

Living Islands Movement comments to the Panel for Development on "Studies related to artificial islands in the central waters"

April 25, 2019

Living Islands Movement committee would like to express their deep concern for the proposed development through reclamation in Central waters.

The Legislative Council Panel on Development should reject this proposal for the following reasons:

1. Hong Kong is not short of building land. Three of the city's developers hold undeveloped banks of former agricultural land in the New Territories with a combined area of 859 hectares. Unused military sites and former industrial sites could also be developed without the need for costly reclamation or "triggering the long-drawn land resumption and clearance process" so feared by the authors of the Paper in front of you.

2. Hong Kong is not short of housing. Hong Kong currently has more than 200,000 empty homes.

3. Therefore, the key reason for building the artificial islands around Kau Yi Chau is to "capitalise on Lantau's geographic advantage" to create a new transport network connecting cities in China with Hong Kong. The need for this new network of roads and railways between China and Hong Kong has not been researched or proven. This proposal amounts to using a substantial proportion of Hong Kong's fiscal reserves to singlehandedly fund a symbolic link with China. The Paper (PWP Item No. 768CL - Studies related to Artificial Islands in Central Waters) even states that these transport links "would otherwise not have a case" if the artificial island (which is not needed for land or housing) were not constructed.

4. Elsewhere around the world, researchers are noting the negative impact infrastructure projects, and in particular motor vehicle roads, have on wildlife and biodiversity, and in other major cities there is a greater interest in pedestrian and bicycles zones. At the same time, Hong Kong suffers from serious air pollution issues, to which motor vehicles contributes. Hong Kong would benefit from development away from motor vehicles and road networks.

5. The Paper makes frequent reference to the report of the Task Force on Land Supply (TFLS). This self-serving body and its associated reports have no credibility as the Task Force was specifically selected to represent those who would benefit from the development of Lantau and any independent or objective contributions were suppressed.

6. The Paper tries to justify donating HK\$1 trillion of its people's money to overseas developers and construction companies with banal clichés about the public "living and working in contentment and improving our livelihood". These trite feelgood statements are insulting to our Legislators and the people of Hong Kong because they are cynically aimed to distract attention from the complete absence of concrete measures to address the Territory's real social needs.

7. A similar attempt to mislead the people of Hong Kong about the true nature of this project has been demonstrated by the clever trickery of associating it only with the Lantau area e.g. East Lantau

Metropolis; Lantau Vision Tomorrow, so that people living elsewhere in Hong Kong are deceived into believing that it is not a Whole of Hong Kong issue.

8. Climate change is here and its effects are worsening. Reclamation entails serious carbon emission, and as such the environmental impact of this project goes beyond solely Hong Kong's interest. At a time when other countries and cities are striving to reduce their carbon emissions, we do not believe such a polluting approach should be taken when there are more efficient alternatives. At the same time, the impacts our changing environment will have on an artificial island must not be underestimated. As a local community and on a global level, it is of utmost importance that we minimize our activities that contribute to climate change and prepare our own city for future devastating impacts.

9. Environmental costs of natural resources is too high. The price of sand and other natural resources is rising. Moreover, the ecological impact of obtaining raw construction materials would cost in other geographical areas must also be taken into consideration.

10. There has been no public consultation on the Lantau Tomorrow Vision, which appeared in the Chief Executives policy address and was not part of the Task Force on Land Supply (TFLS) process. Funding first a study of whether is a need for the project makes more sense than starting with an engineering feasibility study (which has a huge cost that in itself could be used for housing in other areas of HK).

In an unprecedented age, in which our human impact has negatively affected our environment to the point of harming our own livelihood, cities around the world must adapt their traditional methods of planning and development. The reclamation plan off central waters is a plan of the past that is not appropriate in this day and age. Proponents of it may prioritize economic gains, yet societies around the world are learning that the ecological costs – which are intertwined with our most basic human needs – counteract the perceived benefits. With increased pollution and loss of pristine natural habitats this project is set to be a detriment to Hong Kong's future.

Chinese version:

島嶼活力行動對擬建的中部水域人工島發展表達深切的關注。

我們認為立法會發展事務委員會應反對上述發展，理由如下：

1. 香港並不缺乏可建土地。本地三大發展商在新界把持大量農地，數量高達 859 公頃。未被使用的軍事用地和前工業用地均可作發展，這些用地無需巨額公帑填海或立法會文件中所提及「牽涉冗長徵用和清理土地的程序情況」。
2. 香港現時有超過二十萬個空置單位，絕非政府所言的房屋短缺。
3. 因此，我們認為在交椅洲附近興建人工島的真正目的是「利用大嶼山的地理位置」建設一個連接香港的新交通樞紐。這些新道路和鐵道網絡沒有經過研究或任何證明其需要性。政府這項建議是打算消耗香港大部份財政儲備，獨力注資這項與中國「象徵式」的連接。《立法會文件 PWP 768CL - 中部水域人工島策略性研究》亦指出如果沒有人工島（即沒有需要填海作土地或房屋需要）是不需興建相關的交通系統。

4. 環觀世界各國，研究者都發現大型基建，尤其是包括大量汽車的道路基建的負面影響，對自然生境及生物多樣性均具影響，因而不少大城市轉向關注優化行人道或單車系統。與此同時，香港因為過量的汽車導致嚴重的空氣污染。我們建議香港政府應減少需要興建大量道路和吸引極大車流量的工程項目。

5. 立法會相關列案文件大量引述土地供應小組的報告。這個附和政府的小組由與大嶼山發展利益相關的持份者組成，毫無公信力可言。真正獨立和反對的意見被小組忽視。

6. 文件試圖用陳腔濫調說服議員將過萬億屬於市民的公帑，轉移至國外的發展商及工程公司，並稱這是為了提升市民的工作和生活質素。這種自我滿足的字句只是在侮辱議員和香港市民。這些政府官員沒有為真正的社會需要提出具體可行的方案，不斷在轉移視線，妄想用未來的大型發展計劃解決現時社會上的問題。

7. 另一個誤導市民的是，政府一直巧妙地指發展計劃是「東大嶼都會」、「明日大嶼」，誤導市民這只是大嶼山的發展，現實是這個項目將會影響全香港市民。

8. 氣候變化所帶來的影響已刻不容緩。填海將會帶來大量的污染排放，相關的環境影響絕不只限於香港。當全世界各國正努力地減少自身的碳排放，當我們有其他土地發展方案，這個極具污染的方案應該被否決。與此同時，氣候暖化、全球水位上漲對擬建的人工島亦會帶來威脅。在全球化問題的考慮下，為本地的社群著想，我們應該盡力減少對氣候變化帶來更大影響，為未來危機做好準備。

9. 有關項目的環境成本非常高。近年海砂及其他填海相關的天然資源短缺，價格飛漲。加上，我們必須考慮過度取用天然原料會對其他地區帶來環境、生態和景觀上不可逆轉的破壞。

10. 在特首公佈明日大嶼計劃後，從沒有就「明日大嶼」作任何公眾諮詢，在土地供應諮詢的階段均沒有提及。對有關計劃的需求性研究應先於任何工程研究，我們應同時研究其他更適合建屋的選項。

我們正身處前所未有的階段，人類對環境的影響已經深深地影響我們自身的生活，世界各國的城市都應該拋下舊有的規劃和發展模式。香港傳統對填海的依賴已不適合現今社會。對計劃的支持者只考慮到填海發展的經濟利益，全球不少社區都開始明白環境成本其實與人類基本的生命需要互相交織、不可分割。人工島填海項目帶來的污染和對環境的破壞將會嚴重損害香港的未來。