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Public Opinion Survey Results on

THE MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE CHARGING BILL

MAY 2021



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Executive Summary.....	1
Policy Timeline	2
Background	3
Research Design	4
Demographics ..	5

Survey Results

Waste Management Practices.....	7
Views on Waste Management and the MSW Charging Bill.....	12
Conclusion	24
Recommendations	25

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2013, the Hong Kong Government set an ambitious goal of “reducing the volume of daily disposal of garbage per capita to 0.8 kg in 2022”. However, Hong Kong has not only failed to meet this target, but performance has in fact worsened since then, hitting a record high of 1.53kg per capita in 2018.

The "Waste Disposal (Charging for Municipal Solid Waste) (Amendment) Bill 2018" (MSW charging bill) was proposed nearly two decades ago. In the Environment Bureau's "Blueprint for Sustainable Use of Resources 2013 – 2022", the Government expected the MSW charging bill, in conjunction with other waste management policies, to achieve a 40% reduction in MSW by 2022.

The MSW charging bill needs to play a core role in the government's waste management strategy. It aims to proliferate the “polluter pays” principle and the idea of “eco-responsibility”. Implementing this bill helps reduce the quantity of waste, directly tackling the root of Hong Kong's waste issue.

The results of a public opinion survey on the MSW charging bill concluded that nearly 70% of total respondents agree there is a need to implement MSW charging bill in Hong Kong. Amongst white-collar workers,

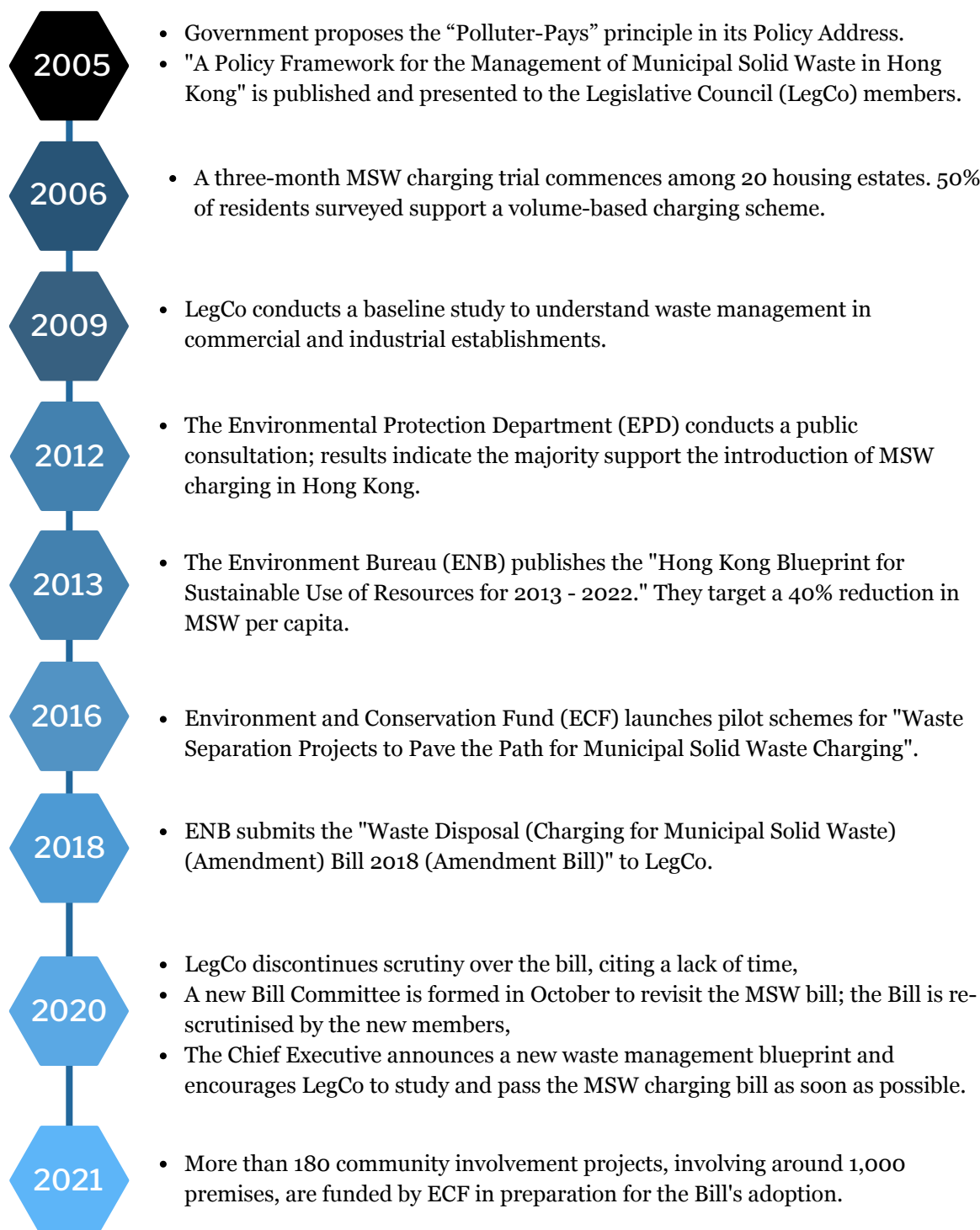
students, and those with tertiary education, support is even stronger.

65% of respondents agree with the proposed charge of HK\$0.11 per litre of waste, along with pre-paid designated garbage bags. This means an average household with three members will pay HK\$1-2 per day. In addition, nearly 80% believe the transitional period 12 to 18 months for MSW charging adoption is long enough, and 50% of respondents recognise how the bill will help reduce waste overall.

These survey results show that the MSW bill is supported by the majority and across social strata of the public. The MSW bill will be a critical foundation for Hong Kong to reach the waste reduction targets of the "Waste Blueprint for Hong Kong 2035".

Now is the right time for the Government to tighten existing regulations, reduce the number of policy exceptions and proactively extend the reach of government legislation. In addition to legislation efforts, the Government also needs to encourage producer responsibility, for example by requiring auditing, providing financial incentives to engage in policy innovation towards sustainable best practice, and assisting with collective action.

POLICY TIMELINE





BACKGROUND

In December 2020, Civic Exchange commissioned the Hong Kong Public Opinion Program (HKPOP) of the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute (HKPORI) to conduct the “Survey on Municipal Solid Waste Charging Bill” targeting Cantonese-speaking residents in Hong Kong of age 18 or above. The objectives of the survey were to gauge Hong Kong citizens’ practices of waste management, their views on waste management, and on the key elements of the proposed municipal solid waste charging bill.

The research design and instrument used in this study were designed by the HKPOP Team after consulting Civic Exchange, while fieldwork operations, data collection, and data analysis were conducted independently by the HKPOP Team without interference from any outside party. In other words, HKPOP was given full autonomy to design and conduct the research and therefore takes full responsibility for all the findings reported herewith.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This was a random telephone survey conducted by telephone interviewers under close supervision from fieldwork supervisors. The data was collected by HKPORI using a Web-based Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (Web-CATI) system, which allowed real-time data capture and consolidation. To ensure data quality, on top of on-site supervision and random checking, voice recording, screen capturing, and camera surveillance were used to monitor the interviewers' performance.

To minimise sampling bias, telephone numbers were randomly generated using known prefixes assigned to telecommunication service providers under the Numbering Plan provided by the Office of the Communications Authority (OFCA). Invalid numbers were then eliminated according to computer and manual dialing records to produce the final sample. Both landline and mobile numbers were included in the sampling frame with a target ratio of 1:1.

The target population of this survey was Cantonese-speaking residents in Hong Kong of age 18 or above. If more than one subject was available in the landline sample, selection was made using the "next birthday rule" which selects the person who has his/her birthday next within the same household. Telephone interviews were conducted during the period of 14 to 25, January 2021. A total of 1,012 qualified respondents were successfully interviewed, including 505 landline and 507 mobile numbers.

The effective response rate of this survey was 74.4%, and the standard error for percentages based on the full sample was less than 1.6%. In other words, the sampling error for all percentages using the full sample was less than +/-3.1% at 95% confidence level.

To ensure representativeness of the findings, the raw data collected have been rim-weighted according to figures provided by the Census and Statistics Department. The gender-age distribution of the Hong Kong population came from their "Mid-year Population [Figures] for 2019", while the educational attainment (highest level attended) distribution and economic activity status distribution came from their "Women and Men in Hong Kong - Key Statistics (2019 Edition)". All figures in this report are based on the weighted sample.

SURVEY OVERVIEW

The survey comprises 15 questions which cover the respondents' attitudes towards waste management and the MSW charging bill. It should be noted that the figures in the main text of this report have been rounded up to the nearest integers after considering the second decimal place, and because of the rounding procedure, the total of some figures may not add up to 100%; these are not mistakes.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Figure 1 - Gender

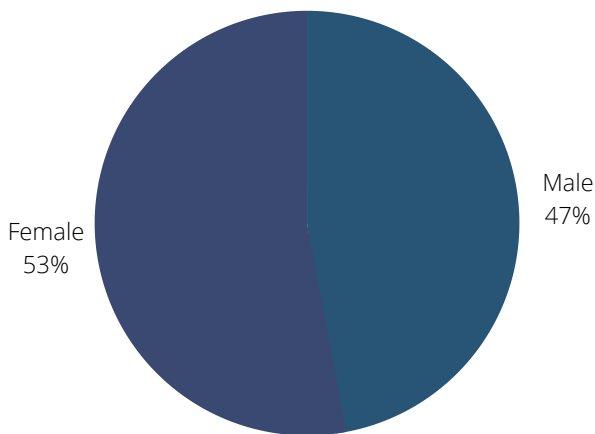


Figure 2 - Age

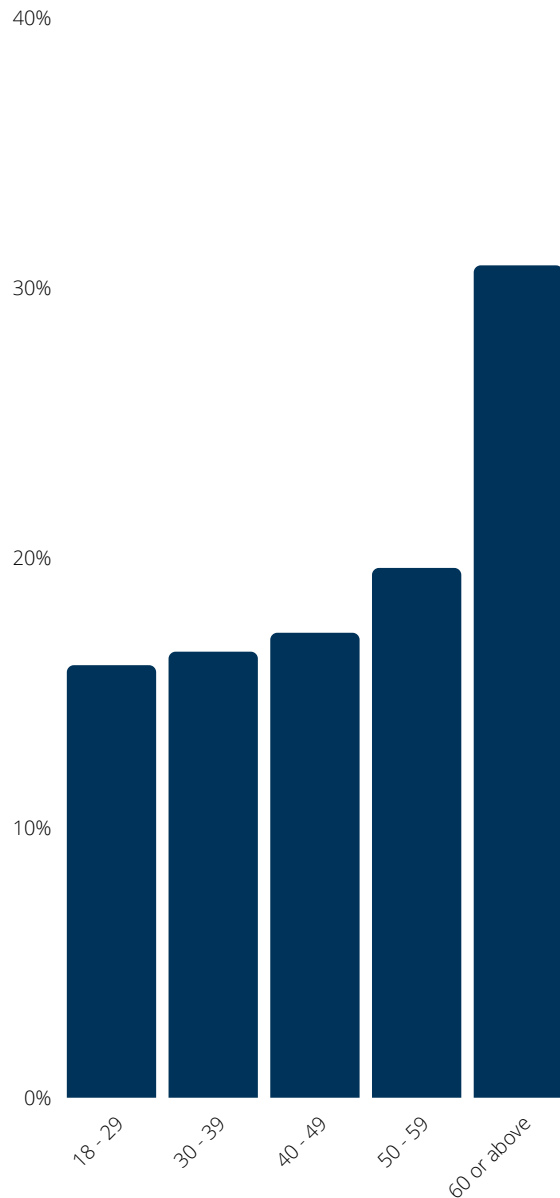


Figure 3 - Political Inclination

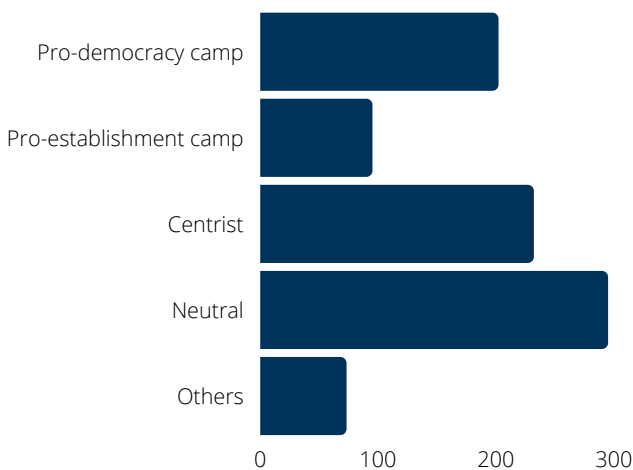


Figure 5 - Housing demographics

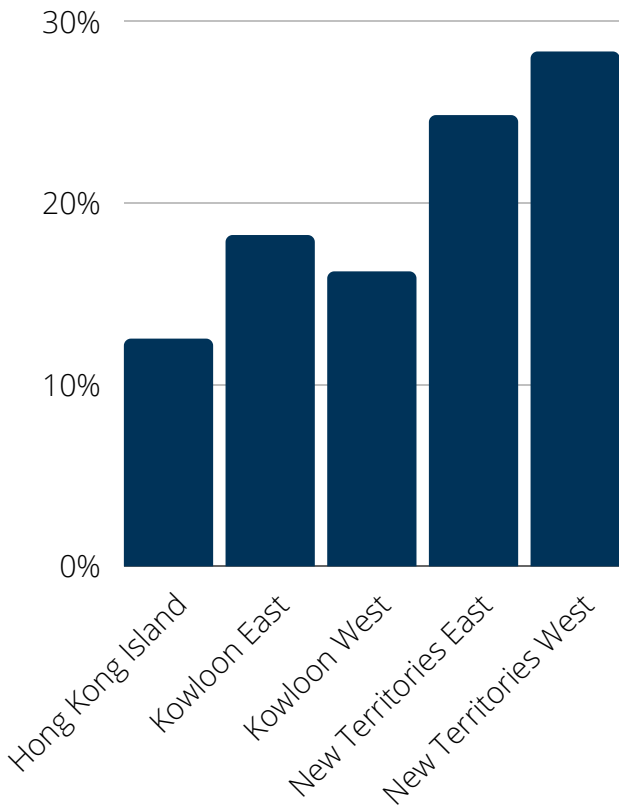


Figure 4 - Education Levels

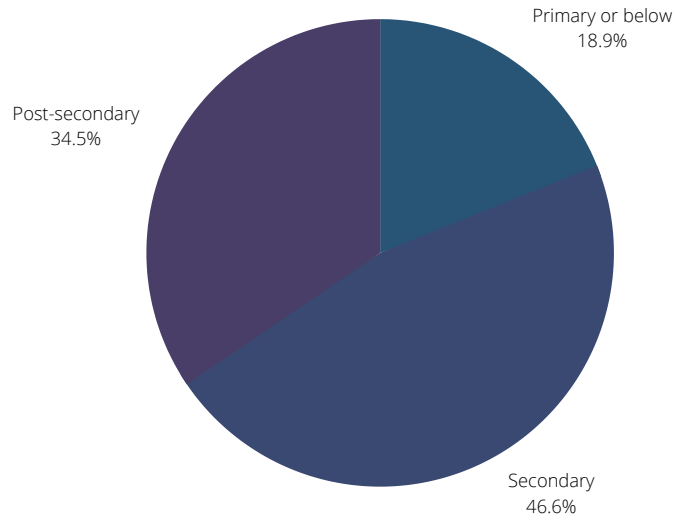
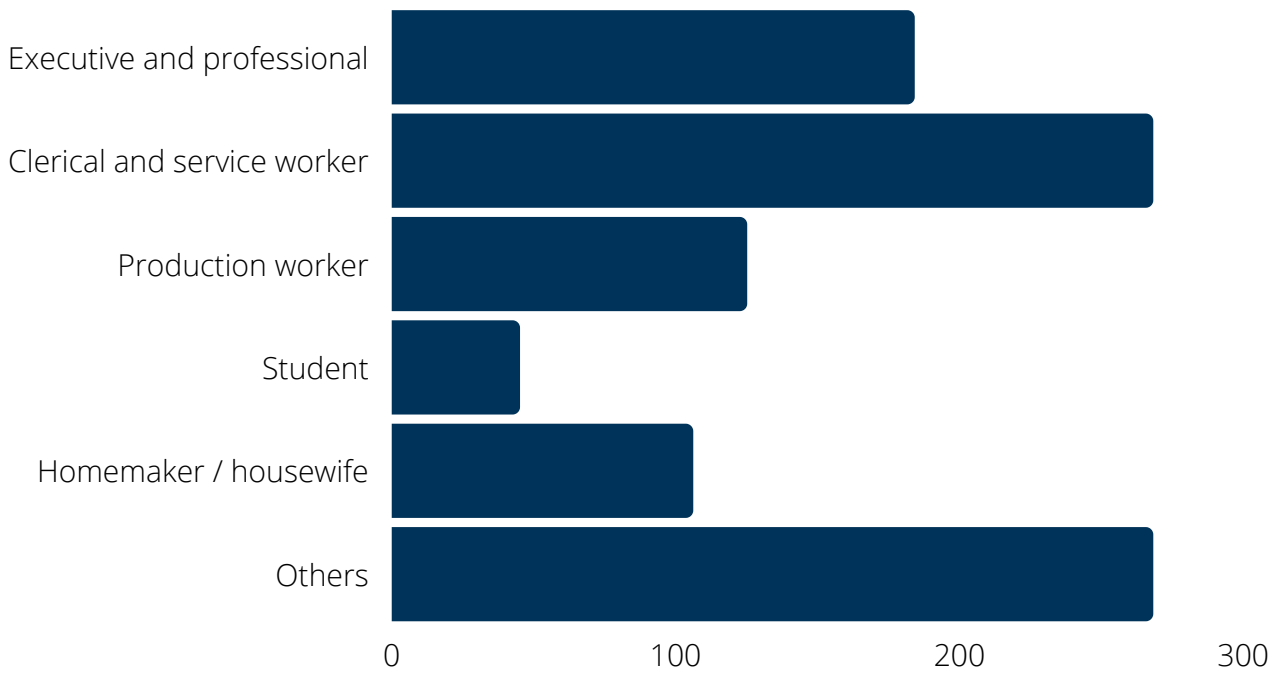


Figure 6 - Occupation





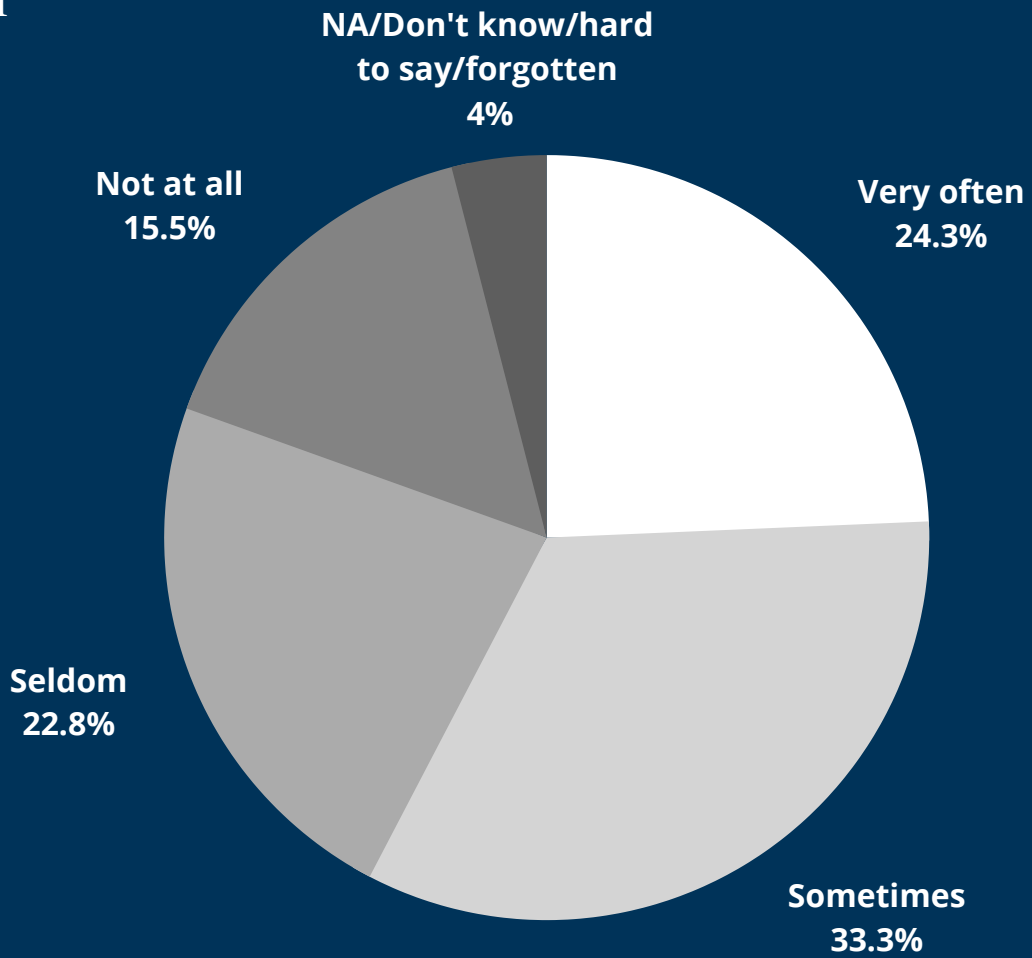
WASTE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

The first part of the survey aimed to gauge the respondents' current practices of waste management in general

Q1 IN THE PAST YEAR, HOW OFTEN DID YOU BUY FEWER POLLUTING PRODUCTS FOR THE PURPOSE OF WASTE REDUCTION?

Results show that when asked if they had bought less polluting products, such as products with excessive packaging, products with high carbon footprint, in the past year for the purpose of waste reduction, around one quarter said “very often” (24%), another one-third did it “sometimes” (33%) whilst more than 20% said “seldom” (23%) and 15% did not do so at all.

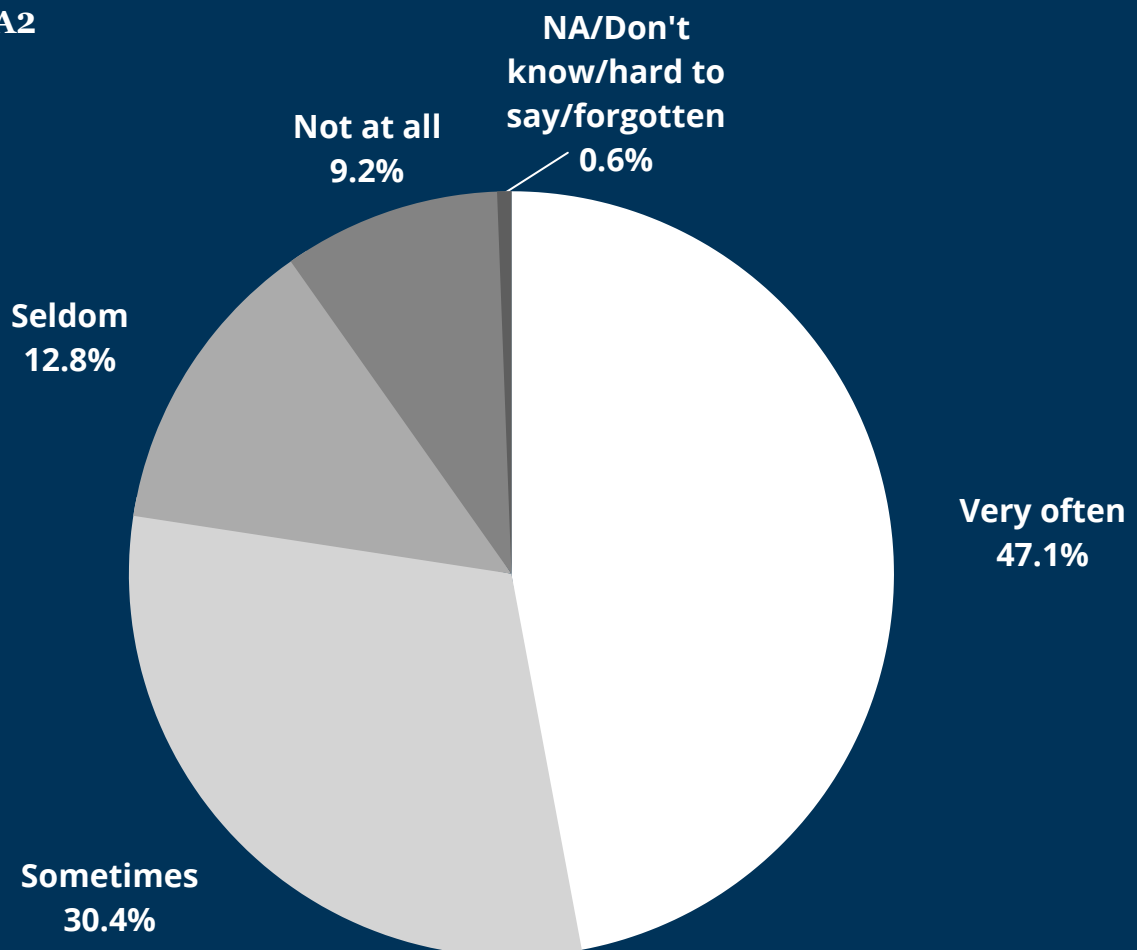
Figure A1



Q2 IN THE PAST YEAR, HOW OFTEN DID YOU USE REUSABLE PRODUCTS FOR THE PURPOSE OF WASTE REDUCTION?

Regarding reusable products such as bottles and lunchbox, nearly half of the respondents claimed they used these products “very often” (47%) in the year past for the purpose of waste reduction while around 30% said “sometimes” (30%). Besides this, around one-eighth opted for “seldom” (13%) and less than one-tenth “not at all” (9%).

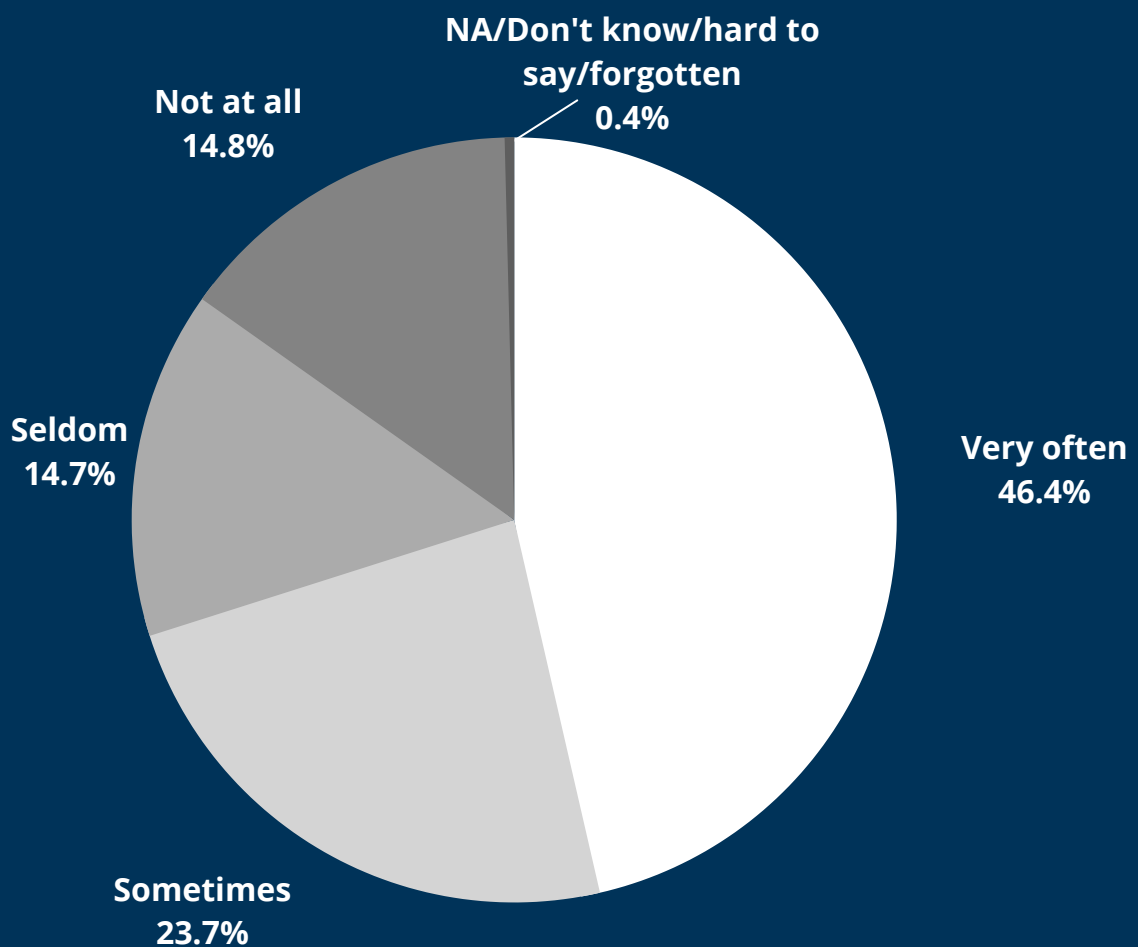
Figure A2



Q3 IN THE PAST YEAR, HOW OFTEN DID YOU RECYCLE FOR THE PURPOSE OF WASTE REDUCTION?

As for recycling papers, cans, metals, and plastic bottles, etc., for the purpose for waste reduction, nearly half of the respondents reported that they did it “very often” in the past year (46%), while nearly one quarter said “sometimes” (24%). At the same time, one-seventh each chose “seldom” and “not at all”(15%).

Figure A3



Q4 WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE MAJOR DIFFICULTIES/HINDRANCES IN IMPLEMENTING WASTE REDUCTION PRACTICES IN YOUR DAILY LIFE?

Results revealed that “too inconvenient” topped the list of major difficulties in implementing waste reduction practices in the respondents’ daily life, with nearly half of the respondents mentioning it (47%). Meanwhile, “better alternatives were not available or trusted (e.g. recyclables still ended up at the landfill, a less packaged product option was not available in the market)” was mentioned by nearly 40% of the respondents (37%). Reasons like “no policy required him / her to do”, “always forgot”, and “not enough knowledge” form the next tier as mentioned by 27%, 24% and 22% of the sample, respectively. Other relatively less frequently cited difficulties or hindrances included “no one around him / her was doing this” (13%) and “no incentive” (9%). Meanwhile, 4% said there was “no difficulties or hindrances at all”, 1% said “no reasons” while 7% could not give a definite answer.

Figure A4





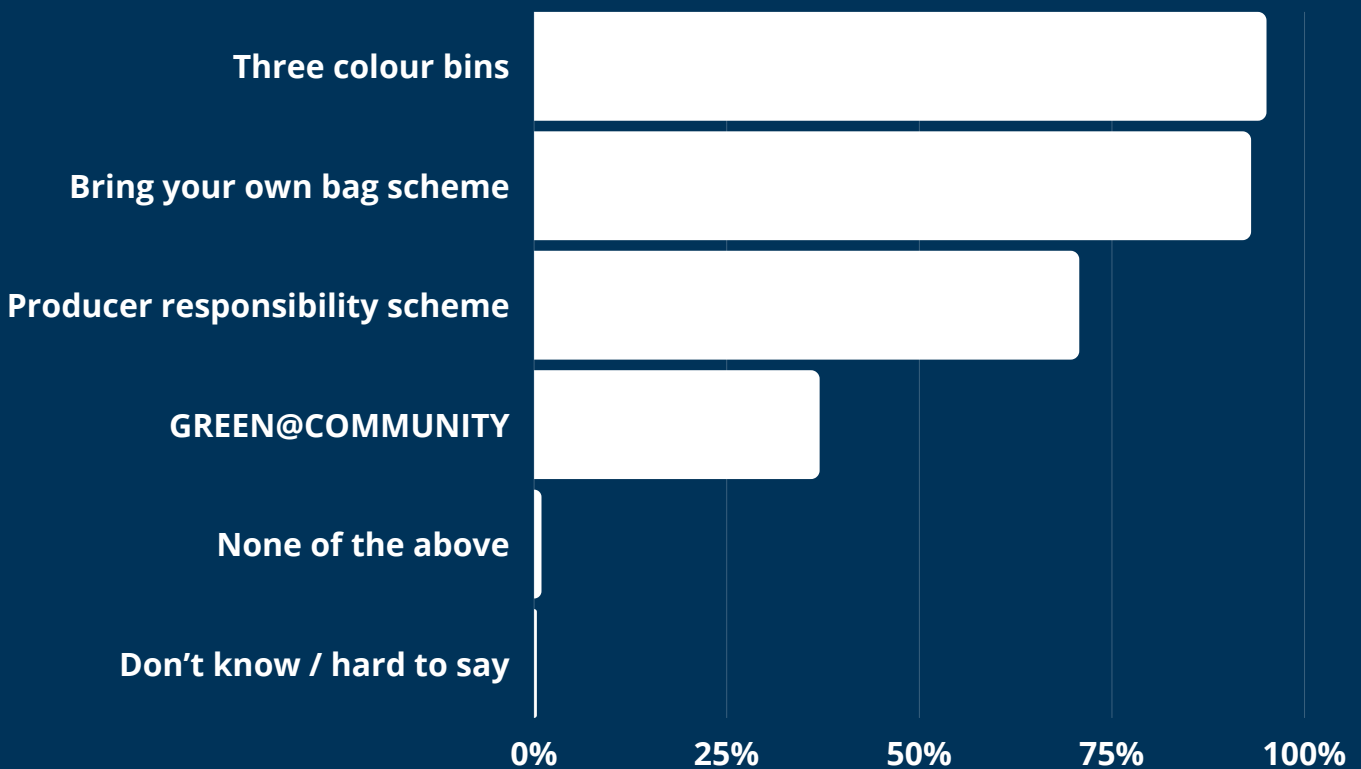
VIEWS ON WASTE MANAGEMENT AND MSW CHARGING BILL

The next section of this survey aimed to gauge respondents' views on waste management and the MSW charging bill

Q5 ARE YOU AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES ON WASTE MANAGEMENT?

The respondents were first asked about their awareness of various government initiatives on waste management. Findings show that over 90% were aware of the “Three Colour Bins” (i.e., Source Separation of Domestic Waste) which were introduced in 2005 (95%) and the “Bring-your-own-bag Scheme” in place since 2009 (93%). Furthermore, more than 70% had heard of “Producer Responsibility Schemes” (e.g., Plastic Shopping Bag Charging Scheme, Producer Responsibility Scheme on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) (71%). As for “GREEN@COMMUNITY” (or formerly, the Community Recycling Network), operational since 2011, the awareness level was lower, at 37%.

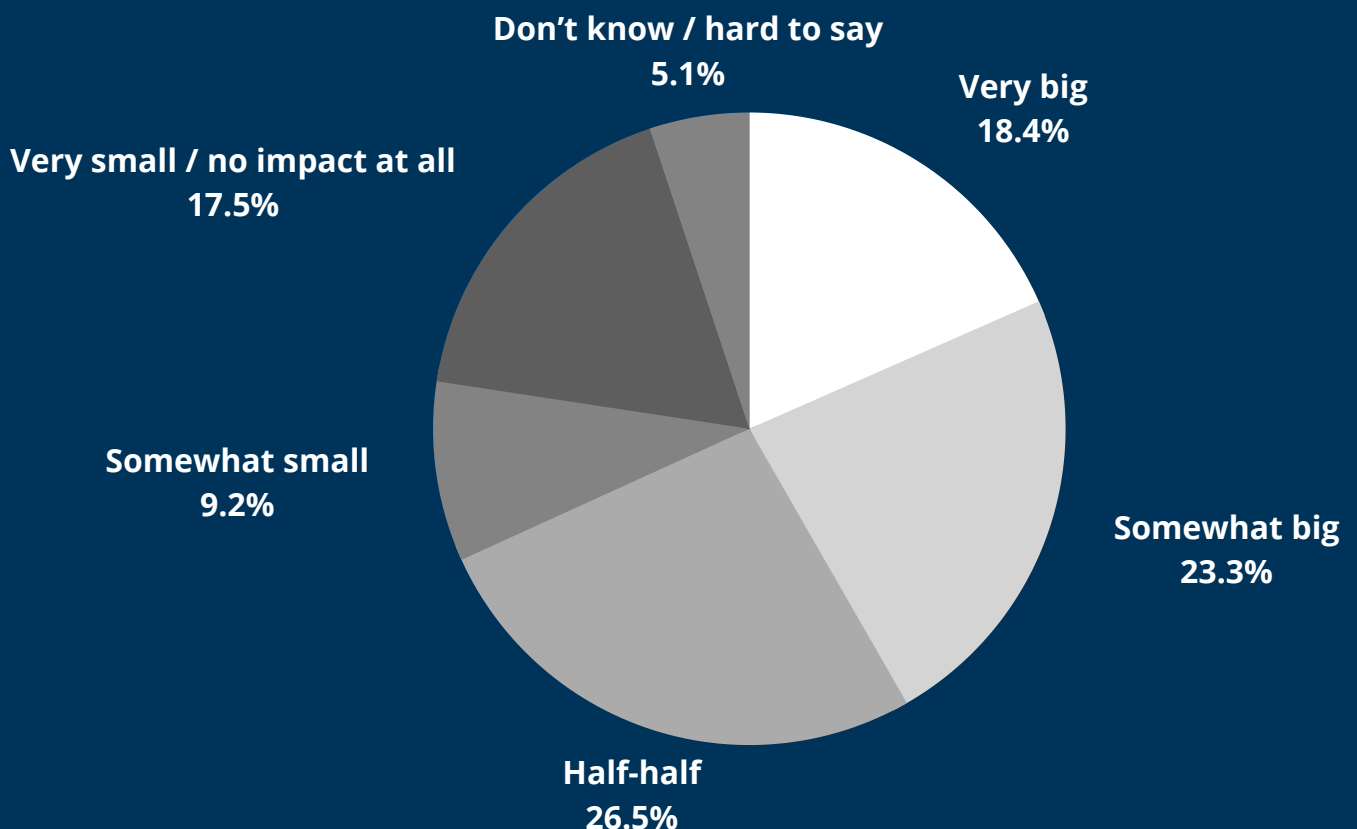
Figure B5



Q6 HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK THE OVERALL WASTE PROBLEM IN HONG KONG, I.E. MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE, MIGHT IMPACT YOUR OWN QUALITY OF LIFE IN 3 TO 5 YEARS?

When asked to assess the impact of the overall waste problem in 3 to 5 years, more than two-fifths thought MSW in Hong Kong would have a sizable impact on their own quality of life (42%), including 18% who answered, “very big” and 23% “somewhat big”. More than a quarter opted for the middle ground “half-half” (26%). On the other hand, more than a quarter believed the impact would be limited (27%), with 9% choosing “somewhat small” and 18% opting for “very small / no impact at all”. The remaining 5% answered “don’t know / hard to say”.

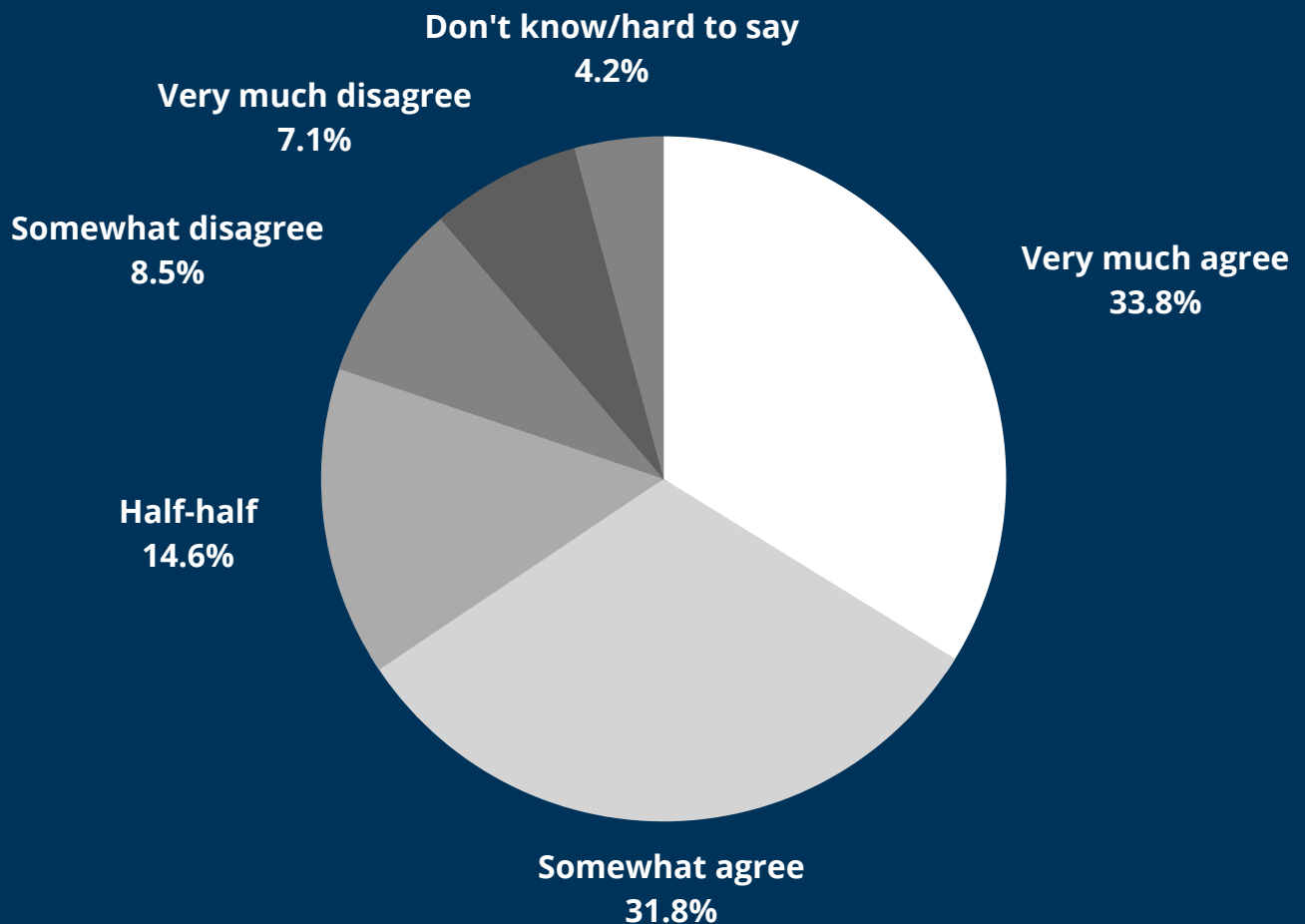
Figure B6



Q7 TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE “POLLUTER PAYS” PRINCIPLE COVERING THE WASTE MANAGEMENT BUDGET?

Some basic information was provided, and two principles of the bill were read out in random order. Respondents were asked to give their level of agreement to each of them. Regarding the “polluter pays’ principle”, instead of covering the waste management budget from general tax, which is the case now, two-thirds of the sample agreed polluters should be held responsible (66%), while half “very much agreed” (34%) and the other half “somewhat agreed” (32%). On the contrary, just one-sixth disagreed with this (16%), with 8% “somewhat disagreed” and 7% “very much disagreed”. Meanwhile, one-seventh chose “half-half” (15%). The remaining 4% did not give a definite answer.

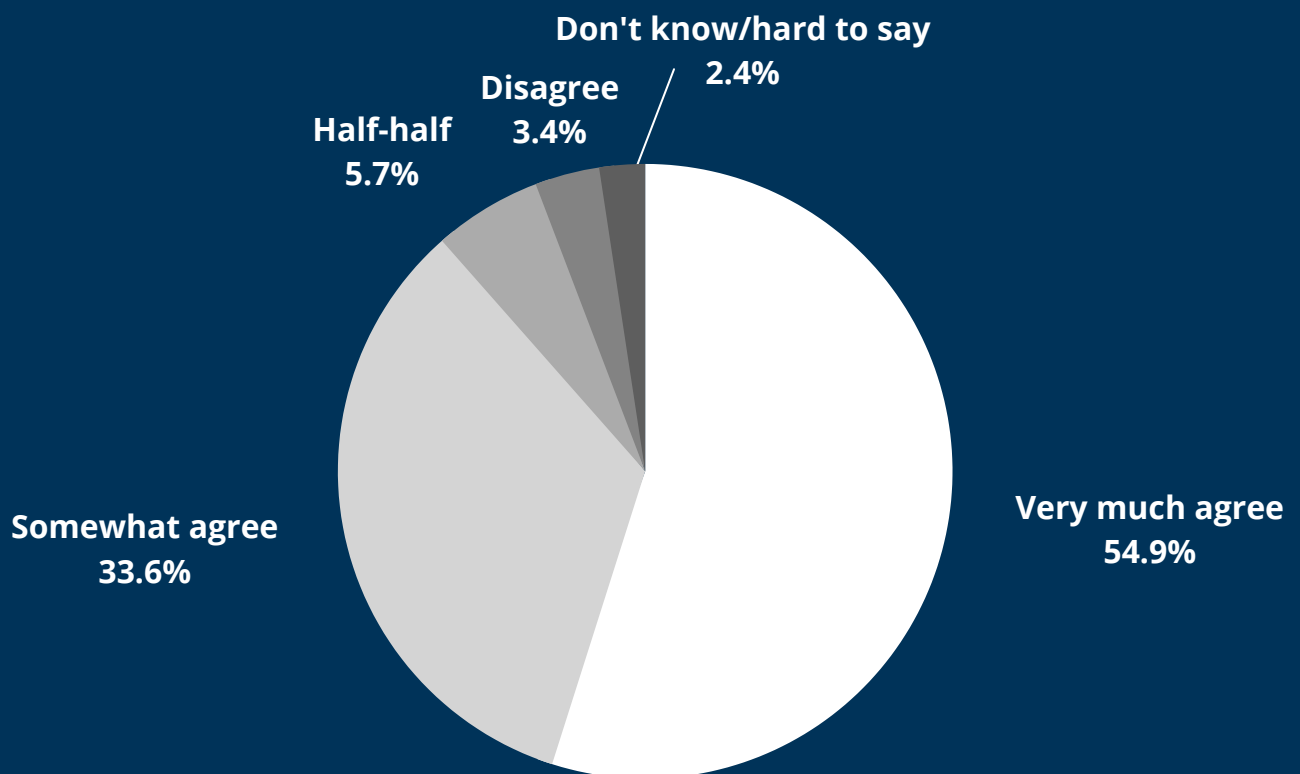
Figure B7



Q8 TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH ENCOURAGING THE PUBLIC TO “REDUCE WASTE AT SOURCE” AND “PRACTICE CLEAN RECYCLING” IN THEIR DAILY LIFE?

With regard to the principle of “encouraging the public to ‘reduce waste at source’ and ‘practice clean recycling’ in their daily life”, an overwhelming majority of nearly 90% of the respondents agreed with this (88%), of which 55% chose “very much agreed” and 34% “somewhat agreed”. On the other hand, only 3% showed disagreement, with 2% each choosing “somewhat disagreed” and “very much disagreed”. 6% responded “half-half” and only 2% had no definite response.

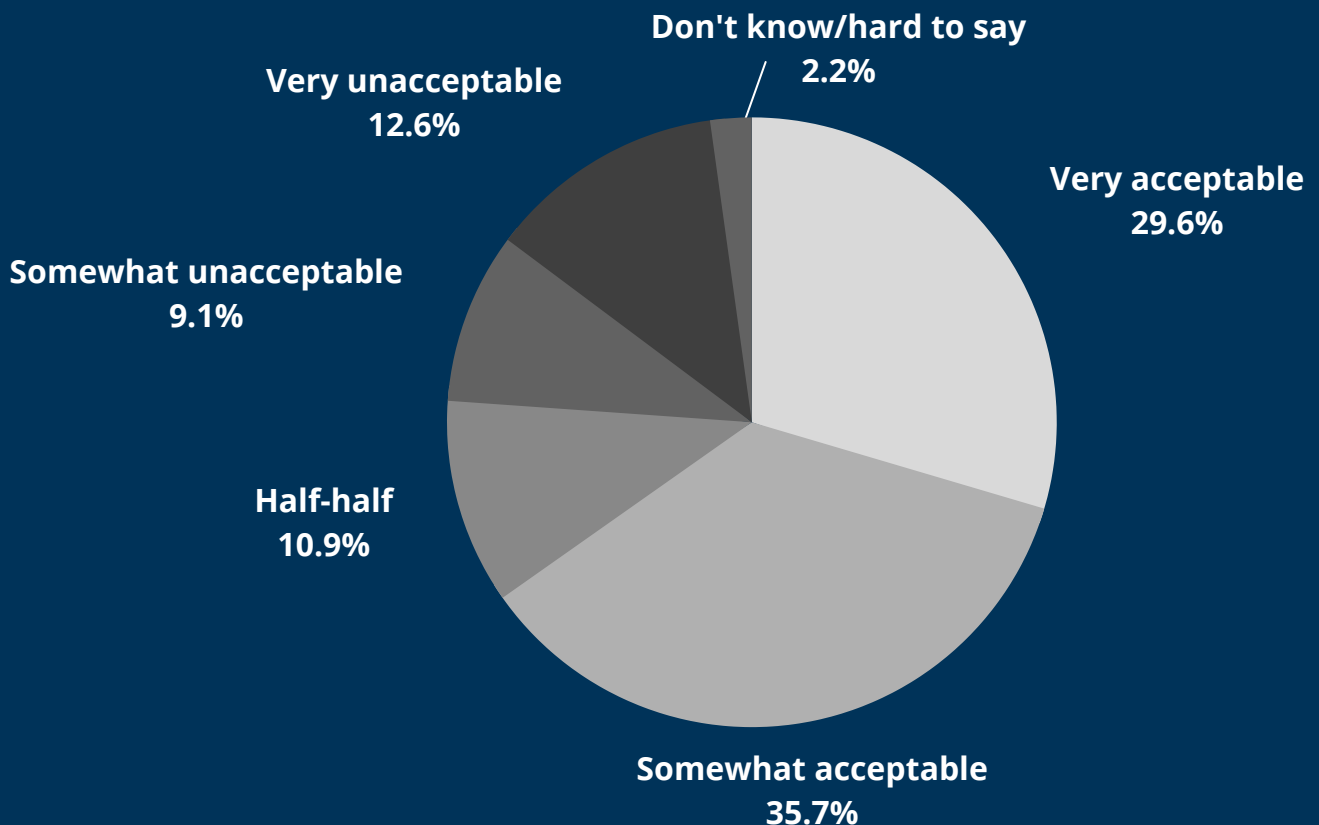
Figure B8



Q9 UNDER THE BILL, PRE-PAID DESIGNATED GARBAGE BAGS HAVE TO BE USED AND THE PROPOSED CHARGE IS \$0.11 PER LITRE. DO YOU THINK THIS CHARGE RATE IS ACCEPTABLE?

Under the bill, pre-paid designated garbage bags have to be used and the proposed charge is HK\$0.11 per litre. This means an average household with 3 members would have to pay HK\$1-2 per day. For comparison, the cost of today's waste facilities is around HK\$2.5 per taxpaying household per day. Results showed that two-thirds thought the HK\$1-2 charge rate was acceptable (65%): 30% found it "very acceptable" and 36% found it "somewhat acceptable". On the other hand, more than 20% gave a negative response (22%), with 9% saying "somewhat unacceptable" and 13% saying "very unacceptable / not acceptable at all". More than one-tenth chose "half-half" (11%) while 2% could not give a definite answer to this question.

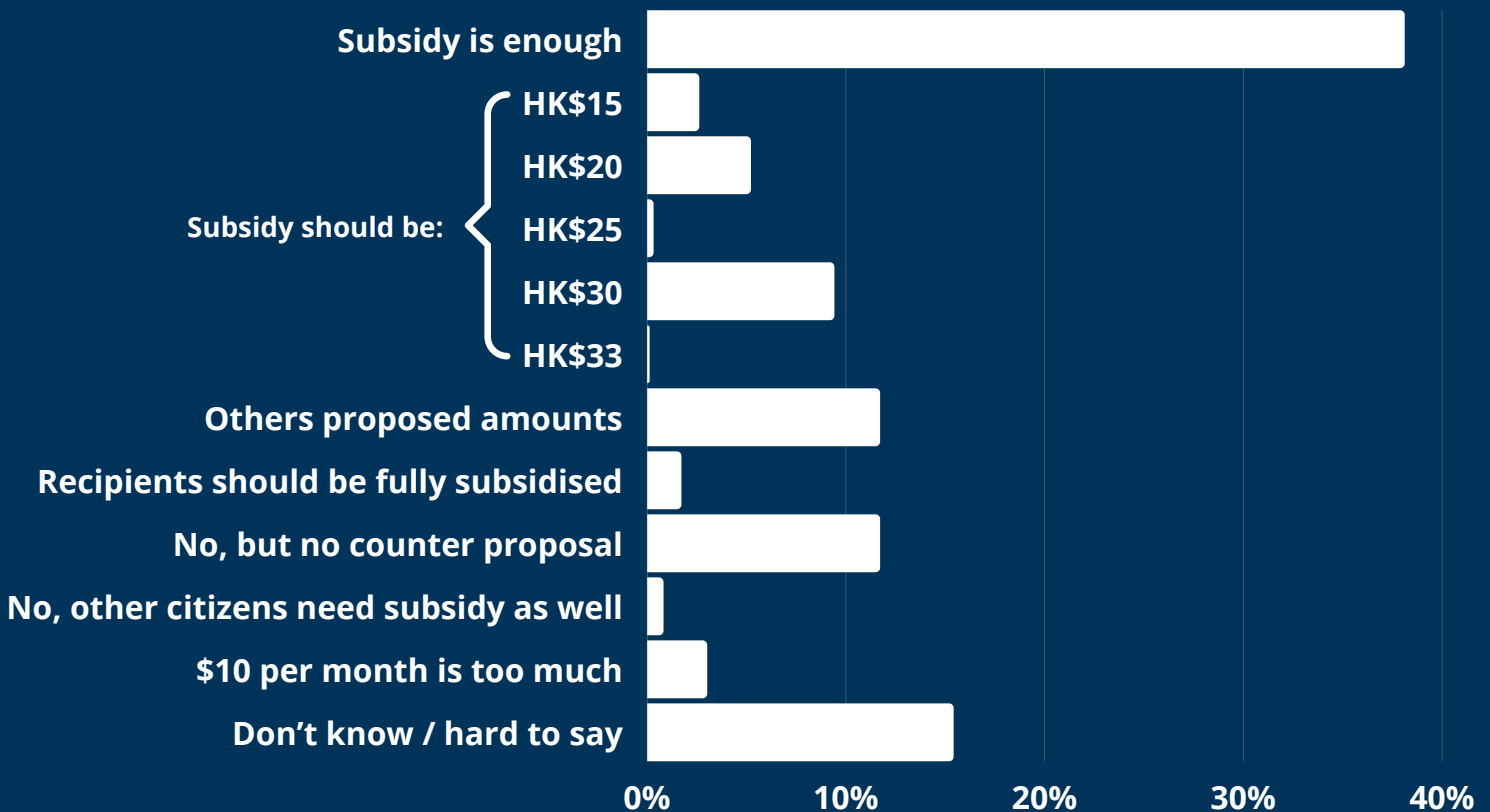
Figure B9



Q10 A HK\$10 SUBSIDY PER MONTH FOR RECIPIENTS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE SOCIAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE SCHEME AND HIGHER OLD AGE LIVING ALLOWANCE WILL BE PROVIDED. IS THIS ENOUGH? IF NO, HOW MUCH WOULD YOU PROPOSE?

The Government would provide a subsidy of HK\$10 per person per month for all recipients of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme and Higher Old Age Living Allowance. The number of respondents who thought it was not enough out-number those who thought it was sufficient by around 6 percentage points. Specifically, 38% thought the subsidy was enough whereas a total of 44% thought it was not sufficient. Among them, 29% counter suggested a subsidy amount: the median and mode was HK\$30, while the overall average of \$51 among these respondents. 12% did not offer a counter proposal; 2% believed these recipients should be fully subsidised, while 1% thought other citizens needed subsidy as well. Meanwhile, 3% believed providing a subsidy of \$10 per person per month was too much while 15% had no view.

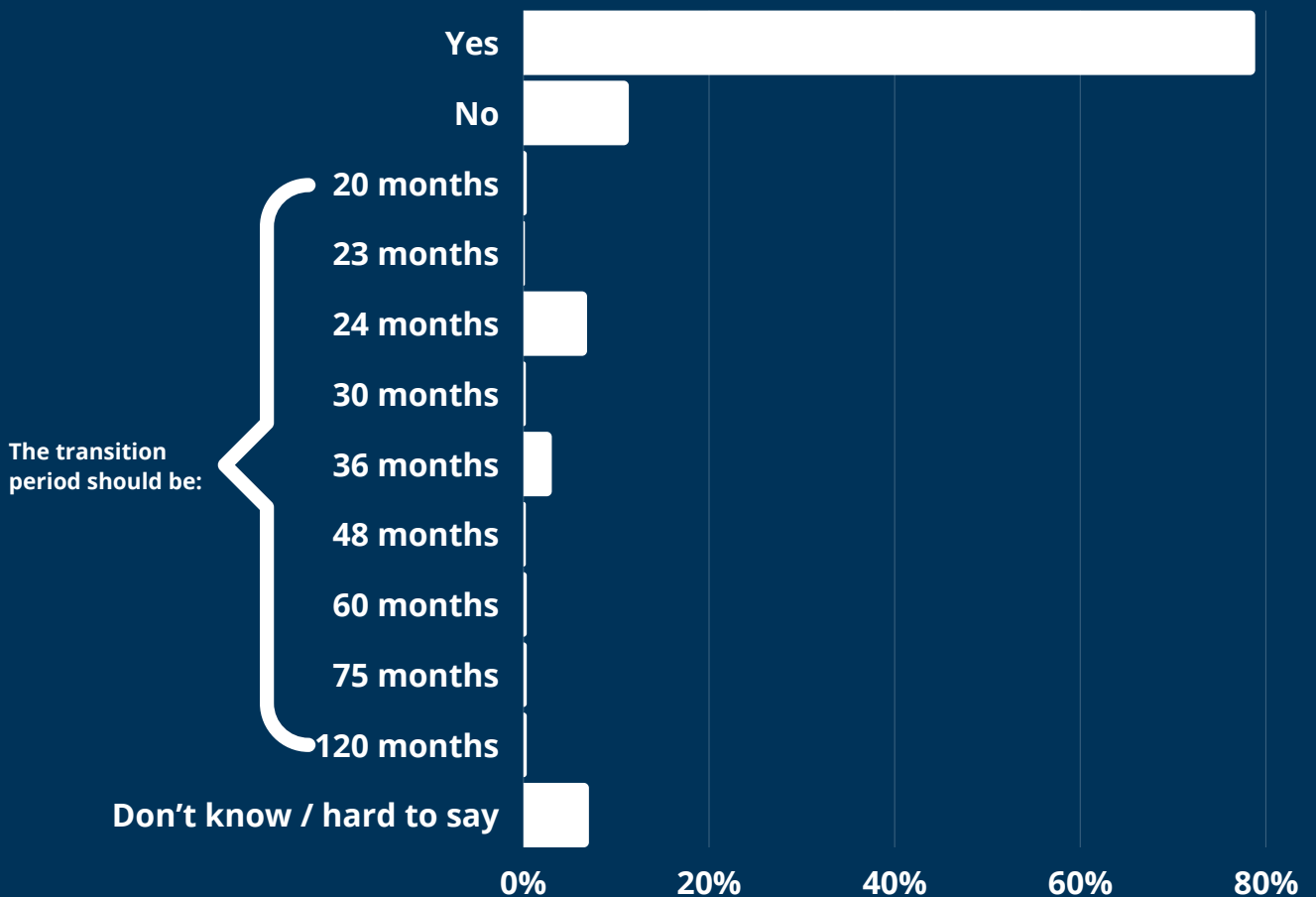
Figure B10



Q11 THERE WILL BE A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD OF 12-18 MONTHS FOR THE CITIZENS TO GET TO KNOW AND BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO THIS NEW WASTE MANAGEMENT STYLE. DO YOU THINK THIS PERIOD IS LONG ENOUGH? IF NO, HOW LONG WOULD YOU PROPOSE?

Nearly 80% of respondents (79%) believed this period was long enough for citizens to get to know and become accustomed to this new waste management policy. On the other hand, close to 15% thought the opposite (14%), of which 11% had counter suggested a different time frame ranging from 20 to 120 months, giving rise to an overall average of 31.5 months among these respondents. 3% did not have any counter proposal, but thought the transitional period should be longer. Finally, 7% had no definite response.

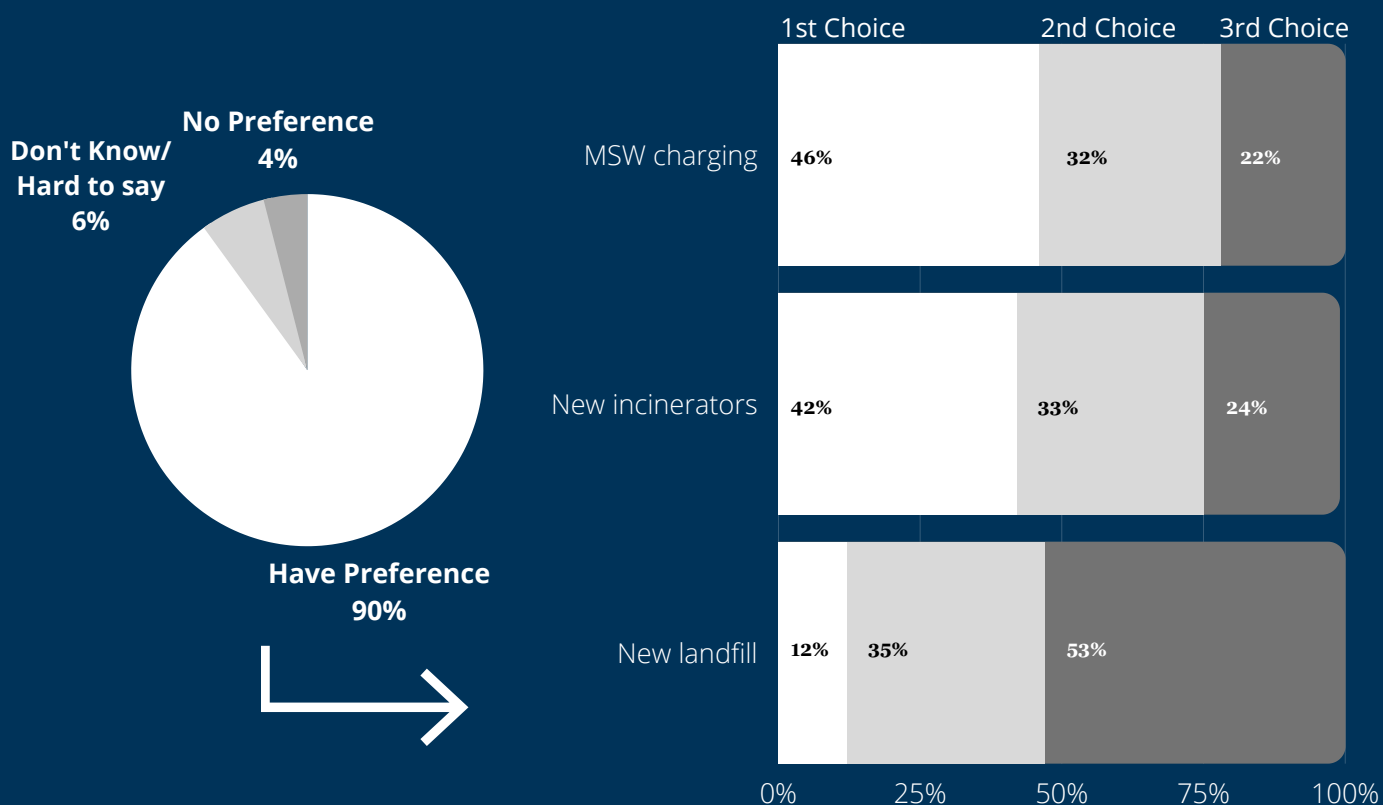
Figure B11



Q12 TO TACKLE THE CURRENT PROBLEM OF MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE IN HONG KONG, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING MEASURES DO YOU PREFER?

Results showed that among those 901 respondents (90%) who showed their preference, 46% picked “MSW charging” as their first choice, followed by 42% who preferred “new incinerators”, while only 12% picked “new landfills” as their most preferred measure. Taking all ranking scores into consideration, “municipal solid waste charging” topped the list and attained an overall rank of 1.77 (from 1 to 3, 1 meaning the best, and 3 meaning the worst), followed closely by “new incinerators” at 1.82. “New landfills” lagged behind and was least preferred by the respondents, with an average rank of 2.41. Another 4% said they had no preference while 6% could not make a choice among these measures.

Figure B12

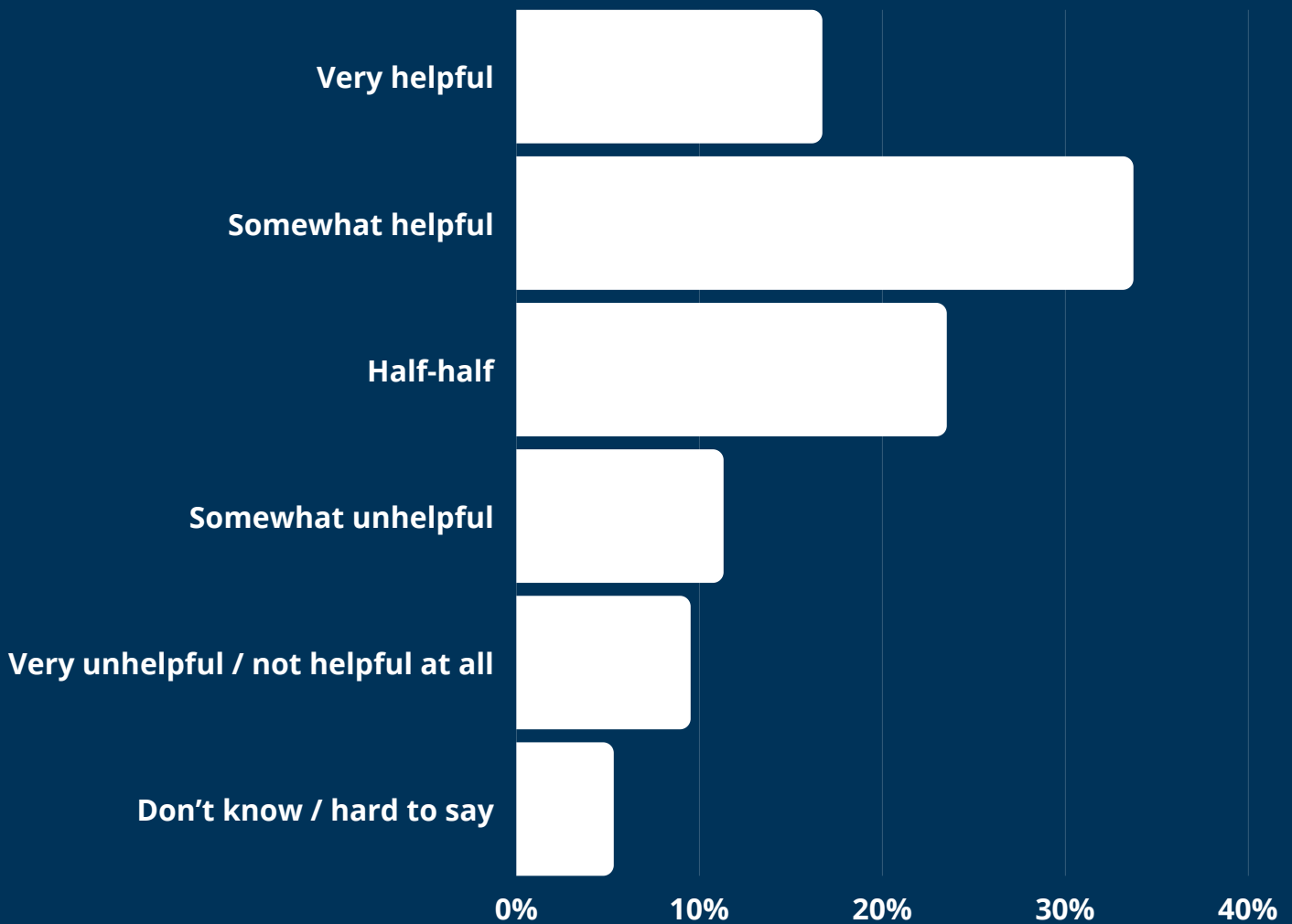


Q13

IF IMPLEMENTED, HOW HELPFUL DO YOU THINK THE MUNICIPAL SOLID WASTE CHARGING BILL IN REDUCING THE OVERALL WASTE DISPOSAL TO LANDFILL IN HONG KONG?

With regard to the helpfulness of the municipal solid waste charging bill in reducing the overall waste disposal to landfill in Hong Kong, half of the respondents gave a positive answer (50%): 17% and 34% found it “very helpful” and “somewhat helpful” respectively. Meanwhile, around one quarter chose “half-half” (24%) and one-fifth found it unhelpful (21%), with 11% opting for “somewhat unhelpful” and 9% “very unhelpful / not helpful at all”. The remaining 5% could not give a definite answer to this question.

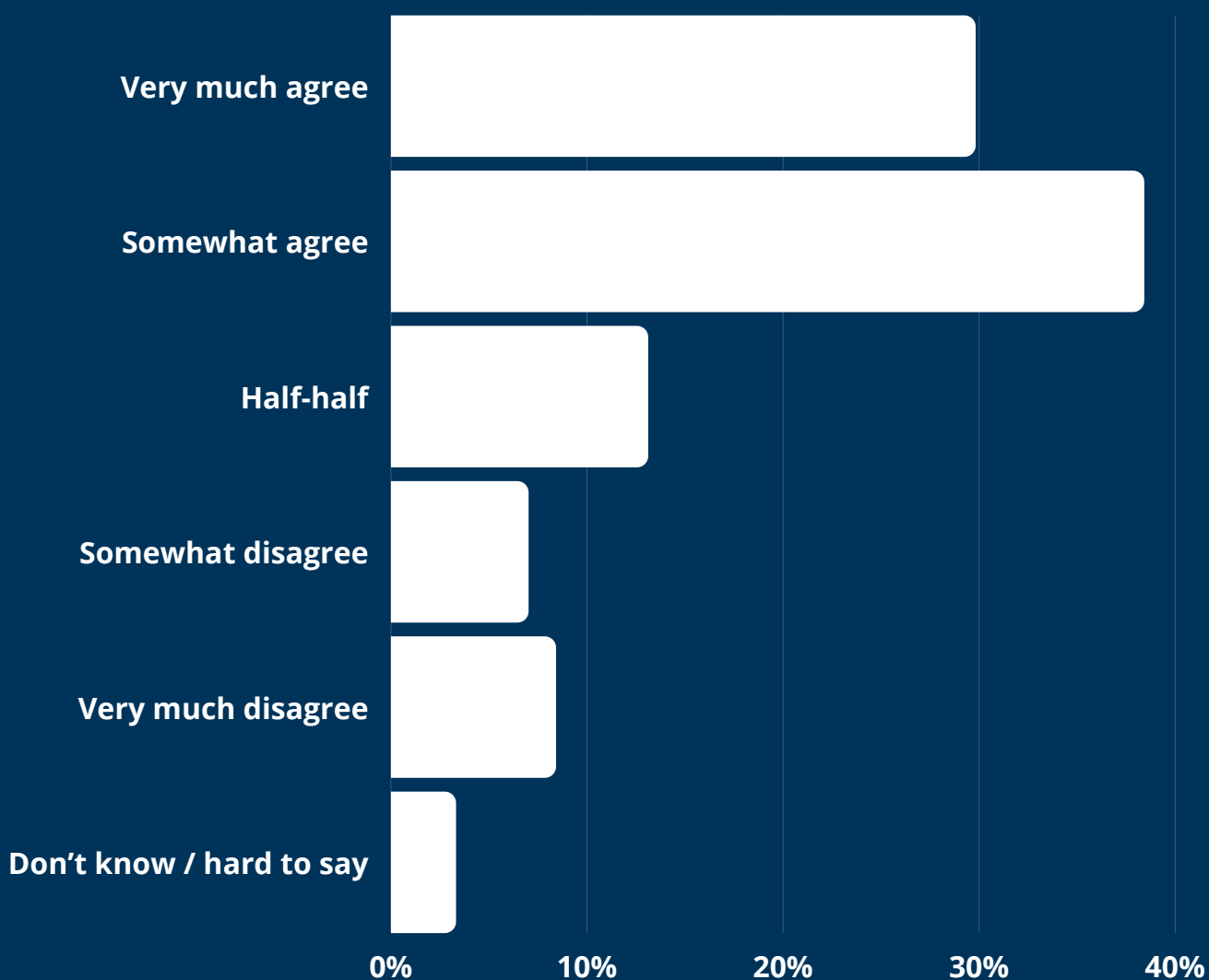
Figure B13



Q14 TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE TO IMPLEMENTING THIS POLICY IN HONG KONG?

Results showed that over two-thirds of the overall sample agreed with implementing the MSW charging bill in Hong Kong (68%), with 30% “very much agree” and 38% “somewhat agree”. One-eighth opted for “half-half” (13%). On the other hand, 15% showed disagreement, with 7% “somewhat disagree” and 8% “very much disagree”. Meanwhile, 3% had no view.

Figure B14

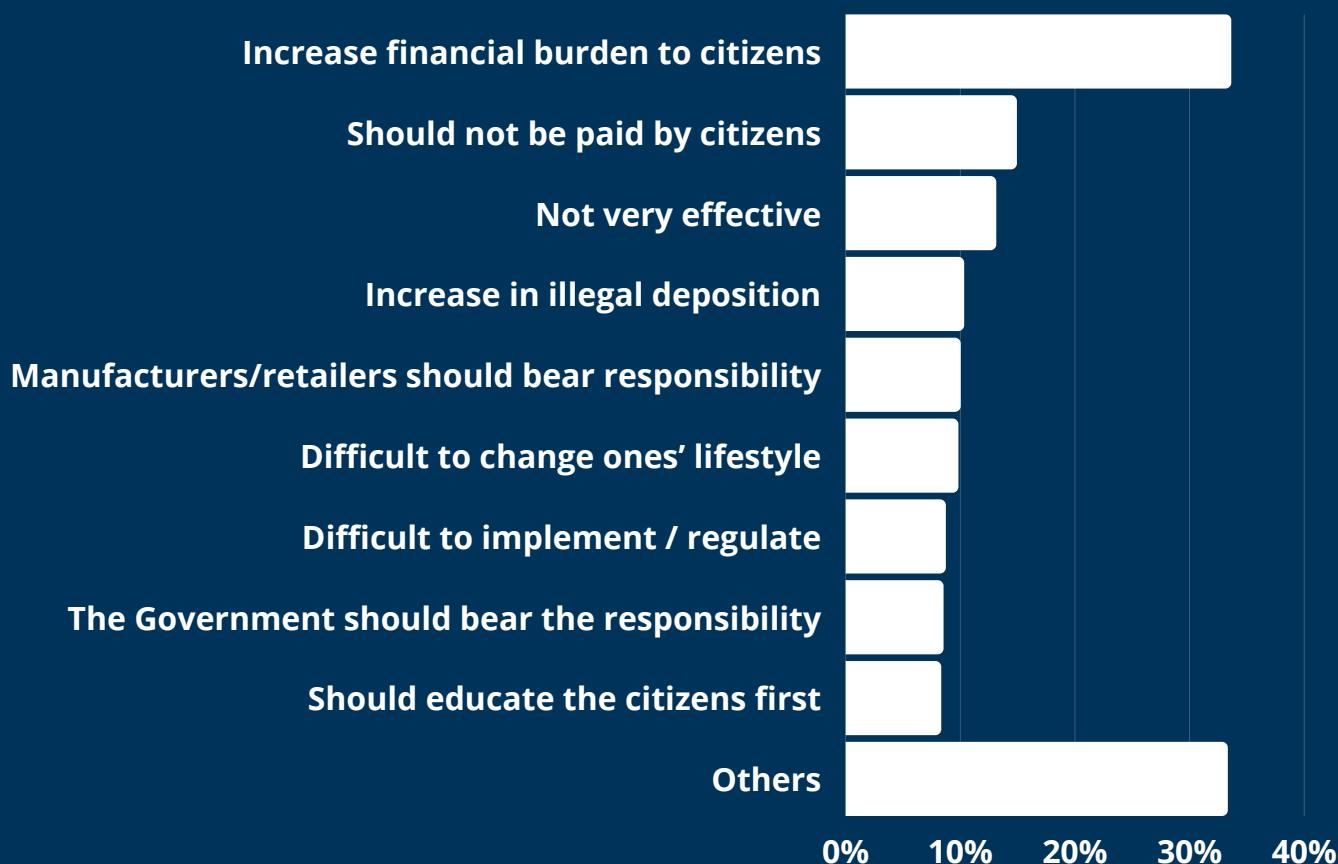


Q15

IF YOU DISAGREE TO IMPLEMENTING THIS POLICY IN HONG KONG, WHY?

Among the 156 respondents who disagreed with implementing the policy, one-third thought it would “increase financial burden to citizens” (34%), which was the main hindrance identified. Around one-seventh respectively believed it “should not be paid by citizens” (15%) or found it “not very effective” (13%). One-tenth each also believed there would be an “increase in illegal deposition” (10%), that “manufacturers / retailers should bear the responsibility (e.g. over-packaging by supermarkets)” (10%), that it is “difficult to change ones’ lifestyle” (10%), “difficult to implement/regulate” (9%), and that “the government should bear the responsibility” (9%). Meanwhile, 5% did not provide any reasons for their disagreement.

Figure B15



CONCLUSION

Overall, most Hong Kong people practice waste reduction in one way or another, such as buying less polluting products, choosing reusable products, and recycling in the past year. Nearly half of the respondents reported that the major difficulty that hindered them from practicing waste reduction was a lack of convenience.

The awareness of government initiatives on waste management was on the high side in general. Nearly all respondents have heard of “Three Colour Bins” and the “Bring-your-own-bag scheme” prior to the interview, whereas more than 70% had heard of the “Producer responsibility schemes”. However, there seems ample room to further promote “Green@Community”, as less than 40% were aware of this scheme and its supporting infrastructure.

When asked to assess the impact of the overall waste problem in Hong Kong, more than 40% of respondents thought that the impact would be sizable to their own quality of life in 3 to 5 years. On the other hand, more than a quarter believed the impact would be small.

Furthermore, findings reveal that the majority of respondents approved of the general principles of the MSW charging bill, with two-thirds agreeing with the

“polluter pays” principle and nearly 90% agreeing to encourage the public to “reduce waste at source” and “practice clean recycling” in their daily life. Meanwhile, two-thirds thought the proposed charge rate of the bill (i.e., HK\$0.11 per liter) was acceptable, and around two-fifths believed the subsidy of \$10 per person per month to needy people was enough. Moreover, as high as 80% thought the transitional period of 12-18 months was long enough for local citizens to get to know and become accustomed to this new waste management policy.

As regards their preference for measures to tackle the MSW problem in Hong Kong, MSW waste charging topped the list, followed closely by new incinerators while new landfills were least preferred among these three measures. Furthermore, half of the respondents believed that the MSW charging bill, when implemented, would help reduce the overall waste disposal to landfill in Hong Kong.

Lastly, more than two-thirds of the respondents agreed with implementing the MSW charging bill in Hong Kong, compared with one-seventh who had reservations on this policy. Among those who disagreed with its implementation, the main reason was they believed this would add further financial burden to the public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- LegCo should follow the will of the people and enact the MSW charging bill.
- Legco should enact a grace period of 12-18 months to allow adequate time for adoption before full implementation.
- Industry leaders should understand the positive contribution of the “Polluter Pays” principle to society and actively support the legislating and implementation of MSW charging.
- The Government should consider the following measures to support swift implementation of the bill:
 - Reinforce cooperation with waste and recycling industries, as well as consumer goods industries to reduce waste at source.
 - Introducing or strengthening waste reduction and recycling behaviour in school curricula for all ages.
 - Formulate sector-specific waste reduction targets, which are essential for better tracking, guidance and driving of the city’s waste management progress.
- Environmental groups should strengthen collaboration on waste issues to bring citizens, companies, and institutions a clear, unified message on waste reduction at source and recycling.

Failure to pass the MSW charging bill within this LegCo term will be a great setback to Hong Kong’s waste management strategy, making it more difficult for the Government to meet the objectives of this year's Waste Blueprint and increasing the need to rely on aversive measures to resolve urgent issues. Further delay means it will take another 3 to 5 years’ cycle of law-making before this much-needed measure can be tabled again.



About Civic Exchange

Civic Exchange is an independent Hong Kong public-policy think tank established in 2000 with a vision to shape a liveable and sustainable Hong Kong. Its mission is to engage society and influence public policy through in-depth research, dialogue, and the development of practical solutions. With research covering four areas — environmental, economic, social, and governance — Civic Exchange has been ranked among the top 50 environmental think tanks in the world by the Lauder Institute at the University of Pennsylvania since 2011.

About Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute

The Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute Limited (HKPORI) was registered in Hong Kong as a limited company on 19 February 2019 and started began operating to operate full-fledged on 1 July 2019. It is a direct continuation of the Public Opinion Programme at the University of Hong Kong (HKUPOP). Since POP's establishment, first under HKUPOP in June 1991 and now under HKPORI, the organisation has have been providing quality survey services to a wide range of public and private organisations. They are dedicated to collecting and studying public opinion on topics of interest and value to academics, journalists, policy-makers and the general public. To this date, HKPOP has conducted more than 2,000 independent surveys and other kinds of research. "HKPOP" in this publication may refer to HKPOP or HKUPOP as the case may be.

About the Authors

Lawrence Iu is the Climate Change & Partnerships Lead with Civic Exchange.
Joyce Chan is a Senior Research Executive with Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute.

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