

\$300m bill to pipe water from China

Plans to pipe more water from China will treble Hongkong's water supplies over the next 12 years . . . and also treble the bill to about \$300 million a year.

This was revealed yesterday following the Water Supplies Department weekend announcement of a three-part development plan to solve the water problem.

Despite the heavy annual costs involved the Government believes it has got a good deal.

A Waterworks spokesman said that the current 50 cents per cubic metre paid to China is expected to remain unchanged.

But the Waterworks director gave the proviso that future charges will depend on whether operating costs increase in coming years.

In that case a revision might be necessary.

By next year the bill for water supplies from China is expected to rise to \$98 million but by the end of the 12-year development programme this is expected to float up to the \$300 million.

The arrangement is considered a good one because of increasing construction costs and the absence of other options.

As far back as 1977, the director, Mr William Tucker, pointed to the lack of suitable sites for reservoirs and the encroachments such reservoirs make into valuable land.

The possibility of further projects such as Plover Cove and High Island was remote, he said. In fact, the available sites appeared "exhausted."

Desalination plants were no viable alternative.

Water produced by this fuel-intensive process costs \$6.62 a cubic metre.

Because of all the construction work for the 12-year programme, privately owned land and residents in the northern part of the New Territories will be affected.

Compensation will be the responsibility of the New Territories Administration but no spokesman was available yesterday.