

# Planning for a growing recreational market



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# How it began

- marine recreation takes many forms — fishing, rowing, swimming, sailing — and, more recently, waterskiing, diving, wakeboarding, windsurfing and dragon boating
- there are records of sampan races in Victoria Harbour and rowing regattas in Canton even before the colony of Hong Kong was established
- with the formal arrival of the British, sailing as a pastime took shape in various places around the sparsely populated colony. The Victoria Recreation Club was established in 1849 and the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club received its Admiralty warrant in 1894
- into the 1900s, recreational boating was largely the preserve of expatriates. But, after the Japanese occupation of 1941 to 1945, the opening up of the RHKYC in the 1960s and the increased affluence of the colony's expanding population, more local Chinese have taken to the water for their leisure.

# Where we are now

- nowadays, there are three major Hong Kong sailing clubs, a collection of private marinas and many smaller sailing and watersports establishments scattered about the territory. Marine recreation, although relatively small in global terms, is intense and vibrant
- according to Marine Department statistics, there are some 8,000 pleasure craft among the 16,280 licensed craft in Hong Kong. If the unlicensed craft, such as sailing dinghies, windsurfers, rowing boats and dragon boats, are factored in to these figures, the number of marine recreational craft is well over 12,000
- in the past, commercial vessels vastly outnumbered marine recreational craft. Now, with containerisation, the opening of ports in China, the banning of bottom trawling and a general decline in river trade, that has changed. Put simply, marine recreational craft are now in the majority
- what has not kept pace, though, is official policy, shore-based public attitudes and space

- we are facing politicians and an administration that sees pleasure boating as ‘elitist’. It’s an easy target, especially since the major sailing clubs operate under privilege. Much like the Hong Kong Golf Club with its private recreational lease, these clubs are believed to favour the rich
- what is not known, however, is how marine recreation has become a multi-million dollar industry, directly employing around 30,000 local people. The figure for those indirectly involved would, of course, be much higher — perhaps around 300,000
- business aside, marine recreation is about healthy, outdoor living. What better for office-bound workers in high-pressure Hong Kong to take to the water for enjoyment?
- the sailing clubs, watersports centres, schools and associations have done an excellent job in the last 20 to 30 years in providing facilities for people from varied backgrounds to enjoy sailing, rowing skiing and paddling. The commercial marinas have built docks that can accommodate larger and larger power craft, while charter companies have improved and updated their traditional junks to bigger and better craft that take large parties out to remote beaches, into the harbour to watch fireworks . . . or simply catch fish!

# Going forward

- Hong Kong has generally relied on the energy and enterprise of its people to keep going and to come up with something new when all seems lost. This has worked in the past, why shouldn't it work in the future?
- government has taken a 'hands off' approach to most things but when it comes to marine recreation, the problems aren't that easily solved
- official policy needs to be more marine recreation-friendly. Sadly, the recent Lamma ferry disaster hasn't helped and, for example, Marine Department appears to be tightening up on regulations when it was once fairly lenient
- the support of the public is needed. Attitudes have certainly changed towards marine recreation, but perhaps not enough
- the territory has plenty of water, but we need to be looking at better management of our waterways with policies that are inclusive of recreation

# Under-used facilities

- Hong Kong has 14 government typhoon shelters. Current Marine Department predictions suggest these are capable of providing shelter for all Hong Kong licensed craft up until 2025
- there are also cargo handling basins, notably in Chai Wan and Wan Chai
- not all typhoon shelters and cargo handling basins are fully utilised. In fact, government statistics reveal that Kwun Tong Typhoon Shelter, for example, was only 45% full during typhoons for the period 2008 to 2010. What's more, Hong Kong's newest typhoon shelter at Hei Ling Chau (1999) was only 6% full for the same period
- even more surprising, during the recent Typhoon Usagi, about two-thirds of the vessels rafted up in Kwun Tong Typhoon Shelter were Mainland coasters!
- what is going on, you may ask? Bad management, is the simple answer and a lack of vision and priority for local craft



- how difficult would it be to move those vessels in Kwun Tong to nearby To Kwa Wan Typhoon Shelter (which was about two-thirds full during the same typhoon)? Not difficult at all and it begs the question — why are Mainland craft using prime shelter space when they could quite easily go to Hei Ling Chau? Perhaps the reason is that there are no 7-Eleven stores on Hei Ling Chau . . . or no karaoke bars
- freeing up space in an under-utilised facility such as Kwun Tong Typhoon Shelter would go a long way to solving the problem of space for marine recreational craft
- much has appeared in the press and internet on the Kowloon East development. Arguments and proposals have gone back and forth and, like the West Kowloon disaster, very little has happened. There is even talk of a bridge for a monorail over the entrance which really only means that those in charge of planning for the Kai Tak area don't have any idea about vessels with masts. Or perhaps they are thinking of something like London's Tower Bridge
- there are other under-used facilities such as Chai Wan where a gentrification of the surrounding area is taking place. Surely town planners can see the advantage of a marina to increase property values? A rickety, blue-barreled, scruffy dock is not an ideal alternative

# Lack of understanding

- part of the problem, or perhaps aversion to utilising space for marine recreational use, appears to be cultural. Part, because, in Macau, the Nam Van Lake fulfils the idea of beautifying the waterfront and also provides a venue for dragon boating. The lake features islands, willow trees and is visually appealing. There is a road over the entrance so it is unable accept pleasure craft for anchoring or docking
- Macau is a very rich city so it doesn't look at the Nam Van Lake for its money-making potential. Further, it doesn't have a boating culture that is operating at capacity
- the situation in Hong Kong is different. Marine recreation is increasing . . . and has nowhere to go. Turning the under-utilised Kwun Tong Typhoon Shelter into a public marina or moorings facility would not only relieve the pressure on the marine recreation industry but would also go a long way to appeasing a public that sees boating as elitist. Everybody wins
- a marina in the heart of the city, adjacent to a brand new cruise terminal would endorse Hong Kong's claim to being Asia's 'world city'



# Why it matters

- let's face it, Hong Kong is about money. Everybody wants to be rich and the argument that marine recreation is 'elitist' is misplaced. A public marina in any of the under-utilised waterfront facilities would go a long way in showing that government is doing something for the less well-off
- think of all the little sampans out on a Sunday with people simply enjoying being on the water, fishing and socialising. They, too, would benefit from better planning and storage for their small craft. At present, they have to haul their craft out of the water and leave them under a flyover or in a car parking lot
- marine spatial planning should also take in other areas such as the vast amounts of space under flyovers. For example, surely better use could be made of the huge areas of 'dead water' under the Island Eastern Corridor?
- Hong Kong has become the 'Monaco' of China and better planning of our waters means taking in more boats belonging to wealthy Mainlanders. We all benefit

# The rewards

- Hong Kong has remained the marine recreational hub of Southeast Asia, despite challenges from Singapore, Phuket and the Philippines. How long this will continue comes down to the better use of local waters, planning and foresight
- Singapore has a public marina at Keppel, and it works. Phuket has freed up waterfront space for the development of half a dozen marinas. In China, new docking facilities for pleasure craft can't be built quick enough. We need to hurry up
- Europe has Monaco; China has Hong Kong. We can and must take advantage of this

This preview does not contain images, charts or graphics. These will be included during the Powerpoint presentation at 1415 on Friday, the 8th of November 2013 on board Star Pisces