

SEN's opening remarks at LegCo Finance Committee special meeting

Following is the opening remarks (English translation) by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, at the special meeting of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Finance Committee today (April 9):

Chairman,

The Financial Secretary's Budget Speech highlighted two new initiatives on our side, namely allocating another \$1 billion for departments to install renewable energy (RE) facilities, and providing more charging facilities for electric vehicles. \$120 million will be allocated to provide over 1 000 additional public chargers at government car parks. I would like to brief Members on other work priorities of the Environment Bureau in the coming financial year.

On mitigating climate change, the Government has earlier earmarked \$900 million to implement energy saving projects in government buildings and made good progress. We are confident that the target to reduce electricity consumption of government buildings by 5 per cent within five years could be reached in this year. Moreover, \$1 billion earmarked for installing RE facilities at government venues in the last two financial years is already benefitting leisure and cultural services facilities, government offices, government schools and sewerage treatment works. The additional \$1 billion this year will allow us to do more green projects.

Pursuant to the requirement of the Paris Agreement, we need to draw up, by 2020, a long-term decarbonisation strategy for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region up to 2050. We have invited the Council for Sustainable Development to conduct a public engagement exercise shortly for this purpose and to engage the public on how to transition towards a low-carbon society.

On improvement of air quality, we are making preparations for phasing out Euro IV diesel commercial vehicles, and planning the trial of retrofitting Euro IV and V franchised buses with enhanced selective catalytic reduction devices to reduce emissions. Having completed the review of Air Quality Objectives (AQOs) last December, we will launch a three-month public consultation this year. If it is decided to tighten the AQOs, we will submit an Amendment Bill to the Legislative Council (LegCo) for implementing the new AQOs as soon as possible.

Implementation of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) charging is at the centre of our waste reduction strategy. The relevant Bill is being scrutinised at LegCo. This year, we are providing additional funding of around \$300 million to \$400 million to enhance support for the work related to waste reduction and recycling. Upon implementation of MSW charging in the future, annual funding will increase to about \$800 million to \$1 billion, which is commensurate with the amount of the estimated gross revenue to be generated

from MSW charging, thereby achieving the effect of "dedicated fund for dedicated use". We are preparing to roll out a pilot scheme in three districts this year to provide free collection service for non-commercial and non-industrial waste plastic. We also plan to introduce a pilot scheme later this year to collect food waste.

On the producer responsibility schemes (PRS), the one for waste electrical and electronic equipment is being implemented progressively. Moreover, we will submit the draft subsidiary legislation regarding the PRS for glass beverage containers to LegCo this year for scrutiny, in order to pursue its full implementation. Our next step is to take forward the PRS for plastic beverage containers. The relevant pilot scheme for reverse vending machines will be implemented in the second half of this year.

On marine refuse, apart from our continuous effort in co-ordinating and stepping up cleaning, monitoring and patrolling work through our inter-departmental working group, we will also strengthen collaboration with our counterparts in Guangdong Province on marine environmental management. We will also enhance communication with the public and provide support to shoreline cleanup actions organised by different organisations.

Regarding water quality, to continually strengthen our sewerage infrastructural facilities and tackle near-shore pollution problems, we plan to seek funding approval from LegCo this year for 15 sewerage projects of some \$29 billion in total for upgrading or constructing sewage treatment works, sewers, village sewerage systems and dry weather flow interceptors.

On countryside and nature conservation, since the establishment of the Countryside Conservation Office (CCO) in July last year, we have been actively co-ordinating relevant government departments and stakeholders. The CCO will launch a Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme in the second half of this year to support interactions and collaboration between non-government organisations and villagers for implementing conservation and revitalisation projects. In addition, we will consult the soon-to-be-established Advisory Committee on Countryside Conservation on the proposed minor improvement works in Lai Chi Wo and Sha Lo Tung.

All in all, I look forward to strengthening both our interaction and collaboration with LegCo Members and all sectors of the community, as well as our joint efforts in innovation, so that together we can continue to contribute to the sustainable development of Hong Kong and the world. Thank you, Chairman.