

## EPD responds to green group's survey result on marine refuse

Noting that a green group had released its survey findings on marine refuse yesterday (September 11), the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) made the following response:

The Government has always attached great importance to the marine refuse problem. In the past few years, strategies and measures on tackling marine refuse have been implemented and the Inter-departmental Working Group has been set up to enhance collaboration with nearby places. The Hong Kong-Guangdong Marine Environmental Management Special Panel was set up by the two sides in October 2016. A notification and alert system on marine refuse was also launched to reinforce co-operation on the prevention and tackling of the marine refuse problem within the region.

In the survey conducted together with a beach clean-up activity from mid-July to early September this year, the number of plastic beverage bottles was counted according to brand names marked in traditional Chinese characters, simplified Chinese characters and other languages. The counting result was used to project the proportion of marine refuse that came from the Mainland. As the result only represents the plastic bottles picked up at individual beaches in 10 days during the summer period, with 1,800 bottles collected in total, the sample size is statistically too small for making the projection, considering that around 15,000 tonnes of marine refuse are recovered every year. As such, the survey result does not fully and thoroughly reflect the different types of marine refuse in different seasons and locations.

The United Nations has released the United Nations Environment Programme / Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (UNEP/IOC) Guidelines on Survey and Monitoring of Marine Litter in 2009 on the survey of marine refuse. The guideline pointed out that, given the increasing globalisation of product markets, tagging items with the point of manufacture or origin is not likely to provide a practical or functional approach to the management of marine refuse. In Hong Kong, there may be more than one possible source of refuse marked with simplified Chinese characters, and the different proportion of sources of origin of plastic bottles, as a single item, cannot reflect the overall proportion of sources of origin of all kinds of marine refuse.

In order to enhance shorelines cleanliness, the EPD conducted a Marine Refuse Study (the Study) in 2013 to investigate the sources, distribution and movement of marine refuse, and to support the development of strategies to combat the marine refuse problem. The consultancy, upon making reference to the above-mentioned United Nations guidelines and taking into account the marine refuse problem in Hong Kong and the methods of refuse collection adopted by the relevant government departments, conducted a 12-month on-site survey at various shoreline locations in Hong Kong to collect data based on a scientific method. During the on-site survey, the consultancy identified

those refuse with simplified Chinese characters as non-local sources and they accounted for about 5 per cent of all the marine refuse sampled.

Notwithstanding that, the result was only taken as a supplementary reference – they are not key data or determinants for formulation of measures for combating marine refuse. For those samples that were not marked with Simplified Chinese characters, there had been no objective method to estimate the percentage that was of non-local origins. As mentioned above, the United Nations guidelines have clearly stated that the points of manufacture or origin of tagged items would not provide useful information for the management of marine refuse.

The Government adopted a three-pronged strategy to address the marine refuse problem in Hong Kong based on the Study results, which includes reducing waste generation at source; preventing refuse from entering the marine environment and removing refuse from the marine environment. The EPD will continue to conduct publicity campaigns and education activities in order to raise public awareness in keeping shorelines clean, encourage the public to make habitual change to reduce waste generation at source and prevent refuse from entering the marine environment.

On regional co-operation, the Hong Kong-Guangdong Marine Environmental Management Special Panel was set up in October 2016 to enhance exchange and communication through regular meetings on various regional marine environmental matters. Both sides are responsible for cleaning up marine refuse under their respective jurisdiction and also enhancing collaboration in regional marine environmental issues, including the handling of marine refuse. If it is forecasted that a large amount of refuse may drift into Hong Kong waters from the Mainland, the Department of Environmental Protection of Guangdong Province will inform the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government as soon as practicable under the notification mechanism established under the Special Panel, with a view to enabling relevant departments to deploy resources timely for interception and clean-up work. The EPD has all along been reporting the progress of co-operation between Guangdong and Hong Kong on tackling marine refuse in a timely manner through issuing press releases and posting updates on the Clean Shorelines website.

The EPD spokesman stressed that regardless of the percentage of non-local items in marine refuse, the HKSAR Government will not take the issue of marine refuse lightly and will continue to enhance collaboration with Mainland in preventing and tackling the refuse problem.

For more details on the efforts of the Government and other organisations in tackling marine refuse, please visit the EPD's thematic website ([https://www.epd.gov.hk/epd/clean\\_shorelines/index-2.html](https://www.epd.gov.hk/epd/clean_shorelines/index-2.html)).