

# Accusations of cover-up over north Lantau port project

By PATRICIA YOUNG

A CONSPIRACY of secrecy has cloaked the North Lantau Port Development Project at Discovery Bay, community groups claimed yesterday.

The group, composed of academics, residents from Discovery Bay and Peng Chau, environmental organisations and legislators, said the Government had intentionally withheld information about the long and short-term impact of the project.

"Very few residents of Discovery Bay have any idea how their lives will be affected when container terminals 10 and 11 are finished," Marine Conservancy chairman Brian Darvell said.

"There is a conspiracy afoot. Why doesn't this project have the fanfare that the new airport has? If the public knew what was going on out there they would be up in arms."

But Port Development Board spokesman Bernard Long said the Government had released all relevant information about the multi-billion-dollar

project in press releases, environmental impact studies and annual reports.

"We have kept people abreast of everything and anything which has happened," Mr Long said. "It is absolute rubbish to say there is any attempt at a cover-up."

Container terminals 10 and 11 will be built on North Lantau. Penny's Bay will be reclaimed and the terminal will be visible from Discovery Bay. Construction is expected to start next month.

Two 25-metre noise barriers will be built, which resident groups have been told will be grass-covered mounds, but Port Development Board officials admit they may install large buildings or a car park instead, which they claim would have the same buffering effect.

The concern group, which represents 25,000 to 30,000 individual members, said the terminals were unnecessary and "that the Government has locked Hong Kong into a massive port development without fully exploring the costs or alternatives".

"With 1997 around the corner, why do we need the port," Discovery Bay resident and former shipping broker Louis Ko Fung-lam said.

"This will become a white elephant in the future. Ports are built on demand and with all the changes which have happened in the last few years I think they have misjudged the need for this site."

"We all want economic development, but we must judge at what cost," said legislator Christine Loh Kung-wai. "We want to highlight the failing of this project. The Government is putting dollar benefits over health and public safety benefits."

According to the Government's own forecasts, the demand for cargo space will have tripled by 2011.

The last forecast, in early 1994, anticipated container terminal 10 coming on-line in mid-1997. But because of delays with the construction of terminal 9, the Government will not speculate on the completion date for the Lantau ports.