

2 June 2021

Hong Kong lacks in marine spatial planning and actions to achieve UN conservation goal

“Befriend the Ocean” campaign and petition launched by concerned groups ahead of UN World Oceans Day

Concern groups urge the Government to expand marine protected area by 10 times and cease unsustainable development plans

8th June is the United Nations “World Oceans Day”. With more and more threats faced by our ocean, it is more urgent than ever that we act together to protect our ocean. One of the targets set in the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is to protect 10% of the world’s ocean by 2020, limiting any further damage to marine ecosystems from anthropogenic activities. In Hong Kong, only less than 3% of waters are protected, which highlights the lag in government actions to protect marine habitats and the lack of marine spatial planning, which have led to endless conflicts between urban development and conservation, threatening to destroy our highly-biodiverse marine habitats. Today, the “Befriend the Ocean Working Group” with other environmental concern groups launched an online petition campaign, urging the government to cease development projects that impact marine ecosystems. “Befriend the Ocean Working Group” already set up a social media page to promote different educational events aiming to encourage the public to participate in marine conservation, reconnect the people with the ocean through raising awareness and getting more involved, be friends with the ocean.

As a member of the international communities, Hong Kong has the obligation to conserve marine habitats and biodiversity. Mr. Eddie Tse, Convener of Save Lantau Alliance, said, “In 2010, the United Nations published a strategic and actions plan in the ‘Aichi Biodiversity Targets and Biodiversity Indicators’, in which participated parties and governments agreed to follow the framework designed to reduce damage to ecosystems. Establishing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in at least 10% of the waters is one of the targets within the framework. However, only less than 3% of Hong Kong waters are protected, which failed to meet the 10% target set by the strategic and actions plan.”

Mr. Eddie Tse, Convener of Save Lantau Alliance, added, “Nearly 6,000 marine species have been recorded in Hong Kong. In east Lantau alone, there are already many precious species, including the White-bellied sea eagle and sea pen. Unfortunately, not only does the Environmental Bureau lack any specific plan to expand current MPAs, various promised actions

are also way behind schedule. The reclamation projects, Lantau Tomorrow Vision, proposed by the government will definitely lead to irreversible damage to the ecosystem.”

The use of marine sand in reclamation projects has exacerbated the deterioration of the marine environment. Mr. Carter Lau, Research Officer of Green Sense, said, “Facing the enormous demand of marine sand by reclamation works, contractors are presented with two choices: Importing marine sand from mainland China or Southeast Asia, or replacing a portion of marine sand fill with artificial sand. Both are equally destructive, as the former causes multiple pollution of oceans, while the latter leads to the suspension of fine rock dust in the water, resulting in unacceptable deterioration of the local marine environment.”

The extent of marine habitat protection in Hong Kong is far from reaching the international target. Ms. Angel Lam, Oceans Conservation Manager of WWF-Hong Kong, said, “Currently, with only less than 3% of the waters are under protection, even with the establishment of currently planned marine parks and all actions in the ‘Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2016-21)’ reached, the area of MPAs will still be significantly lower than the 10% target of the CBD, far from enough to fulfil Hong Kong's obligation in conservation towards China and the international community, not to mention the target to protect 30% of the marine habitat by 2030 currently campaigned by the international communities. Hong Kong desperately needs to review its marine conservation policy, implement marine spatial planning and increase MPAs by at least 10 times to reach the international target of preserving marine biodiversity, which can provide the much-needed protection to threatened marine species and highly biodiverse habitats.”

Hong Kong urgently needs to step up its legislation in marine habitat protection and review its current marine spatial planning. Ms Viena Mak, Vice-chairman of Hong Kong Dolphin Conservation Society, said, “Hong Kong waters serve as important habitats for different marine mammals. With the increase in marine development projects, occurrences of Chinese white dolphins and finless porpoises have been on a steady decline, even in nearby marine parks, which are designated to protect those species. Currently, the extent of marine protections done by the government has failed to compensate for the vast damages done by anthropogenic activities, due to several problems and limitations within the government’s strategies of marine habitat protection. Firstly, the current marine protected area is small in area and fragmented, which failed to protect ecological corridors and important habitats. Furthermore, the progress of establishing marine protected areas is worryingly slow, since marine habitats require a prolonged period to restore, if the ecosystem is disturbed by development in advance of any

significant recovery, habitat restoration will either be nearly impossible or consume a lot more resources and time. The government should speed up the establishment of new MPAs and extend current ones, halt planned marine development and evaluate loopholes in the current ecological impact assessment system, and reroute marine traffic in Lantau Island to relieve pressure on marine habitat.

Mr. Oscar Lai, Member of Bonum: Christians Caring for Creation, reiterated, “Many environmental organisations and concern groups initiate the ‘Befriend the Ocean’ online petition campaign, we call for the public to participate and urge the government to acknowledge the importance of marine conservation policies, begin the discussion in marine spatial planning with different stockholders, including environmental organisations, research groups, marine resources users and grassroots concern groups, work together to come out with a timeline for marine protection-related legislation, to fulfil the responsibility promised in the CBD to increase MPAs to at least 10%, increase the area to 30% by 2030 and terminate ecologically damaging marine development project immediately.”

Mr. Ng Wai-chiu, Member of Management Board of Hong Kong Christian Institute, said, “Upon the ‘World Oceans Day’ in 8th June, we use this opportunity to promote the importance of marine conservation and awareness on Hong Kong’s marine biodiversity, ‘Befriend the Ocean Working Group’ have established pages on socialmedia, to promote upcoming marine awareness activities by different NGOs, including kayaking, sand painting, outdoor sketching, ocean-themed carnival, movie screening, sharing and workshops. We welcome the public to participate in these events throughout June, and work together to conserve our precious ocean.”

“Befriend the Ocean” Petition Campaign :

Period: 2/6 - 26/6

Website:

<https://www.supporthk.org/?petition=conserve-marine-biodiversity-support-marine-spatial-planning&lang=en>

Facebook page for “Befriend the Ocean”

<https://www.facebook.com/BefriendTheOcean/>

Timetable for ‘Befriend the Ocean’ June’s public events:

Date	Event	Location	Organisation
Online events:			
2/6-26/6	Online petition	Online	
6/6	《Breathing room》 Chinese white dolphin documentary screening and Marine Spatial Planning sharing	Online	Co-host by Hong Kong Dolphin Conservation Society, Liber Research Community, Save Lantau Alliance Enquiry: https://www.facebook.com/HKDCSorg/
8/6	FInless porpoise origami workshop	Online	Hong Kong Dolphin Conservation Society Enquiry: https://www.facebook.com/HKDCSorg/
8/6	WWF 《Sea of Noise》 Chinese white dolphin documentary online screening	Online	WWF-Hong Kong Enquiry: https://space.hk01.com/event/60b0c4eb06c0cd0019588904
Indoor events:			
5/6 -6/6	《Ocean Celebration》 carnival	WWF-HK Hoi Ha Marine Life Centre	WWF-Hong Kong Enquiry: https://apps.wwf.org.hk/cf/hhw
6/6	World Ocean day sharing session	Tai O	Lantau Culture Workshop Enquiry: https://www.facebook.com/LantauCultureWorkshop/
23/6	《The Island President》 screening and sharing (English subtitle)	TBC	Bonum: Christians Caring for Creation Enquiry: 2560 3865
26/6	Book discussion club	Jordan	Liber Research Community Enquiry: info@liber-research.com

Outdoor events:			
8/6, 12/6, 12/6, 20/6	Kayaking experiences	Tai O	Lantau Culture Workshop Enquiry: https://www.facebook.com/LantauCultureWorkshop/
26/6	Sand painting workshop	TBC	Concerning Grassroots' Housing Rights Alliance Enquiry: https://www.facebook.com/grassrootshousing

Timetable for 'Befriends the Ocean' private events:

Date	Event	Organisation
2/6	East Lantau Vessel survey	Befriend the Ocean Working Group
6/6-9/6	Kayating trip	RoundHK360
21/6	「潯島」 kayating/surfing	Chan Kin-wing
28/6	Sketching Tour	Co-host by Befriend the Ocean Working Group, Wahayeah Sketch Group

The petition co-initiated by the following groups and individuals (in no particular order, members of “Befriend the Ocean Working Group”)

Groups: 350HK, WWF-Hong Kong, Save Lantau Alliance, Hong Kong Dolphin Conservation Society, Hong Kong Christian Institute, Bonum: Christians Caring for Creation, Greenpeace East Asia - Hong Kong office, Green Sense, **Individual:** Past. Chan Kin-wing

— End —

Remark : The press release is jointly issued by 350HK, Eco-Education and Resources Centre, WWF-Hong Kong, Save Lantau Alliance, Ecology and Biodiversity Society, SS, HKUSU, Hong Kong Dolphin Conservation Society, Hong Kong Christian Institute, Bonum: Christians Caring for Creation, Greenpeace East Asia – Hong Kong office, Green Power, Greener Action, SupoortHK Environmental Petition Platform, Green Sense and Past. Chan Kin-wing.

Appendix A

In 2018, WWF with local academics and experts selected seven of Hong Kong's most ecologically sensitive waters as "Hong Kong Marine Priority Sites", with the aim of providing recommendations for decision makers on the most appropriate conservation measures for each site and helping Hong Kong achieve the target of protecting 10% its waters.

[Seven Marine Protected Areas recommended by WWF - shaded area in blue below]

(The map was created based on the ecological data as of 2018. The absence of sites mentioned does not mean that they are of low ecological value, but may be due to the lack of research data for comprehensive consideration, e.g. the Central Waters.)



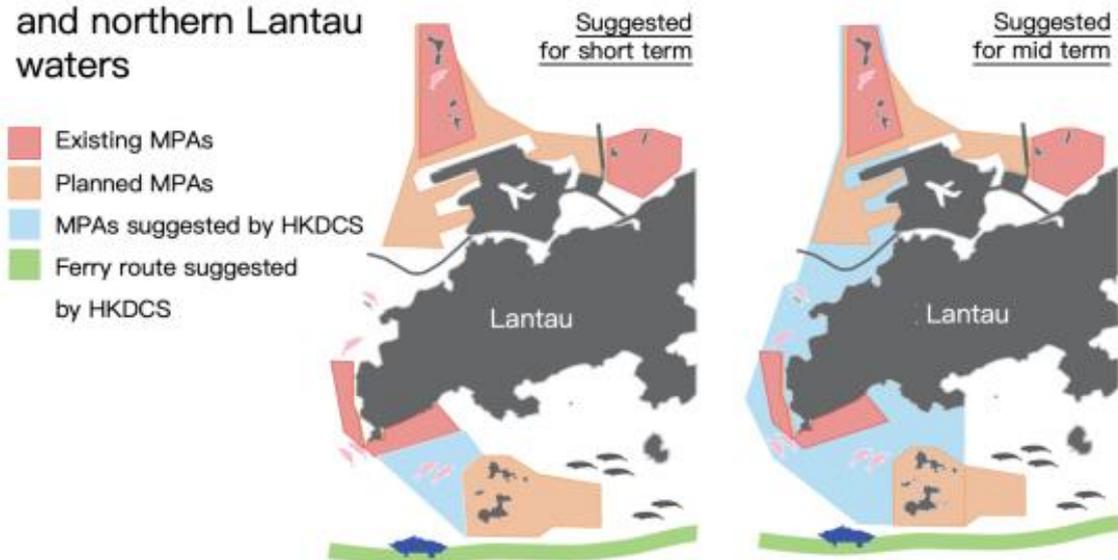
Learn more: <https://www.wwf.org.hk/oceans/protection/>

Appendix B

In 2017, Hong Kong Dolphin Conservation Society gave marine spatial planning recommendations based on AFCDC dolphin monitoring past data to protect cetaceans in Hong Kong waters. It included the rerouting of ferry lanes and expansion of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

(The map was created based on the ecological data as of 2017. The absence of sites mentioned does not mean that they are of low ecological value, but may be due to the lack of research data for comprehensive consideration, e.g. the Central Waters.)

Southern, western and northern Lantau waters



Learn more: <https://hk.hkdcs.org/saving-the-handover-mascot/online-petition/>