

# NGOs want gov't to hear them out on harbour

By Jennifer Ho

Three green groups yesterday criticized the Town Planning Board (TPB) for keeping them out of Friday's meeting that would discuss their proposals concerning harbour reclamation.

The Society for Protection of the Harbour (SPH), Save Our Shorelines (SOS) and Clear the Air (CTA) had submitted three proposals, urging that the Central District (Extension) Outline Zoning Plan be changed to save the Victoria Harbour and the marine ecology.

The plan offers about 1.2 million square metres of commercial and office space, a large portion of which would come from the harbour reclamation project in Central, and a multi-lane traffic network. But the groups argue they'd cause more traffic jams and noise and air pollution.

The SPH has suggested reduction of the size of the reclamation and SOS has argued that the current zoned reclamation could be cut by 50-70 per cent if a traffic tunnel is built for the Central Wanchai Bypass. CTA has said Electronic Road Pricing should be implemented immediately, for it would reduce traffic jams and thus lessen the need for new roads.

At a joint press conference of the three NGOs, SPH chairwoman Christine Loh said they were disappointed, for the TPB meeting was neither open nor fair, in accordance with new amendments to the Town Planning Ordinance. SPH won't be allowed to present its proposal at the meeting.

"We know the best about our proposals. No one else can present the proposals as clearly," Loh said.

CTA vice-chairman Annelise Connell said the government's response to its proposal contained factual errors. "Who will point this out to the TPB members if we can't attend the meeting?"

SPH had requested that TPB vice-chairman preside over the meeting, instead of chairperson Rita Chu, who is also the Permanent Secretary for the Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau, Loh said. For that would have avoided a conflict of interests because Chu is the plan proposer.

But the government has refused SPH's request. "The government claimed that it has legal assurance that there'd be no conflict of interests," Loh said. The NGOs have urged the non-official TPB members to take an independent and balanced view while reviewing the proposals.