

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S MESSAGE

總幹事的話

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The Consumer Council navigated through a crucial yet challenging time during the review period and produced a few groundbreaking advances amid the consumer paradigm shift made possible by new technology. We adapted and responded to the changing needs at different stages of the pandemic period, preparing ourselves in accordance with the preceding three-year strategy plan to meet more challenges in the new normal and impending economic recovery. As the Council is about to cross its half-century mark, we will work to expand the new horizons for protecting and empowering consumers in Hong Kong.

For the Council, it was a year of déjà vu. The fifth wave of the pandemic, which was severe and had spread quickly, brought to light a series of problems, including the scarcity of rapid antigen test (RAT) kits, and delays in the delivery of online purchases and food orders. After the pandemic had passed and the city had reopened, traffic-related problems reappeared. The Council occasionally had to reprioritise its work based on the scenario at hand, but it never stopped promoting consumer education with the use of technology, cultivating media relationships, and providing legal support through the Consumer Legal Action Fund.

剛過去的一年對消費者委員會來說，既是挑戰滿盈又碩果豐盛，在消費模式被新科技徹底改變的大環境下，我們的工作取得突破性進展，面對不同階段的疫情帶來的各種不同需要，本會均迅速回應，並在三年工作策略計劃的框架下整裝待發，以迎接「新常態」及逐漸復甦的經濟所帶來的各種挑戰。本會將走過半個世紀，在未來會繼續努力開拓新領域，教育及增強本港消費者的自我保護能力。

去年的各種經歷，感覺似曾相識。嚴峻的第五波疫情突然來襲，衍生出一連串問題，例如快速抗原測試包供應短缺、網上購物及餐飲外賣延誤送貨等。其後當疫情消退，逐步通關後，又與各種交通運輸相關問題再次浮現。整整一年間，本會需不時按實際情況，重新調整工作的優先次序。儘管如此，仍無阻我們運用科技進行消費者教育工作、加強與傳媒之間的關係，以及透過消費者訴訟基金為有需要的消費者提供法律支援。



Even though the pandemic is over, it would be difficult not to wrap up our work for the year without highlighting some of the novel strategies the Council adopted in this unusual period. At the height of the most contagious season for COVID-19 in early 2023, the Council established a search tool for registered over-the-counter pharmaceutical products containing paracetamol, following a skyrocketing demand for medication for fever and mild pain, and after receiving a number of complaints about over-pricing and late delivery.

Our annual "Top 10 Consumer News — Year of the Tiger" provided a solid illustration of what consumers were worried about the most. We discovered that pandemic-related articles, such as RAT kits, flight reservations, consumption vouchers and store closures, made up the top half of the list. But the news story "Plastic Bag Levy Raised to \$1 Frozen/Chilled Foodstuff No Longer Exempt" topped the list with 3,463 votes, accounting for 73% of the total number of voters, highlighting the importance and application of sustainable consumption in consumers' day-to-day lives.

縱使疫情陰霾消散，要總結過去一年的工作，不得不提我們在這段非常時期所採取的一些嶄新的策略。回想 2023 年初，疫情正處高峰，消費者對發燒止痛藥需求飆升，同時出現不少抬高售價及送貨延誤的投訴，本會適時推出「毋須醫生處方已註冊的撲熱息痛製劑名單搜尋器」，為消費者提供更全面的資訊。

「虎年十大消費新聞選舉」的結果正好反映消費者最關注的消費議題，均與疫情相關，例如快速抗原測試包、航班預訂、消費券及店舖倒閉，佔據了排行榜的前列位置。然而，「膠袋徵費加至 1 元 冷凍食品不獲豁免」這則新聞則以 3,463 票榮登榜首，所得票數佔投票總人數 73%，意味著消費者對可持續消費的重視和在日常生活中加以實踐。

Buyer-Beware Cases During the Pandemic

Almost all businesses were hard hit by the protracted pandemic. We stepped up and provided timely help and support to customers of affected businesses and took the lead to coordinate with traders in handling issues with consumers. Subsequent to the closure of 2 major fitness centre chains in December 2021 and March 2022, whom we urged to properly handle relevant customer service work, such as informing each customer of the remaining prepayment balance and unused services, more fitness centres shuttered during the year in review, which by industry, accounted for more than 30% of all complaint cases related to shop closures in the last financial year.

The untimely collapse of Crostini, a local bakery chain, which led to cake voucher holders losing money last year, served as a reminder of consumer interest in prepaid vouchers, another important subject that we dealt with. Likewise, the demise of a 56-year-old travel agency, Hong Thai Travel, during the extended travel shutdown, though it did not have a great impact on travellers, shocked locals owing to its long history and leadership position in the industry, as exemplified by our readers' selection of the Top 10 Consumer News 2022.

Trade Malpractices in the Spotlight as Global Travel Resumes

Particularly when cross-boundary and international travel resumed in early 2023, travel-related complaints saw a sharp 158% increase to 3,341 cases, ranking among the top complaint categories during the review period. In 2022-23, concerns related to travel rose to the top spot, with 70% of the complaints about online travel purchases. Over 80% of these were associated with airline tickets (45%) and hotel reservations (38%), while some of them were connected to the change in travel policies in Hong Kong and other places during the pandemic.

To prevent imported cases of COVID-19, all arrivals from outside Hong Kong were mandated to book accommodation at designated quarantine hotels from December 2020. Complaints involving quarantine hotels when the mandate was in effect rose by 4.8 times to 917 cases in the reporting period. Similarly, complaints related to staycations, which were a favourite pastime of locals during the pandemic, were mostly about sales practices or contract changes. These short-term, post-pandemic problems are expected to improve as the city returns to normal.

疫情期間的案例值得消費者留意

持續的疫情嚴重打擊各行各業，本會除了及時採取行動協助受影響商戶的顧客外，亦牽頭與商戶磋商，調停他們與消費者之間的糾紛。回顧 2021 年 12 月及 2022 年 3 月，先後有兩間大型連鎖健身中心倒閉，本會當時已馬上敦促商戶必須妥善處理及善後，包括向顧客交代已預繳餘額及尚未使用之服務的安排；而在過去一個年度，有更多健身中心倒閉，最終年內健身行業的結業投訴個案佔整體有關結業的投訴逾 3 成。

去年連鎖餅店 Crostini 突然全線結業，令大批持有該餅店現金券的消費者蒙受損失，而事件亦令大眾再度關注預繳式消費對消費者權益的影響，亦是本會重點工作。與此同時，屹立 56 年的康泰旅行社，在旅遊業長期停擺下倒閉。雖然未有對消費者造成嚴重影響，但從「虎年十大消費新聞選舉」投票結果顯示，這間歷史悠久的行業龍頭倒閉，的確震驚了不少廣大市民。

疫後環球旅遊恢復 不良營商手法成焦點

疫情於 2023 年初逐漸消退，市民終於可以再次出外旅遊散心，與旅遊相關的投訴亦顯著增加 158% 至 3,341 宗，成為去年度最多投訴的類別之一。在 2022 至 2023 年度，大眾都熱切關注旅遊相關議題，在此類投訴中，有 70% 與在網上訂購旅遊產品服務有關，當中超過 8 成的投訴涉及機票（45%）及酒店預訂（38%），有些投訴個案主因是關乎本港及其他國家或地區實施的防疫措施及旅遊政策。

為了防止新冠病毒個案傳入本港，2020 年 12 月起，所有抵港旅客必須強制預訂指定檢疫酒店進行隔離。在政策實施期間，有關檢疫酒店的投訴大幅增加了 4.8 倍至 917 宗。與此同時，「宅度假」在疫情期間亦成為不少人的消閒節目，本會亦相繼收到有關投訴，主要涉及銷售手法及更改合約。隨著社會復常，我們預計這些屬短期、「後疫情」的問題亦會有所改善。

The Return of Sales Fraud Against Mainland Tourists

As an international city, it is just as important for Hong Kong to uphold the consumer rights of visitors as it is for locals. Sales malpractices and bad service targeting Mainland visitors negatively impact the visitor experience and harm the reputation of the Hong Kong's tourism industry, leading to visitor dissatisfaction and frustration. Therefore, it is imperative for the travel industry to take proactive measures to eradicate these problems and ensure a fair and enjoyable tourism experience for all visitors.

Many of the sales malpractices involved the sale of Chinese medicine, as customers must carefully examine the calculations involving price, currency exchange and units of measurement (such as catty or tael) to ensure that they are clearly stated on their receipts. We always emphasise to consumers that if a merchant avoids price enquiries, they should be vigilant, stay calm and avoid engaging in questionable or forced transactions.

Recovering from the Pandemic to the New Normal

While many of the changes experienced during the pandemic were temporary, others ushered in a long-term new normal. As we returned our focus to the main livelihood items that concern local consumers, we found in our annual survey of supermarket prices that the aggregate average price of the principal items in three major supermarket chains increased by 2.1% in 2022, the greatest increase in 10 years, more than the 1.9% increase in the composite consumer price index. The Council took a step further by analysing the average prices of 80 items before and after the three-year pandemic (i.e. from 2019 to March 2023) using its supermarket price comparison tool "Online Price Watch". It revealed a 12% increase in the aggregate average price of the 80 products. The worst was canned food, which was 30% higher than it was before the outbreak.

We urge supermarket groups to assume their social responsibility by striving to control prices of necessities like staple foods and groceries, because as the Chinese saying goes, "firewood, rice, oil, salt, sauce, vinegar and tea" are all necessities for every family. The Council will continue to closely monitor price changes of daily necessities to help the public make wise decisions.

針對內地旅客的欺詐銷售捲土重來

香港作為國際大都會，保障本地消費者與保障旅客的消費權益同等重要。針對內地旅客的不良營商手法及差劣服務，對旅客整體的體驗及本地旅遊業的聲譽均帶來負面影響。因此，旅遊業界必須盡快採取積極措施杜絕這些問題，為所有旅客創造公平及愉快的旅遊體驗。

不少不良營商手法都與中藥銷售有關，消費者在購買此類產品時，務必要細心計算及核對價錢、匯率和量度單位（斤或兩），並確保單據上的資料正確無誤。我們再三提醒消費者，若在查詢價格時商戶有所迴避，消費者應保持警惕及冷靜，如有懷疑或感到受壓迫，應終止交易。

從疫情中復甦 步入「新常態」

雖然在疫情期間很多轉變只是暫時性，但有一些卻已成為「新常態」的一部分。當我們將關注焦點重新放回本地消費者所需的日用品上，一年一度的超級市場價格調查發現，2022年3大連鎖超市主要貨品的總平均價格上升2.1%，為近10年以來的最大升幅，並超越綜合消費物價指數1.9%的升幅。本會進一步利用超市價格工具「網上價格一覽通」比較80項貨品，在疫情前後（2019年至2023年3月）的平均價格變化，發現相關貨品的總平均售價有12%的升幅。升幅最大的是罐頭食品，平均售價較疫情爆發前上升30%。

「柴米油鹽醬醋茶」是每個家庭的必需品，本會敦促各超市集團履行企業社會責任，控制主糧和雜貨等生活必需品的價格。本會亦會密切監察生活必需品的價格變動，協助市民精明消費。



Surging Digital Consumption and Complaints

Being in the Consumer Council for the past 10 years has allowed me to observe how technology has affected the paradigm change in consumer behaviour and how it has empowered consumers through making information more accessible. The rise of social media has amplified the consumer voice and opened up new communication channels that have brought about changes that have never been seen before.

One of the most distinct changes in consumption patterns is the habitual use of internet shopping. This also led to a surge in complaints, reaching over 14,000 cases in the year, a 68% increase, accounting for 44% of all complaints. The category "Travel Matters" had the most complaints, followed by "Food & Entertainment Services" and "Clothing & Apparel".

The Council will keep an eye on technological advances that allow for new ordering and delivery methods in the food industry, which also experienced a significant increase in complaints during the year, as more individuals chose to stay at home during the pandemic. For instance, complaints related to online food delivery platforms rose 57% year on year, and the amount involved soared by almost 80%, mostly involving late or incomplete deliveries and price disputes.

Another problem linked to the rise in online buying is the surge in online fraud. One such instance involved a large-scale credit card fraud involving unauthorised international transactions, which initially came to light on social media but was quickly resolved by the bank, which pledged to reimburse its cardholders for any losses.

Given the increasing use of AI in the digital world, we will periodically examine and respond, where necessary, to the megatrend for the benefit of our business operations and ultimately, Hong Kong consumers. To better serve consumers through their preferred channels, including our website, mobile app and social media platforms, we will also work to improve our digital capabilities.

The use of new technology can help achieve our mission to benefit all consumers. During the year, we launched a brand new virtual reality (VR) programme as part of our ongoing "Support Programme for Persons with Special Needs", whose aim is to educate and empower persons with special needs to protect their consumer rights, generating positive publicity and feedback. Leveraging the immersive experiential learning offered by VR technology, many users reported that the programme made a significant difference in their ability to navigate and experience virtual simulations of real-world consumption environments, assisting them to acquire necessary skills to avert unscrupulous sales tactics deployed by fitness centres and beauty parlours.

電子消費普及 投訴激增

受惠於過去 10 年在消委會工作的經驗，我深深了解到科技如何徹底改變消費行為，和賦權消費者透過獲得更多資訊而能自我保護。社交媒體的興起，令消費者有更大的話語權，亦開拓了新的溝通渠道，帶來前所未有的改變。

其中一個最明顯的消費模式轉變當然是網上購物。隨著網上消費慣常化，相關的投訴亦相應增加，而年內共接獲逾 14,000 宗（按年增加 68%），亦佔全部投訴個案 44%。其中「旅遊事務」的投訴佔最多，其次是「食肆和娛樂服務」及「衣物鞋履」。

疫情期間市民多留在家，光顧外賣點餐平台或網上訂購食材成為大眾之日常，亦引起不少投訴。單計與外賣點餐平台相關的投訴，按年已增加了 57%，涉及金額大幅上升 80%，主因是延誤送貨、訂單錯漏及價格爭議。

網購盛行所衍生的另一個問題就是網絡騙案不斷湧現。其中一宗詐騙個案，涉及大量未經授權的信用卡跨境交易，有關話題最先在社交媒體上發酵，幸好有關銀行迅速處理，並承諾向受影響持卡人賠償一切損失。

鑑於人工智能在數碼世界的應用日漸廣泛，為了本會運作及本地消費者的利益著想，我們將定期審視最新發展趨勢，並在必要時作出回應。本會承諾會提升「數碼能力」，加強透過消費者習慣使用的資訊渠道，例如網站、手機應用程式和社交媒體平台，為他們提供更好的服務。

新科技的應用已扶助本會達成使命，惠及廣大消費者。在本年度內，我們在「特殊需要人士支援計劃」下，推出了一個全新的虛擬實境（VR）角色體驗遊戲項目，目的是教育及加強有特殊需要人士保障自身消費權益的能力。此項目獲得傳媒度泛報道，帶來不少正面的宣傳推廣及迴響。用家亦紛紛表示，能夠從虛擬實境的浸沉式體驗中，體驗到健身中心及美容院的真實銷售情況，並從中學習必要的技巧，避開相關不良營銷手法。

Celebrating a Half-century with the Public

Since its founding in 1974, the Consumer Council has consistently stood up for consumer rights, never wavering from our commitment to advance consumer welfare through safe, sustainable consumption in a just and fair marketplace. We understand the importance of our mandate for safeguarding consumer interests and will continue to look for innovative approaches to deliver our duties more effectively and efficiently.

The Council is therefore on schedule to accomplish the five primary objectives we established for 2022-23 in our three-year strategic plan. Given the importance of reorganising and catching up with the Council's work and plans, we are pleased to report that we are fully on track on our mission to fully protect Hong Kong consumers.

Having laid a strong foundation, we anticipate another busy but fruitful year leading up to our 50th anniversary. I would like to thank everyone involved, notably the Chairman and Council Members for their guidance, and Council staff for their coordinated efforts to help with the post-pandemic recovery and the creation of a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable future.



Ms Gilly WONG Fung-han

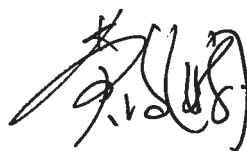
Chief Executive

與眾同歡 50 周年誌慶

自 1974 年成立以來，消委會一直堅持捍衛消費者權益，堅定不移地在公平公正的市場環境中，推動既安全、又可持續的消費模式，以促進消費者的福祉。我們明白保護消費權益的重要性，並將繼續尋求創新方法，更有效地履行職責。

本會正按計劃實現在 2022-23 年度開展的三年工作策略計劃中所訂立的 5 大目標。明白到重新編排及趕上工作及規劃的重要性，我們已全速追回進度，以履行保護消費者的使命。

在堅實的基礎上，我們正準備迎接既忙碌又豐富多姿的 50 周年。我在此感謝所有為本會出心出力的人士，特別是主席及各委員的指導，以及全體職員上下一心，令消委會在疫情過後能夠迅速恢復，創造一個更堅韌、共融及可持續的未來。



黃鳳嫻女士

總幹事

