

**Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene**

**“Trap-Neuter-Return” Trial Programme for Stray Dogs**

**Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the proposed “Trap-Neuter-Return” (“TNR”) trial programme for stray dogs.

**Background**

2. Under its stray dog management programme, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (“AFCD”) will catch stray dogs in response to complaints of noise and environmental hygiene nuisances, potential danger to members of the public and dog biting incidents.

3. The Government attaches great importance to animal welfare and management. Our policy objective is to ensure that animals and people co-exist in a harmonious way.

4. Stray dogs caught will first be sent to AFCD’s Animal Management Centres (“AMCs”) for observation. Health conditions permitting, the animals will stay for four days. During the observation period, veterinary officers on duty will closely monitor the animals’ health and other conditions to ascertain their suitability for re-homing. For dogs licensed and implanted with a microchip, AFCD will try to contact the owners for reclaiming their animals. For dogs not microchipped or unclaimed by owners, they may be passed to animal welfare organisations (“AWOs”) for re-homing if they are found to be healthy and of a mild temperament. Animals which are assessed to be unsuitable for re-homing due to health or temperament reasons or cannot be re-homed by AWOs will be euthanised.

5. In recent years, AFCD has been strengthening its efforts in stray animal management through a number of new and enhanced measures. These include implementing an enhanced education and publicity programme to promote animal welfare and responsible pet ownership, stepping up enforcement actions against pet owners and traders in contravention of relevant animal laws, and strengthening collaboration with and the provision of technical and financial support to AWOs in re-homing of animals and conducting activities relating to animal welfare and management. Through AFCD's on-going efforts, the number of stray dogs euthanised in 2012 has gone down to 5 675 relative to 10 240 in 2008. This represents a 45% drop. Notwithstanding this, there are still concerns about the number of stray dogs euthanised as well as the propriety of the catching and disposal methods. Various AWOs have repeatedly requested that we should explore TNR as an additional method to control the stray dog population.

### **The TNR Concept**

6. Under the TNR, stray dogs are caught, neutered and then returned to their original habitat. Proponents believe that, through the TNR, the number of stray dogs will gradually decline without resorting to euthanasia. From available overseas experience and data, the effectiveness of the TNR in reducing the stray dog population and its associated nuisance has yet to be proven.

7. In a proactive spirit to respond to calls for trying out TNR as one of the ways to tackle the problems posed by stray dogs and associated nuisance, AFCD proposed to assist two AWOs<sup>1</sup> to carry out a three-year trial programme in selected sites ("trial zones") to assess the effectiveness or otherwise of the TNR concept as a means to reduce the stray dog population and its associated nuisance. Other than the designated trial zones, the catch-and-remove method would continue to be applied to control the stray dog population in Hong Kong.

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<sup>1</sup> Namely the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong) and the Society for Abandoned Animals. They have been strong advocates of the TNR concept.

## **Implementation Details**

8. Under the trial programme, stray dogs in the designated area will be closely monitored and taken care of (including vaccination, neutering, feeding, etc) during the trial period. The number of stray dogs within the designated area before and after the trial period will be compared to assess the effectiveness of the trial programme. As the designated area will not be fully enclosed, stray dogs are free to move in and out of the area. The possible fluctuation of stray dog number due to these movements will be taken into account in the assessment of the trial programme. The trial programme will be managed by the AWOs concerned as Programme Coordinators (“PCs”) under a set of agreed protocol. AFCD will take up the monitoring role and provide technical support. A broad framework of the trial programme is set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

### *Carers*

9. The PCs will recruit volunteers as carers to catch and feed stray dogs within the trial zone. The PCs will provide proper training to their carers on animal nutrition, animal behaviour, practical means to identify sick dogs, environmental safety, dog catching methods, necessary data collection and keeping before the carers join the trial programme. The carers will carry an identification card issued under the trial programme while engaging in any activities relating to the trial for better identification.

### *Catching of dogs within the trial zone*

10. The trial programme targets stray dogs in the trial zone, including feral and semi-feral dogs, irrespective of whether they are already in the trial zone at the start of the programme or move into the trial zone during the trial period. The PCs propose to catch the dogs by first developing a trusting relationship between the carers and the stray dogs through regular feeding. However, if the above feeding approach fails due to the feral nature of the dogs, the traditional catching method may also be employed by the PCs, including the use of catching poles and snares.

### *Screening and treatment of the dogs*

11. Stray dogs caught by the PCs in the trial zone will be transported to their designated veterinary clinic for medical and temperament assessment as well as neutering. If the dog is found with a microchip, appears to be well-socialised or is suspected to have an owner, it will be held in the PCs' facilities or referred to the relevant AMC until ownership status is verified. If a dog is confirmed to be owned, it will be returned to its owner. Unowned dogs will be rehomed if they are healthy and of an appropriate temperament. The aggressive ones may endanger public safety and will be euthanised.

12. Those dogs selected to be kept in the trial programme will undergo a veterinary examination by a registered veterinary surgeon before they are released back to the trial zone. These dogs will be given prophylactic treatments against various parasites such as intestinal worms, heartworms, fleas and ticks. They will be neutered, microchipped and given anti-rabies vaccination and other vaccines for the control of parvovirus infection, canine distemper, hepatitis and leptospirosis. In addition to a microchip, a visual marker will also be put on the dog for easy identification after return to the trial zone.

13. It should be noted that the catching and neutering will be a continuous process in that new dogs, though of a small number, may enter the trial zone from outside. These, together with those already in the trial zone at the beginning of the trial but not yet caught and neutered may continue to have offspring. The PCs are therefore expected to continue with the catching and handling of these relevant dogs throughout the trial period.

### *Release of dogs at the trial zone*

14. The carers will be responsible for the care, feeding and monitoring of the dogs under the trial programme. No excessive feeding by the carers will be allowed and they have to ensure that environmental hygiene of the location is not affected by their feeding activities.

### *Complaint handling*

15. During the trial period, any complaint of dog nuisance regardless of whether it is inside or outside the trial zone will continue to be handled by AFCD. AFCD will inform and involve the PCs in any investigation, mediation and remedial action regarding the complaints. Any dogs caught in the trial zone in response to complaints, irrespective of whether they have gone through the screening and treatment described in paragraphs 11 and 12, will be returned to the PCs or held at the respective AMCs. The dogs concerned will only be released back to the trial zone if they are deemed to be suitable after a joint assessment by the PCs and AFCD.

16. Any dogs in the trial zone which are involved in biter cases will be removed from the trial programme. AFCD will then handle these dogs under the established procedures for handling stray dogs involved in biter cases.

### *Record keeping*

17. Record keeping is essential for assessing the effectiveness of the trial programme. All carers are requested to fill in records related to their feeding activities, dog catching activities and post-neuter monitoring. The PCs will keep a database of the population survey. The database will also comprise all veterinary examination reports, temperament assessment reports, microchip numbers, vaccination records, date of neutering and any medical treatment given to individual dogs during the trial period. Any dogs noted to be missing from the trial zone, found dead, being put under an adoption scheme or euthanised will also be recorded. The PCs will provide regular reports to AFCD and the consultant for reference and analysis.

18. Both AFCD and the PCs will maintain complete records of the complaints and enquiries lodged by local residents and other organisations, and of the dogs returned by AFCD after complaint investigations. The records will also contain follow-up actions taken in response to complaints and enquiries received.

### *Monitoring and assessment*

19. To ensure an independent assessment of the outcome of the trial programme, a consultant will be commissioned to conduct a baseline population survey in collaboration with the PCs before the commencement of the programme. AFCD will, along with the consultant, monitor the field work conducted and records compiled by the PCs in the trial zone during the three-year trial period. To this end, AFCD will hold regular meetings with the PCs to chart the progress of the trial programme and to resolve any issues that may arise during the trial period.

20. The consultant will analyse and submit regular reports on the data concerning the change in the number, distribution and ecology of stray dogs as well as the number of complaints received in the trial zone during the trial period and the correlation among them. It will also conduct a mid-term review and an overall assessment on the effectiveness of the trial programme upon its completion. The evaluation of the effectiveness of the trial programme will be carried out with reference to the targets set out below:

- (a) catching at least 80% of stray dogs in the trial zone during the first six months of the trial programme;
- (b) achieving an average 10% annual decrease in the population of stray dogs in the trial zone, which is set with reference to the previous data that there has been a 6%-12% annual reduction of stray dogs being caught in response to complaints in the past ten years in Hong Kong; and
- (c) at least matching with the territory-wide trend in complaint figures during the trial period.

21. For observation purposes, other quantitative and qualitative analyses will be carried out. These include aspects such as animal health and welfare of the dogs in the trial programme, number of animal rescues in the area, the dogs' reproductive rates and cost effectiveness, etc.

22. The sustainability of the trial programme will hinge on a number of factors, including the continued support of local residents, the potential nuisance and/or danger to the local public in the vicinity, and the successful prevention of dog abandonment by irresponsible owners in the area. These factors have been taken into account when devising the implementation protocol for the trial programme and selecting suitable sites for the trial with a view to ensuring the smooth running and sustainability of the programme. Furthermore, AFCD and the PCs will carry out suitable education and publicity activities in the vicinity of the trial zone prior to and during the implementation of the trial programme to provide local residents with a better understanding of the concept of the TNR trial programme. The activities will include distribution of leaflets and organising seminars. We believe that such activities will help gain wider community support for the trial programme and minimize complaints from the local residents.

*Suspension / termination of the trial programme*

23. In order to safeguard public health and safety, the trial programme will be immediately terminated upon the confirmation of the emergence of a rabies outbreak or a zoonotic disease in Hong Kong during the trial period where transmission by stray dogs plays a role in the disease epidemiology. The trial programme will be suspended if any of the following conditions arise:

- (i) significant increase in the number of complaints concerning animal nuisance and animal welfare in respect of the trial programme; or
- (ii) fatal or serious accident(s) caused by one or more dogs of the trial programme.

24. During the suspension period, AFCD and the PCs will work together to derive possible remedial actions. If it is not possible to come up with feasible solutions to prevent future occurrence of these incidents, the programme will be terminated.

25. AFCD may also require the PCs to suspend the trial programme if (i) there are procedural irregularities or non-compliance with the agreed protocol by the PCs; or (ii) the relevant District Council or local community groups have withdrawn their support to the trial programme, depending on the seriousness of the matter. During the suspension period, AFCD will make the best endeavour to work with the PCs and other parties to resolve issues. If mediation and remedial action fails, then the trial programme will be terminated. Upon termination of the TNR trial programme, the traditional catch-and-remove approach will resume in the trial zone concerned.

### **The Trial Zone**

26. An appropriate trial zone should be one with an existing stable colony of stray dogs. To minimise the risk of rabies introduction, dog bites and traffic accidents caused by these stray dogs, the trial zone must not be located around hospitals, schools, homes for the elderly, busy roads or within 500 metres from the boundary with the Mainland.

27. As the population sample size will affect the statistical significance of the trial, the initial stray dog population in the trial zone should be of a reasonable size (at least 30 dogs). The initial population size will be assessed and confirmed jointly by the PCs and a consultant to be commissioned by AFCD.

28. To prepare for the trial programme, AFCD has been working closely with the PCs in identifying suitable trial zones and consulting the local communities.

29. The following two trial zones have been selected for launching the trial programme.

#### *Tai Tong Shan Road Site (Yuen Long)*

30. A map showing the location of the Tai Tong Shan Road site is at **Annex A**. With the initial indication of support from the landlord, questionnaires were sent to villagers nearby and a local consultation



forum was held in November 2013. No negative feedback was received. Upon receipt of the confirmation of support in writing by the landlord of the proposed site, we shall consult the Environmental Improvement Committee of Yuen Long District Council before finalisation.

*Tai Kwai Wan San Tsuen Site (Cheung Chau / North) and Cemetery Site (Cheung Chau / South West)*

31. Two sites in Cheung Chau have also been identified as suitable locations for conducting the trial programme, namely (i) the Tai Kwai Wan San Tsuen Site, North of Cheung Chau and (ii) the Cemetery Site, South-west of Cheung Chau. A map showing the boundary of the two sites is at **Annex B**.

32. Meetings were conducted with local representatives in early 2013. They in general did not object to the trial programme and the site selection. Subsequently in March 2013, a consultation forum was conducted. Some people residing in the Tai Kwai Wan San Tsuen Site raised concerns over the possible nuisance to the neighbourhood, enhanced risk to public safety and possible encouragement of abandonment of dogs in the area. To address these concerns, the relevant PC suggested excluding the area of a private residence 'Scenic Garden' from the Tai Kwai Wan San Tsuen Site. Taking into account the boundary adjustment and the expected benefit to be brought about by the trial programme, the Rural Committee of Cheung Chau and the Island DC, on balance, endorsed the conduct of the trial programme at the two proposed sites in March 2013.

33. Despite the exclusion of the residence area from the Tai Kwai Wan San Tsuen Site boundary, some residents of 'Scenic Garden' continue to express grievances as the site is still in the vicinity. We shall work with the relevant PC to further liaise with the concerned residents to further explain to them the potential ultimate benefits to be brought about by the TNR, i.e. to reduce the stray dog population without resorting to euthanasia. We shall seek to obtain a good measure of understanding from them before finalization of the site boundary.

## **Next Steps**

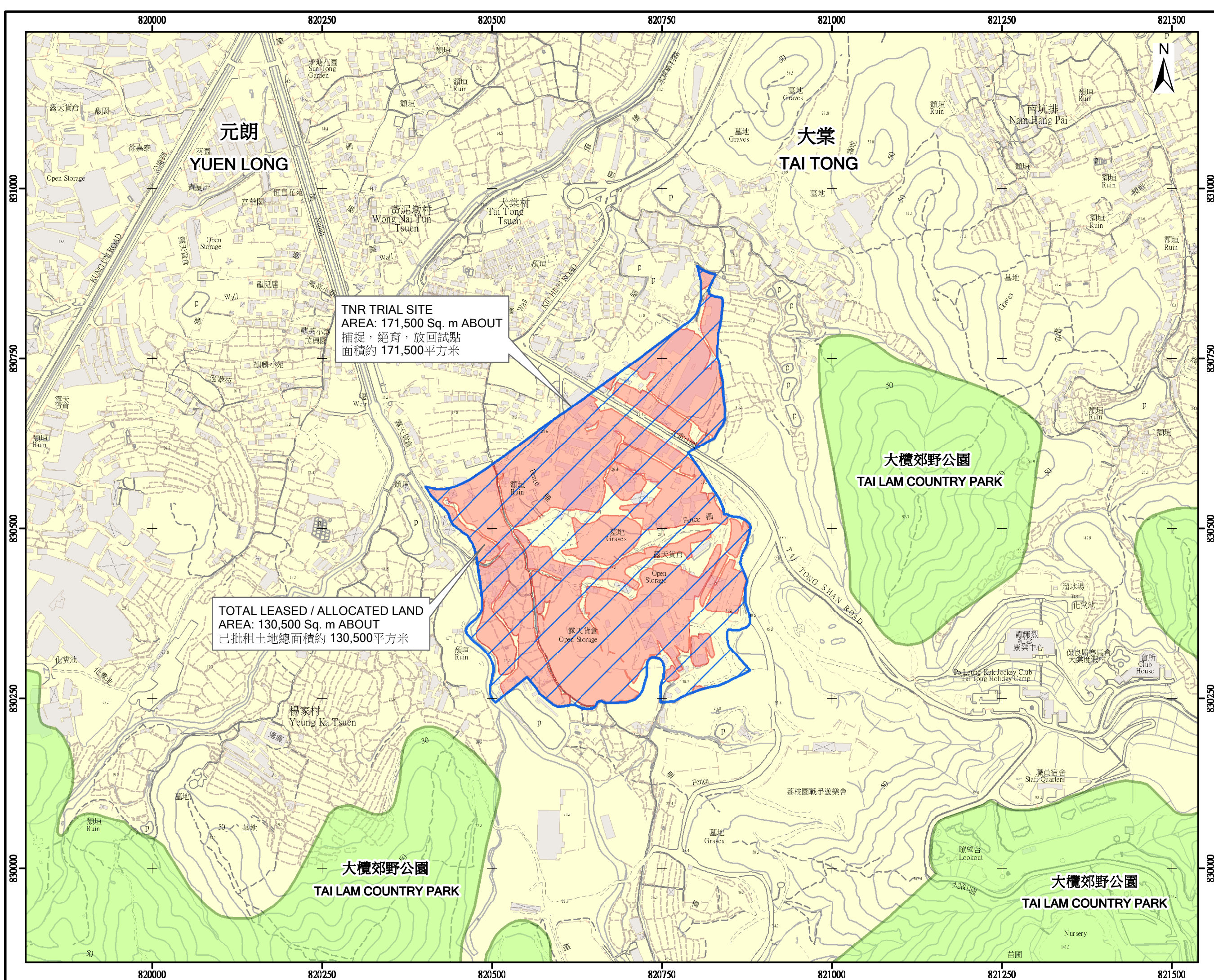
34. Exemption notices under the Rabies Ordinance (Cap. 421) and the Dogs and Cats Ordinance (Cap. 167) will need to be gazetted to clear the way for the implementation of the trial programme. We are in the process of preparing the exemption notices. Subject to confirmation of local support for the proposed trial zones (as set out in paragraphs 30 to 33 above) and negative vetting by the Legislative Council of the exemption notices, we plan to roll out the trial programme in early 2014.

35. AFCD would commission a consultant to help monitor the trial programme and assess its effectiveness. We wish to put down the marker that even if the trial programme in the selected sites is successful, the result may not be readily applicable to other places in Hong Kong, considering the possible differences that may exist in terms of dog population dynamics, human population densities, traffic conditions, public health, as well as animal health and welfare concerns. If the programme is to be expanded to other areas, any such future sites would have to be assessed individually for suitability.

## **Advice Sought**

36. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and comment on the proposed trial programme.

**Food and Health Bureau  
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department  
January 2014**



TNR TRIAL SITE  
 AREA: 171,500 Sq. m ABOUT  
 捕捉, 絕育, 放回試點  
 面積約 171,500 平方米

TOTAL LEASED / ALLOCATED LAND  
 AREA: 130,500 Sq. m ABOUT  
 已批租土地總面積約 130,500 平方米

**Annex A**

- Notes :
1. CO-ORDINATES ARE OF HONG KONG 1980 GRID SYSTEM.
  2. LANDSD'S CIS & BMS DATA AS AT DEC 2013 IS ADOPTED.

- Legend (圖例)**
- TNR Trial Site (捕捉, 絕育, 放回試點)
  - Country Park Area (郊野公園)
  - Leased / Allocated Land Area (已批租土地)

No.	date	description	initial
REVISION			
		name	date
		surveyed	
		designed	
		drawn	K. T. CHAN 24/12/2013
		checked	

approved  
 LAND SURVEYOR  W. F. YIK

contract no.  
 file no.  
 project no.  
 Contract

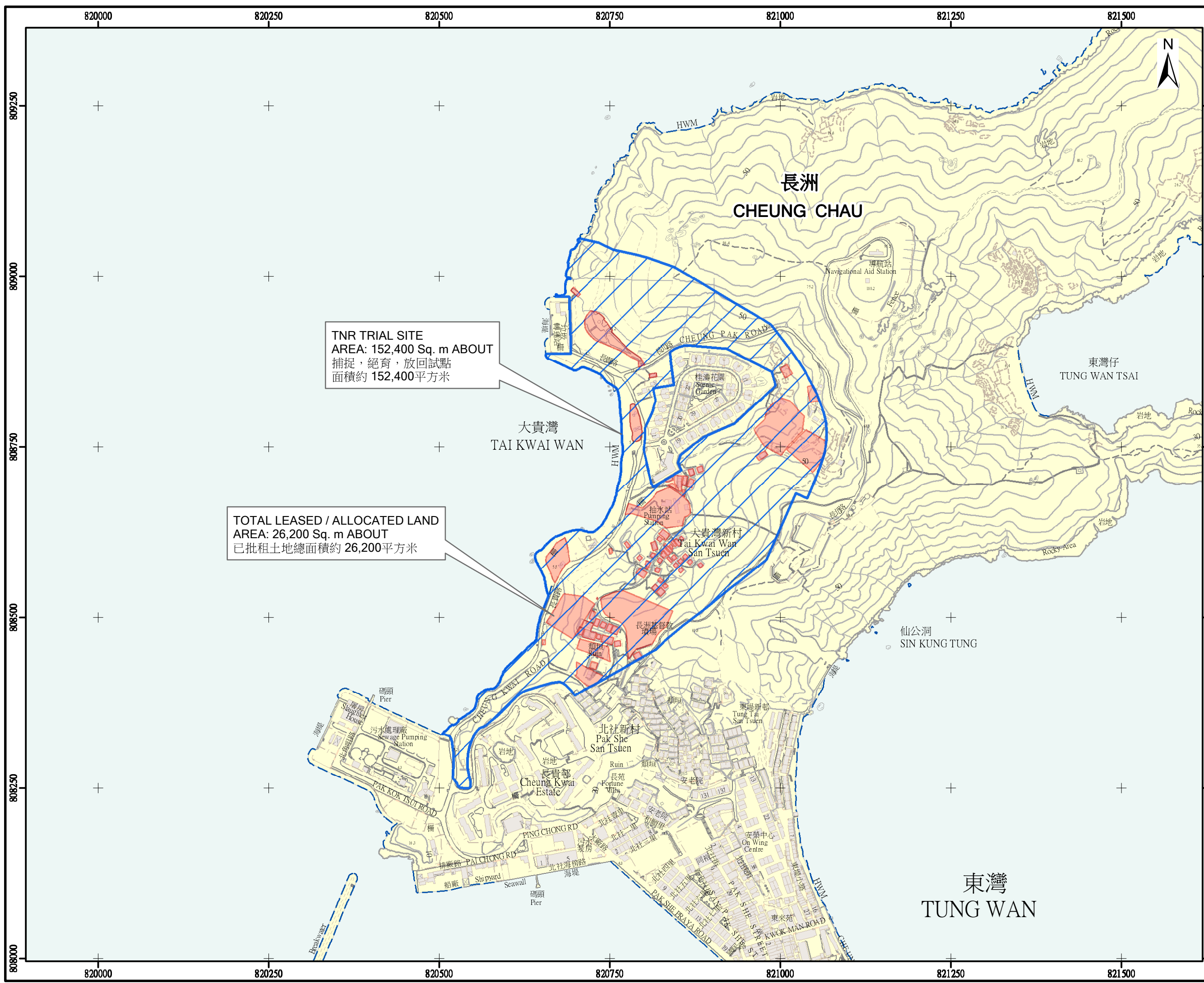
**TRAP NEUTER RETURN (TNR) PROJECT**  
 捕捉, 絕育, 放回計劃

Drawing title  
**TAI TONG SHAN ROAD SITE LOCATION PLAN**  
 大棠山道捕捉, 絕育, 放回試點位置圖

Drawing no.	revision	Scale
AFD-LS-2013-78-2B		1:5,000

Office  
**ENGINEERING DIVISION**





TNR TRIAL SITE  
 AREA: 152,400 Sq. m ABOUT  
 捕捉，絕育，放回試點  
 面積約 152,400平方米

TOTAL LEASED / ALLOCATED LAND  
 AREA: 26,200 Sq. m ABOUT  
 已批租土地總面積約 26,200平方米

Notes : **Annex B (1/2)**

1. CO-ORDINATES ARE OF HONG KONG 1980 GRID SYSTEM.
2. LANDSD'S CIS & BMS DATA AS AT DEC 2013 IS ADOPTED.

- Legend (圖例)**
- TNR Trial Site (捕捉，絕育，放回試點)
  - Country Park Area (郊野公園)
  - Leased / Allocated Land Area (已批租土地)

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REVISION			
		name	date
		surveyed	
		designed	
		drawn	K. T. CHAN 24/12/2013
		checked	

approved  
 LAND SURVEYOR  W. F. YIK

contract no.  
 file no.  
 project no.

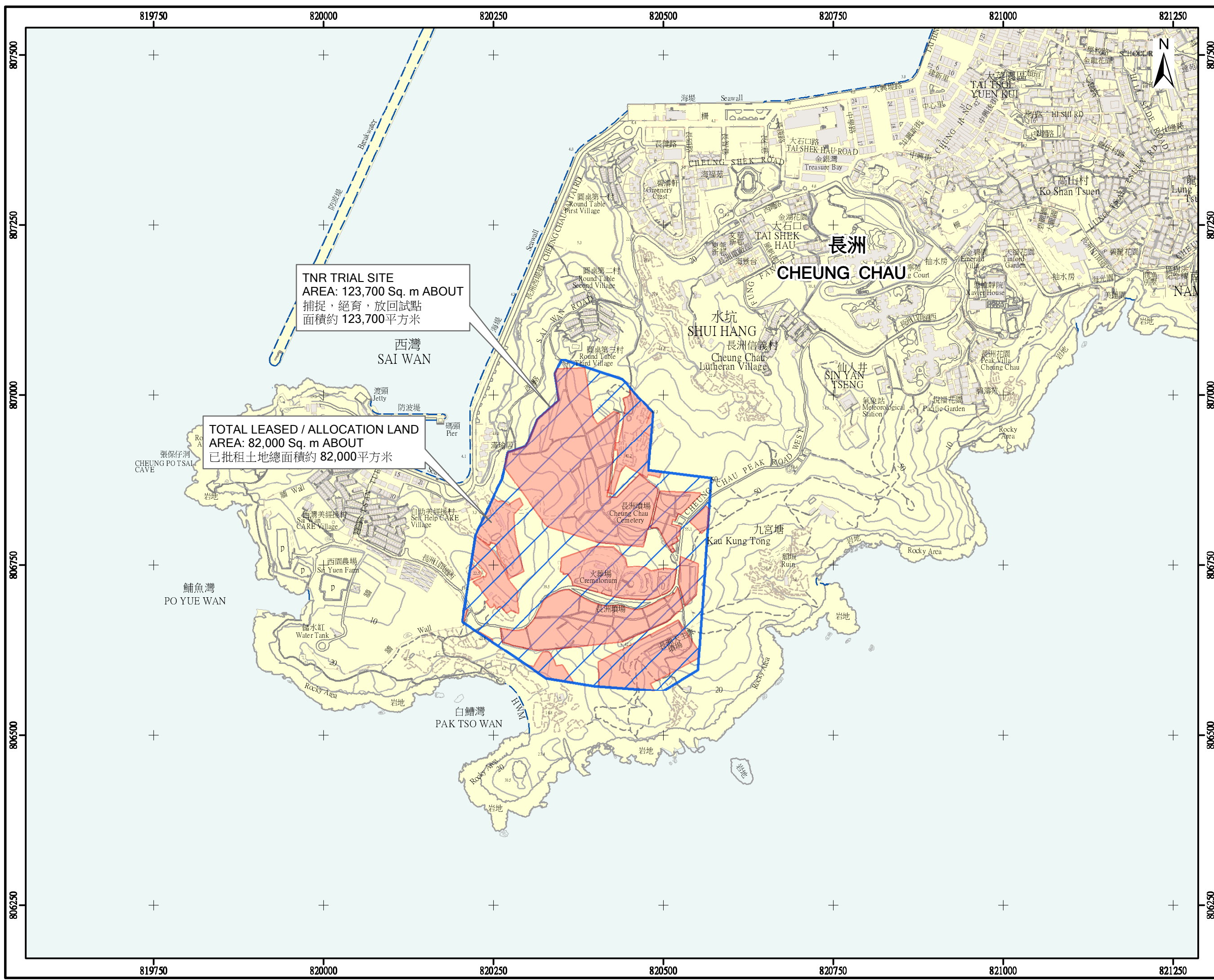
Contract  
**TRAP NEUTER RETURN (TNR) PROJECT**  
 捕捉，絕育，放回計劃

Drawing title  
**CHEUNG CHAU NORTH SITE LOCATION PLAN**  
 長洲北捕捉，絕育，放回試點位置圖

Drawing no.	revision	Scale
AFD-LS-2013-78-3B		1:5,000

Office  
**ENGINEERING DIVISION**





TNR TRIAL SITE  
 AREA: 123,700 Sq. m ABOUT  
 捕捉, 絕育, 放回試點  
 面積約 123,700 平方米

TOTAL LEASED / ALLOCATION LAND  
 AREA: 82,000 Sq. m ABOUT  
 已批租土地總面積約 82,000 平方米

Notes : **Annex B (2/2)**

1. CO-ORDINATES ARE OF HONG KONG 1980 GRID SYSTEM.
2. LANDSD'S CIS & BMS DATA AS AT DEC 2013 IS ADOPTED.

**Legend (圖例)**

- TNR Trial Site (捕捉, 絕育, 放回試點)
- Country Park Area (郊野公園)
- Leased / Allocation Land Area (已批租土地)

No.	date	description	initial
REVISION			
		name	date
surveyed			
designed			
drawn		K. T. CHAN	24/12/2013
checked			
approved			
LAND SURVEYOR		W. F. YIK	

contract no.  
 file no.  
 project no.  
 Contract  
**TRAP NEUTER RETURN (TNR) PROJECT**  
 捕捉, 絕育, 放回計劃

Drawing title  
**CHEUNG CHAU SOUTH SITE LOCATION PLAN**  
 長洲南捕捉, 絕育, 放回試點位置圖

Drawing no.	revision	Scale
AFD-LS-2013-78-4B		1:5,000

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