

COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**Digest of the 39th Meeting
held on 22 April 2021 at 4:00 p.m.
in Conference Room, 33/F, Revenue Tower,
Wan Chai, Hong Kong**

Present:

Dr the Hon LAM Ching-choi	(Chairman)
Ms CHAN Shin-kwan*	
Prof Emily CHAN Ying-yang	
Prof Paul CHU Hoi-shan	
Miss Natalie CHUNG Sum-yue	
Prof Laurence HO Hoi-ming	
Ms Grace KWOK May-han	
Mr Jonathan LEUNG Chun	
Mr LI Sai-lung	
Ms Pamela MAR Chia-ming	
Mr Simon NG Ka-wing	
Prof Dennis NG Kee-pui	
Mr Kevin ORR Ka-yeung	
Miss Samanta PONG Sum-yee	
Mr TAM Kent-chung	
Mr Allan WONG Wing-ho	
Prof Jonathan WONG Woon-chung	
Dr Daniel YIP Chung-yin	
Dr Rita YU Man-sze	
Dr William YU Yuen-ping	
Mr WONG Kam-sing	<i>Secretary for the Environment</i>
Mr LIU Chun-san	<i>Under Secretary for Development</i>
Mr CHAN Jick-chi, Jack	<i>Under Secretary for Home Affairs</i>
Mrs TANG FUNG Shuk-yin	<i>Assistant Director (Estate Management)1, Housing Department</i>
Mr D C CHEUNG	<i>Principal Assistant Secretary for (Secretary) the Environment (Sustainable Development)</i>

* attended online

In Attendance:

Government Representatives

Environment Bureau

Ms Maisie CHENG	<i>Permanent Secretary for the Environment</i>
Mrs Dorothy MA	<i>Deputy Secretary for the Environment (Acting) / Assistant Director (Cross-Boundary & International), Environmental Protection Department</i>
Mr Patrick LEE	<i>Administrative Assistant to Secretary for the Environment</i>
Ms Elaine LI	<i>Press Secretary to Secretary for the Environment</i>
Mr Alvin TAI	<i>Assistant Secretary for the Environment (Sustainable Development)² (Acting) / Economist (Sustainable Development)</i>
Mr Eric WONG	<i>Assistant Secretary for the Environment (Sustainable Development)² (Acting) / Assistant Secretary for the Environment (Sustainable Development)¹</i>
Miss Mandy WONG	<i>Forestry Officer (Sustainable Development) (Acting) / Executive Officer (Sustainable Development)²</i>

Environmental Protection Department

Mrs Millie NG	<i>Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (2)</i>
Mr Bruno LUK	<i>Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (Special Projects)</i>
Ms Iris LEE	<i>Assistant Director (Waste Management Policy)</i>

Opening Remarks

The meeting noted that Prof Jonathan Wong and Ms Chan Shin-kwan had kindly agreed to take up the chairmanship of the Strategy Sub-committee (“SSC”) and the Education and Publicity Sub-committee respectively in the new term. Members were reminded that they should maintain confidentiality of classified materials including those in draft form.

Agenda Item 1 – Adoption of a two-tier declaration system

2. Members were reminded that the Council for Sustainable Development (“SDC”) needed to adopt a two-tier declaration system given the importance of the role of SDC Members. In the first tier, Members were required to disclose their general interests, direct and indirect, pecuniary or otherwise, on appointment / reappointment to the SDC and annually thereafter. In the second tier, Members should declare any actual or perceived conflict of interest as and when they arose.

Agenda Item 2 – Minutes of the last meeting

3. Members were informed that the revised minutes with Members’ comments incorporated were circulated to Members. As the secretariat had not received any further proposed amendments, the minutes were taken as confirmed.

Agenda Item 3 – Enhancing the Public Engagement Process (SDC Paper No. 01/21)

4. Members were briefed on the SDC Paper No. 01/21, namely streamlining the organisation structure, sharpening the focus of the Public Engagement (“PE”) process, random sampling as an additional tool for views collection, and making better use of the support given by the Programme Director.

5. Members were invited to review the process of PE and identify room for enhancement. The following views were raised:

- (a) Supported all the enhancements and suggested conducting a random sampling and a preliminary survey, and believed that this could help avoid manipulation of results;
- (b) Agreed that issues under the PE should be directional, while the details of implementation would depend on the views and the level of acceptance of the public; and
- (c) Expected that the PE process would be speeded up after introducing the proposed enhancements particularly by making better use of

technology.

6. The meeting noted the following responses:
 - (a) Explained that a preliminary survey would be useful for simple topics, of which citizens had basic understanding in a certain extent. However, for issues which the public were not familiar with, it would be difficult for the respondents to provide informed views in a preliminary survey before the start of the public education and publicity activities in the PE.
7. As there was no further comment, the proposed enhancements on PE process in SDC Paper No. 01/21 were endorsed.

Agenda Item 4 – Public Engagement on the Management of Single-use Plastics by the SDC
(SDC Paper No. 02/21)

8. Members were briefed on the proposed PE topic as set out in SDC Paper No. 02/21.
9. The following views / enquiries raised:
 - I. Proposed Topic and Scope of PE
 - (a) The Government was already engaging / would soon engage the public and relevant trade on the management of two types of single-use plastic items, namely plastic beverage bottles and disposable plastic tableware, hence they would not be the focus of this PE. Nevertheless, as the Plastic Shopping Bag Charging Scheme had been implemented for over a decade, in order to maintain the effectiveness of the scheme, the PE might be taken as a platform to solicit views on how the scheme could be enhanced;
 - (b) Shared that based on Member's experience of operating one of the new community recycling facilities, there were around 20% of plastic wastes came from the packaging of household goods. Various initiatives worldwide to reduce the usage of plastic packaging materials were quoted and the concept of "waste-to-energy" or

“waste-to-resources” could be applied for certain plastic wastes. Statistics on global plastic recycling rate were also suggested to be included in the PE in order to present a clearer picture of the plastic waste problem;

- (c) Suggested that the public should first be asked which party along the supply chain should bear the responsibility for the proper treatment of single-use plastics;
- (d) Commented that it would be helpful for Members and Programme Director to be informed of the Government’s overall strategy on the management of single-use plastics. This would facilitate the design of the scope and direction of the PE;
- (e) Opined the public in general understood that there was a need to manage single-use plastics. On this basis, the PE exercise could directly consult the public on the priority in managing different types of identified plastic items and public views on any proposed management strategies. On the proposed PE questions related to green lifestyle, there was room to explore whether the business sector should be suitably engaged as well. While the theme of the PE exercise could be on single-use plastics, the public should be made aware that in fact all single-use items should be avoided as far as practicable;
- (f) Shared that there was a surge of medical plastic waste due to the COVID-19 pandemic and understood that it was difficult to fully eliminate the use of plastics in the medical field. However, as alternatives with similar costs (e.g. cotton masks) were now available on the market, the Government and public organisations should proactively implement green procurement as far as practicable (say, in the medical field);
- (g) Pointed out that incentives should be provided to restaurants which had adopted measures to encourage customers to use less plastic tableware;
- (h) Expressed that it was difficult for the food and beverage (“F&B”) industry to restrict the use of single-use plastic tableware due to

operational needs. Some restaurants actively supported the Government's initiatives on reducing the use of plastics but the public might not be fully aware of their contributions. With a view to promoting relevant good practices in the F&B industry, it would be helpful for the Government to step up promotion so as to encourage more restaurants to follow suit;

- (i) Agreed that the PE should point to a clear direction as the society in general valued sustainable development. It was important to know the current level of acceptance on reducing the use of or imposing more stringent measures on single-use plastics before the PE. Relevant information would be helpful for positioning the PE; and
- (j) Opined that since the society in general supported reducing the use of plastics, it would be unnecessary to further look into this fundamental question in the PE. Instead, the PE might ask the public on the price that they were willing to pay for plastic alternatives.

II. Public Education and Publicity

- (a) Advised that a 10-year cohort study conducted to track the co-beneficial relationship of health and environmental protection could be shared. Educating the public on the above findings could motivate them to be more environmentally friendly;
- (b) Opined that the Government had to ensure that there were sufficient education and promotion provided to the public, so they would understand the need of imposing more stringent measures on single-use plastics;
- (c) Agreed that the major objective of the PE should be public education. The PE could raise public awareness on some less commonly known plastic items. For instance, plastic decorations used in exhibitions and shopping mall events, and degradable plastics, including their associated necessary recycling or treatment support. Regarding the categorisation of single-use plastics, polylactic acid plastics and bioplastics should be included as they could not be recycled via ordinary recycling facilities;

- (d) Opined that there was room to further strengthen public education in the community on reducing the use of plastics. The PE should also tie-in with the everyday life of the community, for instance, the PE might inform the public of the health impacts associated with plastics;
- (e) Opined that the PE should educate the public that it was necessary to use fewer plastics unless no alternatives were available;
- (f) Agreed that highlighting visible consequences of plastic wastes to the environment could serve the education purpose and drive behavioural changes. While low production cost was one of the reasons behind the prevalence of plastic products, there might be other more compelling reasons in the context of Hong Kong, for example, convenience, and absence of reasonable alternatives with similar quality on the market. These considerations should also be taken into account in order to encourage behavioural changes; and
- (g) Opined that there was sufficient public awareness on the impacts of single-use plastics. Yet, there was insufficient level of commitment to reducing their usage in the society. Suitable business groups that were actively promoting the reduction of single-use plastics could be invited as part of the support group in the upcoming PE.

III. Target Audience and Approach of the PE

- (a) Expressed that public opinions could be collected effectively by using social media and other existing survey channels. Given that the PE exercise would take around eight months, there was room to explore how to fully utilise the entire period for the collection and subsequent analysis of public views. Furthermore, the PE questions should also be forward-looking in order to drive discussion and forge consensus;
- (b) Supported conducting telephone survey in the upcoming PE exercise, given that views collected in previous PE exercises could only represent a small group of people in the society. Furthermore, views could also be collected via the social media, especially views of the youth. The PE should reach different age groups and a forum for youth could be organised. A response should be made to organisations who had submitted views so that they knew that the

SDC had received their suggestions; and

- (c) Agreed that promoting lifestyle changes was more important, and the Government should not use monetary incentive as the only means to drive behavioural change. More information should be provided to the general public on the impacts of plastic wastes to the environment and suggested asking the public on whether and how they were going to change. The plastic reduction targets pledged by the business sector should also be shared to the general public.

10. The meeting noted the following responses:

- (a) Agreed that it would be a good topic for PE as it was a down-to-earth livelihood issue;
- (b) Explained that instead of targeting at the responsibilities of a particular party along the supply chain, all producer responsibility schemes in place in Hong Kong advocated the concept of “eco-responsibility”, under which all relevant stakeholders, including manufacturers, retailers and consumers shared the responsibility for the collection, recycling, treatment and disposal of end-of-life products with a view to reducing the environmental impacts caused by them at post-consumer stage;
- (c) Considered that the message of “avoiding and minimising the usage of single-use plastics” should be made prominent to the public, and it would be practical to leave out those single-use plastic items without available alternatives in this PE;
- (d) Explained that there were multiple on-going initiatives put forward by the Government in managing certain types of single-use plastics. There was already public consensus on reducing the use of single-use plastic tableware. The Government had collaborated with various food delivery platforms to promote the reduction in single-use plastic tableware and consultation would be launched later this year. The Mainland’s new policy to control the production and distribution of single-use plastic tableware would have direct impact on the Hong Kong market as the Mainland was the major source of supply of single-use plastic tableware in Hong Kong. On the focus of the PE

exercise, single-use plastic items other than tableware could be explored, as the general regulatory approach for plastic tableware had been mapped out and could be implemented after ironing out the details in consultation with relevant stakeholders;

- (e) Explained why the proposed PE should focus on single-use plastics instead of single-use items of all material types. Global attention was being given to plastics in view of the quantity used, and their impacts on the ocean. As there were multiple on-going or upcoming public consultations on Producer Responsibility Scheme on Plastic Beverage Containers and Scheme on Regulation of Disposable Plastic Tableware, SDC's PE would focus on other single-use plastic items. This step-by-step approach would lead the public to understand that society as a whole was striving towards reducing the use of plastics;
 - (f) Agreed that the upcoming PE should solely focus on single-use plastics, noting that the PE would complement various initiatives on single-use plastics soon to be introduced. If the scope was too broad, it would be more difficult to allow focused discussion. The PE should not only cover the reduction of plastics waste, but also its impacts on health and marine life, etc;
 - (g) Assured Members that the PE would be forward-looking and informative. Under the model of SDC's PEs, a PE exercise involved engaging the public, educating them on the subject matter, and ensuring that they fully understood the issues and implications with a view to enabling them to make informed decisions. Regarding how to reach out to the public (e.g. arrangement of discussion forums and views collection via social media platforms), it could be further discussed by the SSC;
 - (h) Agreed that opinions of the youth should be collected. Young people could be invited to some of the engagement events; and
 - (i) Supplemented that in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, SSC may consider making use of technology, for example, online platform, to engage the public.
11. The meeting concluded that the proposed PE topic was endorsed and

reassured that the details of phrasing PE questions would be discussed in the SSC.

Agenda Item 5 – Any other business

12. The Secretariat was asked to provide Members with relevant information on various government plans on reducing plastics. The information had been shared to the Members afterwards via email.

Agenda Item 6 – Date of the next meeting

13. The Secretary would confirm the date of the next meeting nearer the time.

Secretariat

Council for Sustainable Development