

Fourth round results of Public Policy Research Funding Scheme 2018-19 announced

The Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office (PICO) announced today (February 1) the results of the fourth round applications to the Public Policy Research (PPR) Funding Scheme in 2018-19.

The PPR Funding Scheme aims to promote public policy research and provide evidence-based research to facilitate public policy discussion. Applications are accepted throughout the year. For the fourth round exercise in 2018-19, PICO received 21 applications. On the advice of an assessment panel, PICO has decided to support six projects with total funding of about \$3.2 million.

Applications to the PPR Funding Scheme are assessed by an assessment panel, chaired by and comprising experienced academics, who will take into account comments of reviewers who are academics and experts outside the panel in considering the applications. Each application is considered on its merits and relevance to public policy development in Hong Kong. A declaration of interests system is in place to ensure that the assessments are fair and impartial.

Details of the funded projects have been uploaded to PICO's website (www.pico.gov.hk/en/PRFS).

Special traffic and transport arrangements for 2019 Lunar New Year Fireworks Display

The Transport Department (TD) today (February 1) reminded the public that special traffic and transport arrangements will be implemented on Hong Kong Island and in Kowloon to facilitate the Lunar New Year Fireworks Display on the second day of the Lunar New Year (February 6).

The arrangements will mainly include:

(A) Traffic arrangements

Road closures and traffic diversions will be implemented in phases on Hong Kong Island from about 1pm at Tramway Lane outside Garden Road Peak Tram Lower Terminus, Wan Chai District, Central District, the Peak and the section of Island Eastern Corridor westbound between Victoria Park Road and Man Hong Street. Road closures and traffic diversions will be implemented in phases in the vicinity of Tsim Sha Tsui and Jordan in Kowloon from about 6pm until the crowd is dispersed and road closures are lifted.

(B) Public transport services arrangements

1. Bus and green minibus (GMB) services

In connection with the road closure, some bus and GMB stops will be suspended or relocated. Bus and GMB routes operating in the affected areas will also be temporarily diverted, while the service of some routes may be strengthened subject to passenger demand.

2. MTR services

From 8pm to 11pm, the services of Island Line and Tsuen Wan Line will be strengthened with a three-minute headway and the services of Kwun Tong Line will be strengthened with an about four-minute headway; from 8.30pm to 11.30pm, the services of Tseung Kwan O Line will be strengthened with a four-minute headway.

3. Tramways service

Normal holiday service will be operated and the frequency of the tram service will be strengthened to meet passenger demand if necessary.

4. Central-Mid-Levels Escalator and Walkway System

The service of Central-Mid-Levels Escalator and Walkway System will be extended to 2am on February 7.

5. Cross-boundary coach services

The terminus of the cross-boundary coach services between Wan Chai and Huanggang at the Wan Chai North Temporary Public Transport Interchange will be suspended from about 6.30pm until the road closure is lifted. A temporary terminus will be provided at Hennessy Road eastbound underneath O'Brien Road footbridge.

6. Ferry services

Ferry companies will temporarily adjust the services to facilitate the holding of the celebration event.

Due to extensive road closure, the TD anticipates that the traffic in the vicinity of the affected areas will be significantly congested. Motorists are advised to be patient in case of traffic congestion and follow police

instructions.

In addition, other ad-hoc traffic and public transport measures, including additional road closures, traffic diversions, alteration and suspension of public transport services may be implemented by the Police depending on actual traffic and crowd conditions in the areas.

Members of the public who plan to go to the affected areas are advised to use public transport services as far as possible, particularly the railway services, and avoid driving to the affected or congested areas unless necessary. They should plan their journey early and use alternative routes to avoid delays. Public transport commuters are advised to pay attention to the arrangements of route diversions, suspension and relocation of stops. Moreover, members of the public are advised to stay alert to the latest traffic news on radio and television.

Details of the special traffic and transport arrangements are available at TD's website (www.td.gov.hk). For further queries, please call 1823.

Marine traffic control and safety measures to be followed at Lunar New Year Fireworks Display

With regard to the 2019 Lunar New Year Fireworks Display to be held on February 6, the Marine Department (MD) will implement marine traffic control and strengthen the inspection of spectator vessels on the event day to ensure that safety requirements are met.

The MD will establish a Closed Area in the waters off the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wan Chai, where barges for the fireworks display will be anchored, from 2pm to about 11pm on the event day. All vessels will be prohibited from entering the area. A Restricted Area will be established in the Central Harbour from 7pm to about 9.15pm on the event day. Other than authorised vessels, no vessels will be allowed to enter. Scheduled ferry vessels with permission may continue services until 7.40pm.

For landside crowd control, all public landing steps within the Restricted Area will be closed temporarily starting from 6.45pm to about 9.15pm on the event day. Buffer Zones at Kowloon Public Pier, Kwun Tong Public Pier and Central Piers 9 and 10 will be established immediately after the event for safe and orderly disembarkation of passengers.

In addition, to ensure vessels disperse in an orderly manner, the Eastern and Western Cordon Lines of the Restricted Area will be lifted in

stages after the event. The Western Cordon Line will be lifted first at about 9pm. Spectator vessels behind the Western Cordon Line and those wishing to move to the east must follow the instructions of officers from the MD and the Police at the scene. The Eastern Cordon Line will be lifted later depending on traffic conditions in Victoria Harbour. It is anticipated that the Restricted Area will be lifted by about 9.15pm.

Officers from the MD and the Police will also maintain order at major landing facilities after the event. In order to ensure the smooth and safe disembarkation of passengers, coxswains and crew members should remind passengers to pack their personal belongings early before the vessels arrive alongside the landing steps, as well as assist passengers to disembark. Coxswains and passengers should follow the guidance of the MD and the Police at the scene.

The MD and the Marine Police will also strengthen law enforcement, especially on speeding and overloading. Coxswains and persons-in-charge of vessels should check again and reconfirm that the operating licence, the certificate of survey and the third party risk insurance are valid before setting sail.

Officers from the MD will strengthen the inspection of spectator vessels. Requirements include providing sufficient life-saving appliances on board, ensuring that children wear a lifejacket at all times and that coxswains keep a passenger and crew list on board.

If any vessel fails to meet these requirements, inspecting officers will issue directions at the scene and request the person-in-charge of the vessel to take remedial action. If the person-in-charge of the vessel refuses to comply with the directions, the department will take the necessary follow-up action, such as prohibiting the vessel from departing or considering prosecution.

MD Notice No. 18 of 2019 on the marine traffic control and safety measures has been issued and is available for viewing on the MD's website (www.mardep.gov.hk).

Provisional statistics of restaurant receipts and purchases for fourth quarter of 2018

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest provisional figures on restaurant receipts and purchases today (February 1).

The value of total receipts of the restaurants sector in the fourth quarter of 2018, provisionally estimated at \$30.4 billion, increased by 2.2% over a year earlier. Over the same period, the provisional estimate of the value of total purchases by restaurants increased by 1.7% to \$9.6 billion.

After netting out the effect of price changes over the same period, the provisional estimate of the volume of total restaurant receipts decreased by 0.5% in the fourth quarter of 2018 compared with a year earlier.

Analysed by type of restaurant and comparing the fourth quarter of 2018 with the fourth quarter of 2017, total receipts of Chinese restaurants decreased by 0.8% in value and 3.2% in volume. Total receipts of non-Chinese restaurants increased by 4.4% in value and 2.2% in volume. Total receipts of fast food shops increased by 4.1% in value and 0.2% in volume. Total receipts of bars increased by 2.5% in value but decreased by 1.2% in volume. As for miscellaneous eating and drinking places, total receipts increased by 8.8% in value and 5.0% in volume.

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of total restaurant receipts decreased by 0.9% in value and 1.6% in volume in the fourth quarter of 2018 compared with the preceding quarter.

For 2018 as a whole, the value of total receipts of the restaurants sector was provisionally estimated at \$119.5 billion, representing an increase of 6.0% in value and 3.1% in volume compared with the whole year of 2017. Over the same period, the provisional estimate of the total purchases of restaurants increased by 4.7% to \$38.0 billion.

Analysed by type of restaurant and comparing the whole year of 2018 with the whole year of 2017, total receipts of Chinese restaurants increased by 4.8% in value and 2.1% in volume. Total receipts of non-Chinese restaurants increased by 7.6% in value and 5.1% in volume. Total receipts of fast food shops increased by 5.1% in value and 1.0% in volume. Total receipts of bars increased by 6.9% in value and 6.5% in volume. As for miscellaneous eating and drinking places, total receipts increased by 10.4% in value and 6.8% in volume.

To facilitate further understanding of the short-term business performance of the restaurants sector, statistics in respect of the restaurant receipts and purchases in individual months of the reference quarter are also compiled.

Analysed by month, it was provisionally estimated that the value of total receipts of the restaurants sector increased by 1.2%, 3.2% and 2.3% respectively in October, November and December 2018, compared with the corresponding months a year earlier.

After discounting the effect of price changes, it was provisionally estimated that total restaurant receipts decreased by 1.6%, increased by 0.4% and decreased by 0.3% in volume respectively in October, November and December 2018, compared with the corresponding months a year earlier.

Further information

Table 1 presents the revised figures of restaurant receipts by type of restaurant and total purchases by the restaurants sector for the third quarter of 2018 as well as the provisional figures for the fourth quarter of 2018.

Table 2 and Table 3 present the revised value and volume indices respectively of restaurant receipts by type of restaurant for the third quarter of 2018 and the provisional indices for the fourth quarter of 2018.

Table 4 presents the year-on-year rate of change in total restaurant receipts in value and volume terms based on the original quarterly series, as well as the quarter-to-quarter rate of change based on the seasonally adjusted series.

The revised figures on restaurant receipts and purchases for the fourth quarter of 2018 (with breakdown by month) will be released through the website of C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/bbs.jsp) and relevant publications of the Department from March 21, 2019.

The classification of restaurants follows the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification (HSIC) Version 2.0, which is used in various economic surveys for classifying economic units into different industry classes.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on Quarterly Survey of Restaurant Receipts and Purchases". Users can download this publication free of charge at the website of C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/hkstat/sub/sp320.jsp?productCode=B1080002).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact the Distribution Services Statistics Section of C&SD (Tel: 3903 7401; email: qsr@censtatd.gov.hk).

Red tides sighted

Four red tides have been sighted over the past week, an inter-departmental red tide working group reported today (February 1).

The first red tide was spotted by staff of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) on January 29 at Tolo Harbour. The second red tide was spotted by a member of the public on January 30 at Inner Port Shelter and Port Shelter including the Ma Nam Wat Fish Culture Zone. The third red tide was spotted by staff of the Environmental Protection Department on January 31 at Sha Tin Hoi. These three red tides still persist.

In addition, staff of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department spotted a red tide at Silverstrand Beach, Sai Kung, on January 31. The red flag was hoisted immediately at the beach. The red tide has dissipated.

No associated death of fish has been reported so far in all four red tides.

A spokesman for the working group said, "All four red tides were formed by *Noctiluca scintillans*, which is commonly found in Hong Kong waters and is non-toxic."

The AFCD urged mariculturists at the Yim Tin Tsai, Yim Tin Tsai (East), Yung Shue Au, Lo Fu Wat, Ma Nam Wat, Kau Sai, Kai Lung Wan, Tai Tau Chau and Leung Shuen Wan fish culture zones to monitor the situation closely and increase aeration where necessary.

Red tide is a natural phenomenon. The AFCD's proactive phytoplankton monitoring programme will continue to monitor red tide occurrences to minimise the impact on the mariculture industry and the public.