

COUNTRY AND MARINE PARKS BOARD

Summary Report of the Marine Parks Committee

1. Purpose

1.1 This paper aims to inform members of the major issues discussed at the Marine Parks Committee (MPC) meeting held on 9 September 2022.

2. Web-based Education Tools on Marine Biodiversity in Tolo Harbour and Channel

2.1 The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) briefed members on the newly developed web-based education tools on marine biodiversity in Tolo Harbour and Channel. A thorough study of the ecological condition, important species and significant habitats in the Tolo area was conducted between 2015 and 2018. To facilitate sharing of the study findings with the public, a set of web-based education tools, including a website with a biodiversity map, a Geographic Information System (GIS) based species database and a web application, were developed using data from the study. The AFCD also reported on the education efforts on the “Ting Kok Coastal Conservation Plan” (Ting Kok+). A series of educational activities for students, teachers and the public had been organised.

2.2 Members remarked that the web-based education tool consolidated the biodiversity information in Ting Kok and was a good source for teaching and research. They enquired about the strategy of promotion and suggested promoting the tools through schools. The AFCD concurred that schools would be one of the target groups and explained the promotion channels. Some members enquired if the web-based tools would be extended to cover other locations with rich marine resources in the future. The AFCD explained that the Department had developed a new online platform, the Hong Kong Biodiversity Information Hub, which consolidated the various sources of biodiversity information including both terrestrial and marine resources, throughout the territory.

3. An Overview of Marine Mammal Monitoring by AFCD

3.1 The AFCD briefed members on the work carried out in monitoring the marine mammals in Hong Kong waters. Various methods, including line-transect vessel survey, helicopter survey and Passive Acoustic Monitoring, were employed in the monitoring programmes to comprehensively understand the distribution and activity patterns of local marine mammals. The presentation showed data from recent years to reveal the latest status of marine mammals, including their abundance, distribution and habitat use in Hong Kong waters, as well as their activity patterns.

3.2 Some members suggested the AFCD further collaborate with Mainland China to holistically understand the movement patterns of Chinese white dolphins in the region. The AFCD explained its close collaborations with Mainland China institutions and informed members that available and relevant data from the Mainland side had been incorporated into the monitoring reports. Some members enquired about the effectiveness of the line-transect survey method to monitor cetaceans as the survey did not cover all Hong Kong waters, and it was not easy to spot the small cetaceans during vessel survey. The AFCD explained its various monitoring methods supplementary to line-transect to cover remote areas and to detect shy cetaceans like finless porpoises. A member enquired about the way forward on the conservation strategy for Chinese white dolphins given the decline in their abundance. The AFCD had extended the coverage of marine parks and prioritised monitoring the return of the dolphins to Hong Kong waters.

4. Any Other Business

Brief Report on the Widespread Coral Bleaching in Hong Kong Summer 2022

4.1 Widespread coral bleaching was observed in July 2022, suspected to be attributed to the record-breaking high temperature. The AFCD reported on the bleaching incident and the actions taken in response to the situation. The actions included collaborative monitoring with Hong Kong Baptist University and The Chinese University of Hong Kong, raising public awareness, and appealing to the public to providing information on the incident.

4.2 Members appreciated the AFCD's swift response in identifying the coral bleaching situation and its dedication to conserve the local coral communities. Some

members asked about coral conservation strategies in response to extreme weather. The AFCD would analyse the data collected from the survey sites to ascertain the level of recovery, and would also strengthen public education to reduce human impacts on the corals. The Department would also continue to work with coral specialists and researchers for scientific dialogues to formulate appropriate strategies to conserve and facilitate the recovery of the coral communities.

5. Presentation

5.1 This paper is prepared for members' information.

Country and Marine Parks Authority

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