

**Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene**

**Review of the Centre for Food Safety**

**PURPOSE**

This paper seeks members' views on our proposed framework and scope for the Review of the Centre for Food Safety.

**BACKGROUND**

2. The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) was established on 2nd May 2006, under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. At the Legislative Council Establishment Sub-Committee Meeting of 8 February 2006, the Administration undertook to review the progress of the CFS after it had been operational for 12 months.

3. During this short period of operation, CFS has many challenges. With the new establishment, CFS was able to respond to these challenges more swiftly with determination and increasing transparency. Special units have been set up to monitor and communicate food incidents occurring around the world that may have an impact on Hong Kong, and respond to the increasing number of food complaints. CFS has also devised new and more target-based food surveillance strategy and enhanced risk communication with the public. Additional manpower was deployed to various fronts to strength food surveillance work and border control. Designated communication fora have also been set up to collect views from food experts, the trade and general consumers in relation to food safety.

**SCOPE AND FOCUS OF REVIEW**

4. The review will concentrate on several main focus areas that have been selected to broadly represent the challenges that the CFS has

faced and work that the CFS performs on a daily basis. It will include the examination of problems faced by the CFS during its first year in operation including public expectations and concerns, make an assessment of the work that has been done and also provide proposals for future measures for the CFS, such as legislative amendments, to overcome any deficiencies identified during the course of the review and to meet future challenges. The focus areas in the current review with justifications are set out below:

- (a) *Control of imported food*: since Hong Kong imports some 95% of its food, the control of imported food poses a significant challenge. Concerns about produce sourced from the Mainland have served to heighten public concerns with regard to imported food.
- (b) *Standard setting*: the way in which the CFS sets standards is of critical importance as it serves to define safe and unsafe food for the public. This requires keeping abreast of international standards and harmonizing our standards with overseas authorities. The steer of expert committees such as the Advisory Committee on Food and Environmental Hygiene is helpful in lending credence to our standard setting procedures.
- (c) *Conducting food surveillance*: monitoring and surveillance of our food chain is crucial to reducing the chance of food incidents. There are many challenges that must be overcome in order to ensure that there is a pro-active and preventive surveillance programme that also targets seasonal foods as well as typically high-risk food products. Food labelling and enforcement of labelling requirements is also an important issue that needs to be considered.
- (d) *Management of Food Incidents*: meeting the public's expectations for managing food incidents has become increasingly challenging as public demands for safe food are ever increasing. Responding to food incidents is no longer sufficient and modern approaches to food safety incidents must include implementation of preventive measures such as promotion of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point, promotion of consumer awareness and requiring the registration of importers and distributors to facilitate prompt

tracing and recall of suspect food items.

- (e) *Communicating risk*: proper, user-friendly and timely communication to the public and other stakeholders is an essential task performed by the CFS.
- (f) *Working with partners*: working with stakeholders is a vital role that the CFS must embrace especially when it comes to working with the trade and the public. Consultation with other stakeholders including NGOs, the media and consumer groups also plays an important part in food safety prevention. Taking notice of stakeholders' concerns is essential in help shaping public opinion on food safety matters (see Appendix for a summary of stakeholders' concerns).
- (g) *The Future*: a review of the preceding challenges and concerns is only fruitful if solutions are proposed to tackle these issues. This may involve business re-engineering and re-organisation of the CFS to better target limited resources. However, departmental re-organisation plans will not fall within the scope of this review.

## **ADVICE SOUGHT**

5. Members are invited to comment on the basic framework of the Review of the Centre for Food Safety and whether there are any special areas under the purview of CFS that warrant particular attention.

**Health, Welfare and Food Bureau  
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department  
Centre for Food Safety  
April 2007**

Views on the Centre for Food Safety

Issues/ Suggestions	LegCo Members	Occasions
<p><u>Staffing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review the composition, functions and operations of existing food safety regulatory departments to facilitate performing of gate-keeping functions</li> <li>● Involve veterinarians and relevant professionals in the food safety regulatory framework</li> <li>● Increase manpower for conducting more food tests</li> <li>● Appoint professionals or food experts from overseas on a short-term contract basis to strengthen the professional and expert support for CFS</li> <li>● Hire professionals, e.g. nutritionists, food chemists and food scientists etc., with relevant training/ experience on food safety</li> </ul>	<p>Hon WONG Kwok-hing  Hon Dr KWOK Ka-ki  Hon WONG Yung-kan  Hon Emily LAU</p>	<p>Panel meeting on 17.1.2006  Panel meeting on 24.7.2006  Panel meeting on 13.10.2006  Motion debate on 24.1.2007</p>
<p><u>Food surveillance and sampling</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To conduct more food surveillance and sample testing</li> <li>● To formulate a risk classification and sample testing system for food of different risk categories, and inform the public of the risk level for different types of food so that the consumers can make an informed food choice</li> <li>● To improve food sample collection and testing procedures to enhance the safety of seasonal food products</li> </ul>	<p>Hon Dr Joseph LEE  Hon Tommy CHEUNG  Hon WONG Kwok-hing</p>	<p>Panel meeting on 11.7.2006  Panel meeting on 24.7.2006</p>

<b>Issues/ Suggestions</b>	<b>LegCo Members</b>	<b>Occasions</b>
<u>Enhance food safety at source</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure no problematic food was allowed to be imported into Hong Kong</li> <li>● Set up control at source to ensure effective tracing</li> <li>● Conduct more audit visits to food animal farms and food processing plants</li> <li>● Inspection and testing of food samples at import levels in accordance with their places of origin</li> </ul>	Hon Emily LAU Hon Vincent FANG Hon WONG Yung-kan Hon WONG Kwok-hing	Panel meeting on 17.1.2006 Panel meeting on 11.7.2006 Panel meeting on 24.7.2006 Panel meeting on 13.10.2006 Panel meeting on 14.11.2006 Panel meeting on 9.1.2007
<u>Regulation of imported foods</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enact legislation to regulate imported foods, including setting up a licensing system for food importers, implementing mandatory inspection and testing at border control points, clearly specifying the penalties for non-compliance, and bringing live fish, egg products, vegetables and fruits into the ambit of regulation</li> </ul>	Hon Fred LI Hon WONG Yung-kan	Panel meeting on 24.7.2006 Motion debate on 24.1.2007
<u>Vegetables/ fruits</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explore measures, including legislation, to ensure vegetables from the Mainland come from registered farms</li> <li>● To tighten the monitoring of pesticide residues in vegetables at the border control points and draw up a legislative timetable on prescribing standards for pesticide and chemical residues in vegetables and fruits</li> </ul>	Hon WONG Yung-kan Hon WONG Kwok-hing Hon Fred LI	Panel meeting on 11.7.2006 Panel meeting on 20.4.2006 Panel meeting on 24.7.2006 Motion debate on 24.1.2007

<b>Issues/ Suggestions</b>	<b>LegCo Members</b>	<b>Occasions</b>
<u>Shellfish and aquatic products</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Explore ways to enhance the safety of shellfish and aquatic products during transportation</li> <li>● Introduction of legislation to regulate the food safety of aquatic products</li> <li>● Combat the smuggling of fish into Hong Kong from unregistered fish farms in the Mainland</li> <li>● Conduct testing for imported oysters and shellfish</li> <li>● Enhance communication with the Mainland authorities as it would exert a positive influence to the Mainland authorities in stepping up their education of fish farmers about food safety</li> </ul>	Hon WONG Yung-kan Hon WONG Kwok-hing Hon Fred LI	Panel meeting on 11.7.2006 Panel meeting on 24.7.2006 Panel meeting on 13.10.2006 Panel meeting on 14.11.2006
<u>Eggs</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To conduct more inspection and sample testing to registered farms to ensure food safety of poultry eggs</li> <li>● To bring wholesalers, distributors and retailers under regulatory control</li> <li>● To facilitate the tracing of source in case of food incidents by regulation of imported poultry eggs at wholesale and retail levels</li> </ul>	Hon WONG Kwok-hing Hon Tommy CHEUNG Hon Fred LI	Panel meeting on 9.1.2007
<u>Food traceability</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establishing a food supply chain tracking mechanism to enable food surveillance and control at source</li> </ul>	Hon Fred LI	Motion debate on 24.1.2007

<b>Issues/ Suggestions</b>	<b>LegCo Members</b>	<b>Occasions</b>
<u>Food recall</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduction of a mandatory food recall mechanism</li> </ul>	Hon Fred LI	Panel meeting on 11.7.2006 Panel meeting on 13.10.2006
<u>Notification mechanisms</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Perfecting the food safety notification mechanisms between Hong Kong and the Mainland as well as other places of origin of foods</li> </ul>	Hon WONG Yung-kan	Motion debate on 24.1.2007
<u>Risk communication</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Enhance work on risk communication by reintroducing food safety ambassador programmes in schools</li> <li>● Enhance the dissemination of information on food safety, and provide educational and training programme</li> </ul>	Hon WONG Kwok-hing Hon Dr KWOK Ka-ki	Panel meeting on 24.7.2006 Motion debate on 24.1.2007
<u>Expert Committee on Food Safety</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Appoint representatives from the food business trade to the Expert Committee</li> <li>● Invite more local and international experts to participate in the work of the Expert Committee on Food Safety, and draw up reference benchmarks for food safety policies and standards which are suitable for Hong Kong</li> </ul>	Hon Vincent FANG Hon Dr KWOK Ka-ki	Panel meeting on 11.7.2006 Motion debate on 24.1.2007

**Issues/ Suggestions raised by media, public / trade (including trade consultation forum, consumer liaison group)**

General

- Appreciated the effort of setting up the CFS, but the law is insufficient in empowering CFS in discharging its duties
- More surveillance should be conducted
- Strengthen its work on preventing food being imported from illegal sources
- Should provide specific advice (e.g. amount consumed to be considered safe)

Handling of food incidents

- Should be more active in preventing and monitoring food incidents, instead of being seen as reacting to media reports
- Contact trade direct to obtain information and inform the public immediately

Risk assessment studies

- Useful and can provide useful health messages
- Results should be publicized as soon as possible

Result of telephone survey of Consumer Liaison Group members on the incident of sudan dyes in eggs

- Over 70% of respondents considered work efficiency of CFS “Acceptable” to “High”
- Over 60% of respondents considered advice provided were sufficient and practical

Risk communication media

- Consider API the most effective method of communication
- Information provided in posters, leaflets, handbills and other printed materials are useful, clear and up to date
- Message from press conference is brief and conclusive

Views on new website

- Satisfied with the new website and found the information useful

Trade consultation forum

- 92% of participants found the forum useful in understanding the Administration’s work and 82% are satisfied with the logistics