

**PANEL ON FOOD SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL HYGIENE  
MEETING ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2003**

**“REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR FISHING ACTIVITIES IN HONG KONG WATERS”**

Hong Kong's marine ecosystem has been seriously degraded by a combination of reclamation, pollution, dredging and other coastal development<sup>1</sup>. Since the 1950s overfishing has further exacerbated the already depleted marine resources<sup>2</sup>. Landings of fishery products have shifted from large, slow-growing, commercially valuable fishes such as grouper, snapper and sea bream to young, small, less commercially valuable species<sup>3</sup>. Of the 17 commercially important fish species, 12 species have been fully or over exploited, and less than 10% of Hong Kong's total fisheries products are now coming from Hong Kong waters<sup>4</sup>.

It was not until mid 1990s that the fisheries objectives of the government changed from 'facilitating production' and 'improving productivity' to 'sustainable use of fisheries resources'<sup>5</sup>. A special working group, the Fisheries Management Working Group, was formed in 1999 to investigate the feasibility of various fisheries management measures. At the same time, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) took the initiative to restore several important fishery habitats via deployment of artificial reefs and Re-stocking Programme.

Among a number of different management measures proposed and applicable under the Fisheries Protection Ordinance (Cap 171), we believe that the proposed introduction of Fishing Licence Programme (FLP) and Fisheries Protection Areas (FPAs) are particularly effective measures in restoring our dwindling marine resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Morton, B. 1996. Protecting Hong Kong's marine biodiversity: present proposal, future challenges. *Environmental Conservation* 23 (1).

<sup>2</sup> Cheung, W.L. 2001. *History of Fisheries in Hong Kong in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and Reconstruction of the inshore marine ecosystem in Hong Kong in the 1950s*. M. Phil Thesis, University of Hong Kong.

<sup>3</sup> 1998. ERM. *Fisheries Resource and Fishing Operation in Hong Kong Waters*. Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department Annual Report. Hong Kong Special Administration Region, Hong Kong, China.

<sup>4</sup> 2001 AFCD. *Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department Annual Report*. Hong Kong Special Administration Region, Hong Kong, China.

<sup>5</sup> Leung, A.W.Y. 2003. Overfishing and Changes to the fishing Industry in Hong Kong. *Perspectives on Marine Environmental Change in Hong Kong, 1977-2001*. ed. Brian Morton. Hong Kong University Press.

### **Fishing Licence Programme (FLP)**

With more than 5,000<sup>6</sup> fishing vessels including pair trawlers, hang trawlers, shrimp trawlers, gill netters, P4/P7 craft, etc. currently operating in Hong Kong without regulation, the FLP would allow the authorities to actively manage the fishing effort<sup>7</sup> and capacity<sup>8</sup>. By introducing a licensing system and controlling the number of fishing licences (i.e. limiting the entrants), the FLP provides a framework for reducing the fishing effort, in turn slowing down the extraction rate of marine resources. Furthermore, it will facilitate the collection of valuable information such as fishing methods, gear types, catches and fishing areas which can be used to develop a long-term sustainable fisheries management policy. Without a licensing system in place to control fisheries, implementation and monitoring of other management measures like FPAs would be very difficult.

### **Fisheries Protection Areas (FPAs)**

Another key management measure to regulate fishing activities is the establishment of FPAs, areas protected from ALL fishing activity, in which commercially important species such as sea bream, snapper and grouper may spawn and grow. Unselective fishing methods and fry collection during the spawning season compromise the sustainability of the local fisheries industry. Experiences from FPAs around the world show that appropriately sized, effectively managed and fully protected areas benefit fisheries through the spillover of juveniles and adults, and export of eggs and larvae. Studies have shown that catches adjacent to these areas can increase by 40%-90%<sup>9</sup>. As such, we support the establishment of “no-take” FPAs.

In conclusion, we welcome the Government’s proposal to introduce the Fishing Licence Programme and establish Fisheries Protection Areas for replenishing and restoring our already over-exploited waters. Furthermore, we urge the Government to further develop a comprehensive fishery management policy, which is long overdue.

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<sup>6</sup> 2002. AFCD. *Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department Annual Report*. Hong Kong Special Administration Region, Hong Kong, China.

<sup>7</sup> The fishing effort exerted by a vessel may be defined as the product of the fishing power of that vessel and an appropriate measure of fishing activity or time spent fishing.

<sup>8</sup> Fishing capacity can be defined for a given fleet as the amount of fishing effort that can be produced over a given period of time (e.g. a year) under full time utilization (i.e. assuming normal utilization, unrestricted by catch or effort constraints).

<sup>9</sup> 2003. Gell, F.R. and C.M. Roberts. Benefits beyond boundaries: the fishery effects of marine reserves. *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*. In press.