

**A brief account of Chapter 1 of Report No. 75
“Collection and removal of marine refuse by the Marine Department”
by the Director of Audit
at the Public Hearing of the Public Accounts Committee
of the Legislative Council on Wednesday, 3 March 2021**

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for inviting me here to give a brief account of Chapter 1 of Report No. 75 of the Director of Audit, entitled “Collection and removal of marine refuse by the Marine Department”.

This Audit Report comprises four PARTs.

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

The work of the Marine Department (MD) in tackling marine refuse includes collecting vessel-generated refuse and scavenging floating refuse, conducting publicity campaigns, performing daily patrols in Hong Kong waters and conducting enforcement against marine littering. In 2020-21, its estimated annual recurrent expenditure on such work is \$102 million, of which \$95 million (93%) is related to the outsourcing of marine refuse cleansing and disposal services.

PART 2 of the Report examines the administration of marine refuse cleansing and disposal contracts by MD.

MD has outsourced marine refuse cleansing and disposal services to a contractor through 2 contracts. The Audit Commission (Audit) found that from 2012 to 2019, there were significant discrepancies between the quantities of municipal solid waste disposed of by the contractor as per records of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and the quantities of marine refuse collected as reported in MD’s Controlling Officer’s Reports. Overall, the quantities per EPD records represented only about 20% of the quantities reported by MD.

The contractor has disposed of the bulk of marine refuse collected at EPD’s refuse transfer stations with disposal charges reimbursed by MD, but the reimbursement arrangement had not been mentioned in the tender documents. In addition, contrary to the provisions set out in the tender documents, the contractor has sub-contracted the daily transportation of marine refuse under the 2 contracts without obtaining MD’s prior approval, and only informed MD 29 and 22 months respectively thereafter. For the recent 4 tender

exercises of the contract for the whole of Hong Kong waters conducted from 2004 to 2017, the number of tenders received had decreased and there had been a notable increase in the contract expenditure.

PART 3 of the Report examines the monitoring of the marine refuse cleansing and disposal services by MD.

According to MD's guidelines, the whole of Hong Kong waters is divided into 12 patrol areas, and each should be covered in MD's daily cleanliness patrols at least once a month. However, in 2019, the required frequency was not met in 3 of the patrol areas, and the number of months recording no patrols ranged from 1 to 6. Furthermore, while the contract provides that if the level of cleanliness of any part of Hong Kong waters falls below the "Good" level" during the service hours, a "Good" level shall be re-established within the specified time limit, Audit found instances that the provision was not met.

During site inspections conducted in June and July 2020, Audit noted that the contractor deployed pleasure vessels for marine refuse cleansing work, which might have contravened the relevant legislation.

There are currently four marine refuse collection points (MRCs) in Hong Kong for temporary storage of floating refuse and domestic refuse collected from boats and ships for subsequent conveyance to and disposal at disposal sites. Audit's site inspections in July and August 2020 found that there was no daily transportation of marine refuse from 2 MRCs to disposal sites, and another MRC was not in operation with its lifting appliance for unloading marine refuse found to be out of order.

PART 4 of the Report examines other issues relating to the tackling of marine refuse.

In November 2012, the then Inter-departmental Working Group on Clean Shorelines was set up to enhance the collaboration among relevant government departments to address marine refuse problem. In May 2016 and January 2017, the Chairman of the Working Group invited MD to consider arranging officers to take enforcement actions in plain clothes to increase the deterrent effect. However, of the 280 anti-marine littering operations in 2019, 270 (96%) were conducted by MD's officers in uniform.

In May 2019, MD informed the Legislative Council that a trial run of floating booms was planned to commence in 2019-20 to tackle the issue of marine refuse by intercepting floating refuse in waters causing no obstruction to vessel traffic. However, up to August 2020, MD had not yet commenced the trial run.

In the light of the above audit findings, Audit has made recommendations to MD accordingly.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.