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**ACE Paper 23/2005**

*For discussion*

## **Report of the Nature Conservation Subcommittee**

### **“New Nature Conservation Policy – Pilot Conservation Management Agreement Proposals”**

#### **Introduction**

At its meeting held on 1 September 2005, the Nature Conservation Subcommittee (NCSC) considered four applications under the Pilot Scheme for Management Agreement (MA) to enhance the ecological values of priority sites. After deliberation, the NCSC recommended that the four applications should be supported.

#### **Advice Sought**

2. This paper invites the Council's views on the NCSC's recommendation.

#### **Background**

3. The Government announced a new nature conservation policy in November 2004 to better achieve the nature conservation objectives, in particular to enhance the conservation of ecologically important sites which are in private ownership. Under the new policy, 12 priority sites have been identified for enhanced protection and the Administration undertook to implement a Pilot Scheme for management agreements as one of the measures to enhance the ecological value of these sites. Under this Pilot Scheme, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may apply for funding from the Government for entering into management agreements with the landowners. The NGOs will provide the landowners with financial incentives in exchange for management rights over their land and their co-operation in enhancing conservation of the sites concerned. The Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) Committee has approved an allocation of \$5 million for the implementation of the Pilot Scheme.

4. Upon closing of the six-month application period on 31 May 2005, four applications were received involving land located at Ramsar Site, Deep Bay Wetland

outside Ramsar site, Fung Yuen and Long Valley. A summary of the applications is at **Annex A**.

### **The Administration's Assessment**

5. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) have examined these applications in accordance with the following criteria –

- (a) the benefits that the proposed project will bring in enhancing the conservation of the site concerned and in better achieving the nature conservation objective;
- (b) the sustainability of the proposed project including its resources implications, participation of the landowner and local community, the nature and enforceability of the management agreement;
- (c) whether the proposed budget is reasonable and realistic, and whether the project is cost effective; and
- (d) the technical and project management capability, and track record of the applicant. In this regard, NGOs may seek assistance or support from other relevant professional bodies where necessary.

The Administration's assessments on these applications are set out in **Annex B**. AFCD and EPD consider that all four applications will be beneficial to the ecological environment of the concerned sites and are worth supporting.

### **Views of the NCSC**

#### *Sustainability*

6. Members noted that the project proponents would identify alternative sources of funding by fundraising campaign, sale of crops or sponsorship. Members agreed to their approach and suggested ways to make the proposals financially sustainable. For example, the branding of “bird-friendly” crops and “environmental-friendly” fish could help farmers and fishpond farmers generate more income and encourage their continued cooperation in conservation. Members also opined that the identification of alternative sources of funding should start early.

### *Monitoring*

7. Members suggested and AFCD agreed to actively monitor the implementation of all the approved projects. In addition, EPD advised that project proponents would be required to submit quarterly progress reports and a final report. Funds from ECF would be disbursed in phases in accordance with approved payment schedules and subject to satisfactory progress of the project.

### *Collaboration among project proponents*

8. Applications from the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) and the Conservancy Association (CA) both proposed to enter into management agreements with landowners inside the Long Valley. HKBWS's proposal focused more on the enhancement of habitats for birds, while CA's proposal put emphasis on formulating a sustainable habitat management strategy for the local community in the Long Valley. Although the concerned sites of the two projects did not overlap, Members urged the two organisations to closely collaborate with each other. To ensure that resources would be used effectively, the two organisations should share their experience and information where appropriate.

### *Budget*

9. Members noted that the total amount of funding requested for the four projects was \$5,443,750, which exceeded the \$5 million allocated by the ECF for the implementation of the Pilot Scheme. The Secretariat of the Subcommittee advised that the four applications would be submitted to the ECF Committee for formal funding approval shortly. The ECF Committee would be requested to examine the proposed budgets of the projects in detail and consider whether additional funds should be allocated to meet the full amount applied by the four project proponents.

### **Recommendation**

10. The NCSC recommended support for the four applications. Subject to the Council's views, the proposals would be recommended to the ECF Committee for formal funding approval.

**Nature Conservation Subcommittee Secretariat  
September 2005**