

ACE Nature Conservation Subcommittee
Meeting on 28 October 2014 at 3:00p.m.
Room 4690, Revenue Tower, 5 Gloucester Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong

Minutes of Meeting

Present

- Prof CHAU Kwai-cheong
- Miss Yolanda NG
- Dr. Gary W J ADES
- Ms. YAU Lai-ping, Pansy
- Dr. HAU Chi-hang, Billy
- Dr. TSANG Po-keung, Eric
- Dr. TAM Yat-cheung, Alfred

In Attendance

EPD

- Miss Sian LI – Senior Administrative Officer (Nature Conservation) (Secretary)
- Ms. Daisy CHAN – Executive Assistant (Nature Conservation)

AFCD

- Mr. Simon CHAN – Acting Assistant Director (Conservation)
- Dr. Winnie KWOK – Senior Wetland & Fauna Conservation Officer

Absent with Apologies

- Prof FUNG Tung
- Prof John NG
- Prof Nora TAM

In Attendance for Item 4

- Dr. NG Cho-nam - Vice Chairman of HKBWS
- Mr. LO Wai-yan - General Manager
- Mr. YU Yat-tung - Research Manager
- Ms. Vicky YEUNG Lee-Ki - Assistant Manager (Projects)
- Mr. Johnson CHUNG Chun-Kit - Project Officer

➤ Ms. Helen FONG Hoi-Ning - Project Officer

Agenda Item 1: Confirmation of Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 17 December 2013

1. The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting of the Advisory Council on the Environment Nature Conservation Subcommittee (NCSC). The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2013 was confirmed without any amendment.

Agenda Item 2: Matters Arising

2. At the last meeting, Members noted the report on Sha Lo Tung and suggested to be briefed on the ecological status of other priority sites of high ecological importance for enhanced conservation in future meetings. The Chairman advised Members that as there were already two other important issues (agenda items 3 & 4) to be discussed at this meeting, the secretary will bring this item up again in future meetings.

Agenda Item 3: Enhanced Framework for Dealing with Nature Conservation Management Agreement Applications
(Committee Paper NCSC 1/2014)

3. The Chairman informed the meeting that the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) had endorsed an enhanced framework of the vetting mechanism in dealing with applications under Nature Conservation Management Agreement (MA) Scheme (the enhanced MA framework). The enhanced MA framework sought to improve the transparency and accountability of the vetting mechanism and provided clearer guidance on the vetting of MA applications supported by the ECF.

4. A Member declared that he was one of the members of Non-government Organizations which might apply for new MA projects. The Chairman replied that as only the general framework of assessments and the marking scheme would be discussed at this meeting, there would be no

conflict of interest. After consulting Members, the Chairman decided that the Member could participate in the discussion.

5. Invited by the Chairman, Mr. Simon CHAN, Acting Assistant Director (Conservation) of AFCD, presented the enhanced MA framework with the aid of a powerpoint, which the following was highlighted:-

- (a) Additional requirements and parameters were introduced to enhance the assessment on project effectiveness;
- (b) The MA applications would be vetted by an assessment panel consisting of members from EPD and AFCD. The panel will assess the applications according to the revised criteria set out in the Guide to Application with the use of a marking scheme. A suitable marking scheme or suitable guidelines should be developed to facilitate consideration of the benefits and compliance of each proposal with respect to the vetting criteria. Applications, upon vetting, would be recommended and submitted to the NCSC for consultation and then forwarded to the ECF Committee for endorsement;
- (c) For better monitoring of MA projects, project proponents would be required to report the progress of ongoing MA projects to the NCSC regularly; and
- (d) For better management of funding under the ECF, as well as to facilitate comparison and prioritization of competing applications, applications under the MA Scheme would be considered at the same time through open invitations of MA proposals at a fixed time every year.

6. The Chairman noted that there were five major changes in the enhanced MA framework, namely the criteria, vetting procedure, open invitation, the use of a marking scheme and submission of progress reports to NCSC regularly. The Chairman then invited views from Members. A Member enquired about the role of NCSC in considering MA applications. Miss Sian LI explained that in general ECF projects of over \$2 million should be first considered in one of the subcommittees under ECF, before submitting to the ECF Committee for endorsement. For MA projects, NCSC was given similar roles. The ECF Committee would take into

consideration views of the NCSC before making the decision. Members enquired if independent experts would be invited to evaluate the proposals. Miss Sian LI explained that all proposals will be first vetted by EPD and professional colleagues in AFCD before put up to NCSC and subsequently to ECFC. The NCSC was comprised of different members including experts in the field of science and ecology. Mr. Simon CHAN supplemented that before the introduction of the enhanced MA framework, NCSC would be consulted on the proposal assessed by AFCD and advised whether the proposal should be supported from the conservation angle. Under the enhanced MA framework, with the new measures introduced (such as vetting by an assessment panel according to the revised criteria with the use of a marking scheme), the vetting and evaluation would be conducted in a more robust way. AFCD had its own experts in different fields. Under the enhanced MA framework, NCSC would be invited to provide advice and comments on the assessment result proposed by the assessment panel. A Member enquired whether both passed and failed proposals would be submitted to NCSC. Mr. Simon CHAN explained that the results of all applications would be made available to NCSC but only the passed ones would be recommended to NCSC.

7. A Member further enquired if there was any elaborate guideline for reference to the applicants as the criteria appeared to be broad principles. The Chairman referred Members to Annex A and B of Committee Paper NCSC 1/2014. Miss Sian LI explained that if criteria were too strict, it would be hard to vet and compare MA proposals which may vary in size and nature. ECFC had laid down and endorsed the overall framework but NCSC was invited to advise on the implementation, including the proposed marking scheme. A Member enquired on how to facilitate applicant's understanding of the vetting criteria, and whether they would be allowed to revise the proposal upon submission. Mr. Simon CHAN responded that if requested by the assessment panel, the applicant should provide supplementary information within a certain period. Miss Sian LI supplemented that as a matter of fairness, no supplementary information would be sought after the assessment was made. The Chairman suggested briefing session could be arranged to potential applicants to facilitate better understanding on the MA requirements including the enhanced framework.

8. The Chairman ran through the additional assessment criteria (g) to (i)

under the enhanced MA framework with Members. Members agreed that the criteria (g) related to education activities to effectively promote nature conservation and raise awareness of the local community should be supported. The Chairman asked in the scenario in which two applicants, one being an NGO of an existing MA project and the other a new comer, submitted proposals at the same site, how should criteria (h) be referred to. Mr. Simon CHAN responded that open invitation would be carried out under the enhanced MA framework. Both applications would be assessed based on the criteria set out in the Guide to Application. Criteria (h) would only be applicable to application that is modeled on a project previously supported by the ECF. If both applications were able to obtain a mark higher than the passing mark in the marking scheme, they would both be submitted to NCSC for consideration. Theoretically there could be more than one MA projects in a particular site if the areas covered were different.

9. A Member enquired on whether the open invitation arrangements, which only allow MA applications within a certain period of the year, would limit applicants. Miss Sian LI responded that this requirement was introduced to other ECF schemes for better management of funding under ECF as well as to facilitate comparison and prioritisation of proposals. ECF would call for invitation around the same time every year. Potential applicants would be ready to submit their individual proposals by then.

10. Some Members enquired on the alignment of commencement date of new projects with the end day of existing projects. Mr. Simon CHAN replied that there would be arrangements made to align the two. The new MA projects would start in the beginning of next year, which is largely in line with the end day of existing MA projects. The Chairman recalled there were previous occasions where the MA projects were delayed because of some technical problems. He would like ECFC to take note on the issue of delay of commencement date, if any. In response to Members' question on the vetting period, Mr. Simon CHAN replied that the current round of open invitation would end in November 2014. NCSC would be consulted on the recommended applications in around late December, before they were put to ECF Committee in early 2015. Hopefully, the results would be made available by February 2015.

11. The Chairman enquired whether income generated from eco-tours would be considered as an alternative source of funding under the criteria (vi) of the Marking scheme. Mr. Simon CHAN replied in affirmative and supplemented that funding from other bodies would also be regarded as an alternative source of funding. In response to a Member, Mr. Simon CHAN advised that ECF would encourage project proponent to seek alternative funding on top of ECF support.

12. For regular reporting of the progress to NCSC, after deliberation, the Chairman concluded that project proponents should be required to submit annual report in writing to NCSC.

Agenda Item 4: Nature Conservation Management Agreement Projects – Progress of Implementation of two Fishpond Management Agreement Projects

- **Fishpond Conservation Scheme in Ramsar Site (2013-2015)**
- **Hong Kong Got Fishpond – Eco-fishpond Management Agreement Scheme (2013-2015)**
(Committee paper NCSC 2/2014)

14. The Chairman informed the meeting that this paper covered two MA projects, i.e. *Project 1: “Fishpond Conservation Scheme in Ramsar Site (2013-2015)”* which is carried out at the Ramsar Site and *Project 2: “Hong Kong Got Fishpond – Eco-fishpond Management Agreement Scheme (2013-2015)”* at Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site. Project 1 focused on enhancing the conservation value of fishponds while Project 2 emphasized on public education on fishpond conservation. It sought to update Members on the latest progress of implementation of the two MA Projects implemented by the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) in the Northwest New Territories.

15. Invited by the Chairman, Dr. Winnie KWOK, Senior Wetland and Fauna Conservation Officer of AFCD, presented with the aid of a powerpoint and briefed the meeting on the progress of the two fishpond MA projects as follows:-

- (a) The MA projects in the Deep Bay area began with a Pilot Project implemented in January 2012 – February 2013. Subsequently, HKBWS has implemented two MA projects to cover the two Priority Sites for two years from March 2013 – February 2015.
- (b) Upon endorsement of the two project applications in the NCSC meeting on 30 January 2013, NCSC advised HKBWS on the following:
- To conduct ecological baseline studies on the vegetation cover on fishpond bunds;
 - To use benchmarks to assess the effectiveness of the habitat management measures on the abundance and distribution of waterbirds;
 - To incorporate a volunteer programme to raise public awareness;
 - To conduct visitor surveys; and
 - To conduct education programmes for fishpond operators.

NCSC's recommendations had been followed up.

- (d) As in 2014-2015, 665 ha of fishponds were engaged (91% of eligible fishponds), involving 139 fishpond operators; further, over 578 ha of fishponds conducted drain-down in 2013-14 while about 302 ha have conducted drain-down in 2014-15. Activities conducted included eco-tours, exhibitions, workshops, etc.

16. After Dr. KWOK's introduction, the Chairman invited representatives from HKBWS to join the meeting. Mr. YU Yat-tung, Research Manager of HKBWS presented the powerpoint to update Members on both MA projects:-

- (a) Waterbird Monitoring:
Cumulative of 69 wetland bird species were recorded utilizing drained fishpond during surveys since January 2012, including 5 globally near-threatened and threatened species.
- (b) Ecological Baseline Study – Bird:
143 bird species were recorded in the surveyed fishpond areas, including 7 globally threatened and near-threatened species. The study sites composed of Tai Sang Wai, Lut Chau (Ramsar) and San Tin (Outside Ramsar).
- (c) Vegetation Cover of Pond Bund:
There appeared a relationship between birds and different types of vegetation in different seasons, yet further data collection is needed for detailed analysis.
- (d) Education and Further Engagement of Fish Farmers:
Fishermen and local communities were involved in education activities to share their experience and stories. The Tai Sang Wai community became supporting organization of the New Territories Fishpond Festival.
- (e) Volunteer Programme:
119 volunteers with 63 completed the basic 18 services hours and became accredited volunteers.

18. Ms. Vicky YEUNG of HKBWS further informed the meeting that HKBWS tried hard to generate about 3% of the approved budget from other funding source. Large portion of approved budget was spent on fishpond management and survey with limited sum for education and promotion activities. The application for eco-tours increased after mass coverage of media since September 2014. In summary, these two projects directly and indirectly encouraged and benefited the community, enhanced the environment and benefited the biodiversity of the concerned area. Local community was engaged in habitat management and education activities. Education activities were organized for the public to appreciate the nature and wildlife. The message of bird and human harmony was also passed on

to the society. In this project, HKBWS encouraged consumption of local freshwater fish. The Chairman reminded HKBWS that education would be one of the criteria used to vet new applications in future.

19. A Member enquired on the reason for the lower rate of fishponds engaged in 2014. Mr. YU replied that some operators had dropped out from the scheme but with the joining of a major fishpond operator, the total area covered in fishpond projects had actually increased. A Member enquired whether there were any survey on volunteers to assess their changes on knowledge, behavior and skill before and after the implementation of workshops and training programme. In response, Ms. Vicky YEUNG of HKBWS replied that the HKBWS had conducted survey for volunteers and the supplement information would be submitted later. A Member applauded its good work in managing a diverse educational programme. He enquired about the management of volunteers and the number of active volunteers. Ms. Vicky YEUNG replied that out of 119 volunteers, 63 were active volunteers who had completed at least 18 service hours and some others were approaching this benchmark. The age of volunteers ranged widely from 20 to 60. There were some difficulties in managing a diverse group as such because members may have different interests.

20. A Member suggested HKBWS to look into special factor in their bird monitoring, which would help prioritise its resources in managing drain-down of fishponds in the future. Mr. YU replied that since the project duration was short, if the monitoring was conducted in a wide area, there might not be enough data to draw significant analysis in the report. A Member enquired if there were any measures taken to prevent invasive intruder (like greenhouse frog) or feral dog. Mr. YU replied that it had little problem with free running feral dogs at the moment. Mr. Simon CHAN of AFCD replied that though greenhouse frog might be widespread in urban area or sub-urban area, there was no evidence to support that harm was done to local ecology yet.

20. The Chairman noted that the survey on fauna and vegetation cover of pond bund was too brief. Mr. YU responded that under this MA, they had yet to collect enough data to do detail analysis, but they would try to do more in the remaining period of this MA project. They were also considering the

way to improve further in the upcoming MA submissions. The Chairman also asked for further information on attitude change of fishpond operators before and after their participation in this MA. A Member responded that although no surveys had been conducted, there was an obvious positive change in the attitude of fishpond operators after joining the programme, and some also helped set up the education kiosk. Dr. Winnie KWOK supplemented that there were significantly less complaints on illegal bird trapping in the fishpond areas. A Member suggested and members agreed that HKBWS need to prepare questionnaire survey for fishpond operators to fill in to collect quantifiable results thereof.

21. The Chairman enquired on the drain-down pattern of fishponds during a year. Mr. YU answered that its partner of this MA project, the Hong Kong New Territories Fish Culture Association would help liaise the time of drain-down with fishpond operators.

22. Members found the progress of the two Management Agreement Projects satisfactory.

Agenda Item 5: Any Other Business

23. There was no other business.

Agenda Item 6: Date of next meeting

24. The Chairman informed the meeting that the ECF Committee was now calling for application for MA projects. The next meeting would be held around December 2014 or early January 2015 to discuss new MA applications received. The Secretary would inform Members of the details in due course.

Secretariat

Nature Conservation Subcommittee

Advisory Council on the Environment