

## **COUNTRY AND MARINE PARKS BOARD**

### **Preparation for the Revalidation of Hong Kong Global Geopark in 2015**

#### **1. Purpose**

1.1 The aim of this paper is to inform members of the progress made on the preparation for the revalidation of Hong Kong Global Geopark of China (HKGP) in 2015 and to seek Members' support for the sustainable development of HKGP, in particular the proposed way forward outlined in section 11 below.

#### **2. Background**

2.1 A Global Geopark is recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a single, unified geographical area, where sites and landscapes of international geological significance, verified by scientific professionals, are managed with the holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development. It must have a clearly defined border and be of adequate size to fulfill its functions.

2.2 HKGP is a single entity composed of geo-areas and neighbourhood areas, with roughly 50 km<sup>2</sup> of eight geo-areas under the protection of the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap 208) and Marine Parks Ordinance (Cap 476).

2.3 HKGP was planned and developed using Hong Kong's long established country park system and was officially accepted as a member of the National Geoparks of China in November 2009. It was admitted as a member of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) in September 2011 and is due for revalidation in 2015. To this end, HKGP has been doing preparation work since its initial enlistment in 2011. Some of the major activities from 2011 to 2014 conducive to the revalidation are summarized below.

### **3. Management and Conservation**

3.1 Although HKGP is not specifically a new category of protected area, its eight geo-areas are protected by the Country Parks Ordinance and Marine Parks Ordinance to ensure the most sensitive areas of geological significance are effectively protected and managed.

3.2 In parallel with the management structure of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), a Geopark Division was set up in April 2010, which is responsible for developing and carrying out strategies for conservation planning, science popularisation, global networking, local engagement, development, and improving visitor services and facilities.

3.3 In addition to basic training for staff on geology and geoparks, on-the-job training is continuously arranged, and up-to-date or more in-depth knowledge in areas such as volcanology and paleontology are provided to all staff. We organised a total of 12 tailor-made capacity-building sessions for geopark staff in the past four years. For instance, in 2014, AFCD staff members visited Kitakyushu Museum of Japan, Western Australian Museum, China University of Geosciences (Wuhan) and Dabieshan National Geopark of China to get first-hand experience in geo-tourism and geopark management. Renowned paleontologists from the region were also invited to provide hands-on training, including fossil-cleaning techniques, to HKGP staff.

3.4 Site-management plans have been formulated and are reviewed periodically to meet changing needs. These include regular patrols, enforcement and routine maintenance. To ensure the proper management of the entire geopark, regular land patrols are carried out (on foot or by motorbike), while the remote coastal areas and islands are patrolled using marine park vessels.

3.5 To better manage the operation of HKGP and to gather input from all relevant divisions, a set of guidelines, entitled “Hong Kong Global Geopark Operation Guidelines”, was prepared in 2012. We have recently reviewed and updated the operation guidelines with the help of experts from the Global Geoparks Network for the conservation and management of the geopark, taking into account the release of new GGN statutes and the associated operational guidelines released in July 2014, as well as the deliberations on GGN status at the 6th International UNESCO

Conference on Global Geoparks in September 2014. We conducted workshops and regular inspections every year over the last four years to ensure that the quality of management work remains high and that the relevant staff are well aware of the objectives and requirements of their daily operations.

#### **4. Geopark Branding Visibility**

4.1 One of the key requirements of the GGN is that visitors would be given a clear understanding that HKGP is a member of both the China Geoparks Network (CGN) and the GGN. In order to ensure the identity of HKGP is clearly visible to visitors and local residents to effectively promote geopark branding, the geopark logo is displayed on our website, in our publications, and at our visitor centres and other facilities.

4.2 We have conducted numerous brand-new GGN-related initiatives to promote geopark branding and community awareness over the years, including providing visitors with innovative promotion materials, such as interactive e-books and a photo album with 3D pop-ups, and ensured the provision of a high quality tourist experience in HKGP in collaboration with non-government organizations (NGOs), local publishers, public buses and local boat operators.

4.3 We also initiated global E-classroom sessions starting in 2012, using the internet to enable presenters to provide real-time science-transfer sessions for teachers, students and geopark staff in different countries and regions. This initiative, which was new to the GGN, resulted in over 20 sessions a year in both 2013 and 2014. On 17 October 2014, for instance, we co-organised a global e-class session with English Riviera Global Geopark of the United Kingdom, bringing together representatives from schools spanning five Global Geoparks in the European Geoparks Network and a Natural Park in France.

4.4 On 24 July 2014, Hong Kong Post (HKPO) launched a new set of definitive stamps in 16 different denominations with "Hong Kong Global Geopark of China" as the design theme. These beautifully designed philatelic materials, which comprise the world's first definitive stamp set featuring a global geopark, display the unique natural environment of Hong Kong to the world, as well as popularising earth science and contributing to the promotion of the global geopark movement.

## **5. Local Engagement**

5.1 Local engagement is an important requirement of the GGN. The 2014 opening of the Hong Kong Global Geopark Volcano Discovery Centre (HKGP VDC) has set a good example for local engagement, with a local, self-sustaining community organization engaged in the planning and operation of the Centre.

5.2 Another partnership scheme is underway in the northeast part of Hong Kong to improve geosite access. Local communities were engaged during the planning stage of the project. In addition to the engineering aspects, the partnership scheme includes local engagement activities.

5.3 We have established a public-private partnership with two hotels. All hotel staff have received basic geopark training. The lobbies and selected rooms are decorated with the geopark theme and have geopark videos, and specially designed geopark menus to promote HKGP. To ensure that the partnership meets GGN requirements, an annual inspection was completed in October 2014. Special cooking classes for geopark gourmet will also be offered by the two hotels in 2015.

5.4 To run geoheritage centres and produce science-popularisation materials about HKGP, we work in partnership with local communities, NGOs and the local business sector, including the Association for Geoconservation, Hong Kong (AGHK), the Lions Nature Education Foundation, the Friends of the Country Parks, the Environmental Association Ltd., the Sai Kung District Community Centre, the Fung Ying Seen Koon and the Bank of China (Hong Kong) Ltd. The geopark provides capacity-building support for local communities and NGOs during the initial stage, after which the local communities and NGOs operate the centres independently. This operation model has been found to be cost-effective and sustainable.

## **6. Accessible Geopark Information**

6.1 To ensure Geopark information is readily accessible and reliable, HKGP has proactively engaged academics and geologists to carry out geological and paleontological surveys in Hong Kong. The knowledge and materials acquired from these studies, along with our continuous collaboration with leading institutes, such as the University of Geosciences (Beijing), Nanjing Center, China Geological Survey,

Hong Kong's Civil Engineering and Development Department, and Japan's Tsukuba Geological Museum and other scientific institutes, were of great benefit in establishing the HKGP VDC and other science-popularisation projects.

6.2 The HKGP website is one of the major means for the public to obtain information about HKGP. It also represents the image of HKGP to overseas visitors. The website has been well received and was voted an "Excellent Website" for two consecutive years. In late 2012, we launched a newly revamped HKGP website, providing more comprehensive and easily understandable information for tourists and teachers who are looking for tourist information and educational activities, respectively.

6.3 YouTube and other video platforms also provide an effective way to reach a wider section of the public, especially youngsters. We have so far produced a total of 34 video clips on different themes, which are available on the HKGP YouTube channel. The channel has generated 126,419 views since November 2010.

## **7. Visitor Centres**

7.1 In 2013 and 2014, we renewed and enhanced the exhibits in our displays at the Lions Nature Education Centre, the Endangered Species Resource Centre and the Woodside Biodiversity Education Centre with the findings and knowledge acquired through geological surveys. Two new fossil corners showing the different geological ages and how their respective fossils relate to typical living organisms were created.

7.2 The HKGP VDC was recently opened at the gateway to the geopark to publicize HKGP, to promote science popularisation, and to provide tourist information and services. The centre provides free guided tours of the exhibits, which are open for registration to the public. It also offers visitor one-stop registration for various geopark guided tours.

7.3 The exhibits in the HKGP Visitor Centre introducing the Sai Kung Volcanic Rock Region are being enriched with new findings acquired from on-going geological studies. This will be followed in 2015 by the renewal of part of the existing exhibits to introduce the geological history of Hong Kong and the GGN.

7.4 To cultivate a wider audience base and to enhance the educational elements in public museums, HKGP has joined hands with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department to establish a Paleontology Gallery and Earth Science Gallery in the Hong Kong Science Museum. These permanent exhibitions, which are expected to be complete by mid-2020, will showcase the abundant biodiversity of the ancient world and depict the underlying mechanisms that drive our dynamic planet.

## **8. Science Popularisation**

8.1 With the growth of our internet-based social media platform, HKGP has migrated from traditional media to a multi-platform strategy. This multi-platform approach has helped HKGP disseminate information to its target audience and solicit feedback from geopark users effectively, while giving the content a personal touch.

8.2 Back in the 2011-12, we made our first attempt to explain geology in comic format and produced two sizes of Geofolks products: a big doll and small key ring. We also designed and produced Geofolks papercraft with ideas and assistance from Japan's Itoigawa Geopark, one of our sister geoparks.

8.3 In 2012, we published a photo album entitled *Through the Lens – A Tour of Hong Kong Global Geopark*. Showcasing Hong Kong Global Geopark with 3D pop-ups and interactive gimmicks, the album emphasizes an enjoyable hands-on experience, something which virtual means, such as electronic books, cannot provide. The album presents a holistic visual overview of the geopark.

8.4 We produced an enhanced edition of our *Handbook for Geopark Guides*, with voice-over in Cantonese, English, Putonghua, Japanese and Korean. This handbook, published in March 2013, helps geopark guides learn the correct wording and pronunciation of different terms, so that they can provide quality interpretation to visitors.

8.5 All information boards and interpretation panels in the geopark are periodically reviewed and updated, in order to incorporate the latest research findings, and more importantly, to adjust and enhance the information according to visitors' needs. All panels were updated for the second time in 2011 and a "Geo-lexicon" corner was added in 2014.

8.6 Electronic books have become very popular among all ages worldwide. To keep up with this trend and to reach a broader audience, not only in Hong Kong but also across the globe, HKGP published three e-books in 2014, one of which promotes all 29 global geoparks of China, with photos and video clips.

8.7 School education is one of the major focuses of HKGP. Instead of one-off individual education activities, the geopark has organised a Geopark School Programme, which attracted the participation of over 16,000 students from 21 schools in 2014-15. The participating schools and their students also joined the “Geopark Youth Mentoring Scheme” to share with their fellow students the knowledge and information they acquired in the School Programme.

8.8 To promote the geopark concept and to communicate geo-scientific knowledge to university students, we arranged four geopark talks in late 2014 by experts, academics and young scientists from various research institutes and universities. We are also working with the Stephen Hui Geological Museum of the University of Hong Kong for mutual promotion and enhancement of their exhibits through the use of our digital skills.

## **9. Geotourism**

9.1 HKGP is conveniently located within a 45-minute drive from the city centre. According to our records, HKGP received over 1.4 million local and overseas visitors in the early days of the establishment of the geopark. The number of visitors has remained stable in recent years.

9.2 HKGP has continued to work closely with the tourism industry and other relevant stakeholders to encourage and facilitate the sustainable development of geotourism and to enhance the visitor experience by attracting, educating and immersing local and international visitors in the geological wonders, and other natural and cultural riches of HKGP.

9.3 HKGP takes every step to ensure the quality of its Geopark guides and the services they deliver. We have joined hands with AGHK and the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong to manage a Recommended Geopark Guides

(R2G)/Accredited Geopark Guides (A2G) system, supported by continuing education, and re-assessments for quality assurance. There are currently 39 R2Gs and four A2Gs in HKGP. To meet visitors' needs, the R2G system is regularly reviewed. On-going training and relevant courses are provided to geopark guides to help them qualify for a valid licence in travel and tourism.

9.4 In collaboration with the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb), promotional leaflets on HKGP are now available at the HKTb tourist counters at Hong Kong International Airport, Luohu, and popular tourist areas, such as the Peak and Tsim Sha Tsui. Over 1.2 million leaflets with recommended itineraries and information on the HKGP had been distributed by the end of 2014. Concerted effort was made with the HKTb to promote HKGP and other natural attractions in Hong Kong, including arranging press tours for media and direct promotion to overseas operators.

9.5 To tie in with the HKTb's Promotional Programmes on green tourism, HKGP supported the organization of the first Asia Pacific Geotourism Conference in Hong Kong in November 2013.

## **10. Exchange and Sharing**

10.1 HKGP treasures every opportunity to share experience with other geoparks for the betterment of the GGN. Since becoming a global geopark, HKGP has established partnership arrangements with eight sister geoparks and three cooperation partners including Yandangshan Global Geopark, Wudalianchi Global Geopark in China; Kanawinka Geopark in Australia; English Riverera Global Geopark in United Kingdom; Itoigawa Global Geopark, Unzen Global Geopark and Aso Global Geopark in Japan; Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark in Northern Ireland, Bergstrasse-Odenwald Global Geopark and Messel Pit World Heritage Site in Germany and Lesvos Global Geopark in Greece. We have undertaken various cooperation initiatives with them which resulted in mutual and observable benefits. Major activities organised with our sister geoparks, cooperation partners and other members of the geopark networks are summarized below.

10.2 At regional level, HKGP assisted the Office of the CGN in organizing an exhibition entitled "10th Anniversary of China's Global Geoparks" at Stonehammer Geopark during the 6th International UNESCO Conference on Global Geoparks in September 2014.

10.3 In late 2014, HKGP was invited to visit Tianzhushan Global Geopark, Qinling Zongnanshan Global Geopark and Dabieshan National Geopark of China, which were preparing for their global geopark revalidation and assessment.

10.4 The Annual Student Exchange Programme jointly organised by HKGP and the Itoigawa Global Geopark is an example of successful, long-term sister-geopark activities. Students from HKGP visited geoparks in Japan in 2013, and the upcoming 2015 visit to Japan by Hong Kong students will be the fifth visit in a row. This Student Exchange Programme has not only fostered continuous collaboration and science transfer between Global Geoparks in the Asia Pacific (AP) Region but has also broadened the horizons of the students involved.

10.5 Since 2012, HKGP has organised annual roundtable conferences and workshops for geopark managers, which have provided opportunities for our sister geoparks and cooperative partners to gather and share our latest initiatives and contributions in the GGN. Participant feedback has indicated that these roundtable conferences serve as a valuable platform for knowledge exchange and experience sharing among geoparks from the AP region and around the world.

10.6 To play an active role in the AP region and to share our experience in the management and development of a world-class geopark, HKGP, with the support of the Asia Pacific Geoparks Network (APGN), coordinated a series of APGN workshops on the theme “Learning with GGN Partners” in Japan, Beijing and Hong Kong in 2014. HKGP representatives moderated a panel discussion entitled “Midas Touch – Can We?” during the workshops.

10.7 In February 2014, HKGP was invited by the Messel Pit World Heritage Site, Germany to be a keynote speaker at a workshop entitled "Earth Discovery Concepts, Geo-Education & Science Transfer in Science Societies" and to share with the workshop participants the science-popularisation work of the CGN.

## **11. Latest Developments and the Way Forward**

11.1 The status of each global geopark is subject to a thorough revalidation every four years after its first enlistment. To ensure continued eligibility as a global Geopark, HKGP will keep contributing actively to the GGN and remain committed to its long term goals and better quality services.

11.2 The comprehensive legal framework of Hong Kong's Country Park and Marine Park system has ensured the sustainability of the protected areas in Hong Kong and will continue to act as the foundation for the conservation and protection of HKGP. To ensure the effectiveness of the protection and management of HKGP, operation guidelines and management plans for HKGP will be reviewed and updated regularly taking into account the development of the GGN and the changing needs of geopark visitors.

11.3 Engagement with local communities and other relevant stakeholders, together with global networking in the GGN, remain two essential requirements for maintaining the global geopark status of HKGP. Real improvements to local communities through more partnership projects and capacity building are anticipated.

11.4 HKGP has established partnership arrangements with eight sister geoparks and three cooperation partners as mentioned above in Section 10. Various activities of mutual benefits have been organised together with our sister geoparks. In 2015, HKGP will provide more capacity-building opportunities for young geopark managers in the region with "Image Building and Publicity" as the theme. These training sessions to tie with changing needs will contribute to the geopark movement by bringing new momentum to the regional and global networks.

11.5 We will continue to actively support the Ministry of Land and Resources (MLR) and APGN in the training of geopark managers, and in science-popularisation workshops, targeting Mainland manager-grade staff. The relevant Mainland authorities, including the MLR, Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office, and Chinese National Commission for UNESCO, have indicated their full recognition of our work. By sharing our experience, we aim to contribute to the networks by further promoting HKGP as an intellectual hub for networking and helping other members in the region achieve their science-popularisation goals.

## **12. Advice Sought**

12.1 Members are invited to offers views and comments on the planning and on-going work that are conducive to the sustainable development of HKGP as well as the Global Geopark revalidation in 2015 as stated above.

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department**  
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