

Boat owners lose fight over fee rises

By SA NI HARTE

PLEASURE craft owners face hefty fee increases despite months of bitter protest.

It is understood the Executive Council gave the final clearance to a new set of private mooring and pleasure vessel licence fees early this week after increases introduced in May last year had to be withdrawn.

Sources said yesterday the new fees could be the same as those originally imposed,

with some increases as high as 2,000 per cent.

The go-ahead was made possible after controversial changes to the existing law made by the Legislative Council last month.

The administration had to shelve its controversial new set of fees last year after it was discovered it had no power to impose them.

The Hongkong Yachting Association and the Royal Hongkong Yacht Club took legal action against the Government over the increases,

which forced the Government to revert to the old scale of charges and refund the difference.

A total of about \$15.4 million has had to be reimbursed, but pleasure boat owners say they have not yet received the money.

The Shipping and Port Control (Fees) Act 1986, which allows the introduction of the new fees, was passed in the Legislative Council last month despite strong criticism from the yachting community.

A member of the Executive and Legislative Councils, Mr Allen Lee, said he was surprised the Government has not yet reimbursed boat owners.

Asked whether he expects the yachting community to lobby against the increases, Mr Lee said representations made by them would be studied carefully.