

**Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene**

**Minutes of the Thirty-third Meeting  
held at 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, 9 November 2006  
at Room 2005, 20/F, Murray Building, Garden Road, Central**

Professor YUEN Kwok-yung, SBS, JP (Chairman)

Professor HO Suk-ching, Sara

Dr. Anthony Edward JAMES

Mr. KWOK Chun-wah, Jimmy, MH

Miss LAM Chui-lin

Dr. LO Chi-kin, JP

Dr. LO King-shun

Dr. LO Wing-lok, JP

Dr. TANG Shuk-ming, Winnie

Dr. WONG Sin-ying, Lillian

Mr. W H CHEUK

Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare  
and Food (Food and Environmental  
Hygiene) (Acting)

Mr. Eddy CHAN

Director of Food and Environmental  
Hygiene

Mr. Wallace LAU

Secretary of the Advisory Council on  
Food and Environmental Hygiene

**Absent with Apologies**

Dr. CHAN Hei-ling, Helen

Mr. FONG Wo, Felix, JP

Mr. HUNG Hak-hip, Peter

Ms. LAM Wai-ling, Leona, JP

Mrs. LAM WONG Pik-har, Grace

Professor KWAN Hoi-shan

Mrs. Stella HUNG

Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and  
Conservation Department

Dr. P Y LAM

Director of Health

### **In Attendance**

#### **Health, Welfare and Food Bureau**

Mr. Vincent LIU

Principal Assistant Secretary for Health,  
Welfare and Food (Food and  
Environmental Hygiene)<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Johnson TANG

Assistant Secretary (Food and Environmental  
Hygiene) 1

Dr. Della SIN

Assistant Secretary (Food and Environmental  
Hygiene) Special Duties

Ms Selina LEE

Senior Executive Officer (Food and  
Environmental Hygiene)

#### **Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department**

Mr. S. P. LAU

Deputy Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and  
Conservation Department

Mr. K. K. LIU

Assistant Director (Agriculture)

#### **Food and Environmental Hygiene Department**

Dr. Thomas CHUNG

Assistant Director (Food Surveillance &  
Control)

#### **Department of Health**

Dr. L. Y. TSE

Head, Surveillance and Epidemiology Branch

#### **Opening Remarks**

The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting.

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

2. Members confirmed the minutes of the last meeting without amendments.

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

3. There was no matter arising from the minutes of last meeting.

### **Agenda Item 3 : Preparing for the Peak Season of Avian Influenza Outbreak (ACFEH Paper 18/2006)**

4. Mr. Wallace LAU introduced the paper.

5. A Member enquired about the effectiveness of the voluntary surrender scheme for the poultry trade (the Scheme) and whether the scheme would be extended. Mr. Wallace LAU replied that the scheme started in August last year and ended in August this year. A total of 146 applications from farmers were received (102 out of 147 chicken farms, 39 out of 40 pigeon farms and all 5 duck farms). As a result, local on-farm poultry population went down from about 3.7 million to 1.7 million, well below the original target reduction to about 2 million. This would certainly help reduce the risk of avian influenza outbreaks in local farms and improve the overall effectiveness of the avian influenza preventive measures in Hong Kong. The remaining farms were those larger in scale and should have more resources to improve the biosecurity measures. AFCD would dedicate more efforts to monitoring these farms in accordance with the existing stringent requirements. The scheme had achieved its objective and would not be extended.

6. In response to a Member's enquiry about the progress of the development of a poultry slaughtering and processing plant, Mr. Vincent LIU said that an Invitation for Expression of Interest exercise would start within this year. The tendering exercise would be formally conducted in the middle of next year. The plant was expected to come into operation in 2009/2010. When the plant starts operation, sale of live poultry in retail outlets would be

prohibited. To address the concerns of some residents, an Environmental Impact Assessment study would be conducted later this year. The Administration planned to set up one poultry slaughtering plant in Hong Kong unless there was very great demand for another. Mr. Wallace LAU added that HWFB was working out a plan to deal with the termination of the wholesale and retail trade when the plant came into operation.

7. A Member noted from media reports that there was a new “Fujian-like” avian influenza virus and asked if tests on the existing vaccine had been conducted to ascertain its efficacy in preventing infection by the new virus. Mr. Wallace LAU said that as gene sequencing was done by the Hong Kong University, the Administration did not have detailed information about this new virus. Nevertheless, the vaccine being used in local farms was still effective. Mr. W H CHEUK added that the World Health Organization had clarified on 6 November that the “Fujian-like” strain was only another name for the same prevailing H5N1 virus strain identified in Hunan in 2004. As gene sequencing of H5N1 virus changed from time to time, AFCD had been closely monitoring the effectiveness of the vaccine. Mr. Eddy CHAN briefed members on the measures adopted by FEHD in checking the imported chickens and monitoring the operation of the registered chicken farms in Hong Kong. He said so far there was no evidence indicating that the vaccine was ineffective.

8. Another Member opined that the measures taken last year were effective in preventing avian influenza outbreaks and therefore should continue. He said that some members of the public did not know that result on dead bird test could only be announced in two to three weeks’ time and the fact that no announcement meant the dead bird did not carry avian influenza virus. He suggested the public should be better informed. Mr. S P LAU told the meeting that AFCD would conduct tests on dead birds collected. If avian influenza viruses were found, they would make announcements as soon as possible. Therefore, if no announcement was made after a certain period of time, it implied that no avian influenza viruses were found. This message would be conveyed to the District Council members again at the coming briefing sessions.

9. A Member observed that branches and leaves of some trees were totally cut by the public, presumably trying to prevent avian influenza. This would kill the trees but had no effect on preventing avian influenza. He asked if tree-cutting by private housing estates could be regulated by the Government.

He also proposed that messages concerning proper ways to handle trees and birds should be conveyed through District Councils and building management offices. Mr. S P LAU replied that according to the terms and conditions of most new title deeds, approval from the Lands Department had to be obtained before cutting trees. But, if only branches and leaves were cut, approval was not required. He agreed that educating the public on the proper ways to prevent avian influenza was important.

10. The Member asked the Chairman for more information about the “Fujian-like” virus. The Chairman told the meeting that whether the virus found should be classified as a new strain was purely an issue of academic debate because there was no existing rule defining under what conditions should a virus be classified as a new strain. The most important implication was to closely monitor the effectiveness of the existing vaccine.

11. In reply to a Member’s enquiry, Mr. Wallace LAU said that public education programme and promotion activities included Announcement of Public Interest broadcast on TV and radio, displaying poster, uploading information onto thematic website and organizing two joint briefings for all District Council Members. The Member suggested that education programme could be conducted in schools. Mr. S P LAU, in response to another Member’s request, said that relevant materials would be sent to District Council Members who could not attend the briefings.

#### **Agenda Item 4 : Feasibility of Applying Information Technology to the Tracing of Mainland Food and Food Animals Supplied to Hong Kong (ACFEH Paper 19/2006)**

12. Dr. Della SIN introduced the paper.

13. A Member supported the exploration of applying radio frequency identification (RFID) technology to develop a traceability system. He remarked that it might not be necessary to identify individual animal. Information on batch of animals in order to trace the supplier farm should be sufficient. Dr. Della SIN said the tags being used in the pilot programme contained information for individual identification. Comments were welcomed so as to better prepare for the next phase of experiment.

14. Another Member supported the application of information technology in enhancing the traceability of food supplied to Hong Kong. She suggested using active tags in the experiment to improve accuracy of the system though the cost involved would be higher. As food would be imported from other countries as well, she suggested conducting trial on other traceability systems where international standards were being adopted. Dr. Della SIN replied that the tags used in the experiment had been developed by the Guangdong Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau and they had met the ISO 15693 standard. This system could be tried on other food items later.

15. Mr. Eddy CHAN added that the scheme was voluntary at the present stage and the Government was encouraging the trade to participate as the technology was very useful for tracing the origin of the imported food. As such, cost of the tag was an important factor for the participants to consider. He said that the trial scheme was conducted in the Mainland first because the registered farms there were willing to take part and the majority of the imported food animals came from the Mainland. It would be difficult to extend the scheme to food imported from other countries unless the use of RFID tags was made an import requirement. Besides, the applicability of this technology to cut meat needed to be further explored.

16. A Member supported the exploration of this new technology to enhance the traceability of Mainland food supplied to Hong Kong. In response to his concern over the existing system, Mr. Eddy CHAN said that the existing system could also trace the source of the imported food animals but a long time would be required. The new technology would greatly shorten the time for the tracing process.

17. A Member considered RFID system useful and supported its exploration. Advantages of the system included fast exchange of information and a cross-checking mechanism against paper documents. As the majority of imported food animals came from the Mainland, trying the scheme with the Mainland at an early stage would save the time for further fine-tuning in future. He told the meeting that the tags used in library books cost only around \$5. The tags, if mass produced in the Mainland, should cost much less.

18. Another Member supported the scheme. In reply to her question about “recognized farms”, Mr. Wallace LAU said “recognized farms” were farms growing vegetables and fruits while poultry were raised in “registered farms”. Only registered farms could supply poultry to Hong Kong. He said source management mechanism had already been established. The RFID technology was an effort to improve the efficiency of the management. Mr. Eddy CHAN then explained the operation of registered farms and the monitoring measures adopted.

19. The Chairman relayed other members’ enquiry on the reasons why other countries always detected banned chemicals in fish products before Hong Kong and why they would take the initiatives to test for these chemicals. Mr. Eddy CHAN told the meeting that laws of Hong Kong stipulated seven types of chemicals should not be found in food and there was a maximum permitted level for 37 types of chemicals found in food. All these banned chemicals would have adverse effect on health if consumed. The tests conducted by FEHD on imported food focused on these chemicals. Other countries would have different standards for banned chemicals and that some tests were possibly initiated out of concern for trade.

#### **Agenda Item 5 : Any Other Business**

20. In response to a Member’s enquiry on the progress of the review on food business licences, Mr. Eddy CHAN said that the review was underway and the Council would be consulted after completion of the review.

21. There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at around 4:20 p.m.

**Secretariat  
Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene  
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau  
November 2006**