

Hong Kong Green Strategy Alliance's Deputation
at LegCo's Panel on Environmental Affairs Meeting on 16 December 2013

"Public Engagement on Municipal Solid Waste Charging"

“香港綠色策略聯盟是一個非牟利團體，成立之目的旨在組織一群對環保及持續發展有願景及承擔之學界及專業人士，對環保課題、項目、技術等透過研討、交流及參與，提出專業意見及方法以解決香港及鄰近地域的環保議題。

Hong Kong Green Strategy Alliance in principle supports the Government's current initiative on charging for Municipal Solid Waste. The Alliance strongly believes that charging is one of the better tools to accelerate behavioral changes to a commercialized metropolitan, such as Hong Kong. This behavioral change is evident from the results of the Charging Scheme on Plastic Shopping Bags, where the number of plastic bags consumed at retailers is much reduced and more importantly, the idea of "polluter-pays" is getting increasingly acceptable by general citizens.

Focusing on the 4 core subjects under the current phase of Public Engagement Exercise, HKGSA would express its views as follows:

(1) Charging Mechanism

Commercial and Industrial (C&I) wastes shall be charged at the gate of landfills or at transfer stations, just like the current practice with C&D wastes where a trip ticket system is implemented. C&I wastes are typically collected by collectors, who will apply for an account for trip tickets. These collectors can also weigh the C&I wastes collected from individual producers and charge the producers accordingly.

Domestic waste shall be charged on volume basis, irrespective of large housing estates, high-rise buildings, single establishments or village houses, by designated garbage bags, which could be purchased through designated outlets or even convenient stores. Initially, more surveillance might be needed for illegal disposal, just like when charges for C&I wastes were initially imposed.

Rubbish bins on streets shall be progressively reduced and eventually removed. Refuse collection points (RCP) shall also gradually be changed from unmanned to manned premises for waste collection, as well as with certain recycling capability, either run by local communities or charities.

(2) Coverage of Charging Scheme

For the sake of fairness and shared responsibility, both the domestic and C&I sections shall be charged at the same time. We have waited long enough and there is no better time to act than now.

(3) Charging Level

As a starting point, HKGSA opines that the charging level shall be based on similar fees charged in countries around the region, and fixed at a socially and politically acceptable level.

However, HKGSA would like to bring the followings for the Administration's attention and consideration:

- (i) Certain reduction in, or even waiver of, the charges for the low-income families, the needed and the like. These groups of our community are not expected to be major waste producers.
- (ii) Should the results be positive in future, the Government shall consider returning some of the charges collected back to the community, via electricity, water, rates and rents or the like.
- (iii) When the scheme becomes mature, a progressive charging rate may be considered, similar to water charges currently applied.

(4) Recycling

The current recycling industry operates on the verge of survival, relying on the ever fluctuating and volatile value of the recycled commodities, as well as the lack of a well defined set of policies to allow the recycling industry better quantify its business risk.

Although this charging scheme essentially adds a certain "value" of the recycled commodities on top of its current market value, the initial phase of startup is not expected to be smooth and easy. HKGSA supports the government to set up certain type of fund or trust to help the recycling industry "jumpstart" or "get on their foot". Once stabilized and mature, the fund or trust shall be steered towards promoting newer and clean technologies, as well as assisting the recycling of the less valuable, yet environmentally harmful, products.

In summary, HKGSA believes MSW charging is an essential part of a sustainable waste management solution for Hong Kong."

--- End of Speech ---