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WWF-Hong Kong's Submission on Budget Recommendations

Parties at the Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 15) recently agreed to the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), which commits the world to a mission of halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. To contribute to this global mission, the HKSAR government needs to mainstream biodiversity into policies and planning to ensure Hong Kong's unique ecological heritage and rich biodiversity are not adversely affected by the upcoming large-scale development projects, such as the Northern Metropolis. We strongly urge the government to allocate sufficient manpower and funding to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) so that they can update and effectively implement the Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.

WWF-Hong Kong (WWF) has the following recommendations regarding specific targets set in the GBF:

Target 1 on ensuring that all areas are under participatory integrated biodiversity inclusive spatial planning

The HKSAR government must allocate sufficient resources to set up a task force to kickstart a territory-wide marine spatial-planning initiative. By using a rights-based and consultative approach during the planning process, it can account for the diverse and sometimes opposing opinions of stakeholders, enhance transparency, and promote social harmony, while facilitating Hong Kong's sustainable maritime development.

Target 3 on effectively conserving and managing at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas

Only 19 per cent of Hong Kong's land and sea area is protected and merely 3% of these protected areas is sea area, which is well below the GBF's global consensus. The government should resume high ecological value private land and establish specific HK SAR conservation management target for these areas. In our oceans, the government should proactively establish an expanded set of no-take marine protected areas in accordance with the national prioritization of ecological civilization, thereby aligning with the country's strategy of integrating development and conservation.

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Target 5 on ensuring that the use, harvesting and trade of wild species is sustainable, safe and legal

WWF recommends that the HKSAR government allocate funding to establish a comprehensive labelling policy for pre-packaged seafood products, which is crucial to ensure traceability, sustainability, legality, and monitoring of food safety. On the law and enforcement side, the government can establish an impartial Scientific Authority (SA) to provide expert assistance to AFCD on matters related to CITES (the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species) and the wildlife trade in general. The SA could provide objective scientific advice on the appropriate protocols that should be followed when trading live animals, and advise on the sustainability of the numbers in trade. These measures would also provide protection for potential detrimental impacts arising from the wildlife trade, such as invasive species and zoonotic diseases such as COVID.

Target 7 on eliminating pollution

The Environment and Ecology Bureau has made good progress in waste reduction. As a way forward, the HKSAR government should expedite the overall transition from a linear to a circular economy by dedicating more funding and resources to support local recyclers. Facilitation of knowledge exchange for the circular economy transition, and provision of additional incentives for the F&B industry to adopt green practices (such as switching to reusable alternatives) are also necessary.

Target 8 on coping with the threats of climate change

WWF urges the HKSAR government to use nature-based solutions (NBS, such as green infrastructure) as a framework to guide large-scale development projects. For instance, the government should devote resources to incorporate the concepts of 'sponge cities' and 'urban ecology' into the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines, so that ecosystem integrity, connectivity and resilience can be maintained, enhanced, or restored. We also recommend that the government conducts a strategic environmental assessment to identify priority sites for the adoption of NBS in order to strengthen Hong Kong's climate adaptation and resilience to sea-level rise and storm surges. The government must use the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) SSP5-8.5 scenario when planning measures intended to improve the city's climate resilience.

Target 21 on ensuring that the best available data, information and knowledge, are accessible to decision makers, practitioners and the public to guide effective and equitable governance

We urge the government to establish a biodiversity baseline for Hong Kong with a suite of indicator species; their status would be the subject of regular monitoring and reporting so that the data are publicly available. This would increase transparency and serve as a core reference to inform both conservation and development initiatives. In accordance with Hong Kong's Smart City Blueprint, the government can invest further in smart conservation measures for example, the efficiency of ecosystem management through enhancement of environmental monitoring incorporating the 'Internet of Things'; one way of achieving this would be for government to scale up the existing *Smart Wetland* project at Mai Po Nature Reserve supported by the Countryside

Conservation Funding Scheme of EPD, and transfer this innovative approach to other local ecosystems.

We are confident that Hong Kong can contribute to the ambitious yet imperative national and global mission of halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. WWF is committed to supporting the government's efforts to build a sustainable and livable city where people dwell in harmony with nature.

Yours sincerely,

Dan Bradshaw
Chairman, WWF-Hong Kong