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**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene**

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat  
for the meeting on 9 June 2020**

**Safety of pet food products in Hong Kong**

**Purpose**

This paper provides background information on issues relating to the safety of pet food products in Hong Kong, and summarizes major views and concerns expressed on the subject by members of the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights ("the Subcommittee") formed in the Sixth Legislative Council ("LegCo") under the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel").

**Background**

2. According to the Administration, the term "pet food" covers a wide range of "foods" for various species. In general, it refers to feed for dogs and cats, as well as other common pets, such as birds and rabbits. Pet food is broadly categorized into commercial pet food and homemade pet food. Commercial pet food is usually pre-packaged/processed food available in the form of dry food, wet food, semi-moist food, freeze-dried food and frozen food. Homemade pet food refers to food made or cooked from fresh ingredients for pets by their owners. In recent years, there is a growing tendency for pet owners to feed their pets with commercial pet food. According to the information gathered by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") from some pet food companies, it is estimated that about 70% of pet owners in Hong Kong feed their pets with commercial pet food.

### Pet food products in Hong Kong

3. According to the Administration, there is no major production of pet food locally. Commercial pet food is imported mostly from places outside Hong Kong. According to statistics of the Census and Statistics Department, dog and cat food imported to Hong Kong amounted to 37.8 million kilograms in 2016. The United States ("US") is the largest source of pre-packaged/processed pet food, accounting for over 40% of the pet food imported in 2016. Other major sources include some member states of the European Union ("EU"), Thailand, Canada and the Mainland.

4. Unlike overseas jurisdictions (such as EU, US, Japan and Singapore), Hong Kong has no dedicated legislation regulating the safety of pet food products sold in the territory. Pet food products in general are regulated under the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (Cap. 362), prohibiting any person from applying false or misleading trade descriptions (including descriptions as to the composition and the place of origin) to goods in the course of trade or business.

### Study on pet food products

5. According to information provided by the Administration in May 2017, AFCD will commission a study on the safety of commercial pet food products in Hong Kong in October 2017, with a view to gaining a better knowledge of the pet food available in the market and subsequently assessing whether the safety of pet food is a concern. The study is expected to be completed in three years. The contractor of the study will conduct sampling and testing of commercial pet food products in Hong Kong. It is planned that a total of six rounds of random sampling of pet food products will be conducted. In each round, 60 pet food products will be sampled, such that a total of 360 pet food products will be tested by the end of the study. Majority of the samples will be collected from the most common forms of pet food products for dogs and cats, such as dry food and canned food, with the remaining samples comprising semi-moist food, freeze-dried food, and frozen food as well as feed for other species like birds and rodents. A number of harmful substances and microbes, such as Salmonella, Aflatoxin and Melamine, and certain heavy metals will be tested with reference to the standards adopted in some overseas jurisdictions.

### **Members' concerns**

6. At the Subcommittee meeting on 16 May 2017, the Administration briefed members on issues relating to the safety of pet food products in Hong

Kong. Members' major views and concerns are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### Need for regulating pet food products sold in Hong Kong

7. Some members expressed concern about the lack of dedicated legislation regulating commercial pet food products in Hong Kong. Enquiries were raised as to whether consideration would be given to regulating commercial pet food products, including homemade pet food that was sold on the Internet. There was a suggestion that the Administration should consider amending section 14 of the Public Health (Animal and Birds) (Chemical Residues) Regulations (Cap. 139N) ("the Regulations") to extend its coverage to pet food.

8. The Administration advised that commercial pet food products on sale in Hong Kong were mainly imported from other places. Overseas jurisdictions like US, EU and Thailand had put in place legislation governing the safety of pet food. Sale of homemade pet food on the Internet only accounted for a small fraction of pet food sold in the territory. Pet food was not subject to regulation in Hong Kong in respect of its production, import and distribution. The Regulations were only applicable to fodder for food-production animals. The Administration considered that the need for regulating pet food in Hong Kong had to be further assessed in the light of the results of the proposed study on pet food products.

#### Handling of pet food incidents in Hong Kong

9. Some members enquired about follow-up actions taken by the Administration when pet food incidents occurred in Hong Kong. Citing the incident where Salmonella was discovered in three frozen raw pet food samples in the study conducted by the Consumer Council in 2015, members sought information on how the Administration handled local pet food incidents.

10. According to the Administration, it had not come across major incidents concerning the safety of pet food in Hong Kong in recent years. Between 2004 and 2013, only six cases involving recall of pet food sold in the market due to product safety were recorded. These pet food incidents were mainly related to the presence of Melamine and microbes, except for one case which was related to possible excessive vitamin content. According to past experience, Hong Kong importers were cooperative in handling pet food incidents. The importers would initiate product recalls and/or remove pet food products from shelves, as and when necessary. The manufacturers concerned would also review their production processes.

11. Information was sought on the sources from which the Administration obtained the information on pet food recalls and the channels through which such information was communicated to the local public. There was a suggestion that information on local pet food recalls should be uploaded onto AFCD's webpage for reference by the public.

12. According to the Administration, AFCD identified pet food incidents mainly through regular surveillance of announcements from related overseas authorities, e.g. the US Food and Drug Administration. AFCD also maintained close contact with relevant importers to ascertain whether the incidents were of local relevance. In the Administration's view, all arrangements on pet food recalls were the responsibility of the importers concerned. On the suggestion of providing information on local pet food recalls on AFCD's webpage, the Administration advised that its feasibility had to be further considered, having regard to various issues including the intellectual property right of the trademarks concerned.

### **Latest development**

13. The Administration will report to the Panel on the outcome of the consultancy study on pet food products commissioned by AFCD at the meeting on 9 June 2020.

### **Relevant papers**

14. A list of the relevant papers on the LegCo website is in **Appendix**.

**Relevant papers on  
the safety of pet food products in Hong Kong**

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Question / Paper</b>
Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights	16.5.2017 (Item I)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Legislative Council	13.12.2017	<u>Official Record of Proceedings Pages 3975 – 3982 (written question raised by Hon Claudia MO on "Protection of animal rights and welfare")</u>
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	12.1.2018*	<u>Report of the Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights</u>

\* Issue date

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