

Chapter X : Works

10.1 At the Chairman's invitation, the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (SETW), Dr Sarah LIAO, briefed members on the work of the Works Branch and Works Departments of the Environmental, Transport and Works Bureau (ETWB) in 2003-04 (Appendix V-9).

Water supply to remote villages

10.2 Members noted that 39 remote villages in the New Territories (NT) had not yet been provided with metered water supply. While 20 of these villages would be provided with metered water supply progressively within the next two years, the Administration had no programme to provide metered water supply to the remaining 19 villages. Dr TANG Siu-tong enquired about the measures to be taken by the Administration to ensure that the quality of the existing water sources (stream water and ground water) for the remaining 19 villages would be in compliance with the World Health Organization Guidelines for Drinking-water Quality. Mr WONG Yung-kan shared the concern and urged the Administration to closely monitor the quality of the existing water sources in these remote villages, and to duly inform the residents of the villages and the visiting public of the suitability of the water sources for human consumption.

10.3 The Director of Water Supplies (DWS) replied that a detailed study on water supply schemes to remote villages had been conducted by the Administration. While it was technically feasible to provide treated water through the water distribution network to the 19 villages, the construction cost for the water distribution facilities was very high. Given that population in these villages was very small, the study recommended that the implementation programme for supplying metered water to these remote villages should be postponed to a more favourable time when development took place near these villages rendering the provision of metered water supply more economical. The Water Supplies Department (WSD) had also considered the use of water boats to supply treated water to some of these villages. SETW said that Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and WSD had a comprehensive programme for monitoring the quality of raw water, and she assured members that quality of stream water and ground water in remote villages would be subject to stringent testing and monitoring by FEHD and WSD.

10.4 Mr WONG Yung-kan suggested that the Administration should properly label the water sources in remote villages and other countryside areas to indicate to the public whether the water sources were suitable for human consumption. SETW agreed to consider Mr WONG's suggestion.

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10.5 Ms Emily LAU referred to the exposed water mains laid at some country parks and commented that the exposed water mains had destroyed the nice scenic setting of the country parks. She thus enquired whether the water mains to be laid for the 20 remote villages would be laid underground. DWS advised that about 80% of the water mains would be laid under ground while the others would be exposed mains. He explained that some water mains in the rural areas could not be laid under ground or underneath hill slopes due to topographical constraints such as the presence of hilly slopes and river streams. In reply to Ms LAU's enquiry about the cost difference between exposed water mains and underground water mains, DWS said that there was no significant cost difference in main-laying works. Nevertheless, provision of underground water mains would require higher maintenance cost as it would be necessary to arrange staff to detect water leakage on a regular basis. Water leakage from exposed water mains could be identified more easily by government departments or the public.

10.6 Ms Emily LAU opined that conservation of the countryside should be an important factor for deciding whether water mains should be laid above or under ground. DWS assured members that water mains for new water distribution systems in rural areas would be laid under ground as far as practicable. For exposed water mains already laid in rural areas, WSD had conducted site inspection with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) to consider installing underground water pipes as a replacement where needed and practicable.

10.7 SETW said that the Administration would strike a balance among a number of factors in considering the best approach to take forward public works projects. In some circumstances, a more cost-effective approach was to reduce the visual impact of exposed water mains through beautification works rather than installing underground water mains. ETWB would give more thoughts on this aspect under its greening programmes.

Water leakage

10.8 In reply to Ms Emily LAU's enquiry, DWS advised that the overall water distribution system covered about 7 000 kilometres (km), of which 3 000 km was over 30 years. The average life span of water mains ranged from 25 to 50 years depending on the type and quality of pipe materials. A study on these 3 000 km aged water mains had revealed that about 30% to 40% of them could be reinforced for further use by adding protective lining while the remaining 60% to

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70% should be replaced by new water mains. The Administration was undertaking a 20-year water mains replacement and rehabilitation programme covering about 3 000 km of water mains to reduce the overall leakage rate in the territory from 25% to 15%. Ms LAU asked the Administration to translate the leakage levels into dollar terms. DWS advised that on the basis that the average cost of water per cubic metre was about \$4, the reduction in water leakage from 25% to 15% would save an equivalent of about \$400 million each year. Notwithstanding that, leakage from water mains was unavoidable all over the world. It would be an achievement for a country to maintain a leakage rate of water mains not exceeding 20%.

10.9 Ms Emily LAU considered it too long to take 20 years to reduce the leakage rate to 15% and asked if any interim measures would be taken by the Administration to reduce water leakage. SETW assured members that maintenance works for water mains were carried out on a routine basis and reference had been made to overseas countries on the latest technology and methods to achieve the best results. She also said that the progress of the 20-year rehabilitation and replacement programme had so far been satisfactory.

Re-engineering of the Architectural Services Department

10.10 Referring to the Architectural Services Department (ArchSD)'s plan to outsource 90% of its new projects within seven years, Mr LAU Ping-cheung enquired about the staff arrangements as he recalled that the Administration had undertaken to explore all possible options to ensure that the best arrangements would be offered to staff affected by the re-engineering programme.

10.11 The Director of Architectural Services (D Arch S) replied that the inter-departmental working group comprising relevant Heads of Grades and Departments had explored the possibility of staff redeployment to other government departments for which projects were being undertaken by ArchSD. The progress was unsatisfactory as most government departments found it difficult to absorb additional staff given their stringent budgets. The working group had looked into other alternatives such as providing retraining for surplus staff to take up new jobs in ArchSD and other departments. For 2002-03 and 2003-04, the number of surplus staff was small due to the expanded programme of minor works scheduled for completion in these two years. D Arch S assured members that the Administration would continue to explore various possible staff arrangements for surplus staff affected by the re-engineering programme.

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10.12 In response to Mr LAU Ping-cheung's further enquiry, D Arch S advised that ArchSD would strengthen its monitoring role in delivering and maintaining public building projects. ArchSD would also strengthen its regulatory role on government buildings similar to the functions performed by the Buildings Departments for private buildings. ArchSD would also expand its role in development and research and work with the industry to promote higher standards in construction, site management and safety in accordance with the recommendations of the Construction Industry Review Committee. Some surplus staff could thus be absorbed by the new jobs arising from these new initiatives.

Environmental and ecological studies

10.13 Noting that the Civil Engineering Department would be undertaking five environmental and ecological assessments and studies related to marine mud disposal in 2003-04, Mr WONG Yung-kan was concerned how the Administration would ensure that the assessment approach would be acceptable to the fishery industry to avoid the recurrence of disputes between the Government and mariculturists as in the case of the dredging works for the Penny's Bay development. The Director of Civil Engineering advised that the Administration would consult the mariculturists concerned and the fishery industry associations on the assessment approach. SETW pointed out that contractors would be required to comply with the statutory requirements to minimize the impact of dredging works on the marine environment. While it was not possible for mud dredging works not to have any impact on the marine environment, there were provisions under the relevant legislation for parties who had suffered losses as a result of mud dredging and disposal works to seek compensation.

10.14 Mr WONG Yung-kan said that he was particularly concerned about the impact of mud dredging and disposal works on the habitats of Chinese White Dolphins. SETW said that the conservation of Chinese White Dolphins was a priority concern of the Administration. AFCD had taken a number of measures to protect the habitats of Chinese White Dolphins such as designation of the waters frequented by Chinese White Dolphins as marine parks. She assured members that the Administration would continue to closely monitor the impact of mud dredging works on Chinese White Dolphins.

Progress of the Central-Wanchai Bypass

10.15 Ms Miriam LAU expressed concern about the lack of progress of the Central-Wanchai Bypass project and further delay to the project caused by a related judicial review case. The Director of Territory Development said that the Central-Wanchai Bypass was now at its detailed design and site investigation stage and was scheduled for completion by 2012. The issue of whether the Town Planning Board's approval for the proposed reclamation under the Wanchai Development Phase II project was in breach of the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance (Cap. 531) was under judicial review at present. As far as he knew, a hearing on the case had been scheduled for mid April and the Administration hoped that a ruling on the case would be available in May 2003. SETW assured members that the Administration would expedite the project as early as practicable. The present delay was however beyond the control of the Administration.

Greening policy and programmes

10.16 Ir Dr Raymond HO asked whether additional resources would be allocated by the Administration for beautification works at priority sites such as along waterfronts footbridges. The Permanent Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (Transport & Works) (PSETW) advised that a Steering Committee on Greening chaired by him had been established to formulate the overall greening strategy and to oversee the implementation of greening programmes. The Steering Committee and its four sub-committees had been focusing on three major areas of work, namely, enlisting community support for greening activities, formulating standards and guidelines for greening and proper preservation of trees for works departments and the private sector to follow and drawing up works programmes on greening. For 2003-04, the Administration planned to plant about 15 million trees/plants, of which about 10 million would be planted in urban areas. A register of old and valuable trees would be compiled to afford them proper maintenance and protection.

10.17 Ir Dr Raymond HO enquired whether the Administration would provide resources and work with owners of private buildings on the greening of private slopes. PSETW replied that the Administration considered that at the present stage, it was more practicable to encourage owners of private buildings to promote greening and bring about improvements to their buildings through publicity programmes.

Environmental-friendly features in the design for new building projects

10.18 Ms Emily LAU questioned the reason for not including noise mitigation measures as one of the environmental-friendly features to be incorporated by ArchSD in new building projects in 2003-04. D Arch S replied that the environmental-friendly features referred to in the policy programme of "Facilities Development" of ArchSD were additional measures other than those taken in compliance with statutory requirements. He assured members that noise was a major planning parameter governed by the relevant statutory requirements under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance (Cap. 499) and the Town Planning Ordinance (Cap. 131). Where possible, new buildings would be built at a certain distance away from road traffic and the layout of new buildings would be designed to minimize traffic noise nuisance to occupants. Noise mitigation measures such as installation of noise barriers would be resorted to where the above measures were not practicable and the noise level exceeded the relevant statutory limit.

