

South China Morning Post

Jan 6, 1976

\$14,600 blow to oyster men

The Government has shown "no real consideration of priorities" in refusing to buy an oyster-sterilising machine which could guarantee a decrease of hepatitis in Hongkong, according to the Conservancy and Youth Environment Action Group.

A much-publicised Government study of the machine, which can clean as many as 5,000 oysters a day of all infection-carrying particles by ultra-violet light, has resulted in a decision not to invest in even one machine.

A single "bath" or machine costs \$14,600.

"The general neglect of anti-pollution measures in the past makes them all the more urgent today, and it seems a pity that this relatively small sum cannot be found to make the oysters safe for human consumption," said the Action Group's publication, SOS Environment.

The bath sterilises the oysters which are laid on racks in enclosed seawater tanks by

ultra-violet light. The process is reportedly standard practice in the U.S. and in Britain.

The advantage of the bath is that the rays are non-toxic and leave no unpleasant taste in the oyster itself.

Other methods such as using chlorinated water can leave a chemical taste in the oyster.

The machine, if bought by the Government or by private fishermen, could save a declining industry which has been damaged by the well-known danger of contracting viral hepatitis from oysters contaminated by sewage-water.

Only last year, when infectious hepatitis first became a reportable disease, it was realised that there were many cases in Hongkong.

Although not serious in children whose livers repair quickly, the disease can be fatal in adults.

The Agriculture and Fisheries Department has declined to comment.