

TNC's Response to Hong Kong's First Five-Year Plan (2026–2030)

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Hong Kong welcomes the publication of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's First Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development (2026–2030) and its recognition of ecological civilisation, environmental protection, climate resilience, ocean conservation, sustainable finance, and Greater Bay Area cooperation as important components of Hong Kong's long-term development pathway.

The Plan establishes important foundations for a more sustainable and resilient future. TNC is particularly encouraged by commitments to develop a blue-green network within the Northern Metropolis, foster greater collaboration with the GBA, promote ecological approaches to climate adaptation and flood management, support blue-carbon restoration, strengthen Hong Kong's role as a green finance centre, and expand marine conservation efforts through the increase the coverage of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) to at least 20% of Hong Kong waters by 2030.

The continuity of Hong Kong's climate ambitions across successive policy cycles has also provided a stable and predictable direction for government, businesses and society. The forthcoming update of the Climate Action Plan presents a timely opportunity to assess progress, address implementation gaps, and identify pathways for deeper emissions reductions while further strengthening nature's role in climate adaptation and resilience. Taken together, these commitments reflect a growing recognition that ecological health, climate resilience and economic prosperity are mutually reinforcing objectives.

TNC is encouraged that many of the recommendations submitted during the consultation process are reflected, wholly or partially, in the final Plan. In particular, the Plan demonstrates greater recognition that healthy ecosystems support flood protection, climate adaptation, public wellbeing, sustainable tourism, economic competitiveness, and long-term resilience. This direction is highly consistent with TNC's core recommendation that nature should be recognised as strategic ecological infrastructure and embedded across Hong Kong's development agenda rather than treated solely as an environmental issue.

The opportunity now is to translate these commitments into measurable outcomes. Drawing on our experience in Hong Kong, the Chinese mainland and globally, TNC sees five areas where implementation could generate particularly significant benefits for people, nature and Hong Kong's long-term competitiveness.

1. Building Climate-Resilient Communities

The Plan's emphasis on climate resilience is particularly welcome given increasing risks associated with sea-level rise, extreme weather events and coastal ecosystem degradation.

Hong Kong already demonstrates international leadership through its Progressive Adaptive Approach to climate adaptation. The next phase should extend this adaptive logic more broadly across landscapes, communities and ecosystems.

TNC believes the Northern Metropolis offers an exceptional opportunity to integrate planned conservation areas with Nature-based Solutions, demonstrating how ecosystem restoration, climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and community stewardship can be delivered together. Such initiatives would deliver multiple benefits for biodiversity, livelihoods, climate resilience and

community wellbeing while creating a replicable model for other coastal areas across Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area.

Greater Bay Area Collaboration for greater resilience

TNC welcomes the Plan's emphasis on Greater Bay Area cooperation and believes Hong Kong has a unique opportunity to advance ecological civilisation through stronger cross-boundary collaboration on connectivity and shared ecosystems.

TNC stands ready to work with the HKSAR Government and Shenzhen partners to explore a cross-boundary Shenzhen River Basin initiative, drawing on our local expertise in the Chinese mainland, including Shenzhen, and global experience in watershed management and ecosystem restoration. Potential areas of collaboration could include habitat restoration, Nature-based Solutions, climate-adaptation pilots, and joint applied research, etc., across the Shenzhen River Basin. The Basin provides a particularly valuable platform for demonstrating how environmental protection, climate resilience and sustainable development can be pursued jointly across administrative boundaries, while contributing to BSAP 2035, the Beautiful Bay Initiative and broader Greater Bay Area ecological civilisation objectives.

2. Mainstreaming High-Integrity Nature-based Solutions

The Plan contains encouraging references to blue-green infrastructure, climate resilience and ecological restoration. Building on these commitments, we see an opportunity to mainstream high-integrity NbS more systematically across planning, infrastructure, drainage management, coastal protection, urban renewal and major development projects. High-integrity NbS should deliver measurable benefits for biodiversity and climate resilience, be designed around local ecological conditions and community needs, and be supported by credible monitoring over time.

Hong Kong already possesses strong technical foundations through the Hong Kong Guidelines on Nature-based Solutions and international standards such as the IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions. Applying these frameworks across government projects would help ensure that ecological interventions deliver meaningful biodiversity, climate adaptation and social outcomes.

TNC recommends the establishment of a cross-government coordination mechanism to support capacity building, shared monitoring and the development of a small portfolio of flagship demonstration projects. These pilots could showcase how wetlands, ecological corridors, eco-shorelines, urban greening, oyster reefs, mangrove restoration and other blue-green infrastructure can reduce climate risks while supporting biodiversity and community wellbeing.

The Northern Metropolis presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to demonstrate how nature-positive development can be integrated into large-scale urban growth from the outset.

TNC remains committed to supporting the government in mainstreaming the adoption of NbS across Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area. Through the International Hong Kong Nature-based Solutions Action Week, TNC and partners will continue to convene government agencies, practitioners, researchers, financial institutions and regional partners to share best practice, showcase implementation experience and strengthen technical capacity.

3. Strengthening Marine Conservation Through High-Integrity MPAs and OECMs

TNC particularly welcomes the Plan's ambition and the target to increase the coverage of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) to at least 20% of Hong Kong waters by 2030. This represents a significant opportunity to advance the goals of BSAP 2035 and the Beautiful Bay Initiative.

To maximise both ecological value and international credibility, TNC supports the development of a Hong Kong OECM framework that is aligned with:

- The Convention on Biological Diversity's guidance on OECMs;
- The IUCN Guidelines for Recognising and Reporting OECMs; and
- Relevant national standards and guidance being developed and applied in Mainland China.

Aligning Hong Kong's approach with both international and national frameworks will strengthen consistency in reporting, facilitate Greater Bay Area collaboration, and ensure that Hong Kong's contributions are recognised as part of broader national and global conservation efforts.

In particular, OECMs should demonstrate clear and sustained in situ biodiversity conservation benefits, supported by transparent governance arrangements, long-term management commitments, and regular monitoring. Site identification should also contribute to a coherent and connected network of protected and conserved areas by improving ecological connectivity between key marine habitats, fisheries nursery grounds, migration corridors and coastal ecosystems.

TNC stands ready to support the HKSAR Government in developing a science-based and internationally credible OECM framework aligned with global guidance and relevant national standards. TNC also aims to support the government to accelerate site readiness for OECM recognition through ecological assessments, stakeholder engagement, management planning and pilot-site development. By focusing on measurable conservation outcomes, Hong Kong can establish a high-integrity OECM network that advances BSAP 2035, the Beautiful Bay Initiative and ecological civilisation goals.

4. High-Integrity Ecotourism and Sustainable Rural Development

The Five-Year Plan appropriately identifies tourism diversification and rural development as important economic opportunities.

TNC believes Hong Kong possesses exceptional natural assets for high-quality ecotourism, including globally significant wetlands, geoparks, country parks, marine parks, traditional villages and diverse coastal ecosystems.

As visitor numbers increase, tourism development should be guided by ecological carrying capacity, destination management, community participation and conservation outcomes. Tourism revenue should help support habitat management, environmental education, biodiversity monitoring and stewardship activities.

The proposed expansion of home-stay accommodation on outlying islands offers potential opportunities for rural revitalisation and local livelihoods. Meanwhile, environmental safeguards will be essential. Many rural areas and outlying islands contain habitats of high conservation value that

may be vulnerable to increased visitor pressure, wastewater discharge, solid waste generation, wildlife disturbance, noise and light pollution.

Sustainable tourism success will therefore depend on ensuring that development remains compatible with the ecological values that attract visitors in the first place.

Marine Ecotourism to support Beautiful Bay and Sustainable Blue Economy

TNC also sees significant potential in aligning conservation with emerging opportunities in the blue economy. Marine recreation and ecotourism can create economic value from healthy ecosystems, while appropriate visitor-management models, conservation levies and private-sector partnerships can help reinvest that value in habitat management, restoration and community stewardship.

Importantly, the success of marine recreation depends fundamentally on healthy coastal ecosystems, good water quality and thriving biodiversity. This creates opportunities for the marine recreation sector to become an active partner in conservation through responsible boating practices, citizen science, education and direct investment in ecosystem restoration.

5. Integrating Nature Finance as Part of Hong Kong's Sustainable Finance Leadership

TNC welcomes the Plan's commitment to strengthening Hong Kong's position as an international green finance centre and the development of a Greater Bay Area green finance ecosystem.

However, there remains significant scope to expand beyond climate finance towards nature finance. Globally, increasing attention is being directed towards financing biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, climate adaptation and Nature-based Solutions. Hong Kong is uniquely positioned to become a regional hub that mobilises public funding, philanthropy, ecotourism revenue, blended finance and private capital towards nature-positive outcomes.

Future efforts should focus on developing project readiness, risk-sharing mechanisms and credible measurement frameworks. This would strengthen Hong Kong's role as a bridge between national ecological civilisation objectives and international capital markets while creating tangible environmental and social benefits.

Drawing on TNC's global experience in nature finance, we stand ready to work with government and partners to develop scalable financing models that generate measurable biodiversity outcomes while strengthening Hong Kong's leadership in sustainable finance, ecological civilisation and the Beautiful Bay Initiative. We are already exploring opportunities associated with the proposed Coastal Protection Park (CPP), the Wetland Conservation Park System (WCPS), and future OECMs could help demonstrate how blended finance, philanthropic capital and outcome-based funding can support the long-term management, restoration and monitoring of conservation areas.

Looking Forward

TNC believes the First Five-Year Plan marks an important evolution in Hong Kong's development agenda. The Plan increasingly recognises that environmental quality, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience and economic prosperity are interconnected rather than competing objectives.

The key challenge now is implementation. By mainstreaming high-integrity Nature-based Solutions, developing nature finance, strengthening marine conservation, supporting climate-resilient

communities, and building conservation-centred tourism models, Hong Kong can demonstrate how a world city can create lasting value for both people and nature.

TNC stands ready to work with government, academia, local communities, civil society, the private sector and partners across the Greater Bay Area to translate the ambitions of the Five-Year Plan into practical projects, measurable outcomes and scalable models that contribute to a Beautiful Hong Kong, a Beautiful Bay Area and a nature-positive future.