

LCQ14: Nuisance caused by wild pigs

Following is a question by the Hon Steven Ho and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (December 12):

Question:

Cases of wild pigs appearing in country parks, farms and urban areas have been heard from time to time in recent years. Some members of the public have pointed out that wild pigs eat and damage crops as well as tip over rubbish bins, thereby jeopardising environmental hygiene and posing threats to the personal safety of the public. Given the outbreak of African swine fever (ASF) in recent months on the Mainland, they are worried about wild pigs spreading ASF to the pigs in pig farms. On the other hand, the Government launched in October last year a two-year Pilot Study on the Contraception and Relocation of Wild Pigs (Pilot Study). As at September this year, the Government conducted 30 operations under the Pilot Study and captured 101 wild pigs, among which 33 female wild pigs were administered with contraceptive vaccine and six wild pigs received permanent surgical sterilisation. The Government also relocated another 72 captured wild pigs to the countryside far away from residential areas. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will consider conducting an assessment of the number of wild pigs and the number of wild pig herds across the territory as well as their fertility trend; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) of the estimated expenditure of and the manpower needed for the Pilot Study; the locations to which the aforesaid 72 wild pigs were relocated and the location selection criteria (whether they include distance from farms); whether it has reviewed if the number of operations was on the low side; whether it will increase the number of operations and review the effectiveness of the Pilot Study; if it will review, when the outcome will be published; if not, of the reasons for that;

(3) given that the Government has commissioned a local university to examine and improve the design of refuse collection facilities to prevent wildlife animals from foraging food from refuse, of the progress of such work, and whether the relevant design will be adopted for the refuse collection facilities situated in the vicinity of residential areas, country parks and farms;

(4) as the Government has advised that it will conduct public education to remind members of the public not to feed wild pigs, of the details of such work;

(5) as the Government has advised that infrared cameras will be used to take photos of feeding activities once environmental hygiene problem has been

found to have been caused by the feeding of wild pigs, and the photos taken will be referred to the relevant departments for follow-up actions, how the relevant departments follow up those referrals; in respect of the aforesaid work undertaken by the Government in the past three years, of the manpower deployed, the number of prosecutions instituted, the penalties generally imposed and the maximum penalty imposed on the convicted persons, as well as the number of cases involving repeated offenders;

(6) of the Government's suggestions for farmers about how to protect their personal safety when wild pigs intrude into farms; and

(7) whether it has assessed the risk of wild pigs spreading ASF to pigs in local pig farms; whether it will (i) implement measures and provide financial assistance to help pig farm operators guard against ASF, and (ii) formulate a contingency mechanism to deal with the situation of massive deaths of wild pigs; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government is very concerned about the nuisance and potential hazards caused by wild pigs to the public. We are reviewing our existing practices in handling wild pigs and will submit in due course a paper to the panel concerned of the Legislative Council for discussion.

In consultation with the Food and Health Bureau (FHB), our reply to the question raised by the Hon Steven Ho is as follows:

(1) Wild pigs mainly appeared in rural areas of the New Territories in the past, yet surveys conducted by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) have revealed that they now scatter across the whole territory, including the northern part of the New Territories, Sai Kung and Hong Kong Island. As wild pigs normally appear individually or in small groups, making covert movements in their widespread and vast habitats, it is technically difficult to compile statistics on the overall number of wild pigs in Hong Kong.

(2) In response to the objections raised by some concern groups on animal interests, the AFCD, on grounds of safety, has suspended hunting operations by the wild pig hunting teams since 2017, and launched a Pilot Capture and Contraception/Relocation Programme of Wild Pigs (CCRP) in October in the same year. Under the Pilot CCRP, contraceptive treatments are given to wild pigs habituated to feeding and found near the community, and those causing nuisance to the public are relocated to the countryside far away from residential areas and facilities (including farms), such as Tai Tam Country Park and Tai Lam Country Park. During such operations, veterinarians first tranquilise wild pigs with dart guns, then inject a contraceptive vaccine GonaConTM specially developed for mammals to suitable female wild pigs and microchip them. GPS transmitters are also put on wild pigs before they are released back to the countryside. In addition, the AFCD is examining the

feasibility of conducting permanent surgical sterilisation on site for wild pigs.

Since the launch of the Pilot CCRP, three wild pigs were captured in each operation on average, which is more effective than that captured by hunting (less than one each time on average). To assess the effectiveness of the contraceptive vaccine, the AFCD, in collaboration with the United States Department of Agriculture as well as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of the United Kingdom, has commenced an on-site study since this February on the effectiveness of GonaCon™ in controlling the breeding of wild pigs. As the adoption of GonaCon™ in controlling the breeding of wild pigs has never been tried out elsewhere in the world, it is premature to comment on the effectiveness of the contraceptive vaccine at this stage. The AFCD expects that the assessments on the effectiveness of GonaCon™ and the feasibility of conducting permanent surgical sterilisation on site will be completed at the end of 2019.

Large in size and aggressive in temper, an adult wild pig may weigh up to 150 kg and measure up to 1.6 m in length. Adult males even have tusks to attack. As it takes at least 10 minutes for the anaesthetic to take effect after successful injection, during which wild pigs will try their best to dash off and become aggressive, the AFCD, on account of operational need and safety, has to deploy 12 to 15 staff to capture wild pigs in each operation. On-site preparation (such as allowing wild pigs to get used to the tools at the trap so as to reduce their alertness) is also required about two weeks in advance of the operation. The expenditure involved for the Pilot CCRP in 2017/18 was \$1.79 million. The AFCD has earmarked \$3.5 million to implement the Pilot CCRP in 2018/19.

(3) To prevent wild animals such as monkeys and wild pigs from foraging food from refuse, the AFCD commissioned in 2018 a local university to help improve the design of refuse collection facilities being used in residential areas and on the streets. The first batch of design has been completed by the contractor. It is expected that trials will be carried out on site when prototypes are ready early next year.

(4) The AFCD is conducting a series of publicity and education programmes, including promotion on TV, radio and public transportation, as well as organisation of fun day, roving exhibitions, public lectures and visits, to publicise the negative impacts of feeding wild animals. The AFCD has also set up a YouTube Channel and Facebook page earlier, and launched the TV Announcements in the Public Interest together with a series of micro-movies titled "Don't Feed Wild Animals and Feral Pigeons" to inform the public about the negative consequences of feeding wild pigs, monkeys and feral pigeons, etc. In addition, the AFCD is promoting public awareness of the wild pig problem through its newly designed posters, banners and leaflets.

(5) If wild pigs are frequently spotted searching for food from feeders in the vicinity of certain residential areas, the AFCD will put up banners or posters at suitable places within these areas to remind the public not to feed wild animals. Where possible, the AFCD will also set up infrared

automatic cameras to monitor the feeding and appearance of wild pigs. The information collected will be referred to the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department for follow-ups on the environmental hygiene problems caused by such feeding. Furthermore, under the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170), feeding of wild animals (including wild pigs) in feeding ban areas such as Kam Shan, Lion Rock and Shing Mun Country Parks, part of Tai Mo Shan Country Park, Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve, area of Caldecott Road and Piper's Hill section of Tai Po Road will be liable to prosecution and a maximum fine of \$10,000. The AFCD conducts regular patrols at the feeding ban areas. There was no prosecution initiated for wild pig feeding in these areas over the past three years.

(6) When encountering wild pigs, members of the public should keep calm and stay away from them as far as possible. One must not get near them or drive them away with any objects lest there should be danger. If necessary, one may hide behind some robust and large barriers, and wait until the wild pigs leave before proceeding with one's activities. If wild pigs are found searching for food on farmland, farmers could erect sturdy fences to protect crops or use infrared auto-trigger lightings to deter wild pigs. Farmers should not drive wild pigs away from the farmland with any object, and should immediately keep dogs under restraint so that the wild pigs will not feel threatened and react in self-defence. When a wild pig is posing immediate threats to life and property, one should report to the police for emergency assistance.

(7) According to the FHB, since the outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF) found in the Mainland in August this year, the Government has been maintaining close liaison with relevant Mainland authorities on the latest development, so as to prevent the spread of the disease to Hong Kong. The Government has stepped up cleansing and disinfection in various areas, including boundary checkpoints, transportation and slaughterhouses, etc. In addition, the AFCD has been actively disseminating messages to relevant sectors and pig farmers on how to prevent ASF infection with a view to enhancing their vigilance of this disease. Among others, the messages cover how to implement good biosecurity measures, such as preventing wild animals from entering pig farms. Based on the current biosecurity measures in place in pig farms, it is believed that there will be minimal direct contact between wild pigs and pigs in farms. As the ASF virus can persist for months in pork and pork products, the AFCD has amended the conditions of the livestock keeping licences issued to pig farms to ban the use of kitchen waste and catering waste that may contain or have been in contact with pork or pork products as feeds. To assist pig farmers switching to other suitable feeds and procuring the necessary equipment, the AFCD has set up a special loan scheme under the J.E. Joseph Trust Fund to provide low-interest loan up to \$800,000. The AFCD will continue carrying out farm inspections and educating farmers, with a view to ensuring proper implementation of disease prevention work and good biosecurity measures at various levels. The AFCD has also prepared contingency plans in response to outbreak of ASF at local pig farms which cover culling operations and relevant compensation packages, and conducted a pig culling drill earlier, in order to enhance preparedness for preventing the spread of ASF in Hong Kong.