

## **A. Introduction**

The Audit Commission ("Audit") conducted a review of the provision of local services by the Marine Department ("MD") such as managing public cargo working areas ("PCWAs") and private moorings, and conducting marine accident investigations that occurred within Hong Kong waters.

2. The Committee did not hold any public hearing on this subject. Instead, it asked for written responses to its enquiries.

## **B. Managing public cargo working areas**

3. The Committee noted from paragraph 2.33 of the Director of Audit's Report ("Audit Report") that the use of automated vehicle entry/exit control systems in the four PCWAs had proved to be cost-effective in achieving a saving of four staff in each PCWA. The Committee enquired whether there were any difficulties for the MD not to replace such unserviceable systems for Tuen Mun and Rambler Channel PCWAs since 2008.

4. In his letter of 30 November 2012 (in *Appendix 39*), the **Director of Marine** replied that the software operating system and the spare parts of the computer hardware for the automated vehicle entry/exit control systems were no longer available for replacement. In this connection, the MD had been exploring with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department on the feasibility of introducing a new system at the two PCWAs, including the use of the Octopus card system, which was already in use in some other PCWAs.

5. In view of the decreasing trend in the actual rate of return of PCWAs since 2005-2006 as revealed in Figure 1 in paragraph 2.39 of the Audit Report, the Committee enquired why the MD did not conduct more frequent reviews of the financial performance of PCWAs.

6. The **Director of Marine** explained that it had been the practice of the MD to carry out reviews of the financial performance of the PCWAs at three-year intervals to tie in with the tendering of PCWA berths for a new Berth Licence Agreement ("BLA") term. With the 2011-2016 BLAs running for five years for all

PCWAs, the MD agreed with the Audit recommendation that more frequent reviews should be conducted. The MD was presently conducting an interim review of the 2012-2013 financial performance of the PCWAs for completion in March 2013.

7. According to paragraph 2.16 of the Audit Report, the information on vacant berths available for letting was presently only disseminated to interested operators through the MD's quarterly meetings with the trade representatives. The Committee enquired whether there were any difficulties for the MD not to also publicize on its website information of berth vacancy and upcoming tendering exercise; and if so, what were these difficulties.

8. The **Director of Marine** replied that the MD had arranged to publicize on its website the information of berth vacancy with effect from 1 December 2012. Tender invitations would continue to be published in the Government Gazette and local newspapers as well as on the MD's website.

### **C. Providing surveying and licensing services**

9. The Committee noted from paragraphs 3.12 and 3.15 of the Audit Report that due to the limited supply of authorized surveyors in Hong Kong and Mainland China, demand on survey services by the MD had remained high. This had resulted in the MD's failure in meeting its performance pledges in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 for approving 90% of the plans for new building and modification of local vessels within two months and one month respectively. The Committee enquired about the reason(s) for the limited supply of authorized surveyors, and whether consideration would be given to, say, collaborating with vocational training institutions in coming up with more training places for people who aspired to become authorized surveyors.

10. In his letter dated 30 November 2012, the **Director of Marine** explained that:

- as ship building and ship repairs were no longer major industries in Hong Kong, there were currently limited places in the local tertiary institutions on marine engineering and no local academic courses for naval architecture; and

- in 2004, a Sea-going Training Incentive Scheme ("Scheme") was launched by the Government to provide subsidy to encourage youngsters to take up and complete sea-going training with a view to developing their future careers in the port and maritime industry. So far, more than 200 youngsters had joined the Scheme.

11. The Committee noted from paragraph 3.23 of the Audit Report that from November 2008 to early June 2012, the MD only issued reminders for vessels with licences expired since 2008. The Committee enquired about the reason(s) for not issuing reminders to vessel owners with expired licences irrespective of the expiry dates.

12. The **Director of Marine** replied that following the Audit recommendation, the MD would issue reminders in phases to all owners with expired licences irrespective of the expiry date.

13. On the question of whether consideration would be given to stepping up efforts in contacting the vessel owners with expired licences, such as by telephone, facsimile, electronic mail and cable, the **Director of Marine** responded that the MD would follow up those cases with expired licences by telephone and closely monitor their feedback and evaluate the effectiveness of this measure.

#### **D. Managing private moorings**

14. As revealed in paragraph 4.11 of the Audit Report, 123 (87%) of 141 private mooring owners had not renewed the licences of their designated vessels and the majority of them had their licences expired for more than three years, reflecting these owners are no longer in need of private mooring spaces. As there were long waiting lists for private mooring spaces in some areas, the Committee asked about the reason(s) for not strengthening enforcement action against private moorings not used by the designated vessels.

15. The **Director of Marine** replied that the MD would step up patrol at designated mooring areas to check whether the private mooring was no longer used by the designated vessels and take enforcement action as appropriate, including verifying whether consent had been given by the mooring owner. The MD was also

upgrading its computer system to enhance the linkage between the vessels' licence information and the database of private moorings to facilitate its patrol officers to take more effective and efficient enforcement action against any irregularities identified.

## **E. Marine accident investigation**

16. As stated in paragraph 5.8 of the Audit Report, the MD has not set any target time for the translation of an accident investigation report from English into Chinese. A total of 13 out of the 34 draft reports completed at 31 May 2012 required translation. The translation process for 10 of these draft reports took eight to 51 weeks. The average time taken was 25 weeks, which was disproportionately long compared with the 30-week target time for completing the draft reports. The Committee asked what difficult(ies) was encountered by the MD for not being able to expedite the translation of these draft reports.

17. The **Director of Marine** replied in his letter that:

- factors affecting the translation process of marine accident investigation reports included the technical nature and length of the reports, the professional language used in the drafting and the regular change in the posting of Official Languages Officers in the MD; and
- the MD would amend the investigation guidelines to specify that for incidents that involved local or river trade vessels operators, the related investigation reports should be drafted in Chinese.

## **F. Conclusions and recommendations**

18. The Committee notes the above replies of the Director of Marine and wishes to be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the various recommendations made by the Audit.