

PRESS RELEASE

Civic Exchange water study outlines threats to HK water supply

Christine Loh: “Growing competition means water will become more political”

Hong Kong: 4 December, 2009 – Civic Exchange today released a new policy paper – *Liquid Assets: Water Security and Management in Hong Kong and the Pearl River Basin* which raises questions about the security of Hong Kong’s water supply in the face of an increasingly unstable supply and growing competition from other users throughout the Pearl River Basin.

Hong Kong’s supply from the Dongjiang is supposedly guaranteed, even in drought years, by agreement with the Guangdong Provincial Government. Yet tens of thousands of factories and millions of homes in the Pearl River Delta, and the more widely-distributed farms that produce the region’s food depend on water from the same source. Heavily-populated Guangdong is already classified as “water-stressed” according to the criteria set out by the United Nations Environment Programme.

“So far access to water has been decided principally by administrative measures. But given the rising demand for water from population growth, economic development and agriculture, future discussions about water allocation look set to become increasingly competitive and increasingly political,” said Christine Loh, Chief Executive Officer of Civic Exchange.

The report also suggests that climate change will cause rainfall in the Pearl River Basin to become more variable, albeit with a predicted increase in the overall quantity. In particular, droughts years are predicted both to be dryer and more frequent, and competition can only become more intense, and may lead to more direct conflict between competing users.

Competition is further intensified by pollution, which comes from human sewage, agricultural run-off and manure, and industrial waste. While the Pearl River is the cleanest major river in China, certain portions are heavily contaminated, further reducing the supply of water that is fit for use.

More positively, the report outlines a range of actions being taken to reduce pollution in the Pearl River’s key tributaries, and notes that the Water Supplies Department has developed a broad suite of measures for Hong Kong to make better use of its water. These include a publicity campaign, and using sea-water for toilet flushing.

However, initiatives that have proven successful overseas, particularly in Singapore (which also buys a large proportion of its water from a larger neighbour to the north) have either not progressed past the pilot stage or have not been implemented at all.

“Hong Kong’s water supply has been ignored for so long because it is plentiful, affordable, and safe. How long this situation continues remains to be seen. We would certainly do well to start making better use of our own rainfall, and to ensure that the water we do get from the Dongjiang is put to the best possible use,” added Ms Loh.

Visit us at: www.civic-exchange.org

CIVIC EXCHANGE IS A COMPANY WITH LIMITED LIABILITY AND A REGISTERED CHARITY IN HONG KONG
ROOM 701, HOSEINEE HOUSE, 69 WYNDHAM STREET, CENTRAL, HONG KONG.
TEL: (852) 2893-0213 FAX: (852) 3105-9713

p.1/2

Civic Exchange's policy recommendations include:

1. *Introduce a fully integrated system of water resource management*

This should ensure the resilience of the Pearl River Basin by providing a forum to resolve conflicting management imperatives in the current framework, and by establishing a transparent monitoring regime.

2. *Take a regional water planning approach*

Regional planning should include representation from all key stakeholders. These should include the principal managers of water quality and supply and the different consumers in Guangdong, it should also allow appropriate representation for Hong Kong and Macau, under the 'one country two systems' principle.

3. *Anticipate climate change impacts*

Infrastructure and management systems to cope with increased occurrences of both droughts and flooding should be introduced. Investment in forecasting technology, and preparation of contingency plans and emergency response protocols are essential to ensure the worst effects of extreme weather events can be safely mitigated.

4. *Hong Kong needs its own water policy*

The Water Supplies Department has developed plans for total water management that have not been fully implemented, partly for lack of a clear policy direction. The Hong Kong SAR Government should task a Policy Secretary with setting this direction and ensuring Hong Kong's place in future discussions about water management in the Pearl River Basin.

~ Ends 完 ~

For inquiries, please contact:

Andrew Lawson (2893-0213 / alawson@civic-exchange.org); or/
Christine Loh 陸恭蕙 (9802-8888 / cloh@civic-exchange.org).