

Agents push for buoying up Hongkong's container trade

By Alan Tyler

HONGKONG'S port is unlikely to suffer from serious congestion despite increasing container trade, but a lack of deep water mooring buoys and a trend towards monopoly in the operation of the territory's container terminals is causing concern among shipping agents here.

The Government's Marine Department spokesman Alfred Ho said the territory had one of the most perfect natural harbours in the world and was on a crossroads of international trade between east and west. With expanding container

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terminal facilities and an enviable record of efficiency, Hongkong should avoid the serious congestion problems suffered by other busy ports in East Asia.

But a senior official at a local shipping agents was not so bullish. "I can't guarantee my captains a buoy as soon as they reach Hongkong. Some have to wait several days if they want a deep water buoy", he said.

The official said he knew of one agent who had to cancel a shipment of dry bulk cargo because no deep water buoy was available; and it

would have been uneconomic to transfer the load to two smaller ships and use shallower water buoys.

The territory currently has 71 mooring buoys and shipping companies have been lobbying the Government for more.

But the official stressed that Hongkong was still one of the most efficient ports in the world, and was in a "different league" compared with other regional ports like Bangkok where congestion fees are now being levied.