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ENVIRONMENTAL LAW REPORT

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This issue features a review of Environment Hong Kong 1992, the Environmental Protection Department's annual review of Hong Kong environmental regulation. This is the only comprehensive statement on Hong Kong's environment and what the government is doing (or not doing) to improve it. Between the lines there is an increasing degree of transparency about Hong Kong's pollution problems and the fact that government action has thusfar failed to address many of them effectively. The Review is divided into six major topics which, apart from summarising the year's events in air, noise, waste and water pollution, include chapters on environmental planning and assessment as well as on efforts to promote environmental education and awareness.

The International section has a contribution from our Canadian correspondents on the environmental audit and the lawyer's role in the audit process. The Hong Kong Government hopes to encourage more companies to do regular environmental audits and the Canadian experience is therefore very relevant. We hope also to bring you news of developments from regional correspondents in future issues.

On page eight we have compiled a table of environmental prosecution statistics based on figures for June supplied by EPD. We hope that this will remain a regular feature of the *Report*.

The Editors

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Environment Hong Kong 1992:

A Review of 1991

FOLLOWERS of the fortunes of Hong Kong's environment have for years found essential reading in the Environmental Protection Department's annual reviews. For here is the only comprehensive statement on Hong Kong's environment and what the government is doing (or not doing) to improve it. Between the inevitable pages of self-congratulation one expects to find in the publication of a government department distributed to the public at a giveaway price, there is an increasing degree of transparency about Hong Kong's pollution problems and the fact

that government action has thusfar failed to address many of them effectively.

Environment Hong Kong 1992: A Review of 1991 is no exception. It is a clear and comprehensive review replete with tables, figures and photographs as well as sometimes frank views about what has gone wrong with Hong Kong's environment. Of course, as with all government publications, do not expect to find the whole truth without reading carefully between the lines.

The Review is divided into six major topics which, apart from summarising the year's events in air, noise, waste and water pollution, include chapters on environmental planning and assessment as well as on mental education and awareness.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

is a theme which emerges in chapter two on environmental planning and assessment. First, there is the government's decision in 1991 to make the results of EIA studies available to the public. Whilst this and other developments in environmental planning are not to be ignored, it must not be forgotten that truly progressive EIA procedures should involve the public in the assessment process and not merely present the public with a fait accompli. Public outcries over golf courses and the columbarium this year could have been avoided with closer public consultation in the early planning stages. Notwithstanding consultants recommendations over a decade ago, the Review admits that 'the exact form and scope of EIA legislation' which Hong Kong should have 'has not yet been determined.'

Another aspect of public participation highlighted in the Review is the EPD's handling of complaints. Much space is devoted to digesting complaint statistics but little effort is made to explain why complaints, especially about noise, decreased overall by 27 percent from 1990. Nor is there any attempt to explain why only 2,113 complaints out of a total of 4,856 (43 percent) were 'satisfactorily resolved'. We should certainly expect the public to feel discouraged if so few legitimate complaints can be resolved. Perhaps there is a connection between this and the falling number of complaints. Perhaps the measures to educate the public and heighten environmental awareness discussed in chapter seven are not having sufficient impact.

AIR QUALITY shows 'significant improvements' as a result of new regulations introduced in 1990 on fuel and smoke, according to the introductory chapter. Indeed, 1991 was a busy year for air pollution enforcement with over 8,000 inspections made and 449 prosecutions laid for air pollution offences. However, in chapter three's assessment of air pollution in 1991 the fact is that air quality objectives are not being attained in respect of nitrogen dioxide as well as

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suspended and respirable particulates the levels of which 'remained high in many districts', including Kwun Tong, Sham Shui Po, Central/Western, Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung and Mong Kok. Either the legislation is not strict enough or even more resources must be committed to prosecuting air polluters.

NOISE from percussive piling shows little sign of abating since stricter time restrictions have been placed on piling at construction sites. Yet, only six cases of illegal piling were prosecuted in 1991. Clearly, the government is now considering introducing stricter controls on piling methods. A total of 199 prosecutions for noise offences were laid in 1991, noise from general construction noise, industry and the neighbourhood each constituting

about one third of all cases.

THE WASTE DISPOSAL Ordinance, introduced in 1980, has been found to be inadequate even before it was fully implemented, the Review frankly admits in chapter five. An amendment bill will be introduced in 1993. Perhaps as a result, enforcement of this area of the law in Hong Kong is not fully accounted for here. Well documented, however, is the alarming increase in the incidence of illegal marine dumping. Cases increased from 17 to 41 between 1990 and 1991. (Statistics on page eight of this issue show that this trend has continued in 1992. despite fines for marine dumping being among the highest.)

WATER QUALITY too has regrettably shown a general decline in 1991. It seems extraordinary that with major public outcries about the deterioration in Hong Kong waters that only 35 cases of water pollution were prosecuted in 1991. A major factor in this decline seems to be Hong Kong's sewerage infrastructure which is described as inadequate or non-existent. Ten-year sewerage master plans are now in place but, as reported in the May issue, are being threatened by funding cutbacks. On a brighter note, however, the water quality at bathing beaches has improved with 27 classified as 'good'.

Environment Hong Kong 1992 shows how far the regulatory regime for Hong Kong's environment has come since the first environmental legislation was introduced in 1980. However sophisticated and energetic the bureaucracy, in the final analysis, it is a sad fact that the regulators are often unable to achieve the very environmental objectives they set themselves.

Digest of LEGISLATION

(This digests Legal Supplements to the Gazette Nos. 26/26 June 1992 to 38/18 September 1992.)

LAND USE PLANNING

Antiquities and Monuments (Declaration of Historical Building) (No. 2) Notice 1992 (L.S. No. 2 to GAZETTE No. 26/26 June 1992 p. B766) This Notice declares the building known as the Yi Tai Shu Yuen at Shui Tau Village, Kam Tin, New Territories to be an historical building for the purposes of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance (Cap. 53). Although there are a great many recognised historical buildings in the Kam Tin area, this appears to be the first such declared in Shui Tau Village. See S. Bard, GUIDE TO THE ANTIQUITIES OF HONG KONG Hong Kong: Urban Council, 1988.

NOISE CONTROL

Factories and Industrial Undertakings (Noise at Work)
Regulation (L.S. No. 2 to
GAZETTE No. 29/17 July
1992 p. B919-925)

This regulation is designed to replace the current and more limited provisions of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Regulations (Cap. 59 sub. leg.) and thereby increase the protection given to the hearing of employees who are exposed or are likely to be exposed to hazardous noise levels at work in an industrial undertaking. Note that except as specifically excluded in s. 4(1), an industrial undertaking, as defined in the principal legislation includes, inter alia, construction sites and kitchens.

The Regulation requires employers to take seven protective measures in respect of employ-

exposure to hazardous noise. Employers must (1) engage a competent person to assess noise risk to employees and supply information on how to comply with the technical requirements of the Regulation; (2) identify ear protection zones and ensure that employees do not enter without correct ear protectors; (3) assess noise risk from portable equipment and label such equipment and ensure employees wear ear protectors when operating or assisting in the operation of such equipment; (4) provide employees with suitable approved ear protectors; (5) reduce employees' noise exposure to safe levels; (6) ensure that ear protectors and noise control equipment is properly used and maintained; and (7) provide employees with adequate information, instruction and training on noise risks, steps to minimise risks and effective use of equipment. Employees are required to use protective equipment supplied by the employer and report defects in the same.

Both employers and employees will be liable to fines for failure to fulfil the requirements of the Regulation.

Although broader than its predecessor, the new Regulation is not without its critics. See Hong Kong Briefing for details.

WATER POLLUTION CONTROL

Merchant Shipping (Liability and Compensation for Oil Pollution) (Compulsory Insurance) (Amendment) Regulation 1992 L.S. No. 2 to GA-ZETTE No. 30/24 July 1992 p. B976

This Regulation increases to \$400 the fee payable under the Merchant Shipping (Liability and Compensation for Oil

Pollution) (Compulsory Insurance) Regulations (Cap. 414 sub. leg.) for a certificate, issued in respect of a ship registered in Hong Kong, as to insurance against liability for oil pollution damage.

CASELAW Update

R. v. Ultrafine Circuits Ltd.

In July, a Shatin magistrate fined the defendants, manufacturers of printed circuit boards, \$100,000 for discharging effluent contaminated with eight times the permitted level of copper into a drain flowing into Tolo Harbour. The defendants had four similar convictions.

This is the highest fine for a single offence since the case of cyanide discharges in R. v. Shaw Bros. Studio which resulted in a fine of \$140,000 for the second of two similar convictions. The High Court subsequently halved that fine (see May's Caselaw Update).

It is not known if the defendants have appealed in this case.

Mull Shellfish Ltd. v. Golden Sea Produce Ltd.

(Times Law Report 17 October 1991.)

The Second Division of the Inner House of the Scottish Court of Session has held that a tenant of an area of seabed under a lease for the sole purpose of cultivating mussels has a sufficient proprietary right to sue for nuisance.

The pursuers, Mull Shellfish Ltd., cultivated mussels over an area of seabed leased from the Crown by suspending ropes in the water on which free settle and grow. Between 1984

and 1987 they suffered a loss of mussel production because the defenders used a banned anti-fouling agent to protect their nets in an adjacent area used for farming salmon but which damaged mussel larvae freely floating in the sea.

The court held that the pursuers' right to attract free floating mussel larvae was implicit in the lease. Whilst not amounting to ownership, this right was sufficient interest to bring an action in nuisance for the damage caused by the poisoning of the mussel larvae.

The consequences of this decision for Hong Kong fish and shellfish farmers are obvious although the proof of causation in such nuisance cases will remain problematic. It remains to be seen, however, whether the lack of adequate legislative protection of their industry from poisoning will stimulate fish farmers to bring civil actions to protect their interests. Eds.

Diary

(See DIGEST OF LEGISLATION for details.)

17 June: Yi Tai Shu Yuen at Shui Tau Village Kam Tin is declared an historical building pursuant to Antiquities and Monuments (Declaration of Historical Building) (No. 2) Notice 1992.

27 July: Merchant Shipping (Liability and Compensation for Oil Pollution) (Compulsory Insurance) (Amendment) Regulation 1992 came into operation.

1 August: Smoking (Public Health) (Amendment) Orders increasing the fines for smoking in a no-smoking area to \$5,000 and changing specifications for no-smoking notices

came into operation.

2 September: noise emission labels to be fixed on hand held percussive breakers ('pneumatic drills') under the Noise Control (Hand Held Percussive Breakers) Regulation.

17 November: last date for registration of chemical waste producers under the Waste Disposal (Chemical Waste) (General) Regulation.

HONG KONG Briefing

ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTH

NEW NOISE REGULA-TIONS (see Digest of Legislation) have been criticised by both labour unions and industrialists. Labour spokesmen criticised the regulations for imposing liability on employees for failing to wear devices which protect against noise. Employers complained that making workers wear protective devices against their will would adversely affect productivity. The fact is, however, that 63,000 workers in Hong Kong are exposed to noise of 90dB(A) or above which can damage hearing. (SCMP 15 August 1992)

THE PROPOSED LEVY on chemical imports designed to finance the operating costs of the Tsing Yi Island chemical waste treatment plant has been dropped because of vigorous opposition from the chemical industry. Government must now find another source to fund the plant without discouraging chemical polluters from using the plants facilities. (SCMP 27 August 1992)

ASBESTOS IN HOSPITALS

has been described as a 'timebomb' by the Chairman of the Asbestos Control Association. A programme for the removal of asbestos building materials will have to be initiated when the Air Pollution Control (Amendment) Bill becomes law. (SCMP 10 August 1992)

CHLORINE LEAKS from a water treatment plant in Sha Tin have revived a 1990 study which recommended that bulk chlorine storage be abandoned. Altogether seven treatment plants throughout Hong Kong pose a hazard to the neighbourhood should chlorine leak from bulk storage. (SCMP 9 September 1992)

AIR QUALITY continued its decline in July and August, although tropical storm Mark was blamed for the increase in airborne pollutants in August. Despite restrictions on the burning of fuels containing sulphur, sulphur dioxide levels in some areas, such as Mongkok, rose above health limits. (SCMP 14 August; 15 September 1992)

WATER POLLUTION in Stonecutters Island channel. aggravated by the Western Kowloon reclamation, caused the death of thousands of fish in August and may lead to the destruction of marine life in the channel. This occurred, it is alleged, despite a consultant's advice that reclamation works cutting the channel in two would not adversely affect the environment which contradicted advice from the EPD that reclamation should not proceed until a new sewerage system was in place. (SCMP 23 & 25 August 1992)

BEACH WATER QUALITY has improved over the last four months, according to EPD data, but the spell of good weather seems to be the principal reason. Whilst the water quality of almost one quarter of Hong Kong's beaches declined in the early summer, (SCMP 26 June 1992) the situation later stabilised (SCMP 16 July 1992) and improved throughout the summer (SCMP 7 & 21 August 1992) so that by September 11 beaches had been upgraded by EPD to reflect improvements in water quality. (SCMP 4 September 1992)

PLANNING AND LAND USE

PRIVATE REDEVELOP-MENT PROJECTS were the subject of a United Democrats motion in LegCo intended to 'protect the interests of affected citizens' which succeeded by iust one vote. The motion proposed that the administration set up a working group to comprehensively review proiects and to formulate policies on compensation, redevelopment impact assessment and rehousing with the aim of increasing regulation of private redevelopment. The Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands, however, is clearly opposed to such an increase of control. In his view this would discourage private projects and conflict with the government's role of maintaining freedom in the private sector. (SCMP 2 July 1992) Some controls may, however, be imposed by legislation to make private developers responsible for inspecting and maintaining hillsides. this follows the deaths caused by mudslides earlier this year. (SCMP 30 June 1992)

COMPENSATION UPDATE

The Lands Tribunal awarded a recordbreaking \$131m. to Shun Fung Ironworks for the resumption of land for Junk Bay new town. The award, which

included reclamation costs, was arrived at after a hearing which lasted a mammoth 22 months, involved a massive stack of documents and produced a record judgment of 833 pages. (30 June 1992) The residents of Ma Wan village, scheduled for an approved private redevelopment into a Discovery Bay style resort, have been offered a compensation package they cannot refuse: for each hut occupied on the island they will receive a \$1.5m. townhouse. Some residents own as many as 8 such huts. (SCMP 12 July 1992) 60 tenants affected by Kingsonic Development Ltd's redevelopment at Shamshuipo have been offered \$75,000 per flat before their cases go to the Lands Tribunal. (SCMP 12 August 1992)

Cottage squatter residents of Rennie's Mill, the pro-Taiwan enclave to be vacated next year to make way for a new town development, have asked the government for compensation in the form of public housing flats rather than cash. (SCMP 4 August 1992) Walled City residents still protesting against their compensation offers have been given an extra two months to appeal on the grounds that they may not have understood the procedures. (SCMP 11 August 1992)

Tenants affected by LDC redevelopments can now engage their own surveyors to value their property for the purpose of calculating compensation payments. Where there is a discrepancy between a private valuation and that of the LDC, the higher figure will be used. (SCMP 14 August 1992)

THE WALLED CITY is to be demolished using explosives, a method rarely used in Hong Kong. The demolition contract

has gone out to tender and requires the preservation of the ancient Yamen building at its centre. It is expected that flights leaving and arriving at Kai Tak may have to be disrupted around blasting times. (SCMP 27 June & 31 July 1992)

THE LDC HAS FAILED to negotiate with private developers over a comprehensive redevelopment of an area in Wanchai. This is the first time that the LDC has been forced to abandon redevelopment plans because of lack of interest (SCMP 29 July 1992)

SKYRAIL plans have been rejected by EPD because of concerns over potential noise and vibration from the proposed \$3m. elevated railway. (SCMP 27 July 1992)

MODIFIED PLANS for the columbarium at Pat Heung have been rejected by the government on the grounds of concern over the loss of agricultural land. The developers are angry and intend to appeal as they believe that the government took account of the complaints made by villagers in reaching their decision. (SCMP 28 July 1992)

THE HAPPY VALLEY racecourse project (see July issue) has been delayed until next year as government approval has still not been given. (SCMP 18 August 1992)

COMPULSORY PURCHASE

powers are to be reviewed by the courts. More than 20 landlords affected by a compulsory purchase order (CPO) on land in Central have applied for judicial review of the government's use of the Resumption Ordinance. In order to acquire a CPO the LDC must demonstrate that the owners of the land are unwilling to vacate despite a reasonable offer of compensation. The landlords argue that the offer made was only one-third of market value and so was unreasonable, but overlapping membership of the LDC and the Building and Lands Department prevented the government from making an independent assessment, particularly as they had not taken into account any other views such as those of the District Board. (SCMP 30 August 1992)

SOME MILITARY LAND, particularly sites in the inner city, should be redeveloped for 'economic and social purposes' said the Governor after the Chinese team leader of the JLG rejected claims that China wished to maintain all such sites after 1997. (SCMP 29 & 30 August 1992) Inside the JLG little progress has been made on the disposal of military sites since negotiations on the issue began 7 years ago. (SCMP 27 August 1992) There are plans to move the government dockyard to Stonecutter's Island with a view to the dockyard taking over the new naval base there in 1997, but this has still to be approved by the JLG. (SCMP 28 July & 26 August 1992)

'PADS' UPDATE

FINANCING of the airport and its rail link continues to be deadlocked despite long-awaited high level talks with the British negotiating team being led by a personal emissary of the Prime Minister. (SCMP 3, 4, 5 & 7 July 1992) As a reaction to the addition of \$12.5 billion callable equity in the financing package to cover the

possibility of forecasts not being met, the Chinese have called for an increased investment by the Hong Kong government, from reserves if necessary, so as to avoid overburdening the future SAR. (SCMP 1 September 1992)

However, the talks ended in deadlock because of 'political issues'(principally, it is rumoured, the Chinese opposition to the United Democrats (SCMP 23 August 1992)) introduced by the Chinese rather than over detailed discussion of financial arrangements. (SCMP 8 July 1992) Sino-British JLG Airport Committee talks held on July 16th failed to make progress (SCMP 17 July 1992) with the Chinese team proposing a piecemeal agreement on the airport platform alone which failed to satisfy Britain or potential investors. (SCMP 18 & 19 July 1992)

RE-TENDERING for the airport reclamation contract proved to be a success by reducing costs by more than 25% so as to keep that contract within its \$10m. budget. (SCMP 30 June 1992) The tender was won by a consortium led by Nishimatsu Construction but the government were only able to issue a letter of intent because of the deadlock over financing. (SCMP 1 & 2 August 1992)

Not so positive was the cost estimate of \$7.3 billion (1997 prices) on the Western Harbour Crossing prepared by a consortium headed by CITIC, \$800m. higher than the latest government estimate. (SCMP 3 July 1992) CITIC and Wharf jointly made the only bid for the tunnel contract and have projected a toll of \$30 for private cars in 1997. (SCMP 5 July 1992)

THE LATEST DESIGN PLANS for the airport were revealed in July and included a substantial increase in commercial space inside the terminal, providing more opportunity to generate revenue. (SCMP 2 July 1992) The airport has been designed to allow outsiders to look in and to create a feeling of space with a huge atrium as a focal point. (SCMP 5 July 1992) The PAA has requested that the building be exempted from the Buildings Ordinance which sets safety standards in order to avoid delays and in view of its unusual design. (SCMP 30 July 1992)

HONGKONG RESORTS have submitted a planning brief to the government to build a tunnel to link Discovery Bay with the new airport. (SCMP 8 July 1992)

A NEW LAYOUT DESIGN for the airport, projecting savings of \$150m. may have undesirable environmental and safety implications. (SCMP 18 August 1992)

LANTAU ISLAND land sold at auction for nearly 3 times its opening price. (SCMP 20 August 1992)

HK FIRMS are to be given preference when awarding contracts for engineering infrastructure works. (SCMP 8 August 1992)

NEW PUBLICATIONS

EPD, Environment Hong Kong 1992: A Review of 1991 (Aug. 1992) (Hong Kong: Government Printer 165pp.) HK\$22. See this issue's Feature.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL

Canada
Environmental Audits

'Environmental audits', like financial audits, are becoming a regular part of Canadian corporate life. In Hong Kong the idea has only recently been introduced with the publication in November 1991 of the Environmental Audit Manual.

The Hong Kong Government is hoping for a noticeable expansion of environmental audit programmes in a substantial number of companies. This report from our Smith Lyons correspondent explains what an environmental audit is and the role played by the legal advisor. Eds.

Environmental audits, like financial audits, can take different forms depending on their objectives. Most commonly environmental audits are undertaken as either part of a company's comprehensive environmental compliance programme, performed on a regular basis and followed up with remedial measures where necessary, or as a central component of due diligence prior to the acquisition of an interest in a business or property.

Environmental audits can assist a company identify the environmental impact of a its operations, in assessing the effectiveness of existing environmental management, in determining compliance with existing law and as a protection for employees, directors and officers from the ever-widening net of legal liability. Regular audits can also assist in protecting a company's reputation and maintaining its status as a good corporate citizen.

It is important that the environmental audit be designed with the client's objectives in mind. For example, is there a concern about an existing or future contamination? Is the client operating outdated equipment causing problematic effluent discharges? Or has the client already developed an environmental policy with the audit performing as an annual checkup?

The goal of any environmental audit is to facilitate management control by providing vital information. This means getting to the root of the problem after identifying its symptoms to prevent continuation or recurrence. Environmental audits should make recommendations for improvement and assist management in setting priorities.

The role of the lawyer in an environmental audit may vary. If the audit is to assess compliance and the legal risks and liabilities of the company arising from its current operations, the audit may be structured so that the environmental consultant reports directly to the lawyer and the lawyer provides the client with advice with reference to the results of the consultant's analysis.

(It is frequently argued that environmental audits are privileged documents under such circumstances, that is, cannot be used before a court against the interests of the client for whose benefit the document was created. However, privilege will depend on the usual principles, that is, whether the document was created in order to obtain legal advice or in anticipation of litigation.)

A lawyer can also assist by acting as an intermediary between a client and an environmental consultant to assist in the design of the audit and advising on the future action which should be undertaken by the client and, where necessary, in negotiating a remedial strategy with the relevant government authorities.

As we saw in the last issue, directors and officers of corporations have stringent responsibilities under the Environmental Protection Act to ensure that the corporation does not contravene the Act. By conducting an environmental audit and acting upon its results, an officer or director can establish due diligence in discharging statutory obligations and thus limit or avoid personal liability. In order to use an audit to constitute a defence to an environmental prosecution, the company must be prepared to release the findings of the audit and to document the steps subsequently taken.

Other benefits may flow from a comprehensive environmental audit programme. The company will be better able to anticipate environmental problems. Its relationships with ministry and municipal authorities as well as its public image may be enhanced. A pro-active approach to environmental concerns can assist in strategic planning and budgeting for future capital expenditure.

(In the November issue we will consider the question of confidentiality and environmental audits. Eds.)

Table of Environmental Convictions: June 1992

	Number	First Offence	Second Offence	Third Offence	Maximum Fine
Air	19	15	3	1	\$ 6,000
Dumping at Sea	13	7	-	6 (5th & above)	\$50,000
Noise	13	10	1	2	\$20,000
Waste	Nil				
Water	5	4	1	-	\$20,000
Ozone	1	1	-	-	\$10,000
Total	51	37	5	9	

Source: EPD, Anti-Pollution Prosecution Figures (21 July 1992).

ABBREVIATIONS

APCO	Air Pollution Control Ordi-		
	nance		
CFCs	Chlorofluorocarbons		
EC	European Community		
EPCOM	Environmental Pollution		
	Advisory Committee		
EPD	Environmental Protection		
	Department		
EXCO	Executive Council		
FEER	Far Eastern Economic		
	Review		
JLG	Joint Liaison Group		
LDC	Land Development Corpo-		
	ration		
LEGCO	Legislative Council		
LS	Legal Supplement		
NCO	Noise Control Ordinance		
NT	New Territories		
PAA	Provisional Airport		
	Authority		
PADS	Port and Airport Develop-		
	ment Strategy		
SCMP	South China Morning Post		
SMP	Sunday Morning Post		
WDO	Waste Disposal Ordinance		
WPCO	Water Pollution Control		
	Ordinance		

This report does not constitute advice of a legal nature. Whilst all effort has been made to ensure completeness and accuracy at the time of publication, no responsibility is accepted for errors or omissions. Further information, inquiries and advice in respect of this report should be directed to:

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