

COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Paper 11/05

Briefing on the Sustainability Assessment System

Purpose

This paper provides background information for the briefing on the Sustainability Assessment (SA) system to be given by the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU).

The SA System

2. Developed under the Study on Sustainable Development in Hong Kong for the 21st Century (SUSDEV 21), the SA system aims to integrate sustainability principles into the Government's decision-making process. It is used as a planning tool in formulating major Government proposals. In this regard, it provides a structured framework for bureaux and departments to identify the sustainability implications associated with a proposal, compare different strategic or policy options, and scope out cross-sectoral or sensitive issues for early attention or joint departmental examination.

Computer-aided Sustainability Evaluation Tool (CASET)

3. The CASET is built upon eight guiding principles and a total of 42 sustainability indicators that align with the principles. These guiding principles and indicators are set out in **Annexes A and B** respectively.

4. In carrying out a CASET run, a bureau or department is required to assess the impacts of its proposal according to relevant sustainability indicators, and to quantify the impacts if possible. The bureau or department may also include non-quantifiable considerations, such as public reaction, to explain other impacts not covered by the indicators.

Standard Requirements for SA

5. We have instituted the SA system within the Government since December 2001. Under the current system, all bureaux and departments are required to –

- (a) conduct SA of their new major proposals that may likely bring about significant or prolonged implications on the economic, social and/or environmental conditions of Hong Kong;
- (b) include a paragraph in their submissions to the Policy Committee or the Executive Council setting out the sustainability implications of relevant proposals;
- (c) conduct SA of their new major proposals before public consultation, and incorporate the main SA findings into relevant consultation documents; and
- (d) incorporate the requirement for SA into their planning or feasibility studies of major proposals, as appropriate.

Reviews of the SA/CASET System

6. The SDU is committed to keeping the SA system and the CASET effective and up-to-date. To achieve this aim, we update the baseline data of the CASET indicators regularly. In our last updating exercise completed in July 2005, we have also taken the opportunity to incorporate a new indicator on landscape value as recommended in Planning Department's consultancy study on "Landscape Value Mapping of Hong Kong"^(Note). For this new indicator, bureaux and departments will now have to assess, as appropriate, the impact of their proposals on the number or area of special landscape features in Hong Kong, such as natural landscape, landmark buildings and historical monuments.

7. Further, we conduct review of operation of the SA system from time to time, normally at an interval of around two years. The last review was completed in 2003. Pursuant to that review, various new

^(Note) The consultancy study was completed in mid-2005.

measures were introduced with Members' endorsement. One of them was the requirement for bureaux and departments to carry out SA of their new proposals before public consultation and to incorporate the assessment findings in relevant consultation documents (c.f. paragraph 5(c) above). Besides, the "social checklist" was introduced into the CASET as an alternative to "social indicators", to cater for proposals that require comprehensive evaluation on social sustainability.

2005/06 SA/CASET Review

8. We will embark on the next biennial review of the SA/CASET system shortly. Taking account of comments and suggestions coming from within the Administration and outside, the upcoming review will seek to establish a mechanism whereby the phased development of the sustainable development strategy under the auspices of the Council will be integrated into the SA system. As a start, we will focus on the agreed objectives and targets with regard to the three pilot areas covered under the first stage of the strategy, i.e. solid waste management, renewable energy and urban living space. Furthermore, we will examine whether and how we may further enhance the user-friendliness and accessibility of the proprietary CASET system, taking into consideration the custodian departments' requirements to maintain confidentiality of their data or special inputs embedded in the CASET database.

Way Forward

9. We will proceed with the review and report the findings and recommendations to the Council in due course. Taking into account the consultation programme which involves all user bureaux and departments and interested stakeholders in the community, we aim to complete the review and launch the revised SA/CASET system before mid-2006.

Sustainable Development Unit
Chief Secretary for Administration's Office
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