

LCQ9: Planning for retirement and health protection

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-chun and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (July 11):

Question:

Last year, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare (the Secretary) pointed out that in some two decades to come, there would be about one elderly person (i.e. a person aged 65 or above) in every three Hong Kong people, and that any retirement protection measure should have due regard to fiscal sustainability, in order not to impose a heavy burden on public finances and the next generation. Regarding the planning for retirement and health protection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of (i) the latest projected elderly population, (ii) the projected expenditure for the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme and (iii) the projected expenditure on public healthcare services, in each year from now to 2066;

(2) among the elderly persons, of the respective numbers and percentages of those receiving the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, the Old Age Allowance, the Normal Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) and the Higher OALA in each year from now to 2066, as well as the respective percentages of such expenditures in public expenditure;

(3) as the Secretary indicated earlier that as far as OALA was concerned, public annuities would not be counted as assets but the monthly payouts received would be regarded as an income, whether the authorities have estimated (i) the number of elderly persons who will participate in the public annuity scheme each year from its launch to 2066 and (ii) the number of elderly persons who are ineligible for OALA owing to their receipt of monthly payouts from the public annuity scheme, as well as the amount of public expenditure saved as a result; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) as the Commission on Poverty pointed out in its consultation paper published in 2015 that elderly expenditure in 2064-2065 would be two to four times of that in 2014-2015, and the Working Group on Long-Term Fiscal Planning pointed out in its report published in 2014 that a structural deficit could strike in as early as 2021-2022 under the public service enhancement scenario, of the measures to be put in place by the Government to ensure that retirement and health protection is financially sustainable in the long run?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted relevant bureaux and departments, my reply to Member's question is as follows:

(1) In respect of elderly population projection, with the availability of up-to-date benchmark population data from the 2016 Population By-census, the Census and Statistics Department released in 2017 the latest set of population projections covering the period from 2017 to 2066. The mid-year population projections of elderly persons aged 65 and above (excluding foreign domestic helpers) are at Annex.

In respect of the Elderly Health Care Voucher (EHV) Scheme, according to information provided by the Food and Health Bureau (FHB), the EHV Scheme was launched on a pilot basis in 2009 to subsidise elderly persons to use private primary healthcare services. The EHV Scheme became a recurrent programme in 2014. At present, each eligible elderly person aged 65 and above is provided with an annual voucher amount of \$2,000. As at the end of June 2018, over 1.09 million elderly persons had made use of EHV (around 87 per cent of the eligible elderly population). Expenditure for the EHV Scheme has increased from \$49 million in 2009-10 to \$1,697.5 million in 2017-18. The estimated expenditure for 2018-19 is around \$3,156 million. As the population ages, even if the operational details of the EHV Scheme remain unchanged, it is expected that the expenditure involved will rise as the elderly population increases.

In respect of public healthcare services, the Hospital Authority (HA) is the major provider. According to information provided by the FHB, the overall recurrent subvention to the HA amounts to \$61.5 billion in 2018-19. Starting from this financial year, the Government will increase the recurrent funding for the HA progressively on a triennium basis having regard to population growth and demographic changes. Under this triennium funding arrangement, the additional full-year recurrent provision will be \$10.83 billion with effect from 2020-21. In estimating the overall operating expenditure of HA and the funding required, the model adopted by the Government and the HA is based on the population of Hong Kong, taking into account factors such as the overall demographic and age distribution, and the increase in service costs as a result of changes in the modes of service delivery with the introduction of new medical technology. In finalising the subvention for the HA, the Government will take into account a number of factors, including the population growth and ageing in Hong Kong, the demand for public healthcare services, the need for service enhancement and the Government's overall fiscal position. The Government will continue to liaise closely with the HA in its overall consideration of the level of subvention to the HA.

(2) In respect of expenditure on social security for elderly persons (including the Old Age Allowance and Old Age Living Allowance (OALA)), according to information provided by the Office of the Government Economist, based on the aforementioned population projections and 2018 price levels and after taking into account the two OALA enhancement measures (i.e. relaxing

the asset limits of Normal OALA and implementing Higher OALA), it is crudely estimated that the average recurrent government expenditure on social security for elderly persons would be around \$60.9 billion per annum during the 49-year period between 2018 and 2066.

It must be noted that the above estimation covers an extremely long period of time and hence the relevant figure is subject to significant limitations and uncertainties. In addition, the Government does not possess accurate information on assets owned by elderly persons (e.g. cash, bank deposits, values of shares and investment funds, etc) and cannot estimate their eligibility for receiving social security. There will inevitably be a discrepancy between the above crude estimate and the eventual figure.

(3) According to information provided by the HKMC Annuity Limited, public response has been generally positive since the announcement of the HKMC Annuity Plan. In addition, to dovetail with the Plan, while the Social Welfare Department will count the payout provided under the Plan as monthly income under OALA (including both Higher OALA and Normal OALA), the one-off lump-sum premium payment placed with the Plan will not be counted as asset, unless an recipient surrenders or partially surrenders an annuity scheme; and in such cases, the surrender value (if any) will be regarded as his/her asset under OALA.

Whether elderly persons participate in the Plan launched by the HKMC Annuity Limited is a matter of personal choice. At this stage, it is difficult to estimate the number of applicants for the Plan or the Plan's impact on the number of OALA beneficiaries.

(4) According to information provided by the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, based on the Medium Range Forecast conducted in the 2018-19 Budget, the Government will have an overall surplus from 2018-19 to 2022-23. The fiscal position of the Government is healthy in the medium term. On the premise of ensuring the health of public finance, the Government will continue to adopt forward-looking and strategic financial management principles in optimising the use of surplus to invest for Hong Kong and relieve our people's burdens.

[LCQ11: Regulating trading of shark fin products](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (July 11):

Question:

Hong Kong is the world's largest trading centre for shark fins. Food products of as many as 76 shark species are on sale in the local market, with nearly one-third of them belonging to endangered or vulnerable shark species. Although the quantity of imported shark fin products declined by 50 per cent in the past decade, the number of cases of seizure of controlled shark fin products by the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) surged by 4.5 times in the past four years. While there were a total of 23 such cases in the past four years, the C&ED did not institute prosecution in respect of any of such cases on grounds of insufficient evidence. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) in respect of the shark fin products involved in the aforesaid 23 cases, of their weights, species, places of origin, destinations and modes of import; the concrete evidence the lack of which has rendered the authorities unable to institute prosecutions in respect of those cases; how the C&ED will step up evidence gathering efforts in future to enable instituting prosecutions;

(2) given that some unscrupulous merchants use misleading labels in consignments of shark fins (such as seafood, dried seafood products and fishery products), or mix the fins of endangered shark species with those of shark species that are not subject to control, of the number of training courses organised for their staff in the past three years by the law enforcement departments on the identification of shark species, and the number of staff members trained; and

(3) as the findings of a questionnaire survey conducted by a concern group on endangered shark species have revealed that with no resemblance between the names of the shark fins sold in the retail market and the official names of the controlled shark species, it is difficult for consumers to identify shark fins belonging to controlled shark species, whether the Government will step up publicity in order that consumers can tell, among the names of shark fins sold in the retail market and those used in shark fin dishes, the ones related to controlled shark species; whether, apart from stepping up publicity, the Government will consider putting in place a mechanism to assist consumers in identifying shark fins belonging to controlled shark species?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Martin Liao is as follows:

(1) The Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) is responsible for combating illegal importation and exportation of controlled articles (including shark fins of species listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)). The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has been working closely with the C&ED, including provision of assistance to the C&ED in identifying controlled shark fins and other endangered species during the process of passenger and cargo clearance.

Between 2014 and 2017, the C&ED made 23 seizures of illegal import of controlled shark fins from overseas. Details are set out at the Annex. To successfully prosecute a person for violating the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586) (the Ordinance), the prosecution must provide sufficient evidence to prove that someone has imported or arranged to import the controlled species to Hong Kong. Despite the relevant documents collected in the above cases, such as bills of lading and waybills, contained the consignee's information, they do not sufficiently prove that the consignee knowingly import or arrange the import of the controlled specimens. Therefore, there may not be sufficient evidence to institute prosecution against the consignee shown on the relevant documents. Despite this, the AFCD will forfeit the seized controlled shark fins in accordance with section 42 of the Ordinance to combat the relevant illegal act.

The C&ED will continue to strengthen co-operation and intelligence exchange with the AFCD and agencies outside territory. Front-line officers' knowledge in identification of shark species will also be strengthened to further enhance their ability in evidence collection.

(2) The AFCD has been organising training courses on the identification of shark species from time to time for front-line officers of the AFCD and the C&ED to better prepare them for duties related to the implementation and control of scheduled shark species. In the past three years, the AFCD organised a total of six classes for the identification of shark species. A total of 188 front-line officers of the AFCD and the C&ED received the training. The AFCD will continue to work closely with the C&ED to combat illegal import and export of endangered species.

(3) Hong Kong has been strictly following the relevant provisions of CITES and the Ordinance. According to CITES, the export of Appendix II specimens, including shark fins of scheduled species, must be accompanied by a valid export permit issued by the exporting country. The export permit is issued only if the authorities of the exporting country ensure the export will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild and has met the requirements for sustainable capture. CITES does not ban the trade in Appendix II species but regulates its international trade through a licensing system, thereby avoiding the threat of the species being over-exploited and threatening its survival. The AFCD ensures that the shark fins purchased by the public are captured in a sustainable manner through the implementation of CITES.

On the other hand, the Government strives to raise public awareness on sustainable use and conservation of endangered species through various channels, including the internet, advertisements, leaflets and posters, as well as conducting exhibitions and seminars. The relevant education and publicity programmes include the operation of the Endangered Species Resource Centre, distribution of video announcement through the media and the Internet, public exhibitions, and the distribution of leaflets to traders, tourists and the public. The AFCD has also been in contact with relevant key stakeholders, including shipping and logistics companies, reminding them to

observe the requirements of CITES and the Ordinance. In addition, the Government has taken the lead in adopting conservation-conscious menus that conform to the concept of sustainable development, which include no shark fins, in official entertainment functions. Compared with the establishment of a mechanism to distinguish different types of shark fins, we believe that implementing the above measures are more effective.

LCQ17: A Waste Reduction Guidebook for Large Scale Event Organisers

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Kwok Ka-ki and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (July 11):

Question:

In 2017, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) released A Waste Reduction Guidebook for Large Scale Event Organisers (the Guidebook), to assist event organisers in formulating waste management measures so as to achieve waste reduction and promote clean recycling. EPD indicated that it had appealed to the organisers of quite a number of events (including the Lunar New Year fairs, the Hong Kong Flower Show and the Hong Kong Sevens) to implement the waste management measures recommended in the Guidebook. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) how EPD assists organisers of large scale events in implementing the measures recommended in the Guidebook;
- (2) of the number of large scale events in respect of which EPD has, since the release of the Guidebook, assisted their organisers in implementing the measures recommended in the Guidebook, as well as the names of such events and their organisers;
- (3) whether EPD has compiled statistics on the quantity of waste generated in the events mentioned in (2), so as to gauge the effectiveness of the waste reduction initiatives; if so, set out the relevant statistics in a table; if not, how EPD monitors the effectiveness of the Guidebook; and
- (4) given that some organisations organised festive activities in the bamboo theatres at Tsing Luk Street, Tsing Yi in April and May this year, whether EPD assisted the organisers of such activities in implementing waste management measures; if so, of the details and the effectiveness; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has maintained liaison with organisers of a variety of events to encourage and assist them in adopting more green measures. The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) published A Waste Reduction Guidebook for Large Scale Event Organisers (the Guidebook) in December 2017, which provides clear and practical information as well as examples to help event organisers and related stakeholders develop strategies on waste reduction and recycling, with a view to enhancing the environmental performance of their events. My responses to the various parts of the question raised by the Dr Hon Kwok Ka-ki are as follows:

(1) To facilitate the drafting of the Guidebook, the EPD has co-operated with 11 large-scale event organisers of varied nature to implement various green measures (details at the Annex) since April 2017. Our collaboration experience of practising green measures in event organisation at early stages also facilitated the drafting of the Guidebook. Professional consultants and/or green groups have been engaged by the EPD to give advice to the event organisers under the collaboration, so that various waste management measures have been implemented at different stages of their events; promotion efforts on waste reduction and recycling targeting the public, event participants and stakeholders (including exhibitors and food stall operators) have been enhanced; and waste audits have been conducted. Having regard to the actual circumstances of individual events, the EPD has also provided on-site support in many aspects. They included co-ordinating with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department to enhance street cleansing services during the events; lending information display boards and waste recovery facilities to the event organisers for the promotion of clean recycling; liaising with the District Offices concerned, local bodies and business establishments to recruit and train up volunteers to become environmental protection ambassadors of the events, whose main duty is to educate event participants to practise waste separation at source and clean recycling; and assisting the event organisers in collecting, recovering and donating the recovered or reusable materials generated from their events. For example, the EPD has made use of its Pilot Composting Plant in Kowloon Bay to recycle food waste. Joint efforts in recycling waste plastics among the event organisers, Community Green Stations and the community recycling centres funded by the Environment and Conservation Fund have been encouraged. For the recycling of glass containers and wooden pallets generated from the events, event organisers have also been encouraged to cooperate with the glass management contractors hired by the EPD and the recyclers in the EcoPark respectively. The event organisers may also make use of the Environment Bureau's social media platform in promoting relevant green measures and to enhance public participation.

Looking ahead, the EPD will continue to motivate district organisations, the business sector, schools and youth groups, etc. to make reference to the Guidebook and implement relevant recommendations when organising events, with the aim of producing less waste while boosting event participants' sense of participation and achieving green branding for their events. The EPD will also closely monitor the efforts of various international and local events in promoting waste reduction and recycling to update the content of the

Guidebook in a timely manner and provide more useful information and training to stakeholders.

(2) and (3) The EPD has assisted a number of event organisers in formulating and implementing measures on waste reduction and recycling for their events. The names of these organisers and their events, as well as the statistics on the waste and recyclables generated from these events, are set out at the Annex. Event organisers are welcome to refer to their relevant experience when organising similar events in the future so as to carry out more measures on waste reduction and recycling and better achieve waste reduction at source and the sustainable use of resources, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of waste management.

(4) Regarding the Tsing Yi Bamboo Theatre 2018 held between April and May 2018, the EPD, the Kwai Tsing District Office, certain green groups and the organiser of Tsing Yi Bamboo Theatre met before the event to discuss ways to improve the management of waste and recyclables for the event. They included providing more on-site recycling facilities, recruiting and training secondary school students in Kwai Tsing as environmental protection ambassadors to help promote clean recycling, enhancing publicity through social media and encouraging the public to bring their own dining utensils and food containers. Among the 114 participating food stall operators in the event, over two-thirds of them responded to the appeal and signed a green charter pledging to encourage and facilitate the public to use less disposal tableware.

Employers and employees should take precautions against heat stroke

As the Hong Kong Observatory has issued the Very Hot Weather Warning, the Labour Department (LD) reminds employers and employees to take appropriate precautions to prevent heat stroke when working in a hot or humid environment.

Heat stroke could occur if an employee works in a hot or humid environment for prolonged periods of time, as the body may fail to regulate its temperature by effective heat dissipation through sweating.

The early symptoms of heat stroke include feeling thirsty, fatigue, nausea and headache. Later, the victim may experience shortness of breath, rapid and weak pulse, dizziness, confusion or even loss of consciousness and convulsion.

For example, construction workers, cleaning workers, kitchen workers and porters are more prone to heat stroke when working for long hours in such an

environment, especially if appropriate preventive measures have not been taken.

The LD reminds employers to arrange for a suitable assessment of the risk of heat stress in the work environment and take appropriate preventive measures. The LD has produced two leaflets entitled "Checklist for Heat Stress Assessment at Construction Sites" and "Checklist for Heat Stress Assessment at Outdoor Cleansing Workplaces" respectively. Employers engaged in construction or outdoor cleaning work are advised to refer to these checklists in assessing the risk of heat stress at their workplaces. As for heat stress assessment at a workplace in general, employers can refer to a booklet entitled "Risk Assessment for the Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work" produced by the LD.

The LD also reminds employers and employees to take the following precautions to prevent heat stroke:

Employers

- (1) Take heed of the weather report and adopt shift work arrangements for employees to reduce their exposure to the hot environment, or arrange appropriate rest breaks for them during very hot periods;
- (2) Avoid working under direct sunlight and set up temporary sunshade wherever possible;
- (3) Provide cool potable water for employees at all times during work. If necessary, provide drinks containing minerals for employees to replenish loss of electrolytes during profuse sweating;
- (4) Minimise physical demands by using tools or mechanical aids at work;
- (5) Increase air flow by enhancing ventilation or air-conditioning as appropriate;
- (6) Isolate heat-generating facilities at the workplace and use insulating materials to minimise heat dissipation to the other work areas; and
- (7) Provide relevant information and training for employees on heat stroke such as preventive measures and first aid treatment.

Employees

- (1) Wear clothing made of suitable materials (for example, cotton) that is loose-fitting and light-coloured to help heat dissipation, minimise heat absorption and allow sweat evaporation;
- (2) Wear a wide-brimmed hat when working outdoors;
- (3) Drink plenty of water or other appropriate beverages to replenish the fluids and electrolytes lost through sweating; and
- (4) Whenever there are any symptoms of heat stroke, inform supervisors and take appropriate actions immediately.

Some employees may have difficulty in adapting to a hot working environment owing to their own health conditions. Employers should take this into account and consider the recommendations of their doctors when assigning work to these employees.

In addition to the publications on risk assessment, the LD has produced a leaflet entitled "Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work in a Hot Environment" for the public. The publications can be obtained free of charge from the offices of the Occupational Health Service of the LD, or downloaded from the department's webpage at www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/content2_9.htm.

The LD organises occupational health talks in public places and at its own training venues regularly to raise employers' and employees' awareness of occupational health. Details of health talks on the prevention of heat stroke at work in a hot environment in July to September are as follows:

(A)

Dates: July 24; August 2, 13 and 30; and September 13 and 24 (am)

July 20 and 30; August 8 and 22; and September 5, 20 and 27 (pm)

Time: Half-day

Venue: Occupational Safety and Health Training Centre of the Labour Department, 13/F, Kowloon Tsuen Wan I, 68 Chung On Street, Tsuen Wan, New Territories

(B)

Dates: July 13 and 27 and August 10 and 20

Time: Half-day, morning

Venue: Occupational Safety and Health Centre of the Labour Department, G/F, Kwun Tong Community Health Centre Building, 60 Hip Wo Street, Kwun Tong (MTR Kwun Tong Station Exit A1)

(C)

Date: August 13

Time: 3pm to 4.30pm

Venue: Lecture Hall, Hong Kong Space Museum, 10 Salisbury Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon (MTR Tsim Sha Tsui Station Exit E)

(D)

Date: July 16 and September 14

Time: 3pm to 4.30pm

Venue: Activity Room I, Hong Kong Central Library, 66 Causeway Road, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong (Opposite Victoria Park, MTR Tin Hau Station Exit B)

For enrolment or enquiries about these occupational health talks, please call 2852 4040 or 2361 8240 (for talks organised at the Occupational Safety and Health Centre). Moreover, the LD also provides an outreach health education service and occupational health nurses will, on invitation, disseminate occupational health information at workplaces at a convenient time. Please contact the nursing officer at 2852 4062 for details. All these health talks are free of charge.

Red flags hoisted at some beaches

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (July 11) that due to big waves, red flags have been hoisted at Shek O Beach and Big Wave Bay Beach in Southern District, Hong Kong Island; Clear Water Bay First Beach and Clear Water Bay Second Beach in Sai Kung District. Beach-goers are advised not to swim at these beaches.