

( Translation )

Ms Josephine SO  
Clerk to Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road  
Central, Hong Kong  
(Attn.: Ms Josephine SO)

16 April 2020

Dear Miss SO,

**Bird predation in fishponds and sustainability of pond fish farming**

The letter dated 3 April 2020 has been received. With regard to the questions raised by Hon Steven HO in his letter to the Chairman of Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene Panel on 2 April 2020, the consolidated reply of the Food and Health Bureau (FHB), Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and the Development Bureau (DEVB) is as follows.

FHB and AFCD strives to promote the sustainable development of the fisheries industry. The \$500-million Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund (SFDF) has approved 23 projects since its establishment, among them 11 projects are related to the development of aquaculture. These projects cover various aspects such as the provision of assistance to fish farmers for obtaining organic accreditation of their culture operation; the provision of veterinary services for fish farms; and the use of local food waste to produce low-cost pellet feed, etc. In addition, AFCD has been providing technical support to pond fish farmers, including the development of local fish hatchery and nursery, the development of over-wintering installation and transferring techniques on water quality monitoring to pond fish farmers. To assist the industry in developing the local market, AFCD and the Fish Marketing Organization (FMO) have also been actively promoting local quality fisheries products and brands through various promotional activities.

We understand the concern of pond fish farmers on their loss due to bird predation in fishponds. EPD and AFCD have been striving to strike a balance between supporting the fisheries industries and bird conservation, at the same time assisting pond fish farmers in taking appropriate measures to reduce bird predation in fishponds without harming birds. The Government has been concerned about the issues of cormorant predation in fishponds around Deep Bay area and has conducted studies to facilitate the formulation of preventive measures. In late 2016, AFCD commissioned a specialist consultant to collect information on cormorant predation in commercial fishponds, review the effectiveness of the existing preventive measures, and explore measures to prevent cormorant predation in fishponds. Prior to the commencement of the study, AFCD had communicated with the representatives of the aquaculture industry who welcomed the study. A field trial on the use of the measures recommended by the specialist consultant was completed in early 2018. It was found that pond wiring at a density of 40-70 wires/hectare is an effective method to prevent cormorant predation. AFCD assists pond fish farmers to grasp the knowledge in preventing bird predation through regular seminars and workshops as well as distribution of booklets with the relevant information. Farmers in need of financial support may apply for low interest loans administered by AFCD or apply fund under the Equipment Improvement Project of SFDF for purchase of equipment or materials for preventive measures.

The Environment and Conservation Fund under the policy purview of the Environment Bureau has been supporting Fishpond Management Agreement projects in the Deep Bay area since 2012, with a view to achieving wise use of wetlands through fostering collaboration between pond fish farmers and non-governmental organisations, and adoption of a more ecologically-friendly approach to the operation of fishponds. The projects cover two Priority Sites designated for enhanced conservation, namely Ramsar Site and Deep Bay Wetlands outside Ramsar Site. During harvest, pond fish farmers will drain-down the ponds to provide more shallow water habitats for waterbirds to feed on the “trash fish” and other invertebrates of low economic value left behind, hence increasing the ecological value of fishponds; in return, pond fish farmers will receive a management fee. The management fees issued under the projects are intended to subsidise the cost of draining-down rather than the loss of fish due to bird predation. The amount of management fees is determined based on expenses including electricity and wages.

With regard to freshwater fish wholesaling, local pond fish farmers can sell their fish through traders at wholesale food markets or by other ways such as selling their fish directly to retailers. The Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market and the Western Wholesale Food Market currently operated by AFCD distributes a wide range of fresh food produce including freshwater fish. The Yuen Long temporary wholesale fish market is a private market. According to DEVB, the Government granted the current site under a short term tenancy in 2000 as a transitional arrangement to allow the fish market operators to make appropriate arrangements on their own, such as setting up privately operated fish markets on suitable private land.

Yours Sincerely,

(Mr. Amor WONG)  
for Secretary for Food and Health

c.c.

AFCD (Attn: Mr. Mickey LAI)

EPD (Attn: Ms. Daisy LO)

DEVB (Attn: Mr. David LAM)