

To: Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau
12/F, East Wing, Central Government Offices
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong

Submission on Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's First Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development (2026–2030)

Nature as strategic ecological infrastructure and the foundation of long-term prosperity, resilience, and quality of life.

Executive message

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) welcomes the HKSAR Government's consultation on Hong Kong's first Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development. As Hong Kong charts a pathway towards high-quality development, the Plan presents a unique opportunity to align with national priorities on ecological civilisation, climate resilience, and the harmonious relationship between people and nature. Healthy ecosystems are not only environmental assets; they are strategic ecological infrastructure that supports economic competitiveness, reduces climate risks, enhances public wellbeing, strengthens food and water security, and improves long-term resilience.

Hong Kong's natural assets, including its wetlands, forests, marine ecosystems, country parks, geoparks, and rural landscapes, provide essential ecosystem services while creating opportunities for sustainable tourism, innovation, green finance, and nature-based economic growth. Consistent with Hong Kong's Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2035 (BSAP 2035), investing in biodiversity conservation, Nature-based Solutions, and ecosystem restoration can simultaneously advance the goals of a Beautiful China, a Beautiful Bay Area, and a more liveable and resilient Hong Kong.

Against this backdrop, TNC believes biodiversity, ecosystem health, and climate resilience should be integrated throughout the Five-Year Plan as enablers of sustainable development rather than treated primarily as environmental issues within Part 6. Their current placement risks underrepresenting the important role nature plays across planning, infrastructure, finance, innovation, tourism, and regional cooperation.

Our core recommendation is straightforward: recognise nature as strategic ecological infrastructure and a foundation of long-term prosperity, resilience, and quality of life by embedding biodiversity, climate adaptation, and Nature-based Solutions across Hong Kong's development agenda. Supported by science-based planning, robust monitoring, and evidence-based decision-making, this approach can accelerate Hong Kong's transition to a nature-positive and climate-resilient future.

Eight focused recommendations

1. Establish Ecological Civilisation as a Guiding Principle

Hong Kong's first Five-Year Plan should explicitly recognise ecological civilisation as a guiding principle for high-quality development. Biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration and sustainable resource management should not be treated as standalone environmental objectives but as contributors to economic resilience, public wellbeing, climate adaptation and long-term prosperity. As recognised in BSAP 2035 and national development policy, ecological civilisation provides a framework for integrating ecological considerations into planning, infrastructure, finance, innovation and social development. Nature should therefore be recognised not only as something to be protected, but as strategic ecological infrastructure that supports Hong Kong's long-term resilience and prosperity.

2. Mainstream Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) and Biodiversity Conservation into Planning and Infrastructure Development

Recognizing that nature underpins economic resilience and community wellbeing, Hong Kong should integrate NbS into all major spatial planning, infrastructure, and development decisions. The Government should establish a formal requirement for biodiversity and climate resilience outcomes to be considered alongside economic, social and engineering criteria in major development and infrastructure projects. Ecological corridors, wetland protection, blue-green infrastructure, biodiversity-inclusive urban design, and nature-based drainage systems should become standard components of development planning, particularly within the Northern Metropolis. By working with natural systems rather than against them, Hong Kong can reduce flood and heat risks, improve climate resilience, lower long-term infrastructure costs, and maintain the ecosystem services that support public health and economic productivity.

The Northern Metropolis presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to demonstrate how ecological conservation, climate resilience and economic development can be advanced together through integrated spatial planning. The Northern Metropolis should serve as a flagship example of how conservation and development can be planned together to create both ecological and economic value.

3. Accelerate Climate Adaptation Through Nature-Based Solutions

Climate adaptation should be elevated as a strategic priority within Hong Kong's development agenda. Healthy ecosystems provide essential resilience infrastructure that can help reduce flood risk, urban heat, coastal erosion and other climate-related impacts while simultaneously supporting biodiversity and human wellbeing. Wetlands, forests, blue-green infrastructure, eco-shorelines, ecological corridors and nature-based drainage systems should be integrated into climate adaptation planning alongside conventional engineered solutions. The ongoing review of Climate Action Plan 2050 presents an opportunity to strengthen ecosystem-based adaptation approaches and establish a long-term pathway for climate-resilient landscapes across Hong Kong.

4. Develop High-Integrity Ecotourism and Nature-Based Rural Development

Hong Kong is exceptionally well positioned to develop high-quality ecotourism. Few international cities combine such rich biodiversity, extensive country and marine parks, wetlands, coastlines, traditional villages, cultural landscapes and productive rural areas within easy reach of a major urban centre. Properly designed ecotourism can support biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration while safeguarding cultural heritage, creating local employment, sustaining traditional livelihoods and strengthening rural communities. Hong Kong therefore requires a coordinated ecotourism policy and action plan that establishes a common vision, governance framework and implementation pathway across conservation, tourism, rural development, planning, transport and cultural heritage. Tourism development should be guided by a conservation-first principle, supported by carrying-capacity assessments, science-based monitoring, community participation and reinvestment of tourism revenue into conservation and stewardship outcomes. By focusing on quality rather than visitor volume, Hong Kong can create green jobs, strengthen rural livelihoods and establish itself as a leading destination for high-integrity ecotourism in Asia. Conservation is not a constraint on economic growth, but a prerequisite for sustainable tourism and resilient rural economies.

5. Establish Flagship Demonstration sites for Nature-positive development

Hong Kong should develop a network of demonstration sites that showcase how healthy ecosystems can generate environmental, social, and economic benefits simultaneously. Priority locations could include Deep Bay, the Northern Metropolis, wetlands, marine parks, country parks, geoparks, and rural communities. These destinations should integrate habitat restoration, biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage protection, environmental education, community stewardship, and sustainable tourism experiences. Beyond attracting visitors, they should function as living demonstrations of how investment in nature can strengthen local economies, create jobs, improve ecosystem health, and generate knowledge that can be replicated across Hong Kong and the Greater Bay Area.

6. Hong Kong as an International Hub for Nature Finance

As an international financial centre, Hong Kong is uniquely positioned to become a regional hub for nature finance and Nature-based Solutions investment. The Five-Year Plan should support mechanisms that mobilise public funding, philanthropy, blended finance and private capital towards habitat restoration, biodiversity monitoring, ecological management and community stewardship. Hong Kong can also contribute credible standards, monitoring frameworks and financing mechanisms that support measurable biodiversity and climate resilience outcomes while

strengthening its role as a bridge between national ecological priorities and international investment markets. This represents a significant opportunity to translate ecological civilisation into investable and scalable projects.

7. Strengthen Greater Bay Area Green Connectivity

At the regional level, Hong Kong should promote the concept of **Greater Bay Area green connectivity**, recognising that ecosystems transcend administrative boundaries. Ecological civilisation provides a common framework for collaboration across shared watersheds, coastal systems, ecological corridors and climate risks. Cross-boundary cooperation on ecological monitoring, habitat restoration, watershed management, and biodiversity conservation can strengthen climate resilience across the GBA while contributing to the Beautiful Bay vision and broader ecological civilization goals. Using the Shenzhen River Basin as a starting point, Hong Kong can convene cross-boundary data sharing, monitoring, ecological-corridor planning and joint pilots with Shenzhen as an exemplary case of cross boundary collaboration in the GBA region.

8. Mobilise a whole-of-society delivery model

Work with NGOs, universities, professional bodies, local communities, indigenous and village stakeholders, conservation organisations, tourism operators and the private sector to deliver conservation, stewardship, monitoring, green jobs and sustainable tourism initiatives. A whole-of-society approach will help accelerate implementation, strengthen public ownership and ensure that biodiversity conservation, climate resilience and ecological civilisation become shared societal objectives rather than responsibilities of a single bureau or sector. This would align closely with the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach envisioned under BSAP 2035.

Together, these recommendations place **nature at the centre of Hong Kong's long-term prosperity agenda**. By treating ecosystems as strategic assets and integrating Nature-based Solutions, climate adaptation, and high-integrity ecotourism into economic planning, Hong Kong can unlock multiple benefits including climate resilience, biodiversity recovery, rural revitalisation, public wellbeing and sustainable economic growth. These recommendations position Hong Kong as a regional leader in demonstrating how conservation, innovation, finance and tourism can work together to create lasting value for both people and nature, while advancing the national goals of Beautiful China, the Beautiful Bay Initiative and ecological civilisation.

TNC stands ready to support the Government, together with civil society, professional bodies, academic institutions, the private sector and partners across the Greater Bay Area, in translating these recommendations and other priorities in the Five-Year Plan into practical projects, measurable outcomes and investable models.