

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

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**Panel on Environmental Affairs**

**Meeting on 23 March 2020**

**Updated background brief on nature conservation in Hong Kong  
prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat**

**Purpose**

This paper provides updated background information on nature conservation in Hong Kong. It also gives a brief account of the major views and concerns expressed by Members when related issues were discussed by the relevant committees of the Legislative Council.

**Background**

2. The Administration introduced the New Nature Conservation Policy in 2004, aiming at regulating, protecting, and managing natural resources that are important for the conservation of biological diversity of Hong Kong in a sustainable manner,<sup>1</sup> taking into account social and economic considerations, for the benefit and enjoyment of the present and future generations of the community.

Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2021

3. In order to contribute to global efforts on biodiversity conservation and step up conservation efforts to support the sustainable development in Hong

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<sup>1</sup> Biological diversity or "biodiversity" in short, means the variety of living organisms. It serves as a measure of how stable ecosystems are, and is a key determinant of the benefits that the natural environment delivers to humans. There are three levels of biodiversity: genetic diversity refers to the variation among individuals within the same species; species diversity refers to all the different kinds of organisms within a habitat or a region; and ecosystem diversity is the variety of habitats and communities of organisms found within an area.

Kong,<sup>2</sup> the Administration released the first city-level Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan ("BSAP") for Hong Kong on 21 December 2016, which provides administrative and planning guidance on the conservation of local biodiversity from 2016 to 2021. BSAP comprises 67 specific actions under four major areas, including enhancing conservation measures, mainstreaming biodiversity, improving knowledge and promoting community involvement.

4. In the area of enhancing conservation measures, the Administration will, among other things, take the following actions:

- (a) maintaining and enhancing the management of protected areas,<sup>3</sup> including development of conservation management plans for specific areas with rich biodiversity;
- (b) considering the potential to extend protection to other ecologically-important sites;
- (c) stepping up enforcement against wildlife crimes and imposing heavier penalties on smuggling and illegal trading of endangered species; and
- (d) formulating and implementing conservation action plans for priority species, as well as improving management of invasive alien species.

#### Enhancement of the recreation and education potential of country parks and special areas

5. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") commissioned a consultancy study in January 2017 to explore opportunities to enhance the recreation and education potential of Hong Kong country parks and special areas, with a view to broadening and diversifying visitors' experience

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<sup>2</sup> China joined the "Convention on Biological Diversity" ("the Convention") in 1993 and extended it to Hong Kong in 2011. The Convention is an international treaty aiming to conserve biodiversity, utilize its components sustainably, and ensure fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of biodiversity.

<sup>3</sup> Ecologically-important sites are designated as protected areas to comprehensively protect the ecosystems therein and conserve wildlife in-situ including country parks and special areas established under the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap. 208) for the purposes of nature conservation, outdoor recreation and countryside education. Country parks usually cover larger areas and are managed for recreational, educational and nature conservation purposes. Special areas are of smaller sizes and higher conservation value, and are usually managed for nature conservation and educational uses only. There are 24 country parks and 22 special areas in Hong Kong, covering a total area of about 44 300 hectares, i.e. almost 40% of the total land area in Hong Kong.

and meeting the growing demand for countryside recreation while maintaining their conservation functions. The study aims to recommend proposals in three broad aspects, namely overnight facilities, adventurous activities and leisure. A public consultation was conducted from 16 February to 15 May 2019 to collect public views on the following proposed enhancements:

- (a) *enhancing existing facilities* such as enhancing the existing country park visitor centres as visitor hubs to serve as gateways to country parks and special areas and one-stop service hubs; introducing an advance booking system for popular camp sites to facilitate activity planning and strengthen management; providing more viewing platforms for scenery appreciation, and enhancing physically handicapped and able-bodied sites and facilities;
- (b) *establishing open museums for historical relics appreciation* within country parks and special areas, with various education activities provided;
- (c) *providing tree top adventure activities* along with a wide variety of associated activities, such as canopy walks and tree climbing for various age groups to deepen their understanding of nature conservation; and
- (d) *enhancing glamping sites and eco-lodges* to enrich campers' experience and facilitate campers of different age groups with different needs to connect with nature.

### Management of invasive alien species

6. Incoming foreign animals or plants could threaten local habitats of a place if they are too resilient or invasive. In Hong Kong, while most of the alien species introduced into the territory are harmless and have been well-integrated into the local environment, some are exerting significant adverse impacts on local ecology, such as Red Imported Fire Ant, *Mikania micrantha*, *Spartina* species, exotic mangroves (e.g. *Sonneratia* species) and House Crows.

7. To combat invasive alien species, AFCD mostly relies on regular inspection of country parks, special areas and sites of special scientific interest, followed by eradication if invasive alien species are spotted. In addition, a number of ordinances are in place to provide control on the import or release of alien species. For example, the Plant (Importation and Pest Control) Ordinance (Cap. 207) was enacted in 1976 to prevent the spread of plant pests and diseases by controlling the importation of plants, plant pests and soil. The Public Health (Animals and Birds) Ordinance (Cap.139) and the Rabies Ordinance (Cap. 421) regulate the import of animals and birds (including all live birds,

reptiles or warm-blooded vertebrates) for the prevention and introduction of animal diseases including rabies into Hong Kong through a permit system.

8. The Government has incorporated several new measures into BSAP to control invasive alien species including (a) establishing a local inventory of invasive alien species by 2020; (b) identifying high-risk invasive alien species by 2021; (c) encouraging research on invasive alien species; (d) reviewing removal programmes on targeted invasive alien species; and (e) stepping up public education on the adverse impacts caused by release of exotic species on local ecology.

### **Major views and concerns expressed by Members**

9. The Panel on Environmental Affairs ("EA Panel") discussed the proposed BSAP at the meeting on 22 February 2016 and received public views on the subject on 29 March 2016. EA Panel also discussed matters relating to nature conservation at its meeting on 27 March 2017.<sup>4</sup> Issues relating to enhancement of country parks and management of invasive alien species were raised by Members during examination of the Estimates of Expenditures in recent years. The major views and concerns expressed by Members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### Promoting compatible uses of country parks

10. Members considered it important to conserve biodiversity while promoting compatible uses of country parks and marine parks. They asked about the specific measures undertaken by the Administration to achieve such purposes.

11. The Administration advised that country parks and marine parks were designated and managed for the purposes of nature conservation, recreation and education. To conserve biodiversity, AFCD had carried out a number of measures including vegetation and habitat management, hill fire prevention and fighting, patrolling and law enforcement as well as biodiversity and water quality monitoring. AFCD also provided and maintained various facilities to facilitate and promote compatible uses of country parks and marine parks such as hiking, camping, mountain biking, boating, canoeing and dolphin watching. Relevant education and publicity programmes were conducted for students and the general public to promote nature appreciation.

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<sup>4</sup> At the meeting on 27 March 2017, the Administration briefed EA Panel on the progress of Government's efforts on nature conservation and marine conservation, as well as the legislative proposal to phase out the local trade in ivory.

### Hill fires

12. Members expressed concerns over the damages to country parks caused by hill fires and urged the Administration to prevent occurrence of hill fires and expeditiously rehabilitate the sites destroyed by hill fires.

13. Referring to the statistics collected between 2013 and 2017, the Administration stated that there were a total of 104 cases of hill fires which had affected country parks and special areas. It was believed that some of these hill fires might be related to human activities during the grave sweeping periods. AFCD had taken various preventive/firefighting measures, such as erecting fire danger warning signs in all country parks, and constructing and maintaining facilities and equipment to prevent the spread of hill fires and facilitate firefighting during an outbreak. The AFCD Fire Control Centre and fire crews were on a 24-hour shift standby on days when the fire risk was high.

14. Subsequent to each hill fire in a country park area, AFCD would carefully assess the conditions of the affected site in order to determine the rehabilitation work required, which would usually involve tree planting. Where appropriate, public tree planting activities would be organized at some of the affected areas to engage the public in the rehabilitation work for both education and conservation purposes.

### Enhancing facilities in country parks

15. Members expressed concerns that many paths and facilities at country parks were not disabled-friendly, making it difficult for persons with disabilities to visit the parks. The Administration advised that to enhance the accessibility of country park facilities and services for persons with disabilities, AFCD had implemented various measures including upgrading or providing barrier-free facilities in existing and/or new premises, as well as undertaking retrofitting programmes such as construction of ramps and installation of handrails along the footpaths to accessible toilets. Officers in charge of the country park venues and facilities were also appointed as Access Officers by AFCD to facilitate the implementation of accessibility measures and provision of services for the disabled.

16. Some members were concerned whether the facilities in country parks could meet the increasing demands. The Administration responded that facilities provided in country parks mainly included camp sites, morning walker gardens, shelters, hiking trails, visitor centres, water dispensers, etc. AFCD would take into account visitors' needs, compatibility with the surrounding environment, and site-specific considerations when considering the provision of required facilities in country parks. AFCD also collected views from country

park users on the facilities through regular visitor satisfaction surveys as well as meetings and discussions with different stakeholders.

17. To meet public demands for camping activities in country parks, AFCD had improved the facilities and services of various camp sites based on their usage and popularity, including designating two new camp sites in Sai Wan and Tai Mong Tsai in Sai Kung in 2014 and 2015 respectively, as well as conducting improvement works for the camping ground of Wan Tsai camp site in Sai Kung in 2016 and extension works on the camping area of Chung Pui camp site in Tai Po in 2017.

#### Controlling proliferation of invasive alien species

18. Members were concerned about the impacts of alien species on the local ecological environment and asked whether the Administration had conducted related studies. As regards certain alien species which were known to be posing threats to the local natural environment such as *Mikania micrantha* and *Leucaena leucocephala*, Members enquired about the actions taken by relevant government departments to curb the proliferation of such species and whether any legislation would be enacted to regulate their import.

19. The Administration advised that in accordance with BSAP, an inventory of invasive alien species would be built, and a preliminary risk assessment would be conducted to better understand the impacts of invasive alien species on the local ecology. Meanwhile, the Administration would encourage universities and non-governmental organizations to conduct research studies on invasive alien species through funding support. For example, the Environment and Conservation Fund had provided funding to a university to conduct a study in 2016-2017 on the impacts of exotic herpetofauna on the local ecology.

20. The Administration further advised that AFCD conducted regular patrols and inspections in country parks, special areas and sites of special scientific interest and removed invasive alien species including *Mikania micrantha* and *Leucaena leucocephala* once they were found. Other relevant government departments also carried out regular inspections and vegetation maintenance work within the facilities and slopes under their management. As observed, the proliferation of *Mikania micrantha* had been under control by removing them manually while the impact of *Leucaena leucocephala* was relatively restricted as the plant mainly existed on roadside or disturbed sites at present. If certain species were discovered to be potentially invasive, further investigations and control measures would be initiated accordingly.

21. As regards tightening the import control on alien species, the Administration advised that the issue should be handled in a prudent manner by assessing the effectiveness of the existing control measures, the impact of the alien species on the local ecology and the potential impact of introducing further legislation on the society and the economy.

### **Council questions**

22. At the Council meetings of 11 November 2015, 22 November 2017, 28 March 2018, 23 May 2018 and 30 May 2018, Hon CHAN Kak-kan, Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, Hon YIU Si-wing and Hon Kenneth LAU Ip-keung raised questions related to enhancement of country parks and management of invasive alien species. The questions and the Administration's replies are hyperlinked in the **Appendix**.

### **Latest development**

23. At the meeting on 23 March 2020, the Administration will brief EA Panel on the plan to enhance the recreation and education potential of country parks for enjoyment of the general public, as well as the measures to manage invasive alien species.

### **Relevant papers**

24. A list of relevant papers is set out in the **Appendix**.

## Nature conservation in Hong Kong

## List of relevant papers

| Date of meeting  | Event  | Paper  |
|------------------|--|--|
| 22 February 2016 | Meeting of the Panel on Environmental Affairs ("EA Panel") | <p>Administration's paper on "Update on the protection of endangered species and biodiversity in Hong Kong" (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)557/15-16(04)</a>)</p> <p>Background brief on "Protection of endangered species and biodiversity in Hong Kong" prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)557/15-16(05)</a>)</p> <p>Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)857/15-16</a>)</p>                                      |
| 29 March 2016    | Special meeting of EA Panel                                | <p>Background brief on "Public consultation on Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for Hong Kong" prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)712/15-16(01)</a>)</p> <p>Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)1113/15-16</a>)</p>   |
| 27 March 2017    | Meeting of EA Panel  | <p>Administration's paper on "Legislative proposal to phase out the local trade in ivory and progress of Government's efforts on nature conservation and marine conservation" (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)705/16-17(05)</a>)</p> <p>Background brief on "Nature conservation in Hong Kong" prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)705/16-17(07)</a>)</p> <p>Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. <a href="#">CB(1)1268/16-17</a>)</p> |



| <b>Date of meeting</b> | <b>Event</b>  | <b>Paper</b>  |
|------------------------|---|---|
| 5 April 2017           | Special meeting of the Finance Committee ("FC") for examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2017-2018 | Written questions raised by Members and the Administration's replies<br>(Reply serial numbers: <a href="#">ENB008, 009, 010, 211</a> )  |
| 17 April 2018          | Special meeting of FC for examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2018-2019                           | Written questions raised by Members and the Administration's replies<br>(Reply serial numbers: <a href="#">ENB022, 029, 187</a> )<br>(Reply serial numbers: <a href="#">S-ENB02, 03</a> ) |
| 9 April 2019           | Special meeting of FC for examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2019-2020                           | Written questions raised by Members and the Administration's replies<br>(Reply serial numbers: <a href="#">ENB014, 026, 200</a> )   |

**Other relevant documents:**

| <b>Government bureau</b> | <b>Document</b>   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Environment Bureau       | <a href="#">Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2021</a><br><br><a href="#">Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan Terrestrial Biodiversity Working Group Information Note 7-Invasive Alien Species (English version only)</a><br><br><a href="#">Consultancy Study on Enhancement of the Recreation and Education Potential of Country Parks and Special Areas – Recommendations and Way Forward</a> |

**Hyperlinks to relevant Council questions:**

| <b>Date</b>      | <b>Council Question</b>  |
|------------------|--|
| 11 November 2015 | <a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (written) raised by Hon CHAN Hak-kan         |
| 22 November 2017 | <a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (written) raised by Hon CHAN Hak-kan         |
| 28 March 2018    | <a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (oral) raised by Hon LEUNG Che-cheung        |
| 23 May 2018      | <a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (written) raised by Hon YIU Si-wing          |
| 30 May 2018      | <a href="#">Press release</a> on Council question (written) raised by Hon Kenneth LAU Ip-keung |