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22 November 2019

Chief Council Secretary (1) 1  
Council Business Division 1  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
Legislative Council Complex  
1 Legislative Council Road, Central  
Hong Kong  
(Attn: Ms. Angel SHEK)

Dear Ms. SHEK,

**Panel on Environmental Affairs**  
**Follow-up Action from the Meeting on 28 October 2019**  
**Emergency Response Mechanism and Measures for Tackling Floating Refuse**  
**Caused by Marine Incidents**

I refer to the Follow-up Action Item 1(a) for the “Briefing by the Secretary for the Environment on the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address” from the meeting on 28 October 2019. Please find our response in the Annex for Members’ information.

For further information, please feel free to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

(C.K. CHEN)  
for Director of Environmental Protection

Encl.

**Panel on Environmental Affairs**  
**Follow-up Action from the Meeting on 28 October 2019**  
**Emergency Response Mechanism and Measures for Tackling**  
**Floating Refuse Caused by Marine Incidents**

In January 2018, the Government revamped the Inter-departmental Working Group on Clean Shorelines that was only responsible for coordinating efforts on handling marine refuse as the Inter-departmental Working Group on Marine Environmental Management (the Working Group), with its terms of reference expanded to cover coordination of all marine environmental incidents under the steer of the Environment Bureau. The Task Force on Emergency Response to Marine Environmental Incidents (the Task Force) was set up under the Working Group, with members comprising various departments including the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), the Marine Department (MD), the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), the Department of Health, the Fire Services Department, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), the Government Flying Service (GFS), the Government Laboratory, the Hong Kong Police Force and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD).

2. When a marine incident occurs, the Task Force assumes a coordination role to investigate its nature, assess its environmental and ecological impact and initiate appropriate mitigation and preventive measures. Once the duty MD officers confirm the occurrence of a marine environment incident, they will immediately notify EPD and relevant departments and monitor the situation of the waters nearby. EPD will convey the message to relevant departments (including MD, AFCD, FEHD and LCSD) for mobilizing sufficient manpower to clean up marine refuse that may arise in large amount at sea and coastal area according to relevant alert mechanism and protocol.

3. In addition to cleaning up floating refuse and collecting domestic refuse from vessels at anchorage areas and typhoon shelters on a daily basis, MD also operates, as part of the emergency response mechanism and measures for handling floating refuse caused by marine incidents, 24-hour hotlines (2385 2791 and 2385 2792), an email address ([admpecu@mardep.gov.hk](mailto:admpecu@mardep.gov.hk)) and a fax line (2543 6877) for reporting marine refuse in large amount being netted during fishing activities, so that the MD can promptly deploy a larger vessel for collection of the netted refuse from the typhoon shelter where the fishing vessel concerned is berthed. Besides, MD also

arranges special refuse collection service in the first 2 weeks after the end of the fishing moratorium every year. The special service cover both Sundays and public holidays, with details as follows:

- (1) For fishing vessels arriving at typhoon shelters before 12:00 noon, the refuse collection service will be completed on the same day;
- (2) For fishing vessels arriving at typhoon shelters after 12:00 noon, the refuse collection service will be completed on the same day as far as practicable or in the next morning the latest.

4. In the past few years, there had been two incidents of fishermen sighting or scooping up excessive amount of refuse during fishing operations. The specific follow-up actions that have been taken were as follows: -

- (1) On 15 August 2016, the Hong Kong Fishermen Consortium reported illegal dumping activities in the waters of Wanshan Qundao and a large amount of refuse was scooped during their fishing operations. As the incident happened outside Hong Kong waters, AFCD, EPD and MD notified relevant authority of Guangdong Province immediately. The Department of Environmental Protection of Guangdong Province (GDEPD) subsequently informed the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government that the suspected vessel and personnel had been detained for investigation. In recent years, MD has also stepped up patrols at offshore waters near the Hong Kong boundary, but there was no further sighting of surge in floating refuse.
- (2) A green group reported in the evening of 28 March 2018 about a case of illegal dumping at Zhuhai waters. EPD notified GDEPD on the following day and requested follow-up actions, but no floating refuse was found during the follow-up inspections conducted by the Guangdong side. MD also stepped up patrols at waters near the Hong Kong boundary, but there was no sign of refuse floating from Mainland to Hong Kong waters in the following few weeks. Neither had MD received any request from fishermen for refuse collection by a larger vessel or other special arrangements. Upon further follow-up, it was noted that the concerned fishermen did not require Government departments' assistance in handling the netted refuse.

5. Regarding collaboration with Mainland in tackling floating refuse, there had

been three cases in the recent years of Hong Kong notifying relevant Mainland authorities of floating refuse caused by marine incidents for follow-up. In July 2016, many beaches and coastal areas in Hong Kong were hit by a sudden surge of marine refuse. The collected refuse increased by six to ten times of the normal quantities. LCSD, FEHD and MD then stepped up cleanup operations and patrols while EPD undertook investigations on the waste composition and surveillance on the affected locations in cooperation with GFS by helicopter flights. It was believed that refuse might have been washed to the Pearl River Estuary by a severe flood occurring at the Mainland and drifted to Hong Kong. In response to the situation, EPD requested assistance and follow-up from relevant Guangdong authorities, who subsequently uncovered six illegal dumping cases, initiated criminal investigations against relevant personnel and arranged cleanup and disposal of 2,000 tonnes of refuse.

6. In light of the above incident, Hong Kong and Guangdong set up the Hong Kong-Guangdong Marine Environmental Management Special Panel (the Special Panel) in October 2016 under the framework of the Hong Kong-Guangdong Joint Working Group on Sustainable Development and Environmental Protection to enhance exchange and communication on various regional marine environmental matters, and established the Hong Kong-Guangdong Cross Boundary Notification Mechanism on Marine Refuse. The mechanism allows one side to notify the other during a significant marine environmental incident or heavy rain event and facilitates relevant departments to make timely resource deployment and preparation. Since the trial launch of a notification and alert system in May 2017, EPD has issued 18 notifications to GDEPD in response to heavy rainfall, flooding or other environmental incidents, including two marine refuse incidents occurred in August 2017 and March 2018.

7. In August 2017, there was a surge of marine refuse occurring in a number of beaches in Tuen Mun. After receiving LCSD's report, EPD informed relevant departments including MD, FEHD and AFCD to step up patrols and cleanup at the areas which may be affected. EPD also notified the Guangdong side according to the notification mechanism. The Guangdong side followed up immediately by strengthening patrols at the sea and at major coastlines. In addition, EPD conducted a computer simulation analysis and deduced that the refuse surge might be attributed to a heavy rain event occurring at Shenzhen and the northern part of Hong Kong. With the concerted efforts of various parties, all affected beaches resumed normal after 3 days.

8. In March 2018, some fishermen reported that there was suspected illegal

dumping in Zhuhai waters and large amount of refuse was scooped up from the seabed. After receiving EPD's report, MD immediately stepped up patrols in Hong Kong waters and offshore waters near the boundary of Hong Kong, but no surge in refuse drifting from Mainland to Hong Kong waters was found. In accordance with the notification mechanism, EPD notified the Guangdong side and requested follow-up actions. The law enforcement units of Guangdong immediately conducted inspection at the scene, and coordinated other relevant units to pay special attention to refuse transfer vessels heading offshore and intercept suspicious vessels for investigations. In addition, the Guangdong side also launched a one-month special enforcement operation to combat illegal dumping activities which might damage the marine ecological environment in the Pearl River Estuary. Guangdong and Hong Kong will continue to consummate the notification and alert system and further strengthen emergency response in handling floating refuse caused by marine incidents.

9. On whether the Government will consider providing financial incentives to fishermen to help clean up marine refuse, MD advises that, under the Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (Certification and Licensing) Regulation (Cap. 548D), a fishing vessel licensed as a Class III vessel shall be used solely for fishing and related activities. Nonetheless, the Government is actively exploring an appropriate mechanism where fishermen can participate in emergency cleanup actions using appropriate vessels during refuse surge incidents and collaborate with the Government in emergency response to marine refuse incidents. During the Lunar New Year and before the fishing moratorium, MD, AFCD and relevant departments jointly organise meetings with the fishery trade for promoting and disseminating the message of keeping the sea clean. Besides, the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) has been providing funding to local non-profit-making organisations, including community associations and green groups, to support their green projects and initiatives. We have earmarked HK\$7.5 million through the ECF for the Environmental Education and Community Action Projects on clean shorelines in the second round invitation of 2019/20. For more information, please visit the ECF website (<https://eeca.ecc.org.hk/english/news/news.html>). Fishermen associations may consider submitting funding applications in collaboration with eligible organisations under the corresponding funding schemes.

Environmental Protection Department  
November 2019