

Revenue Bill 1999

Submission to the Bills Committee on Revenue Bill

10th Jun 1999

The Council of the British Medical Association (Hong Kong Branch), an Association with 300 doctor members in Hong Kong, strongly supports the proposed legislation to increase the fine for polluting vehicles to \$HK 5,000, rather than merely increasing the current fine of \$HK 450 in line with inflation. The main reasons are as follows.

Pollution in Hong Kong is evidently an increasing problem, and a major component of this comes from smoky vehicles, especially diesel vehicles that are responsible for some 80% of the road miles driven. The resulting pollution affects our health (especially the health of our airways) and quality of life as reflected in the pleasantness of the environment. It poses a significant health hazard and health burden on the community.

Many of these vehicles are currently maintained by small back-street garages doing cut price jobs, and merely to the minimum standard necessary for the vehicle to be drivable. This is much less than the standard needed in order to minimise the emission of black smoke from the exhaust system, which requires regular servicing of the vehicle, with checking and cleaning of the exhaust system and regular changing of the air filter. For example, many taxis are driven in two near-continuous shifts, day in and day out, leaving little time or incentive to take the vehicle out of service for the time necessary for maintenance.

Common sense dictates that the product of the fine and the chance of being caught, must substantially exceed the cost of maintaining the vehicle in a non-polluting state and having it off the road for servicing. The fine, coupled with the efforts put in to enforce it, must serve as a deterrent, constraining often reluctant owners to maintain their vehicles in a good state of repair rather than run them until they break down. A larger fine will also help pay for the more inspectors and spotters necessary in order to enforce it.

The responsible taxi and minibus driver will not suffer, because he is already maintaining his vehicle properly. The legislation has to appeal to the lowest common denominator; basically, this amounts to money straight and simple Only if it saves money (and effort) to keep the vehicle non-polluting will the most cynical (who are by definition the worst polluters) do the necessary work on their vehicles.

David C Anderson,
President, British Medical Association (Hong Kong Branch)