Action call to 100,000 hawkers

An estimated 100,000 hawkers were called upon yesterday to press the Urban Council for drastic changes in the Hawker Permitted Area scheme, including the scrapping of the "first come, first served" clause.

The call was made in a statement issued by the Hongkong and Kowloon Licensed Hawkers' Association. It coincides with the end of the six-month experimental scheme.

The statement, sent to hawkers in the 23 Hawker Permitted Areas in Kowloon, also called for the re-issue of hawker licences and a stop to the clearing of existing stalls and the confiscation of goods.

The association said most hawkers regard the "first come, first served" clause as unfair and impractical as it only creates confusion and provides an opportunity for triad elements to move in.

"The Hawker Permitted Areas should also be extended to make enough room for all bona fide hawkers, who are making an honest living," the statement said.

Meanwhile, in the troubled Tung Choi Street Hawker Permitted Area, a number of people who claimed to have been trading there long before the scheme started said that the best locations had all been taken over by triad-backed hawkers.

They said that people friendly with the Wor Sing Woo Triad Society, which is very influential in Mongkok, had taken over the stalls near Tung Choi Street's junction with Argyle Street and Nelson Street. These are considered to be the best areas for hawking.

They said genuine hawkers were forced to move to the quieter areas and consequently their business had suffered.

However, a spokesman for the Urban Council said yesterday that the Hawker Permitted Area Scheme in Kowloon had operated smoothly, except in Tung Choi Street.

He said in all the areas hawkers removed their stalls at the correct times so that street-cleaning operations could be carried out smoothly.

"Obviously Tung Choi Street has been the major exception and the public appears to know only about this particular street," the spokesman said.