

## /\$1.3b screening plant opened

By KATHY GRIFFIN

THE last piece of a 20-year-old plan to partially treat sewage entering Victoria Harbour fell into place yesterday, after being held up for years because of funding delays.

The \$1.3 billion north-west Kowloon sewage plant was officially opened by the Governor, Mr Chris Patten, to handle waste generated by more than one million people.

It was the last of 11 plants, first proposed in the early 1970s to screen out solids from sewage, to be built. None removes bacteria or other contaminants.

Officials deny the delay in getting the plant built is a sign of things to come for a more sophisticated, \$23.8 billion plan to remove all pollution from the harbour, even though this has received only partial funding.

Dr Stuart Reed, the Director of Environmental Protection, said the community's priorities had changed in recent years, giving pollution a higher priority.

The \$23.8 billion plan calls for all the sewage around the harbour to be collected, treated and pumped via a 35-kilometre pipe into the South China Sea, where

it would be diluted and dispersed.

About \$12 billion has been pledged by the current administration and the rest will have to be funded by the post-1997 Special Administrative Region.

Ms Mary Riley, spokeswoman for Friends of the Earth, said she was amazed it had taken so long to complete the simple screening system.

"It should be a warning that if we don't speak up we could be in for a longer period [on the \$23.8 billion plan] than expected," she said.

Opening the plant, Mr Patten admitted the state of the harbour was poor and much work needed to be done to clean it up.

"The opening of the plant is a symbol of our determination to tackle this problem," he said.

The construction of the plant is to be followed by about \$650 billion in work to ensure all buildings are properly connected to the sewerage system, funding for which was granted by the Finance Branch this week.

Waste is carried to the Stonecutter's Island screening plant and discharged about three-quarters of a kilometre off the island.