

立法會
Legislative Council

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Panel on Environmental Affairs

**Minutes of special meeting held on
Tuesday, 14 January 2003, at 2:00 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon CHOY So-yuk (Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan (Deputy Chairman)
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Dr Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS, JP
Hon LAU Ping-cheung
- Non-Panel Members attending** : Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
- Members absent** : Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-yee, JP
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
- Public officers attending** : Environment, Transport and Works Bureau

Dr Sarah LIAO
Secretary

Mrs Rita LAU
Permanent Secretary (Environment)

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Mr Donald TONG
Deputy Secretary (Environment)1

Mr Thomas CHOW
Deputy Secretary (Environment)2

Clerk in attendance : Miss Becky YU
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)1

Staff in attendance : Ms Pauline NG
Assistant Secretary General 1

Mrs Mary TANG
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)2

Miss Mandy POON
Legislative Assistant 4

I. Briefing by the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2003
(Progress Report on Policy Objectives (2001)
The 2003 Policy Address
LC Paper No. CB(1) 705/02-03(01) —Paper provided by the Administration)

The Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (SETW) briefly introduced the key environment initiatives of the Government in the next 18 months by highlighting the salient points in the Administration's paper.

2. Referring to the Progress Report on Policy Objectives (2001) in respect of the Environment portfolio, Ms Cyd HO noted that there were 11 items that were behind schedule and 11 items which were under review. She requested the Administration to provide the updated timetable for the items. While agreeing to provide the information as requested, SETW advised that the some of the delay was beyond control, and that the Administration was making up the lost time for items which fell behind schedule. It would also take time to assess the items under review.

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Improving air quality

3. Ms Emily LAU noted with concern the poor air quality in Hong Kong which was getting worse in these few days. She enquired whether the targets for improvements in air quality set out by the former Secretary for the Environment and Food in her policy objectives for 2001 would be adhered to and the time frame for the improvements to take effect. In response, SETW said that the Administration

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attached great importance to improving air quality and was committed to achieving the targets as pledged. Improvements made over the years had been evidenced by the compliance with air quality objectives most of the time. However, there were often some “episodic days” in a year when low pressure slowed down air movement such that pollutants could not be blown away, thereby resulting in deteriorating air quality. Poor air quality was also common during the typhoon season when low pressure set in. She added that emissions from Southern China also affected the ambient air pollution in Hong Kong. To address the ambient air pollution in the Pearl River Delta Region, the Administration had conducted a joint study with the Guangdong Provincial Government which had identified that one of the major air pollution sources in the region was emissions from power plants. However, as a process of deregulation of power plants was being taken place in Guangdong, it would take time to implement the recommended improvement measures.

4. The Permanent Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (PSETW) supplemented that in the light of the findings of the joint study, both the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government and the Guangdong Provincial Government had agreed to reduce, on a best endeavour basis, the regional emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, respirable suspended particulates (RSP) and volatile organic compounds by 40%, 20%, 55% and 55% respectively by 2010, using 1997 as the base year. The HKSAR Government had been implementing measures to reduce emissions with good progress and it was expected that RSP and nitrogen oxide emissions from motor vehicles would be reduced by 80% and 30% respectively by end-2005. She added that the pilot scheme on emissions trading would be implemented separately and would be additional to the existing measures to reduce emissions.

5. While supporting the need to integrate with the Pearl River Delta Region and to facilitate boundary crossings, Ms Cyd HO was concerned about the disparity in vehicle standards between Hong Kong and the Mainland. These included, among others, differences in vehicle emission standards, noise control and other vehicle requirements such as use of safety belts. Given that the Shenzhen Western Corridor was expected to be completed soon, Ms HO considered it necessary for the Administration to seek co-operation from the Mainland authorities in resolving these differences to ensure that the standards in Hong Kong would not be compromised for the sake of integration. SETW said that at present, the Administration was more inclined to control local vehicles and to facilitate boundary crossing. There was still a long way to go in the control of cross-border traffic since the differences in legislation and vehicle standards between Hong Kong and the Mainland had yet to be resolved in the context of the integration process. Notwithstanding, incoming vehicles from the Mainland were subject to stringent requirements.

6. On the replacement of diesel light buses and installation of particulates removal devices on pre-Euro heavy diesel vehicles, Ms Emily LAU expressed concern about the slow progress and asked if this was due to a lack of resources on the part of the Government or co-operation from the trade. SETW advised that the Administration had recently launched an incentive scheme to encourage the replacement of diesel light buses with ones that run on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG)

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and it would take time for the replacement. The Administration would continue to solicit co-operation from the trade. Given the incentives and the lower price of LPG, it was expected that the scheme would be well received.

7. Ir Dr Raymond HO enquired about the progress of the 16 proposals to improve air quality submitted by the joint political parties to the Chief Executive years ago. The Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (Environment)² said that the Administration had earlier provided progress of the proposals to improve air quality which included, among others, control of idling engines, increase in fixed penalty for smoky vehicles, introduction of ultra low sulphur diesel etc. Except for the proposal of setting up a duty-free fuel filling station at the boundary which was considered not attractive given the low fuel price in the Mainland, almost all the proposals had been implemented. To deter the use of illicit vehicle fuel, the Administration had resorted to enforcement action through the introduction of legislative changes. As a result, the amount of duty unpaid fuel seized by the Customs and Excise Department in 2001 had dropped by 83% as compared to 1999. At Ir Dr HO's request, the Administration agreed to provide an updated progress report on the 16 proposals put forward by the joint political parties.

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Waste management

8. On construction and demolition (C&D) materials, Ir Dr Raymond HO noted that there would be no permanent outlet in the next three years for the 24 million tonnes of inert C&D materials. He opined that instead of adopting a passive approach of exporting unwanted C&D materials outside Hong Kong, consideration should be given to encouraging the recycling of these materials such as putting in place a statutory requirement for contractors to segregate C&D materials at source to facilitate waste reduction and recycling. SETW confirmed that the Administration was actively encouraging the recycling of C&D materials. For example, C&D materials from the demolition of Government buildings had been recycled as aggregates for construction projects. Other useful materials such as metals were sorted for recycling purpose. As regards sorting of C&D materials at source, SETW advised that this might be feasible for large construction sites but not for smaller ones due to site constraints. To this end, sorting facilities were being planned adjacent to landfills so that C&D materials could be separated for recycling/reuse. SETW added that the proposed exportation of inert C&D materials outside Hong Kong was in fact a win-win proposal as it would not only serve as a more cost effective way to deal with the excessive inert C&D materials in Hong Kong, but also meet the need for inert C&D materials by many reclamation projects outside Hong Kong.

9. On control of clinical waste, Mr MAK Kwok-fung supported the introduction of the Clinical Waste Control Scheme but pointed out the need to address the concerns raised by clinical waste producers on fees and collection arrangements. SETW advised that legislation on clinical waste control would be introduced within the current legislative session.

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Energy efficiency

10. The Chairman opined that the Administration's policy was not conducive to the operation of the recycling industry. The levying of tax on local production of methanol and ethanol from waste oil was a typical example. She opined that if it was the Administration's intent to encourage waste recycling, measures such as free transport of waste oil to the manufacturers and exemption of tax on the ethanol and methanol so manufactured, similar to that on LPG, should have been put in place. Instead, the Administration had chosen to deliver the waste oil for treatment at the Chemical Waste Treatment Centre, resulting in extra expenses. She questioned the rationale behind such action which was at variance with environmental objectives. In reply, SETW noted that biodiesel manufactured from waste oil was well tried out in many countries. While the Administration welcomed exchanges on the feasibility of introducing alternative fuels in Hong Kong, including biodiesel which was a cleaner fuel, the use of such fuels would be governed by market forces. Notwithstanding, she agreed that the Government could consider allowing tax exemption for biodiesel and in fact, there were local parties who had indicated interest in producing/importing biodiesel in Hong Kong. The Chairman also expressed support for the use of biodiesel which was manufactured on a large scale in Szechuan. She suggested and SETW agreed to consider formulating policies to encourage the switch to biodiesel.

11. Mr LAU Ping-cheung enquired about the possibility of generating renewable energy through incineration of solid waste. SETW clarified that waste incineration was a waste treatment option while generation of renewable energy was a separate issue. The Government's strategy on waste management would continue to accord priority to waste reduction, reuse and recycling. The Government was now examining the 59 submissions received in response to an Invitation for Expression of Interest for building large-scale waste management facilities in Hong Kong. Some of these submissions had included the use of incinerators. Incineration technology had developed to a very high standard whereby if adopted in Hong Kong, emissions would be stringently controlled and were able to comply with environment and health requirements. On Mr LAU's enquiry on Green Island Cement Company's (GICC) Integrated Co-Combustion Cement Production Facility, SETW explained that this was a research project jointly undertaken by GICC and the Department of Chemical Engineering, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and was partly funded by the Innovation and Technology Fund. The purpose of the trial was to test the concept of co-combustion during which energy would be recovered from incineration of domestic waste for the purpose of cement production. PSETW added that GICC was in the process of applying for a Specified Process licence for the proposed pilot plant. The application had to go through a consultation process and factors such as environmental and health implications, levels of emission etc would be examined in detail by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) before a decision on the application was made. Generally speaking, a decision on an application could be reached within a few months.

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Nature conservation

12. While supporting the identification of areas for improvement to better conserve sites of ecological importance, the Chairman expressed concern about the Administration's recent plans in re-zoning low quality agricultural land for low density residential developments as this was at variance with Government's conservation policy. SETW explained that at present, the Administration was working on an ecological database for Hong Kong and developing a scoring system to assess the ecological value of individual sites. The information could facilitate decision on sites that deserved conservation and their priority. In addition, developers and planners would have a better idea on the ecological value of different sites and their potentials for development. She had also been liaising with the Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands regarding the re-zoning proposal. She had been informed that consideration was being made to better utilize those sites which had been left vacant and in ruins over the years (e.g. used as container storage). The Administration had no intention to re-zone all agricultural land of low conservation value for residential purposes. In fact, individual re-zoning proposals regarding the sites referred to had to be examined in detail at the district planning level and no decision had yet been made. Developers wishing to develop such land would have to submit their plans to the Government for consideration. The Chairman stressed the need for the Administration to make clear its conservation policy lest some private owners might attempt to destroy the conservation value of their land so that the land could be re-zoned for residential purposes.

Quality of Dongjiang water

13. Given that vast investment had been put in for the provision of a closed aqueduct for conveying Dongjiang water, Mr LAU Kong-wah asked when and the extent of improvement the aqueduct would bring to the quality of Dongjiang water. He also asked if it was possible for the Administration to negotiate with the Mainland authorities with a view to moving the current water intake point, which was at the lower end of Dongjiang where pollution had already been taken place, upwards to He Yuan so that first grade water from the Xin Feng Reservoir could be provided for Hong Kong and Shenzhen. SETW advised that the closed aqueduct was expected to be completed in the second half of 2003. While the water supplied to Hong Kong was from a clean source at the upper part of Dongjiang, proper treatment was still required to ensure that potable water supplied to consumers met the World Health Organization's standards. If the water intake point were to move upwards to He Yuan, which was quite distant from Hong Kong, a much longer closed aqueduct would have to be constructed. This was not advisable as water conveyed over a long distance in a closed aqueduct would tend to become septic due to chemical changes in an anaerobic environment. Besides, Guanzhou residents would have strong reservations in allowing Hong Kong to tap water from Xin Feng Reservoir which was their own water source. As clean water sources were scarce, SETW emphasized the need to conserve water. Besides, it might not be sustainable in the long run for Hong Kong to rely on Dongjiang as its sole water supply.

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14. On the progress of talks with the Guangdong Provincial Government on the supply and charges for the provision of Dongjiang water, SETW advised that the process was ongoing and an agreement had yet to be reached. She was however pleased to inform members that the Guangdong Provincial Government had agreed to invest \$20 million to protect the water source through the implementation of measures to prevent pollution from industrial and other undertakings.

Environmental education

15. SETW agreed with Mr MAK Kwok-fung on the need to enhance public awareness in respect of environmental protection. She assured members that the Administration and the Environmental Campaign Committee (ECC) would continue their efforts in promoting environmental awareness. PSETW added that publicity programmes on environmental protection were conducted through the concerted efforts of the ECC, District Councils, EPD, Education Department, and schools, with funding from the Environment and Conservation Fund. While there were indications that the public had become more aware of the need for environmental protection, it was difficult to set an objective standard to assess the effectiveness of these programmes.

II. Any other business

16. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 3:06 pm.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
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