

LCQ3: Combating climate change and protecting biodiversity

Following is a question by the Hon Chu Hoi-dick and a reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (May 29):

Question:

Last month, a socio-political movement called "Extinction Rebellion" staged a large-scale demonstration in London, putting forward the following three demands to the Government of the United Kingdom (UK): (1) the Government must tell the truth about the climate and wider ecological emergency, reverse inconsistent policies and work alongside with the media to communicate with citizens; (2) the Government must enact legally binding policy measures to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2025 and to reduce consumption levels; and (3) a national Citizens' Assembly should be set up to oversee the changes, as part of creating a democracy fit for the purpose. On the other hand, a global environmental assessment report published early this month by an organisation under the United Nations (UN) has pointed out that a million species are threatened with extinction due to the destruction inflicted by human beings on the natural environment, and thus only "transformative changes" across the globe on various aspects may reverse this situation. Some environmentalists have pointed out that if the Hong Kong Government does not make transformative changes to its current policies for addressing climate change and protecting biodiversity, it can hardly satisfy the three aforesaid demands nor meet the UN Aichi Biodiversity Targets. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will pledge to the public that it will devote all its efforts to satisfying the three demands of the Extinction Rebellion movement; if so, of the transformative changes to be made in respect of its policies for addressing climate change; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given that the Parliament and dozens of local councils of cities and towns in UK have declared a climate emergency, whether the Hong Kong Government will make such declaration; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will study what transformative changes to the policies on protecting biodiversity are needed in Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(1) and (2) There is no time to waste in combating climate change. The Paris

Agreement agreed that all Parties should take appropriate measures based on the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities" in order to tackle this imminent challenge together. Hong Kong has responded positively when the Paris Agreement came into effect in 2016. We set up the Steering Committee on Climate Change under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary of Administration to steer and co-ordinate climate actions among various bureaux and departments in the whole Government; and released the Hong Kong's Climate Action Plan 2030+ in 2017, setting out the target to reduce Hong Kong's carbon intensity by between 65 per cent and 70 per cent by 2030 compared with the 2005 level and detailing the key measures to be taken. These actions are in line with the Paris Agreement to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. The Government will also review our climate actions every five years as required by the Paris Agreement.

As electricity generation contributes to about two thirds of Hong Kong's carbon emissions, improving the fuel mix is the prime consideration. For this, the two power companies will use more natural gas in the coming ten years to replace the coal-fired generating units which will gradually retire. At the same time, the Government will continue to take the lead in developing renewable energy (RE). For example, we have earmarked \$2 billion to implement relevant projects at government premises, and will install solar generation systems of a larger scale at suitable reservoir and landfill locations. Beyond the Government, we have introduced Feed-in Tariff (FiT) and implemented different facilitation measures, including suitably relaxing the restrictions on "village house" rooftop installations, launching Solar Harvest to assist eligible schools and welfare non-governmental organisations in installing solar photovoltaic panels, etc. There were only dozens of private RE systems connected to the power grids in the past, but in the past year alone, the two power companies have already received about 3 000 FiT applications.

In addition, the Government unveiled in 2015 "the Energy Saving Plan for Hong Kong's Built Environment 2015~2025+", setting a target of reducing energy intensity by 40 per cent (compared with 2005) by 2025. To date, our overall energy intensity has decreased by more than 28 per cent, putting us in the lead among members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. We have implemented a number of measures to enhance our energy efficiency, including (a) taking the lead in saving energy and developing green buildings; (b) raising statutory standards; (c) providing tax incentives; (d) constructing district cooling systems; (e) promoting retro-commissioning; (f) expanding the Mandatory Energy Efficiency Labelling Scheme; and (g) harnessing technology and innovation, etc. After implementing all these measures, we expect that our annual carbon emission will be reduced by 1.7 million tonnes. Using the carbon emission level of 2016 as reference, this would be equivalent to a carbon reduction of about 4 per cent.

Energy saving is also a key element of the post-2018 Scheme of Control Agreements (SCAs) we signed with the power companies. The two power companies have implemented different programmes under the SCAs to assist the community in participating in energy saving. In the future, smart meters will be used

to provide electricity consumption information to all customers in Hong Kong to help save energy and implement demand response schemes.

We are also developing Organic Resources Recovery Centres (ORRCs) in phases to turn food waste into biogas. Phase 1 of ORRC was commissioned in 2018, while Phases 2 and 3 are under planning. Moreover, the first Food Waste/Sewage Sludge Anaerobic Co-digestion Trial Scheme that is carried out jointly by the Environmental Protection Department and Drainage Services Department is just being conducted at Tai Po Sewage Treatment Works. This allows proper recycling of food waste and turning waste into energy, while reducing carbon emissions at the same time.

The transport sector accounts for around 20 per cent of Hong Kong's carbon emissions. Upon the completion of the Shatin to Central Link, the railway service will cover more than 70 per cent of the local population. The Government will continue to promote "Walk in HK" to encourage people to walk more, and to foster a "bicycle-friendly environment".

With the successive implementation of various measures, we are moving steadily towards the 2030 target of reducing per capita carbon emissions from 5.7 tonnes in 2016 to less than 4.5 tonnes in 2020 and within 3.3 to 3.8 tonnes by 2030. Pursuant to the Paris Agreement, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) shall formulate, by 2020, our long-term decarbonisation strategy up to 2050. To this end, the Council for Sustainable Development has accepted the Government's invitation to launch a public engagement next month. In the process, the Council will, as usual, adopt a bottom-up approach, providing a platform to gauge the views of the community and help build consensus. We encourage all sectors of the community to take this opportunity to express their views.

(3) In the face of various global challenges for biodiversity, the HKSAR Government launched the first city level Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP) for Hong Kong in 2016. The four major areas under BSAP include enhancing the existing conservation measures; mainstreaming biodiversity; improving knowledge and enhancing public participation in biodiversity. There are 67 specific actions under BSAP, many of which are related to mitigating and adapting to climate change.

At present, various work under the four major areas of BSAP has been progressing, and actions are being implemented by relevant bureaux and departments in accordance with the timetable.

Thank you, President.