For discussion
on 6 January 2015

Legislative Council Panel on Security

Provision of a Barge Operating Platform for the Marine Region of the Hong Kong Police Force

Purpose

This paper consults the Panel on a proposal by the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) to acquire a Barge Operating Platform (BOP) to provide the necessary facilities and capabilities to ensure continued effective and efficient policing of waters within and near Starling Inlet and the northern portion of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Boundary of Administration (BoA). The proposed acquisition is necessary to efficiently maintain an effective round-the-clock maritime law enforcement capability and response to maritime incidents, including potential security threats and rescue operations.

Background

2. Marine North Division (MNDIV) of the Marine Region is responsible for the policing of Starling Inlet and its adjacent waters. In addition to core constabulary duties, MNDIV is also responsible for preserving the integrity of the BoA that runs through Starling Inlet to its landfall at Chung Ying Street.

3. Starling Inlet has long been vulnerable to exploitation by smugglers, illegal immigrants and for other illicit activities. In recent years it has become increasingly apparent that the only effective way to suppress these illegal activities and prevent the law abiding community of Sha Tau Kok (STK) from being frustrated by waterborne black market activities is to have a strong, effective and highly visible maritime enforcement presence permanently on-site in the waters of Starling Inlet.

4. The installation of the STK maritime anti-smuggling floating barrier (STK Barrier) in late 2010 improved the situation but it was found that without a dedicated 24 hour on-scene police presence to respond, support and enforce, the barrier was vulnerable to breaches and could not be relied upon in isolation. MNDIV has to rely on a reserve Inshore

Patrol Craft (IPC) [1] moored at the access control point of the STK Barrier and a Divisional Fast Patrol Craft based in the Tolo Channel to render any response required. Marine Police has identified the following major inefficiencies under the current arrangement:-

(i) delay in the arrival of small fast response craft and police officers to incidents due to the distance between their operating base at Tolo Channel and Ma Liu Shui and Starling Inlet;

(ii) the lack of adequate space and suitable equipment on board the IPC for effective control, inspection and handling of compliant vessels and the deterrence of non-compliant craft; and

(iii) the unsatisfactory working conditions, for example lack of toilet facilities, rest areas and shelter from the adverse weather, for officers required to perform prolonged duty at the STK Barrier.

In brief, the existing arrangement and facilities fall far short of the requirements that are necessary to support the STK Barrier and various maritime security and counter terrorism operations, and to preserve the integrity of the BoA.

The Proposed BOP

5. It is proposed to acquire a BOP with a hull measuring approximately 30 meters long by 13 meters wide rising about 2 meters out of the water with a superstructure to support a raised vantage point and provide the required equipment and supporting facilities needed to effectively and efficiently police the waters of Starling Inlet and preserve the integrity of the adjacent BoA. The proposed BOP will be equipped with appropriate modern communication, detection and IT systems to allow officers to perform their constabulary and administrative duties in a professional and efficient manner. Sufficient accommodation and related facilities will be included to cater for round-the-clock duty and provide adequate space to effectively support other units on site such as divisional Division Fast Patrol Craft teams and Small Boat Division.

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[1] Small police cabin boat of 10-13m designed for patrolling duties inside sheltered waters, typhoon shelters and port facilities.

6. The decision to acquire a BOP for STK is based upon Marine Police's 12 years of experience of operating a similar system in the waters of Deep Bay where two BOPs and fourteen small support craft which perform similar type of duties including the protection of the BoA but over a much larger area. A similar BOP operates as the checkpoint facility at the gate of the floating anti-smuggling barrier in the Tolo Channel at Heung Lo Kok and another BOP operates in the waters of Rocky Harbour south of Sai Kung where a fleet of fast patrol craft conducts operations.

7. By adopting the proposed BOP as a floating police post, MNDIV could greatly improve its operational efficiency and the working conditions for officers on-board and also release resources presently engaged to deliver officers and equipment from their home base at Ma Liu Shui and Tolo Channel to Starling Inlet to perform duties.

8. The BOP is a purpose-built platform designed to be used as a localised operational coordination and operational response platform for maritime incidents occurring within its area of responsibility. The introduction of BOP will strengthen the enforcement capability of the Marine Police to effectively handle maritime incidents on a round-the-clock basis. It will also address the Marine Police's current inadequacy in conducting preventative shallow water operations and small craft operations within Starling Inlet and along the STK Barrier deterring illegal activities and reducing infringements at the BoA.

9. The functionalities of the BOP are summarised as follows:

(i) the BOP will be equipped with a variety of smaller support vessels designed to enhance the ability of the marine police to handle incidents in Starling Inlet shallow waters and beach/foreshore areas and protect the BoA without the need to summon resources from other operational units;

(ii) the provision of a basic propulsion system will allow the BOP to move under its own power to optimise its operational positioning and relocate to more tactically advantageous locations for specific operations, return to the government dockyard/marine bases for routine overhauls or repairs and seek shelter from adverse weather during typhoons etc. without the need for commercial towing services;

(iii) the squat broad hull low-profile design provides a more stable working environment and much greater space for the necessary security and communications equipment, briefing/staging areas for small support craft operators and accommodation for fast response craft crews, allowing on-site stand-by and therefore vastly improved response time. It will also provide improved deck space for enhanced small vessel operations and on-scene initial handling of injured and/or affected persons, etc. in a safe and secure environment; and

(iv) the BOP will be equipped with suitable thermal imaging, radar, image intensification, situational awareness and navigation equipment which would enable commanders to make more informed and timely decisions based upon real time information. The incorporation of modern control and navigation equipment will greatly improve operational capabilities without the need for increased crew numbers. Real time information, live video and data feeds will be relayed between the BOP and shore Command and Control facilities for use by central commanders.

10. Consideration has been given to deploy an existing police vessel or BOP to perform duty at STK but it has been proved impractical for the following reasons:

(i) each of the four existing BOPs fulfills a critical fulltime operational role in its present location;

(ii) none of the four BOPs is suitable for use in the shallow and confined waters of Starling Inlet due to their specific design and mooring requirements, and;

(iii) each of the twelve Marine Region's police launches of sufficient size to provide the required facilities, accommodation and technical equipment are fully employed in patrol duties in deeper waters and cannot be redeployed to serve Starling Inlet without incurring an unacceptable loss in critical coverage in other areas.

Benefits of the Acquisition Proposal

11. Maintaining a robust maritime law enforcement capability, and keeping local waters free from the threat of terrorism and crime, is considered essential for Hong Kong's international reputation. The need to effectively suppress sea-borne illegal immigration, smuggling and breaches of the BoA is an integral part of this capability.

12. The BOP will benefit from advances in technology and provide safer, more fuel efficient, greener and more capable and effective craft to assist HKPF in performing its assigned duties and maintaining maritime safety in a professional manner. Over and above these general improvements, specific equipment, features and capabilities have been included in the designs to address areas identified for enhancement, to allow faster police arrival on scene and a more effective first response once at scene. The provision of specialist equipment for the BOP, modernisation of night vision, target radar, situational awareness and thermal detection equipment of evidential standards and improved capability in shallow water operation through the use of its appropriately equipped small support craft will allow HKPF to enhance its proficiency in detecting and responding to suspicious craft at sea - in both daylight and dark conditions - provide a more robust enforcement and prosecution capability thereby deterring criminal activity and the threat of illegal activity – including terrorist incidents - in Hong Kong waters around Starling Inlet and the northeastern waters of Hong Kong. Such capability is especially important in maintaining the confidence of the general public in Hong Kong's ability to maintain a safe maritime environment and deal effectively with illegal cross BoA activity.

Financial Implications

Non-recurrent Cost

13. HKPF estimates that the acquisition of the BOP and its small support craft will incur a total non-recurrent cost of $35,762,000 which will be included and reflected in the Estimates of the relevant financial years.

14. The estimated cash flow requirement is as follows:-

Year	**$'000**
2015–16	3,000
2016–17	4,500
2017–18	2,862
2018–19	22,538
2019-20	2,862
Total:	**35,762**

Recurrent Cost

15. HKPF estimates that the recurrent cost of the new BOP and its associated small support craft will be $3,809,000 per annum from 2018-19 onwards. This will be partially offset by a reduction in the fuel and logistics costs associated with the present method of operation. The requirements of recurrent expenditure will be reflected in the Estimates of the relevant years.

Implementation Plan

16. The tentative implementation timetable of the proposed acquisition is as follows:-

Item	**Activities**	**Target Completion Date**
Acquisition of small support craft [2]		
	Preparation of tender document	July 2015
	Tender evaluation and Award	October 2015
	Construction	December 2015
	Inspection and Delivery	January 2016

[2] These refer to the small support vessels of the BOP, i.e. two small aluminium diesel waterjet craft, two inflatable boats and one shallow water recovery craft.

Item	Activities	Target Completion Date
BOP [3] *acquisition*		
	Preparation of consultancy document for the acquisition of launches	November 2015
	Consultant Selection	March 2016
	Preparation of tender documents	June 2016
	Tendering, evaluation and approval	September 2016
	Award of tender	October 2016
	Design and construction,	February 2018
	Inspection and delivery	April 2018
	Training and commissioning	May 2018

Advice Sought

17. Members are invited to offer views on the proposal.

Security Bureau
December 2014

[3] Main Craft - Barge Operating Platform.