

Submission to Legislative Council

Panel on Environmental Affairs

28 May 2007

How Hong Kong should Respond to Global Warming

A Civic Party Perspective

Background

(1) The International Scenario

According to the *United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, (IPCC) if carbon dioxide content is to be stabilized at a level two times that of the pre-industrial revolution period, the current level of global emission has to be reduced by half. However, even after the signing of the “United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change” in 1992, global atmospheric content of carbon dioxide keeps rising, pointing to the fact that the signatories, on the whole, have not been adhering to the reduction target in earnest. A consensus for a legally binding protocol was eventually reached, leading to the signing of the Kyoto Protocol in Japan in December 1997. Under this Protocol, major industrialised countries are required to control and regulate man-made

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emission of greenhouse gases in order to minimize the harmful effects of global warming on the environment. Countries which have signed the Kyoto Protocol need to cut back on their greenhouse gases emission to the level of 1990, plus a further reduction of 5.2% based on that level by the year 2012.

The latest annual report of the IPCC has provided scientific clearance to former doubts over climate changes and has confirmed the irreversibility of the onset of global warming.¹ To combat climate disasters which may occur spontaneously in the days to come, all governments need to embark on new strategies that would enhance mitigation on the one hand and emphasize adaptation on the other.

(2) The Hong Kong Situation

The Hong Kong Observatory predicts that Hong Kong will experience a 3.5 degree centigrade rise in temperature over the city's 1990 figure by the end of 21st century, which is a rate even higher than the world's average.² The imminent crisis resulted from global warming is evident to Hong Kong. Before 2002, an inter-departmental working group was set up by the Hong Kong Government to deal with global warming by means of strategy research. However, as the Kyoto Protocol does not cover China, Hong Kong follows and stays aside. The inter-departmental group

¹ IPCC Fourth Assessment Report, 2007 (www.ipcc.ch)

² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts, from 1990 to 2100, the global average temperature will rise approximately 3 degrees centigrade.

soon faded away, leaving a total vacuum in the present government structure on the tackling of global warming from multiple dimensions. Once again, Hong Kong lags far behind in the international community on major environmental issues. The Civic Party, therefore, urges the Government to act immediately through institutional strengthening and other strategies to better equip Hong Kong in the face of global warming.

Recommendations

1) Set up an inter-departmental working team headed by the Chief Secretary

(1.1) The crisis global warming poses to Hong Kong is expected to be widespread, affecting public health, domestic ecology, infrastructure construction, the overall economy and almost the operation of each and every trade. To fight such a widespread crisis seriously, Hong Kong must not rely on one single policy bureau, as coordination and cooperation with other policy bureaus will be difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, the Civic Party suggests that an inter-departmental working team headed by the Chief Secretary be formed to immediately formulate and launch multi-dimensional policies encompassing both mitigation and adaptation strategies as advocated by the United Nations.

(1.2) Such a mode of setting up specific bodies in charge of

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strategy formulation and policy coordination is not unprecedented in other countries. The United Kingdoms established in 1997 the *UK Climate Impacts Programme* to assist the public and private sectors with the formulation of climate adaptation strategies. The Australian Government has also set up the *Australian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation* for a similar purpose.

2) Adaptation Strategy

(2.1) Since global warming is considered irreversible, mitigation measures alone to slow down the onset of its hazardous impacts through emission reduction are not sufficient. We must, at the same time, adopt adaptation strategies within a short span of time to alleviate the harmful effects of global warming, to explore the opportunities, and be ready to manage the consequences.

(2.2) Many countries have already adopted various adaptation strategies to strengthen their defense against global warming, providing valuable models for Hong Kong to follow. The coastal embankment projects of Holland and the Maldives, the Federal Bridge project of Canada, and the glacial lake flood-control scheme of Nepal all make examples of good technological sense. Other countries choose to work on behavioral change and appeal to their citizens for a change of their choices of food and forms of entertainment. Still, there are others, like Australia, which emphasizes on the management of water resources; and Europe, which opts for policy changes as evidenced in its heat wave containment schemes.³

(2.3) The Hong Kong Government should build in adaptation

³ IPCC WGII Fourth Assessment Report, April 2007 (www.ipcc.ch/SPM13apr07.pdf)
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measures right from the conceptual stage, so as to achieve better risk management and cost-effectiveness control. Adaptation strategies should be applied to a host of areas including urban planning, design of infrastructure, building regulations, climate monitoring and warning systems, water resources management, public health control, etc.

3) Partnering Strategy

(3.1) The Government should take the role of a facilitator to encourage participation from all sectors of the society and to co-operate with various civic organizations, professional bodies, the business sector and the academia. To start, the government can consider organizing a summit meeting on global warming to lay down frameworks and action plans with all stakeholders for mitigation and adaptation strategies.

(3.2) Overseas examples include the *Adaptation Policy Framework* initiated by the British Government in 2005, which engaged both public and private organizations⁴. Another example is the *National Climate Change Adaptation Programme* launched by the Australian Government, which works hand in hand with the society at all

⁴ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
(www.defra.gov.uk/environment/climatechange/uk/adapt/policyframe.htm)
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levels in the formulation of adaptation strategies.⁵

⁵ Australian Greenhouse Office (www.greenhouse.gov.au/impacts/nccap/index.html)
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4) Regional Perspectives

Global warming and climatic changes bring common crises to all countries. Hong Kong will never be able to get away should there be an outbreak of disaster in our neighbouring regions. Hence, when researching and formulating strategies, the Government should not be focusing on the domestic situation alone but should also put our neighbouring region into perspective and seek its cooperation.