

URBAN PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL LAW QUARTERLY

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The health of our rivers and their dependant ecosystems is an environmental issue which is perhaps over shadowed to some extent by Hong Kong’s more prominent environmental problems, such as poor air quality and harmful waste disposal practices. In this edition, we consider the health of our rivers and streams and partiall) review an informative article on this topic published by Earth.org.

The Editors

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MORE ROBUST STEPS NEEDED TO ADDRESS RIVER POLLUTION IN HONG KONG

Introduction

A report prepared and published (January 2023) by one of Hong Kong’s leading environmental NGOs, *Earth. Org*, (“**Report**”) presents a summarised assessment of Hong Kong’s current policies concerning river pollution. As the Report notes:

River pollution in Hong Kong represents a huge threat to biodiversity and ecosystems. While water pollution levels are improving, the quality of some watercourses located in rural areas. Despite not being as severe as it was in the past, river pollution in Hong Kong remains a threat to biodiversity and entire ecosystems. Agriculture and industrial activities contribute to the degradation of water bodies, with detrimental consequences on human health and the environment.

Water Quality Index & Objectives

The water quality - or pollution level -of a river is determined by the extent to which polluting agents are present. Examples of these agents are: dissolved pH and oxygen; *E.coli* bacteria; biochemical oxygen demand; suspended solids; phosphorous, nitrogen and other agricultural run-off; and waste.

*“These parameters influence the Water Quality Index (“**WQI**”) and the Water Quality Objectives (“**WQO**”), both of which are used to quantitatively asses river health.”*

The Environmental Protection Department (**EPD**) describes WQOs and the WQI as follows:

WQO

Hong Kong is divided into 10 Water Control Zones (WCZs) and each WCZ has a set of Water Quality Objectives (WQOs). The rates of annual compliance with the key WQOs (i.e. dissolved oxygen, unionized ammonia, total inorganic nitrogen and E.coli) are assessed based on all the data collected at 76 marine monitoring stations during the years.

<i>Parameter</i>	<i>Objective</i>
<i>Dissolved Oxygen (depth-average)</i>	<i>Not less than 4mg/L in 90% of the samples</i>

Dissolved Oxygen (bottom)		Not less than 2mg/L in 90% of the samples
Unionized Ammonia		Annual mean not exceeding 0.021mg/L
Total Nitrogen	Inorganic	Ranging from annual mean of not exceeding 0.1mg/L in Southern Water Control Zone to not exceeding 0.7mg/L in the inner Deep Bay Water Control Zone
E. coli		Annual geometric mean no exceeding 610/100ml in the Secondary Contact Recreation Subzone

WQI

In addition to the WQOs, a Water Quality Index (WQI), based on assessment on the level of dissolved oxygen, 5-day Biochemical Oxygen Demand and ammonia-nitrogen, is used to indicate the overall status of health of rivers. These parameters are relevant to conserving the primary beneficial use for maintenance of aquatic life, and are collectively used to gauge the extent of organic pollution in a river. The WQI classifies river water quality into 5 categories according to the level of organic pollution. In recent years, most rivers in Hong Kong are within the “Fair” to “Excellent” range.

WQI		Condition of River Water
3.0 – 4.5		Excellent
4.6 – 7.5		Good
7.6 – 10.5		Fair
10.6 – 13.5		Bad
13.6 – 15.0		Very Bad

The mechanics of monitoring our rivers and marine water are summarised by the EPD:

Hong Kong is a thriving port with a population of over 7 million people. It relies heavily on the sea for navigation, recreation, seafood production, and supply of flushing and cooling water. The sea surrounding us is also the home of diverse forms of marine life ranging from microscopic algae to dolphins. Hong Kong SAR Government is fully committed to protecting its marine environment.

The Environment Protection Department (EPD) of the Hong Kong SAR Government monitors the water quality of some 1,700 sq km of the territory’s marine waters. The monitoring programme serves the following purposes:

- evaluate the state of coastal waters;
- monitor long-term changes in water quality;
- provide a scientific basis for planning water pollution control strategies; and
- assess the compliance with key statutory Water Quality Objective (WQOs)

Marine Water Quality Monitoring

Every month, the EPD monitors the marine water quality at 76 monitoring stations and collects and examines phytoplankton samples from 25 of these stations. We also monitor the water quality of 17 typhoon shelters, marinas and dockyard across Hong Kong bimonthly. In addition, sediment samples are collected and analysed at 60 stations, covering open waters, typhoon shelters, marinas and dockyard, twice a year.

Marine monitoring is carried out on board a scientific vessel, the Dr. Catherine Lam, which is equipped with a satellite-aided differential global positioning system (DGPS) for accurate location of sampling stations at sea.

A range of physical and chemical parameters, including temperature, pH, salinity turbidity and dissolved oxygen, are measured in situ by a conductivity – temperature – depth (CTD) profiler and the data are relayed to a computer. In addition, water and sediment samples are collected and sent to the laboratories for analysis of some 40 parameters such as nutrients, metals, organics and coliform bacteria.

The EPD’s most recent report (2021) on river quality informs us that the river monitoring programme currently covers 30 water courses,-- ranging from the Tseng Lan Shue Stream to the Tung Chung River – and 82 monitoring stations. That report concludes:

“The river water quality in Hong Kong in 2021 continued to be satisfactory with an overall WQO compliance vale of 88 % which is generally in the range of fluctuations since 2006.”

The report adds:

“In summary, the water quality of Hong Kong’s water courses remained good and steady in 2021 and generally maintained a long-term improvement trend as a result of the implementation of various pollution control measures by the government and the gradual reduction of pollution loading to the rivers and streams.”

A different perspective

Whilst the EPD has given itself and the government a pat on the back for the improving quality of Hong Kong’s river waters, a somewhat different perspective is offered by *Earth Org* in the Report.

The Report highlights several serious sources of river pollution which continue today. Briefly, they are as follows:

Sewerage contamination

Whilst the government has developed a sewerage infrastructure system across the Territory, *Earth.org* comments that:

Untreated human sewage contains numerous pathogens that cause water-borne diseases and is one of the primary sources of low river water quality. A total of 8 sewerage master plans – design plans of sewage systems – were implemented in 1995 and are regularly reviewed to ensure that the water quality isn’t further altered by increasing population and development. However, there are three key issues related to the sewerage master plan.

The first problem is that rural areas are not being prioritised enough. An example of this can be observed in Tuen Mun, Hong Kong’s westernmost district in the New Territories. Despite being reviewed under the sewerage master plan, there is evidence that rivers in that area still suffer from sewage discharges. In 2021, the monitoring station upstream of Tuen Mun River had a low WQI due to sewage from rural areas.

The Report suggests that the EPD *ought to cooperate with other shareholders, such as restaurants and country dwellers, to reduce sewage at the source* rather than relying solely on sewerage infrastructure, which is expensive to establish and maintain and also can itself be a source of pollution: e.g. grease and cleaning chemicals.

Livestock waste

The *Livestock Waste Control Scheme* (implemented under the *Waste Disposal Ordinance* (Cap.354)) prohibits the discharge of untreated livestock waste and faeces and establishes areas where livestock are prohibited. *Earth. Org* comments:

However, the malpractice of agricultural farmers could be a challenge. To reduce environmental adherence costs, pig and chicken farmers may illegally dump livestock waste into nearby rivers, despite the scheme providing sufficient treatment facilities. This claim is supported since rivers in North Districts and Yuen Long are among the worst in Hong Kong, likely due to the fact that most pig and chicken farms are in northwest New Territories. Livestock waste not only includes antibiotics, but also e.coli, ammonia and nitrogen, which makes illegal dumping detrimental to water quality particularly in individual sections of major watercourses.

Further, the livestock waste control scheme only focuses on the overall control and treatment of livestock waste but does not specify the limit of antibiotics consumption. High levels of antibiotics such as sulfamethoxazole, sulfadiazine and ofloxacin were detected in some of the most polluted Hong Kong rivers, such as the Yuen Long River and the Kam Tin River. Therefore, similar to the WQO, the government should impose a standard use of antibiotics to reduce pollution at the source.

Microplastics

The Report comments that *microplastics concentration* be included as a pollution parameter in EPD’s water quality monitoring programme. The Report notes:

Microplastics are microscopic fragments resulting from the breakdown of plastics. Common examples include materials such as glitter, microbeads and fragments from larger pieces of plastic debris, as well as from items of clothing. Not only do high concentrations of microplastics lead to biomagnification in aquatic life ultimately risking public health, but they can also cause stress on wastewater treatment facilities as most are unable to effectively remove all microplastics from wastewater. Therefore, it is important to include parameters like microplastics in WQO to make the assessment of river pollution in Hong Kong more comprehensive and reliable.

An intelligent network management system can be used as a blueprint for introducing microplastics as a WQO parameter. This system focuses on data collection, analysing microplastic particles from water samples and prioritising rivers with high microplastic concentrations.

Earth.Org’s conclusions

Undoubtedly, the policies and ordinances in place have significantly improved river pollution in Hong Kong. The government’s expansion of sewage infrastructure has reduced the amount of sewage and wastewater entering rivers and the Livestock Waste Control Scheme provides stringent guidelines for waste disposal in nearby rivers.

However, updated technology, a push to reduce farmer malpractice and illegal dumping, as well as the prioritisation of certain pollutants are equally necessary to maintain effective sewage systems.

Policy suggestions include promoting a friendly river culture under revitalisation projects to integrate the public with the environment, setting a livestock consumption limit for antibiotics to reduce bacterial-resistant population, and including new parameters to the outdated WQO such as microplastics to safeguard wildlife and public health.

Our conclusions

Much work remains to be done to bring Hong Kong's fresh water courses up to a reasonably healthy ecological state. However, by far the major factor clouding the future of this component of our environment --as it does in all other aspects of Hong Kong's environmental protection programmes--is weak agency enforcement of such environmental laws that we have, coupled with the judiciary's perplexing and shameful reluctance to apply realistic penalties for environmental offences.

TOWN PLANNING

Approved URA Kwun Tong Town Centre - Main Site Development Scheme Plan amended

On 8th December 2023, the Town Planning Board announced amendments to the approved Urban Renewal Authority Kwun Tong Town Centre - Main Site Development Scheme Plan (DSP).

The amendments mainly involve:

1. rezoning a site to the north of Kwun Tong Road from "Comprehensive Development Area (1)" to "Other Specified Uses" annotated "Mixed Use" for mixed use development; and
2. rezoning a site to the south of Mut Wah Street from "CDA(1)" to "Residential (Group A)" to reflect the completed development;

The Notes and Explanatory Statement of the DSP was amended as well in accordance with the latest Master Schedule of Notes to Statutory Plans and also to reflect the above amendments and the latest status and planning circumstances of the development scheme area.

[Town Planning Board Press Release, 08/12/2023]

Approved Mid-levels East Outline Zoning Plan amended

On 2nd February 2024, the Town Planning Board announced amendments to the approved Mid-levels East Outline Zoning Plan (OZP).

The amendments mainly involve:

1. rezoning a site at 15 and 24 Stubbs Road and 7 Tung Shan Terrace from "Residential (Group C)1", "Government, Institution or Community (4)" and "Green Belt" to "Residential (Group C)3" and stipulating Sub-areas on the OZP to take forward the decision of the Metro Planning Committee of the Town Planning Board on a Section 12A application for a proposed residential development with a privately-initiated residential care home for the elderly; and
2. rezoning a site at 18 Stubbs Road from "Comprehensive Development Area" ("CDA") to "Residential (Group C)4" and a strip of government land from "CDA" and "R(C)1" to area shown as "Road" to reflect the as-built conditions of various sites.

[Town Planning Board Press Release, 02/02/2024]

Statutory plans related to the San Tin Technopole

The Town Planning Board has agreed to gazette the new draft San Tin Technopole Outline Zoning Plan (OZP) and the proposed amendments to the approved Ngau Tam Mei OZP and the approved Mai Po and Fairview Park OZP for public consultation in accordance with the Town Planning Ordinance.

Members of the Town Planning Board considered the importance of San Tin Technopole for the implementation of Hong Kong's role as an international innovation and technology (I&T) hub and the development of the I&T industry. At the meeting, members discussed the positioning of San Tin Technopole, permitted uses of I&T land, urban-rural integration, urban design, the implementation programme and mechanism, etc. Ecological conservation and wetland compensation were also major concerns of members.

Members agreed to the establishment of the 338-hectare Sam Po Shue Wetland Conservation Park to achieve the dual goals of strengthening wetland conservation and providing wetland compensation. Given about 90 hectares of fishponds would be filled for the development of the San Tin Technopole, members noted that the environmental impact assessment report recommended increasing the ecological value of the wetlands in the Sam Po Shue Wetland Conservation Park through active conservation measures so that there would be no net loss in the ecological function or carrying capacity of the fishponds.

[Town Planning Board Press Release, 23/02/2024]

DIGEST OF LEGISLATION

Extension of Government Leases Bill

The Development Bureau ("DEVB") published the *Extension of Government Leases Bill* (the "Bill") on 7 December 2023, with a view to providing a standing mechanism for extension of leases in a streamlined and orderly manner by operation of law. Leases will be extended in

batches by virtue of the government’s regular publication of notices in the Gazette, obviating the need for all the owners and the government to undergo cumbersome procedures of execution of a new lease.

The Bill provides that the Director of Lands must publish an “Extension Notice” and a “Non-extension List” in the Gazette no less than six years before expiry of each batch of leases to declare that the leases covered by the “Extension Notice” will be extended, unless a lease is being listed on the “Non-extension List”. Existing provisions in the leases will be retained upon extension, with additional conditions in accordance with the 1997 Land Policy that the lease will be extended for a term of 50 years, without payment of any additional premium for the extension itself, but subject to payment of annual rent annually adjusted and assessed according to the rateable value of the property, as well as essential conditions for safeguarding the government’s enforcement powers. All interests, encumbrances and rights under the original lease will be carried forward.

The DEVB briefed the Legislative Council Panel on Development on the legislative proposal in May 2023, and thereafter engaged relevant professional bodies and stakeholders. The legislative proposal has received wide support, and has refined operational details having regard to the views received, including doubling the lead time for publishing the “Extension Notice” from no less than three years to no less than six years before lease expiry. This has positively responded to stakeholders’ concern for earlier certainty on extension of leases, while striking an appropriate balance with the need for the government to consider whether to allow extension for a lease closer to the time of lease expiry.

A spokesperson for the DEVB said, “*Land leases underpin the daily life and business operations of the general public. The new mechanism for extension of leases will bring about significant facilitation for both the public and businesses. The Government will fully support the LegCo’s examination of the Bill, with the hope that the Bill could be passed and implemented as soon as possible*”.

The Bill was gazetted on 8 December 2023 and introduced into the LegCo for first reading on 13 December 2023.

According to the progress update available on the website of the LegCo, the Bill was submitted to the Bills Committee for consideration on 29 January 2024.

[Press Release, Government of Hong Kong, 07/12/2023]

[Progress of the bill, Extension of Government Leases Bill, Legislative Council, accessed on 15/03/2024]

Concerns regarding implementation of MSW charging

In response to recent media reports on the implementation of municipal solid waste (“MSW”) charging on 1 April 2024, as well as concerns raised by citizens and groups of different sectors, a spokesperson for the Environmental Protection Department (“EPD”) said, “*Since the legislation relating to MSW charging was passed by the Legislative Council in August 2021, the EPD has conducted various preparatory work, such as launching promotional and educational activities, continuously enhancing recycling facilities, and maintaining close communication and co-operation with stakeholders from all sectors to prepare for the implementation of MSW charging together*”.

MSW charging goes hand in hand with waste reduction and recycling. On strengthening support for recycling facilities at the district level, the EPD has expanded its community recycling network, GREEN@COMMUNITY, during the past three years. GREEN@COMMUNITY has always been well received by the public. It received over 5 million visits for clean recycling in 2023, and there are over 400,000 registered accounts for the GREEN\$ Participation Incentive Scheme.

There have been quite a number of concerns on the recycling of food waste, which accounts for 30 per cent of the total volume of MSW disposal. The EPD has also expanded the collection service for food waste over the past year, including collecting food waste from more public and private premises and areas where restaurants are concentrated.

To further encourage recycling efforts, the Environment and Ecology Bureau will introduce two bills into LegCo later this year. One of the bills proposes to require property management companies and owners’ organisations of private residential buildings to separately collect common types of recyclables and pass the recyclables collected to downstream recyclers for processing, with a view to implementing the legislation by end 2024, whilst the other bill seeks to establish a common legislative framework for producer responsibility schemes (“PRs”), as well as formulating subsidiary legislation, to gradually implement from 2025 PRs for five types of products: plastic beverage containers, beverage cartons, electric vehicle batteries, vehicle tyres and lead-acid batteries.

[Press Release, Government of Hong Kong, 05/01/2024]

WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT

The Board of the West Kowloon Cultural District Authority (WKCD) held its 117th meeting on 18 January 2024.

Advancing Hong Kong’s role as the East-meets-West Centre for International Cultural Exchange is a primary mission for WKCD and one of the major initiatives of WKCD for 2024. At the meeting, Betty Fung announced that WKCD would host the **Hong Kong International Cultural Summit 2024** from 25 to 26 March 2024.

In 2024, M+ is set to unveil three special exhibitions, with the inaugural showcase opening in March: **The Hong Kong Jockey Club Series: Noir & Blanc—A Story of Photography**. This exhibition, co-presented with the French May Arts Festival and in collaboration with the Bibliotheque nationale de France, marks M+’s first dedicated exploration of the realm of photography. The exhibition showcases a curated selection of important photographs from BnF’s collection, alongside works from the M+ Collections, encompassing works dated from 1915 to 2019 by various internationally acclaimed photographers.

In addition, the South Galleries on 2/F of M+ reopened on 3 February 2024, presenting the special exhibition *Shanshui: Echoes and Signals*. Through a curated selection from the M+ Collections series, the exhibition explores the complex connections between landscape and humanity in a world that is both post-industrial and increasingly virtual. The exhibition showcases the works by Zao Wou-ki, Xu Bing, Wucius Wong, and other internationally acclaimed artists.

The Hong Kong Palace Museum (HKPM) welcomed its two millionth visitor on 16 January 2024. Achieving this just one and a half years after its opening, HKPM has demonstrated its widespread appeal and support amongst local, overseas and Mainland visitors.

The special exhibition, *Gazing at Sanxingdui: New Archaeological Discoveries in Sichuan*, concluded successfully on 8 January 2024, welcoming over 227,000 visitors. With an average of approximately 2,500 visitors each day, the exhibition set a new record for the daily attendance at a special exhibition of HKPM. In 2024, HKPM plans to introduce four spectacular special exhibitions and will keep the public engaged with rotations of the treasures from HKPM on view. Additionally, HKPM will debut a selection of new thematic exhibitions, with details to follow.

The Impossible Trial – the musical, the first original Cantonese musical commissioned by WKCD, co-presented and co-produced with Hong Kong Repertory Theatre (HKRep), had a successful 21-show rerun from the end of November to 24 December 2023. This return of *The Impossible Trial* garnered extraordinary acclaim, selling out almost all 21 performances and attracting a total audience of over 19,000. Building on the popularity and impact of the musical in Hong Kong and Mainland China, plans are underway to tour *The Impossible Trial* in multiple cities in the Mainland, with the aspiration of elevating it to the international stage, thereby promoting this distinguished Hong Kong-made musical to worldwide audiences.

[West Kowloon Cultural District Authority Press Release, 18/01/2024]

HONG KONG BRIEFING

Illegal feral pigeon feeding

Hong Kong's wild animal protection law is subject to a potential change. The maximum penalty for illegal feral pigeon feeding is proposed to be raised to HK\$100,000 and imprisonment for a year. If the legislature approves, the proposed penalty will take effect in August 2024.

The *Wild Animals Protection (Amendment) Bill 2023* was published in mid-November to enhance the deterrence against illegal feeding activities, protect wild animals and improve environmental hygiene.

The Environment and Ecology Bureau stated that feeding of feral pigeons and other wild animals adversely affects their foraging ability, making survival on their own in the wild difficult, adding to public hygiene and other issues.

Back in 2021, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department launched a trial programme of using contraceptive drugs on feral pigeons aiming to test the effectiveness of the use of contraceptive drugs in reducing nuisance caused by the pigeons. If the programme shows promising progress, the government might expand the programme to more locations.

[HKFP, 17/11/2023]

Golf course wins UNESCO conservation award

Fanling Golf Course, managed by the Hong Kong Golf Club, was among the winners of an Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which commended the golf club's measures for at least a degree of protection of its ecological value and biodiversity in its conservation management plan. The Hong Kong Golf Club thanked the UNESCO for the recognition and attributed the award to the whole city's efforts in preserving important cultural heritage sites.

Some considered the golf club's application for the UNESCO award a move to rally support for the club amid the government's plans to turn 9.5 hectares -- of 32 hectares of land which was returned to the government in September after its lease to the club expired -- into public housing.

Earlier in 2023, the golf club challenged the government's approval of an environmental report on the impact of the housing plan in court. It argued that there was a lack of public consultation and a failure to account for ecological concerns. The court later granted a suspension of implementation of the approved report pending a verdict in the judicial review proceedings, which will be heard in May 2024.

[HKFP, 28/12/2023]

Postponement of pay-as-you-throw waste tax until August

The Environment and Ecology Bureau announced that the government would delay charging waste levies until 1 August since they have been told that there was public confusion and lack of a clear understanding of the waste charging scheme.

Under the new scheme, waste has to be disposed of only in designated plastic bags. There will be 9 different sizes from 3 to 100 litres; each litre costs HK\$0.11. For instance, a household using a 10-litre bag per day would pay about HK\$33 a month in garbage tax.

The scheme was approved by the legislature in August 2021. The charge originally was to come into effect by the end of 2023. However, it was announced last year that the levy would not be introduced until 1 April this year. Now, in early 2024, the application of levies was again put back so that public concerns can be properly addressed.

Various sectors in the society have voiced their concerns over implementation details and increased running costs of the waste charging scheme. For example, a spokesperson from the Elderly Services Association of Hong Kong pointed out that new levy would not help reduce waste at care homes for the elderly, where most of the refuse was non-recyclable clinical waste. She added that the homes would incur additional operational cost and employees' workload would increase.

[HKFP, 19/01/2024]

Standards for environment-friendly commercial vehicles remain unchanged

The Environmental Protection Department announced that the qualifying standards, first registration tax concession rates and their concession caps for environment-friendly commercial vehicles will remain unchanged for the period from April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025, both inclusive.

Tax incentives have been offered since 2008 to encourage commercial vehicle owners to choose environmental-friendly commercial vehicles with exhaust emissions that exceed existing emission control standards, in order to improve roadside air quality and enhance general public health.

[Press Release - the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 23/02/2024]

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE ENVIRONMENT (ACE)

On 4 September 2023, the ACE held its 260th meeting. There were two major topics discussed during the meeting, namely the implementation of the *Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan* (the "BSAP") and the review of *Air Quality Objectives* ("AQOs").

Implementation of the BSAP

Background

The BSAP was launched on 21 December 2016 in response to the decisions adopted by the Fifteenth Meeting of the *Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity* ("Conference"), of which Hong Kong is a signing party. The primary aims of the *United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity* are to promote the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its components, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

The BSAP sets out actions to be taken by the government to enhance Hong Kong's biodiversity and sustainable development from 2016 to 2021. By May 2023, 56 out of the 67 specific actions (i.e. about 84%) in the BSAP 2016-21 have been completed, with the rest either being long-term in nature or ongoing.

In the *Conference* held in December 2022, a new strategic framework for the implementation of the *Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity* was set up. It was also resolved that the Parties shall refer to the new framework in updating their BSAPs by the next Conference to be held in late 2024.

Question-and-Answer Session on the next BSAP

In this session, members raised three major concerns for the government's consideration when setting the next BSAP.

Conservation measures for marine species

Different suggestions were raised regarding the improvement of the biodiversity of marine species.

First, it was suggested that more marine conservation areas should be established. In particular, it was recommended that Tolo Channel and Port Shelter should be designated as fisheries protection areas, Pak Nai and Shui Hau as marine protected areas and also that the three Wetland Conservation Parks in the Northern Metropolis should be established in order to increase the ratio of protected area in Hong Kong.

Second, members also advocated for the improvement of water quality. In particular, members recommended different governmental departments cooperate and maximise the use of dry weather flow interceptors to reduce surface runoff and water pollution. Upgrading sewage treatment to tertiary level where practicable was also suggested, along with providing sewerage for unsewered villages.

As for the restoration of the ecosystem on a larger scale, it was suggested that nature-based solutions should be used. A member gave examples in this regard, such as reforestation, mangrove plantation, coral restoration as well as oyster reef installations. In light of developing technology, a member suggested that artificial intelligence might be utilised in detecting natural hazards posing threats to biodiversity. For instance, it was suggested that the government could use artificial intelligence and geographic information systems to detect hill fires which cause damage to our natural habitats.

Publicity and education

A member pointed out that there was insufficient public awareness and understanding of the need to conserve biodiversity. Members discussed different measures the government should take to strengthen publicity and public education.

Regarding school education, it was suggested that ecological conservation should be incorporated into the school curriculum from kindergarten to tertiary education. Another member indicated that teaching/learning materials with messages on the positive outcomes brought by the current BSAP could be produced to help the general public understand the work of the Environment and Ecology Bureau and the Agriculture, Fisheries

and Conservation Department (“**AFCD**”) while promoting biodiversity at the same time. In response, Mr. Simon Chan, Assistant Director (Conservation) of the AFCD, replied that the concept of biodiversity had already been incorporated into the primary and secondary school curricula. He elaborated that AFCD had been hosting a vast amount of biodiversity information events on the *Hong Kong Biodiversity Information Hub* (HKBIH) website and other social media platforms, such as the “*Mr. B Nature Classroom*” Facebook page.

Regarding public education, it was suggested that the government should establish designated biodiversity or natural history museums for the promotion of nature conservation while showcasing the diverse species of Hong Kong. As to a potential venue, one of the members mentioned that Tai Mo Shan Youth Hostel would be a good place for establishing a biodiversity museum given the rich fauna and flora in the surrounding area. It was also recommended that several kinds of natural history museums should be established to showcase the various natural treasures such as the wetlands of Hong Kong.

Community involvement

Members suggested that the government should devote more resources in the next BSAP to engage and motivate the participation of the business sector. Highlighting the business opportunities brought about by green finance and climate change resilience actions, it was pointed out that many corporations were eager to make contributions to the environment. It was further opined that the good work of the business sector on environmental, social, and corporate governance could be promoted by the government to inspire wider participation from the public.

Members were also concerned about the limited inclusion of biodiversity elements in the current BEAM Plus New Buildings Manual. Regarding this, it was recommended that AFCD should liaise with the Hong Kong Green Building Council to further incorporate biodiversity considerations into the relevant sections of the manual in the upcoming update exercise. In support of his recommendation, the member added that the forthcoming framework to be released by the *Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures* would further motivate the business sector to contribute to nature conservation. The recommendation was agreed to by Mr. Simon Chan.

Review of AQOs

Background

Under Section 7A of the *Air Pollution Control Ordinance* (Cap. 311) (APCO), the Secretary for Environment and Ecology is required to review the AQOs at least once every five years and submit to the ACE a report of the review. At the ACE meeting on 6 January 2020, members were consulted on their recommendations and ways forward to update the AQOs. Members had recommended progressive tightening of the AQOs towards the ultimate goal of the World Health Organisation’s *Air Quality Guidelines* for protecting public health.

Pending consultation of members’ opinions in this meeting, EEB will report to the Panel on Environmental Affairs of the Legislative Council on the outcome of the public consultation, and accordingly prepare to amend the APCO to introduce an APCO amendment bill to the LegCo in 2024 and implement the new AQOs in January 2025.

The proposal

The government’s proposal for reviewing the AQO requirements is as follows:

- Tighten the 24-hour AQO for sulphur dioxide from Interim Target-2 (“**IT-2**”) level of the World Health Organisation’s (“**WHO**”) *Global Air Quality Guidelines* (“**AQGs**”) to AQG level. The current number of exceedances allowed (three) remains unchanged.
- Tighten the annual AQO and the 24-hour AQO for respirable suspended particulates from IT-2 to IT-3. The number of exceedances allowed (nine) remains unchanged.
- Tighten the annual AQO and the 24-hour AQO for fine suspended particulates from IT-2 to IT-3. The number of exceedances allowed decreased from the current 35 to 18.
- Add three new AQO parameters introduced by the WHO (namely the 24-hour AQO for nitrogen dioxide, the peak season AQO for ozone and the 24-hour AQO for carbon monoxide) to the existing five AQO parameters.

Presentation and question-and-answer session

Scope of regulation

Members have been supportive of the proposal raised by the government. In addition, a review of the list of the seven pollutants to be regulated under the AQOs was also recommended. A member was of the view that the EEB should consider including volatile organic compounds (“**VOCs**”) which are carcinogenic.

In terms of policy formulation, a member submitted that the EEB should adopt a health risk-based approach, instead of a concentration-based approach, for the determination of the next AQOs, which should also include a composite index to provide such health-related information. In particular, the government should give due weight to the overall health risk in formulating air policies, apart from monitoring the level of air pollutants.

In response to members’ enquiries on the interim target of the government, Dr. Kenneth Leung, the Principal Assistant Secretary for Environment and Ecology (Air Policy) of the EEB, explained that it would be difficult to meet the interim target level 4 for fine-suspended particulates of the WHO in short to medium term as Hong Kong is greatly affected by the regional air pollution from the Greater Bay Area.

Indoor air quality

Apart from outdoor air quality, a member also expressed concern about indoor air quality (“**IAQ**”) and suggested that EEB should provide tips and information packs for the public to tackle formaldehyde (a colourless, highly toxic and flammable gas) and improve IAQ. Dr. Leung replied that it would be difficult to regulate IAQ as it involved numerous private owners. Moreover, IAQ was currently not subject to any legislative control in Hong Kong and no countries or places had regulated IAQ by legislative means. However, the EEB would invite relevant experts to advise on the parameters of the IAQ Scheme in the next review exercise.

Publicity and public education

Members raised different suggestions regarding the contents to be included in public education on the importance of good air quality. A member suggested that the EEB should promote and educate the public on the health risks of pollutants so as to keep them alert to the matter and supportive of improving air quality.

It was suggested that the EEB should continue to explain the subject to the public in an easy-to-understand manner. In particular, the EEB should highlight and quantify the improvement in air quality such as in the number of days with blue skies annually and the improvement in the level of VOCs, etc. Since it might be difficult to put the benefit of saving a life in monetary terms, it was suggested that the government should highlight the number of lives saved annually due to the improvement of air quality in the promotion campaigns.

Conclusion

Members were generally supportive of the government’s proposal in the next BSAP to tighten the VOCs content limit of architectural paints and to extend the control to cleaning products. Members have also reviewed the government’s proposal for reviewing the AQO requirements and given different suggestions for the consideration of the EEB.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The 1.5C threshold explained

Climate change discussions at COP28 in Dubai focus heavily on the critical threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius (1.5C) warming above pre-industrial levels. This figure, established in the Paris Agreement, represents a key target for limiting global temperature rise to mitigate climate impacts. The breach of this threshold for a full year in 2024 signals a significant challenge, highlighting the urgency to address climate change.

The 1.5C limit aims to minimise extreme weather events, sea level rise, and other detrimental effects associated with higher temperatures. However, reaching and maintaining this target requires substantial global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Despite efforts, there's a growing concern that overshooting 1.5C is becoming inevitable, necessitating immediate action to minimise its duration and magnitude.

Returning below the 1.5C threshold after overshoot would demand extensive carbon capture technologies, though the feasibility and costs remain significant obstacles. Moreover, some argue that even 1.5C may pose substantial risks, advocating for more ambitious targets or focusing on achieving net-zero temperature change.

Addressing climate change requires unprecedented levels of action, including strong leadership from major economies like the US and China. Promising signs include advancements in renewable energy and electric vehicles, alongside a shift towards fairer climate policies, particularly for vulnerable nations.

[BBC news, 08/02/2024]

Rate of global warming is speeding up

Celeste Saulo, the newly appointed chief of the United Nations weather agency, has drawn attention to the accelerating rate of human-induced climate change and its impact on Arctic cold outbreaks. Saulo stresses the pressing need to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. However, she acknowledges the challenging obstacles posed by economic interests, which often hinder swift action on climate change. Saulo expresses concern about the clear and alarming trend she sees unfolding.

Supporting the findings of former NASA scientist James Hansen, Saulo highlights the acceleration of climate change. She emphasises the uncertainties surrounding the future implications of this rapid pace, underlining the urgent need for action. Saulo points to the melting of ice in the polar regions as a critical issue, with significant consequences for rising sea levels and the overall environmental balance.

Saulo draws attention to the connection between amplified Arctic warming and the increasing frequency of severe cold outbreaks in North America and Europe. As the temperature difference between the Arctic and mid-latitudes decreases, changes in the jet stream become more pronounced, leading to extreme cold weather events. Saulo expresses deep concern about the impact of these cold outbreaks, especially in densely populated regions of the northern hemisphere.

In addition to cold outbreaks, Saulo highlights the severity of heatwaves, which she considers the deadliest among extreme weather events. Heatwaves not only lead to immediate fatalities but also exacerbate existing health issues, contribute to wildfires, and degrade air quality. Saulo stresses the need for better monitoring and warning systems for floods, storms, heatwaves, and droughts, particularly in vulnerable areas.

Despite the immense challenges, Saulo remains optimistic and determined to use her position to help society better prepare for the inevitable impacts of climate change.

[Associated Press, 08/02/2024]

New system to turn gas into valuable products

A Chinese team may have found an answer to a decades-old quest for scientists – how to convert carbon dioxide into valuable chemical products while also tackling climate change.

Conversion systems devised to harness the greenhouse gas had so far struggled to show viability outside the laboratory.

But researchers at the Huazhong University of Science and Technology (HUST) in Wuhan have announced a breakthrough, with an electrolysis system that can convert carbon dioxide into formic acid with an efficiency of more than 93 per cent.

More importantly, the system can operate continuously for at least 5,000 hours, far longer than any other known device under research.

The finding of the study, a collaborative effort by researchers from institutions including HUST, the University of Science and Technology of China and the University of Auckland, were published in the journal Nature on January 31.

Formic acid has many applications for instance, as a preservative and antibacterial agent in livestock feed, in fuel cells, in leather tanning, and as a cleaner.

An added benefit is that the electrolyte used in this new process can be sourced directly from spent lead acid batteries.

The process is an electrochemical method applying electricity to change the properties of a chemical.

The process involves breaking the chemical bonds of carbon dioxide and then adding hydrogen to produce various valuable hydrocarbons such as formic acid, methanol, ethanol, alkanes or olefins.

For the past five years, the team behind the study had been trying out a new idea that involved using some key components from lead acid batteries. But the process is unstable in an acidic environment, and the catalysts needed to accelerate reactions are easily corroded.

The researchers came up with a number of solutions, including the development of a catalyst that was highly efficient in conversion and less susceptible to corrosion.

Using the catalyst derived from the lead acid batteries meant their equipment could achieve a stable operating record of more than 5,000 hours.

Lead-acid batteries are a stable, mature technology but the recycling process for used batteries is energy intensive and cumbersome as they must be incinerated before the lead is extracted. Lead is a very efficient chemical for converting greenhouse gases, but it is also a toxic heavy metal.

The new system would allow the batteries to be directly reused in a productive way.

With further development, the technology could be used in carbon intensive industries such as fossil fuel companies, to help them to decarbonise. But scaling it up for industrial use might present challenges that affect operation, such as the device heating up.

With continued research, the team hopes to turn carbon dioxide into products even more valuable than formic acid, such as ethylene, which is used in everything from textiles to antifreeze to vinyl and has been called “the world’s most important chemical”.

[SCMP, 19/02/2024]

Saving energy to meet climate objectives

China’s growing energy consumption, faltering progress on decarbonisation, and limitations on new energy capacity installation pose major challenges for the world’s largest greenhouse gas emitter’s climate goals, according to the head of China’s National Energy Administration (NEA).

The country’s energy transition faced various difficulties, such as greater than expected growth in energy demands which had increased the need for transformation.

The average annual growth in energy consumption from 2021 to 2023 was 1.8 times that of the previous five years, an increase which was equivalent to the energy consumption of Britain every year, according to the NEA. It is expected that rapid growth will be maintained in the future, making it more difficult to coordinate energy security and achieve a low-carbon transition.

According to the NEA, energy conservation and carbon reduction on the consumer side needed to be urgently strengthened, China’s energy consumption intensity is 1.5 times the world average, with six major industries, including petroleum, chemicals, electric and heat power, accounting for 75 percent of the nation’s energy consumption, according to the NEA.

Progress in reducing energy consumption per unit of gross domestic product during the 14th five-year plan from 2021 to 2025 was lagging behind expectations.

The subsequent potential for energy substitution had gradually narrowed, and it has become more difficult to substitute clean energy for end-use.

The NEA also recommended strengthening innovation in the fields of green and low-carbon technology to consolidate the development of the country's new energy industry.

[SCMP, 20/02/2024]

China must cut coal use

China is at heightened risk of missing its climate targets and suffering major economic losses unless it takes decisive actions to stop runaway coal power plant expansion and reform outdated power grid management, new research has found.

To meet the challenges posed by an unchecked boom in construction of coal power plants, initiated in the name of preventing periodic power shortages, Beijing must scrap policies that support coal power generation, according to climate analysts.

Last year, the Chinese energy sector's carbon emissions rose by an estimated 5.2 percent, the same as gross domestic product, highlighting a failure to rein in energy-intensive growth, they said.

"Another year of rapidly rising emissions in 2023 leaves China way off track against its target of cutting carbon intensity by 18 percent between 2021 and 2025," said Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA). "As a result, carbon emissions would now need to fall by 4 to 6 percent by 2025 to hit the goal."

The approaching deadline for achieving peak carbon emissions before 2030 appeared to have led many developers to pursue a wave of carbon intensive projects while the window was still open, a joint report by CREA and Global Energy Monitor published yesterday said.

In April 2021, President Xi Jinping said China would "strictly control" coal-fired power generation projects, reach peak consumption next year, and begin phasing it down in 2026, as part of the nation's goals for carbon emissions to peak before 2030 and reach net-zero by 2060.

A policy document followed in October than year, in which Beijing committed to raise the share of non-fossil energy consumption to 20 percent by 2025 from 15.9 percent in 2020, while slashing emissions per unit GDP by 18 percent and energy usage intensity by 13.5 percent from 2020 levels.

However, the nation's carbon intensity fell by only 5 percent between 2020 and last year. Meanwhile, energy usage intensity grew by 0.5 percent last year, the first time it has risen since at least 2005.

In particular, the growth rate of coal power generation increased to 4 percent annually between 2021 and last year from 3.5 percent between 2016 and 2020, while growth in total coal consumption – in the power and non-power sectors – accelerated by eightfold to 3.8 percent a year from 0.5 percent.

New coal power projects with 114 gigawatts (GW) of generating capacity received government approval last year, up from 104GW in 2022. The total volume of 218GW in the past two years came close to the record 233GW permitted in 2014-15.

As well, construction has begun on a further 70GW of capacity, a sharp rise from 54GW in 2022.

[SCMP, 23/02/2024]

Coastal US cities are sinking as sea levels continue to rise

New research indicates that several coastal cities in the United States are sinking due to a process called subsidence, amplifying the challenges posed by rising sea levels. By 2050, substantial areas of land in 32 coastal cities could face flooding risks due to this phenomenon. Notable cities at risk include Boston, New Orleans, and San Francisco, potentially impacting hundreds of thousands of people and properties.

The study reveals disparities in flood threats based on elevation levels and subsidence rates, with areas like the Pacific Coast facing lower risks compared to the Gulf Coast. Factors such as groundwater extraction and sediment compaction are driving subsidence, often overlooked in flooding models. The combined effects of subsidence and sea level rise could lead to worse flooding scenarios than previously anticipated.

Coastal management policies need urgent reinforcement to protect infrastructure and communities, with suggested measures including sea walls, property elevation, and groundwater replenishment. Disadvantaged populations are particularly vulnerable to these challenges, necessitating equitable adaptation strategies. While the situation is concerning, the researchers emphasise that mitigation is feasible through existing engineering and nature-based solutions.

[ABC News, 07/03/2024]

Great Barrier Reef guides face up to bleaching tragedy

Australia's Great Barrier Reef is facing its fifth mass coral bleaching event in eight years, prompting tour boat guides to openly discuss climate change and the Reef's condition with tourists. Initially hesitant to do so, these guides are now sharing with their customers the harsh reality of the bleaching tragedy.

The tourism industry, which heavily relies on the Great Barrier Reef as a major tourist attraction, initially downplayed the severity of bleaching events. However, efforts have been made to train dive professionals as Master Reef Guides, enabling them to communicate effectively the Reef's challenges to visitors. Some guides are experiencing "ecological grief" as they witness the deterioration of the Reef.

Conversations about climate change with tourists have become more common, with visitors showing openness to learning and taking action. Divers now feel empowered to discuss climate change, despite previous concerns about doing this. Urgency is emphasised as the Reef continues to decline, and tourists are encouraged to use their influence and make environmentally conscious choices.

Tourists also approach guides seeking ways to help the Reef. They are encouraged to appreciate its beauty and take proactive steps, such as advocating for beneficial environmental policies and considering the impact of their financial choices. Individual and collective efforts are vital to preserving the Great Barrier Reef.

The tourism industry has recognised the need for accurate communication. Guides are witnessing the tragic consequences firsthand, and tourists are receptive to information and eager to take action. Urgency is stressed as the Reef continues to decline, highlighting the need for immediate efforts to protect this natural wonder, which is by far the world's largest coral reef.

[*The Guardian*, 22/03/2024]

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL

China

Sustainability funds have tripled since launch of 'dual carbon goals'

According to a report by Morningstar, sustainability funds in mainland China have tripled since the country pledged to achieve peak emissions by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2060. The report highlights how local asset managers have been expanding their sustainable product offerings since President Xi Jinping announced China's "dual carbon goals" in 2020. As of 30 June 2023, the number of sustainable funds in China had reached 246, compared to 78 in December 2020. Furthermore, 29 sustainable funds were launched in the first half of 2023.

The report notes that investors' awareness of sustainable investing has increased due to the Chinese government's promotion of a green transformation. Sustainable funds in China have experienced significant growth in recent years, with a surge in product availability and consistent annual net inflows. Despite the challenging Chinese stock market, these funds received a net inflow of 31.7 billion RMB (US\$4.4 billion) in the first half of 2023, indicating increasing popularity of sustainable investments.

Morningstar highlights that local asset managers are participating in sustainable investing to capitalise on opportunities arising from the green transition. However, the report also emphasises the need for improvements in disclosure requirements and investor education. While China has taken steps, such as establishing a social responsibility unit and calling for the mutual fund industry to embrace sustainable investing, more efforts are needed to enhance transparency and understanding in this area.

In February 2024, the Shanghai Stock Exchange, Shenzhen Stock Exchange, and Beijing Stock Exchange released their first guidelines for listed companies to disclose sustainability-related information, a significant milestone for China's progress towards a sustainable economy. However, the report points out that the lack of public disclosure of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) information related to sustainable funds remains a challenge for Chinese investors. Establishing unified standards for disclosure related to "sustainable investments" will be crucial to increase transparency and provide investors with the necessary information to make informed decisions.

Overall, the rapid growth of sustainability funds in China reflects the increasing importance of environmental considerations and sustainable investing in the country. With ongoing efforts to refine investment approaches and educate investors, the report expects more asset managers in China to participate in sustainable investing in the future.

[*SCMP*, 12/03/2024]

Australia

Burning Australia

Australia is no stranger to bushfires. Some areas burn more frequently and severely than others.

Australians grow up with fire. We live in landscapes shaped by original inhabitants who wielded it as a tool, and for many of us smoke and flame form a backdrop to our long summers. But as climate change renders Australia hotter, bushfires are becoming more fearsome and their footprint is spreading.

Now, climate change is shifting the fire seasons, making them longer and more intense, with a greater overlap between states.

To trace the growth and spread of the fires that mark Australia, our data team drew on historical data from the Bushfire Data Challenge Project to show how much of our country has burnt in the past 42 years. In Australia, a total of 2.79 million square kilometres has burnt, with up to one third of total burning occurring in the past 10 years.

Western Australia has burnt the most, losing 1.5 million square kilometres, followed by Queensland (628,123), South Australia (311,782), NSW (130,029) and Victoria (127,896). (There were no data for Tasmania, the Northern Territory or the Australian Capital Territory).

To put that into perspective, the total area burnt in Australia since 1980 is equivalent to about 70 percent of Central Asia's total land mass. Typically, the fire season begins in the top end of the Northern Territory and Western Australia in winter and spring. But as the dry summer months approach, southern Australia enters the greatest fire danger period. What makes Australia's fire season unique is our different landscape: rangelands, wheatbelts, forests, and grasslands, which all affect how fire burns.

[*The Age*, 28/02/2024]

Great Barrier Reef faces new mass bleaching

Australia's iconic Great Barrier Reef is currently experiencing another mass bleaching event, as confirmed by officials. This phenomenon occurs when corals, under heat stress, expel the algae that provide them with life and colour. It is the fifth time in the past eight years that widespread damage has been observed in this UNESCO World Heritage site. Prior to 2016, only two mass bleaching events had been recorded, highlighting the need for urgent climate action to ensure the survival of the reef.

"The frequency and scale of these mass bleaching events are now occurring at an alarming rate. Every summer, we hold our breath" said David Ritter from Greenpeace Australia. He criticised the expansion and government subsidisation of the coal and gas industry, stating that claims of Australia taking the health of the Great Barrier Reef seriously are empty.

Simon Bradshaw from the Climate Council emphasised the severity of the situation, stating that the reef is "literally cooking". The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest coral system, stretching over 2,300 km (1,400 miles) along Australia's north-east coast. It is also one of the most biodiverse habitats on the planet.

An aerial survey of 320 reefs, spanning from the tip of Australia to Bundaberg, revealed widespread bleaching, following a summer of elevated sea temperatures. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is conducting in-water examinations to assess the extent and severity of the damage, which is likely to vary across different areas of the reef.

According to the Chief Scientist of the Marine Park Authority, Roger Beeden, bleaching in the southern region is the worst observed in nearly two decades and could become "unprecedented". It is too early to determine the full consequences of this event, but recovery may be possible if conditions cool down.

Over the past decade, the reef has shown resilience and recovered from mass bleaching events, severe tropical cyclones, and outbreaks of crown-of-thorns starfish. However, record-breaking global sea temperatures have led to similar bleaching events in the northern hemisphere, and bleaching has also been observed at Lord Howe Island, the world's southernmost coral reef, located in Australian waters.

The Great Barrier Reef has been listed as a World Heritage site for over 40 years due to its immense significance. However, UNESCO has expressed concern that the reef is under "serious threat" from warming seas and pollution. Successive Australian governments have sought to prevent UNESCO from declaring the reef as "in danger", which could result in the loss of its heritage status. The Reef's status will be reviewed by UNESCO in July 2024.

Australia's Environment Minister, Tanya Plibersek, acknowledged climate change as the biggest threat to coral reefs worldwide. The Australian government has increased funding for reef conservation and implemented stronger emissions reduction targets. Plibersek emphasised the importance of protecting this remarkable natural wonder for future generations.

The latest UN climate change report highlights that the occurrence of future mass bleaching events depends on the speed at which global emissions are reduced. Prompt and decisive action is crucial to safeguard the Great Barrier Reef and coral reefs worldwide.

[*BBC*, 09/03/2024]

Norway

SWF sells Jardine stake over "severe environmental damage"

Norway's \$1.6tn sovereign wealth fund has sold out of its investments in Jardine Matheson and two related companies, saying they were "contributing to, or responsible for "severe environmental damage".

The decision related to a gold mine in Indonesia that environmental groups have long said threatens the habitat of the world's most endangered species of great ape, the Tapanuli orangutan.

The mine is operated by a unit of Jardines, one of Hong Kong's oldest colonial era business empires.

The fund "has decided to exclude the companies Jardine Matheson Holdings Ltd., Jardine Cycle & Carriage Ltd and PT Astra International Ltd. due to unacceptable risk of the company contributing to or being responsible for severe environmental damage," it said in a statement.

Jardine Cycle & Carriage is Jardines' building company in south-east Asia, whilst PT Astra is an Indonesian conglomerate controlled by Jardines. In January, Agincourt Resources – the Astra subsidiary operating the gold mine – said it was expanding operations despite concerns from scientists and environmental groups about the threat to the Tapanuli orangutan.

The Martabe gold mine is located in the only remaining habitat for the orangutan, which was identified as a separate species in 2017. Fewer than 800 of them remain in the wild.

Environmental group Mighty Earth, which has been tracking the Martabe Project for years, told the Financial Times last month that the mine is located within a key biodiversity area deemed critical for endangered animals and ecosystems.

Jardines said then that the plan was limited to “low-impact exploration” and that, if mining was found to be commercially viable, further activity would be subject to assessments from a panel of biodiversity experts advising the group.

Responding to the Norwegian fund’s decision to sell out of Jardines, Mighty Earth’s Amanda Hurowitz, senior director for south-east Asia, said: “we hope that the group seriously reconsider its plans to expand the Martabe mine.”

Erik Meijaard, a conservation scientist focused on the region, said he hoped “other investment funds and banks will follow this lead”.

[*FT Weekend*, 02/03/2024]

United Kingdom

Winchester to transition to vegetable oil

In a significant move to mitigate emissions, the park-and-ride fleet in Winchester is set to adopt vegetable oil as its primary fuel source instead of diesel. The transition to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) is scheduled to take place in the spring of 2024 and will be implemented by Stagecoach, the operator of the service.

According to Winchester City Council, vehicles utilising this biofuel alternative could potentially achieve a remarkable 90% reduction in carbon emissions. This initiative aligns with the council's overarching goal of achieving carbon neutrality. The council has made a firm commitment to becoming a carbon neutral local authority by 2024, with the broader aim of declaring the entire district carbon neutral by 2030.

Kelsie Learney, the cabinet member responsible for addressing the climate emergency, emphasised that this transition to HVO serves as an interim measure until the affordability of electric vehicles can be realised.

Winchester's park-and-ride service encompasses five conveniently located car parks situated on the outskirts of the city centre. By implementing this sustainable fuel solution, the council aims to contribute significantly to the reduction of carbon emissions associated with transportation in the urban area.

As the transition to vegetable oil-based fuel commences, Winchester sets a compelling example for other cities seeking innovative strategies to combat climate change and promote sustainable transportation options. The success of this initiative will undoubtedly inspire further exploration of alternative fuel sources and serve as a catalyst for the adoption of environmentally friendly practices in the transport sector.

With the imminent deployment of HVO in Winchester's park-and-ride fleet, the city takes a significant stride towards realising its carbon neutrality goals, ensuring a greener and more sustainable future for its residents and the environment as a whole.

[*BBC*, 05/03/2024]

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**Convictions under environmental legislation:
December 2023 to February 2024 (March
data not available)**

**[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:

December 2023

Thirty-one convictions were recorded in December 2023 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Seven of the convictions were under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 6 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 15 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, and 3 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance.

A company was fined \$30,000, which was the heaviest fine in December, for failing to comply with air pollution abatement notice.

January 2024

Thirty-one convictions were recorded in January 2024 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Five of the convictions were under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 2 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 13 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, 1 was under the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance, 8 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance, and 2 were under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance

A company was fined \$41,000, which was the heaviest fine in January, for failing to comply with the requirements of a noise abatement notice.

February 2024

Twenty-nine convictions were recorded in February 2024 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Five of the convictions were under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 2 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 10 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, 1 was under the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance, and 11 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance.

A company was fined \$20,000, which was the heaviest fine in February, for failing to comply with air pollution abatement notice.

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