

PRESS RELEASE

“Modernising Hong Kong’s Water Management Policy**Part 2: Sustainable Water Infrastructure: Towards a Diversified Water Supply”**

Civic Exchange calls for the Government to reduce reliance on the natural water cycle, diversify sources of water supply and consider a variety of factors, including climate resilience, water sustainability and adaptability when evaluating the deployment of water sources.

HONG KONG, 17 December 2019 – A report published by Civic Exchange today recommends the government to reduce its reliance on natural water cycle, such as Dongjiang water, and consider the conditions necessary for deploying desalinated water while increasing the use of reclaimed water.

It calls for the Hong Kong government to lower the supply ceiling and adjust the payment approach when renegotiating the Dongjiang water purchase agreement with Guangdong authorities next year. It also calls for the public to join hands in conserving water – a precious resource that we all have a responsibility to protect.

“We should reduce our reliance on Dongjiang water, not because we want to save money, but because we want to contribute to our goals of safeguarding Hong Kong’s long-term water sustainability, ensuring the right to water for our future generations and regional neighbours, as well as contributing to the global ambition of ensuring sustainable management of water for all,” Dr Frederick Lee, Fellow of Civic Exchange, explained. Hong Kong should take a leading position in the region to conserve ecology in the Dongjiang basin and reduce the amount of imported water.

In response to the government’s plan of supplying 5% of fresh water by desalination, Natalie Chan, Senior Advisor of Civic Exchange, said that although this is not affected by natural flows, there is still a need to reconsider the necessary conditions for deploying desalination as a backup option of freshwater supply.

“The production of desalinated water requires 6-8 times as much electricity as our current supply and distribution of fresh water. Transitioning to the use of clean energy in electricity generation is essential to ensure our needs for fresh water will not compromise our ability to mitigate against adverse climate impact. Also, the potential impact on the reproduction and growth of marine organisms brought by brine disposal in the desalination process would require further in-depth analyses.”

Civic Exchange finds reclaimed water an economically viable, highly adaptable and climate-resilient alternative, and recommends the government to set a more ambitious vision in its deployment, by raising the current goal to 20% for non-potables uses.

“Referencing examples of Singapore and California, it is feasible for WSD to deploy reclaimed water and reduce reliance on natural flows, as long as the treated wastewater meets strict standards and regulations for non-potable uses,” Dr David von Eiff, associate researcher of Civic Exchange, said.

In the discussion about whether people in Hong Kong have the appetite to conserve water, Evan Auyang, Chairman of Civic Exchange, expressed the hope that there would be more education on water sustainability.

“Water is a precious resource that has been undervalued in Hong Kong. From Civic Exchange’s track record of researching on our local water assets, we see that there is an illusion that there is a lot of it. Like curbing air or plastic pollution, once the education is there, people will take action.”

Key Policy Recommendations

1. Enhance water resilience by reducing reliance on natural water cycle
2. Set an ambitious vision for the deployment of reclaimed water in non-potable uses
3. Reconsider the necessary conditions for deploying desalination as a backup option of freshwater supply
4. Build closer collaboration between WSD and DSD
5. Increase granularity and transparency of data to improve water supply planning



From left to right: Evan Auyang, Chairman of Civic Exchange, Dr David von Eiff, Associate Researcher of Civic Exchange, Natalie Chan, Senior Advisor of Civic Exchange and Dr Frederick Lee, Fellow of Civic Exchange.



Dr David von Eiff shares the key findings of the report.

“Towards a Diversified Water Supply” is the latter part of a two-part research project on modernising Hong Kong’s water management policy – one on conservation and consumption that was published in June 2019, the other on local water infrastructure. This project aims to study what it takes for Hong Kong to ensure a sustainable water system, in the face of climate change and other increasing pressures. In this second report on sustainable water infrastructure, the challenges and opportunities of both current water taps (local yield, Dongjiang water and seawater flushing) and taps with potential for wider use (recycled water and desalinated water) are analysed in the local context of Hong Kong.

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Civic Exchange is an independent public policy think tank with a vision to shape a liveable and sustainable Hong Kong. Our mission is to engage society and influence public policy through research, dialogue and the development of practical solutions. Civic Exchange has been ranked among the top 50 environment policy think tanks in the world by the University of Pennsylvania since 2011.

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