

For discussion on
29 January 2004

Legislative Council Panel on Environmental Affairs

Management of Marine Parks

INTRODUCTION

The Administration briefed Members on the management of marine parks in general and the measures taken to cope with the increased number of visitors to the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park at the panel meeting on 22 July 2003. This paper reports on the progress made to further improve the management of marine parks.

MANAGEMENT OF MARINE PARKS

2. Marine parks are established under the Marine Parks Ordinance and managed by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) for the purpose of nature conservation, and for providing venues for recreation, education and scientific studies. AFCD, in consultation with the Country and Marine Parks Board, reviews from time to time the management strategy in order to better achieve the stated objectives. The progress that has been made since the last panel meeting held in July 2003 is summarized below -

(a) Habitat monitoring and enhancement

AFCD continues to closely monitor the water quality and the conditions of corals and other important marine life in marine parks. The latest monitoring results show that the situation has remained satisfactory. In collaboration with the Reef Check Foundation, AFCD has co-ordinated annual surveys of corals in Hong Kong since 2000. The results of Reef Check 2003 that was conducted from June to September 2003 has confirmed that the coral communities in the Hoi Ha Wan and Tung Ping Chau Marine Parks have shown no signs of deterioration.

(b) Law enforcement

AFCD has strengthened law enforcement to deter destructive acts and other illegal activities in marine parks. Since July 2003, 84

prosecutions have been made and they include 8 cases of littering and 53 cases of illegally collecting marine life (including fishing without a valid permit).

In addition, AFCD visited the Enforcement Unit of the Guangdong Provincial Bureau of Oceans and Fisheries in September 2003 to seek their assistance in combating unauthorized fishing by Mainland fishermen in Hong Kong waters including marine parks. As agreed, the Mainland authorities have stepped up patrols and have cautioned Mainland fishermen, especially those engaged in collection of sea urchins, against fishing in Hong Kong waters.

AFCD and the Marine Police have worked out an enhanced strategy to step up efforts in curbing unauthorized fishing activities of Mainland vessels in marine parks. According to the past practice, any Mainland vessels intercepted in marine parks by AFCD, no matter they are carrying out illegal fishing activities or not, will be handed over to the Marine Police. They will usually be escorted out of Hong Kong waters. To increase the deterrent effect, the Marine Police will now arrest the Mainland crew on board Mainland fishing vessels intercepted in Hong Kong waters and handle them as “unauthorized entrants” where circumstances warrant (e.g. dubious activities without legitimate documentations are found upon police enquiries). They will be repatriated back to the Mainland while their fishing vessels will be detained and handed over to the Mainland authorities for their appropriate actions. Where Mainland fishing vessels are caught conducting illegal activities in contravention of the Marine Parks Ordinance (e.g. unauthorized fishing), prosecution action will be taken against the Mainland fishermen concerned. Parallel action will also be taken against them by the Marine Police for unauthorized entry into Hong Kong. In the same way, as the persons described above, their vessels will be detained and handed over to the Mainland authorities.

(c) Provision of facilities and services

AFCD has installed ten new information signs at various locations in marine parks. They have also increased the frequency of litter collection and the number of litterbins provided at areas frequented by visitors. The department will closely monitor the impact of increased visitors on marine parks and step up management accordingly including considering temporary closure of or restricted access to ecologically sensitive areas where necessary.

(d) Communication with the public

AFCD has enhanced communication with the local community in the management of marine parks through meetings and other informal contacts with a view to enhancing their understanding and support. AFCD staff will approach villagers living in the vicinity of marine parks during their routine patrols to better understand their concerns arising from the increased number of visitors to the marine parks. Community activities such as marine park cleanup exercises have been arranged with the support of local villagers in order to involve them and the general public in marine conservation work. Meetings of the Marine Parks Visitor Liaison Group that is open to the general public are held to provide a regular forum for discussing marine park management matters. Four public forums on marine parks and marine ecology were held in November 2003 to enhance the public's understanding of marine conservation. AFCD has also organized a number of seminars and workshops, and published various leaflets with a view to cultivating the correct knowledge and attitude about nature conservation among tour operators and the general public. All these formal and informal contacts with the stakeholders are expected to strengthen community support in the protection and management of marine parks and conservation of marine life.

HOI HA WAN MARINE PARK

3. A number of measures have been taken to improve the management of the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park to cope with the increased number of visitors and to address the concerns of the local residents. The progress of the measures taken is summarized as follows -

(a) Improvement to toilet facilities

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will convert the existing aqua privy at Hoi Ha into a toilet with flushing facilities and tap water for hand washing. The conversion project is now at the planning and design stage, and is expected to be completed in the third quarter of 2004.

(b) Traffic control

The modifications to the roundabout, construction of lay-bys and erection of anti-parking railings at Hoi Ha to improve the traffic flow and enhance pedestrian safety have been completed. In addition, AFCD, in consultation with the two relevant District Offices, have completed a review of the current permit system regulating the

movement of private vehicles beyond the Pak Tam Chung Barrier. Under the new system implemented since 1 December 2003, the number of permits issued to coaches destined for Hoi Ha has been limited to a maximum of 12 per day, i.e. two way trips by 12 coaches a day in maximum, compared with a total of 30 coach permits per day in the past for access beyond the Pak Tam Chung Barrier with no control on destinations. The new arrangement is supported by the residents of Hoi Ha Village and the Sai Kung North Rural Committee. It has effectively controlled the number of visitors to Hoi Ha. In parallel, AFCD and the Police continue to take enforcement actions against vehicles entering the Hoi Ha area without a valid permit, and illegal parking at the roundabout outside Hoi Ha Village. The traffic control situation has improved over the past months.

(c) Alternative footpath bypassing the Village

AFCD, in consultation with relevant departments and the residents of Hoi Ha Village, have identified a preliminary alignment of an alternative footpath that will enable visitors to bypass the Village when walking to or from the Marine Park and the Marine Life Centre of the World Wide Fund For Nature Hong Kong (WWF), thus reducing the possible disturbance to the residents of the village. AFCD is carrying out a feasibility study on the proposed alignment. Subject to availability of funding, the construction works will be carried out within this year.

(d) Marine traffic

There was an increase in the number of sampans illegally operating in the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park during the last summer months. These sampans took passengers from the beach or the pier to view corals and sometimes travelled at a high speed within the Marine Park. They posed safety concerns on other marine park users participating in water activities including swimming, snorkelling or diving. AFCD, the Marine Police and the Marine Department have taken enforcement actions against these sampan operations. Two have been fined \$1,000 and one \$900. The others are awaiting trial. The three departments will continue to monitor the situation and take appropriate enforcement action.

In addition, AFCD has established since October 2003 three "Mechanized Vessels Prohibited Zone" at the main beach, around the pier and at the coral beach respectively within the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park to prohibit the entry of power-driven vessels for protecting the safety of people participating in water activities in

those areas. The Zones have been demarcated on-site by marker buoys. It is an offence for any power-driven vessels to enter those Zones.

(e) Habitat monitoring

Since the designation of the Marine Park, AFCD has conducted water quality monitoring at the outer bay once every three months covering the main ecological sensitive areas of the Marine Park. They have also organized annual reef check in the Marine Park since 2000. To further enhance the monitoring of the habitats of the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park including possible impacts arising from the increased number of visitors, AFCD and WWF will jointly implement an “Ecosystem Health Check” through the collection and analysis of the representative indicators of the ecosystem including water quality and corals. Additional water quality monitoring stations in the inner bay that are closer to the Marine Life Centre and the main beach will be set up. In addition, WWF will organize an additional annual reef check in the winter to supplement the annual reef check conducted in summer so as to provide additional information on the ecological status of the coral areas.

(f) Enhanced enforcement and publicity

AFCD has stepped up law enforcement against illegal activities in the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park. Since July 2003, AFCD has prosecuted 17 persons for illegally collecting marine life. To improve the cleanliness of the area, AFCD has placed eight additional litterbins along the beach. In addition, regular cleansing is carried out in the Marine Park and the village by the contractors of AFCD and FEHD.

AFCD has resumed organising guided walks since August 2003 to educate the public on the marine environment at Hoi Ha Wan. Volunteers have been deployed to the Marine Park as Marine Park Ambassadors to advise visitors on the importance of protecting the natural environment including marine life. Signs have been put up along the beach and the coast to remind the public of the importance to conserve the marine environment and not to cause disturbance to the villagers. Moreover, AFCD has published a special leaflet reminding visitors to keep their voice down when passing through the village.

WWF MARINE LIFE CENTRE

4. The WWF Hoi Ha Wan Marine Life Centre will open in phases. WWF is now drawing up a set of guidelines in conjunction with AFCD on environmentally responsible operations to avoid accidental and unintentional damage to the environment arising from its future operation. The first phase of operation will focus on school and public education programmes. At the initial stage of its operation, there will be two tours to the Centre each day with a maximum number of 40 persons per tour. If the operation is satisfactory, WWF will consider operating four tours each day during the weekends and public holidays. In this regard, WWF has been closely liaising with AFCD in working out the associated arrangements to avoid causing adverse impact on the ecology of the area or disturbance to the village residents. There will be bimonthly assessment of the corals at the sites where WWF's glass-bottom boat will operate so as to provide early warnings on the potential impact of the activities on the corals such that the operation of the boat could be duly adjusted.

5. Since July 2003, WWF has organized a number of seabed clean-ups. They have also been monitoring the growth of vegetation replanted to reduce the visual impact of the sewage pipes. Subsequent plantings have also been conducted to replace the dead plants.

6. In addition, WWF has held community forums and ad-hoc meetings with the residents of Hoi Ha Village periodically to keep them informed of the progress of the works and to listen to their views. To provide a regular forum for communication, WWF has proposed establishing a community liaison group and the idea is welcomed by the villagers.

WAY FORWARD

7. No nature conservation efforts can sustain without public understanding and support. By visiting marine parks, the public will have the opportunity to appreciate the beauty of the natural environment and better understand the need to protect it. AFCD and the departments concerned will continue to work closely with both the villagers and non-governmental organizations to improve the management of marine parks.

Environment, Transport and Works Bureau
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