

Advisory Committee on the Quality of Water Supplies Minutes of the 4th Meeting

Date: 12 July 2001 (Thursday)

Time: 2:30 p.m.

Venue: 4/F Committee Room, 3 Edinburgh Place, Central
Hong Kong

Present: Mr. Kenneth FANG Hung (Chairman)
Mr. Hugh Phillipson (Vice-Chairman)
Mr. Hugh WU Sai Him
Prof. LAM Kin Che
Dr. HO Kin Chung
Mr. Ronnie WONG Man Chiu
Mr. Patrick KWONG Hing Ip
Dr. TSE Lai Yin
Mr. WONG Bay
Ms. Rhonda LO Yuet Yee
Dr. Michael CHIU
Mr. Stephen LAU Chi Ming (Secretary)

In attendance: Mr. KO Chan Gock
Mr. KU Chi Chung
Mr. CHAN Kwong Wei
Mr. CHEUNG Tze Leung
Mr. David CHAU Chi Wai
Mr. TAM Yat Hung
Mr Paul HO Kei Wei

Absent with
apologies: Dr. Richard CHEUNG Yun Hing
Dr. SO Kai Ming
Mr. WONG Kwok Keung
Prof. David Dudgeon
Ms. Lister CHEUNG Lai Ping
Ms. Nancy POON Siu Ping

1. The Chairman welcomed all Members to the fourth meeting.
2. The Chairman extended a welcome to representatives from the Water Supplies Department (WSD).
3. The Chairman advised that a short media briefing session would be held at the conclusion of the meeting. Prof. LAM Kin Che volunteered to join the briefing.
4. **Confirmation of minutes of the third meeting held on 15 January 2001**

The minutes were confirmed with the following amendments:-

Para. 6.1, line 1 – “is” should read “was”.

Para. 6.2, line 5 – “minimise” should read “minimising”.

Para. 6.5.4, the 1st sentence should be replaced by “A Member opined that similar to fire services, periodic maintenance checking of inside services would be done by registered contractors.”

Para. 6.6.3, lines 5 & 7 – “building management” should read “facilities management”.

5. Matters arising

5.1 Site Visits

- 5.1.1 The Chairman informed that WSD were arranging another visit to the Dongjiang Water Supply System on 12-13 September 2001 to enable Members to understand more about the effort of the Guangdong Authorities in protecting the quality of Dongjiang water and to see the progress of construction of the closed aqueduct between Dongjiang and Shenzhen. Details of the proposed arrangement for the visit were distributed to all Members with the agenda for information. He was pleased to note that most Members would be able to join the visit.
- 5.1.2 He added that WSD was working on the itinerary for the visit with the Guangdong side. The proposed locations to be visited included:-
 - a) construction sites of the closed aqueduct that form part of the Dongshen Water Supply Improvement Works;

- b) catchment areas of the Dongshen Water Supply System, including the Guanlang River;
- c) Huizhou Meihu Sewage Treatment Works;
- d) other sewage infrastructures and sewage treatment plants within the catchment of the Dongshen Water Supply System for the protection of the quality of Dongjiang water;
- e) automatic monitoring stations along Dongjiang; and
- f) Shima River rehabilitation works.

Further details would be given to Members in due course.

WSD

- 5.1.3 **A Member** suggested that the developer of the hydraulic model for the intake of the Taiyuan Pumping Station should be invited to give a presentation on the development of the model. **WSD** suggested that alternatively a prototype demonstration of the flow abstraction under present-day conditions should also be considered.

WSD

- 5.1.4 The Chairman requested the Secretary to consult also Members absent from this meeting so that their suggestions could be considered.

Secretary

5.2 ACQWS Paper No. 8 – Quality of Water in Buildings (Supplementary Paper No. 1)

- 5.2.1 The Chairman explained to Members that the paper was a follow up paper to ACQWS Paper No. 7 which presented possible strategies for enhancing the entire water supply system in Hong Kong such that Hong Kong citizens could have the confidence to drink water direct from their taps. This paper was prepared basing on the information on the maintenance requirements and practices for plumbing systems collected from other Asian cities. It was intended to map out the proposed strategies for the development of implementation programmes for Members' consideration. Subject to further advice from Members, a detailed strategy and implementation plan would later be drawn up for public consultation.

- 5.2.2 After presentation of the paper by **WSD**, Members generally agreed with the proposed strategies and the two-staged approach for implementation. In the first stage, building owners in the private sector would be allowed to adopt the new requirements on a voluntary basis. In the second stage, a review would be conducted to see whether there was any need to make such requirements mandatory.

Maintenance Requirements

- 5.2.3 The Chairman commented that the paper put much emphasis on maintenance of plumbing system in buildings. Questioning the rationale behind, he wondered whether we should strengthen the Waterworks Ordinance in respect of the requirements on the quality of maintenance and on replacement of plumbing within 5 to 10 years.
- 5.2.4 WSD clarified that for new buildings completed after 1996, corrosion resistant pipes, like lined galvanised iron (GI) pipes or thermoplastic pipes, with life span ranging from 25 to 50 years were used in accordance with the Waterworks Ordinance. For old buildings or buildings built before 1996, unlined GI pipes were commonly used. Such pipes could only last for about 10 years after which they would normally become rusty and give rise to water quality problems. For buildings with proper management, such GI pipes would have been replaced with corrosion resistant pipes after 1996. However, major problems arose in old buildings lacking proper management or funding to replace the plumbing. WSD also pointed out that it would be a very tough campaign to make re-plumbing compulsory at the moment.
- 5.2.5 The Chairman expressed his concern about the issue of promoting to drink directly from the tap. If some old buildings still had problems with the plumbing systems and some kids not knowing the problems, drank the tap water and became unwell, then we might be accused of putting people's health at risk. WSD informed that from experience there was no such case in the past arising from problems in the plumbing systems and expected that the accusation would be very unlikely.
- 5.2.6 **A Member** suggested that organising a campaign or producing a TV commercial might help to educate and encourage the public to maintain and upgrade their plumbing systems. The Chairman appreciated the difficulties in putting the requirements compulsory and concurred that we should try our best to encourage the public to do it voluntarily. In addition, if WSD found any corroded pipes or dirty tanks, WSD should inform the relevant building owners of the situation in writing.

5.2.7 **WSD** drew attention to the suggestion of establishing an award scheme to give recognition to the effort of management companies in maintaining buildings in good conditions. Members generally supported the idea. **A Member** supplemented that some form of loan or assistance would certainly help to kick off such an incentive scheme.

Resources and Costs

5.2.8 The Chairman enquired on the resource requirement for WSD to carry out inspection of a large number of buildings in Hong Kong and the cost implication on building owners. WSD estimated that roughly about 50 additional staff would be required for the additional inspection work and the total cost for cleaning, inspection and testing would be of the order of \$100 per flat per year for well maintained estates.

5.2.9 **A Member** added that the Housing Department had completed the re-plumbing works in more than 40 public housing estates and the cost was about \$3,000 per flat. He estimated that in the private sector, the cost would be **higher**, probably around \$10,000 per flat or more.

5.2.10 The Chairman commented that WSD should tell the building management offices what they should do and what the government had done. He also expressed his concern that some building owners might not be able to afford the re-plumbing costs. **WSD** informed Members of WSD's annual seminars for representatives from the building management industry to give them advice and guidance on maintenance of the plumbing systems. He also advised that starting from 1 July 2001, the Building and Safety Loan Scheme was in place for building owners to apply for loans at a very low interest rate to do the plumbing replacement work.

Publicity

5.2.11 The Chairman opined that we should publicise more on whatever the government were doing and whatever good management companies were doing, and should pinpoint on those poor examples.

5.2.12 The Vice-Chairman concurred that publicity was very important although it might be difficult to change the attitude of the general public. He suggested it might be useful if the Chairman would personally be involved in the publicity, such as visiting public housing estates. The Chairman agreed to the proposal and the Vice-Chairman undertook to give a detailed proposal later. WSD

Water Quality Testing

5.2.13 **A Member** concerned whether a sufficient number of accredited laboratories existed to meet the sudden surge in demand arising from the water quality testing requirements.

5.2.14 Agreeing with **the Member's** concern, **WSD** responded that this was one of the reasons why a two staged approach was proposed. This would give time for the trade to develop in all areas, including areas of laboratory services.

Legislation

5.2.15 **A Member** expressed that to legislate the requirements, we might face a lot of questions from the legislature. To sell the package, we should demonstrate the scale and extent of the problem, provide cost data for re-plumbing, inspection, cleaning and testing, evaluate affordability of the people at large, and include the loan scheme for helping the poor.

5.2.16 **Another Member** suggested that the legislative procedures and the implementation programme could start earlier with a view to phasing out the corrosive pipes in an early stage. The compulsory requirements on testing could be worked out at a later stage. It was also advisable to tell the general public the key picture of what we expected in the next 5 to 6 years, so that they could be more committed to the programme.

5.2.17 Concluding the discussion, the Chairman requested **WSD** to proceed with putting forward more detailed strategies to show how they would propose to implement the strategies step-by-step. The Vice-Chairman added that in the next meeting, **WSD** would also give a more detailed answer on the Chairman's queries on resources and costs, and would work out two schemes, an incentive (award) scheme and a warning

scheme.

5.3. Homepage of the Advisory Committee

The Chairman said that the homepage for the Advisory Committee had been launched on 20 March 2001 to promote transparency and encourage public participation in the monitoring of water quality in Hong Kong. This was in line with the objective of establishing this Committee. Apart from introducing the composition and the work of the Committee, the launching of the homepage also encouraged and facilitated the public to give their comments and suggestions to the Secretariat of the Committee. Members' further comments and suggestions would, of course, be always welcomed.

6. Publication of Water Quality Data

6.1 The Chairman recounted that WSD first published the 1999-2000 water quality data on the Internet in August 2000. He said that the department were now updating the data as an annual exercise for publication of the 2000-2001 data before the end of this month.

6.2 The Vice-Chairman added that the format of the data to be released would remain unchanged and the data would include those of the Dongjiang water as received at Muk Wu Pumping Station and those of drinking water in Hong Kong.

6.3 **WSD** advised that the updated data would be distributed to Members for their advance information on 18 July 2001 prior to formal publication on the Internet on 20 July 2001. He summarised that the quality of Dongjiang water in 2000/2001 was quite similar to that in 1999/2000, except that there was a slight increase in biochemical oxygen demand, total phosphorous and total nitrogen. The quality of drinking water in 2000/2001 fully complied with the World Health Organisation Guidelines for Drinking-water. **WSD**

6.4 The Chairman informed that WSD also uploaded in May this year the Dongjiang water quality data provided by the Guangdong Environmental Protection Bureau on the Internet for public access. This was the first step the Guangdong side was taking towards openness and transparency on matters concerning Dongjiang water

quality. The bureau also agreed to provide similar information for publication in Hong Kong as an annual exercise. WSD would continue to liaise with them for releasing more information to the public in Hong Kong.

- 6.5 The Vice-Chairman informed Members of discussion going on between the Department of Health (D of H) and WSD on working arrangements to communicate water quality data in case of encountering significant exceedance of the level of a certain parameter above the relevant WHO guideline value. The aim was to develop procedures of communication before encountering such an incident. **A Member** said that the D of H was working on it closely with counterparts in WSD. Members would be informed when concrete arrangements were developed. WSD
D of H
7. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m. The date of the next meeting would be fixed in due course.