

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

**Minutes of the 76th Meeting
held at 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, 29 June 2021,
in Room 1801, East Wing, Central Government Offices,
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong**

Prof Kenneth LEUNG Mei-yee, J.P. (Chairman)

Hon CHAN Hak-kan, B.B.S., J.P.

Dr Olivia CHAN Sinn-kay

Prof CHEN Sheng

Ms CHIANG Lai-yuen, J.P.

Dr Jill CHIU Man-ying

Ms Catherine CHING Siu-yi

Dr Crystal FOK Lo-ming

Dr Dennis IP Kai-ming

Prof Terence LAU Lok-ting

Dr Peter LEE Wai-man

Dr Stanley TAM Kui-fu

Mr Richard TSANG Lap-ki

Prof WONG Man-sau

Prof Sophia CHAN Siu-chee, JP Secretary for Food and Health

Miss Vivian LAU Lee-kwan, JP Permanent Secretary for Food and Health
(Food)

Dr LEUNG Siu-fai, JP Director of Agriculture, Fisheries
and Conservation

Ms Irene YOUNG Bick-kwan	Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene
Dr CHOW Chor-yiu	Senior Medical and Health Officer (Environmental Health & Toxicology) / Acting Principal Medical and Health Officer (Disease Prevention), Non-Communicable Disease Branch, Department of Health
Mr Amor WONG Yiu-tuen	Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 3 (<i>Secretary to ACFEH</i>)

Absent with Apologies

Dr CHEN Xue-ping	Mr CHEUNG Ki-tang
Ms Sandy KEUNG Yurk-nam	

In Attendance

Food and Health Bureau (FHB)

Miss Erica NG Lai-man	Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 1
Mr Anthony LI Ping-wai	Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 2
Ms Chelsea WONG Wing-chee	Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 1
Miss Colette SHAM Shiu-yan	Assistant Secretary (Food) 4
Mr Daniel CHAN Zhuo-xi	Assistant Secretary (Food) 6

Centre for Food Safety (CFS)

Dr Edwin TSUI Lok-kin	Controller, Centre for Food Safety
Dr Jackie LEUNG Ching-kan	Assistant Director (Risk Management)

Opening Remarks

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

2. Prof Sophia CHAN extended her gratitude towards the re-appointed members for their continuous support to the work of the Committee, and greeted the Chairman and new members with anticipation to their active contributions in the new term. Miss Vivian LAU hoped that the members from various professional backgrounds could provide the government with valuable advices in this term.

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

3. The minutes of the last meeting on 25 March 2021 were confirmed.

Agenda Item 2: Matters Arising

4. At the 71st meeting on 7 May 2019, members were briefed on Food Safety Management and Import Control of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS). CFS would update members on the regulation of food imports under agenda item 4.

Agenda Item 3: Findings of the Second Hong Kong Population-based Food Consumption Survey (ACFEH Paper 3/2021)

5. Dr Samuel YEUNG briefed the meeting with a PowerPoint presentation on the major findings of the Second Hong Kong Population-based Food Consumption Survey.

6. Prof WONG Man-sau remarked that dietary exposure to mercury through the consumption of fish as well as sufficient dietary intake of iodine, iron and docosahexaenoic acid (“DHA”) were of particular concerns to childbearing women. She asked if the Government would consider promoting a balanced diet apart from monitoring the risk of certain foods, and if the data collected in the survey could be shared with academic institutions.

7. Dr Jill CHIU echoed Prof WONG Man-sau’s views, adding that the intake of dietary fibres in the local population seemed to be low, and asked if the data collected should benefit the Government’s work in promoting a healthy diet as well. Ms CHIANG Lai-yuen asked whether the results reflected that respondents had been adopting healthier eating habits in recent years.

8. Dr Edwin TSUI responded that while CFS would apply the latest set of food consumption data in its relevant work for achieving focused food safety control, the data collected on the daily intake amount of various food groups among respondents was useful in its own right. The data of the survey would be uploaded to data.gov.hk for sharing with academic institutes for research purposes. He also said that CFS would work closely with the Department of Health to promote a healthy diet.

9. Prof Terence LAU appreciated CFS' effort in collecting such comprehensive data, and suggested that the data could be further defined by age distribution. He also said that there would be risk and benefit for consuming any food, but the "risk-to-benefit" ratio was the key issue which the Government could provide advices to the public. Mr Richard TSANG encouraged the Government to provide user-friendly assistance to the public, for example, some simple dietary advice for different population subgroups. He further suggested that the Government could develop a mobile application for people to record their food intake and in turn assess their nutrient intake.

10. Dr Olivia CHAN congratulated CFS for the great work, and suggested the Government to conduct food consumption surveys regularly, say at ten-year intervals. She further suggested that the survey results could shed light on where we stood in the face of rapid development in food safety, and the Government could identify important issues in food consumption trends and conduct promotional programmes in schools and companies to get the latest information across to the public.

11. Dr Dennis IP enquired whether stringent food safety standards would only apply to food that were commonly consumed by the population. He further asked if CFS would consider including demographic information in the food consumption database and allow showing trends in future surveys, such that more accurate and personalized advices can be provided to people with different needs. The Chairman agreed, citing ethnic minorities as having distinctive eating habits. Dr Stanley TAM suggested that emphasis could be put upon susceptible individuals (i.e. children and the elderly) with greater risks of malnutrition. The Chairman asked whether there were any major changes in the population's eating trends when comparing the two recent surveys.

12. Dr Samuel YEUNG responded that demographic information including gender and age, etc, had been collected from each survey respondent. CFS would review the data collected from the survey and conduct further analysis as appropriate to see if any food safety advice could be provided to the public accordingly. Indeed, CFS had already provided specific advice on fish consumption, with reference to the food consumption data collected from the First Hong Kong Population-based Food Consumption Survey, to childbearing women with unique food safety concerns, taking into account of CFS' risk-benefit analysis

of fish consumption. For setting food safety standards, according to recommendation by Codex, maximum levels (MLs) should be set for those foods in which the contaminant might be found in amounts that would be significant for the total exposure of the consumers. CFS would take into account factors including the dietary exposure of the local population and international standards when reviewing and formulating the local regulations.

13. Dr Edwin TSUI noted that the data collected from the Population-based Food Consumption Survey and the Population Health Survey could be read together for a more comprehensive analysis. He agreed that advices on food safety and healthy diet should be presented to the public in an accurate and accessible manner.

14. Dr Peter LEE asked if the survey covered respondents' income levels, given that the purchasing power of individuals might affect their food consumption habits. Dr Crystal FOK suggested that the application of technology could significantly enhance the efficiency and scope of manual data collection, which might in turn attract more responses in future surveys. Hon CHAN Hak-kan noticed that the respondents were not drinking enough water, and also asked the Government to further promote a balanced diet.

15. Dr Edwin TSUI responded that while information such as those relating to income levels were not collected in the survey, the key components for analysis had been obtained. The survey chose to conduct 24-hour dietary recall interviews, which was an internationally accepted methodology proven to be more effective, accurate and unbiased than self-administered questionnaires. CFS would consider using Zoom interviews in future surveys.

16. Ms Catherine CHING shared that although EatSmart Restaurants under her company had been providing healthy dishes on their menus, customers tended not to choose them. She asked if the Government would consider providing incentives for customers to pick healthy meals.

17. Prof CHEN Sheng opined that information on foodborne illnesses was important in view of the high population density and relatively high temperature in Hong Kong and that such information should be captured. Dr Jill CHIU commented that the Government should strengthen the promotion of healthy diet to lower the risk of chronic diseases such as colorectal cancer, strokes and heart diseases, which were the leading causes of deaths in Hong Kong.

18. For foodborne illnesses, Dr Edwin TSUI responded that the routine food surveillance programme conducted by CFS already covered testing for foodborne pathogens. The Department of Health had also been conducting the Population Health Survey covering some dietary risk factors of non-communicable diseases as well as frequency of acute diarrhoeal episodes. Miss Vivian LAU added that notifications of food poisoning had been kept over the years, and the number of food poisoning notifications was significantly lower than that of ten years ago.

19. Mr Anthony LI remarked that CFS had been promoting the reduction of dietary sodium and sugar in collaboration with Department of Health and local academic institutions. Miss Vivian LAU said that the data collected would be shared inter-departmentally, and relevant public education programmes would be conducted.

Agenda Item 4: Regulation of Food Imports (ACFEH Paper 4/2021)

20. Dr Jackie LEUNG briefed the meeting with PowerPoint presentation on the regulation of food imports.

21. As Hong Kong imported most food from Mainland China, the Chairman enquired if there were any notification mechanisms between Hong Kong and Mainland China, and whether most imported food was already traceable on a “farm-to-table” basis. He also asked if the current surveillance on imported food covered testing on mutant strains of COVID-19.

22. Dr Jackie LEUNG responded that a point-to-point communication mechanism had been maintained between Hong Kong and Mainland to exchange intelligence, and that the Food Incident Surveillance System (FISS) remained active with daily analysis on international and local news reports related to food safety. The “farm-to-table” traceability for products with higher food safety risks (e.g. meat, poultry, eggs milk, etc.) was well maintained. Regarding the recent finding of the COVID-19 virus from the packaging of pre-packaged frozen crocodile product in a confirmed patient’s residence, CFS had worked with the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) in the investigation and identified the source of import. Testing on over 100 samples related products yielded negative results.

23. Dr Edwin TSUI further commented that although the main mode of transmission of COVID-19 virus was through respiratory droplets and contact, in view of public concern, CFS had conducted testing on over 10 000 samples of cold-chain foodstuffs, and the results were all negative. The Government would continue to monitor and take further action when necessary.

24. Dr Dennis IP asked if an expansion on the scope of sampling testing with a larger variety of food would be feasible. Dr Crystal FOK suggested the Government to adopt automated inspections on imported food to enhance efficiency. Dr CHEN Sheng shared that high positive rate on microorganisms, e.g. extended-spectrum beta-lactamases (“ESBL”) and Escherichia coli (“E. coli”), had been identified in some local studies conducted by institutions, and asked if CFS could share whether different testing methodologies contributed to the differences in testing results.

25. Dr Jackie LEUNG responded that the sampling rates of different food imports were risk-based. Dr Edwin TSUI explained that CFS’ testing strategies had

been updated from time to time with reference to various factors including consumption trends. He also said that CFS' testing of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in food were conducted by accredited laboratories, and CFS would welcome the exchange of data with academic institutions.

26. Prof Terence LAU believed that the surveillance data reflected AMR continued to be an issue to be tackled, and suggested that application of technologies like block chain and real-time temperature monitoring should be useful in testing. He also asked if the Government had any measures to safeguard food safety in the face of Japan's plan to release treated nuclear wastewater into the Pacific Ocean.

27. Dr Edwin TSUI said that the Government had been closely following the matter since Japan's announcement in April, and would report to members when more information were available. Mr Anthony LI added that as Hong Kong was the major market of Japanese food, the Government had conveyed concerns of the food trade and the local community to the Japanese government about the potential impact on food safety and the environment, and had requested the Japanese government to provide more information of the proposal. It was noted that the International Atomic Energy Agency would set up an expert working group to follow-up the matter and experts from neighbor economies including the Mainland and Korea had also been invited to join. The Government would keep in view development of the matter and Japan's response. Miss Vivian LAU indicated that Hong Kong had reiterated to the Japanese side that no wastewater should be released by Japan before a consensus could be reached by the international community, and the Government would ensure that food safety in Hong Kong was not jeopardized.

Agenda Item 5: Any other business

28. The Chairman said that a Working Group would be set up under ACFEH with a view to advising the Secretary for Food and Health on application of technological solutions for keeping Hong Kong clean and hygienic. Members would be invited to join the Working Group.

29. Miss Erica NG explained that the Working Group aimed to provide a platform for experts who have technological background to advise or exchange views with the relevant departments on how best to apply technology in the delivery of a variety of environmental hygiene issues. The secretariat would send out invitations to members in due course. Ms Irene YOUNG hoped that the Working Group could allow the exchange of views between the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and experts from the technology sector, and that the applications of technologies could help strengthen FEHD's work in the near future.

30. Miss Vivian LAU thanked members for their active participation in the discussions and valuable advice.

31. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Secretariat
Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene
September 2021