

**Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene**

**Minutes of the Forty-fourth Meeting  
Held at 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, 12 March 2009  
at Room 2005, 20/F, Murray Building, Garden Road, Central**

Professor YUEN Kwok-yung, SBS, JP	(Chairman)
Professor HO Wing-shing, John	
Dr. LO King-shun	
Mrs. Elizabeth MOK	
Mr. FONG Wo, Felix, JP	
Miss LAM Chui-lin	
Dr. WONG Sin-ying, Lillian	
Dr. YUE Kwok-to	
Professor WU Shiu-sun, Rudolf	
Professor HO Suk-ching, Sara	
Miss LAM Wai-ling, Leona, JP	
Ms. Olivia NIP, JP	Acting Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Food)
Miss CHEUNG Siu-hing, JP	Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
Dr. LEUNG Ting-hung, JP	Head, Surveillance and Epidemiology Branch, Department of Health

**Absent with Apologies**

Dr. TANG Shuk-ming, Winnie	
Dr. LO Chi-kin	
Mr. KWOK Chun-wah, Jimmy, MH, JP	
Mr. LAU Yiu-fai, Ronald	
Mrs. Stella HUNG, JP	Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Food)
Mr. CHEUK Wing-hing, JP	Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

**In Attendance**

**Food and Health Bureau**

Mr. Owin FUNG	Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) <sup>3</sup>
Mr. Edward CHAN	Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) Special Duties 1



the market to scare away the wild birds from poultry farms. Dr. SIT replied that the AFCD would study the suggestion. Dr. SIT added that AFCD had advised and reminded the poultry farms of different measures to reduce the risk of AI. For example, poultry feeds should be properly stored and not be left in the open to attract wild birds. Hanging reflective CD discs around the sheds could also be adopted as one of the measures to deter wild birds. He pointed out that AFCD had requested the poultry farmers to tighten up biosecurity measures including installation of metal mesh bird protection nets with small mesh size to replace the existing wider-spaced nylon mesh in a bid to further reduce the AI risk.

6. In response to a Member's suggestion, Ms. CHEUNG Siu-hing supplemented that the AFCD had the responsibility under the law to protect wild birds from unnecessary human disturbance. She agreed that her department would explore the option of electronic devices, taking into account the animal welfare perspective. (Post meeting notes: The feasibility of installing an electronic sound-emitting devices was studied. It is found that such kind of device is not commonly used in poultry farms because the sound-emitting devices causing disturbance to wild birds will also cause disturbances to chicken. This will have an adverse animal welfare impact on chicken because of the prolonged and constant exposure).

7. A Member thanked AFCD's work in the prevention of AI. She emphasized that it was important to give proper advice to the poultry farmers to enhance their vigilance against the spread of AI. In response to the Member's query on the safety of the imported live chickens, Dr. Constance CHAN replied that all live chickens imported from the Mainland must come from registered farms and be vaccinated in compliance with the requirements of the Ministry of Agriculture and the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the PRC. The chickens would be quarantined for five days prior to exportation to Hong Kong. At the point of importation at the Man Kam To Boundary Control Point, the live chickens would be checked against their health certificates and tested for AI. The chickens would then be transported to Cheung Sha Wan Temporary Poultry Wholesale Market and would not be released into the market until the tests were confirmed to be negative. In addition, veterinary officers would conduct regular visits to the Mainland poultry registered farms. She emphasized that the government had implemented the above stringent measures to ensure that the live chickens imported from the Mainland were safe for human consumption.

8. A Member indicated that she was under an impression that the government was indecisive on the central poultry slaughtering policy. She opined that this policy was considered to be the ultimate solution in segregating the live poultry from humans, which was conducive to the prevention of the AI although she was also aware that some public might still prefer live chickens to freshly slaughtered chilled and/or frozen chickens.

9. Ms. Olivia NIP responded that the government was determined to pursue the policy of segregating live poultry from humans in order to minimize the risk of avian influenza outbreak. This is a public policy commitment. She said that the setting up of a poultry slaughtering centre was an indispensable step to help achieve the policy objective. The Government was currently refining the parameters for the poultry slaughtering centre project as a substantial number of live poultry traders had ceased business under the buy-out scheme launched for the live poultry trade in 2008 following the local AI outbreak, and it was necessary to re-assess the scope and financial viability of the project. The preparatory work for the development of the poultry slaughtering centre was proceeding in full speed for completion in 2011/12. Enactment of legislation was required to govern the operation of the central slaughtering facility. The government would submit the legislative proposals to the Legislative Council in the first half of the legislative session in 2009/10.

10. In response to the Chairman's question on the apparently long lead time in the development of the poultry slaughtering centre, Ms Olivia NIP explained that besides the time required for construction, the Environmental Impact Assessment and town planning process are statutory procedures with stipulated time periods for consideration of public objections.. She said that the Government would need to take into consideration the views of different stakeholders in devising the poultry slaughtering centre. As regards the Food Safety Bill, in response to the Chairman, Ms NIP pointed out that because of the outbreak of the Melamine incident last year, it was necessary for the Government to expedite the legislative work on the food recall mechanism by amending the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) before introducing the whole Bill. The Government's current plan was to introduce the Food Safety Bill into the Legislative Council in the 2009/10 legislative year.

11. A Member thanked the work of the investigation group in the drawing up of a comprehensive epidemiology report and observed that the avian influenza outbreak in a Yuen Long farm was very likely associated with the infection from wild birds. In response to the Member's question on the efficacy of the vaccine currently used by the local farmers and the role of sentinels in the local farms, Dr. Thomas SIT replied that there was no vaccine currently in the market that could provide 100% protection to poultry against

AI and the vaccine currently used was considered effective. That said, to ascertain the efficacy of the vaccine, an investigation group on vaccine study had been formed in December last year. On the use of sentinels on local farms, Dr. SIT explained that the sentinels were not vaccinated against H5 AI and hence they had no antibodies on H5 AI virus and could provide a direct and quick indication as to whether the chickens in question were infected with H5 AI virus.

12. In reply to a Member's question on how to ascertain an AI outbreak and the reason for raising sentinels on local farms, Dr. Thomas SIT said that highly pathogenic avian influenza would usually cause a sudden death and high mortality among the chicken on a farm. To confirm whether the death or outbreak had been caused by the avian influenza virus, the chicken carcasses and their tissues including internal organs would be taken for a series of testing including gross pathology, polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests, virus immuno-staining, histopathology and virus isolation. On the issue of the sentinels raised on the local farms, Dr. Sit reiterated that at this stage it was considered that this compulsory farm biosecurity requirement could facilitate the early detection of the intrusion and prevention of further spread of the AI virus among local farms.

13. Dr. TL LEUNG supplemented that the deployment of sentinels in poultry farms could also help determine the efficacy of the vaccine. In the latest AI outbreak in a Yuen Long farm, the high death rate among the sentinels compared to that of the vaccinated chicken suggested that the vaccine currently in use was still effective in the general protection of chicken against AI.

14. A Member pointed out that there were many factors leading to AI outbreaks. She suggested that AFCD's frontline staff should act more proactively during their routine farm inspection with a view to having early detection of any abnormalities. She also pointed out that it was equally important for the farmers/workers to make early report of any abnormalities.

15. Dr. Thomas SIT said that AFCD staff had been giving advice to the chicken farmers in the prevention of various animal diseases during their routine farm inspection. Regular seminars on biosecurity measures were also held. AFCD staff would also conduct a head count on the chicken population during their farm visits and then compare the data collected against the computer records to see whether there was any abnormal death of chicken. Furthermore, blood test would be performed on the sentinels and any detection of antibodies would trigger extensive tests of chicken on that farm. With such stringent surveillance and control measures, Dr. SIT said that the possibility of covering-up any abnormally high rates of poultry death by farmers was slim.

16. A Member expressed his appreciation of the efforts made by AFCD in conducting an extensive and comprehensive investigation into the outbreak which would be conducive for the work in the prevention of AI outbreak in future. He commented that over the past years there had been much improvement in the overall condition of the local poultry farms. However, he also raised his concern that some farmers might not be able to comply with the new biosecurity measures due to financial constraints. He also suggested that AFCD deploy resources efficiently and effectively in order to follow up the recommendations of the investigation report.

17. Miss CHEUNG Siu-hing thanked the Chairman and the Member for their contribution to the investigation and the compilation of the epidemiology report. She said that AFCD had accepted all the recommendations of the report and had started working out the implementation details. She added that her staff would maintain close dialogue with the farmers and allow for sufficient time for completing the implementation of the various bio-security measures recommended by the report, in particular on the installation of metal protection nets. The AFCD would also consider providing financial assistance through low-interest loans to individual farmers. As regards resource management, Miss CHEUNG said that AFCD had recently recruited a few veterinarians and manpower deployment should not be a significant problem in overseeing local farms' implementation of the enhanced biosecurity measures.

18. Ms Olivia NIP stressed that FHB would work closely with AFCD with a view to assisting the farmers to enhance the biosecurity measures of the farms. Ms NIP added that FHB and AFCD would closely monitor the situation to see whether there was a need to reopen the buy-out scheme for the live poultry trade.

19. In response to a Member's question as to whether the government would offer any incentives to farmers who made an effort to implement the biosecurity measures as required, Miss CHEUNG Siu-hing said that the farmers should understand that the present improvement measures had been worked out in the interest of the long-term development of the local poultry farms. Avoiding the adverse impacts of an AI outbreak should be the best incentive to farmers. In the event of any outbreak involving mass culling of poultry, the government would offer statutory compensation to the affected farmers.

20. The Chairman concluded that there was much discussion on the subject and would also like to express his appreciation of the effort made by AFCD in containing the spread of the AI virus in the territory.

**Agenda Item 4 : Summary of Recent Food Incidents (ACFEH Paper 05/2009)**

21. Dr. S.Y. LEE introduced the paper.

22. In response to a Member's query on whether there were any guidelines governing the selection of food samples in food surveillance exercises, Dr. S.Y. LEE said that the Centre of Food Safety (CFS) would draw up a yearly sampling programme to determine the number and types of food samples to be collected, taking into account the varieties of food being sold. She added that for food like children's snacks and Lunar New Year food, usually 2 to 3 samples would be taken at a single retail outlet on each occasion. Different retail outlets such as chain supermarkets, corner shops and convenience stores would be covered as far as possible.

23. In reply to a Member's question on the seasonal food surveillance on Lunar New Year food, Dr. S.Y. LEE confirmed that there was marked improvement in the results of food samples taken in this lunar new year, especially in the aspect of microbiological examination in which all tests on festive food samples were satisfactory. She said that the improvement was probably due to greater awareness of the trade in improving their overall hygiene standard and food storage condition.

24. A Member expressed her appreciation of the work undertaken by CFS since its establishment as there was obvious improvement in terms of food safety. However, she pointed out that there were times when CFS action was not reported in media reports on food safety issues with much public concern. Dr. Constance CHAN explained that as a general rule CFS would conduct risk assessment on each unsatisfactory food sample. CFS would announce immediately if there was high health risk. In the past year, the report on food safety was made public once every two months. This year, CFS made the announcement of unsatisfactory food samples on a monthly basis while the practice of immediate announcement of high risk cases was unchanged.

25. Dr. S.Y. LEE added that CFS staff would take immediate follow-up action on all unsatisfactory food samples without waiting for public announcement. She said that CFS had make this point clear in press conferences but unfortunately the media chose to report selectively on matters of their own interest.

26. In response to a Member's question on whether the voluntary traders registration scheme helped CFS to identify the problematic food samples, Dr. S.Y. LEE replied that the data collected and stored in the system could facilitate checking for local availability or import of food items, especially in following up overseas food incidents. However, for tracing the food samples taken at retail outlets, the voluntary traders registration scheme could not help much. Dr. Constance CHAN supplemented that the present approach of food import registration was only on a voluntary basis. She said that CFS would recruit additional staff to reach out to importers and distributors with a view to expanding the registration among the food trade.

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

27. A Member expressed her concern about the high vacancy of public market stalls. The Chairman requested FEHD to follow up and report in the future.

28. The Chairman took the opportunity to thank members for their past contributions and support to the work of the Advisory Council. He said that the government would make public announcement of the next term of membership in due course. He added that he had issued a farewell letter to all members concluding his six-year chairmanship of the council.

29. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m. The Secretariat would inform members of the date of the next meeting in due course.

**Secretariat**  
**Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene**  
**Food and Health Bureau**  
**May 2009**