



Hawker Centre 3.0 Committee Report

2017

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(Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources)*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Committee would like to thank the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources for giving us the opportunity to gain deeper insights into the challenges facing the hawker sector and to contribute to enhancing the role of hawker centres and the hawker trade.

We would like to express our appreciation to the hawkers, patrons of hawker centres, and all stakeholders who took time to share their views.

Finally, we thank the following organisations for their efforts to help us gather inputs and to facilitate the engagement sessions:

- The Federation of Merchants' Associations, Singapore (FMAS)
- REACH
- ITE College (West)
- Republic Polytechnic
- Workforce Singapore (formerly Workforce Development Agency)
- People's Association
- Various cleaning companies

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“(The) young to keep the hawker tradition alive, so that many more generations (can) get to enjoy this important piece of Singapore culture.”

- Jiang Yi, TODAY (3 Sep 2016, Pg 10) “Younger generation should pick up the skills to keep hawker tradition alive”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HAWKER CENTRES are an important part of Singapore’s food and beverage (F&B) landscape and have long served the purpose of providing affordable, good quality and hygienic food for our residents and visitors. While there are many different dining options in Singapore, from food kiosks to Michelin-star restaurants, hawker centres remain a popular and well-loved dining destination amongst Singaporeans. Indeed, hawker centres have become an integral part of Singaporeans’ everyday lives and even our national identity. According to a survey carried out by the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources (MEWR) in 2015/2016, almost three-quarters of the respondents declared that they visited a hawker centre at least once a week.



A typical mid-afternoon crowd at Maxwell Food Centre

Today, hawker fare is not only known to be affordable but also tasty. Hawkers are increasingly recognised for their culinary skills – two hawker stalls have been awarded the one-star rating by Michelin and many have loyal and regular patrons.

To ensure that hawker centres continue to meet the needs of a growing population for affordable and hygienic food, the Government has announced in 2011 its intention to build 20 new hawker centres by 2027¹. These new centres will supply about 800 more cooked food-stalls.

However, in anticipation of the challenges that hawker centres will increasingly face, such as manpower constraints and the relatively high median age (59 years old) of incumbent hawkers, the Government appointed a multi-disciplinary Hawker Centre 3.0 Committee with members from the academia and the private and public sectors to review and recommend measures on the management of hawker centres and the sustainability of the hawker trade. The vision is for our hawker centres to be appealing and vibrant social spaces where people from all walks of life can enjoy affordable and tasty food in a clean and hygienic environment and where hawkers can continue to make a decent livelihood. The Committee's 4 focus areas are on how to:

4

Focus Areas

- 1) sustain the hawker trade and support new entrants;
- 2) improve productivity in hawker centres;
- 3) enhance hawker centres as social spaces and improve vibrancy of hawker centres; and
- 4) promote graciousness in hawker centres.

Through MEWR and the National Environment Agency (NEA), the Committee has engaged over 800 stakeholders including hawkers, members of the public, patrons of hawker centres, cleaning companies and The Federation of Merchants' Associations, Singapore (FMAS). Their views have been considered in developing the findings and recommendations of this report.

¹ Three of them are already operational: Bukit Panjang Hawker Centre & Market (since 2015), Ci Yuan Hawker Centre (since 2015) and Our Tampines Hub Hawker Centre (since 2016).

The Committee's key recommendations for each focus area are as follows:

II Key Recommendations

Sustain the hawker trade and support new entrants

- 1) Develop training opportunities and pathways for hawkers
- 2) Design an incubation stall programme
- 3) Create a one-stop Information and Service Centre for hawkers
- 4) Enhance profile of hawkers

Improve productivity in hawker centres

- 5) Implement centre-level productivity initiatives
- 6) Promote use of productive equipment at stall-level

Enhance hawker centres as social spaces and improve vibrancy of hawker centres

- 7) Encourage regular organised activities at hawker centres
- 8) Improve amenities of hawker centres
- 9) Manage the food mix offered more proactively

Promote graciousness in hawker centres

- 10) Partner key stakeholders on tray-return measures and improve tray-return facilities
- 11) Encourage kind and considerate behaviour

A

SUSTAIN THE HAWKER TRADE AND SUPPORT NEW ENTRANTS

- 1) **Develop training opportunities and pathways for hawkers.** The Committee recommends that the Government develop a sustainable dedicated training programme (or series of programmes) which will help facilitate and encourage the entry of aspiring hawkers into the trade. Essentially, the programmes should involve a pathway which will allow the participants to learn about the hawker trade, acquire culinary and business management skills, as well as have some opportunity to experience being a hawker and eventually become one.
- 2) **Design an incubation stall programme.** The Committee recommends that the Government allocate a number of stalls in various hawker centres as incubation stalls for aspiring individuals to experience being a hawker for a limited period of time. These incubation stalls should be fitted with basic equipment to reduce the capital investment required to start a hawker stall. It will be useful if there are supervisors or mentors to guide and enhance the incubation stall-holder's learning experience and success in mastering the relevant culinary and management skills. It will, therefore, be desirable to form a panel of supervisors/mentors to provide coaching and guidance to these aspiring hawkers.
- 3) **Create a comprehensive one-stop Information and Service Centre for hawkers.** The Committee recommends that the Government set up a comprehensive one-stop information

centre which will function as a service centre for hawker trade-related enquiries, such as hawker stall licence application, regulatory requirements, relevant courses, suppliers' contacts, etc. Apart from guiding new hawkers, the centre should also function as a resource centre for existing hawkers where they can find information on the latest developments and best practices relevant to the hawker trade, such as kitchen equipment and automation, training courses, networks and new initiatives.

- 4) **Enhance profile of hawkers.** The Committee supports the efforts of NEA and the National Heritage Board (NHB) in coming up with various initiatives to enhance the profile of hawkers and hawker centres. The Government could consider partnering relevant parties to develop suitable promotional programmes to raise the profile of hawkers and the hawker trade. These initiatives could also celebrate and promote hawker centres as a uniquely Singapore icon. Outstanding hawkers with inspiring stories could also be featured through such platforms to raise the profile of the hawker trade and reinforce the hawker culture.

B

IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY IN HAWKER CENTRES

- 5) **Implement centre-level productivity initiatives.** The Committee recommends that the Government continue exploring ways to improve the productivity in hawker centres and of the hawker trade. The Government could explore, for example, the viability of centralised dishwashing, cashless payment systems

and bulk purchasing of common ingredients. Such measures if successfully implemented, will not only improve productivity but also address manpower constraints and even cut costs, especially over the medium to long term. Nonetheless, there could be cost implications particularly in the short term and for some hawkers in certain trades. Hence, the Committee recommends that the Government look into facilitating the implementation of productivity measures in hawker centres. For instance, in the case of centralised dishwashing, the Government could look into a more equitable charging model to ensure buy-in by the hawkers. The Government could also facilitate cashless payment and self-ordering/payment initiatives so that hawkers do not have to deal with payment directly and can concentrate on food preparation.

- 6) **Promote use of productive equipment at stall-level.** Through the course of the review, it was found that there is potential to improve the productivity of hawkers by automating certain tedious and repetitive tasks, such as cutting chilli or onions, mixing dough or fish paste for fishballs and frying etc. However, it is observed that there is currently very little attempt to automate at the stall-level to ease the hawkers' workload and improve productivity. Hence, there is still room for the Government to play a facilitating role to increase awareness among hawkers, as well as promote and encourage more widespread adoption of more efficient and productive equipment in the hawkers' operations.

C ENHANCE HAWKER CENTRES AS SOCIAL SPACES AND IMPROVE THE VIBRANCY OF HAWKER CENTRES

- 7) **Encourage regular organised activities at hawker centres.** NEA and hawker centre operators could facilitate regular activities, such as music performances and festive celebrations within hawker centres to enhance the vibrancy of the hawker centres and customers' dining experience. One way this could be achieved is for community groups, such as grassroots organisations, arts groups, schools and tertiary institutions to adopt or partner their preferred hawker centres to hold relevant and regular activities there over a sustained period. This will further strengthen the use of hawker centres as social spaces for communities to come together not just to dine but enjoy and/or participate in community activities.
- 8) **Improve amenities of hawker centres.** The Committee recommends that the Government, where appropriate, consider enhancing the amenities of hawker centres, such as by providing free Wi-Fi and child-friendly spaces for the benefit of patrons.
- 9) **Manage the food mix offered more proactively.** Hawker centres should continue to have a good food mix to cater to the diverse needs of the population. In the new centres which are managed by NEA-appointed operators, there is a requirement on such operators to ensure good food mix. To this end, the Committee recommends that the Government take a more proactive

management of vacant stalls in existing hawker centres which are not managed by third party operators to ensure that there is a good variety of food available at these hawker centres.

D PROMOTE GRACIOUSNESS IN HAWKER CENTRES

- 10) **Partner key stakeholders on tray-return measures and improve tray-return facilities.** The Committee's engagement sessions with various stakeholders indicate that there was a universal desire for a clean and hygienic dining environment and most saw tray-return as a desirable social habit that should be cultivated. A good tray-return culture would facilitate faster turnover of tables and reduce waiting time for the next diner, thus potentially increasing sales for the hawkers. It would also result in a cleaner and more pleasant dining environment. One of the often quoted reasons for not returning trays is the misperception that this would deprive the table-cleaners of their jobs. Yet another common reason cited is that the table-

cleaners would remove the tray and crockery even before the patrons can return them to the tray-return station. To cultivate and entrench a tray-return culture, the Committee recommends that NEA and the hawker centre operators work with key stakeholders like the cleaning companies, to dispel the misperception that cleaners will be made redundant. NEA should also conduct more campaigns to propagate the virtue and habit of tray-return and other gracious and considerate behaviour. Concurrently, the current tray-return facilities, including their design, layout and location, could be improved to make it easier and more convenient patrons to use and for cleaners to do their work.

- 11) **Encourage kind and considerate behaviour.** As hawker centres are community spaces shared by everyone, the Government and other stakeholders should continue to encourage kind and considerate behaviour, such as the sharing of tables and keeping hawker centres clean by not littering. These may include having posters, murals or campaigns to remind patrons to be considerate to others.

“Given the importance of nurturing a new generation of hawkers, the Committee should ensure that there are good business and better working conditions to attract the young.”

- The Straits Times Editorial (6 Nov 2016, pB4)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Role of Hawker Centres

Singapore is well-known as a food paradise and has no lack of food options – from food kiosks to pop-up cafes to celebrity chefs’ restaurants. Despite the varied F&B landscape in Singapore, hawker centres are undisputedly the place to go to for clean, affordable and tasty food. The rise of social media food bloggers has also helped hawkers and their food to gain recognition from a wider audience. Some hawkers stalls have even recently made it to the Michelin Guide Singapore. In fact, the world’s cheapest Michelin Star food can be found in one of our hawker centres.

There are currently more than 100 hawker centres with more than 6000 cooked food stalls located all over Singapore. Many are found within the heartlands and have served residents in the neighbourhoods for decades. The overall average stall occupancy rate of more than 97% in the hawker centres over the last five years is testament to the vibrancy of our hawker business.

1.2. Evolution of Hawker Centres

Hawker centres were first built in the 1970s as a result of the Government’s policy to resettle itinerant street hawkers to improve public health. Subsequently, more than 100 centres have been upgraded under the Hawker Centres Upgrading Programme between 2001 and 2014 with improved ventilation and exhaust systems, as well as more dining seats with wider walking space between the tables.

Hawker centres have now gained a reputation for providing affordable food in a hygienic environment and are also widely acknowledged as a place for social interaction and bonding, as well as a unique part of our Singapore identity. Hawker centres are also a source of employment for the locals as only Singaporeans or Permanent Residents (PRs) are permitted to operate or work in hawker

stalls. To enable hawker centres to remain relevant and continue serving the people well, the Government announced the building of new hawker centres in 2011.

In end 2011, a Hawker Centres Public Consultation Panel comprising 18 representatives from different social enterprises and industries was formed to provide ideas on new hawker centres. The report by the Panel was submitted to MEWR in April 2012 and most of the Panel's recommendations such as having social enterprises or cooperatives to operate hawker centres on a not-for-profit basis and designing centres for environmental sustainability and cost effectiveness have been implemented by the Government. For example, 4 centres are already being managed by socially conscious operators such as NTUC Foodfare Cooperative Ltd. These operators have the flexibility to innovate and customise solutions for each centre to improve the dining experience, enhance vibrancy and improve operational efficiency of the centres under their management, while at the same time ensure the affordability of hawker food.

The Panel's proposal of disallowing subletting and assignment of stalls was subsequently also implemented in all hawker centres. To further keep stall rents in check, the Government removed the concept of a reserve rent in 2012 to allow tendered cooked food stalls to be awarded below what the reserve rent would have been. These measures were aimed at moderating rents to ensure that it does not put upward pressure on food prices over time.

Going forward, there is a need to address other challenges of sustaining the hawker trade, such as manpower constraints, the high median age of existing hawkers, as well as a possible lack of new entrants into the hawker trade as the Government ramps up the supply of hawker centres. It was against this backdrop that the Hawker Centre 3.0 Committee was formed.

1.3. The Hawker Centre 3.0 Committee

The Hawker Centre 3.0 Committee was formed in January 2016 to review and make recommendations to the Government on the management of hawker centres and the sustainability of the hawker trade. The vision is for our hawker centres to be appealing and vibrant social spaces where people from all walks of life can enjoy affordable and tasty food in a clean and hygienic environment and where hawkers can continue to make a decent livelihood.

The Committee is led by the Senior Minister of State for the Environment and Water Resources Dr Amy Khor and comprises individuals from diverse fields and backgrounds who have expertise relevant to the hawker trade or who have shown an interest in preserving the hawker trade. The list of members is provided in Annex A.

The Committee has looked into the following 4 focus areas:

- 1. Sustain the hawker trade in Singapore, and attract and support individuals who wish to enter the hawker trade**

Given the high median age of existing hawkers (at about 59 years), the hawker trade, whilst vibrant now, may increasingly face challenges in terms of sustainability. Even though there are currently some aspiring hawkers, the numbers could remain too few to be able to sustain the hawker trade in the long run if nothing is done. In light of the new hawker centres that would be built over the next decade, there is a need to attract more people into this trade. Therefore, one of the key goals of the Committee is to better understand the barriers to entry and address gaps so as to attract new entrants and sustain the existing pool of hawkers.

- 2. Improve productivity in hawker centres, such as through the design of hawker centres, kitchen automation and adopting centralised and digital services**

Productivity is not a new concept in the F&B sector. Productivity improvements aim to address manpower constraints and reduce the cost of doing business over the medium to long term. NEA has productivity initiatives in hawker centres, particularly in the new hawker centres where centralised dishwashing and cashless payment systems are being implemented under the alternative management model². With more than 100

hawker centres in Singapore, there is room for more adoption of productivity measures but barriers to adoption (such as infrastructural limitations in older centres and cost implications for some hawkers in certain trades) must first be addressed. Apart from centralised dishwashing and cashless payment systems which are centre-level initiatives, the Committee has also explored enhancing productivity at the hawker stall-level in terms of automating mundane and laborious cooking or food preparation processes.

- 3. Enhance hawker centres as social spaces for activities and community bonding, which could also improve the vibrancy of hawker centres**

As many hawker centres are located in the heartlands, they can be useful social spaces, especially for community bonding. NEA encourages fringe activities to be held at hawker centres and the Committee has looked into ways to make this more regular and sustainable.

- 4. Promote graciousness in hawker centres, such as by keeping tables clean for the next diner**

It is not uncommon to be greeted by tables filled with soiled dishes when dining at hawker centres. This is an unpleasant sight. Tray-return is an act of graciousness and should not be seen as the “cleaners’ job”.

² NEA has been exploring alternative management models for hawker centres by engaging socially-conscious operators as managing agents. The experience of these operators in food and beverage operations, as well as property and lease management, can help improve the operational efficiency of hawker centres. They can also help

enhance the dining experience at hawker centres while ensuring good quality and affordable food. Centralised dishwashing and cashless payment systems have been implemented in these operator-managed centres (e.g. *Bukit Panjang Hawker Centre*, *Ci Yuan Hougang Hawker Centre* and *Our Tampines Hub Hawker Centre*).

Instead, if every patron does his/her part in clearing trays and keeping the tables clean, it will result in a faster turnover of tables and create a cleaner and more pleasant dining experience for everyone. This will also facilitate the work of cleaners who can then concentrate on cleaning the tables. To this end, the Committee discussed the challenges confronting the tray-return initiative and explored ways to improve tray-return rates in hawker centres. The Committee also discussed the need to promote kind and considerate behaviour at hawker centres.

(The) preservation of our local culture can coexist together with efforts to remain an economically vibrant country.

- Ashley Tan Yu Yi, ST Forum (27 July 2016), “Keep safeguarding hawker culture”

2. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: GETTING INPUTS

**More than
800
stakeholders
engaged**

Through MEWR and NEA, inputs and ideas were gathered over the course of 2016 from various groups of stakeholders on the Committee’s 4 focus areas. In particular, 5 focus group discussions were held to engage the hawkers, including a dedicated session each for new/young hawkers and experienced hawkers, as well as The Federation of Merchants’ Associations, Singapore (FMAS) and cleaning companies. Views from the public were also sought through REACH E-Poll, Listening Points and Facebook ‘Live’ chat, as well as a Radio ‘Live’ Chat with Capital 95.8FM (“In Conversation”) to

ensure that a diverse range of people, including youth, netizens, as well as hawkers and patrons of hawker centres were consulted. More than 800 stakeholders have given their feedback. In addition, views and opinions reported by the media with regard to the hawker trade were also considered in this review. Visits were also made to (kitchen) equipment suppliers and some hawker centres to understand what equipment was available to improve productivity at the stall-level.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS	MODE OF CONSULTATION
1) Hawkers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group discussions
2) The Federation of Merchants' Associations, Singapore (FMAS)	
3) Cleaning companies	
4) Members of the public / patrons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SGfuture Engagement Sessions • REACH Listening Points, On-Site polls and Facebook 'Live' Chat • Radio 'Live' Chat

2.1. Hawkers and The Federation of Merchants' Associations, Singapore (FMAS)

Many hawkers shared their views on the key challenges faced by the hawker trade and on possible productivity initiatives for hawker centres. In some areas of discussion, there was no consensus. For example, some experienced hawkers shared that they would prefer not to have a shared central kitchen area for fear of recipe leaks and conflicts over the loss of raw materials. On the other hand, a few, newer hawkers found the idea of a central kitchen preparation area useful for facilitating conversations, building rapport with fellow hawkers and learning "tips" from the veteran hawkers. The hawkers' views were also sought on having programmes and activities in their hawker centres.



A hawker sharing his views on having activities in hawker centres



Experienced hawkers discussing possible improvements to the hawker centre infrastructure



Lively focus group discussion with hawkers and members of the FMAS at Holland Village Market & Food Centre

2.2. Cleaning Companies

Speaking with the cleaning companies provided insights into the barriers faced by hawkers in adopting centralised dishwashing as well as the problems of tray-return. The companies shared that while hawkers recognised centralised dishwashing as a means to improve productivity and hygiene, high cost was a key barrier for them. There is, therefore, a need to calibrate the business model of centralised dishwashing to make the scheme more attractive to hawkers. The cleaning companies

highlighted that if Government funding were available to help with the initial capital cost of investments (e.g. purchase of common crockery), hawkers may be more willing to come on board the initiative.

Apart from cost issues, the companies also shared other key considerations (e.g. space constraints in existing hawker centres, having more economies of scale for larger machines located off-site) in determining which of the two main models of centralised dishwashing services, on-site and off-site services, to adopt in hawker centres.

2.3. Members of the Public and Patrons

The future of hawker centres was discussed at the SGfuture engagement sessions held in January 2016. About 40 participants shared their concerns on sustaining the hawker trade, the variety of food available and the vibrancy of the hawker centres. To further engage members of the public, the Committee collaborated with REACH to organise 2 Listening Points at ITE College (West) and 208B New Upper Changi Road Hawker Centre and a Facebook ‘Live’ Chat where more than 2,700 views were received. Altogether more than 800 stakeholders, including the youth, netizens and patrons of hawker centres, contributed their views and suggestions at these engagement sessions. One common comment that was shared in many of the sessions was the desire for hawker centres to provide affordable food in a clean environment.



One of the participants at the SGfuture dialogue explaining the importance of preserving our beloved hawker heritage

On joining the hawker trade and attracting new hawkers

As part of the engagement, students from the School of Hospitality at ITE College (West) were surveyed on the hawker trade. Whilst not the majority, 32% of respondents said that they would like to join the hawker trade and cited “being their own boss” and the lower start-up capital involved as reasons. Online contributors during a separate live Facebook chat also had a lively discussion on the topic of sustaining hawker trade and attracting new entrants. Some called for a more comfortable and cleaner working environment for hawkers. Others suggested having incubation stalls for aspiring hawkers to try out and assess if they were suited for the trade. Yet others called for training support such as SkillsFuture courses for aspiring hawkers.

On cashless payment systems in hawker centres

More than half of the Listening Points respondents said that they would use a cashless payment system if it was available in hawker centres. They reasoned that it would be more convenient and less of a hassle for the hawkers who would then have more time to prepare their orders.

On enhancing our hawker centres as vibrant social spaces

More than 80% of the Listening Points respondents welcomed the idea of introducing organised programmes within hawker centres to boost vibrancy. They also gave many suggestions on the activities that could be organised, such as culinary demonstrations, movie screenings, live band performances and even eating competitions, to enhance hawker centres as vibrant social spaces to attract more patrons. A handful, however, expressed doubt towards the purpose of such activities and were concerned that they would disrupt the patrons' dining experience.

On promoting gracious behaviour within hawker centres

The majority of respondents were in favour of patrons practising tray-return and the general consensus was that it would benefit everyone. Some suggested ramping up public education and campaigns to educate the public on the benefits of tray-return.



Students from ITE College (West) taking time to answer an e-poll on their views of the future of hawker centres



REACH Listening Point at 208B New Upper Changi Road attracting a lunchtime crowd to offer views on the future of our hawker centres

The Committee also considered ideas and feedback from media reports and forum letters on sustaining the hawker culture. Most of the feedback supported the need to preserve our hawker culture and the social benefits of hawker centres in providing affordable and hygienic food. Key issues raised revolved around preserving the hawker trade, cleanliness and poor tray-return practices.



The Committee's visit to Sembawang Hills Food Centre



The Committee having lunch at Ci Yuan Hawker Centre

“The humble hawker showcased the spirit of entrepreneurship in its most rudimentary form.”

- Lionel Loi Zhi Rui, Straits Times (1 Nov 2016, pA27) “Economic, societal benefits to preserving hawker culture”

3. FINDINGS: UNDERSTANDING CHALLENGES & AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

3.1. Sustain the Hawker Trade and Support New Entrants

While a few hawkers expressed concerns over rising costs of business, the most common view shared by many hawkers and members of the public was that the hawker trade was challenging due to factors such as long hours of laborious work and uncomfortable and physically demanding working conditions within hawker centres. With more comfortable employment options available, being a hawker is not a natural choice for many. While some were genuinely interested to try out being a hawker, the sheer amount of hard work needed was a deterrent. Many shared that it takes both passion and determination to succeed as a hawker and to persevere and thrive in the trade. Interestingly, although a few Committee members were of the view that it was difficult for hawkers to make a decent livelihood as they felt that hawkers generally charged relatively low prices largely in keeping with public expectations, this issue was not flagged by the hawkers in our discussions as a key challenge or deterrent to being a hawker. The Committee also noted a study conducted by MEWR and the Ministry of Trade and Industry in 2014 on the cost drivers of hawker food prices. The study found no strong link between rentals, which formed a relatively small proportion of the operating costs for typical hawkers, and hawker food prices. The data further suggested that hawker food prices are set according to market principles, such as the lack of affordable alternatives elsewhere and a patron’s willingness-to-pay.

New / Young Hawkers

Many new/young hawkers, when asked, shared that they had joined the trade due to passion or were continuing their parents' legacy. According to them, high start-up cost, lack of funding support and challenging working conditions were common barriers to entering the trade. These new/young hawkers would like to have a better working environment with high standards of cleanliness and better ventilation in hawker centres. In contrast to more experienced hawkers, new hawkers were more receptive towards adopting cashless payment systems which would reduce the hassle of computing the total costs and collecting physical notes or coins. These new hawkers also said that it would be useful to have a resource centre to help orientate new hawkers.



Two hawkers listening to the sharing of experiences by fellow new/young hawkers



A hawker sharing her motivation on becoming a hawker

The hawkers suggested having a mentor and a try-out period to help new entrants learn about the hawker trade and set the correct expectations about the job. This could potentially reduce drop-out rates. A number of hawkers said that they were willing to impart their skills and experience but there was no suitable platform to do so. Many participants shared that they were aware of the culinary certification courses (e.g. WSQ Certificate in Culinary Arts) offered in both the public (e.g. ITE, Polytechnics, etc.) and private domains (e.g. SHATEC and Dignity Kitchen) but some felt that such courses were too long and onerous for hawkers-to-be. Currently, Dignity Kitchen is the only organisation providing training specifically for aspiring hawkers. Dignity Kitchen's Hawkerpreneur Programme is largely aimed at helping those who are exploring a mid-career switch. In addition, Dignity Kitchen also has a Hawker Training Programme that is focused on helping disabled and disadvantaged individuals.

Public	Private
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian Culinary Institute • Polytechnics • ITE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SHATEC • At-Sunrice • Dignity Kitchen

Current training providers of culinary courses

The contents of the other culinary course providers were generally not as directly applicable to the hawker trade and most students at such courses aspired to be chefs in hotels/restaurants rather than hawkers. **Hawkers therefore felt that having a dedicated structured training programme on the hawker trade would be useful.**

On the topic of training, various participants also recalled the Hawker Master Trainer Pilot Programme launched by the then-Workforce Development Agency in 2014 with the aim of preserving the hawker heritage. However, it was noted that very few of the graduates have become hawkers given various challenges such as high set up costs and lack of experience. These are areas which the new training programme could address.

Apart from training, some hawkers were unaware of resources such as equipment that can help in food preparation and suppliers' contacts which would be particularly useful for aspiring hawkers. In light of these concerns, there were suggestions to set up an information and services centre for hawkers. **The centre should be a one-stop provider of hawker-related information (e.g. hawker policies, licence application process, information on benefits for the self-employed) and relevant resources, such as training.**

Dignity Kitchen

Targeted at mid-career individuals who are seeking to enter the hawker or F&B industry, Dignity Kitchen's 19-day Hawkerpreneur Programme seeks to provide trainees with foundational Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) training in Food & Beverage and an opportunity to learn from the experienced trainers.

Separately, Dignity Kitchen has a Hawker Training Programme, which is a 6 to 8-week development programme for disabled and disadvantaged individuals. The curriculum includes theory, practical work, assessment and placements. Students are trained in food-stall operations, basic food hygiene, food preparation, kitchen safety and simple cooking. Upon completion of the training, Dignity Kitchen will undertake job placement for the students.

About Dignity Kitchen: Established in 2010, Dignity Kitchen is Singapore's first hawker training school for disabled and disadvantaged individuals to help them become more employable. It provides on-the-job training and place its graduates in jobs. Dignity Kitchen also operates a fully functional, regular food court that is open to the public.

3.2. Improve Productivity in Hawker Centres

There was general agreement that hawker centres have over the years improved in their design and operations. Since the Hawker Centres Upgrading Programme (HUP) in 2001, existing hawker centres have been upgraded with wider passageways and better layouts to optimise the use of space. New hawker centres are now built with higher ceilings for better ventilation and have designated spaces for amenities such as centralised dishwashing facilities.

Centralised dishwashing, cashless payment systems and digital services such as self-ordering/payment systems were the key areas of discussion under the topic of productivity. **Both hawkers and patrons saw benefits in the adoption of centralised dishwashing, particularly in reducing workload and improving hygiene.** A number of hawkers, however, voiced concerns over the higher cost of centralised dishwashing compared to their current practice, where their stall assistants would wash the used crockery during off-peak hours. Hawkers also felt that charging a uniform fee to all stall-holders for centralised dishwashing was not an equitable charging model as some trades, such as stalls selling traditional pancakes, would use very little or virtually no crockery,

whilst those selling economy rice or noodles would use much more crockery. Echoing the views of the hawkers, a number of cleaning companies shared that many hawkers would rather wash the dishes themselves during off-peak hours. In this regard, to promote the adoption of centralised dishwashing, a more equitable charging model would be needed and perhaps also some incentives from the Government to get them on board.



Centralised dishwashing equipment

Centralised dishwashing could be performed on-site or off-site. However, according to the cleaning companies, there are infrastructural challenges in some existing centres as there is no provision for on-site centralised dishwashing operations. If on-site centralised dishwashing were to be implemented, reconfiguration works will be needed. Moreover, many companies that provided dishwashing services shared that off-site dishwashing was more feasible as there would be economies of scale.

Hawkers and patrons generally welcomed cashless payment modes in hawker centres for the increased convenience and to speed up payment. The younger ones also suggested that hawker centres be equipped with self-ordering/payment systems which have been implemented in other food establishments. However, some older hawkers still preferred the traditional methods of payment and ordering.

Additionally, many hawkers commented that cashless payment systems, if implemented, should utilise a payment mode that is already widely used and which most patrons, including the elderly, were familiar with and could use easily.



A patron making payment using a stored value card

Cashless Payment at Our Tampines Hub (OTH) Hawker Centre

In conjunction with the opening of OTH Hawker Centre, the operator OTMH Pte Ltd³ launched a commemorative limited edition stored value card and distributed the card for free to the residents of Tampines. Patrons using this card or any Kopitiam stored value cards are able to enjoy up to 10% discount off their food item purchases and be rewarded with points upon returning their tray after their meal. The accumulated points can be used to redeem free drinks and breakfast sets.

³ A unit of food court operator Kopitiam

To have a better appreciation of hawker stall operations, visits were made to several hawker centres and a number of equipment suppliers. It was observed that some hawkers deployed rather innovative kitchen automation equipment to help them in certain tedious and mundane tasks such as frying and cutting or peeling of ingredients. Some hawkers had also introduced new cooking methods to reduce food preparation time and improve turnaround. However, it is observed that the adoption rates of such equipment and innovative approaches to improve productivity at the stall-level are not high. Hence, there is potential to improve productivity at the stall-level by encouraging more hawkers to adopt such approaches.



Productive equipment observed in hawker centres (Left, top and bottom: Automatic chopsticks dispenser and dough apportioning machine; Middle: Digital queue system; Right, top and bottom: Potato peeler and automated stirrer)

3.3. Enhance Hawker Centres as Social Spaces and Improve the Vibrancy of Hawker Centres

As part of the review efforts, NEA actively collaborated with various partners on the active use of spaces in hawker centres to test the effectiveness of such ideas in enhancing their vibrancy. A few pilots which took place included the 2016 French Festival “Voilah” where live musical performances were held at 16 hawker centres; a SkillsFuture exhibition held at Blk 254 Jurong East St 24 (Yuhua Village) Market and Food centre; and the first anniversary celebration of the Ci Yuan Hawker Centre. NEA also collaborated with the National Arts Council (NAC) to hold a ukulele performance, ocarina-

playing workshop and Chinese musical performance at Blk 115 Bukit Merah View, Blk 628 Ang Mo Kio Avenue 4 and Bedok Food Centre respectively.

These events were well-received. **Hawkers were supportive of having events at hawker centres which they said would improve footfall.** Only a small handful highlighted concerns of possible feedback from residents on noise disturbance.



Participants were brought on a musical trail around Bedok, with one of the stops at Bedok Food Centre (part of the Bedok Heritage Trail), where they enjoyed local delicacies and lively music.



Ukelele performance organised by the NAC

During the public engagement sessions, some members of the public suggested cooking classes or demonstrations and singing competitions as good events to be held in hawker centres. **Some hawkers and patrons highlighted that the activities should be conducted on a regular basis and over the longer term, as one-off events would not have a significant, sustainable impact.**

Some hawkers and patrons said that providing free Wi-Fi and child-friendly facilities would not only benefit the hawkers but also attract more patrons, especially the younger ones.

3.4. Promote Graciousness in Hawker Centres

Tray-return was a key topic of discussion with regard to the promotion of gracious behaviour in hawker centres. There was also a universal desire for a clean and hygienic dining environment. According to the on-site polls conducted at the two REACH Listening Points, the majority of the participants saw **tray-return as a desirable social habit which needed to be cultivated**. However, there was a misconception that the cleaners' jobs would be at risk if patrons returned their own trays. The table-cleaning contractors had received similar feedback from patrons and also shared that their cleaners were afraid to ask patrons to return their trays for fear of offending them. Together, these factors had contributed to the poor tray-return rates in many hawker centres.

Suggestions for improving tray-return that focused on tackling the behavioural aspects include educating the young who in turn can influence adults, encouraging parents to be role models, conducting campaigns and appointing ambassadors to remind patrons to return their trays.

Notably, the table-cleaning contractors shared that if patrons practised tray-return, their cleaners would be better able to focus on maintaining the cleanliness of the tables and premises. If their cleaners were freed from collecting trays, some could be redeployed to be stationed at the tray-return stations to ensure that trays were promptly cleared. Hence cleaners would not lose their jobs just because patrons practised the habit of returning their tray and crockery after their meal.



Tray-return area at Timbre+

A \$1 Tray-Return Policy

To promote the act of tray-return, **Timbre+** introduced the **\$1 tray-return system** where patrons pay a **\$1** dollar deposit for the tray. Upon return of the tray to the centralised tray-return station, the **\$1** is refunded through an automated coin return system.

“Diners have the misconception that clearing their trays will leave cleaners out of work. They will, in fact, be making life easier for the cleaners and making work less of a burden for older workers.”

- Yip Keng Soon, Director of Operations at Kopitiam Investments, Straits Times Online(9 May 2016) “S'pore diners still fare poorly in returning trays”

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made by the Committee in this report are intended to address the gaps and challenges identified under each of the 4 focus areas of the Hawker Centre 3.0 Committee review in order to sustain the hawker trade. In formulating these recommendations, the key concerns, findings, observations and suggestions arising from the engagements with stakeholders and interactions with the public were taken into consideration.



A typical late morning crowd at Tiong Bahru Market and Food Centre

4.1. SUSTAIN THE HAWKER TRADE AND SUPPORT NEW ENTRANTS

Recommendation 1

Develop Training Opportunities and Pathways for Hawkers



Being a hawker has its own unique set of challenges which is not quite the same as being a chef in a larger F&B organisation. The Committee assessed that it will be useful to provide some appropriate practice-oriented training programmes for aspiring hawkers to make it easier for those who wish to enter the trade. Such courses could also pique the interest of those who might be looking for a change in their career. Such courses must be accessible, affordable and reasonably short, so that more aspiring hawkers, including working individuals considering a change of career, would be able to attend. The Committee thus recommends that training opportunities be developed for the hawker trade. A sustainable dedicated training programme (or series of programmes) will help facilitate the entry of aspiring hawkers into the trade. However, the elements of the training programme would have to be carefully designed. For example, the course could focus on teaching culinary skills as well as how to tender and operate a hawker stall. It could include training on traditional hawker fare so as to help preserve the hawker heritage and culture.

This course is not meant to be equivalent to a full-fledged culinary certification programme but one that provides relevant practical and basic skills to enable the aspiring hawker to get started. Essentially, this programme could establish a pathway for interested participants to learn about the hawker trade, acquire culinary and business management skills, as well as have some opportunity to experience being a hawker and eventually become one.

Institutions of learning and training providers, such as ITE and Dignity Kitchen, could look into the provision of such courses and to offer the courses in a modular form to make it easier and more convenient for aspiring hawkers to attend.

Recommendation 2**Design an Incubation Stall Programme**

In response to the numerous feedback on making provision for “trials” and apprenticeship schemes, the Committee recommends that the Government set aside incubation stalls at hawker centres for aspiring hawkers. According to the feedback received, a try out period of about 6 to 12 months would be needed for an aspiring hawker to learn the ropes and assess if he/she wishes to continue in the hawker trade. Drawing lessons from the Hawker Trainer Master Pilot Programme conducted in 2014, the Committee recommends that NEA fit incubation stalls with basic equipment to allow aspiring hawkers to try out at the stalls without having to incur high capital costs. Taking reference from the industry hawker training programmes such as Fei Siong’s Entrepreneurship Programme and OTMH’s Train and Place Entrepreneurship scheme, it would be useful if the programme can match the aspiring hawkers with supervisors or mentors to enhance the incubation stall-holder’s learning experience and success in mastering culinary skills. We could form a panel of willing supervisors/mentors to provide coaching and guidance to these aspiring hawkers as they establish their businesses.



Fei Siong’s Entrepreneurship Programme

Aercurl Chng is a young hawker who started her own business at Ci Yuan Hawker Centre selling desserts.
(Image Source: Fei Siong)

Fei Siong’s 3-year entrepreneurship programme is aimed at preserving the local hawker food. The programme involved a 3-month training for aspiring hawkers by veteran hawkers. Those veterans acted as consultants to the participants and helped the new entrants learn the ropes of cooking and managing a hawker business.

Recommendation 3**Create a One-stop Information and Service Centre for Hawkers**

Taking up the suggestion of the hawkers to have a comprehensive information centre, the Committee recommends that the Government set up such an information and service centre which would serve as a one-stop resource centre for both new hawkers and existing hawkers. The centre should aim to orientate new entrants in terms of providing information on hawker stall licence application, tendering of stalls, etc. At the same time, the centre can provide existing hawkers with information on resources as well as the latest developments and best practices relevant to the hawker trade, such as kitchen equipment and automation, training courses, networks and new initiatives. The centre could be an expansion of NEA's current Customer Service Centre at HDB Hub Toa Payoh, which is mainly for hawker stall licence applications.



NEA's current Customer Service Centre for hawker stall licence applications

Recommendation 4 | Enhance Profile of Hawkers

Hawker food is a well-loved part of Singapore's food heritage and there have been various initiatives to celebrate hawker culture. For example, City Hawker Food Hunt⁴ gives awards to hawkers for their popularity and culinary skills. NEA and NHB, in partnership with NAC and Nippon Paint Singapore, had also jointly organised an initiative titled "Our Hawker Centres – a Heritage and Art Project" to raise public awareness of the heritage and cultural value of our hawker centres and the areas where they are located. These are positive and laudable initiatives from the private and public sectors. Nonetheless, we could do even more to profile hawkers and their stories. In this regard, the Committee suggests that the Government could consider partnering relevant parties to develop suitable promotional programmes to raise the profile of hawkers and the hawker trade. These initiatives could also celebrate and promote hawker centres as a uniquely Singapore icon. Outstanding hawkers with inspiring stories could also be featured through such platforms to raise the profile of the hawker trade and further reinforce the hawker culture. All these could help make the hawker trade more attractive to aspiring hawkers.



Roti Prata is a much-loved food in Singapore

⁴ Organised by City Gas and Shin Min Daily News and supported by NEA, the Health Promotion Board (HPB) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB).

4.2. IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY IN HAWKER CENTRES

Recommendation 5

Implement Centre-Level Productivity Initiatives



Conveyer belt automated tray-return system at OTH Hawker Centre

Improving productivity is key to reducing the workload of hawkers, improving their working conditions and increasing the sustainability of the hawker trade. In particular, centralised dishwashing is a service that should be seriously explored for wider implementation in hawker centres to help address the challenge of manpower constraints. Unlike foodcourts and coffeeshops which are managed by a single operator who makes the business decisions, individual hawkers make their own business decisions. Although there would

be some economies of scale when more hawkers in a centre sign up for centralised dishwashing services, many hawkers still face cost barriers, in particular, the upfront capital cost of investment (on common crockery) and the monthly service fees, especially if the fees are charged at a uniform rate. Therefore, to encourage the adoption of centralised dishwashing by hawkers in a hawker centre, one key challenge that needs to be addressed is to find a more equitable charging model for the hawkers. Whilst incentives could be of help, an equitable charging model would ultimately be a more sustainable solution. The Committee also proposes that the Government look into having some initiatives to incentivise existing hawkers to get them on board schemes like centralised dishwashing.

Hawker centres should keep up with the times to ensure that they continue to be relevant to the younger generation. Increasingly, more food establishments are providing cashless payment options which have increased the convenience for many patrons, particularly the younger ones who are more adept with technology. Hawker centres should also consider moving in this direction and indeed some newer hawker centres are already introducing such cashless modes of payment. Cashless payment systems would reduce the need to manually calculate the costs of orders and do away with the need to physically handle cash, thereby increasing productivity. OTH Hawker Centre, which opened in November 2016, for instance, has rolled out a self-ordering system too. Self-ordering machines would similarly reduce the manpower needed for food orders and reduce errors in taking orders.



*QR code-based payment trial at Tiong Bahru Market and Food Centre
(Image Source: Liquid Pay)*



Patrons using the self-order kiosk at OTH hawker centre

Recommendation 6**Promote Use of Productive Equipment at Stall-level**

As highlighted in the findings, there is potential to improve productivity even at individual hawker stall-level. In this regard, the Government could play a facilitating role in increasing awareness and reducing the information gap, possibly through the one-stop information and service centre to disseminate and share information and, in turn, promote and encourage more widespread adoption of more efficient and productive equipment in the hawkers' operations. This will, over time, improve the productivity of hawker stall operations.



A hawker making noodles with a noodle-making machine

4.3. ENHANCE HAWKER CENTRES AS SOCIAL SPACES AND IMPROVE THE VIBRANCY OF HAWKER CENTRES

Recommendation 7

Encourage Regular Organised Activities in Hawker Centres

Both patrons and hawkers unanimously welcomed having suitable events and activities at the hawker centres. The Committee recommends that the Government encourage activities, such as music performances and festive celebrations, to be held in hawker centres on a regular basis to enhance the vibrancy of the hawker centres and customers' dining experience. This could be achieved if community groups, such as grassroots organisations, arts groups, schools and tertiary institutions, adopt or partner their preferred hawker centres to carry out relevant and regular activities there over a sustained period. This will further strengthen the use of hawker centres as social spaces for communities to come together not just to dine but enjoy and/or participate in community activities.



Republic Polytechnic co-organised Ci Yuan's 1st Anniversary Celebration held at the hawker centre

Recommendation 8

Improve Amenities of Hawker Centres

To make hawker centres more attractive to patrons, there should be better amenities at the hawker centres to meet the needs of the people. Having free Wi-Fi and more child-friendly spaces were among the common suggestions. These are feasible improvements to the hawker centres which the Government should work towards. Stall size and configuration could also be reviewed from time to time to take into account the need for further customisation.

Recommendation 9**Manage the food mix offered more proactively**

Hawker centres should continue to have a good mix of food to cater to the diverse needs of the community. To this end, there should be a greater focus on food curation, including the retention of traditional hawker food where appropriate. For the new hawker centres which are under the alternative management models, the successful operators of the centre are already required to ensure that there is a good mix of food available for patrons. The Government should explore more proactive management of existing hawker centres when stalls in these centres fall vacant, to ensure a good variety of food.



Food-stalls commonly found in hawker centres (Clockwise from top left: Nasi Lemak, Nasi Padang and other Malay dishes; Mee Goreng, Briyani and other Indian dishes; Fried Kway Teow/Hokkien Noodles; Roast Meat)

4.4. PROMOTE GRACIOUSNESS IN HAWKER CENTRES

Recommendation 10

Partner Key Stakeholders on Tray-Return Measures and Improve Tray-Return Facilities

Tray-return facilities are implemented in all hawker centres but the rates of tray-return vary widely. The highest rates of tray-return were observed at Tiong Bahru Market and Food Centre and Blk 137 Tampines Street 11 Market and Hawker Centre.



Reward-based tray-return initiative at OTH hawker centre

The Committee recommends that the Government continue to explore ways to encourage tray-return in hawker centres as, based on public feedback, it is a behaviour that many welcome. Besides promoting graciousness, a good tray-return culture makes for a cleaner and more pleasant dining environment. It would also facilitate a faster turnover of tables and reduce waiting time for the next diner, thus potentially increasing sales for the hawkers. In particular,

there should be collaborations with key stakeholders on tray-return initiatives e.g. tray-return ambassadors and consistent and regular campaigns to inculcate the behaviour of tray-return. The Committee notes that as part of the alternative management models, operators have to meet targets on tray-return rates. In this regard, we look forward to more innovative tray-return systems or measures by these operators that could be implemented in other centres.

Nonetheless, in line with suggestions to tackle tray-return issues from a behavioural perspective, the Committee suggests that NEA work with cleaning companies to promote tray-return at hawker centres and to dispel the misconception that tray-return will make cleaners redundant. In this regard, the buy-in of the cleaners and giving them appropriate training, assurance and support are needed. The cleaning companies should train their cleaners on how to promote tray-return as it has been observed that some cleaners would discourage patrons from returning trays, while others would

collect trays from patrons as soon as they have finished eating, giving patrons no chance to return the tray themselves even if they wish to. Different behavioural interventions, including campaigns, should also be conducted to propagate the virtue and habit of tray-return and reinforce the message that the act of tray-return will not take away the cleaner's job but instead increase his/her efficiency.



Cleaners managing tray-return racks

To complement the behavioural interventions, the Committee recommends that the Government concurrently enhance the design, layout and location of tray-return facilities in the centres e.g. by installing signage, making tray-return stations more visible and prominent, etc. to make it easier and more convenient for patrons to use and for cleaners to do their work.

Recommendation 11

Encourage Kind and Considerate Behaviour

To ensure that hawker centres continue to serve our diverse community and promote graciousness, we should continue to encourage the communal sharing of tables and remind patrons to keep the environment clean for their fellow diners. OTH Hawker Centre has introduced a set of 'House Rules' (e.g. "Queue up", "Share the table", "Keep the table clean", etc.) to encourage patrons to participate in acts of graciousness whenever they dine at the hawker centre. These 'House Rules' are conspicuously incorporated into the Tray-Return Station Wall Art Mural at the Family-friendly Corner and displayed on the tables in the hawker centre. This is an idea that can be implemented in other hawker centres.



House Rules incorporated in the Wall Art Mural at OTH Hawker Centre

4.5. ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT MODELS

Hawker centre issues are multidimensional and have multiple stakeholders. As highlighted in various parts of the report, many of the new initiatives in hawker centres (e.g. centralised dishwashing, tray-return, food curation, etc) are being implemented by socially conscious operators that have been appointed by NEA to manage some of the hawker centres. Of note, these operators have expertise and experience, such as in food and beverage operations, as well as property and lease management, which can be tapped on to improve the operational efficiency of hawker centres. There is merit in further exploring the expansion of alternative management models with a view to transforming hawker centres to provide good dining and working environments, while ensuring good quality and affordable food and that hawkers continue to be able to make a decent livelihood.

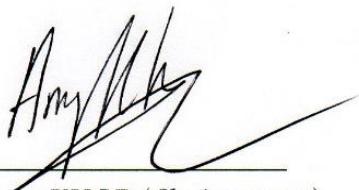
CONCLUSION

Singaporeans currently continue to enjoy the convenience and affordability of our hawker food but it is important to appreciate the challenges faced by the hawker trade and address the gaps to ensure their sustainability in the long run. To this end, the Committee had set out to review four key focus areas, to (i) sustain the hawker trade and support new entrants; (ii) improve productivity in hawker centres; (iii) enhance hawker centres as social spaces and improve vibrancy of hawker centres; and (iv) promote graciousness in hawker centres.

The Committee believes that the recommendations in this report, if successfully implemented, will invigorate the hawker trade and sustain the hawker culture while ensuring a pleasant dining environment for everyone.

Moving forward, the Government should continue with its efforts to engage the hawkers, patrons and goods/service providers who, together, have made the hawker centres a central part of our population's collective national dining experience and heritage. This will ensure that hawker centres will continue to be relevant to future generations. Ultimately, hawker centres should continue to be an appealing and vibrant shared space where people from all walks of life can enjoy affordable and tasty food in a clean and hygienic environment and where hawkers can continue to make a decent livelihood.

ANNEX A



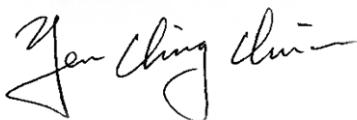
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Senior Minister of State
Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources



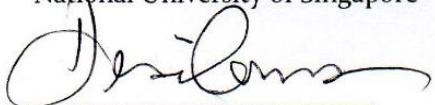
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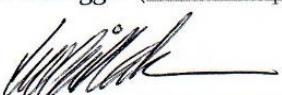
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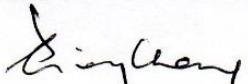
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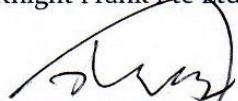
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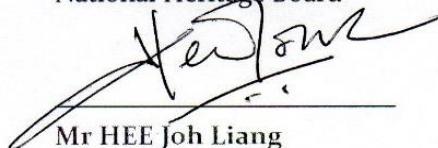
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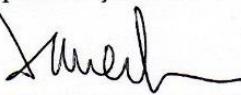
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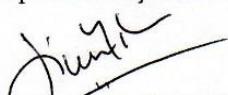
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