

**Extract of minutes of meeting with
Yuen Long Provisional District Board Members on 8 July 1999**

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IV. The Deep Bay Area as wetland and its Conservation Area

16. Mr TAI Kuen explained that the Deep Bay, Mai Po Marshes and its adjacent area were listed as a “Wetland of International Importance” under the Ramsar Convention by the Government in 1996. However, Government kept on expanding the Wetland Conservation Area (WCA), which was unfair to the affected land owners.

17. Mr MAN Ping-nam pointed out that the Planning Department consulted YLPDB on a newly-completed Study on the Ecological Value of Fish Ponds in the Deep Bay Area (the Study) on 24 June 1999. However, YLPDB members were dissatisfied that they were in fact just “half” consulted, and “half” told of the findings of the Study. According to the Study, the Conservation Area would be expanded to six times the size of the wetland and the development of land in San Tin, Mai Po, Nam Sang Wai and Tsim Bei Tsui by the land owners were subject to restrictions. As those pieces of land were located at the border with important value of development, Government should let the land owners know the purposes for which the land could be used in future. Mr LO Yuk-fun also pointed out that the coverage of the Conservation Area proposed in the Study was too large. Given that land resources in Hong Kong were very precious, further expansion of the Conservation Area would no doubt have an impact on land use. While he acknowledged the importance of environmental protection, the area to be conserved should not be too large.

18. Mr CHOW Wing-kan pointed out that according to the Ramsar Convention signed in Iran in 1971, it would be sufficient for each signatory to designate a piece of wetland recognized by the international community for proper protection. According to the interpretation of Article 1 of the Convention, wetland means marshes, muddy land and mudflats of less than 6 metres deep when the tide ebbs. Areas which were listed as “Wetland of International Importance” did not necessarily include fish ponds because unlike wetlands where sea water was mixed with

fresh water, fish ponds were fresh water ponds. There was a difference in depth between the two. Moreover, the organisms that existed were very different. Therefore, the conservation of fish ponds and the conservation of wetlands were completely different. Under the proposal put forward by the Planning Department, the wetland and the Conservation Area occupied an area of 2 160 hectares, which was about 30% of the total area of the Yuen Long district.

19. Mr CHOW further pointed out that according to the Territorial Development Strategy Review published by the Government in 1996, San Tin was zoned as a business centre and a secondary development area. However, the Study commissioned by the Planning Department recommended that the land lots in this area should be zoned as Conservation Area or green belt. This would no doubt have policy implications on the planned development of the area, in particular the development of freight transport industry and port back-up land.

20. Mr MAN Ping-nam said that to tackle the problem of the on-going expansion of WCA, YLPDB members had visited the mangrove planting area in Futian, Shenzhen. They noted that the development area and the mangrove planting conservation area there were successfully separated by a 20 feet-wide man-made river so that the two areas could co-exist in harmony. He commented that Hong Kong should make reference to the experience in Shenzhen.

21. Mr MAK Ip-sing was also of the view that compensation should be made to land owners as Government restricted the use of land for other purposes by administrative orders. Moreover, Government should be aware that while the population in the Yuen Long district increased rapidly, less and less land was available for development because of the proposal put forward by the Planning Department.

22. YLPDB members were of the view that wetland conservation and economic development should be compatible. They pointed out that more than 60 WCAs were successfully established in the Mainland and they were developed as education centres for environmental protection, tourist spots, scientific research and wildlife protection centres etc. Apart from maintaining an equilibrium of the ecosystem, the wetland could also help promote economic activities in the local area directly. YLPDB members therefore opined that as San Tin and Yuen Long were located at the border, Government should

make use of their unique locations and provide facilities such as resort hotels, education and scientific research centres as well as venues for recreational activities in the wetland.

23. In response to Hon CHOY So-yuk's enquiry about specific proposals which could serve both the purposes of environmental protection and development of the area, Mr CHOW Wing-kan said that trees could be planted along the drainage pipeline in San Tin to serve as a barrier for the wetland. The area to the east of the drainage pipeline in San Tin could be zoned as an area for economic development purposes. Moreover, the Conservation Area could be promoted as a spot for tourism as well as for educational and scientific research purposes, thus changing the narrow view that it was not impossible to conserve the wetland and develop the area at the same time.

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24. Hon Miriam LAU Kin-yee commented that while it was important to protect the environment, the Government had to take into account the contribution of business activities to the community. Members were particularly concerned whether land reserved in San Tin for container back-up and open storage uses purposes would be affected by the Study. Mrs LAU pointed out that the Government had not consulted Members on the Study. She suggested the issue be referred to the LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs for follow-up discussion, and YLPDB members be invited to the meeting to express their views.

25. The meeting ended at 12:45 pm, followed by a luncheon in the Dining Hall.

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