

To: Environmental Protection Department, water policy division ("EPD")
Marine Department – Aberdeen ("MD")
Marine Police – Aberdeen ("MP")
District Office Aberdeen /Ap Lei Chau / Outlying Islands ("DO's")
Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD")

Date: 4 December 2009

Dear Sirs,

Re: water quality Aberdeen Typhoon Shelter ("ATS") and other waters in Hong Kong

Last week I attended a Public Consultation meeting organized by EPD with the aim to arrive at recommendations for new Water Quality Objectives for Hong Kong. I reckon that anyone will support this exercise but I was disappointed to learn that surface pollution was low on the list of requirements and no objectives have (yet) been formulated in this regard.

I have lived at the seaside in Luk Chau Wan, Lamma Island, since 1994 and I cross East Lamma Channel on average 4 times a day. During this period I have noted a material improvement in the general water quality, mainly thanks to the continuous upgrading of Hong Kong's sewerage system. Unfortunately and notwithstanding increased cleaning efforts on the part of the Government, surface pollution has only deteriorated and the quality of our coastline accordingly (witness SCMP's special report of 13 November'09 regarding a recent voluntary beach clean-up).

It is my experience that the bulk of this type of pollution is caused by the local fishing community. The fact that the seasonal peak of surface pollution in the typhoon shelters coincides with the summer fishing ban in Chinese waters (when many fishing vessels are lying idle in Hong Kong) is evidence of my findings. Further, the fishing community's absence of the mentioned beach clean-up, also suggests a surprising lack of concern.

Fishfarm operators form another group of major surface polluters as they or their personnel have little opportunity, incentive and/or respect for the environment to dispose of their waste properly, possibly as they often operate out of sight of the authorities (but in front of my door). Others, such as owners and operators of pleasure craft, sampans, ferries, adjacent shipyards and other users are also culpable, but the fishing and fishfarming communities are without doubt the biggest offenders.

In order to change the status quo a concerted effort is warranted and I believe that some simple and cost effective measures will go a long way:-

Education

- 1) All owners and personnel of craft and fishfarms need be advised on a regular basis what can be discarded in local waters and what not (action EPD);
- 2) All owners and personnel of craft and fishfarms need be advised what the nearest waste collection point is of their home mooring (EPD/MD/DO's/AFCD);

Licensing

- 3) the examination materials for licensed operators of any craft to include a chapter about the local laws and advisable behaviour regarding environmental protection (EPD/MD);
- 4) the annual extension of boat licenses to include an undertaking from the boat owner that he and his employees/guests will comply with Hong Kong's anti-pollution laws (MD);
- 5) boat owners, boatboys, fishfarm and shipyard operators to (regularly) attend environmental protection and awareness courses (EPD/MD);
- 6) to advise and preferably legislate that any licensed vessel be fitted with a garbage bin (MD/EPD);
- 7) fishfarm licenses to include advice and conditions on how and where to dispose of their garbage (EPD/AFCD);

Waste collection

- 8) the installation of waste collection containers at jetty's, ramps, quays, and other strategic places, making proper waste disposal easier for boat users (action MD/DO's);
- 9) to organize better waste collection services for fishfarm operators (AFCD/DO's);
- 10) in addition to the fishing of trash out of the water the (sampan) garbage collectors should also be instructed to collect directly from moored vessels. If over a certain period of time no waste is handed over without a valid excuse, the vessel concerned should be asked to leave the shelter (DO's/MD);
- 11) upon arrival (and departure) in any shelter vessels should be asked to hand over their garbage (MP vessels have rightfully adopted this practice), and if it is claimed that they have no waste they may immediately be labeled suspect (MD/DO's);
- 12) more drastic measures could for instance be that (arriving and departing) vessels be offered a nominal compensation of say HK\$5 per garbage bag handed over. The cost of this exercise can probably be met by a consequential reduction in expenses of the cleaning of surface water and our beaches (EPD/AFCD/DO's);

- 13) visiting vessels using the shelter overnight to be advised on the rules and regulations on local garbage disposal, including the available waste collection services and an indication of nearest points where various kinds of waste can be disposed of (MD);
- 14) in addition to the picking up of the trash from our beaches cleaning workers should also be assigned to collect waste directly from fishfarms. If over a certain period of time no waste is handed over without a valid excuse, the fishfarm's license should be revoked (DO's/MD/AFCD);

Enforcement

- 15) a more vigilant monitoring of marine pollution and to prosecute offenders more intensively, especially at night and in the months June, July and August (MP/EPD/MD);
- 16) occasional undercover policing (MP/EPD/MD);
- 17) monitoring of shelters and fishfarms with camera's (MP/EPD);
- 18) the HK\$[1,500 penalty for the offence of littering should be much more actively applied, the progress in this regard should be communicated to the public, and the proceeds may be applied towards the cost of further clean-up (MP/EPD);

Other (and optional)

- 19) all boat owners having a certain typhoon shelter as their home port to be charged for the 'waste fishing' services, payable as a surcharge on their periodic license fees. This will ensure better communal awareness and hopefully some social control (MP/DO's).

Most of the above suggestions are obvious and involve common sense. Nonetheless their implementation require a concerted effort of the various Government Departments, something which regrettably Hong Kong is not strong at. Some ideas may prove more difficult or take time, however action is overdue and rigorous steps need be taken to reduce surface pollution in Hong Kong waters. It would be widely appreciated if the departments concerned follow up on the matter adequately.

Yours faithfully,

Eduard van Voorst

