

Environmental Issues in the Chief Executive's 2013 Policy Address

Public Comment on the Proposals

Dear Panel on Environmental Affairs,

As a professional with more than 15 years experience working on nature conservation issues in Hong Kong, I wish to share my opinion on three aspects of the 2013 policy initiatives of ENB.

i) Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP)

The formulation of a BSAP is an excellent opportunity to develop a more robust, holistic and comprehensive approach to nature conservation, and make a major contribution to the sustainable development of Hong Kong. The multi-stakeholder approach to formulating the BSAP that has been adopted by ENB thus far is to be commended. However, the experience from overseas is that BSAPs need to be implemented across all bureaus that impact nature conservation.

As a next step, the following oversight bodies should be established:

- ***Establish high level Steering Committee***: to be chaired by the Chief Executive or the Chief Secretary, to ensure that the BSAP is adopted throughout the administration.
- ***Establish a multi-stakeholder Working Group***: responsible for developing and driving *the* process of formulating the BSAP. The working group should compose of key government departments with relevant expertise, and non-government members familiar with marine and terrestrial conservation issues. This mix ensures the BSAP is community-led rather than entirely government-controlled.

ii) Marine conservation

Marine conservation lags far behind terrestrial conservation in Hong Kong. For example, commercial fishing is still allowed in marine parks, the marine park network only covers 2% of local waters, numbers of Chinese white dolphin inhabiting Hong Kong waters are in decline, and globally vulnerable species of fish such as whale sharks receive no protection. The ban on trawling and eventual introduction of sustainable fisheries management will greatly improve the situation, but there is still much to be done. The following actions are greatly needed:

- ***Ban commercial fishing in marine parks***. This measure has wide support from the public, and deserves to be strongly supported by legislators. **In 2008, 58,000 people signed a WWF petition to ban trawling and commercial fishing in marine parks, and an independent opinion poll found that 87% of Cantonese speaking people between the ages of 15 and 64 thought that it was reasonable that all marine parks should be made no-fishing protected areas.** Creating true sanctuaries for marine life is a critical part of allowing

the marine ecosystem to recover and unlocking the full economic benefits for Hong Kong, and is worthy of strong support by legislators.

- ***New marine parks.*** Global experts suggest that 20-30% of a nation's sea should be set aside as no-fishing zones in order to protect marine life, and optimize commercial fish catches. Hong Kong has a lot of catching up to do, as only 2% of our waters are protected, and many important habitat types receive no protection at all. No new protected areas have been designated since 2000, and marine parks at the Soko Islands and SW Lantau were proposed and endorsed by the Country and Marine Parks Board in 2002, but inexplicably not approved by government. The marine park network should be expanded for the benefit of present and future generations.
- ***Cross-border management plan for the Chinese white dolphin.*** The government's own monitoring programme suggests that the numbers of dolphins occurring in Hong Kong waters has declined in recent years, but no action is being taken to reverse the situation. With growing threats from reclamation, high-speed ferries etc. the only way the Pearl River Estuary population can survive and prosper long-term is if a cross-border management plan is established that seeks to reduce multiple threats simultaneously and rebuild the population.

iii) Low-carbon economy

Unfortunately, there is very little in the way of new policy initiatives to finally transition Hong Kong to a truly low-carbon city.

- ***Establish carbon emission targets.*** Policies will continue to be fragmented until an overall greenhouse gas emission cap is established for Hong Kong, with demand and supply-side targets and supporting strategies to achieve them.

I would encourage Legislators to support the ban on commercial fishing in marine parks, and encourage the administration to do more on the other areas covered here.

Yours sincerely,

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I am an independent ecologist based in Hong Kong, and have nothing to gain financially from any measures suggested here.