

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)802/19-20

(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/FE

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday, 14 January 2020, at 2:30 pm in Conference Room 3 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
Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, SBS, JP
Hon Claudia MO
Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS
Hon CHAN Chi-chuen
Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki
Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP
Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, SBS, JP
Hon Andrew WAN Siu-kin
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP
Hon SHIU Ka-chun
Hon Wilson OR Chong-shing, MH
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan, JP
Dr Hon Pierre CHAN
Hon Kenneth LAU Ip-keung, BBS, MH, JP
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP
Hon CHAN Hoi-yan

Members absent : Ir Dr Hon LO Wai-kwok, SBS, MH, JP
Hon CHU Hoi-dick
Hon HO Kai-ming
Hon HUI Chi-fung
Hon LAU Kwok-fan, MH

**Public Officers : Item IV
attending**

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

Mr Amor WONG Yiu-tuen
Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 3

Mr Mickey LAI Kin-ming
Assistant Director (Fisheries)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Mr CHAN Kim-hung
Senior Fisheries Officer (Fisheries Supporting Services)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Item V

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

Mr Gilford LAW Sun-on
Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 2

Mr Eric TSAI Yu-sing
Assistant Director (Grade Management and Development)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr LEUNG Fo-man
Senior Superintendent (Operations) 3 (Acting)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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

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

Miss Cally LAI
Legislative Assistant (2) 2

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I. Confirmation of minutes
(LC Paper No. CB(2)434/19-20)

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2019 were confirmed.

II. Information papers issued since the last meeting
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)411/19-20(01), CB(2)456/19-20(01), CB(2)470/19-20(01) and (02), and CB(2)487/19-20(01))

2. Members noted that the following papers had been issued since the last meeting:

- (a) letter dated 13 December 2019 from Prof Hon Joseph LEE on the use of forged health certificates by a Vietnam meat processing plant for application of import licence of frozen pork to Hong Kong;
- (b) Administration's response to Prof Hon Joseph LEE's letter dated 13 December 2019;
- (c) two letters dated 2 January 2020 from Hon CHU Hoi-dick on the Administration's follow-up actions against suspected pneumonia cases in Hong Kong and the Mainland; and
- (d) joint letter dated 7 January 2020 from Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki and Dr Hon Pierre CHAN on the Administration's follow-up actions in response to the identification of a cluster of pneumonia cases in the Mainland.

III. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)482/19-20(01) and (02))

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for Tuesday, 11 February 2020 at 2:30 pm:

- (a) Mosquito control work; and
- (b) Construction of a joint-user building for reprovisioning a refuse collection point and setting up a community recycling centre at the junction between Hung Yuen Road and Hung Ping Road, Yuen Long.

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(*Post-meeting note:* On consideration of the latest situation of COVID-19 epidemic in Hong Kong, the Panel's regular meeting in February 2020 was not held as scheduled.)

4. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan suggested that the Administration should update the Panel as early as practicable on the outcome of public consultation on the Administration's proposals to enhance animal welfare and its work progress in implementing the Market Modernization Programme. Secretary for Food and Health ("SFH") advised that the Administration was collating and analysing the public views received on the proposals to enhance animal welfare and following up on the provision of a number of new markets and temporary markets. It was the Administration's plan to report to the Panel on the latest progress of the above initiatives in March 2020 and beyond.

5. The Chairman said that relevant items had been included in the Panel's list of outstanding items for discussion (LC Paper No. CB(2)482/19-20(01)). According to the discussions at the meeting between himself, the Deputy Chairman and SFH to discuss the work plan of the Panel for the 2019-2020 session held on 4 November 2019, the Administration planned to report to the Panel on "Proposals to enhance animal welfare - Report on the outcome of public consultation and the way forward" in March 2020 and "Implementation of the Market Modernization Programme and development of new public markets" in the first quarter of 2020. Other items previously suggested by some members had also been added to the list with proposed timeline for discussion. As a three-hour timeslot (i.e. from 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm) had been reserved for some of the regular meetings scheduled in the next few months, other issues of urgent public importance/wide public concern could be added to the agenda of these meetings if necessary. Mr Steven HO expressed agreement with the meeting arrangements proposed by the Chairman.

6. The Deputy Chairman expressed concern that the Administration had yet to provide its responses to the issues raised by members at the Panel meeting on 10 December 2019 in relation to rodent control work, including a copy of the report provided by the British expert in rodents who visited Hong Kong in early November 2019 on the invitation of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD") to provide advice on improvement in anti-rodent work. SFH said that the Administration would provide the requested information once available.

7. The Deputy Chairman noted that a Government delegation had departed for Wuhan to participate in a two-day working visit under the arrangement of the National Health Commission to understand the latest situation/development of the cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan. She considered that the Administration should brief the Panel on the information acquired during the working visit (including the source as well as

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the prevention and control of the pneumonia cases infected with the novel coronavirus). The Chairman reminded members that the issues as referred to by the Deputy Chairman fell within the purview of the Panel on Health Services ("the HS Panel") and the HS Panel had discussed "The Administration's response measures for the emergence of a cluster of pneumonia cases in Wuhan of Hubei Province" at its meeting on 10 January 2020. Members who wished to further pursue those issues should do so at meetings of the HS Panel, for continuity and given the ambit of the HS Panel.

(Post-meeting note: The HS Panel held a special meeting on Thursday, 30 January 2020 at 10:45 am to discuss the measures for the prevention and control of novel coronavirus infection in Hong Kong.)

IV. Proposed injection into the Fishing Moratorium Loan Scheme
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)482/19-20(03) and (04))

8. At the invitation of the Chairman, SFH briefed members on the Administration's proposals to increase the loan ceiling and the financial commitment of the Fishing Moratorium Loan Scheme ("FMLS") which aimed to assist fishermen in tiding over the annual fishing moratorium implemented in the South China Sea as well as the major latest measures for supporting the sustainable development of the local fisheries industry, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)482/19-20(03)). Members noted the background brief prepared by the Legislative Council ("LegCo") Secretariat on the subject (LC Paper No. CB(2)482/19-20(04)).

Proposed injection of \$210 million into the Fish Marketing Organization Loan Fund ("FMOLF")

9. The Deputy Chairman sought information on FMLS, including (a) the average number of applications for FMLS received/approved in recent years; (b) the estimated loan amount to be disbursed under the Scheme, on average, if the loan ceiling per vessel of the fishing moratorium loans was increased from \$300,000 to \$500,000, as proposed by the Administration; and (c) whether the interest rate for the loan scheme charged on borrowers would be maintained at a minimum of 1% per annum ("p.a.").

10. Assistant Director (Fisheries), Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AD(F)/AFCD") responded that in 2019, loan applications from some 300 vessels were approved under FMLS, representing a slight increase when compared with the average number in 2017 and 2018. Except a small number of applications withdrawn by the applicants, all applications for loans received in the past two years were approved. Due to the extension of the

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fishing moratorium in 2017 and the worsening operating environment, the loan ceiling per vessel had been raised to \$300,000 since then. Recently, various fishermen associations had expressed to AFCD that they anticipated the existing loan amount not sufficient to help fishermen tide over the moratorium amid the more difficult operating environment as elaborated in paragraph 6 of the Administration's paper. They also expected the fishing moratorium would likely be further extended for conservation of the fisheries resources in the South China Sea. The Administration therefore proposed to increase the loan ceiling per vessel to \$500,000, which could be further revised on the advice of the Fish Marketing Advisory Board ("FMAB"), taking into consideration the fuel price, operating environment and other factors including the implementation details of the fishing moratorium in the future, provided that the maximum amount would not exceed \$750,000. The Administration estimated that the interest rate would remain at the existing level of 1% p.a. after the proposed adjustment to the loan ceiling.

11. In response to the Deputy Chairman's further enquiry about vessel owners'/fishermen's demand for loans, AD(F)/AFCD said that about 1 000 fishing vessels operating in both Hong Kong and Mainland waters were affected by the annual fishing moratorium in the South China Sea. As indicated by the number of applications submitted for the loan scheme, some fishermen might not need to borrow low interest loans to tide over the annual fishing moratorium. However, in view of a longer incomeless period for fishermen brought about by the longer fishing moratorium period, the Administration expected that there would be a surge in the demand for loan from fishermen in the future.

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12. The Deputy Chairman and Mr CHAN Chi-chuen requested the Administration to provide, in its paper to be submitted to the Finance Committee ("FC") seeking funding approval, more information on FMLS, including (a) the number of applications received/approved; (b) the total amount of loans issued to owners of fishing vessels and fish collectors; and (c) the average loan amount disbursed under the Scheme in each of the past five years.

13. In response to the Chairman's enquiry, AD(F)/AFCD said that if FC's approval for the proposed increase of the loan ceiling and the financial commitment of FMLS could not be obtained within the current legislative session, the maximum loan amount per vessel would remain at \$300,000 for the upcoming moratorium period (\$400,000 including the extra loan of \$100,000 provided by the Fish Marketing Organization). The Chairman opined that the Administration should consider channelling the resources under various loan funds administered by AFCD (e.g. the Agricultural Development Fund under the Vegetable Marketing Organization) to advance loans to fishermen as a temporary measure before FC's approval was given for the injection of \$210 million into FMOLF.

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14. Mr Steven HO suggested that in the event that FC approved the proposed injection into FMOLF during the 2020 moratorium period, the Administration should immediately convene a meeting of FMAB to consider raising the loan ceilings for the loan applications received this year, including those applications which had already been approved by then, taking into consideration the actual needs of the vessel owners/fishermen. AD(F)/AFCD responded that the Administration would consider Mr HO's suggestion.

15. The Chairman and Mr Steven HO said that Members respectively belonging to the Liberal Party and the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong supported the Administration's proposals to increase the loan ceiling of FMLS and to inject \$210 million to FMOLF. Mr CHAN Chi-chuen indicated support for the direction of the Administration's proposals. Ms Claudia MO said that she was not opposed to the funding proposals.

Measures for promoting sustainable development of the fisheries industry

16. Ms Claudia MO noted that AFCD would establish an open sea semi-submersible steel truss mariculture demonstration farm, with a view to encouraging the local mariculture sector to adopt a modern and sustainable operation as well as providing a platform for technology transfer. She sought information on the operation mode of the demonstration farm, its location and impact on the marine environment.

17. AD(F)/AFCD responded that AFCD had been assisting the local fisheries industry in developing or switching to modernized and sustainable modes of operation through the provision of technical and financial support. One of the support measures was the proposed establishment of a modern mariculture demonstration farm in Tung Lung Chau Fish Culture Zone, to serve as a base for promoting modern mariculture technologies as well as training and research purposes. The demonstration farm was expected to be in service in 2020. This strong wind and wave resistant farm would be set up in deep water for fish farming to avoid pollution in inshore waters.

18. Mr Steven HO expressed concern about the situation of Mainland fishing vessels entering and fishing illegally in Hong Kong waters. In his view, AFCD and relevant departments should acquire additional resources for combating illegal fishing activities and step up joint operations with relevant Mainland departments against such activities. Mr HO said that local fishermen had faced many challenges in continuing fishing operations (e.g. fishing moratoriums, prohibition of fish capture activities, higher fuel cost, repair work of fishing vessels/gear and compliance with new fishing policies), which had affected the livelihood of fishermen and reduced the space for fisheries development. He hoped that the Administration could

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work with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs to strengthen publicity on new fishing policies to facilitate the compliance of the industry. He also called on the Administration to convey to the Mainland authorities the wish of local fishermen to develop the Mainland market by leveraging the opportunities brought by the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area development.

19. Mr Steven HO further said that the existing Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund ("SFDF") was unable to cope with fishermen's needs for financial assistance to enable them to switch from capture fisheries to mariculture. He asked whether additional measures could be taken to help the local fishing community move towards sustainable or high value-added operations (e.g. setting up a new fund to provide financial support for fish farmers).

20. In response, SFH said that AFCD would continue to implement appropriate support measures to promote the sustainable development of the local fisheries industry. It would tap the views of fishermen and relevant stakeholders on how the support measures could be further enhanced to help them move towards high value-added operations. AFCD had also been maintaining close liaison with the relevant Mainland authorities, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, on the development of the fisheries industry and the implementation of relevant fishing policies. The Administration would relay to the relevant Mainland authorities the wish of local fishermen to explore new opportunities in the Mainland market.

21. Mr CHAN Chi-chuen asked whether fishermen engaging in capture fisheries but planned to switch to more sustainable fisheries operations could apply for both types of loan under FMOLF and the Fisheries Development Loan Fund (the latter was established to provide loans for fishermen to switch to sustainable fisheries or related operations, and for mariculturists and pond fish farmers to develop sustainable aquaculture business). SFH and AD(F)/AFCD advised that only vessel owners and owners of fish collectors affected by the fishing moratorium were eligible to apply for loans under FMLS. In 2014, the Administration set up SFDF to help the local fishing community move towards sustainable or high value-added operations. Programmes, projects and research that would 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, would be considered under SFDF.

V. Promotion of green burial

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)482/19-20(05) and (06))

22. At the invitation of the Chairman, SFH briefed members on the Administration's progress in promoting green burial, as detailed in its paper

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(LC Paper No. CB(2)482/19-20(05)). With the aid of power-point presentation, Assistant Director (Grade Management and Development)/FEHD ("AD(GMD)/FEHD") highlighted the Administration's efforts in establishing Garden of Remembrance ("GoR") facilities, enhancing green burial services and stepping up publicity on green burial through various channels.

(Post-meeting note: The softcopy of the power-point presentation materials was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)527/19-20(01) on 14 January 2020.)

23. Members noted the background brief prepared by the LegCo Secretariat on the subject (LC Paper No. CB(2)482/19-20(06)).

Promotion of green burial

24. Mr CHAN Chi-chuen and Mr SHIU Ka-fai noted from paragraph 2 of the Administration's paper that the number of green burial cases (including the scattering of ashes in GoRs or at sea) in Hong Kong had increased by 47% when compared with the figure in 2016, and the percentage of green burial cases against the total number of deaths had also increased from 11.5% in 2016 to 16.3% in 2019 (up to November 2019). Mr SHIU expressed support for the Administration's continued promotion work of green burial. Mr CHAN and Dr KWOK ka-ki asked whether the Administration would set any targets for members of the public to adopt green burial to handle ashes of the deceased in a more environmentally-friendly and sustainable manner.

25. Noting that the number of cases of scattering ashes at sea had dropped from 900 in 2016 to 828 in 2019 (up to November 2019), Dr KWOK Ka-ki opined that the Administration should strengthen its efforts in promoting green burial services. He suggested that the Administration should consider engaging non-government organizations ("NGOs") or private companies to undertake the promotion and publicity work, offering incentives to bereaved families for using green burial (such as waiving the fees and charges for cremation services) and providing subsidies to private boat/ferry operators who provided ashes scattering services at sea.

26. Mr SHIU Ka-chun suggested that the Administration should make reference to the experiences of other places and consider introducing more diversified forms of ash scattering (e.g. burying ashes in the soil where trees had been planted, transforming ashes into synthetic diamond, ornament or any other material (synthetic material) or setting up underwater cemetery) for consideration/selection by the public.

27. Mr CHAN Chi-chuen considered that the Administration should facilitate the public's adoption of solemn and decent designs for memorial

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plaques mounted on dedicated walls in GoRs, so as to enhance the attractiveness of the service. Mr Steven HO said that there were views in the community that the bereaved families should be allowed to perform memorial rituals before the scattering of ashes, in order to keep the ethical culture of filial piety and fraternal duty.

28. SFH made the following responses:

- (a) while it took time to fortify the necessary mindset changes to turn green burials into the mainstream mode for handling human ashes, the Administration would put in persistent efforts to bring about the change of social norms and conventions. As shown by the figures on the usage of green burial services in the past four years, while the number of cases of scattering ashes at sea might have dropped slightly in 2019, there had been a steady rise in the total number of green burial cases. This indicated that green burial was gaining popularity;
- (b) the Administration was conducting two questionnaire surveys to gauge people's views on the existing green burial facilities and services, their awareness of green burial, considerations in choosing post-death arrangements, etc. The surveys were expected to be completed in the first half of 2020. The Administration would make reference to the findings of the surveys in formulating the long-term development plans for green burial facilities and services as well as strategies to promote green burial;
- (c) the Administration would continue to promote green burial through various publicity channels. In January 2019, the Government launched a central register to encourage the public to plan in advance their after-death arrangements by registering their wish for green burial and making it known to their families. As at the end of 2019, more than 3 400 members of the public had registered their wish for green burial. The Working Group on Green Burial and Related Matters under the Advisory Committee on Food and Environmental Hygiene also assisted in formulating the strategies for promoting green burial; and
- (d) the Administration would plan for new GoRs facilities with larger scale and more space, enhance the existing facilities and services and step up publicity and education. At the same time, the Administration also encouraged NGOs and religious organizations to build GoRs at suitable sites under their management. A number of NGOs were assisting with the

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promotion of green burial when providing advice and information to the elderly on after-death arrangements.

29. The Chairman expressed support for the Administration's continued promotion of green burial. In his view, the Administration should consider providing bereaved families with financial incentives to encourage the adoption of green burial. SFH said that it was already the existing arrangement for FEHD not to charge any fee for scattering ashes at GoRs or at sea. Apart from GoRs, members of the public might apply for scattering ashes at three designated locations using the free ferry service provided by FEHD. The Administration would consider the views collected in the surveys when formulating the strategies for promoting green burial.

30. Mr SHIU Ka-chun expressed concern that since its introduction into Hong Kong in 2006, the utilization rate of using paper coffins remained low (e.g. 2% in 2014 and 2.2% in 2019). He learned from members of the funeral trade that the time required for cremation of paper coffins should be much shorter than that for wooden coffins. However, FEHD required that the cremation time of paper coffins should not be less than a specified duration, rendering the use of paper coffins less common and defeating the purpose of using paper coffins to reduce the amount of carbon emissions from cremation for environmental protection purpose. Mr SHIU asked whether FEHD would strengthen the promotion on the use of paper coffins and relax the restrictions on the cremation time for paper coffins.

31. SFH and AD(GMD)/FEHD responded that the cremation time depended on various factors, including the material of which the coffin was made, the size and design of the coffin, and more importantly, the body weight of the deceased. Eco-coffins (made of recycled paper and cardboard) were more environmentally friendly than traditional coffins (made of wood). However, according to experience, using eco-coffins would not shorten the cremation time significantly as compared to using traditional coffins. SFH added that FEHD would continue to promote the use of eco-coffins by displaying notices about eco-coffins at cremation booking offices and disseminating relevant information through FEHD's website. FEHD had also required all licensed undertakers of burials to display and offer eco-coffins as an option for the choice and purchase by bereaved families.

32. The Deputy Chairman noted that the Department of Health had set up the Centralised Organ Donation Register for prospective donors to register their wish to donate organs after death, and the Hospital Authority had since 2010 implemented by administrative means "advance directives" ("ADs") for patients to indicate their refusal to receive life-sustaining treatment in an end-stage irreversible life limiting condition. She suggested that for the convenience of the public, the Administration should consider the

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arrangements for members of the public to deal with in one go the registration of wish to donate organs, to make ADs and to use green burial.

33. SFH responded that the Health Branch of the Food and Health Bureau had recently completed a public consultation exercise on end-of-life care legislative proposals regarding ADs and dying in place. Since the issues referred to by the Deputy Chairman straddled several policy areas, it would be more appropriate for the relevant government departments to consider the way forward and to follow up the issues. In response to the Deputy Chairman's further enquiry, SFH said that in the event that the family members of the deceased person did not agree with the organ donation and after-death arrangements opted by the latter, relevant departments would respect and act according to the decision of the bereaved family members.

Scattering ashes in GoRs

34. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan asked whether there were restrictions on ash scattering arrangements in GoRs (e.g. whether there was a ceiling on the number of sets of ashes that could be scattered in a GoR). AD(GMD)/FEHD responded that the size of existing GoRs ranged from a few hundred square metres ("m²") to about 2 300 m². The Tsang Tsui Columbarium in Tuen Mun (the development of which was expected to be commissioned in 2020) would provide a GoR of bigger size (about 4 800 m²). No restrictions were imposed on the number of sets of ashes that could be scattered in a GoR. Members of the public could select an area inside a GoR they liked most for scattering the ashes of the deceased. They could also perform memorial rituals and scatter the cremated ashes themselves or with the help of dedicated staff of FEHD.

35. Mr SHIU Ka-fai sought more detailed information about the ashes scattering services provided in GoRs. AD(GMD)/FEHD responded that those who scattered ashes could choose different areas in a GoR to scatter the ashes over the grass by using the ash scattering device. Under a pilot scheme launched by FEHD in March 2019, a one-off heart-shaped paper scattering device was provided free of charge to those who scattered ashes in GoRs. Words of remembrance could be written on the device for burning after the ash scattering activity to pay tribute to the deceased. FEHD was exploring other kinds of scattering devices (e.g. tubular devices made of biodegradable materials) for use in Hong Kong.

36. The Chairman asked whether worshipping facilities were provided in GoRs for members of the public to pay tribute to their ancestors whose ashes had been scattered in GoRs. SFH responded that in June 2010, FEHD launched the Internet Memorial Service ("IMS") which provided a free memorial website (www.memorial.gov.hk) for bereaved family members and friends to create memorial webpages for their deceased loved ones to pay tribute at any time and from anywhere. In June 2018, a mobile application of

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IMS was launched. Its functions included personalized profile settings, message notifications and social media sharing. Since then, the public could pay tribute to their deceased family members and friends with their mobile devices anywhere and anytime. AD(GMD)/FEHD added that four electronic kiosks were provided adjacent to the new Kwai Chung Garden of Remembrance which was opened in January 2019. This digital worshipping facility was the first of its kind in GoRs managed by FEHD and would be provided in newly constructed GoRs. Members of the public could access to the free memorial website through the electronic kiosks in GoRs or their mobile phones to pay tribute to their ancestors.

37. In response to Dr CHIANG Lai-wan's enquiry, SFH said that the disposal of cremated ashes in country parks was not allowed under the laws. To enhance the promotion of green burial, FEHD would plan for new GoR facilities with larger scale and continue to explore the feasibility of providing GoR facilities in existing columbaria where space permitted.

38. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan suggested that the Administration should explore whether GoR facilities could be provided in country parks or "Green Belt" sites to enable the public to scatter ashes and pay tribute to their deceased family members in a scenic and tranquil environment. SFH responded that the Administration would consider Dr CHIANG's suggestion and identify more suitable sites for providing green burial facilities.

Scattering ashes at sea

39. Mr CHAN Chi-cheun said that he had received complaints that FEHD only arranged a few memorial sailings on weekdays before the Ching Ming Festival and the Chung Yeung Festival for members of the public to pay tribute to their ancestors at the waters where ashes had been scattered. He enquired about the latest arrangement for memorial sailings. Dr KWOK Ka-ki suggested that the Administration should consider subsidizing private boat/ferry operators in their arrangement of sailings using smaller boats. This would help increase the frequency of ashes scattering and memorial sailings.

40. Noting that the trial scheme launched in April 2019 inviting the public to visit the service of scattering ashes at sea at no charge had received positive response, Mr CHAN Chi-chuen hoped that FEHD could increase the number of such visits.

41. AD(GMD)/FEHD responded that members of the public might apply for scattering ashes at three designated locations using the free ferry service provided by FEHD or privately arranged boats. At present, free ferry service for scattering ashes at sea was provided every Saturday. To facilitate the public's application for scattering ashes at the designated locations, FEHD had streamlined the application process and simplified the administrative

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procedures for approving such applications. Approval would be granted normally within five working days from the date of receipt of a duly completed application. The utilization rate of FEHD's free ferry service was more than 70%.

42. AD(GMD)/FEHD further said that to facilitate the public to pay tribute to the deceased at the waters where ashes had been scattered, FEHD would, starting from 2020, increase the number of memorial sailings to be arranged before the Ching Ming Festival and the Chung Yeung Festival from four to eight each year. Some memorial sailings would be arranged on Sundays for public convenience. To raise public awareness of the ferry service for scattering ashes at sea, as a trial scheme FEHD had been inviting members of the public to attend such service on the last Saturday of each month since April 2019. The visit was free of charge and the quota on the number of participants for each visit was 20. FEHD had also been inviting representatives from NGOs and elderly centres/homes to attend the service of scattering ashes at sea.

43. Mr Steven HO expressed concern that there had been reports that some unscrupulous private operators who provided ashes scattering services at sea had thrown the urns into the sea. As the netting of the disposed urns would bring unease to the fishermen, the Administration should enhance public education on the proper way of scattering ashes at sea and step up enforcement actions against unauthorized ashes scattering activities. In Mr HO's view, there was no need for the Administration to identify additional locations for scattering ashes at sea if the existing three designated locations could cope with the need for such service.

44. AD(GMD)/FEHD responded that the annual number of cases of scattering ashes at sea maintained at a level of around 900 in recent years. The Administration noticed that members of the public scattering ashes at sea mainly used the free ferry service provided by FEHD. So far, FEHD had not come across the disposal of urns by unscrupulous operators at sea as reported by the media. That said, the Administration would continue to remind the public and private boat/ferry operators to comply with the relevant requirements in conducting ashes scattering activities at sea.

Provision of columbarium facilities

45. The Deputy Chairman held the view that the Administration should work with the District Councils ("DCs") to promote green burial at the district level and continue to press ahead with various public columbarium projects under the district-based columbarium development scheme, with a view to increasing the supply of public niches.

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46. In response, SFH said that the Administration had been actively promoting the district-based columbarium development scheme under which 24 potential sites across the 18 districts had been identified for columbarium development to increase the supply of public niches. So far, support had been obtained from nine DCs for 14 columbarium projects, which involved the supply of about 590 000 new niches in total. Apart from the two completed projects in Wong Tai Sin and Cheung Chau, the projects in Wong Nai Chung Road in Wanchai, Tsang Tsui in Tuen Mun and Wo Hop Shek in the North District would soon be completed in phases, providing about 212 000 new niches. Five other projects (i.e. Mui Wo Lai Chi Yuen, Cap Collinson Road in the Eastern District, Shek Mun in Shatin, Sandy Ridge in the North District and Tsing Tsuen Road in Kwai Ching) were scheduled for completion in the coming five years, involving 140 000 new niches. The Administration would continue to identify suitable sites for constructing public columbaria, and timely consult DCs on other columbarium projects.

VI. Any other business

47. The meeting ended at 4:25 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
7 April 2020