1. **Mission to provide statistical data**

1.1 The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) is committed to providing adequate, relevant, reliable and timely statistics to facilitate research, discussion, planning and decision making within the government and in the community. C&SD undertakes to ensure that statistics are compiled and disseminated in accordance with scientific principles, professional ethics and international standards and in a user-friendly manner.

1.2 Recognising that official statistics are public goods which can be perceived as being in the public domain, C&SD strives to promote the wider use of statistics and ensures openness and transparency in disseminating statistical data.

2. **Basic principles and data dissemination standard**


2.2 In respect of statistics obtained through surveys, only aggregate statistical data are published. Procedures are in place to ensure that information relating to any particular individual person, household or undertaking will be kept strictly confidential and will not be divulged to external parties.

2.3 In respect of dissemination of economic and financial statistics, the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which was formally established in 1996, serves as a practical guide. In April 1997, IMF accepted Hong Kong’s subscription to SDDS. Having subscribed to SDDS, C&SD has undertaken to follow international standards regarding the coverage, periodicity, timeliness, integrity and quality of disseminated data and access by the public in respect of economic and financial data. Relevant information about the
compilation method and dissemination practices of Hong Kong’s economic and financial statistics is posted on the IMF’s Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board on the Internet (dsbb.imf.org), making them more widely known to people around the world.

3. **Timeliness in disseminating statistical data**

3.1 C&SD is committed to releasing statistical data as early as possible, as the usefulness of statistics is related to the timeliness with which the statistics are made available to users.

3.2 In drawing up schedules for releasing statistics, C&SD carefully strikes a balance amongst various factors:

(a) the need of users for obtaining timely statistics;
(b) the quality of statistics; and
(c) the practicality of raw data suppliers, mainly survey respondents, in providing the required data and that of survey workers or statistics compilers in completing their tasks within a specific time frame.

Related to these factors is the need to control costs.

3.3 Where appropriate, the practice of releasing provisional statistics is adopted for certain statistical series. With the provision of clear information about the revision practice and time schedule, users may apply the provisional statistics or the final figures to suit their needs at different times.

3.4 Continuous efforts are made to shorten the time lag in releasing statistics. Since 2000, most monthly statistics are released within one month and all quarterly statistics within three months after the reference period. For instance, labour force statistics and Consumer Price Index are released around 3 weeks, and merchandise trade statistics about 4 weeks after the reference month. The quarterly GDP estimates are released around 1.5 months after the reference quarter.

4. **Quality of statistics**
4.1 C&SD follows closely the widely accepted definitions, concepts and methods on statistical matters and classification systems promulgated by international organisations such as the United Nations, International Labour Organization and International Monetary Fund in compiling and disseminating statistics. The adoption of internationally accepted standards helps ensure a definite level of quality in the statistics compiled and comparability with statistics of other economies.

4.2 Transparency of statistical methods and practices is one of the key factors in creating public confidence in the quality of statistics released by C&SD. Descriptions or explanations about coverage, definitions, methodology and sources of data are readily available to the public in publications or reports. Notice for changes in methodology would be given. Information about revisions of official statistics is also provided to the public.

4.3 C&SD also devotes efforts to promoting statistical literacy in the community so that the public will be in a better position to understand the statistics available, judge their quality and make proper use of them.

5. **Schedule for releasing statistics and equal access to statistics**

5.1 For statistics of common interest, C&SD issues press releases to the media. The schedule for issuing press releases on regular series of statistics for each calendar year is announced by C&SD in September of the preceding year. The schedule, covering around 120 press releases per year, is distributed to the media and also made known to the general public on the website of the department and in the *Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics* published by the department. The precise date of issue for each press release on frequently released statistics, which are mainly monthly and quarterly series, is clearly specified in the schedule and is strictly adhered to by the department in practice. In the past, except for such circumstances as very adverse weather conditions leading to temporary closure of business, all releases were made exactly on the scheduled dates.

5.2 The schedule for issuing regular releases of statistical data by C&SD is available on the C&SD Website (www.censtatd.gov.hk).
5.3 As a rule, a press release for releasing regular statistical information is issued to the media through the Information Services Department at 4:30 p.m. Hong Kong time (i.e. GMT 08:30) on the pre-announced scheduled date. Shortly after their release to the media, press releases are posted on the C&SD Website, making up-to-date statistics readily accessible to the local public and the international community.

5.4 Statistics are treated with strict confidence before 4:30 p.m. of the scheduled release date. Access to embargoed statistics slightly in advance of the release date is confined to a very limited number of people and is based on genuine needs. They are mainly high-ranking officials in the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region who have to prepare commentaries on the released statistics. The extent of advance accessibility is limited to a reasonably short period, i.e. normally three to four working days before the release date.

5.5 The primary purpose of allowing designated parties to have advance access to statistics is to enable them to prepare their commentaries on the economic or social conditions as may be reflected by the statistics. In line with C&SD’s policy of maintaining neutrality and objectivity in releasing statistics, the commentaries provided by other government officials are clearly distinguishable from the statistical descriptions released by C&SD.

6. Means of data dissemination and charging

6.1 To meet the divergent needs of data users, official statistics compiled by C&SD are disseminated through the following means:

(a) Issuing of press releases which contain statistics of common interest to the general public;

(b) Posting of statistics of common interest on the C&SD Website (www.censtatd.gov.hk). The C&SD Website also serves as a portal for official statistics compiled by other government departments/bureaux in Hong Kong;
(c) Release of statistical publications, providing statistical data and methodologies in greater detail. They include thematic reports on different aspects of social and economic situation of Hong Kong and general digests containing statistics straddling different subject areas, some of which are contributed by other government departments/bureaux and organisations;

(d) Production of statistical tables which contain more detailed statistics than publications, available both in the form of computer printouts for manual retrieval and softcopies for free download from the C&SD Website;

(e) Production of CD-ROM products which disseminate massive data;

(f) Provision of data enquiry services, including customised data tabulation service, for users requiring specific data; and

(g) Collaboration with data agencies and information providers in the private sector in incorporating official statistics about Hong Kong in their value-added information products and applications (including GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping, economic and financial data products, etc), thus creating value-added benefits to data users.

6.2 Chinese and English are both official languages in Hong Kong and bilingualism is adopted in all forms of data dissemination such as statistical reports and the C&SD Website. While the responsibility of preparing reports on specific areas of statistics rests with the relevant subject officers in C&SD, a branch in the General Statistics Division of the department undertakes co-ordinating role in such matters as standardisation of formats and design, monitoring the overall publication plan of the department and liaising with external parties such as the Government Logistics Department and Information Services Department. The branch is also responsible for compiling some general statistical publications covering a wide range of statistics on different economic and social aspects of Hong Kong, including the *Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics* and the *Hong Kong Annual Digest of Statistics*.

6.3 Statistics provided to the public in press releases and on the C&SD Website
comprise mainly statistics of common interest at broad levels of analysis. More detailed statistics are usually included in statistical publications and CD-ROM products. Time series of statistics are presented wherever appropriate to facilitate analysis by users. Seasonally adjusted statistics are also presented as far as practicable in addition to the original series.

6.4 Users are welcome to consult C&SD in case the statistics they need are not accessible from the products or website of C&SD. Some of them may be already available and be provided readily upon request although they are not published due to limitations in the size of the publication concerned and their limited market demand. Photocopies or copies in electronic form of such statistics can be provided at a charge. Occasional requests are received for statistics not readily available from standard tabulations. These are also entertained at a charge subject to the level of analysis permissible having regard to considerations of statistical precision and data confidentiality.

6.5 The determination of prices of publications in print version and charges of providing photocopies follows the general principle of cost-recovery of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The costs mainly refer to the costs of printing and photocopying but do not cover the cost for compiling the statistics (e.g. the cost of conducting surveys).

6.6 There are circumstances where data may be provided free-of-charge to users for the purpose of promoting statistical literacy generally and/or, in some cases, better understanding of government policies. Such circumstances would normally be where the data volume requested is small; additional efforts and resources involved are minimal; the administrative cost for collecting charges exceeds the amount which may otherwise be collected; and the requesting party is not habitually using such service. In providing such goodwill service, opportunity is also taken to introduce C&SD’s full list of statistical products and services and to advise the requesting party to subscribe for the relevant publications or services in case the need for the statistics is regular.

6.7 Exchange of publications with other official statistical agencies is arranged
to enhance understanding of international practices and sharing of experience in statistical matters.

7. **Developments in electronic delivery services**

7.1 To meet the increasing expectation of statistics users, the contents and functionalities of the C&SD Website have been continuously enhanced over the years.

7.2 As a major category of outputs, all publications of C&SD are made available through the Internet. Capitalising on the low marginal cost for data dissemination via the Internet, we have implemented a free downloading policy as from mid-2006 to enable statistical data users to acquire the download versions of publications and statistical tables free of charge online. With the implementation of the free downloading policy, access to statistics has become much more convenient and application of statistics in the community has also been greatly enhanced.

7.3 The Internet poses new opportunities for meeting user needs in more innovative ways. Among other developments, interactive and customised content delivery has been very popular in the Internet community. In February 2008, we introduced in the C&SD Website the “Statistics on Map” service, which is an online map-based dashboard presenting key characteristics of Hong Kong’s population, households and business establishments in different geographical areas. The “Interactive Data Dissemination System” launched in August 2008 is another free Internet statistical service which aims at serving both the general public and the more sophisticated data users. Through this service, users can easily build their own statistical tables and charts using the rich dataset obtained from the 2006 Population By-census.

7.4 Traditionally, the public are faced with a number of access barriers to official statistics, particularly when the dataset is too extensive for presenting in simple summary reports. These barriers include, for example, unawareness of the existence of the statistics, need for physical presence to the office premises in which the data are located, inconvenience of transcribing and transforming the data into the format compatible for further own use, and also the possible monetary cost incurred.
The introduction of messaging services including RSS (Really Simple Syndication) information feed as well as E-mail Notification Service through the C&SD Website enables the department to take a proactive approach in informing promptly its users on the release of updated statistics. Indeed, the flexibility of interactive e-statistical services in producing customised outputs freely over the Internet renders it possible to overcome the barriers and meet the diverse needs of different users at the same time.

7.5 Subsequent to the launch of the free downloading policy and the resultant drop of sale of statistical publications, the print versions of selected publications are no longer produced. To address the digital divide concerns, a print-on-demand service has been introduced whereby computer printouts of statistical publications are available on a cost recovery basis.

8. Way forward

8.1 Continuous effort will be made to explore the feasibility of expanding the channels of data dissemination and enhancing the relevant services with the adoption of new technologies, with a view to further promoting the use of official statistics in the community.