

**Christians for Eco-concern's Submission to
LEGCO's Bills Committee on Product Eco-responsibility Bill**
(3 Pages)

The following Views regarding the Product Eco-responsibility Bill is made further to our former submission re The Proposal on An Environmental Levy on Plastic Shopping Bags submitted by us on 11 July, 2007.

The Basic Principles

1. We are "Christians for Eco-concern" of Hong Kong, an environmental network supported by the Hong Kong Christian Council. There is an increasing consensus among ecologists that global ecosystems are under strain from unsustainable consumption habits together with an expanding human population. To tackle the above situation, we would like to advocate three principles: balance, wisdom and responsibility.
2. Balance means economic growth must be balanced with social and ecological concerns. The reason for this principle is obvious. When money or profit is the only concern, corporate strategies in our largely capitalistic world would be oriented towards mass production and consumerism to optimize sales and profits. The check against such unscrupulous and unsustainable processes is by introducing an obligation with social and ecological concerns. Similarly, the authority should balance the pros and cons of introducing a piece of legislation against the welfare of the society at large and of the directly affected persons in particular.
3. Wisdom means a genuine understanding of the concerned problems and their effects. Equally important is the wisdom for prevention and cure. It is no good to deal with problems in a piece meal and divergent manner if a long term sustainable goal is intended. As a Christian group, we would like to refer to the Judaistic belief in the oneness of all beings with a transcendent being, and therefore, of the interconnectedness of all life.¹ Jewish wisdom teaches that "genuine divine existence engenders the existence of all of creation," and that "everything is linked with everything else." Similarly, we believe that God is the almighty Creator of all things and human beings are entrusted the stewardship to look after the creations in a responsible and caring manner.

¹See MARTIN BUBER, I AND THOU 123-24 (Walter Kaufman trans., 1970).

4. It follows that responsibility for a healthy and sustainable world falls basically upon the shoulders of us as human beings. This spells out the need for a well defined responsibility regarding the world's existing agendas and future perpetuation. As one could easily understand that governments and large corporations must be held for the major share of such responsibilities in terms of sustainability and ecological justice. For instance, today's global economy provides ample opportunities for increased international trade and the creation of economic wealth. However, such trading practices do not necessarily support the UN's Millennium goals of reducing poverty and ensuring greater environmental security.

Our Opinions

5. We agree that urgent corrective action is needed to help minimize plastic wastes and their damage to the environment. We presume that this is the background for the Product Eco-responsibility Bill aiming at an appreciable reduction of plastic waste through the introduction of an environmental levy in line with the 'polluter pays' principle. Indeed, there appears to be NO other better way to bring about an immediate reduction of the use of plastic bags locally except through a mandatory levy. As such, we support the bill in principle. Also, we request that the **money so collected should be used directly to deal with the specific or related priority environmental problems**. Hence, the full principle should be: **The polluter pays and it pays to resolve the problem** (污者自付，用諸環保). Accordingly, the government should assign the levy so collected to a suitable environmental fund aiming at environmental protection and improvement.
6. On a longer term, we expect the government to take a more pro-active role to implement the 4 "R" principles, namely, to replace, reduce, reuse and recycle the concerned plastic bags as with other waste reduction schemes. We see the concerned Bill as only an initial attempt to resolve such plastic waste problem the success of which depends on the followings:
 - (a) There is sufficient consumer cooperation and understanding to help reduce the concerned use of plastic bags.
 - (b) The concerned chain stores and supermarkets do take up an appreciable (preferably predominant) share of local use of plastic bags.
 - (c) The spared plastic bags would not be deployed in other non-ecological usage or be disposed of irresponsibly.
7. It follows that measures should be introduced by the relevant authorities to encourage local residents to use environmentally friendly bags such as by making available reasonably priced bio-degradable bags at major supermarket, chain stores, etc... for their customers' use. The government should cooperate with local

concerned groups, responsible manufacturers and research & development personnel with a funding incentive to produce and promote the use of bio-degradable bags.

8. Periodic review and announcement of the relevant statistics should be made and publicized by the government for the purposes of information, follow-up and education to the public on the matter of reducing plastic wastes. Also, the government should promote and conduct education of environmental protection and ecological concerns through schools, relevant organizations and any other voluntary institutions.
9. Last but not least, environmental problems are often associated with over or unwarranted production especially in the Hong Kong context of market economy and consumerism. An associated damage is often seen in their effects in aggravating or inducing poverty through the injustice and immorality embedded in the processes of production, distribution, sales and end-user disposals. Thus, minimization of poverty and the building up of social eco-responsibility are essential besides legislative control to help achieve and maintain a truly eco-responsible society.

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