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Climate change is indisputably real and threatens catastrophic world-wide environmental and infrastructure damage if unchecked. Hong Kong has some unique connections with climate change, some of which are considered in this edition.

The Editors

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CLIMATE CHANGE EFFECTS IN HONG KONG

Climate Change

Global warming – the cause of “climate change” – due to human activity is an unwelcome fact of life today, despite the mutterings of the very small minority comprising the climate sceptics camp.

Sceptics argue that the earth’s climate has warmed and cooled in cycles for as long as science is able to reliably measure average temperature. However, major global surface temperature reconstruction studies reveal that the earth has significantly warmed since 1880. Most of the increase in temperatures has occurred within the past 35 years; fifteen of the 16 hottest years on record occurred since 2001. For the first time, global average temperatures in 2015 were 1°C or more above the 1880-1889 baseline average.

Global warming is mainly due to human activity – such as burning fossil fuels – causing hugely increased volumes of carbon dioxide to accumulate in the atmosphere. Four hundred thousand years ago the atmosphere held 280 parts per million of carbon dioxide. This level fluctuated in a band between 180-300 ppm over ensuing periods until the 20th century, since when the level has continued to rise. Today, the reading is approximately 400 ppm.

So, undoubtedly the world is facing a future of permanently increased average temperatures. This has unusual, particular significance for Hong Kong.

Climate change in Hong Kong

The feature article in the Spring 2017 edition of Convocation Newsletter (University of Hong Kong) has the title: Climate Crunch: The point of no return?

The article describes the relationship between global warming and some of Hong Kong’s indigenous wildlife. The author observes: “The relationship between climate change and biodiversity has developed into an interesting phenomenon. As temperatures rapidly rise, requiring all our ecosystems, plants and animals to adapt, an outcome is that with global warming we are seeing new species emerging and biodiversity increasing”.

We have a surprisingly high number of butterfly and dragonfly species in our small land territory of approximately 1850 sq. km. The article notes: “As climate change affects the variety of life forms in the world, many scientists believe that the ideal animals to observe the effects of climate change are ectotherms, or animals dependent on external sources for heat. For this reason, butterflies have been used in studies to find out how an increase in temperature will impact on their species in the future. Although it is a well-known fact that butterflies are usually more active in Hong Kong between March and November – when temperatures and humidity remain high – it comes as no surprise that there was a surge in butterflies across the HKU campus as Hong Kong has become relatively warmer all year round”.

Formal gardens associated with urban development ironically have increased our butterfly population: “the increase in development of urban spaces around Hong Kong is promoting even greater diversity, such that Hong Kong’s already growing collection of 250 butterfly species is multiplying”.

Butterflies and their habitats in Hong Kong – rural and urban – and their chances of survival in a hotter climate are the subject of on-going research by various scholars at HKU.

More generally, the article makes the point that in Hong Kong (and everywhere) “we need to help biodiversity adapt to changing temperatures and offset any potential damage arising from climate change”.

The report of a recent study led by the University of Florida was published in *Science*. The report was co-authored by HKU’s Professor David Dudgeon and describes Hong Kong’s paradise fish and short-legged toad as the species most affected by climate change. “They are not able to adjust their ranges due to intense urbanisation around the sites they occupy currently. If the current climatic conditions change, they will either have to adapt or perish”, said Professor Dudgeon.

The Hong Kong newt (a brilliantly coloured species of salamander) is also under threat from increased average temperatures: “the Hong Kong newt, which breeds only during the coolest months of the year, would also likely fall victim to global warming since warmer winter temperatures in the future might halt the reproduction of this species”.

Animals which live in our higher regions are also vulnerable to a hotter climate: “Mountain-top animals, such as the giant spiny frog, are already mainly confined to streams near the summit of Tai Mo Shan and globally vulnerable to the point of extinction. They would also have nowhere to migrate to as the climate warms”, warns Professor Dudgeon.

The University of Florida study concluded that: “out of a total of 94 ecological processes evaluated globally, 82% of them displayed evidence of impact from climate change. Land, freshwater and marine ecosystems and species have all been affected, which could lead to the increase of pests and disease outbreaks, unpredictable changes in fisheries, and decreasing agriculture yields”.

The researchers quoted in the HKU article had a sober conclusion: “We now have evidence that, with only 1 degree Celsius of warming globally, major impact is already being felt in natural systems. Genes are changing, species’ physiology and physical features such as body size are changing, species are moving and we see clear signs of entire ecosystems under stress, all in response to changes in climate on land and in the ocean”.

Conclusion

Even this short insight into scientific opinion is sufficient, surely, to galvanise our lethargic government departments and apathetic public here in Hong Kong into treating climate change as the severe, present day environmental (and economic!) danger it is – and taking consequential robust steps to change our energy and other consumption patterns to limit the extent of global warming.

TOWN PLANNING

Draft Chai Wan Outline Zoning Plan approved

On 15 September 2017, the Chief Executive in Council approved the draft Chai Wan Outline Zoning Plan (OZP).

The planning scheme area, covering approximately 614 hectares, is bounded by Heng Fa Chuen to the north, Tai Tam Country Park to the west, Shek O Country Park to the south, and the waterfront to the east.

Specific Zones are:

- (1) Approximately 1.37 hectares are zoned “Comprehensive Development Area” (CDA).
- (2) 72.88 hectares, covering public housing and private residential developments, are zoned “Residential (Group A)” for high-density residential developments.
- (3) 6.19 hectares are zoned “Industrial” for general industrial uses to ensure an adequate supply of industrial floor space.
- (4) 70.58 hectares are zoned “Government, Institution or Community”;
- (5) 20.98 hectares are zoned “Open Space” to serve the needs of local residents and the general public.
- (6) 88.15 hectares are zoned “Other Specified Uses”.
- (7) 181.32 hectares, covering the undeveloped hill slopes in the area, are zoned “Green Belt” for the conservation of the existing natural environment amid the built-up areas and at the urban fringe, to safeguard it from encroachment by urban-type development, and to provide additional outlets for passive recreational activities.
- (8) 115.43 hectares covering parts of Tai Tam Country Park and Shek O Country Park are zoned “Country Park”.
- (9) 5.88 hectares are zoned “Coastal Protection Area” to conserve, protect and retain the natural coastlines and the sensitive coastal natural environment.

[Town Planning Board Press Release, 15/09/2017]

Approved Kwun Tong (South) Outline Zoning Plan amended

On 3 November 2017, the Town Planning Board announced amendments to the approved Kwun Tong (South) Outline Zoning Plan (OZP).

The amendments mainly involve:

- (1) the rezoning of a site at Ting On Street from “Government, Institution or Community” to “Residential (Group A)3” for public housing development;
- (2) the incorporation of “Art Studio (excluding those involving direct provision of services or goods)” and corresponding amendment to replace “Place of Recreation, Sports or Culture” by “Place of Recreation, Sports or Culture (not elsewhere specified)”; and
- (3) various amendments to reflect the latest planning circumstances.

[Town Planning Board Press Release, 03/11/2017]

Draft Urban Renewal Authority Hung Fook Street/Ngan Hon Street Development Scheme Plan approved

On 10 November 2017, the Chief Executive in Council approved the draft Urban Renewal Authority (URA) Hung Fook Street/Ngan Hon Street Development Scheme Plan (DSP).

The Development Scheme Area covers a total area of approximately 4,951 square metres. The Area is zoned “Residential (Group A)8” (“R(A)8”). Developments within the “R(A)8” zone are subject to a maximum plot ratio (PR) of 7.5 for a domestic building or 9.0 for a building that is partly domestic and partly non-domestic, or the PR of the existing building, whichever is the greater. The maximum building height of the Area is restricted to 100 metres above Principal Datum or the height of the existing building, whichever is the greater.

[Town Planning Board Press Release, 10/11/2017]

Draft Hung Hom Outline Zoning Plan approved

The Chief Executive in Council approved the draft Hung Hom Outline Zoning Plan (“OZP”) on 10 November 2017. The approved OZP provides a statutory land use planning framework to guide development and redevelopment in the Hung Hom area.

The planning scheme area of the OZP, covering approximately 145 hectares, is located in the south-eastern part of Kowloon Peninsula. The approved OZP also indicated that two areas were excised from the OZP boundary and replaced by the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) Chun Tin Street/Sung Chi Street Development Scheme Plan (DSP) and URA Hung Fook Street/Ngan Hon Street DSP.

Specific zones are:-

- (1) 6.39 hectares are zoned “Commercial”, which covers existing commercial developments such as Hunghom Commercial Centre, Harbourfront Horizon and the proposed commercial developments at Cheong Tung Road.
- (2) 22.08 hectares are zoned “Comprehensive Development Area”, covering Whampoa Garden, Kerry Hotel Hong Kong at Hung Luen Road, One Harbour Gate at the junction of Hung Luen Road and Kin Wan Street, and two sites at the junction of Cheong Hang Road and Winslow Street.
- (3) 26.75 hectares are zoned “Residential” covering nearly all existing residential developments in Hung Hom and some residential sites at Lee Kung Street, Ko Shan Road and junction of Chatham Road North and Hok Yuen Street.
- (4) 15.23 hectares are zoned “Other Specified Uses” (“OU”) for specific uses such as funeral parlour/depot, public mortuary, MTR freight yard, ferry piers, sewage treatment plant and a hotel development at Wuhu Street.
- (5) 7.38 hectares under the “OU” zoning are intended for “Business” uses, so that non-polluting industrial, office and other commercial uses are permitted as of right.
- (6) 12.58 hectares are zoned “Government, Institution or Community”.
- (7) 13.40 hectares are zoned “Open Space” for active and passive recreational uses, whilst about 41.65 hectares are set aside for major roads and other uses.

[Town Planning Board Press Release, 10/11/2017]

Draft Urban Renewal Authority Chun Tin Street/Sung Chi Street Development Scheme Plan approved

On 10 November 2017, the Chief Executive in Council approved the draft Urban Renewal Authority (“URA”) Chun Tin Street/Sung Chi Street Development Scheme Plan (“DSP”).

The Development Scheme Area covers a total area of about 2,475 square metres, which mainly comprises the following sites:-

- (1) the Area covers a whole row of old and dilapidated tenement buildings bounded by Chun Tin Street, Hok Yuen Street and Sung Chi Street;
- (2) Chun Tin Street is proposed to be closed and integrated into the Area for redevelopment to achieve better site utilisation, increase redevelopment potential and enhance the local traffic and pedestrian environment;
- (3) road improvement works are proposed to be carried out in part of Sung Chi Street adjoining the Area and the adjoining pavement of Hok Yuen Street.

The Area is zoned “Residential” for high-density residential developments. Commercial uses are permitted on the lowest three floors of a building or in the purpose-designed non-residential portion of an existing building.

Developments within the zone are subject to a maximum domestic gross floor area of 12,270 sq m and maximum non-domestic gross floor area of 2,454 sq m.

The maximum building height of the Area is restricted to 120 metres above Principal Datum or the height of the existing building, whichever is the greater.

[Town Planning Board Press Release, 10/11/2017]

WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT

The 65th Board Meeting of West Kowloon Cultural District Authority

The Board of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (“WKCD”) held its 65th meeting on 24th October 2017.

The meeting was told that WKCD had won two awards in recognition for its excellent construction safety for the M+ Museum Project, namely the Considerate Contractors Site Award (New Works) jointly presented by the Development Bureau and the Construction Industry Council; and the first prize of the Safe Project Team Award presented by the Lighthouse Club Hong Kong.

The Art Park project is on track with the opening of Phase 1 by the end of this year. Regarding Lyric Theatre Complex and relevant part of the Integrated Basement project, the new construction phase of the Integrated Basement, which had been approved by the Board, is now pending for the funding application to pass through the Legislative Council.

With the M+ project, the focus has been shifted to constructing the podium deck and the tower above. There was also significant progress in the production and testing of the ceramic tiles and precast facade system last month. Further, for the Xiqu Centre, the first Statutory Building Inspections are being conducted and the building is near completion both internally and externally.

In October and November, WKCD and Swire Properties came together to bring *Freespace at Taikoo Place*, whereby over 80 local and overseas artists were perform at different places around Taikoo Place for two consecutive weeks. WKCD has also launched a comprehensive three-year programme to help nurture talent and build audience appreciation for the theatrical arts.

After co-presenting the *New Works Forum: Screendance* in 2015, WKCD and City Contemporary Dance Company cooperate again to invite Cinemovement, a screendance organisation in Singapore to co-produce *Creative Meeting Point on Screendance – Hong Kong x Singapore*.

On the M+ side, *Rethinking Pei: A Centenary Symposium* is a two-part programme linking two conferences in the US and Hong Kong. The symposium aims to re-examine I.M. Pei, one of the most celebrated architects of the 20th and early 21st centuries.

[WKCD Press Release, 24/10/2017]

The 66th Board Meeting of West Kowloon Cultural District Authority

The Board of the WKCDA held its 66th meeting on 20th November 2017.

It was reported to the meeting that the Xiqu Centre project is moving towards the final phase of fitting out and statutory building inspections are in full swing. Phase 1 of the Art Project will be completed by the end of this year and Phases 2 and 3 of works have seen good progress. The Lyric Theatre Complex and relevant part of the Integrated Basement project is still pending funding approval by the Legislative Council.

Apart from the construction activities, in recognition of excellence in its architectural design, the M+ Pavilion has recently received the 2017 AIA Hong Kong Merit Award for Architecture from the American Institute of Architects Hong Kong Chapter.

Progress of development of the Hong Kong Palace Museum (“HKPM”) was discussed. A series of activities was organised after the scheme design of HKPM was approved by the Board in September 2017, including a media roundtable where Rocco Yim, representative of the design consultant of HKPM, walked participants through the scheme design and key features of HKPM; three pop-up exhibitions held over three weekends at China Hong Kong City, Hong Kong Maritime Museum and Sha Tin Town Hall respectively.

The *Freespace Happening* held on 11 and 12 November 2017 attracted an attendance of around 5 100. The next *Freespace Happening* will be held on 10 December at the Nursery Park with music, Poetry Music Jam, Reading on the Grass, a Wander in the Park guided tour as well as WE Dance showcases and workshops.

[WKCD Press Release, 20/11/2017]

The 67th Board Meeting of West Kowloon Cultural District Authority

The Board of the WKCDA held its 67th meeting on 18th December 2017.

It was reported to the meeting that the Xiqu Centre project is undergoing statutory building inspections and targeting to obtain the Occupation Permit in early 2018. The Art Park project has seen the first batch of trees from the Nursery Park transplanted into their permanent location in Phase 1. Freespace is now on track for completion in the third quarter of 2018.

Since mid-2017, the Lyric Theatre Complex and relevant part of the Integrated Basement project have been ready move on to the next construction stage. Nevertheless, due to the delay in the funding approval by the Legislative Council, both the award of the construction contract and the completion date of this major complex are being affected.

Members were informed that *The Weight of Lightness: Ink Art at M+* exhibition running till 14 January 2018 has received extremely positive reviews in local and overseas media. The exhibition attracted a cumulative attendance of around 8,000. Together with the exhibition, a commissioned dance performance, *TranforMotion*, by Hong Kong choreographer Allen Lam took place at M+ Pavilion on 28 and 29 October as well as 9 and 10 December 2017. Members were also noted that the next *Freespace Happening* will be held on 14 January 2018 with new sounds and surprising collaborations.

In addition, to further expand its global performing arts network, WKCDA has joined the Silk Road International League of Theatres (SRILT) initiated by the China Arts and Entertainment Group as its first Hong Kong Member.

[WKCD Press Release, 18/12/2017]

HONG KONG BRIEFING

Government filibuster on environmental protection

In an article in the SCMP (19 October 2017) Edwin Lau Che-feng, executive director of *The Green Earth*, calls on the government to take urgent remedial action concerning three major environmental problems Hong Kong faces – and has faced for decades. He argues (correctly, in our opinion) that the new Chief Executive should treat these environmental problems as equally serious as our notorious housing crisis. Mr. Lau’s article (below) reflects the frustration that citizens concerned with the state of Hong Kong’s environment have endured (and continue to endure) through years of bureaucratic inertia when it comes to implementing robust measures to combat our significant environmental problems.

“Though Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor is right to focus on housing issues in her first policy address, environmental issues are equally important to Hongkongers well-being. Here are several we must not neglect. First, regulations are urgently needed to improve the city’s air quality. The Environmental Protection Department claims that over 90 per cent of roadside air pollution is due to commercial diesel vehicles. The government must move quickly to roll out electronic road pricing to improve traffic flow, which in turn would improve air quality.

And, why, despite requiring vessels to use low sulphur fuel in Hong Kong waters, has the government yet to act on reducing emissions from diesel vehicles?

Second, we need cleaner electricity supplies. This requires an efficient system, and a fuel mix with a much lower carbon content. This means a push for more renewable energy. I’m pleased to see that a feed-in-tariff scheme has been introduced in the new scheme of control agreements the government signed with the two power companies. This will allow privately run renewable energy power generation installations to sell their electricity to the two suppliers. Let’s hope an attractive selling price can be negotiated so that businesses and households will be encouraged to invest in renewable energy installations.

Third, we need to rapidly reduce our waste. This problem must be tackled on several fronts.

I welcome the new measures announced in the policy address, such as forming outreach teams to promote clean recycling, and better government support for the collection of waste plastic bottles, which recycles generally ignore due to their low value.

But we also need urgent efforts to deal with the plastic waste that will overwhelm our landfills come 1 January, when mainland China implements its stricter waste import requirements. The government has earmarked HK\$20 million for the purchase of processing equipment to help the recycling industry meet these

new standards. But, given the time lag between submitting funding applications to actually setting up the infrastructure, the government must have a Plan B ready for this potential waste disaster.

Food waste, which makes up the largest share of municipal solid waste at 33 per cent, must be dramatically cut. We could follow South Korea's lead in making food waste recycling mandatory. Our government expects the waste charging legislation to take effect by the second half of 2019. The public also expects convenient recycling facilities to be installed by then, so households can easily separate food waste."

[SCMP, 19/10/2017]

Public to get say on developing country park fringes for homes

After the fifth meeting of the Task Force on Land Supply, the task force decided to invite for public opinion in relation to whether land on the fringes of country parks shall be given over to housing.

They noted that country parks are valuable assets with 13 million visitors each year and were, thus, of the opinion that the threshold for such development must be very high and the ecological value must be low with no other alternatives available for development.

They also commented that the priority for developing the Plover Cove Reservoir will be lower than that of country park fringes, as the reservoir plays an integral role in Hong Kong's water supply and it would require at least 20 years to redevelop the reservoir before people could move in.

[The Standard, 06/12/2017]

War declared on big-event waste

The Environmental Protection Department and the Business Environment Council have jointly issued a booklet on waste reduction for major community events. The booklet contained suggestions on avoiding the production of waste as well as effective ways to collect and handle recyclable items.

However, the guidelines on the booklet are voluntary and there will be no sanctions if event organisers do not follow the suggestions. The Secretary for the Environment noted that the booklet is a step forward in reducing waste in Hong Kong and that the situation will be further improved when the municipal solid waste charging scheme is in place.

[The Standard, 12/12/2017]

Private sector has failed on plastic bottle recycling

A study by the Green Earth found that only 7.6% of plastic bottles in 2015 were recycled with 96% of which were recycled by government-backed entities.

The study also revealed that most private recycling companies would not recycle plastic bottles. 84% of the 74 firms interviewed declined to accept plastic bottles, while the rest required customers to pay for shipping.

The recycling rate for plastics has also dropped from 69% in 2010 to just 11% in 2015, due to the plummet in crude oil prices in recent years. In order to establish a self-sustaining system for plastics recycling, the Green Earth suggested that the government shall introduce a producer responsibility scheme which holds manufacturers accountable for the collection, recycling and disposal of plastic products.

[SCMP, 14/12/2017]

Bins on Hong Kong hiking trails removed

553 rubbish and recycling bins have been removed from the hiking trails since 2015 in order to reduce litter in the country parks. As a result, the rubbish collected in country parks declined by 10% to 3,400 tonnes last year as compared to the statistics in 2014.

Before the campaign in 2015, there were approximately 40 – 50 bags of rubbish every day. This year, the amount of rubbish declined to around a dozen bags of rubbish per day. The number of people prosecuted for littering has also plummeted to 39 for the past 11 months this year, down from 202 in 2013.

[SCMP, 15/12/2017]

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE ENVIRONMENT (ACE)

Summary of Minutes of the 226th Meeting of the ACE held on 9 October 2017 at 2:30 pm

One of the main items of the meeting was to review the Environmental Assessment Reports of two projects, namely Siu Ho Wan Station and Siu Ho Wan Depot Replanning Works ("**Railway EIA**") and Proposed Comprehensive Residential and Commercial Development atop Siu Ho Wan Depot ("**Topside EIA**").

The Chairperson of the EIA Subcommittee ("**EIASC**") reported that the Railway EIA report submitted by the MTRC was made available for public inspection from 14 July to 12 August 2017.

(a) **Railway EIA**

For connectivity and walkability within the project site, a Member suggested that recommendation (d) i.e. "to provide facilities including pedestrian walkway, linkage, public space and cycle tracks to enhance connectivity and walkability within the project site and also to the adjacent waterfront and nearby Tung Chung New Town Extension" should be upgraded as a condition. He considered that it was important to enhance internal connection in terms of walkability and cycling in order to reduce the need for transportation within the Railway project site, thereby minimising noise impacts and emissions.

Mr C F Wong, Assistant Director (Environmental Assessment), EPD said that any proposed conditions should be relevant to the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance ("**EIAO**") and the Technical Memorandum ("**TM**"). Since there were no specific requirements on walkability and connectivity in the TM, it might not be appropriate to upgrade recommendation (d) into a condition.

For landscape and visual impacts, Mr C K Soh, Chief Town Planner/Urban Design & Landscape, Plan D pointed out that the existing waterfront was a man-made feature on reclaimed land that was likely to have low usage, hence no negative impact from the Railway project was anticipated. Nevertheless, he agreed that the proposed Topside development would be a good opportunity to improve the landscape and visual quality of the waterfront area.

(b) Topside EIA

It was reported at the meeting that the Topside EIA report was made available for public inspection from 14 July to 12 August 2017, during which a total of six public comments had been received by the EPD.

Regarding noise impacts, to minimise the proposed extent of fixed windows for two-third along the southern façade in the proposed development scheme, two Members suggested mitigating the noise impacts at source and deploying alternative noise mitigation measures such as installing ventilators and acoustic balconies.

Mr Franki Chiu, Director of Ove Arup & Partners Hong Kong Limited explained that the southern facades of residential towers along the southern boundary were exposed to noise sources including the road traffic noise from North Lantau Highway (NLH), and railway noise from Tung Chung Line (TCL) and Airport Express Line (AEL). Noise will not be fully addressed by deploying mitigation measures at source. Self-protecting building design was therefore proposed, with the use of fixed windows at the habitable rooms along the southern facades, coupled with the provision of noise canopy along the southern podium and acoustic windows to achieve full compliance of relevant noise limitations.

Summary of Minutes of the 227th Meeting of the ACE held on 6 November 2017 at 2:30 pm

Mr K S Wong, Secretary for the Environment (“SEN”) briefed the Members on the key policy initiatives in relation to the environmental issues in the 2017 Policy Address.

(a) Setting up of the Countryside Conservation Office

According to Mr K S Wong, the government will continue to implement the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP), which was Hong Kong’s long-term blueprint for nature conservation and sustainable development in the next five years. As one of the new environmental initiatives under the Chief Executive’s 2017 Policy Address, a Countryside Conservation Office (CCO) would be established to co-ordinate conservation projects that would promote sustainable development of remote countryside.

(b) Energy Saving Measures

Since the Global Liveability Ranking for Hong Kong published by the Economist Intelligence Unit had recorded a decline in recent years, a Member expressed support for the environmental initiatives in the 2017 Policy Address which should complement the development of Hong Kong as a liveable city.

According to Mr K S Wong, the Environment Bureau has formulated various initiatives to promote energy saving and concept of green buildings. Under the post-2018 Scheme of Control Agreements (SCAs), existing incentives in relation to promotion of energy efficiency and conservation will be expanded, while new elements will be introduced.

(c) Waste to Energy Strategy

A Member expressed supported for the setting up of a Food Waste Recycling Group and commented that it was important to promote waste reduction at source, which should include promoting the concept and attitude of food waste reduction in the community, as well as encouraging food retailers and vendors to reduce food disposal.

Mr K S Wong said that while Phase One of the Organic Resources Recovery Centre (“ORRC”) was scheduled for commissioning in early 2018, Phase Two of ORRC was going through the necessary tendering procedures. In addition to these, the government was making preparation for the engineering feasibility study and EIA for Phase Three of ORRC in 2018.

(d) Use of Green Technologies

A Member suggested the government adopt the practice of Northern European countries in using electric vessels as the main means of public transport in order to reduce air pollution.

Mr K S Wong said that legislation has been implemented to cap the sulphur content of locally-supplied marine light diesel and mandate ocean-going vessels to switch to low sulphur fuel while at berth; and a funding scheme had been put in place to encourage public transport operators to make use of similar green technologies.

Apart from these, the government was also cooperating with the Mainland Government to jointly promote the establishment of a Domestic Emission Control Area (“DECA”) in the Pearl River Delta waters.

(e) Public Education and Publicity

A Member opined that the government should accord priority to organising publicity and educational programmes in inducing the necessary behavioral changes of the community.

Mr K S Wong agreed that public education and publicity were important. Taking MSW charging as an example, the government will take the opportunity to increase public education and launch publicity campaigns so as to raise public awareness of the importance of waste reduction and recycling.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate justice in Jamaica and Germany

We are pleased to report progress in the fight for a healthy climate!

In Jamaica, a proposed 1000MW coal-fired power plant was cancelled. It would have been the first coal-fired power plant in Jamaica and would have locked Jamaica into decades of burning coal, polluting the air and water, and damaging the climate.

In Germany, a court of appeals declared that German energy giant RWE could be held liable to pay its share of the cost of protecting a farmer's home from the potential flooding of a glacial lake in Peru. The Civil High Court in Hamm will issue a formal decision soon on how the case will proceed, making it clear that a large greenhouse gas emitter in Germany can be held liable for climate impacts caused in another country.

The *Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide* is working closely with partners in the Caribbean and Europe to protect the climate for future generations.

We helped partners at the *Jamaica Environment Trust (JET)* speak out against the proposed coal plant due to its effects on human health and the environment. Jamaica's Transport and Mining Minister announced earlier this month that the proposed Jiquan Iron & Steel Company Ltd. aluminum refinery in Nail, St. Elizabeth, will run on Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) instead of coal.

JET's #SayNOtoCoalJA campaign educated Jamaicans about the impacts of coal, and more than 20,000 people signed a JET-led petition calling on the government of Jamaica to reject the proposal for the coal plant and continue the transition towards renewables, including using LNG as a transitional fuel.

ELAW's science team worked with JET and provided information about the impacts of burning coal on local ecosystems and the climate. We also worked with JET on a public fact sheet, which JET used to educate citizens about the deadly impacts of coal.

[*ELAW Press Release*, 21/11/2017]

BYD to open e-truck factory in Canada

BYD, the Chinese electric-vehicle maker, plans to open its first assembly plant in Canada, in anticipation of a surge in demand for electric trucks from municipalities and businesses. BYD, often described as China's Tesla, will open the plant in Ontario next year and hire about 40 people to start with.

The company's plan comes as countries shift to electric vehicles to combat climate change and reduce health risks. Britain and France plan to ban sales of diesel and petrol cars by 2040, while China has said it will set its own deadline.

Some Canadian provinces are offering thousands of dollars in rebates to electric-vehicle buyers, and companies are moving towards electric fleets. Loblaw's, a major supermarket chain, unveiled its first fully electric truck last week.

BYD will begin its operations in Ontario by shipping technology and components from China and making short-range vehicles, such as garbage and delivery trucks.

[*SCMP*, 23/11/2017]

Beef farmers to cut emissions

A carbon neutral red meat industry by 2030 is next on the agenda for Meat and Livestock Australia. And it won't require "the heavy hand of regulation".

MLA boss Richard Norton announced the plan at the MLA AGM in Alice Springs last week, and said Australia could be the first nation to accomplish the challenge. "In Europe there have been calls for carbon taxes on red meat," Mr. Norton said. "Remember, 70 per cent of our red meat ends up in global markets. These consumers are in the nations that are banning petrol and diesel cars by 2040."

MLA has commissioned CSIRO to find out how the red meat industry, both producers and processors, could be carbon neutral by 2030. They will publish a report next month.

He pointed to dung beetles in pasture systems, feedlotting, savanna fire management, sensible vegetation management, new feed supplements, genetic improvements and the possibility of a methane reducing vaccine.

Mr. Norton said the industry had lowered its emissions from 20 per cent of Australia's total in 2005 to 13 per cent in 2015.

Farmers for Climate Action chief executive Verity Morgan-Schmidt said MLA's plan was a win for producers, meat lovers and the environment.

"Not only will livestock producers be creating a product that more and more consumers will demand, but by looking at the bigger picture, cutting pollution and aiming to be carbon neutral they will also be safeguarding their own future," she said.

[*Weekly Times*, 29/11/2017]

The Arctic ice is dying

The Arctic "shows no sign of returning to the reliably frozen region of past decades," according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) annual Arctic Report Card.

The 2017 report card primarily covers the period from October 2016 to September 2017. NOAA releases its report card each December to sum up the previous October-to-September year in the northern latitudes. The report card puts the year's developments into context with the longer-term trends observed in the region. After this past Arctic summer – which was relatively cool in the context of the past several decades – failed to produce stable sea ice or other positive indicators of a healthy ecosystem, the authors of this year's report card suggest that the region has reached a "new normal" of thin, weak sea ice.

Even cool years are now unlikely to return the Arctic to its healthy status quo; the region is just too damaged to go back to what was previously considered to be normal, they wrote.

"Arctic paleo-reconstructions, which extend back millions of years, indicate that the magnitude and pace of the 21st century sea-ice decline and surface ocean warming is unprecedented in at least the last 1,500 years and likely much longer," they wrote.

To understand the Arctic climate in a deep way, you have to understand its four key elements: air, water, land and ice.

Here's what happened with each of those pieces of the Arctic between October 2016 and September 2017.

The air

Last year's 2015-2016 report card showed that year was "by far" the warmest in the observational records, which date back to 1900. The 2016-2017 period was significantly cooler – but still the second-hottest year since 1900.

Most of that heat was packed into the beginning of the year, leading to a warm Arctic autumn and winter.

Spring and summer 2017, on the other hand, were abnormally cool for the modern era. Summer, in particular, was out of step with recent trends, with temperatures comparable to those before extreme Arctic warming kicked in during the 1990s, the report's authors wrote. The only exceptional Arctic summer weather turned up in Alaska and northwestern Canada, where July was the warmest on record.

The water

Sunlight drives warming in the Arctic ocean. The water's temperature varies each summer with the amount of sunlight that makes it through the atmosphere and ice cover to strike the sea surface, the report authors wrote.

That means that when there's less ice and less cloud cover, the northern ocean warms faster.

Arctic researchers make their most meaningful sea-surface temperature measurements in August, after the end of a full summer of warming but before the September cool sets in.

In some areas, August 2017 was almost 5.4 degrees Fahrenheit (3 degrees Celsius) cooler than August 2016. But 2017 sea-surface temperatures still joined a long-term warming trend: August 2017 was 5.4 degrees F warmer than August 2012, the authors wrote. That's a big deal, because 2012 saw the lowest summer sea-ice minimum ever recorded in the Arctic and, absent long-term warming, should have been a warmer year underwater.

That long-term warming has sustained a bloom of life in Arctic waters, as critters ranging from algae to large predator fish move into waters that had once been too cold for them, according to the report.

The land

Data about the Arctic land isn't as up-to-the-minute as data about Arctic ice, air and sea. But here's what researchers do know, and wrote in this year's report:

Permafrost – the ancient layer of wet, frozen earth in the northern latitudes – is warming and softening. In summer 2016, the permafrost 66 feet (20 meters) below the surface reach its warmest temperatures since 1978. All around the Arctic, the ground has gotten mushy as thicker and thicker layers of slush form beneath the Earth.

At the same time, in 2015 and 2016, there was a spike in "greenness" in the Arctic – areas that look green in satellite views because of plants – after a several-year decline. One positive sign on land was an above-average snow cover in the Asian Arctic, as measured by satellites – the second highest ever. It was the first "positive anomaly" in the snow record since 2005.

The ice

The final and most important element of the Arctic, the axis around which all the other elements turn, is the sea ice. When the sea ice is expansive and healthy, it keeps the oceans from warming and reflects sunlight into space, protecting the whole planet from warming.

Arctic sea ice pulses every year, growing each winter to double or triple its extent of the previous summer, the authors wrote. In recent decades, though, it has been in a state of overall decline.

For years, scientists have warned that the first completely ice-free summer in the Arctic was coming. Now, it's the official position of NOAA that the Arctic shows no signs of ever returning to its year-round comfortably iced-over state.

Winter 2016-2017 saw the lowest maximum sea-ice extent in satellite records dating back to 1979 – the third record-low year in a row. Sea ice maxed out on 7 March 2017, at 5.5 million square miles (14.2 million square kilometers) – 8 percent below the 1981-2010 average.

Sea ice then started to shrink five days earlier than the 1981-2010 average, reaching its summer minimum on 13 September, at 1.8 million square miles (4.6 million square km). That extent was slightly greater than the 2016 minimum and 25 percent lower than the 1981-2010 average.

"The 10 lowest September extents," the report card authors wrote, "have occurred in the last 11 years."

In any given month of the year, they calculated, sea-ice extents are declining at a rate of about 13.2 percent per decade.

The ice that remains is also thinner, younger and less stable than it's been in the past. Back in the 1980s, just 55 percent of the peak ice each winter was new that year, and 16 percent of the ice had hung around for more than four years. In 2017, a full 79 percent of the winter maximum was made up of newly frozen ice, and only 0.9 percent of the maximum was more than four years old.

When ice doesn't age, it doesn't have time to grow thick. That long-term thinning trend weakens the ice, making it more difficult for it to stabilize or grow during cooler years, with long-term implications for the health of the Arctic and, in turn, the entire planet, the researchers said.

[*Live Science*, 13/12/2017]

Third warmest year to date

With a warm start to the year and only one month remaining, 2017 remains on track to go down as the third warmest year in the 138-year climate record.

The average global temperature in November 2017 was 1.35 degrees F above the 20th-century average of 55.2 degrees, according to scientists from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information. This average temperature tied 2016 as the fifth highest for November in the 1880-2017 record. This marked the 41st consecutive November and the 395th consecutive month with temperatures above the 20th-century average.

The end of November marks the end of the fall season for the Northern Hemisphere and spring for the Southern Hemisphere. The average seasonal temperature for the globe was 1.35 degrees F above the 20th century average of 57.1 degrees F. This was the fourth highest for September-November in the 1880-2017 record.

The year-to-date average temperature was 1.51 degrees F above the 20th-century average of 57.2 degrees. This was the third warmest for this period on record.

Notable climate events and facts around the world in November 2017 included:

- Near-record-low sea ice at the poles
 - The average Arctic sea ice coverage in November was 11.6 percent below the 1981-2010 average, the third smallest since records began in 1979.
 - Antarctic sea ice extent in November was 5.7 percent below average, the second smallest on record.
- Warmer-than-average lands and oceans
 - The globally averaged land-surface temperature ranked as ninth warmest for the month of November, fifth warmest for the season (September – November) and second highest for the year to date (January to November).
 - The globally averaged sea-surface temperature ranked fourth warmest for November and the season, and third highest for the year to date.
- South America and Asia led the continents in November, seasonal warmth rankings
 - South America and Asia had their 10th warmest November on record; Oceania, its 13th; Africa, its 19th; Europe, its 22nd; and North America, its 30th.
 - For the season, South America and Asia had their second warmest September-November on record; Africa, its fourth; North America, its fifth; Oceania, its sixth; and Europe, its seventh.

[National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (USA) press release, 18/12/2017]

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL

CHINA

“Green certificate” scheme has slow take-up

Three months after its launch, the mainland’s first “green energy certificate” trading scheme has raised only five million yuan (HK\$5.9 million) for the country’s cash-strapped renewable-energy firms, which are owed 75 billion yuan in government subsidies.

The figures highlight the challenges Beijing faces in balancing the interests of electricity users and producers while ensuring the mainland meets its target for clean-energy consumption.

The voluntary trading and subsidy scheme is likely to require polluters to buy “certificates” from renewable-energy suppliers. Intended as an eventual replacement for subsidies paid to suppliers, the pilot programme was launched on 1 July 2017 to help ease the pressure on the government to implement power price increases to foot the subsidy bill.

Since its launch, about 21,000 certificates – each representing one megawatt-hour of electricity produced – were bought by 1,560 buyers. One industry leader commented: “If we only rely on voluntary purchases, the scheme could hardly play a significant role to fund our clean-energy development aspirations”. Most voluntary purchases are made by firms seeking to meet their own corporate social responsibility goals.

The daily average certificate transaction prices for wind power ranged from 137.20 to 241.50 yuan per megawatt-hour, according to data from state-run trading platform greenenergy.org.cn.

As renewable energy costs more to produce on a per-unit basis than coal-fired power, Beijing’s reluctance to keep raising power prices to cover subsidy costs has left renewable energy producers financially strained.

[SCMP, 20/10/2017]

China embraces renewables

China, the world’s worst polluter, is leading the clean energy revolution, according to the International Energy Agency.

China will account for a third of new wind and solar power installations and 40 per cent of electric vehicle investments up to 2040, the Paris-based agency said on Tuesday in its World Energy Outlook. Meanwhile, China’s coal use peaked four years ago and it will cede to India its role as the driver of global oil demand by 2025.

Underscoring the shift is a maturing economy that is moving away from energy-intensive industry, and government policies aimed at cleaning up air pollution that causes almost 2 million premature deaths a year, the agency said in the report.

Falling costs of renewables also play a role, as solar is expected to become China’s cheapest source of new electricity additions, surpassing natural gas by 2020 and coal by 2030.

Until recently, China’s export-oriented economy demanded a coal-and oil-intense economy that over the past 15 years helped bring modern fuels to 260 million people who had been relying on burning wood and other biofuels for heat and cooking. That economic development brought with it a legacy of environmental issues, such as severely reduced air quality. Only 2 per cent of China’s population breathes air that meets *World Health Organisation* particulate guidelines.

New government policies aiming to reverse poor air quality are proving to be a boon for natural gas, the most environmentally benign of fossil fuels, and renewable. Natural gas use, which was about 210 billion cubic metres last year, is projected to increase by 400 billion cubic metres by 2040.

China is already a leader in renewables, ranked first in the world by installed capacity of wind, solar and hydro-power. Half of all additions to its electricity generating capacity since 2013 have been renewable or nuclear. By 2040, the IEA sees renewables accounting for 40 per cent of total power generation. Coal, which contributes about 67 per cent of generation now, will fall to 40 per cent over that period.

If China takes just a decade longer than expected to transition to its cleaner path, coal and oil demand would rise further and carbon emissions to 2040 would increase by 2.7 billion tons, an amount that would require growing 70 billion tree seedlings for a decade to offset.

Meanwhile, it takes a decade less than expected for China's economy to transition, it would wipe out about 5.3 billion tons of carbon emissions.

[*Australian Financial Review*, 15/11/2017]

Hundreds arrested for smuggling waste into China

As part of Beijing's campaign against "foreign garbage", the Chinese government has arrested 259 people for smuggling more than 300,000 tonnes of waste into China.

In 2017, 1,074 companies in the recycling sector breached environment regulations and 871 of them have already been punished. These companies were found to have violated environment regulations by applying for import permits even though they did not meet industry requirements. Other offences involved concealing pipes or pits to hide pollution discharges and operating pollution control equipment improperly.

[*SCMP*, 27/11/2017]

Ban on plastic waste imports could increase UK pollution

Restrictions on imports of plastic waste imposed by the Chinese government from January 2018 could lead to an increase in the risk of environment pollution in the United Kingdom. British companies have shipped more than 2.7 million tons of plastic waste to China and Hong Kong since 2012, accounting for approximately two-thirds of the UK's total plastic waste exports.

In recent times, China has been the world's largest importer of recyclable materials. In 2016, developed countries, such as the UK, the US and Japan, exported 7.3 million tons of waste plastics to China.

The 2018 ban is part of the Chinese campaign against "foreign garbage". The authorities announced that they intended to prohibit imports of 24 kinds of solid waste by the end of 2017, including polyethylene terephthalate bottles, other plastic bottles and containers, and all mixed paper.

[*The Guardian*, 07/12/2017]

ADB approves 428 million euros loan to improve air quality

The Asian Development Bank approved a third loan of 428 million euros to improve air quality in China's smoggiest region of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei as part of the campaign to reduce concentrations of hazardous airborne particles by 25% by the end of 2017.

The two previous loans were granted in 2015 and 2016 for the purpose of helping small and medium-sized companies to install pollution-reduction technology.

It is also expected that the loan granted by the ADB will attract approximately 1.3 billion euros in co-financing from public and private sectors.

[*Reuters*, 14/12/2017]

Push for higher pollution tax

As China prepares to impose new levies on the discharge of industrial pollutants, environmentalists say the system needs tougher tax rates and more stringent monitoring to deter the country's polluters.

From January 2018, mainland factories will be taxed for producing air, water, solid waste and noise pollution, a move the government says will be more effective than the current "emission fee" system in addressing serious industrial pollution.

Emission fees have been collected by environmental regulators and plagued by defaults; but the environmental tax will be collected by tax officials with more power to enforce the charges.

In a bid to give local authorities more incentive to charge polluters, all the environmental taxes will go to local government revenues, compared with 90 per cent of the emission fees.

However, many heavily polluted regions have chosen to set their tax rates low, prompting concerns that cadres are prioritising the local economy over the environment.

The new environmental protection tax law allows provincial governments to set their own tax rates based on the region's environmental, economic and social conditions. The levy rates have to fall within set ranges.

On air pollution, for example, the levy is 1.2 yuan (HK\$1.4) to 12 yuan per unit of atmospheric pollution. The tax for water pollution is 1.4 yuan to 14 yuan per unit.

Local governments have already set their rates ahead of the implementation of the new tax. Liaoning, a northeastern province in China's former heavy industry heartland, will be charging the lowest possible rates. It recorded the country's lowest economic growth rates last year.

Smog-prone Shanxi province, China's biggest coal producing region, has opted for a 1.8 yuan levy on air pollution and 2.1 yuan for water. Even affluent Guangdong province has set the relatively low rates of 1.8 yuan and 2.8 yuan.

By contrast, Beijing and its surrounding regions, which are under political pressure to reduce their notorious smog levels, have set tax rates relatively high.

The capital has decided to tax local polluters at the highest rates of 12 yuan and 14 yuan per unit measured of pollution.

Analysis add that the tax rates are unlikely to be tough enough to force factories to invest in equipment or new processes to control emissions – as the government hopes.

Lauri Myllyvirta, a Beijing-based campaigner with the environmental group Greenpeace, said many officials had failed to recognise failing to tackle pollution would cost the authorities even more in the long-term.

“The idea that environmental taxes impose a burden on the economy is definitely misguided,” Myllyvirta said.

“Industrial air pollution alone costs China more than 600 billion yuan per year, more than 10 times the projected tax haul.”

The effectiveness of the environmental tax also depends on the accuracy and authenticity of pollution data, analysts said.

The environmental tax law requires enterprises to submit tax reports every quarter based on the emission levels recorded with their own monitoring devices and tax officials should compare the data with those recorded by local environmental authorities.

[SCMP, 16/12/2017]

UNITED KINGDOM

Plans approved for major nuclear power station

UK regulators have approved a design for a new nuclear power station at Horizon Nuclear Power’s plant in Wylfa. The new plant will use Hitachi’s advanced boiling water reactor (ABWR) and have a capacity of 2.7 GW.

Hitachi also hoped to build a second new nuclear power plant at Oldbury in Gloucestershire, if the Wylfa plant proves to be successful.

[The Guardian, 14/12/2017]

HUNGARY

Plans to boost solar power generation

The Hungarian authorities will relax regulations governing the construction of small solar power plants and will subsidise loans to landowners to promote renewable energy.

Currently, half of the country’s electricity is provided by its sole nuclear power plant, and another 29% of the country’s electricity is imported. On the other hand, less than a tenth of Hungary’s energy use in 2013 came from renewable energy. The government is planning to promote solar power plants in Hungary to reduce its reliance on imported electricity.

According to Janos Lazar, Prime Minister Victor Orban’s chief of staff, the government will provide subsidised loans to farmers or companies to finance the construction of solar plants, with a capacity of up to 0.5 megawatt, through the state-owned development bank, MFB. The state will also purchase all electricity generated by the new solar plants. Lazar reported that the authorities have issued 2,600 solar power plant permits as at the end of last year, and approximately half of them are now under construction.

[Reuters, 15/12/2017]

WORLD

Light pollution is increasing

The world’s nights are getting alarmingly brighter, which is bad news for all sorts of creatures, humans included.

A German-led team has reported that light pollution is threatening darkness almost everywhere. Satellite observations during five Octobers show Earth’s artificially lit outdoor area grew by 2 per cent a year from 2012 to 2016. So did night-time brightness.

Light pollution is actually worse than that, according to the researchers. Their measurements coincided with the switch to energy-efficient and cost-saving light-emitting diodes, or LEDs for outdoor lights. As the imaging sensor on the polar-orbiting weather satellite cannot detect the LED-generated colour blue, some light is missed.

The observations, for example, indicate stable levels of night light in the United States, Netherlands, Spain and Italy. But light pollution was almost certainly on the rise there, given this elusive blue light, said Christopher Kyba of the GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences and lead author of the study, published in *Science Advances*.

The biological impact from surging artificial light is also significant. People’s sleep can be marred. The migration and reproduction of birds, fish, amphibians, insects and bats can be disrupted. Plants can have abnormally extended growing periods.

About the only places with dramatic declines in night light were in areas of conflict like Syria and Yemen, the researchers found.

Asia, Africa and South America, for the most part, saw a surge in artificial night lighting.

More places are installing outdoor lighting given its low cost. Urban sprawl is also moving towns farther out.

The *International Dark-Sky Association* in Tucson, Arizona, has been highlighting the hazards of artificial night light for decades. “We hope that the results further sound the alarm about the many unintended consequences of the unchecked use of artificial light at night,” director J. Scott Feierabend said.

[SCMP, 24/11/2017]

Electronic waste at new high

Electronic waste, which includes anything with a plug or a battery, rose to a record of 45 million tonnes worldwide in 2016, which amounted to the weight of 4,500 Eiffel Towers. The value of the raw materials contained in the electronic waste in 2016 is estimated to be approximately 55 billion euros.

However, only 8.9 million tonnes out of the 45 million tons were collected and recycled. Most of the electronic waste ended as rubbish in landfills, notwithstanding 67 countries had legislation encouraging recovery processing of e-waste.

It is expected that the weight of electronic waste will climb to 52.2 million tonnes by 2021.

[Reuters, 13/12/2017]

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Convictions under environmental legislation: October to December 2017

[Note: the EPD no longer classifies second (and subsequent) offences.]

The EPD's summary of convictions recorded and fines imposed during the above period is as follows:

October 2017

Fifty-eight convictions were recorded in October for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Eleven of the convictions were under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 12 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 33 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance, and 2 were under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

The heaviest fine in October was \$30,000, assessed against a construction company for using powered mechanical equipment without a valid construction noise permit and a clinic for improper disposal of clinical waste respectively.

November 2017

Forty-two convictions were recorded in November for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Thirteen of the convictions were under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 1 was under the Dumping at Sea Ordinance, 7 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 18 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance, and 3 were under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

The heaviest fine in November was \$90,000, assessed in three convictions respectively against a company for failing to comply with the requirements of a noise abatement notice, and two construction site contractors for illegally discharging wastewater.

December 2017

Thirty-five convictions were recorded in December for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

One of the convictions was under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 3 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 2 were under the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance; 27 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance, and 2 were under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

The heaviest fine in December was \$60,000, assessed against a company that imported controlled waste without a permit.

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