

**Extract from the minutes of the special House Committee meeting
on 28 February 2003**

Action

X X X X X X X X

I. Sustainable development

Council for Sustainable Development

3. Mr IP Kwok-him enquired about the working relationship between the Council for Sustainable Development and other relevant government advisory bodies, such as the Advisory Council on the Environment, and non-government organisations (NGO) concerned.

4. CS said that the Council for Sustainable Development would adopt a macro approach in its work, while the specific areas, such as environmental protection, would be within the purview of the relevant advisory bodies. CS further said that there would be interfacing between the Council and these advisory bodies and the NGOs concerned, but it would take time and adjustment to sort out the division of work. CS assured Members that as the relevant Directors of Bureaux were also members of the Council for Sustainable Development, he would not expect problems in the interfacing and division of work.

5. CS informed Members that there would be a clearer picture of the work of the Council for Sustainable Development after its first meeting which would probably be held at the end of March 2003. CS added that he would report the work of the Council in greater detail when he next met with Members.

6. Dr LAW Chi-kwong asked whether the Council for Sustainable Development would accord priority to the target of eradicating poverty. Dr LAW further said that community participation was very important, and opportunities should be provided for the public to hold discussions and give views before the Council set its agenda and priorities of work.

7. CS said that sustainable development cut across all sectors but the present priority was on balancing social, economic and environmental and resource needs. In this connection, eight guiding principles and 39 indicators of the key sustainable development issues in Hong Kong had been adopted. CS pointed out that the principles and indicators were not something that could not be changed, and the Council on Sustainable Development would be consulted on the priorities of work. CS added that although eradicating poverty was not a priority work target, promoting economic development indirectly helped combat the problem of poverty.

Action

8. CS further said that he fully agreed that sustainable development required public participation and support. He would discuss with members of the Council on Sustainable Development ways to enhance the transparency of its work.

9. Ms Emily LAU said that she had noted from the press release issued by the Government on 27 February 2003 that the Chief Executive (CE) had made appointments to the Council for Sustainable Development. Ms LAU asked why it had taken as long as three years and four months for the Council to be established, as CE had announced his intention to set up the Council in his 1999 Policy Address. Ms LAU further said that CE had said in his 1999 Policy Address that the Council would report to him, and would make periodic reports on its work. Ms LAU asked how the Council would report to CE and whether the Administration would consider holding open hearings to listen to public views. Ms LAU also sought CS's view on which Panel would be the most appropriate forum to follow up the subject of sustainable development.

10. Referring to his earlier reply to an oral question raised in the Legislative Council (LegCo), CS said that following introduction of the accountability system in the Government, CE had been considering how the Council for Sustainable Development should feature and perform its functions under the new system. CS further said that the Administration had conducted research on the structure, modus operandi and performance of similar committees established overseas. The Administration had noted that there had been unsuccessful experience overseas, e.g. the panel in the United Kingdom was disbanded and hence had not met since.

11. CS pointed out that members of the Council for Sustainable Development were appointed by CE, and the Council reported to him. CS further said that it would be for Members to decide on which Panel should follow up the subject of sustainable development. CS added that he would be happy to attend special meetings of the House Committee to discuss those sustainability issues which straddled a number of policy areas.

12. CS further informed Members that to enhance public awareness, education programmes and activities, including seminars, workshops and exhibitions, had been held, and relevant materials were also made available on the website on sustainable development. CS further said that the Council for Sustainable Development would be consulted on how the public could gain access to information on its agenda and outcome of discussion. The website on sustainable development, for instance, could be used to disseminate such information. CS added that the idea of holding public hearings would also be considered, subject to availability of resources.

13. Ms Emily LAU said that issues relating to sustainable development were

Action

mainly followed up by the Panel on Environmental Affairs, but there were views that it was not the most appropriate forum. Ms LAU suggested that the House Committee should discuss, at a future meeting, which Panel or committee should follow up the subject of sustainable development.

Sustainable development assessment

14. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung pointed out that as Policy Bureaux and government departments were now required to carry out sustainability assessment on new policy proposals and programmes, he asked CS how the public would be able to find out whether a certain policy proposal or programme had undergone sustainability assessment. Mr YEUNG also asked whether the Administration would consider ways to enhance the transparency of the sustainability assessment system and increase public awareness of the concept of sustainable development.

15. CS said that Policy Bureaux and government departments were required to include in their submissions to the Executive Council (ExCo) a statement on sustainability evaluation, so that sustainability issues would be given early consideration in the decision-making process. The submissions would be put forward for ExCo's consideration only when the Sustainable Development Unit was satisfied with the sustainability assessment. CS further said that while the agenda and papers of ExCo meetings were confidential, a LegCo Brief would normally be issued to Members after ExCo had taken a decision on a specific proposal, and the Brief would include information on the relevant sustainable assessment.

16. CS informed Members that details of the guiding principles and indicators of key sustainable development issues in Hong Kong were available on the Administration's website on sustainable development. CS added that the advice of the Council for Sustainable Development would be sought on enhancing transparency of the sustainability assessment system and increasing public awareness of the concept of sustainable development.

17. Mr LAU Ping-cheung pointed out that at present a new policy proposal or programme had to go through different types of assessment. Mr LAU expressed concern that the requirement for sustainability assessment would add another layer of work and slow down the pace of development. He was of the view that impediment to economic development should be minimised.

18. CS responded that apart from carrying out sustainability assessment, Policy Bureaux and government departments were required, when proposing new initiatives or programmes, to provide assessments on economic and environmental implications as well as human rights and Basic Law implications. CS pointed out that these assessments were carried out concurrently, within a short period of time. He could not recall any occasion

Action

where a submission to ExCo was delayed because of the need to go through the various assessments.

19. Mr Henry WU enquired how the indicators of key sustainable development issues were determined. Using unemployment rate as an example, Mr WU also asked whether comparisons were made against previous unemployment rates, and whether a specific target was set as to what level the unemployment rate should be brought down to.

20. CS responded that the principle of sustainable development was to ensure that the present needs were met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. CS further explained that the indicators were representative of the key sustainable development issues in Hong Kong at the current times. They were not prescribed targets as described by Mr WU. Rather, the indicators were to facilitate qualitative assessment of the positive or negative impacts of a new policy proposal or programme.

21. Ms Cyd HO said that at the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services held in February 2003, the Director of Social Welfare advised the Panel that her department was requested by the Sustainable Development Unit to comment on a range of sustainability indicators for assessing the implications of major new policy proposals on the social conditions of Hong Kong. Ms HO enquired about the mechanism for determining these indicators, whether the consultation process had been completed, and whether members of the public could also give views on these indicators.

22. CS responded that Hong Kong had already adopted 39 indicators of key sustainable development issues in Hong Kong. CS further said that these indicators would be regularly reviewed by the Council for Sustainable Development, so that they could be revised or brought up-to-date as conditions changed over time. CS added that the Council on Sustainable Development would be consulted as early as possible on the means to disseminate information on its work to the public, e.g. through the website on sustainable development.

23. Mr HUI Cheung-ching said that given the close cooperation between Hong Kong and Guangdong in tourism, infrastructural projects and other areas, the Administration should consider setting up a working group, comprising representatives of the Administration and Guangdong officials, which would meet on a regular basis. Mr HUI further said that without a proper forum, the progress of work would be affected, for instance, by staff changes on the Guangdong side.

24. CS said that quite a number of working groups dealing with different area, such as infrastructural projects, boundary control point facilities, logistics

Action

and transport matters, had already been set up jointly with the Guangdong side. It would therefore not be necessary to set up another working group. CS further said that CE would shortly meet with Guangdong officials, and there would be discussion on ways to further enhance the cooperation and communication between the two places.

X **X** **X** **X** **X** **X** **X** **X**