

Legislative Council Special Meeting to receive public views on the Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030

Submission on behalf of the Ark Eden Foundation

As a Lantau-based environmental education foundation, Ark Eden is dedicated to preserving Hong Kong's environmental legacy and enhancing its resilience for future generations, and it is in this capacity that we raise serious concerns about the 2030+ development plan - in particular the East Lantau Metropolis (ELM).

The satellite islands and the waters around the south of Lantau encompass some of the richest biodiversity in the region, and are the last bastion for some highly endangered species such as the Chinese White Dolphin, Romer's Tree Frog and the Black Finless Porpoise and also home to species of animals not found anywhere else on the planet such as Bodadek's Legless Lizard and Hollinsrake Bronzeback and the Jade Vine snake. However, the complete lack of up to date, publicly available data conducted by the government paints a picture of gross negligence towards those highly rare species or species on the brink of extinction to whom we owe a duty of care. The timeline of public consultation on the ELM means that by the time any data on the environmental impact of construction is available, the public consultation period is already over. If the government is so afraid that an informed citizenry will object to its plans, it should also realise that those plans cannot go ahead.

Like many other organisations that view the development plans in the 2030 vision as unnecessary, unjustified and out-dated, we agree that this project will cause more damage than it could possibly repair, and that the justifications for it represent neither a compelling, overriding nor present need.

We believe that the ELM represents the pinnacle of an old way that needs to be discarded in the face of planetary crisis.

In December of 2015, the Hong Kong SAR applauded the international agreement on climate change signed at the COP21 summit in Paris, and set aggressive targets to reduce carbon intensity by 50-60% by 2020 when compared to 2005 levels. Lantau is known as the Green Lung of Hong Kong because its complex and thriving ecosystem provides environmental services which our technology cannot match, including carbon sequestration and scrubbing the air of pollutants. The wetlands around Mui Wo, an area proposed for development, provide a vital flood defence buffer which would be ruinously expensive to replace. We ask the government how it plans to stay on course for these climate targets when pouring half the fiscal reserve into massive infrastructure projects which will both curtail the effectiveness of these ecosystem services and increase the strain upon them? Mui Wo, under these plans is also earmarked for a population increase of 100,000, destroying its rich history and natural biodiversity and paving the way for the urbanization of south Lantau. Is that really

smart planning? We also ask that the government considers the reputation of Hong Kong in the eyes of the international community - do we want to be seen as another homogenised financial city, or as a trailblazer and pioneer in a more sustainable and harmonious world?

The shortsighted nature of the ELM project represents an intergenerational theft, as the environment of Lantau took 250 million years to evolve, and it is our children and their children who will have to live in a world without the services it provides.

To proceed with public consultation on construction without having released vital information to the public is fundamentally undemocratic. It is with this in mind that we strongly urge the government to publicise results for environmental impact surveys on the land and the water, followed by another round of public consultation, **before** any further talk of a feasibility study takes place. We also urge the government to follow international precedent in effectively protecting habitats for any threatened species found to rely on the area proposed for the ELM and any associated transport links. Lastly, we require that the government conducts a thorough carbon audit of the proposed plans where the ecosystem services of Lantau are taken into account, and to ensure we are on target for our greenhouse gas emissions.