

Report No. 57 of the Director of Audit — Chapter 6

MANAGEMENT OF THE HONG KONG WETLAND PARK

Summary

1. In the 1980s, the Government started the development of Tin Shui Wai New Town. An ecological mitigation area (EMA) was to be constructed at the northern part of Tin Shui Wai. In 1999, the Government decided to develop the EMA into a purpose-built wetland park, the Hong Kong Wetland Park (HKWP). The Government aimed to develop the HKWP into a world-class conservation, education and tourism facility. In May 2006, the HKWP was opened to the public. In order to provide a proper legal framework for its management and control, the HKWP has been designated as a special area under the Country Parks Ordinance (Cap. 208). The Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation is responsible for controlling and managing the HKWP. Financial resources for the management and operation of the HKWP have come from the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB). The Audit Commission (Audit) has recently carried out a review to examine the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD)'s management of the HKWP.

Patronage of the Hong Kong Wetland Park

2. *Estimation of patronage of the HKWP.* The AFCD's 2002 and 2008 marketing studies projected increasing trends of patronage of the HKWP. However, the actual patronage of the HKWP decreased from 890,000 visitors in 2006 to 435,000 visitors in 2008. Since 2008, the patronage had stabilised at the level of around 440,000 visitors a year. The AFCD was of the view that a target patronage of around 440,000 visitors a year, including 15% of tourists, would be appropriate. Audit considers that it may be too early to have the patronage stagnated at the current level and there may be room for further growth in patronage. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation should, in consultation with the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, review the target patronage for the HKWP and take measures to improve its patronage.*

3. ***Patronage of tourists.*** The AFCD reports to the CEDB the HKWP's patronage. Audit found that, in 2008, the patronage of tourists reported to the CEDB did not tally with AFCD records. In 2010, with reference to the percentage (11.62%) of tourists in single-entry-ticket holders, the AFCD multiplied the total number of HKWP visitors by this percentage to work out the patronage of tourists for the year. Audit noted that 18% of the HKWP visitors in 2010 were multi-entry-pass holders who, in most cases (99%), were not tourists. Assuming 11.62% of these multi-entry-pass holders to be tourists in the AFCD's calculation was not appropriate. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation should: (a) maintain proper records relating to the compilation of the patronage figures; and (b) refine the methodology for deriving the patronage of tourists.*

4. ***Measures to promote patronage.*** To help improve patronage of the HKWP, the AFCD has taken various measures, including advertising the HKWP and enhancing the entertainment elements. Audit noted that the AFCD did not have a mechanism for identifying the most suitable channels for broadcasting the HKWP's television (TV)/radio commercials. Besides, with the closure of the water droplet presentation system (an edutainment facility at the HKWP) in January 2011, the facility housing the system has been left idle. Until the implementation of a more sophisticated 4-D theatre, the HKWP visitors have been deprived of a key edutainment facility. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation should: (a) consider establishing a mechanism for identifying the most suitable channels for broadcasting TV and radio commercials for the HKWP; and (b) make better arrangements in planning future replacement of key facilities of the HKWP, with a view to minimising their idle time.*

Wetland conservation

5. ***Ecological monitoring of species diversity.*** The AFCD has conducted regular surveys to collect relevant information about the plants and wildlife in the HKWP. According to the results of the AFCD's ecological monitoring, there was a decrease in the recorded number of species for birds, aquatic plants and butterflies in the past few years. On the other hand, there were increases in the recorded number of species for dragonflies and freshwater fish, as well as fluctuations in those for reptiles, amphibians and mammals. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation should continue to monitor closely the biodiversity of the HKWP's Wetland Reserve and take appropriate habitat enhancement work where necessary.*

6. ***Reporting results of ecological monitoring.*** At present, the AFCD does not publish key performance information for its conservation work in the HKWP. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation should publish performance information on key results of the HKWP's ecological monitoring work.*

Programme management

7. **Guided tours of the HKWP.** The HKWP provides two types of guided tours, namely guided interpretations and guided walks. Of the 58 guided walks scheduled for individual visitors on weekdays from 11 May to 30 June 2011, 21 (36%) were cancelled because no participant appeared at the scheduled departure time. The AFCD collected teachers' feedback on guided walks for schools, but not the feedback of students. While the AFCD relied on the general surveys to collect visitors' opinions on HKWP services, no specific questions about guided interpretations were asked in these surveys. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation should: (a) ascertain the reasons for the high cancellation rate of guided walks for individual visitors on weekdays; (b) improve the take-up rate of guided walks on weekdays; (c) consider collecting feedback from students; and (d) incorporate specific questions about guided interpretations in the HKWP's general surveys.*

8. **Teacher workshops.** The HKWP has arranged workshops for teachers to support their learning of wetland conservation. From 2006-07 to 2010-11, the number of teacher workshops decreased by 58%, and that of trained teachers decreased by 75%. Of the 8 teacher workshops conducted in 2010-11, only 1 fell within the optimum range (30 to 50 participants) according to the HKWP's guidelines. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation should: (a) arrange workshops for more teachers; and (b) take measures to optimise the size of teacher workshops in future.*

9. **Individual Volunteer Scheme.** The HKWP Individual Volunteer Scheme is for individuals who are willing to contribute their time and effort in conserving wetlands. In 2010, the Scheme had 811 qualified volunteers, of whom 436 (54%) did not provide any volunteer service. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation should take effective measures to sustain the interest of volunteers in providing services for the HKWP.*

Other administrative issues

10. **Administration of multi-entry passes.** According to the Country Parks and Special Areas Regulations (Cap. 208A), the fee (\$200) of a family pass will allow no more than four members of a family, who are in the relationship of parents and children, to unlimited number of entries into the HKWP within a year. However, the AFCD issued family passes to extended family members (e.g. grandparents and spouses of children). At present, a multi-entry pass does not have any features (e.g. photograph of the holder) which can render the holder identifiable without having to resort to his identity documents. Audit noted that there were cases in which perpetrators used other people's multi-entry passes to enter the HKWP. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation should: (a) ensure that the statutory requirements in relation to family passes are complied with; and (b) provide additional features on the multi-entry passes to discourage misuse.*

11. **Utilisation of audio-visual (AV) theatre and classroom.** The HKWP has an AV theatre and a classroom which are available for renting to the public and other interested parties. In 2010-11: (a) the AV theatre was rented out twice for a total of five hours; (b) the classroom was rented out once for two hours; and (c) when not rented out, the AV theatre was used to arrange events (e.g. film shows) which had low (12%) occupancy, and the classroom was left unused for 26% of the time. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation should put HKWP facilities to more gainful use.*

Performance management

12. **Performance measures.** The AFCD has adopted, for internal management purpose, six performance indicators for assessing its performance in relation to the HKWP's conservation, education and tourism objectives. Audit notes that the six performance indicators do not adequately assess the HKWP's performance in the pursuit of its objectives. The AFCD also does not publish the HKWP's performance measures in the public domain. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation should: (a) develop more appropriate performance indicators for measuring the HKWP's performance; and (b) publish key performance measures of the HKWP.*

13. **Post-implementation review (PIR).** PIR is a tool for evaluating project achievements. Audit considers that, after five years of operation, it is timely for the AFCD to conduct a PIR on the HKWP to take stock of the position and plan the way forward. In conducting the PIR, it is necessary to clearly define the positioning of the HKWP relative to its different roles as a conservation, education and tourism facility. *Audit has recommended that the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation should, in consultation with the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development: (a) conduct a PIR on the HKWP; and (b) in conducting the PIR, review the positioning of the HKWP and map out a strategy for its future development.*

Response from the Administration

14. The Administration agrees with the audit recommendations.

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