

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

EEB(F)059

(Question Serial No. 2048)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not specified

Programme: (2) Environmental Hygiene and Related Services

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Ms Irene YOUNG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Question:

It is mentioned under the Brief Description of the Programme that the Government will oversee the implementation of the regulatory regime for private columbaria under the Private Columbaria Ordinance (Cap. 630). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) the staff establishment, expenditure on salaries by rank and total expenditure for the licensing of private columbaria by financial year.
- (2) the total number of applications received as well as their types and progress by financial year as per the table below:

Type of applications	Received	Approved	Approved in principle	Refused	Withdrawn	In progress
Application for licence						
Application for exemption						
Application for temporary suspension of liability						
Total						

- (3) the average time, median time and longest time required for a formal result to be available after the receipt of an application since the implementation of the licensing scheme.

Asked by: Hon CHAN Hak-kan (LegCo internal reference no.: 39)

Reply:

- (1) The Private Columbaria Affairs Office (PCAO), established in June 2017, comprises the Licensing Team, the Enforcement Team, the Financial Monitoring Team, the Private Columbaria Licensing Board (PCLB) Secretariat and the Branch Administration Unit. The overall staff establishment, expenditure on salaries and total expenditure of the PCAO as at 31 March in each of the past three years are tabulated as follows:

	2020-21 (actual)	2021-22 (actual)	2022-23 (revised estimate)
Staff establishment (posts)	67	67	67
Expenditure on salaries (\$ million)	48.5	51.1	51.0
Total expenditure (\$ million)	70.9	73.1	74.5

Licensing of private columbaria is mainly handled by the Licensing Team, which comprises 25 posts including two posts of Superintendent of Environmental Health, two posts of Chief Health Inspector, five posts of Senior Health Inspector and 16 posts of Health Inspector. The other teams under the PCAO also provide support on licensing issues. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department does not keep a breakdown of the expenditure on salaries and the total expenditure related to the handling of licensing issues.

- (2) The PCLB has started to receive applications for specified instruments (i.e. licence, exemption and temporary suspension of liability (TSOL)) under the Private Columbaria Ordinance (Cap. 630) (the Ordinance) since 30 December 2017. As at 28 February 2023, the PCLB has received applications for specified instruments from a total of 147 private columbaria. The progress of the applications is summarised as follows:

Number of private columbaria	Approved	Approved in principle	Refused	Withdrawn	Pending decision (excluding those approved in principle)
147	11	80 ^{Note 1}	33	17	6 ^{Note 2}

Note 1: These 80 columbaria in respect of which approval-in-principle has been given to their applications for a licence/an exemption/a TSOL are still required to take actions in order to fulfil all requirements for a licence/an exemption.

Note 2: The PCLB aims to make certain decisions (including giving approval/approval-in-principle to or refusing the licence/exemption/TSOL applications) on all applications for specified instruments in respect of pre-cut-off columbaria by mid-2023. The above six columbaria pending decision include four pre-cut-off columbaria.

- (3) The time the PCLB takes to process a licence application depends on the actual circumstances of the case, particularly on whether the private columbarium has complied with all the requirements relating to licence application stipulated in the Ordinance and those specified by the PCLB (including the requirements relating to planning, land, buildings, fire safety, electrical and mechanical safety, management plan, right to use the premises, environmental protection, etc.), as well as whether the applicant has submitted the required documents and information to respond to the comments of the relevant departments and prove that the private columbarium has complied with those requirements.

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