

**ACE Nature Conservation Subcommittee
Meeting on 22 December 2014 at 3:00p.m.
in 33/F Conference Room, Revenue Tower, 5 Gloucester Road,
Wanchai, Hong Kong
Minutes of Meeting**

Present

- Professor CHAU Kwai-cheong
- Professor NG Cheuk-yee, John
- Professor Nora TAM
- Dr. TSANG Po-keung, Eric
- Dr. TAM Yat-cheung, Alfred
- Ms. Pansy YAU

In Attendance

EPD

- Miss Sian LI – Senior Administrative Officer (Nature Conservation) (Secretary)
- Ms. Daisy CHAN – Executive Assistant (Nature Conservation)

AFCD

- Dr. P. M. SO – Assistant Director (Conservation)
- Mr. Simon CHAN – Senior Conservation Officer (Biodiversity)

Absent with Apologies

- Professor FUNG Tung
- Dr. Gary Ades
- Dr. Billy HAU
- Miss Yolanda NG

In Attendance for Item 3

For the application on “Nature and Human in Harmony - Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2015 – 2017”

- Dr. NG Cho-nam - Vice Chairman of HKBWS
- Mr. LO Wai-yan - General Manager of HKBWS
- Mr. SO Kwok-yin – Chief Executive of CA

- Ms. HUI Shuk-kwan – Assistant Conservation Manager of CA
- Mr. LAU Sin-pang – Conservation Officer of CA

For the applications on “Fishpond Conservation Scheme in Ramsar Site 2015-17” and “Hong Kong Got Fishpond – Eco-fishpond Management Agreement Scheme 2015-2017”

- Dr. NG Cho-nam - Vice Chairman of HKBWS
- Mr. LO Wai-yan - General Manager of HKBWS
- Mr. YU Yat-tung - Research Manager of HKBWS
- Ms. Vicky YEUNG Lee-ki - Assistant Manager (Projects) of HKBWS
- Ms. Helen FONG Hoi-ning - Project Officer of HKBWS
- Mr. Johnson CHUNG Chun-kit - Project Officer of HKBWS

Agenda Item 1: Confirmation of Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 28 October 2014

1. The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting of the Advisory Council on the Environment (ACE) Nature Conservation Subcommittee (NCSC). The minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2014 was confirmed without any amendment.

Agenda Item 2: Matters Arising

2. There are no matters arising from the last meeting.

Agenda Item 3: Vetting of Applications of Nature Conservation Management Agreement (MA) Project *(Committee Paper NCSC 3/2014)*

3. The Chairman informed the meeting that the Assessment Panel, consisting of members from AFCD and EPD, would present the assessment results of the MA applications received. Proponents of the recommended applications would then be invited to join and present their applications and answer questions from NCSC members. After the proponents left, NCSC

members would be invited to consider the applications based on the assessment results, and put forth the recommended applications to ECF Committee for consideration for funding support.

4. The Chairman reminded Members to declare potential interest before the discussion. Applicants to the three Nature Conservation Management Agreement (MA) applications were the Conservancy Association (CA) and the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS). Section 2.7 of the Guideline to Application for the ECF Nature Conservation Management Agreement Projects states that –

2.7 Avoidance of Conflict of Interests

To avoid conflict of interest, members of ACE (or its subcommittee) and the ECF Committee who are directly or indirectly related to an application will be required to declare interest and refrain from taking part in the discussion of that application by leaving the venue where the deliberation takes place. This will apply to members who are part of the project team and/or members who belong to the same organisation.

No attending members had conflict of interest to declare.

5. Invited by the Chairman, Mr. Simon CHAN, Senior Conservation Officer (Biodiversity) of AFCD, briefed Members on the *NCSC Paper 3/2014* with the aid of a powerpoint of which the following was highlighted:-

General requirements under MA Scheme

(a) Under the enhanced MA framework, which was discussed at the last NCSC meeting on 28 October 2014, open invitations of MA proposals would be called for at a fixed time every year and the invitation would be announced in the ECF homepage. All the MA applications received would be considered at the same time.

(b) As set out in the Guide to Application for MA project,

- Registered local non-profit making organisations (e.g.

universities, community bodies and green groups) or groups formed under a registered non-profit making organisation in Hong Kong are eligible to apply.

- All Management Agreement Projects should observe a funding cap of HK\$10 million for each project lasting for a period of three years. Funds may be granted for full or partial support of projects.
- Each Management Agreement project should last for at least 12 months and normally not more than three years.
- All applications received will first be vetted by an Assessment Panel consisting of members from EPD and AFCD. The panel will assess each application according to the criteria set out in Section 2.6 of the Guide to Application. The recommendations will then be submitted to the NCSC under the ACE for consultation and then forwarded to the ECF Committee for consideration.

(c) For MA scheme, NCSC is invited to examine the MA applications received from nature conservation angle, before the recommended applications are put forth to the ECF Committee for consideration on funding support. Below are some pointers to facilitate members' consideration:

- NCSC may consider applications based on the assessment result made by the Assessment Panel on each application
- NCSC may consider the project details including the scope, level of activities, deliverables etc., and provides its comment (which may include proposing approval conditions) to ECF Committee for consideration
- The ultimate decision on (I) whether the funding application should be approved, and (II) if approved, the amount of funding support to be granted rests with the ECF Committee. Generally speaking, the budget items of MA applications shall be considered by the ECF Committee. Members may

however give comments to the assessment under broad vetting criteria (e) and (i) in relation budget and expenditure.

- (d) Furthermore, for better monitoring of the progress and effectiveness of MA projects, on top of the vetting by AFCD and EPD, the recipient organizations are also required to report on the progress of the ongoing MA projects regularly to the NCSC.

Open invitation and Assessment on Applications Received

- (e) The first round of invitation for MA applications was open from 6 October to 17 November 2014. Three MA applications were received by the deadline. One funding application was submitted by the CA in association with the HKBWS for wetland conservation in Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung Priority Site while the two other MA applications were submitted by the HKBWS for fishpond conservation in Ramsar Site Priority Site and the Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site Priority Site.
- (f) An Assessment Panel had been established to consider the applications of MA Projects. The Panel met on 8 December 2014 to examine and evaluate the applications based on the approved marking scheme as agreed by NCSC in the last meeting.
- (g) The Assessment Panel considered that three proposed projects were worth supporting in view of the benefits that the proposed projects would bring to the conservation of the concerned sites and raise the public awareness on nature conservation. The detailed assessments of each of the application were at Annex II of *NCSC Paper 3/2014*.
6. Upon the enquiries of the Chairman and a number of Members, Dr. PM So and Mr Simon Chan responded that registered local non-profit making organisations were eligible to apply. MA projects could be carried out in Priority Sites for Enhanced Conservation, Country Park enclaves as well as private land within Country Parks. Duration of a particular MA project would depend on its nature and other factors.
7. After Mr. Simon CHAN's introduction, the Chairman invited

representatives from the project proponent, CA and HKBWS, to join the meeting. Mr. Ken SO, Chief Executive of CA presented the powerpoint to Members on the project:-

Session 1

Nature and Human in Harmony – Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2015-2017

The key objectives of the project

- (a) The new project in the coming years marked a very important transitional stage for Long Valley in maintaining the conservation value and conditions when the private lands would be resumed to form the future Nature Park under the NENT NDA project.
- (b) The continuation of the project, during this transitional period, aimed to maintain the conservation status in Long Valley developed under the Long Valley Management Agreement since 2005.
- (c) The Management Agreement work would be extended to the northern side of the site, which would not be included in the proposed Nature Park.
- (d) Education and publicity programs would be strengthened; various in-depth wetland conservation and eco-farming activities would be organized for students and the general public and enriched with lectures and workshops.

Features highlighted

- (a) Paddy rice fields with a flooding period for about three months were believed to be key habitats for Chinese Bullfrogs to breed, as well as for tadpoles to grow to metamorphosis.
- (b) Engage more lands in Long Valley North (i.e. Ho Sheung

Heung), which would be zoned as agriculture with a presumption against development in future. By managing more wetlands in Long Valley North, the overall wetland coverage of Long Valley could be maintained even though some of the wetland in the core Long Valley area was being transited into dry orchards.

- (c) Maximize the usage of the new Education Centre to enhance education elements; comprehensive education programmes for schools and the general public would also be organized.
- (d) Strengthen education elements with increased number of participants and enhance promotion of the project to the general public would generate income from project activities in order to achieve 5% contribution of the approved budget.

8. The Chairman enquired about the yield of the agricultural product. He suggested to increase the yield and revenue of the project. Ms. Vicky YEUNG of HKBWS responded that there were about 3000 kg in 2014. Members enquired about the willingness and enthusiasm of farmers to participate in the MA project in light of the coming new plans in conjunction with the the North East New Territories New Development Areas (NENT NDA) project. Mr. Ken SO of CA replied that through close communication with the farmers, the farmers were willing to participate in the MA project. However, the farmers' willingness will be affected by the resumption plan of NDA. Dr. NG of CA informed the meeting that under the NENT NDA project, the core area of Long Valley would become a Nature Park, thus it would be critical, in this transitional stage, to continue the MA efforts in the northern side of Long Valley, which was private farmland area. A Member enquired about the behaviour change of both the general public and farmers participated in this project. He suggested the contents of questionnaire should reflect both the behaviour change of participants as well as those of farmers. The Chairman raised the issue that year 2015 would be an International Year of Soils, and suggested CA well publicize the knowledge about soils in the new project. Further, the Chairman enquired about the possibility to cooperate with Social Enterprise during the project period. Mr. Ken SO of CA replied that the project had already been cooperating with different social enterprises.

(End of Session 1)

Session 2

Project 1: Fishpond Conservation Scheme in Ramsar Site 2015-17 and

Project 2: Hong Kong Got Fishpond – Eco-fishpond Management

Agreement Scheme 2015-17

8. The Chairman invited representatives from the project proponent, HKBWS, to join the meeting. Mr. YU Yat-tung, Research Manager of HKBWS presented the powerpoint to Members on the two fishpond projects:-

The key objectives of the two fishpond projects

Project 1 focused on habitat management and off-site education and promotion and Project 2 focused on on-site education. To maintain the integrity of the Deep Bay ecosystem, the two proposed projects were part and parcel of each other. The two projects would provide feeding grounds in fishponds for wetland birds, and researches and studies would be conducted to provide ecological information. In these projects, the applicant, HKBWS, would strengthen collaboration with local fishermen and the Hong Kong New Territories Fish Culture Association (HKNTFCA). HKBWS would also organize education and promotion activities to convey the message of “Birds and Human in Harmony”.

Features Highlighted

- (a) Noted that waterbirds recorded in fishponds with full drain-down (>50% of exposed bottom) was significantly higher than that in partially-drained ponds, fish farmers were encouraged to conduct full drain-down through additional financial incentive.
- (b) Intensive and regular waterbird monitoring for drain-down would be continued to monitor the effectiveness of management practice. Ecological baseline studies for birds, herpetofauna and odonata would be conducted.

- (c) Ecological baseline studies on the relationship of birds and pond bunds would be conducted to study the utilization of pond bunds by birds and thus the relationship between them
- (d) The project team would explore and diversify activity types to attract more general public and generate income for the projects in order to achieve 5% contribution of the approved budget.

9. A Member enquired on the revenue generating activities in these projects. Ms. Vicky YEUNG of HKBWS answered that souvenir sale and fishpond festivals held in Ramsar Site would generate favorable income. Mr. YU Yat-tung of HKBWS further explained that, however, public safety would be a crucial factor to consider in organizing site visits to fishponds. Based on past experience, even with the assistance of volunteers, it would be risky to handle too many visitors at fishponds at one time. Dr. NG Cho-nam of HKBWS further explained that the nature of Long Valley MA and the two fishpond MAs were totally different. Agricultural products, such as rice, could be cultivated in Long Valley and there would be more public participation; whereas the activities held for public about fishponds would be limited. This would affect the income generated from the projects.

10. A Member suggested interesting activities like fishing and netting could attract public participation and pointed out that the number of participants in the Hong Kong Got Fishpond project was too low to meet the the project objective to reach out to the public. Mr. YU Yat-tung and Mr. LO Wai-yan of HKBWS responded that fish-fins could cause danger in netting. Furthermore, most of the fishponds were in operation, so the open space suitable for public site visit was restricted. In organizing activities in fishpond area, on top of safety, other factors needed to be considered, such as the willingness of fish farmers to assist, the landscape of fishponds, narrow path between fishponds, logistic arrangement etc. Dr. NG Cho-nam of HKBWS shared that with the successful experience in its Fishpond Festival, HKBWS would organize more activities for public participation.

11. A Member noted the physical constraints of fishponds, and suggested if an observation site could be set up for public to understand the fishpond operation from a safe spot. He also noted that there were only 20 teachers

participated in the teacher activity. Mr. CHUNG Chun-kit of HKBWS replied that most teacher were not available for 2-days tours. Thus, HKBWS would adjust the program and organize 1-day tour so that more teachers could participate in the program. Mr. LO Wai-yan of HKBWS supplemented that as the fishpond operation would not follow a fixed schedule, it would be difficult to arrange sightseeing of fishponds for the public in advance. Nonetheless, the HKBWS would further explore collaboration with fishermen.

12. The Chairman, who shared the view of a Member, pointed out that the number of participants in the Hong Kong Got Fishpond project was far too low as compared with public participation of Long Valley and for the amount of budget requested for the project. The Chairman suggested HKBWS, on top of nature conservation of wetland birds, to explore seeking the traditional drain-down practice of fishpond, to become an Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Chairman commented further that year 2015 is the International Year of Soils, HKBWS should publicize the information about soils in fishponds. A Member commented that fishpond operators should be re-educated on traditional drain-down of fishponds through financial incentives under MA. Mr YU Yat-tung of HKBWS informed the meeting that fishpond operators faced various difficulties besides drain-down and netting, such as the schedule for selling fish fixed in the Freshwater Fish Wholesale Market and wholesale price of fish in the market.

13. A Member enquired about if the fishpond operators joined the Accredited Fish Farm Scheme (AFFS) under AFCD. Mr. YU Yat-tung of HKBWS answered that HKBWS did not have the information whether the fish farmers joined the AFFS but they were fishponds registered under AFCD's Voluntary Registration Scheme.

14. The Chairman commented that HKBWS should enhance the fishpond operators' as well as visitors' awareness and behavior change towards fishpond conservation. It should make use of the questionnaire to measure the conceptual and behaviour change of fishpond operators and the participants in this project. HKBWS should submit the questionnaire in respect of the fishpond operators and general public for vetting by NCSC.

(End of Session 2)

15. The Chairman invited the Members' views on the applications based on the assessment results, and whether to put forth the recommended applications to the ECF Committee for consideration on funding support. The recommended applications, together with the views of NCSC Members, would be submitted to ECF Committee for consideration at the next ECF Committee meeting.

16. A Member suggested the applicant may consider appropriate infrastructure (e.g. broadwalk or viewing point) to facilitate education without disrupting the fishpond operation.

17. The Chairman and Members' views and suggestions on the three Applications are listed as follows:-

I. Nature and Human in Harmony – Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2015-17

The MA application was supported in general, but the following conditions were recommended:

- (i) To better understand the awareness and behavior change of the major stakeholders and visitors towards nature conservation, the CA should develop questionnaire to understand the conceptual and behavior changes of major stakeholders and visitors in this project. CA should submit the questionnaire for comment by the NCSC prior to commencement of the project;
- (ii) CA should convey the message to the major stakeholders and general public that urban development could coexist harmoniously with nature conservation, and benefiting one another environmentally and socially in its education activities and programmes, using the Long Valley MA as an example;
- (iii) CA should manage to increase the productivity of crops, especially rice, grown under this project so as to increase the yields and revenue, as well as the carrying capacity for birds feeding on the grain.
- (iv) The United Nations has declared 2015 the International Year of Soils (IYS). The IYS would serve as a platform for raising awareness on the importance of sustainable soil management as the basis for food, fuel and fiber production, provision of essential ecosystem functions and better adaptation to climate change for the present and future generations. CA is advised to

publicise the knowledge about the importance of soil in this project.

- (v) CA is advised to explore the possibility to cooperate with social enterprises in conducting the revenue-generating programmes during the project period.

(II) *Fishpond Conservation Scheme in Ramsar Site 2015-17*

The MA application was supported in general, but the following conditions were recommended:

- (i) The HKBWS should demonstrate its utmost efforts in seeking alternative funding, including income-generating activities and private sponsorships, so as to achieve 5% contribution to the total budget;
- (ii) HKBWS should conduct education programmes for the fishpond operators so as to promote the sustainability of traditional fish-farming practices and to enhance their awareness on the importance of fishpond conservation;
- (iii) To better understand the awareness and behavior change of fishpond operators and visitors towards fishpond conservation, the HKBWS should revise the questionnaire to understand the conceptual and behavior change of fishpond operators and visitors in this project. HKBWS should submit the questionnaire for comment by NCSC prior to commencement of the project ;
- (iv) HKBWS is suggested to further develop its volunteer programme with a view to raising the awareness of the public in nature conservation.
- (v) HKBWS is advised to explore the listing of the traditional drain-down practice of fishpond as Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- (vi) The United Nations has declared 2015 the IYS. The IYS would serve as a platform for raising awareness on the importance of sustainable soil management as the basis for food, fuel and fiber

production, provision of essential ecosystem functions and better adaptation to climate change for the present and future generations. HKBWS is advised to publicise the knowledge about the importance of sustainable pond soil management in this project. This shall include but not limited to the development of soil toxicity during fish rearing and subsequent drain-down measures to resolve the problem.

(III) *Hong Kong Got Fishpond – Eco-fishpond Management Agreement Scheme 2015-17*

The MA application was supported in general, but the following conditions were recommended:

- (i) The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society should demonstrate its utmost efforts in seeking alternative funding, including income-generating activities and private sponsorships, so as to achieve 5% contribution to the total budget.
- (ii) HKBWS should conduct education programmes for the fishpond operators so as to promote the sustainability of the traditional fish-farming practices and to enhance their awareness on the importance of fishpond conservation;
- (iii) To better understand the awareness and behavior change of fishpond operators and visitors towards fishpond conservation, the HKBWS should revise the questionnaire to understand the conceptual change of fishpond operators and behavior change of the visitors in this project. HKBWS should submit the questionnaire for comment by NCSC prior to commencement of the project;
- (iv) To further enhance the awareness on fishpond conservation of the general public, the HKBWS is advised to promote more activities and attract more public members to participate in the project;
- (v) HKBWS is suggested to further develop its volunteer programme with a view to raising the awareness of the public in nature conservation.

- (vi) HKBWS is advised to explore the listing of the traditional drain-down practice of fishpond as Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- (vii) The United Nations has declared 2015 the IYS. The IYS would serve as a platform for raising awareness on the importance of sustainable soil management as the basis for food, fuel and fiber production, provision of essential ecosystem functions and better adaptation to climate change for the present and future generations. HKBWS is advised to publicise the knowledge about the importance of sustainable pond soil management in this project. This shall include but not limited to the development of soil toxicity during fish rearing and subsequent drain-down measures to resolve the problem.

Agenda Item 5: Any Other Business

18. There was no other business. The Chairman informed Members that this would be the last meeting of the current ACE term, and thanked Members for their contributions in the previous two years.

Secretariat

Nature Conservation Subcommittee

Advisory Council on the Environment

May 2015