

Home Affairs Panel Meeting - 18 May, 1999

**Remarks by Robert L. Wilson
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1. I thank the panel for inviting me to attend this meeting and providing me with an opportunity to expand on the already lengthy comments made in the HKCRA letter dated 24 April, 1999. That letter set out as briefly as possible the essential views of the HKCRA. That it is 7 pages long indicates that the subjects covered are numerous and important to the wellbeing of the community in relation to sport and physical recreation and community development.

I will not repeat what has already been written and read, but there are several additional points which I feel should be made to the members of this panel.

2. Firstly, the Government's choice of a consultant was formerly the Director of the Urban Services Department. No doubt his intimate knowledge of the workings of that department were of value in helping him to advise the Government on the future framework for the discharge of the municipal councils' responsibilities. We do not have a problem with the proposed framework. However, the consultant has, we believe, exceeded his brief by venturing into the realms of policy and has attempted to confine the role of the SDB to elite sport.

3. When, in the late 1980's, the Government announced its plan to set up the SDB, it was opposed by the municipal councils, who viewed the SDB as an interloper into an area of activity over which they exerted a stranglehold. As a member of the Board of the SDB since its establishment as a provisional body and for 6 years after, I had a ringside seat at the contest for access to public sports facilities by clubs and NSAs on the one side, supported by the SDB, and the municipal councils, who were determined to restrict their access, on the other side.

4. Although the SDB is the statutory body responsible for the development of sport and physical recreation and has the legal authority to advise government departments on policy matters concerning sport, departments are free to ignore the SDB. This is what the councils did. Furthermore, the councils actually opposed the SDB's efforts to develop sport, maintaining that they alone had the right to determine policy concerning usage of the public sports facilities entrusted to them.

5. Let me give you an example of the councils' attitude to the development of organised sports activity by clubs. When I use the word 'club' I mean an organisation of individuals, not bricks and mortar.

6. About 7 or 8 years ago the SDB, at my suggestion, began a programme to encourage the formation of clubs. Today these clubs are referred to by the SDB as Community Sports Clubs and their number is steadily growing. To help promote club formation the SDB planned to publish a booklet explaining what a club was and how to go about forming one. The Municipal Services Department learned of this and tried to prevent the SDB from publishing the booklet. The USD did not

want its facilities to be used by organised sports clubs. They preferred unorganised, casual use. Consequently, municipal council facilities are underused and need to be very heavily subsidised. To its credit the SDB went ahead and published the booklet and the formation of clubs continued.

7. The SDB was set up by a decision of the Legislative Council, to develop sport and physical recreation. Unfortunately, Legco left control of all the public sports facilities in the hands of the municipal councils, who, as I noted earlier, had opposed the setting up of the SDB.

8. Is it any wonder that sports development has proceeded very slowly?

9. Can you see the error that was made? It is as if the Hospital Authority had been set up, while all the hospitals were left under the control of other organisations.

10. Members of the Legislative Council now have an opportunity to create the appropriate framework for allowing sport and organised physical recreation to flourish. The one essential factor in this is that there must be one and only one governmental organisation in charge of policy and that organisation already exists.

11. The SDB must be given full authority to determine policy concerning usage of public sports facilities. The SDB in any case is supervised by the Home Affairs Bureau and that should be adequate.

12. Sport and the community do not need two government bodies making policy, in conflict with each other.

13. So your deliberations and the HKCRA letter of 24 April are about creating the ideal framework for allowing the community to get involved in sport according to the community's needs, not according to some outdated concept of the municipal councils that the consultant is trying to perpetuate within the proposed Culture & Leisure Services Department.

14. All Hong Kong rejoiced when Li Lai-shan won an Olympic Gold Medal, but in relation to our population size we should have won at least a dozen medals. That sport is so under-developed is due entirely to the wholly inappropriate and ineffective policies of the municipal councils.

15. The age of the dinosaurs is over, or it will be after the end of the year. Please, do not allow a new dinosaur to be born in their place.