

立法會
Legislative Council

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by the Administration and cleared
by the Chairman)

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LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs

**Minutes of special meeting held on
Thursday, 21 June 2001, at 1:00 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Prof Hon NG Ching-fai (Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan (Deputy Chairman)
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Hon Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-yee, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
- Members absent** : Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP
Hon Bernard CHAN
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
Hon LAU Ping-cheung
- Public officers attending** : Environment and Food Bureau

Mr Donald TONG
Deputy Secretary (B)

Mr Raistlin LAU
Principal Assistant Secretary (B)

Environmental Protection Department

Mr Benny WONG
Assistant Director

Drainage Services Department

Mr HON Chi-keung
Chief Engineer
(Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme Division)

Clerk in attendance : Miss Becky YU, Chief Assistant Secretary (1)1

Staff in attendance : Mrs Mary TANG, Senior Assistant Secretary (1)2

I Report of the Delegation to Study Overseas Experience in Sewage Treatment

(LC Paper No. CB(1) 1569/00-01(01))

The Chairman, who was also the leader of the Delegation to Study Overseas Experience in Sewage Treatment (the Delegation), gave a power-point presentation on behalf of the Delegation, highlighting the findings and observations made during the overseas duty visit.

2. Despite the relatively small land requirement of sewage treatment plants (STPs) using Biological Aerated Filter (BAF) technology, Miss CHOY So-yuk enquired whether the site at Stonecutters Island was able to house the required BAF facilities for sewage treatment in Hong Kong. The Chairman advised that the Colombes STP in Paris, which had a footprint of only three hectares, was able to house all the sewage treatment facilities. The Chief Engineer (Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme Division), Drainage Services Department (CE/DSD) said that there were about 2.3 hectares of land at the Stonecutters Island site which could be further developed for higher levels of sewage treatment. At present, the Stonecutters Island Sewage Treatment Works (SCISTW) had a capacity to treat sewage from 3.5 million population upon completion of Stage I of the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme (HATS). The capacity would be increased to cater for a projected population of 5.5 million after completion of the remaining stages of the Scheme.

3. Referring to the treatment process adopted at the Herford STP, Ms Cyd HO enquired whether the porous styrene balls used for treating wastewater could be reused. The Chairman advised that the balls could be reused after backwashing and rinsing.

Miss CHOY So-yuk expressed concerned about odour emission. She asked how the emission levels of SCISTW compared with that of STPs in Europe. As a member of the Delegation, Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that there was no odour emission from the STPs visited. In fact, some of the STPs were located in close proximity to residential areas and no noticeable odour was emitted.

4. On waste incineration, Ms Cyd HO considered that this should only be used as a last resort to waste treatment. She pointed out that overseas countries had adopted incineration as an option for waste treatment because they had well-developed recycling industries. This was however not the case in Hong Kong. She reminded the Administration of the need to promote recycling industries in an attempt to reduce waste. Expressing similar concern, Miss CHOY So-yuk stressed the need for reduction of waste. The Chairman also agreed that waste reduction and recycling should come before incineration. The Deputy Secretary for Environment and Food (DSEF) affirmed that the Administration would accord priority for waste reduction and recycling in order to address the anticipated shortfall in landfills.

5. While acknowledging that sludge incineration could be used to generate electricity, Mr LAW Chi-kwong was concerned about the cost implications and the impact of dumping the inert ashes from incineration at landfills. The Chairman said that different countries had different disposal methods for sewage sludge. By way of illustration, some STPs visited recycled the sludge as agricultural fertilizer, while others disposed of it by incineration. DSEF said that, having regard to the depletion of landfills, the Administration would consider all possible options for disposal of sewage sludge.

6. Mr Henry WU welcomed the latest information on sewage treatment brought back by the Delegation. Given that the treatment technologies adopted by some of the STPs visited were relatively new, he was concerned about the plant life, maintenance outage, down time and mean time between failures etc of these STPs. He also enquired whether the design of the sewage facilities had provided for contingencies since any breakdown or electricity outage would have a serious impact on the population concerned. The Chairman said that the Delegation had discussed the contingency arrangements with the operators of STPs. They were given to understand that the STPs had built-in contingency measures. By operating the treatment facilities as separate units, the problem of total failure could be avoided. Some STPs even operated on their own electricity generated from sludge incineration as in the case of the Colombes STP. CE/DSD added that since the STPs visited were relatively new, the operators did not have much experience of service disruption. Yet, they did not envisage any difficulties even if disruption occurred since most STPs had spare capacities which had facilitated maintenance of different units on a rotational basis. He pointed out that SCISTW was also provided with a dual power supply. The service of the standby supply line would be activated in the event of failure of the other supply line.

7. Noting from paragraph 4.1 of the Report that members of the Delegation were generally in favour of a partially distributed system with three treatment plants at the Stonecutters Island, Lamma Island and Tseung Kwan O, Ms Emily LAU enquired about the basis upon which the choice of locations was arrived at. The Chairman said that members of the Delegation were aware of the availability of land at Lamma Island and Tseung Kwan O, and the possibility of further expansion of SCISTW for higher levels of treatment. He emphasized that this was only an initial proposal by members of the Delegation, and that the feasibility of locating STPs in these sites had yet to be explored. DSEF said that the Delegation's proposal was similar to some of the recommended options put forward by the International Review Panel (IRP) which the Administration would be conducting studies on.

8. Ms LAU asked how the Administration would proceed forward in the light of the findings and observations set out in the Report. CE/DSD said that as BAF technology was relatively new and was mainly adopted in the Northern hemisphere where the climate was colder, there was a need to test out the technology in Hong Kong, particularly on account of the high salinity of sewage as a result of the use of seawater for flushing. A series of trials and studies would be performed on the technical and economical viability of the IRP's recommendations, including the feasibility of a centralized or decentralized treatment system. As regards the timetable for implementing the studies and trials, DSEF said that the trials on treatment technologies would take about nine months to complete while other studies which included the level of tertiary treatment needed to meet the environmental requirements, land requirements for the different options, availability of land, financial assessments on capital and recurrent costs of the options, and public acceptance of having a treatment facility in their neighbourhood under the proposed decentralized system etc would take about two years.

9. Responding to Mr WONG Yung-kun on the way forward, DSEF said that SCISTW would be treating over 70% of the sewage entering the Harbour from the main urban areas in Hong Kong upon the full commissioning of Stage I of HATS by the end of 2001. The Administration would proceed with the aforesaid feasibility studies for the subsequent stages of HATS. It would consult the public on the way forward after completion of these trials and studies.

10. Given that the observations and conclusions in the Report were drawn up by the four members who had participated in the visit, Ms Emily LAU asked whether it was necessary to have a formal procedure for endorsement of the Report. Miss CHOY So-yuk said that she would have difficulty in making a decision at this stage when the Administration was in the process of conducting trials and studies on IRP's options, some of which were in line with that proposed by the Delegation. In order to save time, she suggested that the Administration should conduct the trials and studies on treatment technologies in parallel with that on the IRP options. In this way, separate consultation exercises to gauge public opinions on the proposals could be conducted, without having to await the outcome of all the studies. DSEF agreed on the need to adopt an open and transparent approach in the conduct of the studies. He

said that upon completion of the trials on the viability of BAF technology under local conditions, the Administration would consider the best way forward in involving the public.

11. Ms Cyd HO said that it might be necessary to seek the views of the green groups on the Report. The Chairman agreed that as the conclusions of the Report were drawn up in the absence of concrete scientific evidence, input from both the public and the green groups would be most welcomed. Mr Tommy CHEUNG said that he found the visit to study overseas experience in sewage treatment very inspirational. He considered it useful to hold an open forum to discuss the way forward on sewage and waste treatment.

(Post meeting note: Copies of the Report were sent to the Conservancy Association, Friends of the Earth, Green Lantau Association, Green Peace, Green Peng Chau Association, Green Power, Hong Kong Marine Conservation Society and World Wide Fund for Nature.)

12. Members agreed to discuss how to follow up the Report at its next meeting on 3 July 2001.

13. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 2:15 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

21 August 2001