

**Progress Report for Motion Debate on
“Establishing a geological park in the eastern part of the New Territories”
at the Legislative Council meeting on 20 December 2007**

PURPOSE

This report informs Members of the Administration’s follow-up actions on the motion debate on “Establishing a geological park in the eastern part of the New Territories”. Moved by the Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming and amended by Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee and Hon LI Kwok-ying, the motion was carried at the Legislative Council meeting on 20 December 2007.

THE MOTION

2. The wording of the motion is:

“That, as the eastern part of the New Territories has a unique geological environment but the SAR Government does not attach much importance to it, this Council urges the Government to put forward proactive conservation proposals and plan the area according to the principle of sustainable development, including protecting the unique, rare and spectacular geological features of the area and, in particular, safeguarding the stone columns and stone walls with rhyolitic columnar joints, which are found in Sai Kung but rare in the world, from being damaged in the future, the Government should request the Central Government to apply to the United Nations for listing the site as a World Natural Heritage Site and, taking into account the area’s ecological carrying capacity and modelling on a marine park, develop the eastern part of the New Territories into a geological park of conservation, science popularization and eco-tourism value, as well as to make recommendation to the Central Government to strive for its grading as a national geological park and apply to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for its listing as a world geological park.”

THE ADMINISTRATION’S FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

Conservation of the geological environment in the eastern part of the New Territories, and the proposal of developing the area into a geological park

3. The vast area of the eastern part of the New Territories encompasses places of very high conservation value, such as Ma On Shan, Pat Sin Leng, High Island Reservoir and its vicinity in Sai Kung. Rock clusters of special geological features are mostly found in country/marine parks. Therefore, geological environment of

scientific value (including some special geological features and rocks) are legally protected by the provisions and statutory plans of the Country Parks Ordinance, Marine Parks Ordinance and Town Planning Ordinance, or included into protected areas, so that development, conservation, education, scientific research, nature appreciation, recreation and tourism within these areas are recognized and safeguarded. As for the proposal of setting up additional “geological parks” in these areas, since they are already located in country/marine parks, we have to examine whether naming them as “geological parks” could bring additional benefits or lead to duplication of resources. While we will conduct detailed study and assessment, we will continue to rely on our existing mechanism to protect our valuable natural resources (including rock clusters with special geological features), and step up our work in the publicity, promotion and education aspects.

4. An inter-departmental meeting was held in January 2008 to follow up on the points raised in the motion. We set out our main work focus as follows:

(a) Resource Management

Existing facilities (such as signboards along nature trails) and guided tours of some country parks and special areas have already covered special geological features. To offer visitors with more knowledge on nature and information on conservation, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) will update relevant interpretative signs in 2008 and to provide them in more languages. The AFCD will collaborate with geological experts to include more information on geological conservation at country park visitor centres and on interpretative signs along trails.

(b) Publicity and Promotion

The AFCD has been actively implementing initiatives on geological conservation promotion and education, such as setting up visitor centres in major country parks to display information on local geological features, and publishing books on the subject. The AFCD will continue to publish such publications in 2008, including a number of books on rocks and geological landscape, so as to promote the messages of protecting our natural environment, and recommend to the public on the sites of special geological scenic spots value, and to disseminate the related knowledge.

(c) Supporting Measures for Tourism

The Government has been actively promoting natural scenic spots, including places with rocks and geological features, as tourist attractions and to make them more appealing to the public and tourists. For instance, apart from organizing various seminars and workshops for the

public, the AFCD has joined hands with the Tourism Commission to provide training courses for tourist industry employees to help them conduct eco-tours. We will also identify suitable sites and transport facilities to improve access to places with special geological features. When such facilities are available for use, we will promote them in collaboration with the Hong Kong Tourism Board.

(d) Environmental Education

The AFCD conducts ecological baseline surveys in protected areas on a long term basis, and uploads relevant information to the internet for the reference of academics and the public. Meanwhile, the Education Bureau (EDB) has prepared teaching materials on natural ecology to enhance teachers' and students' knowledge of Hong Kong's ecological and geological features (for instance, the "Virtual Field Trips for Secondary School Geography" CD-ROM prepared in 2007 for the secondary school geography curriculum) and will continue to organize relevant training programmes for teachers. The AFCD will make available to the public through the internet the "Code for Rock and Landform Appreciation" (the Code) compiled with the Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong. To promote geoconservation, the Code lists out the rules for rock appreciation and safety precautions to be observed during outings. The EDB will continue to strengthen the implementation of environmental education in primary and secondary schools through various means, in order to promote the relevant values and knowledge among the students. In the New 2009 Senior Secondary Curriculum, geological knowledge will continue to be taught in subjects including Geography, Chemistry and Combined Science. Moreover, we will enhance coordination with universities and other institutions, with a view to assisting them in carrying out academic researches, field trips and sampling work without violating the codes of protecting the natural environment, and encouraging the tertiary institutions to incorporate the message of conservation into their geology display facilities.

Feasibility of grading the eastern part of the New Territories as a national geological park, and applying for listing it as a world geological park and World Natural Heritage Site

5. The Government holds open attitude to the proposal of applying for listing certain geological features in the eastern part of the New Territories as a national or world geological park.

6. In January this year, we had a preliminary exchange of views with the Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong. It is agreed that, as a first step, an objective and professional assessment should be made to ascertain whether the

geological features in the eastern part of the New Territories meet the requirements of a national geological park. We are considering engaging geological and geoconservation experts to assess the geological value of Hong Kong's rock clusters with reference to relevant national and international standards, and make recommendations on whether we need to enhance certain geological conservation measures in Hong Kong so as to meet the criteria for a national geological park. The assessment is expected to complete within this year which will help us decide how to take forward the listing proposal.

Environmental Protection Department
February 2008