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Submission to LegCo regarding Proposal to Ban Trawling in HK Waters

Background materials for oral presentation– 15th March 2011

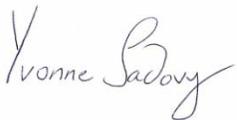
I strongly support the proposed total trawling ban in Hong Kong waters. The proposed ban is long overdue given the heavily overfished state of Hong Kong's waters and the major and well-known role played by bottom trawling in the degradation of the marine ecosystem. The ban is also highly timely given global concerns about overfishing and Hong Kong's heavy global marine footprint: the city of Hong Kong has one of the highest *per capita* consumption rates in the world. As a 'World Class City' that depends heavily on natural resources from outside of Hong Kong, many of which are also undergoing declines, we must be far more responsible in making the best of natural resources by starting to manage our own 'at home'. A full trawling ban is a major step towards such goal.

In particular I highlight the follow 8 issues:

1. The issue of a trawl ban in Hong Kong has already been discussed for many years and inaction has led significantly to worsening resources. The situation in the local marine system is so poor now, that **if the full ban does not go through, in any case there will be no trawling industry in Hong Kong within a decade and, by delaying further, we may permanently destroy parts of the marine ecosystem of Hong Kong for the present and for future generations.** Anything less than a total ban at this stage, therefore, is not in the interest of the people of Hong Kong.
2. The marine environment and natural resources of Hong Kong belong to all the people of Hong Kong and not just to the relatively very few individuals who conduct and support bottom trawling. While fisheries resources should be available to support livelihoods and supply food, **nobody has the right to use these resources in a damaging and unsustainable way that compromises their long term value and future availability to Hong Kong residents.** It is the duty of the government to make sure the marine resources are appropriately safeguarded.

3. Trawling contributes to the substantially overfished (i.e. fished beyond naturally sustainable levels and hence leading to declines) state of Hong Kong waters because it is a highly unselective fishing method and produces a high proportion of its bycatch (i.e. unwanted and non-target catch of little commercial value that ends up dead) made up of little fish that are the juveniles of commercially important fish for Hong Kong people. **If these small 'bycatch' fish were allowed to grow it would increase the city's own fish production and self-sufficiency ratio for seafood supply.**
4. **Despite the fact that there are only a small number of local bottom trawling vessels, they exert a disproportionately massive impact on the marine ecosystem.** The physical damage to the substrate destroys the home and food of a range of species and overall is far greater than the damage caused by occasional use of explosives or toxins, both of which have long been banned in local waters. **Bottom trawling is a highly damaging fishing method with relatively little, and continually declining, return in terms of income for fishermen.**
5. Given its widely accepted problems of substrate damage, wasteful bycatch and its negative impacts on other fishing sectors, **bottom trawling has been banned in the coastal waters of many countries globally.** Mainland China has long had a seasonal trawling ban and has recently strengthened these measures due to dropping catches.
6. **If trawling is not banned, Hong Kong's fisheries resources will continue to decline until they can no longer support the few fishermen they barely support today.** Further measures will be needed to move towards a fishery recovery in Hong Kong waters but the proposed ban is an excellent and substantial first step that has wide support, even from sectors of the fishing community.
7. **A 100% ban on trawling will allow for significant recovery of natural marine resources** and any costs associated with the ban, such as for compensation of affected fishermen, **should be considered an investment in Hong Kong's future food security and sustainable fishing industry.** It should also be noted that the current fuel subsidies to trawlers already represent costs to the Hong Kong people. The sea is for everybody to use and enjoy, not just a select few.
8. Marine fisheries now have a high international profile. As a large and highly visible modern economy in the region and a major importer of seafood, **our actions (or lack thereof) attract considerable international interest, scrutiny, and criticism in the case of lack of action.**

Yours sincerely,



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ORAL PRESENTATION – Professor Yvonne Sadovy LegCo 15th March, 2011

I strongly support the proposed total trawling ban. The proposed ban is long overdue given the major and well-known role played by bottom trawling in the degradation of the marine ecosystem. Trawling is also a major contributor to the heavily overfished state of Hong Kong's waters. Bottom trawling damages the homes and food of fishes and other animals which form the foundation of the fishery. Importantly, it also removes massive numbers of baby fish (caught as non-target catch). These babies, or juvenile fish, include many of food importance to humans and are the next generation to supply the local fishery-once they have gone, there can be no future for a healthy fishery. Little fish of 10g are the typical fish size found in bottom trawlers of HK. If allowed to grow bigger and reproduce, they would feed people and replenish the fishery. Only management can achieve this.

The issue of a total trawl ban in Hong Kong has been discussed for many years and inaction has led to worsening resources. The situation is now so bad that if the full ban does not get approved, there will be no trawling industry in Hong Kong within a decade. Moreover, by delaying further, we seriously risk destruction of significant parts of the marine ecosystem of Hong Kong for the present and for generations of Hong Kong citizens.

The local marine environment and natural resources belong to all the people of Hong Kong. While healthy fisheries resources can support livelihoods and supply food, no one fishing sector should be allowed by government to destroy Hong Kong's resources and eliminate their long term value and future availability to Hong Kong residents. Would we allow a few highly polluting vehicles to completely destroy Hong Kong's air quality for everybody else? I would hope not.

Despite the fact that there are only a small number of local bottom trawling vessels, they exert a disproportionately massive impact on the marine ecosystem. Overall, damage from bottom trawling is far greater than the damage caused by occasional use of explosives or toxins, both of which have long been banned in local waters. THE BOTTOM LINE is that BOTTOM TRAWLING is a highly damaging and wasteful fishing method with relatively economic returns for fishermen today. It is biological and economic suicide to continue fishing in this way.

Bottom trawling has been banned in the coastal waters of many countries globally. Mainland China, for example, has long had a trawling ban and is recently strengthening these measures due to continually dropping catches.

A 100% ban on trawling will allow for significant recovery of natural marine resources in the long term. Any costs associated with the ban, including compensation for affected fishermen, which must be fair, clear and comprehensive, should be considered as an investment in Hong Kong's future food security and fishing industry.