



# EAST LANTAU RECLAMATION



## THE ISSUE

To boost Hong Kong's housing supply in the coming 20-30 years, the government announced the Lantau Tomorrow Vision in the Chief Executive's 2018 Policy Address. Lantau Tomorrow included a study on phased reclamation at East Lantau for the construction of four artificial islands with a total of about 1,700 hectares, the largest single reclamation project in Hong Kong's history. The islands are proposed to be reclaimed in the waters near Kau Yi Chau, Siu Kau Yi Chau, Hei Ling Chau, and Sunshine Island, with the aim of commencing the first phase of reclamation in 2025.

If this proposal is approved, the ecology of the reclamation and its vicinity will be seriously affected. Lantau Island already faces tremendous development pressure. Recent reclamation associated with the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge and the third runway impacted the marine environment beyond just the direct destruction of marine habitat from putting sand and concrete in the ocean. Chinese white dolphins once heavily used the waters north and northeast of the airport, but following the reclamation, they have largely left this area and not returned. The reasons for their departure may be due to increased disturbance and changes in benthic habitats and food sources.

## WHAT WE ARE DOING

The ecosystems and biodiversity of the coastal waters potentially impacted by the reclamation are poorly known. However, a survey by WWF found several locally uncommon marine species, such as spotted seahorse (*Hippocampus kuda*), sea pen (*Virgularia* sp.) and pipefish (*Trachyrhamphus* sp.), highlighting the potential importance of the area for certain marine populations and that more comprehensive surveys are needed. The East Lantau waters are home to at least 14 species of octocoral and black coral and 21 species of hard coral, including an uncommon hard coral *Psammocora haimeana*. This species is of research interest as it can survive in lower salinity and more turbid water, potentially adapting to the changes in marine environments driven by climate change.

Several terrestrial species inhabiting the islands in the construction zone will be potentially impacted by the reclamation. These include the white-bellied sea eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) and Bogadek's burrowing lizard (*Dibamus bogadeki*). Hong Kong has the most stable nesting white-bellied sea eagle population along the South China coast. Sunshine Island in the proposed reclamation zone is one of the few known localities for Bogadek's burrowing lizard. Reclamation activities are likely to bring invasive species to the islands that will prey on this locally endemic lizard or intensify food competition. Hong Kong's obligations under the Convention of Biological Diversity clearly state that locally-endemic species should not be threatened with extinction through development.

## OUR ASK

WWF believes that better land-use planning through adopting a "brownfield first" policy and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) are needed to solve conflicts between conservation and development. To facilitate the 'brownfield first' policy, the government should revisit land use zonings of brownfields and review their suitability for residential development. Science-based, consensus-driven marine spatial planning is needed to ensure that an adequate amount of habitat in Hong Kong's coastal waters is managed for biodiversity conservation and ecosystem health and that users of marine ecosystems and resources employ best practices to minimize negative impacts. Development projects, developers, and other users of the marine

environment must be required to consider and build in environmental and conservation values and costs in their project proposals and impact assessments. Through cross-cutting exercises between different authorities and sectors, the most appropriate way to minimize conflicts and promote synergies among sectors is provided through a balanced marine spatial planning process. Marine managers, planners, developers and sea users can make strategic decisions that can achieve sustainable development while conserving. WWF believes a “brownfield first” policy and MSP are essential steps for Hong Kong to become Asia’s most sustainable city.

Putting rocks in the sea is a really bad way to treat the ocean and the planet. In various approaches to mitigating the environmental damage of impacts – ranging from avoidance, minimizing impacts, and restoration to offsets – WWF advocates avoidance in the case of reclamation. Rather, expansion of the marine protected area network towards a science-based 30% coverage, the global standard for MPA coastal network coverage, should be the government’s priority in coastal waters.

