

**Confirmed Minutes of the 112th Meeting of
the Advisory Council on the Environment
held on 12 January 2004 at 2:30 p.m.**

Present:

Prof. LAM Kin-che, J.P. (Chairman)
Prof. Peter HILLS
Prof. HO Kin-chung
Mr. LIN Chaan-ming
Dr. NG Cho-nam
Mrs. Mei NG, B.B.S
Prof. POON Chi-sun
Mr. Otto L. T. POON, B.B.S.
Mr. Michael J. D. RUSHWORTH
Mr. Markus SHAW
Ms. Iris TAM, J.P.
Prof. WONG Tze-wai
Ms. Jessie WONG (Secretary)

Absent with Apologies:

Mr. Peter Y. C. LEE
Prof. LUNG Ping-yee, David, S.B.S., J.P.
Prof. WONG Yuk-shan, J.P.

In Attendance:

Mr. Thomas CHOW	Acting Permanent Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (Environment and Transport) (Environment)/Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (Environment and Transport)(E)2
Ms. Doris CHEUNG	Deputy Secretary for the Environment, Transport and Works (Environment and Transport)(E)1
Mr. Rob LAW, JP	Director of Environmental Protection
Mr. C C LAY	Assistant Director (Conservation) Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Mr. Jimmy LEUNG	Assistant Director/Technical Services Planning Department
Mr. Matthew LEUNG	Secretariat Press Officer, Environment, Transport and Works Bureau (ETWB)
Ms. Polly LEUNG	Principal Information Officer Environmental Protection Department (EPD)
Miss Petula POON	Chief Executive Officer (E), ETWB
Mr. Eddie CHENG	Executive Officer (E), ETWB

In Attendance for Agenda Item 4 :

Miss Dora FU	Assistant Director of Administration, Administration Wing, Chief Secretary for Administration's Office
Mr. Terence TSANG	Senior Environmental Protection Officer, Administration Wing, Chief Secretary for Administration's Office

In Attendance for Agenda Item 5 :

Mr. Duncan PESCOD	Deputy Commissioner for Tourism, Tourism Commission, Economic Development and Labour Bureau (EDLB)
Dr. Bob McKERCHER	Associate Professor, School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Action

Agenda Item 1 : Confirmation of Minutes of the 111th Meeting held on 8 December 2003

The draft minutes were confirmed by Members subject to the amendments proposed by a Member that the words "In response to a Member's query, Miss Fong confirmed that the ERP study had already assumed that the Central and Wanchai Bypass would be in place for the Central District, and therefore there would not be a need for an ERP system." should be added to the end of paragraph 21.

Agenda Item 2 : Matters Arising

Para. 20: Figures on vehicle growth rates

2. The Chairman informed Members that the figures were being compiled by the Transport Sub-branch and would be forwarded to Members once ready.

(Post-meeting note : The figures were circulated to Members on 19 January 2004.)

Para. 24: Provision of rail links to the southern side of Hong Kong Island

3. The Chairman informed Members that the Transport Sub-branch would reflect the views to the Mass Transit Railway Corporation

Limited.

Para. 26: Visit to a vehicle smoke test centre

4. The Chairman informed Members that they would be invited to join the visit when the date was fixed.

Para. 41: To discuss the technical papers of the Hong Kong 2030 Study

5. The Chairman informed Members that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Subcommittee might discuss the major technical papers at its next meeting scheduled for 19 January 2004.

Para. 50: To visit the Tung Chung Stream and provide a plan on areas affected by the unauthorized works

6. The Chairman reported that the visit to Tung Chung Stream was held on 10 December 2003, and that the plan prepared by District Lands Office (Island) on the areas affected by the unauthorized works was distributed to Members on the same day. A revised plan was distributed on 24 December 2003. Members were invited to join a specialist group involving members from the Council and green interest groups to examine how the reinstatement works to the damaged section of the stream should be carried out from the ecological angle. Four Members had joined the specialist group.

(Post-meeting note : A Member had subsequently withdrawn from the specialist group that met on 15 January 2004.)

Agenda Item 3 : Report on the 82nd meeting of the Environmental Impact Assessment Subcommittee
(ACE Paper 1/2004)

7. The Chairman informed Members that the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Subcommittee, at its meeting held on 23 December 2003, re-elected Mr. Otto Poon and Prof. Ho Kin-chung as the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Subcommittee respectively for the year 2004. The Subcommittee Chairman then briefed Members on the discussion of the Subcommittee meeting.

8. Members noted the report of the EIA Subcommittee on the discussion about the study for the extension of existing landfills and identification of potential new waste disposal sites.

Agenda Item 4 : Information Note on Sustainability Assessment System

(ACE Paper 2/2004)

9. The Chairman welcomed the presentation team to the meeting. Miss Dora Fu briefed Members on the sustainability assessment (SA) system.

10. In response to the Chairman's question, Miss Dora Fu reaffirmed that the SA system was adopted within the Government, and all bureaux and departments were required to conduct SA of their major proposals and to include a "sustainability implications" paragraph into their submissions to the Policy Committee and the Executive Council to explain their main SA findings. In reply to the enquiries of the Chairman and a Member, Miss Fu explained that the SA system provided a structured framework to help scope out sensitive or cross-sectoral issues at an early stage, which would facilitate more detailed studies or assessments to be carried out at subsequent stages.

11. The Chairman enquired how the system would facilitate departmental interactions if a policy involved two or more bureaux. In reply, Miss Dora Fu explained that the system would help identify the key cross-sectoral issues for early attention at the planning stage, so that the bureaux/departments concerned would have more time to jointly examine the issues and work out possible solutions through a concerted effort. A Member pointed out that some government projects might involve conflicting interests of departments/bureaux. She asked how the system could help resolve the conflicts. She also requested Miss Fu to illustrate the effectiveness of the SA by quoting a real life project as an example. In response, Miss Fu clarified that the SA system was designed as a systematic framework for scoping out sensitive or cross-sectoral issues for joint departmental examination at an early stage, and to facilitate the relevant bureaux and departments to resolve those issues together. She quoted the example of the Urban Renewal Scheme, and said that although the scheme was basically a planning issue, the SA identified cross-sectoral issues like impacts on local communities, and recommended the need to conduct social impact assessment before implementation of the scheme. She added that as an established practice, should there be issues unresolved at the departmental or bureau level, the parties concerned should bring up such issues to the higher levels for resolution. The SA system could not replace the decision-makers who would make the final judgement taking account of all relevant considerations.

12. In reply to a Member's question on whether government budget would be subject to SA, Miss Dora Fu said that all major policy proposals submitted to the Policy Committee and the Executive Council would be subject to SA.

13. A Member asked whether the SA system would cover cross-border projects such as the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge. In response, Miss Dora Fu said that the subject bureau, i.e. ETWB, would undertake a SA for the section of the bridge within Hong Kong boundary.

14. A Member queried the inclusion of mobility as a guiding principle of sustainable development, and commented that as economic progress should be pursued in an environmentally sustainable manner, environmental sustainability should be the over-riding principle for determining sustainability. He asked whether the various principles adopted in the SA would be given different weightings. In reply, Miss Fu explained that the principles were not mutually exclusive and they should be considered in an integrated manner, bearing in mind that sustainable development was about the integration of economic, environmental and social considerations at the same time. No weighting was assigned to the principles when the guiding principles were drawn up in the context of the consultancy study on “Sustainable Development in Hong Kong for the 21st Century”. Mr. Jimmy Leung added that some practices adopted by planners such as permitting greater flexibility in the change of use in industrial buildings, facilitating the redevelopment of brownfield sites making full use of the existing infrastructure, the provision of pedestrian walkways and cycling tracks were conducive to sustainability.

15. In reply to a Member’s question about the health indicators in the SA system, Miss Dora Fu pointed out that “health and hygiene” was one of the guiding principles for social sustainability. Three out of the 41 sustainability indicators adopted in the computer-aided sustainability evaluation tool (CASET) were health-related. The Severe and Acute Respiratory Syndrome, being a communicable disease, was covered by the “notification of communicable diseases” indicator. The Member suggested including “indoor air quality” as a health indicator, and replacing “notification of communicable diseases” with “bio-safety” as the latter was easier to understand. In response, Miss Fu explained that “indoor air quality” was not included as an indicator in the CASET because it was relatively insensitive to policy changes according to the consultancy study on “Sustainable Development in Hong Kong for the 21st Century”. As regards the “notification of communicable diseases” indicator, Miss Fu said that it measured the number of reported communicable diseases and was included as an indicator as recommended by the consultancy study with agreement of the Department of Health.

16. A Member referred to his earlier suggestion of including the statistics on respiratory diseases and cancer cases as health indicators, and explained that the suggestion was based on the understanding that the system

would be used for environmental sustainability assessment. He also considered that indicators related to safety such as statistics on traffic accidents would be more relevant to planning proposals. Nonetheless, he appreciated that the number of indicators had to be limited. Miss Dora Fu thanked the Member for his advice on the health-related indicators during the consultation on the review of the SA system. She clarified that apart from planning proposals, the system was also used for the assessment of major policy proposals. She added that some of the social indicators included in the CASET were narrowly defined and not easily triggered by policy proposals. Therefore, following the review, the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) included a social checklist (with more open-ended questions) in the CASET as an alternative for assessing social sustainability of major proposals. She said that the indicator on traffic accidents would likely be insensitive to policy changes, and less useful for policy assessment purpose. Instead, it might be more useful for tracking the progress of sustainability of the society.

17. A Member considered that the current set of indicators was concise enough to assess the sustainability of the society, which he thought was the initial objective when designing the SA system in the context of the consultancy study on “Sustainable Development in Hong Kong for the 21st Century”. However, since the system was used for assessing the impact of projects/policy proposals, the indicators might be too specific as projects under assessment were different in nature, and indicators useful for one project/proposal might not be relevant to the other. He considered that more indicators should be included. Having regard to the present format of the system, he was of the view that the consultancy study could have been done more professionally. Miss Dora Fu noted the Member’s comments.

18. In response to a Member’s query on the “sustainability implications” (SI) paragraph of the public consultation document of the Hong Kong 2030 Study, Miss Dora Fu informed the meeting that to enhance transparency, the Planning Department had, in addition to the inclusion of a SI paragraph in the public consultation document, uploaded the detailed SA report onto their website. The SA report set out the sensitive and cross-sectoral issues identified in the study to facilitate public discussions. In reply to the Member’s suggestion to release the full list of SAs conducted so far, Miss Fu said that as a new arrangement, bureaux and departments were advised to set out the main SA findings of their major proposals in the relevant public consultation documents, with a view to facilitating better informed public discussions and building of community consensus. They would be encouraged to release the relevant SA reports to the public where appropriate.

19. In response to a Member’s question on the frequency of the

updating of the baseline data of the CASET, Miss Dora Fu advised the meeting that the baseline data were collected from the relevant departments and would be updated regularly. The last update was just completed in 2003. The SDU would co-ordinate the updating exercise at least bi-annually in consultation with the departments concerned, which might have their respective baseline data updated at different intervals.

20. The Chairman thanked the presentation team, and said that he was pleased that the baseline data were updated regularly and the SDU had made efforts to enhance the transparency of the SA system.

Agenda Item 5 : Consultancy Study on Development of Tourism in the Northern New Territories
(ACE Paper 3/2004)

21. The Chairman welcomed the presentation team to the meeting. Mr. Duncan Pescod introduced the consultancy study and Dr. Bob McKercher briefed Members on the findings of the study.

22. A Member asked whether green groups had been consulted on the consultancy study. He said that eco-tourism was one of the possible activities that would be conducted under the improvement options recommended by the Government in the Nature Conservation Policy Review. In reply, Dr. Bob McKercher said that in order to study the ecological issues involved, an ecologist from a green group had been invited to join the study team. The natural environment would be one of the major tourist attractions in Northern New Territories. The study team would ensure conservation of the area and the sustainability of the proposals to be implemented. Mr. Duncan Pescod supplemented that they had previously organized a public forum on the study, and it was noted that the public was most concerned about sustainability. Also, Hong Kong subscribed to the World Tourism Organization's principle of sustainable tourism and hence, an EIA study would be conducted for all suggested developments. As regards partnership with local community, Mr. Pescod said that since most development options would need the cooperation of local people, their involvement would be most essential. Another Member hoped that members from green groups or local conservation groups could be invited to join the inter-departmental committee on the development of tourism in Northern New Territories.

23. A Member cautioned that Hong Kong people tended to flock to popular places. Quoting the case in Hoi Ha Wan, he said that as a result of some publicity, the place suddenly became a hotspot for local tourism, resulting in adverse environmental impacts. In response, Mr. Duncan Pescod said that local tourism could develop on its own in an unexpected

way. If measures were not taken to respond to the findings of the study, Hong Kong would not be ready for future development in tourism. The situation could be much worse. Therefore, their aim was to develop tourism in Northern New Territories in a regulated manner, so that the developments would be sustainable. Dr. Bob McKercher added that the number of visitors to some of the areas under study, e.g. Tung Ping Chau, was already quite substantial since the expenses for visiting those places were very low. The natural resources in those areas were under exploitation but the benefit to the local community was meager. Also, the Frontier Closed Area, a valuable place with unique cultural and natural heritage, was under huge pressure to be opened up to visitors. The uniqueness of the area would be lost if it was not well protected. The aim of the study was hence to develop sustainable tourism in those areas so that both the natural and cultural heritage could be preserved and the local community could benefit from it in a sustainable manner.

24. In response to the Chairman's question on the carrying capacity of the scenic spots, and the management measures to control the number of visitors, Mr. Duncan Pescod said that there was no easy way to control the number of visitors because people were not charged for entering those areas. At present, access to those places was affected by the availability of transport. The Tourism Commission would look into the matter and make reference to overseas models on feasible solutions.

25. In reply to a Member's question on the feedback of the villagers concerned on the proposals, Mr. Duncan Pescod informed the meeting that local villagers were very keen on tourism development but it would not be easy to get their agreement to develop tourism in an environmentally sustainable manner. The issue would involve the interest of many parties, and imposing a particular model in a top-down approach would not work. The local community had to come up with their own ideas of development and the Government could only help in the implementation.

26. In response to a Member's question on the sustainability of eco-tourism, Mr. Duncan Pescod said that the issue would be studied in a comprehensive manner. He shared the Member's concerns about the negative environmental impacts of unregulated tourism. The Tourism Commission would examine ways to tackle the problem.

27. A Member pointed out that the guiding principle for development was to preserve local heritage. He welcomed the development of a master plan to develop eco-tourism in Northern New Territories. However, he was concerned that the opening up of the places could lead to flytipping problems in ecologically sensitive sites within the area. Mr. Duncan Pescod noted his concerns.

28. In response to a Member's question on whether the proposed activities in country parks would be subject to EIA, Mr. Rob Law said that any major developments in country parks had to go through the EIA process and obtain the endorsement of the Country and Marine Parks Board. For non-works projects, an EIA would not be required under the EIA Ordinance. However, the Country and Marine Parks Board would have to be satisfied that the project would not cause problems to the country parks concerned. Dr. Bob McKercher added that one of the advantages in developing tourism in Northern New Territories was that most of the areas concerned were within country or marine parks. The existing legal framework would ensure that no inappropriately large development would be allowed there. Mr. Duncan Pescod supplemented that AFCD was represented in their inter-departmental working group.

29. A Member commented that Hong Kong's overseas tourism promotion mainly focused on shopping and food only. The territory had never been promoted as a place for leisure tourism. Furthermore, quality resort hotels were lacking in Hong Kong. He considered that some places in the southern coast of Lantau Island could be suitable sites for good resort hotels. In response, Dr. Bob McKercher said that Hong Kong's major tourist attraction would still be urban tourism. The Northern New Territories would offer an alternative for a small number of tourists who looked for something different. The study suggested quality tourism with high yields but the number of visitors should be kept small. Mr. Duncan Pescod informed the meeting that according to a planning study conducted on South Lantau, the area had the potential for development of tourism with low environmental impact. Hence, it would not be desirable to set up resort hotels there. In the coming decade, it was expected that most tourists would come from the Mainland and that urban tourism would continue to be the focus. Furthermore, it would be difficult and impractical to change the image of Hong Kong to a place for green tourism.

30. A Member pointed out that provision of hotel accommodations would need to be supported by other infrastructure facilities such as sewerages which were not in place at the moment. The provision of those facilities might have implications on the environment.

31. A Member agreed in principle with the approach to improve the quality of lodging facilities in the study area but that would depend on whether the private sector was willing to invest. Bed-and-breakfast had been there for many years but it would take a long time to put them within a regulatory framework. Mr. Duncan Pescod advised Members that the Tourism Commission had received proposals from major developers to develop tourism in various parts of Hong Kong. However, it was the aim of

the Tourism Commission that local people could benefit from such developments.

32. A Member said that it was important to identify the target groups and the kind of tourism they favoured. While the small group of high-yield tourists would require luxurious hotels, etc, the requirements of the general tourists from the Mainland would be different. Mr. Duncan Pescod concurred that the needs of different groups of tourists had to be identified. The Hong Kong Tourism Board had different promotion strategies for tourists from different countries. He shared another Member's views that Japanese tourists could be targets for tourism development in Northern New Territories as many of them enjoyed hiking in the countryside.

33. Referring to the proposal to develop Plover Cove Reservoir for fresh water sports, a Member expressed concerns about the impact on the water quality since the reservoir was still in service. He pointed out that the current test on potable water which was based on bacteria count would not be able to assess pollutants such as organic chemicals and heavy metals that might be discharged into the reservoir when recreational activities were conducted. Another Member agreed and pointed out that fresh water resources should be well protected. A Member said that the Plover Cove area was very crowded during weekends and the littering problem was quite serious. He considered that water sports should be developed in marine water instead. In reply, Dr. Bob McKercher explained that there were already lots of activities on the marine side of Plover Cove. The Plover Cove Reservoir was the largest body of fresh water in Hong Kong and it had great potential for the development of fresh water sports. Mr. Duncan Pescod said that the Home Affairs Bureau was working on a proposal to open up Pok Fu Lam Reservoir for recreational purpose as a pilot scheme. In fact, there were many overseas examples of using reservoirs for more extensive tourism activities. However, he assured the meeting that the proposal would be implemented only if it was agreeable to the community.

34. In response to a Member's query on limiting the scope of the study to Northern New Territories, Mr. Duncan Pescod said that the study was originally confined to the border areas but it was decided later that the scope could be extended. At present, a number of studies were being conducted in other areas and some of them were undertaken by the Planning Department.

35. In reply to a Member's comment that tidying up existing tourism hotspots should have a higher priority than developing new areas, Mr. Duncan Pescod informed the meeting that some projects to tidy up existing tourist hotspots were underway and there would be a rolling

programme covering existing tourist facilities over the next few years.

36. A Member pointed out that tourism development should not take into account the benefit to local people only. The benefit to the whole community should also be considered. In response, Mr. Duncan Pescod clarified that tourism including local tourism would benefit not only the local people but also the whole community because tourists would spend money during their stay in Hong Kong. Dr. Bob McKercher added that their study had covered local tourism. Some activities were designed for Hong Kong people, especially for students and children.

37. The Chairman thanked the presentation team. He concluded that the cultural and natural heritage of Northern New Territories were important assets of Hong Kong, and sustainability should be the guiding principle for the proposed tourism development. Quality tourism with a limited number of tourists should be the direction of the development. The target users and their needs should be studied carefully. Proposals to improve the accessibility of the area should be considered carefully, as any new initiative could bring in large number of visitors. At the same time, innovative management should be explored. While local people should benefit from tourism development, the need of the community should also be taken care of. Green groups should be involved as far as possible. It would also be helpful to make reference to the recent Nature Conservation Policy Review.

Agenda Item 6 : Any Other Business

Tentative items for discussion at the next meeting

38. The Chairman informed the meeting that a discussion item on air quality was tentatively scheduled for the next meeting.

Agenda Item 7 : Date of Next Meeting

39. The next meeting would be held on 9 February 2004.

ACE Secretariat
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