



Convention on Biological Diversity and Hong Kong's Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

In 1992, world leaders signed the “Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)” promising to conserve biodiversity and fairly share the benefits among people. China joined the CBD in 1993 and extended it to Hong Kong in 2011. The next step in meeting our United Nations’ obligation was to create a Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP) for Hong Kong. Actions are to be implemented by 2020, the strategies are long term.

Early 2013 Government convened a Steering Committee – and I was asked to join - to assist with the process. The upside was that over a hundred experts and opinion leaders were brought in. They proposed over 400 specific actions summarized into 33 broad actions, and formulated 11 guiding principles together with a vision and mission statement on biodiversity for Hong Kong.

The downside was that government departments stood on the sidelines. The failure of the Development Bureau and the Transport and Housing Bureau to participate was a missed opportunity in strengthening the actions and making sure they can be implemented.

Earlier this year Government consulted the public on the badly needed biodiversity action plan. Unfortunately, the consultation only included the recommended vision and mission statements and four focus areas – Conservation, Mainstreaming, Knowledge and Community Involvement. The consultation also failed to identify the convention’s strategic goal ‘*reducing direct pressures on biodiversity*’ and the global target “*By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought to zero...*”.

Worse, on page 37 government states that “*we do not intend to initiate major changes at this stage, such as changing existing policies and legislation.*” The consultation

suggests that all is hunky-dory. None of the threats to Hong Kong's biodiversity were identified: Green belt development, land supply strategy, small houses in country park enclaves, airport expansion... to name a few. Nor does it acknowledge the need for law reform and enforcement powers over ongoing destruction of biodiversity and valuable ecological habitats on private land. The most important debate – how to safeguard Hong Kong's outstanding biodiversity while meeting the demands for development – has been shamefully ducked. That's a pity.

The consultation suggests that *“our efforts should focus on enhancing our existing strengths, mainstreaming biodiversity, increasing the understanding and engaging different sectors in the dialogue.”*

The best way to start this is by putting the land supply strategy and biodiversity discussion into one room. Without a high-level consensus the community is left with fighting every project by tooth and nail. And that is in no-ones interest.

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