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27 January 2014

Dr Hon LAU Wong-fat, GBM, GBS, JP
Chairman of Panel on Development, Legislative Council
Room 814, Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road, Central, Hong Kong

Dear Dr LAU,

Suspension of Water Supply in Western District on 1 January 2014

With regard to the letter dated 3 January 2014 addressed to you by Dr Hon Kenneth CHAN Ka-lok concerning the suspension of water supply in Western District on 1 January 2014, our reply is as follows:

In the evening of 31 December 2013, the Water Supplies Department (WSD) received the report of a burst involving an 18 inch diameter cast iron fresh water main at 79 Pokfulam Road near the Haking Wong Building of the University of Hong Kong (HKU). The WSD immediately dispatched staff to the scene to shut down the burst water main and carry out emergency repair work. The fresh water supply at High Street and in the area from First Street to Third Street was affected starting from 11:00 pm that night. As the water main burst damaged some 700 square metres of road surface, the Aberdeen-bound carriageway of Pokfulam Road near the Haking Wong Building of HKU had to be closed.

Since there were a lot of public utilities around the burst underground water main, the WSD could only carry out excavation and repairs with light machinery, which affected the progress of the repair work. The WSD thus

estimated at the time that the repair work would be completed by 3:00 pm on 1 January 2014. However, at noon on 1 January 2014, after the section of burst water main was cut off and taken out, the WSD noticed that fresh water was still gushing from inside of the water main. It was due to the two ageing valves in the upstream were not functioning and could not be closed completely. Therefore, the WSD had to turn off the main valve at the Western Fresh Water Service Reservoir to stop the flow before the WSD could lay the new water main and complete the repair work. As a result, the fresh water supply to other buildings in Western District was also affected at 5:00 pm on 1 January 2014. At about 9:00 pm that day, the WSD finished the repair work and resumed water supply. The repair work to the damaged road surface was completed at 5:00 am the next morning, and the road was re-opened, thus avoiding disruption of the traffic on the first working and school day after the holiday.

During the suspension of water supply, the WSD immediately deployed water wagons, water tanks and temporary standpipes to provide fresh water for the affected residents. In addition, the WSD announced the emergency water supply suspension on its website. In view that the area with fresh water supply affected was extended at 5:00 pm on 1 January 2014, it also issued a press release and informed the public of the emergency suspension through the media such as the radio. The WSD also maintained close liaison with the Emergency Transport Co-ordination Centre of the Transport Department to monitor the impact on the traffic.

The water main concerned has been in use for over 30 years and the water main burst was caused by its ageing problem. That section of water main was included in Stage 4 of the Water Mains Replacement and Rehabilitation (R & R) Programme and the works contract commenced in May 2011. To tie in with the programme of the West Island Line project of the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), the replacement works for the water main section concerned were originally scheduled to commence after the completion of the West Island Line in 2014, so as not to hinder the progress of the West Island Line project by the temporary traffic arrangement for the water main replacement works. In light of the incident, the WSD is now negotiating with the MTRCL to explore the feasibility of bringing forward the replacement works for the section of water main to an earlier date. On 16 January 2014,

the WSD also reported to the Food, Environment, Hygiene & Works Committee of the Central and Western District Council on the details of the water main burst incident, the way they handled it as well as the progress of replacement for that water main section.

The WSD launched the programme in 2000 to replace and rehabilitate some 3 000 km of aged water mains in four stages at a cost of about \$ 23.6 billion. The programme was originally scheduled to complete by 2020. However, to improve the water supply system as early as practicable and minimise the inconvenience to the public caused by water main bursts, the completion date of the whole R & R Programme is now advanced to 2015. At present, the first two stages of the programme were substantially completed while the third and fourth stages are in progress. As at the end of 2013, approximately 2 300 km of water mains have been replaced or rehabilitated.

We fully understand that water main bursts would cause inconvenience to the public and affect the traffic. To tackle the problem proactively, the WSD is taking a multi-pronged approach including the detection of water main leakage to avoid it being developed into water main bursts, as well as the implementation of water pressure management and the R&R Programme. Moreover, it will also advance the replacement or rehabilitation of a water main in light of its ageing condition such as when there is a burst. These efforts have reaped positive results, with the number of water main bursts dropping from the peak of about 2 500 per year in 2001 to about 260 in 2013.

We apologise for any inconvenience to the public caused by the water main burst at Pokfulam Road.

Yours sincerely,



(C. L. WONG)

for Secretary for Development

c.c.:

Director of Water Supplies (Attn.: Mr. CHIN Chu-sum)