

Access code exemptions 'ridiculous'

By MICHELLE CHIN

LEGISLATORS have dismissed as ridiculous some of the proposed exemptions in a government code of practice covering public requests for information.

At a Legislative Council panel meeting, members said the definition of some of the 16 categories of exempted information contained in the draft Code of Access to Information were too broad and vague. Some were simply "ridiculous".

For instance, the Gov-

ernment could reject requests for information if the disclosure "would increase the likelihood of damage to the environment, or rare or endangered species and their habitats".

Democrat Man Sai-cheong said that in other countries greater access to information would help protect the environment.

Members also said it was too broad to say information could be withheld if it would "harm or prejudice Hong Kong's defence or security".

Democrat James To Kun-sun said it was even more vague to say exemptions would be offered if "disclosure could lead to improper gain or advantage".

He said it was uncertain whether it applied in monetary terms.

They also said the first nine departments to be chosen under a pilot scheme beginning next month, were not representative.

Sensitive departments such as the Security Branch, Police and the Planning, En-

vironment and Lands Branch should be included.

Panel chairman Emily Lau Wai-hing said the Housing Department should be included because it had received the largest number of complaints from the public.

Independent Christine Loh Kung-wai was confident her private members' bill on information access would be passed.

Over half of the legislators had already indicated their support, she said. It is expected to be tabled for first reading in February.