

Dear Members of Panel on Environmental Affairs and Economic Development,

Statement from Lindsay Porter, SMRU Hong Kong:

The forgotten finless one: unprecedented Finless Porpoise (*Neophocaena phocaenoides*) mortality in Hong necessitates enquiry into cause of deaths and explicit action for 'Unusual Mortality Events' of marine mammals.

Hong Kong has two resident marine mammals, the Chinese white dolphin and the finless porpoise. Both are threatened and are listed as 'vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List. The Government of Hong Kong monitors the abundance, distribution and behavioural ecology of each species, and documents mortality and injury rates, through an annual marine mammal monitoring programme and a strandings programme (the recovery of dead or injured marine mammals). These are important initiatives and the Government must be acknowledged for the tremendous resources it has committed to the monitoring of Hong Kong's marine life. The Chinese white dolphin, by far, garners the most attention and pro-active management measures include the designation of Marine Parks specifically for this species. The finless porpoise has no such special provision, although one proposed marine park area for Chinese white dolphins does overlap a very small portion of the porpoise's habitat in Hong Kong. There are no species action plan for either finless porpoise or Chinese white dolphin. Further, there is no mechanism in place to react to atypical events, such as unusual mortality events. An unusual mortality event is a *stranding that is unexpected; involves a significant die-off of any marine mammal population; and demands immediate response.*

In 2016, between January and May, 7 finless porpoise were reported dead; for the same period in 2017, 10 were reported dead. In 2018, January to date, 20 finless porpoise have been confirmed as dead with a further seven reports of carcasses that were not recovered. The 2018 numbers do not include the pregnant females that have been reported. This unprecedented number of porpoise deaths is extremely worrying and the negative impact such a die off is having on the local population of porpoise is unknown. The Government should immediately review this unusual mortality event and support an expert to independently investigate the cause of deaths to determine if there is a disease and/or if new activities within the porpoises' environment are killing or injuring them. The investigation should also determine effective actions to reduce porpoise mortality in the short term

The following recommendations should be considered:

- Establish an emergency action plan that will become immediately effective during unusual mortality events, and other environmental disasters, that impact marine mammals, and provide funds and resources to implement any plan;
- Establish detailed protocols for the treatment of free-ranging marine mammals that have been injured by human activities, including entanglement in fishing gear;
- Put in place an action plan for each resident species of marine mammal in Hong Kong, to include not only monitoring, but a series of pro-active steps that will safeguard habitat and the critical elements of their environment.

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