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\$10 million to go towards harbour scavengers

THE Government is planning to continue its harbour clean-up campaign by replacing its out-dated scavenging vessels.

About \$10.2 million has been allocated in the 1989-90 fiscal year for collecting floating refuse and combating oil spills at sea.

This is nearly double the \$5.4 million spent on these services in the 1986-87 fiscal year.

The amount of refuse recovered has steadily grown over the years and the Marine Department now considers the existing vessels inadequate.

The department, which is responsible for collecting marine refuse, still relies on six Water Witch vessels, which have been in service for 10 years.

But these vessels are designed for operation in docks and have difficulty working in open waters.

Marine officer Mr Roger Tupper said the Marine Department intended to phase out half of the Water Witches and replace them with more advanced vessels.

A trial of one European model, called Pelican, was completed earlier this year and another trial with a Japanese vessel will start soon.

Mr Tupper said the department was looking for a vessel with high manoeuvrability, which could work in both enclosed bays and choppy conditions.

"More refuse is coming into the harbour on each day. Our major objective

is to have one to collect much more on a daily basis," Mr Tupper said.

The quantity of refuse collected at sea last year reached 4,630 tonnes, more than double the 2,000 tonnes in 1975.

This had prompted the department to raise the refuse-recovering capacity of its fleet accordingly.

The capacity of its scavenging fleet has been expanded by 40 percent and that of refuse reception by 50 percent since 1986.

Last year each operating team collected 595 tonnes of floating refuse, up from 568 tonnes in 1987.

This year the amount is expected to rise to 681 tonnes.

The department now operates six inshore scaveng-

ing units, each comprising a Water Witch, its accompanying reception vessel and a sampan.

But Mr Tupper stressed that the scavenging operation was merely dealing with the symptoms of the problem.

The cure was to prevent refuse from entering the harbour, he said.

Surveys by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) established that about 70 percent of floating rubbish originates from land sources.

The EPD conducts quarterly surveys to monitor the problem and advises the various departments concerned.

The harbour was first studied in 1983-84 and a proposed series of control

measures were issued following this.

Principal Environmental Protection Officer, Mr Paul Holmes, said some sources of refuse had improved since then, especially around cargo handling and squatter areas.

But Mr Tupper said Kai Tak nullah, which was identified as the worst area in the EPD study, had remained the largest source of floating refuse.

According to the Urban Council, which is responsible for preventing land refuse from being washed into the harbour, about 1.5 tonnes of debris is removed from the nullah each day.

Aberdeen Harbour also continues to be a

blackspot, receiving most of the refuse from Wong Chuk Hang nullah.

Turning to refuse generated at sea, Mr Tupper said the Government would enact new legislation this year to help prevent Hongkong-registered ships polluting waters throughout the world.

The control is in compliance with the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, to which Hongkong is a signatory.

Under the convention, ships are barred from dumping plastic garbage in all waters, and are forbidden to dispose of any refuse in areas highly sensitive to pollution.

BLACKSPOTS FOR FLOATING RUBBISH

