

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

**Minutes of the 65th Meeting
held at 2:30 p.m. on Wednesday, 14 September 2017,
in Room 1801, 18/F, Central Government Offices,
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong.**

Prof LO Yuk-lam	(Chairman)
Dr Felix CHAN Hon-wai, JP	
Mr David CHAN Wai-ming, MH, JP	
Prof CHIU Siu-wai	
Dr CHUNG Shan-shan	
Mr Stephen LEUNG Kwok-keung	
Prof Kenneth LEUNG Mei-yee	
Prof Leo POON Lit-man	
Mr Simon TAM Hop-sing	
Prof Samuel WONG Yeung-shan	
Mrs Cherry TSE LING Kit-ching, JP	Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Food)
Dr LEUNG Siu-fai, JP	Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
Ms Vivian LAU Lee-kwan, JP	Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene
Dr Regina CHING Cheuk-tuen, JP	Head, Surveillance & Epidemiology Branch, Department of Health
Mr Bill WONG Kwok-piu	Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) ³ (Secretary to ACFEH)

Absent with Apologies

Dr Doris AU Wai-ting
Mr Abraham CHAN Yu-ling
Mrs Vivien CHEN CHOU Mei-mei
Ms Josephine KEA Chi-shun
Mrs Jenny LAM WEN Mei-fong
Mr Richard TSANG Lap-ki
Prof WONG Wing-tak

In Attendance

Food and Health Bureau (FHB)

Mr Eugene FUNG Kin-yip, JP	Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food)2
Ms Diane WONG Shuk-han	Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food)1 (Acting) / Principal Assistant Secretary (Food)2
Mr Ricky CHENG Wing-kei	Principal Assistant Secretary (Food)1 (Acting) / Assistant Secretary (Food)2
Miss Agnes HO Tsz-ting	Assistant Secretary (Food)3
Miss Fanny YEUNG Pou-ian	Assistant Secretary (Food)4
Dr Samuel LO Man-fung	Assistant Secretary (Food)SD2

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD)

Dr Thomas SIT Hon-chung	Assistant Director (Inspection & Quarantine)
Dr Shirley Veronica CHUK Sheung-ying	Senior Veterinary Officer (Animal Health)

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD)

Dr Samuel YEUNG Tze-kiu	Consultant (Community Medicine)(Risk Assessment & Communication), Centre for Food Safety
Dr Sarah CHOI Mei-ye, JP	Assistant Director (Food Surveillance & Control), Centre for Food Safety
Mr FORK Ping-lam	Assistant Director (Operations)3

Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed members and Government representatives to the 65th meeting of the Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene (ACFEH).

Agenda Item 1: Confirmation of the Minutes of the Last Meeting

2. The minutes were confirmed without amendments.

Agenda Item 2 : Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Last Meeting

3. Members were briefed at the last meeting that visits on green burials would be arranged. On 27 May 2017, a visit to the Garden of Remembrance at Wo Hop Shek Kiu Tau Road Columbarium Phase V which was under the management of FEHD was held. Matters related to green burials would be further reported at agenda item 6.

*** Agenda Item 3 : Import Arrangement of Hairy Crabs (ACFEH Paper 7/2017)**

4. Dr Sarah CHOI briefed members on the import and surveillance arrangements for the import of hairy crabs in the coming hairy crab season, as well as the initial plan of imposing a licensing requirements on premises selling live hairy crabs.
5. Mr Stephen LEUNG enquired whether the trade would be required to test the dioxins level of the hairy crabs before import. The Chairman and Mr David CHAN considered controlling at source important to safeguard public health. Dr Sarah CHOI explained that some exporting countries might have such requirement. For import from the Mainland, there were administrative arrangements between the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) and the Mainland authorities that each consignment of hairy crabs should be accompanied with a health certificate issued by relevant Mainland authorities. The Government had also been maintaining close liaison with the Mainland authorities on the import arrangements of hairy crabs. To supplement, Mrs Cherry TSE assured that CFS, working in Hong Kong and in cooperation with the relevant Mainland authorities, would continue to endeavour its best to perform the gate-keeping roles in ensuring food safety of the imported food.

6. Regarding the testing of dioxins in hairy crabs, while there were laboratories in overseas countries providing such service, Dr Sarah CHOI said that only the Government Laboratory had been accredited for conducting such testing in Hong Kong so far. Prof CHIU suggested the Government to recognise the testing results of other laboratories to facilitate the trade, invite other laboratories to help take up the testing work with incentives, or even subsidise the testing. Mrs Cherry TSE supplemented that the lack of local private laboratories accredited for providing dioxins testing services was mainly due to limited demand and high costs. The justification for subsidising the testing with taxpayers' money was dubious, as the sale of hairy crabs was a commercial activity with considerable profit margin. While the trade were welcome to conduct tests out of their own volition, Mrs Cherry TSE and Dr Sarah CHOI stressed that such testing results or documentary proofs could not replace the existing compliance checking or testing by the Government Laboratory for safeguarding public health and enforcement purposes. To enable a more efficient and effective testing process, Prof Kenneth LEUNG suggested adding a rapid test to help screen the detection of dioxins. Dr Sarah CHOI replied that the usefulness of a rapid test depended largely on the detection level and sensitivity of the substance tested.

7. Mr David CHAN supported CFS' advice to the trade for importing smaller consignments of hairy crabs at the early stage of the coming hairy crab season, and the plan to impose a licensing requirement on premises selling hairy crabs. Also, he suggested recommending the retailers to sell the fresh hairy crabs promptly to ensure food safety. These efforts should also be supplemented by publicity and education on how the public / trade should store and handle the hairy crabs.

8. The Chairman enquired how the Government would ensure the food safety of hairy crabs and restore the public's confidence following the incident last year. In response, Dr Sarah CHOI said that CFS would continue with the surveillance and compliance checking work, and would make public the surveillance results and health advice promptly via the media.

9. Prof Kenneth LEUNG enquired how the Government would tackle the sale of hairy crabs which were illegally imported, and whether the problem would be worsened in the coming hairy crab seasons. Dr Sarah CHOI explained that combating illegal import was under the purview of the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED). C&ED had referred a case of illegal import of hairy crabs to the CFS in the last season.

Agenda Item 4 : Strategy and Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance Related to Food (ACFEH Paper 8/2017)

10. Dr Thomas SIT and Dr Sarah CHOI briefed members on the food-related initiatives under the Hong Kong Strategy and Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) (Action Plan). Dr SIT took the opportunity to brief members on the concept of AMR. The promotional videos on the usage of antimicrobials in local food animal farms, to be uploaded on AFCD's website later, were shown at the meeting.

11. Dr Samuel YEUNG explained that CFS had all along been promoting the importance of maintaining personal and food hygiene, using the World Health Organization's Five Keys to Food Safety (including choosing safe raw materials, keeping hands and utensils clean, separating raw and cooked food, cooking thoroughly and keeping food at a safe temperature), to prevent food-borne diseases, including those caused by AMR bacteria. In response to the question of Mr Stephen Leung on the public's concern over safety of food related to antimicrobials, Mrs Cherry TSE said that there was a misconception among some people that consuming meat from animals which had taken antimicrobials would necessarily lead to AMR in human. She said that while raw meat might contain pathogens, they were safe to eat when well cooked. Prof Leo POON supported the Action Plan, but remarked that the correlation of AMR transmission among animal, human and the environment was unclear, and suggested conducting study to collect field data which would help the Government formulate policy for safeguarding public health. He added that, aside from food animals, AMR bacteria could easily be found in pets and sewage which could be potential means for AMR transmission. Prof Kenneth LEUNG and Prof CHIU echoed that the correlation of various factors were unclear and complicated and supported conducting study to find out where the problem was. Prof Kenneth LEUNG cited that past research did not show a strong connection between the level of antimicrobials in fish farm water and AMR in cultured fish. Prof CHIU suggested that focussed studies be conducted on specific areas initially, and AMR in pets could be accorded a lower priority. .

12. Dr LEUNG remarked that while we only focused on the food side for today's discussion, there were other aspects of the Action Plan including the work done by the Department of Health. AFCD would soon commission a consultancy study to devise plans of surveillance on AMR microorganisms and antimicrobial usage in food animal production farms. As regards AMR transmission via pets, Dr LEUNG said that priority would be given to food animals at this stage. The Government would consult the Veterinary Surgeons Board on better record keeping in the use of antimicrobials by pet clinics.

13. Since the local production only accounted for 1-2% of Hong Kong's food consumption, Prof Kenneth LEUNG considered that imported food should be the focal point for AMR surveillance. On this, the Government could share the work on combating AMR with the Mainland to enhance the latter's awareness of the importance to keep AMR at bay. The Chairman supported enhancing control of antimicrobial usage at the farm level. He noted that abusive use of antimicrobials by employees was not uncommon in Mainland farms. In response to Prof Samuel WONG's enquiry on whether food to be eaten raw would be accorded a higher priority for the Government's surveillance work, Dr Sarah CHOI explained that all along the testing of pathogen in ready-to-eat raw food was covered under CFS's Food Surveillance Programme and the satisfactory rates were high.

14. Mr Simon TAM remarked that the earlier reports by the Consumer Council on antimicrobials in food, in particular chicken meat, had adversely affected the catering sector as it gave the wrong impression that meat from animals which had taken antimicrobials would lead to spread AMR and were not safe to eat even after being well cooked. He suggested the Government to educate the community with the correct message and provide the catering sector with more information to help the sector acquire antimicrobial-free ingredients in future.

Agenda Item 5 : Keep Clean Measures (ACFEH Paper 9/2017)

15. Mr FORK briefed members on the new strategies and measures adopted by FEHD for maintaining a clean and hygienic living environment. Ms Vivian LAU supplemented that in 2016 FEHD had handled about 220 000 complaint cases / requests for services, of which over 50 000 were environmental hygiene-related and most of them were made through the 1823 hotline. FEHD would continue to keep Hong Kong clean by engaging more resources in cleansing services, strengthening enforcement and enhancing publicity work.

16. Noticing some parks were particularly dirty due to the feeding of birds by some individuals, Dr CHUNG enquired whether FEHD's work also covered those parks under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). Mr FORK explained that LCSD managed its parks in accordance with its respective subsidiary legislation. He also remarked that feeding birds itself was not an offence under the law, but FEHD officers would issue fixed penalty notices of \$1,500 under the Fixed Penalty (Public Cleanliness Offences) Ordinance (Cap. 570) to persons found to have littered or dirtied public areas while feeding birds. The public could dial the 1823 hotline for reporting such cases.

17. Regarding the Internet Protocol (IP) cameras, Prof Kenneth LEUNG enquired whether the illegal refuse dumping activities had been shifted to other spots after the installation in some places, and whether the Government had any mechanism to monitor the situation. Mr FORK explained that installation of IP cameras in blackspots was effective in facilitating enforcement. Shifting of refuse dumping activities to other spots after the installation of IP cameras was not serious and could be coped with by enhancing surveillance and enforcement. Given the result of the scheme, FEHD would consider extending the installation to all districts in a progressive manner subject to availability of extra resources. FEHD would also strive for more resources to enhance the other keep clean measures. In response to Mr David CHAN's enquiry about whether the footage collected from the IP cameras could be reviewed by District Council members, Mr FORK said that since the footage might be used as evidence to prosecute offenders who dumped refuse in blackspots. Current plan was to allow only FEHD's officers to review the footage.

18. Although different anti-mosquito and anti-rodent campaigns were in place throughout the year, FEHD would continue its efforts in these regards. Mr David CHAN shared that all 18 District Councils had set up a committee respectively which focused on environmental hygiene issues and the Secretary for Food and Health had regular meetings with the Chairmen and Deputy Chairmen of these committees. This platform had been proven successful in the past, and suggested continuing such structure to help promote "keep clean". He also suggested extending the anti-mosquito work to November / December each year due to the climate change in recent years, and supported the extension of anti-rodent operations in designated target areas to all 18 districts.

19. Expecting that the implementation of the municipal solid waste (MSW) charging scheme and the gradual reduction of rubbish bins on streets might contribute to more illegal refuse dumping on streets, Prof Kenneth LEUNG enquired how the Government would tackle the related issues. Acknowledging that the implementation of the waste charging would be uneasy, Mr FORK said that FEHD would liaise closely with EPD to engage stakeholders and formulate plans to tackle the potential issues. Mrs Cherry TSE said despite FEHD's colleagues had been working very hard in maintaining streetscape, it was important to locate the source of the illegal refuse and penalise the offenders accordingly. She also expressed concern about the implication to FEHD's work brought by the implementation of MSW charging scheme. In this regard, Ms Vivian LAU added that FEHD would draw up prudent contingency plans and prepare for the worst scenario. The Chairman said that education was crucial to the smooth implementation of the MSW charging scheme.

Agenda Item 6: Any Other Business

20. The discussions are kept in strict confidence.

21. Miss Agnes HO reported that the Working Group on Green Burial and Related Matters met on 23 May and 14 June 2017. The Working Group had a fruitful exchange on green burial initiatives and the arrangements relating to public niches as well as temporary ash storage facilities. The Working Group would continue its deliberation on green burial matters, and the next meeting was tentatively scheduled for October. The Secretariat would also arrange a visit on the scattering of ashes at sea shortly and inform members of the arrangements in due course.

22. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

Secretariat

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

October 2017