

I fully support the proposed WASTE DISPOSAL (CHARGING FOR MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE) (AMENDMENT) BILL 2018. In line, with the “polluter pays” principle, I believe that charging for waste is a vital component of Hong Kong’s waste management toolkit, and a proven means of driving corporate and individual waste reduction behaviour with the lowest level of capital investment and quickest results.

Though the HKSAR Government set a laudable and ambitious goal in 2013 of “reducing the volume of daily disposal of garbage per capita to 0.8 kg in 2022”, the city is far from this target. Disposed waste per capita hit a record high of 1.53 kg per person in 2018, an increase of 15% from 2013’s 1.33 kg per capita, and the latest government figures indicate that the per capita rate remains at a relatively high level (1.47kg) while the overall recycling rate has dropped to 29%. The lack of MSW charging legislation is without doubt a leading contributing factor to this trend and state of affairs.

With Hong Kong’s recycling industry facing challenges of land security and international waste trade restrictions, MSW charging is an essential economic tool to allocate social cost correctly and support the long-term sustainability of local processing and recycling businesses. It will also be an excellent reinforcement of EPD’s various complementary waste initiatives, offering citizens more waste management options and a convenient recyclables collection network.

I strongly agree therefore with the Government’s view that quantity-based waste charging is a vital component of Hong Kong’s wider, comprehensive resource waste management strategy and a critical step towards the Government’s vision of Zero to Landfill. It cannot be the only tool, and should not be sold as the solution to the current waste problem, rather a ‘nudge’ in the right direction.

There is already a precedent – this is the mechanism by which sewage is charged. Therefore, generally acceptable to the public. Some may argue that the introduction of waste charging will cause ‘dumping’ of rubbish – there is little evidence of this in countries that have adopted these measures, or in equivalent schemes such as that set up for sewage. This measure will also bring Hong Kong in line with international peers including Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan which have implemented similar measures and experienced a direct reduction in household waste as a result.

Despite the challenges which may arise in preparing for the MSW charging scheme, the plan to build in a period of 12-18 months after the passage of the Bill to prepare for implementation is more than sufficient to mitigate this, and these operational challenges should not be seen as a reason to delay the bill overall nor to extend that grace period any further.

I strongly urge the honourable members of the Bills Committee to support the passage of this Bill during this term of the Legislative Council.

Leigh Farina