



6th March 2011

Living Seas Hong Kong

Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Chairman, Legco Panel on Food and Environmental Hygiene
Legislative Council Building
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Living Seas Hong Kong is a local non-profit organisation that is working to ensure our marine life is revitalized for the benefit of all Hong Kong residents. Living Seas Hong Kong was formed in 2007 and is composed of concerned Hong Kong citizens seeking to make a difference. We aim to work with the community at large to introduce practical solutions to revitalize our marine environment.

Living Seas is very supportive of the current government proposals to introduce more sustainable fisheries policies. We are also supportive and sympathetic to the needs of the beleaguered fishing community in Hong Kong.

We fully understand the vital part that fishermen have played in Hong Kong's history and that the fisheries industry forms a very important community in many parts of Hong Kong; however both the local fishing industry and our marine life have clearly suffered for a long time and more needs to be done to ensure its survival. Fisheries in Hong Kong have greatly declined, both in terms of the number of fishermen employed in the industry and the total fisheries production in Hong Kong's waters.

Only with a revitalized marine environment and only with marine biodiversity assured will a thriving fishing industry be viable. A flourishing fishing industry will be a clear indicator that we have succeeded in our mission.

A ban on trawling in Hong Kong's waters is a necessary step and we are fully in support of the planned actions by the AFCD. Our reasoning is:

1. Studies have confirmed that Hong Kong's seas are overfished and that the current fishing fleet is approximately 30% overcapacity (*source:AFCD/Chinese Academy of Fishery Science 2006*). To revitalize the seas, it is necessary to introduce measures to reduce production efforts so as to ensure the long term viability of the industry and of our marine life.
2. Trawling is known internationally to be very destructive. Firstly, it is a non-selective form of fishing generating excessive by-catch and secondly, bottom trawling is destructive to benthic communities and marine biodiversity. For these reasons trawling has been banned in many countries and regions,

including Belize, USA (Alaska and the Pacific West Coast), New Zealand, Palau, India (Kerala coast), parts of Scandinavia, etc.

The differences between areas where trawling is banned and where it is allowed has often been dramatic. For instance, in Öresund, Sweden where trawling is not allowed, the fisheries production for demersal fish is 100 times higher than the adjacent Kattegat, where no trawl ban is in place. (*source : CFP Watch*)

3. Trawling in Hong Kong waters is also difficult for fishermen in terms of production effort. Photographs and videos taken on typical day of trawling, shows catches that contain very small fish, a few shrimp and rubbish such as empty shells and plastic. The following photographs were taken on a trawler, they are a straightforward example of some of the issues facing fishermen operating in Hong Kong

		
<p>Source: http://www.alexhofford.com</p>	<p>Source: http://www.alexhofford.com</p>	<p>Source: http://www.alexhofford.com</p>
<p><i>Photos from one day out on a shrimp trawler: After much effort a small catch is collected in the trawling net</i></p>	<p><i>And dumped onto the deck:</i></p>	<p><i>The catch was very small, including a few prawns, very small fish, plastic bags and some undersize crabs</i></p>



4. Trawling is a non selective fishing method and we are aware that occasionally; rare international protected species are caught in trawl nets in Hong Kong.

	
<p><i>A juvenile green turtle, found dead on a Lamma Beach, presumably caught in a trawlers net and dumped overboard</i></p>	<p><i>The death of a whale shark in June 2008, made international headlines</i></p>

5. Seafood consumed in Hong Kong is primarily supplied from outside Hong Kong. In reality, local fishermen are no longer able to furnish supply to meet local demand. Moreover, trawling damages fish spawning grounds and catches local fish fry before they can become commercially viable.

70's	South China Sea
80's	South East Asia (Philippines, Indonesia)
90's	Maldives and the South Pacific

Expansion of live fish supply network. Source :HKU

6. Trawling is not truly an historic cultural legacy for fishermen in Hong Kong, but is a damaging practice introduced in recent decades that reduces the value of the marine environment for society at large.

The case for banning trawling in Hong Kong waters is absolutely clear cut; what is not so clear cut is how the affected fishermen will be able to earn a living on an ongoing basis. We are sympathetic to their concerns and our strategy is to consult with and work with the community to identify alternative livelihood options for



fishermen. Only with viable options will the fishing community be willing to adhere to required regulations. So far we have consulted with the recreational diving industry and private membership clubs. Our initial efforts show that there is wide community support for fishermen and that there are alternative livelihood options that can be explored further. We will continue with this effort.

We are fully aware that there is currently an issue regarding compensation payments to affected fishermen. This clearly needs to be addressed amicably for all concerned parties. We can hope that the government can refer to other industries that were forced to undergo restructuring in order to reach an appropriate consensus.

I can be contacted for any additional information or questions.



David O'Dwyer
Chairman

