



Submission to the Public Consultation on Updating the Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP)

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Biodiversity Matters

We are facing the global crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. As elaborated in the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services thematic assessment (IPBES, 2024), **biodiversity is intricately linked to water supply, food, human health and climate stability**. Hence, biodiversity conservation should be treated as a priority not only for the wildlife but also for the human society.

Contributing to Global and National Biodiversity Targets

Under this context, the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** (KMGBF) was adopted at COP15 to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in 2022. China also rolled out the **National BSAP** in 2023 with targets largely aligned those of KMGBF. Therefore, Hong Kong Wetlands Conservation Association (HKWCA) thinks Hong Kong should **adopt the targets** that are applicable to the local context such as **effectively conserve 30% of the marine environment** and ensure **sustainable harvesting and trade of wild species**. These targets are particularly relevant because we have an exceptionally diverse marine biodiversity but only about 6% of our coastal water is protected. Moreover, Hong Kong is a wildlife trading hub including CITES-listed species and we should play a more active role in protecting the biodiversity of other places.

HKWCA focuses on wetlands and its biodiversity. Hence, we would like to make detailed suggestions on these topics for consideration in the update of the Hong Kong BSAP:

Conserving and Managing Deep Bay Ecosystems for Biodiversity and People

Deep Bay has the largest wetland ecosystem in Hong Kong. Both natural tidal mudflat and mangroves, and, man-modified fish ponds are present. These wetlands are next to many of the future developments in the Northern Metropolis. To conserve the extensive fish ponds in the area, the Government is planning to establish a Wetland Conservation Park System (WCPS). To ensure the long-term sustainability of these parks and the active participation of different stakeholders, a **Statutory Wetland Trust** should be established to administer and develop the WCPS. The Trust can fund-raise, accept donation and collaborate with businesses, thus putting the future management of the extensive Deep Bay wetlands in a strong footing.



A **holistic Deep Bay wetland ecosystem management plan** covering the two Ramsar Sites in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, the Mai Po Nature Reserve, Futian National Nature Reserve, the Lok Ma Chau Ecological Enhancement Area, the four planned Wetland Conservation Parks, the planned Coastal Protection Park and other managed wetlands should be formulated with the participation of the two governments, academics, conservation organizations and other stakeholders. This will ensure a common vision and shared goals for the Deep Bay wetlands, and, help to cultivate a partnership spirit among the different bodies.

Pond fish aquaculture has been in decline and many of the fish ponds in Deep Bay are inactive. There is a great potential to restore them back to tidal shrimp ponds. They should be upgraded with electric sluice gates and sensors, i.e. **Smart Gei Wais**. Their storm water storage capacity can be greatly increased by letting water out ahead of incoming typhoons and heavy rainstorms, thus provide climate resilience to the Northern Metropolis. This **Nature-based Solution** also enhances the biodiversity, produces high quality seafood and has great potential for eco-tourism development.

Strategy for Freshwater Marshes

The freshwater marshes in Hong Kong are seriously threatened by land use changes. Moreover, many of them would undergo natural succession, eventually turning into grassland if not actively managed. A lot of relevant studies and monitoring have been carried out and the information should be reviewed and analyzed to identify the important ones. A **strategy to conserve and manage important freshwater marshes** and the associated threatened species should be developed and implemented.

Saving Threatened Aquatic Species

Red list assessments of several taxon groups including many aquatic species have been conducted under the first BSAP. These should be used to produce the **List of Threatened Species (LTS)** as planned. Recent research on freshwater crustaceans have produced a lot of data that would allow them to be assessed and added to the LTS if justified. Such an official list is invaluable so that additional species can be included and **protected by legislations**. They can also be duly considered in EIAs and planning studies to minimize development impacts.

Strengthen Animal Protection inside Country Parks

The Country Park Ordinance (CPO) bans the use of hunting devices to hunt or trap wildlife. Collecting unprotected species by hand is not regulated. For example, there have been cases of



people collecting the Giant Spiny Frog *Quasipaa spinosa*, which is highly restricted locally, inside Tai Mo Shan Country Park. This species is treated as a delicacy in mainland China and is heavily collected to trade as food, leading to a significant population decline and is assessed as 'Vulnerable' in both the Global and National Red List. With the promotion of eco-tourism, more visitors will be drawn to the countryside. The risk of collecting of this and other unprotected species of commercial value will likely increase, especially with the promotion in social media. **CPO should be amended to provide protection to all wildlife** not only to protect our biodiversity but also to prevent potential social conflicts.

Effective Conservation for Critically Endangered Freshwater Turtles

Through good protected area system and sympathetic society that supports conserving endangered species, Hong Kong still retains wild populations of many globally threatened wildlife. However, freshwater turtles are easy to catch and rare species fetch a very high price as medicine, pets and used as breeding stock in turtle farms. The local populations of Golden Coin Turtle *Cuora trifasciata*, Big-headed Turtle *Platysternon megacephalum* and Beale's Eyed Turtle *Sacalia bealei* have been seriously depleted by illegal poaching. Joint efforts by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), conservation organizations and researchers have managed to save some key populations. Recently, two local poachers cum traders have been sentenced to jail as a result of joint efforts by AFCD and the Hong Kong Police. However, illegal poaching and smuggling of protected turtles across the border have not stopped. There is a need to make the anti-poaching more effective by **using technology to help surveillance** such as deploying CCTV at strategic locations. Having **police to actively support wildlife crime investigation** is also crucial.

Species Action Plan has been or is being formulated for the three Critically Endangered turtles. Their implementation should be **regularly reviewed** by the corresponding experts so that the gathered data can be analyzed to improve the actions. Such an Adaptive Management approach allows learning of the changing poaching situations. This is essential for devising effective anti-poaching and conservation measures to save the Critically Endangered turtles.

With effective conservation measures and species action plans in place, healthy populations of the three freshwater turtle species can be restored in Hong Kong. However, wild populations of these turtles in the Greater Bay Area have more or less gone and it would be very difficult if not impossible for these stream turtles to travel to suitable habitats across the border. Collaboration between the governments and conservationists to **reintroduce these Critically Endangered turtles** originated from Hong Kong **to other protected areas in GBA** would be worthwhile project to enhance the regional biodiversity. This will showcase how collaborative actions can save these



globally threatened, culturally important species.

Reference

IPBES (2024). Summary for Policymakers of the Thematic Assessment Report on the Interlinkages among Biodiversity, Water, Food and Health of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. McElwee, P. D., Harrison, P. A., van Huysen, T. L., Alonso Roldán, V., Barrios, E., Dasgupta, P., DeClerck, F., Harmáčková, Z. V., Hayman, D. T. S., Herrero, M., Kumar, R., Ley, D., Mangalagiu, D., McFarlane, R. A., Paukert, C., Pengue, W. A., Prist, P. R., Ricketts, T. H., Rounsevell, M. D. A., Saito, O., Selomane, O., Seppelt, R., Singh, P. K., Sitas, N., Smith, P., Vause, J., Molua, E. L., Zambrana-Torrel, C., and Obura, D. (eds.). IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13850289>