed/coloured water sprayed out by the Police's Specialised Crowd Management Vehicles in recent dispersal operations; and whether the Administration would assess the impact of the dyed/coloured water on marine environment and fish culture operations, if and when such water was discharged to the sea.

Food safety management

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22. The Deputy Chairman said that the Audit Commission and The Ombudsman had highlighted in their recent reports the deficiencies identified in CFS' import control of foods. She requested the Administration to provide information on its follow-up actions in response to the said reports, setting out in detail in table form (a) the progress of CFS in implementing those recommendations which had been taken on board and (b) recommendations which had not been accepted (if any) and the issues considered by the Administration in drawing up such a decision.

Issues relating to environmental hygiene

Refurbishment of public toilets

23. Mr Tony TSE expressed appreciation that FEHD and the Architectural Services Department had taken on board his suggestion of separating the tender for the refurbishment works of public toilets, so as to enlist more contractors to participate in this area of work and to bring in new ideas in designing public toilets. Mr TSE noted that a total expenditure of over \$600 million had been earmarked in the 2019-2020 Budget for refurbishing 240 public toilets managed by FEHD in the coming five years and FEHD planned to kick start the refurbishment or facelifting works for 42 public toilets in the current financial year. He hoped that the Administration could

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expedite the works progress and include more public toilets in this year's refurbishment programme. He also welcomed the application of technology to help improve hygiene, enhance management and achieve timely maintenance of public toilets.

24. SFH said that whether it was feasible to renovate more public toilets in this financial year would depend on the progress of FEHD's refurbishment works and the outcome of the pilot scheme of applying technologies in the management of public toilets.

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25. At Ms Elizabeth QUAT's request, the Administration would provide a written response on whether it would consider outsourcing the management of some public toilets to private operators to enhance the management of the toilets.

Rodent and mosquito control work

26. Ms CHAN Hoi-yan expressed concern that the rodent problems in public housing estates continued to be serious despite FEHD's application of technology to enhance rodent control. She asked whether FEHD would adopt other new measures/methods for rodent prevention and control.

27. SFH responded that FEHD would take various measures to improve environmental hygiene and strengthen rodent prevention and control at the district level. Such measures included: (a) enhancing cleansing services for public streets, public markets and hawker bazaars in target areas; (b) synergizing the efforts of various bureaux and departments through the Pest Control Steering Committee ("PCSC") in carrying out pest control work; (c) strengthening rodent prevention and control work at problematic spots (such as rear lanes, refuse collection points, markets, hawker bazaars, cooked food markets and peripheral areas of construction sites) through applying poisonous baits and setting traps, destroying rat holes and implementing rodent-proofing measures; (d) stepping up inspections and enforcement actions against food premises causing poor environmental hygiene conditions, doing scullery and food preparation at rear lanes and handling or disposing refuse improperly; and (e) strengthening public education and publicity on rodent prevention and control.

28. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan expressed concern about the rodent infestation problem in various districts. She said that according to relevant studies, the average lifespan of *Rattus rattus* and *Rattus norvegicus* (two common species of rodents found in Hong Kong) was about two years. A female rat could reproduce up to six litters a year, consisting of around 12 pups. According to some experts' estimation, the rat population could be as high as 15 times of the human population living in the same city.

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29. DFEH stressed that FEHD would continue to adopt multi-pronged strategies to combat the rodent problem, including eliminating food sources, hiding places of rodents as well as blocking their passages. At Dr CHIANG's request, the Administration would provide statistics about rodent infestation in Hong Kong (including average lifespan of common species of commensal rodent found in Hong Kong, their reproduction rates and the projected position (in 10 years' time) of rodent infestation in the territory).

30. Mr HO Kai-ming expressed concern about the effectiveness of the enhanced anti-rodent work carried out by FEHD since the commencement of the territory-wide cleansing operation from 20 May 2019 onwards. DFEH responded that between 20 May and 20 October 2019, FEHD had destroyed some 4 600 rat holes, with more than 10 000 dead rodents collected and around 8 200 live rodents caught in traps. Regarding illegal disposal of refuse, FEHD had issued more than 10 000 Fixed Penalty Notices and instituted more than 4 200 prosecutions against the persons concerned.

31. Mr HO Kai-ming expressed disappointment that although extra resources had been allocated for enhancing rodent control work, the results of FEHD's recent anti-rodent operations were not impressive when compared with past figures. In his view, FEHD should set performance targets for evaluation of its anti-rodent work.

32. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan asked whether the Administration had assessed the effectiveness of new technologies applied in enhancing rodent control. DFEH responded that for rodent surveillance, FEHD had, since April 2019, put on trial night vision and thermal imaging cameras with artificial intelligence to capture video images for monitoring the extent of rodent activities. These technologies would allow better understanding of rodent infestation causes, extent of rodent activities and population, facilitating more targeted rodent control work. FEHD would consider wider use of these devices in other districts, if the test results in pilot sites (e.g. wet markets and rear lanes) proved to be satisfactory.

33. Ms Elizabeth QUAT said that she had received complaints that rodent problems in many districts resurged after the completion of the first phase of the anti-rodent operations conducted in designated target areas. In her view, inter-departmental co-ordination had to be strengthened for more effective implementation of anti-rodent measures. She asked whether PCSC meetings were chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration ("CS") to provide a high-level policy steer on inter-departmental rodent control work. SFH responded that under the co-ordination of PCSC, which was normally chaired by the Under Secretary for Food and Health, a number of departments had been allocated additional resources for carrying out enhanced pest control

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work in areas under their respective purview. CS had attended some of the meetings of PCSC and was kept abreast of the Administration's work progress in respect of rodent prevention and control.

34. The Deputy Chairman said that the rodent problem in Oi Man Estate in Ho Man Tin was very serious. She hoped that FEHD would work with the Housing Department to tackle the rodent problem in that estate.

35. Mr Wilson OR said that apart from tackling rodent problems in the community, the Administration should strengthen the prevention and control work against mosquitoes and biting midges. SFH advised that FEHD had applied technologies to enhance mosquito control. For instance, FEHD had put on trial ovitraps with improved design in Wong Tai Sin, Cheung Chau and Yau Tong to calculate the density of adult mosquitoes since June 2019. FEHD had also introduced in recent months a new design of mosquito trap which involved the carrying of insect growth regulators by female mosquitoes to other water bodies, thus preventing mosquito larvae from hatching into adults. Through enhanced interdepartmental co-ordination, the mosquito prevention and control work had been effective with the monthly ovitrap index for *Aedes albopictus* dropping significantly since June 2019.

Nuisance caused by wild animals

36. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan expressed concern about the nuisance caused by wild animals (including wild pigs, monkeys and wild pigeons) to residents. She asked whether AFCD would consider stepping up inspections and enforcement efforts to curb the acts of feeding wild animals.

37. Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation ("DAFC") responded that two dedicated teams had been set up to handle the nuisances caused by wild pigs and monkeys respectively. In collaboration with FEHD and the Environmental Protection Department, AFCD was conducting a consultancy study to improve the design of refuse collection bins and containers, with a view to deterring wild animals such as wild pigs and monkeys from scavenging for refuse and hence reducing environmental nuisances due to such activities. The specially designed refuse collection bins and containers had been put on trial at 40 wildlife nuisance black spots. If such designs could effectively minimize the refuse scavenging activities of wild animals, AFCD would work together with FEHD to extend deployment of these bins and containers to other black spots as appropriate. Besides, AFCD would strengthen its efforts to educate the public on the negative impact of feeding wildlife with a view to discouraging such feeding behaviour. Members of the public might report illegal feeding activities through the government hotline 1823. Upon receipt of complaints or reports regarding nuisances or potential danger caused by wild animals, AFCD

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would conduct follow-up inspections and arrange catching operations as necessary. Wild animals caught would be subject to contraception or sterilization as appropriate and then relocated to the remote countryside away from residential areas and farmlands, with a view to removing the nuisances caused by them with immediate effect and controlling their population in the long run.

38. Mr Wilson OR said that he had received complaints about frequent appearance of wild pigs at Lam Tin (Kwong Tin Estate) Terminus and the nuisance caused to the residents. He called on the Administration to look into the matter.

Issues relating to animal welfare

39. Ms Claudia MO and Mr CHAN Chi-chuen expressed grave concern about possible health impact of the Police's deployment of tear gas rounds in dispersal operations on pets, community animals and police dogs deployed to assist in the handling of demonstrations. They were worried that tear gas rounds would irritate an animal's respiratory system (in particular dogs as they had good sense of smell) and skin, and might even kill them. In their views, deploying police dogs to carry out duties at demonstrations would cause hazards to the dogs and could be in violation of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169). Mr CHAN asked whether AFCD would consider (a) issuing guidelines on the handling of animals affected by tear gas rounds for the reference of pet owners and animal welfare organizations and (b) giving advice to the Police on the safe deployment of police dogs for handling demonstrations.

40. SFH and DAFC responded that pet owners should bring their pets to registered veterinary surgeons for examination and treatment if their pets were suspected to be affected by tear gas rounds. Upon request, AFCD's Veterinary Officers would perform health checks for police dogs and provide the Police with professional advice on animal health and protection. No physical or behavioral abnormality was found in any police dogs during the health checks performed by AFCD recently.

41. Ms Claudia MO considered that AFCD should advise the Police not to deploy police dogs during operations against protesters. She asked whether arrangements would be made for registered veterinary surgeons from animal welfare organizations (e.g. Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) to perform health check-up for police dogs. DAFC responded that it was up to the Police to decide as to whether registered veterinary surgeons from animal welfare organizations would be invited to engage in this area of work.

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Promotion of the mariculture industry

42. Mr Steven HO said that despite the proposed designation of new fish culture zones for promoting sustainable development of mariculture, local fish farmers still lacked confidence in the prospect of the mariculture industry and were not prepared to make huge investment. He called on the Administration to make reference to the practices of other places (e.g. the Mainland) and set up a "natural disasters protection mechanism" for the mariculture industry in order to enhance support for mariculturists who were affected by natural disasters.

43. DAFC responded that he understood the trade had commented that the assistance provided under the existing Emergency Relief Fund ("ERF") was inadequate. In fact, the Administration had been keeping in view as to whether the grants under ERF would serve the purpose of helping the fishermen and fish farmers affected by natural disasters and would explore additional measures if needed. DAFC added that apart from ERF, AFCD would continue to adopt various measures to minimize the impact of natural disasters on fish farmers. Such measures included (a) introducing new equipment and technologies for fish culture operations (e.g. abyssal aquaculture cages with strong wind and wave withstanding capability) and water quality/red tide monitoring, (b) designating new fish culture zones at suitable locations in open seas, (c) promoting modern fish farm and health management practices to fish farmers through training and technical support; and (d) providing financial assistance to local fish farmers through the Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund and various loan schemes.

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44. At Mr Steven HO's request, the Administration would revert in writing on whether it would consider (a) setting up a "natural disasters protection mechanism" for the mariculture industry, which included an insurance scheme for the mariculture industry, interest-free loans for post-disaster business resumption, etc.; and (b) reviewing the eligibility criteria and application procedures for financial assistance for fishermen under ERF and if yes, the timetable of the review.

Policy on burial

45. Mr SHIU Ka-fai considered it necessary for the Administration to identify more sites for constructing public columbaria to meet the strong demand for niches. He also urged the Administration to allocate more resources for healthcare services for the elderly.

46. Mr Wilson OR expressed concern about the progress of the Private Columbaria Licensing Board ("PCLB") in processing specified instruments applications from private columbaria. He asked whether any new measures

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would be taken by the Administration to promote the adoption of green burial as a sustainable way of disposal of ashes.

47. In response, SFH advised that the Administration was determined to take forward the burial policy by adopting a three-pronged approach, namely, increasing the supply of public niches, regulating private columbaria and promoting green burial. Regarding the provision of public niches, the Administration would continue to press ahead the district-based columbarium development scheme. In 2019, the columbarium projects at Wong Nai Chung Road in Wan Chai, Tsang Tsui in Tuen Mun and Wo Hop Shek in North District would be completed respectively, accounting for about 208 000 new public niches, among which about 21 000 had been open for application in mid-2019. Moreover, the projects at Sandy Ridge in North District and Shek Mun in Shatin were pending the scrutiny of the Public Works Subcommittee and approval of the Finance Committee. The Administration would continue to identify suitable sites for the construction of public columbaria, and would consult relevant DCs on other columbarium projects and seek funding approval from the Legislative Council.

48. SFH further said that regarding the regulation of private columbaria, PCLB had thus far approved four licence applications and agreed to approve one application in principle. So far, 13 applications had been refused. PCLB would continue to process the remaining applications expeditiously. In recent years, green burial had gained popularity. The number of green burial cases handled by FEHD in 2018 accounted for about 14.8% of the total number of deaths in Hong Kong in that year. As of September 2019, the number of green burial cases accounted for over 16% of the total number of deaths so far recorded in 2019, representing a slight increase compared with the same period last year. In the coming year, the Administration would step up promotion efforts, including promoting the Green Burial Central Register and cooperating with various sectors in the promotion work.

II. Any other business

49. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:01 am.