

COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**Digest of the 42nd Meeting of Strategy Sub-committee
held on 15 June 2021 at 4:00 p.m.
in Multi-purpose Hall, 3/F, City Gallery, 3 Edinburgh Place,
Central, Hong Kong**

Present:

Prof Jonathan WONG Woon-chung (Chairman)
Ms CHAN Shin-kwan
Prof Paul CHU Hoi-shan
Miss Natalie CHUNG Sum-yue *
Ms Grace KWOK May-han
Mr Jonathan LEUNG Chun
Ms Pamela MAR Chia-ming *
Mr Simon NG Ka-wing
Mr Kevin ORR Ka-yeung
Miss Samanta PONG Sum-yee
Mr TAM Kent-chung *
Mr Allan WONG Wing-ho
Dr Daniel YIP Chung-yin *
Dr Rita YU Man-sze
Dr William YU Yuen-ping
Mr Stephen CHAN Chit-kwai ^
Mr Alfred CHANG Yu-ching ^
Ms Linda HO Wai-ping ^
Dr Patrick LEE Kwan-hon ^
Dr Peter LEE Wai-man ^
Mr LEUNG Hiu-fai ^
Mr Sam LIU Hin-sum ^
Dr Daniel TSANG Chiu-wa ^
Ms Susanna WONG Sze-lai ^
Mr D.C. CHEUNG
*Principal Assistant Secretary for (Secretary)
the Environment (Sustainable
Development)*

^ co-opt member

* attended online

In Attendance:

Government Representatives

Environment Bureau

Mr WONG Kam-sing	<i>Secretary for the Environment</i>
Mrs Millie NG	<i>Deputy Secretary for the Environment</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>Acting Assistant Secretary for the Environment (Sustainable Development)2 / Economist (Sustainable Development)</i>
Mr Eric WONG	<i>Acting Assistant Secretary for the Environment (Sustainable Development)2 / Assistant Secretary for the Environment (Sustainable Development)1</i>
Ms Mimi LO	<i>Senior Executive Officer (Sustainable Development)1</i>

Environmental Protection Department

Mr Bruno LUK	<i>Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (Waste Reduction Policy)</i>
Ms Iris LEE	<i>Assistant Director (Waste Management Policy)</i>
Dr Alain LAM	<i>Waste Management Manager</i>

Programme Director – Hong Kong Productivity Council

Ir Kenny WONG	<i>Deputy General Manager/ Principal Consultant</i>
Dr Keith CHOY	<i>Senior Consultant</i>

Absent with apologies:

Prof Laurence HO Hoi-ming
Dr TANG Chin-cheung ^

Opening Remarks

Members were briefed on the scope of work of Strategy Subcommittee (“SSC”). They were reminded to follow the two-tier reporting system and relevant guidelines on declaration of interests; and to maintain confidentiality of classified materials including those in draft form.

2. Members were also informed of the background of the current public engagement (“PE”). The consultations that the Government had conducted / planned in relation to the management of certain types of single-use plastics (i.e. public consultation on the Producer Responsibility Scheme on Plastic Beverage Containers and public consultation on the Scheme on Regulation of Disposable Plastic Tableware) this year were highlighted and the focus of the current PE was to widely cover all other types of single-use plastics. Following a review of the previous PE on long-term decarbonisation strategy and in view of the expectation of the public, the timeline of the current PE would be expedited and Members’ support was called for to achieve this target.

3. The work plan of the PE, the role of Programme Director (“PD”) and the bottom-up and stakeholder-oriented approach being adopted in the process of PE were introduced. The PD would arrange focus group meetings to engage stakeholders in mid-2021 to gather views for preparing the PE document on the topic, which shall then be released for wide discussion and collection of views from the general public and stakeholders. The Council for Sustainable Development (“SDC”) would then base on the views collected to formulate relevant recommendations to the Government. Members were reassured that the PD was prepared to arrange public interaction activities online as and when necessary.

Agenda Item 1 – Proposed Framework for the PE on the Management of Single-use Plastics *(SSC Paper No. 01/21)*

4. Members were briefed on the proposed framework of PE as set out in the SSC Paper No. 01/21. The meeting also noted the examples of single-use plastics as cited in SDC Paper No. 02/21. These types of single-use plastics were proposed to be covered in this PE exercise. The following views were raised:

Proposed Content of PE

- (a) Explained that plastic packaging performed different functions, and most of them were for transportation purposes. Suggested mentioning and explaining in the PE document the different functions of packaging in order to raise the awareness and understanding of the public;
- (b) Agreed on the need to first understand the functions of different plastics before coming up with a solution to reduce their use;
- (c) Suggested addressing the operational needs of industries on the use of single-use plastics in the PE Document. Findings of some previous management research studies were shared that cost would be a major concern that affected the willingness of businesses in participating in recycling;
- (d) Mentioned that reducing the use of single-use plastics was relevant to the concept of circular economy. The PE should provide consumers with knowledge on the impact of their consumption behaviour on the environment. The PE Document might address whether degradable plastics were in fact “greener” than conventional plastics, and whether they could fit in Hong Kong’s waste management system;
- (e) Mentioned that both producers and consumers would have major concern over the cost and price of single-use plastics alternatives. It would be helpful to convince and educate the public by statistics and figures. For instance, on “recyclability” of plastics, it would be helpful to educate the public that certain types of plastics, say, composite plastics, would be more difficult to recycle; and
- (f) Considered that the high cost and storage issues of single-use plastics alternatives might be one of the key concerns of producers. Suggested that in this PE, a flow chart / model be provided for guiding the public and stakeholders through the key issues and providing different options to facilitate them in giving their views.

Single-use Plastics Alternatives

- (a) Pointed out that manufacturers in Hong Kong could be very flexible

in shifting to other alternatives / replacements for packaging (such as using paper boxes for packing food in supermarkets);

- (b) Reckoned that certain packaging was necessary for the business sector as it served various practical purposes. It was sometimes difficult for the business sector to identify green alternatives as they did not possess relevant knowledge;
- (c) Pointed out that generally speaking, manufacturers and retailers were aware of increasing customer awareness on over-packaging and the need for green alternatives. Manufacturers' behaviour would be heavily influenced by Government's policies. The Government should closely communicate with manufacturers on the development of more low-cost and environmentally-friendly single-use plastics alternatives;
- (d) Agreed that in order to reduce the use of certain single-use plastic products, it would be important to provide practical alternatives;
- (e) Opined that the industry and stakeholders had considered their operational needs and single-use plastics alternatives. It might not be easy to phase out certain single-use plastic products. Certain alternatives might also cause harmful impact on the environment. It was considered that the assessment criteria (e.g. availability of alternatives) mentioned in the SSC Paper were helpful for educating the public and identifying practical alternatives;
- (f) Mentioned that the life-cycle assessment of plastics alternatives should also be taken into account; and
- (g) Suggested that alternative materials, e.g. using paper for packaging could be explored.

Proposed Approach to Control Single-use Plastics

- (a) Suggested that a practical approach should be adopted to promote reduction in the use of single-use plastics. If it was the intention to avoid the use of certain single-use plastics items, alternatives would also need to be offered;

- (b) Suggested providing incentives to mobilise the business sector to take part in reducing the use of single-use plastics. Suggested tackling the issue on single-use plastics progressively, i.e. starting from single-use plastics items with readily available alternatives and would not substantially affect the operational needs of the business sector. Personal care and cosmetics items, which might involve hygiene concerns, could be tackled in a later stage;
- (c) Pointed out that the amount of plastics collected for recycling had been increasing rapidly in recent months, which demonstrated that the public was generally supportive towards recycling. Considered that the Producer Responsibility Scheme was helpful for tackling some plastic products of high disposal volume and with comparatively higher recycling value, say, plastic beverage container;
- (d) Considered that a complete ban was in no doubt the most effective way in reducing the use of certain items that were not necessary, for example, umbrella bags. Nevertheless, education was equally important. Also, other approaches like trade-led charter could also be considered;
- (e) Suggested that stakeholders might be consulted on whether recent moves, approaches and policy plans of other countries were one of the criteria to be taken into account when considering the approach of reducing single-use plastics in Hong Kong;
- (f) Suggested that more quantifiable plastics reduction targets could be set. Furthermore, before implementing any new policies on plastics, the business sector should be given ample time to adapt to and make changes. In order to present a clearer picture on any upcoming plans on the management of plastics, it would be helpful to prepare a timeline for reference;
- (g) Opined that a reward scheme, such as rewarding customers who did not choose to use single-use plastic products, might be considered to encourage behavioural change; and
- (h) Agreed that a reward scheme could be an effective way for driving behavioural change of customers. Other reward schemes (such as offering discount on drinks for bringing own cups) were effective in

some coffee shops. It was also important to build up a positive image of using eco-bags.

Plastic Shopping Bag Charging Scheme

- (a) Opined that there was room for enhancing the Plastic Shopping Bag Charging Scheme. Taking Macao as an example, \$1 had already been charged for each plastic bag when the scheme was launched. It might be easier to convince the public that Hong Kong's present charging level could be adjusted as well;
- (b) Agreed that the Plastic Shopping Bag Charging Scheme had room for improvement. Reviewing the scheme including its scope and charging level would be beneficial to maintaining the effectiveness of the scheme and public education; and
- (c) Considered that the present scope of exemption of the Plastic Shopping Bag Charging Scheme was too wide. If the Government was planning to increase the plastic shopping bag levy to say \$1 per bag, it would be effective in reducing the use of plastic shopping bag only if such levy and tightening of the exemptions could be implemented together.

Engagement Process

- (a) While the Plastic Shopping Bag Charging Scheme currently in place had been an effective way to reduce the use of plastic shopping bags, attention should be paid to any possible shift in consumer behaviour;
- (b) Suggested that when engaging the business sector or the public, the PD could explain the current position in the reduction of plastics usage and show overseas examples for illustration, to be followed by factual information on plastics, e.g. statistics on daily disposal of plastics in Hong Kong;
- (c) Considered that there would be a need to ascertain the willingness of the public in minimising the use of plastics or changing their behaviour if no alternatives were available, and it was important to gauge the views of different age groups; and

- (d) Emphasised that it was important to engage as many stakeholders as possible in this PE to avoid biased opinions.

Focus Group Meetings

- (a) Suggested that apart from retailers, manufacturers might be invited to the focus group meetings as they were responsible for producing plastics alternatives or environmentally-friendly products;
- (b) Commented that the business sector should be one of the key parties to be engaged in the upcoming focus group meetings. The business sector could give practical feedback on the difficulties in reducing single-use plastics in dealing with logistics and retail sectors;
- (c) Pointed out that there were a lot of possible single-use plastics alternatives including new materials and recycling techniques, not only being studied and developed, but also ready for the market through different local manufacturers;
- (d) Considered that before conducting the focus group meetings, PD should gather more information on the industries which generated single-use plastics, the consumption level and the available alternatives to facilitate the collection of more useful views and comments from stakeholders;
- (e) Suggested inviting suitable business groups which had been actively promoting or implementing environmentally-friendly practices as one of the target groups for the focus group meetings so that they could share their experience with other stakeholders in the industry;
- (f) Advised that sending a clear and simple message was important, hence simple infographics would facilitate the public to grasp the key message. The design and flow of the focus group meetings and engagement events should focus on how to reduce single-use plastics and when it could be achieved in order to collect public views on relevant key issues; and
- (g) Suggested that PD should invite stakeholders from the material supply industry to attend the focus group meetings as they were more knowledgeable about the availability of alternatives to various plastic

materials in the market. The handling of various plastic products could be very different and one of the consideration factors would be the recyclability of such particular products and waste reduction should always come first.

Public Education and Publicity

- (a) Shared experience of organising a forum for the youth on a similar topic that it was important to outline current situation in Hong Kong first. The public might not have the knowledge of the ways to reduce the use of plastics in their daily lives and the availability of alternatives. Suggested gathering such information and educating the public in the PE;
- (b) Pointed out that many government-led initiatives had been performing fairly well in terms of waste reduction. To achieve further improvement, the Government, the business sector and consumers all had a role to play. The Government should take the lead in shifting consumers' behaviour through education;
- (c) Appreciated the education and views-collection purposes to be served by the PE and considered modern methodology should also be adopted on top of conventional methods. On this front, the public relations agency should utilise their skills and knowledge with social media and contemporary techniques;
- (d) Considered outdoor advertisement spaces should be utilised as far as possible for drawing the attention of the public, and there should be wide-spread media advertisements;
- (e) Agreed that education was important. The Government should take an active role in coordinating the business sector and change consumers' behaviour;
- (f) Noted that more youth groups were discussing the issue of single-use plastics recently. Suggested making use of social media and the web page of SDC to widely promote the PE. A wide range of engagement channels should be used to reach out to different age groups;

- (g) Explained that for promotion of greener lifestyle and driving behavioural change of consumers, apart from presenting cost analysis, it was important to cultivate a “go green culture” and encourage the public by non-financial means. Positive psychology could be used to drive behavioural change so that people would feel happy about the environmental benefits brought about by the difference they made instead of focusing on the difficulties to make the changes;
- (h) Agreed that education was a key purpose of the PE. Considered that employing tools or social media (e.g. the online game on decarbonisation released earlier by the SDC) would make the engagement process more interesting and more effective to reach out to and educate the public; and
- (i) Opined that this PE topic was a practical and relative simple one for engaging the youngsters. Information on single-use plastics at different knowledge levels (from basic understanding of general facts to more complex information for in-depth discussion) might be provided on electronic platforms, such as e-learning platform, in order to engage more youngsters. Social media platform was the quickest and easiest way to reach out to and engage more youngsters.

Others

- (a) Suggested that part of the outcome of the upcoming PE could be presented by numbers, e.g. the number of students / schools engaged during the PE, such that the effectiveness of PE could be presented quantitatively;
- (b) Supplemented that the key message to be presented to the public was to “avoid the use of single-use plastics”. Umbrella bags were considered not necessary and banning of free distribution could be explored; and
- (c) Opined that disposable plastic tableware was inseparable from the topic of single-use plastics. Though it would not be focused in this PE and had been separately covered in another consultation, the Government could consider combining the findings together for presenting a whole picture to the public on the trend and handling of single-use plastics in Hong Kong.

5. The meeting noted the following responses:
- (a) Remarked that this PE topic was addressing a complex issue with no single answer given different considerations of the public and the business sector. In any event, the PE was a bottom-up exercise to collect public opinions to facilitate the Government to make decision on how to address the issue. Agreed that the education purposes should be highlighted in this PE;
 - (b) Agreed that new channels for engaging the public should be considered for this PE. The Government had strived to provide more recycling outlets in the community while a wide range of recycling facilities had been established. The Government also took the initiative to facilitate the collection and recycling of recyclables with low commercial values. Members were briefed on the Government's vision of "Waste Reduction · Resources Circulation · Zero Landfill" featured in the Waste Blueprint for Hong Kong 2035. The SDC's PEs were important for policy formulation by the Government;
 - (c) Concluded that Members generally agreed that it might not be practical to ban all single-use plastics items from the outset. Instead, a range of approaches including charging, trade-led voluntary scheme, charter scheme, education, etc., could also be explored. To ensure effective implementation of relevant single-use plastics reduction initiatives, it was important to set a timeline. Advised that overseas examples could be quoted as reference in the PE Document to facilitate the public and stakeholders to make an informed decision; and
 - (d) Agreed that the Government should consider wider use of social media. Members were informed that the focus group meetings would be held in the near future and the PD would arrange accordingly.

Agenda Item 2 – Any other business

6. There was no other business raised.

Agenda Item 3 – Date of the next meeting

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

**Secretariat
Council for Sustainable Development**