

**Relevant extract of the draft minutes of
the Environmental Impact Assessment Subcommittee meeting
held on 29 April 2026**

EIA report on “Development of the Loop – Eastern Connection Road”

Question-and-Answer Session (Open session)

Wetland Compensation

1. In response to the Chairman's query on wetland compensation for the 2.09 hectares (ha) of permanent habitat loss, Mr Benjamin Chan explained that about 10 ha of compensatory wetland habitat (i.e. Off-site Wetland Compensation Areas (OWCAs)) created under the Lok Ma Chau Loop (LMCL) project was available to cover both the temporary loss of about 9 ha of wetland habitat during the construction period and the permanent loss of about 2 ha. Taking the opportunity of the tunnel works, CEDD would also implement enhancement measures in three existing fishponds with a view to improving the ecological conditions of an additional 4 ha of wetlands.

2. To address a Member's questions on the time span for the overall construction works, the duration of temporary loss of 9 ha of wetland and the lead time to nurture the 10 ha of compensatory wetland, Mr Benjamin Chan responded that the construction works could commence in early 2027 with targeted completion in 2031 subject to funding application to the Legislative Council. Mr Chan furthered that the 10-ha compensatory wetland areas were readily available as they had been created during the previous development of the LMCL. For the fishponds which would be temporarily affected by the tunnel construction works, he expected that full restoration would take approximately three years.

Tree Compensation

3. While it was indicated in the EIA report that trees affected by the project would be preserved as far as possible, a Member shared that young agarwood saplings of less than 3 years would have a higher rate of survival than fully grown trees in transplantation. For the difficult-to-transplant species, the Member suggested that the project proponent should collect their seeds for replanting in the surrounding area with a view to conserving the genetic biodiversity of the site.

4. For the four affected agarwood trees which required transplantation, Mr Benjamin Chan assured that the project proponent would explore all possible measures to support their conservation including the collection of trees seeds. Ms Elly Leung acknowledged the challenges in transplanting the four grown up agarwood trees which

were 4 m to 7 m tall, but the project team would strive to conserve the protected species as far as possible. She said that the tender documents would specify the requirements of practical proposals, such as the adoption of a suitably large root ball and an extension of the root pruning period, to boost the survival rate of the transplantation.

5. A Member urged the project proponent to engage qualified professionals for the transplantation process which was highly technical and would affect the survival of the trees. He highlighted that conserving the species through successful transplantation should be the priority while seeds collection would serve as contingency to ensure species sustainability in case the parent trees failed to survive. Mr Benjamin Chan assured that experienced horticultural contractors specialised in public works would be engaged to ensure that the transplantation works would be properly done at the outset while seeds collection would serve as a fallback for long-term propagation. Throughout the process, there would be ongoing monitoring by the Independent Environmental Checker and Environmental Team.

6. The Chairman suggested adding agarwood trees to the proposed planting list for the 1.68-ha compensatory woodland, which could serve as a mitigation measure for the transplantation. With reference to the Chairman's questions on the total number and species of trees to be felled in the project, Mr Benjamin Chan responded that 327 out of the 2,642 trees within the 100-m boundary of the project would be affected and among them included four agarwood trees and five *Leucaena* trees. He said that one-for-one compensation would be provided for the felled trees. Ms Elly Leung supplemented that other affected species were common rural trees such as camphor, banyan, chinaberry, macaranga and longan, and more details of the tree survey were available at Appendix to the EIA report.

Wildlife Monitoring

7. A Member enquired whether AI cameras or similar technological equipment could be used for underwater ecological monitoring in addition to terrestrial wildlife monitoring. Mr Benjamin Chan replied that AI cameras would be deployed to monitor terrestrial wildlife including birds, Eurasian Otters etc. but could not be used underwater. CEDD would explore with universities the possibility to introduce underwater AI monitoring in the project.

8. Considering the potential environmental disturbances associated with the four-lane carriageway, a Member asked if continuous monitoring would be arranged during the construction phase. Mr Benjamin Chan indicated that the alignment of the four-lane carriageway had been carefully considered to avoid sites of high ecological value, and updated ecological surveys would be conducted before the construction works to cater for the latest ecological situation. In case longer monitoring was considered necessary, CEDD was ready to discuss the matter with AFCD and EPD. Mr Chan shared that CEDD would liaise with green groups, scholars and local universities to conduct researches on the change in biodiversity and ecological values before and after the works.

9. The Chairman suggested that the project proponent should enhance the monitoring efforts at the egret night roosts, particularly during the peak roosting season from February to April, throughout the construction and operation phases to collect data on the ecological impacts. Mr Benjamin Chan said that CEDD would step up monitoring at the night bird roosts in collaboration with the government departments concerned before and during construction. He said that AI cameras would be deployed as appropriate.

10. To address a Member's questions on key animal species including Eurasian Otters sighted in the project area during EIA surveys and the corresponding mitigation measures, Mr Benjamin Chan clarified that no Eurasian Otters were found within the project boundary during the ecological surveys while they had been spotted near the Shenzhen River in Area 2. This notwithstanding, Ms Heather Li supplemented that dedicated mitigation measures were tailor-made for different wildlife including Eurasian Otters, butterflies and birds with reference to their habits and requirements, such as by restricting the usage of heavy machinery, limiting the construction periods and hours etc. As an effort to bring environmental enhancements to Area 4, Ms Li said that gentle slopes and islands would be provided for birds while a variety of vegetation would be planted to accommodate the needs of butterflies, dragonflies and other wildlife species.

Air Quality

11. Noting that the projected figure for fine suspended particulates was very close to the Air Quality Objective (AQO) benchmark, a Member sought details on the projected traffic flow and vehicle mix in the proposed access road. Mr Benjamin Chan replied that the number of heavy-duty vehicles would be limited as the district was targeted to be an innovation and technology hub. The local traffic would mainly be private cars and low-emission vehicles as the number of electric vehicles (EVs) in Hong Kong had been increasing. He considered that the overall air quality impact to the surrounding area would be minimal.

12. In response to a Member's further question on the basis of the projection, Mr David Ho explained that the traffic impact assessment showed that most passing vehicles were private cars. Based on the survey statistics, the projected traffic volume beyond 2046 would be around 1,350 Passenger Car Unit and the corresponding Volume-to-Capacity Ratio would be below 0.5, meaning no traffic congestion was expected.

13. As a Member was unable to attend the meeting, the Chairman relayed his question on the measures to ensure the air quality level inside the tunnel particularly during traffic congestion. Mr Benjamin Chan replied that air pollution would be reduced and controlled at source through the wider adoption of EVs in society and the tunnel design involving less road junctions would help keep the traffic smooth. He said that the air quality inside the tunnel was monitored on an ongoing basis with air circulation maintained by natural ventilation. In case any exceedance was detected, the exhaust fans in the tunnel would be activated automatically. Mr Chan furthered

that special coatings could be applied to the tunnel walls and barrier panels to trap air pollutants. As such, the air quality impact inside the tunnel would be insignificant.

Noise and Vibration

14. Noting that the deployment of Powered Mechanical Equipment (PME) near the active bird night roost and ecological sensitive areas was restricted to a specified range of time, a Member asked about the additional construction time associated with the restrictions. She also enquired whether Quality Powered Mechanical Equipment (QPME) would be adopted in the project as it had less environmental impacts in terms of noise, emissions and oil leakage. Mr Benjamin Chan explained that the stringent requirements were applicable to a small area near a night bird roost and the construction period would be lengthened by about two to three times for the purpose of ecology protection. To reduce noise and emissions, Mr Chan said that the project would encourage the adoption of more electric construction machinery by contractors. To address the Member's further questions on the definition of noisy construction activity in the EIA and whether QPME would fall within the definition, Mr Chan explained that the current noise assessment was based on conventional works process and the assumption of standard PME deployment. As to whether QPME could be exempted from the restrictions, he said that it would be subject to further discussion with the relevant authorities as there was a wide variety of QPME.

15. Instead of relying on at-receiver mitigation measures like acoustic windows or acoustic balconies, a Member questioned if low-noise road surfacing would also be adopted for locations with noise-sensitive receivers. As low-noise surfacing materials were more wearable which required higher maintenance and replacement costs, Mr Benjamin Chan said that they would be used for certain sections of the road such as near the residential areas while different mitigation measures, such as noise barriers, acoustic windows etc. would be adopted for other locations with reference to their functions.

16. A Member enquired if there were any impact assessment or mitigation measures to address the impacts of the traffic along the road beneath Ponds 36 to 38 as aquatic organisms including underwater micro-organisms were vulnerable to vibrations. Mr Benjamin Chan informed that vibration impacts had been assessed and the ponds would be cleared before the construction and reinstated after the works. He explained that the structural mass of the tunnel would dampen the vibrations which would be barely noticeable at the ground level. In addition, pre-operation tests with vibration sensors would be conducted to doublecheck the vibration level.

Other Environmental Impacts

17. With reference to a Member's request for more details on mitigation measures for light pollution, Mr Benjamin Chan shared that they would work out the streetlight design in consultation with the Highways Department and deploy eco-friendly measures including lamp hoods and warm lighting to minimise light pollution. In addition, light detectors would be installed to ensure that the brightness level near

ecological sensitive areas would be kept to the minimum and the light impacts to the wildlife animals in the area would be monitored during the operation phase.

18. A Member sought to know the overall phasing arrangement and mitigation measures to address the cumulative impacts of light, noise and dust during the construction of the various sections of the road involving tunnel, at-grade road and viaduct. He was concerned that the cumulative impacts might drive local wildlife away. Mr Benjamin Chan explained that the 2.5-km road would be constructed by sections in three phases to help reduce and offset cumulative impacts by limiting the scale and duration of disturbance at different locations. Appropriate mitigation measures such as boundary walls and temporary hoardings would be provided along the site perimeter while acoustic noise barriers would be installed at sensitive receivers and in areas of high ecological value. Citing the tunnel under the fishponds as an example, Mr David Ho said that the excavation works would be conducted in three sequential phases, to be followed by at-grade road, slope works, viaducts building etc.

19. A Member asked for more details of the moderate landscape impacts at Lok Ma Chau hillside landscape (LCA3), lowland rural landscape of Ho Hok Wai (LCA4) and hillside landscape of Ma Tso Lung (LCA6) which were stated in the executive summary of the EIA report. Ms Elly Leung indicated that the moderate visual effects to the aforementioned areas could be reduced to slight level through the implementation of suitable mitigation measures in the operation phase. She said that the impacts of the hillside and slope works at LCA3 and LCA6 would be offset by slope greening and reinstatement of the surrounding environment through planting of appropriate vegetation. As for LCA4, there would be reinstatement of fishponds and habitat enhancement measures to minimise the visual impacts to the landscape in the long run. Mr Benjamin Chan added that extensive greening would be introduced along roadside slopes and retaining walls through the micro-forest planting approach.

20. On a Member's questions about the disposal of the 100,000 cubic metres of excavated sediments after cement solidification, Mr Benjamin Chan explained that the proposed cement solidification treatment process aimed to make use of the sediments as a component for producing cement mixture on-site in order to reduce the amount to be disposed of as waste. He shared that the method was commonly adopted in other local projects.

21. A Member noted that there was a 36-month validity period for the EIA report which would expire by the time when the project commenced. He highlighted that thorough and comprehensive pre-construction surveys would be essential to ensure the sustainability of ecological protection. Mr Benjamin Chan assured that the findings in the baseline surveys were based on investigations over a relatively long period of time and additional pre-construction ecological surveys would be carried out. In addition, an environmental committee (EC) comprising green groups, academics etc. would be set up to provide advice on the project including project designs and ecological mitigation / enhancement measures. Mr Chan aspired that the project could bring ecological enhancement through infrastructure development.

The Chairman welcomed the arrangement and suggested that all monitoring data should be included in EPD's central database.

Conclusion

22. Mr Benjamin Chan thanked Members for their comments. He assured that CEDD would closely monitor the environmental impacts and adopt innovative and eco-friendly techniques throughout the construction and operation processes, striving to enhance the environmental performance with improved ecological outcome.

(A Member joined the meeting during the Question-and-Answer session.)

(The project proponent team left the meeting after the Question-and-Answer Session.)

Internal Discussion Session (Closed-door Session)

23. The Chairman noted that the design of the four-lane carriageway was carefully planned. He remarked that the project proponent had demonstrated good initiatives in the project through placing part of the road underground and reconstructing the wetland fishponds, which were commendable enhancements features.

24. With reference to a Member's earlier comments on the validity of the EIA report, Mr Gary Tam clarified that the 36-month validity period mentioned in the Technical Memorandum of EIA Process referred to the shelf-life of the ecological baseline survey data used to compile the EIA report, i.e. the information was considered valid for 36 months upon completion. Given that projects could span over a long period of time, as a standard practice, a pre-construction ecological survey would be conducted to update the ecological condition before the commencement of works and such requirement also applied to delayed projects with Environmental Permits. In some particular cases where the EIA reports could not be submitted within the 36-month survey window, Mr Tam said that the project proponent would be required to go through a data verification process through desktop review or supplementary field surveys. Members noted that an EIA report without valid baseline data would not be acceptable to the EPD.

25. The Chairman advised Members that the EIASC could make one of the following recommendations to the ACE on the EIA report –

- (i) endorse the EIA report without condition; or
- (ii) endorse the EIA report with condition(s); or
- (iii) reject the EIA report and inform the project proponent of the right to go to the full Council.

If the EIASC cannot reach a consensus during the meeting, it may –

- (i) ask for a 2nd submission to the EIASC; or
- (ii) defer the decision to the full Council and highlight issues or reasons for not reaching a consensus for the full Council's deliberation.

26. The Chairman proposed and Members agreed to endorse the EIA report with conditions.

Conditions

27. Based on the discussions at the meeting, Members agreed that the following conditions could be proposed for the full Council's consideration.

(a) Brief Introduction

- (i) According to Section 8.13.4 of the EIA Report, an updated Habitat Creation and Management Plan (HCMP) for the OWCA's and Area 4 (i.e. Ponds 36 to 38 for ecological enhancement) should be submitted. **Condition (1)** was to require the Project Proponent to provide a detailed and updated HCMP as recommended in the EIA Report to the DEP for approval no later than 3 months before commencement of construction of the Project.
- (ii) Having taken into account the public comments, **Condition (2)** was to require the establishment of a well-represented EC which would advise on the preparation of the HCMP, and review the effectiveness of implementation of the proposed ecological mitigation / enhancement measures of the Project according to the EIA Report and the approved HCMP.

(b) Conditions

The Project Proponent should –

- (i) submit a detailed and updated HCMP for the OWCA's and Area 4 (i.e. Ponds 36 to 38 for ecological enhancement) as recommended in the EIA Report to the DEP for approval no later than 3 months before commencement of construction of the Project. The HCMP should set out design details (including specifications for the target habitats and species), location of wetland compensation and enhancement works, implementation schedule in table form to clearly list out the measures to be implemented, implementation party, implementation programme, environmental performance required for implementation of the measures, management strategy, ecological monitoring and audit requirements, and details of smart initiatives (including AI-powered camera) to enhance the monitoring works of birds and mammals at the wetland compensation and enhancement areas. The Project Proponent should consult the AFCD on the HCMP prior to submission to the DEP; and

- (ii) set up an EC no later than 3 months before the commencement of construction of the Project. The EC should advise on the preparation of the HCMP, and review the effectiveness of implementation of the proposed ecological mitigation / enhancement measures of the Project according to the EIA report and the approved HCMP. The EC should have a wide representation such as representatives of the relevant government departments (including AFCD), green groups and academics. The list of members and terms of reference of the EC should be submitted to the DEP for approval.

(Post-meeting notes: The draft conditions were circulated to Members for comment before the ACE meeting on 11 May 2026.)

**EIA Subcommittee Secretariat
May 2026**