

Chapter X : Works

10.1 At the Chairman's invitation, the Secretary for Works (S for W), Mr S S LEE, gave a presentation highlighting the major tasks of the Works Bureau (WB) in 2000-01 (Appendix V-9).

Slope safety

10.2 Pointing out that the general public was very concerned about slope safety and the Government's landslip prevention work plans, Miss CHAN Yuen-han enquired about the number of slopes on which major upgrading or maintenance works would be carried out by the Government in 2000-01 and the location of these slopes.

10.3 The Director of Civil Engineering (DCE) advised that as a long-term Government strategy to improve slope safety, a ten-year extended Landslip Preventive Measures (LPM) Programme had been launched in early 2000. The target annual output under the programme was to upgrade 250 substandard Government slopes and conduct safety screening on 300 private slopes. Regarding the exact locations of the stabilisation works of the substandard Government slopes in 2000-2001, DCE said that the priority programme was being examined by the consultants and the distribution of the slopes to be stabilized was roughly estimated to be 80 slopes on Hong Kong Island, 50 slopes in Kowloon and 120 slopes in the New Territories. On the maintenance of Government slopes, DCE advised that the maintenance responsibility had already been identified and the Geotechnical Engineering Office (GEO) was providing assistance to various departments. GEO also audited the departments' maintenance works and made various suggestions to ensure quality and standard.

10.4 Miss CHAN Yuen-han opined that the Administration should publish its annual work plans on slope upgrading and maintenance with details on the location of slopes involved for easy reference by the general public. Mr Howard YOUNG echoed Miss CHAN's view. In response, S for W advised that currently, the Works Bureau co-ordinated the work on slope safety of various departments while Civil Engineering Department was responsible for the implementation of the expanded LPM Programme and monitoring the performance of various departments in discharging their slope maintenance responsibility. In view of wide public concern on the matter, the Chairman suggested and S for W agreed to consider publishing on a regular basis a consolidated programme on the major slope upgrading and maintenance works

undertaken by various Government departments.

10.5 Noting that a computerized Slope Information System (SIS) had been launched in 1998, and that information in the SIS had also been made available on the Internet since 1999, Mr Howard YOUNG enquired about the utilisation of the two systems. The Administration advised that the average monthly enquiries made through the 14 terminals of the computerized SIS were 43 000 over the last six months while the average number of visitors per month accessing the SIS through the Internet was 1 500. As regards the difference in utilisation between the two, DCE advised that the terminals were widely used by Government departments, consultants, property owners and potential property buyers at present. The main reasons for its popularity might be attributable to its earlier establishment coupled with the assistance given by on-site staff to users. On the other hand, the internet access was only launched in late 1999 and direct enquiries were not catered for at present.

Water supplies

10.6 Noting that the Administration had made a provision of \$67.4 million on water treatment chemicals for 2000-2001, Miss Emily LAU enquired whether the expenditure was necessitated as a result of the deteriorating quality of raw water from Dongjiang. In reply, the Director of Water Supplies (DWS) assured members that treated water supplied to the public was safe for consumption at all times. He advised that chemicals had all along been used for purification in the water treatment process in Hong Kong as in most other places. He also advised that the quality of raw water in terms of ammonia and manganese content had been improving over the past year. As a result, it had enabled the reduction in chemicals used, chlorine in particular, by 10% in 1999-2000 and a further estimated reduction by 3.3% in 2000-01. At Miss Emily LAU's request, DWS agreed to provide information on the water treatment chemicals used and the expenditure on these chemicals over the past 10 years.

10.7 Given the existence of delegated authority of the Financial Secretary to approve supplementary provision for departmental expenses, Miss Emily LAU remarked that members might find it difficult to monitor the increase of expenditure on water treatment chemicals during the year. In view of wide public concern on the issue, the Chairman suggested and the Administration agreed to provide regular reports on the consumption of water treatment

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chemicals and the relevant expenditure to the relevant LegCo Panel for members' information.

10.8 Referring to Report No. 33 of the Director of Audit which stated that the quality of Dongjiang water did not comply fully with the Mainland's 1983 national standard for surface water, Mr LAU Kong-wah pointed out that the Administration should provide clear and sufficient indicators in the Estimates with reference to the parameters and standards adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO) to facilitate control and monitoring by the general public and Members.

10.9 In response, S for W stressed that the Director of Audit in his report had already confirmed that treated water quality in Hong Kong fully complied with the health-related guidelines of the 1993 WHO Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality. He however appreciated members' concern about the quality of raw Dongjiang water and agreed to consider providing relevant information in the Estimates in future. DWS added that publishing water test results against various quality parameters was an international trend and the issue of dissemination of information on water quality would be examined by an independent committee as had been undertaken by the Administration at the Public Accounts Committee.

10.10 Noting that the construction of a closed aqueduct to replace the existing open channel system for conveying water from Dongjiang to Hong Kong was scheduled to commence in June 2000 for completion by the end of 2002, Dr TANG Siu-tong expressed concern that due to rapid economic development in the Mainland, raw water from the main stream of Dongjiang at the intake point might also be subject to pollution as well. He thus enquired whether the Administration had any plan to prevent and control pollution at the intake point in collaboration with the Guangdong authorities.

10.11 In reply, S for W advised that the current quality of raw water from the main stream of Dongjiang at the intake point was graded as meeting the Mainland standards, which were considered acceptable. The closed aqueduct scheme under implementation would effectively prevent pollution of Dongjiang water during transportation to Hong Kong. Meanwhile, various measures were taken by the Guangdong authorities to improve and protect the quality of Dongjiang water. He however concurred that a comprehensive package of measures was required to prevent and control pollution of the Dongjiang River in

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the long term, and indeed, this was one of the six areas of mutual co-operation on environmental protection for which the Government had entered into agreement with the Guangdong Provincial Government as announced by the Chief Executive in his 1999 Policy Address.

10.12 In reply to Mr SIN Chung-kai's enquiry about the volume of water that had been deliberately leaked out due to excessive supply of Dongjiang water, DWS advised that overflowing of water from reservoirs at the end of the wet season had not been recorded so far. As regards the issue of excessive supply of Dongjiang water, he assured members that the Administration would endeavour to incorporate greater flexibility in negotiating for future water supply agreements with the Guangdong Authority. He also remarked that the supply of Dongjiang water had relieved the Hong Kong community from the potential need of water rationing over the years.

10.13 Mr SIN Chung-kai enquired about the leakage rate of the water mains in Hong Kong for 1999 and opined that such information should be included in the Estimates. In reply, DWS advised that the leakage rate was 26.4% for 1999. While this leakage rate was not exceptionally high in comparison to other places, a replacement and rehabilitation programme for ageing water mains was considered necessary to prevent further deterioration of the water supply network. In this respect, the relevant funding proposal had already been approved by the Finance Committee. DWS also agreed to the member's suggestion to include information on leakage rate of water mains in the Estimates in future.

Soil settlement

10.14 Regarding financial provision for tackling problems associated with soil settlement on reclaimed land, in particular the unusual settlement currently found in Tseung Kwan O (TKO), the Director of Territory Development advised that while the costs for control of soil settlement in individual reclamation projects were provided for in the respective approved project estimates, a financial provision from the Block Allocation of the Capital Works Reserve Fund had been approved for the investigations into the unusual settlement recorded in TKO. He further advised that a preliminary investigation on the unusual settlement in TKO had been completed and the report was being examined within the Administration. The Administration planned to brief Members on the preliminary investigation

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results before end of April 2000.

Job opportunities created by public works projects

10.15 On job opportunities arising from implementation of public works projects, S for W advised that some 24 000 new jobs would be created as a result of the commencement of 200 public works contracts and consultancy agreements in 2000. These contracts and agreements amounted to some \$33 billion. The 24 000 new jobs would comprise professional, technical and various other positions. At Dr NG Ching-fai's request, the Administration agreed to provide a breakdown of these 24 000 new jobs by job types and an estimate on the number of man-years these 24 000 jobs would represent.

10.16 Miss CHAN Yuen-han opined that priority should be given to local workers in filling the new jobs and enquired whether Government's works contracts would include conditions to require contractors to give priority to local workers. Mr HO Sai-chu also enquired about relevant policies and measures to enable local professionals and managerial personnel to benefit from the new job opportunities.

10.17 In reply, S for W advised that the existing legislation already provided that local workers had to be given priority in filling any vacancies in the market and that only those employers who were genuinely unable to find the required number and types of local workers were allowed to import workers for such vacancies. As far as Government projects were concerned, conditions were already included in the works contracts to require contractors to abide by relevant legislation in the employment of workers for delivery of the projects. As regards the employment of professionals and managerial personnel, S for W advised that according to his understanding, the employment of expatriate professionals and managerial personnel by local employers was subject to relevant immigration legislation and policies.

Consultancy services engaged by Architectural Services Department

10.18 Noting that the number of outsourcing projects in the Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) was reduced from 32% in 1999-2000 to 23% in 2000-2001, Mr Edward HO enquired about the reason for the reduction. He also

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requested the Administration to provide further information on the estimated expenditure on consultants' fees to be incurred by ArchSD in 2000-01. The Director of Architectural Services advised that the reduction in consultancy services to be engaged by ArchSD in 2000-01 was mainly attributable to the department's efforts to absorb more consultancy work to achieve savings and the increased proportion of school projects and security-related building projects for which ArchSD had the required expertise and experience to provide input on design and construction supervision. He undertook to provide the information as requested by Mr HO after the meeting.