

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
PANEL ON PLANNING, LANDS AND WORKS**

Ground investigation conducted for the Tamar development project

At the meeting of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Planning, Lands and Works on 9 June 2006, some Member expressed concerns about media speculations that the Tamar site might be seriously contaminated. In this regard, we set out below the Government's response and clarifications –

Unfounded media report on alleged enquiry from SEPA

2. There was media report on 7 June that the State Environmental Protection Administration (SEPA) had expressed "grave concerns" about contaminated soil at the Tamar site and approached the HKSAR Government on this issue. The report was totally unfounded and was immediately rebutted by the Government. The HKSAR Government had not received any enquiry or advice from SEPA in relation to the handling of contaminated soil at the Tamar site. SEPA considered the matter entirely an internal affair of the HKSAR Government. SEPA confirmed that they had not expressed any view on the matter. The report is therefore but a fabricated speculation.

Whether there are contaminants in the former seabed of Tamar

3. The current site designated for the Tamar development project was mainly reclaimed under the Central Reclamation II (CRII) project in the 1990s. Before commencement of CRII reclamation, the Government had conducted a detailed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), findings of which showed the presence of heavy metal contaminants including copper and zinc in the seabed soil samples. In the CRII reclamation, general fill materials were used and placed above the former seabed of Tamar. In accordance with the General Specification for Civil Engineering Works promulgated by the Government in 1992, the fill materials did not contain any dangerous or toxic materials or materials susceptible to combustion, rubber, plastic or synthetic materials. Moreover, when the Government

decided to implement the Tamar development project, the Architectural Services Department conducted a ground investigation assessment of land contamination specifically on the Tamar site in 2003. Results of the ground investigation assessment revealed presence of contaminants with traces of heavy metal and organic chemical in the seabed soil samples, but these contaminants can be thoroughly and properly handled and disposed of according to ordinary and established practices. As for the fill material samples, the findings were below the Lower Chemical Exceedance Level, meaning the fill materials contained negligible or nil contamination.

4. In the tender document for the Tamar development project, we will remind tenderers of the existence of the said contaminants. We will also require tenderers to endeavour to propose designs for buildings the underside of which would avoid encroaching upon the former seabed. If the construction method might dredge up some of the contaminants, the contractor must minimise the amount to be excavated, and propose robust and effective disposal plan for dealing with the contaminants. In this connection, the most common way of properly treating the contaminants is the “cement solidification/stabilisation” method, which is to mix contaminants with cement for solidification and then disposal. This treatment method complies with the requirements of international standards.

5. The aforementioned CRII EIA report is an open document, whereas the ground investigation report mentioned above has been included in the documents submitted by the Government to the Subcommittee to Review the Planning for the Central Waterfront (including the Tamar Site) under the PLW Panel for the meeting on 7 March 2006. The allegations that the Government had never conducted any environmental assessment and never submitted relevant information to LegCo are not true.

Speculations on dioxins

6. Dioxins are unintended by-products of industrial and thermal processes involving organic matters and chlorine, formed and released as a result of incomplete combustion or chemical reactions. They are also produced by natural processes such as forest fires and volcanic eruptions. According to expert advice, during industrial processes, normally only massive incineration of waste containing certain types of plastics (for

instance polyvinyl chloride) or similar materials with incomplete combustion would lead to chances of producing large amount of dioxins.

7. The bulk of the Tamar site is reclaimed land, whereas the remaining bit was land formerly used as mechanical repair workshop, helipad and relevant facilities. There is no reason to believe that massive incineration has ever taken place at the Tamar site. Hence, the allegation that there are large amount of dioxins at the Tamar site is not substantiated.

8. The speculation that there is excessive accumulation of dioxins at Tamar site due to its former use as dockyard of the Royal Navy is equally not justified. As a matter of fact, the majority of the land formerly used as maintenance workshop is outside the present Tamar project site area. Furthermore, normal operation of dockyards would not involve massive incineration of chlorinated plastic wastes.

9. The circumstances pertaining to the former Cheoy Lee Shipyard and Tamar site are entirely different. In the former Cheoy Lee case, the existence of dioxin was due to illegal massive incineration of chlorinated plastic materials. It was not a normal activity of the operation of a dockyard. There is no reason for us to believe that massive incineration had ever been carried out in the ship maintenance workshop and helipad in the city centre of Central.

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