

COUNTRY AND MARINE PARKS BOARD

Mirs Bay in Hong Kong Selected as “Outstanding Example of Beautiful Bays”

1. Purpose

1.1 This paper aims to brief Members on the announcement of Mirs Bay in Hong Kong being selected as an “Outstanding Example of Beautiful Bay” and the relevant conservation work carried out by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD).

2. Background

2.1 “Beautiful Bays” is an important practical means and priority task for the building of a “Beautiful China” in the field of marine ecological environment. To achieve “pristine water and beaches, thriving marine life, and harmonious coexistence between humans and the sea” is the aim of the overall enhancement in ecological environment quality. It is being realised through actions such as improvements in quality and effectiveness, the rehabilitation of ecosystems and the remediation of effluent discharge outlets, striving to transform 283 marine bays throughout China into Beautiful Bays by 2035. To proactively support the National 15th Five-Year Plan to develop Beautiful Bays, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government set out in the 2025 Policy Address that it would actively take part in developing the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) into an international, first-class beautiful bay area and take forward the development of Mirs Bay and Port Shelter into Beautiful Bays.

2.2 Located in the northeastern waters of Hong Kong, Mirs Bay boasts panoramic scenes of natural shorelines and good quality of water. The bay’s rich and diverse ecosystems are important habitats for various nationally protected wild species, such as hard corals, seahorses, horseshoe crabs, and White-bellied Sea Eagles. Besides, the bay area also features Hong Kong UNESCO Global Geopark, Yan Chau Tong Marine Park and Tung Ping Chau Marine Park and Double Haven Special Area,

as well as the various country parks along the shore, allowing the public to appreciate the rich and diverse ecological, cultural and geological wonders in the bay and to experience the harmonious coexistence between humans and the sea.

2.3 The Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) launched a campaign to select the “Outstanding Examples of Beautiful Bays” for the first time in 2021. The MEE issued a notice calling for the fourth batch of submissions of the “Outstanding Examples of Beautiful Bay” campaign in June 2025. In response, the HKSAR Government submitted a proposal on Mirs Bay (Hong Kong Section), which is the first time we took part in the campaign. The fourth batch of national “Beautiful Bays”¹ was announced in December 2025, and Mirs Bay in Hong Kong was not only amongst the 32 bays awarded as “Beautiful Bays”, but also selected as an “Outstanding Example of Beautiful Bays” with an excellent overall score. This highlighted the HKSAR Government’s efforts in marine ecological environment protection, while representing its significant achievement in jointly building the GBA into an international, first-class beautiful bay area. Given that Mirs Bay (Shenzhen Section) was selected as a national “Outstanding Example of Beautiful Bays” in 2022, Hong Kong and Shenzhen have now successfully realised the goal of building “Beautiful Bays” for the entire marine waters of Mirs Bay, which serves as an exemplary model for collaborative management of the marine ecological environment across the border.

3. Priority Work Areas in Developing “Beautiful Bays”

3.1 Led by the MEE, the “Beautiful Bays” assessment encompassed multiple assessment criteria, which could be mainly categorised into six areas, namely marine environment, water quality management, ecological conservation, pollution prevention and response, public engagement and green development. Over the past years, the AFCD collaborated with various departments to promote related work and encourage public engagement in marine conservation, jointly driving Mirs Bay towards the national goal of developing “Beautiful Bays” and further consolidating Hong Kong’s important position in regional co-operation on marine ecological conservation. Priority areas of work of the AFCD in Mirs Bay contributing to its successful recognition as one of the “Beautiful Bays” are set out below.

¹ A total of 72 applications were received nationwide. Upon effectiveness evaluation on the development as well as consideration by experts, a total of 32 bays were finally awarded as “Beautiful Bays”, among which 12 (including Mirs Bay in Hong Kong) were selected as “Outstanding Examples of Beautiful Bays”.

Continuous ecological monitoring and strengthening ecological protection

3.2 The AFCD has all along been committed to the protection and management of the marine ecosystems in Hong Kong. The Marine Parks Ordinance, enacted in the 1990s, laid the foundation for the establishment of the first batch of marine parks in Hong Kong. Yan Chau Tong Marine Park (680 hectares, established in 1996) and Tung Ping Chau Marine Park (270 hectares, established in 2001) were designated successively under this ordinance. The AFCD implements the zoning management measures in marine parks, such as designating mooring sites to regulating vessel anchoring. In addition, the AFCD conducts patrols to monitor vessel speed and other illegal activities such as fishing and collection of marine life, with a view to preventing disturbance to corals and ecological habitats.

3.3 To ensure the effectiveness of conservation work, the AFCD conducts continuous ecological monitoring within Mirs Bay (including two marine parks and other key ecological areas). The scope of monitoring covers coral communities and fisheries resources, which provides a scientific basis for conservation work. Mirs Bay encompasses 14 key coral sites, and long-term monitoring results showed that the coral ecosystem remained healthy and stable. In particular, the coral coverage of Tung Ping Chau Marine Park exceeded 70%, reflecting its excellent ecological environment.

3.4 The AFCD is collaborating with research institutions to conduct a trial experiment on coral restoration at Tung Ping Chau using sexually propagated coral juveniles for transplantation, with the aim to increase the genetic diversity of the transplanted corals and effectively enhance coral resilience. A small-scale *in situ* coral nursery at Tung Ping Chau Marine Park was set up in the first quarter of 2025 for one-year monitoring to assess the effectiveness of restoration.

3.5 The AFCD conducts regular surveys on the breeding of White-bellied Sea Eagles in Mirs Bay to observe and record their breeding sites. Data collected includes the distribution of nests and the number of adult and juvenile birds. In addition, the AFCD conducts long-term monitoring of the condition of wetland in Mirs Bay, including using drones to collect mangrove distribution data and conducting ecological surveys on wetland species. The data are released to the public on the Hong Kong Biodiversity Information Hub.

Conserving fisheries resources and promoting sustainable development

3.6 Under the Fisheries Protection Ordinance, trawling and destructive fishing practices such as the use of explosives or toxic substances are completely banned in Hong Kong waters, while the Marine Parks Ordinance prohibits commercial fishing within designated marine parks to safeguard precious marine ecosystems and fisheries resources. Concurrently, the Government is advancing habitat restoration and fisheries resource enhancement measures, which include the deployment of approximately 360 units of artificial reefs with a total volume of about 56 000 cubic metres and conducting restocking exercises in Mirs Bay. The Government is also working with the Shenzhen Municipality to foster recovery of fisheries resources and regional collaborative management, with a view to effectively conserving marine fisheries resources and enhancing ecological value of the Mirs Bay.

3.7 To keep in view the latest situation of the local fisheries resources, the AFCD has launched a Long-Term Fisheries Resources Monitoring Programme since 2025. A research team from a local university has been commissioned to collect fish samples and data across Hong Kong waters, including the waters around Mirs Bay, by employing fishing methods such as longlining, cage trapping, and gill netting, for carrying out analyses on the fish species, weight, abundance, and diversity in local waters.

3.8 Moreover, the Government has established two new fish culture zones (FCZs) in Mirs Bay under the Marine Fish Culture Ordinance, where the environmental carrying capacity of the FCZs is calculated using the water quality model, and modernised aquaculture facilities and techniques, including steel truss cages or HDPE (high-density polyethylene) gravity-type cages with strong wind and wave resistance, are introduced. By exercising stringent control on the stocking density and feeding, eutrophication of water body is reduced effectively. Automated feeding systems equipped with real-time water quality monitoring and surveillance technology are adopted to enable precise aquaculture management, thereby enhancing the efficiency of resource utilisation. These allow fishermen to adopt intensified and high-efficiency modes of operation, facilitating them to switch to modernised and environmentally friendly practices. These measures not only promote the sustainable use of fisheries resources and advance the development of marine economy but also showcase Hong Kong's innovation in and fruits of ecological conservation and sustainable development.

Promoting public engagement to build a “beautiful bay” together

3.9 Enhancing public awareness is vital for marine conservation. We continue to deepen public understanding of marine ecology and enhance their awareness of protecting our marine environment through various channels, such as organising seminars, school and public lectures, eco-tours, citizen science programmes, photography competitions and exhibitions, and producing publicity videos.

3.10 Furthermore, the Marine Ambassador Scheme has trained over 600 youth volunteers to advocate for marine conservation, while the Hong Kong Marine Classroom has been organising school talks, field studies, exhibitions, etc., to enhance the understanding of students and the public on the marine environment. Every summer, the AFCD recruits over 1 000 volunteer divers and ecologists to assist in conducting the Reef Check to continuously monitor and assess the health of coral communities at 33 survey sites (14 of which are in Mirs Bay), for the purpose of providing data for ecological management and raising public awareness of conservation.

3.11 Over the past two years, we have taken the promotion of scientific restocking as an entry point and organised a number of restocking activities to engage with the public. More than 300 students and teachers from primary and secondary schools, representatives from religious groups, fishermen’s associations, and green groups participated in the activities, releasing about 80 000 juvenile fish of native species in total into the waters of Tung Ping Chau Marine Park and Yan Chau Tong Marine Park in Mirs Bay. These activities aim to raise public awareness of the conservation of marine resources and environment, and promote the understanding of the significance of restocking. We also collaborated with Shenzhen to release juvenile fish concurrently in the waters adjacent to the two cities to deepen co-operation and promote conservation of aquatic resources in the GBA.

Promoting earth science and conserving coastal and village traditions

3.12 There are unique landforms and sedimentary rocks on the islands and along the coastal areas in Mirs Bay. They include coastal landforms such as fine laminated siltstone, Kang Lau Shek and Cham Keng Chau on Tung Ping Chau, the sea arch on Ap Chau, and the sandstone and siltstone on the Flame of the Coast of Hung Shek Mun. The AFCD has built trails and interpretation panels along the coasts of Ap Chau and Tung Ping Chau to help the public learn more about the local geology and

geomorphology. A boat tour of the Northeast New Territories Sedimentary Rock Region has also been designed to encourage visitors to enjoy the unique view of Hung Shek Mun, Wong Chuk Kok Tsui and Port Island by boat.

3.13 With many Hakka and fishing settlements, Mirs Bay has developed a distinctive Hakka and fishermen's culture. Hong Kong Geopark has collected and recorded historical stories of Lai Chi Wo, Kat O and Ap Chau in Mirs Bay through oral history and has collaborated with the local communities in setting up Story Rooms and heritage trails with a view to conserving and promoting the culture and intangible cultural heritage of the Hong Kong Geopark communities in an innovative approach while publicising the Code for Visiting the Geopark. Through promoting eco-tourism, villagers who have moved away are encouraged to return to their villages, and visitors are attracted to visit Mirs Bay, to learn and cherish the rich geological, ecological and cultural heritage of the bay area, fostering the sustainable development of the Hong Kong Geopark communities.

3.14 The AFCD launched the "Fish enJoy" Scheme in September 2025 to promote the development of local leisure fisheries and enhance the income of fish farmers. Under the scheme, participating fishing rafts in FCZs at Mirs Bay, Sham Wan and Tap Mun are permitted, in addition to aquaculture, to offer ancillary activities, including leisure fishing, sales of self-cultured fisheries products, and fisheries-related educational activities. These activities not only enrich the visitors' experience in Mirs Bay, but also further reinforce its position as an exemplary model showcasing the harmonious integration of ecology and culture. By combining leisure fisheries with sustainable aquaculture practices, the "Fish enJoy" Scheme has injected new vitality into Mirs Bay, fostering the co-ordinated development and preservation of the local economy and ecology.

4. Way Forward

4.1 Looking forward, the AFCD will continue to take forward marine conservation to protect the local marine ecosystems and biodiversity. The AFCD will also enhance public awareness and support for marine conservation and promote the principle of sustainable use of marine resources. In addition, continued efforts will be made to integrate nature conservation, geological education, leisure fisheries and eco-tourism, and to set up visitor and cultural facilities, with a view to providing unique and characteristic leisure and cultural experiences for locals and visitors while conserving

the nature and local culture and promoting the sustainable development of the Hong Kong Geopark communities.

5. Advice Sought

5.1 Members are invited to note the content of this paper and comment on the above work.

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