

BCE Meeting with Mr Edward Yau, Secretary for the Environment

Meeting Notes

Date : 5 October 2007 (Friday)
Time : 2:45 pm - 4:15 pm
Venue : Room 837, 8/F, West Wing, CGO

15 BCE members met with Mr Edward Yau, Secretary for the Environment, together with his Administrative Assistant Mr Eric Chan and Press Secretary Ms Teresa Chiu to discuss Hong Kong's major environmental challenges in the areas of waste, air and water pollution.

Waste

1. The Government promulgated "A Policy Framework for the Management of Municipal Solid Waste" in 2005 to consolidate various waste management initiatives and targets, covering source management, mechanical sorting and recycling, EcoPark development, landfills extension, thermal treatment, and etc. The framework includes the "Integrated Waste Management Facilities (IWMF)," which the Government is now studying.
2. Total MSW recovery rate was 45% in 2006, a target met three years in advance, resulting in a slight decline of waste disposal in the three landfills. But there is a challenge to sustain waste reduction programme because of the increasing waste generation due to the growing economy.
3. To further promote recycling, the government has extended the source separation programme from public housing to large private housing estates. However, there has been a difficulty to promote source separation and collection in single buildings, which account for half of the total housing in Hong Kong.
4. The EcoPark had let out three pieces of land and entered its second phase of development. Besides as a base for recycling industry, the Government would like to use it as a means to educate the general public. More parties, e.g. green groups, would be engaged in the wider education campaign.
5. While waste reduction and recycling could help conserve landfill space, they would not eliminate the need for landfill extension and incineration as necessary elements of waste management strategy, but it would be a very hard battle due to the local objections.
6. Based on foreign experience, members considered that legislation could be the only effective means to introduce further measures to implement polluter-pay principle. Mr Yau told members that legislation required community consensus, so he sought support from chambers to help build up a critical mass in public opinion on environmental policies.
7. Meanwhile, the business community could help promote environmental practices, e.g. by encouraging more SMEs to implement green procurement. Members commented that the market lacked green products because of the price disadvantage and suggested that the government could consider offering incentives to popularize the use of environmentally friendly products.

Air

8. Hong Kong's air pollution has come from both local and regional sources. For the local pollution, efforts had been made to reduce the number of smoky vehicles, e.g. by subsidizing taxis to shift to LPG and controlling emissions level of power plants. Emissions from these local sources had been reduced over the years.
9. Increasing awareness on technology and solutions has driven the bus companies to retrofit old buses to higher Euro standards, but there has not been a community consensus to subsidize bus operators to move on cleaner engine.
10. In the recent public engagement exercise on better air quality launched by the Council for Sustainable Development, one of the key subjects is to explore the use of electronic road pricing to ensure smooth traffic flows so as to improve local air quality. The Council has so far received 30,000 responses from the community.
11. In regard to the Scheme of Control, the Government had to take into consideration not only the environment but also the security and reliability of power supply.
12. Regional air pollution is mainly caused by emissions from power generation and industrial operations in the Pearl River Delta. In 2002, the HKSAR and Guangdong Governments reached consensus on emissions reduction targets by 2010 on four major pollutants. Some concrete actions had been taken by the Guangdong Government, e.g. shutting down small power plants and cement factories.
13. Guangdong officials had begun to realize that economic development and environmental protection were equally important, so they were willing to maintain a working dialogue with the HKSAR to learn from Hong Kong's experience, e.g. the legislation on VOCs and other air quality control measures.
14. Guangdong had difficulty in enforcing the use of clean fuels by vehicles, as cars and trucks came from everywhere in the nation.

Water

15. Mr Yau believed that the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme deserved credit in improving water quality, and was also a fine example of how polluter-pay principle worked.
16. Instead of engaging the public in a lengthy debate on higher standards, the Government had taken the practical and logical step in implementing Stage 2A immediately - extending the sewage tunnel network to capture the left-out areas along the harbour and expand the existing chemical treatment capacity.
17. Upon the completion of Stage 2A, the Government would review through public consultation the implementation of Stage 2B - upgrading to biological treatment plant.