

**Advisory Committee on the Quality of Water Supplies
Report on Visit to the Dongjiang Water Supply System
(29-30 August 2000)**

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Advisory Committee on the Quality of Water Supplies Report on Visit to the Dongjiang Water Supply System (29-30 August 2000)

SECTION A - INTRODUCTION

1. The Advisory Committee on the Quality of Water Supplies, an independent body, was formed in April 2000 to keep under review and to advise the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region through the Director of Water Supplies on matters relating to the quality of water supplies.
2. The formation of the Advisory Committee aims at promoting transparency and encouraging extensive public participation in the monitoring of the quality of water supplies in Hong Kong. The Advisory Committee comprises representatives from the academics, professionals, local districts, green groups and several government departments.
3. The Advisory Committee also helps to strengthen the monitoring of water quality through its encouragement of public participation and regular dissemination of information to the public. It will continue to play a key role in enhancing the quality of water supplies for meeting the changing needs of the community.
4. Dongjiang water is the most important source of raw water in Hong Kong, contributing to about 80% of our consumption. In view of public concern on the quality of Dongjiang water, the Advisory Committee endorsed a proposal in its first meeting on 26 April 2000 that a visit should be arranged for members of the Advisory Committee to visit the Dongjiang water supply system. The visit was considered to be very important to enable members to see the real picture on the Guangdong side and to represent the people of Hong Kong to express our concern on the quality of Dongjiang water.

SECTION B - PARTICIPANTS

5. The delegation led by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee comprised 14 members of the Committee (including 9 non-official members and 5 official members) plus 6 government officers, as detailed in **Annex 1**.

SECTION C - ITINERARY

6. The delegation visited a number of places of the Dongjiang water supply system, from the upper reach of Dongjiang to Shenzhen, including:

- i. Huizhou Meihu Sewage Treatment Works,
- ii. Xinfengjiang,
- iii. Wah Gar Wastewater Treatment Works at Heyuan,
- iv. Heyuan Environmental Monitoring Station,
- v. Taiyuan Pumping Station at Dongguan,
- vi. Open aqueduct downstream of Taiyuan Pumping Station,
- vii. Qiling Barrage,
- viii. Quanlang River,
- ix. Bio-nitrification Plant of the Shenzhen Reservoir.

A record of the itinerary of the visit is enclosed in **Annex 2**.

SECTION D – THE VISIT

7. Details of the visit including observations of the delegates, briefings and commentaries made by the Guangdong officials, discussions and the two speeches given by the Vice Director of Water Resources Department of Guangdong Province and the Vice Mayor of Municipal People's Government of Heyuan of Guangdong Province are recorded in **Annex 3**.

SECTION E – MEDIA BRIEFING IN HONG KONG

8. After the visit, the delegation returned to Hong Kong at 4:00 p.m. on 30.8.2000 and proceeded to visit the Sha Tin Treatment works where a media briefing was arranged.

9. A video that highlighted the visit was shown at the beginning of the briefing as an introduction. The Chairman, Mr FANG Hung accompanied by five members, viz. Prof. David Dudgeon, Prof. LAM Kin-che, Ms CHEUNG Lai-ping, Dr HO Kin-chung and Dr CHEUNG Yun-hing gave accounts of the visit on 29th and 30th August 2000.

10. Mr Fang reported that the Vice Directors of Water Resources Department and Environmental Protection Bureau of Guangdong Province received the delegation. Through their briefings and explanations during the visit, the delegation comprising 20 members was impressed by the commitment of the Guangdong Provincial Government

to combat water pollution. They learnt that the provincial government had taken a number of executive measures to control developments prone to pollute the water resources. Throughout the visit covering places like Heyuan, Huizhou, Taiyuan, Quanlang River and Bio-nitrification Plant of the Shenzhen Reservoir, they noticed that the Guangdong officials spoke openly and frankly, giving them more confidence that the Guangdong side had a genuine determination to combat the water pollution problem.

11. In response to a question on pollution of Quanlang River, Mr Fang reported that the Guangdong side had taken an important step this year to improve the water quality of the river by removing many pig farms to reduce waste discharge. Such an action was equivalent to the removal of about one million people in terms of waste discharge. He noted that the tributary would join up with Shima River, the water of which contributed partly to the inflow into the Shenzhen Reservoir, where the water would undergo bio-nitrification treatment before delivery to Hong Kong. He added that upon completion of the closed aqueduct, Quanlang River would be completely isolated from the Dongshen Water Supply Scheme.

12. Professor Dudgeon commented that Dongjiang was at present the best clean source of water in Guangdong. It was in the best interests of the Guangdong authorities to protect the Dongjiang water supply. Since Hong Kong was taking water at Taiyuan, upstream of where Guangzhou took its water, the efforts of the Guangdong authorities to protect their own sources of water would inevitably benefit Hong Kong.

13. Ms Cheung expressed that she was impressed by the Guangdong officials that they were more open than before and answered their questions frankly on issues covering planning, construction, programme, progress and finance, etc. and the associated difficulties and constraints. Meanwhile, she observed that officials of the Guangdong side involved in the protection of Dongjiang came from the relevant professions and possessed the relevant knowledge. She expressed that, because of the transparency and expertise of the Guangdong side, she was more confident on their effort to improve the quality of Dongjiang water. She quoted the Guangdong officials as saying that some media reports in Hong Kong on pollution of Dongjiang water were incorrect as they had mistaken some open drainage channels as part of the Dongshen Water Supply Scheme. However, she had reservation on the Guangdong officials' saying that the Huizhou Meihu Sewage Treatment Works could be completed in September/October 2000.

14. Dr Ho advised that the Guangdong side had invested about RMB 7 million to build three automatic water quality monitoring stations along Dongjiang. He appreciated the openness of the Guangdong authorities in showing and distributing the

water quality monitoring results to the delegation. He confirmed that the results had matched with his findings. He emphasised that it was certain that some tributaries of Dongjiang had been polluted. However, the water quality of the main stream had been up to Class 2 of the national surface water quality standard. He pinpointed that regarding the concern on deterioration of the water quality of Shima River upon completion of the closed aqueduct, the Guangdong authorities had been undertaking planning on rehabilitation of Shima River. They were also planning a separate system to supply Dongjiang water to Dongguan and Changping for irrigation purposes in order to alleviate the threat on pollution of agricultural produce supplied to Hong Kong and other areas.

15. Professor Lam reiterated that the quality of Dongjiang water was a common concern of Hong Kong and a large part of Guangdong. It was important that both sides looked at the issues globally from political, financial and water resource allocation points of view since numerous consumers in Guangdong and Hong Kong were involved. He appreciated that the mainland authorities had coordinated efforts to resolve the water quality issues. He urged the Hong Kong side to maintain close liaison with the Guangdong side on the water quality issues. He also encouraged the public to continue to show their concern on the issues.

16. Dr Cheung appreciated being given the opportunity to visit the whole route of Dongjiang water supply starting from its source at Xinfengjiang up to Sha Tin Treatment Works in Hong Kong. He was impressed by the work of the Guangdong side in protecting the intake at Taiyuan Pumping Station against pollution by the discharge of Shima River. He also admired the Guangdong side for their efficiency in designing and building simultaneously, for their commitment in protecting the environment while developing its economy, and for their ability in resolving conflicting issues such as the operation of Xinfengjiang that provided water supply to Dongjiang and power supply to Heyuan.

17. In response to questions on the project progress control and finance, Mr Fang informed that the programme of the Huizhou Meihu Sewage Treatment Works had been deferred due to some difficulties in financing the project and should be closely monitored. Ms Cheung stressed that the provincial government were determined in protecting the water resources and would strictly enforce the relevant regulations. Officials would be personally liable for late completion of works or default of order. Thus they would be pressed to follow suit. Dr Ho believed that under the current policy of “polluters pay”, although Huizhou encountered some difficulties at the moment, they would be able to obtain the necessary funding in the next few years. Professor Lam drew the attention to the most important project, i.e. the construction of the closed aqueduct for supply to Hong Kong. He advised that based on the

information from the Guangdong authorities, he expected that there would be no financial problem.

18. Regarding new developments, Mr Fang added that new developments were withheld or shelved unless the developers or local government built the required treatment facilities. An example would be the Wing Wah Dyeing Factory and Wah Gar Wastewater Treatment Works in Heyuan.

19. Dr Ho clarified that the said closed aqueduct would not be completely closed. He said that some sections of the aqueduct would be open but isolated from pollution. The arrangement would help to improve the quality of the water due to the increase in dissolved oxygen in the open aqueduct. He commented that the design of the closed aqueduct was reasonable and would be an effective measure for protecting the quality of Dongjiang water supply to Hong Kong.

SECTION F – FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS

20. Feedback from members after the visit is summarised below:-

- i. Members agreed that the visit was useful and constructive, and helped them to discharge their duties in the Advisory Committee.
- ii. Members were able to express the concern of the people of Hong Kong on the quality of the Dongjiang water and to show their full support to the WSD.
- iii. Members appreciated the openness, positive attitude and the dedicated efforts of the Guangdong authorities in protecting the common water resources for Guangdong and Hong Kong. As a matter of fact, Hong Kong consumes water taken out of the Dongjiang upstream of where Guangzhou and other cities obtain their water. The Guangdong authorities have a strong interest in protecting the common water resources for the benefit of areas relying on the downstream flow of Dongjiang. Accordingly, the actions of the Guangdong side will certainly benefit Hong Kong in the medium and long term.
- iv. Members learnt more about the details of the work of the Guangdong side and also the difficulties and constraints encountered by the various authorities. Some examples are pinpointed below:
 - a. The administration of the Dongjiang basin involves the Provincial Government, local/district governments, water resources officers and environmental protection officers among other stakeholders.

The parties must be well coordinated on issues including inter alia monitoring, control, enforcement, planning, finance, construction, operation and maintenance.

- b. Household connections to sewerage networks, maintenance of existing sewers and segregation of the storm water drainage and sewerage networks should be critically assessed.
- v. Members recommended that similar trips should be organised by WSD on a regular basis, perhaps once every 1 to 2 years.
- vi. Members recommended that WSD should continue with the following:
 - a. expressing concern over the water quality issues and the progress of planned projects and improvement works on the Guangdong side,
 - b. requesting the Guangdong side for monitoring data of water quality at the automatic water quality monitoring stations, at the water intake points of Taiyuan Pumping Station and at the Bio-nitrification Plant of the Shenzhen Reservoir; and
 - c. correcting the impression of the media and the general public that people in Hong Kong drink raw untreated Dongjiang water direct.

SECTION G – CONCLUSION

21. The visit was successful. It benefited both the Hong Kong and Guangdong sides. The Advisory Committee was able to reflect the views and concerns of the people of Hong Kong on the quality of Dongjiang water. The Guangdong authorities got the chance to explain to the Advisory Committee their commitment, efforts and works in protecting the Dongjiang water, and were able to clarify certain misunderstandings of the people of Hong Kong. The openness, positive and cooperative attitude of both sides established a good foundation that should be maintained for further liaison and coordination over the issue of water quality.