

LCQ13: Wetland conservation

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Lau and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (June 14):

Question:

There are views that the Government should follow the country's efforts to build a modern and comprehensive conservation system which features "harmony between humanity and nature", so as to promote the high-quality development of wetland protection. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of (i) the number of visitors to, (ii) the cumulative number of species of living organisms found, and (iii) the expenditure involved in the protection and conservation of wetlands in the Hong Kong Wetland Park and the Mai Po Nature Reserve, in each of the past 10 years (set out in a table);

(2) given that the Government has proposed in the Northern Metropolis Development Strategy the development of a Wetland Conservation Park System with a total area of about 2 000 hectares, of the following information on the various wetland conservation parks, the nature park and the coastal protection park proposed to be built: (i) the planning area, (ii) the expected date of commencement of works, (iii) the modes of development and conservation, (iv) the expected date of completion of works, and (v) the estimated expenditure (set out in a table);

(3) whether the Government will, in formulating the development proposals and conservation plans for Hong Kong's wetland system, draw reference from the experience of the Mainland in promoting harmony between humanity and nature and, on the premise of ensuring effective wetland conservation, step up efforts to open up wetlands to the public, so as to make reasonable use of the natural and cultural resources of wetlands, thereby promoting the development of green industries such as eco-tourism; and

(4) whether it will step up publicity and education efforts to create a good atmosphere for the society to cherish and care for wetlands, thereby raising the awareness of protecting wetlands among members of the public?

Reply:

President,

The northwestern New Territories comprises a mosaic of habitats including large areas of wetlands such as fishponds, marshes and mangroves. In particular, an area of over 1 500 hectares of wetlands in the Mai Po Inner Deep Bay is listed as Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. The area is a key wintering site for migratory birds along the

East Asia-Australasia Flyway which attracts tens of thousands of migratory birds to visit during winter every year, including globally threatened or near-threatened species such as Black-faced Spoonbill, nurturing a very rich biodiversity. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has been collaborating with the World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong in carrying out active conservation management of the Mai Po Nature Reserve (MPNR) which provides feeding and roosting habitats for waterbirds and other wildlife, with a view to contributing to the conservation of biodiversity in Asia as well as other global regions.

After consulting the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and the AFCD, the reply to the various parts of Hon Lau's question is as follows:

(1) The number of visitors to the Hong Kong Wetland Park (HKWP) and the MPNR, the cumulative number of species recorded, and the expenditure for maintaining and conserving the subject wetlands in the past ten years are tabulated below:

(a) Number of visitors

Financial Year	Visitor Number	
	HKWP	MPNR
2013/14	438 083	33 308
2014/15	443 933	34 218
2015/16	473 808	34 387
2016/17	487 298	35 106
2017/18	481 111	35 412
2018/19	447 592	32 452
2019/20	313 631	21 109
2020/21	197 017	14 038
2021/22	296 090	20 564
2022/23	400 820	20 876

(b) Cumulative number of species recorded (as at 2022)

Faunal Group	Cumulative Number of Species Recorded	
	HKWP	MPNR
Bird	293	440
Butterfly	184	106
Dragonfly	57	54

Fish	32	54
Amphibian	11	8
Reptile	34	24
Mammal	22	34

(c) Expenditure for maintaining and conserving the wetlands

Financial Year	Expenditure for Maintaining and Conserving the Wetlands (million dollar)	
	HKWP	MPNR
2013/14	3.47	1.83
2014/15	4.11	2.35
2015/16	4.01	2.03
2016/17	3.90	2.37
2017/18	3.96	3.64
2018/19	4.49	3.33
2019/20	4.51	3.73
2020/21	6.48	4.48
2021/22	5.60	3.75
2022/23	5.95	3.75

(2) The Chief Executive's 2022 Policy Address proposed to implement a "New Proactive Conservation Policy" to gradually resume private wetlands and fish ponds with ecological value, and establish a Wetland Conservation Parks (WCPs) System, with a view to increasing the environmental capacity for the development of the Northern Metropolis. The AFCD is conducting a strategic feasibility study to determine the exact locations, areas and mode of management, etc. of the various parks proposed to be established, and targets to complete the relevant study by the end of this year the earliest. The Environment and Ecology Bureau and the AFCD will reveal to the public in due course the plan for the implementation of the WCPs System.

(3) and (4) The Mai Po Inner Deep Bay has beautiful wetland scenery. Apart from providing feeding and roosting habitats for wildlife such as waterbirds, the fishponds also provide fisheries produce as well as leisure and eco-tourism resources for the public, promoting economic activities, showcasing the concept of "harmony between humanity and nature" as advocated by our country, and echoing the Ramsar Convention's guideline on "wise use of wetlands". When formulating conservation plan for the wetland system in Hong Kong, on the premise of conserving natural habitats and enhancing biodiversity, the Government will make wise use of the various rich resources provided by wetlands on a sustainable basis, hoping to protect the nature and

at the same time enable our society to benefit from the natural resources.

As an example, the HKWP, as a wetland education centre and a member of the Wetland Link International (Asia), has been striving to promote wetland conservation and organise public education activities to foster public awareness on the topic. To enhance the appeal of the HKWP as a green tourism attraction, the Tourism Commission and the AFCD obtained approval from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in 2021 for a funding of \$135 million to implement the plan of upgrading the exhibition and visitor facilities in the HKWP, and are proactively taking forward the relevant work. To tie in with the renewal of exhibition and visitor facilities, and enhance public awareness of wetland conservation, the HKWP has started to develop and design new educational programmes and teaching materials targeting at general visitors, as well as teachers and students of secondary schools, primary schools and kindergartens. In addition, the HKWP has launched the "Hong Kong Wetland Park Volunteer Scheme" to encourage public participation in relevant volunteer work to promote wetland conservation with concerted efforts.

On the other hand, in the past 10 years, over 600 hectares of fishponds in the Ramsar Site and the Deep Bay Wetland outside Ramsar Site were conserved proactively under the Nature Conservation Management Agreement projects funded by the Environment and Conservation Fund and the Countryside Conservation Funding Scheme. The relevant publicity and educational activities such as guided tours, talks, fishpond festivals and exhibitions, etc, recorded more than a million person-times of participation, which helped raise public awareness on fishpond conservation.