

J.C.M.P.

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Berthing fee rises cut but handlers still glum

The Government yesterday announced minor concessions in proposed fee increases for berthing vessels in cargo working areas.

But it is not budging on the bulk of its tough new package to control vessels in these areas.

Affected cargo handlers were stunned yesterday by the suddenness of the Government's announcement that the new fees will take effect from Monday.

"We've only just heard about this today. We will meet tomorrow to discuss our next course of action," the chairman of the Cargo Supervisors Association, Mr Tang Tong, said.

"There are very few changes to the original package and it's very difficult for us," he said.

The only changes to the original package are that the average-sized 30-metre cargo lighter will have to pay \$45 daily for the first two berthing days, instead of the \$60 first proposed.

At present, the fee for such a lighter is \$25 daily no matter how long it berths at a

spot.

But the average-sized lighters in the cargo working areas will still have to pay from Monday the surcharge of \$400 on each of the third and fourth days to which cargo handlers have objected.

The new measures also restrict the consecutive days each vessel can berth to six in a bid to make sure a lighter will not occupy any berth permanently, a Marine Department spokesman said yesterday.

"Now many cargo handlers berth permanently once their vessels are alongside and refuse to leave. When one of their lighters go, another comes in," he said.

The new fees, which also cover items such as lorry parking and working fees, are expected to boost the department's coffers by \$1 million yearly.

At present, it earns about \$10 million yearly from the various fees from its cargo working areas, the spokesman said.

The fee increases from Monday were announced in the Government Gazette yes-

terday. The Port Control (Cargo Working Areas) (Amendment) Regulations 1983, also gazetted yesterday, reduced the fees for a berthing permit for the first two days.

The spokesman said the cuts in berthing fees for the first two days were made following the objections from shipping companies and wharf operators to Umelco last year.

This group had asked Umelco to re-examine the matter.

The Port Control (Cargo Working Areas) (Amendment) Ordinance 1982, which first announced the increases, was supposed to come into operation late last year.

But the objections to Umelco prompted a re-examination of the matter.

Affected operators have claimed the increases will deal a severe blow to the industry at a time of economic downturn and will have a serious impact on Chinese bulk carriers whose foodstuffs, destined for Hongkong, for local use or re-export, are handled in these areas.