



## THE ISSUE

If everyone in the world led the lifestyle of Hong Kongers, 4.2 Earths would be needed to fulfil our drain on renewable natural resources, a significant increase from the 2016 figure of 3.9 Earths. Hong Kong's Ecological Footprint is the second-worst per capita in Asia and the 10th worst globally.

Since the 1970s, Hong Kong's economy has seen an average 8.9% GDP growth in real terms annually. Its Ecological Footprint recorded an annual 5% growth until the mid-90s. During the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 and 1998, both GDP and Ecological Footprint dropped. As GDP dropped so did our strain on natural resources.

Consistent trends of GDP and Ecological Footprint were seen during the SARS outbreak in 2003 and the global financial crisis in 2007 and 2008. Since the economy started recovering in 2009, the Ecological Footprint has been worsening. With continued GDP growth, our Ecological Footprint may continue to increase if we adopt a business-as-usual approach.

Hong Kong's per capita Ecological Footprint grew from 1.8 gha (global hectares) in 1961 to 7 gha in 2014, which is 2.5 times the world average. Due to a lack of productive land, Hong Kong has a limited biocapacity (0.09 gha and 0.03 gha per person in 1961 and 2014, respectively) and is dependent on external biocapacity, in other words, imported natural resources.

Take seafood as an example, about 90% of the seafood products we consume are imported from more than 170 countries and territories. Hong Kongers consume an average of 71.8kg of seafood each year, ranking us the second-largest per-capita consumer in Asia. The need to transform the food system at scale, and with urgency, is highlighted in WWF's *Living Planet Report*, which outlines the pressing need to simultaneously avoid dangerous climate change, feed the world's growing population and restore biodiversity.

## WHAT WE ARE DOING

WWF-Hong Kong works with Global Footprint Network to compile and monitor the city's Ecological Footprint. Hong Kong's Ecological Footprint is influenced directly by households, including direct consumption by individuals and businesses and indirectly by gross fixed capital formation and government expenditure. Daily household consumption accounts for 78% of Hong Kong's total Ecological Footprint. If individuals and companies change the way they live and make responsible and sustainable consumption choices, it will have an enormous impact towards reducing our Ecological Footprint.

Looking at the full picture, half of the city's Ecological Footprint comes from food (21%), clothing (15%), personal transportation (8%) and electricity (7%). Food and clothing are the biggest contributor to our Ecological Footprint, but consumption in these two categories have made different impacts on the environment.

Food accounts for 21% (1.47 gha) of Hong Kong's total Ecological Footprint, with the top contributor in this category coming from meat at 26%, while fish and seafood have the second-highest Ecological Footprint at 23%. If unsustainably managed, food production can have a

massive impact on the environment. This is especially true for meat due to the high amount of natural resources, such as energy and freshwater, required for its production.

Clothing accounts for 15% (1.02 gha) of Hong Kong's total Ecological Footprint. In this category, the forest area used to sequester carbon dioxide accounts for 45%, grazing land for 28%, and cropland for 23%. The environmental cost behind apparel production should be addressed along the entire production chain, from raw material production to "last mile" transportation. The use of natural resources includes freshwater and natural fibers such as cotton, wool and hemp. Making these fibers requires the use of productive land which increases our Ecological Footprint.

## **OUR ASK**

A shift in our daily habits, coupled with support from business and government, can help to stem the runaway consumption that is impacting the habitats and natural resources we depend on. Our work in Hong Kong aims to minimize the gap between awareness and sustained action by incentivizing businesses and consumers towards sustainable consumption practices. This includes our work to transform Hong Kong to a shark fin free city, and back the increased availability of sustainable seafood.

We urge the government to effectively regulate labeling to increase transparency on wildlife food products and their provenance and means of production; and to promote the use and importance of moving to natural resources that are produced in ways that are biologically sustainable with a pilot project focused on pre-packaged marine species. We suggest that the government develop a city-wide credit rebate system to provide incentives to businesses and consumers for promoting sustainable products.

Hong Kong is not only a leading international city, but also a trading hub and consumption centre for different products around the world. Incentivizing businesses and consumers toward practicing sustainable consumption can help reduce Hong Kong's negative impact on the world's natural resources and act as a driver for a growing green economy – an important step towards Hong Kong becoming the most sustainable city in Asia.