



for a living planet[®]

**Bills Committee on Fisheries Protection (Amendment) Bill 2011 -
Meeting on 20 January 2012**

WWF's Submission

I. Achieving Sustainable Fisheries Management

The government has committed to develop long-term plans for managing Hong Kong's fisheries and views that the trawling ban and the other proposed fisheries management measures would help conserve marine diversity and fisheries resources, leading to the recovery of the marine environment and will achieve a sustainable fishery industry in the long run.

In WWF's opinion, the forthcoming trawling ban is the arguably the most powerful measure ever to conserve marine ecosystems in Hong Kong. It is also a major step towards the formulation of a comprehensive sustainable fisheries management plan to allow the recovery of fish stocks and sustainable utilization of these resources by a smaller, but revitalised fishing community. Management will need to be adaptive to meet changing social and economic needs of the fishery as well as to address fluctuations in the marine resources supporting the fishery. Additionally, these management measures should be able to facilitate marine eco-tourism and increased recreational use of the sea.

WWF recommends that the ultimate goal for Hong Kong marine capture fisheries should be to attain the world-renowned Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)¹ certification for wild capture sustainable fisheries. The MSC is growing rapidly and there are currently 133 MSC certified fisheries and 141 fisheries (total 274 fisheries) undergoing MSC assessment, representing ten per cent of the world's wild caught

¹ MSC is an independent non-profit organization with an eco-label and fishery certification programme founded in 1999. Their mission is to promote sustainable wide-captured fishing and seafood traceability by following the best practice guidelines. Fisheries that are assessed and meet the standards can use the MSC blue eco-label, which indicates that the fishery from which it comes operates in an environmentally responsible way and does not aggravate the global environmental problem of overfishing. For more information on the work of the MSC, please visit www.msc.org

seafood. WWF believes that the MSC is currently the only credible eco-label for wild capture fisheries, and it provides a useful reference point for the changes proposed to the Fisheries Protection (Amendment) Bill 2011. The four key MSC principles for sustainable fisheries are as follows:

- The maintenance and re-establishment of healthy populations of targeted species;
- The maintenance of the integrity of ecosystems;
- The development and maintenance of effective fisheries management systems, taking into account all relevant biological, technological, economic, social, environmental and commercial aspects; and,
- Compliance with relevant local and national local laws and standards and international understandings and agreements.

Sustainable fisheries management is not a static process, but one achieved through constant adaptive management in response to the highly variable marine environment, and other factors.

II. WWF's Views on Proposed Fisheries Management Measures

A total of four proposed fisheries management measures are proposed in the LegCo Brief on Fisheries Protection (Amendment) Bill 2011 dated 12 October 2011. In general. **WWF fully supports:**

- **Registration system for local fishing vessels**
- **Limiting new entrants**
- **Fisheries Protection Area (FPAs)**

These are critical improvements in the management of local fisheries, and will provide the foundations on which a sustainable fishery can be built. For the first time they will allow the numbers of commercial fishing vessels to be managed, and for spawning and nursery grounds to be protected, both fundamental measures in rebuilding a heavily depleted fishery like that in Hong Kong. Limiting the number of vessels is also important for establishing a financially healthy fishing industry, and preventing profits being diluted.

As such WWF supports the proposed measures, but notes that in the longer term, the government will also need to address the “fishing effort” and “impacts of recreational fishing” if it is to truly achieve a sustainable fishery and maximise the benefits to the

fishing community and Hong Kong. Our opinions on these aspects are explained in the following paragraphs.

IIa. Controlling Fishing Effort

According to the “Management System Criteria” of MSC (refer to Appendix A), the management system shall:

- “*require that assessments of the biological status of the resource and impacts of the fishery have been and are periodically conducted*” (#9);
- “*specify measures and strategies that demonstrably control the degree of exploitation of the resource.....*” (#10);
- “*contains appropriate procedures for effective compliance, monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement which ensure that established limits to exploitation are not exceeded and specified corrective actions to be taken in the event that they are*” (#11).

These three criteria lay out that in order to attain sustainable fisheries, it is very important to be able to control the total catch so as to prevent overexploitation and allow recovery, particularly following the implementation of the trawling ban. However, the current measures, while critical steps in the right direction, do not allow for the total “fishing effort”/ “catch levels” to be controlled, as each registered fishing vessel can potentially do unlimited fishing with the specified gear type. The management of effort is fundamental to resolve issues of overexploitation and there are many ways in which it can be achieved in time. Fundamentally, the fishing effort must be adjusted to the available fisheries resources and not the other way around.

WWF additionally suggests that the fishing vessels should routinely report their catches to AFCD (not only limited to the “Port Survey” period) so as to overcome the current shortage of detailed fisheries data, and to provide the information necessary to optimise management of the fishery, and monitor its recovery.

IIb. Impacts of Recreational Fishing -

a) Regarding the measure on “*Restriction of fishing with the use or aid of non-fishing vessels and prohibition of fishing with the use or aid of non-local fishing vessels*”

The amount of recreational fishing activities may surge once the fisheries resource starts to recover. Under the proposed measure “*fishing by hand-lining or without any fishing gear with the use or aid of a non-fishing vessel will not be subject to the restriction*”, recreational fishing conducted with the use or aid of non-fishing vessels will not be subject to any control under the proposed licence system.

WWF anticipates that this could be a significant loophole as the popularity of

recreational fishing has grown over past few years, and estimates of the numbers of recreational fishers fishing annually are substantial at upwards of 500,000. However, the exact number of recreational fishers remains unknown as the recreation activity is not yet licensed. If the recreational fishing activity flourishes – such as when fish stocks start to recover - and operates in an uncontrolled/ unregulated manner (e.g. no limitation on fishing effort/ species/size), the fishing pressure could impact the speed at which fish stocks to recover, and can support a sustainable commercial fishery.. A scientific study should be carried out to look more rigorously at the potential impacts of recreational fishing on the development of sustainable commercial fisheries, and make recommendations to address potential negative impacts of recreational fishing.

b) Regarding the measure on “*Designation of Fisheries Protection Areas (FPA)*”

Regardless of how FPAs are designed, recreational fishers should be licensed and their effort should be regulated by establishing maximum numbers of recreational fishers per day per area, maximum number and type of gear to be used (eg. two rods per fisher, rod and reel only), maximum number of fish caught per day, limitation on species that can be kept, minimum size per species, etc. Enforcement and education will be fundamental to sustain these areas.

III. Establish Goals and Strategies for Sustainable Fisheries

A healthy fishery must be managed according to its capacity to sustain catches. Fisheries management research should include studies on the relationship between fishing activity and fishing mortality rates, investigating the importance of inshore nursery grounds for populations of commercial fish species, research on how fishing gears operate and how fish are caught by them, biological and ecosystem modelling in the marine environment and research into multi-species interactions in fisheries and fish population ecology. Conservative limits to catches should be employed to sustain the fishery through uncertain times common in biological systems. These targets should be set from information gathered according to strict scientific criteria and data collected from the new catch monitoring programme. In addition, an observer programme is a component needed to provide precise data on effort, catches, discards, by-catch, etc.

IV. Immediate Actions for Removing Obstacles on Alternative Livelihoods

WWF has been exploring potential options for alternative livelihoods for fishermen affected by the trawl ban so that fishers can continue to utilize their fishing skills and experiences to make a living after the implementation of new fisheries measure. Given that Hong Kong has considerable potential for creating marine-related business and employment opportunities, WWF-Hong Kong held two workshops (“All Hands on Deck - Alternative Livelihoods for Fishermen Workshop”) with the support of Living

Seas Hong Kong in 2011 to provide an interactive platform for various stakeholders (fishermen, business operators, community representatives etc.) to explore and exchange views on the opportunities and difficulties in developing this potential.

The full report “All Hands on Deck - Alternative Livelihoods for Fishermen Workshop” can be downloaded at

Chinese version:

http://assets.wwfhk.panda.org/downloads/wwf_sos_all_hands_on_deck_report_chi.pdf

English version:

http://assets.wwfhk.panda.org/downloads/wwf_sos_all_hands_on_deck_report_eng.pdf

The workshops identified not only business and employment opportunities for affected fishermen, but also various government restrictions that hinder the realisation of these opportunities. For the first time, major stakeholders arrived at a consensus that urgent action is needed to create alternative livelihoods for the affected fishermen and preserve the local fishing culture.

At the second workshop held by WWF, all participants voted on the most urgent and plausible measures that would help fishermen switch to viable alternative livelihoods in the near future. “Convert fishing boats into recreational fishing boats” was the top priority of all. There is no reason why Hong Kong should not to follow the same path in exploiting real and feasible options for the marine fishers to change. The government should seriously consider successful practices elsewhere and apply models which are suitable for Hong Kong.

WWF urges that immediate actions should be taken as follows:

1. Adopt a vision which values the fishing industry and its culture, and holistically promotes and invests in the development of marine eco-tourism through good utilization of geoparks and marine parks in Hong Kong.
2. Form a cross-departmental body/working group to identify and fill the existing policy gaps and make regulatory changes required to remove obstacles related to developing alternative livelihood opportunities.
3. The government should - without any delay - relax the regulatory restrictions on the conversion of their vessels for various purposes such as diving and recreational fishing. This will directly and immediately provide an alternative

livelihood for affected fishermen.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andy Cornish". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr Andy Cornish
Director, Conservation
WWF-Hong Kong