

## Comprehensive coastal conservation plan introduced for Ting Kok

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The Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, said today (October 25) that the Government believed development and conservation could go hand-in-hand and that there was a win-win solution for the Lung Mei Beach works project.

While going ahead with the beach works project, Mr Tsang noted that proactive initiatives would also be taken to launch the Ting Kok Coastal Conservation Plan, providing a comprehensive and integrated conservation plan for the entire Ting Kok coastline.

The Home Affairs Bureau, Environment Bureau and relevant departments held a press conference today to explain the Government's position on the construction of Lung Mei Beach and conservation of Ting Kok coastline.

Mr Tsang said the Government understood the good intentions of local green groups, noting their care for Hong Kong's environment as well as their love for nature and diversity of species. With the principle of "people-based governance" in mind, relevant departments have, in response to the concerns of the green groups and various individuals, seriously reviewed again the vetting process for the Lung Mei Beach works project, discussing over and over again all the views, including those concerning the ecology and water quality of Lung Mei as well as the needs of the local community.

"We believe that development and conservation can go hand-in-hand and there is always a win-win solution. In this connection, we propose to take proactive initiatives to preserve the ecological environment of the Ting Kok coastline while going ahead with the Lung Mei Beach works project," Mr Tsang added.

He said at the moment, the Government was evaluating the tender submissions after which construction would start. While it is expected that the beach will be open during the swimming season of 2015, the Government has also decided to provide a comprehensive and integrated conservation plan for the entire Ting Kok coastline.

The Under Secretary for the Environment, Ms Christine Loh, said, "The recent public attention over Lung Mei has stimulated the Government to enhance protection of ecology at the 'Sites of Special Scientific Interest' (SSSI) at Ting Kok East and Ting Kok. The Government will commence immediately a new Ting Kok Coastal

Conservation Plan (Ting Kok Plus), which is a new plan to protect the ecology of the area for the long-term."

The plan covers various perspectives including long-term conservation for the whole Ting Kok area, Tolo Harbour and Tolo Channel, monitoring of water quality of Shuen Wan Hoi and also takes into account the education value of the whole area. The Environment Bureau will lead an inter-bureau and departmental process to work out implementation details, as well as to engage interested people and groups who can share their views and expertise.

Ms Loh said, "The Government believes that the planning and realisation of 'Ting Kok Plus' will set a standard for public engagement and government-community collaboration, with a view to strengthening ecological protection and education works with joint efforts."

The Environment Bureau will organise an initial engagement session with interested parties to work on an improved ecological protection plan for the Ting Kok area and its SSSI within this year.

On the need for developing a public beach at Lung Mei, the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services, Mrs Betty Fung, said, "In 2011, the 41 gazetted public beaches managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) recorded a total attendance of over 11 million, which is much higher than the total attendance of 9.5 million in the 41 public swimming pools. This clearly shows the high public demand for beach facilities. Tai Po and its neighbouring districts (including Sha Tin and North District) together had a population of over 1.25 million but there is not a single public beach facility in any of the three districts, and the fun of beach-going cannot be easily replaced by swimming pools. The provision of a beach at Lung Mei, together with the existing recreational and leisure facilities in Tai Mei Tuk, will provide more attractions for visitors."

Mrs Fung noted that Tai Po District Council (DC) had strenuously urged for the construction of a public beach at Lung Mei. Since the then Chief Executive announced the project in his Policy Address in January 2005, the Government had actively followed up with the project and formally consulted the Tai Po DC 14 times. The project was also discussed at various meetings of the DC and its committees more than 70 times. The project has all along been listed as the top priority leisure and cultural project by the DC. Various DC members have given their full support for the

project on various occasions and urged for its early implementation.

Since the initiation of the project, there have been ample opportunities for various sectors of society, including the environmental concern groups, to voice their opinion at various stages of the consultation process, which was not limited to district level. Upon the receipt of the views, the Government has gone through the various statutory procedures to consult, respectively, the Advisory Council on the Environment, the Town Planning Board, the Chief Executive-in-Council and the Legislative Council. The Government subsequently revised the project scale and came up with mitigation measures to minimise the impact that the project may cause to the environment.

On the habitat management of the beach construction, the Deputy Head of Civil Engineering Office, Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD), Mr Robin Lee, said "The CEDD submitted an environmental impact assessment report for the project in 2008. Taking into account the recommendations of the Advisory Council on the Environment, we have conducted additional ecological surveys, reduced the scope of the project, revised the beach design, and undertaken to adopt mitigation measures during construction in order to minimise the impact on the marine ecology due to the project. Subsequently, the Environmental Protection Department issued an Environmental Permit (EP) for the project in 2010."

According to the EP, the contractor shall remove of rocks/hard objects in the intertidal zone before commencement of the works and the area shall not exceed 10 square metres for each removal. The "cleared" areas shall then be properly fenced off immediately. Fish specialists will check the areas before fencing off to ensure that none of the three fish species with conservation importance are trapped within the enclosed areas. Relevant work will only be carried out during low tide periods.

Mr Lee said, "We are aware public concerns on environmental protection and the translocation of species of creatures found at Lung Mei. We have adopted a 'Conservation before Construction' principle in implementing the project. Consultants were therefore engaged in early 2012 to conduct further study and design the marine ecological mitigation measures. The scope includes conducting detailed ecological surveys and identifying suitable reception sites; designing mitigation measures and incorporating them into the tender documents for compliance by the contractor; carrying site trials for the proposed mitigation measures; and providing training to site supervisory staff. Upon commencement of the construction works, we will continue to communicate with green groups, such as inviting them to oversee the translocation

of creatures to Ting Kok East, etc."

On the water quality of the beach, the Deputy Director of Environment Protection, Mr Tse Chin-wan, said, "To improve water quality, the Government is providing a new sewerage network in Lung Mei and its vicinity. The construction is underway and will complete in 2013."

As an increasing number of dwellings have been connected to public sewers, the water quality of Lung Mei has shown marked improvement recently, from Grade 4 between the beginning and mid-2012 to Grade 2 in recent weeks. Hence, the Government is confident that upon the opening of Lung Mei Beach to the public in 2015, the water quality will be up to the required standard. The Environmental Protection Department will continue to conduct water quality monitoring and publish the monitoring results regularly.

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