

Chapter X : Works

10.1 At the Chairman's invitation, the Secretary for Works (S for W), Mr LEE Shing-see, gave a presentation highlighting the major tasks of the Works Bureau (WB) in 2001-02 (Appendix V-9).

Quality of Dongjiang water

10.2 Miss Emily LAU Wai-hing pointed out that the provision of \$168.8 million for water quality control in 2001-02, which although was almost the same as the revised estimate for 2000-01, was in fact lower than that originally committed for the same purpose last year. In view of the importance to improve the quality of Dongjiang water and the questions recently raised about the effectiveness of the closed aqueduct system under construction, she asked what measures had been put in place to improve the water quality.

10.3 In response, S for W assured members that fresh water provided by the Water Supplies Department (WSD) fully conformed to the Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality of the World Health Organization. WSD had been closely monitoring the quality of Dongjiang water at the reception point at Muk Wu Pumping Station by regular water quality sampling and testing. When any sign of deterioration in water quality was noticed, Guangdong Authorities would be requested to take prompt actions to rectify the situation. The Director of Water Supplies (DWS) added that the Guangdong Authorities had taken a number of measures to control pollution and improve the quality of Dongjiang water. There had been significant improvement in the quality of raw water since the construction of a bio-nitrification plant at the end of 1998. It was expected that further improvement could be made upon completion of the closed aqueduct system in 2003.

10.4 Miss Emily LAU highlighted that some Hong Kong deputies to the National People's Congress had recently raised that the construction of the closed aqueduct in Guangdong could not solve the problem. She requested the Administration to provide more concrete information on the water quality improvement measures in the Dongjiang catchment areas undertaken by the Mainland Authorities, such as the number of additional water treatment plants commissioned, the number of polluting factories closed and the number of polluters found guilty in court. DWS undertook to provide the information. He also assured members that the Administration would continue to liaise closely with the Guangdong Authorities to review their progress on control over pollution at source. Arrangements would also be made for members of the Advisory Committee on the Quality of Water Supplies to revisit the Dongjiang catchment

and on-going projects.

Development of fresh water resources

10.5 Referring to the feasibility study on desalination of seawater commenced in early 2001, Mr IP Kwok-him sought clarification on the reason for reactivating the strategy which had been abandoned some years before. In response, DWS pointed out that the old type of desalination of seawater process was very expensive and time-consuming. With the development of new and improved technology, the cost was reduced but still expensive, and might be further reduced to a more economical level in the future. In view of the infinite source of seawater, it was considered a worth-pursuing alternative for the provision of fresh water in Hong Kong in the long run.

10.6 Mr IP Kwok-him considered the recycling of wastewater a more innovative idea for the development of fresh water resources. DWS advised that elsewhere in the world, serious thoughts had been given to use recycled wastewater for flushing or irrigation purposes. The Director of Drainage Services (DDS) added that in California, for example, recycled wastewater was used for irrigation. However, the ultimate objective of using recycled wastewater as a source of potable water supply still could not be achieved because of the high costs involved and the difficulties in securing public acceptance. It might take some years for small places like Hong Kong with limited resources to achieve the objective. As a first step, the Administration would study the use of recycled wastewater for flushing purpose. In response to Mr IP's enquiry, DDS advised that the provision for the study had been included in the estimates for previous years.

Provision of water supply to remote villages

10.7 Noting that 38 of the 53 remote villages in the New Territories would be provided with metered water supply in stages from 2001 to 2006, Mr WONG Yung-kan was concerned about the schedule for provision of the same to the remaining 15 remote villages. DWS advised that metered water supply would be provided to all remote villages on a priority basis, basically on the size of the villages. According to the Administration's programme, metered water supply would be provided to the remaining 15 remote villages by 2009 subject to funding approval. In the interim, the Administration would assist the villagers concerned if there were water shortage problems.

Public Works Programme

10.8 Referring to the commitments made by the Chief Executive in his Policy Address in 1998 on the investment of \$235 billion in infrastructure projects within five years, Ir Dr Raymond HO Chung-tai queried the slow progress in implementing the projects involved after a lapse of two years. In response, S for W advised that the provision of \$235 billion in 1998, adjusted to \$240 billion in 1999, was mainly for railway works (\$110 billion) and public works (\$130 billion). Quite a number of the projects had already commenced, and the Administration was confident that the target could be achieved within the five-year period. Longer time was taken to commence the projects as there was a need to conduct public consultation for environmental and transport reasons. The provision for the infrastructure works was likely to be adjusted downwards because of the lower tender prices received. Ir Dr Raymond HO opined that the money thus saved should be reallocated for use in other works projects to create more job opportunities.

10.9 Referring to the 169 outstanding works projects of the former Urban Council and the former Regional Council which involved \$23 billion, Mr LAU Ping-cheung asked for the timetable for the completion of the projects. The Director of Architectural Services advised that a subcommittee had been formed to follow up the outstanding capital works projects of the former municipal councils.

Development of new towns

10.10 Mr Albert CHAN Wai-yip pointed out that the infrastructure road works and drainage works for new towns were often not completed in time for the moving-in of residents to newly completed public housing estates. This had caused tremendous inconvenience to the residents. He asked whether a mechanism could be put in place to address the problem. The Director of Territory Development (D of TD) said that the Territory Development Department at present played a co-ordinating role in new town development. The timing for the occupancy of public housing estates and the completion of public works programme in the vicinity were closely monitored by the Works Progress Committee under his chairmanship. In normal circumstances, infrastructure and public utility works would be completed three months before occupancy of public housing estates. He requested members to refer specific cases of delay to him so that he could examine the cases.

Upgrading of substandard government slopes

10.11 Dr TANG Siu-tong noted that in 2001-02, \$883 million would be allocated for the upgrading of 250 substandard government slopes and for safety screening studies on 300 private slopes. He sought clarification on the criteria for selecting the 250 substandard government slopes. The Director of Civil Engineering (DCE) advised that under the 10-year Landslip Preventive Measures Programme, substandard government slopes would be upgraded to reduce the landslide risk posed to the public. Slopes with higher risks, such as those close to schools, residential buildings and major roads, would be accorded with priority for upgrading. The provision of \$883 million was dedicated to the upgrading works and not for the maintenance of government slopes.

Disposal and management of contaminated mud

10.12 Referring to the Administration's written reply on the four options for contaminated mud management, Miss Emily LAU considered the disposal of contaminated mud outside Hong Kong waters not a desirable option. DCE advised that as the current facilities at East Sha Chau for the disposal of contaminated mud would be exhausted in 2007, consultants would be engaged in April 2001 to study long-term options to be adopted thereafter. In the interim, disposal of contaminated mud outside Hong Kong waters would not be pursued.

10.13 In response to Miss Emily LAU's enquiry, DCE advised that the Administration was planning an environmental impact assessment (EIA) for backfilling the exhausted sandpits at north of the Brothers Islands using uncontaminated mud with a view to restoring the marine environment and ecology. Mr WONG Yung-kan considered it important for the Administration to consult fishermen in the vicinity when conducting the EIA. DCE confirmed that fishermen associations would be consulted when the assessment took place.

Construction Industry Review

10.14 Mr LAU Ping-cheung enquired whether the Administration had reserved any resources in 2001-02 for implementing the 109 improvement measures recommended in the report of the Construction Industry Review Committee (CIRC). S for W replied that WB had studied the recommendations of CIRC and would work closely with relevant Government bureaux and departments with a view to examining the way forward. Many of the recommended improvement measures fell within the purview of WB and their

implementation could be met by existing resources of WB. In the circumstances, no provision had been made in the estimates for 2001-02 for the purpose. Nevertheless, the Administration would seek supplementary provisions at a later stage if it was considered necessary to do so .

Employment of non-civil service contract staff

10.15 Miss CHAN Yuen-han was concerned that despite the lifting of the freeze on recruitment to the civil service, the provision under subhead 149 of Drainage Services Department (DSD) would be increased by \$21 million (27.9%) for 2001-02 for the employment of non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff to support the operation and maintenance of sewage and drainage facilities. DDS explained that in view of the Administration's policy to contain the size of the Civil Service, it was considered not appropriate to create a considerable number of civil service posts in DSD to meet the additional service needs arising from commissioning of new sewage and drainage facilities. While arrangements were being made for the contracting out of the additional services, NCSC staff would be employed as an interim measure.