

**Advisory Council on the Environment
Nature Conservation Subcommittee
Meeting on 16 June 2015 at 10:30 a.m.**

**In Conference Room, 33/F Revenue Tower, 5 Gloucester Road,
Wanchai, Hong Kong**

Minutes of Meeting

Present

- Prof. CHAU Kwai-cheong (Chairman)
- Prof. FUNG Tung
- Dr. HAU Chi-hang, Billy
- Prof. NG Cheuk-yee, John
- Dr. TSANG Po-keung, Eric
- Ir. CHAN Wing-hong, Cary
- Dr. LAU Wai-neng, Michael
- Prof. Albert LEE
- Ir. WONG Tin-cheung, Conrad
- Mr. WONG Yuen-fai, Stanley

Absent with Apologies

- Prof. TAM Fung-yee, Nora
- Ms. YAU Lai-ping, Pansy

In Attendance

Environmental Protection Department (EPD)

- Mr. Howard CHAN – Deputy Director (2)
- Mr. Elvis AU – Assistant Director (Nature Conservation and Infrastructure Planning)
- Ms. Sian LI – Senior Administrative Officer (Nature Conservation) (Secretary)
- Ms. Pauline TONG – Forestry Officer (Nature Conservation)
- Ms. Daisy CHAN – Executive Assistant (Nature Conservation)

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD)

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

In Attendance for Agenda Item 4

Environmental Association (EA)

- Dr. YAU Wing-kwong – Chief Executive
 - Ms. Colleen CHIU – Project Manager
 - Mr. Nelson SO – Assistant Project Manager
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- 1 The Chairman welcomed Members to the first meeting of the Advisory Council on the Environment (ACE) Nature Conservation Subcommittee (NCSC) of that term. He briefed Members that the NCSC was tasked to advise the Government, on nature conservation matters, including management of the Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site; and to examine nature conservation proposals referred to it by the Government.

Agenda Item 1: Confirmation of Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 22 December 2014

2. The draft minutes of the last meeting held on 22 December 2014 were circulated to Members and the Chairman asked Members if there was any amendment to the draft minutes. The minutes were confirmed without any amendment.

Agenda Item 2: Matters Arising

3. The Chairman reminded Members that to avoid conflict of interests in the NCSC meeting, those who were directly or indirectly related to a Management Agreement (MA) project were required to declare any potential conflict of interests before the discussion of agenda item 4 on the progress of the Fung Yuen MA project. Members declared that no existence of potential conflict of interests related to the Fung Yuen MA project.

Agenda Item 3: Updates on Species Action Plans and Conservation Measures

(NCSC Paper 1/2015)

4. Invited by the Chairman, Mr. Simon CHAN, Senior Conservation

Officer (Biodiversity) of the AFCD, briefed Members on the updated action plans and conservation measures (*NCSC Paper 1/2015*) with the aid of a powerpoint presentation. He provided Members with background information on the criteria for formulating a species action plan (SAP), and explained in details the SAPs and conservation measures for species/species groups of conservation concern that had been implemented by the AFCD. The following SAPs and conservation measures were highlighted in the presentation:-

- Romer's Tree Frog (*Liuixalus romeri*, 盧氏小樹蛙) (RTF)

The RTF was an endangered species. Since 2008, the AFCD, the Kadoorie Farm and Botanical Garden (KFBG), the University of Hong Kong and the Ocean Park Hong Kong (OPHK) had jointly implemented a SAP for better conserving the RTF in Hong Kong. Habitat protection was carried out. Awareness of the conservation of RTF was also raised through public education. Long-term monitoring results revealed that the species had stable populations in both its natural habitats and translocated sites.

- Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*, 黑臉琵鷺) (BFS)

Through law enforcement, monitoring, habitat management and protection and education, the conservation plan for the BFS was in place to conserve the species in Hong Kong. Over the past five years, an average of 12% of the world population of the BFS had been recorded in the Deep Bay area in winter.

- Chinese White Dolphin (*Sousa chinensis*, 中華白海豚) (CWD)

The CWD was protected by the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170) in Hong Kong. Designation and management of marine parks under the Marine Parks Ordinance (Cap. 476) provided protection to the CWD and its associated habitats. Research and long-term monitoring

continued to feedback information for refinement of management strategies for the CWD.

- Freshwater Fish

The AFCD had identified a number of freshwater fish species as species of conservation concern based on the restricted distribution of those species. Major conservation efforts implemented for those species included population monitoring, captive breeding, identification of suitable translocation sites and trial establishment of captive-bred populations at the translocation sites identified.

- Butterflies

In 2003, the AFCD had initiated a SAP covering a number of butterfly species. Those species had restricted local distributions were often due to the restricted distributions of their larval food plants. Regular monitoring and management of the food plants had been carried out to secure the provision of suitable larval food / habitats for those butterflies.

- Other Targeted Conservation Measures

- Sea Turtles

All sea turtles were protected by law in Hong Kong. The nesting beach at Sham Wan had been designated as a Restricted Area under the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170). During the nesting season, the AFCD conducted day and night patrols at Sham Wan to protect and monitor any nesting turtles and their eggs. Sea turtles came into the possession of the AFCD would be kept in captivity with the assistance of the OPHK until they were found suitable for releasing back to the wild.

- Burmese Python (*Python bivittatus*, 蟒蛇)

Burmese Python was protected by law in Hong Kong. The AFCD and KFBG together formulated a long-term

management plan on stray pythons in 2011. Under that plan, captured Burmese Pythons were sexed, had the body measurements taken and micro-chipped for identification and future monitoring before they were released back to the wild in remote areas with suitable habitats away from any human settlement and property.

Breeding Terns

A number of conservation actions, including monitoring, law enforcement, habitat protection and education, were taken to conserve breeding terns in Hong Kong. Shek Ngau Chau was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 2005 because it was an important breeding ground for terns. Warning notices and artificial nest boxes had been installed and maintained on the island.

Indo-Pacific Finless Porpoise (*Neophocaena phocaenoides*)

The porpoise was protected by law in Hong Kong. A number of conservation actions, including monitoring and law enforcement had been undertaken. Research had also been conducted to study the life history, acoustic behaviour, mortality, etc. of the species.

Horseshoe Crabs

Various measures had been adopted for conserving horseshoe crabs in Hong Kong. Horseshoe crabs were regarded as species of conservation importance in environmental impact assessment studies.

Corals

In order to monitor the status of the coral communities in Hong Kong, the AFCD coordinated the Hong Kong Reef Check annually and undertook comprehensive coral monitoring studies. Specially-designed marker buoys were installed in some sites to eliminate or alleviate the problem of anchor damage.

Plants

To protect the plant diversity of Hong Kong, measures including *in-situ* habitat protection and legislative regulations were in place. A number of SSSIs had been designated owing to their floristic interest. In addition, the AFCD had propagated rare plants through various methods, such as seed collection and cutting.

5. A Member shared his view with Members that once a SAP was formulated, it should be implemented with adequate resources and be reviewed regularly. He suggested that a clear objective should be laid down in SAPs so that their effectiveness could be assessed in the review. The criteria to determine which species required SAPs should be clear, and SAPs should be implemented for species that were endangered locally and globally. For example, he pointed out that the existing SAPs did not include some globally threatened species in which Hong Kong holds important populations such as the Three-banded Box Turtle (*Cuora trifasciata*, 金錢龜), and Chinese Pangolin (*Manis pentadactyla*, 穿山甲). A Member further suggested that the AFCD could cooperate with local experts and review the SAPs regularly.
6. A Member enquired if there were any indicators adopted to choose a particular species for developing a SAP. He also asked if horseshoe crabs were protected by law and whether the AFCD would consider upgrading their protection status.
7. A Member commented that the objectives of SAPs could be more proactive by considering whether it would be possible to propagate the species, e.g. butterflies, Incense Trees (*Aquilaria sinensis*, 土沉香), etc. so that they could blend in with the urban setting and coexist in harmony with the general public.
8. A Member enquired if any data could be obtained from the police to identify black spots of illegal felling of Incense Trees and whether it would be possible to plant more threatened tree species in urban areas,

such as public housing estates.

9. To enhance students' knowledge of species protection, a Member considered that the findings in the SAPs were very interesting and the Government could consider using such information in the academic curriculum to increase awareness of the young generation on species conservation. He also expressed concerns on the potential impacts of various development projects on Lantau to the CWD and asked whether the species still existed.
10. Mr. Simon CHAN responded that, in the past, the AFCD considered two major criteria in determining whether a particular species required a SAP, viz. whether there was a need and whether the species was endangered. The AFCD had proposed to review and standardize the species selection criteria for SAPs as an action in implementing the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP). The AFCD would enhance SAP measures by conducting review, setting clear objectives and making further improvements by including elements such as research, monitoring, habitat protection, education, etc.
11. Regarding education, Mr. Simon CHAN pointed out that the AFCD considered that it was a very important part of their work and organised various education programmes, either by the Department herself or jointly with NGOs, to increase public awareness on the importance of species protection from time to time. For instance, school projects which involved planting of butterfly larval food plants at schools to attract butterflies were conducted in the past. Through those activities, the students could have the chance to have close contact with the species and the biodiversity of urban areas could also be enhanced.
12. Mr. Simon CHAN further informed Members that, in formulating the BSAP, the AFCD was liaising with the Education Bureau on measures to enhance students' awareness and knowledge of biodiversity. A measure being explored was to incorporate information on local species conservation into the current education curriculum. Besides, local publishers could approach the AFCD for information and photos of local species for use in textbooks.

13. In response to the enquiry on the CWD, Mr. Simon CHAN replied that the species could be found in the western waters of Hong Kong. In addition to implementation of protective measures for a particular species, he stressed that protection of local species could also be achieved through protection of their habitats. For instance, marine parks were designated and managed to protect habitats of the CWD and the AFCD would continue to designate more marine parks for the purpose. Similarly, habitat protection was also applicable to the protection of other species such as horseshoe crabs.
14. Mr. Simon CHAN further replied that the AFCD continued monitoring the populations of various species regularly. He explained that whether it was suitable to take a proactive approach to increase their populations would depend on the characteristics of the species in question. For instance, the active propagation approach would be useful for species with a decreasing population or under threat.
15. Some Members suggested enhancing the co-existence of wildlife and human in urban areas, such as planting more Incense Trees in the urban setting. They expressed that it was a worldwide tendency to integrate biodiversity in urban areas. With better integration, it would enhance the image of a city, e.g. through planting of Japanese Cherry Trees in other countries. A Member enquired about whether the current measures being conducted under the various SAPs took integration with the urban setting into account, the amount of budget allocated for the protection of local species, and whether the Government had undertaken sufficient efforts to protect local species as compared to other countries.
16. The Chairman commented that the habitat level of SAP related to land use and planning required coordination among various departments. Mr. Elvis AU informed Members that at the strategic and planning level, Chapters 9 & 10 of the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines already required the incorporation of conservation elements in territorial planning. In the sub-regional level, he quoted an example of the Tin Shui Wai New Town project in which efforts had been taken to balance

nature conservation and urban development by proposing the construction of mitigation wetlands (which had subsequently been further developed into the present Hong Kong Wetland Park) in the planning stage. Another example was the proposed development of a nature park as part of the Kwun Tung development proposal. Mr. Elvis AU supplemented that under the Public-Private Partnership scheme of the New Nature Conservation Policy, two projects were under consideration in which land with low conservation value was proposed for limited development while those parts with high conservation value would be under long-term management for conservation purposes.

17. In response to the Chairman's enquiry on the time-line for implementation of the BSAP, Mr. Simon CHAN replied that some action plans had already been regularly reviewed while other reviews would be undertaken with the implementation of the BSAP.

18. A Member suggested the Government to promote and upgrade Tung Chung River as an Ecological Conservation Area for proper management. He also opined that more efforts should be undertaken to tackle the cross-boundary crimes on smuggling of ecological resources such as Incense Trees and Small Persimmons (*Diospyros vaccinioides*, 小果柿). Dr. P.M. SO replied that the Department had increased the frequency of patrol, in particular to the black spots, in order to tackle those crimes. In addition, the AFCD cooperated closely with the Police in law enforcement against illegal harvesting and smuggling of ecological resources. On the budget for nature conservation, Dr. P.M. SO advised that there were about 500 to 600 million dollars annually allocated for the nature conservation and country park programme. In view of the fact that Hong Kong had a rich biodiversity and 40% of our land had been designated as protected areas, Dr. P.M. SO opined that they had achieved a remarkable result and believed that Hong Kong was doing much better than most other countries. The Chairman shared the view of Dr. P.M. SO and agreed that Hong Kong had a remarkable achievement in conservation.

(End of Session 1)

Agenda Item 4 : Nature Conservation Management Agreement Project – Progress of Implementation of the Management Agreement on the Private Land with High Conservation Value at Fung Yuen Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest in Tai Po, Hong Kong (2013-16)
(NCSC Paper 2/2015)

19. The Chairman invited Mr. Simon CHAN of the AFCD to brief Members on the progress of implementation of the MA project at the Fung Yuen SSSSI in Tai Po. Mr. Simon CHAN highlighted the key elements as follows:-

- The MA project in the Fung Yuen Priority Site had first been launched in November 2005. The present project, which had been launched on 1 February 2013, was a continuation of previous MA projects with an aim to conserve and enhance the butterfly habitats in Fung Yuen through partnership between the EA and land owners.
- For better monitoring of MA projects, recipient organisations were requested to report progress of the MA projects to the subcommittee regularly. In this regard, the EA had prepared a progress report at **Annex 1** summarising the progress made during the period from 1 February 2013 to 31 January 2015 (2 years).
- Furthermore, the recipient organisations were also required to submit progress reports with statements of accounts to the AFCD and the EPD every six month. Both departments had examined the progress reports submitted and were satisfied with the progress.

20. A Member enquired if there was an attitude change of the public towards nature conservation through participation of various activities organised by the EA. He opined that the positive change in attitude of the public should be reflected in the report as an

achievement of the MA project.

21. A Member questioned if similar models in a smaller scale could be held in the community.
22. A Member expressed his concerns on the poor attitude of some butterfly photographers and suggested that cooperation with schools and photography clubs could be explored to spread the message of butterfly conservation.
23. A Member agreed that that was a good example to demonstrate successful integration of conservation with urban areas and such integration should be further encouraged.
24. In view that residents would move into the nearby high-rise buildings soon, a Member raised the issue as what actions could be taken by the EA to raise the awareness of the residents so that they will support butterflies conservation work and Fung Yuen in the future.
25. A Member enquired how could the Fung Yung Valley accommodated 3000 visitors a day during the Butterfly Festival in view of its small size.
26. Ms. Colleen CHIU of the EA replied that it conducted questionnaire surveys on the views of participants of the various activities. Together with findings of the briefing and debriefing sessions of the activities, there was an obvious change in attitude among the participants, especially the kids. Dr. YAU Wing-kwong agreed that qualitative data to show education impact and positive change in public attitude on conservation would be incorporated in the report.
27. Dr. YAU Wing-kwong further replied that 20 schools had set up small butterfly gardens at their schools. He informed Members that, under EA's supervision, participants from various organisations, including photo clubs and schools, learnt the proper attitude of taking photos and 15 photo clubs signed a pledge to uphold photo taking

ethics. To minimise the potential impacts of the nearby high-rise building on the conservation of butterflies at Fung Yuen, the EA had discussed with the estate management and encouraged them to observe some guidelines in managing the estate, such as planting food plants for butterfly larvae and minimising the use of pesticide, etc. The EA would organise workshops for the residents on the proper attitude towards butterflies. Dr. YAU Wing-kwong further advised that, in addition to the Fung Yuen Valley itself, the EA also used nearby facilities e.g. the nearby schools, education centre, butterfly garden and village office (鄉公所) for the Butterfly Festival, education workshops and various activities so that more participants could be accommodated at a time. The EA would also be prepared to promote the message to future residents of the nearby building and invite them to visit Fung Yuen.

(Representatives of the EA left at the juncture.)

28. The Chairman requested that a visit to Fung Yuen be arranged for Members if possible. Ms. Sian LI agreed.

(End of Session 2)

Agenda Item 5: Any Other Business

29. There was no other business for discussion at the meeting. The Chairman informed Members that the next meeting would be held on 10 December 2015.

Secretariat

Nature Conservation Subcommittee

Advisory Council on the Environment

August 2015