

## Xiongan New Area ecology a priority

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Hebei provincial government signed a cooperation agreement on Monday, as China's top environmental watchdog vowed to support environmental protection work in Hebei's Xiongan New Area.

"The ministry has made the area's ecological environment rehabilitation and protection a priority," said Li Ganjie, minister of environmental protection, during a signing ceremony for the agreement in Shijiazhuang.

Li said the ministry has set up a special working group to push forward environmental protection in Xiongan, and assessment of the area's current situation has been completed.

The ministry has also drawn ecological "red lines" – limits that cannot be crossed – to protect and restore the area's environment.

Under the agreement, the ministry will join hands with Hebei to reduce pollution in the Xiongan area's freshwater Baiyangdian Lake, to establish a monitoring and supervision system and to promote the development of green industries.

In April, the central government announced plans for the new area, which will help the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. About 100 kilometers southwest of Beijing, the new area includes Baoding's Xiongxian, Rongcheng and Anxin counties.

According to the plan for the area, development should always put the environment first and follow green strategies.

When plans for the area were unveiled, one goal was to create a "naturally scenic city with blue skies, fresh air and clean water".

Baiyangdian Lake, a major wetland that covers 366 square kilometers is believed to be the key to improving the area's overall environment.

At the same time, Baoding is one of 10 cities with the worst air quality in the country. Also, the city's ecology has been damaged by years of pollution from fish farming and industrial discharges.

On Nov 8, an inspection team from the Hebei Environmental Protection Bureau disclosed that there are piles of waste along the banks of the lake's feeder rivers, and that the rivers are filled with sediment and lined with illegal sewage discharge outlets, which pollute the lake.

Wang Dongfeng, Party chief of Hebei, said the province will adhere to green development and strive to solve such problems with the help of the ministry.