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For discussion on 22 September 2017

**Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2016-2021)
Framework for Supporting Biodiversity Research and Studies**

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the framework for providing and coordinating funding to support biodiversity research and studies under the Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP) 2016-2021, and seeks Members' views on the approaches suggested.

BACKGROUND

2. The BSAP provides administrative and planning guidance to the conservation of Hong Kong's biodiversity for 2016-2021, by setting out a strategy and an action plan that comprises 23 action categories encompassing 67 specific actions under four key areas of actions. One of the key areas of action, Area 3, aims to improve our knowledge of the local flora and fauna, and fill in important information gaps on biodiversity, to facilitate informed decision-making related to biodiversity conservation.

3. Specifically, under Action 19 of the BSAP, the Government will provide and coordinate financial support to research and studies for advancing our knowledge in priority areas, through commissioning studies by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) (Specific Action 19a), as well as encouraging and supporting submissions to relevant funding sources (Specific Actions 19b and 19c).

4. To take forward Action 19 in a systematic and coordinated manner, AFCD has worked out a framework for supporting research and studies relevant to the BSAP, so that resources would be allocated appropriately and research outputs would be taken stock of and duly applied to fill existing gaps in our knowledge of the local biodiversity. The following framework is proposed for guiding allocation of resources to support research and studies, according to their contribution to the BSAP and application to biodiversity conservation.

Specific Action 19a – Conduct studies that would directly and significantly contribute to the conservation of biodiversity

5. The Government has earmarked \$150 million for taking forward initiatives under the BSAP from 2016/17 to 2018/19. AFCD will allocate part of the earmarked funding to commission studies that can directly contribute to the achievement of specific actions under the BSAP, and can be immediately applied in the conservation of local biodiversity. Institutions/individuals with relevant expertise will be invited to provide the required services through standard government procurement procedures¹.

6. Topics of the studies to be commissioned from 2017 to 2021 include:

- Baseline surveys for selected data-deficient taxa (e.g. beetles, macroalgae, octocorals) and monitoring of priority taxa and habitats of conservation concern (e.g. reef fish, natural streams) (Action 13 and Specific Action 3a);
- Targeted ecological studies to support the formulation/updating and implementation of Species Action Plans (e.g. for Incense Tree, corals, Black-faced Spoonbill, Green Turtle, Three-banded Box Turtle) (Action 6);
- Studies to take stock and conduct a preliminary risk assessment for invasive alien species (Action 7), update the territorial habitat map (Action 15), and assess the ecosystem services provided by major habitat types (Action 17);
- Studies to prepare for designation of new country park, review and enhance the effectiveness of conservation management measures in marine parks, Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site, the Hong Kong Wetland Park, and important fisheries and aquaculture areas (Specific Actions 1a, 1d, 1f, 11b, 11d); and
- Consultancy studies to review and enhance school and public education

¹ Information on the regulations and process of government procurement available at: <http://www.fstb.gov.hk/tb/en/guide-to-procurement.htm>

programmes in the Hong Kong Wetland Park and the Woodside Biodiversity Education Centre (Specific Action 20a).

Specific Action 19b – Encourage research to fill key information gaps on local biodiversity, through funding support by the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) and Specific Action 19c – Support research on sustainable agriculture and fisheries practices and management

7. In addition to taking forward studies with direct and immediate contribution to the BSAP, the Government also recognises the value of basic scientific research that can deepen our knowledge of the biodiversity in Hong Kong, or lead to the development of methods and tools for future application in biodiversity conservation work, as well as the importance of fostering inter-disciplinary studies to better understand social and economic considerations in biodiversity conservation.

8. During the formulation and consultation process of the BSAP, the BSAP Steering Committee, Working Groups and Focus Groups, as well as members of the research community had proposed numerous suggestions on a wide range of research topics to address gaps in our knowledge of the local biodiversity². These suggestions were consolidated and categorised into priority topics of research that would fill key information gaps, and could potentially be applied to biodiversity conservation work (**Annex**).

9. The ECF provides funding support to Environmental Research, Technology Demonstration and Conference Projects that contribute in direct and practical ways towards environmental improvement and conservation of the local environment, and has earmarked additional funding for supporting research projects that would contribute to biodiversity conservation since 2016. The Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund and the Sustainable Fisheries Development Fund have also been set up to provide funding for projects that support the development of sustainable practices in the management and use of natural resources for benefiting the agricultural and fisheries sectors.

10. AFCD will share the list of priority research topics with the research

² Focus Group reports available at:
http://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/conservation/Con_hkbsap/bsap_links_to_resources/bsap_links_to_resources.html#Focus Group Reports

community, encourage submissions to relevant funding sources, and provide the necessary support for meritorious projects according to the established criteria of the funding bodies. AFCD will also maintain close dialogue with the research community, to keep abreast of the latest research developments and outputs, as well as keep researchers informed of AFCD's interests and needs as the BSAP is taken forward.

ADVICE SOUGHT

11. Members are invited to comment on the framework for providing and coordinating funding to support biodiversity research and studies, and on the priority research topics to be supported.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
August 2017

List of priority research topics

- Baseline studies on taxa groups that are understudied, or whose information is outdated, but have been demonstrated in other scientific studies to be important to community structure/ecosystem function, or potentially be of conservation concern (e.g. certain arthropods, echinoderms, amphioxus)
- Distribution, status, ecology, taxonomy and genetics of threatened/ecologically important/keystone species
- Influence of environmental conditions and habitat connectivity on biodiversity in rivers/streams; enhancement measures to link fragmented habitats
- Impacts of invasive alien species on native biodiversity; control and management measures
- Impacts of climate change on vulnerable/sensitive species and habitats (e.g. upland species, coral communities)
- Impacts of human recreational activities on vulnerable/sensitive species and habitats (e.g. clams, mudflats)
- Impacts of mercy release to the natural environment
- Development of methods and tools to assess biodiversity in taxa with identification difficulties
- Development of methods and tools to aid enforcement operations of wildlife crime
- Documentation and promotion of traditional knowledge and practices in sustainable use, preservation, restoration and management of biological resources and ecosystem services
- Development of initiatives/practices to promote sustainable consumption of biological resources