

Friends of the Earth 地球之友

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Submission to Panel on Environmental Affairs and Panel on Planning, Lands and Works on the Council on Sustainable Development

Friends of the Earth (Hong Kong) welcomes the formation of the long-awaited Council on Sustainable Development in April. In response to the four papers of the first Council Meeting (No. 01/03, 02/03, 03/03, 04/03) prepared by the Council Secretariat (Sustainable Development Unit), we have the following comments:

The Council

It is noted that two sub-committees, namely Strategy Sub-committee and Education and Publicity Sub-committee will be formed which will include a wider representation by co-opting members outside the Council.

Friends of the Earth notes that the appointment of the Council members has been somewhat biased towards business sector. As the above two sub-committees will be responsible for consultation and development of Sustainable Development Strategy as well as the allocation of the Sustainable Development Fund, we urge the Chairman of the sub-committees to include a much wider representation from various stakeholders, into these sub-committees.

We also urge the Council to open its meetings to the general public except for sensitive issues. Besides releasing agenda and briefing the press after each meeting, meeting minutes should also be available to the public.

Sustainable Development Fund

In response to the proposed funding guidelines at paper 02/03, we urge the Council to avoid funding one-off, ad hoc projects (such as carnivals or pop-singer concerts) which do not provide long-term benefits to the community. We note that the Council has identified the difference of this fund from a number of existing funds including the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF). We must point out that some of the existing funds impose unreasonable guidelines and criteria which inhibit, rather than facilitate the implementation of innovative and sustainable projects by community groups. As a result, a lot of the funded projects are very similar in nature.



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We hope the Education and Publicity Sub-committee could consult the public on the criteria for funding applications so that the fund would be allocated to projects which can generate genuine benefits to the community in a sustainable manner. As Hong Kong is undergoing the process of integration with the Pearl River Delta (PRD), research and community projects including the PRD should also be encouraged.

We think that the allocation of \$10 million per year is inadequate, in particular for projects which may become self-sufficient initiatives. For reference, ECF waste recovery projects have already granted more than \$12 million in the last year for 33 projects. We think that Sustainable Development is a much broader concept which will involve the collaboration of different organizations at the community level. Inadequate funding will lead to high failure rate of applications or a huge cut of funding on viable projects. This will frustrate the community groups who are keen to undertake projects which provide environmental, social and economic benefits. We propose that 20 million should be allocated per year, and the government should consider injection of funding after 5 years if the fund is exhausted

On Sustainable Development Strategy

One of the terms of reference of the Council is to advise the government on the priority areas in promoting sustainable development. We believe the following items should receive immediate attention:

Integration of Policy Development

A number of important sustainability issues are being looked after by different departments and bureaux and the lack of coordination among them has resulted in fragmented and inconsistent policy responses. The lack of an overall Energy (and Renewable Energy) Policy in Hong Kong is but one of the numerous examples.

As a high-level advisory body under the Chief Secretary for Administration, the Council should seek to strengthen the integration of policy development of important sustainability issues such as energy, water and transport by improving coordination among departments and bureaux as well as involving the participation of various stakeholders in the policy-making process.

Sustainability Assessments (SAs)



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Currently all government policies and projects are required to conduct SAs for submission to the Executive Council. However, SAs are conducted in-house by government officials without any transparency, let alone public consultation.

We believe that Sustainability Assessments conducted by officials through answering a number of computer-generated questions (CASET system) are neither objective nor accountable to the public. We understand that several hundred SAs have already been conducted thus far and we urge the Council to review and endorse the results of all SAs with adequate public participation. SAs refer to the assessment of policies, plans and programmes which will have much wider impact on the future of Hong Kong than individual projects. Therefore, the public participation on these assessments should be at least as much as that stipulated under the EIA Ordinance.

Sustainable Education

While the CASET system may serve as a tool for assessment purposes, the essential components of sustainable development lie with the process of public participation and empowerment. Sustainable development does not start with the whole city, but the district and neighbourhood to which every citizen belong.

Sustainable Resource Centres should be set up for each district so that the concept of sustainable development can be diffused to the neighbourhood level. The Centre should serve a multitude of functions including research, exchange of information, public policy discussion, and capacity building so that a sense of belonging to the community can be cultivated.

Finally, to enhance transparency of the Council and facilitate dialogue with the general public, the Council and its sub-committees should meet regularly with major stakeholders of sustainable development including the major green groups. Friends of the Earth look forward to working with the Council and the general public to achieve sustainable development in Hong Kong.

Please contact our Environmental Affairs Manager Henry Ho at 25285588 for further information.

