

Hong Kong Wetland Park Project

Purpose

This paper is to brief members on the progress of the Hong Kong Wetland Park (HKWP) Project.

Background

2. Construction of the HKWP, a world-class tourism, conservation and education facility, is one of the millennium capital works projects being implemented by the Government. The Park is located in the southern side of Deep Bay, south of the Tsim Bei Tsui Peninsula and northeast of the Tin Shui Wai New Town. A location map is at **Annex A**. It is approximately 64 hectares in size and located entirely on unleased government land. It is built upon an Ecological Mitigation Area (EMA) created for compensating the loss of natural habitats arising from the development of the Tin Shui Wai New Town.

3. The works for the EMA have been completed and handed over to AFCD for management since December 2003. Ecological monitoring programmes at the EMA site commenced in early 2003 to monitor the performance of the re-created wetland habitats. Upon end of April 2004, 129 species of birds, 32 species of dragonflies, 55 species of butterflies, 9 species of amphibians, 7 species of reptiles, 9 species of fishes and 5 species of mammals were recorded. The results indicated that a wide range of wildlife is utilizing the re-created wetland habitats.

4. The HKWP project is implemented in two phases. Phase 1 includes a 230 m² Exhibition Pavilion and landscaped forecourt, which serves as an early venue for publicity of the HKWP project and promotion of public awareness on wetland conservation. It was completed and opened to the public in December 2000. Since its opening, Phase 1 of HKWP attracts some 100,000 visitors each year. Admission to the venue is free and guided visits and education programmes are offered by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) under a prior booking system. The planning and development of Phase 2 of the HKWP project is being undertaken by AFCD and the Architectural Services Department for completion in around late 2005.

The project

Mission and Objectives of the HKWP

5. The mission of the HKWP is to foster public awareness, knowledge and understanding of the inherent values of wetlands throughout the East Asian region and beyond, and to marshal public support and action for their conservation.

6. The primary objective of the HKWP is to create a visitor attraction of international status, catering both for the general public and visitors, and also for those with special interest in wildlife and ecology. Other objectives of HKWP include:

- (a) demonstrating the diversity of Hong Kong's wetland ecosystem and highlighting the need to conserve them;
- (b) providing an attraction which will diversify the range of visitor experience in Hong Kong for visitors from abroad;
- (c) serving the recreational needs of local residents of the adjoining urban areas in the Northwest New Territories;
- (d) providing a facility that will both complement and supplement those offered at the Mai Po Marshes Nature Reserve; and
- (e) providing opportunities for education and public awareness in regard to nature conservation.

Visitor Forecast

7. According to the market survey previously commissioned by AFCD, it is expected that the HKWP will attract about 500 000 visitors each year including the local ones and those coming from Mainland China and overseas. The HKWP is expected to be particularly attractive to –

- (a) family groups (i.e. those with children);
- (b) school and college groups;
- (c) adult tourist groups; and
- (d) specialist interest groups (such as those interested in natural appreciation and bird-watching).

Progress of the Project

8. Development of Phase 2 of the HKWP project is in progress. It includes the construction of a 10,000 m² indoor Visitor Centre with three major exhibition galleries, an AV-theatre, indoor and outdoor play areas, a souvenir shop, a café, classrooms and a resource centre. There will also be outdoor facilities including the Wetland Discovery Centre, exterior exhibition stations, bird hides, trails and boardwalks. The construction works of the Main Building are expected to be completed by end of 2004 and the on-site exhibit fabrication will be carried out in early 2005. The entire project is scheduled for completion in around late 2005.

9. The exhibition to be staged at the HKWP aims to provide visitors with an exciting, interesting and informative experience while raising their awareness of wetlands as an important but threatened habitat. It comprises three major areas, viz. the Entry Zone and Arrival Plaza, the Indoor Visitor Centre, and the Outdoor Area. An outline of the exhibition highlights is attached at **Annex B**.

Future Management of the HKWP

10. The Government is going to outsource the management and operation of the HKWP to private service providers. AFCD will be responsible for the day-to-day monitoring and supervision of the Contractor in order to achieve the mission and objectives set out above. The department conducted an Expression of Interest exercise in March 2004 to gather market feedback on the service specifications and remuneration packages. It is planned to invite tenders later this year with a view to identifying and appointing a suitable service provider in mid 2005.

11. To empower AFCD to effectively manage the facility including imposing admission charges, it is also planned to designate the site of HKWP as a Special Area under the Country Parks Ordinance (CPO), Cap. 208. AFCD has consulted the Country and Marine Parks Board (CMPB), the Wetland Advisory Committee, Yuen Long District Council, Ping Shan Rural Committee and relevant government departments on the proposal and none of them had any adverse comments. CMPB has endorsed the draft map and explanatory statement of the proposed Special Area at its meeting on 21 May 2004. The proposal will be submitted to the Chief Executive in Council for consideration in due course.

Proposed Fees and Charges

12. To be in line with many other eco-tourism facilities in Hong Kong and to facilitate the control over the number of visitors in the HKWP, it is proposed to impose admission fees and car-parking charges. The proposed level of admission fees and car-parking charges is required to be listed in the Schedule of the Country Parks and Special Areas Regulations, a subsidiary legislation of CPO. Amendment to the subsidiary legislation will be prepared to provide the relevant fees and charges in due course.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
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