

LCQ11: Public facilities on Po Toi Island

Following is a question by the Hon Mrs Regina Ip and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui, in the Legislative Council today (September 29):

Question:

Po Toi Island is a popular tourist spot but it lacks public facilities, causing great inconvenience to the residents on the Island and tourists. The only public toilet on the Island is far away from the pier, is overloaded during peak tourist seasons, and gives off stench as it is an aqua privy; residents on the Island do not have tap water supply and can only use rainwater collected by water storage tanks, nor do they have electricity supply and can only rely on power generators for provision of night-time lighting. In addition, as the only existing trail connecting Tai Wan and the pier is rugged with many steps, the residents of the Island have, over the years, strived for the construction by the Government of a barrier-free access connecting the two places as a replacement, but to no avail. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will provide modernised public toilets near the pier and at other places with high visitor flows on Po Toi Island, and decommission that aqua privy; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as it has been reported that a power company has completed a preliminary design study on the construction of a solar power generation system on Po Toi Island, whether the Government knows the project's details (including the generating capacity and the construction timetable) and progress;

(3) as it has been reported that the Water Supplies Department commissioned early last year a consultant to conduct investigation work on underground water resources on Po Toi Island, of the progress of the relevant work; and

(4) whether it will study afresh the construction of the aforesaid barrier-free access; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that, and what other measures are in place to facilitate tourists as well as aged and mobility-impaired residents on the Island to commute between Tai Wan and the pier?

Reply:

President,

Po Toi Island (the Island) is the southernmost island in Hong Kong with an area of about 3.69 square kilometers. There are about 20 ordinary residents on the Island. As the Hon Mrs Regina Ip's question covers a number

of policy areas, upon consultation with the Food and Health Bureau, the Environment Bureau (ENB) and the Development Bureau (DEVB), my reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) At present, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) provides daily cleansing services to the aqua privy (AP) on the Island. The FEHD also provides toilet attendant services to this AP during weekends and public holidays to enhance its cleansing service. Furthermore, additional public toilets (four regular portable toilets and one accessible portable toilet) are provided at the strategic locations on the Island to meet the demand of visitors. The FEHD once explored the feasibility of converting the AP into a flushing toilet, but it was considered technically infeasible due to the lack of formal water mains and site constraints. The FEHD completed in-situ facelifting for the AP in April 2019 which included replacement of aging facilities and installation of new facilities, repainting of ceiling, replacement of toilet compartment panels, wall tiles and floor tiles, etc., to improve the design and the facilities of the AP and enhance its hygiene standard.

Besides, to further enhance the environmental hygiene of the Island, FEHD has, taking into account the actual situation, increased the frequency of refuse collection with a view to ensuring the cleanliness of public places. The FEHD will continue to closely monitor the situation and as necessary increase the frequency of toilet cleaning and refuse collection during periods of high usage, such as weekends and public holidays, to maintain the cleanliness of public toilets on the Island.

(2) According to the ENB, the Hongkong Electric Company, Limited (HK Electric) is conducting a study on the feasible options for installing a photovoltaic system on the Island. The electricity generated under the project should be able to meet the daily needs of the residents on the Island. The HK Electric is identifying suitable partners to assist it in co-ordinating with various stakeholders on matters such as future deployment of resources and allocation, residents' participation, etc., with a view to taking forward the relevant works.

(3) According to the DEVB, as the sparse population on the Island and low daily water consumption may lead to prolonged water stagnation in a submarine pipeline of long distance, resulting in deterioration of water quality, the supply of potable water by a submarine pipeline to the Island is not technically feasible. In response to the request of residents of the Island for increasing water supply sources, the Water Supplies Department (WSD) has engaged consultants to carry out ground investigation works for the feasibility study of utilising groundwater as a supplementary water source for the Island. The preliminary testing results reveal that the quality and quantity of groundwater in the Island cannot meet the relevant requirements. Nevertheless, taking into consideration that the quality and quantity of the groundwater source may be subject to seasonal variations, the WSD has been conducting water quality and quantity monitoring for about one year until early 2022 as scheduled to ascertain the feasibility of utilising the groundwater source.

At present, water supply for domestic use on the Island is mainly provided by raw water collection systems under the maintenance of the Islands District Office (IsDO). In case of insufficient raw water supply from these systems, residents can inform the IsDO to transport potable water to the Island for consumption.

(4) The Home Affairs Department (HAD) and the IsDO have studied the proposal of constructing a barrier-free access connecting the Po Toi Public Pier and the Tai Wan beach. As the proposed works location is close to the seashore and rock slopes, the proposed barrier-free access would have to be constructed along the rock slopes and supported by piles. Considering the complexity of the construction works, remoteness of the location, and limitations on the transport of construction plants and materials, the HAD estimates that the cost of the proposed works will very likely exceed the project ceilings allowed under the District Minor Works Programme and the Rural Public Works Programme. The complexity of the proposed works has also gone beyond the typical scope of minor works. Nevertheless, in response to the proposal of constructing a barrier-free access and to improve road conditions on the Island, the IsDO has conducted site inspections with relevant residents and stakeholders on many occasions. Where practicable, improvement works (including the widening and leveling of pavements, conversion of some steps into ramps, and additional handrails and railings at appropriate locations) have been carried out for the major access on the Island (such as the one near the Public Pier) for use by residents and tourists. The IsDO will continue to improve the existing footpaths on the Island under the aforementioned minor works programmes to facilitate access by the public, including the elderly.