

Secretariat of the Steering Committee on Population Policy,
26/F, Central Government Offices,
2, Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar,
Hong Kong.

(Email: views@hkpopulation.gov.hk)

23rd February, 2014.

By email only

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Thoughts for Hong Kong – Public Engagement Exercise on Population Policy

Context

Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden wishes to draw attention to the fact that humans are but one species/strand in the ecological web that makes up our planet. KFBG feels that the Hong Kong Government needs to be explicit in terms of where the limits of population, development and economic growth are to be drawn, taking into account our dependence on this ecological web.

Population and Work Force

Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden (KFBG) welcomes the effort of the Steering Committee on Population Policy (SCPP) in preparing the Consultation Document (the Document) and in undertaking public engagement to solicit the views of the community. We are glad that the Government is aware of the importance of a population policy for the city's long-term sustainable development.

However, we feel that the Document focuses predominantly on economic development and workforce issues related to the availability of a long-term labour pool and shortfalls in manpower resources. We would like to emphasise that the sustainability of our natural and rural environments (e.g., natural habitats and agricultural land) is also vital to our society – both to our quality of life and the daily living needs, and this concept must also inform and be incorporated into a Population Policy for Hong Kong.

The Document seems to suggest that a larger workforce is needed for Hong Kong to combat the demographic trend of aging populations, and, that this can come about by boosting the home-grown rates of childbirth. The exponential growth of population is the fundamental driver of forest loss, extinction of species, over-harvesting of the oceans, water shortages, soil depletion, waste generation, resource depletion (especially oil) and reduction in availability of land for agriculture.

Every time, we double the total human population, that population, for its lifetime, will need more resources than we have ever used before in the whole history of humankind (assuming that our level of consumption remains the same); so population growth has an extremely powerful exponential effect and must be treated with extreme caution. Hong Kong and the whole world needs rapid population **reduction**, not growth^{1,2}.

Adopting a policy of population growth through boosting childbirth rates will be tantamount to adopting a policy of greater consumption, and deliberately exacerbating the rate of drawdown of already scarce resources. High demand and declining supply will increase prices to squeeze demand out of the market, thus causing social pressures and unrest, as has been seen in the Middle East in the last decade. The impact of expanding population levels in Hong Kong will simply aggravate the depletion of resources, both globally and locally through the daily need to supply Hong Kong people with energy, water, food, housing, transport, schools, goods and services. This creates a never ending spiral of needs as more funding is required to supply these things, therefore, the population needs to grow even more so as to pay taxes. A reducing population will have the reverse effect and the government will be able to invest in growth of wellbeing/ quality of life, not economic growth.

It is impossible to have endless growth of population and economy on a finite planet. We need a decrease in economic activity to combat climate change, biodiversity loss and resource depletion. Whilst, overall, we do not need more jobs there may in some cases be a lack of certain types of skill sets in Hong Kong. A more wise and equitable system would be to adopt an approach of flexible manpower and human resources planning rather than population growth planning. Hong Kong should allow expatriates with the requisite types of employment skills to take up work in Hong Kong where there are identified shortfalls in the labour needs or manpower resources.

¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0ghHia-M54>

² [http://www.npg.org/forum_series/ForgottenFundamentalsEnergyCrisisApril1998\(web\).pdf](http://www.npg.org/forum_series/ForgottenFundamentalsEnergyCrisisApril1998(web).pdf)

This would have the advantage of being far more responsive to the manpower needs of the various economic sectors. It could also be more flexibly applied short-term measures where such people work in Hong Kong for a certain period of time, and, the influx of such employed people into the working population would be adults, meaning that these would be persons who can contribute to GDP immediately. There would be no need to invest additional vast amounts in the education and training of increased numbers of children as they progress from a baby to a university student and beyond. There is no need to further increase the total population size of the planet to keep Hong Kong working.

Part of the Government's motivation to increase the population is to provide more taxpayers to pay for the Government salaries and services. It follows that a smaller population would require a smaller government to govern them and would require less airport runways, railways, bridges, schools, roads, and housing estates to be built and all this would in turn mean that there would be a much lower funding need so less tax needs to be raised, so the population can be even smaller. People who are not needed to fill Government jobs could work in life-enhancing jobs such as community farming, tree planting, nurseries, green building development, etc.

Importance and Global Status of Biodiversity

Humans are but one species/strand in the ecological web that makes up our planet. This means that, in “economic” terms, we are reliant on the “ecosystem services” provided by the other strands (e.g., water supply, land for growing food, insect pollinators of plants to produce food, and, fresh air created by forests and phytoplankton). This is why maintaining the integrity of ecosystems and biodiversity is fundamental to the survival of human beings. We feel that it just simply does not make any sense if we do not incorporate protection of biodiversity into the formulation of a “long term” Population Policy.

In the past few decades, biologists have been studying the extinction of species on Earth and believe that the sixth mass extinction has begun. The current rate of species extinction is at least several hundreds or even a thousand times higher than the background rate from geological records³. Some palaeontologists have suggested that, without any conservation

³ Dirzo, R., & Raven, P. H. (2003) Global state of biodiversity and loss. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 28(1), 137-167.

measures to slow down or stop the extinction of species currently in the “critically endangered” category, humans would push the world to a state of mass extinction, which has only occurred five times in the past⁴, and this will be the first time that a species has done this knowingly. We would like to draw your attention to the fact that decline in the population of some tiny but ecologically-important species such as honey-bees (due to pesticide use) as pollinators of plants directly and indirectly affects ecosystems (and, thus, the ecosystem services mentioned above), and also the production of food crops^{5,6,7} – bees and all aspects of the complex ecological network they inhabit are essential to everyone on this planet and must be protected. To suggest, as the Document does through omission, that protection of biodiversity has no significant meaning to the livelihood of human beings would be ignoring current scientific thought and study. We are animals, part of nature and in nature populations collapse and extinction occurs when populations grow too much in relation to resources.

The Population Policy must include both ecological and social elements to ensure that the natural environment of Hong Kong, and the environment beyond Hong Kong’s boundaries in supplying Hong Kong, would not be negatively affected and that Hong Kong embraces transition to a more sustainable way of living. However, in the Document, these concepts are only slightly touched upon and/or mentioned (in one short paragraph in Section 1.21). This is insufficient and inadequate. We need a holistic and comprehensive approach following the guiding principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Government would be wise to focus on improving the quality of life of the Hong Kong community for the long term (so that Hong Kong still exists and prospers in a thousand years) rather than focusing on a narrow and shallow viewpoint of economic growth at the expense of future survival. By protecting biodiversity, not only can the ecosystem services be maintained but the community can also enjoy the recreational functions provided by the countryside – this was demonstrated to be very important during the 2003 SARS crisis. Protecting the integrity of our biodiversity is simply a

⁴ Barnosky, A. D., Matzke, N., Tomiya, S., Wogan, G. O., Swartz, B., Quental, T. B., Marshall, C., McGuire, J. L., Lindsey, E. L., Maguire, K. C., Mersey, B. & Ferrer, E. A. (2011) Has the Earth’s sixth mass extinction already arrived? *Nature* 471(7336), 51-57.

⁵ Allen-Wardell, G., Bernhardt, P., Bitner, R., Burquez, A., Buchmann, S., Cane, J., Cox, P.A., Dalton, V., Feinsinger, P., Ingram, M., Inouye, D., Jones, C.E., Kennedy, K., Kevan, P., Koopowitz, H., Medellin, R., Medellin-Morales, S., & Nabhan, G.P. (1998) The Potential Consequences of Pollinator Declines on the Conservation of Biodiversity and Stability of Food Crop Yields. *Conservation Biology* 12(1), 8-17.

⁶ http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s5_8879.pdf

⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-12747560>

way to ensure that the long-term integrity and health of society is maintained and preserved, and, this is simply an element which must be robustly considered when a long-term Population Policy is to be formulated.

There can be thousands of jobs for local people in operating native Tree Nurseries and planting and maintaining trees in reforesting the upper, grassy slopes of Hong Kong's hills; thus, restoring the huge ecosystem services that once existed. This effort will lessen our dependence on Mainland China for our on-going water supply. As climate change worsens that supply from the north will be under threat.

Population and Land

Simply speaking, an increase in overall population numbers in Hong Kong would mean that the availability of “developed” land resource also needs to be increased (e.g., for housing and associated public infrastructure facilities, and the operation of various economic sectors). Given the limited size of Hong Kong, where would such supply of land come from if the basic quality of life of the community is not to be affected?

The Government has already claimed that Hong Kong urgently needs more land to cater for the current, and seemingly ever increasing, housing demand. In the 2014 Policy Address, the Chief Executive stated that some areas within the Green Belt (GB) zones which are primarily intended for the conservation of the natural environment could be considered for residential development. The function of a GB zone is to act as a buffer between urban and rural areas (including Country Parks). In another study regarding the land supply strategy, reclamation and the construction of an artificial island has been proposed to relieve the “so-called” land shortage. All of these proposals in one way or other would threaten the integrity of our natural countryside and biodiversity.

In our previous submissions to Government regarding the above topics, we have already mentioned that the Government should seriously consider all other alternative land supply options such as urban renewal, re-zoning of land with low ecological value as well as utilisation of government land under short term tenancies, vacant lands and brownfield sites to address the issue of urban development.

Land reclamation, construction of artificial islands and utilisation of natural or countryside areas with ecological value should not be considered by a wise Government. Indeed, the Government also seems reluctant to acknowledge that a basic, but widely recognised, root cause of the shortage of land supply in Hong Kong is that huge tracts of land in the New Territories has been used for creating low-rise, unplanned luxury housing or is reserved for building three-storey New Territories Exempted Houses.

Generally speaking, Hong Kong's area (both terrestrial and marine) is small and finite, and, Hong Kong is already densely populated, overcrowded, polluted and congested. It is unrealistic to suggest and promote the notion that Hong Kong's population can increase forever, or increase to even higher levels (in the past, there was a belief that the population of Hong Kong should be increased to 10 million people "to keep up with the megacities such as New York and London"⁸) without a deterioration in the quality of life or living standards. This is obviously not clear, holistic thinking. There are also plans to increase the numbers of visitors to Hong Kong.

We urge the Government to seriously consider:

- (1) limiting the local population to a certain level. Setting that level and sticking to it through various policies and regulations. The limit should be set with carrying capacity of the land and immediate hinterland as the key factor;
- (2) critically reviewing the shortfalls in labour and manpower resources and adopting a pragmatic and open door policy to attract people with the necessary skills and resources to work and reside in Hong Kong;
- (3) even if an unavoidable increase in future population is anticipated, all existing policies/practices that affect the evenness of land supply and social resources, such as the New Territories Exempted House Policy (the Small House Policy), the role of the Urban Renewal Authority as well as other housing authorities and tax rates should be critically reviewed;
- (4) any increase in the supply of land resources for development should not be sought by "land mining" the remaining pockets of agricultural land in our countryside and/or at the expense of destroying the natural landscapes in places such as our Country Parks.

⁸ <http://www.asianewsnet.net/HK-ponders-weak-population-growth-42207.html>

The natural countryside and the Country Parks of Hong Kong are a vital element of our landscape. They provide essential ecosystem services and are an essential outlet for Hong Kong people to escape from the ubiquitous small housing space available to the majority of people, the general lack of urban amenities especially in the older densely populated districts and the generally bad or poor quality of air in the urban areas.

Any further increase in population for Hong Kong would just exacerbate the already congested and overcrowded living conditions in Hong Kong and all associated social problems would just become worse, and the quality of life for Hong Kong people would deteriorate even more rapidly. The Government needs to understand that the Hong Kong community, nowadays, highly values a good quality of life, and, unlimited economic growth and development is not the only way to improve the life of the community. If the population grows Hong Kong will become unliveable and those that can would seek to move to other places in the world, which would defeat the Government's economic dreams anyway.

Population and Food Security

Section 3 of the Document rather extensively outlines matters related to “enhancing the quality of home-grown talent”, such as how to improve the issue of skills mismatch and social mobility, and also the diversification of the economic base. While we agree that Hong Kong should not rely on only certain sectors such as finance and property investment for sustaining the economy, we are disappointed that the Document mentions nothing about development of the primary production industry sector (e.g., agriculture) especially the production of food which is directly related to our fundamental daily needs – the food we eat comes from the cultivation of agricultural products on farmland.

“Food security” is an issue that cannot be ignored by any community or society; for instance, Mainland China has set up a “red-line” system to ensure that there would be enough farmland for food production⁹; both the cities of Beijing and Shanghai have also designated a “degree of self-sufficiency” regarding food production¹⁰. In Hong Kong, however, there is no proper Agriculture Policy, and the Government even considers that “...*Primary production (including agriculture, fisheries, mining and quarrying) is insignificant in Hong Kong in terms*

⁹ http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-10/18/content_11423618.htm

¹⁰ <http://finance.people.com.cn/BIG5/17845618.html>

of its share of the GDP and total employment, as the city is a predominantly urban economy. As such, redevelopment of the agricultural industry by a significant scale as a means to raise the share of local produce in local food supply does not appear to be a practicable proposition”¹¹.

Hong Kong currently only grows about 2.5% of its vegetables locally¹². This is a long way from ensuring food security for the people of Hong Kong. Local scholars have already reported that the present reality of food production in Hong Kong is not desirable^{13, 14}.

Hong Kong is also currently unprepared for the effects of Climate Change and Peak Oil which are likely to be severe. Peak Oil is the tipping point of global oil production which will be followed by an ever-decreasing flow of supply and ever-increasing price hikes, leading to economic and social instability, and is considered by leading analysts to have already happened, with the effects slowly coming into play. Climate scientists in Hong Kong, Mainland China and elsewhere predict food shortages in the coming years due to climate change in China. Hong Kong’s food supply is also heavily reliant on the supply of cheap oil and gas, which is used in the production of fertilizers and pesticides, and of course, which is needed for food transportation and refrigeration. We consider that food security is a very serious issue and that the Government should take all possible steps to protect and conserve Hong Kong’s active, abandoned, developer-owned, and illegally degraded agricultural lands so that there is a chance of Hong Kong having increased resilience in the future. Hong Kong needs a lower population and much more agricultural land in production for its long term survival.

We do not consider that any kind of “long-term” Population Policy can be formulated without taking into account food security. Although Hong Kong has already lost about 60% of its farmland area in the past 50 years^{15, 16}, there are still many areas zoned for Agriculture under

¹¹ <http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201302/06/P201302060519.htm>

¹² Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department. 2012. Appendix 2: Fresh food – Production, exports, imports, re-exports and consumption 2009 – 11. *Department Annual Report 2011-2012*. Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, Hong Kong.

¹³ <http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/news/art/20130513/18258255>

¹⁴ <http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/news/art/20140205/18615493>

¹⁵ Agriculture and Fisheries Department. 1961. *Annual Departmental Report 1960/61*. Hong Kong Government, Hong Kong.

¹⁶ Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation. 2012. *Department Annual Report 2011-2012*. Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, Hong Kong.

the current planning system that are not under production despite high demand from the public. Incidents caused by the developments in Choi Yuen Tsuen and the Northeast New Territories New Development Area should have also shown that farming is not really a diminishing industry in Hong Kong. In addition, the demand for good quality local produce is increasing¹⁷. By conserving our remaining agriculture areas to safeguard our capacity and potential for sustainable food production both for the present and future populations, the livelihoods of those in the rural community of Hong Kong who possess the skills and knowledge, and, who also wish to continue with farming as a traditional way of life can also be protected. Hundreds of hectares of agricultural zoned land are held by the developers who ban farming on that land and wait for the Government to change the zoning and let them build on it. This is immoral.

Section 3 of the Document deals with enhancing the quality of home-grown talent. People with low workplace skills and/or education levels in the community can also be absorbed by the agriculture industry – this is exactly how to go about diversifying the economic base and preventing mismatch of skills. To conclude, we consider that the Government should not simply ignore or dismiss the importance of agriculture as irrelevant in the local economy when formulating the Population Policy. In fact, we would urge that the Government take pro-active and practical measures to re-vitalise and support local food production as a fundamental pillar of the local economy of Hong Kong.

Population and Ecological Footprint

According to the Hong Kong Ecological Footprint Report 2013 produced by WWF Hong Kong and Global Footprint Network¹⁸, the ecological footprint of Hong Kong was 4.7 global hectares¹⁹ (gha) per person while its bio-capacity was only 0.03 gha per capita (that means its ecological footprint was 150 times greater than the productivity of its own ecosystem capacity). Hence, while we are already consuming the earth's resources at our current population level, we are also actively contributing to increasing the ecological footprint deficit of other countries or nations. This is not sustainable and a hardly desirable status quo where the high population level in Hong Kong consumes almost all of its daily needs (e.g., food, fuel supply to power its

¹⁷ http://producegreen.org.hk/download/LocalAgriRTDiscussion_final.pdf

¹⁸ http://www.footprintnetwork.org/images/article_uploads/hong_kong_ecological_footprint_report_2013.pdf

¹⁹ A global hectare is defined as “a hectare of biologically productive land or sea area with world average bio-productivity in a given year”.

energy needs and water) from outside its borders.

To highlight a moot point, using the ecological footprint value of 4.7 global hectares per person for Hong Kong, our land area, footprint-wise, only has an optimal carrying capacity for a population, obviously theoretical, of about 23,000 people. Somewhere between this figure and 7 million people is an optimal, though still unsustainable population size.

This suggests that, as a community, we must reduce our population size, consume wisely, responsibly and sustainably, and, Hong Kong people must change their lifestyle and consumption habits. The Government has the responsibility to promote a more sustainable living style and should not promote the concept of non-stop economic growth and unlimited development potential. Otherwise, the high population of Hong Kong will continue to place tremendous pressure on the other countries or places through extraction and utilisation of their resources (e.g., food, water, energy, material supply for construction and housing development such as river sand, rock, gravel and forest timber products). A high population in Hong Kong, therefore, directly contributes to the degradation of the natural environment and depletion of natural resources in other places and also fosters all the attendant problems (e.g., over-harvesting of the oceans for seafood, the illegal logging of trees for vast amounts of timber and the wholesale clearance of ancient tropical rainforests).

We urge that the Hong Kong Government, in formulating the Population Policy, which would affect every future aspect of the society and, also, the natural resources of other countries or places should take ecological footprint considerations into account.

Sustainable Development of Hong Kong

Sustainability requires a balance of environmental, social and economic demands, for the benefit of the global inhabitants of the planet, from now into the future. We do not feel this cosmopolitan principle of being a “Global Player or Globally Responsible Citizen” has been incorporated into this Document, and feel it should be included into the formulation of the future Population Policy. We are clearly consuming more than our fair share of resources (consuming other people’s resources) and providing more than our share of emissions towards climate change.

As mentioned in Section 1.22 of the Document, the objective of the policy, as proposed by the SCPP, is “to develop and nurture a population that will continuously support and drive Hong Kong’s socio-economic development as Asia’s world city, and to engender a socially inclusive and cohesive society that allows individuals to realise their potential, with a view to attaining quality life for all residents and families”. Even though the SCPP has tried to address the environmental issues in Section 1.21 by citing some of the work under the Environment Bureau, we would like to state that this is not enough.

The lack of consideration of sustainability issues (i.e., Food Security, Water Security, Cheap Oil Supply, Land Security and Biodiversity Loss) is common among other countries. This error is clearly described in the Global Biodiversity Outlook 3²⁰, of the Convention on Biodiversity which states “...Actions to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity receive a tiny fraction of funding compared to activities aimed at promoting infrastructure and industrial developments. Moreover, biodiversity considerations are often ignored when such developments are designed, and opportunities to plan in ways that minimize unnecessary negative impacts on biodiversity are missed. Actions to address the underlying drivers of biodiversity loss, including demographic, economic, technological, socio-political and cultural pressures, in meaningful ways, have also been limited”.

We consider that a green economy, which supports social-economic development, but not at the expense of the biodiversity and the natural environment, should be created to drive our economy forward in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way. Since the Earth is finite and ‘natural resources’ limited, thus, economic growth must also be finite: in other words, a line must be drawn somewhere, if we are to survive. The multi-billion-dollar infrastructure programmes will need lots of resources including energy and all technology requires some kind of energy input. As Hong Kong dreams of becoming a mega-city and as fuel costs rise, will it one day become too expensive to power and run the extensive public transport systems, and, power the lifts in the ever soaring high-rise blocks of public housing? Then, what?

We feel that the Government needs to be explicit in terms of where the limits of population, development and economic growth are to be drawn, taking into account our critical dependence on natural resources and the functioning of ecosystem services. This requirement is reflected in the Hong Kong Government’s legal obligations under the international Convention on Biological Diversity.

²⁰ <http://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/gbo/gbo3-final-en.pdf>

The Convention on Biological Diversity

We are surprised, and disappointed, to know that the Secretary for the Environment and relevant authorities are not members of the SCPP, in view of the fact that The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has been extended to Hong Kong since 2011. Under the Strategic Goal A of the Aichi Targets in the CBD²¹, mainstreaming biodiversity across the government and the society is necessary to address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss. All government departments, along with members of the public, should work hand in hand in order to support the sustainable use of biodiversity and all natural resources. We would like to remind the SCPP about the Hong Kong Government's legal obligations under the CBD²².

Articles 3, 4, 6 and 8 of the Convention state that:

Article 3: Principle

States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

Article 4: Jurisdictional Scope

Subject to the rights of other States, and except as otherwise expressly provided in this Convention, the provisions of this Convention apply, in relation to each Contracting Party:

- (a) In the case of components of biological diversity, in areas within the limits of its national jurisdiction; and*
- (b) In the case of processes and activities, regardless of where their effects occur, carried out under its jurisdiction or control, within the area of its national jurisdiction or beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.*

²¹ <http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

²² <http://www.cbd.int/convention/text/>

Article 6: General Measures for Conservation and Sustainable Use

Each Contracting Party shall, in accordance with its particular conditions and capabilities:

(a) Develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity or adapt for this purpose existing strategies, plans or programmes which shall reflect, inter alia, the measures set out in this Convention relevant to the Contracting Party concerned; and

(b) Integrate, as far as possible and as appropriate, the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies.

Article 8: In-Situ Conservation

(d) Promote the protection of ecosystems, natural habitats and the maintenance of viable populations of species in natural surroundings;

(e) Promote environmentally sound and sustainable development in areas adjacent to protected areas with a view to furthering protection of these areas.

Conclusion

The world's population is growing at 1.1 per cent annually or 78 million people which is half the peak level of 2.1 per cent in the late 1960s^{23, 24}. Although the world's growth rate is continuing to slow due to declining birth rates, the eight billion people mark will likely be reached by 2025. Human population growth is not only a significant threat to our quality of life but to the very ecological systems that sustain our unique environment. Dismissal of this major demographic trend can result in ill-conceived policies, unsustainable programmes and squandered resources.

Hong Kong's population has been booming²⁵. Our population exceeded seven million in 2013. Some 784 000 new arrivals have settled in Hong Kong under the One-way Permit (OWP) Scheme since 1997 and that number accounts for 11% of our population in 2013. There are

²³ <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/better-planning-watch-global-demographic-trends>

²⁴ <http://www.fao.org/english/newsroom/news/2002/7833-en.html>

²⁵ <http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1106837/seven-population-trends-hold-key-good-public-policies>

another 200 000 ‘Type II babies’ born in our hospitals to mainland parents who have the right to one day return to their birthplace. Hong Kong is already highly developed and our current population has already stretched our carrying capacity way past the limits. Hong Kong’s transportation, healthcare, housing, education and welfare systems have long been placed under extreme pressure by the unmanaged growth of population. It is also leading to an increasing loss of pristine countryside, native habitats, ecological deficits and a deteriorating quality of life.

In the consultation paper and the process, the looming global crisis and the complex subjects that are fundamental to a population policy are missing. It is disappointing that discussions for defining a ‘ceiling to population growth’ seems to be regarded as a no-go zone currently.

We believe truly transformative changes are essential to solve the paradox of development and we urge the government to set a Population Policy that will:

- Stabilize and reduce Hong Kong’s population and resource use to ecologically sustainable levels;
- Address the environmental consequences of demographic changes in Hong Kong population settlement and distribution;
- Develop and fund strategies that minimize the environmental impact of our large population and maximize biodiversity outcomes;
- Encourage a migration policy that fulfils environmental and social obligations rather than perceived, ill conceived and un-ending economic needs;

We are now living in the era of crises: loss of biodiversity, climate change, invasive exotic species, lack of clean water resources, depletion of fossil fuels and insecure food supply. Indeed, there is an actual need for a transition and mindset change from a scenario of unlimited economic and population growth to sustainable development. This includes limiting birth rates and reversing population growth; reducing the size of government; resisting the temptation to build more and more infrastructure, which requires funding by the population; adopting better and effective land use planning; reducing consumption and waste per capita; supporting eco-friendly and sustainable economy; mainstreaming biodiversity protection into government policies; restoring degraded ecosystems and restoring degraded agricultural lands.

The present Document, however, reflects that the Hong Kong Government still takes a narrow and shallow view, with limited consideration of alternative sustainable options of development, of the urgent need for transition to sustainable living and of the irreversible consequences of non-stop economic growth. Hong Kong needs to be prepared and build economic, social and governmental resilience to the crises that are upon us. This will not only enhance the living environment and make better our home but will also free Hong Kong from reliance of extracting and over-harvesting resources from the people of other countries. Hong Kong is capable of becoming one of the leading sustainable cosmopolitan cities in the Asia-Pacific region but that will only come about if there is a change-over to new ways of doing things that will follow from facing up to realities.

Andrew Brown
Executive Director
Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden

cc.
Development Bureau
Environment Bureau
Conservancy Association
Designing Hong Kong
Hong Kong Bird Watching Society
WWF – Hong Kong