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Applications under Nature Conservation Management Agreement Scheme

PURPOSE

This paper seeks Members' views on the evaluation of the applications received under the Nature Conservation Management Agreement (MA) scheme in August 2018.

BACKGROUND

2. Under the MA scheme, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may apply for funding from the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) for entering into management agreements with the landowners or tenants in order to enhance conservation of the priority sites identified for enhanced conservation under the New Nature Conservation Policy, country park enclaves or private land in country parks.

3. The Guide to Application for MA projects (latest version issued in July 2018) specifies that all applications received will first be evaluated by an Assessment Panel consisting of members from the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD). The recommendations will then be submitted to the Nature Conservation Subcommittee (NCSC) under the Advisory Council on the Environment (ACE) for consultation and then the ECF Committee for endorsement.

4. This year, the invitation for MA applications was open from 3 July to 13 August 2018. A total of five applications were received for renewal of existing MA

projects in the Ramsar Site Priority Site, Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site Priority Site, Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung Priority Site, Fung Yuen Priority Site, and Lai Chi Wo Enclave respectively. The main features of the applications are summarised in **Annex A**, and the respective applications with supplementary information are provided in **Annexes B to F**.

5. The Assessment Panel meeting was held on 21 September 2018 to evaluate the five applications. The results of the Panel's assessment are summarised in the following paragraphs, and detailed in **Annexes G-1 to G-5**.

Two Fishpond Management Agreement Projects in Deep Bay

6. The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) has been conducting two MA projects in the Deep Bay since 2012 to enhance the ecological value of fishponds through collaboration with the fishpond operators, with support of the Hong Kong New Territories Fish Culture Association. These two complementary MA projects, covering the Ramsar Site Priority Site and Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site Priority Site, have jointly enhanced the ecological functions of fishponds through wise use of the wetland, preserved traditional fish farming as local cultural heritage, and increased the awareness on aquaculture and bird conservation in the Deep Bay area.

7. Over 90% of the eligible fishponds¹ in the area have been engaged in the fishpond MA projects through the years. In 2017-18, drain-down was conducted at 87% of the engaged fishponds. The high participation rate of local fishpond operators over the large wetland area was a key to success of the projects. Overall, the management measures have provided more feeding opportunities for waterbirds in the Deep Bay area. Monitoring data from 2012 to 2017 have indicated that the mean abundance of waterbirds has increased 20-fold during drain-down as compared to that beforehand, with the most significant increase found in ardeids (egrets and herons) and shorebirds. In addition, ecological surveys conducted in the project sites by HKBWS from March 2013 to February 2017 have recorded a rich diversity of species consisting of 207 bird species, 29 amphibian and reptile species and 35 dragonfly species. HKBWS has also conducted a wide range of public education programmes to raise awareness about the conservation of fishponds. The projects represent a win-win solution to bird conservation and local aquaculture while promoting the wise use of the wetlands.

¹ Eligible fishponds refer to fishponds with operators registered under the Voluntary Registration Scheme of the AFCDC, and located within the Priority Sites.

Fishpond Conservation Scheme in Ramsar Site 2019-21

[Project duration: 1 March 2019 to 28 February 2021 (24 months)]

8. The current two-year MA project covering the Ramsar Site will end on 28 February 2019. HKBWS has submitted an application to seek ECF's support to continue the project for another two years (**Annex B**). The application requests a funding support of \$7,456,636. Drain-down is proposed to be conducted at up to 95% (i.e. 275 ha) of all eligible fishponds in the area. According to HKBWS' proposal, apart from conservation management to be conducted by the fishpond operators (i.e. annual drain-down of fishponds), HKBWS will continue to conduct bird surveys to monitor bird usage on fishpond habitats in Deep Bay. A series of public education activities such as eco-tours for schools, talks, exhibitions, secondary school project-learning programme and teacher workshops will be organised. Fishpond education for primary schools will be introduced as a new initiative to highlight the links among fishpond conservation, choice of food and eating habits. The annual Fishpond Festival will continue to be held as an anchor event to promote local aquaculture as well as the ecological and cultural value of Deep Bay fishponds. The applicant would continue organising the Fishpond Sustainable Art Festival, with artwork creation, workshops and exhibitions in the fishpond environment, to showcase the value of fishponds from an artistic perspective.

Hong Kong Got Fishpond – Eco-fishpond Management Agreement Scheme 2019-2021

[Project duration: 1 March 2019 to 28 February 2021 (24 months)]

9. This project is conducted in the Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site Priority Site by HKBWS, similar to the complementary MA project conducted in the Ramsar Site Priority Site. The current MA project will end on 28 February 2019. HKBWS has submitted a funding application with a view to seeking ECF's support to continue the project for another two years (**Annex C**). The application requests a funding support of \$7,246,276. Drain-down will be conducted at up to 95% (i.e. 350 ha) of all eligible fishponds in the area. In addition to conservation work such as drain-down and ecological monitoring, HKBWS will organise an array of activities including eco-tours, summer exploration tours, eco-tour guide training, summer camps, workshops, education kiosk and volunteer scheme for enhancing project sustainability and engaging the public. In addition, HKBWS will organise a new "Get-into Community" programme through collaboration with local communities in Tin Shui Wai, Yuen Long and the North District to promote local aquaculture produce which is ecologically friendly. Activities such as eco-tours, community eco-mapping, bird survey, talks, etc. will be organised under the programme to strengthen the linkage between local aquaculture and the community.

10. In general, the Assessment Panel considered that the two complementary fishpond applications worthy of support, in view of the benefits that the proposed projects would bring to the conservation of waterbirds, and in raising public awareness about nature conservation. The track record of the applicant in managing the previous MA projects was also considered satisfactory. Marks given to the applications on individual criterion and specific considerations are detailed in **Annexes G-1 and G-2** respectively.

Nature and Human in Harmony - Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2019-2021

[Project duration: 1 September 2019 to 31 August 2021 (24 months)]

11. The Conservancy Association (CA) (in association with HKBWS) has been conducting MA projects in Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung Priority Site since 2005. Previous MA projects at Long Valley have successfully enhanced the biodiversity and ecological values of the freshwater wetlands in the area. The number of bird species has increased from 221 before the MA (2005) to 314 at present, which accounts for about 57% of the total number of bird species in Hong Kong. Abundances of target species such as the critically endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting and the Chinese Bullfrog (Class II Protected in China) have also increased. Over 240,000 participants and visitors were involved in the various public education and publicity programmes, accompanied with wide media coverage for the previous project which was completed in 2017. The current project (2017-2019) is also in good progress, with 28 farmers, representing two-thirds of the local farming community, engaged to manage over 17 ha of land. All in all, the project has been successful in partnering with local stakeholders in enhancing nature conservation, and has become a showcase for MA projects.

12. As the current project will end on 31 August 2019, CA has submitted a funding application to seek ECF's support to continue the project (**Annex D**). The new application requests funding support of \$9,102,960.76 for management of about 19.7 ha of land. Similar to the previous phases of the MA project, active management of different habitat types, including shallow water habitats, paddy rice fields and freshwater marshes, as well as biodiversity surveys and conservation measures, will be implemented. Education activities including eco-tours, harvest festivals, volunteer programmes and exhibitions will also continue to be organised. In anticipation of the resumption of Long Valley under the North East New Territories New Development Areas (NENT NDAs) project, the project team proposed management of the portion of the site within Long Valley (to be resumed under the

NENT NDAs project) for 12 months, and the portion at Ho Sheung Heung for 24 months.

13. In general, the Assessment Panel considered the application worth supporting, in view of the benefits that the proposed project would bring to the conservation of wetland habitats and wildlife, and in raising public awareness about nature conservation. The track record of the applicant in managing the previous MA projects was also considered satisfactory. Marks given to the application on individual criterion and specific considerations are detailed in **Annex G-3**. However, the Assessment Panel was mindful of the uncertainty in the schedule of the land resumption under the NENT NDAs project. For sake of prudence, it will recommend the ECF to grant funding for 12-month operations only (i.e. from 1 September 2019 to 31 August 2020) so as to allow for more flexibility to adjust to future developments in the land resumption process. The Assessment Panel will also recommend ECF imposing conditions on the application in relation to the arrangements under the land resumption process as set out in Annex G-3.

Management Agreement Scheme at Lai Chi Wo Enclave 2019-2021

[Project duration: 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2021 (24 months)]

14. In association with CA, Hong Kong Countryside Foundation (HKCF) has received funding to initiate the first MA project at Lai Chi Wo in October 2017. The project is in good progress, with eco-agriculture activities and various habitat management measures being implemented by different stakeholder groups.

15. The current MA project will end on 30 September 2019. HKCF has submitted a funding application to seek ECF's support to continue the project for another two years. The new application requests a funding support of \$8,166,184 for management of about 5.0 ha of land (**Annex E**). The project will continue to strengthen its four pillars of work, namely biodiversity conservation, eco-friendly agriculture, community engagement and public education. Similar to the current project (2017-2019), habitats including wetlands, wet and dry agricultural fields, stream, terraced fields and orchard will be managed to provide suitable habitats for aquatic plants and wildlife such as amphibians, dragonflies, butterflies and freshwater fish (in particular, rice fish). HKCF will conduct ecological surveys to monitor the target taxa groups and carry out community engagement activities to build up the capacity of the local community. HKCF will also organise a wide range of education activities including eco-tours, workshops, Harvest Fun Fairs, etc. for the public.

16. Overall, the Assessment Panel considered the project worthy of support in

view of the benefits the project would bring to the enhancement of the conservation value of Lai Chi Wo. More importantly, the project would help revitalise the traditional farming landscape at Lai Chi Wo through engaging and collaborating with local villagers; the project would also help raise awareness on rural sustainability. Marks given to the application on individual criterion and specific considerations are detailed in **Annex G-4**. The Assessment Panel recommended minor revisions to the proposed budget in order to comply with the Guide to Application after considering the clarifications on the manpower and insurance provided by the applicant upon request. These minor amendments will be recommended to the ECF Committee for endorsement.

Management Agreement on the Private Land with High Conservation Value at Fung Yuen Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in Tai Po, Hong Kong (2019-2021)
[Project duration: 1 February 2019 to 31 July 2021 (30 months)]

17. The Environmental Association (EA) Limited has conducted MA projects in the Fung Yuen Priority Site since 2005. Through implementing conservation management measures to maintain and enhance the habitat quality of this important site for butterflies, the number of butterfly species recorded at Fung Yuen has increased from 162 in 2005 (i.e. beginning of the first MA project) to 216 at present, which accounts for over 80% of the butterfly species in Hong Kong. Public education and engagement activities including workshops, exhibitions, volunteer programmes and butterfly festivals have also been organised during previous MA projects.

18. The current three-year MA project will end on 31 January 2019, and EA has submitted a funding application to seek ECF's support of \$9,044,028 to continue the project for another 2.5 years (**Annex F**). Under the proposed project, about 2.1 ha of land will be actively managed through site stewardship, planting of butterfly larval food and nectar plants, conducting monitoring and surveys, as well as removal of invasive weeds. Education programmes including various volunteer programmes and workshops on nature conservation, monthly and annual butterfly festivals for the general public, as well as outreach booths for schools, will be carried out.

19. In general, the Assessment Panel considered the application worth supporting, in view of the benefits that the proposed project would bring to the conservation of butterflies and in raising public awareness on nature conservation, and the track record of the applicant in managing the previous MA projects. The Assessment Panel's comments on individual criterion and specific considerations are detailed in **Annex G-5**. Taking into consideration that the proposed moth survey had limited relevance

to the MA project, the Assessment Panel recommended removal of this item from the project. In addition, a budget item was in compliance with the Guide to Application and thus a revised proposed budget will be recommended to the ECF Committee for endorsement.

ADVICE SOUGHT

20. Members are invited to consider the recommendations of the Assessment Panel, with a view to putting forth the recommended applications with revisions, if any, to the ECF Committee for consideration on funding support.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Environmental Protection Department

October 2018

**Summaries of Applications under
Nature Conservation Management Agreement Scheme**

Table 1 Summary of the MA application in Ramsar Site Priority Site

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Project Title | Fishpond Conservation Scheme in Ramsar Site 2019-21 |
| Area Managed | About 275 hectares |
| Proponent | Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) |
| Project Summary | The project aims at enhancing the conservation value of commercial fishponds in the Northwest New Territories, especially for avifauna, through partnership between HKBWS and local fishpond operators. Education activities consist of mainly off-site activities such as talks, exhibitions and workshops, except for one-off events such as the Fishpond Festival. |
| Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To enhance the conservation value of fishponds; - To maintain the harmonious relationship between local fish farming and bird conservation; - To preserve the cultural heritage of local traditional practice of fish farming; - To update ecological information and formulate strategies for long-term conservation; and - To engage fishpond operators and raise public awareness on the importance of the conservation values of fishponds. |
| Key Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management of drain-down activities; - Baseline study on birds; - Education programmes including eco-tours for schools, talks, exhibitions, fish education for primary schools, secondary school project-learning programme and teacher workshop; and - Fishpond Festival and Fishpond Sustainable Art Festival |
| Key Deliverables | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technical reports on baseline study on birds; - 5,000 copies of pamphlets on conservation of fishponds and aquaculture; - 3,000 copies of magazine (and online version) on the Sustainable Fishpond Art Festival; and - Questionnaires for participants of activities |
| Duration | 24 months (from 1 March 2019 – 28 February 2021) |
| Amount of Fund applied for | Funding applied: \$7,456,636 Expected income: \$377,750 (5.07% of proposed budget) Expected balance: \$7,078,886 |

Table 2 Summary of the MA application in Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site Priority Site

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Project Title | Hong Kong Got Fishpond – Eco-fishpond Management Agreement Scheme 2019-2021 |
| Area Managed | About 350 hectares |
| Proponent | Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) |
| Project Summary | The project aims to enhance the conservation of fishponds by providing more feeding grounds in fishponds in Deep Bay Wetlands outside Ramsar Site for avifauna, through partnership between HKBWS and local fishpond operators. On-site education activities such as guided eco-tours, Education Kiosk, etc. will be conducted and will involve the local communities. |
| Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To enhance the conservation value of fishponds; - To maintain the harmonious relationship between local fish farming and bird conservation; - To preserve the cultural heritage of local traditional practice of fish farming; - To update ecological information and formulate strategies for long-term conservation; and - To engage fishpond operators and raise public awareness on the importance of the conservation values of fishponds. |
| Key Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management of drain-down activities; - Baseline study on birds; - Education programmes including eco-tours, summer exploration tours, eco-tour guide training, summer camps, workshops, Education Kiosk and volunteer scheme; and - “Get-in Community” programme with eco-tours, community eco-mapping, bird surveys and talks to promote local aquaculture produce to the local communities |
| Key Deliverables | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technical reports on baseline study on birds; and - Questionnaires for participants of activities |
| Duration | 24 months (from 1 March 2019 – 28 February 2021) |
| Amount of Fund applied for | Funding applied: \$7,246,276 Expected income: \$237,000 (3.27% of proposed budget) Expected balance: \$7,009,276 |
| Assessment Panel’s Remarks | Many education activities such as Education Kiosk, volunteer scheme, eco-tour guide training and Get-into Community programme will be offered free of charge. Besides, the estimated revenue of \$20,000 to be generated from “Fish for All” programme may depend on corporate donation to be raised which will be variable. |

Table 3 Summary of the MA application in Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung Priority Site

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Project Title | Nature and Human in Harmony - Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2019-2021 |
| Area Managed | About 19.7 hectares |
| Proponent | The Conservancy Association (CA) |
| Key Partner | Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) |
| Project Summary | The project will continue the impetus of past MA projects to enhance the conservation and ecological values of the freshwater wetlands at the Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung, through partnership with local landowners and farmers. |
| Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To conserve the landscape and biodiversity, particularly freshwater wetland-dependent birds and amphibians; - To engage local landowners and farmers in habitat management and promotion of eco-agriculture; - To update ecological information and formulate strategies for long-term conservation; and - To raise public awareness on the importance of freshwater wetlands. |
| Key Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management of habitats including shallow water habitats, paddy rice fields, wet agricultural fields, etc.; - Conservation measures to protect and enhance breeding success of birds and amphibians; - Habitat and biodiversity monitoring; and - Education and publicity programmes including eco-tours, night safaris, workshops, Harvest Day, and volunteer programmes, etc. |
| Key Deliverables | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports on species and habitat monitoring (including amphibians, birds, habitat and vegetation) - 3,000 copies of pamphlets on Long Valley; - Questionnaires for participants of activities; and - Around ten issues of media coverage. |
| Duration | 24 months (from 1 September 2019 – 31 August 2021) |
| Amount of Fund applied for | Funding applied: \$9,102,960.76 Expected income: \$123,600 (1.36% of proposed budget) Expected balance: \$8,979,360.76 |
| Assessment Panel's Remarks | Since the schedule of the land resumption under the NENT NDAs project is still uncertain, the Assessment Panel considered it more prudent to recommend the ECF to grant funding for 12 months only (i.e. from 1 September 2019 to 31 August 2020), to allow for more flexibility to adjust to future developments in the land resumption process. Revisions to the proposed budget for the shortened project duration and funding conditions to be imposed on the application in relation to the arrangements under the land resumption process will be recommended to the ECF for endorsement. |

Table 4 Summary of the MA application in Lai Chi Wo Enclave

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Project Title | Management Agreement Scheme at Lai Chi Wo Enclave 2019-2021 |
| Area Managed | About 5.0 ha |
| Proponent | Hong Kong Countryside Foundation (HKCF) |
| Key Partner | The Conservancy Association (CA) |
| Project Summary | This project will build upon its previous work and it aims to revitalise the traditional farming landscape at Lai Chi Wo and enhance its conservation and ecological values, through collaborations between HKCF, CA and the local community. |
| Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To rehabilitate agricultural land and enhance their ecological functions for wildlife use; - To enhance the conservation of aquatic plants, amphibians, dragonflies, butterflies and rice fish; - To engage local landowners and community farmers in habitat management and eco-agriculture activities; and - To increase the general public's understanding of eco-agriculture and nature conservation. |
| Key Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management of habitats including wetlands, wet and dry agricultural fields, etc.; - Conservation measures to protect and provide suitable habitats for aquatic plants, amphibians, dragonflies, butterflies and rice fish; - Habitat and biodiversity monitoring; - Community engagement activities such as regular stakeholder meetings, training opportunities, etc.; and - Education and publicity programmes including eco-tours, workshops, Harvest Fun Fairs, exhibitions, and volunteer programmes, etc. |
| Key Deliverables | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports on species monitoring (including amphibians, dragonflies, butterflies and rice fish); - Three pamphlets on the project, eco-agriculture and biodiversity of Lai Chi Wo; - Questionnaires for participants of activities; and - Three media reports in newspaper, magazine, radio or TV. |
| Duration | 24 months (from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2021) |
| Amount of Fund applied for | Funding applied: \$8,166,184 Expected income: \$396,500 (4.86% of proposed budget) Expected balance: \$7,769,684 |
| Assessment Panel's Remarks | Some budget items were incompliant with the Guide to Application, and revisions to the proposed budget will be recommended to the ECF Committee for endorsement. |

Table 5 Summary of the MA application in Fung Yuen Priority Site

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Project Title | Management Agreement on the Private Land with High Conservation Value at Fung Yuen Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in Tai Po, Hong Kong (2019-2021) |
| Area Managed | About 2.1 ha |
| Proponent | The Environmental Association Limited (EA) |
| Project Summary | This project aims at conserving and enhancing the natural habitats of butterflies in the Fung Yuen valley SSSI through management agreements with local landowners. |
| Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To reduce and minimise environmentally incompatible behavior on private land in Fung Yuen; - To enhance and maintain the habitat quality of private land in Fung Yuen; - To provide a refuge area for butterfly foraging, inhabiting, and breeding, so as to conserve and enhance the butterfly diversity; - To train volunteers in conservation programmes; - To provide up-to-date ecological information and formulate strategies for long-term management in the area; and - To promote nature conservation awareness of the general public. |
| Key Activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Site safeguard and ecological monitoring programme - Habitat management including removal of invasive weeds and planting of butterfly larval food plants and nectar plants - Species conservation programme - Education and publicity programmes including monthly and annual Butterfly Festivals, outreach booths, conservation workshops, etc. |
| Key Deliverables | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reports on species and habitat monitoring; - 3,000 copies of leaflets and 2,000 copies of a book on Fung Yuen; - Questionnaires for participants of activities; and - Around 50 issues of media coverage. |
| Duration | 30 months (from 1 February 2019 – 31 July 2021) |
| Amount of Fund applied for | Funding applied: \$9,044,028 Expected income: \$375,000 (4.15% of proposed budget) Expected balance: \$8,669,028 |
| Assessment Panel's Remarks | Taking into consideration that the proposed moth survey had limited relevance to the MA project, the Assessment Panel recommended removal of this item from the project. In addition, a budget item was non-compliant with the Guide to Application and thus a revised budget will be recommended to the ECF Committee for endorsement. |