

Report No. 43 of the Director of Audit — Chapter 9

PROVISION OF MARINE SCAVENGING SERVICE

Summary

1. The Marine Department (MD) provides marine scavenging service in Hong Kong waters by operating seven specialised scavenging vessels (i.e. a Disfloater and six Sea Cleaners) and employing a fleet of scavenging vessels (i.e. 11 marine refuse reception vessels (RVs) and 46 motorised sampans (MOPANs)) from private sector contractors. The scavenging vessels collect and transfer marine refuse to four Marine Refuse Collection Points (MRCPs) for temporary storage awaiting transportation to landfills. In 2003-04, the total cost for the marine scavenging service was \$48.5 million.

Marine Department's scavenging vessels

2. **Overlapping of duty areas.** The Audit Commission (Audit) noted that the duty areas of the Sea Cleaners overlapped with that of the Disfloater and those of the contractors' MOPANs. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should review the existing arrangements of providing marine scavenging service in the same water areas by both the MD's scavenging vessels and the contractors' scavenging vessels.*

3. **Cost-effectiveness of the scavenging vessels.** In 2003-04, the cost of collecting marine refuse per tonne by the Sea Cleaners was about 16 times that of the contractors' scavenging vessels. For the Disfloater, the cost was nearly 3 times that of the contractors' scavenging vessels. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should review the cost-effectiveness of using the MD's vessels to provide scavenging service, explore ways to improve the cost-effectiveness of the MD's scavenging vessels, and consider decommissioning some of the MD's scavenging vessels.*

4. **Performance of non-scavenging duties by the Sea Cleaners.** In 2003-04, the Sea Cleaners were often deployed to carry out transportation duties. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should strictly monitor and control the use of the Sea Cleaners.*

Monitoring contractors' performance

5. **Vessel-hiring contracts and objective-based contracts.** Under vessel-hiring contracts, the contractors' scavenging vessels carry out scavenging duties during the specified operating hours. Under the objective-based contracts, the contractor is only required to carry out scavenging duties for the whole duty area not less than twice in the working day, and whenever marine refuse is found in the duty area throughout the operating hours. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should review*

critically the operation of marine scavenging service under the objective-based contracts before applying this type of contract arrangement to all the service areas.

6. ***Motorised sampans found not fully engaged in carrying out scavenging duties.*** Audit field visits found that the MOPANs had not been fully engaged in carrying out scavenging duties during their operating hours. Some MOPANs could not be found in their duty areas and some MOPANs were found not carrying out scavenging duties. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should introduce effective measures to ensure that the contractors' scavenging vessels are fully engaged in carrying out scavenging duties during their operating hours, strengthen the existing system of supervision and monitoring of the contractors' scavenging vessels, and consider recovering part of the contract payments made to the contractors.*

7. ***Records prepared by the Marine Department staff are not consistent.*** The attendance records of scavenging vessels prepared by the Pollution Control Assistants (PCAs) and the Marine Services Assistants (MSAs), and the surprise inspection records of scavenging vessels prepared by the Marine Inspectors are not consistent. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should examine the cost-effectiveness of deploying PCAs and MSAs on board the RVs to oversee the provision of service.*

Marine Refuse Collection Points

8. ***Non-compliance with contractual requirements.*** Audit field visits to three MRCPs found that the contractor did not fulfil the contractual requirements of removing all marine refuse daily and providing sufficient staff during the operating hours. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should introduce additional control measures to monitor the contractor's performance, and consider taking actions to recover part of the contract payments made to the contractor.*

9. ***Low utilisation of Marine Refuse Collection Points.*** Audit field visits found that the Ap Lei Chau MRCP, the Causeway Bay MRCP and the Yau Ma Tei MRCP were used by scavenging vessels for unloading marine refuse only a few times a day. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should re-examine the need for retaining all the four existing MRCPs.*

10. ***New Marine Refuse Collection Points.*** The MD plans to build three new MRCPs at Sai Kung, Tai Po and Tuen Mun. Audit has noted that alternative arrangements exist for the unloading of marine refuse collected at Sai Kung, Tai Po and Tuen Mun, and the utilisation of existing MRCPs is low. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should explore the feasibility of using the existing or new Refuse Collection Points operated by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, and review the justifications for building the three proposed MRCPs at Sai Kung, Tai Po and Tuen Mun and the justifications for installing a new pillar jib crane at each of the proposed MRCPs.*

11. ***Pillar jib cranes not used.*** In 2003-04, the pillar jib cranes installed at the Ap Lei Chau MRCP and the Causeway Bay MRCP were not used for transferring marine refuse. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should, if the building of any*

new MRCPs with pillar jib cranes is justified, consider relocating the pillar jib cranes installed at the Ap Lei Chau MRCP and the Causeway Bay MRCP to the new MRCPs.

Overtime work of the crews of the Sea Cleaners

12. ***Audit findings of field visits.*** Audit field visits found that the crews of five Sea Cleaners at the Government Dockyard did not work overtime for one hour from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., as recorded in the log books. The time at which the last member of the crews left the five Sea Cleaners was about 5:40 p.m. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should review the weaknesses in internal control in the existing system and introduce measures to tighten up the controls.*

13. ***Review of overtime situation.*** The MD did not review the overtime situation of the crews of the Sea Cleaners at least once a year. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should review the overtime situation of the crews of the Sea Cleaners at least annually in accordance with Civil Service Regulation 663 and MD Headquarters Circular No. 2/2001.*

14. ***Nature of overtime work.*** Audit considers that it is inappropriate to require staff of relatively senior ranks to work overtime on cleaning duties on the Sea Cleaners. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should consider deploying staff on the Model Scale 1 Pay Scale for the daily cleaning work or contracting out the daily cleaning work.*

15. ***Rate of overtime allowance.*** Regular overtime work carried out by the crews of the Sea Cleaners was compensated at the same rate as occasional overtime. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should compensate the regular overtime work of the crews of the Sea Cleaners by a consolidated overtime allowance.*

Other actions to tackle the marine refuse problem

16. ***Marine refuse problem.*** In recent years, there was a steady increase in the quantity of marine refuse collected by the MD. This may indicate a deterioration of the marine refuse problem. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Marine should review the effectiveness of the existing educational activities in enhancing public awareness of the importance of keeping the Hong Kong waters clean, consider conducting more publicity campaigns with government departments and non-government organisations, devise other measures to enhance the effectiveness of the educational activities, and step up enforcement action.*

Response from the Administration

17. The Administration generally agrees with the audit recommendations.

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