

世界自然(香港)基金會提交的意見書  
Written submission from World Wide Fund Hong Kong

FISHERIES PROTECTION *Markus Shaw*

# Stop the slaughter in our seas

In his book, *The End of the Line*, Charles Clover asks us to imagine a giant net being dragged along the African plains, scooping up all wildlife in its path – lions, cheetahs, herds of wildebeest, as well as countless other creatures; to imagine further the heavy boom of the net tearing up all trees, bushes and outcrops, leaving behind a wasteland.

This is a vivid analogy of the devastation that is taking place in our seas, where it is known as trawling. Our seas are experiencing a scale of slaughter and destruction which, if it took place on land, would not be tolerated. Huge areas of ocean floor are being reduced to desolation; once burgeoning fisheries have suffered collapse; only 10 per cent of the stock of “large fish” present in 1950 are left today.

In Hong Kong, it has taken less than 40 years to destroy a once-thriving fishery, and the main culprit is overfishing. Every day, our trawling fleet continues to scour our seabed. For what? “Trash fish” of a mere 10 grams average size, which are processed into fish meal for farmed fish. This state of affairs is nothing less than a disaster, and the blame lies squarely with the Agricultural, Fisheries and

Conservation Department. This department, which is directly responsible for the sustainability of our fisheries and for the conservation of our natural environment, has been ineffectual in the face of the wholesale degradation of our marine resources, and has done almost nothing to bring the problem to the attention of the public. This failure is serious and inexcusable.

Whereas 40 per cent of our land area is designated country park, a mere 2 per cent of our marine area is designated marine park; even in those tiny areas, heavy fishing takes place both legally by licensed fishermen, and illegally. Loopholes and lax enforcement make our marine parks the laughing stock of the conservation world.

What can be done? First, there should be an outright ban on trawling in Hong Kong. The extreme destructiveness of inshore trawling is now recognised around the world and has been banned in many places. The intensive trawling that

goes on in Hong Kong waters destroys the habitat that nurtures fish: it simply makes no sense.

Second, the entire eastern waters of Hong Kong should be a “no-take zone”, properly enforced with deterrent fines. Experience from no-take reserves around the world have shown that they really work in

allowing fish a complete refuge to breed and thrive: the overspill provides a foundation for sustainable fishery outside the reserves. In many cases, fishermen who were violently opposed to the establishment of such reserves are now their most ardent supporters.

Third, the government should not continue to subsidise an unsustainable industry: it is simply exacerbating the problem.

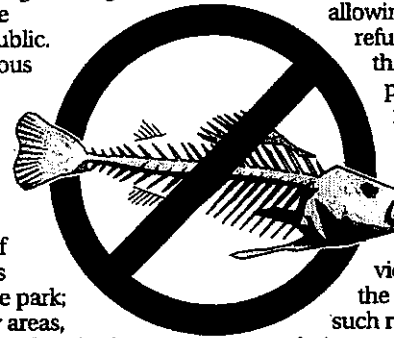
The Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department is now seeking the public’s views on its proposed amendments to the Fisheries Protection Ordinance which, among other things, will permit the designation of “Fishery Protected Areas” (FPAs) where all

trawling is banned, as well as further areas as complete no-take zones. This will be a big step forward, provided that sizeable FPAs, and in particular no-take zones, will actually be created (the current proposed areas are far too small and will have minimal impact), and provided that the department will be properly resourced to enforce them.

Reducing the fishing effort will create only winners. Nature will benefit, as will the fishing community through the creation of a sustainable fishery: by overfishing and destroying habitat through trawling, local fishermen are responsible for their own demise. The economic benefits of a sustainable fishery, and the value of recreational fishing and diving in thriving waters, will outweigh the costs of the creation and enforcement of marine reserves.

This is one clear and simple instance in which the government can show that its constant pronouncements of commitment to sustainability are more than mere lip service. I hope that our legislators will also have the courage to support this important initiative.

*Markus Shaw is chairman of World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong*



**WWF POSITION PAPER**

**on the**

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE FISHERIES PROTECTION ORDINANCE (THE “AMENDMENTS”)**

1. **Very urgent, resolute and wide-ranging action** is required if Hong Kong is to have any chance of restoring its marine habitats and the sustainability of its fisheries. Without fish, there can be no fishing industry.
2. The Amendments will create powers for the Government to designate Fisheries Protection Areas (“FPA's”) and no-take zones in Hong Kong\*. WWF wholeheartedly supports the creation of these new powers. [\*FPA’s: all trawling banned, fishing only under special license issued to “bona fide fishermen habitually fishing in the waters of the FPA’s”. No-Take zones: all fishing activities prohibited.]
3. However, WWF strongly urges that **all** Hong Kong territorial waters should be declared a FPA under the new powers. This would result in an **outright ban on trawling** in Hong Kong.
4. WWF further strongly urges that **all** eastern waters should be designated “No-take” zones (with designated and managed recreational fishing area). The area should include all waters east of Poi Toi Islands and Lei Yue Mun (but including the whole of Tolo Harbour and Starling Inlet).
5. WWF Hong Kong supports the annual two-month territory-wide “Closed Season” for fishing proposed by the Amendments.
6. WWF supports the establishment of the licensing/permit system (subject to clarification of certain categories) and urges AFCD to institute a quota system based on actual assessments of stocks.
7. The Government subsidises the fishing industry in many harmful ways. These subsidies simply exacerbate the unsustainability of the industry and should cease.
8. Hong Kong's marine environment and its resources are a public good. The Government has a duty to the people of Hong Kong to protect the health and sustainability of Hong Kong’s fisheries and to conserve its marine environment. It should take whatever measures are necessary to fulfil that duty, including the wide-ranging measures that are now required, and should explain the necessity of its policies to the public and to the fishing community.

## Rationale

Hong Kong's current fisheries are a clear case of unsustainability. For example: the average size of fish caught by trawlers is a mere 10g; 12 out of Hong Kong's 17 commercially important species are over-exploited, the remainder fully exploited; Hong Kong has amongst the lowest biomass of fish per square metre of reef in the world.

The Government commissioned a major study of Hong Kong's fisheries in 1998<sup>1</sup> (the "Fisheries Report") which stated:

*"...fish stocks in many parts of the world have reached a critical state. South China Sea and Hong Kong stocks are no exception."*

*"As discussed throughout this report, urgent action is required to rescue the Hong Kong fish stocks from their present overexploited state."*

Very little action has been taken by the Government since the Fisheries Report in 1998 – seven years!

The extreme destructiveness of inshore trawling is now recognized around the world and has been banned in many Southeast Asian countries including Mainland China<sup>2</sup>, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines<sup>1</sup>. The intensive trawling that goes on in Hong Kong causes extensive damage to the seabed – habitat that nurtures fish: it simply makes no sense. Designating all Hong Kong territorial waters as a Fisheries Protection Area will result in an outright ban on trawling in Hong Kong and will prevent our marine habitats from further degradation. This will bring Hong Kong in line with its neighbouring countries.

There is rapidly increasing evidence to show that fully protected marine areas and fishery closures benefit a wide range of marine species<sup>3</sup>. For example, the success for large-scale closure in Georges Bank, USA has demonstrated that fully protected marine habitats can enhance production of commercial species such as haddock, scallop and flounder. It also suggested that closures of 20-40% of marine areas are needed. The "No-take" Zones proposed by the Amendments are far too small – they will have only minimal impact. Designation of all Eastern waters as "No-take" Zones will not only protect important spawning and nursery grounds of commercially important species but also ecologically sensitive marine ecosystems such as coral reef communities and sea grass beds.

Aimed at restoring fisheries resources, Mainland China has declared a Summer fishing moratorium in the South China Sea since March 1999: there are numerous reports of increase in

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<sup>1</sup> ERM (1998). *Fisheries Resources and Fishing Operations in Hong Kong Waters*. Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, Hong Kong SAR.

<sup>2</sup> Watson R., L.Pang and D. Pauly (2004). *The Marine Fisheries of China: Development and Reported Catches*. Fisheries Center Research Reports. Fisheries Center, University of British Columbia, Canada. 50pp.

<sup>3</sup> Gell, F.R. and C.M. Roberts (2004). Benefits beyond boundaries: the fishery effects of marine reserves. *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*. Volume 18, Issue 9, pp. 448-455.

catches after the “Closed Season” every year. The annual two-month territory-wide “Closed Season” proposed in the Amendments should coincide with the Mainland China’s in order to maximise the positive effects of the Summer moratorium.

The licensing/permit system should cover recreational fishing in the “No-take” zones. It should also take into account fishing capacity and must be based on comprehensive stock assessments so that the fishing effort can be balanced to available stock; sustainability is meaningless without this.

In the early 1980s the Government sought to maximise fishery productivity and actively provided financial and technical assistance to local fishermen<sup>5</sup>. The trawling devices of local fishermen were upgraded in order to increase fish catch. Recognising the disastrous impact of such decisions in the late 1990s, the Government has since changed its objective from maximum production to sustainable fisheries<sup>6</sup>. However, the Government not only has not taken any steps to eradicate trawling but on the contrary continues to provide harmful subsidies to support this destructive fishing practice. This policy simply exacerbates the unsustainability. Harmful Government (and therefore taxpayer) subsidy of the fishing industry should cease and financial assistance should only be given to convert trawlers to non-destructive fishing gear.

Hong Kong, acclaimed as “Asia’s world city”, lags behind Mainland China and its neighbours and the developed world in its fisheries management policies.

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<sup>5</sup> AFCD (1987). *Annual Report of Agriculture and Fisheries Department*. Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, Hong Kong SAR

<sup>6</sup> Leung A.W.Y. (2004). Overfishing and changes to the fishing industry in Hong Kong. *Perspectives on Marine Environmental Change in Hong Kong, 1977-2001*. Hong Kong University Press. Pp719-737.