

Information Note for ACE

Environmental Impacts of Development Projects and Off-site Compensation for Wetland Loss

Background

On 5 July 1994, ACE's EIA Sub-committee considered the EIA for the Route 3 Country Park Section project. Members raised questions as to whether there could be off-site compensation for the loss of wetlands affected by the project and asked the Administration to provide a position paper on the subject.

Environmental Impact of Development Projects

2. All development projects are likely to have some environmental impact. The Government therefore requires that such projects undergo environmental impact assessment to determine the extent of possible impact and how it can be kept to a minimum and mitigated. There is no policy as such to "compensate" for environmental impact however. Some projects, in particular transport infrastructure projects, affect areas of conservation value to varying degrees, including country parks. In such cases, we endeavour -

- (a) to avoid, or, if this is not possible, to minimise encroachment; and
- (b) to minimise the impact and adopt appropriate mitigation measures, both on-site and off-site.

3. We also, as a separate matter and on a case by case basis, seek to extend and enhance our conservation areas as much as possible.

Obligations in respect of Wetlands

4. The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the "Ramsar Convention") dates from 1971. The United Kingdom ratified the Convention on 5 January 1976 and extended it to Hong Kong on 10 May 1979. The Convention provides for the designation of wetlands and, where they are unavoidably lost, for their

replacement as far as possible. No wetland in Hong Kong has been designated although consideration is being given to the designation of Mai Po Marshes. Much preparatory work has been done but action in the immediate short term is not possible.

Route 3 Country Park Section Project

5. As stated above, while it is not our general policy to provide "environmental compensation" schemes for development projects as such, we do try to extend and enhance our conservation areas as far as possible. The Highways Department, with the assistance of the Agriculture and Fisheries Department, is also looking into possible off-site mitigation measures, e.g. planting and wetland conservation, in relation to the project itself.

Planning, Environment and Lands Branch

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