

***DRAFT***  
**Centre for Food Safety**  
**Food and Environmental Hygiene Department**  
**Notes of the Fifty Seventh Meeting of the Trade Consultation Forum**  
**held on 6 January 2017 at 2:30 p.m.**  
**in Conference Room at Room 102, 1/F, New Wan Chai Market,**  
**258 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, Hong Kong**

**Present**

**Government Representatives**

Dr. HO Yuk Yin	Consultant (Community Medicine) (Risk Assessment & Communication)	(Chairman)
Dr. Forest LAM	Senior Medical Officer (Risk Communication)	
Dr. Andrew LAU	Senior Medical Officer (Risk Assessment) <sup>2</sup>	
Ms. Joan YAU	Scientific Officer (Standard Setting) <sup>2</sup>	
Mr. Johnny CHU	Scientific Officer (Toxicology)	
Ms. Fiona FONG	Research Officer (Standard Setting) <sup>2</sup>	
Mr. LIANG King Man	Chief Health Inspector (Import/Export) <sup>6</sup>	
Mr. WONG Cheuk Ho	Superintendent (Risk Communication)	(Secretary)

**Trade Representatives**

Mr. LEUNG Wing Kam	3M Hong Kong Limited
Ms. May LAU	A & W Food Service Ltd.
Mr. LO Lok Sang	A-1 Bakery Co., (HK) Ltd.
Mr. Andrew WONG	Abbott Laboratories Ltd.
Ms. Lilian TANG	Aeon Topvalu (Hong Kong) Co., Ltd.
Ms. Michelle CHENG	Alliance Gourmet Ltd.
Mr. Ronald SIEW	ALS Technichem (HK) Pty Ltd.
Ms. May LEUNG	Angliss Hong Kong Food Service Ltd.
Ms. Frances CHEUNG	Australian Trade And Investment Commission
Mr. LAM Pak Wah	Best Harvest Company Limited
Mr. CHU Ching Yin	C & Y Co.
Mr. TSANG Wah Him	Calbee Four Seas Co., Ltd.
Mr. Jacky LO	Castco Testing Centre Ltd.
Mr. Paul TANG	Caviar House & Prunier

Mr. SIN Tak Lun	Century Food Co. Ltd.
Ms. Christine CHEUNG	China Dragon Inspection & Certification (H.K.) Ltd.
Mr. Chi WONG	China Inspection Co. Ltd.
Mr. Jack TSE	China Resources Ng Fung International Distribution Co., Ltd.
Ms. Maggie LEUNG	China Resources Vanguard (Hong Kong ) Co.
Ms. Grace YEE	City Super Limited
Mr. Marco LAU	Classic Fine Foods (HK) Ltd.
Ms. Patience CHOI	CMA Industrial Development Foundation Ltd.
Mr. TSANG Yiu Yuen	CMA Testing and Certification Laboratories
Mr. CHUNG Chin Ming	Coca-Cola China Ltd.
Mr. David HE	Coils Electronic Company Limited
Mr. Houston WONG	Consulate General of Canada
Ms. Charlotte LAU	Consulate General of France in Hong Kong and Macao
Ms. AU YEUNG Fung Chi	Crowne Plaza Hong Kong Kowloon East
Ms. LEUNG Wai Yan	Crystaljade Culinary Concepts Holding (Great China) Limited
Mr. FONG Ip Bor	Culina (HK) Ltd.
Ms. YIU Tsz Yau	Dah Chong Hong
Ms. Kacila LEUNG	Enviro Labs Limited
Mr. Jonathan CHIM	Euro Healthy Foods Corporation Ltd.
Mr. CHOI Wai Ho	Eurofins Food Testing Hong Kong Limited
Mr. Freddy FONG	Foodscan Analytics Ltd.
Ms. Karen CHIU	Friesland Campina (Hong Kong) Limited
Ms. Julie WONG	Galaxy Macau
Ms. Noel HO	Garden Heart Food Ltd.
Mr. Sunny NG	Golden Pegasus Int'l Ltd.
Ms. Tiffany CHENG	Grand Hyatt Hong Kong
Mr. Anson POON	GS1 HK
Ms. Heidi HO	GS1 HK
Mr. CHENG Ho Ming	Hong Kong Skycity Marriott Hotel
Mr. Gary LO	Hong Kong Yakult Co., Ltd.
Mr. Wong Shing Yip	Hotel Icon
Ms. Katrina NG	Hutchison China Meditech Ltd.
Mr. Marco LO	Institution of Dining Art
Mr. Sidney LAI	International F & B Solution Ltd.
Ms. Becky CHEUNG	International Food Safety Association
Mr. FUNG Kam Lun	Intertek Testing Services Hong Kong
Ms. AU Wing Sum	Island Shangri-la

Ms. Carmen TAM	Jianzeng Food Trading Limited
Ms. LEUNG Ka Ying	Kowloon Shangri-la, HongKong
Ms. Alice WONG	Lee Kum Kee International Holdings Ltd.
Ms. LAI Shui Fun	Longino & Cardenal Ltd.
Ms. Gail CHAN	Maxim's Caterers Ltd.
Ms. Rita HO	Maxim's Caterers Ltd.
Ms. Amy CHU	Mead Johnson Nutrition (Hong Kong) Ltd.
Mr. Roy FUNG	Ministry of Economy of Mexico
Mr. Joseph MA	Nestle Hong Kong Ltd.
Mr. Tommy CHAN	New Sam Yung (HK) Limited
Mr. Sunny CHAN	New World Millennium Hong Kong Hotel
Mr. Herbert LEE	Nissin Foods Co. Ltd.
Ms. Doris LO	Nu Skin Enterprises Hong Kong, LLC
Ms. Sandy KI	Old San Yang (HK) Ltd.
Ms. Phoebe YUEN	Orient EuroPharma Co., Ltd.
Ms. German CHEUNG	Pappagallo Pacific Limited
Ms. Catherine KONG	PARKnSHOP (HK) Limited
Ms. YU Chi Yin	Pizza Hut Hong Kong Management Limited
Mr. Stanley WONG	Poly Shining Limited
Mr. WONG Wing Hong	Quality Management Services (HK) Limited
Mr. LIN Gui Ping	Quantum Enterprise Limited
Ms. Esther LAM	Royal Park Hotel
Mr. Daughin Montgomery CHAN	Scandinavian Group Limited
Ms. Kitty LAI	SGS Hong Kong Limited
Mr. CHAN Tsz Yin	Shanghai Maling (Hong Kong) Limited
Mr. CHOI Ki	Shing Lung Hong Co.
Ms. Olivia LAM	Silco Int'l Ltd.
Ms. Yuki KONG	Sims Trading Co., Ltd.
Ms. YE ZHU Zhenzhen	Spanish Trade Commission
Mr. CHOW Shu Yan	Sun Wah Beston Food Limited
Ms. Rebecca CHEUNG	Sun Wah Marine Products (HK) Co., Ltd.
Mr. Victor KOK	Tai Pan Bread & Cakes Co. Ltd.
Mr. TSANG Chun Kei	Taste Supermarket
Mr. Thomas YU	Texas Food Supplies Ltd.
Ms. Leona HO	The Dairy Farm Company Ltd. - IKEA
Ms. Anita LAI	The Hong Kong Food Council
Ms. Kammy YEUNG	The Hong Kong Standards and Testing Centre Ltd.
Mr. WONG Chi Man	The Peninsula Hong Kong

Mr. Adam Gregory Goern	TPA & CO
Ms. Joanna LAM	Trade Commission of Belgium
Ms. TAN Hui Ping	Tsit Wing Coffee Co., Ltd.
Ms. Peri TONG	Tsui Wah Group
Ms. Melinda Meador	U.S. Agricultural Trade Office
Ms. Wing CHEUNG	Unilever Hong Kong Limited
Mr. CHAN Chi Kong	Vitasoy International Holdings Ltd.
Mr. CHU Kar Cheong	Wah Kee Wing Cheung Ho
Ms. Sheena TAM	Wellcome Fresh Food Centre
Mr. LAM Tsz Mau	Winner Food Products Ltd.
Ms. Merlinda NG	Worldwide Seafood Ltd.
Ms. Amy FU	Wyeth (Hong Kong) Holding Co. Ltd.
Mr. Paul LEUNG	YATA Ltd.

### **Opening Remarks**

The Chairman welcomed all trade representatives to the 57<sup>th</sup> meeting and introduced government representatives to the meeting.

### **Confirmation of the Notes of Last Meeting**

2. The notes of last meeting were confirmed without amendments.

### **Matters Arising**

#### **Labelling of Prepackaged Food**

3. Regarding the trade's suggestion in paragraph 21 of the notes of the last meeting concerning information to be provided to the public in cases of non-compliance to the nutrition labelling requirement, the Chairman informed the meeting that the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) was updating the 'Frequently Asked Questions' section of the related web page

of CFS website for general information.

### **Use of Rare Sugar**

4. Regarding the trade's enquiry in paragraph 28 of the notes of the last meeting on the use of rare sugar, the Chairman informed the meeting that the CFS was studying the characteristics of rare sugar and the result would be provided to the trade in the form of a post-meeting note.

[Post-meeting note: Rare sugars are present in nature. Rare sugars were defined by the International Society of Rare Sugars as monosaccharides and their derivatives that exist in nature but are only present in limited quantities. Animal study showed that the energy value of rare sugars was zero. On the other hand, a study showed that the energy value of rare sugars in human body was very low (0.2 kcal/g). Although rare sugars may only provide little energy to human body, products containing rare sugars may also contain other sugar or ingredients providing energy (e.g. fat) and consumers should take note of that.]

### **Agenda Item 1**

#### **Pyrrolizidine Alkaloids in Food**

5. Mr. Johnny CHU briefed the meeting of the risk assessment study conducted by CFS on Pyrrolizidine Alkaloids (PAs) in Food. PAs were secondary metabolites which were not directly involved in the normal growth, development or reproduction of an organism but served to ward off herbivores. They were natural toxins and could cause economic losses to farmers and pose risk to humans. The toxicity affected predominantly the liver and lungs and was characterized by acute hepatic veno-occlusive disease and chronic liver cirrhosis. To date, no epidemiological data suggested a link of PA exposure and cancer in humans, but

animal studies had indicated that some PAs showed carcinogenic and genotoxic effects. The population's dietary exposure to PA was mainly through plant products like grain, flour or bread, tea products and spices; and also through carrying over of plant PAs into food of animal origin like honey, milk, eggs and offal. The Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) opined that health concern was low, from a public health point of view, if the dietary exposure to PAs was below 0.0182 µg/kg bw/day. The objectives of the risk assessment study were to determine the total sum of PAs in selected food items; to estimate the dietary exposure to PAs of the HK adult population; and to assess the associated health risks. The food groups included for chemical analysis were cereals and cereal products, milk and milk products, eggs, meat and meat products, honey, dried spices, tea leave and tea beverages. The total sum of 28 PAs was analysed in the selected food items. The results were combined with the Hong Kong Population-based Food Consumption Survey (2005-2007) to determine the mean and 95<sup>th</sup> percentile PA exposure levels (i.e. consumers of average PA dietary exposure and high PA dietary exposure). The result indicated that 118 (50%) of the 234 samples analysed were found to have at least one PA, and 91 (77%) of the 118 samples were honey, dried spices and tea leaves (infusion). The dietary exposure of both the average and high consumers was significantly lower than 0.0182 µg/kg bw/day, indicating a low health concern. The public were advised to maintain a balanced and varied diet which included a wide variety of fruit and vegetables, so as to avoid excessive exposure to any contaminants from a small range of food items. Mr. Johnny CHU further informed that in Australia, honey processors would blend honey which was known to contain relatively high level of PAs with other honey so as to reduce the PAs to a safe level. Some specific tea leaves and dried spices were also found to contain higher levels of PAs. However, the levels of PAs in the specific tea leaves were significantly lower than that reported by European Food Safety Authority (ESFA); hence, a lower health concern to local consumers was expected. As regards dried spices, since they were expected to be used in small quantities during the

preparation of food, they were unlikely to be the major contributor to the overall PAs dietary exposure. Because PAs were genotoxic and carcinogenic in animal studies, they were undesired in foods and PA contamination in all foods, including tea leaves and dried spices, should be reduced as low as possible.. Companies producing dried spices and tea leaves should identify the causes of contamination and undertake source-directed measures to prevent and reduce PA contamination, and to make reference to Codex Alimentarius Commission's Code of Practice for Weed Control to Prevent and Reduce Pyrrolizidine Alkaloid Contamination in Food and Feed (Codex).

6. The Chairman remarked that a press release would be issued on the same date to announce the result of the study, after which the relevant information would be uploaded to the departmental web page. The CFS would pay close attention to the international development and treatment of the matter. The trade involved in the sale and processing of food items concerned was advised to take effective measures to minimize the content of PA in their products.

7. One trade representative commented that since there was no international standard or law governing the levels of PAs in food, it would be better to inform the media that the risk assessment result was for the general information of the public only. She particularly mentioned that the sources of most herbal tea were from Europe and it would be difficult to answer the media on matters of testing and control of these substances. Mr. Johnny CHU advised that the trade should stay alert to the development and news on the subject matter. Importers of honey, tea leaves and dried spices should ask for more information from the exporters / manufacturers of exporting countries regarding the existence of PAs and whether they had observed the Codex guideline during the production of the food products. In general, it could be concluded from the risk assessment study that the health concern for the

local population was low. The Chairman supplemented that in order to protect some specific consumers who consumed products from a limited source that might be exposed to contaminants, the trade should take measures to communicate with suppliers to eliminate the possibility of contamination at the source of the products. In response to the interest of the media, the trade could make reference to the press release and the report of the study.

8. A trade representative remarked that the study result indicated that the concentration of PAs in dried spices was much higher than that in tea leaves; and it would be more informative for the public if the amount of dried spices consumed in each serving was included in the report. Mr. Johnny CHU remarked that the details had been covered in the report except for specific tea leaves and dried spices for which local consumption patterns were not available.

9. In response to an enquiry from a trade representative on the length of the time period between the availability of the study report and the promulgation of the result, the Chairman replied that it would be promulgated as soon as possible but the time might vary depending on the degree of complexity, whether further analysis was required, and whether there was updated development. The trade representative further enquired whether the trade could be notified of the release beforehand so that they could make early preparation. The Chairman replied that there were previous remarks that all parties, including the trade and the public, should be notified simultaneously. CFS might, however, discuss with members of the concerned trade beforehand if indicated.

10. The Chairman remarked that as there was no safety standard established for PAs, it would not be worthy for the trade to conduct testing themselves. But the trade should pay more attention to the development of the issue. Regulatory control of the substance could not be ruled out in the future. The trade representative further enquired whether the trade could be informed when the study commenced such that they could make early preparation.



The Chairman replied that there was no standing practice of a formal notification of the commencement of study to prevent possible introduction of bias in the study results. But the trade should take note that some studies / issues which had not been resolved would be re-visited in future.

## **Agenda Item 2**

### **Surveillance and Control of Dioxins and Dioxin-like PCBs in Hairy Crabs**

11. Ms. Joan YAU briefed the meeting of the surveillance and control of dioxins and dioxin-like polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in hairy crabs. Dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs persisted and were ubiquitous in the environment. They arose naturally or were by-products of industrial activities, were fat soluble and not easily broken down, and tended to accumulate in the food chain, mainly in the fatty tissue of animals. Dietary intake was by far the most important exposure, and meat, milk, egg and seafood were the major dietary sources. They had toxic effects on the human endocrine system, immune system and developing nervous system. The International Agency for Research on Cancer had classified dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs as human carcinogens. The Stockholm Convention had listed them as persistent organic pollutants (POPs). In the First Hong Kong Total Diet Study, the dietary exposures to dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs were 21.92 and 59.65 pg toxic equivalent (TEQ)/kg bw/month for average and high consumer of the population, respectively which were below the provisional tolerable monthly intake (PTMI) of 70 pg/kg bw/month expressed as TEQ established by JECFA in 2001. Hence, the general population was unlikely to experience major undesirable health effects of dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs. Nevertheless, having considered their carcinogenic risk, efforts should be made to reduce the dietary exposure to dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs of the population. The major food contributor of dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs was 'fish and seafood and their products', followed by 'meat,

poultry and game and their products'. Previous overseas studies had found high levels of dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs, particularly in the brown meat of hairy crabs. Brown meat referred to "the edible parts of the crab, excluding the claw, leg and shoulder meat, which may include the liver and gonads or parts thereof". At present, the Codex had not set any maximum levels for dioxins in foods, but had issued a Code of Practice for the Prevention and Reduction of Dioxin and Dioxin-like PCB Contamination in Foods and Feeds. The European Union (EU) and Taiwan had set maximum levels for dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs in crabs at 6.5 pg/g wet weight. The EU maximum level applied to muscle meat from appendages only, whereas the maximum level of Taiwan applied to whole edible portion including white muscle meat and brown meat. In Hong Kong, there was currently no specific statutory safety standard for dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs in food, while Section 54 of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance, Cap. 132 required that foods for sale and were intended for human consumption should be fit for human consumption. According to the Codex, maximum levels for contaminants in food should be set as low as reasonably achievable and at levels necessary to protect the consumer. In 2016, the CFS established action levels of 3.5 pg TEQ/g food sample (wet weight) for dioxins and 6.5 pg TEQ/g food sample (wet weight) for dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs respectively in edible portion of hairy crabs for the purpose of food surveillance. Under the seasonal food surveillance project, the CFS collected five hairy crab samples (a total weight of about 12 kilograms) for tests on dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs in late September 2016. Test results showed that two of the samples were found to contain dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs at a total level exceeding the action level adopted by the CFS. According to the health certificates provided by the importers concerned, the affected products were imported from two aquaculture farms in Jiangsu Province. Risk assessment on the two hairy crabs exceeding our action level indicated that consumers were unlikely to experience immediate / acute adverse health effects upon usual consumption. The CFS suspended the import into and sale within Hong Kong of

the hairy crabs from the concerned aquaculture farms; informed the local importers concerned of the irregularity and instructed them to remove the affected products from shelves, stop sale and initiate recall; notified the relevant Mainland authorities of the incident and maintained close contact with them to follow up the issue; and stepped up surveillance on hairy crabs. So far, 13 additional samples had completed laboratory testing. One sample taken at the retail level was found to contain dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs at a level exceeding our action level. The remaining 12 samples passed the test. The CFS will continue to monitor the international practices on regulation of dioxins in food with a view to reviewing and updating our work and measures in this regard as and when appropriate; step up surveillance at import level; and maintain close contact with the relevant Mainland authorities.

12. The Chairman remarked that the Government was very concerned about the level of dioxins in food and had put in place a surveillance plan since 1999. Regarding the problem of hairy crabs the CFS would continue to follow-up on the matter.

13. One trade representative remarked that dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs were present in the environment and should be found in a lot of foods, and wondered why the Government was pinpointing hairy crabs. She asked whether the CFS had conducted tests for other food items like meat, milk, egg and offal. She asked whether the Government had plans to ban carcinogenic food items like tobacco, pickled and barbecue food. Her company was engaged in the import of hairy crabs from Lake Taihu, China. On 18 September 2016 the Government took samples of the company's hairy crabs for six to eight times from various retail outlets and import control points for testing. The result was not released until 7 November 2016 and all crabs were found safe for consumption. She agreed that all importers had the responsibility to ensure that all foods imported into Hong Kong were safe. But she wondered what to do under such circumstances. Other than the tests conducted by the

Government, her company had conducted private testing of the crabs for six times both in Hong Kong and the Mainland and the result was satisfactory and meeting the safety standards of Hong Kong. She did not understand why the Government claimed that the hairy crabs coming from the two originating sources had problems but her crabs coming from the same source did not have problems. Her company rejected the press release on the issue which had resulted in negative reports and exaggerated remarks from the media and thus damaging the goodwill of her company. As the Government took some 50 days to announce the result of the tests, she wondered whether the testing could be conducted earlier say in April / May each year so that the company could have more time to prepare and react. She asked whether the Government had a list of qualified laboratories to do the testing. It was already January and the company had to draw up procurement plans and allocate resources for this year and she asked what she could do. She also wanted to know whether the Hong Kong Government had any agreement with the relevant Entry-Exit Inspection and Quarantine Bureau of the Mainland on how to handle the hairy crab issue, so that the trade would have a clearer picture on their investment in the food item in future. All the hairy crabs imported by the company in September and October and up to 200 tonnes arranged in November and December 2016 had been dumped. She wanted to have a clear answer from the Government on what she could do.

14. Another trade representative asked what would be the standard procedures to be adopted in future for the testing of dioxins in hairy crabs. He pointed out that the selling point of hairy crabs was 'fresh' and the lengthy period required for testing would hurt the crabs. He asked whether the Chinese Government would assist in the testing. He also suggested for consideration other measures like not testing every batch, or weekly, monthly or seasonal testing.

15. Another trade representative said that the hairy crabs supplied to her company were

accompanied by health certificates endorsed by the CFS. She asked whether it was sufficient proof that the crabs were free of dioxins, as it would be difficult to ask all suppliers to provide test reports.

16. Ms. Joan YAU informed the meeting that since 1999 dioxins were put under the food surveillance programme of the Government after the outbreak of a food incident in Belgium. An action level of 1 pg TEQ/g food sample was then adopted. The risk-based surveillance conducted by the CFS had included all high risk food items including meat, milk, egg, offal and seafood. In recent years it had been reported in Europe that the level of dioxin in the brown meat of hairy crabs was high. In 2013 the European Commission recommended member states to enhance surveillance of relevant food items including hairy crabs. The CFS considered it necessary to strengthen the surveillance of hairy crabs. The Chairman remarked that currently the import ban only covered the two concerned aquaculture farms. Import from other farms was not affected. It was the responsibility of the trade to ensure that the products they sold were safe. The Government was discussing with the Mainland authority to explore the ways to handle the issue in the current year. The investigation of the problems found in the two concerned farms was in progress.

17. One trade representative commented that the trade had all along been mindful of their responsibility to ensure food safety by following CFS' advice to test for heavy metals and sourcing import from reliable suppliers. But the new requirement on dioxin level of hairy crabs came out of a sudden which caught the trade unprepared. She also wondered why the health certificate endorsed by the CFS was not enough to prove that the food was safe for consumption, and whether there was any guideline for procurement. The Chairman replied that the health certificate was issued after passing some tests conducted in the Mainland, and might not cover all items. The CFS was discussing with the Mainland authority to explore

the ways to tackle the problem. It was understood that the testing of dioxins had to be conducted overseas as Hong Kong did not have the concerned testing facilities.

18. Another trade representative commented that in accordance with the principle of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP), control should start at the source of the food chain. An overseas example was that the suitability of fishing from a fishing ground was established by testing the level of heavy metals in the sea water of the area. Similarly, since dioxin was an environmental pollutant, the Government could test for the substance at the habitat of the hairy crabs such as ponds and lakes, and in the soil and feeds. The Government could assist the trade to ask for certification from suppliers after testing those areas, and not to wait until the arrival of the crabs to conduct the testing. The Chairman agreed and said that control at source was critical and testing of the product was only part of the solution.

19. Another trade representative remarked that his company had conducted testing of their hairy crabs in Europe and the result was all fit. He commented that it was good for Hong Kong to have stringent requirements on food safety. But for the hairy crab incident, the CFS should not convey to the public the message or understanding that they should not consume hairy crabs, which was unfair to the industry as most of the products out of 12 samples were safe, and would cause unnecessary panic in the population. Instead, the CFS should be more scientific in relating to the public, such as informing them the normal level of dioxin intake from food and the maximum level above which would be hazardous to health, translating into how much of the food they could eat and how frequently. The reference to the Codex standard could be quoted. The officers should inform the public that there had been two unsatisfactory samples detected since 1999 and advise the public to take into consideration of the risk involved and eat less. The Chairman responded that the CFS would review the matter.

20. Another trade representative remarked that not all hairy crabs were unsafe for consumption. Her company also imported hairy crabs originating from areas other than Lake Taihu which were safe. To request a total recall of the product was too drastic and arbitrary. She also said that as dioxin was fat soluble, the CFS should also test other fatty meat, milk and eggs. The Chairman replied that he would not comment on individual cases, but the trade should distinguish between announcement from the Government and comments from unofficial bodies. The Government had not determined the scope of the recall. The stringent recall requirement often came from the trade itself. Ms. Joan YAU informed that in the past food surveillance programmes and Total Diet Study, various food items had been tested including seafood, meat and offal, cereals and their products, beverages, milk and dairy products, eggs and crabs. In the past all items tested had dioxin levels below the action level set by the CFS. The Chairman remarked that the CFS would continue to carry out its recurrent surveillance programmes on various food items and its surveillance of hairy crabs. In response to the enquiry of another trade representative, Ms. Joan YAU remarked that the CFS would only test the edible parts of the food sample in general, for example, after removal of the shell of certain seafood before testing. Also, risk assessment work would be conducted mainly on the edible parts.

### **Agenda Item 3**

#### **Oysters for Raw Consumption**

21. Ms. Fiona FONG briefed the meeting of oysters for raw consumption and food safety. Oysters feed by filtering large volumes of water from their surrounding environment. If they were grown and harvested from water containing pathogens, chemical contaminants or natural toxins, these substances might accumulate in the oysters and pose significant health

risks to consumers. From 2014 to September 2016 (up to 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016), the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health had recorded 20 confirmed food poisoning cases linked to consumption of raw oysters, affecting a total of 82 people. In the EU, the production areas of live bivalve molluscs were classified into three classes and the products had to meet specific standard requirements before allowed for sale in the market. In Hong Kong, the CFS continuously monitored overseas food safety incidents and would issue rapid alerts to the trade for their information if the incidents would affect Hong Kong. The trade was advised that selling oyster to be eaten in raw state required permission in writing / endorsement from the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene. They should source oysters that were grown in and harvested from areas of clean water, and should obtain oysters from reliable sources with health certificates issued by the relevant authority of the exporting country. Transaction records should be kept to ensure traceability as required by the Food Safety Ordinance, Cap 612. The public was advised that eating raw oysters carried inherent food safety risks. They should maintain a balanced diet and avoid overindulgence in oysters for minimising the excessive exposure of chemical contaminants or natural toxins from a small range of food items. Susceptible populations (e.g. the elderly, young children, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems) should avoid eating raw oysters. For oysters intended for consumption after cooking, never ate them raw. Eating raw oysters with hot sauce, lemon juice, vinegar or alcohol would not kill pathogens – only thorough cooking could destroy them. To reduce risk, raw oysters should only be consumed in or obtained from reliable licensed premises. People should check with the shop whether the oysters were accompanied by health certificates issued by competent authorities from their places of origin.

22. The Chairman remarked that the availability of health certificates did not necessarily mean that the oysters were 100% safe. Every year there were cases of food poisoning in



association with the consumption of raw oysters. The trade should note that only Class A oysters, in the case of EU products, could be consumed raw, but not those of Class B or Class C. They should also make sure that health certificates were available for the product and that the living areas of the oysters concerned were free from contamination.

23. One trade representative asked whether oysters of Class B and Class C could be eaten raw after the necessary purification treatment and relaying, and how long was the relaying period for Class C. Ms. Fiona FONG replied that the relaying period depended on the hygienic conditions of the oysters, and the oysters should meet specific standard requirements before allowed for sale in the market.

24. Another trade representative remarked that the health certificates shown during the meeting did not indicate the class of the oysters. The Chairman replied that for European oysters the trade could ask the exporting authority. The trade representative further asked whether there was any legal requirement for the exporters of oysters to indicate on their package the production date, packing date and expiry date. She knew that some companies were doing that and others were not. The Chairman remarked that there was no such mandatory requirement in Hong Kong. The requirements overseas were to be checked out. Ms. Fiona FONG suggested making reference from standards e.g. Codex on evaluating the freshness of the oysters.

25. Another trade representative shared with the meeting the process of checking of Norovirus for her company's imported oysters. She asked whether Hong Kong could align with the treatment of European countries to provide a degree of tolerance for a small level of Norovirus which would not affect human health. She would provide the relevant standard / indicator after the meeting. She informed that the suppliers should know the class of the oysters. The Chairman welcomed her provision of information regarding Norovirus and said

that the CFS would follow-up. In response to another question raised by her, the Chairman remarked that if there were food safety problems leading to the ban of oyster import, the relevant consulate would be informed to conduct investigation.

26. Another trade representative also asked how to determine the class of imported oysters. The Chairman replied that some of the health certificates would indicate the class. For those oysters without such information, the trade could ask the originating oyster farms. In response to the trade representative's further question, the Chairman said that the CFS would consider providing clearer guidelines on import and consumption of oysters to the trade and the public. In response to the question of another trade representative, the Chairman agreed to include in the guidelines the classification of oysters in other countries in addition to that of the EU.

#### **Agenda Item 4**

#### **Import Beef, Pork and Mutton from Animals Raised and Slaughtered in One Eligible European Union Member State but Packed in Another EU Member State**

27. Mr. LIANG King Man briefed the meeting of the administrative arrangement on the import of beef, pork and mutton from animals raised and slaughtered in one eligible EU member state but packed in another EU member state. Since March 2015, EU had been exploring with the CFS on the issue of "single market" recognition and the "born, raised and slaughtered in the same country" requirement. The issue concerned meat from animals raised and slaughtered in one EU member state but packed in another member state before export to Hong Kong. EU asked that all its member states should be treated as one single country in such export matters, since animal husbandry practices, slaughter and manufacture standards were all governed by the same EU rules. Under Regulation 4(1) of the Imported

Game, Meat, Poultry and Eggs Regulations, Cap. 132AK, no person should import meat without a health certificate issued by an issuing entity recognized by the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene. According to Regulation 4(2) of Cap. 132AK, meat might be imported without a health certificate subject to the permission in writing of a health officer and to such conditions as he might impose. Subsequent to the agreement made between the CFS and EU commencing 25 December 2016, importers who wished to import beef, pork and mutton packed in an eligible EU member state while the animal born, raised and slaughtered in other eligible EU member states under the aforesaid arrangement required permission in writing of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) under Cap. 132AK. Importers should provide the health officer with information on the type and quantity of the beef, pork or mutton to be imported, countries where animal born / raised / slaughtered / packed, the expected date of arrival of the beef, pork or mutton at Hong Kong, the means of transport used for the import of beef, pork or mutton, and any other information the officer considered essential to enable the officer to trace the beef, pork or mutton imported. Importers might download the application form FEHB 161 from the website of the FEHD or CFS to apply for the permission in writing. The permission in writing would be valid for six months from the date of issue and could be used for more than one shipment and no application fee would be required. The FEHD pledged to process applications for the import of beef, pork and mutton under the said arrangement from EU member states within 5 working days. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, Cap. 60, import of frozen or chilled beef, mutton, pork and poultry was subject to import licensing control. The FEHD was responsible for issuing import licence for these foods. Importers were also required to apply for import licence from the FEHD for each consignment of imported beef, pork or mutton from eligible EU member states under the said arrangement. Upon arrival, each imported consignment would be accompanied by an export certificate issued by the relevant eligible exporting EU member state to certify that the meat was fit for human consumption. Mr.

LIANG then informed the meeting of how to submit applications and make enquiries.

28. In response to an enquiry from a trade representative, the Chairman informed that the new arrangement was a relaxation of the previous arrangement to recognize eligible EU member states as a single market.

### **Any Other Business**

29. In response to an enquiry from a trade representative concerning hairy crabs, the Chairman reiterated that the Government was still discussing with the Mainland authority to explore the ways to handle the issue. It was hoped that the import of hairy crabs could resume this year and the confidence of the public in consuming the food item could be rebuilt.

30. One trade representative raised that for brown crabs imported from Europe, they were accompanied by health certificates which indicated that they were safe for consumption, but subsequent testing by the Hong Kong Government often failed. She wondered whether the Hong Kong Government would liaise with relevant European authorities to find out why there were discrepancies. The Chairman remarked that past surveillance result had indicated that the level of the heavy metal cadmium was quite high in brown crabs. The EU had realized the fact and had recommended that consumers should not eat the brown meat of crabs. It was uncertain whether such a recommendation would be effective in Hong Kong or not. The CFS was currently considering an amendment to the heavy metals regulation in which the issue on cadmium would be touched. A public consultation exercise would be held this year.

31. Another trade representative enquired that for food items for which there was no specific standard limit of toxic substances set up in Hong Kong yet, would the Government accept the

health certificate of the exporting countries for import purpose. The Chairman replied that the control in Hong Kong was stipulated in Section 54 of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance, Cap. 132 which stipulated that all foods for sale and intended for human consumption in Hong Kong should be fit for human consumption. Standards adopted in other countries might not necessarily be acceptable to Hong Kong.

32. In response to the enquiry of another trade representative on why dioxin was not detected in past surveillance by the CFS, the Chairman said that the CFS had started the concerned surveillance in 1999 and had strengthened the surveillance effort starting from 2014 in line with higher concern over the issue in Europe. Before 2016 only a few borderline cases were detected but there was no case exceeding the action level. All along the number of samples taken for testing was not too high in view of the high cost of testing overseas. The trade representative further asked whether the laboratory facilities in Hong Kong could be enhanced to cater for such tests. A trade representative from the laboratory sector replied that the test was complicated and the investment on a laboratory with the required capabilities would be quite high, while the demand for the service in Hong Kong was quite low.

33. This was the last time that Mr. WONG Cheuk Ho attended this meeting. The Chairman thanked Mr. WONG for his valuable contributions in the past.

#### **Date of Next Meeting**

34. The date of next meeting would be decided later.

35. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.