

## Study finds waterfront facilities badly lacking

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A series of snapshots shows facilities for people working at or appreciating Hong Kong's waterfront are poorly designed or lacking, prompting calls for a review of their adequacy.

The observations were part of a waterfront study commissioned by the Harbour Business Forum this year. The organisation comprises representatives of major business groups and developers concerned about the quality of the waterfront.

The study was carried out by a team of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the US state of Massachusetts. The university was chosen because its students have participated in similar projects before.

They inspected areas around Victoria Harbour area twice and conducted interviews with major stakeholders, including shipowners, cargo operators, a yacht club, developers, town planners and government departments. That comes as the government sets up a Harbour Commission to replace the advisory Harbourfront Enhancement Committee this year. The commission, which is to be non-statutory, is expected to take on a larger and more powerful role in planning the waterfront. Project teams will be set up to implement ideas the commission initiates.

Despite large increases in the number of pleasure vessels and tourists in and around the harbour, the study found the waterfront is not very user-friendly. It said people could be seen climbing over obstacles to get aboard vessels because no steps were available or their way was otherwise blocked. Public piers were crudely built, the study said. Boat operators had built their own shelters to protect passengers from the weather but such structures lacked lighting, making getting on and off vessels at night difficult.

Poor signage and a lack of washrooms and general-use kiosks in landing areas were also cited. Fake life buoys were welded onto railings at Sam Ka Tsuen Typhoon Shelter in Lei Yue Mun. A small sign said the metal buoys were for decoration only. The real buoys are in a sitting-out area on the other side of the shelter.

'This is really dangerous and should be fixed soon,' investigator Santiago Lora said. He said people could be misled during a life-threatening emergency.

One middle-aged man said after being seen climbing over a waterfront railing in Lei Yue Mun: 'I like standing on these rocks to watch people fishing. The railing is

too high and the seating designed at the waterfront is too low. I can't see the harbour view at all.'

The only good design examples were identified at a public pier in Aberdeen and piers that are exclusively used by government departments. 'There should be places where people can just park their boats and walk to the town centre,' team member Brian Berard said. 'That's the first thing I expected to see in Hong Kong but I didn't.'

A study released by the Marine Department said sheltered waters would be reduced from 403.5 hectares in 2008 to 394.7 hectares in 2015 due to development projects. The shortage would last until 2020.

The Worcester Polytechnic Institute team suggested expanding shelters inside the harbour because travel from the harbour to facilities for commercial and pleasure vessels in Hei Ling Chau and Sai Kung were fuel and time-consuming.

The Hong Kong Shipowners Association and the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club told the team that sampans were the only way to reach land from larger ships, but they were disappearing. They also urged the government to show off the harbour instead of obscuring it with signboards.

Holding world-class sailing events to promote the harbour would require support facilities like a racing village, the club said. Vincent Ng Wing-shun, a member of the defunct Harbourfront Enhancement Committee, said recreational uses of the harbour 'are not encouraged by the government because the harbour is busy, the water quality is poor and the activities can take place at beaches'.

'But this mindset should change if we really want a more diversified and vibrant harbour.' The Harbour Commission must incorporate water uses into planning and improvement of waterfront facilities, he said.

Harbour Business Forum executive committee head Rhydian Cox said the study showed much still needed to be done to transform the harbour and waterfront into world-class assets.

A Development Bureau spokeswoman said the bureau's harbour unit offered assistance to the study.

A Marine Department spokesman said private marinas should be encouraged in appropriate areas to meet the mooring needs of pleasure vessels. That would allow larger vessels to moor in the Hei Ling Chau Typhoon Shelter.