

Advisory Committee on the Quality of Water Supplies Minutes of the 1st Meeting

Date: 26 April 2000 (Wednesday)

Time: 2:30 p.m.

Venue: 12/F Conference Room, Murray Building, Garden Road, Central, Hong Kong

Present: Mr. Kenneth FANG Hung (Chairman)
Mr. Hugh Phillipson (Vice-Chairman)
Dr. SO Kai-ming
Mr. WONG Kwok-keung
Prof. David Dudgeon
Prof. LAM Kin-che
Dr. HO Kin-chung
Ms. Lister CHEUNG Lai-ping
Mr. WONG Man-chiu
Ms. Nancy POON Siu-ping
Mr. Patrick H.I. KWONG
Dr. L.Y. TSE
Mr. WONG Bay
Mr. KWAN Ka-lun
Mr. Stephen LAU Chi-ming (Secretary)

In attendance: Mr. CHAN Pui-wah
Mr. Damien KU Chi-chung
Mr. CHAN Kwong-wei
Mr. CHEUNG Tze-leung

Absent with
apologies: Dr. Richard CHEUNG Yun-hing
Mr. Hugh WU Sai-him
Dr. Mike CHIU

1. The Chairman welcomed members to the first meeting of the Committee and members introduced themselves one by one.
2. The Chairman extended a welcome to Mr. CHAN Pui-wah, Mr. KU Chi-chung, Mr. CHAN Kwong-wei and Mr. CHEUNG Tze-leung from the Water Supplies Department.
3. The Chairman advised that in view of public interest on water quality, a short briefing session would be held at the conclusion of the meeting for members of the media present.

4. Terms of Reference

The Chairman presented the proposed terms of reference for the Advisory Committee on the Quality of Water Supplies which had been circulated to all members (Appendix I). There being no amendment proposed by members, the terms of reference were agreed.

5. Introduction to Water Supplies Department

- 5.1 Mr. Phillipson tabled at the meeting an information package on the Water Supplies Department for members' reference. He then gave a brief introduction to the Water Supplies Department (WSD).
- 5.2 Some members expressed interest in the trend of per-capita consumption. It was advised that the per-capita consumption or the unit domestic water demand had levelled off for some years despite the improvement in living standard. It was also pointed out that bottled water consumption was less than 1.5% of the per-capita consumption and therefore was not a significant factor in the overall consumption.
- 5.3 It was clarified that the responsibility for water quality of WSD was up to the connection point. Beyond that, the responsibility was with the building owners or the building maintenance/management agents as they are responsible for the maintenance of the water supply systems inside the buildings. Some members remarked that the general public might not be too clear about such limit of WSD's responsibility. Members were informed that educational activities had been provided to the building management offices or the building owners and would be extended to the general public including school kids.

- 5.4 To address such a concern, members were advised that the Director of Buildings had formed a working group to prepare a guidance manual on the maintenance of buildings and associated building services including water supply, electricity, etc. In the manual, the maintenance responsibility of the water supply system beyond the connection point could be clearly spelt out.

6. ACQWS Paper No. 1 - World Health Organization Guidelines and International Standards for Drinking-water Quality

- 6.1 The purpose of this paper was to introduce and compare the three most well known water quality guidelines/standards in the world. In the same way as Singapore and New Zealand, Hong Kong had adopted the World Health Organisation (WHO) Guidelines as the standard for drinking water quality. The WHO Guidelines were designed to protect human health and were aimed globally, not just at developing countries. The Members generally agreed that such a practice was considered effective in protecting public health and therefore should be continued.

- 6.2 At present, all 94 health related chemical parameters of the WHO guidelines and about 30 other aesthetic parameters had been included in the comprehensive monitoring programme and the sampling points covered the whole supply system. The WHO guidelines did not further classify the relative importance of the health parameters. However, WHO emphasised that bacteriological quality should always take precedence. The testing frequency of individual parameter could vary from once every hour to twice a year depending on various factors. A paper covering the details of the water quality monitoring programme would be prepared for members' reference before the next meeting. WSD

- 6.3 In response to a member's request, WSD would provide more details in the next meeting concerning those parameters appearing in the USEPA and EC Standards but not in WHO Guidelines. More details would also be provided on the cost implication if the existing treatment works were to be upgraded to meet these two Standards in addition to the WHO guidelines. WSD

- 6.4 Some members commented that it would be a bit mechanical to rely on the running annual averages in monitoring of water quality. Members considered that the maximum and minimum values and the percentage of compliance for

individual parameters should also be made known to the public.

- 6.5 It was clarified that the toxicity level of a chemical was the level at which it would give rise to immediate medical symptoms and was very much higher than the WHO guideline values or other quality standards because the WHO guideline values were very conservative values for life long consumption to protect public health.

7. ACQWS Paper No. 2 – Publication of Water Quality Data

- 7.1 The purpose of this paper was to introduce the practice in publication of water quality data in different countries. It was proposed to publish water quality information annually on the Internet and in the form of a leaflet for distribution to the public. All members generally supported such a move which was in line with the world trend of publishing water quality and was a prompt response to public concern over the quality of drinking water in Hong Kong.
- 7.2 To address the rising concern on the quality of Dongjiang water, although it was not a worldwide practice to publish raw water quality data, the proposal was extended to cover the publication of Dongjiang water quality data. This was also welcomed by the members.
- 7.3 Members generally agreed that publication in the form of leaflet once a year was adequate. However, some members considered that the water quality data should be published more frequently on the Internet. Notwithstanding this, a balance should be struck between the resources required and the real need for greater frequency.
- 7.4 Some members opined that information given in the leaflet should be simple and easily apprehended by the general public. General remarks accompanied by a few selected water quality data would serve the purpose. As regards the information to be published on the Internet, some members suggested that more details should be covered.
- 7.5 A more detailed proposal on the frequency and the format of publications would be worked out and distributed to all members for comments and discussion in the next meeting. Members were assured that a proper channel or access would be established in due course to enable any member of the public to acquire additional information of water quality.

WSD

8. Any Other Business

8.1 A member requested to arrange site visits in both the Hong Kong side and the Guangdong side to see the works and the situation on both sides. A list of options would be provided for members' consideration before the next meeting. WSD

8.2 In response to an enquiry from a member about the quality of Dongjiang water, the Chairman answered that the Committee played an advisory role on the subject. It was suggested that members might obtain more information about the Guangdong side through various channels such as site visits, reference materials from other sources as well as from official publications from the Guangdong Authority. This could then be circulated to all members later on.

9. Date of Next Meeting

Members agreed that at this early stage, meetings should be held bimonthly. The Chairman agreed that the next meeting would be held in about two months.

10. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.