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(ACE Paper 55/97)
for advice

Report of the EIA Subcommittee

The Subcommittee considered the Environmental Impact Assessment report on the Main Drainage Channel for Fanling, Sheung Shui and Hinterland at its meeting held on 3 November 1997.

Main Drainage Channels for Fanling, Sheung Shui and Hinterland Environmental Impact Assessment (ACE-EIA Paper 18/97)

2 The low gradient, large number of meanders and ox-bows of the River Indus Basin limit water flow and drainage, thus making it vulnerable to flooding. The proposed project aims to train River Sutlej, River Indus and River Beas to alleviate the flooding potential in these areas. Measures to decrease the amount of sediments reaching the rivers and those being transported to Deep Bay have also been examined.

3 In order to provide redress to the areas as soon as possible, the Initial Assessment Report (IAR) of the project was submitted to this Council in July for the endorsement of an early gazettal of the project plan under the Foreshore and Seabed Ordinance and the Crown Land Resumption Ordinance. The Council endorsed the IAR on 28 July 1997 subject to the following conditions:-

(a) detailed assessment on ecology should be included in the final EIA;

(b) concrete channelisation should be kept to a minimum and alternative strategies should be considered in the final EIA; and

(c) no construction works would commence before the final EIA report was endorsed by the Council.

4 The final EIA concluded that no insurmountable problems would arise from the project with the implementation of recommended mitigation measures. The key issue highlighted is the ecological impacts on riverine and agricultural wetland.

5 To mitigate the impacts on the loss of riverine habitat, a "soft" channel lining with grasscrete embankments, selected species planting along river corridor and retention of natural river segments within retained meanders is recommended where possible. The concrete lining of the channel banks and bottom has therefore been minimised. Moreover, a spectrum of habitat will be provided along the river corridor for wildlife. The changes in the design of the channel and the alignment have reduced the residual losses of fish ponds to 4.68 ha. Further mitigation in the form of the creation of 7.1 ha wet areas in the abandoned meander segments will support fauna in a similar way to the fish ponds.

6 As regards the mitigation measures to the loss of seasonally inundated floodplain with impacts on wildlife such as waterbirds, reprovision of habitat by managing abandoned meanders and creating marshland habitat are recommended. These measures will increase the diversity in the area and will allow marsh-dependent species to regain foothold in the floodplain system.

7 The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society and Mr David Melville had made submissions to the EIA Subcommittee expressing their concern about the impact on wildlife habitat in the Long Valley floodplain. Their submissions and the project proponent's responses are at Annexes A and B.

EIA Subcommittee's Views and Recommendations

8 Members were in general content with the extent of channel concretisation and ecological mitigation measures. One Member had reservation about the adequacy of the proposed ecological management measures. The Subcommittee agreed to recommend endorsement of the report subject to the satisfactory resolution of the comments made by the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society and Mr David Melville.

Advice Sought

9 Members are invited to advise whether the EIA report on the Main Drainage Channels for Fanling, Sheung Shui and Hinterland should be endorsed.

Planning, Environment and Lands Bureau
November 1997