

**ACE Nature Conservation Subcommittee
Meeting on 17 December 2013 at 10.30 am
Conference Room 1523, 15/F, East Wing,
Central Government Offices, 2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong.**

Minutes of Meeting

Present

- Prof CHAU Kwai-cheong (Chairman)
- Dr Gary W J ADES
- Dr. HAU Chi-hang, Billy
- Professor NG Cheuk-ye, John
- Professor Nora TAM
- Dr. TSANG Po-keung, Eric

Absent with Apologies

- Dr TAM Yat Cheung, Alfred
- Professor FUNG Tung
- Ms. YAU Lai-ping, Pansy
- Miss Yolanda NG

In attendance

EPD

- Mr Howard CHAN – Deputy Director (2)
- Mr Elvis AU – Assistant Director (Nature Conservation and Infrastructure Planning)
- Miss Sian LI – Senior Administrative Officer (Nature Conservation) (Secretary)

AFCD

- Mr YK CHAN – Assistant Director (Conservation)
- Mr. Simon CHAN – Senior Conservation Officer
- Ms. Jackie YIP – Senior Conservation Officer

For Agenda Item 3

- Mr. Ken SO Kwok-yin, Chief Executive of The Conservancy Association
- Ms. Katie CHICK Hiu-lai, Conservation Manager of The Conservancy Association
- Mr. LO Wai-yan, General Manager of the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society
- Ms. Vicky YEUNG Lee-ki, Assistant Manager (Projects) of the Hong

Agenda Item 1: Confirmation of Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 30 November 2012

1. The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting of the Advisory Council on the Environment Nature Conservation Subcommittee (NCSC). The minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2013 was confirmed without any amendment.

Agenda Item 2: Matters arising

2. There were no matters arising.

Agenda Item 3 : Nature Conservation Management Agreement Project – Progress of Implementation of the Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2012 – 2015

(NCSC Paper 3/2013)

3. The Chairman informed the meeting that the Management Agreement (MA) Project in Long Valley (LV) and Ho Sheung Heung was first launched in November 2005 and had been renewed several times. In the latest funded project, the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) had approved an allocation of \$9.7 million for three years to the Conservancy Association (CA) in association with the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) (the project manager) for the MA project entitled “Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2012-2015” in January 2012. CA and HKBWS would like to make a presentation to update Members on the latest progress of implementation of the MA project.
4. A Member declared that he was one of the Board of Directors of the CA. Since the project managers were only giving a progress report on the MA project at this meeting, after consulting Members, the Chairman decided that the Member could participate in the discussion.

5. Invited by the Chairman, Mr Ken So, Chief Executive of The Conservancy Association presented the progress with the aid of a powerpoint. Mr Ken So briefed the meeting that the project objectives were to enhance long term conservation of entire LV and Ho Sheung Heung area, conserve the landscape and biodiversity therein, as well as to promote eco-agriculture in that area. He advised the meeting that for most of the habitat types, the managed area had exceeded the proposed area in the approved MA submission. The exception were water flea ponds, as the owner of the only flea ponds in Long Valley had withdrawn three out of his five ponds from the MA project; and fallow agricultural land, as those had become active farming land. The project manager would encourage the farmers to join the MA project. Different management measures to conserve locally rare and unique agricultural wetland habitats were adopted in LV. When looking at the long term trend, there was 68% increase in number of birds recorded per survey from 2006 to 2012, probably because a diversified habitat had been developed at LV as a result of the MA project. Ten new bird species were sighted during this reporting period, bringing the cumulative number of bird species recorded at Long Valley up to almost 300 species. Different programmes were carried out for monitoring and conservation of birds and amphibians, and promoting sustainable eco-agriculture. Engagement programmes for schools and the general public were carried out in collaboration with other working partners (e.g. workshops, eco-tours, Harvest Fest, international work camps).

6. On the difficulties encountered under the MA project, visitor disturbance and invasive species (Red import fire ant, Apple snail, Greenhouse toad etc.) directly affected the effectiveness of its conservation measures. The project manager would continue to educate visitor not to disturb wildlife and behave well when watching/photographing birds and wildlife. Invasive species removal activities were organised to tackle the problem of invasive species. There were also some problems derived from the uncertainty brought under the Government's North East New Territories New Development Area (NDA) proposal: termination of engagement by farmers, increase in farmland rent and farmlands withdrawal by landowners etc. The project manager would continue to monitor the situation.

7. The Chairman then invited views from Members. Members congratulated the success in this MA project and recognized its importance as a model to other MA projects. Some members gave their views on better reporting for evaluating the effectiveness of the project. Members suggested that the project should be assessed in terms of the extent to which the objectives of the MA project had been met. Other than fauna species, the project managers should also update NCSC on their work on flora species, other crops and vegetation, as well as the impact of this MA project on LV's ecosystem as a whole. Members also suggested the project manager to study and report on the feedback of local farmers and visitors towards this project and how their attitudes and behaviors had changed after joining the MA or visiting LV. In response to Members' enquiries and views, Mr Ken So and Miss Katie Chick of CA advised that biannual habitat and vegetation surveys were conducted under this MA. Crop diversity in LV had also been enhanced since the introduction of this MA. Practices of ecological agriculture were adopted, for example farmers would plant at farmland margin to avoid the use of herbicides. As regards the participation of local community, more farmers joined this MA but there were some anxiety building up from the uncertainty brought by the future NDA project. Separately, about 20 local villagers were trained to become eco-guides under this MA to share their traditional knowledge. All-in-all, in addition to the direct benefits to biodiversity, the MA project had raised the public and local communities' awareness on nature conservation and built up momentum throughout these years of operation.
8. In response to Members' enquiry, Miss Katie Chick of CA explained that the number of arranged workshops and ecotours had yet to meet the original target as the project manager had some difficulties in finding a right location to set up its Education Centre. It was expected that more workshops could be arranged upon the opening of the Education Centre in Q1 2014.
9. On the difficulties encountered under this MA, a Member offered to share his experience on using environmentally friendly method to tackle the problem of red import fire ants with the project manager. A Member suggested the project manager to assess the impacts of the NDA project to the MA under different scenarios. Mr Elvis Au

informed the meeting that under the NDA, LV would be transformed into a nature park in the longer term. The nature park would be managed by the AFCD. Wet agriculture would be carried out but the Administration had yet to decide on the detailed operation and management regimes.

10. The Chairman concluded that CA and HKBWS were to be commended on their conservation work at LV including the current MA, which benefited the whole society and the locals. The NCSC would advise the project manager the following:

- (a) The project manager was advised to report from the perspective of a community-based MA on the management of an ecologically sensitive area to show a comprehensive picture.
- (b) In the future reporting, the project manager would be required to report on flora status (e.g. species, health condition, status of growth, their impact on fauna number) in addition to the fauna ones;
- (c) The project manager would be required to conduct stakeholder surveys (including visitors and farmers) to facilitate the evaluation of the effectiveness of the projects in enhancing the visitors and villagers' awareness and recognition on nature conservation. The Chairman also suggested the project manager to circulate their latest survey questionnaire and results to the NCSC.
- (d) The project manager should evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the MA in terms of the extent to which the objectives of the project had been met and the change since last reporting using a semi-quantitative approach;
- (e) If there were any changes to the progress report, the project manager should inform NCSC in advance before its meeting to facilitate NCSC's discussion.

Agenda Item 4: Status of *Aquilaria sinensis* (Incense Tree) in Hong Kong

11. The Chairman invited Dr Jackie Yip to brief Members on the status

of *Aquilaria sinensis* (Incense Tree) in Hong Kong. Dr Jackie Yip update Members on the current status and the measures taken to conserve this species. The key points were as follows:-

- i. *A. sinensis* was a native tree species of the plant family Thymelaeaceae. It was an evergreen tree of 6 to 20 m tall. *A. sinensis* is a common species widely distributed in lowland forests especially near villages. The plant could be used for production of valuable fragrant wood (Agarwood) used for incense, medicine, artifact and carving.
 - ii. *A. sinensis* was listed as “Vulnerable” in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species published by The World Conservation Union, as well as the China Red List (2004). Currently, all species of *Aquilaria* were listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and their import and export require relevant licenses. In Mainland China, *A. sinensis* was in the “List of Wild Plant Under State Protection” (Category II).
 - iii. Cases of illegal exploitation were reported in different regions of Hong Kong. Enforcement actions against illegal logging, which were essential to the protection of the existing populations, will be continued. AFCD would closely liaise and cooperate with the Police in combating against illegal felling or pruning of *A. sinensis*. Patrols would be stepped up at hotspots of illegal tree felling to deter unauthorized activities.
 - iv. In addition to protecting the existing populations, efforts were also made to enhance local propagation of *A. sinensis*. AFCD had increased the production of seedlings of *A. sinensis* in the past few years, and planted the seedlings extensively in country parks.
12. Members recognized AFCD’s effort on conserving *A. sinensis* and suggested the Administration to step up policing to tackle illegal exploitation of the species through different means.

Agenda Item 5: Any Other Business

13. Invited by the Chairman, Mr Simon Chan, Senior Conservation Officer/ Biodiversity of AFCD updated Members on the present ecological status of Sha Lo Tung. Members noted AFCD's report and suggested to be briefed on the ecological status of other priority sites of high ecological importance for enhanced conservation in future meetings.

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