

署檔號
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 來函檔號
 YOUR REF: CB(3)/PAC/R42
 電話
 TEL. NO.: (852) 2835 1001
 圖文傳真
 FAX NO.: (852) 2891 2512
 電子郵件
 E-MAIL: Rob_Law@epd.gov.hk

Director of Environmental Protection
 28th Floor, Southern Centre,
 130 Hennessy Road,
 Wanchai, Hong Kong.
 HOMEPAGE: <http://www.info.gov.hk/epd/>



環境保護署署長
 香港灣仔
 軒尼詩道
 一百三十號
 修頓中心廿八樓

18 May 2004

Legislative Council Secretariat
 Legislative Council Building
 8 Jackson Road
 Central
 Hong Kong
 (Attn. : Ms Dora WAI
 c/o Clerk Public Accounts Committee)

Dear Ms Wai,

**The Director of Audit's Report on the
 results of value for money audits (Report No. 42)**

Chapter 3 : Harbour Area Treatment Scheme (HATS) Stage I

Thank you for your letter of 11 May 2004 relaying the follow up question of the Public Accounts Committee. My response is set out below.

The Administration did indeed assess the effects that HATS Stage 1 might have on the water quality of Victoria Harbour. The assessment was conducted by means of a computer based water quality modelling tool and the results were, in fact, broadly in line with the actual observed outcome, taking the harbour as a whole. The water quality at the eastern end of the harbour and the beaches to the east of the harbour has improved dramatically, as predicted. At the western end of the harbour, in the general vicinity of the outfall, it was expected that there would be some deterioration in water quality due to concentrating the treated effluent in this area. This expected deterioration was judged to be acceptable, particularly having regard to the planned temporary nature of the outfall.

However, the small area of the harbour now in question, i.e. in the vicinity of the Tsuen Wan beaches, is hydrodynamically very complex, with several narrow channels through which the water may flow. The model used at the time simply could not deal with such complexity of water movement on such a very fine geographical grid. We were therefore not aware that the expected deterioration in water quality at the western end of the harbour would affect the Tsuen Wan beaches to the extent that has been observed.

Furthermore, as I pointed out at the PAC meeting, there was considerable uncertainty as to the degree of reduction in bacteria that the chemical treatment process might achieve on its own. This, together with the distance between the

outfall and the Tsuen Wan beaches and the fact that the outfall was intended to be only temporary, led us to believe that the prudent course of action would be to await the actual operation of the plant before drawing any conclusions about the need for disinfection, as the cost for this would have been very high.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Law', written in a cursive style.

(Robert J S Law)
Director of Environmental Protection

c.c. Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works
Director of Drainage Services
Director of Audit
Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury
(Attn : Miss Amy TSE)