

Panel on Environmental Affairs 15th December – LEGCO

Banning of commercial fishing in marine parks

I have been at the University of Hong Kong for over 16 years. Prior to that, I ran a government fishery laboratory in Puerto Rico. I regularly work with governments, NGOs, IGOs (e.g. FAO and IUCN-see below), fish traders and fishermen in many countries of the tropics and subtropics. This gives me quite a broad perspective on fisheries problems, solutions, issues and implications of inaction.

I will speak first to the general issue of the condition of fisheries in Hong Kong and then to the specific issue of marine parks.

Problem: Hong Kong's fisheries are 'sick'

- The coastal fishery in Hong Kong is severely overfished. This has been a matter of record for over 10 years.
- Overfishing means that animals are being removed more quickly than they can replace themselves. The only way to solve the problem is to reduce this removal rate.
- Prevention of overfishing is the direct responsibility of the government according to the following Mission: **The Government policy on fisheries is to conserve the fisheries resources in local waters and promote the sustainable development of the fisheries industry, with a view to maintaining a steady supply of fresh fish to local consumers.** (AFCD website accessed December 14th, 2009).
- AFCD has not fulfilled its Mission and, as a result, the fisheries resources are not 'conserved' and the industry has not undergone 'sustainable development'. There is currently no direct monitoring of fishery resources and no meaningful management or research that could lead to sustainable use of resources.
- There has been considerable wastage of government money on experimental schemes such as artificial reefs and restocking, neither of which is a proven tool for commercial fishery recovery globally, and for neither of which is there any publicly available evidence of fishery improvement.
- The poor condition of the fishery is to the detriment of both the fishing community and the marine ecosystem; considerable seafood and job potential have been lost as a result of mismanagement of marine resources, and Hong Kong has to import almost all its seafood.
- There appears to be no accountability for AFCD to fulfill its Mission of sustainable fisheries.
- There is insufficient legislation for sustainable fisheries. For example, there is no legislation to protect threatened marine fishes.
- The above problems are not due to lack of talent and knowledge among many AFCD staff – I should know, I trained some of them and I know they strive to do

their best. The problem rests squarely on the shoulders of leadership lack of vision and commitment.

- Hong Kong's fisheries are sick; if AFCD were a doctor responsible for the survival of the fishery, he is letting the patient die, and he is wasting government funds on false 'cures' (artificial reefs, restocking).

The condition of fisheries in Hong Kong is not just a local issue

- Government funds are being used to sustain fishing activity through provision of fuel subsidies. Subsidies are one of the biggest causes of overfishing globally and a matter of controversy in relation to the World Trade Organization.
- Hong Kong has a responsibility under the voluntary Code of Conduct of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, which it is not meaningfully addressing.
- Hong Kong has one of the highest *per capita* seafood consumption rates globally yet makes little attempt to reduce its dependence, and considerable ecological footprint, on other fisheries.

Steps forward: The role of MPAs in fishery recovery and management

- MPAs are globally recognized as an important step towards fishery recovery, with the condition that they are large enough, placed in the correct location and are under no-take conditions.
- General guidelines for fishery management are for 20-30% of the total fished area to be protected, with higher percentage applicable when a fishery is already heavily overfished, as in Hong Kong's case. The higher percentage should be the ultimate goal until fishery recovery begins.
- Fishes do not discriminate; if there is a need to stop fishing, this applies equally to commercial and recreational fishing.
- MPAs alone will not save or restore the fishery; also needed are reduction in fishing effort overall and enforcement. A licensing system alone, without control of catch levels, will not help to reduce fishing effort.
- Legislation for threatened marine fishes and invertebrates is needed to conserve species considered to be threatened (e.g. red or Hong Kong grouper) according to International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) globally accepted categories and criteria for species status assessment. No-take MPAs are well-suited to protecting some threatened species.
- Healthier fisheries will produce more seafood and provide more jobs. MPAs are an important step towards healthier fisheries in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Panel on Environmental Affairs about this important issue.

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