

SEN's opening remarks at LegCo Finance Committee special meeting

Following is the opening remarks (English translation) by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, at the special meeting of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Finance Committee today (April 17):

Chairman,

I would like to brief Members on the part of the Estimates relating to the Environment Bureau (ENB) and the key foci of our work in the new financial year.

In the 2018-19 financial year, ENB and departments under my portfolio are allocated with about \$17 billion, which is about 26 per cent or \$3.5 billion more than the revised estimate for 2017-18. Of the total allocation, recurrent expenditure accounts for about \$9.4 billion, up \$1.5 billion or 18.4 per cent from the revised estimate for 2017-18. The additional allocation is mainly for taking forward various initiatives including meeting the operation fees of various additional waste facilities such as WEEE·PARK and Phase 1 of Organic Resources Recovery Centres (ORRCs), taking forward the Producer Responsibility Schemes, preparation for the Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Charging scheme, setting up outreach teams on waste reduction, reduction of food waste, operation of Community Green Stations, handling public fill, implementation of initiatives of strategic landfill extensions, implementing various nature conservation and biodiversity initiatives, setting up a Countryside Conservation Office (CCO) to co-ordinate conservation projects of remote countryside areas, implementing various air pollution control programmes, implementing the initiatives in relation to combating climate change, promoting renewable energy (RE) and energy efficiency, taking forward measures to enhance the quality of coastal waters of Victoria Harbour and step up marine refuse cleansing services for mitigating marine refuse problem and improving sewage treatment facilities. As regards the number of posts, there will be a net increase of 211 posts in the ENB and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) in 2018-19, representing an increase of 11 per cent.

In addition, provision for projects under Capital Works Reserve Fund, non-recurrent expenditure and capital account in 2018-19 is about \$7.6 billion, representing a net increase of \$2.1 billion or 36.9 per cent over the revised estimate for 2017-18. The increase is mainly for meeting the expenses of various capital works projects under the Environment portfolio, including the integrated waste management facilities phase 1, ORRC phase 2 (Cat B), facilitating the sustainable development of the recycling industry, Southeast New Territories Landfill extension, enhancement works for Kwun Tong sewage pumping station and expansion of Sha Tau Kok Sewage Treatment Works – phase 1 (Cat B), implementing energy saving projects in government buildings, etc..

I will now give a brief outline of the work priorities of ENB in the coming year.

On combating climate change, ENB shall continue to coordinate the efforts of various bureaux and departments in implementing the climate change work plan under the Steering Committee on Climate Change chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration. The Government has set a target to reduce our carbon intensity by 65 to 70 per cent by 2030 compared with the 2005 level, which is equivalent to an absolute reduction of 26 to 36 per cent and resulting in reduction in per capita emissions from around 5.7 tonnes in 2015 to 3.3 to 3.8 tonnes in 2030. Pursuant to the Paris Agreement, Parties should strive to formulate and communicate by 2020 their long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies. To this end, the Government has invited the Council for Sustainable Development to conduct a Public Engagement exercise in 2018-19 financial year, so as to tap and gauge the views of the community for developing Hong Kong's long-term decarbonisation strategies up to 2050.

ENB shall continue its publicity efforts to raise public awareness of the importance of combating climate change, and highlight the key measures that the Government will undertake itself and in conjunction with various stakeholders. To enhance publicity, a total of \$15 million has also been earmarked under the Environment and Conservation Fund in 2017-18 financial year and 2018-19 financial year to subsidise non-profit-making organisations to carry out public education work and demonstration projects on climate change. ENB will also launch a low carbon living calculator in the second quarter this year. The calculator helps the public assess and learn how to reduce their carbon emissions in respect of clothing, food, living and travel in daily life, thereby promoting behavioural change towards low-carbon living.

The Government continues taking the lead to apply RE on a wider and larger scale, and creating the conditions to enable the private sector and the community to consider adopting RE. In the 2017-18 financial year, we earmarked \$200 million for bureaux and departments to implement RE projects. About \$100 million have been approved for relevant departments to conduct these projects. In order to install RE facilities at more government premises, we will increase the funding by \$800 million from \$200 million to \$1 billion. The Government is also implementing various large scale RE projects, including the successful pilot schemes of floating photovoltaic systems at the Shek Pik Reservoir and the Plover Cove Reservoir. Apart from government projects, we will also introduce new measures under the post-2018 Scheme of Control Agreements (SCAs) signed with the power companies to further promote the development of distributed RE in a broader horizon, including the introduction of the Feed-in Tariff Scheme (FiT) and RE Certificate Schemes. Our main objective of introducing FiT is to provide incentives to develop distributed RE. After careful consideration of the outcome of an independent consultancy study, we have decided to set the FiT rates at \$3, \$4 and \$5 per unit of electricity having regard to the generation capacity of the RE system concerned. We believe that the level of FiT rates would help drastically reduce the payback period of most RE systems

to about 10 years and in turn facilitate more proactive consideration by individuals or organisations of the installation of RE systems at their places. In addition, power companies will also sell RE Certificates, through the purchase of which the organisations and the public can support the development of RE in Hong Kong. At the same time, the revenue from such sale can alleviate the tariff impact of the introduction of FiT. We have already submitted the relevant paper to the LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs, and will provide more details of the aforementioned schemes next week.

Furthermore, the Energy Saving Plan for Hong Kong's Built Environment 2015~2025+ has a target to reduce energy intensity by 40 per cent by 2025 using 2005 as the base. The Government will continue to lead by example and promote energy efficiency and conservation (EE&C) as well as green building. To achieve the 5 per cent electricity saving target for government buildings from 2015-16 to 2019-20, at least \$600 million has been earmarked so far to help bureaux and departments implement energy saving projects. To further encourage EE&C in private buildings, we propose that the tax deduction period be shortened from the current five years to one year for capital expenses on RE and building energy efficiency installations. To encourage the public to use energy-efficient electrical appliances, we aim to complete the legislative amendment process of Phase III of the Mandatory Energy Efficiency Labelling Scheme in mid-2018.

The power companies also play an important role in the promotion of energy saving. Under the post-2018 SCAs, power companies will introduce a series of measures to promote EE&C and we will brief the LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs on the details of these programmes next week. In gist, under the aforementioned SCAs, the existing energy efficiency funds and incentive schemes in relation to energy saving will be considerably expanded. The power companies will also establish Community Energy Saving Funds with funding from ploughing back over half of the incentives earned as a result of promoting energy saving to assist disadvantaged groups and for the community to further promote energy saving.

Improving air quality has all along been one of our key priorities. Apart from ongoing initiatives such as phasing out progressively pre-Euro IV diesel commercial vehicles by the end of 2019 and strengthening the control of emissions from petrol and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) vehicles, we continue to waive in full the first registration tax (FRT) for electric commercial vehicles, electric motor cycles and electric motor tricycles until March 31, 2021 to promote the use of electric vehicles (EVs) as replacements of their conventional counterparts. As for electric private cars, on the one hand, the Government has to control the growth of private cars to avoid causing traffic congestion and aggravating roadside air pollution; on the other hand, we hope to encourage car owners to go for EVs as far as possible when purchasing private cars. Hence, apart from continuing with the current FRT concession of up to \$97,500 till March 31, 2021, we will also launch a new One-for-One Replacement Scheme to allow eligible private car owners who buy a new electric private car and scrap an eligible old private car to enjoy a higher FRT concession of up to \$250,000.

On air pollution caused by vessels emission, we are drafting a new regulation to mandate vessels within the waters of Hong Kong to use compliant fuel (including low sulphur fuel with sulphur content not exceeding 0.5 per cent) starting from January 1, 2019 to tie in with the control at the domestic marine emission control area of the Pearl River Delta region. Besides, we are preparing the drafting of an amendment regulation to tighten the emission standards of non-road vehicles operating at specified locations such as the airport, container terminals, etc. to bring them in line with the latest statutory emission standards for newly registered vehicles. Over the years, we have been collaborating with the Guangdong government and set reduction targets for emissions of four major air pollutants to improve regional air quality.

Chairman, I am aware that the public are concerned about our work on various aspects.

Eggs imported from US suspected to be contaminated with Salmonella

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (April 17) that the import into and sale in Hong Kong of poultry eggs produced by a plant (Plant No. P – 1065) of Rose Acre Farms' Hyde County farm in Hyde County, North Carolina, the United States (US), has been suspended with immediate effect, as the products might have been contaminated with Salmonella, a pathogen. The trade should also stop using or selling the products concerned immediately if they possess them.

"The CFS, through its Food Incident Surveillance System, noted a notice issued by the Food and Drug Administration of the US about a recall of eggs produced by the above-mentioned plant as they might have been contaminated with Salmonella. For the sake of prudence, the CFS has immediately suspended the import into Hong Kong of the poultry eggs produced by the plant concerned," a spokesman for the CFS said.

"The CFS also contacted the major local importers and retailers for follow-up. Preliminary investigation found that five Hong Kong importers, namely General Hero Ltd, Shun Hing Hoo, Tai Cheong Eggs Company Ltd, Luen Tai Hong and Maxim's Caterers Ltd, had imported in different batches a total of about 6,000 cartons of the affected products into Hong Kong," the spokesman added.

"According to the information provided by them, except for Maxim's Caterers Ltd which has all the affected products stored in the warehouse without any entering the market, the remaining four have distributed all the affected products. The four importers have initiated a recall according to the CFS' advice. Enquiries about the recall can be made to General Hero Ltd at 2381 9138, Shun Hing Hoo at 2543 4655, Tai Cheong Eggs Company Ltd at 2546

1834 and Luen Tai Hong at 2857 9389 during office hours. Maxim's Caterers Ltd will dispose of all affected products. The CFS is also tracing the distribution of the affected products. The trade should stop using or selling the products immediately should they possess them.

"Salmonella infection may cause fever and gastrointestinal upset such as vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhoea. The effects on infants, young children, the elderly and persons with a weak immune system could be more severe and sometimes may even lead to death. Generally speaking, Salmonella cannot survive under high temperature and can be killed by thorough cooking," he said.

The spokesman advised consumers, particularly the elderly, infants and pregnant women, to avoid eating raw or inadequately cooked eggs and egg products. Eggs should be thoroughly cooked until the yolk and white are firm. Consumers should choose pasteurised eggs or egg products or dried egg powder to prepare dishes not requiring heat treatment.

The CFS has contacted the US authorities concerned over the incident. It will alert the trade, continue to follow up on the incident and take appropriate action. Investigation is ongoing.

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