

Revised version

Friends of the Earth's Submission for the Legislative Council Panel on Environmental Affairs Meeting on 16 January 2017

Refuse Collection and Resource Recovery

1. Introduction

Over the past 30 years, Hong Kong's population has grown by 36%, yet our municipal solid waste disposal has risen by 80%¹. In 2014, 5.62 million tonnes of MSW was generated², averaging to 2 kg of waste per person per day³. Hong Kong generates more waste per capita compared to neighbouring cities such as Tokyo, Seoul and Taipei⁴. Of the 3.5 million tonnes of waste we disposed of at landfill in 2014, many items – such as putrescibles, paper and plastics – could have been recovered⁵. The Government has targeted to reduce per-capita waste disposal rates by 40% and increase the percentage of recycling to 55% by 2022⁶. Although Hong Kong does recover some of its resources, low-value recyclables like plastics have very low recovery rate. Our current linear economic model cannot sustain our growing demand for higher standards of living. The Government should support the transition towards a circular economy to close the material loop. FoE (HK) proposes the following recommendations to shift Hong Kong to a more sustainable economic model:

2. Expand Producer Responsibility Scheme (PRS)

Under the “polluter pays” principle, FoE believes that those who produce wastes (i.e. manufacturers, distributors, retailers) should afford the cost of waste management to prevent damage to the environment. A producer responsibility scheme (PRS) would hold producers accountable for the waste they generate and encourage more environmentally-friendly product designs. In 2016, the Legislative Council passed the enabling legislations on WEEE and glass beverage containers on March and May respectively⁷. Still, it has been disappointing to learn that the EPD has failed to meet all of the time targets set down for PRS implementation.

¹ Environment Bureau, *Hong Kong Blueprint for Sustainable Use of Resources 2013-2022*

² Environmental Protection Department, *Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong 2015*

³ Determined using GovHK's *Hong Kong Fact Sheets – Population*

⁴ Environment Bureau, *Hong Kong Blueprint for Sustainable Use of Resources 2013 - 2022*

⁵ Environmental Protection Department, *Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong, Waste Statistics for 2014*

⁶ Environment Bureau, *Hong Kong Blueprint for Sustainable Use of Resources 2013-2022*

⁷ Environmental Protection Department, *Producer Responsibility Schemes*



According to EPD data, we disposed 136 tonnes PET plastic bottles at landfill every day in 2015⁸. **The Government should develop a container deposit-refund system on plastic bottles, putting a rebatable duty to increase recovery rates**⁹. The system has been adopted in many municipalities with much success¹⁰. The legislative proposal on MSW charging will also be submitted in the first half of 2017¹¹. The Government should however review and adjust the charges regularly to ensure their effectiveness¹². FoE (HK) recommends the Government to integrate and accelerate producer responsibility to cover more goods and services to reflect their true environmental cost from production to disposal.

3. Support Recycling Industry

Resource should be reused or recycled instead of disposed. In 2015, only 37% of MSW was recovered, with the remaining disposed of at landfills¹³. Of the recovered materials, 98% was shipped to the Mainland and other countries for recycling, creating little value locally¹⁴. FoE welcomes the one-off HK\$1 billion Recycling Fund to support Hong Kong enterprises to upgrade their waste recycling operational capacity and non-profit distributing organisations (NPOs) to develop projects to assist the local recycling industry¹⁵. The Recycling Fund so far has only approved 38 applicants and mobilised 5% of the earmarked funds¹⁶. However, the one-off funding is not able to solve the root of the problem, including the high operational cost (labour, rent, insurance, etc.) and the low value of certain recyclables. **The Government needs to develop material recovery facilities (MRFs) in each of the 18 districts to receive and sort out solid waste for recycling**¹⁷. In addition, the Government should support the recycling industry through leasing the land with a lower rent and longer duration.

Effective programmes require accurate data and monitoring. Last year, the Audit Commission reported that EPD has inflated the MSW recovery rate due to the

⁸ [Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong](#)

⁹ [Bottle Bill Resource Guide](#)

¹⁰ [Cashing Bottles: The German Deposit Program](#)

¹¹ [Environmental Protection Department, Confirmed Minutes of the 212th Meeting of the Advisory Council on the Environment](#)

¹² [Poon, C.S. et al., Quantifying the Impact of Construction Waste Charging Scheme on Construction Waste Management in Hong Kong](#)

¹³ [Legislative Council, Environmental Affairs](#)

¹⁴ [Environmental Protection Department, Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong 2014](#)

¹⁵ [Environmental Protection Department, Recycling Fund](#)

¹⁶ [Environmental Protection Department, Recycling Fund – Application Results](#)

¹⁷ [Veolia, Materials Recovery Facility](#)



inclusion of re-exported recyclables. Without accurate dataset, the EPD will not be able to evaluate its reduction efforts and develop appropriate countermeasures & adjustments. Further, the US-based environmental protection watchdog, Basel Action Network, has traced waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) being imported and stored illegally in multiple Hong Kong recycling sites. FoE (HK) recommends the Government to enhance the local recycling industry with increased infrastructure support, better economic instruments, stronger monitoring and strengthen enforcement.

4. Enforce Landfill Ban

Hong Kong's three strategic landfills were predicted to reach their full capacity on or before 2020¹⁸. Although funding for the extension of two landfills has been approved¹⁹, this is not a permanent or sustainable solution for avoidable waste. Demonstrating a clear political will is important in stimulating the society to change. Both France and Italy have recently passed a ban on unsold food from being disposed from supermarkets^{20,21}. Germany has also implemented a landfill ban on recyclable, biodegradable and untreated waste, with evident waste reduction²². Putrescibles, plastics and papers are the three largest categories of waste, accounting for 44%, 21% and 20% of the MSW disposed in Hong Kong respectively²³. Landfill ban by itself does not solve the waste problem. It needs to be coupled with policies, legislation and financial support to facilitate the sustainable development of the recycling industry. **FoE (HK) recommends the Government to enact a landfill ban on food waste and recyclables,** accompanied with other policy instruments to ensure its effectiveness.

¹⁸ Legislative Council, Panel on Environmental Affairs -Environmental Infrastructure Projects

¹⁹ Legislative Council, Administration's paper on 2016 Policy Address – Policy initiatives of Environment Bureau: Environmental protection

²⁰ The Guardian, French law forbids food waste by supermarkets

²¹ BBC, Italy adopts new law to slash food waste

²² Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (Australia), Landfill ban investigation

²³ Environmental Protection Department, Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong, Waste Statistics for 2014