

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

EEB(F)099

(Question Serial No. 3065)

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:

At present, the Government ensures that private columbaria are in compliance with relevant laws and government requirements and that they adopt a sustainable mode of operation through the regulation under the Private Columbaria Ordinance (Cap. 630). In this connection, please advise this Committee of:

- (1) the number of applications for private columbarium licences received, the number of cases approved, and the respective number of niches involved in each of the past 3 years;
- (2) the number of applications for specified instruments currently processed by the Private Columbaria Licensing Board and the numbers of private columbaria and niches involved; and
- (3) the staff establishment, expenditure on salaries and total expenditure of the Private Columbaria Affairs Office in each of the past 3 years.

Asked by: Hon LEE Tsz-king, Dominic (LegCo internal reference no.: 38)

Reply:

- (1) The number of applications for specified instruments (i.e. licence, exemption or temporary suspension of liability (TSOL)) received and the number of specified instruments approved by the Private Columbaria Licensing Board (PCLB), as well as the number of niches involved, in the past 3 years are tabulated as follows:

| | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Number of applications for specified instruments received | 1 licence application | 0 | 0 |
| Number of specified instruments approved (number of niches) | 2 licences (about 30 700 niches) | 1 licence and 1 exemption (about 5 300 niches) | 2 licences and 2 exemptions (about 16 600 niches) |

- (2) The PCLB has started to receive applications for specified instruments since 30 December 2017. As at 29 February 2024, the PCLB has received applications for

specified instruments from a total of 147 private columbaria. The progress of the applications is summarised as follows:

| | Licence approved | Exemption approved | Application approved in principle | Application refused/withdrawn | Application pending decision |
|--------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Number of private columbaria | 12 | 5 | 78 ^{Note 1} | 51 | 1 ^{Note 2} |
| Number of niches (approximate) | 190 800 | 9 800 | 520 600 | 8 800 (ashes) | 15 900 |

Note 1: These 78 columbaria in respect of which approval-in-principle has been given to their applications are required to continue to take appropriate actions in order to fulfil all requirements for a licence/an exemption.

Note 2: The PCLB has made certain decisions (including giving approval/approval-in-principle to or refusing the applications) on all applications for specified instruments in respect of pre-cut-off columbaria. A “pre-cut-off columbarium” refers to a columbarium that was in operation, and in which ashes were interred in niches, immediately before 8:00 a.m. on 18 June 2014. The above 1 columbarium pending decision is a post-cut-off columbarium.

- (3) The overall staff establishment, expenditure on salaries and total expenditure of the Private Columbaria Affairs Office as at 31 March in the past 3 financial years are tabulated as follows:

| | 2021-22 (actual) | 2022-23 (actual) | 2023-24 (revised estimate) |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Staff establishment (posts) | 67 | 67 | 67 |
| Expenditure on salaries (\$ million) | 51.10 | 50.93 | 55.16 |
| Total expenditure (\$ million) | 73.10 | 73.32 | 76.45 |

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