

立法會
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Panel on Environmental Affairs

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Friday, 21 October 2005, at 9:35 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Hon CHOY So-yuk, JP (Chairman)
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon SIN Chung-kai, JP
Hon WONG Yung-kan, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP

Members attending : Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH

**Public officers
attending** : **For item I**

Environmental Protection Department

Dr Sarah LIAO
Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works

Mr K K KWOK
Permanent Secretary for the Environment, Transport and
Works (Environment)

Dr Mike CHIU
Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (1)

Mr Raymond FAN
Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (2)

Mr Roy TANG
Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (3)

Mr Esmond LEE
Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (4)

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

Staff in attendance : Ms Pauline NG
Assistant Secretary General 1

Mrs Mary TANG
Senior Council Secretary (1)2

Miss Mandy POON
Legislative Assistant(1)4

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I Briefing by the Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works on relevant policy initiatives in the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2005-2006

(The 2005-2006 Policy Address

LC Paper No. CB(1) 24/05-06(01) — 2005-2006 Policy Agenda - Policy Initiatives of the Environment, Transport and Works Bureau)

The Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (SETW) briefed members on the initiatives affecting the environmental portfolio of the Environment, Transport and Works Bureau (ETWB) in the 2005-2006 Policy Agenda by highlighting the salient points in the information paper.

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2. Referring to paragraph 59 of the Chief Executive's Policy Address which stated, inter alia, that "In future all new major government policies will be subject to environmental protection scrutiny", Ms Audrey EU sought elaboration on the difference between environmental protection scrutiny and the existing Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. Ms Emily LAU also enquired about the operation of the environmental protection scrutiny and the number of departments involved in the process. SETW said that the Administration had decided that in future, sustainability and environmental considerations would be taken into account before major policy decisions were made. Such considerations, to be taken at the conceptual stage, would effectively avoid any insurmountable or irreversible impact on the environment. At members' request, the Administration undertook to provide an information note explaining the operation of environmental protection scrutiny, the stage at which new major policies would be subject to the scrutiny process and the number of departments involved.

3. Mr Jeffrey LAM said that the business sector had been very responsive to Government's initiatives to improve air quality and had signed a Clean Air Charter. While the industries had shown their support by adopting environmental practices, he was concerned about the lack of public awareness of environmental protection, and considered that more proactive efforts should be made by the Administration to promote public participation. SETW said that the Administration had been promoting environmental protection through education and publicity programmes. These included a recent prime time television series on waste reduction. While efforts had been made to promote public awareness, it would be up to the general public to incorporate environmental practices in their daily lives. Taking the case of idling engines, the problem could be easily resolved with public participation. The same applied to energy conservation. While it remained a contention as to whether financial incentives or legislation should be introduced to ensure compliance, the implementation of the polluter-pays principle would remind the public that there was a price to pay in protecting the environment.

Local air quality

4. On *respirable suspended particulates* (RSP), Ms Audrey EU noted with concern that the Air Quality Objectives did not set any standard to control emissions of RSP measuring 2.5 micrometres, which could have adverse impact on health according to the World Health Organization (WHO). She was also concerned about the impact of the daily fireworks display at the Disney Theme Park on air quality given its level of RSP emissions and effect on visibility. SETW said that while WHO had raised concerns about RSP emissions measuring 2.5 micrometres, no standard had been set by the WHO nor European countries. Since the setting of standard would involve assessment of a number of health and environmental factors, it would not be appropriate for Hong Kong to set its own standards without considering these factors in full and taking into account overseas experience.

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5. On *vehicle emissions*, Mr WONG Kwok-hing noted that only 50% of the public light buses (PLBs) had been converted to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) models after the implementation of the incentive scheme in August 2002 to encourage the early replacement of diesel light buses with LPG or electric ones. He enquired if there were any plans to encourage more owners of PLBs to take part in the scheme. SETW replied that as the incentive scheme would expire by end 2005, owners of PLBs might prefer to optimize the service span of their vehicles before replacing them. The provision of LPG filling stations was also a factor which owners had to consider in making the switch. In this connection, the Administration had been trying to identify suitable sites for LPG filling stations, but risk assessments had to be carried out taking into account safety concerns. Notwithstanding, the Administration would continue its efforts to encourage the switch to more environmentally friendly models.

6. Mr Albert CHAN said that apart from taxis and PLBs, the Administration should take a step further to promote the use of LPG private cars as in the case of many overseas countries, with a view to further reducing vehicle emissions. He was disappointed that the switch was constrained by the inadequate provision of LPG infrastructure, and considered it necessary for the Administration to work out a time table to resolve the problem in order to facilitate replacement of petrol vehicles with LPG ones. SETW advised that the Administration had been trying hard to identify more sites for use as LPG filling stations but due to the land constraints and stringent requirements on gas safety, suitable locations were difficult to find. In the absence of adequate supporting infrastructure, further switch to LPG vehicles could not be warranted. At present, the Administration was trying to encourage the replacement of the remaining diesel vehicles with more environmentally friendly models. The replacement of petrol private cars with LPG ones would be the last stage since petrol cars did not have as many emission problems as diesel vehicles.

7. The Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (3) supplemented that since the introduction of a package of measures to control vehicle emissions in 1999, a total of 50 LPG filling stations had been installed and six more would come into operation next year. It was estimated about 88 LPG filling stations would have to be provided to cater for the needs of the fleet of 60 000 LPG vans. This was a very arduous task having regard to the land constraints in Hong Kong. A much larger number of LPG stations would be required if all the 250 000 private cars in Hong Kong were to be converted to LPG models. Mr Albert CHAN said that there might be a need to review the requirements for filling stations taking into account the land constraints in Hong Kong.

8. Ms Miriam LAU opined that as a staunch supporter of environmental protection, the Government should endeavour to identify more environmentally friendly motor fuel. She noted that countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Pakistan and India were using buses and trucks which ran on natural gas, and enquired about the studies which the Administration had undertaken in this respect. Mr Albert CHAN also supported the use of more environmentally friendly fuel to reduce vehicle emissions and improve the air quality in the long run. SETW

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said that while natural gas could out-perform LPG in some aspects, it could not be used to run air-conditioned double-decker buses in Hong Kong. Besides, there were site constraints in the provision of supporting infrastructure if natural gas was to be introduced as motor fuel. Nevertheless, the Administration would keep in view the latest developments on environmentally friendly fuel and its applicability to Hong Kong.

9. On *electric and hybrid cars*, Mr WONG Kwok-hing enquired if measures would be taken to promote the use of electric cars having regard to the latest research findings by local tertiary institutions. SETW said that while electric cars were feasible, there were practical difficulties associated with the long charging time and the provision of charging facilities in Hong Kong. The use of hybrid cars, which ran on a combination of petrol and electricity and could be re-charged while running on petrol, would be a solution. The Government would support the use of hybrid vehicles if these could be made available on a commercial scale.

10. Ms Miriam LAU enquired whether further research studies would be conducted on the use of hybrid cars since these would be very useful if they could be re-charged while running on petrol. She also asked if the Government was prepared to provide incentives to encourage the switch to hybrid cars. SETW advised that hybrid cars were viable and no further studies on their feasibility were required. While these cars were commercially available, their supply was limited and unable to meet demand worldwide. Besides, there was only one right wheel driving model in the market. In view of the limited supply, it might not be an opportune time to introduce an incentive scheme to encourage the switch. The situation was expected to change as vehicle manufacturers in the Mainland had been requested to manufacture more hybrid models. Until then, the Administration would consider promoting the use of hybrid cars on a wider scale.

11. On *control on idling engines*, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he had been approached by parents requesting control on idling engines. They were particularly concerned about emissions from idling engines of school buses which lined up to pick their children from school. The problem was more serious in kindergartens and primary schools where younger, shorter children were directly exposed to these emissions. They enquired if there were any other measures to control idling engines for the benefit of younger children.

12. SETW said that there were difficulties in enforcing control on idling engines. She recalled that when the subject was last discussed by the Legislative Council, it was agreed that there should not be any legislative control on idling engines due to strong objections from the transport trades. Besides, there were some parents who preferred school buses to keep the air conditioning on for the comfort of their children. Consideration had also been given to the setting of a temperature below which engines should be switched off, but this had been ruled out since the temperature in Hong Kong was high for most of the year.

13. While recognizing the difficulties in introducing legislation to control idle engines, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that the Administration should at least consider controlling idling engines in school and hospital premises for the protection of younger children and patients who were more vulnerable. Apart from stepping up education and publicity against idling engines, assistance should be sought from the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) in the control of idling engines of school buses through collaboration among school management, bus companies and parent associations. Children could also play an important role in persuading their parents to switch off their engines while waiting. SETW said that there had been discussions on the control on idling engines in school and hospital premises. The Administration would be pleased to liaise with the school authorities in the control of idling engines. The subject could be taken up further by the Environmental Protection Department and EMB.

14. Mr Martin LEE held the view that the present approach adopted by the Administration was not proactive enough. To demonstrate its commitment, the Government should make it clear to the world that improving the air quality was its top priority. It should also take the lead to resolve the air pollution problem. He supported that legislation should be introduced to control idling engines and he was confident this would have the support from the trades. SETW said that the Administration was committed to identifying practicable measures to improve air quality but public support was crucial in implementing these measures, such as the proposed legislation to control idling engines, and the affected trades had to be consulted. She agreed that the measures proposed by Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong to control idling engines in school and hospital premises would be the first step. Apart from control on idling engines, measures were being implemented to control other pollutants such as emissions from power plants.

Regional air quality

15. On *2010 emission reduction targets*, Mr WONG Kwok-hing considered it necessary for the Government to strengthen cooperation with Guangdong to tackle the problem of air pollution in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) Region, particularly the high levels of polluting emissions from power plants in the Region. He said that there was a need for additional measures in order to achieve the emission reduction targets before 2010. Ms Emily LAU added that the public had been very impatient about the long time taken to improve the air quality. They were concerned that the emission reduction targets could not be reached in 2010. Given that a high percentage of emissions in the PRD Region were from industries owned by Hong Kong, she said that action should be taken to request these entrepreneurs to take more proactive measures to reduce emissions. Efforts should also be made to step up enforcement against polluting industries.

16. As 20% of the pollution in the PRD Region originated from Hong Kong and 80% from Guangdong, SETW said that there was a need for cross-boundary cooperation in resolving the problem. To this end, the Hong Kong Special

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Administrative Region Government (HKSARG) and the Guangdong Provincial Government had jointly drawn up the PRD Regional Air Quality Management Plan with a view to meeting the emission reduction targets by 2010. In this connection, HKSARG had introduced progressive measures to control emissions and these had started to yield results. However, long-term efforts were required from both sides to improve the regional air quality. Meanwhile, the Special Panel on PRD Air Quality Management and Monitoring set up under the Hong Kong-Guangdong Joint Working Group on Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection would be following up on the tasks under the PRD Regional Air Quality Management Plan. On engaging manufacturers in cleaner production, SETW said that the Administration had been in discussion with them. She understood that cleaner production could be eligible for tax incentive schemes in the Mainland. The Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (4) (DDEP(4)) supplemented that a consultancy study was being considered to help manufacturers in the PRD Region to adopt cleaner production to reduce emissions through a demonstration project and the provision of technical support. The Guangdong economic and trade authorities had also agreed to participate in the plan.

17. Mr SIN Chung-kai said that the public was eager to know what real improvement had been made to the air quality as a result of the measures taken by the Administration. He enquired if the Administration would provide an undertaking on the perceivable improvements that could be made within a definite timeframe. SETW said that improvements made to the air quality were not readily perceivable but could be reflected by statistical analyses and measurements. Through a package of improvement measures to reduce emissions, the level of nitrogen oxides had been reduced and the air quality as reflected by the Air Pollution Index was also seen to have improved as compared to last year. The message was clear that the efforts made to improve air quality had paid off. As to whether projections on air quality could be made, SETW confirmed that projections had all along been made using computer models and this was in fact how the 2010 emission reduction targets were derived. Based on trends in economic growth and industrial development, it was projected that the emission reduction targets could be reached by 2010 if the planned emission reduction measures were achieved. In response to Mr SIN's request for announcing to the public these projections over a period of say two to three years, SETW said that the computer projections were not so accurate. Each year's projections were subject to fluctuations due to factors such as weather conditions. The provision of inaccurate projections might undermine public confidence. She nevertheless agreed to consider publicizing the projections for the public's reference.

Water quality

18. Referring to the proposed legislative control on non-pesticide hazardous chemicals, Mr WONG Yung-kan was concerned about the pesticide run-off which was polluting the Hong Kong waters. The problem was particularly acute when large amounts of pesticides were used to kill mosquitoes during the breeding seasons. He enquired about the measures taken to tackle the problem. SETW said that under

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the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (the Convention), Hong Kong was obligated to control and regulate persistent organic pollutants consisting of pesticides and chemicals. The pesticides used in Hong Kong were not persistent organic pollutants under the control of the Convention and would not cause long-term damage to the environment.

19. Mr WONG Yung-kan further enquired about the joint efforts made by both Hong Kong and Guangdong in improving water quality which was seen to be deteriorating, particularly at the seabed, as a result of reclamation activities in PRD Region. DDEP(4) explained that the Guangdong Environmental Protection Bureau had attached great importance to the protection of water quality of the Pearl River and a consultancy study on the subject would be conducted. SETW said that in the Administration's dealings with the Guangdong authorities, it would raise the issue of how to reduce the effect of reclamation and introduce its technology.

II Any other business

20. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:40 am.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
24 November 2005