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Submission from Department of Ecology and Biodiversity

University of Hong Kong for LEGCO Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

There is no doubt, based on scientific evidence, that the marine fishery of Hong Kong has declined seriously in the last 3-4 decades, and will continue to decline if there is no intervention. Declines in fish stocks began in about the 1970s to 1980s, prior to major dredging operation and pollution problems. Therefore, over-fishing is a major cause of fish stock declines. Urgent management measures must be implemented to safeguard remaining stocks if a collapse of the fishery is to be prevented.

We support the proposed amendments to the Fisheries Protection Ordinance (Chapter 171) to regulate fishing activities, **but** regard these to be the absolute minimum action necessary to *slow down* fish stock declines. Although we are of the opinion that **the proposed measures do not go nearly far enough to allow recovery of stocks**, given the critical state of the local fishery, nonetheless they will be an important foundation on which more effective measures can be established.

- **The Licensing System** will determine current fishing effort and is essential for effective and *equitable* action in the future; it **must be introduced, and the number of licenses adjusted to limit fishing effort to sustainable levels. Moreover, all types of fishing activity should be licensed**; even recreational fishing can remove substantial numbers of fish, as documented elsewhere.
- **The Fishery Protection Areas** will protect some essential benthic habitats from the highly damaging effects of trawling and **are good in principle; however a much larger Fishery Protection Area than proposed is needed to foster fishery recovery**. This larger area should incorporate *natural reefs* (only artificial reefs are proposed) to ensure protection of natural spawning and nursery grounds.
- **The Moratorium demonstrates a mature regional approach to fisheries management** by acknowledging that fishes move widely and that fisheries management must be *regionally* implemented to be effective.

Regulations should be enacted as soon as possible once legislation is passed

The essence of the Hong Kong fishery debate is not whether something must be done, but what must be done and how quickly. The key issue is to determine what actions are necessary and appropriate in the short-term, to ensure a viable fishery in the long-term. The immediate issue to be addressed concerns the livelihoods of fishermen *demonstrably* affected by any new legislation.

Possible options, which have been applied in similar circumstances elsewhere are: (a) to compensate fishers who *demonstrably* use the areas to be protected and whose *livelihoods would be affected*; (b) to train fishers in alternative livelihoods or resource use, such as in (licensed) recreational fishing; (c) to do nothing because the areas to be protected do not currently produce significant landings (AFCD data should provide landings value data).