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11 January 2016

(by fax: 2543 9197)

Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

(Attn: Mr. Anthony CHU)

Dear Mr. CHU,

**Public Account Committee
Consideration of Chapter 1 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 65**

Government's efforts in managing municipal solid waste

Thank you for your letter dated 30 December 2015 on the captioned. We would like to set out the Administration's reply below for Members' reference.

2. The Environment Bureau published the Hong Kong: Blueprint for Sustainable Use of Resources 2013-2022 (the Blueprint) in May 2013 which analyses the challenges and opportunities of waste management in Hong Kong. It also maps out a comprehensive strategy, targets, policies and action plans for waste management for ten years with a view to tackling the waste problems in Hong Kong.

3. While a comprehensive waste management plan is being implemented, we have adopted an overall target of reducing the Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) disposal rate on a per capita basis by 40 percent by 2022 to serve as a measurable focal point for our efforts. The underlying assumptions for Hong Kong to achieve the disposal rate reduction target have been set out in the Blueprint (page 18).

4. Achieving the MSW disposal rate reduction target set out in the Blueprint would largely be contingent upon the implementation of various waste reduction measures in particular the completion of Phases 1 and 2 of OWTF, the effectiveness of the Food Wise Campaign in changing the community's food consumption behavior, and the implementation of the MSW charging by 2022. Fluctuations in waste recovery rates in recent years and the estimation of the serviceable lives of the three landfills would not affect the waste reduction target set out in the Blueprint, nor diminish the impact of the various waste reduction measures.

Calculation and dissemination of waste information

5. Nevertheless, we agree with the Director of Audit's finding that there is a need to strengthen our efforts in improving the accuracy of the statistics on locally-generated recyclables and the MSW recovery rates. Since 2014, we have joined hands with the Census and Statistics Department and the Customs and Excise Department to implement measures to enhance data collection for calculation of recovery rates. We note that the recovery rates have stabilized in recent years, at the level of 37 percent in both 2013 and 2014. We are confident that the enhanced quality checks on export declarations are effective in preventing the mis-reporting of re-exports of plastic recyclables as domestic exports, so that the domestic exports statistics on plastic recyclables are accurate and reliable. We will remain vigilant in monitoring the trend.

6. As for the estimated serviceable lives of the landfills, the PAC may wish to note that the Audit Report had not found that the estimated serviceable lives of the landfills had been overstated or incorrectly provided by the Administration. The Director of Audit only noted that EPD had not provided quantifiable information on the basis and the underlying assumptions for estimating the serviceable lives of the landfills and recommended that the Administration should provide LegCo with quantifiable information and the

assumptions made in estimating the remaining serviceable lives of landfills in seeking funding approval for landfill extension works in future. We agree with the Audit's recommendation and have pledged to do so in the future.

7. We would like to emphasize that the Administration had provided best available information to LegCo during the process of seeking funding approval for the landfill extension and Integrated Waste Management Facilities projects. LegCo had conducted close scrutiny of the funding proposals over the course of three years before giving funding approval to the proposals. We have provided all of the information sought by LegCo Members including the Administration's approach in estimating the remaining serviceable lives of landfills (please refer to our reply to question (u) in ~~EPD's letter of 21 December 2015 (Paper: R65/1/GEN5)~~ ^{Appendix 8}). While we will continue to adopt multi-pronged approach in achieving a sustainable use of resources as set out in the Blueprint, it will still be necessary to develop adequate waste disposal facilities which remain an essential and ultimate part of the waste management chain. The development of waste disposal infrastructure requires considerable lead time and we need to ensure that adequate infrastructure is put in place on a timely basis. As said before, we will endeavor to provide LegCo with quantifiable information, including the underlying assumptions, for estimating the remaining serviceable lives of landfills, in funding applications for landfill extension works in future.

Constant review of the Blueprint

8. While the Blueprint has only been implemented for a few years, we have been constantly reviewing our waste management policies and initiatives to ensure they are updated and responsive to new challenges posed by societal development, keep pace with public aspirations and are timely and adequate to address the needs of the industry.

9. To echo the Director of Audit's recommendation that the Administration should publicize waste disposal problem and challenges faced by Hong Kong with a view to gaining public support, we plan to brief the LegCo Panel Environmental Affairs about the updated progress and initial achievements of our waste management measures promulgated in the Blueprint in 2016 when the waste statistics for 2015 is available.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Chan', written in a cursive style.

(James CHAN)

for Director of Environmental Protection

c.c.

Commissioner of Customs and Excise (fax no. 2854 1959)

Commissioner for Census and Statistics (fax no. 2119 0160)

Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (fax no. 2147 5239)

Director of Audit (fax no. 2583 9603)