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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Subcommittee on Issues Relating to the Improvement of
Environmental Hygiene and Cityscape**

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 23 March 2021**

Administration's work on rodent prevention and control

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Administration's work in respect of rodent prevention and control, and summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by members at previous meetings of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") on the subject.

Background

2. Since 2000, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD") has been making use of the rodent infestation rate ("RIR")¹ and the trend movement of RIR to gauge the general situation of rodent infestation in individual districts and as the basis for devising anti-rodent measures and assessing the overall efficacy of FEHD's rodent prevention and disinfestation work. A district's RIR is calculated with reference to the ratio of baits bitten in that district.

3. According to the information provided by the Administration to the Panel in February 2020, FEHD has been adopting a multi-pronged approach in its rodent prevention and control work, including improving environmental

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Rodent infestation rate = $\frac{\text{Number of baits bitten by rodents}}{\text{Total number of baits collected from the selected areas}} \times 100\%$

hygiene, strengthening rodent disinfestation operations and stepping up enforcement actions against illegal disposal of rubbish at hygiene blackspots. The Administration's rodent control strategy is to take targeted measures to eliminate the three fundamental survival conditions of rodents, viz. food, harbourage and passages (i.e. the elimination of the food sources and hiding places of rodents, as well as blockage of their dispersal routes).

4. To synergize efforts in rodent prevention and control work, the Food and Health Bureau ("FHB") and FEHD have liaised with relevant bureaux and government departments, and the Pest Control Steering Committee ("PCSC")² under FHB has been providing high level direction for rodent control work.

Members' concerns

5. The effectiveness of the Administration's anti-rodent efforts has all along been a concern to Panel members. Their major views and concerns expressed at the meeting on 10 December 2019 are summarized below.

Effectiveness of rodent prevention and control work

6. Members were gravely concerned about the worsening rodent infestation problem in various districts across the territory. Many members expressed dissatisfaction that FEHD and relevant departments had not been proactive enough in tackling the rodent problem in the community. They criticized that almost all of the existing measures/new initiatives implemented by relevant departments (e.g. local repaving of back alleys and enhanced anti-rodent operations in selected public markets) were limited in scale and not effective in combating rodent infestation. Some members were of the view that FEHD should tackle rodent infestation at source, by improving the environmental hygiene conditions in various districts. There was a suggestion that FEHD and relevant departments should conduct large-scale and intensive anti-rodent operations in all 18 districts concurrently for a longer period, so as to maximize and sustain the Government's efforts in combating rodent infestation.

7. In response, the Administration advised that FEHD and relevant departments had made concerted efforts in launching the territory-wide cleansing campaign. During the campaign, the numbers of enforcement actions taken and rodents caught had increased; whereas the number of

² PCSC is chaired by the Under Secretary for Food and Health. PCSC's terms of reference cover pest control issues, including the prevention and control of rodent infestation. Government departments attending PCSC meetings include FEHD, Housing Department, Highways Department, Home Affairs Department, etc.

rodent-related complaints had decreased. To sustain the effectiveness of rodent prevention and control work at the district level, FEHD had, since May 2017, regularly launched two-month anti-rodent operations in designated target areas in various districts. During the operations, FEHD would deploy additional manpower and resources to prevent and control rodent infestation by eliminating the three survival conditions of rodents. Work assessment for various districts would be conducted upon completion of the operations for enhanced monitoring of the effectiveness of anti-rodent efforts.

8. Some members took the view that there was a lack of coordination among various departments in carrying out anti-rodent operations. Concern was raised on how PCSC would strengthen inter-departmental coordination of various bureaux and departments in carrying out rodent prevention and control work. There was a suggestion that FEHD should take a leading role in coordinating the rodent control work of various departments.

9. According to the Administration, PCSC coordinated and synergized, through providing high level direction, the pest control efforts of three bureaux and 19 government departments. Under the coordination of PCSC, additional resources had been allocated to a number of departments for carrying out enhanced pest control work in areas under their respective purview. This apart, FEHD had been maintaining close liaison with other departments and providing them with technical support as well as training in the implementation of effective pest control measures in venues or areas under their purview.

Effectiveness of anti-rodent methods and devices adopted

10. As there had been criticisms that raw sweet potatoes might not be attractive to rodents, some members considered that FEHD should review the effectiveness of using raw sweet potatoes as monitoring baits and explore other more effective baits.

11. The Administration advised that sweet potatoes were mainly placed at selected areas as monitoring baits to detect the extent of rodent activities for compiling RIR under the rodent surveillance programme. Depending on the actual circumstances, pest control staff might use other baits (e.g. BBQ pork) with cage traps for controlling rodents. As rodents were omnivorous with food choices depending on environmental conditions, time, weather, etc., no single type of food was particularly appealing to them in any circumstance. FEHD would examine the effectiveness of using mixed rodent baits and break back traps through tests in more public markets.

12. Since rodent infestation was becoming rampant in many public rental housing ("PRH") estates, some members considered that rodent proofing structures should be installed in all PRH estates.

13. According to the Administration, guidelines on rodent control in building design had been promulgated. The guidelines provided for rodent proofing design in new private buildings and the implementation of anti-rodent work in construction and demolition sites. A similar design guide on government works and buildings had also been issued. FEHD, in conjunction with the Buildings Department, the Architectural Services Department and the Housing Department ("HD"), had organized talks to brief the trade on the relevant guidelines. The rodent proofing design introduced in these guidelines, which aimed at long-term rodent prevention and control, was applicable to construction of new buildings and renovation of existing buildings. HD would make reference to the guidelines in reviewing and installing rodent proofing facilities at suitable locations in PRH estates.

14. In response to members' suggestion that FEHD and relevant departments should provide assistance to residents/owners in their cleansing and anti-rodent work in private lanes and "three-nil" buildings (i.e. buildings without owners' corporations, residents' organizations or property management companies), the Administration advised that FEHD had been exploring with relevant departments, including the Home Affairs Department, on how the environmental hygiene problem in "three-nil" buildings and private lanes could be better tackled.

Application of new technologies in rodent control

15. Members took the view that FEHD should adopt new rodent control methods/techniques by making reference to the experience of other countries/places. Enquiries were raised as to whether FEHD would formulate a timetable on enhancing environmental hygiene through the application of new technologies in rodent surveillance/control, with a view to preventing the outbreak of epidemic diseases in the community.

16. According to the Administration, FEHD would keep in view the latest advances in rodent control methodologies/techniques. Also, FEHD was exploring the application of suitable technologies with the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation and other local technology companies. If suitable technologies were identified, it would conduct preliminary tests, make adjustments in the light of the actual conditions and then assess their feasibility and effectiveness. Technologies tested to be effective would be applied across the territory. In respect of rodent surveillance, FEHD was conducting studies on thermal imaging camera with artificial intelligence analytical function for

monitoring the areas and extent of rodent activities. Initial trial results had shown that the data captured could quantify and assess the effectiveness of anti-rodent work by directly comparing the rodent population density before and after carrying out anti-rodent operations. Also, the technology could be used for identifying potential rodents' entry points, travel routes and areas they frequently visited, so that rodenticides and trapping devices could be placed in a more effective manner and more targeted rodent control measures could be implemented. The Administration assured members that FEHD would keep an open mind to the introduction of technologies in enhancing anti-rodent work.

Rodent surveillance programme

17. The Director of Audit had, in the Report No. 63 published on 31 October 2014, recommended that FEHD should, among others, (a) consider widening the network of surveyed areas selected for the rodent surveillance programme and (b) review the effectiveness of Rodent Infestation Survey ("RIS") in providing surveillance information for planning and evaluation of pest control work. Enquiry was raised about the Administration's progress in implementing the recommendations made, and whether there were internationally adopted standards for evaluation of rodent surveillance and control work.

18. The Administration advised that FEHD had reviewed the locations and coverage of baiting points in all districts. In 2020, the number of surveyed areas selected for conducting RIS under the rodent surveillance programme would be increased from 41 to 50. At present, there was no internationally adopted rodent infestation index. FEHD had devised RIR and the corresponding actions at different levels with reference to overseas practices and the actual situation and experience of Hong Kong. Compared with the rodent surveillance programmes of other countries (e.g. Singapore and the United Kingdom), the geographical coverage of surveyed areas for rodent surveillance in Hong Kong was already quite extensive. In assessing the effectiveness of anti-rodent operations conducted, FEHD would take into account a host of indicators, including trapping rate, the numbers of live rodents caught and dead rodents collected.

Motions passed by the Panel

19. When the Panel last discussed the Administration's rodent control work at the meeting of 10 December 2019, members passed a total of four motions. The wording of the motions is in **Appendix I**.

Recent developments

20. On 14 January 2021, the Ombudsman announced the launch of a direct investigation to examine the effectiveness of rodent prevention and control by FEHD. The relevant press release issued by the Office of The Ombudsman is in **Appendix II**.

21. The Administration will brief the Subcommittee on the enhancement of rodent control work at the meeting on 23 March 2021.

Relevant papers

22. A list of relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix III**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
17 March 2021

食物安全及環境衛生事務委員會
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

在 2019 年 12 月 10 日的會議上就議程項目 IV
"防治鼠患工作"通過的議案
Motions passed under agenda item IV "Rodent control work"
at the meeting on 10 December 2019

議案一

(議案中文措辭)

本事務委員會強烈要求政府，加強與大學或科技機構合作，以新型技術加強防治鼠患工作，以改善滅鼠成效；同時強制所有私人及政府建築物和住宅大廈加入防鼠為本的建築設計技術，進一步遏止鼠患問題。

另外，政府除加強社區清潔、教育和滅鼠等工作外，應訂立滅鼠工作的具體工作承諾和指標，以強化有關工作力度和加強監管進度，改善防治鼠患效益。

動議人：尹兆堅議員和黃碧雲議員

Motion 1

(English translation of the motion)

This Panel strongly requests the Government to enhance the cooperation with universities or technology organizations to step up its rodent control work by applying new technologies so as to improve the effectiveness of anti-rodent work; and to make it a mandatory requirement for all private and government buildings as well as residential buildings to incorporate building design with rodent proofing features to further curb the problem of rodent infestation.

Moreover, the Government should, apart from strengthening its work in the areas of community cleansing, education, anti-rodent operations, etc., also set specific performance pledges and indicators for anti-rodent work so as to intensify its relevant work and strengthen its monitoring of work progress with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of rodent control measures.

Moved by : Hon Andrew WAN Siu-kin and
Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan

議案二

(議案中文措辭)

本事務委員會促請政府把「全城清潔」行動恆常化，盡快完成檢討追蹤鼠患的調查方法，並增撥資源完善治理蟲鼠機制。另外，政府必須加強支援舊樓區公用地方如後巷及私家街的清潔工作、優化及持續監督公共屋邨潔淨服務及增設定期的績效評估。

動議人：鄭泳舜議員, MH, JP

和議人：何俊賢議員, BBS

Motion 2

(English translation of the motion)

This Panel urges the Government to regularize the territory-wide cleansing campaign, expeditiously complete its review of the survey methodology for tracking rodent infestation and allocate additional resources to refine the pest control mechanism. Moreover, it is incumbent upon the Government to strengthen its support in cleaning up the common areas (such as rear lanes and private streets) in districts with higher concentration of aged buildings, enhance and continuously monitor the cleansing services for public rental housing estates, and establish a mechanism for conducting regular performance assessment.

Moved by : Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP

Seconded by : Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS

議案三

(議案中文措辭)

本事務委員會要求食物及衛生局徹底改革鄉郊垃圾收集系統，防止垃圾於垃圾站周邊的地面堆積，吸引老鼠繁殖。

動議人：朱凱迪議員

Motion 3

(English translation of the motion)

This Panel requests the Food and Health Bureau to revamp the refuse collection system in rural areas, so as to prevent the piling up of refuse on the ground near refuse collection points since it will provide a breeding environment for rodents.

Moved by : Hon CHU Hoi-dick

議案四

(議案中文措辭)

本事務委員會促請政府加強以下措施以防治鼠患：

- (i) 擴大全港監察鼠患計劃下的監察地點覆蓋網絡，將監察點數目由現時 41 個，增加至少 3 倍；及
- (ii) 監察鼠患地點應包括全港公眾街市及私營街市。

動議人：黃碧雲議員

Motion 4

(English translation of the motion)

This Panel urges the Government to step up the following rodent control measures:

- (i) the network of surveyed areas selected for the territory-wide rodent surveillance programme should be widened through increasing the number of surveillance areas by at least three times from the existing level of 41; and
- (ii) rodent surveillance areas should include public and private markets across the territory.

Moved by : Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan

PRESS RELEASE

**Ombudsman probes into effectiveness of
rodent prevention and control
by Food and Environmental Hygiene Department**

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (14 January) announced the launch of a direct investigation to examine the effectiveness of rodent prevention and control by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD).

The Government's rodent prevention and control work is important, as it can affect people's everyday life. Currently, the Pest Control Teams of the FEHD are responsible for rodent prevention and disinfestation in public places. Their major duties include conducting rodent infestation rate (RIR) surveys, carrying out inspections at places with potential risks of rodent infestation, such as rear lanes and illegal refuse disposal blackspots, and taking necessary preventive and control measures. The FEHD also provides training and technical support for other government departments regarding rodent prevention and control at public venues and premises under their management.

However, there are public views that the FEHD's rodent control has been ineffective and that the Department's RIR surveys have failed to reflect the actual situation, leading people to believe that the rodent infestation situation is not serious.

Ms Chiu noted, "Rodent infestation can cause a nuisance to the daily life of the general public and spread different types of serious diseases. I have noticed the wide media coverage about the grave problems of rodent infestation in a number of markets managed by the FEHD last year. Moreover, it is of concern that since the world's first case of human infection of rat Hepatitis E virus was found in Hong Kong in 2018, more than 10 cases had been recorded as at December 2020. In view of the situation, I have decided to initiate a direct investigation to examine the effectiveness of the FEHD's rodent prevention and control work and make recommendations for improvement where necessary."

The Ombudsman now invites members of the public to provide information and views on this topic. Written submissions should reach the Office of The Ombudsman by 14 February 2021:

Address: 30/F, China Merchants Tower, Shun Tak Centre
168-200 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong
Fax: 2882 8149
Email: complaints@ombudsman.hk

**Office of The Ombudsman
14 January 2021**

For media enquiries, please contact the External Relations Section at enquiry@ombudsman.hk

**Relevant papers on
the Administration's work on rodent prevention and control**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	13.11.2018 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
	12.2.2019 (Item III)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
	11.6.2019*	Administration's paper entitled "Follow-up Actions on Emerging Cases of Human Infection of Rat Hepatitis E Virus and the Territory-wide Rodent Control Work" (LC Paper No. <u>CB(2)1631/18-19(01)</u>)
	10.12.2019 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Legislative Council	11.12.2019	<u>Official Record of Proceedings Pages 3122 to 3127 (Written question raised by Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan on "Rodent prevention and control ")</u>
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	31.12.2019*	Administration's response to the motions passed under the agenda item "Rodent control work" at the meeting on 10 December 2019 (LC Paper No. <u>CB(2)457/19-20(01)</u>)
	26.2.2020*	Administration's paper entitled "Follow-up to the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene Rodent Control Work" (LC Paper No. <u>CB(2)637/19-20(01)</u>)

Legislative Council	18.3.2020	<u>Official Record of Proceedings</u> <u>Pages 4959 to 4965 (Written</u> <u>question raised by Hon Jimmy</u> <u>NG on "Efforts on rodent control</u> <u>and epidemic prevention")</u>
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* Issue date

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