

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

**Minutes of the 77th Meeting
held at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, 19 October 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

Mr CHEUNG Ki-tang

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

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 Rita HO Ka-wai

Head, Non-Communicable Disease
Branch, Department of Health

Mr Amor WONG Yiu-tuen

Principal Assistant Secretary for Food
and Health (Food) 3
(Secretary to ACFEH)

Absent with Apologies

Prof CHEN Sheng

Dr CHEN Xue-ping

Ms Sandy KEUNG Yurk-nam

In Attendance

Food and Health Bureau (FHB)

Mr Anthony LI Ping-wai

Deputy Secretary for Food and Health
(Food) 2

Mr Parson LAM Chun-wah

Principal Assistant Secretary for Food
and Health (Food) 2

Miss Sandy LI Ka-yuen

Assistant Secretary for Food and
Health (Food)3

Miss Colette SHAM Shiu-yan

Assistant Secretary for Food and Health
(Food) 4

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD)

Ms Jacqueline HO Yuen-man

Assistant Director (Grade
Management & Development)

Mr LEUNG Fo-man

Superintendent (Cemeteries &
Crematoria) 1

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD)

Dr Michelle YEUNG Lee

Sr. Veterinary Officer (Animal
Health), Inspection and Quarantine
Branch

Dr Raymond CHEUNG Hiu-kin

Veterinary Officer (Animal Health) 2,
Inspection and Quarantine Branch

Opening Remarks

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

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

2. The minutes of the last meeting on 29 June 2021 were confirmed.

Agenda Item 2: Matters Arising from Past Meeting

3. At the 60th meeting on 24 November 2015, members were briefed on the promotion of green burial. FEHD would report on design thinking in promotion of green burial under agenda item 4.

Agenda Item 3: Policy Address Initiatives relating to Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (ACFEH Paper 5/2021)

4. Mr Anthony LI and Mr Parson LAM briefed the meeting on the Policy Address initiatives relating to food safety and environmental hygiene.
5. The Chairman enquired if the review on the standards of veterinary drug residues in food under the Harmful Substances in Food Regulations (Cap. 132AF) and relevant prevailing legislation and regulatory arrangements would cover various food types including fishes and seafood. Mr Anthony LI responded that the review would be conducted with reference to the relevant standards and recommendations as promulgated by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) and the practices of other major economies, covering a wide range of food types. The review was expected to be completed by the end of 2022.
6. For the review on regulation of nutrient composition and the related labelling requirements of formula products for infants and young children, the Chairman asked if non-staple foods for infants and young children would be reviewed alongside infant formulas. Prof. Wong Man-sau echoed the Chairman's views, adding that non-staple foods also contributed to the health of infants and toddlers. She suggested that the Government should strike a balance between regulating the non-staple foods and allowing room for academic institutions and interested start-up companies to develop supplements for infants and toddlers. This was important so that a wider range of alternatives could be available in the market. She also observed that nutrition education for pregnant women, parents and families in Hong Kong was insufficient.

7. Mr. Anthony LI responded that the Government aimed to conduct the review from the food safety angle to protect the nutrition and health of children below the age of 36 months. Regarding nutrition education, the Department of Health had been providing relevant support to mothers at Maternal and Child Health Centres. As regards the point to provide adequate room for start-up companies to develop baby supplements, Mr. Anthony LI suggested Prof. Wong Man-sau to provide the Government representatives with more details for specific follow-up, where available.

8. Dr. Dennis IP asked about the objective of building a dedicated cremation facility for abortuses, and the types of abortuses eligible. Ms Irene YOUNG explained that according to the relevant legislation, abortuses of less than 24 weeks' gestation were not considered human remains, and could not meet the requirements for obtaining death certificates or cremation permits to be cremated at public cremation facilities. In response to the demand for the service, the Government was now building a dedicated cremation facility for abortuses with a Garden of Remembrance in Kwai Chung. Alternatively, parents could also choose to place the abortuses in keeping spaces of the Gardens of Forever Love at Wo Hop Shek and Cape Collinson Columbarium. Apart from the public facilities, five more private facilities were also offering keeping spaces for abortuses.

9. Miss Vivian LAU added that the keeping spaces and the cremation facilities were provided out of care for parents who suffered loss of their fetuses. With the dedicated cremation facility, abortuses of less than 24 weeks' gestation could be cremated with dignity. Parents who do not wish to collect their abortuses could authorize the Government to handle the remains for them.

10. Dr. Dennis IP asked if the Government would provide niches for parents who refuses to scatter the cremains. Ms Irene YOUNG replied that although such service cannot be provided by a public columbarium, parents could choose to place the cremains in a private columbarium. Mr. CHEUNG Ki-tang enquired about the number of abortuses recorded per year. Mr LEUNG Fo-man replied that based on the data provided by the Hospital Authority (HA), the number of abortuses recorded in public and private hospitals (including spontaneous miscarriage and termination of pregnancy) was around 10 000 to 20 000 per year. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) had reached an agreement with HA and private hospitals on the transfer arrangement of abortuses to the Kwai Chung facility after its commencement.

11. The Chairman appreciated FEHD for the good work. Mr. CHEUNG Ki-tang opined that there might be demand for niches for abortuses in the future. Miss Vivian LAU explained that the cremains often came in relatively small amount, and the Government was not aware of any requests for columbaria for abortuses at the moment. FEHD would keep in view the public's need for abortus cremation and keeping facilities after the Kwai Chung facility began to provide service.

12. Dr. Dennis IP commented that neither the scattering of cremains, the making of memorial accessories nor the keeping of cremains at home were allowed in Catholicism. He suggested the Government to take into account of religious constraints when considering the policy of green burial. Miss Vivian LAU noted the concerns of religious practices, and responded that the cremation services for abortuses was designed to be “people-oriented”, with a view to providing more options to comfort grief stricken parents.

13. Dr. Olivia CHAN thanked the Government for looking into the regulations for standards of veterinary drug residues in food, and asked for more details on the approach of sampling. Mr. Anthony LI responded that the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) had an existing mechanism of sampling in import, wholesale and retail levels. CFS would adjust the number of samples to be collected based on a risk-based principle, taking into account relevant considerations such as the popularity of various food commodities and potential hazards involved.

14. Dr. Olivia CHAN also observed that some food from Mainland China might contain Chinese veterinary medicines, which were not covered by the existing standards under Codex. She asked if the Government would consider exploring the regulation of Chinese veterinary medicines in food. Mr. Anthony LI explained that the prevailing legislation regulated around 40 types of veterinary drug residues in food, and the proposed review would expand the coverage to around 80 types. The Government would take into account the regulatory arrangements of various places in conducting the review to suit the situation of Hong Kong.

15. Prof Terence LAU suggested the Government to conduct review over veterinary drug residues in selected foods with greater hazards, and to look into the regulation of Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) in food at the same time. Dr LEUNG Siu-fai responded the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) was responsible for the surveillance for antimicrobial use (AMU) and AMR on local food animal farms. The AFCD had partnered with the City University of Hong Kong (CityU) to conduct surveys and sampling to monitor AMR in local food animals. With the financial support from the Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund (SADF) and the Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund (SFDF), veterinary services from CityU had been made available to the local food animal production sector in respect of disease prevention and treatment, in order to help individual farms address AMR issues.

16. Dr. Olivia Chan asked if there were any new approaches from the Government in rodent control. Mr Parson LAM responded that FEHD had adopted thermal cameras to detect rodent activities for analysing rodent traces at different stages of the operations, which helped the Government devise an appropriate anti-rodent strategy. More intensive rodent control measures had been implemented in 50 priority public rental housing estates this year, and another 30 priority estates early next year. The Government would continue the employment of technology in

anti-rodent operations.

17. Ms Irene YOUNG shared that thermal cameras were useful in helping the department evaluate the effectiveness of anti-rodent operations. For the Anti-rodent Operations in designated target areas in May and June 2021, thermal cameras were used, and rodent activities detected in five selected biotopes had decreased by 27% to 64%. She also indicated the importance of support from citizens in keeping the city clean, as proper disposal of food waste could help cut off their source of food. FEHD would continue to strengthen their work in public education and enforcement operations.

18. Dr. Peter LEE enquired if the Government had any plans to develop other technologies under the pilot “smart public toilet system” to collect daily operational data of public toilets. Mr. CHEUNG Ki-tang asked how the Government would maintain the cleanliness of newly renovated public toilets, and how the data collected could help improve in the management of public toilets.

19. Ms Irene YOUNG responded that apart from the pilot “smart public toilet system” which collects various data of users feedbacks, FEHD and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) were also studying the use of the Government-Wide Internet-of-Things Network to launch a “smart toilet pilot programme” to collect data for better efficacy of cleansing, housekeeping and maintenance. FEHD had also been using a new minor works order record system mobile app since 2019, so that staff could make repair requests to works departments and monitor the progress in a timely manner. The efficiency of maintenances had been significantly enhanced since.

20. Mr. CHEUNG Ki-tang suggested the Government to develop a mobile app for the public to provide feedbacks on the conditions of public toilets. He also shared that public members had complained about rodents in some districts. Ms Irene YOUNG replied that members of public were welcome to contact colleagues at districts and report on sightings of rodents, as well as offer opinions on public toilet facilities.

Agenda Item 4: Design Thinking in Promotion of Green Burial (ACFEH Paper 6/2021)

21. Ms Jacqueline HO and Mr LEUNG Fo-man briefed the meeting on design thinking in promotion of green burial.

22. Mr Richard TSANG enquired whether the end-users of green burial were the ones to receive the service or their families, given there might be discrepancy of opinions between two groups. He also suggested relevant educational work could start in kindergartens and primary schools, as young children tend to find it easy to accept new ideas.

23. Ms Jacqueline HO responded that the end-users would primarily be family members of the deceased, whose opinions on their user-experience would also be collected for the Government to improve the service in the future. She added that the Government had launched a central register in 2019 to allow the public to register their wish for green burial so that their families would know. The Government would work with the family members to facilitate their options of green burial services. For education on green burial for young students, her observation was that primary schools and kindergartens were generally more reserved in death-related matters. The Government would continue to develop suitable teaching kits for youngsters and cover a wider range of schools.

24. Dr. Dennis IP restated his opinion on the religious objective and proposed the Government to introduce a mechanism to remind users to consult their religious organizations before choosing green burial. The Chairman suggested that such reminder can be incorporated into the application form of the service. Prof Terence LAU added that religious organizations should be included as targeted stakeholders.

25. Mr LEUNG Fo-man advised members that religious organizations had been FEHD's important working partners in promoting green burial, and the Department would continue to enhance communication with them and explore opportunities of collaboration as appropriate. The Buddhist Association, for instance, had applied to renovate one of their cemeteries and turn it into a memorial garden for scattering of cremains. The construction work was underway with target completion by the end of 2021 or early 2022.

26. Ms CHIANG Lai-yuen asked if people could choose to scatter their cremains in their preferred sites, including country parks, and if the Government would encourage such choices if no pollution was involved. Mr LEUNG Fo-man responded that according to Cap. 132, approval from FEHD was needed for the scattering of cremains in places other than cemeteries. Ms Irene YOUNG explained that views from the public should be taken into account, as there might be varying degrees of receptiveness to the scattering of cremains in public areas.

27. Miss Vivian LAU added that according to the relevant legislation, there were restrictions to the use of country parks, which would not allow scattering of cremains. The Government would, however, continue to identify suitable sites for building gardens of remembrance (GoRs) along with public columbaria as appropriate.

28. Miss Vivian LAU further explained that since the Government's active promotion in the 1970s, cremation had gradually become the main form of final disposal of bodies of the deceased in Hong Kong. Around 50 000 people passed away each year and more than 90% of them were cremated. The demand for niches could be huge. Taking the Tsang Tsui Columbarium as an example, while it offered 160 000 niches, at the current rate of allocation, the facility would be filled up in

around 5 to 6 years. It was therefore important for the Government to promote green burial as a more sustainable form of ash disposal.

29. Miss Vivian LAU added that out of the 255 deceased persons who had registered their wish for green burial, about 64% eventually had green burial with their ashes handled in the way they had wished. With the pressure on the supply of public niches, the Government would continue to promote green burial, and to allocate niches on a renewable basis for every 20 years initially, and every 10 years thereafter to ensure efficient use of public resources.

30. Dr. Olivia Chan suggested that the Government should consider promoting digital worshiping in replacement of the emotional anchorage at physical columbarium spaces. Mr LEUNG Fo-man introduced the existing Internet Memorial Service (IMS) at “memorial.gov.hk”, which offered digital memorial services on both webpage and mobile applications for public to create memorial pages for the deceased, and pay tributes to them anytime and anywhere. Miss Vivian LAU said that users could upload videos and photos of the deceased, and present digital offerings on the page. Noting that the public had turned to use more of the service under the pandemic, the Government would continue the promotional work, particularly among the younger generations. Ms Irene YOUNG agreed that emotional anchorage was important for descendants of those whose cremains were scattered in gardens of remembrance, and explained that name plaques of the deceased could be placed in the garden for memorial purposes. For those who chose to scatter cremains at sea, FEHD offered a number of free ferry cruises per year (during Ching Ming and Chung Yueng Festivals) for the bereaved families to pay tributes.

31. The Chairman noticed that the majority of people preferred scattering their cremains in GoRs than at sea, and asked if the Government would consider building more GoRs. Ms Vivian LAU agreed that currently people tended to accept green burial at GoRs more. The situation was kept under review and more GoRs would be built as necessary to meet demand. Prof Terence LAU appreciated the idea of design thinking in green burial and suggested the Government to look for innovative ways to handle human ashes in a more sustainable manner.

32. The Chairman added that people might prefer columbaria closer to the urban areas that were more convenient, and asked if the Government would provide better public transport arrangements for users of facilities in remote areas, like Tsang Tsui Columbarium. Ms Irene YOUNG responded that the Government had been trying hard to identify suitable sites for columbaria in various districts, but had faced challenges due to limited land supply and local resistance. Although some columbaria were located in remote areas, they had nice scenery and were accessible by public transport.

33. At the suggestion of the Chairman, FEHD would arrange visits for

Members to its green burial facilities and provide more detailed briefing on site.

Agenda Item 5: Any other business

34. Dr Michelle YEUNG and Dr Raymond CHEUNG briefed the meeting on the recent detection of African Swine Fever (ASF) virus in a wild pig carcass.

35. The Chairman enquired on how ASF spread to Hong Kong, given it was originated in Africa. Dr Michelle YEUNG explained that it was widespread in European areas, before being found in Mainland China and later Hong Kong.

36. Mr Parson LAM provided members with updates on the progress of the the Working Group on Application of Technological Solutions for Enhancing Environmental Hygiene, which would hold meetings every 3 to 4 months to discuss issues including street cleansing, refuse collection, rodent and mosquito control. The secretariat would send details of the first meeting to members of the Working Group in due course.

37. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Secretariat

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

January 2022