

Confirmed Minutes of the 28th Nature Conservation Subcommittee Meeting
held on 16 July 2018 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
Ms Julia LAU
Prof LAU Chi-pang, JP
Prof Kenneth LEUNG, JP
Mr Anthony LOCK
Prof John NG
Ir Michelle TANG
Dr Eric TSANG
Ms Becky LAM (Secretary)

Absent with Apologies:

Dr Billy HAU
Dr HUNG Wing-tat, MH
Prof Nora TAM, BBS, JP
Ir Conrad WONG, BBS, JP
Prof Jonathan WONG, MH, JP

In Attendance:

Environmental Protection Department

Mrs Vicki KWOK	Deputy Director of Environmental Protection (2)
Ms Daisy LO	Assistant Director (Conservation Policy Review)
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

Mr Simon CHAN	Assistant Director (Conservation)
Dr Jackie YIP	Senior Conservation Officer (Biodiversity)
Dr Evelyne KUO	Conservation Officer (Biodiversity)1
Ms Scarlet CHENG	Conservation Officer / Special Duties 1

In Attendance for Item 4:

Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Mr SIU Yue-hei	Principal Research Executive
Dr Dennis LEUNG	Assistant Principal Research Executive
Ms Rachel WONG	Senior Research Executive

Action

The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting and informed that apologies of absence had been received from Dr Billy Hau, Dr Hung Wing-tat, Prof Nora Tam, Ir Conrad Wong and Prof Jonathan Wong.

Item 1 : Confirmation of the draft minutes of the 27th meeting held on 30 April 2018

2. The draft minutes were confirmed without amendments.

Item 2 : Matters Arising

3. Subsequent to the last NCSC meeting on 30 April, the Sai Kung District Community Centre (SKDCC) and the Environmental Association Limited (EA) were requested to provide further information in relation to the MA projects on “Rehabilitation Project for Sai Wan Area” and “the Management Agreement on the Private Land with High Conservation Value at Fung Yuen Valley Site of Special Scientific interest in Tai Po, Hong Kong (2016-2019)”. The supplementary information provided by the two organisations was passed to Members on 6 and 12 July 2018 for reference.

4. In order to have a better picture of the trend and fluctuations in the butterfly species in Fung Yuen, the Chairman further invited the EA to provide the yearly butterfly species recorded under the ecological monitoring programme of the Management Agreements.

Secretariat

[Post meeting notes: The supplementary information provided by the EA on 10 October 2018 was passed to Members for reference on the same day.]

5. A list of publications issued by the organisations responsible for the MA projects, including research papers, conference papers, journals and leaflets etc., had been uploaded to the Cloud-based Paperless Meeting System for Members’ reference on 10 July 2018.

6. The Chairman also informed that the Secretariat had suggested arranging a site visit to Sai Wan in the last quarter of 2018 when the weather was cooler for hiking.

Item 3 : Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP) 2016-2021 - Compilation of Hong Kong List of Threatened Species (the List) (ACE-NC Paper 3/2018)

7. The Chairman declared that he was a member of the BSAP Steering Committee and its Terrestrial Biodiversity Working Group, and he had provided his views with regard to the compilation of the Hong Kong List of Threatened Species (the List). Apart from that, there was no declaration of interests from Members.

8. By way of a Powerpoint presentation, Dr Jackie Yip briefed Members on the need and the framework for compiling the List under the BSAP 2016-2021.

Implementation timeframe

9. In response to a Member's written comments regarding the implementation timeframe for compiling the List, Dr Jackie Yip advised that priority would be accorded to those species with known conservation risks in Hong Kong.

10. A Member expressed appreciation towards AFCD for planning and coordinating the assessment exercise. He remarked that the conservation status of the species in Hong Kong would be constantly changing and it would be important to conduct reassessments on a timely basis to reflect the latest situation.

11. Dr Jackie Yip advised that as recommended by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), reassessments would ideally be conducted every ten years. AFCD would endeavour to conduct regular reassessments to gauge the changes in circumstances.

12. In reply to a Member's opinion that it was important to devise the actions to be taken with respect to the assessment results, Dr Jackie Yip said that the assessment could help identify information gaps and threats impacting different species, which could be used to devise and trigger conservation actions

for different species. She added that the prioritisation of actions would also be subject to the availability of resources.

Institutional framework

13. In reply to a Member's written suggestion for engaging professionals, experts and green groups in the assessment process, Dr Jackie Yip said that AFCD had already engaged about 100 well-recognised experts of the respective taxonomic groups in Hong Kong in the assessment process. Given that the IUCN Red List assessment process was a rigorous scientific procedure that required a sound understanding of the application of criteria and would involve access to sensitive ecological data, it was not desirable to further engage additional personnel in the assessment process.

14. Given that the assessment result would form the basis for relevant policy making, a Member enquired if there were any checks and balances in the assessment system to ensure the credibility of the data. He suggested introducing an appeal mechanism in the assessment to address any disagreements relating to the data used and/or assessment results.

15. Dr Jackie Yip explained that the assessment results, as well as all supporting data and justifications of the assessments, would be published for public information in due course to ensure the transparency of the system. She mentioned that both AFCD and experts outside the Government were working to familiarise themselves with the technical aspects of the assessments, and AFCD was still collecting feedback from the personnel involved with a view to improving the management of the process.

16. In reply to a Member's question regarding the role of the IUCN in compiling the List in Hong Kong, Dr Jackie Yip said that trainers from the IUCN had provided training to assessors and reviewers on the use of IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria in the regional context. However, the work of the IUCN was largely focused on assessing the conservation status of species on a global scale, and they would not generally participate in regional assessments.

Managing supporting data and information

17. In order to protect the threatened species, a Member remarked that AFCD should be cautious in publishing information in order to avoid exposing their locations.

18. A Member opined that the lack of information on certain species should be made known to the academic community. Resources such as the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) could be utilised to encourage the academic community to fill information gaps with a view to supporting the assessments. He also suggested that the data collected for environmental impact assessments (EIAs) as well as environmental management and audit (EM&A) programmes under the EIA Ordinance should be coordinated and shared on a common platform, so as to enable the continuous monitoring of the status of the species and avoid duplication of efforts.

19. In response to a Member's question on the data sources, Dr Jackie Yip advised that the assessment would be based on the best available data collected under the continuous survey programmes of AFCD, as well as that shared by reviewers and relevant stakeholders. Given the tight implementation timeframe, she mentioned that there would not be sufficient time to commission new studies. Having said that, she assured Members that there should be adequate data on the taxonomic groups included in the work plan to support the assessment, especially for terrestrial taxonomic groups on which AFCD had commenced conducting a territory-wide ecological survey programme since 2002.

Classification scheme

20. In reply to a Member's enquiry regarding what baseline would be used to evaluate the temporal changes in the trends of species, Dr Jackie Yip advised that the assessments were to evaluate the current status of the species, and the timeframes of the baseline data required to evaluate the temporal changes were set out in the IUCN guidelines.

21. Given that there were many migratory species which stayed for varying durations in Hong Kong, a Member requested for clarification on the categorisation of these species and whether they would be determined as ineligible for regional assessment, i.e. falling under the "Not Applicable" category.

22. Using the migratory birds in Mai Po as an example, Dr Jackie Yip explained that the categorisation of these species would depend on the regularity of the species' occurrence in Hong Kong and whether Hong Kong provided important resources, such as habitat and food, during their migration. The management unit, which was dedicated to planning and coordinating the assessment process, would set out guidelines to facilitate the assessment of all

taxonomic groups.

Publicity and education

23. Considering that public empowerment was the key to the success of implementing the BSAP, a Member opined that it was important to increase public understanding on the List by translating technical information into layman terms. Dr Jackie Yip agreed and assured Members that this would be one of the top priorities of the management unit. Another member further suggested using infographics with examples to illustrate the assessment criteria.

24. Given that the compilation of the List would take years to complete and some species were under imminent threat of extinction, a Member considered that it would be important to raise public awareness and understanding on the assessments being conducted and the significance of conservation at the same time. He reminded that the List would only be the means, but not the goal, for the conservation of biodiversity, and suggested engaging the public as far as possible.

25. The Chairman concurred and pointed out that the public had a generally low level of awareness and knowledge towards biodiversity in Hong Kong. He considered that information on specific species rather than the concept of biodiversity would more likely draw interest from the public, and suggested using the social media as a platform for sharing information to the public. The public could also input information, for instance regarding the distribution of the species, into the system so as to enrich the database.

Item 4 : Baseline Survey on the Level of Knowledge and Attitude towards Biodiversity in Hong Kong
(ACE-NC Paper 4/2018)

26. The Chairman informed Members that the paper was about the results of the “Baseline Survey on the Level of Knowledge and Attitude of the General Public and Stakeholder Groups towards Biodiversity in Hong Kong” under the BSAP 2016-2021.

27. There was no declaration of interests from Members.

[AFCD’s consultant joined the meeting at this juncture.]

28. At the invitation of the Chairman, Dr Jackie Yip briefed Members on the background and Dr Dennis Leung followed to provide details on the objectives of the study, research design and methodology, results as well as recommendations of the baseline survey.

Baseline survey

29. In response to a Member's question on the reason for not including NGOs as a stakeholder group in the baseline survey, Dr Jackie Yip said that the major objective of the study was to develop a baseline on the attitude and level of knowledge of the general public of Hong Kong on biodiversity. When defining the scope of the study, teachers and professional bodies were identified as the key stakeholder groups as many initiatives under BSAP were related to them. Noting that the views of NGOs and green groups had already been well reflected in the process of formulating the BSAP, the Chairman said that the study should encourage feedback and participation from other relevant sectors.

30. Mr Y H Siu explained that the "Knowledge Index" was constructed based on respondents' answers to two subjective knowledge questions. The first question was extracted from the questionnaires from the European Union (EU) countries to test whether the general public had heard of the term "biodiversity". The second question was the respondents' self-assessment on how informed they were about the biodiversity in Hong Kong. He supplemented that a longitudinal comparison within Hong Kong could be studied with the data collected from the two subjective knowledge questions, or comparison could be made with EU countries by comparing the first subjective question only.

31. In response to a Member's comment on the lack of correlation in the data obtained from the survey, Mr Y H Siu said that the major purpose of the study was to develop a baseline that could be used as a benchmark for comparing data as implementation of BSAP progressed. As such, the construction of a "Knowledge Index" rather than a correlation index would be more appropriate for the purpose of studying the change in the attitude and level of knowledge of the general public, and also for providing useful reference in setting targets and goals, as well as guiding the planning of public awareness and education programmes in the future.

32. A Member considered that it was important to study the correlation between the knowledge and attitude of the public and their behavioural change as this would be conducive to developing strategies to educate the public to effectively induce their behavioural change.

33. In response to a Member's question on the ranking of Hong Kong in comparison with other countries with regard to the "Knowledge Index", Mr Y H Siu said that from the survey conducted by the EU in 2015, Hong Kong ranked around 20-25 amongst the 29 places. In this survey, respondents were asked whether they had heard of the term "biodiversity" and knew what it meant.

34. A Member further enquired on the reason why the knowledge level for general public was relatively low with a "Knowledge Index" of 2.4% yet respondents valued the importance of conserving biodiversity. Mr Y H Siu said that the findings showed that general public had limited understanding of biodiversity especially the concepts of "genetic diversity" and "habitat diversity". Although the "Knowledge Index" was relatively low, the study aimed to collect data to help the Government monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of various BSAP initiatives over the next few years. Ms Rachel Wong supplemented that the general public perceived biodiversity as similar concepts as nature conservation and environmental protection which they valued. This might explain the difference between a low level of knowledge and a high level of importance in public's perception on biodiversity.

Public education and promotion

35. A Member opined and another Member agreed that the question on whether economic development was "more important" than preserving biodiversity could be better phrased as "equally important" because economic development and preservation of biodiversity were not concepts in contrast with each other. The questionnaire should be designed to promote a balanced view.

36. A Member remarked on the importance of incorporating the concept of biodiversity in primary and secondary education. He further suggested that Government officials were also an important stakeholder group for raising awareness on biodiversity.

37. A Member remarked on the importance of drawing up precise and feasible solutions for the Education Bureau in promoting biodiversity such as making biodiversity and outdoor field trips as part of the school curriculum in the General Studies in primary schools as well as Liberal Studies, Biology and Geography education in secondary schools. He suggested drawing on overseas experience in designing and implementing a biodiversity-related curriculum at schools.

38. Noting that the teachers and students from Northern Europe in general had a better knowledge on biodiversity than students in Hong Kong, a Member suggested engaging experts and professionals in training local teachers and facilitating a more innovative mindset when planning other learning experiences (OLE) for students on biodiversity and in designing a curriculum that would be suitable to local circumstances.

39. Two Members were of the view that the recommendations provided by the Consultant were rather generic and could be further elaborated. The Member added that the survey should identify the knowledge gaps of the general public to facilitate the Government to devise targeted plans in education to help the public understand the relevance of biodiversity to their lives. He further suggested the Government draw reference to past successful experience in organising environmental public awareness programmes and using incentives to encourage changes in public attitude and behaviour. He agreed that the Government should be the role model in biodiversity conservation and suggested strengthening efforts in incorporating biodiversity considerations in public infrastructure projects.

40. In response to the Chairman's enquiry on whether the recommendations of the study could be further elaborated and circulated to other Government departments, Dr Jackie Yip said that the Consultant was mainly responsible for conducting a survey to collect baseline information on the knowledge and attitude of the general public and stakeholder groups towards biodiversity in Hong Kong. The information gathered from the study would facilitate the Government in enhancing biodiversity mainstreaming and public education initiatives under the BSAP. For example, in view of the relatively low percentage of respondents perceiving biodiversity as relevant to their daily lives, AFCD would organise public education activities that help the public understand how biodiversity relate to their lives.

41. Dr Jackie Yip further explained that some teachers had pointed out in focus group that field trips were one of the effective means in raising students' awareness on biodiversity. Dr Yip said that AFCD would continue to explore opportunities, such as the annual Hong Kong Biodiversity Festival, to enhance the capacity of teachers and students through outdoor activities.

42. The Chairman referred the meeting to a Member's written comments on the pressing need to step up education and publicity related to biodiversity as well as the need to have an action plan to organise awareness activities at schools and professional bodies. In addition, the Member concurred with the Consultant's

recommendation that the Government should take lead by adopting higher standards of biodiversity conservation in public infrastructure projects in a more visible manner, as well as mobilising and coordinating with different sectors to join hands together to conserve biodiversity. The Member considered that AFCD should prepare and submit action plan in relation to this recommendation in future for NCSC's deliberation.

43. Dr Jackie Yip replied that the paper (ACE-NC Paper 2/2017) which was issued for the NCSC meeting in September 2017 provided a clear outline as to the plan for community involvement programmes to be carried out in 2017/18 under BSAP. Dr Yip advised that AFCD would review these projects from time to time and take into consideration the findings of the study, with the aim to further instill a sense of stewardship of biodiversity in the targeted groups and the community. She added that AFCD would report to the NCSC on the progress made in future as appropriate.

44. A Member suggested issuing a press release or organising a press conference on the Baseline Knowledge and Awareness Survey as an opportunity to alert the public and the press of the low level of knowledge on biodiversity. Noting the lack of time and resources for teachers to organise outdoor activities for students, he suggested that schools could contact external service providers for providing OLE for students.

45. A Member suggested designing e-learning courses in biodiversity at schools such that students could gain an understanding of biodiversity through a virtual learning environment without the need to participate in outdoor activities.

46. The Chairman thanked Members for their views and comments and the Consultant for their presentation.

[AFCD's consultant left the meeting at this juncture.]

Item 5 : Any Other Business

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

Item 6 : Date of next meeting

48. The Chairman said that Members would be advised on the date of the next meeting and the agenda in due course.

**Nature Conservation Subcommittee Secretariat
October 2018**