

# South China Morning Post 南華早報

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## Public input key to making vibrant harbourfront vision a reality

Wednesday, 08 October, 2014, 5:06am

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### SCMP Editorial

The mission to restore access to Hong Kong's famous harbour to those to whom it belongs - all of us - has proved as long and winding as the 73km of its shoreline. But it has gained a little momentum ahead of a consultation on the creation of a new harbourfront authority. Over the next 10 years the authority will directly develop and manage 12 sites totalling 37 hectares on newly reclaimed land in Central, Wan Chai, Causeway Bay and North Point, a waterfront park in Quarry Bay, a promenade in Kwun Tong and a new public space next to the Hung Hom ferry pier.

That is a long way from coherent management of all the sites alongside the harbour by a statutory public body, but this is the ultimate vision.

The mission began 10 years ago with the establishment of the Harbourfront Enhancement Committee to give a bigger say to a public ill-served by fragmented management and planning authority across different government departments. This turned out to be little more than a PR exercise - except for its advice to the government to replace it with a commission with more authority. That commission, including then development minister and now Chief Secretary Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, in turn recommended its own replacement with the now proposed authority. Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying has since pledged what is believed would be substantial financial support.

Launching the consultation, chairman of the current commission, Nicholas Brooke, said the authority could encourage activities so far not welcomed on the waterfront, such as alfresco dining, cycling and street performances, under its own, self-determined regulatory framework for management, maintenance and operation of the sites. Compared with the present fragmented control, it is envisaged that the authority would function as a "one-stop shop" to reflect public demand for interaction with the harbour.

Government support for the authority does not ensure the public interest will be safeguarded. That depends on striking the right balance between government, commercial and public interests and emphasis on development of vibrant waterfronts that reflect community aspirations, not purely commercial opportunities. We need genuine public representation alongside people from the bureaucracy, the legislature, district councils and professions to make the vision a reality.

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**Source URL (retrieved on Oct 31st 2014, 12:42pm):**

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