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Anti-litter war hots up

By Tonny Chan

MUNICIPAL foremen may be empowered to enter private property in the fight against marine littering in the New Territories.

The Regional Services Department has proposed that 14 ranks of its workers be given the authority to enter private property, with the exception of people's homes.

This follows the passage of the Summary Offences (Amendment) Ordinance in June, which increased the ways the authority could tackle marine pollution.

Under the amendment, the two municipal councils and the director of the Marine Department can authorise public officers to board vessels or enter non-residential premises to investigate littering.

The officers can demand that a suspect immediately give his name and address and produce his identity card for inspection.

A warrant must be obtained from a magistrate before residences are entered.

The proposed list of Regional Services Department ranks to be empowered to enter premises was tabled for discussion by the Regco Environmental Hygiene Select Committee yesterday.

It ranged from directorate-grade officers to foremen and librarian.

Only Mr Lai Kwok-iu of the 19-member committee voiced concern that it could lead to abuse.

Mr Lai wondered whether foremen should be given such power because they might not have the required education to exercise the authority in the right manner.

"This may lead to abuse," Mr Lai said. "The rank of foremen is just one grade above ordinary workers. Do they have the education level for the job?" she asked.

The director of Re-

gional Services Miss Jacqueline Willis gave assurances that training would be provided and said the foremen would be guided by their superiors.

A committee member, Mr Poon Chin-hung, supported the proposal saying that delegating the power to as many people as possible would make enforcement effective.

But other members were concerned that the department, which is required to serve the New Territories, did not have sufficient manpower to monitor littering at sea.

Senior crown counsel, Mr Benedict Lai, said the Marine Department and the Regional Services had agreed on the distribution of duties.

The Marine Department will act against people found littering at sea while the Regional Services will deal with people who litter the sea from land.

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