

For discussion on  
22 July 2003

## **Legislative Council Panel on Environmental Affairs**

### **Management of Marine Parks**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper briefs Members on the management of marine parks in general and the measures taken to address the concerns arising from the recent increase in the number of visitors to the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park including the issues set out in the submissions (which the Legislative Council Secretariat has received) made by the Friends of Hoi Ha and the World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong (WWF).

#### **MANAGEMENT OF MARINE PARKS**

2. Marine parks are designated under the Marine Parks Ordinance (the Ordinance) for protecting important marine environments and marine life in Hong Kong. At present, there are four marine parks, namely the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park, Yan Chau Tong Marine Park, Sha Chau and Lung Kwu Chau Marine Park, and Tung Ping Chau Marine Park. Under the Ordinance, marine parks are managed by the Country and Marine Parks Authority (the Authority), i.e. the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation (DAFC), for the purposes of nature conservation, recreation, education and scientific studies. Compatible recreational activities such as swimming and diving are allowed in marine parks. To strike a balance between conservation needs and the livelihood of fishermen, the Ordinance provides that the Authority may issue fishing permits to bona-fide fishermen or villagers ordinarily residing near a marine park to allow them to continue fishing in the respective marine park in a non-destructive manner. All other fishing activities are prohibited in marine parks with the exception of the Tung Ping Chau Marine Park where recreational fishing is allowed at selected locations on a trial basis.

3. The management strategy currently adopted by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) mainly comprises the following –

(a) Habitat monitoring and enhancement

AFCD regularly monitors the water quality and the conditions of corals and other important marine life in marine parks. Results of

the annual reef checks show that there has been a slight improvement in the conditions of corals in marine parks in the past years. AFCD also actively conserves and enhances the ecological value of marine parks. For example, artificial reefs were deployed at the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park and Yan Chau Tong Marine Park in 1998, and at the Sha Chau and Lung Kwu Chau Marine Park in 2000. The results are encouraging: over 200 species of fish can be found in the areas where the artificial reefs are lying.

(b) Law enforcement

AFCD staff patrol marine parks on a daily basis and at irregular hours throughout the day to deter illegal activities such as unauthorized fishing, littering, collection of animals or plants, etc. in order to protect the marine environment and marine life from threat and disturbance. They will issue warnings to or prosecute offenders as appropriate. Since the designation of marine parks in 1996, 515 persons have been prosecuted for offences under the Ordinance with a total fine of over \$540,000. AFCD also maintains regular liaison with the Guangdong Provincial Bureau of Ocean and Fisheries to deter Mainland fishermen from fishing or carrying out other illegal activities in the marine parks of Hong Kong.

(c) Provision of facilities

To enhance visitors' safety and enjoyment and, as part of nature conservation education, AFCD has installed information signs, warning signs and maps at suitable locations within marine parks to introduce the natural features and inform visitors which activities are allowed at which locations. To facilitate park management, the department has also placed buoys to demarcate the water areas for mooring and diving.

(d) Education and publicity

To promote public understanding of the importance of marine conservation and solicit their support to protect the marine parks, AFCD organises a variety of educational activities targeting at both students and the general public. Activities held include voluntary clean-ups, guided tours, public seminars, workshops and exhibitions. In 2002-03, over 17,000 people participated in these activities. AFCD has also produced leaflets and booklets to educate the public about our marine environment and the importance of protecting it.

4. Public support and involvement are essential to the effective operation of the marine parks system. Various channels have been established to collect views from the public, in particular those from the

stakeholders concerned. The Country and Marine Parks Board is a statutory body established under the Ordinance to advise the Authority on matters relating to, amongst others, the management of marine parks. It comprises 16 non-official members from different sectors including green groups, academics and the fishing community, and 10 official members representing the relevant government departments. Moreover, AFCD has set up a Marine Parks Visitor Liaison Group to provide a direct channel for members of the public to offer their views on marine park matters.

5. The management strategy of marine parks is reviewed from time to time to take account of the changing needs of the community. In view of the recent increase in the number of visitors to the countryside and coastal areas, AFCD has stepped up patrols and enforcement actions in both country parks and marine parks. Publicity and education programmes have been enhanced to educate the public on the need to protect the natural environment and to keep the venues clean. Special briefing sessions have been arranged for local tour operators. Volunteers are recruited to provide on-site advice to visitors and tour groups on the need to take care of the natural environment when visiting these facilities, e.g. not to use loudhailers or collect marine organisms in marine parks. We will also continue to liaise closely with the Tourism Commission and other relevant bureaux and departments to ensure better co-ordination on the development of eco-tourism in Hong Kong.

## **HOI HA WAN MARINE PARK**

6. The Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park is located next to Hoi Ha Village where most of the village houses are let to outsiders. The Marine Park has become one of the hotspots for local visitors in the past few months. The number of visitors in April and May 2003 were twice those of the same month in 2002 and reached 15,700 and 17,600 respectively. While the increase in visitors is welcomed by the restaurant and store operators at Hoi Ha Village, some residents of the village are concerned that the infrastructure in the area may not be adequate to support such a large number of visitors, thus causing traffic, environmental and other problems.

7. The Tai Po District Office has convened working group meetings involving all the parties concerned, including the villagers and residents of Hoi Ha Village, the relevant departments (e.g. AFCD, Transport Department (TD), Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), Police, etc.) and WWF which Marine Life Centre at the marine park is due to be opened though not in at least six months from now, to draw up practicable measures to address the concerns raised. Based on the discussions, a number of improvement measures have been implemented while some other long-term measures are being considered or taken forward. These measures include -

(a) Improvement to toilet facilities

FEHD will convert the existing aqua privy at Hoi Ha into a toilet with flushing facilities and tap water for hand washing within the current financial year. On Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays, additional portable toilets are provided and cleaners are stationed at the toilets to ensure that they are kept in hygienic conditions.

(b) Sewage discharge

As with many other village houses, sewage from houses in Hoi Ha Village is connected to and treated by septic tanks and soakaway systems. Sale of food in these village houses is governed by the Food Business Regulations under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance. Stores selling snacks with trade effluent discharge also require a licence issued by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance to ensure that the effluent is treated properly, e.g. by grease traps, before discharge. FEHD and EPD will conduct site inspections and take appropriate law enforcement actions against irregularities found. In addition, AFCD has been monitoring the water quality of the Marine Park on a regular basis. The monitoring sites are located at the ecologically sensitive areas with the marine park and the water quality has been satisfactory so far. Results of coral monitoring also show that the corals are in good and healthy conditions. AFCD will continue to closely monitor the situation.

(c) Water supply

Metered water supply is available and can be promptly arranged by the Water Supplies Department for the residents in Hoi Ha Village upon receipt of applications.

(d) Traffic control

A number of measures have been worked out to improve the traffic situation in the area. First, the Police have stepped up patrols in Hoi Ha on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays to ensure that the road to Hoi Ha will not be congested with traffic. TD has started constructing lay-bys and modifying the roundabout at Hoi Ha to improve the traffic flow. Works are also in progress to erect anti-parking railings along the pavement to enhance pedestrian safety. In order to encourage the use of public transport, the green minibus service has been enhanced through extension of the route to Sai Kung Town and extension of the green minibus service to weekdays.

At present, all vehicles except public transport require a permit for

travelling to Hoi Ha via the Pak Tam Chung Barrier. To better control the number of visitors to Hoi Ha, AFCD and the Tai Po District Office are reviewing the current permit system and are considering tightening up the control over the issue of permits to private cars and coaches. Meanwhile, Country Parks Wardens, with the assistance of the Police, have stepped up enforcement actions against vehicles entering the Hoi Ha area without a valid permit.

(e) Alternative footpath bypassing the Village

To reduce the possible impact of the increased number of visitors to the marine park on the residents of Hoi Ha Village, AFCD, in consultation with the Tai Po District Office and other relevant departments, is studying the feasibility of establishing an alternative footpath that will enable visitors to bypass the Village when walking to or from the marine park and the WWF Marine Life Centre. As the study has to take into account technical, financial and land considerations as well as the concerns of some villagers about fung shui, the study is expected to take a few months to complete. The villagers will be kept informed of the development.

(f) Enhanced enforcement and publicity

AFCD has stepped up patrols and enforcement actions against littering and other illegal activities within marine parks, such as collecting animals and plants, and fishing without a valid permit. FEHD has stepped up enforcement against littering in the Hoi Ha Village and has arranged for additional refuse collection service especially during public holidays.

In addition, AFCD has enhanced publicity efforts to educate the public to avoid causing damage or disturbance to the natural environment and the Hoi Ha Village when visiting the marine park. Local tour operators have been reminded not to use loudhailers when they are in the village. New signs will also be installed to remind visitors of the need to conserve the marine environment.

## **WWF MARINE LIFE CENTRE**

8. The WWF Hoi Ha Wan Marine Life Centre is located in the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park and is not expected to be ready for opening within the coming six months. Its main function is to promote public interest in marine life with a view to enhancing public understanding of and support in protecting the marine environment. As the development is within a marine park, the project when it was still in proposal form was considered by the Authority in consultation with the Country and Marine Parks Board and

approved under the Marine Parks Ordinance before the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Ordinance came into operation in April 1998. Under the EIA Ordinance, it is an exempted project, and its construction and operation do not require the issue of an environmental permit unless there is a material change to the project.

9. Some of the Hoi Ha villagers are concerned that the opening of the WWF Hoi Ha Wan Marine Life Centre would attract more visitors to Hoi Ha and hence would create more problems for the environment and their daily living. In this regard, the WWF has explained to the villagers about the establishment and future operation of the Marine Life Centre at the meeting convened by the Tai Po District Office mentioned above. WWF has also completed the landscape planting at the disturbed sites including the sewage pipeline so as to reduce the visual impact. They have also undertaken to take prompt action to clear the underwater construction waste. AFCD will continue to liaise closely with WWF on the future management of the Marine Life Centre to ensure that it will not cause any adverse impact on the ecologically sensitive environment of the Marine Park. To enhance communication with the villagers on matters pertaining to the future management and operation of the Marine Life Centre, the WWF will set up a liaison committee with the villagers.

## **WAY FORWARD**

10. Public support and participation is essential to the success of our nature conservation efforts. By visiting the marine parks, the public will be able to appreciate the beauty of the natural environment and better understand the need to protect it. In respect of the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park, AFCD and the departments concerned will continue to work closely with both the villagers and the WWF to undertake suitable measures to cope with the increased number of visitors and to protect the marine environment.