

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1447/19-20
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 13 July 2020, at 9:00 am
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)
Hon Claudia MO
Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS
Hon CHAN Chi-chuen
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 SHIU Ka-fai, JP
Hon SHIU Ka-chun
Hon Wilson OR Chong-shing, MH
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan, JP
Dr Hon Pierre CHAN
Hon LAU Kwok-fan, MH
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP
Hon CHAN Hoi-yan
- Members attending** : Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon Jeremy TAM Man-ho
- Members absent** : Prof Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun, SBS, JP
Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki
Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP
Hon CHU Hoi-dick
Hon HUI Chi-fung
Hon Kenneth LAU Ip-keung, BBS, MH, JP

Public Officers : Item III
attending

Dr SO Ping-man, JP
Deputy Director
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Dr Thomas SIT Hon-chung
Assistant Director (Inspection and Quarantine)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Dr Jim CHU Chun-wa
Senior Fisheries Officer (Aquaculture Fisheries)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Dr Michelle YEUNG Lee
Senior Veterinary Officer (Animal Health)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Dr Lucia LAW Siu-lun
Veterinary Officer (Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance) 1
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Miss Yandy CHAN Tsz-yan
Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 1

Item IV

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

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

Miss Diane WONG Shuk-han
Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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

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

Staff in attendance : Ms Wendy LO
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)1310/19-20)

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2020 were confirmed.

II. Information paper issued since the last meeting

2. Members noted that no information paper had been issued since the last meeting.

III. Progress of the work in tackling the threat of antimicrobial resistance in food animals
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1312/19-20(01) and (02))

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Deputy Director, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("DD/AFCD") briefed Members on AFCD's work progress in tackling the threat of antimicrobial resistance ("AMR") in food animals in Hong Kong, as set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1312/19-20(01)). Members noted the information note prepared by the Legislative Council ("LegCo") Secretariat on the subject (LC Paper No. CB(2)1312/19-20(02)).

Monitoring of the AMR issue in local food animal farms

4. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan sought information on how the AMR issue in food animals would pose threat to public health. She was concerned whether standards or restrictions had been set in respect of the use of antimicrobials in food animals. In response, DD/AFCD explained that AMR was the ability of a microorganism (like bacteria, viruses and some parasites) to stop an antimicrobial agent (such as antibiotics, antivirals and antifungals) from working against it. One of the major factors leading to the rise of AMR was the misuse and overuse of antimicrobial drugs in humans and animals, which accelerated the emergence of AMR in microorganisms. When antibiotics

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were given to sick people or food-producing animals, susceptible bacteria were killed and bacteria with resistant genes survived. AMR microorganisms might subsequently outgrow their counterparts and develop in the bodies of humans and animals. As a result, standard medical treatments might become ineffective, infections might persist and spread to other bodies. DD/AFCD further advised that veterinary surgeons would take into account the disease status of food animals and recommendations of drug manufacturers on the usage (e.g. dosage and dosing schedule) of antimicrobials in administering the drugs to treat diseases in different animal species.

5. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan sought details on how data on antimicrobial usage ("AMU") in local food animal farms were collected. DD/AFCD responded that a mandatory AMU reporting system for the 120 fish farms under AFCD's Accredited Fish Farm Schemes had been put in place since 2005. AFCD had also implemented a voluntary AMU reporting system for other fish farms since May 2017. To check against the report systems, AFCD officers visited fish farms and collected samples for antimicrobial residue analysis. Over the past three years, a total of 572 samples including fish, feed and water samples had been obtained and tested, and no antimicrobial residues were detected. Aside from this, AFCD had been collecting AMU reports from 72 livestock farms on a monthly basis since June 2018. Although the AMU report collection was a voluntary scheme, the majority of the farmers recognized the importance of providing information on AMU. From June 2018 to May 2020, the average monthly reporting rate was approximately 74%. For those farmers who were less responsive, AFCD would endeavour to acquire the information from them through continuous education and communication and through industry associations.

6. In response to Dr CHIANG Lai-wan's follow-up enquiry about the control on acquisition of antimicrobials for food animals, Assistant Director (Inspection and Quarantine), AFCD said that in accordance with section 6(2) of the Antibiotics Ordinance (Cap. 137), local livestock farmers should obtain a written permit issued by the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (i.e. an antibiotic permit) in order to purchase and possess 20 antimicrobial substances listed in the permit for treatment of diseases of farm animals.

7. Mr Steven HO opined that the way how the Administration's paper presented the subject of AMR had given the public a wrong impression that the AMR issue in local livestock and fish farms had posed a major threat to public health. He considered that the Administration should clearly explain to the public the overall AMU situation in local farms. DD/AFCD responded that although there had been no concrete data and statistics globally showing an exact correlation between the abuse/misuse of antimicrobials in food animals and the presence of AMR bacteria in humans, there was an international consensus on the need to tackle the threat of AMR in food

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animals to contain the occurrence and spread of AMR bacteria in the food chain. AFCD officers regularly inspected local livestock and fish farms. There had been thus far no evidence found during these inspections that antimicrobials were being misused or abused in local food animal farms. That said, AFCD considered that there was room to engage the veterinary sector to enhance veterinary services for local food animal farms. Once the services matured, AFCD would implement the "veterinary prescription-only medication supply" measure ("the measure"), whereby antimicrobials would not be administrable to food animals by farmers unless under the prescription of registered veterinary surgeons.

Provision of veterinary services to local food animal farms

8. Mr Steven HO said that to his understanding, local food animal farmers were willing to take necessary actions to address the AMR issue. However, they were concerned about the resultant increase in the operational cost because of the need to implement farm management plans and initiatives to enhance surveillance on AMU. Regarding the implementation of the measure, farmers had expressed worries that it might take a long time for veterinary surgeons to prescribe antimicrobials for farm animals in the future as laboratory testing of viruses and bacteria might be required before the prescription. Farmers hoped that after the implementation of the measure, advice could be provided on the viruses or bacteria usually presented in their livestock and the types of antimicrobial drugs suitable for treatment of diseases concerned. Also, for the timely treatment of farm animals with diseases, farmers should be allowed to keep in their farms those antimicrobial drugs and to report to AFCD at a later stage on the use of such drugs for AMU surveillance purposes. According to Mr HO, farmers also considered that AFCD should not stop issuing antibiotic permits such that they could purchase antimicrobials before veterinary services and corresponding support could be adequately provided to the farms.

9. DD/AFCD responded that for the implementation of the measure, funding had been approved and provided under the Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund and the Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund for the Jockey Club College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences ("the College") of the City University of Hong Kong ("CityU") for developing the provision of veterinary services to local food animal farms and conducting practical studies on livestock and fish disease management. The progress of the development of veterinary services was being monitored closely and assessed regularly by AFCD. DD/AFCD assured Members that the measure would not take place until the veterinary services provided to local farmers had become mature. AFCD would then stop issuing antibiotic permits to encourage prudent and responsible use of antimicrobials in local food animal farms.

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10. Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok declared that he was a director of the CityU Veterinary Health Group and the CityU Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory. He and Ms CHAN Hoi-yan expressed concern about the present lack of veterinary services provided to local food animal farms for tackling the AMR issue. Ms CHAN enquired about (a) the number of registered veterinary surgeons currently providing veterinary services to local livestock and fish farms, or to be engaged by the College under the measure to provide veterinary services to local livestock and fish farms; and (b) the estimated ratio of veterinary surgeons to food animals reared in local farms. She also asked whether AFCD would consider conducting a study to find out how abuse or misuse of antimicrobials in food animals would pose adverse effect to human health (e.g. how AMR would spread from food animals to humans through the food chain).

11. DD/AFCD responded that in general, the ratio of pets to veterinary surgeons was adopted as a key criterion in assessing the adequacy of veterinary services in a region or country. There were currently more than 800 registered veterinary surgeons practising in Hong Kong. Compared with many other places, Hong Kong did not suffer from a lack of veterinary surgeons. However, the experience and expertise of local veterinary surgeons were mainly related to treatment of diseases in pets. There were indeed very few veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong providing services focusing on food animals. The Administration hoped that through the implementation of the measure with the support of the College, veterinary surgeons could be recruited and trained up to provide professional veterinary services to local food animal farms and devise tailor-made farm management plans to help farmers address the AMR issue. The Administration undertook to provide a written response to the enquiries raised by Ms CHAN Hoi-yan in paragraph 10 above.

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(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response (Annex B to LC Paper No. CB(2)1426/19-20(01)) was circulated to members on 10 August 2020.)

12. Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok considered that as the development of veterinary services for food animals and control of AMU in local food animal farms might involve complex issues relating to human, animal and environment health, AFCD should not rely solely on local research institutions to conduct studies relating to AMR. In his view, AFCD should keep in view international strategies and practices for tackling the threat of AMR in food animals and develop practical guidelines on the proper use of antimicrobials for local farmers' reference.

13. DD/AFCD responded that veterinary surgeons recruited by the College would help develop domestic guidelines on the proper use of antimicrobials for food animal producers, taking into account the local situation as well as

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standards adopted by international organizations. AFCD would keep providing local food animal farmers with information on how to contain AMR in farms. AFCD had also conducted surveys to assess the knowledge, attitude and practices ("KAP") of local food animal farmers. Results of the second survey conducted from November 2018 to January 2019 showed that KAP of livestock farmers had been enhanced and farmers were more willing to take necessary actions to address the AMR issue. Through the surveys, farmers' needs and concerns associated with the problem of AMR were also identified, including how to arrange laboratory testing of animal residues in feed, how to properly record AMU and topics of interest to them for future educational activities.

14. The Chairman opined that local food animal farmers were willing to cooperate with AFCD in reducing the use of antimicrobials if practical guidelines in this regard were provided to them. He called on the Administration to (a) conduct more studies on the subject of AMR to provide farmers with useful advice on food farming practices and disease prevention, (b) equip local veterinary surgeons with the knowledge of treating diseases in food animals, and (c) step up liaison with the Mainland authorities to understand the latest development in AMR control on the Mainland.

IV. Progress on provision of facilities for the handling of abortuses
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1312/19-20(03) and (04))

15. At the invitation of the Chairman, Under Secretary for Food and Health ("USFH") briefed Members on the progress of providing facilities for the handling of abortuses by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD") and private cemetery operators, as set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1312/19-20(03)). Members noted the information note prepared by the LegCo Secretariat on the subject (LC Paper No. CB(2)1312/19-20(04)).

16. The Deputy Chairman, Mr SHIU Ka-chun, Dr Fernando CHEUNG and Mr Jeremy TAM indicated support for the Administration's proposals to improve the handling of abortus in a holistic manner, including the provision of facilities for keeping and cremating abortuses in public columbaria and private cemeteries. Mr SHIU, Dr CHEUNG and Mr TAM expressed appreciation that FEHD and the Hospital Authority ("HA") had proactively responded to the requests from Members and relevant concern groups and made concerted efforts to provide facilities and services for the handling of abortuses. They considered that the initiatives could help relieve the anxieties of parents in arranging proper burial for their abortuses.

17. The Deputy Chairman enquired about the progress of providing facilities for keeping abortuses in public columbaria other than the "Garden

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of Forever Love" at Wo Hop Shek Cemetery in Fanling. Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene), FEHD ("DD(EH)/FEHD") advised that 400 keeping spaces would be provided at Cape Collinson in Chai Wan by the end of 2020. Besides, the two columbarium development projects at Shek Mun, Sha Tin and Sandy Ridge, North District would each provide 300 keeping spaces and facilities for scattering the cremated ashes of abortuses. These facilities would blend in with the surrounding environment to enable the public to pay tribute to their lost loved ones in a scenic and serene setting.

18. Mr CHAN Chi-chuen enquired about the fees or charges for using the abortus keeping facilities in public columbaria or private cemeteries. DD(EH)/FEHD advised that no fee was charged for the keeping spaces in the "Garden of Forever Love" or the "寧馨園" in Tsuen Wan Chinese Permanent Cemetery. For similar facilities in the other four private cemeteries as set out in Annex 3 to the Administration's paper, the applicants had to pay a fee as prescribed by respective operators.

19. Mr CHAN Chi-chuen and Mr SHIU Ka-chun expressed concern about the application procedure for keeping abortuses in public columbaria or private cemeteries. They noted from Annex 3 to the Administration's paper that as at 31 May 2020, the occupancy rate of the "Garden of Forever Love" was only 39% and the occupancy rates for similar facilities in private cemeteries ranged from 10.4% to 61.6%. They enquired about the reasons for the low utilization of the facilities as to whether it was due to the low demand from parents, cumbersome application procedure for using the facilities or low awareness of such service among the public.

20. In response, USFH advised that the abortus keeping facilities in public columbaria and private cemeteries were planned to cater for the long-term demand and it would take time for the abortus keeping spaces to be fully taken up. DD(EH)/FEHD added that the number of abortuses recorded each year was taken into account in planning the facilities. While some of the abortuses were claimed by parents for arranging burial, unclaimed abortuses were handled by HA in accordance with the relevant legislation. FEHD was actively setting up cremation facilities dedicated for abortuses. The cremation and associated facilities to be built at a site near Kwai Chung Crematorium would have an area of about 90 square metres housing two sets of installations for cremation and ancillary facilities (including a multi-purpose room which could be used for holding memorial activities, a reception area, a storeroom and a fire service installation room). A garden where parents might scatter the cremated ashes of abortuses tranquilly in a serene environment and four electronic kiosks for memorial activities would also be set up next to the cremation facilities for use by bereaved families. It was expected that the commissioning of the dedicated cremation and ancillary facilities for abortuses would further enhance public awareness

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towards such user-friendly facilities and services for keeping and cremating abortuses.

21. Mr SHIU Ka-chun said that some parents had relayed to him that medical staff of HA had not provided them with adequate information on options available for handling abortuses. He asked whether consideration would be given to (a) enhancing the training for HA's medical staff to ensure that latest information on the handling of abortuses would be provided to parents and (b) offering one-stop support services to help parents seek counselling services and apply for use of abortus keeping facilities in public columbaria.

22. USFH said that there was room for improving the communication between HA medical staff and parents regarding how abortuses could be handled. DD(EH)/FEHD said that bereavement counselling teams set up in the obstetrics and gynaecology departments of HA to take care of parents who had experienced a miscarriage or baby loss would inform parents of the availability of facilities for handling abortuses in public columbaria or private cemeteries and the relevant arrangements, apart from providing emotional support and counselling services to help them recover from bereavement. FEHD and HA would consider stepping up publicity efforts in this regard after the commissioning of the cremation facilities for abortuses.

23. Mr Jeremy TAM expressed concern that at present, unclaimed abortuses were treated as "clinical waste". He hoped that FEHD and HA could handle unclaimed abortuses in a more sensitive and humane manner, such as arranging cremation of unclaimed abortuses and scattering the cremated ashes in public columbaria. DD(EH)/FEHD responded that apart from being available for application by parents, the dedicated cremation facilities for abortuses to be established in Kwai Chung would also handle unclaimed abortuses provided that the parents concerned would give consent to such an arrangement. This would be an improvement to the current arrangement of disposing unclaimed abortuses as clinical waste (to be incinerated at the Chemical Waste Treatment Centre of the Environmental Protection Department). Through the coordination of HA, Department of Health and private doctors, parents who did not want to claim the abortuses could indicate their consent through simple documentation under the procedure for cremation of their abortuses at the dedicated cremation facilities.

24. While noting that the dedicated cremation facilities for abortuses were targeted to be completed within 2021, Dr Fernando CHEUNG hoped that the facilities could be put in place as early as possible. Dr CHEUNG considered that the demand for abortus cremation, keeping and ancillary facilities would increase in the long run. He expressed concern that as abortuses did not meet the requirements for obtaining the death certificate or relevant documents

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under existing legislation, they could not be cremated in FEHD's existing cremation facilities. This had caused particular difficulties to parents whose stillborn abortuses were under 24 weeks' gestation, preventing the parents concerned from properly handling the remains of their abortuses after a pain of loss. In Dr CHEUNG's view, the Administration should consider amending the relevant legislation to facilitate the proper handling of abortuses like human remains, so as to tackle the problem at root.

25. USFH responded that although the Administration would not rule out the possibility of amending legislation to facilitate better handling of abortuses, the relevant law drafting process would inevitably involve complex legal issues which required careful examination. To provide a timely solution to the problem, the Administration had dealt with issues relating to the cremation and burial of abortuses through administrative means. USFH assured Members that the keeping and ancillary facilities for abortuses already provided or under planning in various public columbaria and private cemeteries should be able to cope with the need for such services in the long run.

V. Any other business

Report on the work of the Panel

26. As this meeting was the last meeting of the Panel in the 2019-2020 legislative session, the Chairman took the opportunity to thank Panel members, the Administration and the LegCo Secretariat for their support and contribution to the work of the Panel.

27. The Chairman said that a report on the work of the Panel in the 2019-2020 legislative session would be made to the Council at the Council meeting of 15 July 2020.

28. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:18 am.