

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

主席的話



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Chairman 主席

COVID-19 has gripped the world in 2020-21, causing not only **economic hardships** to millions but also the loss of loved ones for many. At the time of writing, it is encouraging to see the virus largely brought under control in Hong Kong and vaccination numbers increasing by the day, albeit at a slower than ideal pace. However, there is still **a high degree of uncertainty** as to whether there could be yet another wave on the horizon, given the highly contagious nature of the disease and its potential for rapid mutations.

在過去一年，2019 冠狀病毒病席捲全球，不僅導致世界各地的**經濟大受打擊**，亦令許多人失去至親。撰文之際，尤幸本港的疫情大致受控，而市民接種疫苗的情況即使未及理想中的速度，接種人數已與日俱增，值得鼓舞。儘管如此，病毒的傳染性高，並具有快速突變的潛在危機，對於會否引發新一波疫情，現時仍是**未知之數**。





The pandemic has usurped our conventional ways of thinking, working, and inevitably of making purchases. Consumer behaviour and marketplace trends are very different today from just a few years back. The hyperconnectivity of global e-commerce has empowered consumers like never before, enabling them to locate objects of desire at the click of a button instead of waiting for a bricks-and-mortar outlet to open. The fact that the number of online traders has exploded, as anyone with a mobile phone can set up shop in minutes, has further bolstered the options available to consumers online. At the same time, consumption priorities have seen a major upheaval. Regular purchases have shifted in the past year from pleasure-focused items such as travel and clothing to health-related goods, foodstuffs and daily necessities. The pandemic has thrown consumers into crisis mode where health and well-being take priority.

While digital communication has empowered consumers to search for information at lightning speed, the overload of information can also be stressful to them as it is no longer an easy feat to differentiate between accurate and fake news. Taking the shortage of toilet rolls and rice during Lunar New Year last year as an example, false information, once viral, would make consumers more prone to emotional purchasing, be it impulse buying online or stockpiling daily necessities at supermarkets.

All of these changes, coupled with the pandemic, have placed the Consumer Council in a very challenging environment during the year under review. In the early days of the outbreak, our office was swamped with complaints, ranging from delay or failure to deliver health-protective goods to outright fraud, in which some online traders set up social media accounts to sell a variety of items with no intention or ability to fulfil them.

Meanwhile as the pandemic persisted, the “stay-at-home economy” began propelling the popularity of online shopping. During the past year, 41% of the overall complaints received by the Council related to “Internet Shopping”, almost double the figures of the previous year. The Council was equally concerned about the prices as well as the quality and safety of pandemic-related goods that flooded the market. We acted swiftly by carrying out tests and releasing prompt results on a broad range of disinfecting products throughout the year.

Prices of masks and other anti-epidemic products including hand wipes shot up multiple times compared with pre-pandemic days, and consumers were further aggravated by supply shortages. Meanwhile, increased time spent at home drove up demand for supermarket foodstuffs such as canned food and daily necessities, resulting in higher prices. This was further exacerbated by constraints on air cargo and shipping, leading to sharply increased prices for imported foods. Most severely affected were those families and individuals who had either lost their jobs or had their salaries frozen owing to the pandemic.

The price information in our supermarket Online Price Watch should hopefully provide consumers with a useful tool to beat this wave of pandemic-linked inflation. Our 2020 annual supermarket survey revealed that despite the rapidly deteriorating economy, prices for certain foodstuffs such as canned food rose by a staggering 20% from a year ago. As the city's unemployment rate rose to record levels, the Council called on supermarket groups to shoulder more social responsibilities and help grassroots consumers tide over the difficult times by trying to avoid increasing the prices of staple foods and daily necessities. The Council also reminded consumers to compare product prices carefully for a smart consumption choice.

是次疫情顛覆了大眾習以為常的思維及工作方式，也無可避免地改變了消費者的購物模式。加上現今世代的消費行為和市場趨勢，與幾年前相比，已截然不同；全球電子商貿的互聯互通，讓消費者體驗到前所未有的便利，現時只要簡單點擊一個按鈕便可以找到心儀貨品，毋須再等待實體店開門營業。事實上，只要「一機在手」，人人也可以瞬間開店；而急增的網上商店數量，給予消費者更多購物選擇。過去一年，消費的優次考慮亦出現劇變，以往恆常選購的貨品多以消閒享樂為主，例如旅行用品及衣服等，疫後卻變為保健品、食品 and 日用品，可見疫情增加了消費者的危機意識，轉而以健康為重。

數碼傳播雖然能夠讓消費者極速搜索資訊，但另一方面，泛濫的資訊卻又令消費者難分真假，更會因而引起焦慮。以去年農曆新年期間，廁紙及大米供應緊張為例，當時謠言四起，引發了消費者恐慌性搶購，衝動地在網上或到超市囤積日用品。

回顧本年度，這林林總總的轉變，加上疫情本身的影響，為消費者委員會的工作帶來極大挑戰。在疫情爆發初期，本會接獲大量投訴，包括衛生防護用品的延誤或未能如期交付，甚至有網上商戶存心欺騙，在社交媒體開設帳戶出售多種貨品，卻無意或無能力交付商品。

隨着疫情持續，「宅經濟」進一步促使網上銷售盛行。過去一年，本會接獲有關網購的投訴佔整體投訴的 41%，差不多是一年前的 2 倍。同時，市場上湧現大量抗疫相關用品，本會極為關注這些商品的價格、質量及安全，因而迅速行動，於年內持續公布有關不同防疫用品的測試報告。

口罩和其他防疫用品，例如濕紙巾等，價格較疫情前飆升數倍；加上供應短缺，對消費者帶來沉重的壓力。與此同時，由於居家抗疫的時間日長，消費者對超市的糧油雜貨，例如罐頭食品 and 日用品的需求增加，引致價格上升；另一方面，空運和航運在疫情下的限制，亦加劇進口食品的價格升幅，為因疫情而失業或被凍薪的家庭及人士帶來雙重打擊。

本會期望「網上價格一覽通」能為消費者提供有用的價格資訊，共同抵禦因疫情帶來的通貨膨脹。2020 年度超市價格調查顯示，儘管經濟下行，但部分食品如罐頭的價格，比前年升近兩成。鑑於本地失業率屢創新高，本會呼籲超市集團肩負起更大的社會責任，與基層市民共度時艱，避免調高糧油食品等日常必需品的價格；同時，本會亦提醒消費者應貨比三家，精明格價。



On a positive note, consumers' awareness of the importance of personal hygiene has heightened significantly. The city's lifestyle has also changed dramatically, from residents eating out a few times a week to mostly ordering takeaways or preparing meals at home, typically with a healthier flair. The Council's tests on table salt were hence timely, and many were surprised by the disturbing results: microplastics were found in some 20% of edible salt products in the market as a result of human disposal of plastic waste which ended up in the sea.

While the pandemic has raised our health-consciousness to unprecedented levels, there remains much less sense of urgency and concern in the community on the "routine" damage we are causing the environment. The COVID-19 health crisis might indeed turn out to be an environmental disaster, as people's stay-at-home lifestyle has dramatically increased the use and dumping of plastic containers of takeaway food and drinks. A responsible consumer is one who consumes rationally and not wastefully, showing care and concern for the environment as well as the needs of our future generations; while an environmentally conscious trader is one who is able to meet the needs of the consuming public with minimal impact on the environment.

As I write, our second *Sustainable Consumption Study Report* has just been published. It showed how consumers' sustainable consumption behaviour and awareness have changed since the previous study released 5 years ago, and also showcased our ongoing efforts to promote sustainable consumer behaviour. As a long-term strategic direction, the Council has for years advocated for environmentally responsible consumption behaviour, although driving behavioural change is never easy. Our study revealed that consumers' recycling behaviour needed improvement. This should be addressed by providing consumers with regular information and statistics on recyclables, so as to increase public confidence in the recycling management system. It would also take the tripartite efforts of the Government, business and consumers to make any meaningful changes to our environment. The organisers of the World Consumer Rights Day have picked a most relevant theme this year: "*Tackling Plastic Pollution*".

The Council has always acted swiftly to respond to changes in the market landscape. COVID-19 has necessitated an even more responsive and flexible approach to these challenges. The 4 waves of COVID-19 in Hong Kong in 2020-21 forced many, including staff of the Council, to work from home on a roster basis for almost 4 months in total during the year, while ensuring minimal impact on the Council's service to the community. Fortunately, some of our work in the past has proved its value and relevance during the pandemic. For instance, the Council has in the past few years called upon the authorities to tighten regulation on money lenders to ensure they market themselves and lend responsibly and adopt measures to protect consumers from malpractices. The drastic economic downturn as a result of the pandemic has put many families in financial stress, prompting their thought of seeking relief from money lenders. This makes it more urgent than ever for the Government to act on the Council's recommendations contained in our *Money Lending — Reforming Law and Trade Practices for Consumer Protection* study report issued in 2019, a few months before we were hit by COVID-19.

Despite the extra efforts spent on dealing with pandemic-related issues in the past year, it was largely business as usual for the Council in other respects. We continued to work on new initiatives such as the launch of

樂觀地看，不難發現疫情令消費者的個人衛生意識顯著提高。市民的生活模式亦明顯改變，由以往每周數次外出用膳，改為多以外賣或在家煮食，養成較健康的飲食習慣。因此，本會發布的食鹽測試報告正合時宜，而測試結果令人意外和擔憂：逾 2 成的食鹽樣本檢出多種微塑膠，由人類所棄置的塑膠廢料，最終流入海洋所致。

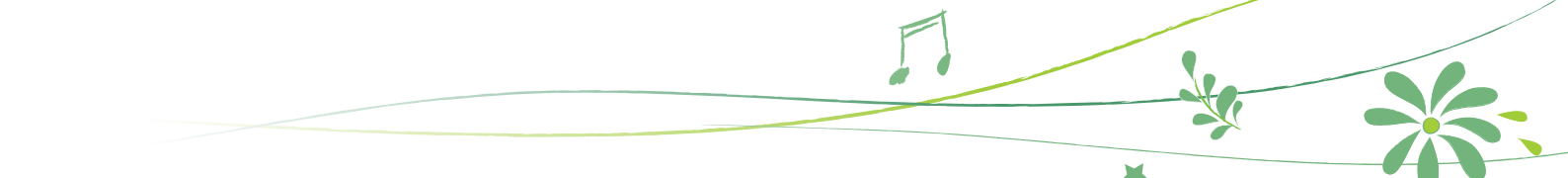
由於疫情的關係，大眾對健康的關注達至前所未有的高度，然而卻低估及忽視了「日常」行為對環境造成的破壞；居家抗疫的生活模式，大幅增加了外賣食品及飲品塑料容器的使用及棄置，致使 2019 冠狀病毒疫情最終或會演變成一場環境災難。作為一個負責任的消費者，應該理性消費而不浪費，既愛護及關注環境，亦顧及下一代的需要；另一方面，商戶亦需具備環保意識，在滿足消費者需求的同時，亦應盡力減低對環境造成的影響。

執筆之時，本會剛發表第二份可持續消費的研究報告，追蹤消費者對於可持續消費的態度和行為與 5 年前是否有所轉變，亦展現了本會持續促進可持續消費的努力。儘管推動消費行為改變絕非易事，但多年來，本會一直以倡導對環境負責的消費行為作為我們的長期策略方向。研究顯示，消費者的回收行為要加把勁。要提升公眾對回收管理系統的信心，定期向消費者發布有關回收的資訊和統計數據尤為重要。綜觀研究結果，政府、企業和消費者必須三方協作，才可為我們的環境帶來實質的保護。無獨有偶今年國際消費者權益日的主辦組織亦以「應對塑膠污染」為主題。

面對市場環境的變化，本會向來均迅速應變；疫情下，更需要採取積極及靈活的方式應對隨之而來的挑戰。2020 年內的 4 波疫情，迫使本會員工，跟其他在職人士一樣，輪流在家工作幾近 4 個月，以維持本會服務，確保對市民大眾的影響減至最低。幸而，本會過往一些工作，於疫情下正好發揮其價值及適切性，例如於 2019 年疫情肆虐前數個月，發布《保障消費權益 — 改革放債法規和營商手法》研究報告，倡議有關當局加強對放債人的監管，推廣負責任借貸，並透過切實可行的措施，遏止不良營銷手法，以保障消費者；隨後疫情導致經濟急劇下滑，許多家庭因而陷入財務困難，要向放債人求助，鑑於當下情況，政府更見急切性接納報告中提出的相關建議。

過去一年，即使需更費力應對疫情帶來的難題，但本會在其他方面工作並沒有因而停頓。我們繼續致力推行新的計劃，例如推出全新升級優化版





a new Oil Price Watch, an improved tool to provide the motoring public with information on auto-fuel prices. In April 2020, oil prices made history as this traditionally valuable commodity fell into negative territory, with demand having all but dried up as lockdowns across the world kept people indoors. While global investors pondered the cause and effect of the news, consumers were naturally looking forward to substantial savings when they filled up the tanks of their motor cars, but the reality was auto-fuel prices in Hong Kong remained high during the year. To help motoring consumers, the Council swiftly conducted its *Auto-fuel Price Monitoring Analysis 2020* study and released the report in May 2020, consolidating 7 years' data and showing a consistent tendency of pump prices "more going up, less coming down". The analysis further highlighted issues such as confusing discounts and promotions, and general low transparency in the local auto-fuel market.

Information is power, and the Council's fundamental belief is that consumers are much more empowered if the marketplace is transparent and there is timely and relevant information readily available to help them make informed choices. Traders, on the other hand, must uphold and enhance not just their quality of service and products but the amount of accessible information about them. Looking ahead, the Council will continue to adopt a pre-emptive mode in its advocacy work to identify any inadequacies and shortcomings in consumer protection legislation, or potential traps that consumers may fall into. It will also monitor and follow up closely with various stakeholders and the Government to put related policies into action.

The theme of our annual report this year is ***Standing with Consumers: Weathering the Pandemic in Health and Unity***. The Council will fight as hard as everyone in Hong Kong to overcome the pandemic and we are hopeful that life will be very different a year from today, when we have been able to return to our normal routines. Hong Kong and indeed our Council have weathered many storms in the past, yet we never lost sight of our role as a statutory body, standing at the forefront to safeguard and promote consumer rights and interests.

This year marks the 45th anniversary of CHOICE Magazine. Our mission and commitment have never changed but have rather been fortified as we stay abreast of the times. We are as determined as ever to safeguard consumer interests by providing timely, reliable information to help consumers make informed choices. The Council will also strive to advocate sustainable and responsible consumption culture for our society.

In closing, I would like to express my indebtedness to our Council Members for their contribution and advice during a most difficult year for the Council. My gratitude also goes to the Chief Executive and her dedicated team of staff for their agility, diligence and dedication to serve.



Mr Paul LAM Ting-kwok, SBS, SC, JP
Chairman

「油價資訊通」格價工具，為駕駛人士提供油價資訊。2020年4月，燃油作為傳統高價商品，其價格曾一度跌至負數，創下歷史新低。疫情期間，世界各地封城鎖國，大眾都被逼待於室內，對燃油的需求自然銳減。當全球投資者正思考當中的因果關係時，另一邊廂的消費者則自然期望可節省入油開支，惟現實反映本港車用燃油價格年內仍然高踞不下。為幫助駕駛人士，本會迅速進行研究，並於2020年5月發布《2020年車用燃油價格監察分析》，整合過去7年所蒐集的數據，指出汽油牌價長期存在「加多減少」的趨勢。報告亦顯示各種複雜的折扣優惠和推廣，以及市場普遍存在透明度低等問題。

資訊就是力量，本會深信要增強消費者的自我保護能力，必須有高度透明的市場，並具備及時和有用的資訊，以助消費者作出明智的選擇；另一方面，商戶除了必須堅守及提升其服務及產品質量外，還須維持和加強資訊透明度。展望未來，本會將繼續以防患未然為目標，透過檢視保障消費者法例的不足及缺陷，或辨識潛在的消費陷阱，從而作出相關倡議；本會亦會密切監察不同持份者和政府，跟進相關政策的實施。

本年度的年報主題為「疫風同行守健康 陽光消費護權益」。本會將與每位香港人一起努力，攜手應對疫情，並寄望一年後的生活與今天迥然不同，一切回復正常。無論香港過去歷經多少風雨，本會從不忘記作為法定機構的角色，並將一如既往，守護在最前線，為促進消費者權益而努力。

今年是《選擇》月刊的45周年，本會的使命和決心始終如一，更會與時並進。本會將堅定不移向消費者發放及時、可靠的資訊，幫助他們作出知情選擇，保障其消費權益，並同時致力提倡可持續及負責任的消費文化。

最後，本人感謝各位消委會委員在這困難的一年作出的貢獻和提出的各項建議，同時亦感謝總幹事和她的團隊，快速應變、努力不懈及竭盡所能的服務。



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