

# 立法會 *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(1)1210/20-21(04)

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## **Panel on Environmental Affairs**

**Meeting on 23 August 2021**

### **Background brief on management of disposable plastic tableware prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat**

#### **Purpose**

This paper provides background information on the management of disposable plastic tableware in Hong Kong. It also gives a brief account of the views and concerns expressed by Members when the subject was discussed by relevant committees of the Legislative Council ("LegCo").

#### **Background**

##### Disposable plastic tableware in Hong Kong

2. Disposable plastic tableware refers to single-use catering utensils made of plastics including straws, stirrers, forks, knives, spoons, cups, bowls, plates, etc.<sup>1</sup> Of the some 2 320 tonnes of waste plastics disposed of daily at Hong Kong landfills in 2019, about 200 tonnes were discarded plastic tableware among which the majority was disposable plastic tableware.

3. Plastics are difficult to decompose naturally. The process may take over a hundred years, during which the plastics will be fragmented into plastic particles. If disposable plastic tableware enters the sea and the human food chain, it will

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<sup>1</sup> Disposable plastic tableware materials in Hong Kong are divided into two main groups, namely expanded polystyrene ("EPS", commonly known as polyfoam) and non-EPS. Non-EPS tableware is mainly made of plastic materials including polyethylene terephthalate, polypropylene and polystyrene.

pose threats to the marine ecosystem and human health.<sup>2</sup> To protect the marine environment and safeguard the health of the community, the Administration has been implementing measures to reduce the use of disposable plastic tableware and promote a "plastic-free" culture in Hong Kong. The major measures are summarized in **Appendix I**.

#### Waste Blueprint for Hong Kong 2035

4. In February 2021, the Administration announced the Waste Blueprint for Hong Kong 2035 ("the Waste Blueprint") setting out the vision of "Waste Reduction • Resources Circulation • Zero Landfill", and related strategies, goals and measures to tackle the challenge of waste management up to 2035. One major area of work is to regulate the use of disposable plastic tableware by phases and explore the need of handling other single-use plastics.

#### Public consultation on Scheme on Regulation of Disposable Plastic Tableware

5. The Environmental Protection Department ("EPD") commissioned a consultancy study in 2019 on the feasibility, scope and mechanism of regulating disposable plastic tableware ("the Consultancy Study"). Based on the recommendations of the Consultancy Study, and along the direction of the Waste Blueprint, EPD launched a two-month public consultation on the Scheme on Regulation of Disposable Plastic Tableware ("the proposed Scheme") on 9 July 2021.<sup>3</sup> It is proposed in the consultation paper that disposable plastic tableware be regulated in two phases:

- (a) *phase one*: (i) banning the sale of disposable expanded polystyrene ("EPS") tableware and the provision of EPS tableware by catering premises to customers for both dine-in and takeaway services; (ii) banning the provision of all types of disposable plastic tableware (including disposable non-EPS tableware) for dine-in services; and (iii) banning the provision of disposable non-EPS tableware including straws, stirrers, forks, knives, spoons, plates, etc. for takeaway services; and
- (b) *phase two*: regulating takeaway services in the same manner as dine-in services, i.e. imposing a complete ban on the provision of all types of disposable plastic tableware for dine-in and takeaway services.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Refuse Characteristics Survey conducted by the Environmental Protection Department from April 2013 to March 2014, plastic pieces, foam plastic fragments and plastic cutlery are among the top ten prevalent types of marine refuse in Hong Kong.

<sup>3</sup> The consultation paper on the proposed Scheme is hyperlinked in **Appendix II**.

## **Major views and concerns expressed by Members**

6. Issues relating to management of waste plastics were raised at various meetings of the Panel on Environmental Affairs ("EA Panel") in the Sixth LegCo. Relevant issues were also brought up during the examination of Estimates of Expenditure in recent years. Members' major views and concerns are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

### Regulating disposable plastic tableware

7. Members expressed dissatisfaction with the Administration's slow progress in taking forward the regulation of disposable plastic tableware, despite growing concern about the environmental impact of disposable plastics.

8. The Administration advised that phased legislative control was a typical approach adopted in different places. The Administration would map out the way forward for regulating disposable plastic tableware through consultation with the public, the trades and relevant stakeholders. Taking into account the need to amend the relevant legislation and provide the public with an adaptation period, especially for the catering sector which required more time to adjust the supply chain amid the Coronavirus Disease 2019 ("COVID-19") epidemic, the Administration planned to introduce the relevant legislative proposal into LegCo in the first quarter of 2022 and would strive to implement the first phase of the proposed Scheme in around 2025.

### Reducing disposable plastic tableware

9. Members expressed concern about the surge in the use of disposable plastic tableware and packaging materials due to the increased popularity of takeaway orders and online shopping during the COVID-19 epidemic. As regulation of these items had yet to be introduced, Members urged the Administration to collaborate with the retail and e-commerce industries in reducing the use of disposable plastic tableware and packaging materials, and step up efforts to promote the use of reusable tableware.

10. The Administration advised that it had provided guidelines to the catering sector and takeaway food delivery platforms encouraging them to phase in green measures such as providing customers with reusable tableware and welcoming customers to bring their own food/beverage containers for their takeaways. Moreover, the Administration had been working with some major operators in the catering trade in reducing the provision of disposable tableware to customers. As observed, more and more catering operators had adopted the practice of providing disposable tableware only on customers' requests; and if use of disposable tableware was unavoidable, more environmentally friendly tableware made of non-plastic materials such as paper or plant-fibre were used. In this connection, the Green Tech Fund had been providing funding support for

research,<sup>4</sup> development and application of decarbonization and green technologies, including innovative materials and alternative products that were more environmentally friendly than disposable plastic tableware.

11. The Administration further advised that to promote a "disposable-free" culture, it had stepped up publicity and public education with a view to changing public behaviour progressively. For instance, two territory-wide promotional campaigns, namely "Plastic-Free Takeaway, Use Reusable Tableware" and "Plastic-Free Beach, Tableware First" were launched in 2018 and 2019 respectively in collaboration with about 700 local eateries during which about 2.4 million sets of disposable plastic tableware were saved. EPD and the Environmental Campaign Committee had also put forward various promotion initiatives through different channels since March 2020 to appeal to the public to minimize the use of disposable plastic tableware.<sup>5</sup>

#### Recycling of disposable plastic tableware

12. Members urged the Administration to enhance relevant recycling support to reduce the disposal of disposable plastic tableware, such as launching a disposable tableware recycling scheme which might also help promote the development of the recycling industry and create more job opportunities.

13. The Administration explained that used disposable tableware was mostly contaminated with food residues and grease and hence was not suitable for recycling unless thoroughly cleaned beforehand. To encourage clean recycling and facilitate the subsequent recycling process and identification of outlets for the recyclables, the Administration had strived to promote participation by all in source separation of waste. For example, EPD had set up the Green Outreach to provide outreaching services in order to assist the public in practising source separation of waste.<sup>6</sup> Compared to other plastic tableware, recycling EPS

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<sup>4</sup> The Green Tech Fund, established with Government allocation of \$200 million as announced in the 2020-2021 Budget, funds projects of up to \$30 million each for up to five years, covering four priority areas, namely decarbonization and energy saving, green transport, waste management, and air and water quality.

<sup>5</sup> The Environmental Campaign Committee has been set up since 1990 to promote public awareness of environmental issues and encourage the public to contribute actively towards a better environment. It also advises the Government on publicity and educational programmes related to the environment. Committee members include representatives of relevant government departments such as the Education Bureau, the Home Affairs Bureau, the Information Services Department and EPD.

<sup>6</sup> The Green Outreach is a community outreaching team set up under EPD since December 2018 which provides on-site recycling support. There are now about 200 staff in the Green Outreach. Pilot outreaching service has been provided in three districts (namely the Eastern, Kwun Tong and Sha Tin) and EPD plans to extend the service to all the 18 districts across the territory within 2021.

tableware was more challenging due to its light weight yet bulky volume.<sup>7</sup> The Administration had therefore enhanced the support for recycling EPS through the Pilot Scheme on Collection and Recycling Services of Plastic Recyclable Materials ('the Pilot Scheme'),<sup>8</sup> and had been collaborating with schools on reducing the use of EPS tableware in school lunches. The Administration planned to extend the Pilot Scheme from the current three districts (i.e. Eastern District, Kwun Tong and Sha Tin) to nine districts progressively.

### **Council questions**

14. Members raised questions about reduction and recycling of waste plastics including disposable plastic tableware at various Council meetings in the Sixth LegCo. The questions and the Administration's replies are hyperlinked in **Appendix II**.

### **Latest development**

15. The Administration will brief EA Panel on the proposed Scheme at the meeting on 23 August 2021.

### **Relevant papers**

16. A list of relevant papers is set out in **Appendix II**.

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Legislative Council Secretariat  
16 August 2021

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<sup>7</sup> In general, EPS products are composed of 98% air and only 2% plastic materials.

<sup>8</sup> The two-year Pilot Scheme was rolled out in 2020 to collect all types of waste plastics (including EPS tableware) from non-commercial and non-industrial sources for proper handling.

### **Measures adopted by the Administration for reducing the use of disposable plastic tableware**

- (a) *promotional campaigns*: "Plastic-Free Takeaway, Use Reusable Tableware" and "Plastic-Free Beach, Tableware First" were launched in collaboration with about 700 local eateries of different sizes in 2018 and 2019 respectively. About 2.4 million sets of disposable plastic tableware were saved during the two campaigns;
- (b) *banning the use of disposable plastic tableware at government venues*: the Administration has progressively ceased the provision of plastic straws and expanded polystyrene food containers in most government premises and canteens and stipulated the relevant requirement on the avoidance of using disposable tableware when awarding new contracts or renewing existing contracts. It is expected that 90% of the restaurants at government venues will cease using all disposable plastic tableware completely by the end of 2021;
- (c) *pilot scheme on central collection service of waste plastics*: in 2020, the Administration rolled out a two-year Pilot Scheme on Collection and Recycling Services of Plastic Recyclable Materials ("the Pilot Scheme") in Eastern District, Kwun Tong and Sha Tin successively to collect all types of waste plastics (including disposable plastic tableware) from non-commercial and non-industrial sources for proper handling. The Pilot Scheme will be extended to nine districts progressively;
- (d) *"Plastic-free" School Lunch*: the "Plastic-free" School Lunch Pilot Scheme was open for applications from all primary and secondary schools from September to November 2020 and will be run for three school years. Under the Scheme, refrigerators, steam cabinets, dishwashers and disinfection machines are provided for participating schools to encourage students to bring their own lunches using reusable food containers; and
- (e) *"Plastic-Free" Takeaway*: in early 2021, the Administration provided the catering sector and food delivery platforms with guidelines to encourage the eateries to adopt various measures to minimize the use of disposable plastic tableware.

[Source: Adapted from Appendix 2 to the consultation paper on the Scheme on Regulation of Disposable Plastic Tableware published by the Environmental Protection Department in July 2021.]

## Management of disposable plastic tableware

### List of relevant papers

Date of meeting	Event	Paper
22 October 2018	Policy briefing of the Panel on Environmental Affairs ("EA Panel")	Administration's paper on "2018 Policy Address - Policy initiatives of Environment Bureau: Environmental protection" (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)10/18-19(01)</a> )  Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)276/18-19</a> )
9 April 2019	Special meeting of the Finance Committee ("FC") for examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2019-2020	Written questions raised by Members and the Administration's replies (Reply serial numbers: <a href="#">ENB051, 102, 119, 120, 232, 276</a> )
6 April 2020	Special meeting of FC for examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2020-2021	Written questions raised by Members and the Administration's replies (Reply serial numbers: <a href="#">ENB038, 058, 060, 083, 101, 232, 266, 282</a> )
25 May 2020	Meeting of EA Panel	Administration's paper on "Management of waste plastics" (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)655/19-20(03)</a> )  Background brief on "Management of waste plastics" prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)655/19-20(04)</a> )

Date of meeting	Event	Paper
		<p>Administration's follow-up paper (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)857/19-20(02)</a>)</p> <p>Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)932/19-20</a>)</p>
28 December 2020	Informal meeting for policy briefing of EA Panel	<p>Administration's paper on 2020 Policy Address - Policy initiatives of Environment Bureau: Environmental protection (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)358/20-21(03)</a>)</p> <p>Notes of meeting (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)894/20-21</a>)</p>
21 January 2021	Meeting of EA Panel	<p>Administration's paper on "Waste Management Strategies for Hong Kong" (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)480/20-21(03)</a>)</p> <p>Background brief on "Waste management strategies" prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)480/20-21(04)</a>)</p> <p>Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)670/20-21</a>)</p>
22 March 2021	Meeting of EA Panel	<p>Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)906/20-21</a>)</p>
13 April 2021	Special meeting of FC for examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2021-2022	<p>Written questions raised by Members and the Administration's replies (Reply serial numbers: <a href="#">ENB076, 086, 105, 124, 164</a>)</p> <p><a href="#">Report</a> on the examination of the Estimates of Expenditure 2021-2022</p>



**Hyperlinks to relevant Council questions:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Council question</b>
9 May 2018	<a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (written) on disposable plastic tableware
13 June 2018	<a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (oral) on reducing the use of disposable plastic tableware
21 November 2018	<a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (written) on impacts of microplastics on the ecosystem and human health
17 April 2019	<a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (written) on microplastics and waste plastics causing environmental problems
8 May 2019	<a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (written) on use, disposal and recycling of styrofoam
13 November 2019	<a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (written) on reduction of waste plastics
27 May 2020	<a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (written) on impacts caused to the environment by anti-epidemic measures
4 November 2020	<a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (oral) on use, recovery and recycling of plastics
16 December 2020	<a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (written) on reduction of waste

**Other relevant document:**

<b>Government department</b>	<b>Document</b>
Environmental Protection Department	<a href="#">Consultation paper on the Scheme on Regulation of Disposable Plastic Tableware</a>