

**Advisory Council on the Environment
Nature Conservation Subcommittee**

Nature Conservation Management Agreement Proposals

Purpose

Three funding applications were received under the Nature Conservation Management Agreement (MA) Scheme in November 2014. This paper seeks Members' advice on the evaluation of the applications, which was carried out using the marking scheme endorsed by this committee at the meeting on 22 October 2014 (*Committee Paper NCSC 1/2014*).

Background

Open Invitation and Evaluation of Applications

2. The Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) has endorsed an enhanced framework of the vetting mechanism in dealing with applications under MA scheme. The enhanced framework, relevant application and vetting procedures and requirements are set out in the Guide to Application and Application Form for MA projects (latest version in September 2014). The Guide to Application also describes the basic requirements and responsibilities of recipient organizations. These documents are made available to the public through the ECF homepage (<http://www.ecf.gov.hk>). Under the enhanced MA framework, all the proposals are considered at the same time through open invitation of MA proposals at a fixed time every year and the invitation will be announced on the ECF homepage. The first round of open invitation for MA applications was open from 6 October to 17 November 2014. Three MA applications were received by the deadline.

3. One funding application was submitted by the Conservancy Association (CA) in association with the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) for wetland conservation in Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung Priority Site while two MA applications were submitted by HKBWS for fishpond conservation in the Ramsar Site Priority Site and in the Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site Priority Site respectively. The three MA applications are summarised in paragraphs 4 to 6 below and **Annex I**. The assessment results of the Assessment Panel on the three applications are at **Annex II** (see paragraph 7 below).

Nature and Human in Harmony - Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2015 – 2017
[Project duration: 1 March 2015 to 31 August 2017]

4. With the funding support from the ECF, CA (in association with HKBWS) has been conducting MA projects in Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung Priority Site since 2005. The current three-year MA project will end on 28 February 2015. In this regard, CA submitted a funding application with a view to seeking ECF's support to continue the project. The application requests a funding support of \$9.8M for management of about 16.9 ha of land. The new project will last for 30 months, from 1 March 2015 to 31 August 2017. Under the new project, important freshwater habitats particularly shallow water habitats, paddy rice fields, and freshwater marshes, which provide important foraging and feeding grounds to birds and amphibians, will be under intensive management. Besides, about 3.4ha of *Fung Shui* wood will also be included in the management programme. With the establishment of an education centre in July 2014, the education and publicity programme will be further strengthened under the new project. A wide range of activities is proposed, for example eco-guide training, eco-tours, Harvest Fest, night safari tours, and volunteers' programmes etc., which are expected to attract over 17,000 members of the public. A copy of the Long Valley MA application (2015-2017) is at **Annex III**.

Fishpond Conservation Scheme in Ramsar Site 2015-17
[Project duration: 1 March 2015 to 28 February 2017]

5. HKBWS has been conducting MA projects in the Ramsar Site Priority Site since 2012 to enhance the ecological value of fishponds through collaboration with the fishpond operators. The current MA project covers a two-year period from 1 March 2013 to 28 February 2015. In this regard, HKBWS submitted a funding application with a view to seeking ECF's support to continue the project for another two years after the completion of the current MA project. According to HKBWS's proposal, apart from conservation management to be conducted by the fishpond operators (i.e. annual drain-down of fishponds), HKBWS will conduct ecological surveys on birds, dragonflies, amphibians and reptiles so as to build on the ecological data collected from previous MA projects on fishpond habitats. In view of the potential human disturbance by visitors on the ecologically sensitive Ramsar Site, the proposed public education activities, including exhibitions, school talks and teacher workshops, will mostly be conducted off-site. In addition, a Fishpond Festival will be organised as a focal event to promote the appreciation of sustainable aquaculture and traditional culture of fish farming community. A series of activities including bird watching, eco-tours and photo contest will be organised. Talks will also be organised to fishpond operators on the importance of fishponds to wetland conservation and the close relationship between aquaculture and wildlife. The proposed budget for this project is \$6,655,388. The MA application of the fishpond project in the Ramsar Site Priority Site is at **Annex IV**.

Hong Kong Got Fishpond – Eco-fishpond Management Agreement Scheme 2015-2017
[Project duration: 1 March 2015 to 28 February 2017]

6. Similar to the MA project conducted in the Ramsar Site, this project has been conducted in the Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site by HKBWS since 2012. The current MA project will end on 28 February 2015. HKBWS submitted a funding application with a view to seeking ECF's support to continue the project. The present application covers a two-year period from 1 March 2015 to 28 February 2017. In addition to the conservation elements such as drain-down and ecological monitoring of fishponds, HKBWS' proposal on Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site emphasises on public education on the conservation of fishponds. As "Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site" is ecologically less sensitive than the Ramsar Site, more on-site activities can be organised, including eco-tours, night safari, and workshops on experiencing fishpond operation. An Education Kiosk will also be set up at Nam Sang Wai to showcase the ecological value of fishponds. The volunteer scheme of the current project will also continue to provide assistance in the various education activities. The proposed budget for this project is \$6,642,968. The MA application is at **Annex V**.

Recommendations

7. Under the enhanced MA framework, an Assessment Panel has been established to consider the three MA applications received. The Panel comprises members from the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and the Environmental Protection Department. The Assessment Panel held a meeting on 8 December 2014 at which it assessed and evaluated the merits of individual applications in accordance with the following broad vetting criteria using the endorsed marking scheme:

- (a) the benefits that a proposed project will bring to the efforts in enhancing the conservation and ecological values of the site concerned, better achieving the nature conservation objectives, and evaluating the effectiveness of this new conservation measure;*
- (b) the sustainability of a proposed project including its resource implications, participation of the landowner(s)/tenant(s) and local community, nature and enforceability of the management agreement concerned;*
- (c) the technical and project management capability of the applicant organisation, as well as its track record, including the effectiveness of past projects, and its ability to comply with funding conditions;*

- (d) whether the proposed project's schedule of implementation is well-planned and practicable, and the duration is reasonable;*
- (e) whether the proposed budget is reasonable and realistic, and whether the project is cost-effective, with full justification for every expenditure item;*
- (f) whether the proposed project has alternative sources of funding, and whether it would be more appropriate for the proposed project to be funded by other sources;*
- (g) whether the proposed project includes appropriate education activities to effectively promote nature conservation and raise awareness of the local community in nature conservation as part and parcel of the Management Agreement project;*
- (h) where the application is modeled on a project previously supported by ECF, whether the applicant has demonstrated, by reference to the previous MA project, the achievements made with respect to enhancing the conservation of the site concerned in the new application; and*
- (i) with regard to (h) above, where the total amount of expenses under its/their respective broad expenditure item deviated from the approved budgets of previous MA by a substantial amount, say 30%, the applicant shall justify the differences.*

8. Upon assessment, all three MA proposals received overall passing marks and scored above the passing marks in broad vetting criteria (a) to (g). For qualitative broad vetting criteria (h), the achievements of previous MA projects were reviewed and were considered satisfactory in achieving the corresponding conservation objectives. For board category (i), upon enquiry from the Assessment Panel, the applicants have provided feedback/responses on the proposed budgets (see paragraph 9 below). All in all, the Assessment Panel considered that the three proposed projects are worth supporting in view of the benefits that the new projects would bring to the conservation of the concerned sites and raising the public awareness on nature conservation, as well as in achieving the nature conservation objectives. The detailed assessment of the Assessment Panel is at **Annex II** for Member's reference.

Feedback/Response from Applicants

9. Since some broad expenditure items in the proposed budgets deviated substantially from the approved budgets of the respective previous MA projects, the applicants were requested to provide clarification / justification on the deviations on 9 December 2014. The feedback/ response from the applicants were received on 16 and 17 December 2014 (**Annex VI** refers). Upon considering their feedback/responses on the proposed budgets, the Assessment Panel considered the clarifications mostly satisfactory but it had reservation on some budget items. Revision on the proposed budgets for those items would be proposed to the ECF Committee for their endorsement of the exact amount of funding.

Advice Sought

10. Members are invited to consider the applications based on the assessment results, and put forth the recommended applications to the ECF Committee for consideration on funding support.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Environmental Protection Department
December 2014