

**Confirmed Minutes of the Nature Conservation Subcommittee Meeting
held on 22 September 2017 at 2:30 p.m.
in Conference Room, 33/F, Revenue Tower, Wan Chai, Hong Kong**

Present:

Dr Michael LAU (Chairman)
Ir Cary CHAN, JP
Dr Billy HAU
Prof LAU Chi-pang, JP
Prof Kenneth LEUNG
Prof John NG
Ir Michelle TANG
Prof Jonathan WONG
Ms Becky LAM (Secretary)

Absent with Apologies:

Dr HUNG Wing-tat, MH
Ms Julia LAU
Mr Anthony LOCK
Prof Nora TAM, BBS, JP
Dr Eric TSANG
Ir Conrad WONG, BBS, JP

In Attendance:

Environmental Protection Department (EPD)

Dr Samuel CHUI	Assistant Director (Nature Conservation & Infrastructure Planning)
Ms Vivian CHAN	Senior Administrative Officer (Nature Conservation)
Mr Eric LIU	Forestry Officer (Nature Conservation)
Miss Dora CHU	Executive Officer (CBD) 1
Miss Apple LEUNG	Executive Officer (CBD) 2

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD)

Mr Simon CHAN	Assistant Director (Conservation)
Dr Flora MOK	Ag. Senior Conservation Officer / Biodiversity
Dr Evelyne KUO	Conservation Officer (Biodiversity)1
Mr Felix CHAN	Conservation Officer (Biodiversity)3

The Chairman welcomed Members and Dr Samuel Chui of the Environmental Protection Department to join the first NCSC meeting for this term. He informed Members that apologies of absence had been received from Dr Hung Wing-tat, Ms Julia Lau, Mr Anthony Lock, Prof Nora Tam, Dr Eric Tsang and Ir Conrad Wong.

Item 1 : Matters Arising

2. There was no matter arising from the minutes of the last meeting.

Item 2 : Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2021 - Framework for Supporting Biodiversity Research and Studies (ACE-NC Paper 1/2017)

3. There was no declaration of interests by Members.
4. The Chairman informed Members that the paper briefed Members on the framework for providing and coordinating funding to support biodiversity research and studies under the Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2021 (BSAP), and sought Members' views on the approaches suggested by the Government.
5. As invited by the Chairman, Mr Simon Chan introduced the background of the BSAP which was presented to the Advisory Council on the Environment (ACE) at its meeting on 13 March 2017. Subsequent to the meeting, an information paper (ACE Paper 16/2017) on the "Roles and Involvement of the Advisory Council on the Environment in the Implementation of Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2021" was circulated to Members for information.
6. With the aid of a powerpoint presentation, Dr Evelyne Kuo briefed Members on Action 19 under Area 3 of the BSAP that was to provide and coordinate financial support for research and studies with a view to advancing knowledge in priority areas.
7. The Chairman drew Members' attention to the written questions submitted by two Members and the responses provided by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) before the meeting, and invited AFCD to provide responses to the follow-up enquiries from a Member.

Financial resources

8. Addressing a Member's enquiry relating to the allocation and use of funding, Mr Simon Chan advised that part of the \$150 million earmarked by the Government would support AFCD on commissioning studies that would directly and significantly contribute to the conservation of biodiversity. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and tertiary institutions were

encouraged to apply for external funding for conducting research and studies that aimed to fill information gaps on local biodiversity or inter-disciplinary topics. He said that the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) had an annual allocation of \$30 million for funding research projects, with biodiversity and climate change included among the priority research themes, as well as \$5 million for biodiversity-related education and community action projects. He shared that the ECF had received a number of biodiversity-related projects this year.

9. In reply to a Member's written question on the allocation of \$150 million apart from the quarter that would be spent on studies to be commissioned, Mr Simon Chan explained that the remaining sum would be allocated to the hiring of non-civil service contract staff and the procurement of stores and services to take forward the implementation of the actions under the BSAP, such as conservation of local species, management of protected areas, establishment of the biodiversity information hub and mainstreaming programmes for bureaux/departments (B/Ds).

10. In order to ensure the sustainability of the BSAP, a Member suggested that a budget proposal with details on the amount of recurrent expenses and one-off costs be made as basis for the setting up of an endowment fund. He considered that the interests generated from the endowment fund could help support the implementation of the BSAP.

11. Mr Simon Chan agreed with a Member that sustained financial resources were essential for the ongoing implementation of BSAP. He said that a long-term spending plan was being devised and, taking into account the status of BSAP implementation, bids for the necessary resources would be submitted under the Government's prevailing resources allocation exercise. Nonetheless, he agreed to relay the Member's suggestion for an endowment fund to the Inter-departmental Working Group on BSAP (IWGB) for consideration.

External funding sources

12. Regarding a Member's written enquiry on the influence of the Government on the allocations of external funding sources, Mr Simon Chan said that AFCD was consulted by the ECF and the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation (OPCF) on applications relating to biodiversity and conservation projects. Meritorious projects covering priority research topics would be supported and recommended for the consideration of ECF and OPCF.

13. A Member expressed concern on whether the Government's recommendations had any bearings on the other funding sources, in particular the Research Grants Council (RGC). While the Government was not involved in the assessment of applications received by the RGC, Mr Simon Chan said that applicants could request B/Ds for an endorsement letter to support their applications should their projects be relevant to and help achieve the objectives

of the concerned Government policies.

14. Given that the University Grants Committee (UGC) would assess the research output of UGC-funded universities under the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), a Member opined that many academics were reluctant to conduct research such as consultancy studies that would be assessed to have low research performance/output under the RAE. On the other hand, as the RAE accounted for research impact as one of the assessment criteria, he suggested that research topics with knowledge transfer and/or exchange components could potentially quantify the research impact in terms of the beneficiaries and contributions in the society, to provide incentive for the academics to conduct research projects that would contribute to biodiversity conservation.

15. A Member supplemented that as the quantification of research impact under knowledge transfer needed to be based on evidence, he suggested the Government facilitate knowledge transfer by including more research citations on policy papers and using the research results to inform relevant policies. He also suggested that the ECF should increase its transparency by setting and updating the prioritised sub-themes under the umbrella of biodiversity, thereby encouraging researchers to make applications that align with the implementation plan for the BSAP.

16. In response to a Member's enquiry on how the research community would know about the funding support for biodiversity-related research and the priority research topics supported under the BSAP, Mr Simon Chan said that upon the endorsement of the NCSC, the information would be shared with the tertiary institutions, for example in the form of a letter issued to the relevant departments, and briefing sessions could be arranged as necessary.

17. A Member suggested the Government focus on publicising the available funding sources for the research community. As regards research performance and impact, he was of the view that it should be explored and studied by the research community itself. Mr Simon Chan agreed and said that the Government would provide a guide on the overarching priority research topics for reference by the research community. The research community would be free to decide on the specific research questions and methodologies based on their research interests.

Implementation of the BSAP

18. In reply to a Member's written question on the role of the ACE on the implementation of the BSAP, Mr Simon Chan advised with reference to ACE Paper 16/2017 that the Government would consult the NCSC when devising major actions under the BSAP, and would report to the ACE annually on the progress of implementation.

19. A Member suggested creating civil service posts instead of relying on

non-civil service contract positions to ensure the continuity of ongoing implementation work and commitments under the BSAP. Mr Simon Chan concurred and said that the Government would consider the necessary permanent establishments to address the long-term manpower needs.

20. Given that there were 23 action categories encompassing 67 specific actions under four key areas of action, a Member opined that it was important to devise an overall strategy with clear priorities and objectives. Another Member concurred that setting clear priorities for the actions could facilitate the BSAP implementation according to the planned timeframe. Mr Simon Chan said that an implementation plan had been devised for each specific action under each action area, to facilitate progressive implementation of these specific actions in accordance with their targeted completion timeframes in the short-, medium-, and long-term as stated in the BSAP.

21. With a view to achieving synergy, a Member considered that it was important to strengthen communication and exchange amongst B/Ds on issues relating to urban ecology and green building assessment.

22. Mr Simon Chan said that subsequent to the formulation and implementation of the BSAP and the commencement of mainstreaming work in the Government, more B/Ds had proactively consulted AFCD on matters such as enhancing biodiversity in urban areas and approached AFCD for collaborations on projects relating to biodiversity conservation.

23. A Member suggested the Government take stock of the biodiversity-related studies and projects being undertaken by B/Ds to avoid the potential redundancy in efforts if different B/D's were to commission studies on similar topics.

24. Mr Simon Chan explained that the IWGB would provide a platform to keep track of the progress of studies or initiatives being taken forward by B/Ds for implementing the BSAP.

25. While research involving more complicated techniques would be better supported by tertiary institutions, a Member remarked that survey-based or taxonomy-based studies could possibly be carried out by young ecologists more cost-effectively. He suggested the Government consider engaging suitable institutions/individuals when commissioning studies.

Information sharing and knowledge transfer

26. The Chairman suggested the Government develop local expertise by asking experts commissioned to conduct research/studies to provide attachment programmes for AFCD staff and/or university students. He also opined that it was important to consider knowledge transfer in the research/studies to be funded, e.g. by including the production of a field guide as an output and

building a webpage or mobile applications. The platform could facilitate information sharing on the implementation progress of BSAP, relevant scientific data and research results and priority research topics with the public and stakeholders.

27. A Member suggested reducing complex research/studies into simple knowledge or concepts for easy comprehension. Through education and publicity programmes, these studies could help influence the behaviour of the public in terms of their interaction with biodiversity.

28. Mr Simon Chan said that a web-based information hub would be developed to provide a one-stop shop for information sharing on local biodiversity. Given the considerable period of time required for setting up a hub, he advised that the public could refer to the BSAP website for the time being for information. The progress reports to be submitted to the ACE would also be available for public information.

Urban forestry

29. A Member expressed support for BSAP and opined that it was important to promote biodiversity in the context of the urban environment given that Hong Kong was a highly urbanised city. With reference to the Policy Address 2017 on the aspects of urban forestry, vegetation diversity and place ecology, he suggested with the support of another Member that the Government should include topics on the list of priority research topics with a view to creating a biophilic city and enriching biodiversity in both the built environment and new developments and projects. The Member opined that while concepts of ecology and biodiversity had been included in the BEAM Plus Neighbourhood, more research should be encouraged in order to incorporate and materialise these concepts in the development of projects.

30. Mr Simon Chan advised that Action 10 of the BSAP was dedicated to promoting biodiversity in the urban environment with specific actions addressing urban forestry and place ecology. These actions would primarily be taken forward by the Greening, Landscape and Tree Management Section (GLTMS) under the Development Bureau (DevB), with support from AFCD, other departments and professional bodies. As one of the IWGB members, DevB would make regular progress reports to the IWGB on the implementation of the relevant specific actions.

31. A Member informed the meeting that DevB had established the Urban Forestry Advisory Panel (UFAP) in January 2017 and suggested AFCD, as a member of the UFAP, to make recommendations on the commissioning of research on urban biodiversity. Mr Simon Chan informed that while the Panel was responsible for providing advice to DevB regarding urban forestry, research on the topic could be included in the list of priority research topics subject to other views members might have, such that the research community

could collaborate with the Government to enhance urban biodiversity.

Release of alien species

32. A Member expressed concern about the release of animals into the wild. Given that these activities were often associated with religious beliefs and practice, he appealed for the Government to set up a working group on biological invasion with representatives from religious groups, NGOs, academics and the Government to enhance mutual understanding and consensus on ways to rectify the situation. For instance, he suggested drawing up a code of practice to guide the industry on the species and locations which would be less harmful to the biodiversity when they were released. He also suggested the Government consider enacting legislation to regulate the release of invasive alien species (IAS) if deemed necessary.

33. Mr Simon Chan emphasised that the Government discouraged any kind of release of animals into the wild, and informed Members that education and publicity programmes had been conducted targeting the relevant stakeholder groups, with a view to enhancing their awareness towards harmful consequences of releasing animals into the wild. He also drew Members' attention to Action 7 of the BSAP which focused on improving the management of IAS. Specific actions primarily included establishing a local IAS inventory, enhancing monitoring and management of IAS, and conducting education programmes to raise public awareness. Based on the experiences and feedbacks gained from these actions, further measures could be considered as necessary during the review of the BSAP.

Item 3 : Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2021 - Community Involvement Programmes
(ACE-NC Paper 2/2017)

34. With the aid of a powerpoint presentation, Mr Felix Chan gave an overview of the community involvement projects that would be launched under Action Area 4 of BSAP with a view to raising people's awareness about biodiversity and instilling a sense of stewardship of biodiversity in the community, including the Hong Kong Biodiversity Festival 2017, Biodiversity Education Programmes, Citizen Science Programme, Baseline Knowledge and Awareness Survey and the provision of funding support.

35. As regards a Member's follow up question suggesting formulating guidelines for public engagements in Government projects touching on biodiversity, Mr Simon Chan explained that many B/Ds had issued guidelines on incorporating biodiversity considerations into their businesses. AFCD would continue to communicate with relevant B/Ds and provide recommendations as needed on matters related to biodiversity conservation.

Promoting community involvement

36. A Member concurred with another Member's view on the use of the terminology of “community involvement” and it would be better to use “community engagement” instead. He considered that the latter had a broader meaning and implied a closer relationship with the community in the participatory process. He added that the language of “community engagement” was widely accepted and used in other government departments such as Planning Department and Housing Department.

37. A Member noted that while half of Singapore’s land was covered in green, 75% of Hong Kong’s land was in a relatively natural state or country parks. As such, he made reference to the biodiversity conservation efforts in Singapore where the concept of conserving biodiversity evolved from a “Garden City” to a “City in a Garden”, and remarked on the importance of delivering messages in the right context when planning and implementing the community engagement programmes. He considered that promoting the concept of a biophilic city might help fostering connections and the engagement of people with nature.

38. Mr Simon Chan said that an art exhibition associated with the Hong Kong Biodiversity Festival 2017 would be organised on the theme of “Nature Around Us”. The exhibition would showcase Hong Kong’s rich biodiversity through artworks created by local artists to promote biodiversity and foster a sense of nature appreciation among wider community. Mr Chan added that community involvement programmes were being planned and designed by AFCD with a view to enhancing biodiversity in urban areas of Hong Kong.

Citizen Science Programme at Urban Parks

39. A Member questioned if the implementation of the Citizen Science Programme at Urban Parks would be project-based, or whether a long-term platform, such as school-based programmes, would be established for its implementation. While the former might be unfavourable to the sustainability of the project, the latter could facilitate the design of environmental surveys and experiments and the sharing of biodiversity data collected by those participating schools. He cited the successful example in Chile where a youth citizen science project was designed for schoolchildren in sampling and collecting data on marine litter. The data collected was effectively used by the government in the deployment of resources targeting places where the issue of marine litter was prominent. Drawing on overseas experience, the Member suggested creating a platform for the planning and implementation of citizen science programme in the long run, and collaborating with the Education Bureau if possible to mobilise funding support from the Quality Education Fund.

40. In response, Mr Simon Chan said that the citizen science programmes at urban parks would be project-based, similar to the citizen science projects

organised by various NGOs. He concurred that sustainability of projects and application of the data collected were important factors, and would take these into consideration among other factors when designing citizen science programmes in the future.

41. The Chairman suggested community-driven projects should be integrated with the environmental targets and conservation policy proposed by the Government, such that the public could recognise the purpose and significance of the citizen science programmes. Apart from engaging school children, the Government could collaborate with other B/Ds in engaging the public as citizen scientists in data collection on projects relating to urban forestry e.g. Highways Department on projects relating to the planting of roadside trees and species; and Leisure and Cultural Services Department for projects implemented at parks and gardens. He further suggested AFCD integrate the community involvement programmes under the BSAP to enrich urban biodiversity (Action Area 4) to the conservation actions in protected areas (Action Area 1), thereby enhancing ecological connectivity of urban areas to the country parks. As such, a coherent policy for the preservation of biodiversity could be developed under the BSAP's framework and a synergy between community involvement and Government's conservation actions could be generated.

42. A Member suggested implementing citizen science programmes to engage participants in gathering information on the presence and abundance of species in parks area in Hong Kong. He added that volunteers could be engaged every year in species recording to raise their awareness on conservation of biodiversity.

Maintaining the momentum in the implementation of programmes

43. A Member remarked that enhanced public education to maintain the momentum was essential to induce public's behavioural change in the long run.

44. A Member opined that publicity was a key to maintain the momentum. He expressed appreciation on the publicity efforts made by AFCD in the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the country parks, in particular YouTube videos showing interviews with various experts and professionals that were actively involved in the conservation of countryside. He suggested similar publicity efforts should be supported by using social media as a tool in sharing stories in conserving biodiversity. Another Member suggested producing a documentary on local biodiversity to raise public awareness on conservation of biodiversity.

Baseline Knowledge and Awareness Survey

45. As regards the awareness survey, the Chairman considered it more important to obtain information on the public's perception and attitude, rather

than their knowledge of factual biodiversity information, for the purpose of a baseline study to assess whether a change in the public's values and behaviour could be achieved upon the implementation of community involvement programmes under the BSAP.

46. Dr Flora Mok said that apart from questions on biodiversity knowledge, the survey would include questions to assess whether the public could relate biodiversity to their daily lives, as well as their attitudes and willingness to conserve biodiversity. The awareness survey would include a telephone survey targeting the public, an online survey targeting relevant stakeholders and focus group discussions targeting relevant sectors, in order to obtain qualitative data and an in-depth understanding of their perception on biodiversity. Information obtained would assist AFCDD to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of various BSAP initiatives to be implemented over the next few years, as well as guiding the planning of public education programmes in future.

47. Noting that literature review would be conducted before drawing up the survey, a Member suggested the Government draw reference to the experience of the European countries in designing the survey. He further suggested that surveys could be conducted regularly to evaluate the changes in Hong Kong citizens' knowledge and attitude on biodiversity, and the findings could be used for comparison with the European population such that more valuable information and analysis could be obtained in future. Mr Simon Chan said that the baseline survey would be conducted regularly to obtain relevant information of public attitude towards biodiversity for devising strategies and guiding decision-making in the future.

Item 4 : Any Other Business

48. There was no other business for discussion at the meeting.

Item 5 : Date of next meeting

49. The Chairman informed that Members would be advised on the date and agenda in due course.

**Nature Conservation Subcommittee Secretariat
November 2017**