

Inspection of aquatic products imported from Japan

In response to the Japanese Government's plan to discharge nuclear-contaminated water at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order which prohibits all aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba, Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong.

For other Japanese aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds that are not prohibited from being imported into Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will conduct 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 the market.

As the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water is unprecedented and will continue for 30 years or more, the Government will closely monitor and step up the testing arrangements. Should anomalies be detected, the Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban.

From noon on December 16 to noon today (December 17), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 201 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category. No sample was found to have exceeded the safety limit. Details can be found on the CFS's thematic website titled "Control Measures on Foods Imported from Japan" (www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_rafs/programme_rafs_fc_01_30_Nuclear_Event_and_Food_Safety.html).

In parallel, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has also tested 50 samples of local catch for radiological levels. All the samples passed the tests. Details can be found on the AFCD's website (www.afcd.gov.hk/english/fisheries/Radiological_testing/Radiological_Test.html).

The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has also enhanced the environmental monitoring of the local waters. No anomaly has been detected so far. For details, please refer to the HKO's website (www.hko.gov.hk/en/radiation/monitoring/seawater.html).

From August 24, 2023, to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 105 798 samples of food imported from Japan (including 68 518 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 23 966 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

CSSA caseload for November 2024

The overall Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) caseload in November showed a drop of 489 cases, representing a decrease of 0.2 per cent compared with that of October, according to the latest CSSA caseload statistics released by the Social Welfare Department today (December 17).

The total CSSA caseload at the end of November stood at 195 988 (see attached table), with a total of 264 371 recipients.

Analysed by case nature, low-earnings cases registered a month-to-month decrease of 1.8 per cent to 1 394 cases. Both single parent cases and unemployment cases decreased by 0.6 per cent to 19 265 cases and 16 251 cases respectively. Permanent disability cases dropped by 0.5 per cent to 16 792 cases. Old age cases declined by 0.1 per cent to 110 551 cases.

Ill-health cases remained steady at 27 851 cases.

TCU's third quarterly report of 2024 released

The following is issued on behalf of the Transport Advisory Committee:

The Transport Complaints Unit (TCU) of the Transport Advisory Committee received 14 519 complaints and suggestions in the third quarter of 2024, with 230 being pure suggestions.

The complaints and suggestions received during the quarter were mostly related to public transport services (91 per cent), enforcement matters (4 per cent) and traffic conditions (4 per cent).

The number of cases on public transport services increased from 11 349 in the previous quarter to 13 160 this quarter, while that on illegal parking and other enforcement matters decreased from 767 to 643. The number of complaints and suggestions on traffic conditions increased from 509 to 629 and that on road maintenance decreased from 82 to 40.

All the complaints and suggestions received by the TCU in the quarter were referred to the relevant government departments and public transport operators for follow-up action.

During the period under review, investigations into 8 863 cases were completed. Of these, 8 347 cases (94 per cent) were found to be substantiated, two cases (less than 1 per cent) were unsubstantiated, and the remaining 514 cases (6 per cent) could not be pursued due to a lack of evidence.

For the substantiated cases, the relevant government departments and public transport operators have either taken steps to rectify the situation or are considering possible solutions to the problems identified. Among these cases, 14 drivers were summonsed by the Police.

During the quarter, the relevant government departments and public transport operators took on board 12 suggestions made by the public to enhance public transport services and improve traffic conditions. A summary of the cases is in the Appendix.

Members of the public may make their suggestions or complaints to the TCU by dialling the hotline 2889 9999 (voice mail service is available outside office hours), by fax to 2577 1858, by email to info@tcu.gov.hk or by filling in a form on the TCU website (www.tcu.gov.hk).

TAC briefed on proposed installation of camera systems and provision of electronic payment means in taxis

The following is issued on behalf of the Transport Advisory Committee:

The Transport Advisory Committee (TAC) was briefed today (December 17) by the Government on the proposed mandatory installation of camera systems in taxi compartments and provision of electronic payment (e-payment) means by taxi drivers to enhance the overall quality of taxi services.

In recent years, there has been strong public demand for quality taxi services, as well as public aspirations for the Government to leverage technology and roll out more measures to further enhance the overall quality of taxi services and step up efforts in combating the malpractices of individual taxi drivers. In this connection, the Government proposes to introduce legislative amendments to mandate the installation of in-vehicle cameras, dash cameras and global navigation satellite systems (Camera System proposal) in all taxi compartments, and to mandate all taxi drivers to provide e-payment means (E-payment proposal).

The TAC Chairman, Professor Stephen Cheung, said, "Members support the Camera System proposal, which will better safeguard the interests of taxi drivers and passengers in cases of disputes and enhance driving safety for

taxi. Members also support the E-payment proposal, which will provide passengers, particularly tourists, with more payment options to meet the increasingly popular trend of e-payment. The TAC believes that these two measures will be conducive to enhancing the overall quality and image of taxi services, thereby gradually improving the prospects for the development of the trade."

TAC's response to Chief Executive in Council's decision to approve franchised bus operators' fare increases

The following is issued on behalf of the Transport Advisory Committee:

In response to the Chief Executive in Council's decision to approve fare increase applications from three franchised bus operators today (December 17), the Chairman of the Transport Advisory Committee (TAC), Professor Stephen Cheung, said the TAC appreciated that the Government has handled the fare increase applications from franchised bus operators in a prudent manner as it has always been, taking into account a basket of factors before arriving at the decision.

Professor Cheung said, "The TAC acknowledges that timely implementation of fare increases at suitable rates is needed for franchised bus operators to maintain adequate financial resources, not only to continue to deliver safe, efficient, and reliable bus services, but also to maintain their professional and high-quality workforce by improving remuneration packages, as well as to make necessary investments to enhance their services to ensure that franchised bus services could stay in tune with the latest societal and economic needs, and complement the long-term development of Hong Kong.

"In respect of this round of fare increase, the TAC notices that the Government has exercised its gatekeeper role, reducing the rates of increase of the two major franchises by a certain extent. The TAC agrees that the Government has endeavoured to strike a balance between minimising the impact on people's livelihood and maintaining reasonable financial capability of franchised bus operators for continuous investments. The TAC recommends that the Government should continue to encourage and assist franchised bus operators in raising revenue and reducing expenditure through a multipronged approach, including enhancing the operational efficiency by optimising bus networks and expanding sources of non-farebox revenue to alleviate the pressure for fare increases," Professor Cheung continued.