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Panel on Environmental Affairs
Legislative Council Complex
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Dear Panel

COMMERCIAL FISHING IN MARINE PARKS

When Hoi Ha Marine Park was set up in 1996, we all assumed that the status would lead to increased protection for the marine life within the park. However, as reported in a survey by Dr Andrew Cornish of the WWF in 2007, the fish stocks in Hoi Ha waters have not improved in numbers or average size since the formation of the Marine Park. The main reason for this lack of recovery of fish stocks was the issuance of many hundreds of licences to fish, both commercially and for recreation, which were issued after the gazetting of the marine park. Thus, commercial and recreational fishing has continued unabated from the formation of the marine park until the present day.

In the 2008 Chief Executive's Policy Address, it was stated that it was the Government's intention to ban all commercial fishing within marine parks. To date, this policy has not been fulfilled. On the contrary, there may have been an increase in the amount of commercial fishing within the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park, as fishers seek to prove that they fish in the marine park in expectation of being paid a sum of money to cease their fishing activities.

There are compelling reasons to bring in the promised fishing ban as soon as possible;

- Hong Kong is now a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity. As such, it is incumbent upon the HK Government to formulate and execute proper management plans for conservation and to take notice of International Best Practice to ensure that this happens. To designate areas as marine protected areas, whilst allowing commercial and recreational fishing, is completely at odds with any viable environmental management plan for marine parks.
- If a fishing industry of any scale is to be maintained in Hong Kong, which will provide employment for local people as well as a source of high quality seafood for the Hong Kong population, which is one of the highest per capita consumers of fish products in the world, then measures must be taken to provide the conditions to support a long-term sustainable fishery. International Best Practice dictates that in order to support a sustainable inshore fishery industry, a minimum of 15-20% of inshore waters should be designated as "no fish"

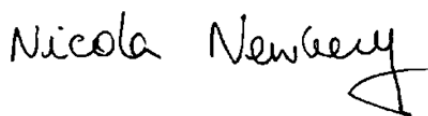
zones. Hong Kong falls far short of this requirement and the marine parks are obvious areas to designate as “no fish” zones. The banning of all commercial fishing within the marine parks is a vital first step.

- “No fish” zones act as areas in which fish can breed, spawn and grow in safety. The present fishing within the marine parks yields few fish which are fit for the table; rather, most of the catch is ground up and used as feed for mariculture, another area which requires examination. However, the establishment of “no fish” zones will provide areas in which fish can grow into adulthood and, as overseas experiences have shown, fish yields outside of the protected zones are improved both in number and size of catch.

However, it must be acknowledged that the banning of commercial fishing within the marine parks will have an effect on the livelihoods of local fishers. This decrease in income may only be temporary as, after a few years, the fisheries outside of the “no fish” zones might well have recovered sufficiently for some fishers to gain a better living from fishing, either through commercial fishing or through recreational activities, which will more than compensate for the loss of catches from the marine parks. There have been some widely-publicised efforts to retrain trawler crews to change their activities and to derive income from the tourist market. However, not much seems to have been done to help individual New Territories’ fishers to diversify their skills. For these individuals, not only do they need to be retrained to alter their commercial activities but, also, before they can derive any benefit from the tourist potential of the New Territories marine environment, some way of licensing them and their P4 boats to carry fare-paying passengers needs to be processed through the Marine Department and other Government agencies.

Four and a half years have elapsed since the Government made a commitment to ban commercial fishing in the marine parks. What has happened in the meantime? We need to see some action to fulfil this commitment in the near future before fish stocks within the marine parks are depleted to such an extent that they will never recover, even after the cessation of commercial fishing.

Yours sincerely



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