



40/F, Revenue Tower, 5 Gloucester Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong
香港灣仔告士打道 5 號稅務大樓 40 樓

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For discussion

**Reorganization Plan for the Integration of Nature Conservation with
Environmental Protection Functions**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the Administration's plan to reorganize the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) to enhance food safety and veterinary public health control in Hong Kong and to integrate the nature conservation functions of AFCD with the environmental protection functions of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD).

Background

2. On 17 October 2005, the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) submitted a reorganization proposal to the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene to reorganize the AFCD and FEHD into the Agriculture, Environmental Hygiene and Conservation Department and the Food Safety, Inspection and Quarantine Department. HWFB proposed that the existing regulatory functions of FEHD over food safety and AFCD's existing functions over the inspection and quarantine would be transferred to the Food Safety, Inspection and Quarantine Department while the remaining functions of agriculture, fisheries, environmental hygiene and nature conservation be transferred to the Agriculture, Environmental Hygiene and Conservation Department. HWFB subsequently briefed the staff of AFCD and FEHD (including the relevant staff unions) on the proposal. The majority of AFCD's nature conservation and country/marine parks staff expressed their preference for the direct transfer of their functions and staff to the EPD and this transfer is supported by the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works. Having considered the views of staff and reviewed the merits of their proposal vis-à-vis the original proposal, the Administration has decided to take the opportunity of the reorganization exercise to transfer the nature conservation and country/marine parks functions of AFCD to EPD at the same time. The revised reorganization plan is described in paragraphs 3 to 7 below.

The reorganization proposal

Reorganizing the Work of AFCD and FEHD on Food Safety, Veterinary Public Health and Related Inspection and Quarantine Matters

3. The FEHD and AFCD will be reorganized to form the Department of Food Safety, Inspection and Quarantine (DFSIQ) and the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Hygiene (DAEH). FEHD's existing regulatory functions over food, live food animals and poultry, vegetables, fish/seafood, cooked food, food products and slaughterhouse management and AFCD's existing functions over the inspection and quarantine of imported non-food live animals, birds and plants, licensing of livestock and mariculture farms, animal management and welfare, and regulation of pesticides be transferred to the new DFSIQ. This would allow the Government to pool the scarce professional and expert resources currently scattered in FEHD and AFCD together and enable us to allocate these resources more efficiently and effectively. The new DAEH will take up the operational responsibilities to promote and facilitate the development of agriculture and fisheries activities in Hong Kong and maintain environmental hygiene (including waste collection; management of refuse collection points; littering offences; licensing of food premises; issuing places of public entertainment licenses; hawker control and street management; market management and improvement; cremation and cemetery services; environmental nuisances such as water seepage and pest control, etc.).

4. About 1 000 staff will be transferred from the FEHD and AFCD to the new DFSIQ. A total of 221 additional posts will be created in the new DFSIQ and the Government Laboratory to perform the various enhanced food safety and administrative functions. It is expected that the new DFSIQ would have a total of some 1 200 staff. The organization chart of the new DFSIQ is at **Annex 1**.

5. Upon reorganization, the new DAEH would have about 10 770 staff. Through outsourced contracts, there will be another 8 000 employees working on environmental hygiene functions. The organization chart of the new DAEH is at **Annex 2**.

Merger of AFCD's Country/Marine Parks and Conservation Branches with EPD

6. The functions of the existing Country/Marine Parks and Conservation Branches of AFCD are related and complementary to the work of EPD on environmental protection. It has always been the plans of the Environment, Transport and Works Bureau (ETWB) to bring these functions under one organization after the amalgamation of policy and executive functions in respect of environmental protection. Following the successful merger of the Environment Branch of ETWB and EPD since 1 April 2005, the expanded EPD has assumed policy responsibilities on country parks

and marine conservation, while the executive functions in these areas remain with AFCD. This split command is not conducive to efficiency and effectiveness in policy formulation and implementation. The natural development is therefore to merge the Country/Marine Parks and Conservation Branches of AFCD with EPD, which will integrate all the policy as well as executive functions of environmental protection and nature conservation under one roof within the policy portfolio of ETWB. It is commonplace in other jurisdictions for environmental protection and nature conservation functions to be discharged by a single organization. The proposal will also bring us in line with the international practice.

7. Upon reorganization, AFCD's Deputy Director and the two Assistant Directors responsible for conservation and country/marine parks management would be transferred to the EPD. The organization structure of EPD after the reorganization is at **Annex 3**. The revamped EPD would have about 1 100 staff transferred from AFCD and, together with the existing staffing of about 1 600, form an expanded department with some 2 700 staff.

Way forward

8. As the reorganization exercise involves introducing legislative amendments to transfer the statutory powers and functions from the existing AFCD and FEHD to the two new departments and EPD, we have commenced the drafting of the Bill for the purpose. The Government is working towards establishing the new DFSIQ by the end of April 2006, we hope to be able to introduce the Bill into LegCo before the end of 2005.

9. Members are invited to comment on the above reorganization plan relating to the merger of the Country/Marine Parks and Conservation Branches of AFCD with EPD. We would further brief and thoroughly consult staff involved in the exercise and other key stakeholders on the details of the reorganization plan.

Environmental Protection Department
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