

15 June 2017

Statement in Response to the Egret Casualty Caused by LCSD's Tree Pruning Works on 06 June 2017

In response to the egret casualty caused by tree pruning works carried out by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) in Tai Po Market Egret Area on 06 June 2017, the Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects (HKILA) is concerned with the government's follow-up actions after the statement issued by the LCSD on 07 June 2017 which had the tendency to tone down their liability when our city should be more responsible to urban landscape management and urban ecology.

The HKILA is shocked that wild animals and their nests, which were protected by Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170), was disturbed by government operations. The HKILA is disappointed at the indifferent attitude towards wild life when empathy and common sense should have ceased this irreversible tragedy.

The quality of the tree maintenance works had also critically hammered the image and morale of many practitioners in arboriculture and landscape architecture who had contributed their efforts to improve the quality of tree management and urban forestry in Hong Kong. The HKILA urges the LCSD to seriously review their tree management mechanism and guarantee tree works are undertaken and supervised by staff holding arboriculture qualifications with sufficient practical experiences and that their professional judgement shall not be unnecessarily overridden.

More than a tree management issue, the HKILA considers the incident had exposed the government's lack of awareness on urban ecology and policy inconsistency in managing the urban environment. While the Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP) promulgated by Environment Bureau has laid a milestone to conserve and improve our natural environment, certain departmental policies seem to be well behind the initiatives. In fact, Action 10(e) in the BSAP reports that LCSD is committed to "explore opportunities to enhance the value of urban parks for biodiversity conservation and education." In the incident happened on 06 June 2017, it was evident that the staff of LCSD had treated the pruning works as purely tree maintenance works and entirely ignored how the operations might pose influence on other important ecological aspects.



We are aware that the incident was triggered out by a complaint case related to bird droppings. We trust an alternative handling method with appropriate explanation to the complainant could avoid many public arguments. To achieve the sustainability principles, the government has the responsibility to educate and reconnect people to the nature. We lament the incident had only exemplified how much our city was separated from the nature.

Standing at the forefront to transform Hong Kong into a sustainable and resilient city, the HKILA urges the government to formulate holistic and ecological strategies to design and manage our urban environment. It is also vital for the government to construct an ecological database accessible by the public and regularly update it.

In the shadow of strong requests for full investigation and disciplinary actions to responsible staff, the HKILA believes that it is equally important for the government to review their methodologies and mentalities on urban landscape planning and abandon the fragmented and bureaucratic structure in urban forestry and landscape management.

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