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for information

LISTING MAI PO AND INNER DEEP BAY AS A WETLAND OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE UNDER THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

INTRODUCTION

The Mai Po Marshes is an internationally important wetland which supports thousands of migratory birds. Under the Convention on Wetland of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (The "Ramsar Convention"), Hong Kong has a general obligation to conserve wetlands and waterfowl within its borders.

2. At the meeting on 28 February 1995, the Executive Council approved the proposal to list Mai Po and Inner Deep Bay as a Ramsar Site. This paper explains the listing and invite your comments on the conservation management for the Ramsar Site.

BACKGROUND

3. The 1971 Ramsar Convention is based upon a recognition of the ecological importance of wetlands and their economic, cultural, scientific and recreational value. It aims to stem the progressive loss of wetland habitats worldwide; to list wetlands of international importance, and to formulate and implement planning to promote their conservation. The Convention was extended to Hong Kong by the United Kingdom in 1979.

4. The Mai Po Marshes is the last remaining wetland of its size in Hong Kong. It is an internationally important wetland because it is a feeding and resting ground for thousands of migratory birds, including many species of rare, vulnerable or endangered birds which rely on it as a "refuelling" station. Mai Po is of special value for its large mangrove stand and because alternative sites in the region are rapidly diminishing in number and extent. It is also important for the a variety of local animal species it supports.

Over a dozen invertebrate species new to science have been recorded in the area. Hong Kong has an obligation to conserve this wetland.

5. Hong Kong announced its intention to consider listing Mai Po as a Ramsar Site at the Conference of the Contracting Parties in June 1993. The Government has subsequently established an interdepartmental working group to study the proposal. Reference to the initiative was also included in the Governor's 1994 Policy Address.

THE LISTING

6. The Inter-departmental working group has recommended that the listing should be done as soon as possible. The listing will help promote the conservation of this intentionally important wetland, preserve plants and animals in the area, and prevent environmental damage caused by incompatible development. We have to proceed with the Ramsar listing and carry out active conservation management in the area to show Hong Kong's commitment to nature conservation. The sustainability of Mai Po as a wetland and waterfowl habitat will be compromised without the listing.

The Authority

7. The Director of Agriculture & Fisheries will be the coordinator and management authority for the Ramsar Site.

The Boundary

8. The boundary of the Ramsar Site is attached. It covers essentially the present Deep Bay Buffer Zone 1 except the Tsim Bei Tsui headland, which is not a wetland, and covers an area of approximately 1,500 hectares, including drainage reserves for the purpose of flood control in the area.

Management of the Ramsar site

9. Requirements under the Ramsar Convention will be followed after the listing. These include formulating and implementing a planning strategy to promote the conservation of Mai Po, development of a management plan and providing adequate wardening for the area, and where there is any change in the boundaries, compensating as far as possible for any loss of wetland resources by creating additional nature reserves for waterfowl for their protection, either in the same area or elsewhere.

10. It is our intention to carry out conservation management, particularly in the core area of the site. The core area includes the intertidal mudflats and the adjacent mangroves and ponds which have already been designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interests. The Mai Po Marshes Restricted Area, effected under the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170), will be extended to cover the Inner Deep Bay inter-tidal mudflats. This will minimise disturbance to the ecological system by human activities.

11. A consultancy study by wetland ecologists will soon be conducted to develop a comprehensive management plan for the area, which will include measures such as habitat creation and restoration, ecological survey and monitoring, vegetation and wildlife management, establishment and maintenance of visitor centres and educational facilities, etc. Subject to the recommendations of this consultancy study, land clearance may be necessary for the implementation of conservation measures.

Programme

12. We aim to submit the listing to the Ramsar Bureau in May 1995, after we have completed this exercise to explain the listing and gather your views on the conservation management of the Ramsar Site.

CONCLUSION

13. We welcome your comments on the conservation management of this important site. Enquiries, suggestions and comments may be directed to :

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