

**A brief account of Chapter 2 of Report No. 75  
“Government’s efforts in tackling shoreline refuse”  
by the Director of Audit  
at the Public Hearing of the Public Accounts Committee  
of the Legislative Council on Friday, 12 March 2021**

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for inviting me here to give a brief account of Chapter 2 of Report No. 75 of the Director of Audit, entitled “Government’s efforts in tackling shoreline refuse”.

This Audit Report comprises six PARTs.

**PART 1 of the Report, namely “Introduction”, describes the background of the audit.**

Shoreline refuse is marine refuse washed ashore and accumulated near the coastline. In 2012, the Government set up an Inter-departmental Working Group (the Working Group) to coordinate and enhance efforts among the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) in tackling the marine refuse problem. In support of the Working Group, the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) completed a Marine Refuse Study in 2015, which recommended various measures to prevent and reduce marine refuse.

**PART 2 of the Report examines EPD’s work in monitoring the cleanliness of coastal sites.**

EPD conducts regular inspections at specific coastal sites which are more prone to marine refuse accumulation, and assesses the cleanliness conditions of these sites using a Shoreline Cleanliness Grading System. The Audit Commission (Audit) found room for improvement in EPD’s inspections for the period between November 2017 and December 2019, such as some re-inspections not being conducted within the planned timeframe, and inconsistencies in inspection records. In addition, EPD does not regularly promulgate in the public domain cleanliness conditions of coastal sites.

In November 2017, EPD updated the list of priority sites, which included 29 locations. However, EPD had not reviewed the priority sites despite improvement in cleanliness conditions of some priority sites from 2018 to 2020. Audit also noted room for improvement in handling surge of cross-boundary marine refuse in Hong Kong.

**PART 3 of the Report examines the clean-up operations of Marine Parks and Marine Reserve by AFCD.**

AFCD has outsourced the cleansing work of five Marine Parks and one Marine Reserve to 3 contractors under 5 recurrent contracts. Audit found that AFCD staff did not take effective follow-up actions on cases of suspected absence from duty of contractors' staff, and AFCD's internal guideline did not provide clear assessment criteria for assessing the level of satisfaction with the services provided by a contractor.

Audit also found that it took 7 months to remove two large pipe structures from the shoreline of Sha Chau and Lung Kwu Chau Marine Park, and there was a large quantity of refuse at the back-of-beach areas of this Marine Park, and along the shorelines of the Brothers Marine Park.

**PART 4 of the Report examines the clean-up operations by LCSD to collect and remove shoreline refuse at gazetted beaches.**

LCSD is responsible for the cleanliness of 41 gazetted beaches and the cleansing work is performed by contractors under three cleansing contracts covering different districts.

Audit noted that statistics of special cleansing operations were inaccurate and not timely reported to the Working Group. LCSD's controls over provision of additional workers for cleansing work at beaches were also inadequate. For instance, justifications for requiring additional workers were not documented, and additional cleansing workers had been deployed before the issue of a written service order on some occasions. In addition, without promulgation of guidelines on collection of marine refuse data, venue staff in different beaches had different interpretations on how to classify, count and weigh refuse collected.

**PART 5 of the Report examines the clean-up operations by FEHD.**

FEHD is responsible for the cleanliness of ungazetted beaches and coastal areas in Hong Kong which are not under the purview of other government departments. Most of the clean-up work has been outsourced to a contractor.

FEHD's guidelines for assessing the cleanliness level did not adopt a grading system similar to EPD's Shoreline Cleanliness Grading System, and the requirement of its Operational Manual on supervisory staff to make use of its Contract Management System to review submissions of Senior Foremen was not fully achieved. From June to mid-September 2020, Audit conducted field visits and found large quantities of refuse in two priority sites in Tai Po District and Islands Districts respectively.

In a tender exercise in 2019, FEHD had not imposed relevant restriction on avoiding over-reliance on a single contractor and thus the clean-up service contracts for both of the two Districts Groups were awarded to the same contractor. In addition, for the period from June 2019 to May 2020, the actual clean-up service hours in Islands District and Sai Kung District incurred by the contractor were only 38.3% and 53.3% respectively of the estimated hours included in the contracts.

**PART 6 of the Report examines other related issues in tackling shoreline refuse.**

From February to July 2018, FEHD launched a trial scheme on using 360-degree camera to monitor the shoreline refuse of 5 priority sites. During the 92 days from 1 March to 31 May 2020, there was a total of 301 camera-days without image received, but no follow-up actions on these malfunctioning cameras had been recorded.

While pertinent departments had been asked to step up inspections and patrols to achieve a deterrent effect and improve compliance according to the Working Group Meeting paper submitted in June 2014, the number of enforcement actions taken against marine littering by AFCD and LCSD remained low.

To reduce refuse from entering the marine environment, LCSD installs water dispensers on gazetted beaches, but progress has been slow. As of June 2020, water dispensers were only provided in 24 (59%) of 41 gazetted beaches.

In the light of the above audit findings, Audit has made recommendations to EPD, AFCD, LCSD and FEHD accordingly.

Our views and recommendations were agreed by the abovementioned departments. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge with gratitude the full cooperation, assistance and positive response of their staff during the course of the audit review amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemic.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.