**China province seeks to ease 'one-child' policy**



Authorities in China's most populous province have asked Beijing to ease the one-child policy, a government official said Tuesday, amid growing concerns over gender imbalances and an ageing population.

Guangdong, in southern China, wants to launch a pilot program to allow some families to have two children, an official with the Guangdong Population and Family Planning Commission told AFP.

Local authorities have submitted the proposal -- which would allow couples where one of the adults is an only child to have a second baby -- to central government, the official, who declined to be named, said.

"To allow the new policy will have little overall impact on population growth," Guangdong family planning chief Zhang Feng was quoted by the Southern Metropolis Daily as saying Monday.

Until now, those exempt from the law introduced in 1979 include ethnic minorities, farmers whose first child is a girl and couples where both are only children.

Policy violations usually result in hefty fines and a cut back in social services.

But the one-child law is facing increasing scrutiny.

He Yafu, an expert who is in close contact with some of China's official demographers, told AFP last year that officials planned to launch similar pilot projects in five provinces aimed at evaluating the effects of relaxed rules.

The would-be test provinces were Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning in the northeast, Jiangsu and Zhejiang in the east.

"Official demographers say that those five provinces have basically been determined as the first pilot provinces, and over the next five years or so it will spread to the whole of China," He said.

If approved, the Guangdong trial would help alleviate problems caused by the policy in the world's most populous country of more than 1.3 billion, such as an ageing population that is putting pressure on the nation's economy.

Critics blame the policy for creating gender imbalances, where sex-specific abortions remain common. Female infanticide and the abandoning of baby girls have also been reported.

By *Peter Parks* | *Associated Foreign Press – July 12th, 2011*