

LCQ8: Speed Restricted Zones

Following is a question by the Hon Steven Ho and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (July 21):

Question:

Kai Lung Wan Fish Culture Zone (FCZ) is located in East Kiu Tsui Chau, which has been zoned as a Speed Restricted Zone (SRZ). Some members of the sector have relayed that, over the years, there have often been vessels proceeding at a high speed in the waters near East Kiu Tsui Chau, and the swells so created have damaged the rafts in the FCZ, dealing a blow to the livelihood of mariculturists and seriously endangering the safety of operators in the FCZ. Although the Government extended the boundaries of East Kiu Tsui Chau SRZ last year, the situation has shown no improvement. Regarding SRZs, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the measures currently in place to ensure that vessels in the various SRZs will not proceed at a speed exceeding the statutory maximum permitted speed;

(2) of the details of the law enforcement actions taken by the Marine Department (MD) in the various SRZs in each of the past five years, including the number of patrols, as well as the manpower and number of vessels involved;

(3) of the number of reports of vessels speeding in SRZs received by the Government, and the respective numbers of persons arrested, prosecuted and convicted, in each of the past five years;

(4) as quite a number of marine operators have relayed that it is difficult to accurately grasp the boundaries of SRZs, whether it has assessed if the existing guidelines issued by the MD to the public are sufficient; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the negative, of the improvement measures to be put in place; and

(5) whether it will adopt a multi-pronged approach to solve the problem of vessels speeding in SRZs, including reviewing the management measures related to SRZs, introducing measures for reducing the disturbance caused to FCZs by vessels speeding, and stepping up law enforcement actions; if so, of the details (including the implementation timetable); if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Marine Department (MD), our reply to the Hon

Steven Ho's question is as follows:

(1) The Government proposed to amend the Shipping and Port Control Regulations (Cap. 313A) and the Merchant Shipping (Local Vessels) (General) Regulation (Cap. 548F) in October 2019 to implement enhancement measures in relation to Speed Restricted Zones (SRZs) within Hong Kong waters with a view to enhancing marine safety. The proposed amendments included establishing eight new SRZs in Sai Kung and Tai Po, amending the boundaries of some existing SRZs, extending the restriction periods and hours of certain SRZs, as well as increasing the level of penalty of breaching the relevant regulations. The relevant Amendment Regulations came into effect on April 1, 2020.

Apart from briefing relevant members of the marine industry of the SRZ amendments at the Navigation Safety Seminar held by the MD regularly, the MD also issues Marine Department Notices and conducts Safety Afloat Educational Seminar annually, and distributes pamphlets to the public and vessel operators during patrols with a view to reminding the public of the legislative requirements in relation to SRZs, including the restricted periods, maximum permitted speed and penalties of each SRZ. Relevant Marine Department Notices are also uploaded to the website of the MD for public's reference.

In addition to routine patrols in Hong Kong waters, the MD also conducts joint anti-speeding operations with the Marine Police from time to time to detect the speed of vessels in SRZs by using detection equipment (i.e. laser guns). Coxswains will be intercepted and prosecuted if any violation to relevant regulations is found.

(2) and (3) Details of enforcement operations at SRZs in the past five years are set out in the following table:

Year	Number of patrols and enforcement operations conducted	Number of speeding complaints handled	Number of prosecution cases	Number of convicted cases
2016	195	0	2	1
2017	180	1	0	1
2018	196	3	0	0
2019	221	3	17	15
2020	234	11	13	12

There are currently 29 patrol launches operated by the MD to conduct patrols in different parts of Hong Kong waters on a daily basis. During the restricted periods of SRZs, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays, dedicated patrol launches are deployed to conduct specialized SRZ patrols with each patrol launch manned by one duty marine inspector. Besides, anti-speeding operations are also conducted by the MD from time to time by at least two patrol launches and at least five marine inspectors.

(4) As mentioned in part (1) above, the legislative requirements and the implementation details of the SRZs are clearly set out in the pamphlets and the annual Marine Department Notices. The boundaries of each SRZ are also clearly outlined in the "Charts for Local Vessels" published in Hong Kong, and shown in the free mobile application "eSeaGo" which provides information on nautical charts of Hong Kong waters. Information of SRZs is also provided in the "Hong Kong Harbour Facilities & Layout" published by the MD. Since the implementation of the newly amended regulations last year, most of the coxswains, who were under investigation of suspected speeding, admitted that they were aware that they were navigating within the SRZs. The MD therefore considered that the current guidance is adequate.

(5) The MD has been monitoring the effectiveness of implementation of the SRZs. In the light of the latest legislative amendments to the SRZs, the MD keeps reviewing the situation in those waters with higher sea traffic density and frequent reports of vessel speeding, and continuously strengthening the patrols in these waters to enhance the safety of, amongst others, water sports players, as well as operators and facilities of the mariculture zones. Owing to geographical limitation of certain new SRZs, such as the waters around Sharp Island East, which poses difficulty for speed detection, the MD has strengthened patrols in these waters and purchased new speed detection equipment with the ability to detect speed from a longer distance and with a higher accuracy last year. The first batch of the new equipment is expected to be put into service within this financial year.

In addition, a hotline has been established by the MD. If the public spot any vessel speeding in the SRZs, they may report to the Harbour Patrol Section of the MD.