

Letter to the editor of SCMP (22 April)

I refer to the SCMP's editorial "Reclamation must be a last resort" dated April 8.

Reclamation has been a major source of land in Hong Kong. New towns such as Shatin, Ma On Shan and Tai Po illustrate the case in point. About 500 to 700 ha land was formed by reclamation every five years from 1985 to 2004. Following the Court of Final Appeal's ruling in 2004, the Government has been very cautious about reclamation, with 84 ha formed from 2005 to 2009 and just 5 ha from 2010 to 2012.

In the past decade, reclamation has virtually been dormant and developable land comes from other options, which all face different challenges and limitations. Now, we are short of developable land. Ironically, more than 400 ha land have been formed in Taishan using our surplus public fill, generated by infrastructure and land development such as urban redevelopment, delivered to Taishan since 2007. Experience demonstrates that no land supply option, including reclamation, should be regarded as the last resort as they can complement each other. Indeed, the result of Stage 1 public engagement showed general support to the multi-pronged land supply approach.

Apart from completing reclamation to meet short-term needs, we may reserve a site and carry out studies but refrain from construction until need arises. This could shorten the response time to make available developable land in the medium term. Likewise, a reclamation site can be earmarked as a long-term land reserve with only preliminary studies conducted.

The Government shares the vision of striking a balance between social, economic and environmental needs. In selecting potential reclamation sites, places of high ecological value were ruled out early in the process. Besides, we shall conduct detailed EIA to confirm the environmental acceptability before reclamation can commence. Eco-shorelines will also be designed to enhance the marine environment, whilst advanced reclamation technology will be employed to minimise environmental impact during construction.

The Government is conducting the Stage 2 public engagement to seek public views on the potential reclamation and rock cavern development sites, and the idea of developing artificial islands in the central waters. Regarding the site at Sunny Bay, though it may not be suitable for residential use, it is apt for uses compatible with tourism, recreation or business. It will create jobs and reduce land demand for such uses in urban areas, which can be spared for residential use.

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