

COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Public Engagement on Promotion of Sustainable Use of Biological Resources

Purpose

This paper seeks Members' views on the proposal to proceed with a public engagement exercise on the promotion of sustainable use of biological resources.

Background

2. Over-exploitation of biological resources¹ has become one of the main threats to global and regional biodiversity. A case in point is over-fishing. According to an estimate from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization ("FAO")², over 70% of the world's fish species are either fully exploited or depleted. The dramatic increase of unsustainable fishing practices worldwide has great impact on marine fauna and their habitats. On land, some wild animals and plants are under the pressure of over-harvesting. For instance, over consumption of paper adds pressure to our natural forests and the wildlife therein. There is now worldwide recognition that the unsustainable practices should be halted and actions taken to sustainably manage and protect our natural biological resources, and that promoting sustainable procurement and consumption practices is an effective and essential tool to achieve this.

¹ According to the Convention on Biological Diversity, biological resources are genetic resources, organisms or parts thereof, populations, or any other biotic component of ecosystems with actual or potential use or value for humanity.

² See www.un.org/events/tenstories/06/story.asp?storyID=800.

3. Different nations have adopted different policies and measures to encourage sustainable practices. These range from product bans, taxes and subsidies, to provision of information and various forms of encouragement to induce behavioural change, such as eco-labelling, consumer guidelines, on-line information, education and publicity, etc.

4. Despite its population only accounting for about 0.1% of the world's population, Hong Kong's unique position as a major trading hub and a world city famous for its food means that our activities may lead to potential impacts on some species of plants and animals, at the regional or global level. Using seafood as an example, Hong Kong is the second largest per capita consumer of fish and fishery products in Asia and the seventh largest in the world³. About 293 000 tonnes of fisheries produce⁴ was consumed in Hong Kong in 2014, 76% of which was imported. In addition, it was estimated that Hong Kong accounted for 70% to 80% of the regional trade in live reef food fish ("LRFF")⁵. This means that the pattern Hong Kong purchases and consumes seafood could have a significant impact on the marine ecosystem.

5. While the consumption of biological resources in our daily lives can entail significant implications on sustainability, public awareness on and knowledge about sustainable consumption is generally low. At the same time, there are different stakeholders in the entire supply and consumption chain, from producers, suppliers, importers, retail outlets, to restaurants, caterers, and the general public. Collaboration among stakeholders along the chain would be important to encourage sustainable consumption.

³ Based on 2011 figures in FAO Yearbook 2012. Figures include capture and aquaculture (both freshwater and marine) fish and fishery products that are fresh, iced, chilled or frozen, cured or canned.

⁴ Figures include capture and aquaculture (both freshwater and marine) fisheries produce. Fisheries produce includes live/chilled/frozen fin fish and shellfish only but excludes fish fillet, meat, liver, roe and processed products such as dried, salted and smoked products.

⁵ Hansen, A. et al., 2011. Greening China's Fish and Fish Products Market Supply Chains, International Institute for Sustainable Development.

Proposed Public Engagement

6. We see a case for Hong Kong to pursue more sustainable consumption and concerted action from the entire community is necessary. It is recommended that the Council for Sustainable Development (“SDC”) should take on promotion of sustainable consumption of biological resources as its next public engagement (“PE”) topic for the following reasons:

- (a) Hong Kong accounts for a significant portion of the consumption and trade of some of the biological resources that are under the threat of over-exploitation. Many of the biological resources that Hong Kong people commonly consume do not come from sustainable sources. As a global citizen, Hong Kong should contribute towards global efforts to achieve sustainable consumption;
- (b) the public awareness on and knowledge about sustainable consumption is not high. There is a need to enhance the work on these aspects; and
- (c) with the well-established bottom-up and stakeholder-led approach in its PE exercise, SDC is well placed to develop strategies that could help foster sustainable consumption.

7. The proposed PE exercise could be a significant step in raising public awareness and foster sustainable consumption. Enhanced awareness could eventually drive changes in consumer behaviour and provide market incentives for the supply of commodities and food from sustainable sources. Specifically, the PE’s objectives could be as follows:

- (a) enhance public awareness on sustainable consumption;
- (b) foster changes in consumer behaviour towards sustainability;
- (c) encourage supply from sustainable sources;
- (d) promote cooperation among different sectors of the society with a view to encouraging and facilitating sustainable consumption; and

- (e) formulate recommendations on strategies and measures to promote behaviour change for sustainable consumption of biological resources in the community.

8. The PE exercise could provide a platform to help solicit support from the public and relevant stakeholders for measures to promote the sustainable use of biological resources. It could seek to identify the barriers to and impediments of sustainable consumption, reveal opportunities and possible measures as identified by stakeholders as well as the general public, and allow the public to deliberate on potential measures. Possible deliverables might include a community wide promotion strategy on sustainable use of biological resources, development of voluntary eco-labelling schemes, and charter or commitment by relevant trades for supply of biological resources from sustainable sources.

9 As the PE exercise is to promote behaviour change for sustainable consumption of biological resources, the focus should be on arousing understanding of the principles and facilitating adoption of such behaviour change in consumption. On the other hand, it may be helpful to arouse discussion in the PE exercise by citing some species which are generally known and/or consumed in the local community but are subject to the risk of over-exploitation as illustration, such as:

- (a) Wild caught seafood

This could include LRFF (such as Humphead Wrasse (蘇眉), Giant Grouper (龍躉), Tiger Grouper (虎斑), High-finned Grouper (老鼠斑), Flowery Grouper (杉斑)) and Bluefin Tuna (藍鰭吞拿魚). Local consumption of these species is high but there are alternative sources such as from sustainable fisheries / aquaculture (either of the same species or different species with similar properties) to meet market demand. Introduction and promotion of voluntary eco-labelling schemes may help the public to identify and buy seafood from sustainable sources.

(b) Sharks

There are about 500 species of shark in the world. Eight species of sharks are currently listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (“CITES”)⁶ and trading is already regulated. Some other species are listed as threatened under the International Union for Conservation (“IUCN”) Red List of Threatened Species. As it would not be easy for consumers to identify different species of sharks in the market, it may be more appropriate to raise public awareness on the conservation of sharks in general.

(c) Wild caught animals/collected plants which are commonly used as Chinese health soup ingredients

Some ingredients used in Chinese health soup are derived from animals caught or plants collected in the wild. The pressure of consumption has led to the depletion of the wild populations of some species. Many species are listed as threatened under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, listed in the appendices of the CITES, and/or protected under national legislation. Species that could be used as examples to raise public awareness include Black Moss (髮菜) (wild plant under priority State protection (category I), 國家重點保護野生植物名錄(I 級)), Pangolins (穿山甲) (CITES Appendix II), and Asian Box Turtles (閉殼龜) (including Chinese Three-lined Box Turtle (金錢龜)) (CITES Appendix II). Most of them are claimed to have special health properties, but there is no scientific evidence supporting that they have particular nutritional values or benefits which are different from domestic fowl and livestock. Apart from raising public awareness on the conservation of animals and plants used as Chinese health soup ingredients in general, introduction and promotion of voluntary eco-labelling schemes for some species

⁶ CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to certain controls. All import, export, re-export and introduction from the sea of species covered by the Convention has to be authorized through a licensing system. Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction. International trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances. Appendix II includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which international trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilisation incompatible with their survival. A specimen of a listed species may be imported into or exported (or re-exported) from a State party to the Convention only if the appropriate document has been obtained and presented for clearance at the port of entry or exit.

with alternative sustainable sources such as aquaculture / farming may help the public to identify and buy these ingredients from sustainable sources.

10. No doubt more examples for illustration may arise during the PE exercise. In line with the bottom-up engagement approach of the SDC, the Support Group (see paragraph 13(b) below) and the Strategy Sub-committee will take into account views collected from the stakeholder engagement sessions in formulating recommendations on the details and issues to be put forward in the “Invitation for Response” (“IR”) document for Members’ consideration.

Proposed Aspects for Public Engagement

11. To impart upon the public and stakeholders a clear message, it is proposed that the central message of the PE exercise is to encourage consumers **to choose food or other biological resources from sustainable sources wherever possible**, and suppliers and relevant trades to source from sustainable sources and help raise consumer awareness.

12. To facilitate discussion, the following aspects for the sustainable use of the three proposed types of biological resources may be considered:

- (a) how “sustainable sources” should be defined/ identified for the purpose of the present exercise;
- (b) strategies to raise public awareness on sustainable use of biological resources;
- (c) ways to educate the public on sustainable use of biological resources;
- (d) roles that may be played by different stakeholders to foster sustainable use of biological resources, e.g. the role suppliers could play in making available products from sustainable sources, and that the public and private sector could play in adopting sustainable purchasing and consumption; and

- (e) measures that may facilitate consumers to shop or consume sustainably, e.g. eco-labelling schemes, packaging information, sustainable consumption guides.

Way Forward

13. Subject to Members' endorsement of the topic, the following will be pursued:

- (a) a Programme Director will be appointed to assist SDC in overseeing the entire PE process and an Independent Analysis and Reporting Agency will be engaged for collation and analysis of views received during the PE process;
- (b) a Support Group ("SG") will be formed to advise on the formulation of an IR document, which would provide background information and set out pertinent issues to facilitate public discussion; and
- (c) a publicity and public education plan will be formulated to supplement the PE exercise.

14. Subject to Members' views, preparations for the PE exercise will commence. SDC members will be invited to join the SG and stakeholders from relevant sectors will be approached to join as well to widen the input in the identification of issues and pertinent perspectives for public engagement. In addition, the SG will hold focus group meetings so the bottom-up engagement process commences with the preparation of the IR document. Steer of the Strategy Sub-committee and SDC will be sought in the process. The entire PE exercise is expected to be completed in around 18 months.

Advice sought

15. Members are invited to consider and comment on the proposed PE topic and outline as set out above.

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Environmental Protection Department
August 2015**