

Scattering of Cremated Human Ashes East of The Brothers Islands

**Letter from Tuen Mun District Council to
Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
(FSEH Panel) dated 23 April 2007**

Response from the Administration

The LegCo FSEH Panel was informed at its March 2007 meeting that the Government is encouraging the scattering of cremated human ashes at sea and in Gardens of Remembrance, with a view to address the persistent shortage of niches for cremated ashes. To this end, we considered it necessary to promulgate a set of user-friendly application procedures for scattering of human ashes at sea.

2. We have therefore proposed to streamline the application for and processing of the relevant applications. Part of the streamlined procedure is the designation of four areas within Hong Kong waters for the purpose of scattering cremated human ashes. These areas have been carefully chosen to minimize the impact of scattering of human ashes at sea on the environment and on people. This list of designated areas will be reviewed from time to time by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), with regard to recommendations from the relevant departments.
3. In an effort to prevent nuisance or pollution, we have also proposed that conditions be imposed on the scattering of human ashes at sea. Having regard to the discussion at the LegCo FSEH Panel meeting held in March 2007 and comments subsequently received from the public, we are finalizing the conditions, and will report the same to Members at the FSEH Panel meeting on 12 June 2007..
4. Since the announcement of the proposed streamlined procedures, we have been given to understand that there are concerns over the designation of particular areas as well as the conditions to be imposed. To this end, we have been explaining to the concerned parties about the harmless nature of cremated human ashes on the environment and people. Moreover, the designated areas have been carefully chosen to minimize any impact on the environment and people. Relevant departments have given careful consideration to the four areas selected and proposed. As the areas are far way from land, and cremated ashes are harmless, relevant departments considered that if approval conditions are complied with in the scattering of human ashes, there

should be no impact on the surrounding environment. In view of the above, the Administration had not specifically conducted district council consultation.

5. In this regard, we met with a number of concerned Tuen Mun District Councillors informally in April 2007 and explained the above proposal. FEHD immediately followed up on the views from Tuen Mun residents as conveyed by the Tuen Mun District Councillors after the informal meeting. To explain our proposed streamlined procedures in even greater detail, FEHD and the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau attended the Tuen Mun District Council's meeting on 8 May 2007. At the meeting, we explained the rationale for the proposals and answered questions from members. The Tuen Mun District Council passed a motion to express dissatisfaction over the lack of prior consultation and stated that the site to the East of the Brother's Islands was not suitable for scattering cremated ashes. In collaboration with the relevant departments, we will continue to look for more suitable sites in the vicinity.

6. As regards other issues raised in Tuen Mun District Council's discussion paper, we would like to provide the relevant information as follows:

- (a) We consulted representatives of the aquaculture and capture fisheries industries through the relevant subcommittees of the Advisory Committee on Agriculture and Fisheries in early March 2007, and they expressed no objection to the proposal;
- (b) Cremated human ashes undergo immense heating (at approximately 850°C) during cremation and are thus innocuous. The scattering of cremated human ashes at sea would not have any impact on the environment;
- (c) All designated areas have been carefully chosen to minimize impact to environment and people. According to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and the Environmental Protection Department, if approval conditions are observed and complied with, impact on water quality and the associated impact on Chinese White Dolphins should be within acceptable limits;
- (d) Attention of the departments concerned would be brought to the conditions, and the departments would take enforcement actions against littering, environmental nuisance and pollution in the normal manner; and

- (e) Individuals had previously boarded vessels at public piers for the purpose of scattering cremated ashes at sea. Currently, there is no information to show that the behaviour of people participating in the activity would cause discomfort to nearby residents and tourists.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
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