

ACE Nature Conservation Subcommittee
Meeting on 18 October 2011 at 3 pm
At Conference Room, 33/F, Revenue Tower, Wanchai
Confirmed Minutes of Meeting

Present

- Prof Chau Kwai-cheong, J.P. (*Chairman*)
- Professor Fung Tung
- Dr Man Chi Sum, J.P.
- Dr Alfred Tam
- Mr. Tsang Kam-lam, J.P.
- Ms Pansy Yau
- Dr Yau Wing Kwong, J.P.

Absent with Apologies

- Ms Ho Siu-fong, Betty
- Mr Hans Michael Jebson, BBS
- Mr LAU Che-feng, Edwin, MH
- Miss Ng Yuen-ting, Yolanda
- Mr Simon Wong, J.P.

In attendance

EPD

- Mr Albert Lam, J.P. - Deputy Director (2)
- Mr Elvis Au, J.P. – Assistant Director (Nature Conservation and Infrastructure Planning)
- Miss Vivien Li – Senior Administrative Officer (Nature Conservation)
EPD (Secretary)

AFCD

- Mr CC LAY – Assistant Director (Conservation)
- Mr Simon Chan – Senior Conservation Officer (Biodiversity)

For agenda item 3

- Dr. Hung Wing Tat, M.H. (Board of Director of CA)
- Mr. So Kwok Yin (Chief Executive of CA)
- Mr. Lau Sin Pang (Conservation Officer of CA)
- Dr. Ng Cho Nam, B.B.S (Vice-Chairman of HKBWS)
- Mr. Lo Wai Yan (Project Manager of HKBWS)
- Miss Yeung Lee Ki (Senior Project Officer of HKBWS)

For agenda item 4

- Mr. Eric Wong Executive Director (Hong Kong Wetland Park)
- Ms Grace Lau Wetland Park Manager/Reserve

1. The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting.

Agenda item 1 -Confirmation of meeting held on 26 May 2011

2. The minutes of the meeting held on 26 May 2011 was confirmed without any amendment.

Agenda item 2 - Matters arising

3. There was no matter arising from the last meeting.

Agenda Item 3: Nature Conservation Management Agreement Proposal – Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2012 -2015 (NCSC Paper 4/2011)

4. The Chairman invited Mr. Simon Chan to brief members on the paper.
5. The Chairman said that the Committee would give advice on the project, so that the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) Committee could take into account the Committee's comments in considering the funding proposal at its meeting on 18 Nov 2011. The Chairman then invited the representatives from the Conservancy Association (CA) and Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) to join the meeting and present their proposal.
6. Mr. Ken So briefed members on the key elements of the existing Management Agreement (MA) project at Long Valley, and also the proposal to continue the project from 2012-15.
7. A Member enquired how the unit cost of managing the farmlands was calculated; how to assess whether farmers fulfilled relevant requirements; and the purposes for acquiring fallow/abandoned farmlands in the project.
8. Miss Vicky Yeung responded that the unit cost was calculated based on the cost for managing each square foot per month; which included rental, electricity charges and other basic costs. The cost was slightly below market value in order not to upset the prevailing farming operations. Miss Yeung also explained that CA and HKBWS conducted regular patrol to monitor works of the farmers; in fact, after many years of cooperation, farmers were already very familiar with the relevant requirements.
9. Regarding the abandoned/fallow lands, Mr. Ken So explained that they indeed served ecological functions as many important species could be found in those areas. Hence, if they were not acquired and

suitably managed, they might be put to other uses incompatible with conservation objectives.

10. On a Member's enquiry, Mr. Ken So explained that recently there were very few of illegal dumping activities in Long Valley, thanks to government's enforcement efforts. On the Member's concerns on the future of the MA scheme, Mr. Ken So said that Long Valley did not have significant development potential, and also, one of the main landowners of Long Valley had already joined the current MA project, and the second main landowner would likely join the current MA project very soon. He was of the view that farming activities at Long Valley were not facing a real threat of being eradicated, but farming operations became very difficult due to significant increase in operational cost and low return. Dr. Hung Wing-tat also added that the current MA project improved the ecological value of Long Valley, hence development pressure would be further alleviated. Dr. Ng Cho-nam added that he did not foresee that the Government would change its policy on MA; for instance, the scheme was recently extended to cover private lands in country parks and country park enclaves.
11. Mr. Albert Lam said that in 2011, the Government took the initiative to revise the guidelines for the MA scheme and removed the requirement that MA projects should achieve self-sufficiency in the long-run, demonstrating the Government's commitment to support the scheme on a long-term basis.
12. Upon a Member's enquiry, Miss Ken So advised that the proposed education centre, which was possibly an abandoned school, was very conveniently located as it was within walking distance to Sheung Shui MTR station.
13. A Member remarked that the abandoned school would be a good base for holding educational activities, and opined that it would be even better if environmental elements could be injected in revitalising the building.
14. Upon the Chairman's enquiry, Mr. Ken So advised that CA and HKBWS would suitably manage the Fung Shui woods which were recently affected by hill fires. Furthermore, works would be carried out to manage the spreading invasive paperbark trees in the area. On visitor management plan, Mr. Ken So explained that they would as far as possible fence off the core area to divert visitors away from it, but as both CA and HKBWS did not have full control over all relevant sites, there could not be a very strict control plan.

15. Noting that Members did not have further questions, the Chairman invited representatives of CA to leave the meeting.

Management Agreement Proposal – Wetland Management Programme for Fishpond

16. The Chairman informed the meeting that as per AFCD's request, he would let AFCD and the HKBWS present the initial proposal for running a Management Agreement proposal which involved wetland management programme for fishponds in the Deep Bay area.
17. Mr. CC Lay explained that the details of the proposal still needed to be fine-tuned in consultation with participating parties including fishermen, but considered the meeting a suitable opportunity for Members to be briefed on the proposal and to offer initial advice.
18. The Chairman further suggested that while the paper for the item was not yet available, if Members in-principle agreed with the proposal, the paper could be subsequently circulated for agreement, and the proposal could then be submitted to the ECF for funding support at the meeting on 18 Nov 2011.
19. Upon Members' agreement, the Chairman invited Mr. Simon Chan to brief Members on the proposal. Mr. Chan highlighted the key elements of the proposals as follows:
- (a) The HKBWS was the proponent of the project, and would run the project in collaboration with fishermen and fishermen group in the Deep Bay fishpond area. The pilot project would run for one year from 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2012.
 - (b) Under the proposal, fishpond operators would adopt ecologically sustainable operation regime to manage their fish ponds such as:
 - i. regular drain-down of fishponds to the required level;
 - ii. maintenance of shallow pond habitats for bird feeding and roosting;
 - iii. clearance of weeds on pond bunds to create more habitats for birds; and
 - iv. prohibition of use of lethal bird deterring device etc.
 - (c) About 700 ha of fishponds (70% of the fishponds in the Deep Bay area) would be managed, requiring funds of about \$4.7M. About 200-230 fishermen would be involved. These fishponds are located in two (Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site and Ramsar Site) of the twelve ecologically important sites under

private ownership announced by the government in 2004.

- (d) Publicity and education programmes such as eco-tours would be organized.
- 20. AFCD explained its initial assessment on how the proposal had met the evaluation criteria of applications under the MA scheme.
- 21. Upon the Chairman's invitation to give supplementary information, Dr. Ng Cho-nam explained that the liaison with fishermen had its challenges, but the HKBWS would strive to reach an agreement with the fishermen on the details and complete the proposal as soon as possible.
- 22. Upon two Members' enquiry, Dr. Ng Cho-nam explained that HKBWS would enter into management agreements with the fishermen, and they would receive a financial assistance of about \$4,500 per hectare per annum. The agreement would, among other things, request the fishermen to adopt ecologically sustainable methods to manage the fishponds, such as regular drain-down of water. It was expected that more birds would be attracted to the area as they could forage on the fish left over in the drained-down fishponds. The scheme could also provide incentives for fishermen not to harm birds in the area.
- 23. Mr. CC Lay added that if fishermen however used illegal measures to catch or harm birds, AFCD would take enforcement actions whether or not the project was in place.
- 24. The Chairman asked if the project would encourage free-riders who had in fact already abandoned their fishponds to join and benefit from the project. He also asked if it would be better for the project, which was intended to be a pilot project, to involve fewer fishponds.
- 25. Mr. CC Lay explained that the filling and draining down of the fish ponds would require significant resources; and hence it was unlikely that those who had abandoned the fishponds would resume their businesses just because of the introduction of the project. He also explained that as the Deep Bay area had about 200-230 fishermen, it would be difficult to select who to include or exclude.
- 26. A Member opined that using ecological methods to manage fishponds, which was akin to the traditional methods, would require using less chemicals and produce healthier fish.
- 27. Upon a Member's enquiry, Dr. Ng Cho-nam said that suitable

resources would be invested to carefully monitor the 700 ha of fishponds covered in the project.

28. Noting that Members had no further questions, the Chairman invited representatives of HKBWS to leave the meeting.
29. The Chairman invited Members to offer views on whether the MA proposal on fishponds and at Long Valley worth supporting.
30. A Member said that the fishpond MA proposal was itself very straight-forward. He considered that the Committee should be able to offer its final view after the paper was circulated, and a further meeting might not be necessary. The meeting agreed. He further added that timing-wise, it would be desirable to start the project in winter to cater for the needs of migratory birds.
31. The Chairman concluded that Members in-principle agreed to support the MA fishponds proposal as it would encourage traditional and ecologically-friendly practices to manage fishponds with a view to enhancing the ecological values. He said that the proposal could also help resolve conflicts between fishermen's operations and the need to conserve the ecological values of fishponds in Mai Po. It is hoped that after implementation of the scheme food safety could be enhanced besides the preservation of an indigenous culture of the local fish farmers. He added that the project would demonstrate Hong Kong's commitment to fulfill the obligations under the Ramsar Convention. It was also encouraging to see that a new project was introduced since the MA scheme was launched in 2004. He asked the Administration to provide the paper as soon as possible for Members to consider the details of the proposal.
32. Regarding the Long Valley proposal, the meeting unanimously gave support. They noted that under the proposal, more areas were being managed, and an education centre to better conduct publicity activities would also be provided. The Chairman advised CA and HKBWS to conduct surveys inviting comments from visitors on how to improve the project.

Agenda Item 4: Ecological Monitoring and Habitat Management Programme of Hong Kong Wetland Park (NCSC Paper 3/2011)

33. The Chairman invited Ms Grace Lau to take member through the paper. The Chairman then invited views from members.
34. Upon a Member's enquiry, Mr. Eric Wong explained that the visitors were usually very well-behaved; and when spotting irregularities

which rarely occurred, AFCD's staff would give suitable advice to visitors.

35. A Member suggested AFCD to organise tours tailor-made for experienced visitors, so that they could acquire more in-depth knowledge when re-visiting the park.
36. Upon the Chairman's enquiry, Mr. Eric Wong advised that the indoor visitor centre could hold a maximum of 3000 visitors and the outdoor venue could hold a maximum of 10,000 visitors.
37. A Member suggested AFCD to organise more courses on biodiversity to raise public awareness. He also commended AFCD for the very well-organised voluntary service scheme in the park.
38. Upon a Member's enquiry, Mr. Eric Wong: explained that according to AFCD's survey, around 15% of those visiting the park were non-local visitors. AFCD also maintained close liaison with the Tourism Commission to promote the park to local and overseas visitors.
39. The Chairman concluded that the meeting appreciated AFCD's works, and hoped that it would keep up the efforts.
40. The Chairman said that the date of the next meeting would be separately advised. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:00 pm.

**Secretariat
Nature Conservation Subcommittee,
Advisory Council on the Environment
October 2011**

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