

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

LC Paper No. CB(1) 696/99-00  
(These minutes have been seen  
by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/EA/1

**LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs**

**Minutes of the special meeting**  
**held on Thursday, 25 November 1999 at 10:45 am**  
**in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

**Members present** : Hon Christine LOH (Chairman)  
Hon HUI Cheung-ching (Deputy Chairman)  
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP  
Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP  
Prof Hon NG Ching-fai  
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong  
Hon CHAN Wing-chan  
Dr Hon LEONG Che-hung, JP  
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, JP  
Hon LAU Kong-wah  
Hon Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP  
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP  
Hon CHOY So-yuk

**Members absent** : Hon Margaret NG  
Hon Ronald ARCULLI, JP  
Hon WONG Yung-kan  
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo  
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP

**Non-Panel Member** : Hon NG Leung-sing  
**attending**

Action

**Public officers attending : Planning, Environment and Lands Bureau**

Mr Kim SALKELD  
Deputy Secretary (Environment) for Planning, Environment and Lands

Mrs Philomena LEUNG  
Principal Assistant Secretary (Environment) for Planning, Environment and Lands

**Environmental Protection Department**

Mr Rob LAW  
Director of Environmental Protection

Mr Benny Y K WONG  
Assistant Director (Waste & Water)

**Drainage Services Department**

Mr John COLLIER  
Director of Drainage Services

Mr Raymond CHEUNG  
Deputy Director of Drainage Services

**Clerk in attendance :** Mrs Mary TANG  
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)6

**Staff in attendance :** Ms Rosalind MA  
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)9

---

**I. Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme**  
(LC Paper No. CB(1)412/99-00(01))

The Deputy Secretary(Environment) for Planning, Environment and Lands (DS/PEL) briefed members on the content of the information paper. The paper was prepared in response to members' concerns raised at the special Panel meeting held on 28 October 1999. It covered areas on the composition of the international review panel

Action

(IRP), community participation in the review process and the extent to which Stage I of the Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme(SSDS) would be subject to review. He pointed out that the scope of the proposed review was quite different from the previous one conducted in 1994-95. The previous IRP was asked to examine the work of the Government's consultants and determine the environmental acceptability of the recommended strategy. As for the proposed review, the panel would be asked to consider alternatives to the recommended strategy, including distributed treatment systems and such other alternatives as might be put forward by the community. The review process would be highly transparent and all meetings would be conducted publicly. Moreover, all interested parties would be given the opportunity to express their views and to receive all related information available to the IRP during the process of the review.

2. The Chairman said that she had received a joint letter from the green groups addressed to all Panel members expressing their views on the SSDS. Copies of the letter were tabled for members' information.

*(Post-meeting note : the letter was circulated to all Panel Members under LC Paper No. CB(1)457/99-00 on 26 November 1999)*

Composition of the IRP

3. Regarding the composition of the IRP, Mr Martin LEE suggested that the membership of the IRP should be expanded to include a town planner, an economist, an expert on biological nutrient reduction, Legislative Councillors and members of the Advisory Council on the Environment (ACE). He agreed with the Administration's decision of not appointing Prof HARREMOES to the IRP in view of his commercial link with the civil engineering contractor who was engaged in the arbitration case with the Government. Mr CHAN Wing-chan also considered that possible conflict of interest should be avoided. Mrs Sophie LEUNG, Dr LEONG Che-hung and Prof NG Ching-fai shared Mr LEE's view on the need for expansion of membership of the IRP to include more local experts in other fields in addition to the engineering field. Prof NG further proposed that a marine biologist should be invited to the IRP.

4. Regarding the possible perceived conflict of interest on the part of Prof HARREMOES, DS/PEL informed members that the Administration had received an explanatory letter from him and this would be forwarded for members' information after the meeting. The Director of Environmental Protection (DEP) added that the Administration could consider expanding the membership if members so wished. However, it would be undesirable for the IRP to have a large number of members as it was not a working group for development of a new scheme but rather a panel to review the existing scheme and to consider possible alternatives.

Action

(*Post-meeting note* : the English and Chinese version of the letter from Prof HARREMOES were circulated to members under LC Paper Nos. CB(1)486/99-00 and 537/99-00 respectively)

Admin. 5. Miss Emily LAU commented that the Administration should consider the need for introducing preventive measures against conflict of interest in the appointment of experts or members to review panels. She expressed reservation on the recommendation of appointing the two experts who had participated in the previous review in 1994-95. The objectivity of these two experts might be undermined by their previous involvement in the 1994-95 review. Mr HUI Cheung-ching shared Miss LAU's view and remarked that it would be preferable for the IRP to have a completely different membership from the previous one to ensure objectivity of the IRP.

6. DS/PEL reiterated that the scope of the new IRP was different from the previous one in 1994-95. It would consider alternatives to the present proposal instead of focusing on the recommendation by the Government and the work of the consultant as in the previous review. Therefore, involvement in the previous review should not affect the objectivity of the two experts in the new review. Moreover, these experts had high international standing and were well respected in their field. It would be inconceivable that they would compromise their professional standing by not giving their best independent advice. As to the control measures against conflict of interest, DEP said that members of the review panels were requested not to use the information made available to them during the review for any other purposes. He added that the appointment of members from the previous review panel would enable continuity in their work and facilitate the discussion of the new panel. Noting members' concerns and suggestions on the composition of the IRP, the Administration undertook to review the composition and report to members at the next meeting.

Admin.

Role of the local Chairperson

7. Mr Martin LEE raised objection to the proposal of appointing the Chairman of the LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs as Chairperson for public consultation meetings in the new review. He opined that the Environmental Affairs Panel should assume the role of supervising the work of the IRP and it would be inappropriate for the Panel Chairman to be involved in leading the discussions of the public consultation, which would be perceived as part of the review. Dr LEONG Che-hung shared his view. DEP explained that the proposal was made in order to ensure a transparent and fair review process. The Administration planned to make progress reports on the review to this Panel and the ACE. Moreover, an information paper for public consultation would be prepared when the IRP had made its recommendations. The responses from the public consultation and the feedback by the Administration would be presented to this

Action

Panel for consideration before making a decision on the way forward for SSDS.

Suspension of Stage I works

8. Mr Martin LEE suggested that where necessary, the works in Stage I should be stopped. As the causes of the unusual site settlement in the new reclaimed area in Tseung Kwan O had yet to be established, it would be advisable to stop works in Stage I until the results of the investigation were available. Given that there was a possibility that the deep tunnelling method for transporting sewage would be abandoned, the further continuation of Stage I works would not only constrain the review by the IRP but also take the risk of spending more money on a method which might later be radically revised. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong concurred and added that if the Administration was open-minded on the result of the review and was prepared to make alterations to the Stage I works, it should suspend Stage I works until the outcome of the review was available.

9. Miss CHOY So-yuk supported the suspension of Stage I works on the grounds that while the underlying cause for the unusual site settlement was not confirmed, further excavation of tunnels in other areas might pose threats to the residential buildings there. She was particularly concerned about the developed urban areas like To Kwa Wan and Mongkok. She said that Stage I works should only be resumed when the investigation report on the Tseung Kwan O site settlement was completed and assurance could be given that the excavation of deep tunnels would not cause site settlement in other areas.

10. The Director of Drainage Services (DDS) explained that there had been a number of achievements in sewage treatment brought about by the Stage I works so far. The sewage treatment plant at the Stonecutters Island was under operation and treating sewage from West Kowloon which constituted 25% of the designed flow. The plant had a capacity of treating 1.7 million cubic meter of sewage per day which could serve a total population of 3.5 million. It was working at a higher standard than originally designed. 70% of the seven tunnels had been completed and with the completion of the remaining 30%, sewage from East Kowloon and Chai Wan would also be collected for treatment at the Stonecutters Island Sewage Treatment Works. Significant improvements to the environment could be achieved as a result. At present, there were 240 workers on shift on a 24-hour basis engaging in the excavation of the four tunnels yet to be completed. Progress had been encouraging and it was expected that all works in Stage I could be completed by mid 2001. Suspension of Stage I works would not only involve compensating claims from contractors, but would also involve costs in restarting the works in the case of resumption of Stage I. Therefore, it would be a more desirable option to continue with the Stage I works and benefit from the environmental improvement instead of suspending the works pending the result of the review. In the event that a decentralized sewage disposal scheme was recommended by

Action

the IRP, the tunnels could still be used for transporting sewage.

11. DEP supplemented that the suspension of works pending the review results of the IRP would be undesirable, given that there were obvious benefits which would be brought about to the environment by the completion of the Stage I works. As the review process would take about 12 months to complete and there would be lead time for restarting the works, the suspension of works would delay the improvement for a few years. In view of members' concerns, he undertook that the Administration  
Admin. would ask the IRP to consider the need for suspension of Stage I works at the earliest possible stage of the review.

Problem of site settlement

12. As to members' concern over the problem of site settlement affecting housing estates in Tseung Kwan O, DDS pointed out that there had been misunderstanding on the deep tunnelling strategy. The deep tunnels could provide channels for transporting sewage underground without causing disturbance to the road surface of the urban areas. For the tunnel leading from To Kwa Wan to Stonecutters Island, it had traversed the built up areas of To Kwa Wan, Ho Man Tin and Mongkok and in particular, the MTRC and KCRC lines at the central part of urban Kowloon. The Administration had been monitoring ground settlement at hundreds of survey stations and had not recorded any settlement of measurable magnitude. He assured that the Administration had imposed very stringent requirement on the amount of groundwater allowed to enter into the tunnels during excavation of tunnels underneath developed areas.

13. DDS further said that excavation work for the tunnel from Tseung Kwan O to Kwun Tong had been completed. It was observed that heavy water inflows into the tunnel did occur especially when the tunnel was underneath the Tseung Kwan O Bay. The location was about one kilometre away from the Tseung Kwan O Town Centre where surface settlement was greater than expected. Investigation on the cause of the unusual site settlement was being carried out and would take around four months to complete. Whilst there was insufficient information at this time to conclude that water inflow into the tunnel was contributing to this settlement, it was considered prudent to halt the inflow of groundwater into the tunnel. Accordingly, the lining of the tunnel at locations with relatively heavy inflow would be carried out in advance of the scheduled programme.

14. Members noted that the problem of site settlement at Tseung Kwan O would be discussed at a joint meeting of the Panel on Housing and the Panel on Planning, Lands and Works on 6 December 1999. The Administration would present an information paper on the issue at the meeting. Upon members' request, DDS undertook to provide a report on the assessment and monitoring of ground settlement  
Admin. in respect of tunnelling works of the SSDS Stage I.

Action

(*Post-meeting note*: the report was circulated for members' information on 3 December 1999 under LC Paper No. CB(1) 531/99-00)

15. Ir Dr Raymond HO indicated his preference for a decentralized sewage treatment strategy. He said that he did not agree with the proposal of suspending the works of Stage I. As the suspension would involve claims for compensations from the contractors and workers, it would be more desirable to carry out the works as scheduled. He said that site settlement did occur in previous underground constructions, for example, the construction of the Mass Transit Railway did have an effect on the Legislative Council Building. In relation to the lining of the tunnels, he sought clarification on the methods used and whether the lining works were included in the cost estimates of the Stage I works. DDS responded that for the remaining four tunnels of which excavation had not yet completed, lining was done in two of the tunnels when the excavation proceed. The other two tunnels would be lined after the excavation had been completed. The cost for lining the tunnels was included in the estimate budget for Stage I. Therefore, no additional cost would be involved in this regard except for that associated with the out-of-sequence work to line the "wet" section first.

Scope of review by the IRP and possible implications on Stage I works

16. Miss Emily LAU opined that there might not be the need for a second review if the scope of the review in 1994-95 was not confined to the recommendations of the Government and the work of its consultants only. She expressed concern over the possible modifications to the Stage I works in case the IRP recommended an alternative to the present centralized treatment strategy. Mr CHAN Wing-chan shared her concern and sought information on the possible modifications to the Stage I works anticipated by the Administration. DS/PEL said that the IRP might consider the following issues in the review:

- (a) whether the sewage flow from Hong Kong island should be provided with a separate treatment system or should it be included in the same centralized system as in the original design;
- (b) whether the level of treatment provided for the sewage flow under the Stage I works should be upgraded;
- (c) whether additional treatment facilities should be provided for distributed treatment of sewage.

17. DEP supplemented that the Administration had no intention to impose any constraint on the review by the IRP. In the case that the IRP recommended a

Action

decentralized system, there would be substantial changes to Stages II to IV but the facilities constructed under the Stage I project would not be abandoned and could still be used for transportation of sewage from West and East Kowloon for treatment at the Stonecutters Island Sewage Treatment Works. In response to Dr LEONG Che-hung's enquiry on what the Administration would do in case the IRP recommended the complete abandoning of the Stage I facilities, he said that this was a rather unlikely recommendation and the IRP would have to provide very strong arguments to back up their recommendation and to get the support of Members of the Legislative Council.

18. In view of members' concern over the possible impact of the IRP's recommendations, the Administration was requested to provide information on the implications on the subsequent stages of the SSDS should there be major alterations Admin. to Stage I works.

19. Concluding the discussion, members agreed that the subject on SSDS would be further discussed at another Panel meeting and the interested green groups would be invited to the meeting to present their views. Members would be informed of the date of the meeting in due course when the Administration had prepared its response to the concerns and requests raised by members at this meeting.

*(Post-meeting note: the subject on SSDS would be discussed at the Panel meeting on 20 December 1999.)*

**II. Any other business**

20. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:25 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat  
30 December 1999