

LCQ9: Keeping of animals in Ocean Park

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Following is a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, to a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan in the Legislative Council meeting today (May 25):

Question:

In the past few years, the Ocean Park has continued to develop new attractions and introduce animals from different places for husbandry in the Park, but incidents of death of those animals, including Chinese sturgeon, bluefin tuna, coral reel fish and penguins, etc. occurred one after another. Concerns have been raised by animal and conservation groups about issues such as the standard of the husbandry staff of the Ocean Park and adequacy of supporting facilities. Some groups have also pointed out that the weather in Hong Kong is hot and queried whether it is suitable to introduce animals which live in cold places. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it knows the number of deaths and death rates of animals kept in the Ocean Park in the past five years and the animal species involved;

(b) whether it knows the respective numbers, average length of service and turnover rates of the husbandry staff and veterinarians of the Ocean Park in the past five years;

(c) whether the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and other government departments have taken the initiative to find out more about and investigate the aforesaid cases of deaths of animals; if they have, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(d) whether, according to the existing practice, the Ocean Park needs to notify AFCD and other government departments of the deaths of animals in the Park; if so, of the details; whether the Park needs to report the causes of death of animals and whether AFCD may conduct reviews in this respect; if not, of the reasons for that;

(e) whether it knows if the new animal species introduced by the Ocean Park in the past five years are wild or artificially bred; whether the Ocean Park will consult AFCD or other government departments before it decides to keep animals of new species; if it will, of the consultation procedure; if not, the reasons for that; and

(f) how the authorities assess the impact on the environment when the Ocean Park develops new attractions and introduces new animal species, including the impact during transportation, implementation of works and various stages of operation; whether it knows if the Ocean Park has implemented mitigation measures; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

We have collated information from the Food and Health Bureau, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and the Ocean Park Corporation (OPC) with regard to the keeping of animals in the Ocean Park. My reply to the question is as follows:

(a) The number of deaths and death rates of animals kept in the Ocean Park in the past five years are tabulated in Annex I.

There are over 6 700 animals in the Ocean Park, with up to 394 species. Owing to the relatively short life span of most animals, the majority of animal death cases within the Park are natural. There were other causes of deaths, such as illness, accidents, and attack between animals etc. However, these only account for about 10% to 20% of the overall death cases.

(b) The respective numbers, average length of service and turnover rates of the husbandry staff and veterinarian/technician of the Ocean Park in the past five years are tabulated in Annex II.

The veterinary team of the Ocean Park has extensive experience working in zoos or aquaria. Their experience includes working with existing animal species in the Park, as well as species newly introduced under the Master Redevelopment Plan (MRP), such as the primates in the Amazon Rainforest, and the penguins, walruses and seals to be introduced to the Polar Adventure.

(c) and (d) AFCD inspects the Ocean Park at least once a month to ensure that the animals' health and welfare are properly taken care of. The scope of the inspections includes whether the temperature and humidity of the accommodation are suitable for

the relevant species of animals, whether the feed materials are properly stored and whether other facilities, such as transportation vehicles, meet animal welfare requirement, etc.

According to the licensing conditions imposed by AFCD, the Ocean Park should report to AFCD cases of death of animal(s) (mammal and reptile) and bird(s), and investigate the cause of animal death. The death certificate or post-mortem report issued by a registered veterinary surgeon should be submitted to AFCD as soon as practicable. Should abnormal animal deaths occur (e.g. massive numbers of deaths), AFCD will proactively carry out investigation, with a view to determining the cause and working out preventive measures. No such abnormal cases of death of animals in the Ocean Park were discovered by AFCD.

(e) In order to prevent infectious diseases being brought into Hong Kong through imported animals, AFCD inspects the quarantine facilities of the Ocean Park to ensure that the requirements are met prior to the introduction of new animals. AFCD will also specify the conditions under the relevant health certificates according to the species to be imported. The Ocean Park has to comply with the relevant conditions when the animals are introduced. As stated above, AFCD will also conduct inspections to determine if the accommodation and other facilities are suitable for that particular species to protect animal health and welfare. According to the information kept in AFCD, the Ocean Park introduced 24 species of animals in the past five years (with a total number of 84), 23 of which were of captive bred origin, and only one was from the wild (one in number).

If the animals introduced are listed in the Appendices of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Ocean Park will report the latest development on the introduction of new animals to the Endangered Species Advisory Committee periodically.

(f) The Ocean Park's MRP involves reconstruction/modification of existing facilities and expansion of the Park. As it is a Designated Project subject to statutory control under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance (EIAO), the potential environmental impacts arising from the construction and reconstruction of various new and existing attractions/venues, and the operation of installed amusement rides and new open-air laser/night show venue have been assessed in an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report before the commencement of the project. The EIA Report concluded that, with mitigation measures in place, the Ocean Park's MRP

could comply with relevant EIAO Technical Memorandum environmental standards and criteria. The EIA Report was approved by the Director of Environmental Protection on July 12, 2006, and the Environmental Permit (EP) for the construction and operation of the MRP was issued to OPC on July 28, 2006.

In accordance with the EP, the OPC is required to implement various mitigation measures as recommended in the EIA Report, including the use of silt removal facilities for the treatment of construction wastewater, dust suppression measures, quiet construction plant and movable noise barriers and compensation of lost shrubland, etc. during the construction stage. During the operation of the redeveloped Park, the OPC is also required to implement specific control measures on noise and air quality impacts arising from the new open-air laser/night show venue, such as adhering to the restrictions on the sound power levels of loud speakers and carrying out air quality monitoring. Furthermore, the OPC is required to comply with other relevant pollution control legislation.

The Ocean Park has also considered whether the weather of Hong Kong is suitable for introducing polar animals. For example, there will be real snow, icebergs and aurora borealis in the new attraction Polar Adventure which help create an environment suitable for polar animals. The attraction will help the public learn about global warming, actions at home affecting the polar region, and the plight of polar species and their habitats, etc. In order to minimise the environmental impact of Polar Adventure, OPC has designed the exhibit as a fully enclosed insulated space to minimise heat exchange and energy loss. An energy efficient water-cooled chiller system, which consumes 30% less power than a conventional air-cooled system, will be used. LED lighting will also be used throughout the facility to lower energy consumption and minimise heat production.

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