

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

Applications under Nature Conservation Management Agreement Scheme

Purpose

This paper seeks Members' views on the evaluation of the applications received under the Nature Conservation Management Agreement (MA) scheme in September 2016.

Background

2. Under the MA scheme, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may apply for funding from the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) for entering into management agreements with the landowners or tenants in order to enhance conservation of the priority sites identified for enhanced conservation under the New Nature Conservation Policy, country park enclaves or private land in country parks.

3. The Guide to Application for MA projects (latest version issued in August 2016) specifies that all applications received will be first evaluated by an Assessment Panel consisting of members from the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD). The recommendations will then be submitted to the Nature Conservation Subcommittee (NCSC) under the Advisory Council on the Environment (ACE) for consultation and then forwarded to the ECF Committee for endorsement.

4. This year, the invitation for MA applications was open from 15 August to 26 September 2016. Four MA applications were received. These include two applications for renewal of the MA projects for fishpond conservation in the Ramsar Site Priority Site and Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site Priority Site, one application for renewal of the MA project in Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung Priority Site, as well as a new application submitted by the Hong Kong Countryside Foundation (HKCF) in association with the Conservancy Association (CA) for habitat rehabilitation at Lai Chi Wo Enclave. The main features of the applications are summarised in **Annex A**, and the respective applications with supplementary information are provided in **Annexes B to E**.

5. The Assessment Panel meeting was held on 2 November 2016 to evaluate the four applications. The results of the Panel's assessment are summarised in the following paragraphs, and detailed in **Annexes F-1 to F-4**.

Two Fishpond Management Agreement Projects in Deep Bay

6. HKBWS has been conducting two MA projects in Deep Bay since 2012 to enhance the ecological value of fishponds through collaboration with the fishpond operators, with support of the Hong Kong New Territories Fish Culture Association (HKNTFCA). The two complementary MA projects, covering the Ramsar Site Priority Site and Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site Priority Site, have jointly enhanced the ecological functions of fishponds through wise use of the wetland, preserve traditional fish farming as local cultural heritage, and increase the awareness on aquaculture and bird conservation in the Deep Bay area.

7. Over the past years, over 90% of eligible fishponds¹ have been engaged in the fishpond MA projects. In 2015-16, drain-down was conducted at nearly 90% of engaged fishponds. The high participation rate of local fishpond operators over the large wetland area is a key to success of the projects. Overall, the management measures have provided more feeding opportunities for waterbirds in the Deep Bay area. Monitoring data from 2012 to 2016 have indicated that the mean abundance of waterbirds have increased 20-fold during drain-down as compared to that before drain-down, with the most significant increase found in ardeids (egrets and herons) and shorebirds. In addition, ecological surveys conducted in the project site by HKBWS from March 2013 to February 2016 have recorded a rich biodiversity consisting of 197 bird species, 23 amphibians and reptile species and 34 dragonfly species. HKBWS has also conducted a wide range of public education programmes to raise awareness about the conservation of fishponds. The project represents a win-win solution to bird conservation and local aquaculture while promoting the wise use of the wetlands.

Fishpond Conservation Scheme in Ramsar Site 2017-19

[Project duration: 1 March 2017 to 28 February 2019]

8. The current two-year MA project covering the Ramsar Site will end on 28 February 2017. HKBWS has submitted an application to seek ECF's support to

¹ Eligible fishponds refer to fishponds with operators registered under the Voluntary Registration Scheme of the AFCD, and located within the Priority Sites.

continue the project for another two years (**Annex B**). The application requests a funding support of \$7,428,832. The area of fishponds eligible to join the project is 291 ha while drain-down is proposed to be conducted at up to around 95% (277 ha) of the fishponds. According to HKBWS's proposal, apart from conservation management to be conducted by the fishpond operators (i.e. annual drain-down of fishponds), HKBWS will conduct ecological surveys on birds and plants in order to build up on the ecological data collected from previous MA projects on fishpond habitats in Deep Bay. A series of public education activities such as eco-tours for schools, talks, exhibitions and secondary school project-learning programme will be organised. In addition, a Fishpond Festival will be held as an annual focal event to promote the appreciation of sustainable aquaculture as well as the ecological and cultural value of fishponds. HKBWS will also organise a side-event called the Fishpond Sustainable Art Festival comprising installation art creation, guided tours, workshops and exhibitions in the fishpond environment.

Hong Kong Got Fishpond – Eco-fishpond Management Agreement Scheme 2017-2019

[Project duration: 1 March 2017 to 28 February 2019]

9. This project is conducted in the Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site Priority Site by HKBWS, similar to the complementary MA project conducted in the Ramsar Site Priority Site. The current MA project will end on 28 February 2017. HKBWS submitted a funding application with a view to seeking ECF's support to continue the project for another two years (**Annex C**). The application requests a funding support of \$8,139,692. The area of fishponds eligible to join the project is 371 ha while drain-down would be conducted at up to around 95% (352 ha) of the fishponds. In addition to the conservation elements such as drain-down and ecological monitoring of fishponds, HKBWS will organise an array of activities for project sustainability and public engagement. Eco-tours, training for eco-tour guides, workshops, Education Kiosk and volunteer scheme will be organised. In addition, HKBWS will initiate an "Eco-fish" programme in which fish rearing practice, fishpond operation and the marketing and sale of fish will be directly managed by HKBWS in cooperation with the fishpond operators, to promote local aquaculture produce which is ecologically friendly.

10. In general, the Assessment Panel considers that the two complementary fishpond applications are worth supporting, in view of the benefits that the proposed projects would bring to the conservation of waterbirds, and in raising public

awareness about nature conservation. The track record of the applicant in managing the previous MA projects is also considered satisfactory. Marks given to the applications on individual criterion and specific considerations are detailed in **Annex F-1** and **Annex F-2**. The Assessment Panel considers that, while the applicant's clarifications about the proposed project and budget items are mostly satisfactory, some proposed items fall beyond the ambit of the MA scheme, and hence recommends deleting such items from the project. Revisions to the proposed budgets will be proposed to the ECF Committee for endorsement of the exact amount of funding.

Nature and Human in Harmony - Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2017 – 2019

[Project duration: 1 September 2017 to 31 August 2019]

11. With the funding support from the ECF, CA (in association with the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS)) has been conducting MA projects in Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung Priority Site since 2005. Previous MA projects at Long Valley have successfully enhanced the biodiversity and ecological values of the freshwater wetlands in the area. The number of bird species has increased from 221 before the MA (2005) to 304 at present, which represents a 38% increase and accounts for about 56% of the total number of bird species in Hong Kong. Abundances of target species such as the endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting and the Chinese Bullfrog (Class II Protected in China) have also increased. Raising public awareness about wetland conservation has been a key component of the project. Under the previous project completed in 2015, over 7,000 activity participants and 140,000 visitors were involved in the various public education and publicity programmes organised, and the project was covered in at least 34 media reports. The current project (2015-17) is also in good progress, with 28 farmers and 2 landowners, representing two-thirds of the local farming community, engaged to implement various habitat conservation measures to manage over 16 ha of land actively. All in all, the project has been successful in partnering with local stakeholders in enhancing nature conservation, and has become a role model of and showcase for MA projects.

12. As the current project will end on 31 August 2017, CA has submitted a funding application to seek ECF's support to continue the project (**Annex D**). The new application requests a funding support of \$8,377,033.52 for management of about 18.3 ha of land. The new project will last for 24 months. Under the new project, important freshwater habitats, particularly shallow water habitats, paddy rice fields

and freshwater marshes, which provide important foraging and breeding grounds to birds and amphibians, will continue to come under intensive management. Besides, about 3.4 ha of *Fung Shui* wood will be included in the management programme. A wide range of education activities, for example eco-tours, Harvest Fest and volunteers' programmes etc., have been proposed, which are estimated to be able to attract over 121,310 participants and visitors.

13. In general, the Assessment Panel considers the application worth supporting, in view of the benefits that the proposed project would bring to the conservation of wetland habitats and wildlife, and in raising public awareness about nature conservation. The track record of the applicant in managing the previous MA projects is also considered satisfactory. Marks given to the application on individual criterion and specific considerations are detailed in **Annex F-3**. While the Assessment Panel has recommended granting the proposed budget in full, given the uncertainties associated with land resumption under the North East New Territories New Development Areas project, the amount of grant would be reduced on a pro-rata basis if a significant number of farmers withdraw from the project and the actual area of the site conserved is less than originally proposed. This will be one of the funding conditions to be imposed on the application which will be recommended to the ECF Committee for endorsement.

Management Agreement Scheme at Lai Chi Wo Enclave 2017-2019

[Project duration: 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2019 (24 months)]

14. Lai Chi Wo is a country park enclave surrounded by Plover Cove Country Park, Lai Chi Wo Special Area and Yan Chau Tong Marine Park. Habitats such as wetlands and open fields in the area were traditionally maintained by agricultural practices, but have showed signs of degradation following abandonment in the recent decades. It was against this backdrop that a privately-funded pilot project was initiated in 2013 to revitalise Lai Chi Wo. The new MA application submitted by HKCF (in association with CA) is a follow-on project to the pilot one, focusing on rehabilitation and enhancement of the ecological values of the habitats and conservation of the associated biodiversity, through collaborating with the local rural community in carrying out habitat management and eco-friendly agricultural practices.

15. The current application requests a funding support of \$7,524,122 for management of about 5.0 ha of land, from 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2019

(**Annex E**). A range of habitats including wetlands, wet and dry agricultural fields, streams, terraced fields and orchards will be managed under the project, which in turn will provide suitable habitats for the conservation of aquatic plants, amphibians, dragonflies and butterflies. A wide range of education activities, for example eco-tours, Harvest Fun Fairs and volunteers' programmes etc., are proposed and projected to attract over 18,880 participants and visitors.

16. Overall, the Assessment Panel considers the project worthy of support in view of the benefits the proposal would bring to the enhancement of the conservation value of Lai Chi Wo through the cooperation between NGOs and the local community. In addition, the Assessment Panel has recognised the strong impetus this project could provide for incentivising private landowners in the country parks or country park enclaves to undertake conservation activities that are compatible with the land uses and country park objectives for conservation, education and recreation purposes. The project is also conducive to enhancing the overall conservation and scenic values of the country parks. Marks given to the application on individual criterion and specific considerations are detailed in **Annex F-4**. The Assessment Panel considers the clarifications given by the applicants about the proposed project and budget items, mostly satisfactory. The Assessment Panel has proposed only minor revisions to the proposed budget in order to comply with the Guide to Application. These minor revisions will be recommended to the ECF Committee for endorsement.

Advice Sought

17. Members are invited to consider the recommendations of the Assessment Panel, with a view to putting forth the recommended applications to the ECF Committee for consideration on funding support.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Environmental Protection Department
December 2016

**Summaries of Applications under
Nature Conservation Management Agreement Scheme**

Table 1 Summary of the MA application in Ramsar Site Priority Site

Project Title	Fishpond Conservation Scheme in Ramsar Site 2017-19
Area Managed	About 291 hectares
Proponent	Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS)
Project Summary	The project aims at enhancing the conservation value of commercial fishponds in the Northwest New Territories, especially for avifauna, through partnership between HKBWS and local fishpond operators.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To enhance the conservation value of fishponds; - To maintain the harmonious relationship between local fish farming and bird conservation; - To preserve the cultural heritage of local traditional practice of fish farming; - To update ecological information and formulate strategies for long-term conservation; and - To engage fishpond operators and raise public awareness on the importance of the conservation values of fishponds.
Key Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management of drain-down activities; - Study of the local movement of waterbirds in the area; - Baseline studies on birds and plants; and - Education programmes including exhibitions, talks, eco-tours for schools, teacher workshop, secondary school project-learning programme and Fishpond Festival (including a Fishpond Sustainable Art Festival)
Key Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports on study of local movement of waterbirds, and baseline studies on birds and plants; - 5,000 copies of pamphlets on the ecology and conservation of fishponds and aquaculture; and - Questionnaires for participants of activities
Duration	24 months (from 1 March 2017 – 28 February 2019)
Amount of Fund applied for	Funding applied: \$7,428,832 Expected income: \$275,500 (3.71% of proposed budget) Expected balance: \$7,153,332
Remarks	The Assessment Panel recommended excluding the item on “study of effects of environmental parameters and fishpond operation on the distribution of waterbirds” and the corresponding portion of data analysis and report writing and equipment, as it was deemed to fall beyond the ambit of the MA scheme.

Table 2 Summary of the MA application in Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site Priority Site

Project Title	Hong Kong Got Fishpond – Eco-fishpond Management Agreement Scheme 2017-2019
Area Managed	About 371 hectares
Proponent	Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS)
Project Summary	The project aims to enhance the conservation of fishponds by providing more feeding grounds in fishponds in Deep Bay Wetlands outside Ramsar Site for avifauna, through partnership between HKBWS and local fishpond operators.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To enhance the conservation value of fishponds; - To maintain the harmonious relationship between local fish farming and bird conservation; - To preserve the cultural heritage of local traditional practice of fish farming; - To update ecological information and formulate strategies for long-term conservation; and - To engage fishpond operators and raise public awareness on the importance of the conservation values of fishponds.
Key Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management of drain-down activities; - Baseline studies on birds and plants; - Education programmes including eco-tour guide training, eco-tours, night safari, workshops, education kiosk and volunteer scheme; and - “Eco-fish” programme to promote and market local aquaculture produce with eco-friendly fish farming practice.
Key Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports on baseline studies on birds and plants; - Questionnaires for participants of activities; - At least two issues of press event and media coverage; and - Around 6,400 “eco-fish” harvested and sold.
Duration	24 months (from 1 March 2017 – 28 February 2019)
Amount of Fund applied for	Funding applied: \$8,139,692 Expected income: \$535,000 (6.57% of proposed budget) Expected balance: \$7,604,692
Remarks	The Assessment Panel recommended excluding the item on “study of effects of environmental parameters and fishpond operation on the distribution of waterbirds” and the corresponding portion of data analysis and report writing and equipment, as well as the item “exchange workshop”, as they were deemed to fall beyond the ambit of the MA scheme.

Table 3 Summary of the MA application in Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung Priority Site

Project Title	Nature and Human in Harmony - Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2017-2019
Area Managed	About 18.3 hectares
Proponent	The Conservancy Association (CA)
Key Partner	Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS)
Project Summary	The project will continue the impetus of past MA projects to enhance the conservation and ecological values of the freshwater wetlands at the Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung, through partnership with local landowners and farmers.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To conserve the landscape and biodiversity, particularly freshwater wetland-dependent birds and amphibians; - To engage local landowners and farmers in habitat management and promotion of eco-agriculture; - To update ecological information and formulate strategies for long-term conservation; and - To raise public awareness on the importance of freshwater wetlands.
Key Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management of habitats including shallow water habitats, paddy rice fields, wet agricultural fields, etc.; - Conservation measures to protect and enhance breeding success of birds and amphibians; - Habitat and biodiversity monitoring; and - Education and publicity programmes including eco-tours, night safaris, eco-guide training, Harvest Fest, and volunteer programmes, etc.
Key Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports on species and habitat monitoring (including amphibians, birds, vegetation and weeds) - 3,000 copies of pamphlets on Long Valley; - Questionnaires for participants of activities; and - Around ten issues of media coverage.
Duration	24 months (from 1 September 2017 – 31 August 2019)
Amount of Fund applied for	<p>Funding applied: \$8,377,033.52</p> <p>Expected income: \$409,600 (4.89% of proposed budget)</p> <p>Expected balance: \$7,967,433.52</p>

Table 4 Summary of the MA application in Lai Chi Wo Enclave

Project Title	Management Agreement Scheme at Lai Chi Wo Enclave 2017-2019
Area Managed	About 5.0 ha
Proponent	Hong Kong Countryside Foundation (HKCF)
Key Partner	The Conservancy Association (CA)
Project Summary	This new MA project aims to rehabilitate Lai Chi Wo enclave and enhance its conservation and ecological values, through collaborations between HKCF and the local rural community.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To rehabilitate agricultural land and enhance their ecological functions for wildlife use; - To enhance the conservation of aquatic plants, amphibians, dragonflies and butterflies; - To engage local landowners and farmers in habitat management and eco-agriculture activities; and - To increase the general public's understanding of eco-agriculture and nature conservation.
Key Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management of habitats including wetlands, wet and dry agricultural fields etc.; - Conservation measures to protect and provide suitable habitats for aquatic plants, amphibians, dragonflies and butterflies; - Habitat and biodiversity monitoring; and - Education and publicity programmes including eco-tours, workshops, Harvest Fairs, exhibitions, and volunteer programmes etc.
Key Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports on species monitoring (including amphibians, dragonflies and butterflies); - 2,000 copies of pamphlets on the project and biodiversity of Lai Chi Wo; - Questionnaires for participants of activities; and - Around eight issues of media coverage.
Duration	24 months (from 1 October 2017 to 30 September 2019)
Amount of Fund applied for	Funding applied: \$7,524,122 Expected income: \$376,210 (5.00% of proposed budget) Expected balance: \$7,147,912