

Submission from Miss MAK Hilda

Prepared for: Special meeting of the LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs (Monday, 29 May 2017)

Prepared by: A member of the general public

Date: 17 May 2017

RE: Personal comments on the proposed Quantity-based MSW Charging Scheme in Hong Kong

I am writing to share a few observations from carrying out a project to rehearse the quantity-based MSW charging at a residential hall where MSW was disposed through private waste collectors.

In principle, I and most of the participants of the rehearsal agree that across-the-board MSW charging is necessary to drive behavioural changes in waste production. However, there are concerns about how the charging will be implemented:

- 1) The “Waste less, save more” concept is not just unappealing but even creating negative views towards the charging. Instead of seeing the “saving”, most of our participants feel that they are being robbed or punished or see the concept as an attempt to candy-coat a tax rise. It is because no matter how much effort they put into reducing waste and separating recyclables, it is, at least with the current recycling/reuse technologies, impossible to achieve zero waste. In other words, they must pay extra for waste disposal, a service that they did not have to pay for before, anyhow.
- 2) Although many think \$30 per month per a 3-person household is reasonable, they want to be sure that they will not be paying for other’s waste and the fee they paid will be used in work/projects directly related to waste treatment or minimisation.
- 3) How likely is the government to privatise the hygiene services and landfill operations in the foreseeable future, like electricity supply and rail services? Have there been any discussion about regulating the charging level if that happens?
- 4) Most private residential estates contract out hygiene services together with other services/maintenance work to property management companies. The management companies are more than likely to transfer the cost of waste disposal to the residents by raising the management fee. Will there be any regulations or guidelines for the management companies on:

- Estimation of MSW fee for individual unit/apartment (e.g. by area); and
- Obligation to monitor MSW disposal of the estate and disclose the actual expenditure on disposal in the annual financial report.

People also think it may be useful to have a designated team, possibly under the EPD, to handle appeals or disputes related to MSW charging or a black list of companies that over charge its customers.

5) The charging deals only with the symptoms but not solving the fundamental issues that attributed to the high MSW production rate of Hong Kong. Enhancing recycling support is essential to reducing waste in the long run. Following are some ideas to be considered:

- Large residential estates (over a certain number of households) should be required to provide food/organic waste collection service and possibly on-site treatment facility.
- Food and/or grocery retailers should be required to use recycled/recyclable materials and packaging that are designed for clean recycling (e.g. plastic food containers with removable lining), to pack their products.
- Retailers of some non-consumable products should be required to accept return of end-of-life products under reasonable conditions. For example, retailers of helium gas cylinders for party balloons should be required to accept returned cylinders free-of-charge when if the cylinder is undamaged.
- Shall there be requirements on the minimum number/volume of recycling bin per population for new residential developments?
- Recycling bins should be equipped with easy-to-operate gadgets for flattening HDPE bottles or metal cans and containers (e.g. milk powder or cookie containers).

6) Charging by number of designated plastic bag should not be a long-term practice. First of all, this charging mechanism will result in disposal of extra plastic bags. Non-designated plastic bags (e.g. those used for takeaways) will likely be disposed as general waste as they cannot be recycled in Hong Kong and no longer be accepted for wrapping waste. Moreover, enormous manpower resources will be required to ensure that genuine designated plastic bags are being used properly. It is suggested that a smart card payment system, similar to the charging system for photocopiers in public libraries, may be a better option. User scans or inserts his/her smart card (e.g. octopus card) to unlock the disposal chamber at FEHD's refuse collection points, where the pre-wrapped waste will be weighted automatically by a built-in scale, and the user will be charged instantly based on weight.

----- I hope you find the comments interesting. Thank you for reading. -----