

**For discussion on  
8 December 2020**

**Legislative Council Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene  
Policy Address 2020-21  
Policy Initiatives of the Food and Health Bureau**

Vision

The Food Branch of the Food and Health Bureau is committed to formulating, co-ordinating and implementing policies on environmental hygiene, food safety, agriculture, fisheries, and veterinary health so as to promote public health and raise the living standards of our citizens.

Anti-epidemic Fund

2. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) have implemented subsidy schemes under the Anti-epidemic Fund to provide financial support to the trades hard hit by the COVID-19 epidemic and the social distancing measures, mainly the catering business, the agriculture and fisheries sector, licensed hawkers and scheduled premises. As at mid-November, more than 36 000 applications and about 18 000 applications were approved in the first and second round of the subsidies, and over \$7.8 billion was approved with another \$900 million earmarked for disbursement. FEHD is processing the applications under the third round of the schemes, with an estimated funding amount of \$1.67 billion. The department will make disbursements as soon as possible.

Public Markets

3. The Government is taking forward seven new public market

projects<sup>1</sup> which are at different stages of planning, and has achieved satisfactory progress in the past year. First, construction of the FEHD Skylight Market (formerly known as Tin Shui Wai temporary market) has been completed and all 36 stalls have been leased out by open application. Among them, ten stalls have been leased to residents in Tin Shui Wai. The market will commission in the second half of December. In addition, we have announced the sites for the new public markets in Tseung Kwan O and Kwu Tung North NDA, for which local consultations have been conducted. As to the Market Modernisation Plan (MMP), we are pressing ahead with the overhaul of the Aberdeen Market with the detailed design finalised and the local community consulted. The installation of an air-conditioning system at Tai Wai Market was also completed. Reopened in October, the market provides a more comfortable shopping environment to the public.

4. We will continue to vigorously implement various new public market projects and MMP projects in future. FEHD will introduce a new operation mode at the Skylight Market by strengthening the role of the service contractor in managing the market, with a view to enhancing business vibrancy and meeting the needs of the public. Moreover, we will take forward the preliminary planning for the new markets at Tseung Kwan O and Kwu Tung North NDA.

5. We aim at seeking funding approval for the Aberdeen Market overhaul project in the first half of 2021 so that works may be carried out as soon as possible. We will also actively pursue the other three public market overhaul projects (Yeung Uk Road Market, Ngau Tau Kok Market and Kowloon City Market) as well as minor refurbishment or improvement works for about ten public markets. These initiatives not only improve municipal facilities, but also provide more employment opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Including the development of new public markets in Tin Shui Wai, Tung Chung Town Centre, Tseung Kwan O, Kwu Tung North New Development Area (NDA), Tung Chung New Town Extension Area and Hung Shui Kiu NDA, as well as building the FEHD Skylight Market (formerly known as Tin Shui Wai temporary market).

6. In the light of public concerns about the risk of virus transmission through cash exchange when shopping at markets, the Government has decided to provide a one-off subsidy to tenants of public markets under FEHD or the Housing Authority at a flat rate of \$5,000 per stall under the Anti-epidemic Fund to encourage them to use contactless payment so as to protect public health. FEHD is processing applications from its tenants and will make disbursements as soon as possible.

### Environmental Hygiene

7. FEHD has significantly stepped up its anti-epidemic efforts in public markets recently, including conducting thorough cleaning and disinfection in over 60 markets and soliciting market tenants' co-operation. This arrangement has been regularised, in which markets are closed an hour earlier than scheduled once every three months for deep cleaning and disinfection. FEHD has also installed body temperature checking systems in its markets, worked with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department to improve air ventilation, installed sensor-type toilet seat sanitisers in market toilet cubicles, applied anti-microbial coating to the communal areas and facilities etc. These measures help improve the hygiene of public markets and put the minds of shoppers at ease.

8. To enhance anti-mosquito work, FEHD introduced newly designed gravidtraps in April this year and formulated quantitative indices for surveillance of mosquito proliferation. In 2020, there was only one local dengue fever case in Hong Kong, which was recorded in April, while the territory-wide mosquito surveillance index during the rainy season was at a similar level to that of last year. Moreover, the recent monthly gravidtrap index for *Aedes albopictus* has dropped to the lowest level at Level 1.

9. As regards rodent control, we have implemented a series of new measures, including the promulgation of guidelines on rodent control in building design. The guidelines provide 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 has also been issued. In addition, FEHD has conducted intensive anti-rodent operations in 11 markets recently and extended them to cover most of its markets from October. During an operation, market staff will thoroughly clear the refuse and clean the passageways and drains in the market every night after its closure so as to eliminate the food sources of rodents. Plentiful traps and baits will also be placed in market areas extensively in the small hours. Moreover, thermal imaging cameras with artificial intelligence analytical function will be installed in all designated target areas since November 2020, with a view to identifying the scope of infestation, travel routes and the extent of rodent activities. The cameras are instrumental to the deployment of more targeted rodent control measures by monitoring the areas rodents frequently visit. They are also useful in assessing the effectiveness of anti-rodent work. In future, FEHD will continue to enhance the intensive anti-rodent operations in markets and use thermal imaging cameras more widely for rodent control. It will also step up inspections on food premises and strengthen enforcement actions against poor environmental hygiene, food preparation and scullery in back alleys, as well as improper handling and disposal of refuse.

10. FEHD has been actively implementing the Enhanced Public Toilet Refurbishment Programme over the past year. Facelifting works for 17 public toilets have been completed so far, and refurbishment or facelifting projects will commence this year and next year for nearly 100 public toilets. FEHD will apply technologies in various areas to improve hygiene in public toilets, enhance management and ensure timely repair works of facilities. We are conducting trials on the application of various technologies in public toilets, including a prototype of a smart public toilet system, anti-microbial coating on sanitary wares, and Nano Plasma Driven Catalysis Oxidation and Nano Confined Catalytic Oxidation technologies etc.

## Enhancing Animal Welfare

11. The Government attaches great importance to promoting and safeguarding animal welfare. We adopt a multi-pronged approach, which includes enhancing public education, handling and preventing acts of animal cruelty, and working closely with animal welfare organisations. We propose to amend the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169) to further safeguard animal welfare. Proposed amendments include introducing a positive “duty of care” on persons responsible for animals to provide for their welfare needs, as well as enhancing the provisions of preventing animal cruelty and enforcement powers to prevent and protect animals from suffering, including the introduction of an indictable offence for severe cases of cruelty. The Government conducted a public consultation on the above proposals last year and reported the results of the consultation to this Panel in April this year. We understand the public’s concerns and expectations towards the legislative amendment. We will draft the legislation expeditiously and introduce the bill to the Legislative Council (LegCo) as soon as possible.

## Sustainable Development of the Agriculture and Fisheries Industries

12. The Government has been supporting the agriculture and fisheries industry to move towards high value-added sustainable development. We will implement the key initiatives of the New Agriculture Policy, including the establishment of an Agricultural Park (Agri-Park) in Kwu Tung South of the New Territories, to help nurture agro-technology and modernise farm management, as well as to provide technical support to farmers. We obtained funding approval of the LegCo earlier this year. The works of the Agri-Park Phase 1 will commence soon, and is expected to be completed in stages from next year to 2023. To facilitate the relocation of chicken farms and improve their bio-security measures, with a view to further enhancing the prevention and control of avian influenza, the Government introduced amendments to the Public Health (Animals and Birds) (Licensing of Livestock Keeping) Regulation (Cap. 139L) to relax the restrictions on the relocation of premises used for chicken keeping. The amendment regulation came into effect in July

2020.

13. As regards fisheries, we are actively expanding room for the mariculture sector to further develop and helping fishermen switch to mariculture. The Government started to re-issue new marine fish culture licences early this year and is preparing for the designation of new fish culture zones in four sites in Hong Kong waters to increase fish production. The relevant environmental impact assessments are being carried out and are expected to be completed in 2022. We also support Hong Kong fishermen to participate in the development of deep-water mariculture in the Greater Bay Area. Cooperation agreements with the relevant authorities of the Guangdong Provincial Government were concluded last year. We will also help fishermen switch to deep-water mariculture by providing support through the Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund (SFDF) and establishing a modern mariculture demonstration farm.

14. In view of the extension of the annual fishing moratorium by Mainland authorities and the continued increase in operating costs, the Government obtained LegCo's approval in July this year to increase the approved commitment of the Fishing Moratorium Loan Scheme by \$210 million and the loan ceiling per vessel from \$300,000 to \$500,000, which may be further increased up to \$750,000 on the advice of the Fish Marketing Advisory Board. The enhanced financial support will help local fishermen cope with the annual fishing moratorium.

15. Besides, the Government will also continue to make use of the Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund (SADF) and SFDF of \$500 million each to provide financial support for the modernisation and sustainable development of local agriculture and fisheries. So far, these two Funds have approved funding of over \$250 million. Through the dedicated schemes set up under the Funds, farmers and fishermen may apply for financial assistance up to \$30,000 to purchase equipment for improving their productivity. So far, more than 1 900 farmers and fishermen have benefited directly from the

schemes. AFCD will continue to implement enhancement measures to further streamline the SADF and SFDF, and facilitate and encourage the sector to make use of them to enhance its overall competitiveness.

### Food Safety

16. We have been closely monitoring international developments and measures on the safeguarding of food safety, including making reference to the food safety standards of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and other economies, as well as considering local dietary practices and risk assessment results, with a view to timely updating local food safety standards and regulatory arrangements based on scientific evidence. Following the completion of the legislative amendments to the Food Adulteration (Metallic Contamination) Regulations in 2018 and its full implementation in November this year, we will conduct a three-month public consultation on proposals to strengthen the regulation on harmful substances in food (such as industrially-produced trans fats and mycotoxins) starting from mid-December this year, with an aim to introduce relevant legislative amendments into the LegCo next year.

17. We plan to cease radiation testing against every consignment of imported Japanese food and subsume the testing under the routine annual Food Surveillance Programme of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) based on risk assessment in 2021, for better trade facilitation while ensuring food safety. As for food products imported from Fukushima and the nearby four prefectures (i.e. Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba and Gunma), we will continue to implement the existing food control and radiation testing requirements. CFS will keep on conducting risk assessment and analysis for food imported from Japan to ensure safety.

## Guarding against African Swine Fever

18. Since the first African Swine Fever (ASF) case on the Mainland, the Government has been striving to prevent and control ASF at different levels, with a view to reducing the risk of the virus spreading in Hong Kong and the impact on the supply of live pigs. Since June last year, the Government has imposed a daily clearance arrangement in the slaughterhouses, which means all live pigs will be slaughtered within 24 hours upon admittance into the slaughterhouses, and lairages in different areas of the slaughterhouses will be cleared out and undergo thorough cleansing and disinfection every day. The Government has also engaged a contractor at Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse to carry out comprehensive cleansing and disinfection of vehicles transporting local pigs. This together with the daily clearance arrangement, has greatly reduced the risk of ASF spreading in Hong Kong.

## Burial Policy

19. The Government is determined to take forward the burial policy under a three-pronged approach, namely, increasing the supply of public niches, regulating private columbaria, and promoting green burial.

20. We proactively press ahead the district-based columbarium development scheme. In the past two years, the columbarium projects at Tsang Tsui in Tuen Mun, Wong Nai Chung Road in Wan Chai and Wo Hop Shek in North District were completed successively, providing over 200 000 niches in total. In resuming the supply of new public niches, newly-built niches are being allocated in phases. The Government will continue to identify suitable sites for the public columbaria use, and timely consult the District Councils on columbarium projects and seek funding approval from the LegCo.



21. On improving the arrangements for handling abortuses, the Garden of Forever Love at the Wo Hop Shek Cemetery, the first public facility for keeping abortuses, was commissioned last year. We also plan to provide similar facilities in the existing Cape Collinson Columbarium in Chai Wan and the columbaria to be constructed at Shek Mun, Sha Tin and Sandy Ridge, North District to cater for public need. Moreover, we have identified a suitable site near the Kwai Chung Crematorium for establishing a designated cremation facility for abortuses. The facility is scheduled for completion by the end of 2021.

22. Regarding the regulation of private columbaria, the Private Columbaria Licensing Board (PCLB) has thus far approved / agreed to approve in principle the specified instrument applications submitted by a total of 17<sup>2</sup> columbaria, including approving six licences, and agreeing to approve in principle two applications for licence, one for exemption and nine for TSOL. On the other hand, the specified instrument applications submitted by 26 private columbaria have been refused for non-compliance with the requirements while 14 private columbaria have withdrawn their applications. The PCLB will continue to process the remaining applications<sup>3</sup> expeditiously. We will also continue to keep in view the implementation of the Private Columbaria Ordinance (Cap. 630) for improving the regulatory regime.

23. There were more than 7 900 green burial cases<sup>4</sup>, accounting for about 16.2% of the total number of deaths in Hong Kong last year. As of October 2020, the number of green burial cases accounted for about 14.8% of the total number of deaths. We will step up promotion efforts, including promoting the Green Burial Central Register and co-operating with various sectors.

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<sup>2</sup> One of the columbaria has been given Approval-in-principle for Exemption Application and Approval-in-principle for temporary suspension of liability (TSOL) Application at the same time.

<sup>3</sup> The Licensing Board has set 31 December 2020 as the deadline for submission of documents / information in respect of the TSOL applications under processing. The Private Columbaria Affairs Office informed the applicants of the relevant details in writing on 4 September 2020.

<sup>4</sup> These include scattering ashes at Gardens of Remembrance or at sea.

## Election of Members from the Veterinary Profession to the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong

24. To implement the amendment ordinance on the registration of veterinary surgeons, the Government introduced the Veterinary Surgeons Board (Election of Members) Regulation, which was passed by the LegCo, on the arrangements for electing members of the veterinary profession to the Board. The Board conducted its first election in accordance with the legislation in September 2020 and elected members of the profession to the Board. The newly constituted Board came into operation in October 2020.

### Advice Sought

25. Members are invited to note this paper and provide comments.

**Food and Health Bureau**

**December 2020**