

**For discussion on
12 October 2021**

**Legislative Council Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Policy Address 2021**

Policy Initiatives of the Food and Health Bureau

The Food Branch of the Food and Health Bureau is committed to formulating, co-ordinating and implementing policies on agricultural and fisheries development, environmental hygiene, food safety and animal welfare, 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 September 2021, more than 94 200 applications were approved, and over \$13.3 billion was approved. We will continue to maintain close communication with the trades and adjust the social distancing measures and other measures having regard to the epidemic situation in a timely manner.

Sustainable Agricultural and Fisheries Development

3. The Government has been supporting the agriculture and fisheries sector to move towards high value-added sustainable development by introducing advanced technology and assisting the sector to seize the opportunities in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) and other places. The Government will continue to make good use of the Sustainable Agricultural

Development Fund (SADF) and Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund (SFDF) of \$500 million each to provide financial support for the modernisation and sustainable development of local agriculture and fisheries. A pilot scheme will be launched under the two Funds to focus on subsidising the local agriculture and fisheries industries to apply new technologies such as hydroponic technology, farm management technology, deep-sea mariculture, shellfish and crustacean farming, and equipment improvement for fishing vessels to operate in other areas etc, with a view to promoting modernisation and enhancing the competitiveness of the industry to facilitate the transfer of knowledge. So far, these two Funds have approved funding of nearly \$300 million. Approved projects include those assisting the industry in developing offshore fishing, recreational fishing and aquaculture, promotion of organic farming, branding of local produce, and improvement on the health and production of livestock etc. Dedicated schemes are also set up under the Funds for farmers and fishermen to apply for financial assistance to purchase equipment for improving their productivity. So far, more than 2 000 farmers and fishermen have benefited directly from the schemes.

4. 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 last 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. Modern deep-sea mariculture is the global trend of mariculture. AFCD has specifically set up the first smart demonstration farm in the Tung Lung Chau Fish Culture Zone to showcase fish culture technology which allows real-time monitoring and can endure adverse weather conditions. The aim of the project is to provide on-site demonstration and practical training to local fishermen and those interested in joining deep-sea mariculture, including the younger generation, so as to forge ahead with the utilisation and transfer of the modern technology in Hong Kong and help fishermen switch to mariculture, as well as to attract new blood into the sector. We also support Hong Kong fishermen to participate in the development of deep-sea mariculture in the GBA. The deep-

sea mariculture project in Huizhou, in which Hong Kong fishermen participated with financial support from the Government, has officially commenced in the first half of this year. It is expected to produce about 3 000 tonnes of cultured fish certified under the Accredited Fish Farm Scheme of the AFCD in the next three years, which will mainly be supplied to Hong Kong. As regards capture fisheries, we have also made great efforts to assist local fishermen to venture into new business opportunities of sustainable fishing operations in other places and provided funds under the SFDF to explore new paths for capture fisheries.

5. We will continue to take forward the initiatives under the New Agriculture Policy, including the establishment of an Agricultural Park (Agri-Park) in Kwu Tung South of the New Territories, to help nurture agrotechnology and modernise farm management, as well as to provide technical support to farmers. The works of the Agri-Park Phase 1 is expected to be completed by phases from the end of this year to 2023. We will then commence the preparatory work for developing Agri-Park Phase 2. Meanwhile, the AFCD actively promotes Smart Greenhouse technology and develops advanced precision and automatic hydroponic production technology to assist the industry in enhancing efficiency and better utilising production space.

Public Markets

6. The Government is taking forward seven new market projects¹ which are at different stages of planning. Among the projects, the Government is carrying out the tender exercise for the “Design and Construction” contract of Tin Shui Wai Market and aims to seek funding approval from the Legislative Council (LegCo) in 2022 with a view to completing the construction by the first half of 2027. Moreover, a new management mode² is being adopted at the FEHD Skylight Market

¹ 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 and Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen NDA as well as the establishment of a temporary market in Tung Chung Town Centre.

² The new management mode includes strengthening the role of the service contractor in market management and expanding its scope of services, which include daily management, cleansing, security

(formerly known as Tin Shui Wai temporary market) on a pilot basis. The Skylight Market has a high patronage every day, with an average daily patronage of nearly 10 000 since its commissioning.

7. Given that it takes time to build a permanent market in Tung Chung Town Centre³, the Government has announced the establishment of a temporary market at Fu Tung Street near Tung Chung MTR Station. The temporary market is expected to be completed for commissioning in the fourth quarter of 2022. Moreover, the preliminary design for the new public market projects in Tseung Kwan O and Kwu Tung North New Development Area (NDA) is in progress; and the preliminary planning of the new market projects in Tung Chung New Town Extension and Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen NDA is also underway.

8. Besides, the Government has earmarked \$2 billion for the implementation of the Market Modernisation Programme (MMP) to improve the facilities in public markets under FEHD. The MMP aims to improve the operating environment of public markets, thereby facilitating tenants' business operation and, at the same time, providing market patrons with a more pleasant shopping environment. The pioneering project of the MMP is the overhaul of Aberdeen Market. We commenced the preparatory work for the overhaul in August 2021. In November 2021, the Market will be closed fully for the commencement of the proposed works, which are expected to be completed within 2022. Meanwhile, FEHD is also carrying out the preparatory and consultation work for the proposed overhaul works for some other markets, including Yeung Uk Road Market, Ngau Tau Kok Market and Kowloon City Market. In addition, FEHD has carried out

and minor repairs for the market, as well as formulating promotion and development strategies for the market, maintaining liaison and communication with stakeholders, advising on the trade mix in the market, etc. with a view to enhancing business vibrancy and meeting the needs of the public. For example, the service contractor has set up a dedicated page on social media for the FEHD Skylight Market and uploaded information on the market's special offers every day, while providing the market patrons with the relevant information at the market entrance at the same time, attracting many residents of Tin Shui Wai to go for shopping.

³ The new public market will be built by a developer at the lower floors of a commercial building at Area 6 which is adjacent to Tung Chung MTR Station. The market design will be prepared by the developer according to the requirements and conditions specified by the Government. The Civil Engineering and Development Department is conducting a further technical feasibility study for the entire commercial building development project (including the new market portion) to ensure that the development project will not affect the safe operation of the MTR.

minor refurbishment or improvement works for 11 markets⁴. Amongst these 11 refurbishment or improvement works projects, four have been completed, while five are scheduled for completion by the end of this year and one within 2023. Preparation for the remaining project is underway. The works are expected to commence in phases in the second half of 2022.

9. In addition, the Government has stepped up the anti-epidemic efforts in public markets, including conducting thorough cleaning and disinfection, amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Environmental Hygiene

10. The territory-wide mosquito surveillance index during the rainy season this year was at a relatively low level similar to the levels of the past years. As at September this year, there was no local dengue fever case in Hong Kong. FEHD will actively research and apply new technologies and equipment to further enhance the effectiveness of its anti-mosquito work. FEHD and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) are testing a large robotics ultra-low volume fogger. It can be installed on vehicles, and the range of the sprayer is wider than that of the knapsack sprayer being used. This can facilitate the fogging operations in large areas and is particularly useful in killing adult mosquitoes in places that are difficult for workers to reach. FEHD has been conducting field trials in several districts since April this year. The initial feedback has been positive and FEHD is recommending other departments to adopt the technology.

11. As regards rodent control, the Housing Department (HD) and FEHD set up a Working Group co-chaired by their Deputy Directors in December 2020 to formulate and implement more effective rodent prevention and control measures in public rental housing estates. HD implemented more intensive rodent control measures in 20 priority estates from April to June this year, including conducting 46 joint inspections and 60 joint cleaning operations with FEHD or local stakeholders, and installing more rodent-

⁴ Including Ngau Tau Kok Market, Yeung Uk Road Market, Luen Wo Hui Market, Fa Yuen Street Market, Quarry Bay Market, Shui Wo Street Market, Tsuen Wan Market, Mong Kok Cooked Food Market, Ngau Chi Wan Market, Shek Tong Tsui Market and Nam Long Shan Road Cooked Food Market.

proofing facilities, etc. HD also launched the second phase of the operation in August, implementing the relevant measures for stepping up rodent control efforts in 30 priority estates. Looking forward, it plans to step up rodent control efforts in another 30 priority estates early next year. To further enhance the effectiveness of the anti-rodent operations in designated target areas, FEHD will, in November this year, deploy additional resources, including deploying pest control roving teams, rear lane clearance teams and street washing vehicles to enhance pest control and rear lane cleaning work, and taking stringent enforcement action against violation of public health legislation. Moreover, FEHD will make use of thermal cameras to detect rodent activities. Analysing the rodent traces detected at different stages of the operations will be helpful in devising an appropriate anti-rodent strategy. Besides, FEHD will carry out the enhanced version of the anti-rodent operations in designated target areas in three districts (Sham Shui Po, Wan Chai and Yuen Long), under which the scope of rodent control will be expanded; more rodent blackspots such as public markets and municipal services buildings, hawker bazaars, and rear lanes adjacent to food premises, etc. will be covered; and large-scale and targeted anti-rodent operations will be conducted. Relevant departments will make every effort to dovetail with the operations when needed to maximise the effectiveness.

12. FEHD has been actively implementing the Enhanced Public Toilet Refurbishment Programme (EPTRP) over the past two years, and has rolled out refurbishment or facelifting projects for more than 90 public toilets. The works for 50 public toilets have been completed so far, and refurbishment or facelifting projects will commence this year and next year for about 100 public toilets. By the end of 2023-24, FEHD will, in accordance with its plan, commence the refurbishment or facelifting projects for a total of around 240 public toilets. Apart from implementing the EPTRP, FEHD will also actively explore the utilisation of technologies to improve hygiene in public toilets and enhance service quality, including developing a “smart public toilet system” to collect daily operational data such as the usage of public toilets, environmental parameters and the usage of consumables, for reference in the review of service quality and management effectiveness. FEHD has piloted the system in the Tsim Sha Tsui East Public Transport Interchange Public Toilet and the Southorn Centre

Public Toilet in Wan Chai since May 2021, and is now evaluating the performance and effectiveness of the system for review and follow-up in due course. Besides, FEHD is working with EMSD to consider making use of the Government-Wide Internet-of-Things Network to launch a “smart toilet pilot programme”. The relevant devices will be successively installed at 10 FEHD toilets over the territory from the third quarter of 2021 onwards to collect useful information and data for better efficacy of cleansing, housekeeping and maintenance.

Food Safety

13. Ensuring food safety has always been one of our major priorities. Following the public consultation on strengthening regulation of harmful substances in food (including industrially-produced trans fats and mycotoxins) launched last year, we introduced the relevant legislative amendments to the LegCo in June this year. The legislative amendments, which were passed smoothly, will be implemented in two phases in June and December 2023 after the grace period. As the next step, in view of the public concern over veterinary drug residues in food, we will conduct a comprehensive review on the standards of veterinary drug residues in food under the Harmful Substances in Food Regulations (Cap. 132AF), as well as the relevant prevailing legislation and regulatory arrangements. We plan to complete the review within next year and thereafter devise arrangements to implement the relevant regulatory proposals for further ensuring food safety.

14. In addition, to further protect the nutrition and health of infants and young children below the age of 36 months, we will review the regulation of nutrition composition and the related labelling requirements of formula products for infants and young children to ensure their proper composition. We will also review the regulatory arrangement on the nutrition and health claims of these products so as to avoid parents choosing to feed their infants and young children with formula products under the influence of these claims. When conducting the review, we will make reference to the latest international development and practices.

Enhancing Animal Welfare

15. 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. In April this year, the Government amended the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) to require drivers to stop the vehicle if they hit cats or dogs in traffic accidents. The new requirement will take effect in November 2021, so that cats and dogs injured in traffic accidents may receive timely medical treatment.

16. Furthermore, we propose to amend the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169) to enhance 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. The Government has conducted public consultation on the proposals and reported the results of the consultation to this Panel. We are fully committed to expediting the drafting of the legislative amendments, with a view to introducing the amendment bill to the LegCo in the first half of 2022.

Burial Policy

17. 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.

18. In terms of increasing the supply of public niches, the most recently completed Tuen Mun Tsang Tsui Columbarium was commissioned in March this year, providing 160 000 niches. We continue to proactively press ahead the district-based columbarium development scheme. In July, we obtained funding approval from the Finance Committee to carry out site formation and associated infrastructural works for development of columbarium at Siu Ho

Wan on Lantau Island. 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. On improving the arrangements for handling abortuses, we are building a dedicated cremation facility for abortuses with a Garden of Remembrance at a site near the Kwai Chung Crematorium. The project is expected to be completed by the end of this year and commissioned in the first quarter next year.

19. Regarding the regulation of private columbaria, as at September 2021, the Private Columbaria Licensing Board (PCLB) has approved / agreed to approve in principle the specified instrument applications submitted by a total of 30 columbaria⁵, involving sold niches which approximately account for 55% of the total sold niches of private columbaria in Hong Kong. On the other hand, the specified instrument applications submitted by 28 private columbaria have been refused due to non-compliance with the requirements. The PCLB will continue to process the applications⁶ expeditiously as far as practicable. We will also continue to keep in view the implementation of the Private Columbaria Ordinance (Cap. 630) and consider how to improve the regulatory regime.

20. As for promotion of green burial, as at August 2021, there were 5 455 green burial cases, accounting for 15.7% of the total number of deaths. To further upgrade the quality and efficiency of green burial services to encourage more citizens to opt for green burial, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department plans to organize “design thinking” workshops to collect views and innovative ideas from the public and stakeholders. Centred on the needs of service users, it is to seek innovative and appropriate solutions to enhance green burial services.

⁵ In respect of the 30 columbaria, PCAB has issued a total of seven licences and one exemption, and agreed to approve in principle one application for licence, one application for exemption and 22 applications for temporary suspension of liability (TSOL).

⁶ The PCLB set a target in May 2021 to make certain decisions on all applications for specified instruments made in respect of pre-cut-off columbaria (giving approval/“approval-in-principle” to or rejecting the applications for licence / exemption / TSOL) within two years.

Advice Sought

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

Food and Health Bureau

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