

SEE's opening remarks on food safety and environmental hygiene at LegCo Finance Committee special meeting

Following is the English translation of the opening remarks by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, on food safety and environmental hygiene at the special meeting of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Finance Committee today (April 17):

Chairman and Honourable Members,

The Food Branch of the Environment and Ecology Bureau is committed to ensuring food safety and environmental hygiene as well as promoting the sustainable development of the local agriculture and fisheries industries.

Continuous improvement in environmental hygiene

Under the Government Programme on Tackling Hygiene Black Spots, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and various government departments have been working together to tackle hygiene blackspots over the territory. In 2023, the FEHD conducted more than 20 000 special cleansing operations at about 200 hygiene blackspots under its purview and stepped up inspection and enforcement at the same time. At present, more than 90 per cent of the hygiene blackspots under the FEHD's purview have been removed. The FEHD will continue to monitor and remove hygiene blackspots at streets and rear lanes to meet the target set out in the 2023 Policy Address, which is to remove 60 per cent of the remaining environmental hygiene blackspots identified by the departments by end-2024 as compared to end-2023.

In order to further consolidate the results achieved and enhance the efficiency in handling various environmental hygiene problems, we have conducted a comprehensive review on the existing statutory powers and penalties of environmental hygiene-related legislation. The first-stage review focused on raising the fixed penalty levels. The new penalty levels took effect on October 22, 2023. We have completed the second-stage review and proposed legislative amendments as well as implementation of new administrative measures to tackle more effectively problems such as shopfront extension, water seepage in buildings, water dripping from air-conditioners and pest infestation. We briefed the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (the Panel) of the Legislative Council on the outcome of the public consultation and the relevant legislative amendment proposals in March this year. Subject to the drafting progress, we target to submit the relevant amendment bill by the fourth quarter of this year at the earliest.

As for the problem of rodent infestation, the FEHD will continue to implement a series of more targeted rodent prevention and control measures. They include strengthening the effectiveness of overnight rodent operations, utilising various new anti-rodent technologies and tools, and fully applying

thermal imaging cameras with artificial intelligence technology this year for monitoring rodent infestation in the community and formulating more effective anti-rodent strategies. In 2023, the FEHD captured about 63 000 live rodents, representing an increase of about 40 per cent as compared to 2022, and removed 70 priority rodent blackspots (about 60 per cent) over the territory. The Government will continue to promote participation in anti-rodent work by different sectors of the community, with a view to achieving the target of removing 60 per cent of the remaining and newly identified rodent blackspots by end-2024 as set out in the 2023 Policy Address.

As regards food business licence, the FEHD is progressively rolling out a number of enhancement measures, including expanding the scope of the Professional Certification System, which adopts an approach of "licence first, inspection later", to cover general restaurant licences, issuing e-licences for food business applications, and publishing a "DIY Application for Food Business Licences" to facilitate business operation.

New public markets and Market Modernisation Programme (MMP)

We are actively taking forward several new public market projects which are at different planning stages, among which the new market in Tin Shui Wai will be completed first by the second half of 2027. Endorsement of the Public Works Subcommittee of the LegCo has been obtained for the construction of the Joint-user Complex with Market in Area 67 of Tseung Kwan O. Subject to the Finance Committee's funding approval, the works will commence as soon as possible and are expected to be completed in around 4.5 years. As for the MMP, the overhauled Lai Wan Market officially reopened in March 2024. We will continue to maintain close communication with stakeholders and implement other MMP projects.

Agriculture and fisheries development

The Government has all along attached great importance to the local agriculture and fisheries industries and is committed to promoting their modernisation and sustainable development. We support the sector in terms of application of advanced technology and intensification of production, as well as helping it seize the opportunities arising from the Greater Bay Area development. In December 2023, we published the Blueprint for the Sustainable Development of Agriculture and Fisheries (the Blueprint), which was formulated hand in hand with the agriculture and fisheries industries, and briefed the Panel on its content. The Government is implementing the measures set out in the Blueprint in phases.

On the fisheries front, the four new fish culture zones with a total sea area of about 590 hectares will commence operation in phases starting from this year. To lower the start-up cost for fishermen, the Government plans to set up five units of modern deep-sea cages in phases for rental to fisheries associations/organisations starting from the first half of 2025 at the earliest. Local mariculture production is expected to increase by 100 per cent by 2027 (within the current-term Government) comparing to 2022.

On the agriculture front, we will facilitate the establishment of a

modernised Technoâ€Agricultural Park of about 11 hectares within part of Agricultural Park Phase 2, led by the agriculture industry through public-private partnership model, and is expected to commence operation in phases starting from the end of 2024. In addition, a pilot project on modernised urban farming in Ma On Shan Sai Sha Road Garden will commence operation in the second half of 2024. To promote the development of leisure farming, we will enable farms engaged in commercial agricultural production to offer leisure farming activities as ancillary businesses, including setting more lenient licence terms in the first half of 2024 for the farms to facilitate the sale of their produce cooked by simple methods.

Chairman, my colleagues and I are happy to answer questions from Members. Thank you.