



PRESS RELEASE

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CONGRATULATIONS HONG KONG!

Chief Executive Donald Tsang makes groundbreaking decision for the future of Hong Kong's marine environment

In yesterday's 2010-11 Policy Address, HKSAR Chief Executive Donald Tsang announced a ban of trawling in Hong Kong waters. He said 'in recent years, Hong Kong's marine environment has been affected by pollution and capture fisheries, resulting in a declining quality of fish catches. To protect our precious marine resources and ecology, we will implement a basket of management measures such as banning trawling in Hong Kong waters through legislation in order to restore our seabed and marine resources as early as possible'.¹ These new measures would be introduced into the Legislative Council next year.

There are approximately 1,000 trawling vessels in Hong Kong. The government plans to allocate funds to compensate fishermen with a trawler buy-out scheme, an allowance to alleviate affected livelihoods and free training to help them shift to sustainable fishing practices and aquaculture.

This declaration shows how Hong Kong, at times, can stand out for its visionary decisions.

As early as 1976, Hong Kong set aside 40% of its territory for protection whilst the rest of the world is still lagging behind with a mere average 12% of land protected. Hong Kong's bold choice has already vastly paid off. It may turn out to be one of Hong Kong's most prized assets in the near future, as the city's Country Parks make it one of the most desirable Asian metropolises to live in.

At long last, Hong Kong has taken a similar step for its marine environment by banning all trawling gear – pair trawling, stern trawling, shrimp trawling and hang trawling – which are known as extremely destructive fishing methods. The city's long forgotten waters and marine life are indeed in a dire condition. With little regulation on fishing gears (except for a prohibition of dynamite and electrical fishing) or fishing effort, Hong Kong's marine environment has been reduced to a mere shadow of what it once was: Hong Kong used to host a variety of large and small marine fauna, from hammerhead sharks to manta rays and turtles. In the 1990s, the mean weight of trawled fish was about 10 grams, which is three times lighter than a sparrow!

The decision announced by the government yesterday gives the marine environment a chance to restore itself to past levels of biological diversity, but it must be seen as one in a set of tools, without all of which the objective to restore Hong Kong's

¹ <http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/10-11/eng/p120.html>, p120-1 (accessed on October 13th, 2010 at 17:00)

'seabed and marine resources' cannot be accomplished. The government should simultaneously address pollution, which has taken a toll on marine (and human) life in recent years and implement other measures such as marine protected areas and sustainable aquaculture practices.

BLOOM therefore calls on Hong Kong to strive to be as daring in 2010 with its waters as it was in 1976 with its terrestrial environment by creating a vast network of fully protected areas (marine reserves) to cover at least 20% of its maritime territory.

Where implemented, and if large enough, marine reserves (no take-zones where no fishing is allowed) have turned out to be fishermen's "best friends" as fish abundance increases exponentially within these areas and eventually spills over the reserve's boundaries for the renewed bounty of fishermen.

BLOOM congratulates the Hong Kong government for its landmark decision to ban trawling, which echoes Australia's call at the WTO last Friday to ban 'subsidies for fishing methods that destroy the underwater environment, such as bottom trawling'. We hope that Hong Kong's new policy will inspire other cities and nations to institute trawl bans to protect their own marine environments and shift to truly sustainable fishing methods and schemes.

"The European Commission should take Hong Kong's policy shift as a wake-up call to ban destructive fishing methods. Instead, it has just issued a proposal on the regulation of deep-sea fisheries in EU waters that effectively allows the most destructive form of fishing – deep-sea bottom trawling – to continue despite masses of scientific evidence of its adverse impact on the marine environment and species", said Claire Nouvian, Founder & President of BLOOM.

Just as the International Year of Biodiversity is coming to an end, Hong Kong's decision casts a beam of hope over what is otherwise a grim future for biodiversity.

END PRESS RELEASE

ABOUT BLOOM

BLOOM is a non-profit organization dedicated to marine conservation that was established in Hong Kong in 2009. BLOOM focuses on the issues that need attention urgently: the protection of vulnerable species and habitats as well as the survival of small-scale fishermen and the promotion of sustainable fisheries. We base all our work on rigorous scientific research.

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