

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)1802/05-06
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref: CB1/PL/ES/1

Panel on Economic Services

**Minutes of meeting held on
Monday, 22 May 2006, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP
Hon SIN Chung-kai, JP
Hon Howard YOUNG, SBS, JP
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-yee, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon Vincent FANG Kang, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Ting-kwong, BBS
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon CHIM Pui-chung
Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG
Hon KWONG Chi-kin
Hon TAM Heung-man
- Member attending** : Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
- Members absent** : Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, S.B.St.J., JP
Dr Hon David LI Kwok-po, GBS, JP
Dr Hon LUI Ming-wah, SBS, JP

**Public Officers
attending**

: Agenda item IV

Ms Eva CHENG

Permanent Secretary for Economic Development and
Labour (Economic Development)

Mr Howard LEE

Deputy Secretary for Economic Development and Labour
(Economic Development)

Mr Roger LAI

Director of Electrical and Mechanical Services

Mr CHAN Fan

Assistant Director/Gas and General Legislation
Electrical and Mechanical Services Department

Agenda item V

Ms Eva CHENG

Permanent Secretary for Economic Development and
Labour (Economic Development)

Miss AU King-chi

Commissioner for Tourism

Miss CHENG Wai-fung

Chief Manager (Tourism) Special Duty
Tourism Commission

Mr LAY Chik Chuen

Assistant Director (Conservation)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Mr Edmond LAM

General Manager, Hong Kong Wetland Park
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Mr Richard CUTHBERTSON

Chief Project Manager
Architectural Services Department

Mr Andy LEWIS

Senior Landscape Architect
Architectural Services Department

Agenda item VI

Ms Eva CHENG
Permanent Secretary for Economic Development and
Labour (Economic Development)

Miss AU King-chi
Commissioner for Tourism

Miss CHENG Wai-fung
Chief Manager (Tourism) Special Duty
Tourism Commission

**Attendance by
invitation** : **Agenda item IV**

The Hong Kong and China Gas Company Limited

Mr Alfred CHAN Wing-kin
Managing Director

Mr James KWAN Yuk-choi
Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer

Clerk in attendance : Mr Andy LAU
Chief Council Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Ms Debbie YAU
Senior Council Secretary (1)1

Miss Winnie CHENG
Legislative Assistant (1)5

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I Confirmation of minutes and matters arising
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1496/05-06 - Minutes of meeting held on
24 April 2006)

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2006 were confirmed.

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II Information papers issued since last meeting

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1402/05-06(01) - Tables and graphs showing the import and retail prices of major oil products from April 2004 to March 2006 furnished by the Census and Statistics Department)

2. Members noted the information paper issued since last meeting.

III Items for discussion at the next meeting scheduled for 26 June 2006

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1498/05-06(01) - List of outstanding items for discussion

LC Paper No. CB(1)1498/05-06(02) - List of follow-up actions)

3. Members agreed that the following items proposed by the Administration would be discussed at the next meeting scheduled for 26 June 2006 –

(a) Postage revision for certain international bulk mail services;

(b) A tourism item; and

(c) Hong Kong Tourism Board Annual Business Plan.

4. In view of the heavy agenda for the meeting, the Chairman sought members' views on whether they had any particular questions on agenda item VI "PWP Item No. 44WS – Salt Water Supply System for Penny's Bay", which was a financial proposal to be submitted to the Public Works Subcommittee (PWSC). As members did not have any particular comments on agenda item VI, the Chairman suggested and members agreed that there was no need to deliberate on agenda item VI. The Administration could submit the item to PWSC for consideration in accordance with its original schedule.

IV Gas Safety

(LC Paper No. CB(1)1498/05-06(03) - Information paper provided by the Administration)

Introduction by the Administration and The Hong Kong and China Gas Company Limited (HKCG)

5. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Permanent Secretary for Economic Development and Labour (Economic Development) (PS/ED) briefed members on the actions and measures being taken by the Administration and HKCG to ensure the safety of town gas supply in Hong Kong. She said that the Government was gravely concerned about the gas explosion incident happened at Ngau Tau Kok on 11 April 2006. It had immediately set up an inter-departmental group, comprising

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representatives of the Hong Kong Police Force, Fire Services Department, Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) and Government Laboratory, to conduct a detailed investigation into the causes of the incident. She stressed that the findings set out in paragraphs 7 – 9 of the Administration's information paper ((LC Paper No. CB(1)1498/05-06(03)) were only initial findings and the inter-departmental group was still carrying out detailed investigation into the incident. Upon completion of the investigation, the inter-departmental group would submit the incident investigation report to the Coroner's Court.

6. The Director of Electrical and Mechanical Services (DEMS) then outlined the initial findings of the gas incident at Ngau Tau Kok, the immediate and further measures taken to ensure gas safety, as detailed in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(1)1498/05-06(03)).

7. On behalf of HKCG, Mr Alfred CHAN, the Managing Director of HKCG expressed the company's deepest sorrow to those affected in the incident, in particular to the families of the fatalities and injuries. He highlighted that the gas incident at Ngau Tau Kok was unprecedented in Hong Kong which was due to a rare coincidence of several factors. In the past few weeks, HKCG was committed to uncovering the underlying cause of the gas incident with a view to preventing the recurrence of similar incidents. The findings of HKCG were basically in line with those in the Government's report. Based on the initial findings of the detailed investigation, HKCG had formulated a series of measures to enhance gas safety. Mr CHAN stressed that it was incumbent upon HKCG to make its best endeavour to prevent gas leakages. In view of the ever-growing demand on underground road spaces for utility services which were mainly buried underground, Mr CHAN called for closer coordination among utility undertakings and government departments in respect of design, installation and maintenance of underground pipelines and underground utilities with a view to enhancing public safety in the long-run.

Discussion

The gas incident and leakage surveys

8. Members noted that the initial findings pointed to a possibility that the escaped town gas went through some existing underground ducts to Wai King Building. The gas could have been transported through a damaged sewer to a point close to the void beneath Wai King Building's entrance, and diffused across the soil and through the openings in the ground beam into the utility void, and accumulated there. Irrespective of the path of diffusion, the gas accumulated in the utility void was probably ignited by electrical spark arising from normal pump operation control, and explosion occurred. Mr LI remarked that as town gas was lighter than air and it would diffuse upward into the air if leakage occurred, he enquired why the gas could have been transported through the paths of diffusion as suggested by the Administration.

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9. The Assistant Director/Gas and General Legislation, Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (AD/GGL, EMSD) confirmed that Hon LI's understanding was correct under normal circumstances. However, he pointed out that town gas leaking from the medium pressure ductile iron (MP DI) gas pipe could have seeped laterally through the soil because of the latter's porosity and diffused in a way as per depicted in the Administration paper (LC Paper No. CB(1)1498/05-06(03)).

10. Given that HKCG had inspected the gas pipe in question just one month before the explosion in March and confirmed that it had not discovered any leakage, Mr Fred LI was very concerned about the reliability of the routine leakage surveys of MP DI gas pipes. In view that the 70 mm hole found on the gas pipe was the biggest one ever identified by HKCG, Mr LI considered that during the leakage surveys, HKCG should also examine if there were signs of pipe corrosion to prevent recurrence of similar gas incidents. Mr SIN also enquired whether laboratory tests had been conducted to ascertain the time taken for a 70 mm hole to be formed on a gas pipe.

11. AD/GGL, EMSD remarked that the reason why there was a 70 mm hole on the gas pipe was one of the main issues of the detailed investigation. In fact, the section of town gas pipe with the said hole was cut off and sent to a university for metallurgical/material examination. As regards rusting of gas pipes, AD/GGL, EMSD advised that additional anti-rusting protective coatings had been put on metal gas pipes laid in or after 1989. However, the gas pipe in question was laid in 1983 when the standard was not as stringent.

12. Acknowledging that the size of the hole in the gas pipe was large, Mr Alfred CHAN of HKCG pointed out that the case had revealed certain abnormal corrosion. While HKCG was eager to understand the underlying cause, it would await for the outcome of the detailed investigation.

13. Members noted that between 13 April and 1 May 2006, HKCG had conducted a comprehensive leakage survey on all its MP DI pipes, and detected minute gas leaks at 51 locations. Mr WONG Ting-kwong enquired about the extent of leakage detected in the current comprehensive survey vis-à-vis past surveys.

14. Mr Alfred CHAN of HKCG remarked that HKCG had used sophisticated detection equipment and exercised due care in carrying out the comprehensive leakage survey, which was now extended to encompassing manholes of other utilities in the vicinity. He informed members that the number of locations found to have minute leakage during the recent survey was broadly the same as in the past, viz 52 locations in 2003, 42 in 2004 and 37 in 2005. The practice and methodology of leakage surveys currently adopted by HKCG were in line with internationally recognized approach for detection of gas leaks from underground gas distribution pipelines. Mr CHAN expected that the enhanced leakage surveys of existing MP gas pipelines from currently three times a year to six times a year could help locate gas leaks at an early stage.

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15. Mr SIN Chung-kai considered that it might be more effective to enhance gas safety by increasing the rigour and trustworthiness of leakage surveys of existing pipelines rather than the frequency of the surveys.

16. AD/GGL, EMSD stressed that leakage surveys of gas pipelines aimed at detecting and rectifying minute leakages as early as possible with a view to preventing gas incidents. As a matter of fact, according to the standard requirement stipulated by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, such minute leakages would not give rise to any hazardous situation and did not warrant any immediate action. Notwithstanding, HKCG usually carried out immediate replacement and repair works.

17. Mr SIN Chung-kai was unconvinced. In view that the 70 mm hole was formed on the gas pipe in question in less than a month's time, he urged that more effective measures be formulated to detect gas leaks on MP DI pipes.

18. AD/GGL, EMSD assured members that the enhanced leakage surveys would be conducted in a thorough manner. Where in doubt, HKCG would drill trial holes to ascertain whether there was any gas leakage. EMSD had also stepped up the monitoring on the leakage surveys of HKCG. For instance, it had audited the 51 locations detected as having minute leakages and that HKCG had carried out repair works afterwards.

19. Noting that HKCG had conducted leakage surveys with the assistance of sophisticated detection equipment and detailed town gas distribution network plans, Mr FANG Kang was concerned whether these equipment and plans were also available to the Government to facilitate its monitoring.

20. DEMS advised that EMSD had monitored HKCG's operation and maintenance management closely, including conducting monthly audits of their pipe leakage surveys or surprise site audit inspections, both of which were carried out by going out with the HKCG staff and using the same set of equipment deployed by HKCG for leakage surveys. Moreover, HKCG was required to maintain a quality assurance programme for deploying advanced equipment for detection of gas leakage. As regards the gas network plans, DEMS highlighted the development of the Internet Interface for Utility Management System (IIUMS) through which government departments and utility undertakings could plan and coordinate their utilities works. Moreover, a party intending to carry out excavation should check with government departments and utility undertakings on an electronic platform to identify all the utilities within its proposed excavation areas.

21. Miss Mandy TAM enquired about the cost-effectiveness of the leakage surveys and whether it would be reviewed from time to time. DEMS assured members that pursuant to outcome of each survey, HKCG had undertaken immediate replacement and repair works to ensure gas safety.

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Towngas pipelines

22. Mr FANG Kang appreciated HKCG's prompt reaction in pacifying and supporting the injuries and victims of the gas incident and implementing immediate remedial measures to ensure gas safety. Noting that HKCG had conducted a comprehensive leakage survey on all its MP DI pipes of about 450 km and agreed to replace 150 km of them within two years, Mr FANG was concerned about the timetable in replacing the outstanding 300 km MP DI pipes. He also sought information on the difference among the three types of pipelines used by HKCG, namely, cast iron pipes, MP DI pipes and polyethylene (PE) pipes.

23. On replacing MP DI pipes by PE pipes, Mr Alfred CHAN of HKCG said that HKCG would accelerate the replacement of those MP DI pipes (i.e. 150 km) which had been installed for 20 years or more within the next two years. It would then replace the remaining pipes (i.e. 300 km) at a normal rate of about 50 km to 70 km per year. In reply to the Chairman, Mr CHAN assured members that the replacement of pipelines was not a recurrent item and the cost incurred would not be passed onto the customers. However, for accounting purpose, it was necessary to adjust the depreciation period of the pipelines and there might be some implications on the cash flow of the company.

24. Of the three types of pipelines used by HKCG, Mr Alfred CHAN of HKCG said that cast iron pipes were the oldest type that could only be used for low pressure distribution. MP DI pipes, which could withstand higher pressure, had widely been used in 1970s and 1980s to replace cast iron pipes. The PE pipes were free from ferrous corrosion problem, and possessed enhanced quality of pipe joint and better resistance to ground subsidence. They had extensively been adopted for use in 1990s to enhance gas safety. Mr Chan further added that cast iron pipes were more prone to breakage under heavy traffic loading or ground subsidence. Therefore, HKCG had taken the initiative to completely replace them in the previous years, albeit still being commonly used by many gas companies in the world.

25. Mr WONG Ting-kwong enquired about the serviceable life span of PE gas pipe. Mr Alfred CHAN of HKCG showed members a PE pipe and briefed them on the rigorous procedures during manufacturing, in particular the steps taken in assuring the quality of the seamless pipe joints with purpose-designed fittings. He further advised that PE pipes were free from corrosion and thus extremely durable. They did not have mechanical joints and therefore the chance of joint seepage was unlikely. According to industrial good practice, it should last for about 50 years.

26. Noting that there were different types of pipelines laid underground, Mr Jeffrey LAM was concerned whether these pipes would undergo accelerated aging or abnormal corrosion by reacting chemically with other agents, such as rain water, in the vicinity that they had come into contact. In line with overseas practice, he called on the Administration to consider housing all pipelines in common conduits to isolate the pipelines with a view to lengthening their useful life. Ms Miriam LAU agreed to the suggestion as it could facilitate repair and maintenance.

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27. DEMS pointed out that since the 1990s, HKCG had gradually phased out laying of DI pipes and introduced new PE pipes for underground distribution network to enhance gas safety. The PE pipes were free from ferrous corrosion problem, and possessed enhanced quality of pipe joint and better resistance to ground subsidence. DEMS undertook to reflect member's view on the use of common conduits but pointed out that the suggestion involved a series of complex issues.

28. AD/GGL, EMSD also assured members that HKCG was obliged to put in place safety procedures with regard to the design, construction, installation, testing, operation, inspection, maintenance of its plants and equipment, including the protection of gas pipes against corrosion. In fact, HKCG exercised a relatively tighter scheduled inspection and maintenance programme when compared with other developed countries such as the European Union and the USA.

29. Mr FANG Kang enquired whether the Administration would help remove abandoned pipelines to avoid the recurrence of similar gas incident. The Deputy Secretary for Economic Development and Labour (Economic Development) (DS/ED) said that in considering whether to remove abandoned pipelines, departments concerned would have to consider possible inconvenience to the public because such works involved excavation of road surfaces and blockage of traffic. Nevertheless, he understood that the Drainage Services Department (DSD) had plans to conduct survey on sewers and it would also take follow up actions pursuant to the recommendations of the detailed investigation report.

30. In reply to Miss Mandy TAM's enquiry on the timetable of replacement of towngas pipelines, DEMS stressed that DI pipes were still widely adopted for gas distribution network in various parts of the world and these pipes, with protective coatings, met international safety standards.

Excavation works

31. Considering that the big hole on the gas pipe might be caused by careless excavation, Mr WONG Ting-kwong enquired about Government's role in monitoring excavation works.

32. DEMS highlighted the Government's stringent procedures in monitoring road opening works. He said that utility undertakings were required to obtain excavation permit (XP) from Highways Department, having liaised with the Transport Department and the Hong Kong Police, prior to commencement of works. Meanwhile, they should register their proposed excavation work through the IIUMS, digitize the alignment of the proposed trench/excavation, and mark the area with a polygon where the XP was to cover. They should also study plans of the gas pipes, power cables, and other utilities obtainable from the respective utilities undertakings so that they could take care of them during excavation. Where necessary, pipes and cable locators should be used to ascertain the exact alignments of these utilities on site, before carrying out any excavation work.

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33. Miss CHAN Yuen-han noted that HKCG planned to replace MP DI pipes by PE pipes within the next two years. Given the complexity of the underground world inside which tremendous changes could have happened in just one month, she called for early replacement of questionable pipelines. HKCG should coordinate with other utility undertakings so that replacement works of gas pipes could be carried out concurrently with other utility works in the vicinity. Mr Alfred CHAN of HKCG replied that there were various restrictions imposed by Government for road openings, for example, utility works in close vicinity to each other might not be allowed on traffic grounds to proceed simultaneously or excavation works at the same section of road should be carried out in stages. Where site situation allowed, they would speed up the related work and liaise with other utility undertakings for a joint programme. Mr Chan added that under a joint programme, the cost of road opening could also be reduced.

34. DEMS and DS/ED briefed members that the Government had implemented the streamlined XP application process. A Review Committee comprising members from utility undertakings and relevant government departments had been set up to oversee the operation of the streamlined process and to resolve issues at departmental level. DS/ED said that under the coordination mechanism, other utility undertakings could carry out works in tandem with the permittee. Mr Alfred CHAN of HKCG said that the company had already made good use of the mechanism.

35. While acknowledging the merit of the coordination mechanism to enable utility undertakings in undertaking utility works in parallel at the same site, Ms Miriam LAU pointed out that the mechanism did not ensure that the works of other parties would not damage the gas pipes in the vicinity and endanger public safety.

36. DS/ED advised that so far as gas pipes and power cables were concerned, the existing legislation already required any party undertaking road excavation work to engage competent persons to ascertain the alignment of these facilities to avoid damages. DS/ED further said that to prevent gas leakage caused by gas pipe damage in the course of underground work carried out by a third party, HKCG had proactively been sending its technicians to work on-site to mark the appropriate alignment of its facilities for maximum security.

37. Ms Miriam LAU further enquired whether other utility undertakings were required to certify that there was no damage to the gas pipes in the area upon completion of their utility works. AD/GGL, EMSD outlined the legal responsibility of the third party under Gas Safety Ordinance (Cap 51), which, inter alia, stipulated that a person who carried out any works in the vicinity of a gas pipe should ensure that all reasonable measures were taken to protect the gas pipe from damage arising out of the works that would be likely to prejudice safety. Any person who contravened the provision and was convicted would be subject to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and imprisonment of 12 months.

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Building structure

38. Mr Ronny TONG commended HKCG's positive feedback and urged it to act promptly in response to the detailed investigation report to ensure gas safety. Noting that a utility enclosure in the form of a void was found underneath the raised entrance floor inside Wai King Building which might be one of the factors leading to the tragic explosion, Mr TONG was concerned whether there was any legislation governing the unsealed underground openings leading to these voids.

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39. DEMS said that the void in question provided the passage for utility pipes to access the building via the openings on the ground beam. On whether the underground openings to these voids were permissible under the law, DEMS undertook to provide further information in writing.

40. Unconvinced of the Administration's reply, Mr Ronny TONG considered that since other harmful gases/vapour endangering human health might also leak through these unsealed underground openings into such voids, guidelines should be in place to advise whether the access openings should be sealed while not in use. He was worried that such a void with unsealed underground openings was a standard design commonly found in most buildings.

41. DS/ED advised that to assist investigation by the inter-departmental group, professional advice and support would be provided by the Buildings Department on whether there were any problem in the design and structure of the underground openings or voids to Wai King Building. He undertook to reflect the member's views to the department concerned.

42. Mr Alfred CHAN of HKCG said that the company decided to conduct a comprehensive survey on about 20 000 single-block old buildings by end 2006. Among some 5 200 buildings which had been inspected so far, utilities voids were found at only 209 buildings within which only three of them had housed electrical equipment. Mr CHAN considered that the proportion of buildings with problematic structures was not high. HKCG would continue to follow up with the Housing Authority and management offices of other major residential estates and malls to identify buildings with similar problems.

Remedial action and compensation

43. Mr CHAN Kam-lam appreciated HKCG's efforts in undertaking many remedial measures. Noting that there were about 13 to 14 false alarms of gas leakage subsequent to the gas incident, Mr CHAN suggested that a major cleansing for the main sewer near Wai King Building should be conducted, if this had not been done. In this connection, Ms CHAN Yuen-han disagreed with the view of AD/GGL, EMSD that the public could detect gas leakage through the smell of town gas. Given that Hong Kong was heavily polluted with smelly odors, detecting gas leakage by nose might lead to frequent false alarms.

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44. DS/ED advised that subsequent to the gas incident, DSD had provided professional advice and support to the inter-departmental group and assisted in investigation. He undertook to reflect member's request for a cleansing of the main sewer near Wai King Building to DSD for its follow-up.

45. Noting that the incident investigation report would be submitted for the consideration by the Coroner's Court, Mr CHAN Kam-lam reflected the concern of the affected victims on their claims against damages to their properties due to the gas incident. He sought information on the party to be held liable and the procedures involved.

46. DS/ED remarked that as the gas incident would be followed up by the Coroner's Court which would be a judicial process, he was not in a position to comment on liability issues in relation to the incident. Nevertheless, the Court's judgment and relevant documents made public in the judicial process should provide reference to any aggrieved party.

Summing up

47. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman suggested that the Panel would consider whether it was necessary to continue discussion on the subject upon receipt of the detailed investigation report from the Administration. Members agreed.

V Hong Kong Wetland Park

- (LC Paper No. CB(1)1498/05-06(04) - Information paper provided by the Administration
- LC Paper No. CB(1)1499/05-06 - Background brief on the Hong Kong Wetland Park Project prepared by the Secretariat)

48. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Commissioner for Tourism (C for Tourism) briefed members on the progress of the Hong Kong Wetland Park (HKWP) project with the aid of a short promotional video. C for Tourism said that HKWP was Hong Kong's first major and a world-class ecotourism facility aimed to promote green tourism, education on environmental protection and wetland conservation. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) had conducted a series of soft opening activities for HKWP and the participants had offered useful suggestions to help AFCD fine-tune the operation of the Park. Upon the opening of HKWP on 20 May 2006 and in view of the large number of visitors queuing at the ticketing office during the opening day, AFCD had deployed extra staff to handle ticket sales to ensure that the operation was conducted in an orderly and efficient manner. Going forward, C for Tourism informed Members that a three-pronged strategy would be introduced to enhance public awareness of how best to enjoy HKWP –

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- (a) education: AFCD had conducted workshops for teachers and school principals before the opening. It would organise an education programme – Wetland Conservation Week – in late June 2006 which would target students, particularly those from the neighbouring areas;
- (b) training for tourist guides: AFCD had also organised workshops for tourist guides before the opening. Similar workshops would be organised in June and July 2006 for tourist guides registered with the Travel Industry Council. In addition, the Education and Manpower Bureau would fund courses on nature appreciation for tourist guides from July 2006 onwards under the Government’s Skills Upgrading Scheme; and
- (c) publicity: AFCD would display more soft messages in the Park to remind visitors to treasure its exhibits and facilities. Leaflets/information on rules for visitors would also be disseminated both on site and on the Wetland Park website.

Staffing and operation

49. Mr Fred LI expressed concern about the overcrowding situation where 5 500 visitors had been admitted to the Park on its opening day. In this connection, he sought clarification from the Administration on the maximum visitor capacity of HKWP per day and measures to control attendance.

50. The Assistant Director of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (Conservation) (AD/AFCD) replied that the maximum capacity of the Park at any one time was about 3 500 visitors. On the day of opening, the cumulative number of visitors entering the Park was about 5 500. In the event that HKWP was about to reach its maximum capacity, announcement would be made through media, Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation and Light Rail Transit (LRT) advising members of the public not to visit the Park. Latest news on ticketing and admission arrangement would be uploaded onto the HKWP’s website when necessary. AFCD would also seek the assistance of the Police and the Transport Department (TD) in handling crowd control and implementing traffic diversion plan on a need basis.

51. Mr KWONG Chi-kin was in support of the “Wetland Park Volunteer Scheme” as it could promote the awareness of wetland protection through direct participation in voluntary services. He urged the Administration to step up publicity and launch promotion programme to attract more people to apply for enrolment as volunteers for HKWP. Echoing the views of Mr KWONG, Mr Vincent FANG and Miss CHAN Yuen-han considered that the Administration should provide more training courses for students to participate in the scheme so that they could help serve the community and visitors. Miss CHAN also suggested that opportunities should be given to local students and organizations to help introduce local attractions to visitors through the scheme.

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52. In response, AD/AFCD advised that over 1 300 members of the public had registered as volunteers for HKWP of which about 100 were receiving volunteer training whilst 60 had already completed the docent training and were ready to provide docent services for visitors. In addition, AFCD had organized three workshops for teachers in May 2006 to help them better understand the educational resources at HKWP. More docent training courses and teachers' workshops as well as related programmes and seminars would be conducted in June 2006. Workshops for secondary students would also be conducted at a later stage. He assured members that the Administration had earmarked sufficient resources in 2006-07 for conducting 1 000 educational programmes for schools and non-profit organizations.

53. Mr KWONG Chi-kin and Mr WONG Ting-kwong expressed concern about the noise problems created by visitors at HKWP. Indeed, visitors should be gently reminded, of the need to keep quiet to avoid lessening their enjoyment during their stay in the Park. In response, AD/AFCD advised that while the Wetland Reserve was not open to the public, noise problem would need to be addressed only in visitors' areas. In this connection, the management of HKWP had reminded visitors, in particular those with children, to keep the environment quiet in order to minimize disturbance to the wildlife in the Park. AFCD would continue to strengthen publicity and education to improve the situation. Mr KWONG Chi-kin disagreed with the Administration's comments and opined that the management of HKWP should educate visitors not to make noise in all areas of the Park.

54. Noting that visitors were found having picnic, consuming food and littering in the Park during their visits, Mr Ronny TONG enquired whether there were any legislation for the Administration to protect and manage HKWP. He also opined that the Administration should step up enforcement action and strengthen the monitoring by displaying signages to remind visitors not to break the rules. Sharing similar views, Miss TAM Heung-man sought information on the Administration's measures to improve the situation.

55. In reply, C for Tourism explained that the subsidiary legislation under the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap. 208) (the Ordinance) was the legal framework for the protection and management of HKWP to achieve the conservation, education, and tourism objectives. AD/AFCD advised that notes to visitors had been displayed to remind them not to litter or picnic in the outdoor area. Whilst littering was observed on the day of opening, visitors had been reminded to put litter into litter bins or take it with them. He assured members that AFCD would take enforcement action against littering as and when necessary.

56. The Chairman remarked that unlike country parks, HKWP should be protected and managed up to the desired standards of other ecological facilities. Consideration should be given to prohibiting visitors from eating in the Park. They should also be reminded not to feed the animals.

57. In response to Miss TAM Heung-man's and Mr WONG Ting-kwong's concern about damages to park facilities by visitors, AD/AFCD advised that to enhance

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publicity and education, AFCD would deploy more volunteers to remind visitors to protect the facilities and the environment of the Park.

58. Mr Fred LI opined that smoking should be banned in the Park including outdoor areas. AD/AFCD advised that smoking was prohibited in indoor public places. There was no provisions under the Ordinance to prohibit smoking in all areas of the country parks. Nevertheless, AFCD would encourage visitors not to smoke in the Park. The Chairman said that in the light of the Administration's proposal to amend the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371) and its subsidiary legislation to tighten the control on smoking, members of the Liberal Party would not support the extension of the statutory smoking ban to outdoor places. However, he considered that visitors should be encouraged not to smoke in the Park.

59. In response to the Deputy Chairman's enquiries about the provision of shelters and first aid service as well as the handling of bird droppings to prevent avian flu at the Park, AD/AFCD said that consideration would be given to providing more shelters in addition to the existing ones at suitable locations. Volunteer members of the Auxiliary Medical Service or Civil Aid Service would provide first aid service to visitors at the Park during Sundays and public holidays in times of emergency. Visitors would be reminded to maintain good personal hygiene and to keep away from wild birds and their droppings during visits. Cleansing service would also be provided to clean up bird droppings twice a day. Action would be taken to intensify cleansing operations when necessary.

60. The Deputy Chairman showed appreciation for the HKWP project which had enhanced the ecological mitigation area to a world-class conservation, education and tourism facility. In view of the situation mentioned by Mr Ronny TONG, he suggested that the Administration should make reference to overseas practice requiring visitors to leave their belongings including food at the cloak room before they entered the Park.

61. Mr Fred LI considered that the Administration should conduct a briefing session for visitors before they entered the Park. Miss CHAN Yuen-han suggested that the Administration might also consider playing a short promotional video to educate visitors at the briefing session. C for Tourism noted members' views. She said that AFCD would consider including the notes on visits in the promotional leaflets and uploading them onto the HKWP's website to remind visitors to observe the rules.

62. In response to Mr Howard YOUNG, PSED said that a number of telescopes had been provided to visitors at the viewing gallery for bird-watching in HKWP. She added that the ecological facilities at Mai Po Nature Reserve would still be open for visit by the public.

Admission fees

63. In response to Mr Howard YOUNG's enquiry about the concessionary package for tour groups and admission fees for tourist guides, AD/AFCD advised that

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a discount rate of 30% would be given to each group comprising 50 visitors or above. PSED added that complimentary tickets would soon be given to tourist guides escorting visitors upon the approval of the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau. Mr YOUNG anticipated the majority of visitors to HKWP would come by coach which could usually accommodate 40 passengers per trip. He opined that 30% discount should be given to groups comprising 40 visitors or more.

64. Miss CHAN Yuen-han suggested that tickets with multiple entries for HKWP in a single day should be made available for visitors to allow them to take meals in Yuen Long or places other than in the Park. This could help boost the local economy and provide additional employment opportunities for local people.

65. Mr WONG Ting-kwong said that a member of the public had complained to him about the procedure for the application of an annual family pass for HKWP. The complainant was dissatisfied that upon his arrival at the ticketing office of HKWP for the purchase of an annual pass for his family, he was asked to provide documents of identity for all his family members for the purpose of verification before he could settle the payment and collect the pass. Mr WONG opined that this would cause inconvenience to visitors as they might not have brought along with them the requisite document such as birth certificates. AD/AFCD said that the Administration had streamlined the application procedure for annual pass for family visitors.

Complementary facilities

66. Miss TAM Heung-man and Mr WONG Ting-kwong opined that there were inadequate directional and road signs to guide motorists to HKWP. Miss TAM also opined that the Administration had not provided sufficient car parking spaces and convenient pedestrian crossings for visitors. They sought information on the Administration's measures to improve the situation.

67. In response, C for Tourism and AD/AFCD said that with the assistance of TD and the Highways Department, the Tourism Commission (TC) had been developing complementary transport and parking facilities for HKWP. These included the enhancement of public transport services and the provision of more traffic and directional signs for the convenience of visitors and motorists. In addition, 27 coach parking spaces and 46 car parking spaces had been provided for visitors of HKWP. Whilst the policy intent was to discourage people from driving to the Park, visitors would be directed to use the multi-storey carpark at the nearby public housing estate if the car parking space inside the Park were fully occupied. On pedestrian circulation, due to safety consideration, alighting passengers of LRT were advised to use the pedestrian walkway for access to the Park.

68. Mr Fred LI said that HKWP might be a popular tourist attraction for family visitors, in particular those of the middle-class owning a car. He considered that there were no conflicts between the provision of parking facilities and the policy on wetland conservation. To promote HKWP, additional car parking spaces should be made available to cater for the need of visitors. PSED responded that a balance between

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the value of the wetland ecosystems and the provision of parking spaces had to be maintained. In fact, there was no shortfall of car parking spaces in HKWP except during weekends and public holidays. Visitors were encouraged to use public transport to HKWP on peak days. Miss CHAN Yuen-han however expressed reservation about the proposal for the provision of additional parking spaces. Instead, the Administration should promote the use of public transport and pedestrian crossing/walkway. Sharing the views expressed by a Yuen Long District Council member in his submission on HKWP tabled at the meeting, Miss CHAN opined that the Administration should also consider ways to improve and beautify the complementary facilities such as providing Park access for visitors with a comfortable and friendly atmosphere. Market stalls could be designated along the routes leading to the Park or other attractions to enhance the value of the district.

Publicity

69. Miss CHAN Yuen-han and Mr Vincent FANG were in support of the HKWP project as it was an edutainment facility which could further improve Hong Kong's domestic consumption market. In this connection, they suggested that TC should help promoting Yuen Long attractions and encourage tourists to go to Yuen Long for its gourmet food after visiting HKWP. In response, C for Tourism advised that TC had been working with AFCD, Yuen Long District Council and Hong Kong Tourism Board to leverage on the opening of HKWP to promote attractions on cultural tourism and gourmet attractions in Yuen Long.

VI PWP Item No. 44WS – Salt Water Supply System for Penny's Bay
(LC Paper No. CB(1)1498/05-06(05) - Information paper provided by the Administration)

70. Members agreed that the Administration could submit the item to PWSC for consideration in accordance with the original schedule. In the meantime, members would be invited to forward any written views' to the Panel for onward submission to the Administration for its consideration.

(Post-meeting note: Members had been invited to provide views on the proposals vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1570/05-06 on 23 May 2006.)

VII Any other business

71. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:00 pm.