

## **Environment and Conservation Fund**

### **Nature Conservation Management Agreement Proposal – Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2012 -2015**

#### **Purpose**

This paper invites Members' advice on a funding application received under the Nature Conservation Management Agreement (MA) Scheme. The application is submitted by the Conservancy Association (CA) in association with the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) (Attachment I).

#### **Background**

2. The MA project in Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung was first launched in November 2005. Over the past five years, the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) had granted a total of \$11.6 million to CA and HKBWS for the long-term management and conservation of the Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung areas.

3. The main objective of this MA project is to enhance the conservation, landscape as well as biodiversity of Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung areas through engagement of farmers, land owners and tenants into management agreements. This project involves a series of active habitat and species management programmes in order to protect freshwater wetland dependent species, in particular waterbirds and amphibians. Since 2005, the MA project has demonstrated the effectiveness in conserving important freshwater wetland habitats, enhancing the species richness and diversity, as well as raising public awareness on conservation.

4. Currently, over 9.7 ha of agricultural land together with 3.2 ha of *Fung Shui* Wood are being managed under the project, representing 20% of the total farming areas in Long Valley. The size of the areas under management has more than doubled (130% increase) when compared with the pilot schemes launched in 2005. Moreover, important freshwater habitats particularly shallow water habitats, paddy rice fields, freshwater marshes and water flea ponds, which provide important foraging and feeding grounds to birds and amphibians are under intensive management under the project.

5. The project has also demonstrated its success in the conservation of birds. When the MA project commenced in Long Valley in 2005, a total of 221 species with a peak count of 400 individuals of birds was recorded there monthly. In 2011, the total number of bird species increased to 268 with a maximum of 1,200 individuals recorded. Over 50% of local bird species could be found in Long Valley. New species have been recorded in Long Valley during the current project period, including the globally threatened Japanese Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone atrocaudata*, 紫壽帶), as well as the rare Crested Bunting (*Melophus lathami*, 鳳頭鷓) and Chestnut Munia (*Lonchura atricapilla*, 黑頭文鳥). The increase in the number and diversity of birds suggested that the current management measures are effective in enhancing the conservation of the concerned site.

6. In addition to the direct benefits to local biodiversity, the MA project also increased awareness of the public and the local villagers on nature conservation. In the current MA project, 66% of local farmers in Long Valley had entered into management agreements with CA and HKBWS. The local farming community actively engaged in the MA scheme through joining guided tours and participating in the annual harvesting festivals. The MA project not only served over 7,000 participants through eco-tours, workshops and farming festivals but also attracted 10,000 bird watchers, wildlife photographers and tourists visiting Long Valley in 2010. Feedbacks from the survey also indicated the encouraging impact the project had on the local community.

7. The Long Valley Project will end on 28 February 2012. In this connection, in October 2011, the NGOs submitted the funding application with a view to seeking ECF's support to continue the project. Under the current application, the management areas will be extended to cover some of the dry arable farmlands in the Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung area. Over 24 % (11.9 ha) of total farming area together with the entire *Fung Shui* woodland (3.2 ha) in the Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung priority site would be under active management and conservation under the proposed MA project. In addition, for the sake of the long-term management and conservation of the Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung areas, the project duration is proposed to be increased to three years with the estimated budget of \$3.3 million per year in the current application. The new project will also strengthen its education and publicity element through setting up an education centre to accommodate the increasing number of visitors to Long Valley. A summary of the application is at **Annex A**.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and Environmental Protection Department (EPD)***

8. AFCD and EPD have examined the application in accordance with the following major evaluation criteria –

- (a) the benefits that a proposed project will bring to the efforts in enhancing the conservation of the site concerned, better achieving the nature conservation objectives, and evaluating the effectiveness of this new conservation measure;
- (b) the sustainability of a proposed project including its resource implications, participation of the landowner(s) and local community, nature and enforceability of the management agreement concerned;
- (c) the technical and project management capability of the applicant organisation, as well as its track record, including the effectiveness of past projects, and its ability to comply with funding conditions;
- (d) whether the proposed project's schedule of implementation is well-planned and practicable, and the duration is reasonable;
- (e) whether the proposed budget is reasonable and realistic, and whether the project is cost-effective, with full justification for every expenditure item; and
- (f) whether the proposed project has alternative sources of funding, and whether it would be more appropriate for the proposed project to be funded by other sources

9. We consider that the proposed project worth supporting in view of the benefits that the proposed project would bring to the conservation of the concerned site and raise the public awareness on nature conservation. Besides, it is also worthwhile to maintain the momentum of the conservation works implemented by the previous MA projects in Long Valley. The two departments' assessment is at **Annex B** for Members' reference.

*Nature Conservation Subcommittee under the Advisory Council on the Environment*

10. The Nature Conservation Subcommittee under the Advisory Council on the Environment was consulted on the application on 18 October 2011. The meeting unanimously gave support. They noted that under the proposal, more areas would be managed and an education centre to better conduct publicity activities would also be provided. The Chairman advised CA and HKBWS to conduct surveys so as to obtain comments from visitors on how to improve the project.

**Advice Sought**

11. Members are invited to advise whether the MA application should be supported and, if supported, the exact amount of funds to be granted.

*Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department  
Environmental Protection Department  
November 2011*

**Summary of Application for  
Nature Conservation Management Agreement Project**

<b>Project Title</b>	Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2012 – 2015 塋原自然保育管理計劃 2012 - 2015
<b>Site involved</b>	Long Valley
<b>Size of Proposed Management Area</b>	About 1,630,500 sq. ft. (15.1 ha)
<b>Proponent</b>	The Conservancy Association (CA)
<b>Key partner in project implementation</b>	Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS)
<b>Project Description</b>	This project is a continuation of “Nature Conservation Management of Long Valley 2010-2012” which aims at enhancing the conservation value of entire Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung area in long run through a partnership programme between CA and local farmers and land owners.
<b>Key Conservation Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To conserve the landscape and biodiversity, particularly freshwater wetland dependent birds, amphibians and other species in Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung;</li> <li>• to cooperate with local landowners and farmers for habitat management and promotion of eco-agriculture;</li> <li>• to provide up-to-date ecological information and formulate strategies for long-term ecological conservation in the area; and</li> <li>• to raise public awareness on the importance of freshwater wetlands in Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung.</li> </ul>
<b>Duration</b>	Three years (1 March 2012 – 28 February 2015)
<b>Amount of Fund applied for</b>	Funding applied: \$ 9,797,050.64 (\$3,265,684 per year) Expected income: \$ 196,600 Expected balance: \$ 9,600,450.64

**Evaluation of Application for  
Nature Conservation Management Agreement Project**

**Our views on the applications received are set out below:**

**Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley 2012-2015  
(submitted by the Conservancy Association (CA) in cooperation with the  
Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS))**

<b>Evaluation criteria</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Benefits that will bring to the efforts in enhancing the conservation of the site concerned and in better achieving the nature conservation objective	<p>It is worthwhile to note that there has been a substantial increase in the diversity of birds in Long Valley since the implementation of the MA project in 2005. The number of bird species increased from 221 before the MA (2005) to 268 at present, which represents a 21% increase and accounts for about 53% of the total number of bird species in Hong Kong.</p> <p>The project would benefit the conservation of Long Valley and Ho Sheung Heung areas by –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reducing and minimizing the incidence of any irregularities and environmentally incompatible activities on the lands under private ownership;</li> <li>• enhancing the habitat diversity and quality of agricultural wetland in Long Valley through management agreements with landowners and tenants of fallow agricultural lands to prevent further land degradation and farmland abandonment ;</li> <li>• enhancing the conservation of freshwater wetland dependent birds and amphibians, particularly the Greater Painted-snipe and the protected Chinese Bullfrog;</li> <li>• enriching the knowledge on effective and efficient habitat management measures as well as providing up-to-date ecological information to formulate suitable long-term conservation and management strategies in Long Valley;</li> <li>• enhancing communications with landowners and local villagers to maintain the long-term sustainability of Long Valley and Ho Sheung</li> </ul>

	<p>Heung, and gaining their support in nature conservation;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increasing the public and local farming community’s understanding of the importance of the freshwater wetland habitats and the associated wildlife; and</li> <li>• demonstrating how stakeholders cooperate in biodiversity conservation to the general public.</li> </ul>
<p>Sustainability including its resources implications, participation of the landowners and local community, the nature and enforceability of the management agreement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The present proposal requests for a 3-year funding (\$3,265,684 per year) from ECF. The expected revenue generated from workshops, public visits and harvesting festivals (\$196,600) will be returned to ECF to cover part of the cost.</li> <li>• The current proposal will be the 4<sup>th</sup> phase of the MA project which will continue the conservation management of Long Valley in accordance with a conceptual management plan. New elements (i.e. rotation of habitat types and extension of management in dry agricultural lands) will be added in this conceptual plan to better evaluate the effectiveness of different management measures for management of Long Valley in a sustainable manner.</li> <li>• A total of 40 management agreements and 2 land rental agreements have been implemented in the current MA project (2010-2012). It is expected that 23 local farmers and 2 land landowners would continue to participate in the project, and the new project would engage 50 local stakeholders.</li> <li>• Revenue generating night safari tours, eco-tours and harvesting activities will be organized to promote the message of nature conservation, recruit supports from the public and generate income.</li> <li>• The project has also been able to drive the local rural economy as ancillary economic activities in Long Valley are encouraged (e.g. sales and promotion of farm products during harvesting activities has brought income to local farmers and provided them the impetus to manage their farmlands). To better achieve long-term wetland</li> </ul>

	<p>sustainability, the operation cost of paddy rice yields would be carved from the management agreements so that the farmers would sell their eco-rice to get financial return under the new project. This change would not only enhance the self-sustainability of the project, but also increase the farmers' incentive to switch to eco-paddy farming.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over the previous years, CA and HKBWS have organized many conservation education programmes, for instance eco-tours, seminars, exhibitions, competitions and volunteer programmes, which attracted over 17,000 visitors, bird watchers, nature lovers and wildlife photographers visiting Long Valley. In the current MA project (2010-2012), the "Long Valley Eco-paddy Club" has been launched to gain more public and financial support on the project. It is anticipated that CA and HKBWS have the capacity to carry on with these activities to better promote nature conservation.</li> </ul>
<p>Technical and project management capability, and track record of the applicant. NGOs may seek assistance or support from other relevant professional bodies where necessary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both CA and HKBWS are experienced in carrying out environmental projects including projects funded by the ECF.</li> <li>They have gained solid experience and knowledge on nature conservation of private land in Long Valley over the previous years. Under their management, the project provided encouraging results in particular increase in species and habitat diversity, stronger cooperation with local stakeholders, as well as better public awareness through conservation education.</li> <li>The project is supported by the North District Council member Mr. Hau Kam Lam who belongs to the relevant constituency (Sheung Shui Rural).</li> </ul>
<p>Whether the proposed project's schedule of implementation is well-planned and practicable, and the duration is reasonable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proposed schedule of implementation is mainly based on the bird migration period, active season of amphibians and harvesting seasons. Habitat management (e.g. planting of crops and draining down of fish ponds) will be arranged in a staged basis over the three years. Species management is scheduled year-round while public</li> </ul>

	<p>activity is scheduled as appropriate. It is considered well-planned and practicable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering that long-term habitat management is required to maintain and enhance the conservation value of the concerned site and longer term of management agreements would provide stronger incentive to engage interested stakeholders, the proposed duration of three years of habitat management is considered reasonable and necessary.</li> </ul>
<p>Whether the budget is reasonable and realistic, and whether the project is cost effective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposal will involve the management of about 15.1 ha (around 24.4% of the total farming area plus the whole <i>Fung Shui</i> woods in Long Valley) of farmlands and woodlands in the subject site, an increase in management areas by 17.5% when compared with the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase MA (i.e. 12.9 ha). The habitat conservation management measure will account for 44% (\$4,314,951) of the budget. It also involves revenue generating activities (e.g. night safari tours, eco-tours, workshops, harvesting festivals and sales of farm products) to enhance the sustainability of the budget.</li> <li>• With the increase in management areas and the enhanced education elements, the budget has proportionally increased by 42.3% (i.e. from \$2,295,480 per year to \$3,265,684 per year).</li> <li>• Given the large extent of farmlands to be managed and the amount of work to be undertaken by the applicant, the project is considered cost effective and the budget is deemed reasonable. The exact amount of funding to be approved will be decided by the ECF Committee.</li> </ul>
<p>Whether the proposed project has alternative sources of funding, and whether it would be more appropriate for the proposed project to be funded by other sources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The sales of eco-produces, namely “Long Valley Green Mooncake” would generate some revenues to cover parts of the expenses of the project.</li> <li>• General public members are required to pay for night safari tours, eco-tours and the harvesting festivals. It is estimated to generate \$196,600 over three years.</li> <li>• The income generated from the above activities is</li> </ul>

	<p>limited (2% of the proposed budget). Sponsorship from the District Council could also be sought as other sources of funding to meet part of the expenses.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial support from sources like the ECF is still required. However, funds required may be reduced in the long run if the above income generating measures are proved to be effective.</li></ul>
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*Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department  
Environmental Protection Department  
November 2011*