

12 April 1989

## 23.4 5-year-old solution is still feasible

MORE than half of the 15 tonnes of refuse entering Victoria Harbour each day are channelled through the territory's network of stormwater drains and nullahs.

Solutions have been lying on the shelf for five years waiting for action, funding and experts to experiment on the best means of engineering.

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD), which proposed the remedies, maintained that its recommendations were as feasible today as they were five years ago.

The department's Principal Environmental Protection Officer, Mr Paul Holmes, said the package designed to tackle the problem at its root came at the end of an exploratory refuse study on Victoria Harbour.

One of the key recommendations was to reduce refuse coming out of stormwater drains.

The great number of stormwater outfalls around the Victoria Harbour areas predisposes a huge continuous inflow of filth.

The EPD, in its package, proposes the installation of bar screens at large drainage outfalls to trap all the refuse from catchment areas.

The capital cost of basic screens for the 80 large outfalls around the harbour was then pegged at about \$8 million, plus a yearly recurrent cost of \$1.7 million for manual cleaning of the screens.

The department, nevertheless, appreciated the difficulties involved in implementing the proposed scheme which could create or exacerbate floodings with bar screens causing hydraulic obstructions to water flow.

"Nonetheless, none of the schemes which are proposed are beyond the skill of engineers in Hongkong to design and implement," the EPD study report claimed.

"All that is required for success is the will, and the cash," it added.

Trials have since been undertaken to assess the effectiveness of a mechanical raked screening chamber in intercepting refuse at the Kai Tak nullah.

But Government engineers are still undecided as to the best means of screening out refuse, according to Government officials who refused to be named.

Engineers claimed it was difficult to come up with a suitable screen design which would not cause flooding in times of heavy rain.

Meanwhile, Mr Holmes said an alternative option to the "screen" proposal was to overhaul the territory's sewage system to allow segregation of foul sewage and rainwater drainage.

Mr Holmes saw one hopeful sign in Hongkong striding towards a lasting solution to the problem in the territory-wide sewage disposal strategy now under study.

The consultants might propose the installation of big interceptors to separate polluted flows from clean rainwater and screen out refuse, he said.

With the present system, there was no way to stop refuse from getting into the stormwater drains, he explained.

"If you put bars to stop refuse from getting into stormwater drains, you will clog the drains and cause flooding," Mr Holmes explained.