

**Summary of Minutes of Meeting of Islands District Council**

Date : 3 September 2012 (Monday)  
Time : 2:00 p.m.  
Venue : Conference Room, Islands District Council, 14/F., Harbour Building,  
38 Pier Road, Central, Hong Kong.

I. Visit of the Director of the Hong Kong Observatory to Islands District Council

The Director of Hong Kong Observatory briefed the meeting of the work of the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO), including the monitoring stations in Islands District, Community Weather Information Network, storm surge warning system and various weather forecast services, etc.

Member gave their views and raised enquiries as follows:

- (a) A member was appreciative of the diversified services provided by the HKO. She said that residents of the district were very concerned about the time of resumption of ferry services in the wake of each typhoon. She proposed that the HKO could step up the dissemination of information of wind speed at sea through television and whether ferry services would be affected, so that residents could make preparations.
- (b) A member enquired whether law suits had been filed against the HKO because its weather forecasts were inaccurate.
- (c) A member said that the HKO had done a good job in disseminating weather information in recent years. However, she opined that there were too many storm warnings.. She received three or four storm warnings through her mobile phone on a day even when the weather was fine. She was appreciative of the HKO's giving prior notice of the imminent hoisting of typhoon signals so that residents of the district could make preparations quickly.

The Director responded as follows:

- (a) Public safety was the major consideration in deciding the termination or resumption of ferry services. In issuing typhoon signals, close communication would be maintained with the Transport Department apart from considering scientific data and public safety. Regular contacts would also be kept with transport services providers such as the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) and ferry companies, so that the latest information would become available. The HKO would also study the proposal of enhancing dissemination of weather information through television.
- (b) The HKO was established in 1883. It was a government department under the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau. The HKO had to be responsible for the services it provided, and so far it had not been involved in any civil lawsuit as a result of inaccurate weather forecast.
- (c) The HKO was concerned about whether there were too many storm warnings and members of the public had reflected that storm warnings would affect the operation of swimming pools, and some advised that less warning be issued. As such, the HKO had considered the issuance of storm warnings on a district basis. However, storms developed and changed very quickly and the feasibility of the above option had to be studied very carefully. At present, the HKO also gave information about the location of lightning, and the management of swimming pools could make references to it.

The Vice-chairlady was appreciative of the concern of Islands District and the support it provided. She said that the Tai O Storm Surge Warning System could effectively remind residents to take suitable precautions. She gave examples to illustrate how weather forecasts could assist organizers of outdoor activities. She also commended the HKO for advancing meteorological and environmental education in the district through Community Weather Information Network. She proposed that the HKO should enhance its communication with ferry companies in order to avoid confusion.

The Director said that the advancement of Community Weather Information Network would continue and that members would be welcome to visit the HKO. Close liaison with the Transport Department would be maintained before hoisting and taking down of typhoon signal number 8, so that suitable preparations could be effected before the typhoon signal was to be made public. Typhoon signals would be announced as early as it was permissible in terms of scientific information. The HKO would also meet with government departments annually to study proposals about information dissemination.

- II. Question on an incident of containers containing polypropylene plastic pellets fallen at sea
- III. Question on serious pollution of plastic pellets in Hong Kong waters

A representative of the Marine Department responded to the enquiries as follows:

- (a) The Marine Department received a report on 24 July that there were two containers floating at the sea near Lamma Island. As the report was received after Typhoon Vicente had passed, the Department worried that a ship might have sunk or there might be some other serious incidents. All efforts were made to trace the source of the containers, and ships and other users of the port were alerted of the danger. They were also requested to make report of any sightings of containers or other floating objects. For the two containers found, one was broken and the other was basically intact. The Department had salvaged the two containers in the shortest time possible. On 25 July, the Department received another report that another container was found stranded at the shores of Lamma Island and its contents were found scattered in the vicinity. Salvage operation was conducted immediately. On the afternoon of 25 July, the Department was able to trace a Mainland ship losing seven containers into the sea during the passage of Typhoon Vicente in the south of Hong Kong waters. There was a total of 150 tonnes of plastic pellets in six of the containers, while the seventh was carrying glass bottles. Five containers of plastic pellets had been salvaged so far. The Department had difficulty in ascertaining the amount of plastic pellets lost, as the current could carry them anywhere. Some might still be inside the container not yet

located, some might have drifted outside of the territory, while most might have been drifted ashore. Based on observation, the amount of plastic pellets floating at sea at the present might not be substantial.

(Post meeting note: The sixth container had been salvaged near Hei Ling Chau on 7 September)

- (b) Users of the port and other ships had been alerted of the danger immediately by Very High Frequency radio once the report was received by the Department.
- (c) A very substantial of resources had been deployed by the Marine Department and other government departments in locating and salvaging the plastic pellets. Patrol ships and the Government Flying Service had been looking for the missing plastic pellets while the Government and voluntary agencies had devoted their efforts in removing those drifted ashore. It was believed that the clearance exercise could be completed shortly.
- (d) The incident was caused by the loss of seven containers into the sea during the passage of Typhoon Vicente. The Marine Department was studying with the Department of Justice on the issue of responsibility of all parties concerned.

A representative of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) responded as follows:

- (a) Upon receiving notice of the incident on 2 August, the Department had conducted inspection on the mariculture zones affected, and mariculturists were approached to find out whether there was fishing dying or any other abnormalities. Inspection had also been conducted on marine parks, marine reserves and country parks under the AFCD's charge, so as to assess the impact of the incident. Starting from 6 August, data of inspection of fish were published daily.
- (b) The Department had also dispatched staff and used fishing boats to assist in removing the plastic pellets in mariculture zones.

- (c) The Department had been closely monitoring effects on marine ecology and no abnormalities had been detected so far.
- (d) Close contact had been maintained with 26 mariculture zones in the territory and no abnormalities and fish dying as a result of plastic pellets had been received.
- (e) Clearing of plastic pellets had been conducted with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) to ensure the quality of environment on Sham Wan, Lamma Island, so as to minimize the effects on the nesting sites of Green Turtles.

A representative of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) said that the plastic pellets were non-toxic, would not dissolve in water and would not decompose in normal temperature. The Department had been following up on the matter immediately upon receiving report of the incident and found that water quality had not been affected.

The representative of the FEHD said that the Department received notice of the incident on 26 July and was requested to assist in removing the plastic pellets. Plastic pellets were found on various non-gazetted beaches and clearance work had then begun immediately. Difficulties were encountered as many beaches were quite remote and inaccessible and the task was rather immense. After two weeks of continuous efforts, most beaches affected had been cleared.

The representative of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department said that the Department had enquired the EPD and learnt that the plastic pellets were non-toxic and would not affect the water quality. The departmental staff would remove plastic pellets found on beaches and separate them from other rubbish. Notices had been put up to alert swimmers.

A member said that the incident reflected the consciousness of the Hong Kong people, but that the performance of the government departments in co-ordination and information dissemination was less than satisfactory. She said that the response of the EPD was very slow and she was moved by the very conscious efforts of the volunteers. She hoped that the government departments would learn from the incident.

A member queried whether the Government had fully disclosed the incident after its learning of the matter on 25 July. Mariculturists said that had the Government informed them of the matter earlier, they would have been able to take precautions and minimized effects. The member enquired whether the Government had plans to mediate between the fishermen on the one hand and China Shipping Container Lines Company Limited and Sinopec on the other. He also said that Sinopec should be responsible for the recovery of the plastic pellets.

The representative of the Marine Department said that the Department was following up on the matter with the Department of Justice. As complicated contractual relationship was involved, it was difficult to estimate when a conclusion would be reached. The Marine Department would keep custody of the plastic pellets until the issue of responsibility would be resolved.

The representative of the AFCD said that data of fish inspection were published daily and that the plastic pellets had constituted no effect on food safety.

Another representative of the EPD said that upon receiving notification of the incident on 26 July, the Department had conducted an assessment and determined that the plastic pellets were non-toxic and there was no wide spread of the materials. The regent job then was to clear the plastic pellets and work had begun with the assistance of the FEHD. Marine Department was then informed and it was then found that the plastic pellets had spread. An interdepartmental meeting was held on 31 July to discuss co-ordination of efforts. As the top priority was the clearance of the plastic pellets, dissemination of information might have been delayed. A review would be conducted to make improvements.

The representative of the FEHD said that collection points were set up in places where a substantial amount of plastic pellets were found. Plastic pellets would be kept in storage compartments.

A member enquired the role played by the District Office and that how much of the 150 tonnes of plastic pellets lost had been recovered so far.

The representative of the FEHD said that around 30 tonnes of plastic pellets had been recovered by the Department.

A member reflected that fishermen were dissatisfied that they had not been informed of the incident immediately. He proposed the formation of a mechanism to inform fishermen organizations in the future. He further enquired if the Government would consider assisting the fishermen to conduct mediation with China Shipping Container Lines Company Limited and Sinopec.

The representative of the Marine Department said that around 60% of the plastic pellets lost had been recovered, which included those recovered by various departments and those recovered by the owner.

The Chairman said that he had contacted the Assistant District Officer on the second day after the typhoon, and he was informed that inter-departmental endeavours were following up on the matter. A substantial amount of resources had been devoted for the task which was very difficult. He was appreciative of the efforts of the green groups and volunteers. The District Office had been following up on the matter all along, although its efforts were not publicized.

The Vice-chairlady said that the Acting Chief Executive had convened an inter-departmental meeting to discuss the incident, which reflected the importance attached by the Government. However, the notification was belated indeed. She said that early notification of the incident and crisis management would ease public worry and she thus urged the Government to improve the notification mechanism.

#### IV. Question on paving blocks in the vicinity of Cheung Chau Pier

The representative of the Highways Department said that:

- (a) In response to public demand, paving blocks would be used as much as possible in the construction or re-construction of walkways. The use of paving blocks would improve the outlook of the area and they were environmentally friendly. Thus the Highways Department had formulated guidelines in the use of paving blocks. Wear and tear of paving blocks was inevitable after being used for a long time. The Department had adopted many measures for the maintenance of paving blocks.

- (b) The paving blocks in the vicinity of Cheung Chau were laid in phases from 2006 to 2009. The location was an Emergency Vehicular Access and thus materials used had been tested before used. Maintenance work had been conducted upon receiving of reports of damage. The Department was open on the issue of whether to conduct a major improvement work or to use concrete in resurfacing of the walkway. The Department was also considering the use of a new technique of resurfacing by using fibre glass on a small section of a road to test its effectiveness.
- (c) It was difficult to compare the maintenance costs of the two methods. In comparison with concrete surface, paving blocks would require more inspection and its requirements in maintenance and construction would be higher. However, from the viewpoint of recycling and environmental protection, paving blocks had an competitive edge. They were more economical when excavation of roads would be needed.

A member enquired about the techniques of laying paving blocks. He said that paving blocks at the location had been used for many years and he requested for a major maintenance project. He further enquired the timetable of using the new technique on the above road section.

Another member said that the vicinity of Cheung Chau Pier was very busy, and thus there was serious damage of paving blocks in the area. Grass growing in the cleavages had further compromised safety. She also urged the Department to implement the project of resurfacing in the area of Pak She Third Lane on Cheung Chau.

A member said that it was to his knowledge that paving blocks would not be used on steep roads and vehicular roads. He thus queried the use of the paving blocks in the vicinity of Cheung Chau Pier. He further said that the lack of supervision could compromise the effectiveness of construction, which in many cases was carried out by contractors. If the compressing procedure was not conducted effectively, rainwater could carry away mud and sand and the paving blocks would become loosened. He thus urged for closer supervision of contractors and a review of whether paving blocks should be used at the location.



Another member also suspected that the procedure of fitting the paving blocks in place had not effectively conducted. He pointed out that when materials were used to fix paving blocks in place, as what had been done in the second phase of construction in the area of Sun Hing Street, the conditions were much improved. He also pointed out that heavy vehicles would cause serious damages to the paving blocks.

A member was concerned about the suitability of using paving blocks as materials for road surfacing. He was concerned about safety, environmental friendliness and cost effectiveness of using the material. He urged the Highways Department to conduct a review on the issue.

The representative of the Highways Department said that the Department was considering the use of a new technique called "Geogrid" on a small section to test its effectiveness. If major improvement work was needed, assistance of district council members and the district office might be required to consult locals of the suitable materials to be used in road surfacing. The Department would then take residents' opinions into account in making a decision.

A member expressed his disagreement of resurfacing by concrete, as the local people had got used to paving blocks.

V. Question on fire mains at Lung Tsai Chuen on Cheung Chau

The representatives of the Fire Services Department (FSD) briefly explained the considerations of installing street hydrants and the situation of Lung Tsai Chuen by means of computer slides. They said that two of the three proposed locations for installing street hydrants were suitable but the available open space of the third was not adequate for operation. The Department thus proposed another location for consideration.

The representative of the Water Supplies Department agreed with the views of the FSD.

The member who raised the enquiry agreed with the proposal of the two departments.

Another member raised a concern that overgrown grass might render street hydrants unusable.

A representative of the FSD responded that regular inspections would be conducted to ensure that street hydrants were operable.

VI. Question on the new scheme- “Making it Easier to Get Around”

A representative of the Highways Department illustrated the major contents of the “universal accessibility” programme. He went on to explain that the four proposals mentioned in the enquiry, namely Cheung Kwai Estate and Nga Ning Court on Cheung Chau, Peng Chau Health Centre and Bus Stop at Shun Tung Road, involved the construction of elevators at hillsides and did not fall within the new policy, and thus were not included.

Members gave their opinions as below:

- (a) The Vice-chairlady could not understand why the four projects did not fall within the new policy. She urged departments not to shirk responsibilities among themselves.
- (b) A member was disappointed with the reply given by the Highways Department. If the new programme could not bring benefits to Islands District, the differences between the urban and rural areas would deepen. He urged the Highways Department to reconsider the proposals.
- (c) A member said that the new programme should take into consideration the actual needs of the community. She gave the examples of Cheung Chau to illustrate her point and urged the Highways Department to reconsider the proposals.
- (d) Another member said that of the 230 proposed projects, only one belonged to Islands District. He was critical of the departments in not considering projects not related to tunnels and pedestrian flyovers, thus limiting the usefulness of the new programme.

- (e) A member said that there were dire needs of the project of constructing an elevator at Peng Chau Health Centre. He enquired whether the Highways Department was the department responsible for making the decision of the project.
- (f) A member requested the Highways Department to relay members' requests to the Chief Executive.

Another representative of the Highways Department explained that the new programme was applicable to existing walkways maintained by the Department. The four proposals in Islands District did not fall within the new programme but they would be related to departments concerned to follow up, such as the Housing Authority and the Transport Department.

The Vice-chairlady opined that the Highways Department did not understand the original intents and contents of the Chief Executive's new policy. She said that the new policy had clearly stated that the new programme would be implemented by three policy bureaux, namely the Transport and Housing Bureau, Labour and Welfare Bureau, and the Home Affairs Bureau. Special funds would be provided for the purpose. She criticized the Highways Department of only "managing its own affairs" and she urged the Department to enquire the three bureaux whether they would handle these essential livelihood projects of Islands District.

A member said that the Highways Department might not fully understand the new policy of the Chief Executive. He proposed that the Chairman should write to the Chief Executive in the name of Islands District Council to inform him of the urgency of the four proposals which were not included in the new programme.

The Chairman said that he would write to the Chief Executive.

Islands District Council Secretariat  
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