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12 Jan 1979

\$millions lost on coin tigers

The Government has been criticised for failing to keep a proper watch on parking meters which have been targets for thieves and vandals.

The attack came from the Director of Audit, Mr G. E. Lyth, who said revenue derived last year from parking meters amounted to almost \$12 million — a lot less than the maximum possible revenue calculated to be about \$37 million.

"I think that most Hong-kong motorists would find it difficult to accept that on average each metered parking space remains unoccupied for more than two-thirds of its operative time and it is apparent that some part of the difference between the actual and the optimum revenue must continue to be due to theft from and misuse of the meters," he said.

In his report on the Government accounts for the year ended March 31 last year, Mr Lyth estimates the loss at about \$2.8 million, although

he calls this an "educated guess."

The true loss could be much greater.

"Whilst the main deterrent to both theft and malpractice must continue to be vigilance and surveillance on the streets, disappointingly slow progress appears to have been made in instituting other possible safeguards, including an exemption of the feasibility of a progressive change-over to a new type of meter," he said.

Of the fixed penalties for parking offences, Mr Lyth said that as of June 30 last year, 177,000 cases, involving arrears of \$13.8 million had been outstanding for more than three months — an increase of 19 per cent over the comparable figure the previous year.

The newly-constituted Public Accounts Committee, in its first reply, has recommended that a review should be conducted of the parking meters' cost-effectiveness.