## Climate Governance Engagement Workshop

# WORKSHOP SUMMARY

**Co-organised by:**
HKUST
Business Environment Council
Hong Kong Green Building Council
Hong Kong Green Finance Association

**Date:**
17 June 2026 (Wednesday)

**Participants:**
Practitioners in the fields of biodiversity, sustainability, finance, corporate management, academia and NGO

# CONTENTS

## 1. Purpose of the Workshop

This workshop used biodiversity and nature-based solutions (NbS) as a case study to examine how Hong Kong can move from policy recognition to practical implementation. The discussion was structured around the Climate Governance Project's 5-Pillar Model.

The workshop tested whether the 5-Pillar Model could help experienced practitioners organise practical feedback. It also generated suggestions on how biodiversity and NbS could become part of Hong Kong's wider development strategy, especially in relation to the Northern Metropolis, climate resilience, ecological civilisation, green finance and liveability.

The timing of the workshop was important. The HKSAR Government had just released the Public Consultation Document on The First Five-Year Plan. Participants were therefore asked not only to discuss biodiversity governance, but also to identify what they would most like to see in the Five-Year Plan in relation to biodiversity/NbS.

## 2. Overall Assessment

The workshop generated strong and practical feedback. Participants agreed that biodiversity in Hong Kong should no longer be treated only as a conservation issue. It should also be understood as part of climate resilience, ecological infrastructure, urban planning, public health, liveability, finance, economic value and Hong Kong's long-term development model.

A clear message emerged: biodiversity must move from being a specialist responsibility of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) to becoming a whole-of-government and whole-of-society priority. Biodiversity affects land use, infrastructure, drainage, architecture, parks, tourism, public health, education, finance, corporate activity and community well-being. This means the Environment and Ecology Bureau, Development Bureau, Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, and their various implementation departments, as well as the Green and Sustainable Finance Cross-Agency Steering Group, all have relevant roles.

Participants saw Hong Kong's Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2035 (BSAP 2035) as an important policy foundation. However, they also identified gaps in targets, KPIs, standards, accountability, data, project transparency and delivery mechanisms. The "whole-of-society" approach needs to be made more operational through measurable outcomes, clearer departmental responsibilities, planning requirements, financeable projects and public-facing engagement.

The plenary discussion sharpened this message. Participants said that government "signals" are not enough if they remain vague, open to interpretation or confined to policy documents. Businesses, financiers, NGOs and communities need clear requirements, standards, incentives, budgets, data, points of contact, project information and mechanisms for participation. The gap is not only between policy and action, but between government missions and the practical pathways through which different actors can contribute.

The strongest recommendation was that Hong Kong's Five-Year Plan should recognise nature and biodiversity as an asset. *Biodiversity should be understood as ecological capital, climate resilience infrastructure, a liveability asset, a well-being asset, an economic asset and potentially an investable asset.* Without this reframing, biodiversity will remain peripheral to development decisions. With it, biodiversity can become part of Hong Kong's competitiveness and its local expression of "high-quality development" and "ecological civilisation".

## 3. Reframing Biodiversity: From Conservation to Asset and Infrastructure

Participants repeatedly stressed the importance of reframing biodiversity. The current framing is still too often associated with protecting individual species, minimising harm or complying with environmental requirements. These remain important, but the framing is too narrow to influence mainstream decision-making.

A stronger framing would treat biodiversity as part of Hong Kong's resilience and infrastructure system. NbS can reduce flood risk, manage stormwater, lower urban heat, improve micro-climates, support public health, enhance liveability, strengthen place-making and improve urban attractiveness. This is especially relevant to the Northern Metropolis, where low-lying areas face long-term flood and sea-level-rise risks. Participants saw a need for ecological master planning that uses wetlands, rivers, green corridors and other natural systems as part of climate adaptation.

Participants also linked biodiversity to Hong Kong's economic and social positioning. A city that protects and enhances its natural assets can improve liveability, tourism, public health, social well-being and long-term competitiveness. Hong Kong has valuable natural assets, including country parks, wetlands, marine habitats, coastal systems and areas of high ecological value close to dense urban districts. Participants felt these assets are not sufficiently recognised in the city's development narrative.

Participants connected this to the national ecological civilisation agenda and China's 15th Five-Year Plan. They supported alignment and for Hong Kong to localise them to reflect Hong Kong's own compact urban form, country parks, marine areas, wetlands, international financial role, development pressures and highly urbanised society.

## 4. Pillar 1 on Direction: Clearer Targets, KPIs and Policy Alignment

Participants considered current government signals on biodiversity/NbS insufficient. BSAP 2035 and the Hong Kong Nature-based Solutions Design Guidelines (HKNbSDG) were seen as meaningful documents, but not yet enough to guide implementation. They are not widely known outside specialist or sustainability circles, and they do not yet provide the measurable targets, KPIs, delivery framework or practical guidance needed to change behaviour across government, business and society.

Participants compared this with the Climate Action Plan 2050 (CAP2050), which was seen as having clearer quantitative targets. Biodiversity targets are harder to identify, measure and monitor. Participants therefore called for clearer short-term and long-term targets, with goals that can be reviewed during a defined period rather than only at the end.

Participants also wanted stronger alignment among BSAP 2035, HKNbSDG, CAP2050, the Northern Metropolis strategy, tourism policy, green finance policy and the Five-Year Plan. These documents should reinforce one another rather than sit in separate silos. The Five-Year Plan consultation document was seen as insufficiently aligned with BSAP 2035 and the national ecological civilisation agenda.

Policy longevity was another concern. Participants noted that policy attention can shift quickly, for example toward AI and data centres, while biodiversity requires a much longer time horizon. Signals need to be stable enough for departments, businesses, financiers and communities to invest in long-term nature outcomes.

## 5. Pillar 2 on Leadership and Accountability

Participants agreed that AFCD cannot be the sole champion for biodiversity. AFCD has expertise and responsibility, but it does not have sufficient authority over land use, infrastructure, capital works, finance, procurement, development conditions or cross-departmental delivery. Biodiversity therefore requires higher level leadership.

The Development Bureau was repeatedly identified as essential because many biodiversity outcomes will be determined by planning, land development, infrastructure, engineering and public works decisions, especially in the Northern Metropolis. The Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau was also seen as important because biodiversity finance, green bonds, blended finance, fiscal incentives and capital works funding all require financial policy support. The Environment and Ecology Bureau remains central, but participants felt that it needs stronger mechanisms to coordinate across government.

Participants proposed a high-level cross-bureau and cross-departmental mechanism with authority to set priorities, assign responsibilities, monitor progress and report publicly. Moreover, each relevant bureau and department should develop its own biodiversity policy statement and actions.

The central point is that leadership must not become another silo. If one department or one champion is seen as solely responsible, others may disengage. Participants emphasised co-ownership, shared KPIs and clear division of responsibility.

Leadership must also engage with developers, banks, insurers, philanthropists, NGOs, academics, professional bodies, schools, communities and politicians – as "collaborative partnering" is one of the strategic pillars under BSAP 2035.

Several corporate participants said their companies wanted to participate in biodiversity/NbS projects but there are no channels to work on projects with the government.

## 6. Pillar 3 on Integration: Bringing Biodiversity Upstream into Planning, Procurement and Development

Participants repeatedly said that biodiversity must be brought upstream into planning, design, procurement, tendering, approvals, operations and maintenance. It should not be treated as an afterthought, late-stage mitigation issue or cosmetic greening measure, and hence the importance of the Development Bureau.

The Northern Metropolis was seen as the most important test case. Participants noted that development is moving faster than the collection of ecological data and the creation of biodiversity planning tools. There is a risk of missing opportunities for wetlands, ecological corridors, water-sensitive design, habitat connectivity and climate resilience. Participants observed that biodiversity/NbS is absent or insufficiently addressed in the Northern Metropolis section of the Five-Year Plan consultation. Given the scale and specificity of that development, this omission was seen as significant.

Some participants discussed Biodiversity Net Gain as a possible planning principle for Hong Kong. Rather than only avoiding or reducing harm, Biodiversity Net Gain would require development to leave biodiversity in a measurably better state. It could be adapted through planning requirements, land lease conditions, development standards, certification systems or public works requirements.

Because many urban development sites are small and constrained, participants suggested that biodiversity compensation should not always be forced onto individual sites in fragmented ways. Developers could, in appropriate cases, contribute to larger professionally managed off-site restoration projects, such as hillside reforestation, wetland enhancement, ecological corridors or district-scale habitat improvement. Lease conditions in the New Territories and Northern Metropolis were mentioned as possible tools for biodiversity net gain, off-site compensation and long-term stewardship.

Procurement and tendering were also identified as powerful levers. If biodiversity/NbS requirements are written into tender documents, contracts, budgets, operating contracts and maintenance contracts, contractors and consultants will respond. Guidance alone will not create an even playing field. Standards, budget allocations, incentives and requirements are needed. Departments also need the expertise to evaluate biodiversity assessments and NbS proposals properly, otherwise the process risks becoming box-ticking.

Integration should also extend to regulators and reporting frameworks, including the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance, ESG disclosure, ISSB-related requirements, and the Hong Kong Monetary Authority's taxonomy. However, participants cautioned that disclosure should reflect real action, not replace it. AI, digitalisation, camera monitoring, remote sensing and data platforms could also help develop indicators, monitor species and make biodiversity evidence more usable.

## 7. Pillar 4 on Finance and Market Creation: From Funding Gap to Investable Nature

Participants saw biodiversity finance as underdeveloped. The issue is not that money is unavailable. Biodiversity projects are often not structured in ways that investors, banks, philanthropists or companies can assess and support.

Several barriers were identified. Biodiversity outcomes are difficult to quantify. Baselines, metrics and independent validation mechanisms are insufficient. Repayment models are often unclear. Project ownership, operation models, timelines, ecological responsibilities and long-term stewardship arrangements may not be transparent. Nature projects often have high upfront capital expenditure, long payback periods, uncertain cash flow and benefits that are difficult to monetise.

Participants repeatedly said that finance depends on project structure. Banks need a clear cash flow, repayment mechanism, strong sponsor, risk-reduction logic or other value proposition. Nature outcomes alone are rarely sufficient for bankability unless linked to operating savings, resilience benefits, insurance benefits, concessions, property value, ESG performance, regulatory compliance, public funding or other forms of value capture.

Possible funding models included public-private-philanthropy partnerships, blended finance, green bonds, NbS bonds, biodiversity-linked loans, government guarantees, matched funding, subsidies, tranching structures, tax incentives, insurance mechanisms, trust funds, and expansion of existing funds such as the Environment and Conservation Fund to support larger-scale nature projects. Some participants suggested that government or philanthropists could fund initial capital expenditure, while private companies could support long-term maintenance or operation under clear KPIs.

Participants also suggested that Hong Kong could develop a nature taxonomy or nature-screening framework for financial institutions, similar in function to a green taxonomy. Banks and investors need quantitative thresholds and criteria to interpret nature projects and avoid nature-washing. The plenary also raised the idea of a biodiversity/NbS sandbox, modelled on financial-sector sandboxes, to test pilot projects, funding models, metrics and governance arrangements before wider regulation is introduced.

## 8. Pillar 5 on Transparency and Engagement

Data is related to transparency and is a part of governance infrastructure. The problem is not only whether data exists, but whether it is interpretable, validated, accessible, comparable and usable for policy, planning, finance and public accountability.

Participants called for baseline and ongoing biodiversity data, clear metrics, quality control, monitoring mechanisms, transparent platforms and independent validation. Practitioners, bankers, project owners and policymakers need data that can be interpreted by non-specialists.

Comparable datasets, standardised indicators, screening thresholds and clear reporting formats are needed. Biodiversity cannot become financeable or accountable if only experts can understand the evidence.

Participants also wanted more project transparency. Information on project ownership, operating models, development timelines, ecological objectives, funding arrangements, monitoring results and long-term management is often difficult to obtain. Existing platforms such as the Hong Kong Biodiversity Information Hub and BSAP-related websites were seen as useful but insufficient. Participants wanted a stronger shared platform that supports targets, KPIs, project development, monitoring, data sharing, case studies, guidance and engagement.

Engagement should move from consultation to co-design and participation, as reflected in one of BSAP 2035's key strategic pillars "collaborate partnering" (see above). Participants were sceptical about consultation processes that collect views but do not show how input affects policy. They wanted clearer channels through which civil society, experts, businesses, local communities and financiers can bring forward ideas and discuss project opportunities with relevant departments.

Business engagement was seen as underdeveloped. Companies have biodiversity impacts and dependencies through land use, supply chains, procurement, investment, operations and customer relationships, yet there are few structured channels for business-government dialogue on biodiversity. A match-making mechanism could help align corporates willing to contribute funds, NGOs with project ideas, philanthropists with catalytic capital, financial institutions willing to structure finance, and government departments with relevant policy responsibilities.

Participants also stressed community involvement, especially in rural areas and places affected by the Northern Metropolis. Engagement should involve local people in planning, doing and stewardship, and should draw on local knowledge.

Public communication also needs to be much more accessible. Biodiversity requires plain-language explanation, social media content, public activities, education and a stronger culture of appreciation. Some participants suggested a mascot or relatable visual identity to build public connection, while others emphasised youth education from school age onwards.

## 9. Usefulness of the 5-Pillar Model

The workshop showed that the 5-Pillar Model was useful not because participants used its headings, but because it helped them examine biodiversity/NbS as an implementation challenge rather than only as an environmental or conservation issue.

Many of the points raised by participants are already familiar: the need for targets, better data, stronger departmental coordination, clearer standards, financeable projects, public engagement and more explicit links to the Northern Metropolis and the Five-Year Plan.

The value of the model was that it helped organise these points into a governance agenda. It clarified that biodiversity implementation requires clearer direction, accountable leadership beyond AFCD, integration into planning and procurement, finance and market creation, and stronger transparency and engagement.

In this sense, the model helped participants move from asking whether biodiversity is important to asking what system conditions are needed for biodiversity/NbS to be delivered in practice. This is especially useful for biodiversity because the issue cuts across conservation, development, infrastructure, finance, public health, education, tourism and community well-being.

The workshop confirmed that the 5-Pillar Model can be a practical tool for analysing complex policy issues where responsibility is dispersed and implementation depends on coordination across government and society.

## 10. Relevance to the Public Consultation Document for the Five-Year Plan

The release of the Public Consultation Document on Hong Kong's first Five-Year Plan gave the workshop additional focus and urgency. Participants were highly interested in the consultation process because biodiversity/NbS cut across many of the themes in the document, including the Northern Metropolis, climate resilience, green finance, tourism, liveability, innovation and Hong Kong's alignment with national development priorities.

The discussion showed the kinds of issues that participants considered important when reflecting on how biodiversity/NbS could be better recognised in the Five-Year Plan. Many participants are affiliated with various organisations with direct interests in biodiversity, sustainability, finance, development, stakeholder engagement and public policy. It is likely that their organisations will respond to the consultation. The workshop helped surface issues that could inform those responses, while also contributing to the Climate Governance Project's wider understanding of how biodiversity/NbS can be governed as part of Hong Kong's long-term development agenda.


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