

For Information
on 7 November 2000

Legislative Council Panel on Environmental Affairs

Disposal of Contaminated Dredged Mud from Container Terminal 9 to Mainland Waters

Introduction

This paper is prepared in response to a request from Members to give some information on the background and the current arrangements for the disposal of contaminated dredged mud from Container Terminal 9 to the Mainland waters.

Background

2. The Container Terminal 9 (CT9) project is to develop a six-berth container terminal at South East Tsing Yi island. The project involves an overall development area of 218 hectare of which 127 hectare will be reclaimed. It is estimated that the project will generate 6.6 million cubic metres of contaminated mud. This comes both from the reclamation area itself and from dredging in the Rambler Channel. The contaminated mud represents 18% of the total amount of mud requiring removal during the project construction. The amount of contaminated mud was determined by chemical analysis of 101 samples taken at various depths throughout the area to be dredged. Sufficient capacity is available at the mud disposal pits at East Sha Chau (ESC) to receive this material.

3. On 7 December 1998, the development of CT9 was granted to a consortium. The dredging works of CT9 started in June 2000. The CT9 contractor made applications for dumping the contaminated mud at ESC and also for loading permits for disposal of the contaminated mud in the Mainland waters near Erzhou.

Loading Permits issued to CT9 Contractor

4. The CT9 contractor had obtained a dumping permit from the State Oceanic Administration (SOA), the authority in the Mainland responsible for marine dumping control, for disposing the contaminated mud in the Mainland's dumping ground (Erzhou Island Dredged Mud Temporary Marine Dumping Ground). The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) issued two monthly permits to the contractor in July 2000 and August 2000 under the Dumping at Sea Ordinance (DASO) for loading the dredged mud in Hong Kong for disposal in Mainland waters.

5. In September the EPD revised its standards and practices in that it would not

issue any loading permits for mud dumping outside Hong Kong waters until such time as an applicant could provide evidence to prove that its dumping operations will not cause unacceptable impact to the marine environment.

6. Based on this precautionary principle, the EPD informed the CT9 contractor on 4 October 2000 that it would not grant any new loading permits for transfer of dredged mud for dumping in the Mainland waters until the EPD had enough information to form a conclusive view that the dumping operation would not cause unacceptable impact to the marine environment.

7. Hence since 1 October, the CT9 contractor no longer has a loading permit from the EPD to dump mud in Mainland waters.

8. Under Section 27 of the DASO the contractor has appealed against the EPD's decision to refuse to grant a new loading permit. Government officials are not in a position to give further comments or details on this case until the legal proceedings have been completed.

9. The CT9 contractor has also applied for permits to dispose of the contaminated mud at ESC from the EPD and permits have been issued. The contaminated mud is placed in controlled conditions into pits previously excavated in the sea bed. These pits are then capped with clean material to prevent the contaminants from being carried out into the wider environment.

Current Position

10. At present, there are no other contractors in Hong Kong holding loading permits for dumping in waters outside Hong Kong. All projects in future are required to provide evidence to prove that the dumping of such material outside Hong Kong waters will not cause unacceptable impact to the marine environment, otherwise the EPD will not permit any transfer of such material for dumping outside Hong Kong.

11. All future projects can continue to apply for permits for dumping at ESC. The contaminated mud disposal pits at ESC are subject to a stringent environmental monitoring and audit programme by the Civil Engineering Department (CED). Under this programme, the CED undertakes monthly monitoring of important water and sediment quality parameters as well as testing of sediment toxicity and contaminants in biota twice a year. In addition, seabed communities are sampled twice a year and fish communities four times a year. These monitoring results are provided regularly to the EPD for reference. The general conclusion is that there is no evidence of any adverse impact from the disposal of contaminated sediment at ESC.