

Public Hearing on HATS - Presentation by HKIE on 6th November 2004.

1. Introduction

The Harbour Area Treatment Scheme (HATS) is one of the most important sewerage infrastructure undertakings ever pursued by the HKSAR Government. The first stage of the work was commissioned in December 2001. The HKSAR Government is seeking views of the public on the implementation of the Stage 2 works which aim to further improve the water quality in the harbour area. A consultation paper which outlines proposals for HATS Stage 2 was released on 26th August 2004 to seek views from the public on whether they agree with: (a) the preferred option, i.e. Option A, (b) phased implementation of stage 2, and (c) polluter pay principle.

In response to this initiative, the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers (HKIE) in association with the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management Hong Kong (CIWEM) organized a forum on 9th October 2004 to discuss the Consultation Document and to collect members' views on this document for the preparation of this position paper to the government. This presentation summarizes the majority views of the HKIE members on the subject, with recommendations for the way forward by the Government.

2. Comments on Consultation Paper

The HKIE is pleased to know that after the commissioning of the HATS Stage I, the water quality in the Victoria Harbour has been substantially improved. Hong Kong SAR Government should be commended for its commitment and efforts in protecting the waters of Victoria Harbour and the adjacent water control zones in Hong Kong. As the statutory engineering institution in Hong Kong, the HKIE is supportive of this project and wishes to urge the Government to proceed with the project without delay. However, the Institution does have some specific views and comments to express about the Consultation Paper and the Environmental & Engineering Feasibility Assessment Studies (EEFS), which form the technical basis of the paper. A Position Paper will be submitted to give more detailed comments of the Consultation Paper and the EEFS.

3. Recommendations

On the three questions in the Consultation Document, the HKIE's responses are:

3.1 Do you agree with the preferred option, i.e. Option A - centralized treatment at Stonecutters Island (SCI)?

YES, but Option B may be better because under this Option land is readily available for an above ground facility using various proven treatment technologies, and therefore we would be less dependent on the use of compact treatment technology, while the capital and recurrent costs of this Option are only marginally higher than those of Option A. In terms of resilience, Option B will provide more flexibility for sewage transfer and for future expansion. Also, it will reduce concentrated discharge of effluent, though the higher risk of this Option on ecological resources around the south of Lamma and fisheries resources in southern waters should be duly considered.

3.2 Do you agree that Stage 2 should be implemented in two phases, i.e. HATS Stage 2A: collection of sewage from HK Island, Chemically Enhanced Primary Treatment (CEPT) in SCI + disinfection; and HATS Stage 2B: biological treatment of all sewage at SCI?

YES, but the two phases should be implemented as an integral plan, but in two engineering phases for practical reasons. It is essential that a definitive consecutive time frame for the two phases should be specified in the Consultation Paper.

On the use of chlorination for disinfection, the HKIE is of the view that the Government should strike a balance between protection of public health and long-term environmental impact of chlorination. The HKIE concurs in the use of chlorination as an interim measure or as needed during, for example, bathing seasons, pending the implementation of Stage 2B.

3.3 Do you agree that protecting the water quality of Victoria Harbour is essential and that it is worth you paying higher sewage charges in line with the "Polluter Pays Principle"?

- YES, it is essential to protect the water quality of Victoria Harbour. The Government has the legal responsibility to protect the water quality of Victoria

Harbour, and it must carry out the necessary measures in the most cost-effective manner.

- The HKIE has no consensus view on how to adopt the “Polluter Pays Principle” in this project.

In addition, the HKIE recommends the following for Government consideration:

- PROPOSE that a standard be set for effluents discharged into the receiving waters.
- PROPOSE to consider shifting the tunnel alignment southward to reduce the risk and cost in tunnelling in the reclaimed area, and to carry out detailed site investigation as soon as possible.