

**Alternative Use of Four Vacant Piers
at the Western Wholesale Food Market**

Aim

This paper seeks the view of Members of the Harbour-front Enhancement Committee's Sub-committee on Harbour Plan Review on possible alternative use of the four vacant piers at the Western Wholesale Food Market (WWFM) currently managed by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD).

Background

2. There are five piers at the WWFM situated at 8 Fung Mat Road, Western District (location plan at Annex refers). Demand for landing fresh produce at these piers has reduced over the years due to decreasing sea arrivals. Sea condition has also been worsening because of frequent high speed boat traffic to and from the nearby ferry terminals. AFCD has been unable to rent out Piers Nos. 1 – 4 despite repeated advertising in the past few years. Pier No. 5 remains in use for landing of fresh water fish and fisheries products.

3. In his Report No. 48 in 2007, the Director of Audit urged the AFCD to explore other options for utilizing the 4 vacant piers. The Legislative Council (LegCo) Public Accounts Committee (PAC) also requested the Administration to identify alternative users for the piers expeditiously, failing which the demolition of the piers should be considered to save further recurrent costs.

Alternative Users and Viability of Commercialization

4. A working group comprising AFCD, the Government Property Agency (GPA), the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD), the Marine Department (MD) and the Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) was tasked to review the situation. The working group concluded that there was no longer any demand for these piers from the fresh food wholesale trades and that action should be taken to identify alternative users. GPA therefore invited other government departments/offices to consider using the four piers, but received no expression of interest. As a result, GPA conducted a study on the feasibility of leasing these piers for commercial uses by open tender in consultation with AFCD, CEDD and MD. GPA's study concluded that commercialization was not viable because of the high repair cost required to reinstate the vacant piers to

tenantable conditions, high recurrent maintenance cost, low-loading design preventing the piers from being converted for container cargos handling, rough sea conditions and availability of cheaper or free facilities in the vicinity.

5. Another limiting factor on finding alternative uses for the vacant piers is the fact that the connecting seafront strip of land also serves as emergency vehicular access, the use of which is restricted by the Fire Services Department.

Other Options Considered

6. Some wholesalers and the Central & Western District Council (C&WDC) have suggested making use the piers for vehicular parking. The Transport Department was not supportive of this proposal because of safety concerns arising from the rough sea condition. They considered that a buffer zone of a few meters wide at the edge of the piers is required. Given that the piers are just 40 meters long by 16 meters wide, only about 4 to 6 lorry parking spaces can be provided on each of them thus rendering such proposal not cost effective.

7. Some C&WDC members suggested opening up the area as a public resting place. To this end, the Subcommittee is invited to note that one of the piers and the seafront strip are still being used for offloading fresh produce to the wholesale market. Allowing public access to the area could pose danger to the public, and become potentially disruptive to the operation of the wholesale market. The safety concerns and required measures as pointed out in paragraph 6 above also restrict the use of the area as a public resting place. In addition, an entry registration system has been put in place in WWFM, with a view to safeguarding public health and food safety. Only individuals related to the wholesale market's operation are allowed entry. On balance, AFCD considers it inappropriate to convert the piers' area into a public resting place.

Advice sought

8. The AFCD would like to seek members' views on any other possible alternative uses of the four piers.

9. If no feasible alternative uses are identified, it appears that demolishing the vacant piers to save recurrent maintenance costs as suggested by the LegCo PAC is a practical solution worthy of consideration. This course of action does not seem to be in contradiction with HEC's Harbour Planning Principles for the following reasons-

- (i) it does not seem suitable to open up the area as a public resting place for reasons set out in paragraph 7 above;

- (ii) possible alternative uses of the piers have been thoroughly assessed and feedbacks from wholesalers and locals carefully considered; and
- (iii) demolishing the vacant piers does not appear to be detrimental to the preservation and sustainable development of the harbour and/or harbour-front area in the vicinity.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
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Location of Western Wholesale Food Market 西區副食品批發市場位置圖

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