LCQ21: Use, disposal and recycling of styrofoam

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 8):

Question:

It has been reported that since styrofoam takes as long as 10 000 years to decompose and has a huge impact on the environment, quite a number of countries have started to control the use of disposable styrofoam utensils. Regarding the use, disposal and recycling of styrofoam in Hong Kong, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the major sources of the styrofoam disposed of at landfills;

(2) of the locations of the existing styrofoam collection points;

(3) of (i) the quantities of styrofoam disposed of and recovered, as well as(ii) the quantities of styrofoam collected from the sea and beaches, in the past five years;

(4) of the new measures to reduce local usage of styrofoam;

(5) given that the Environmental Protection Department is commencing a study on the feasibility, scope and mechanism of controlling or banning disposable plastic tableware, whether the study will cover styrofoam tableware; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(6) whether it will examine the formulation of an implementation timetable for banning styrofoam tableware; and

(7) whether it will allocate funding from the Recycling Fund to support styrofoam recycling; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Styrofoam is lightweight but the volume is large. A large amount of styrofoam recovered and processed will only produce small amount of plastic raw materials. The logistics and recycling costs are high. Coupled with the fact that most of the waste styrofoam is contaminated or contains impurities, the recycling efficiency of styrofoam is thus comparatively low. That said, styrofoam stays afloat for a long time once entering the marine environment and may affect marine ecology. Hence, the Government has been encouraging reduction of styrofoam at source. My reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hak-kan is as follows:

(1) According to the reports on "Monitoring of Solid Waste in Hong Kong" compiled by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), about 30 400 tonnes of waste styrofoam were disposed of at landfills in 2017, among which some 47 per cent were styrofoam tableware, with the rest being styrofoam packaging materials like protective containers for electrical appliances and fresh meat, mesh wrap for fruit, etc. Analysed by waste category, about half of the waste styrofoam was domestic waste and the remaining half was commercial and industrial (C&I) waste.

(2) For the reasons stated in the introduction, there is currently no largescale commercial operation on styrofoam recycling in Hong Kong. Since 2015-16, we have supported a styrofoam recycling project under the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) with a view to trying out recycling of styrofoam. Commenced in June 2016, the project covers not only collection of styrofoam from the C&I sectors and educational institutions, but also collaboration with various community groups and certain ECF-funded Community Recycling Centres to set up collection points across the territory for the public to recycle styrofoam.

(3) The EPD does not compile statistics on the amount of styrofoam found in daily marine refuse collection. The quantities of styrofoam disposed of at landfills between 2014 and 2017 are tabulated below.

Year	Quantity of styrofoam disposed of at landfills (tonnes)
2014	32 100
2015	41 000
2016	33 700
2017	30 400

The relevant statistics for 2018 are still under compilation.

The EPD does not have any statistics on the volume of styrofoam recovered locally. Nonetheless, for the styrofoam recycling project funded by the ECF as mentioned above, the total quantity of styrofoam recovered by the end of December 2018 was approximately 100 tonnes.

(4) With various publicity and education efforts, the EPD has been striving to encourage the public and different sectors to reduce the use of single-use plastic items, especially styrofoam products, and promote the use of more environment-friendly substitutes. In the summer of 2018, the EPD organised the "Plastic Free Beach, Tableware First" campaign at public beaches across the territory. More than 50 restaurants and kiosks participated and used bamboo sticks, paper straws and paper bags in place of disposable plastic (including styrofoam) tableware to promote the "plastic-free" culture to the public. The Environmental Campaign Committee has also launched the Reusable Tableware Lending Programme for Large-scale Events which offers one-stop delivery, collection and cleaning services of tableware to event organisers for free.

The Government has also been encouraging the catering sector to provide reusable tableware and food containers. Under the Sustainable Development Fund, the Government supports the catering sector to formulate guidelines on green procurement for the trade, including their use of reusable or plantfibre tableware instead of disposable plastic ones. Through the annual Hong Kong Awards for Environmental Excellence, the EPD also commends organisations that have excelled in environmental management, including restaurants committed to waste reduction at source (such as taking measures to encourage customers not to ask for disposable tableware).

Starting from January 2019, the Government has taken the lead in banning plastic straws and styrofoam tableware in premises and canteens mainly serving government staff. Relevant departments, when inviting tenders for new contracts and renewing existing contracts, will also require restaurant operators in suitable government venues to avoid using disposable plastic tableware. Besides, the ECF also sponsors local non-profit making organisations to explore environment-friendly and durable alternatives for foam boxes commonly used in the fish markets.

The Government actively preparing for the implementation of the municipal solid waste charging scheme, under which financial incentives are provided to further encourage the public and the C&I sectors to reduce waste at source, such as using less plastic products and materials including styrofoam.

(5) and (6) The EPD is conducting a study on the feasibility, scope and mechanism of controlling or banning the use of disposable plastic (including styrofoam) tableware to confirm whether there is a need for such control and, if needed, the scope and means of control and applicable substitutes, etc. The EPD will also draw reference from approaches and specific situations worldwide on the control of disposable plastic tableware and their means of implementation, and consult the relevant trades and stakeholders. Based on the findings of our study and analysis, the EPD will draw up a proposal that is suitable for implementation in Hong Kong in the long run. The study is scheduled for completion in 2020.

(7) The Government launched the \$1 billion Recycling Fund in October 2015 to assist in upgrading the operational capabilities and efficiency of the recycling industry, thereby promoting waste recovery and recycling as well as reducing waste disposal at landfills. Under the Fund, the Enterprise Support Programme (ESP) provides funding support on a matching basis, and supports individual enterprises to enhance and expand their local waste recycling business. The Fund has earmarked \$50 million for the Standard Projects under the ESP to assist recyclers to procure different recycling equipment such as hot-melting machines and cold compactors for processing styrofoam, as well as air filtering equipment, etc. The Fund has earmarked another \$50 million to encourage recyclers to use compactor trucks for the transportation of

recyclables (including styrofoam), with a view to enhancing operational efficiency and reducing transportation cost.

Furthermore, the EPD plans to roll out a two-year Pilot Scheme on Collection and Recycling Services of Waste Plastics (the Pilot Scheme) in three different districts (i.e. Eastern District, Kwun Tong and Sha Tin) to provide free collection services for waste plastics (all types including styrofoam) from non-C&I sources in these districts, such as public and private housing estates, schools and public organisations. The waste plastics so collected will be further treated and recycled for producing recycled raw materials or products. The practical experience gained from the Pilot Scheme will benefit future expansion of the services across the whole territory. The tender of the waste plastics collection service contract for the Eastern District was closed on April 26, 2019. The EPD is conducting tender assessment with a view to rolling out the service this year. Later on, the EPD will also invite tenders for waste plastics collection services in Kwun Tong and then Sha Tin.

<u>CFS announces results of seasonal food</u> <u>surveillance on rice dumplings (first</u> <u>phase)</u>

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department today (May 8) announced that the test results of about 50 rice dumpling samples collected under a recently completed seasonal food surveillance project on rice dumplings (first phase) were all satisfactory.

Rice dumplings are a popular festive food for the Tuen Ng Festival. The project aims to provide information on the safe consumption of rice dumplings to consumers and the trade in a timely manner.

"The CFS collected samples of rice dumplings from different food premises such as restaurants, food factories and other retail outlets for chemical and microbiological analyses. The chemical analyses included tests for colouring matters (such as red 2G), preservatives (such as boric acid), metallic contamination (such as lead, arsenic, cadmium, mercury and copper) and pesticides. The microbiological analyses covered pathogenic bacteria including Salmonella, coagulase-positive staphylococci organisms, Clostridium perfringens and Bacillus cereus," a spokesman for the CFS said.

The spokesman reminded members of the public to observe the following food safety tips in purchasing, preparing, storing and consuming rice dumplings:

Buying rice dumplings

* Buy rice dumplings from reliable retail outlets;

* When purchasing non-prepackaged rice dumplings, choose those that are securely wrapped in wrapping leaves; and
* When purchasing prepackaged rice dumplings, check the expiry date and whether the packaging is intact.

Home-made rice dumplings

* Buy wrapping leaves from reliable suppliers and avoid leaves that are unnaturally bright green or with chemical smells; and
* Choose healthier ingredients as fillings (e.g. dry beans, lean meat and mushrooms) by following the "3 Low 1 High" dietary principle of low fat, low sugar, low salt and high fibre.

Storing and preparing rice dumplings

* Consume rice dumplings as soon as possible and avoid prolonged storage; * Store rice dumplings at 4 degrees Celsius or below, or store them properly according to the instructions on the package if they are not consumed or cooked immediately;

* Keep cooked rice dumplings that are not consumed immediately in a covered container and put them in the upper compartment of the refrigerator. Keep raw food in the lower compartment to prevent cross-contamination;

* Reheat rice dumplings thoroughly until the core temperature reaches 75 degrees Celsius or above before consumption;

* Do not reheat rice dumplings more than once; and

* Consume reheated rice dumplings as soon as possible.

Consuming rice dumplings

* Before eating, wash hands with running water and liquid soap and dry them with a dry towel or paper towel; and

* Reduce seasonings such as soy sauce or granulated sugar during consumption.

The spokesman said, "Rice dumplings in general are relatively high in energy, fat and salt. During the festival, people should maintain a balanced diet, and consume rice dumplings moderately, with due consideration of their health condition. People are recommended to share rice dumplings with their family members and friends, as this not only enhances the festive atmosphere, but also allows them to taste rice dumplings of different flavours and avoid over-consumption. People are also advised to make use of nutrition labels on prepackaged food to compare their nutritional contents for healthier food choices."

He also reminded food manufacturers to purchase food ingredients from reliable suppliers, adhere to Good Manufacturing Practice for preparation of food products and comply with legal requirements when using food additives.

The CFS will continue to conduct surveillance on rice dumplings and the

second phase results (including nutrition content analyses) will be released in a timely manner to ensure food safety.

EMSD receives award from Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (with photo)

â€<The Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) received the Digital Award for the Best Small Project/ Collaboration from the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers in London, the United Kingdom, on May 7 (London time), in recognition of the department's efforts in applying digital technology and data analysis to improve the efficiency of building services, with a view to fostering a high quality and sustainable built environment.

To promote smart city development, the EMSD has long been committed to leveraging innovation and technology (IT) to provide digital engineering solutions for electrical and mechanical public facilities. This not only enhances the operational efficiency of electrical and mechanical facilities, but also strengthens predictive maintenance for increased system reliability and availability, thereby improving service quality.

Speaking at the presentation ceremony in London, the Director of Electrical and Mechanical Services, Mr Alfred Sit, said it was very encouraging that the department's efforts in promoting energy saving and digitalisation had been well recognised. The EMSD will continue to make use of IT solutions to make Hong Kong a more sustainable smart city, he added.

The award-winning project is based at the Tuen Mun School Dental Clinic, where the EMSD digitalised the air-conditioning and electrical distribution systems to facilitate real-time remote monitoring and fault prediction as well as system performance and energy analyses.



LCQ7: Loading of trains of West Rail Line

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Che-cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 8):

Question:

In 2015, the loading of trains on the busiest section of the West Rail Line (WRL) (i.e. the section between Kam Sheung Road Station and Tsuen Wan West Station) was 104 per cent (calculated on the basis of a passenger density of four persons (standing) per square metre within train compartments). During the period from 2016 to 2018, the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) gradually increased the number of train cars of WRL from seven to eight, resulting in an increase in the carrying capacity of each train by about 14 per cent. While the loading of trains on the aforesaid section dropped slightly to 99 per cent in 2016, it rebounded to 101 per cent in 2017 and 2018. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council if it knows:

(1) whether MTRCL has drawn up targets and plans for reducing the loading of trains on the busiest section of WRL; if MTRCL has, the details of that;

(2) whether MTRCL made prior estimations on the changes that the increase in the number of train cars would bring to the loading of trains on the busiest section of WRL in 2017 and 2018; if MTRCL did, the relevant data, and whether the actual loading met the estimated loading;

(3) whether MTRCL has studied the reasons for the rebound in the loading of trains on the busiest section of WRL in 2017;

(4) whether MTRCL has estimated the loading of trains on the busiest section of WRL in the coming decade; if MTRCL has, the details of that;

(5) the current actual and designed maximum train frequencies of WRL during(i) peak and (ii) non-peak hours respectively; whether MTRCL will immediately increase the train frequency of WRL;

(6) regarding the Tuen Mun South Extension and the Hung Shui Kiu Station proposed to be constructed, whether MTRCL has estimated the impacts of their commissioning on the loading of trains on the busiest section of WRL; if MTRCL has, the details of that; and

(7) the latest progress of the Shatin to Central Link project; whether MTRCL has estimated the impact of the railway line's commissioning on the loading of trains on the busiest section of WRL; if MTRCL has, the details of that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the Hon Leung Che-cheung's question is as follows:

(1) to (3) Hong Kong's community development and population growth have brought about rising traffic volumes. According to the MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL), the daily patronage of the MTR network on weekdays increased from around 5.56 million passenger trips in 2015 to around 5.88 million passenger trips in 2018, representing a growth of nearly 6 per cent within three years. In particular, the rapid development of the community of Northwest New Territories has brought about a continuous rise in both its population and transport demand. Regarding the West Rail Line (WRL), the patronage per direction in the busiest hour during the morning peak for its critical link increased from 36 400 in 2015 to 40 400 in 2018, representing a gain of more than 10 per cent.

When calculating the loadings of the railway lines, the MTRCL takes into account the current carrying capacities of trains on the respective lines, assuming a passenger density of either six or four persons (standing) per square metre (ppsm). The passenger density of six ppsm was the industry standard design adopted at the time of the construction of the railway lines. Nevertheless, it has been observed in recent years that, in actual operation, trains running on the busiest corridors during the busiest hours achieved a passenger density of only around four ppsm. Thus, the MTRCL uses these two passenger densities to calculate the corresponding loadings. A loading based on six ppsm will be lower than one based on four ppsm given the same patronage and carrying capacity. To dovetail with the "East West Corridor" project (i.e. Tuen Ma Line) of the Shatin to Central Link (SCL), the number of cars of WRL trains has been progressively increased from seven to eight since 2016. With the conversion completed in end-May 2018, the maximum carrying capacity (based on six ppsm) has increased from 49 200 (in 2015) to 56 200, representing a gain of 14 per cent.

The MTRCL has been closely monitoring the passenger demand as a reference for service planning. However, the loading of the line is dependent on both the carrying capacity of the trains and the patronage. When the growth in patronage surpasses that in carrying capacity, the loading increases. Thus, since the carrying capacity of the WRL trains increased by 8 per cent in 2018 compared with that in 2016 but the patronage rose by 10 per cent during the same period, there was a slight increase in loading. The carrying capacity, patronage and loading per hour during the morning peak for the critical link of the WRL from 2015 to 2018 are set out in the Annex.

(4) & (5) In order to enhance the carrying capacity and operating efficiency of the overall railway network, the MTRCL has been taking various measures to ease passenger flows during peak hours, including increasing train frequency where practicable, and enhancing platform management at stations to facilitate on-time departures. Currently, the train frequencies of the WRL in the morning and evening peaks are around 3 minutes and 3.5 minutes respectively for trips between Tuen Mun and Hung Hom. During the busiest period of the morning peak hours, the MTRCL additionally provides a regular special train trip departing from Tin Shui Wai Station for Hung Hom. The above measures were observed to effectively alleviate crowdedness at the busiest sections during the said period. The MTRCL will continue to closely monitor the loading of the railway line, and will review and consider proposals from time to time to cope with demand generated by future patronage.

In addition to the basic growth in passenger flow, the patronage for the WRL in the years to come will depend on a number of factors, including the developments along the railway lines and the patronage upon the completion of new railway projects. Based on the data for the previous years from 2013 to 2017, the average daily passenger flow of the WRL generally grows in the range of 0.6 per cent to 2.3 per cent every year. In taking forward individual development project, the relevant bureaux and departments will examine the impact of the proposed development on the existing transport network and formulate the corresponding strategies in order to determine the feasibility of the project. Upon completion and the initial stage of commissioning of new railway projects, it will take time for the passenger traffic to stabilise. Therefore, it is normal for the Government to continuously monitor the passenger traffic after commissioning and re-assess future patronage forecast.

(6) In planning the Tuen Mun South Extension, the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) had, having regard to the indicative implementation window recommended in the Railway Development Strategy 2014, invited the MTRCL to submit a proposal for the implementation of the Tuen Mun South Extension. The MTRCL submitted a proposal for this railway project to the Government in end December 2016. The THB, the Highways Department and relevant bureaux/departments have evaluated the proposal and requested the MTRCL to provide additional information and supplement details. In carrying out the evaluation, our main focus is to ensure that the proposal is practically feasible and can bring maximum benefits to the community. Due to the tight housing supply and the potential housing supply that may be brought about by railway development, the Government is also reviewing the proposal submitted by the MTRCL in this light. Based on the MTRCL's forecast, the WRL would be capable to cope with the additional passenger flow brought about by the Tuen Mun South Extension upon its commissioning. At the detailed planning and design stage, the MTRCL will further review the patronage of the Tuen Mun South Extension and its impact on the WRL in the light of the latest planning data.

For planning of Hung Shui Kiu Station, its implementation is targeted to tie in with the planned population intake of Hung Shui Kiu New Development Area. Subject to the pace of development of the area concerned, the Government will invite the MTRCL to submit a proposal for the project in a timely manner. When preparing the proposal, the MTRCL will assess the patronage of Hung Shui Kiu Station and its impact on the WRL in the light of the latest planning data.

In accordance with the established procedures, we will consult the public, including the Legislative Council and the District Council, on the details of the project before finalising any new railway scheme.

(7) The "Tai Wai to Hung Hom Section" under the SCL is originally scheduled for commissioning in mid-2019. In view of the concern on the works quality of the Hung Hom Station and other stations, the target commissioning date is subject to further review. Meanwhile, the planned commissioning date for the "Hung Hom to Admiralty Section" under the SCL remains to be 2021.

Upon commissioning of the "Tai Wai to Hung Hom Section" under the SCL, it will connect the existing Ma on Shan Line to the existing WRL to constitute the "Tuen Ma Line". Passengers will be able to travel directly from Wu Kai Sha Station to East Kowloon, Hung Hom, New Territories West and Tuen Mun, providing more direct and convenient railway services.

After the commissioning of the Tuen Ma Line, the MTRCL can provide services at a maximum frequency of 24 train trips per hour per direction by procuring more trains and enhancing signalling system, thus increasing the carrying capacity of WRL by approximately 37 per cent as compared with that in 2015. Based on MTRCL's estimation, the above arrangement can cope with the post-commissioning passenger demand. Upon commissioning of the Tuen Ma Line, the Government will require MTRCL to continue monitoring passenger traffic and, if needed, consider the feasibility of further increasing train frequency to enhance the services of the WRL.

LCQ6: Certificates of competency issued by Marine Department

Following is a question by the Hon Steven Ho and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 8):

Question:

The Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (Certification and Licensing) Regulation (Cap. 548D) stipulates that a Class I, II or III vessel that is fitted with any propulsion engines shall not be underway, unless there is on board a person in charge of the vessel who is the holder of a local certificate of competency (CoC) as a coxswain appropriate for the vessel or any equivalent certificates specified in the Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (Local Certificates of Competency) Rules (the Rules). On the other hand, the Rules provide that CoCs shall cease to have effect upon the holder attaining the age of 65. According to the Marine Department Notice No. 12 of 2018 (the Notice), CoC holders who wish to have their CoCs' validity period extended beyond the date of attaining the age of 65 are required to submit an application to the Seafarers' Certification Section of the Marine Department (MD) within six months prior to attaining the age of 65. Quite a number of fishermen who have attained the age of 65 have sought my assistance, saying that they did not apply for the extension of the validity period of CoCs in a timely manner as no expiry date was stated on their CoCs which were issued in or before the 1980s, coupled with reasons such as they have neither received the relevant notifications from the Government nor noticed the Rules and the Notice published by the Government. Regarding the issuance of CoCs by the MD, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of CoC holders in each of the past five years, who reached 65 in the year and, within the six months prior to their attaining the age of 65, (i) did not apply for the extension of the validity period of CoCs, and (ii) had applied for the extension of the validity period of CoCs but the applications were rejected;

(2) whether the Government, in each of the past five years, reminded CoC holders who were about to attain the age of 65 to apply for the extension of the validity period of CoCs; if so, of the channels through which such reminders were made and the percentage of CoC holders reminded;

(3) given that holders of vehicle driving licences may apply for renewal of their driving licences within three years from the expiry dates without undergoing a driving test, why a similar arrangement has not been made for CoCs; whether such an arrangement will be made for CoCs;

(4) given that holders of expired CoCs used to be qualified to navigate or

operate a local vessel, whether the Government will stipulate that for them to be issued CoCs again, they are required to pass a navigation examination only; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(5) as it is stipulated in the Notice that the validity period of CoCs may be granted an extension of three years for holders attaining the age of 65 who appear to be physically fit and pass the eyesight test, and that such an extension may be granted only on a yearly basis for holders who have attained the age of 71, among the applications for the extension of the validity period of CoCs submitted in each of the past five years by CoC holders who were aged (i) 65, (ii) 68, (iii) 71, (iv) 72 to 75 and (v) 76 or above, of the respective numbers and percentages of applications approved;

(6) given that while Hong Kong residents holding the People's Republic of China Fishing Vessel Personnel Certificates may be issued Hong Kong coxswain and engine operator certificates by the MD, these two certificates will cease to have effect simultaneously upon the day on which the holders attain the age of 60, whether the Government will consider discussing with the Mainland authorities revising the existing arrangements on reciprocal recognition of certificates so that persons attaining the age of 60 and having passed fitness and eyesight tests are allowed to apply for the extension of the validity period of such certificates issued by the MD; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(7) of the respective passing rates, in each of the past five years, of the examinations for the various grades of coxswain and engine operator certificates; and

(8) as the various types of vessel operators have indicated that there has been a severe shortage of manpower in the industry, whether the Government will examine if the application thresholds for various grades of certificates (including the requirements on the length of service and examination) may be lowered, so as to attract new blood to join the industry; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (Certification and Licensing) Regulation (Cap. 548D) requires any person navigating or operating a Class I, II or III vessel that is fitted with propulsion engines to hold a local certificate of competency (CoC) as a coxswain or an engine operator appropriate for the vessel. In addition, the Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (Local Certificates of Competency) Rules (the Rules) made under the Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) Ordinance (Cap. 548) specify that CoCs shall expire upon their holders attaining the age of 65 years. Holders of CoCs who wish to have their CoC validity periods extended should, in accordance with the Rules, submit applications to the Seafarers' Certification Section of the Marine Department (MD) within six months prior to reaching the age of 65 years. For a CoC holder who has reached 65 years of age, the validity period of his CoC could be extended for three years if he is physically fit and passes the eyesight test. As for a CoC holder who is 71 years old or above, his CoC would be extended yearly subject to assessments of physical fitness and eyesight.

In response to the Hon Steven Ho's question, in consultation with the MD and the Transport Department, our reply is as follows:

(1) and (5) According to the MD's records, over the past five years, the number of CoCs that have expired as the holders have not applied for extension of their validity periods is set out at Annex A. The age distribution of applicants for extending the validity periods of their CoCs, as well as the respective figures and percentages of applications approved are at Annex B.

(2) To ensure that CoC holders are fully aware of the arrangements and deadline of extending the validity periods of their CoCs, starting from March 2017, the MD would issue letters on a monthly basis to all holders whose CoCs are due to expire in three months' time to remind them of applying for extension of their CoCs' validity periods in a timely manner. These reminders are sent to the holders' correspondence addresses as recorded by the MD. As at March 2019, the MD has issued a total of 2 887 such reminders.

(3) Under section 15(6) of the Road Traffic (Driving Licences) Regulations (Cap. 374B), a full driving licence may be renewed during the period from four months before the date of its expiry to not exceeding three years after the date of its expiry. Given the various differences between driving a vehicle and a vessel in respect of the driving/ navigating conditions, modes of operation and competency requirements for drivers/ coxswains, driving licences and CoCs have their own respective regulatory regimes. The renewal arrangements and considerations of driving licences and CoCs are therefore not directly comparable.

That said, as a special measure to facilitate holders who need to extend the validity periods of their CoCs, the MD made a one-off arrangement in January 2018 for holders aged 65 years or above to renew their expired CoCs. Under the said arrangement, holders whose CoCs had expired for not more than three years (counting from the issue date of the Marine Department Notice No. 12 of 2018 concerned on January 26, 2018) might be granted with a CoC of the same grade as the one expired without having the holders to take an examination, subject to the holders' physical fitness, passage of the eyesight test and completion of a one-day refresher course within six months from the issuance of the aforesaid Marine Department Notice. To effectively notify the persons who might benefit from the arrangement, the MD promulgated this one-off arrangement to over 300 fishermen associations and organisations and enlisted their help to relay the information to their members.

(4) At present, the examinations for CoCs of coxswains and engine operators are mainly in written format (oral examinations could be arranged under special circumstances, such as when a candidate of Coxswain Grade 3 or Engine Operator Grade 3 CoC declares that he is unable to take the written examination due to illiteracy). The contents of the examinations cover several areas, namely basic knowledge of local waters and pilotage, the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGS), as well as seamanship and basic engine knowledge. This is to ensure that the CoC holder possesses sufficient knowledge and skill sets to ensure marine safety. The MD's view is that the proposal to substitute the written (or oral) examinations with a navigation examination is not preferable. This is mainly because such examination format of practical assessment at sea has its inherit limitations, as it could not fully cover different scenarios such as low visibility, night navigation, the application of COLREGs under different navigational circumstances, the knowledge and skills of the candidate in operating different classes of vessels, etc.

(6) To address the operating needs of mobile fishing vessels plying between the Mainland and Hong Kong, the MD issues CoCs with certain restrictions to holders of the Mainland Fishing Vessel Personnel Certificates (Mainland Certificates) to suit their daily mode of operation. It should be noted that as they come with specific restrictions, such as the types and maximum lengths of fishing vessels the holder is permitted to operate, this type of CoCs is different from the CoCs obtained via local examinations which entitle the holder to operate Class I, II and III vessels. Nevertheless, under the overarching principle of ensuring anyone operating a local vessel would possess suitable knowledge on marine safety, the MD is open-minded to possible ways that could assist holders of the Mainland Certificates in meeting the necessary requirements for obtaining a local CoC.

(7) In the past five years, the passing rates of the examinations for the CoCs of various grades of coxswains and engine operators are at Annex C.

(8) To ensure that the holders of CoCs of various grades possess the suitable experience and skills, the applicants of CoCs of various grades are required to meet specific requirements, such as the relevant work experience, on-job training, etc. Currently, to facilitate the manpower development in the local vessel trade and to attract more young persons in joining the sector, the MD is undertaking an accreditation exercise for the qualifications of the relevant CoCs in order to facilitate and support the lifelong learning and development of CoC holders, as well as to enable wider recognition of the CoC holders' abilities. Since such qualification accreditations involve reviewing the existing examination regime, the MD is currently studying whether there is a need to amend the relevant examinations so as to better match the requirements of the accreditation exercise and the actual mode of operation of the trade.