

LCQ22: Management of typhoon shelters and sheltered anchorages

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Lau and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (January 17):

Question:

It is learnt that in recent years, the number of marine pleasure vessels has increased sharply, and most of the owners of such vessels berth their vessels at typhoon shelters near the urban areas, resulting in an acute shortage of berthing spaces at those typhoon shelters. In addition, some vessel owners have relayed that some vessels which are berthed at fixed locations at typhoon shelters (such as fish drying barges (i.e. vessels used by fishermen to dry seafood), decommissioned engineering vessels and barges, or even damaged yachts (commonly known as "dead vessels") are used to occupy berthing spaces, while the spaces on both sides of these vessels are leased to pleasure vessels for berthing, with some vessel owners being solicited for rewards when berthing their vessels at typhoon shelters. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of Classes I to IV licensed vessels registered in Hong Kong in the past year; how such figures compare with those in 2021 and 2022;

(2) of the number of vessels berthing at typhoon shelters and sheltered anchorages in Hong Kong in the past year, together with a breakdown by vessel type; how such figures compare with those in 2021 and 2022;

(3) of the details of the Marine Department's efforts to combat illegal activities by vessels berthing at typhoon shelters in the past five years, including (i) the number of inspections conducted, (ii) the number of non-compliant cases, (iii) the types of non-compliant acts, (iv) the number of prosecutions instituted, and (v) the number of convictions;

(4) whether it will continue to step up inspection and law enforcement actions, including studying the introduction of smart technologies for enforcement, so as to ensure the proper use of berthing places at typhoon shelters; and

(5) whether it will consider setting up a dedicated department to coordinate the policy and management of typhoon shelters and sheltered anchorages, including re-planning and rationalising all berthing places at typhoon shelters in Hong Kong, reviewing the "first-come-first-served" mode of operation for berthing spaces at typhoon shelters, as well as studying the feasibility of recovering all berthing spaces at typhoon shelters and then centralising their management by the Government?

Reply:

President,

The Government is committed to ensuring that sufficient sheltered spaces are provided within the Hong Kong waters for local vessels (including working vessels and pleasure vessels) to take refuge during typhoons or inclement weather, so as to safeguard the safety of the vessels and their crew members. There are currently 14 typhoon shelters located in different parts of Hong Kong waters, providing 423 hectares of sheltered space for use by vessels. Apart from typhoon shelters, local vessels can also choose to berth at 18 sheltered anchorages. Under normal weather conditions, local vessels may be anchored at any safe and suitable locations within Hong Kong waters according to their daily business and operational needs subject to no obstruction being made to marine traffic.

The Marine Department (MD) carries out assessments of the territory-wide supply and demand situation of sheltered spaces on a regular basis. In the latest round of the Assessment of Typhoon Shelter Space Requirements 2022-2035, it is estimated that the supply of sheltered space substantially meet the demand of local vessels throughout the period up to 2035. The relevant report has been uploaded onto the website of the MD for public information in January 2023. In general, the MD conducts assessments every five years, and the next round of assessment is expected to commence in 2025.

After having consulted the MD, replies to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Kenneth Lau are as follows:

(1) The numbers of licensed Classes I to IV vessels in Hong Kong and the year-on-year change in the past three years are shown as follows:

Class of licensed vessels	2021	2022	2023
Class I	396	390 (-1.52%)	393 (+0.77%)
Class II	1 956	1 845 (-5.67%)	1 814 (-1.68%)
Class III	6 376	6 139 (-3.72%)	6 260 (+1.97%)
Class IV	11 767	12 378 (+5.19%)	12 553 (+1.41%)

(2) The MD does not keep statistics on the daily occupancy of typhoon shelters and sheltered anchorages, but maintains records on the highest occupancy of typhoon shelters during the passage of typhoons to ensure that the demand for sheltered spaces by vessels during inclement weather can be accommodated. In the past three years, the highest occupancy of typhoon shelters during typhoons by classes of vessels are attached at Annex.

(3) In order to ensure safe navigation of vessels, the MD conducts inspections across the waters of Hong Kong from time to time, including those conducted in typhoon shelters. According to records, in the past five years, the MD conducted a total of about 49 000 inspections in various typhoon shelters and initiated 2 038 prosecutions against the irregularities of vessels. The irregularities included vessels suspected of operating without a licence, vessels being let for hire or reward without permission, vessels carrying an amount of people in excess of the number specified by law, inadequate life-saving appliances or fire fighting apparatus on board the vessels, failure to produce insurance policy, breaching of licence conditions, failure to paint the mark of certificate in the most conspicuous positions on both sides of the deckhouse, failure to keep the full licence on board, dwelling vessels entering or remaining in the closed area, absence of an operator holding Local Certificate of Competency on board, pleasure vessels being used for non-pleasure purposes. As at December 31, 2023, convictions were made for a total of 1 843 cases while another 195 cases were in process.

(4) In order to ensure smooth navigation in the passage areas of typhoon shelters and crack down on irregularities by local vessels, the MD not only carries out patrols in typhoon shelters from time to time, but also conducts special operations and fire drills in typhoon shelters with the Police and the Fire Services Department from time to time. To strengthen law enforcement, the MD has reached an agreement with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, the Water Supplies Department, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the electric companies to conduct joint operations at typhoon shelters regularly. During routine inspections or joint operations, if any vessels are suspected of violating the Electricity Ordinance, the Waterworks Ordinance or the Food Business Regulation, the MD will refer such cases to relevant departments for follow-up. In addition, the MD has also purchased drones in recent years to support investigation and law enforcement, and will review whether there are suitable smart technologies solutions on the market for related purposes.

(5) It is the established policy of the Government to provide sheltered spaces in Hong Kong on a territory-wide basis for local vessels to take refuge during inclement weather. The MD is always willing to listen to the views of various sectors of the community, participate in study of matters relating to the management of typhoon shelters and work with the industry to discuss the issues of typhoon shelter management.