

**Confirmed Minutes of the 78th Meeting of the
Environmental Impact Assessment Subcommittee of
the Advisory Council on the Environment
held on 29 April 2003 at 4:00pm**

Present:

Mr. Otto Poon (Chairman)
Prof. Ho Kin-chung (Deputy Chairman)
Mr. Peter Y C Lee
Mr. Lin Chaan-ming
Dr. Ng Cho-nam
Mrs. Mei Ng
Miss Petula Poon (Secretary)

Absent with Apology:

Prof. Wong Tze-wai

In Attendance:

Mr. Elvis Au	Assistant Director (Environmental Assessment & Noise), Environmental Protection Department (EPD)
Mr. C C Lay	Assistant Director (Conservation), Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD)
Mr. Eddie Cheng	Executive Officer (E), Environment, Transport and Works Bureau

In Attendance for Agenda Item 3:

Dr. Glenn Frommer	Sustainability Development Manager, Mass Transit Railway Corporation (MTRC)
Ms. Rowena Chan	Assistant Environmental Engineer, MTRC
Dr. Anne Watker-Zeris	Director, Mott Connell Limited
Mr. Simon Hui	Principal Environmental Protection Officer (Assessment & Audit), EPD
Mr. Colin Keung	Senior Environmental Protection Officer (Assessment & Audit) (Atg), EPD
Mr. Leung Chi-hong	Senior Country Parks Officer /South-East, AFCD
Mr. Tony Chan	Country Parks Officer/Lantau, AFCD

Action

Agenda Item 1: Confirmation of Minutes of the 77th Meeting held on 24 March 2003

The Chairman informed Members that the draft minutes of the

last meeting were not yet ready. The confirmation of the minutes would be postponed to the next meeting. Members agreed.

Agenda Item 2: Matters Arising

2. The Chairman informed Members that there were no matters arising from the last meeting.

Agenda Item 3 : EIA report on the Tung Chung to Ngong Ping Cable Car Project

(ACE-EIA Paper 3/2003)

3. The Chairman referred Members to the eight sets of public comments on the captioned EIA report received from EPD before the meeting and which were tabled for Members' information. He suggested that in line with the established practice it was not necessary to discuss the need for the project which in fact was one of the policy initiatives of the Chief Executive.

4. The Chairman welcomed the project proponent team to the meeting. Dr. Glenn Frommer introduced the background of the project and Dr. Anne Watker-Zeris briefed Members of the results of the EIA study. In response to some of the public comments which queried the adequacy of monitoring on the construction process, Dr. Frommer circulated to Members a booklet on environmental safety codes that the workers must adhere to when working on site. He pointed out that training was provided for the workers and those who did not follow the codes of practice would be dismissed.

Cumulative impact assessment

5. In response to a Member's question on cumulative impact assessment, Dr. Watker-Zeris explained that an assessment on cumulative impact had been carried out according to the requirements and scopes set out in the study brief. They had assessed the initial impact of the project and the cumulative impact associated with the potential developments. Since the study area was near the Po Lin Monastery, the environmental permit would likely limit the construction noise level to 75dB. Even so, the cumulative noise impact of carrying out all the works simultaneously would still be acceptable to the potential sensitive receivers in the area. The project proponent was aware of the proposed sewage treatment plant project at Ngong Ping and the findings of the EIA report of the project had been taken into account.

6. While noting that the EIA study had taken into account the cumulative impact of major projects such as the Disney Theme Park and the

Tung Chung Road project, a Member asked whether other less prominent projects near Ngong Ping such as the construction of a theme village, car park and helipad had been considered by the EIA study. In his view, the impacts of those projects might also affect Ngong Ping which was an ecologically important site. In response, Dr. Frommer referred Members to Table 4.9 in page 4.10 of the EIA report which showed the cumulative noise impacts of the cable car project. He said that the noise and air quality impacts caused by the proposed sewage treatment works and the theme village had been taken into account, while the car park and the helipad would not involve any multi-storey or underground structure and their impact on Ngong Ping would thus be relatively small.

7. Dr. Watker-Zeris reiterated that the ecological impact assessment was conducted according to the study brief and they had followed the requirement by reviewing the EIA report on the Ngong Ping Sewage Treatment Work and doing surveys around the area to confirm the findings. Dr. Frommer supplemented that although the project might have impact on the ecology of Ngong Ping, it provided a great opportunity to develop the area for ecological education. For instance, they would co-operate with green groups, AFCD and the Country and Marine Park Board to set up educational facilities such as a Country Park Interpretative Centre within the theme village. They would retain the existing ecology as far as possible and make the environment more conducive to wildlife. His vision was to turn the area into an “Alpine Mei Po”.

8. Speaking from the planning perspective, Mr. Elvis Au said that compared to other new development areas, the planned developments at Ngong Ping were more definitive and the EIA report on the Ngong Ping Sewage Treatment Work had already been approved and made available to the public.

9. In reply to the Chairman’s enquiry on whether the findings of the EIA on the Ngong Ping Sewage Treatment Work had been taken into account, Dr. Watker-Zeris confirmed that the EIA of the Ngong Ping Sewage Treatment Work was taken as the baseline of the current study and the future scenario was projected on that basis.

Construction method and hours of work

10. In response to a Member’s enquiry, Dr. Frommer confirmed that construction materials would be delivered to the work sites by helicopters instead of material ropeways. As regards the possible long hours of work (from 0700 hours to 2300 hours) in certain work sites as mentioned in the EIA report, Dr. Watker-Zeris clarified that they had no intention of carrying out work up to 2300 hours but assessment was conducted to identify impacts if working in such periods was required.

Another Member remarked that the daily working hours should not be too short, otherwise the number of working days would increase and the impact on the environment would be greater.

Construction impact

11. In response to a Member's enquiry, Dr. Frommer explained that various measures would be taken to minimize construction impacts. Firstly, they would adopt the bi-cable system for the cable cars which would require less number of supporting towers compared with another system namely the Funitel system used in the Ocean Park. While the Funitel system would require about 20 supporting towers, the bi-cable system would require only eight. Secondly, the contractors who were appointed on target-cost contracts would work out the detailed plans together with the project design team and the contractors would gain if they could achieve the goals with lower costs. Thirdly, they would have an environmental engineer on site and the site staff would be trained by the engineer to monitor the construction process. The monitoring result would be uploaded onto the Internet for public viewing. Fourthly, all construction works would be confined within 5 meters outside the actual foundation of the towers. For instance, the construction site would be 35m x 35m if the footprint of the towers was 30m x 30m. The tower foundation would be done by small drills and run off would be prevented from getting into the surrounding areas. Furthermore, the number of staff in each site was limited to around 10 and at most two sites would be working simultaneously. As the sites were small and well managed, construction impact would be well contained.

12. A Member expressed concerns about the practicality of the measures proposed in the EIA report, as certain recommendations in the EIA report of another MTRC project in 1995 were found impractical and not implemented subsequently. In response, Dr. Frommer assured Members that the measures in the current EIA report were practicable. He clarified that for the project in 1995, MTRC expected that the impacts as predicted in the EIA report would occur, and in fact the predictions were very accurate. MTRC had learnt from that project and as could be seen from the construction of the West Rail station at Mei Foo, the mitigation measures were very successful and there was only one complaint against the construction works.

Plant surveys

13. A Member asked about the comprehensiveness of the plant survey, as one of the public comments pointed out that some rare plant species identified along the alignment of the project had not mentioned in the EIA report. In response, Dr. Watker-Zeris said that the ecological surveys were carried out according to the study brief and the methodology of

the surveys had been agreed with the authority before hand. Very detailed plant surveys were conducted at the terminal building and tower sites and also along the emergency rescue trail. Areas within 15m from either side of the alignment were also studied. The survey did identify some rare plant species within a tower location and the tower was relocated as a result. Some rare plants were also found under the cable car alignment but they would not be affected by the project. Furthermore, as some plants were not in bloom and hence difficult to identify during the time of the study, the project proponent had recommended as mitigation measure to appoint qualified botanists and ecologists as part of the implementation team for the construction phase so that species that were potentially of interest could be identified and protected during construction.

14. A Member suggested the project proponent contact the person concerned to obtain the location of the rare plants so that proper mitigation measures could be taken. Mr. Simon Hui expressed difficulties in providing the personal data of the person concerned to a third party without prior consent. Mr. Tony Chan suggested EPD contact the person direct and pass the information about the rare species to MTRC for follow up actions. Upon the Chairman's enquiry, Dr. Frommer confirmed that if rare species were discovered during the construction phase, MTRC would take all the necessary measures to protect them. He also noted a Member's comment that collecting the seeds of the rare species might not be as effective as transplanting them to a green house.

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Compensatory planting

15. A Member asked whether the botanists and ecologists would be engaged at an early stage to facilitate compensatory planting. Dr. Watker-Zeris said that the compensatory planting proposal was being developed in detail by the experts in consultation with the Kadoorie Farm. Surveys had been carried out to identify all the trees affected and a list of species that would attract butterflies, birds, etc and suitable for compensation planting was being drawn up.

16. In response to a Member's enquiry, Dr. Watker-Zeris said that the compensatory planting sites were chosen based on expert advice and the availability of the sites.

17. A Member suggested that more compensatory planting should be done for carbon dioxide absorption. In response, Dr. Frommer said that MTRC had implemented replanting projects for areas affected by hill fire and had done a lot in terms of trees replanting.

Operational risks

18. A Member pointed out that adverse weather conditions and overgrown trees might pose hazards to the operation of the cable car system. In response, Dr. Frommer pointed out that the wind speed in the gorge and the valley would be monitored to determine the maximum wind speed within which the cable car system would continue to operate. They were working with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department and the Fire Services Department to identify potential hazards of adverse weather conditions and draw up proper procedures on passenger evacuation during hill fire or typhoons. On tree trimming, the clearance between the top of the vegetation and the bottom of the cable cars was about 10m and there would be regular trimming of vegetation.

Renewable energy

19. In reply to a Member's enquiry, Dr. Frommer confirmed that they were considering using renewable energy for the facilities at Ngong Ping. However, the energy for the cable car system could not be generated by the sun or wind but had to come from the electricity mains.

Waste management

20. On a Member's enquiry regarding the lack of instructions on waste management in the guidebook, Dr. Frommer explained that at the time of writing the EIA report, contractors were not yet appointed and it was impossible to make any commitment in the EIA report without them. At present, the contractors were working out the waste management plans. Excavated soils would be used as materials for constructing the emergency rescue trail and other facilities as far as possible. There were also specific measures in the booklet for treating people's waste and chemical toilets would be provided on site.

Impacts on stream courses

21. In reply to a Member's enquiry on the impacts on stream course, Dr. Watker-Zeris assured Members that the towers would be positioned far away from stream courses and would not directly impact on the watercourses. The project proponent would further minimize the impact by keeping the number of towers to the minimum. At Ngong Ping, a small section of stream course cut through the footprint of the terminal. As a mitigation measure, channels and conduits would be provided to redirect the stream course on a temporary basis. The Member expressed concerns on whether the works concerned would remove soil into the watercourse and affect the habitats therein. Dr. Frommer confirmed that geotech membranes would be installed where appropriate to minimize the impacts on stream courses.

Disturbances by tourists

22. A Member pointed out that more visitors would visit Ngong Ping after the opening of the cable car system and hoped that the place could be protected from visitor activities. In response, Dr. Frommer said that they did not expect a sudden increase in the number of visitors. At present, there were about 1.2 million visitors visiting the area per year and most of them traveled by bus. The number would likely increase to 1.4 million with the operation of the cable car system. The project proponent was mindful of excessive development at Ngong Ping and had in fact turned down a request of the Tourism Commission to examine the feasibility of a mountain bike path through the country park.

23. A Member hoped that sufficient toilets and dustbins would be provided for visitors so as to keep the place clean. He also cautioned that cigarette butts discarded by smokers might cause hill fire. Another Member, however, pointed out that too many dustbins would have adverse impact on the landscape of the place. In response, Dr. Frommer informed Members that they would keep the facilities very clean and smoking would not be allowed. They would also educate people using the trail. Cameras would be installed on the towers to watch out for hill fires and for general monitoring purpose.

Rescue trail

24. In response to a Member's enquiry, Dr. Frommer confirmed that the rescue trail would be managed by MTRC in the capacity as the operator of the system and it would be open to the public. The only restricted areas were the towers which would be fenced off to prevent people from climbing.

Reuse of treated effluent

25. In reply to a Member's enquiry, Dr. Frommer said that a small percentage of the effluent treated by the Ngong Ping Sewage Treatment Work would be reused. The use of more treated effluence than planned might not be possible.

Continuous public involvement

26. A Member appreciated the project proponent's efforts to involve the green groups during the EIA process. He suggested forming a liaison group with the participation of green group to monitor the project and contribute to education programmes. In response, Dr. Frommer said that a liaison group would be set up and green groups as well as other stakeholders such as education groups, local representatives would be

Action

invited to join.

27. Mr. Elvis Au pointed out that the current project was the first one that had adopted the Continuous Public Involvement (CPI) approach promoted by EPD during the EIA process. By adopting the approach, the views of the stakeholders could be taken on board at the early stage of the process. EPD hoped that more project proponents would consider adopting that approach. The Chairman requested EPD to provide the Subcommittee with more information about the CPI approach.

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Conclusion

28. The Chairman suggested and Members agreed that the Subcommittee would recommend to the full Council the endorsement of the EIA report without conditions. Upon the project proponent's request, the Subcommittee would submit its report to the full Council by circulation so as to speed up the process.

Secretariat

Agenda Item 4: Any Other Business

29. No item was discussed under AOB.

Agenda Item 5: Date of Next Meeting

30. The next meeting was scheduled for 19 May 2003

EIA Subcommittee Secretariat

April 2003