

LCQ4: Safety of banana boats and jet-skis

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 9):

Question:

Every summer, many people flock to the waters of Hong Kong to engage in a variety of water sports activities, including riding on a banana boat towed by a speed-boat and jet skiing. It is learnt that accidents involving such recreational activities which resulted in deaths and injuries have occurred from time to time. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of water sports accidents involving banana boats and jet-skis recorded by the authorities in the past five years;
- (2) whether the existing legislation governing vessels regulates jet-skis and non-mechanised vessels such as banana boats; if so, of the details, including the specific requirements under the various provisions and whether such facilities are required to be registered or licensed; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) whether the relevant government departments have conducted inspections regularly on the safety of banana boats and jet-skis; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The reply to the Hon Holden Chow's question is as follows:

(1) From 2012 to 2017, the Marine Department (MD) recorded three accidents involving jet-skis but none involving banana boats (neither banana boats nor pleasure vessels (PVs) towing them).

(2) According to Schedule 1 to the Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (Certification and Licensing) Regulation (Cap. 548D), jet-skis fall within the vessel type of open cruiser under Class IV vessels (i.e. PVs), for which an Operating Licence (OL) for Local Vessel and a valid third party risks insurance certification must be obtained. An operator must also possess the Pleasure Vessel Operator Certificate of Competency for operating jet-skis. To enhance safety, the MD has endorsed corresponding conditions in the OLs for jet-skis, including permitting the use of jet-skis at daytime only, requiring operators to wear lifejackets and jet-skis to be installed with an

equipment commonly known as "kill cord" (i.e. device enabling the engine of a jet-ski to automatically switch off once the operator leaves his seat).

OLs of local vessels are not required for non-mechanised inflatable vessels including banana boats. However, a PV owner who intends to use his vessel for towing inflatable vessels should submit an application in writing to the MD. Upon approval of the application, the MD will endorse the OL of the PV concerned with conditions pertaining to the towing of inflatable boats, including keeping proper lookout on the PV; providing every person on board the vessel being towed with a seat and an independent handhold; and ensuring that each of these persons shall wear a life-jacket.

(3) Apart from conducting regular inspections of PVs, the MD also steps up its patrols and launches anti-speeding operations at popular sites for water sports during the summer. In the summer of 2017, 1 100 inspections of PVs and nine anti-speeding operations were conducted. On the publicity and education fronts, to remind the public to pay attention to their own safety and that of others when taking part in water sports or waterborne recreational activities, the MD collaborates with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and the Hong Kong Police Force in organising the Water Sports Safety Seminar annually, with a view to raising public awareness of water sports safety. The MD also distributes pamphlets on water sports safety to the public with advice on the safe operation of banana boats and jet-skis. As summer draws near, the MD will continue with its relevant work in patrol and education to ensure water sports safety.