

Beijing brought up to date on proposed sewerage project

BY MICHAEL WEEKS

CHINA has been briefed on the multi-billion dollar scheme to clean up Hongkong's outdated sewerage system and will be closely involved in planning and construction.

Deputy Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands Tony Cooper said the close co-operation was undertaken to ensure the Strategic Sewage Disposal Scheme was completed after 1997.

Governor Chris Patten was criticised last week after earmarking nearly \$4 billion towards the launch of the project because he made no provisions for its completion during his policy address.

The money would go towards the \$7.3 billion required for the first stage of the scheme, which

involves collection of sewage from Kowloon, the New Territories and eastern Hongkong for treatment at Stonecutters Island and is scheduled for completion by 1997.

The second stage involves the building of a 35-kilometre-long effluent outfall into the South China Sea. Later phases would link the rest of the island to the network.

But critics said there was no guarantee the post-1997 Special Administrative Region government would finish the mammoth public works scheme, especially given the hefty tag of \$17.8 billion.

"We have briefed China on the scope of the plan and they are now assisting us in studies on phase two," Mr Cooper said. "I don't think there will be any

problems in realising the whole plan in the long run." He stressed the scheme was the only feasible way to tackle Hongkong's sewage problem.

"It provides the best solution in the shortest possible time," he said. "Stage one will collect about 70 per cent of the pollution load for Victoria Harbour."

The Government hopes to raise nearly \$3.5 billion for the first phase of the disposal strategy through direct sewage charges.

Mr Cooper said a consultancy study on the charging system should be completed before the end of this month. The plan will be presented to the Executive Council and the Environmental Pollution Advisory Committee before it is thrown open to public consultation within two months.