

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Submission on “Reduce, Reuse and Proper Waste Management: Progress of the Key Initiatives under the Waste Management Strategy”

INTRODUCTION

The LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs would be holding a discussion on the captioned subject on 26 March 2012 and is seeking views from interested parties. The Advisory Council on the Environment (“ACE”), as the principal advisory body to the Government on policies relating to environmental protection and nature conservation, would like to make this submission in support of the Government’s multi-pronged waste management strategy including the waste reduction and recovery initiatives as well as the waste treatment facilities.

BACKGROUND

2. The ACE has been advising the Government on environmental matters since its inception in January 1994. Under its terms of reference, the ACE is responsible for (i) keeping under review the state of the environment in Hong Kong; and (ii) advising the Government, through the Secretary for the Environment, on appropriate measures which might be taken to combat pollution of all kinds, and to protect and sustain the environment. It also undertakes statutory functions and shall be consulted as part of the statutory decision-making processes under various environment-related legislations including the Environmental Impact Assessment (“EIA”) Ordinance (Cap. 499).

3. The ACE is assisted by the Waste Management Subcommittee (“WMSC”, formerly known as the Waste Subcommittee before April 2006) which is one of the three ACE subcommittees and is formed from among the ACE members to –

- (a) monitor the trends and problems related to the management of solid waste (including municipal solid waste (“MSW”), construction waste and special waste) in Hong Kong;
- (b) study waste reduction measures, including legislation and technologies, that are adopted in overseas economies, and examine their applicability to Hong Kong; and
- (c) advise on possible waste reduction policies and programmes, as well as measures to handle different types of waste.

The ACE, with the support of the WMSC, has been working closely with the Government to ensure that the waste management policy is evolving in tandem with the social development of Hong Kong. Please refer to our website¹ for a full set of records of our past deliberations.

THE MULTI-PRONGED WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

4. At its meeting of December 2005, shortly upon the publication of *The Policy Framework for the Management of Municipal Solid Waste (2005-2014)* (“*The MSW Policy Framework*”), the ACE was briefed on the Government’s plan to tackle our MSW problem during the ten-year period up to 2014 through a holistic approach encompassing various initiatives to achieve waste avoidance and reduction at source, waste recovery and recycling, as well as bulk reduction of waste volume for final disposal.

5. The ACE welcomed the publication of *The MSW Policy Framework*, which showed the Government’s determination in tackling the waste problem facing Hong Kong comprehensively with vision and clearly defined objectives and timetable and strongly supported the initiatives therein². The ACE also conducted an open forum in January 2006 and tasked the WMSC to look into *The MSW Policy Framework*. Taking into account the views collected as well as its own in-depth deliberations, the WMSC endorsed the Government’s proposed initiatives and in particular indicated a keen interest to see early implementation of producer responsibility schemes (“PRSs”), MSW charging, the EcoPark and Integrated Waste Management Facilities (“IWMFs”)³.

6. In January 2011, after the announcement of its specific action agenda which was drawn up after reviewing *The MSW Policy Framework* against the latest developments, the Government also took an early opportunity to brief the ACE⁴. Through the deliberations, Members were fully aware that Hong Kong faced an imminent and serious waste management problem and it required the community’s concerted efforts to tackle the problem. On the specific measures contained in the Government’s action agenda, the ACE supported raising the waste recovery targets to 55% by 2015 and other waste reduction initiatives including PRS and MSW charging. The ACE also agreed to the need of advanced waste treatment facilities for bulk waste treatment and disposal in Hong Kong. Amongst other things, Members discussed at length the issue of food waste and considered it necessary to promote on-site composting as well as setting up more large-scale Organic Waste Treatment Facilities (“OWTFs”) to handle this waste type which formed a significant

¹ www.epd.gov.hk/epd/textonly/english/boards/advisory_council/maincontent.html

² www.epd.gov.hk/epd/textonly/english/boards/advisory_council/files/ACE-131-minutes-web.pdf

³ www.epd.gov.hk/epd/textonly/english/boards/advisory_council/files/ACE-132-minutes-web.pdf

⁴ www.epd.gov.hk/epd/textonly/english/boards/advisory_council/files/ACE-176-minutes-web.pdf

portion of our MSW disposal.

WASTE REDUCTION AND RECOVERY

7. Since January 2011, the ACE (including the WMSC) were briefed on latest development in promoting waste reduction and recovery on four occasions and discussed the Government's proposed way forward on (i) extending the coverage of the Environmental Levy Scheme on Plastic Shopping Bags (Levy Scheme) to all retailers and (ii) introducing a new mandatory PRS for the proper management of Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment ("WEEE"). The ACE also exchanged views on MSW charging which was under public consultation as a policy option for strengthening waste reduction in Hong Kong.

8. In gist –

- (a) the WMSC generally supports the full extension of the Levy Scheme to all retailers and considered that retailers should be allowed to retain the levy so as to obviate the administrative burden to small and medium enterprises⁵.
- (b) the ACE is supportive of the main proposals under the new PRS on WEEE and has offered suggestions that seek to facilitate the collection of locally generated WEEE for local treatment in a cost-effective manner⁶.
- (c) the ACE supports quantity-based MSW charging to be implemented in a phased approach⁷.

ADVANCED WASTE TREATMENT FACILITIES

9. The ACE realizes that notwithstanding the various measures implemented to reduce waste at source, there will still be a substantial amount of waste that cannot be recovered or recycled and has to be properly treated⁸. As a matter of strategy to achieve sustainability, the introduction of advanced waste treatment facilities and the timely extension of the existing landfills are indispensable components in Hong Kong's waste management policy.

10. It is noted that the Government intends to introduce proposals in respect of IWMF Phase I, OWTF Phase I and extension of the three existing

⁵ www.epd.gov.hk/epd/textonly/english/boards/advisory_council/files/29_Minutes.pdf

⁶ www.epd.gov.hk/epd/textonly/english/boards/advisory_council/files/ACE-182-minutes-web.pdf

⁷ www.epd.gov.hk/epd/textonly/english/boards/advisory_council/files/ACE-184-minutes-web.pdf

⁸ www.epd.gov.hk/epd/textonly/english/boards/advisory_council/files/116th_EIASC_minutes.pdf

landfills. Under the EIA Ordinance (Cap. 499), the Director of Environmental Protection (“DEP”) is required to take into account the ACE’s comments, if any, made on EIA reports prior to making a decision on their approval. Operating under the ACE, there is an EIA subcommittee to receive and study EIA reports of designated projects under the EIA Ordinance and to report on its deliberations and findings and make recommendations to the ACE. All of the aforementioned waste treatment projects are designated projects and had gone through the deliberations at the EIA Subcommittee before the ACE endorsed their EIA reports for DEP’s approval⁹. Indeed, the ACE also considered and expressed support for the development of the Organic Waste Treatment Facilities Phase 1.

11. It is noteworthy that in respect of the IWMF Phase 1 project, the ACE had been closely consulted in the early planning stage. Subsequent to the publication of *The MSW Policy Framework* in end 2005, a delegation of the ACE visited the Netherlands and Germany in March 2006 to acquire more understanding about technologies for MSW management and treatment. The ACE later considered in December 2009 the technology review for the IWMF which identified moving grate incineration as the mainstream treatment technology for MSW management facilities worldwide. With the implementation of appropriate mitigation measures, the ACE considered that the environmental impacts of the above projects could be controlled to within the established standards and guidelines.

SUMMARY AND WAY FORWARD

12. With the foregoing, the ACE supports the Government’s multi-pronged waste management strategy including the waste reduction and recovery initiatives as well as the waste treatment facilities. The ACE also supports the Government’s plan to proceed with seeking funding approval for the four waste treatment facilities and looks forward to their early commissioning so as to ensure that adequate waste infrastructure is available in Hong Kong as soon as possible to meet with the challenges posed to the community by the waste problem.

13. Apart from the above, the ACE considers that public education is an indispensable part of the overall strategy to instill change in mindset, lifestyle

⁹ The EIA reports for the four projects were endorsed by the ACE at the following meetings –

- ♦ IWMF Phase I – 117th and 183rd meetings held in April and December 2011
- ♦ OWRP Phase I – 168th meeting held in February 2010
- ♦ Northeast New Territories (“NENT”) Landfill extension – 143rd meeting held in June 2007
- ♦ Southeast New Territories (“SENT”) Landfill extension – 151st meeting held in April 2008
- ♦ West New Territories (“WENT”) Landfill extension – 165th meeting held in November 2009

and behaviour, particularly so in the case of Hong Kong which is a highly consumption-oriented society. Through research and public education and public relations programmes, the Government should seek to induce behavioural changes among our people. There should also be enhanced community involvement through the fostering of closer partnership with various stakeholders such as the trades, non-government organizations and District Councils. Without prejudice to timely actions in a multi-pronged manner to address the imminent waste problem facing Hong Kong, the ACE shall continue work with the Government as well as the community at large in pursuit of sustainable waste management in Hong Kong.

**Presented by Professor Paul Lam
on behalf of the Advisory Council on the Environment
March 2012**