

*Special Meeting for Panel on Environmental Affairs on 7 July 2004*

## Way forward for the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme (HATS) Stage 2/Findings of the trials and studies relating to HATS Stage 2

Evolving from the previously known Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme (SSDS), the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme (HATS) aims at improving the water quality of Victoria Harbour by collecting, treating and disposing of sewage produced in Hong Kong Island and most of the Kowloon Peninsula. With the completion of HATS Stage I, which includes construction of Stonecutters Island Sewage Treatment Works and a more than 20 kilometres tunnel network in 2001, about 75% of sewage receives primary and chemical enhanced treatment. Nevertheless, more than 450,000 cubic metres of pollutants continue to enter our precious harbour every day.

To achieve the targeted water quality, the Government has proposed HATS Stage II including the extension of the deep tunnel network, an increase of existing chemical treatment capacity, the provision of disinfection and most importantly the biological treatment of all HATS flows. While WWF Hong Kong welcomes the commitment by the Government to improve the water quality in Victoria Harbour, we would also like to highlight the following areas for discussion.

**The Polluter Pays Principle (PPP)**

The concept of PPP is, anyone who causes pollution should pay for the cost of removing it, or provide compensation to those who have been affected by it. WWF supports the principle that all in the community share the communal responsibility for causing pollution. In particular, those who produce large quantities of sewage should bear a bigger burden in treating these pollutants. The government should cautiously assess the current sewage charge system to avoid over-burden of certain polluter categories.

While supporting the heavier polluter should pay more concept, WWF considers the ultimate goal of our community should be the reduction in the production of sewage and consumption of freshwater resources. Although the proposed capacity of the HATS II could handle up to 2.8 million cubic metres of sewage per day, treated effluents still cause adverse impacts to our marine environment. Furthermore, the supply of freshwater from mainland China is not infinite because of the rapid development in the Guangdong cities. Competition for scarce freshwater resources is likely to happen with expansion of these cities.

**Phasing of HATS Stage II**

To construct infrastructure to handle large quantities of sewage produced by Hong Kong, the Government anticipates that huge capital and recurrent costs of some 19 billion dollars will be required for HATS Stage II. It is proposed HATS Stage II should be implemented in 2 phases with the extension of deep tunnels, expansion of chemical treatment and disinfection in Phase IIA, and construction of biological treatment plant in Phase IIB. The consultation paper delineates the timetable of the implementation of Phase IIA with completion by 2008/09. However, no timeframe is provided for Phase IIB, and this brings the question of whether the Government is determined to improve the water quality of Victor Harbour



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Biological treatment, also known as Secondary treatment, has been common recognised as the minimum requirement in sewage progress all over the world. Although chemical treatment and disinfection would improve the quality of effluent, they are commonly viewed as enhancement. Biological treatment removes toxic substances such as ammonia which is highly poisonous to marine life, and greatly reduces Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) which is essential for marine organisms. Chemical treatment may give us clearer water but crystal clear water full of toxic waste is still hazardous to the health of both human and marine life.

The International Review Panel commented the SSDS in 2000 and stressed that the discharge of chemically enhanced primary treatment (CEPT) effluent into waters south of Lamma Island is neither a viable nor a sustainable option. The proposed HATS Stage II without a time frame for Phase IIB (Construction of Biological Treatment Plant) has no great difference from the previous SSDS but only with shorter outfalls within our precious Victoria Harbour!

The cost to remedy the environment impacts is never cheap and a committed and responsible Government should not be deterred by the investment involved and the long-term consequence of ignorance will lead disaster. As such, WWF urges the Government to swiftly schedule the timetable for the construction of Biological Treatment Plant.

In conclusion, WWF welcomes the Government to take a big step to HATS Stage II and supports the principle that the causer of pollution should pay. However, we also urge the Government to swiftly schedule the timetable for HATS Stage II Phase B to further upgrade the quality of treated sewage. Should the dream of reopening of the cross-harbour swimming competition be realised, a full implementation of HATS is necessary.