

Public engagement on control of single-use plastics launched

The following is issued on behalf of the Council for Sustainable Development:

At the invitation of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, the Council for Sustainable Development (SDC) today (September 30) launched the public interaction phase of the public engagement on control of single-use plastics. The public engagement aims to provide members of the public with information on the subject of single-use plastics and initiate the discussion on relevant issues with a view to exploring ways to gradually control non-essential and hard-to-recycle single-use plastic items so that the Council can make recommendations to the Government.

Speaking at the press conference, the Chairman of the Council, Dr Lam Ching-choi, said, "The SDC completed the public engagement on long-term decarbonisation strategy last November, and submitted a report to the Government, putting forward a long-term vision to progressively advance to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. It necessitates the need for radical changes in our lifestyles and consumption practices. To achieve the net zero target, large-scale lifestyle transformation is required, e.g. promoting waste reduction and recycling. The production and disposal of plastics will generate greenhouse gas emissions. Controlling single-use plastics can help Hong Kong move towards the goal of achieving carbon neutrality before 2050."

The Government has been promoting a plastic-free culture and enhancing recycling measures on all fronts. It put forth proposals and consulted the public on the producer responsibility scheme on plastic beverage containers and regulation of disposable plastic tableware earlier this year. However, a comprehensive plastic strategy would cover much more than that. The present public engagement aims to complete the puzzle by allowing the public and different sectors of society to take part in mapping out the control of single-use plastics together. The SDC looks forward to hearing from the public on "what to reduce, by how much and when to reduce".

The public engagement, adopting a bottom-up and stakeholder oriented approach, provides a platform to gauge public views. The Strategy Subcommittee (SSC) of the SDC, comprising experts and stakeholders from different fields, is assisting the Council in planning and implementing this public engagement exercise.

The Chairman of the SSC, Professor Jonathan Wong, announced at the press conference a series of public engagement activities to be held in the coming three months, including town hall meetings, a youth forum, school activities and briefing sessions. He encouraged members of the public to actively participate.

The Council also released a Public Engagement Document to highlight the following topics for public discussion:

- * Which single-use plastic products to tackle and the priority, the approach for managing them (such as voluntary measures or regulation) and the timeline; and
- * Exploring ways to go green from the consumers' angle with a view to revolutionising the market, for example:
 - the degree of public acceptance (e.g. willingness to bear additional costs for reducing the use of single-use plastics and the acceptable range of additional costs); and
 - views on choosing greener products (e.g. reuse potential, green packaging and brands' corporate environmental responsibility).

Dr Lam added, "Medical practitioners like myself have taken the Hippocratic Oath – 'primum non nocere' or 'first, do no harm'. However, 'do no harm' might not be sufficient for us to tackle the plastic pandemic. In the face of any disease, doctors will never give up looking for a cure. The plastic pandemic can only be effectively dealt with if the Government and the whole society join hands to come up with solutions and take swift action."

The public interaction phase of the public engagement will run until December 29, 2021. The Public Engagement Document can be downloaded from the Council's dedicated website (www.susdev.org.hk). Members of the public are invited to send the views collection forms in the Public Engagement Document to the Council Secretariat via email (comments@susdev.org.hk), mail (21/F, High Block, Queensway Government Offices, Admiralty, Hong Kong) or fax (3150 8168).