

**Advisory Council on the Environment  
Waste Management Subcommittee**

**Notes of the Thirteenth Meeting  
Held on 6 June 2007 at 2:30 pm**

**Present**

Professor Poon Chi-sun (Chairman)  
Mr. James Graham  
Mr. Lau Che-feng, Edwin  
Dr. Ng Cho-nam  
Mr. Tsang Kam-lam  
Mr. Wong Ka-wo, Simon  
Dr. Yau Wing-kwong  
Mr. Te Chi-wang (Secretary)

**Absent with Apologies**

Professor Howard Huang  
Dr. Man Chi-sum

**In Attendance:**

Mr. Raymond Fan	Deputy Director of Environmental Protection
Mr. Alfred Lee	Assistant Director of Environmental Protection
Dr. Cherie Lee	Environmental Protection Officer

**Action**

**Agenda Item 1: Confirmation of Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The minutes of the twelfth meeting held on 30 April 2007 were confirmed.

**Agenda Item 2: Matters Arising**

*Public Education Programme under the “Policy Framework”*

2. The Secretariat had followed up with the applicants regarding the comments of the Subcommittee. Members noted the revised applications

and the submission to the ECF Committee.

3. The Chairman informed Members that the Green Student Council had provided further information on their proposal “Save Food Project” (ref. PEP 006). In line with the practice of other ECF programmes, the Chairman suggested and Members agreed that the applicant should re-submit his proposal at the next application period, taking into account comments of the Subcommittee. For the next application period, Members agreed that the focus should be on the Integrated Waste Management Facilities and landfill extensions.

### **Agenda Item 3: A Proposal on An Environmental Levy on Plastic Shopping Bags (Paper WMSC 8/07)**

4. While agreeing that the problem of plastic shopping bags was very visible, a Member noted that the current proposal only focused on a few major retailers, which contributed to one-fifth of the problem. In fact, these major retailers had been doing the most in reducing plastic shopping bags voluntarily, and they were disadvantaged by being willing to share their environmental responsibility. He considered that a level-playing field was of utmost importance, and thus, the proposed levy should be applied to all retailers.

5. Mr. Raymond Fan responded that the Administration was thankful to the major retailers for sharing their environmental responsibility. Indeed, the signatories of the “Voluntary Agreement on Plastic Bag Reduction” had managed to reduce a total of 150 million plastic shopping bags in a year. Yet, this was dwarfed by the number of plastic shopping bags disposed of at landfills, i.e. over 8 billion plastic shopping bags each year. By introducing the proposed environmental levy, it was estimated that 1 billion plastic shopping bags could be saved. Mr. Alfred Lee added that a phased approach could help ensure successful implementation of the proposed levy, which was, after all, the first mandatory producer responsibility scheme (PRS) in Hong Kong, and which would set the path for future PRS’s. After implementing the first phase, the Administration would review the effectiveness of the levy and consider how it could be extended to other retailers. It had never been the intention of the Administration to stop after the first phase.

6. Two Members supported the proposal. In particular, an environmental levy had to be put in place first and the coverage could be extended subsequently. A Member also considered that the voluntary effort on plastic shopping bag reduction should continue, especially at retailers not yet covered by the scheme. Another Member supported the proposal as well. By putting a price on every plastic shopping bag, the Member believed that the public would treasure these bags more and found ways to reuse them effectively. While supporting the proposal, A Member suggested setting out clearly why free plastic shopping bags were targeted, in view of other bulkier waste, such as free newspapers. Obviously, paper recycling had been rather well established in Hong Kong, while plastic shopping bags ended up in the landfills and took up precious landfill space for years.

7. In response to a Member's enquiry of the possibility of charging the levy at the manufacturing/import level, Mr. Raymond Fan said that Hong Kong was a free port, and a levy at the manufacturing/import level would have serious trade implications. In particular, bonded warehouse and pre-shipment trade declaration system would have to be established to monitor each and every shipment of plastic shopping bags, most of which, however, were not destined for local use. A Member added that under competitive market environment, retailers might choose to absorb the levy through general price increase, and in the absence of a direct economic disincentive for the consumers, the policy objective could not be achieved. Yet for subsequent phases, a Member opined that it was necessary to look further and study methods to deal with the remaining 7 billion plastic shopping bags. Such methods could include levy collected at the supplier level. Retailers would have to pay upfront to the suppliers and then collect the levy from customers. All levy-paid plastic shopping bags would be marked for monitoring. This would help deal with the massive administrative work when small retailers and wet markets were involved in subsequent phases. A Member added that this could also encourage retailers to keep less plastic shopping bags in stock.

8. A Member noted Taiwan's experience, where an environmental levy on plastic shopping bags had apparently led to an increase in plastic bag waste in certain sector, such as the restaurant trade. Mr. Raymond

Fan said that in addition to the levy, Taiwan also banned plastic shopping bags with thickness of less than 0.06 mm as a way to deal with littering problem. In situations where plastic shopping bags were unavoidable, such as the restaurant trade, such thickness requirement could indeed increase the amount of plastic bag waste. We had learnt from Taiwan's experience, and thus, did not encourage thicker plastic shopping bags, nor cover the restaurant trade. In fact, Taiwan had reviewed the coverage of their scheme and exempted restaurants with storefronts since June 2006.

9. In response to a Member's enquiry on Ireland's experience, Mr. Alfred Lee said that the environmental levy had led to more than 95% reduction of plastic shopping bags in Ireland. Even though there had been some rebound in the use of plastic shopping bags, the usage figure was still well below the pre-levy level.

10. Having taken note of Members' views, the Chairman summed up that

- the Subcommittee supported the Administration's proposal, which would go a long way not only in terms of waste reduction, but also in terms of educating the public on their environmental responsibility;
- the Administration should continue with the voluntary effort on plastic shopping bag reduction, especially at retailers not yet covered by the scheme; and
- to foster a level playing field in the business sector, the Administration should state up front in the proposed legislation that it intends to cover all plastic shopping bags users. After the implementing the first phase for a year, the Administration should review its effectiveness and extend the scheme to other retailers as soon as possible, so as to realize more environmental benefits from plastic shopping bag reduction.

11. Mr. Raymond Fan said that as part of the public consultation, the Administration planned to host a public forum on 22 July 2007. The Chairman and Members agreed that the Subcommittee could join as a co-organizer and nominate a representative as a speaker.

#### **Agenda Item 4: Any Other Business**

12. There was no other business.

#### **Agenda Item 5: Date of Next Meeting**

13. The next meeting would be held on 28 June 2007. The Chairman suggested to take stock the progress of the key initiatives under the Policy Framework at the next meeting.