

**Confirmed Minutes of the Second Meeting of the
Environment and Conservation Fund Research Projects Vetting Subcommittee
held on 1 February 2005 at 9:30 a.m.**

Present

Mr. Joseph Lee, BBS, JP	(Chairman)
Prof. Chan Chi-ming	
Prof. Chan Chak-keung	
Dr. Richard Cheung	
Ms Lau Ka-shi	
Ms Emba Leung WM	
Mr. Man Mo-leung	
Dr. Jonathan Wong	
Mr. Frankie Yick Chi-ming	
Mr. Raistlin Lau	ETWB
Mr. Richard Chan	AFCD
Mr. Wilson Tam	EPD
Dr. Samuel Chui	ETWB (Secretary)
Ms Winifred Chan	ETWB (Assistant Secretary)

In attendance

Mr. Edward Wong	AFCD
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Absent with Apologies

Prof. Chu Lee-man
Mr. Richard W Lee
Dr. John Leung Kon-chong
Ms Edith Ngan Man-ling

Agenda Item 1: Welcoming Remarks

The Chairman welcomed all members to the second meeting of the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) Research Projects Vetting Subcommittee (RPVSC). He then introduced the newly co-opted members, namely Prof. Chu Lee-man, Dr. Jonathan Wong and Dr. Richard Cheung.

Agenda Item 2 : Confirmation of the Minutes of the Last Meeting

2. The minutes of the last meeting held on 2 December 2004 were confirmed without any amendment.

Agenda Item 3 : Matters Arising

3. Dr Samuel Chui briefed members that the Secretariat had recently reviewed the arrangement for handling a conflict of interest. The Secretariat recommended that Members of the RPVSC who have any connection with an applicant, such as belonging to the same organization, should declare interest and refrain from taking part in the discussion and approval of the relevant application. Moreover, Members who are themselves part of the team submitting an application; or belong to the same department to which an applicant belongs in an organization; or have close relationship with an applicant should withdraw himself from the meeting venue when the deliberation takes place, apart from declaring interest. All Members agreed that the new arrangement for declaration of interest should take place with immediate effect.

Progress Report of ECF funded research and technology demonstration projects [ECF Paper 40/2004]

4. With reference to para. 14 of the minutes of the last meeting in which the Secretariat was requested to report the progress of on-going projects and past performance of principal investigators (PIs), Dr. Samuel Chui introduced ECF Paper 40/2004 concerning the progress of the 15 on-going research projects. He also informed the meeting that the Secretariat were compiling information on the past performance of the PIs and would report to Members in the next meeting.

Proposed variations to project details – Project 5/2000 “Conservation of Hong Kong Natural Coastline through Mangrove Replanting”

[ECF Paper 41/2004]

5. Ms Winifred Chan took Members through the Paper 41/2004. It was noted that the PI had extended the monitoring of field trials for one month till the end of September 2004 because more and longer monitoring and planting work was required to compensate the failure in early transplanting. In addition, the content of the CD-ROM was also enhanced to provide more comprehensive information on mangroves and mangrove planting. As a result, the expenditure on transportation and consumables increased. The total expenditure for the project was \$1,311,638.73 which exceeded the approved grant (\$1,303,079.00) by \$8,559.73. The PI proposed to use the interests generated from the fund allocated which amounted to \$8,580.34 to cover the increased expenditure.

6. In response to a Member, Ms Winifred Chan explained that the PIs would be required to keep the fund allocated in a risk-free interest generating account. The use of the interest generated should, however, be decided by the ECF RPVSC. Normally, such interest would be returned to the ECF after completion of the project. After discussion, Members approved the proposed variations to project details.

ECF Project 16/2003 The Use of Biomarkers for Ecotoxicological Assessments of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and Heavy Metals on Birds at Mai Po Nature Reserve and Other Wetlands

[ECF Paper 42/2004]

7. A Member declared a conflict of interest in this application as he and the PI belonged to the same department of the same university. He then left the conference room. Another Member declared a conflict of interest in this application as the PI was his M. Phil supervisor and co-author of many papers. He then left the conference room as well.

8. Dr. Samuel Chui briefed Members on the ECF Paper 42/2004. The project was discussed at the meeting of the RPVSC on 2 December 2004. Upon

the request of the RPVSC, the PI revised the project objectives so that the project would investigate if the aquatic bird species, especially endangered species at Mai Po Marshes were at risk, and study the feasibility of using biomarkers for biomonitoring. The PI also explained the selection of the three study sites, choice of the bird species and use of the biomarkers. Both EPD and AFCD supported the revised proposal. Mr. Richard Chan opined that the revised objectives were appropriate and acceptable. Mr. Wilson Tam considered that the findings of the proposal would provide baseline data to support the Government's obligation under the Stockholm Convention and for future reference in formulating environmental protection policy.

9. The meeting noted the amendments made by the PI and agreed that the project would be supported and recommended to the ECF Committee for endorsement. With reference to the budget of the proposal, the meeting agreed to recommend a total sum of \$588,000.00 as the sum of \$12,200.00 for the visiting scholar would not be supported in accordance with the Guide to Application for the Environment and Conservation Fund/Woo Wheelock Green Fund.

ECF Project 17/2004 On-Farm Organic Waste Composting Trial for Organic Farmers: Demonstration project

[ECF Paper 43/2004]

10. A Member re-joined the meeting at this juncture. Being the PI of the proposal, another Member had a conflict of interest and continued to withdraw from the meeting.

11. Dr. Samuel Chui briefed Members on the ECF Paper 43/2004. The project was discussed at the RPVSC meeting on 2 December 2004. Upon the request of the RPVSC, the PI provided additional information on the estimated number of organic farmers, set-up cost and the work plan for the research assistant. The funding requested was adjusted to \$139,100.00. Both AFCD and EPD supported the proposal. Members noted the amendments and agreed to support the proposal.

Agenda Item 4 : New Applications

ECF Project 23/2003 Lead-free Sn-Zn Solder Interconnects for Green Electronics Manufacturing

[ECF Paper 44/2004]

12. A Member declared a conflict of interest in this application as he and the PI belonged to the same university. Another Member re-joined the meeting at this juncture.

13. Dr. Samuel Chui briefed Members on the assessments of the proposal made by the two external expert assessors and EPD as summarized in the ECF Paper 44/2004. The objective of this particular project was to study the mechanical properties of the Sn-9% Zn eutectic alloy as a replacement for the lead-containing alloys. EPD considered it more appropriate for the project proponent to seek support from other funding agencies. In respect of the assessment from the two external expert assessors, the first one considered the project deliverables too late to help the industry, while the second assessor considered the proposal worthy of support and that the deliverables were genuinely needed. Two representatives of the project team joined the meeting and gave a short briefing to Members on the proposal. The two representatives left the meeting after the clarification.

14. Note

15. Note

16. After discussion, the Chairman concluded that the proposal did not fall within the ambit of the ECF and thus was not supported.

ECF Project 1/2004 Analysis on diversity of insect communities and indicator groups of various habitats in Hong Kong

[ECF Paper 45/2004]

17. Dr. Samuel Chui briefed Members on the project proposal and the assessments given by the two external expert assessors and AFCD as summarized in the ECF Paper 45/2004. The funding requested by this project was \$1,572,400.00 and the project would last for 3½ years. The objective of the study was to enable better understanding of the present insect fauna for planning of ecological and environmental conservation in the future. While AFCD and one assessor had reservation in supporting the proposal, the other assessor supported the proposal despite the fact that he also considered the proposed family level investigation not appropriate. Two representatives of the project team joined the meeting and gave a short briefing to Members on the proposal. The two representatives left the meeting after the clarification.

18. ^{Note}

19. After further discussion, members concurred the view of AFCD and Assessor 2 that the proposal was not worthy of support as stated in para. 4 of the ECF Paper 45/2004. The meeting decided that the proposal should not be supported.

ECF Project 6/2004 Ecological and Physiological Response of Hong Kong Coral Communities to Changing Temperature and Oxygen Levels

[ECF Paper 46/2004]

20. A Member declared interests in this application as he and the PI belonged to the same department of the same university and the PI is his Head of Department. He then left the conference room.

21. Mr. Edward Wong of AFCD attended the meeting at this juncture.

22. Dr. Samuel Chui briefed Members on the project proposal and the assessments made by AFCD and the two external expert assessors as summarized in the ECF Paper 46/2004. The funding requested by this project was \$1,981,654.00 with an estimated project duration of 2 years. The aim of this project was to study the behavioral and physiological responses of local corals and their associated reef

fish in Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park with respect to changing environmental factors, especially dissolved oxygen, salinity and temperature. AFCD supported the project. A representative of the project team then joined the meeting and gave a short briefing to Members on the proposal. The representative left the meeting after the clarification.

23. Note

24. Note

25. After lengthy discussion, the Chairman concluded that the project was worthy of support in principle but the PI would be requested to revise the proposal in the following areas for further consideration by the RPSVC -

- Members would only be prepared to support the cost of engaging two full time Research Assistants. The PI should seek support from other sources, e.g. the City University of Hong Kong, to meet the extra staff cost if necessary.
- The molecular analysis was not supported.
- In view of the high cost of the data logger system and that the City University of Hong Kong has already obtained one data logger separately, Members considered the PI should review the funding application on the data logger system.

26. Mr. Edward Wong left the meeting after the deliberation.

ECF Project 18/2004 Application of photocatalytic oxidation (PCO) technology for disinfection of the water in seafood water tanks

[ECF Paper 47/2004]

27. The Chairman declared interests in this application as the PI came from the same university the Court of which he was a member. Mr. Raistlin Lau chaired this part of the meeting. A Member re-joined the meeting at this juncture.

28. Dr. Samuel Chui briefed Members on the objectives of the proposal and the assessments given by AFCD and EPD as summarized in the ECF Paper 47/2004. The funding requested by this project was \$149,864.00 and the project was expected to last for 12 months. The project aimed to evaluate the bactericidal effect of a PCO-based disinfection system against the conventional UV method. Both AFCD and EPD did not support the proposal.

29. ^{Note}

30. Members endorsed the conclusion of the Secretariat and did not support the application.

ECF Project 19/2004 Source Characterization of Formaldehyde and Volatile Organic Compounds in Indoor Environments

[ECF Paper 48/2004]

31. Dr. Samuel Chui briefed Members on the project proposal and the assessments made by EPD and the two external expert assessors as set out in the ECF Paper 48/2004. The funding requested by this project was \$699,680.00 and the project was expected to last for 18 months. The objective of this project was to characterize volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and formaldehyde emissions from the building materials, furniture and Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) using a large environmental chamber. EPD and one assessor had reservation in supporting the proposal while the other assessor supported the proposal.

32. ^{Note}

33. After discussion, the meeting agreed that the proposal should not be supported.

ECF Project 14/2004 Digital Green-space and its Environment, Social and Economic values in Hong Kong

[ECF Paper 49/2004]

34. Dr. Samuel Chui briefed Members on the project proposal and the assessments made by AFCD, EPD, the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) and two external expert assessors as set out in the ECF Paper 49/2004. The funding requested by this application was \$532,000 and the project was expected to last for 2 years. The project aimed to raise public awareness and understanding of the short- and long-term environmental, social and economic benefits of green space. Whilst one external assessor supported the proposal, the other assessor as well as EPD, AFCD and SDU had reservation in supporting the proposal.

35. Note

36. Note

37. After discussion, the meeting agreed with AFCD, EPD, SDU and the expert assessors' views and considered it not worthy to support the proposal.

ECF Project 20/2004 Water Conservation through Enhanced Biological Wastewater Treatment and UV Disinfection

[ECF Paper 50/2004]

38. The Chairman declared interests in this application as the PI came from the same university the Court of which he was a member. Mr. Raistlin Lau chaired this part of the meeting.

39. Dr. Samuel Chui briefed Members on the ECF Paper 50/2004. The funding requested by this project was \$149,500.00 and the project would last for 9 months. This project would explore the biological treatment of sewage to meet the standards and criteria for irrigation purposes. Both EPD and the Drainage Services Department (DSD) had examined the proposal and considered it worthy of support with some practical value. If the proposed treatment technology was successful, it should have practical application for the small capacity sewage treatment plants at remote locations. The representatives of the project team then joined the meeting and gave a short briefing to the Members on the proposal. The representatives left the meeting after providing some clarifications.

40. ^{Note}

41. After discussion, the Chairman concluded that while the project was interesting and possibly useful, the PI should be requested to provide further details on the expertise of the project team for further consideration.

Agenda Item 6 : Any Other Business

42. The Chairman noted that in the process of vetting applications, the PI would be required to respond to comments/queries made by relevant government departments or expert assessors on their proposals. To avoid undue delay in processing applications, he recommended that when feedback/response from a PI was not received within 3 months, the Secretariat would terminate the processing of the application. The PI would be advised to submit a fresh application if they considered necessary. The meeting agreed to the proposed arrangement.

43. Members noted that some applications were not supported by the departments and/or expert assessors. The Chairman also noted that there would be different opinions in the process of assessing different proposals. To avoid wasting the PI's time and effort and to speed up the vetting process, the meeting discussed and then agreed that when the departments or expert assessors did not support the proposal, the PI would not be invited to stand by for the meeting of the RPSVC though the RPSVC would continue to discuss the applications. The PI might be invited to attend subsequent meeting(s) to discuss the proposal when Members considered necessary.

44. A Member remarked that when submitting applications for funding over \$150,000.00, the PI was required to submit two reference letters together with the application. As it was very likely that such reference letters submitted by the PI would only carry endorsements of the application, they served little value in helping the RPSVC to consider the application impartially. The Member therefore proposed and the meeting agreed that the PI would no longer be required to present the two reference letters when submitting applications for funds over \$150,000.00.

Agenda Item 7 : Date of Next Meeting

45. Although the RPVSC were planned to meet on a bi-monthly basis, as there was no new application being processed by the Secretariat at the moment, Members would be informed of the date of the coming meeting in due course.

46. The meeting ended at 1:00 pm.

Secretariat, ECF Research Projects Vetting Sub-committee

March 2005

Note: The paragraph will not be included in the version of notes to be uploaded to the webpage of ECFC according to the standing practice of not disclosing the detailed reasons for supporting or rejecting an application. The ECFC webpage contains a general disclaimer that “Reasons for supporting/rejecting an application had been made known to the project proponents concerned, and the public could ask the project proponents direct for such information.”