

In the 19th century, Hong Kong's position on the China coast, coupled with its excellent harbour, facilitated the city's economic growth through maritime trade. Shipping is still a vital contributor to Hong Kong's economic success.

Increasing prosperity, rising living standards and a significantly larger population have created a need for recreational facilities that the city struggles to provide. The increasing pressure of Hong Kong's seven million people for housing, hospitals, schools, universities and a host of other services and facilities exerts tremendous pressure on land supply. Facilities for sport rank relatively low on the list of priorities.

Due to land shortages, the provision of playing fields is well short of meeting community needs and government-operated indoor games halls, swimming pools and water sports centres also don't meet the community's need for organised sport.

In contrast to the shortage of land-based, out-door, recreational facilities, Hong Kong is surrounded by hundreds of square kilometres of water, with

innumerable islands, bays and beaches. This resource, if properly managed, could compensate for the shortage of recreational facilities on the land. Most people live within reasonably close proximity to the sea so what is needed are facilities for the various types of water sports.

There is huge economic advantage in developing water sports because, unlike football, rugby, hockey and other land sports, water sports require relatively little land in relation to the amount of recreational activity that can be provided. All that is needed are waterfront facilities for storing boats, plus changing rooms, showers, toilets and all the usual facilities needed to operate a sports centre. The actual 'playing area' is already there in the form of the limitless water surrounding Hong Kong and in the harbour and inlets that nature has so liberally provided.

What could be more logical than that the community, whose origins lie in maritime trade, should now be using those same waters for recreational purposes?

The recently-established Hong Kong Water Sports Council (HKWSC) has been

advocating the advantages of water sports centres and the message seems to be getting through. On the 14th of January 2015, CY Leung, chief executive of the Hong Kong SAR, presented his annual



policy address and reported that he had instructed the relevant bureaux to explore the feasibility of organising water sports activities in Victoria Harbour. The address also recognised the potential of large areas of

water outside the harbour for promotion of water sports and stated that government will identify desirable locations to build new water sports centres.

This is all good news and the HKWSC will follow up the policy address and engage with officials to help execute the chief executive's vision. The result of creating more water sports centres, if they are appropriately managed, will be to provide healthy, outdoor recreational activity, spawn the development of community-based clubs to organise marine activity and provide opportunities for more people to follow Lee Lai Shan to Olympic glory. Another Olympic medal is long overdue.