

Nature Conservation Subcommittee

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2006 at 9:30 am in Conference Room, 33/F, Revenue Tower

Present:

Prof. WONG Yuk-shan, B.B.S., J.P. (Chairman)

Prof. HO Kin-chung, B.B.S.

Prof. Paul LAM

Dr NG Cho-nam, B.B.S.

Mr. Markus SHAW

Mr. Eric CHAN

Mr. C C LAY

Dr P M SO

Miss Florence CHAN (Secretary)

Mr. Claude WONG

Absent with Apologies:

Ms Goretti LAU

Ms Iris TAM, J.P.

In Attendance for Agenda Item 3 :

Dr YAU Wing-kwong Chairman, Tai Po Environmental Association (TPEA)

Mr. Raymond WONG Project Staff (TPEA)

Miss LI See-wai Project Staff (TPEA)

Dr CHEUNG Ho-fai Chairman, Hong Kong Bird Watching Association (HKBWS)

Mr. LO Wai-yan Project Manager (HKBWS)

Miss Vicky YEUNG Project Officer (HKBWS)

Ms Lister CHEUNG Chief Executive, Conservancy Association (CA)

Mr. Scott LINDER Conservation Manager (CA)

Ms Katie CHICK Senior Project Officer (CA)

In Attendance for Agenda Item 4:

Mr. Edmond LAM Senior Wetland Park Officer, AFCD

In Attendance for Agenda Item 5:

Mr. Patrick LAI Senior Conservation Officer (Tech Services), AFCD

Mr. TAM Tze-wai Nature Conservation Officer (Lantau), AFCD

In Attendance for Agenda Item 6:

Mr. Patrick LAI	Senior Conservation Officer (Tech Services), AFCD
Mr. LEE Wai-hung	Wetland and Fauna Conservation Officer (Ornithology), AFCD

Action

The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting of the Nature Conservation Subcommittee (Subcommittee).

Agenda Item 1: Confirmation on Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 9 February 2006

2. The draft minutes were confirmed without amendment.

Agenda Item 2: Matters arising

3. The Chairman reminded Members to declare potential conflict of interest. As the Vice-Chairman of the HKBWS and a Director of CA, a Member declared his potential conflict of interest on discussion item 3. As the discussion item was only to inform the Subcommittee on the progress of the pilot projects, the Chairman suggested and Members agreed that the Member could participate in the discussion of Item 3.

Agenda Item 3: Progress of the Pilot Conservation Management Agreement (MA) Projects (NCSC Paper 4/06)

4. Dr PM SO briefed the paper to Members.

Presentation by TPEA

5. The Chairman welcomed and invited the representatives of TPEA to present the project progress to Members. A Member commended TPEA for engaging the local community in the project.

He asked about the manpower needed to patrol the area. Dr YAU Wing-kwong replied that four staff were involved in this project and one of them patrolled the sites twice per day. Besides, volunteers helped patrolling. In response to the Member's enquiry, Dr YAU said that most of the land leases were signed for two years and subject to renewal. Many landowners supported the project and some were willing to lease the lands at a very low price. The Chairman asked if TPEA encountered any difficulties. Dr YAU said that it was difficult to manage such a large area of land. For example, more trees should be planted to cover the project site at Fung Yuen. Mr. C C LAY said AFCD would consider how the department could assist in tree planting.

6. The Chairman said that the progress of the project was encouraging. A Member was impressed by the landowners' enthusiasm and opined that the project could be a role model for engaging the landowners in conservation matters. He added that university students should be encouraged to visit the site. Eco-tour from Fung Yuen to Sha Lo Tung / Hok Tau should be promoted in secondary schools. Another Member raised the need to formally recognised the contribution of the landowners. The Chairman agreed with the Member and said Tai Po District Council and Tai Po Rural Committee might be the appropriate bodies to commend the landowners' contribution. A Member suggested the Advisory Council on the Environment (ACE) could also be considered as a chance to show appreciation to these landowners. Alternatively, Another Member said the contribution of the landowners could also be recognised through some public activities. Dr. YAU explained that at the opening ceremony of the Fung Yuen Pilot project, certificates of appreciation had been presented to the concerned landowners to recognise their contribution. After some discussion, the Chairman requested the Secretariat to consider further means to

Secretariat

Presentation by HKBWS

7. The Chairman welcomed and invited the representatives

of HKBWS to present the project progress to Members. A Member highlighted a new bird species, Rosy Pipit, was found in Long Valley. This new record implied the significance of Long Valley. Another Member asked if HKBWS had sufficient manpower to implement the pilot project and how they invited farmers to join the project. Dr CHEUNG Ho-fai replied that they had one full-time and one part-time staff for implementing the project, as well as two specialists to conduct the bird monitoring survey. Soliciting farmers' support to the project was rather difficult at the beginning. Farmers were less sceptical when they understood more about the project. The Chairman suggested providing intangible incentives to farmers, such as recognition from the community.

8. One Member asked if the crops in the engaged farmlands would be sold. Dr CHEUNG explained that the primary aim of the project was to conserve birds. They would only sell crops they planted under the project if their harvest would not affect birds' habitats. He further explained that the farmers were not required to practise organic farming but they were advised not to use unnatural fertilisers and herbicides. The Chairman noted the progress of this project and thanked for HKBWS's efforts.

Presentation by CA

9. The Chairman welcomed and invited the representatives of CA to brief the project progress to Members. A Member asked why organic farming was adopted and what the channel was used to sell those crops. Mr. Scott LINDER said that organic farming was environmental friendly and organic products could be sold at a higher price. Ms Lister CHEUNG added direct selling in public housing estates was possible. Another Member suggested the farmers apply for organic certification from Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre, in order to sell the products at a higher price. Ms CHEUNG said Ms Katie CHICK of CA was a qualified organic farm inspector. However, some farmer found it too expensive to obtain the certificates.

10. The Chairman asked if CA planned to rent more land. Mr. LINDER replied that they were negotiating with farmers and expected to rent more land. In response to a Member's enquiry, Mr. LINDER said they had been cooperating with HKBWS to conserve the lands in Long Valley. Another Member added that the bird survey conducted by HKBWS also covered land managed by CA.

Concluding discussion

11. A Member appreciated TPEA's success in involving local community of Fung Yuen at an early stage. The Chairman shared the Member's views.

12. One Member asked if there was policy to encourage farming in Long Valley. Mr. Eric CHAN said that AFCD had been promoting organic farming.

13. The Chairman concluded that the three MA projects were progressing well and the improvements in the ecology of Fung Yuen and Long Valley were encouraging. He suggested the Secretariat arrange PR activity to raise the public's awareness of nature conservation and recognise the efforts made by the various parties. The event could be held after the projects had implemented for about a year.

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Agenda Item 4: Update on the Hong Kong Wetland Park Project
(NCSC Paper No. 5/06)

14. The Chairman welcomed and invited Mr. Edmond LAM to present the paper. A Member asked about the actual number of visitors and the designed capacity of the Hong Kong Wetland Park (HKWP). Mr. LAM replied that since the opening of the HKWP, the average number of visitors was 1,500 – 2,000 on weekday and 4,000 – 5,000 during weekend / public holiday. The maximum capacity of the Park at any one time was 4,000.

15. A Member said that HKWP provided an opportunity to

educate people about respecting the nature. Another Member said that HKWP was able to stimulate public discussion on the conservation of wetland. A Member asked about the revenue of the HKWP. Mr. LAM said there were insufficient data to estimate the long term revenue as the Park had only been opened for less than a month. The Chairman noted that the revenue would be insufficient to cover the recurrent expenses of HKWP. Mr. LAY responded that the admission fee had taken into account the affordability of the wider community and the remoteness of the Park. The Chairman opined that Hong Kong should continue to invest more in education and conservation matters.

16. A Member asked if the souvenir shop could sell products of other NGOs. The Chairman opined that the shop should sell more books. Mr. LAY said they intended to re-tender the souvenir shop soon and they would explore the possibility with the successful tenderer. The Member asked if other organisations were allowed to carry out activities in the HKWP. Another Member said that active participation by the NGOs might help educate the public to respect the nature. Mr. LAY said that NGOs were welcomed to organise activities and visits to the HKWP. He added that the HKWP had planned many education programmes in the pipeline, including some 1,000 guided educational tours for schools and non-profit making organisations.

17. In response to a Member's enquires, Mr. LAM responded that the Architectural Services Department had conducted talks about energy saving measures to the staff in HKWP. The Member also asked about the floating refuse problem in HKWP. Mr. LAY said floating refuse was occasionally found in HKWP and it was not a persistent problem.

18. In conclusion, the Chairman congratulated the success of HKWP. He, on behalf of the Subcommittee, thanked Mr. LAY, Mr. LAM and all staff of HKWP for their efforts and thanked Members for their valuable advice and contribution to the project.

Agenda Item 5: Restoration of Tung Chung Stream (NCSC Paper No. 6/06)

19. The Chairman welcomed Mr. Patrick LAI and Dr T W TAM and invited them to introduce the paper. A Member was pleased to observe the recovery of Tung Chung Stream, which could be a showcase for wetland restoration and other EIA mitigation projects. The Member emphasised that the unaffected natural upstream section of Tung Chung stream was one of the most important factors of the successful restoration works. Another Member added that the prompt response from the Government was also essential. The Chairman recalled that he was shocked by destruction caused by the Tung Chung Rural Committee and was pleased about the success of the restoration project. Mr. LAI thanked ACE Members for their valuable advices throughout the process from design, implementation to monitoring stages.

(The Chairman and a Member left at this juncture. The Chairman invited a Member to chair the rest of the meeting.)

Agenda Item 6: Egrettries in Hong Kong (NCSC Paper No. 7/06)

20. The Acting Chairman welcomed Mr. LAI and Mr. W H LEE and invited them to introduce the paper. The Acting Chairman asked why the large egrettry in Yim Tso Ha had been shifted to A Chau. A Member said that it might be partly due to the changing environment in the vicinity as well as the response of egrets to fragmentation of habitats. The Acting Chairman added that some land near Yim Tso Ha was used as container yard. He asked if AFCD had any measures to conserve egrettries. Mr. LEE replied that in addition to land use planning control, they had also carried out active conservation measures including Mikania removal and tree planting in several egrettries.

21. The Acting Chairman referred AFCD to a Member's concern about people playing remote control aeroplanes near the A Chau egrettry. Mr. LEE said they would look into the case.

AFCD

[Post-meeting notes: AFCD's recent site visits found that people were playing remote control aeroplanes at the abandoned field at Luk Keng, mostly on Sundays and public holidays. As the site was not in close proximity to the A Chau Egretty and was not the major feeding habitat for egrets and herons from the Egretty, the impact of the remote control aeroplanes and related activities on the Egretty was considered not significant. Nonetheless, AFCD would keep monitoring the situation of the Egretty, particularly during breeding season of egrets and herons.]

22. In response to a Member's question, Mr. LAY replied that all important egrettries were already listed as Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Acting Chairman opined that the egretty near the Penfold Park might be affected by construction works for 2008 Olympic equestrian event nearby. Mr. LEE said that there would be a buffer zone between the egretty and the racecourse, and no construction work would be allowed in the buffer zone during breeding season of egrets and herons. In addition, the project proponent had been carrying out ecological monitoring on the egretty and submitting reports regularly to relevant departments including EPD and AFCD for auditing. The Acting Chairman concluded that egretty was a good indicator for wetland and conservation and survey on egrettries should be done continuously.

Agenda Item 7: Date of Next Meeting

23. The Acting Chairman said that the Secretariat would inform Members the date of next meeting nearer the time.

Agenda Item 8: Any Other Business

24. The Acting Chairman suggested the Subcommittee formally report the work of Subcommittee to ACE. Mr. Eric CHAN said the Secretariat would prepare a paper reporting the work of the Subcommittee to ACE. Secretariat

25. The meeting concluded at 12:05 pm.

**Nature Conservation Subcommittee Secretariat
July 2006**