

**Confirmed Minutes of the First Meeting of the
Environment and Conservation Fund Research Projects Vetting Subcommittee
held on 6 February 2007 at 2:30 p.m.**

Present

Mr. Joseph Lee, BBS, JP	(Chairman)
Prof Chan Chak-keung	
Mr. Man Mo-leung	
Prof Jonathan Wong WC	
Prof Chau Kwai-cheong	
Dr. Kenneth Leung MY	
Mr. Eric Chan	EPD
Mr. Richard Chan	AFCDD
Mr. Lawrence Cheung	EPD
Miss Florence Chan	EPD (Secretary)
Ms Winifred Chan	EPD (Assistant Secretary)

Absent with Apologies

Ms Emba Leung WM

Welcoming Remarks

The Chairman welcomed all Members to the first meeting of the new term. He invited Mr. Eric CHAN to introduce Members to each other. Mr. Eric CHAN also briefed Members on the background of the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) Research Projects Vetting Subcommittee (RPVSC).

Agenda Item 1 : Confirmation of the Minutes of the Last Meeting

2. The draft minutes of the last meeting held on 23.8.2006 were confirmed without any amendment.

**Agenda Item 2: Standing Orders and Guidelines on Declaration of Interests
(ECF Paper 21/2006-07)**

3. Miss Florence CHAN briefed Members on the background, the terms of reference and the standing orders of the ECF RPVSC stipulated in Paper 21/2006-07. Members noted that the ECF RPVSC would approve applications at \$150,000 and below, and the quorum for the meeting shall be half of the total number of members.

4. She also drew Members' attention to the need to declare any conflict of interest. The guidelines on declaration of interest were set out in the Annex to Paper 21/2006-07. The meeting discussed and Members agreed that when a member had any potential conflict of interest on an application, he/she should refrain from participating in the discussion of the application in question.

Agenda Item 3: Matters Arising

Para. 11-15 ECF Project 9/2005

5. Ms Winifred Chan reported that subsequent to the discussion at the last meeting of RPVSC and the ECF Committee meetings on 6.10.2006 and 7.12.2006, the proposal was supported with a grant of \$818,685. The Woo Wheelock Green Fund (WWGF) agreed to support the project with ECF on an equal share basis. The project commenced on 15.1.2007.

Progress report of ECF funded research projects

[ECF Paper 22/2006-07]

6. Ms Winifred Chan briefed members on Paper 22/2006-07 on the progress of 15 on-going research projects and five completed research projects as at 31.12.2006. Among the 15 on-going projects, the principal investigators (PI) of three projects, namely ECF Projects 16/2003, 7/2005 and 10/2005, would like to seek approval from the RPVSC for their proposed variation of project details. Details of their proposals were set out in Paper 23/2006-07 for further discussion. Five research projects were completed during the period of 1 July to 31 December

2006. The research findings were summarized in Appendices 16 to 20 to Paper 22/2006-07 for Members' information.

7. Ms Winifred Chan reported that in response to Members' wish to find out how the findings of the completed research projects being disseminated, the Secretariat had invited the PIs of the completed projects to provide such information through questionnaires. The information collected was being compiled and would be reported to Members in due course.

8. As regards the terminated project, Project 4/2002 "Diversity and Conservation of Bats in Hong Kong", Ms Winifred Chan reported that the Secretariat would shortly engage a solicitor to issue a letter to demand the refund of \$211,901 from the recipient organization.

Proposed variations to details of ECF funded projects

[ECF Paper 23/2006-07]

9. Ms Winifred Chan reported that the PI of three projects, namely ECF Projects 16/2003, 7/2005 and 10/2005, would like to seek approval for variation of project details respectively. The PI of Project 16/2003 namely "The use of biomarkers for ecotoxicological assessment of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and heavy metals on birds at Mai Po Nature Reserve and other wetlands" proposed to modify the study scope. No additional fund would be applied from ECF.

10. The PI of ECF Project 7/2005 namely "Study upon the Vegetation Effects and Potential Economic Habitat Management Benefits of Introducing Asian Water Buffalo *Bubalus bubalis* into the Freshwater Ponds at Mai Po Nature Reserve" proposed to defer the project completion date from 9.7.2007 to 31.12.2007. No additional fund would be requested for the extended project period.

11. Lastly, the PI of ECF Project 10/2005 namely "Seabird migration survey in southern and southeastern Hong Kong waters, Spring 2006" proposed to transfer funds from the unspent balance for the project to cover the over-expenditure for organizing a press meeting. The actual expenditure on organizing the press briefing was \$320, which was 220% over the original approved budget of \$100. No additional fund would be required from ECF.

12. The details of the proposed variation were set out in Paper 23/2006-07. Members discussed the progress of the three projects. In reply to a Member's question, Mr. Richard Chan explained that egrets and herons might sometimes change their locations of nesting after a few years. The difficulties encountered by the PI were not exceptional and the PI's proposal to study the Pond Heron instead of Little Egret was acceptable as they belonged to the same family of birds (Ardeidae). After some discussion, the proposed variation for Projects 16/2003, 7/2005 and 10/2005 were approved. In discussing Project 10/2005, members noted that ECF's approval for the proposed transfer of \$220 was required as it was 220% over the original budget and the Guide to Application stipulated that approval should be sought from RPVSC if the spending of a particular item was 20% more than the original budget. Some members opined that such requirement was inflexible, especially for items with small budget. After further discussion, Members agreed that the Secretariat should be given the discretion to approve any increase in expenditure of an approved budget item by up to 20%, or up to **\$5,000**, if the original approved budget for that individual item did not exceed \$5,000. The Secretariat should ensure that sufficient justifications are provided by the PIs on the proposed increase, and that the total amount to be paid would not exceed the total approved budget. The Guide to Application would be amended accordingly.

Agenda Item 4 : New Applications

ECF Project 6/2006 To establish a three dimensional, real-time marine environment monitoring system in Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park with connection to the internet

[ECF Paper 24/2006-07]

13. Miss Florence Chan briefed Members on the proposal and the assessments given by EPD and AFCD as summarized in Paper 24/2006-07. The objectives of the proposal were to extend the existing 2-dimensional marine area monitoring being carried out by the City University DataBuoy I to a three dimensional monitoring system by adding two more units in the Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park. The total budget of the project was \$149,703 and the project was expected to last for 6 months. Both EPD and AFCD supported the proposal because real time monitoring of water quality would provide useful information for the management of marine park. Two representatives of the project team then joined the meeting to

answer questions.

14. Note

15. Note

16. After further discussion, the Chairman concluded that the proposal was supported in principle. The Secretariat would further clarify with the PI on the maintenance responsibility of the system after installation and the data analysis work to enhance the practicality of the deliverables. On receipt of such information from the PI, the revised proposal would be circulated to members for endorsement.

ECF Project 9/2006 Development of an Urban Environmental Quality Index for Hong Kong using remote sensing and GIS

[ECF Paper 25/2006-07]

17. Miss Florence Chan briefed Members on the proposal and the assessments given by EPD, the Planning Department (PlanD) and two external expert assessors as summarized in Paper 25/2006-07. The main objective of the project was to devise an Urban Environmental Quality (UEQ) Index for Hong Kong, and produce a map of UEQ in Hong Kong with resolution from 5m upwards, using multiple parameters. The funding requested by the project was \$498,780 and the project was expected to last for 24 months. Both external assessors opined that the funding support for the project could be sought from the University Grant Council (UGC) or the RGC. EPD had reservation on the practical needs and benefits of the proposed study. PlanD, however, considered the UEQ generated would be useful for interpretation of the Land Utilization Map.

18. Note

19. After discussion, the Chairman concluded that the proposal should not be supported.

ECF Project 10/2006 Association of other waterbird species with wintering Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* in Hong Kong

[ECF Paper 26/2006-07]

20. Miss Florence Chan briefed Members on the project proposal and the assessments given by the AFCD as summarized in Paper 26/2006-07. The objective of the proposal was to identify the relationships between wintering Black-faced Spoonbills and other waterbirds in Hong Kong. The funding requested by this project was \$137,860 and the project was expected to last for 6 months. AFCD opined that the project would provide information for better understanding of the Black-faced Spoonbills in Hong Kong. However, the engagement of a full-time researcher for the last two months on data analysis and report writing was not fully justified. AFCD considered that the researcher could work on a part-time basis for two months to complete the report. The Secretariat remarked that the proposed budget included a sum of \$17,760 as the staff cost for the project officer responsible for the arrangement of press briefing, preparing press kit, distribution of survey reports and writing the project report. Members were invited to consider if the proposed expenditure was similar to general administrative costs which would not normally be given. A representative of the project team then joined the meeting to answer questions in relation to the proposal.

21. Note

22. Note

23. After discussion, the Chairman concluded that the proposal would be further discussed on receipt of the additional information from the PI.

ECF Project 8/2006 A Study of the Impact of Apple Snails on Macrophytes, Nutrients and Chlorophyll in Local Wetlands

[ECF Paper 28/2006-07]

24. The Chairman declared interests in this application as the PI came from the same university of which he was a Court member. Mr. Eric Chan chaired this part of the meeting. Prof Jonathan Wong also declared interest and refrain

from participating in the discussion.

25. Miss Florence Chan briefed Members on the project proposal and the assessments given by AFCD as summarized in Paper 28/2006-07. AFCD and two external assessors supported the project. The Secretariat remarked that ECF had approved \$426,280 to the same PI for another project also on apple snails (ECF Project 3/2005) which commenced on 1.6.2006. The progress of Project 3/2005 had been satisfactory and the project would be completed by May 2008. Members were then invited to consider whether it was prudent to review the second progress report of the current project first before considering whether to approve funding for another research project (\$477,280) on apple snails by the same PI.

26. Note

27. After further deliberation, Members concluded that the proposal would be further discussed when there were further comments from the external assessors.

ECF Project 7/2006 Mechanism of the elevated algal proliferation in intertidal shrimp ponds (gei wais) of the Mai Po Nature Reserve

[ECF Paper 27/2006-07]

28. As the PI of this application also came from the same university of which the Chairman was a Court member, Mr. Eric Chan continued to chair this part of the meeting. Dr Kenneth Leung also declared interest and refrained from participating in the discussion.

29. Miss Florence Chan briefed Members on the project proposal and the assessments given by EPD and AFCD as summarized in Paper 27/2006-07. The objective of the study was to conduct an intensive on-site investigation to identify the environmental conditions responsible for the active algal proliferation and elevation of organic contents in gei wais as compared with open marine and fresh waters. The project aimed to provide insight on ways to reduce the problem of algal bloom in gei wais in Mai Po. The funding requested by this project was \$149,544 and the project was expected to last for 13 months. Both EPD and

AFCD supported the proposal as they considered there was a need for a better water quality management of the tidal ponds in the Ramsar site. A representative of the project team then joined the meeting to answer questions.

30. Note

31. Note

32. After discussion, the Chairman concluded that the proposal was worthy of support. (Post-meeting note: The WWGF agreed to support the project with ECF on an equal share basis. The project commenced on 1.3.2007.)

Agenda Item 5 : Date of Next Meeting

33. The Secretariat would inform Members of the date of the next meeting in due course.

34. The meeting adjourned at 5:20 pm.

Secretariat, ECF Research Projects Vetting Sub-committee

March 2007

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.”