

For information

Legislative Council Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services

Launch of Hong Kong e-Legislation

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the official launch of a new database of Hong Kong legislation. The database has been officially named as **Hong Kong e-Legislation (HKeL)** in English and 「電子版香港法例」 in Chinese. The target launch date is 24 February 2017. HKeL delivers on the Government's commitment to provide high quality and timely free public access to the law.

Introduction

2. In April 2010, we sought the Panel's support for the implementation of a verified, authenticated and searchable electronic database of Hong Kong Legislation (*Database*) (see LC Paper No. CB(2) 1349/09-10(08)). In March 2014, we reported to the Panel the progress of the Project (see LC Paper No. CB(4) 486/13-14(03)). Paragraphs 3 to 8 below contain a brief recap of the background and progress to March 2014.

Background

3. The hardcopy loose-leaf edition of the Laws of Hong Kong (*Loose-leaf Edition*) is the official source of consolidated Hong Kong legislation published under statutory authority. The lead time of a number of months for updating the Loose-leaf Edition does not allow access to the consolidated version of legislation in a timely way. On the other hand, the Bilingual Laws Information System (*BLIS*) allows timely electronic access to the consolidated version of legislation free of charge but it does not have legal status. This situation was no longer adequate from either a user or an information technology perspective. The way forward was to develop a new Database to provide timely electronic legislation data with legal status to the general public.

Progress from 2010 to 2014

4. *Funding approval*: a new commitment of \$79,395,000 was approved by the Finance Committee in May 2010.
5. *Statutory backing*: the Legislation Publication Ordinance (Cap. 614) (*LPO*) was enacted in June 2011. The LPO provides statutory backing for the establishment of the Database and gives legal status to verified copies of legislation published in the Database.
6. *Contractor*: through tendering exercises from 2011 to 2012, the contract for the implementation of the Database was awarded in December 2012 and the Project started in January 2013.
7. *Hong Kong Legislation Database User Liaison Group*: in September 2013, a “Hong Kong Legislation Database User Liaison Group” (*Liaison Group*) was established to provide comments from the users’ perspective. It comprises representatives from the legal professional bodies (the Hong Kong Bar Association and the Law Society of Hong Kong), the Judiciary and the Legal Services Division of the Legislative Council Secretariat.
8. *Last reported position*: in March 2014, the System Analysis and Design (*SA&D*) for Phase 1 of the Project had just been completed.

Progress of Project since March 2014

Completion of Phase 1 (Internal Module) in 2015

9. Phase 1 of the Project, which mainly focused on a new compilation and publication system for internal use by the Law Drafting Division (*LDD*), was implemented in August 2015. Core functions (including legislation capture, legislation compilation, legislation retrieval, full chapter reprint of legislation, auditing and checking, bilingual language support etc.) have been operational internally since that time.

Phase 2 (External Module)

Functions for public use

10. Phase 2 of the Project concerned functions for use by the general public, including online publication of legislation, dissemination of

legislation-related information and legislation retrieval. We completed SA&D for Phase 2 in December 2015 and proceeded to Phase 2 development and testing in 2016.

Verification of legislation

11. During Phase 2, we also started verification of legislation data for HKeL. For data to have verified status, a stringent quality assurance process involving painstaking manual checking of converted data against the Loose-leaf Edition is being undertaken. After data conversion from BLIS (which was established on a different platform), it is unavoidable that checking results in data fixing being required for some legislative provisions. Data checking and fixing work are ongoing to ensure that legislation migrated to HKeL is presented correctly (including, for example, indent position, table columns/rows, etc.). We are striving for precision in both content and format of legislation data.

12. We are progressively verifying legislation data for HKeL. Copies of verified legislation printed from HKeL are presumed to correctly state the legislation (see section 5 of the LPO¹). Priority has and will be given to verifying commonly used, newly-enacted and recently-amended legislation until all legislation has ultimately been checked and verified. As a copy of legislation with legal status becomes available in HKeL, it will be removed from the Loose-leaf Edition which will be gradually phased out. Before an item of legislation is made available in HKeL in verified form, users will still have electronic access to it in HKeL for informational purposes (similar to BLIS).

Print-on-demand

13. During the scrutiny of the Legislation Publication Bill, Bills Committee members expressed the wish to have the Government continue to sell hardcopy legislation booklets under the Database regime. This was notwithstanding that verified copies of legislation printed by users themselves from the Database (which they are able to access free of charge) will have legal status. In this regard, a new service will be implemented. The general public will be able to purchase from the

¹ Section 5 of the LPO provides as follows –

“(1) A copy of a database instrument—

(a) that is published on or printed directly from an approved website; and
(b) that bears an official verification mark,
is a verified copy of the instrument.

(2) A verified copy of a database instrument is presumed, unless the contrary is proved, to correctly state the instrument as at the date specified in the copy.”.

Information Services Department the most updated verified version of any legislation available from HKeL on a “print-on-demand” basis. A legislation booklet available under the “print-on-demand” arrangement will be sold on a cost-recovery basis and a fixed pricing mechanism that has regard to the number of pages of the booklet will be adopted. In most cases, a legislation booklet will be ready for delivery within 7 working days. We have reported to the Liaison Group about the sales and printing logistics and the pricing mechanism. Members have agreed with the arrangements.

14. For legislation that has not yet been published as a verified chapter in HKeL, the existing regime of sales of Loose-leaf Edition booklets published under the Laws (Loose-leaf Publication) Ordinance 1990 (51 of 1990) will continue until all legislation has been published as verified chapters in HKeL and the Loose-leaf Edition is phased out completely.

Liaison Group participation

15. As Phase 2 of the Project concerns an interface to provide legislation data to external users, it has been important to solicit and take account of users’ views. The Liaison Group has been the primary source of external users’ views. Two meetings were held in 2016 (8 March and 27 June) and a “hands-on” Briefing and User Acceptance Test Session was held on 11 October 2016 for Liaison Group members (or their representatives). A further meeting was held on 10 January 2017. The views of the Liaison Group were sought on various topics and it has agreed to –

- (a) the layout and components of a verified copy of legislation;
- (b) the look and feel of the webpages and functions in HKeL;
- (c) the operation of the “print-on-demand” service.

16. Liaison Group members (or their representatives) gave us valuable feedback throughout the Project. Many of their suggestions have been adopted. For example, we have included an indicator for past versions of legislation and added a “chapter number search” in the Quick Search bar.

Completion of testing for Phase 2

17. We completed testing of the system in early January 2017 for

Phase 2 of the Project. Currently we are working on final preparation for cut-over from BLIS to HKeL, including system fine-tuning, transitional arrangements, training, documentation, final rehearsal, etc.

18. We reported the position to the Liaison Group at its meeting held on 10 January 2017. Liaison Group members agreed to our proposed launch of HKeL in quarter 1 of 2017, with a target launch date of 24 February 2017. A further briefing will be provided to the members (or their representatives) before the launch.

Improved functionality

19. HKeL will provide improved functionality. Users will be provided with more advanced viewing functions. For example, it will be possible for a user to decide to view legislation in either monolingual or bilingual mode. Moreover, in addition to the desktop version, there will also be a mobile version available to reflect the trend for users to view and search legislation using mobile phones, tablets and other portable devices.

20. Research functionality will also be improved as HKeL has been designed to allow a user to easily navigate both current and past versions of legislation through a new timeline feature and the introduction of a “point-in-time” search facilitates searches of legislation as at a particular point in time. Users will also be able to take advantage of a feature allowing them to stay up to date about changes to legislation by subscribing to email notifications.

Conclusion

21. BLIS will be replaced by HKeL on the evening of the launch day. A press release will be issued on or shortly before that day, and information of the transition from BLIS to HKeL will also be made available for users accessing the BLIS website. A series of short video clips will also be uploaded to HKeL to assist users.

22. Access to law is a fundamental element of a jurisdiction that upholds the rule of law. In the age of information technology, the availability of an updated, reliable and searchable online consolidated legislation database with legal status is a must. **Hong Kong e-Legislation** will provide important infrastructure for Hong Kong and we look forward to its benefits. These will include –

- (a) users having high quality and timely access to Hong Kong legislation with legal status; and
- (b) the ability to better leverage technology to support value-added services and to facilitate more efficient and effective internal operations within LDD.

Department of Justice
January 2017