

Friends of the Earth

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Protection of Wetlands in Long Valley

Friends of the Earth's Submission to Legislative Council

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Threats to nature conservation is now much more acute than ever before. The loss of valuable habitats of wildlife has been accelerated by the pressure of population growth and its associated impacts on transport, housing and recreation needs. The recent case of Long Valley has not only raised concerns about the conservation of this "bird-heaven", but also spotlighted the pressing need for a long-term comprehensive conservation policy in the context of sustainable development.

Long-Term Solution

In light of the above concerns, Friends of the Earth (Hong Kong), a charitable organization dedicated to protecting and improving Hong Kong's environment, is of the view that a comprehensive long-term conservation policy is urgently needed and a centralized Conservation and Heritage Trust managed by independent trustees/ a statutory body should be set up.

The trust should be empowered to hold land titles and also relay funds for long-term management of ecologically valuable habitats and sites of rich heritage. In particular, it should serve the following functions:

- a) Secure funding and maintain its financial stability to fulfil its obligations;
- b) Provide scientific and economic evaluation of land transactions;
- c) Assist in drafting contracts that reflect and protect the parties' mutual benefits; and
- d) Manage the fund.

To make the trust work, various conservation mechanisms need to be incorporated, including land resumption and transfer of development rights. Some cases studies in other countries are tabulated in Table 1.

On the other hand, a government policy regarding the development of agricultural activities and fishery in Hong Kong should be clearly stated.

Interim Measures

Measures should be taken to avoid negative impacts on the ecology of Long Valley and secure its long-term future. Whilst the long-term solution to our nature conservation problems may take years to ripe, interim measures such as a private-public partnership by which any interested group may cooperate with local people, with subsidies from the government, to "sustain" the existing farming practices are worth considering. This partnership is not necessarily confined to Long Valley. It can be applied to and tried out on a couple of sites with high ecological values, such as Sha Lo Tung.



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In conclusion, many of Hong Kong's areas of exceptionally high and valuable diversity are actually outside country parks and have therefore been exposed to the threats of development or suffer from the loss of ecological values due to lack of active conservation management. Long Valley, although only one of these cases, has led to the emergence of a growing voice of concern about nature conservation from the general public. Friends of the Earth sincerely invites the honourable legislative councillors' attention to our recommendations and we hope that a Conservation and Heritage Trust will be established as soon as possible to avoid further irreversible loss of our natural heritage.



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Table 1: Case Studies of Conservation Trusts

The Ballona Wetlands Land Trust, USA	<p>It is a non-profit community organization founded in 1994. It is dedicated to the acquisition, restoration and preservation of the entire 1,087-acre Ballona Wetlands ecosystem, including salt and fresh water wetlands, dunes, bluffs and upland habitat.</p> <p>It has formed alliances with government officials and other high profile individuals to identify and secure funds available for land acquisition. It also works to ensure that existing laws are followed by both the development company and their local government entities, while fostering and defending laws that protect the natural environment.</p>
Protected Areas Conservation Trust, USA	<p>It was established in 1996 as a statutory body after several years of consultation and meetings with various non-government organisations, government departments, private sector and international conservation organisation. Its roles are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● provide financial assistance for activities on the protected areas; ● raise funds and receive gifts and donations; ● establish and maintain the institutional arrangements, operational procedures and public awareness programmes required for effective and efficient management to carry out the mission of the trust.

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