



嘉道理農場暨植物園公司
Kadoorie Farm & Botanic Garden Corporation

Clerk to Panel on Environmental Affairs
Legislative Council Secretariat
3rd floor Citibank Tower
3 Garden Road
Central
(Email: mpooon@legco.gov.hk)

14 July 2010

By email only

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Framework Agreement on Hong Kong/Guangdong Co-operation - environmental protection and ecology conservation – 21 July 2010

We welcome this Framework Agreement as it will facilitate the communication, coordination and cooperation between Hong Kong and mainland Chinese Governments in protecting the environment and in improving the quality of life. We would like to take this opportunity to make comments and recommendations with regard to the paper CB(1) 1923/09-10(05).

1. Terrestrial ecology

One of the highlights of the terrestrial part is the designation of Robin's Nest as a Country Park and the establishment of wildlife corridors (Pt 11). We strongly support these conservation actions which are recommended by KFBG in 2004 in our preliminary Frontier Closed Area biodiversity survey report. The country park designation and the wildlife corridor between Robin's Nest and Wutongshan of Shenzhen would help to conserve many wildlife, and, enhance the movement of wildlife and genetic exchange between Shenzhen and Hong Kong. We would also like to suggest that a timeline of the designation should be included to show the commitment of the Hong Kong Government.

2. Wetland ecology – Pearl River Delta

Mai Po Marshes and Inner Deep Bay have long been recognized as a wetland of international importance. From the regional point of view, they are part of the Pearl River Delta wetland system. Currently, the wetland monitoring in the Pearl River Delta is not well coordinated. For instance, there is no systematic and regular monitoring of wetland area and waterbirds throughout the Pearl River Delta. Therefore, their trends are not well understood. Hence, we would like to suggest that a well coordinated wetland monitoring and management plan should be developed. Of particular concern is the cumulative impact of the proposed reclamation projects in the Pearl River Delta especially in the Deep Bay area on the hydrology



and sedimentation in Inner Deep Bay. This should be studied and monitored and the results released to the relevant bodies charged with the protection and management of the Inner Deep Bay and Mai Po Marshes.

Regarding the proposed wetland monitoring program, it is suggested that, in addition to the typical monitoring parameters, e.g. water chemistry and migratory waterbirds, breeding waterbirds should be included in the program. Currently, the key breeding waterbirds in the Pearl River Delta are egrets and herons. As these birds are wetland dependent, the change in nesting population could reflect the quality and quantity of wetlands. Therefore, we would like to recommend that these waterbirds to be included in the program.

On the other hand, wetlands at the Pearl River Delta are one of the most threatened habitats as they are often prime lands for developments. After decades of rapid developments, it is thought that they exhibit a sharp decline, in terms of area. Therefore, it is important to identify and protect remaining important wetlands in the Pearl River Delta. A network of wetland protected areas in the Pearl River Delta should be established in order to strengthen the conservation and management of these vital wetlands.

We support the idea of restoring mangroves in areas where they were destroyed before. However, one has to be careful that this will not be carried out at the expense of inter-tidal mudflats. Mudflats and mangroves complement each other and are both important habitats for waterbirds and marine life. One serious threat to the mangroves and mudflats in the Pearl River Delta region is the spread of the exotic, invasive *Sonneratia* mangrove. This mangrove grows much faster than all the native species and if let alone, can out-compete the native mangroves. In recent years, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Dept has been putting a lot of resources in clearing this mangrove yearly in Inner Deep Bay but young trees reestablished as a result of fruits dispersed from mature *Sonneratia* mangrove trees in other parts of the Pearl River Estuary. Hence, cooperation between Hong Kong and Guangdong Govts is needed to successfully control and eventually eradicate this invasive species.

3. Cross-border conservation issues – Protection of Hong Kong's biodiversity against illegal collecting

Harvesting Hong Kong wildlife by people across the border is another major threat to certain valuable species and to the Inner Deep Bay wetland ecosystem. The most important harvests are summarized as below:



(i) Mudskipper collection

In the Inner Deep Bay area, collection of mudskippers on the mudflats by mainland fishermen is a major source of disturbance to waterbirds roosting and foraging on the mudflats. These fishermen collect mudskippers during low tide, which is also the key foraging time of waterbirds. Their activities cause serious disturbance to the waterbirds in the open mudflat. It is thought that the disappearance of wintering Dalmatian Pelicans in Inner Deep Bay in recent years is associated with the mudskipper fishermen activities [are you sure about this? Mudskipper collectors had been operating in Inner Deep Bay at least since the 1980's but the Pelicans only gone much later]. This large waterbird species is very sensitive to human disturbance. This bird decreased from about 27 individuals in 1997/98 to none in the last few years. Please note that Hong Kong was once the key wintering ground of this isolated population of Dalmatian Pelicans in East Asia.

Apart from the disturbance, they also directly reduce food source of waterbirds as mudskippers are a major food habit of a number of waterbirds, e.g. egrets, herons, kingfishers and the Greenshank. Sometimes, they also engage in illegal bird collecting.

(ii) Illegal collecting of Golden Coin Turtle

The globally Critically Endangered Golden Coin Turtle (金錢龜) is threatened by illegal trapping because one adult can fetch HK\$ 30,000 or more. This species has largely disappeared from the wild throughout its range from South China, Vietnam and Laos and Hong Kong is now its last stronghold. Even in Hong Kong, this species has been subjected to intense illegal trapping in recent years. Some are harvested by mainland Chinese and the major demand is in mainland China.

(ii) Incense tree and Buddhist Pine collecting

The collection of Incense trees and Buddhist Pine by mainland Chinese has been widely reported by the media. These two plants are of high commercial value in mainland China and thus they are illegally harvested in Hong Kong, sometimes even in Country Parks, and shipped to mainland China. This illegal harvest is clearly not sustainable and the populations of these two plant species in Hong Kong have declined dramatically.

Joint actions and sharing of information by the Guangdong and Hong Kong SAR Government are the feasible solutions to these illegal cross-border activities. We sincerely hope that these issues can be added to this framework agreement. We are happy to provide further information if needed.



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Thank you for your attention.

Yours faithfully,

Mr. L. C. Wong
Conservation Officer