

Public being kept in the dark over Tamar site, say activists

Chloe Lai

Three anti-reclamation groups yesterday accused the government of plotting to keep the public and the Legislative Council in the dark over the future of the harbourfront Tamar site in Admiralty.

The Society for Protection of the Harbour, the Action Group on Protection of the Harbour, and Friends of the Harbour said the planning process for the site would be worse than that for the West Kowloon Cultural District development.

They demanded an immediate suspension of preparations for building a new government headquarters at Tamar.

Independent legislator Kwok Ka-ki said: "Tamar planning is going to be a black-box operation."

He was referring to the decision not to consult the public on the design of the government headquarters in order to speed up its construction.

The groups accused the government of cheating the public and the High Court, given that it had promised that commercial properties would not be built on the land currently being reclaimed in Central.

A speech at a dinner for the Australian Business Awards three years ago by then-chief executive Tung Chee-hwa was cited as evidence. Mr Tung said: "There would be sort of a park or promenade for the public to enjoy the harbour from the Central area. There will be no commercial buildings on top of it."

They also cited an extract from a government lawyer's argument in

the High Court in a 2003 case over the Central reclamation. The three groups said the counsel only mentioned building a promenade in Central and not commercial properties.

A spokeswoman for the Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau denied the allegation. She stressed the statutory outline zoning plan for the future of Central, including Tamar, had been adopted in February 2000 and nothing had changed since then.

The Administration Wing, which is in charge of the Tamar project, said tendering for the work had not started. "We haven't issued the prequalification exercise and haven't gone to the Legco Finance Committee for money. We have nothing to suspend."