

For discussion on
27 May 2002

Legislative Council Panel on Environmental Affairs
Proposed Designation of Southwest Lantau Marine Park
and Soko Islands Marine Park

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the proposal to designate the Southwest Lantau Marine Park and Soko Islands Marine Park for protecting the habitats of Chinese White Dolphins and Finless Porpoises, and other marine life found within the areas.

ECOLOGICAL VALUE OF THE AREAS

2. In 1998, the Country and Marine Parks Authority (the Authority), i.e. the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation, appointed the Hong Kong Institute of Education to conduct a study on the ecological value of the waters around southwest Lantau and the Soko Islands. The Institute completed the study in September 1999. It concludes that the waters are important habitats of Chinese White Dolphins and Finless Porpoises. Chinese White Dolphins frequent the areas in summer and autumn, while Finless Porpoises visit the waters in winter and spring.

3. Both Chinese White Dolphins and Finless Porpoises are rare and precious marine mammals. They are listed under Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) which covers species that are highly endangered and threatened. Species in the Appendix are subject to maximum protection against exploitation by trade under the Convention. Chinese White Dolphins and Finless Porpoises are protected in Hong Kong by the Animals and Plants (Protection of Endangered Species) Ordinance (Cap. 187), which gives effect to CITES, and the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170), which prohibits hunting, possession and sale of protected wild animals. Notwithstanding the above, it is important to protect the habitats of these important species through designating their habitats as marine parks so that they could continue to survive and propagate in Hong Kong.

4. Moreover, the waters around southwest Lantau and Soko Islands are important fishery spawning and nursery grounds. Diverse types of benthic and coastal communities including sponges, hard corals and benthic worms can also be found around Soko Islands. The proposal to designate the two marine parks is in

line with the planning strategy for Southwest New Territories to conserve the high quality natural environment on Lantau Island and Soko Islands and to develop that region for tourism and recreation purposes.

PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF MARINE PARKS

5. As a first step to designate the areas concerned as marine parks, the Authority obtained the direction of the Chief Executive in Council in April 2002 to prepare draft maps of the proposed Southwest Lantau Marine Park and Soko Islands Marine Park (the proposed marine parks) in accordance with section 7 of the Marine Parks Ordinance (the Ordinance). Preliminary boundaries of the proposed marine parks have been drawn up and are shown in the Annex.

6. The proposed marine parks at southwest Lantau and Soko Islands cover about 660 hectares and 1,270 hectares of waters respectively. Upon notification of the draft maps of the proposed marine parks in the Gazette, no new development may be carried out within the areas without the approval of the Authority. Following designation, the proposed marine parks will be managed and controlled by the Authority in accordance with the Marine Parks and Marine Reserves Regulation for conservation, recreation, education and scientific research purposes.

7. As in other marine parks, trawling will be prohibited in the proposed marine parks since this fishing practice involving non-selective capture of fish and other marine life will seriously disturb the seabed and marine ecology. However, bona-fide fishermen will be allowed subject to a permit system to continue fishing in a non-destructive manner. Designation of the proposed marine parks is not expected to have a significant impact on trawlers' livelihood since they can continue to operate in other fishing grounds. In addition, in the long run, marine parks would contribute to the conservation of marine environment and building up of fish stocks that would benefit the fishing industry as a whole.

8. Recreational activities such as swimming, diving, boating, and dolphin watching will be allowed in the proposed marine parks. The Authority is also considering establishing special zones for recreational fishing at suitable locations in the proposed marine parks provided that this would not adversely affect the marine ecology. As part of conservation education, the Authority would encourage visits to marine parks and development of eco-tourism in these areas in a way compatible with the conservation objective.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

9. The Country and Marine Parks Board (the Board) was consulted on the designation of the proposed marine parks on 27 September 2001. The Board supported the proposal.

10. The Authority has also consulted fishermen organizations, green groups, the Islands District Council, the Rural Committees of Lantau Island and other stakeholders. The trawlers, the Islands District Council and some Rural Committees raised objections to the proposal as they were concerned about the possible adverse impact on fishermen's livelihood. All the other parties supported the proposal. The Authority will consult the Board again before the draft map is finalized for public inspection. The Authority will also carry out further consultation with fishermen groups concerned and explain the benefits of the proposal to them.

STATUTORY DESIGNATION PROCEDURES AND TIMETABLE

11. After finalizing the draft maps of the proposed marine parks, the Authority has to notify in the Gazette the availability of the draft maps for public inspection for two months and specify how objections to the draft maps may be made in accordance with section 8 of the Ordinance. The Board will consider any objections raised during the public inspection period. Within six months after the close of the inspection period, the Authority will submit the draft maps, any objections received and the views of the Board on them to the Chief Executive in Council for consideration. Subject to approval of the draft maps by the Chief Executive in Council under section 14(1) of the Ordinance and the deposit of the approved maps in specified Government offices, the Chief Executive will designate the areas shown in the approved maps to be marine parks by order in the Gazette under section 15 of the Ordinance. The order is subsidiary legislation subject to negative vetting by the Legislative Council.

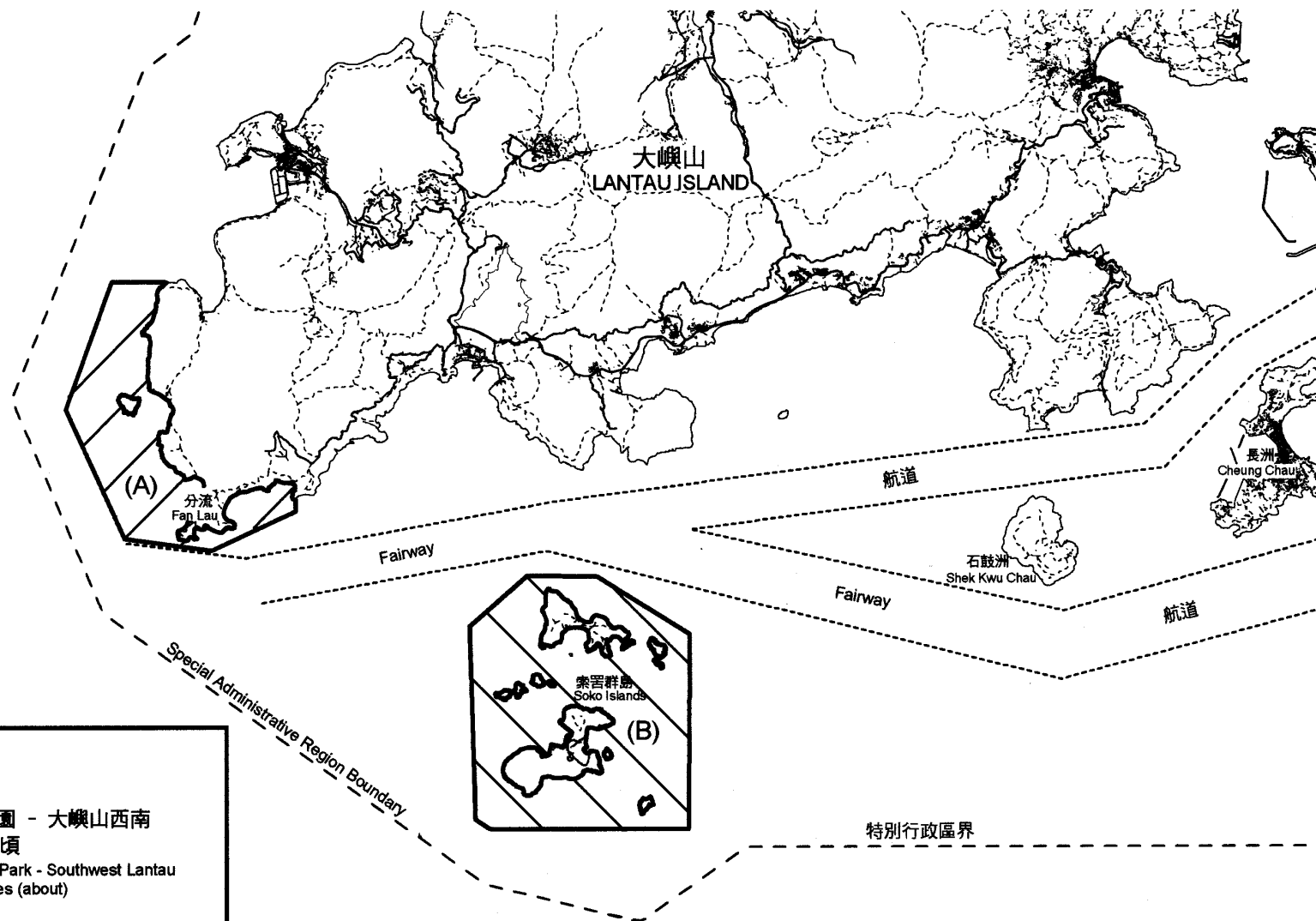
12. Depending on the consultation with the stakeholders as explained in paragraph 10 above, the Authority plans to finalize the draft maps and gazette the notice around August/September 2002. The proposed marine parks are expected to be designated in early 2003.

ADVICE SOUGHT

13. Members' comments are invited on the proposal to designate the two marine parks.

Environment and Food Bureau
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
May 2002

擬議的海岸公園 - 大嶼山西南, 索罟群島
PROPOSED MARINE PARKS - SOUTHWEST LANTAU AND SOKO ISLANDS



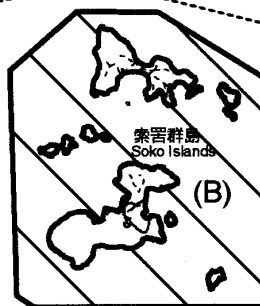
圖例
LEGEND



(A) 擬議的海岸公園 - 大嶼山西南
面積約 657 公頃
Proposed Marine Park - Southwest Lantau
Area : 657 hectares (about)



(B) 擬議的海岸公園 - 索罟群島
面積約 1 272 公頃
Proposed Marine Park - Soko Islands
Area : 1 272 hectares (about)



比例 SCALE 1 : 100 000

