

# LCQ18: Measures to cope with discharge of nuclear wastewater by Japanese Government

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

On July 4 this year, the International Atomic Energy Agency released its final report on Japan's nuclear wastewater discharge plan (the discharge plan). In its response to the report on the same day, the Government indicated that it was reviewing the content of the report and would make further risk assessment regarding the discharge plan. On the other hand, in the light of the discharge plan, the Hong Kong Observatory, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and the Centre for Food Safety regularly publish on their websites the test results of radiological levels on seawater in Hong Kong waters, fishery products and food imported from Japan respectively. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government's risk assessment has made comprehensive consideration from a scientific perspective, including the impact of the discharge plan on public health and safety, as well as environmental conservation; if so, of the details, and whether it will collaborate with the Mainland Government and experts to jointly assess the risks of the discharge plan;

(2) given that the discharge plan will last for 30 years, arousing concern among some members of the public about the cumulative risk posed by the discharged nuclear wastewater, whether the Government will draw up a response plan in the event of abnormal results detected in the radiation monitoring of seawater samples collected in local waters in the future; if so, of the details; and

(3) in addition to the regular publication of monitoring results by the aforesaid government departments, of the measures put in place by the Government to step up public education, so as to avoid undue worries in society?

Reply:

President,

The Japanese Government insisted on commencing, from August 24, 2023, the discharge of the nuclear-contaminated water which had been in contact with the nuclear fuel inside the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station (FNPS). The

decision of conducting such an unprecedented and large scale discharge of nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean, which would last for 30 years, has blatantly ignored the inevitable risk on food safety and the irreversible contamination and damages to the marine environment. It is an irresponsible act which shifts the issue from oneself to another. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government strongly opposes such move.

The reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Martin Liao is as follows:

(1) The HKSAR Government's inter-departmental taskforce has reviewed the final report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and relevant information provided by the Japanese authorities from a scientific perspective. Having considered the final report of the IAEA, information provided by the Japanese authorities, opinions of the experts in the Mainland and risk assessments, the HKSAR Government has come to the view that there is currently no guarantee from the Japanese authorities that their purification and dilution system can operate continuously and effectively in the long term after the commencement of the discharge plan, and that the plan will not pose any potential risks to food safety and marine ecology.

In more specific terms, the nuclear-contaminated water in the FNPS had direct contact with active nuclear fuel and thus contains a high concentration of radioactive substances, involving at least 30 radionuclides. The total discharge volume is over 1.3 million cubic metres. During such a long period of over 30 years, purification would primarily be relied on for reducing radioactive substances in the nuclear-contaminated water. If the relevant system fails to operate effectively, food safety and marine ecology would be at significant risk.

Safeguarding food safety and public health in Hong Kong is the responsibility of the HKSAR Government. In view of the potential serious risk, the HKSAR Government must take corresponding precautionary measures to safeguard food safety and ensure citizens' health. The Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order (FSO) on August 23, 2023 to prohibit the import of aquatic products originating from 10 Japanese metropolis/prefectures with higher risks. For other aquatic products from Japan that are not prohibited from being imported, the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department performs its gatekeeping role at the import level by conducting comprehensive radiological tests to verify that the radiation levels of these products do not exceed the guideline levels before they are allowed to be supplied in Hong Kong. Tests on relevant processed food are also enhanced.

The HKSAR Government will observe for some time after the commencement of the discharge to obtain more monitoring and scientific data in order to further examine the impact of the Fukushima nuclear-contaminated water discharge plan on food safety, and keep under review relevant counter measures. Should anomalies be detected, the HKSAR Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban. The HKSAR Government will continue to maintain close communication with the Japanese authorities,

closely monitor the latest situation regarding the import of food from Japan and the discharge plan of the FNPS, and perform risk assessments to safeguard food safety and citizens' health in Hong Kong.

(2) In response to Japan's discharge of nuclear-contaminated water, the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has enhanced its radiation monitoring of seawater samples collected in local waters. So far no anomaly has been detected. Should any anomaly be detected, the HKO will analyse its cause and assess its impact, and then notify relevant departments for follow-up action, including stepping up the radiation monitoring of seawater, local catch and imported food, expanding the scope of FSO's applicability and disseminating information on food safety and public health to members of the public.

(3) With a view to enabling members of the public to have a better grasp of the latest safety information on imported Japanese food products, the Environment and Ecology Bureau (EEB) has been making public announcements every working day regarding the radiological testing results of imported Japanese food samples, the radiological levels of samples of local catch, and the radiation measurement results of seawater samples in Hong Kong waters since the commencement of the discharge. The HKO and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department will also announce the relevant testing results on their websites. At the same time, the Government will closely monitor the latest developments, explain the matter to the public via different social media platforms, and make clarifications on possible public misconceptions on the nuclear-contaminated water discharge. In addition, the EEB has liaised with the Education Bureau to arrange for the distribution of materials to primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong to explain Japan's nuclear-contaminated water discharge plan, thereby helping students to have a more comprehensive, accurate and in-depth understanding of the issue.