

# Action over harbour chaos

Tad Stoner

**M**arine Department officials want powers to keep small boats from restricted areas in Victoria Harbour to tackle the safety risks caused by increasing congestion.

Safety concerns have also led the department to draft new rules, to be implemented in mid-1995, requiring captains of ships weighing more than 3,000 tonnes to turn control over to local pilots when entering Hong Kong waters.

The previous limit was 5,000 tonnes.

Frustrated by increasing cases of boats ignoring restric-

tions in the central harbour, the Marine Department director, Allan Pyrke, said yesterday he was seeking powers to enforce no-go areas around construction sites off Kowloon and Central.

Pointing to a big growth in traffic and the shrinking space in the harbour brought about by reclamation work, Pyrke said that safety concerns had forced the department to ask for power to enforce designated work areas.

"We are seeking legal authority to declare certain parts of the harbour a no-go area for certain craft," he said.

He said Hong Kong's fleet of pleasure junks was the main

problem. Accusing them of cutting through restricted areas and ignoring buoy markings around the West Kowloon and Central reclamation projects, Pyrke said the junks played havoc with ferries.

Crowding in the harbour has soared as airport-related construction projects close off more areas, while an increasing number of vessels squeeze into the remaining space.

Ocean-going traffic has grown by 16 per cent each year since 1989, with almost 3,250 vessels passing through Hong Kong each month.

The crowded conditions have led to the new rules reducing the size at which ships

must be controlled by local pilots.

"The captain of a ship coming into Hong Kong is going to take one look at this harbour and say there's no way he can sail into that," Pyrke said.

"A Hong Kong pilot knows the waters and the habits of local coxswains, though."

The chairman of the Hong Kong Shipowners Association, Michael Farlie, welcomed the plan.

"Most of the smaller vessels are river trade or coastal ships but if they are being piloted, it will ensure that more ships are obeying the rules of the road and it makes it easier to control the traffic," he said.