NEWSLETTER

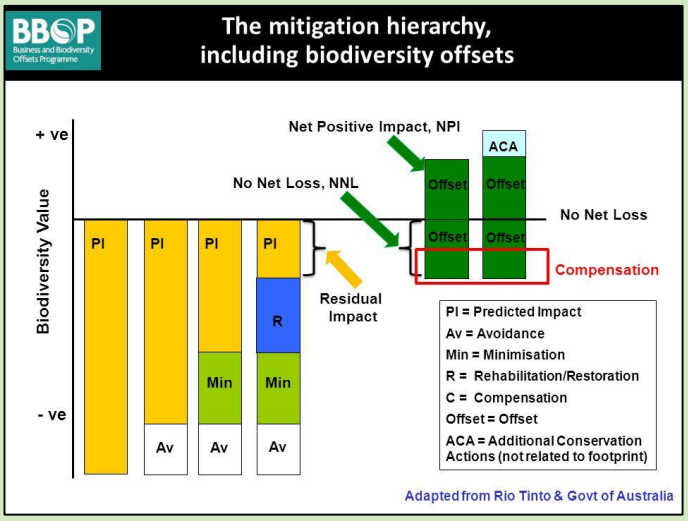
Hong Kong Institute of Environmental Impact Assessment
香港環境影響評估學會

Updating Hong Kong on Environmental Impact Assessment Issue February 2019

Editorial: Biodiversity Offsetting

HKIEIA were strongly represented at the 2018 IAIA annual conference, held in Durban, South Africa. As part of the HKIEIA delegation, I was especially interested to hear more about international biodiversity impact assessment practice. A hot topic discussed at the conference was biodiversity offsetting, which was the focus of no less than four separate sessions.

Biodiversity offsetting is defined by the Business and Biodiversity Offset Programme (BBOP) as "…measurable conservation outcomes resulting from actions designed to compensate for significant residual adverse biodiversity impacts arising from project development after appropriate prevention and mitigation measures have been taken. The goal of biodiversity offsets is to achieve no net loss and preferably a net gain of biodiversity".



Offsetting is not a commonly used term in Hong Kong, but as can be seen from the Figure above, it is somewhat analogous to ecological compensation (particularly off-site compensation) in our local mitigation hierarchy (as described in Annex 16 of the EIAO-TM). In many countries (e.g., Australia, USA, Canada, India), offsetting has further evolved into Wetland Banking/Conservation Credit programmes, where a project proponent can purchase credits to fund various conservation activities as an offset for specific impacts.

Offsetting in general (and credit programmes in particular) is favoured by many EIA practitioners as it can speed up the approval of projects with significant biodiversity impacts; providing a relatively simple solution to complex mitigation requirements. Nevertheless, the approach is not without detractors, who have identified issues with offsetting in both theory and practice. Bull *et al.* (2013)[1] undertook an early and comprehensive critique of the approach, and from the numerous presentations on this topic at IAIA 2018 it seems offsetting is still controversial. A fundamental theoretical issue with offsetting is the risk of upsetting the mitigation hierarchy: where an 'easy' option for compensation is available, less effort might be spent on identifying avoidance and minimization measures. Further, a range of implementation issues were discussed at IAIA 2018, including:

- Government Officials from **India** noted difficulties in mobilizing offsetting funds. Due to these difficulties, the funds were diverted to meet the country's pre-existing commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- In **Australia**, crediting baselines were being developed making certain assumptions on the future trajectory of biodiversity declines, with the intended net outcome of the offset trade being the maintenance of that declining trajectory (this is known as *credit generated against averted losses*). A common issue identified was that the baseline rates of loss were being overestimated, meaning that on average, the crediting baselines were >5 times steeper than recent rates of vegetation loss. As a consequence, crediting requirements were significantly less than what was needed to provide sufficient mitigation.
- Researchers from **Canada** conducting a national review of freshwater fish habitat offsetting found that

[1] Bull, J., Suttle, K., Gordon, A., Singh, N., & Milner-Gulland, E. (2013). Biodiversity offsets in theory and practice. *Oryx, 47*(3), 369-380. doi:10.1017/S003060531200172X

63% of projects resulted in a net loss of fish habitat productivity and did not meet mitigation requirements.

In light of these issues, there would seem to be little incentive for adopting biodiversity offsetting/conservation credits in Hong Kong. Our EIA practitioners already follow the mitigation hierarchy relatively well, and we have demonstrated that existing (mostly on-site) ecological compensation measures can be successfully implemented over the long term. But perhaps there are instances where offsetting is worth a second look. In particular, it is notable that woodlands rarely receive as much attention as wetlands when it comes to mitigation and compensation. We have no commonly applied standards for calculating woodland compensation ratios, and habitat creation programmes are often poorly implemented. Compensation often results in small, isolated woodland patches shoe-horned into project sites and planted with exotics or common pioneer species. There is certainly a case to be made for using off-site compensation or credits to improve current practices. Offsetting could be used to help expand and enhance the fast maturing woodland belt stretching from Tai Po Kau to Shing Mun in the New Territories, or extend the limited woodland cover on Lantau Island around the Tung Chung Valley. Such an approach would provide direct compensation for project level impacts with adequate space for effective compensation ratios, while also enhancing our larger secondary woodlands: a key ecological resource not just in Hong Kong but also across the Pearl River Estuary region.

David GALLACHER, Editor

Chair's Remarks

Dear HKIEIA Members, Friends and Fans:

It is always an exciting time of the year to share with you all what we have achieved in 2018 and what will be the focus of the Institute the year ahead.

For two consecutive years at our AGM, in 2017 and 2018, I emphasized that HKIEIA would continue to "invest" on members to raise professional status and capabilities. With great efforts from our ExCo members, in particular David Stanton, David Gallacher and Kathy Ip, we successfully organised 9 seminars under our capacity building series in 2018, which covered a range of interesting topics on biodiversity, local conservation practices, air and water quality impact assessment, EM&A, sustainable drainage as well as professional ethics. Together with other technical visits and sharing session on IAIA'18, the Institute had offered members more than 30 hours of CPD in the past year. I am pleased to see good attendances at all events organised by the Institute and would also like to thank members for having shown such commitment.

The 2-days visit to Greater Bay Area (GBA) held last November was another success I proud to share. In collaboration with the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government, we met with the officials from Foshan Environmental Protection Bureau and arranged unique visits to an Innovation Park and a high-tech lighting manufacturing factory in Foshan. Needless to say, it is an important step to get our name out to GBA, to raise our professional status through professional exchange with our mainland counterparts and bringing members to GBA to explore different aspects such as career development.

It is my honour to continue leading the Institute and on behalf of HKIEIA, I wish you all a fruitful year ahead.

Clara U, Chairlady

From the Secretary

The new ExCo committee was formed on the AGM of 14 June 2018. HKIEIA Limited aims to continue in organizing capacity building seminars to nourish our young members knowledge as well as to enhance the knowledge of our members. Apart from seminars, site visits and other events are being arranged to support the development of the Institute and the profession.

Here is an overview of the Executive Committee 2018-19.

Chair:	Clara U
Honorary Treasurer:	David Yeung
Honorary Secretary:	Mohamed Hasan Isa
Members:	Freeman Cheung
	Kin-che Lam
	Josh Lam
	David Gallacher
	David Stanton
	Henry Leung
	Karen Lee
	Simon Cheung
Ad-hoc member:	Glen Formmer
	Jackie Yip
	Raymond Wong
	Kathy Ip

Mohamed Hasan ISA, Honorary Secretary

HKIEIA Finances

The accounts remain healthy with accumulated fund over HK$1.0M at end of December 2018.

You are reminded to remit your membership dues to the Honorary Treasurer in accordance with Clause 26 of the Institute's Memorandum, all members shall pay an annual subscription as decided by the Committee payable in advance on the first day of May each year. Please send your cheque, without delay, to the following address for my attention if you have not paid the membership subscription.

Hong Kong Institute of Environmental Impact Assessment Limited
c/o Mr. David Yeung (Honorary Treasurer)
21/F, BEA Harbour View Centre
56 Gloucester Road
Wan Chai
Hong Kong

It is the advice from our auditor that we need to look at the unpaid membership fees seriously as the accumulated account receivable is affecting our financial situation.

David YEUNG, Honorary Treasurer

HKIEIA Memberships

As of December 2018, the institute currently had a total of 466 members, including 26 fellows (8 of which are honorary members), 301 corporate members, 132 associate members and 7 student members.

Simon CHEUNG

Professional Development / Training

Capacity Building Series – Environment Hong Kong

The Capacity Building Series is going from strength–to-strength and we would welcome HKIEIA members to share their expertise, experience or case studies of good (or bad) environmental practices as part of this series. Talks only need to be 20 minutes long to share knowledge and are on a monthly basis, usually the third Thursday of each month.

9 seminars were held in 2018 on various environmental topics to enrich and update members' knowledge in this field. Stepping into 2.0 series of Environment Hong Kong, we aim to offer more interactive seminars with sharing and discussion for members to exchange their experience.

Please contact us on: info@hkieia.org.hk or www.facebook.com/hkieia is you have an idea or would like to explore the possibility of delivering a presentation. CPD units can also be gained for preparation and presenting a talk – so there's an added bonus to getting involved!

1.5: Marine Mammals and Sustainable Drainage, 18 Jan 2018

Speakers: Dr. Lindsay Porter, SMRU and Ir. Richard Leung, DSD

1.6: BSAP and Marine Ecological Enhancement, 22 Feb 2018

Speakers: Dr. Jackie Yip, AFCD and Dr. Jasmine Ng, ERM

1.7: Eco-shoreline and EM&A Enhancement, 15 Mar 2018

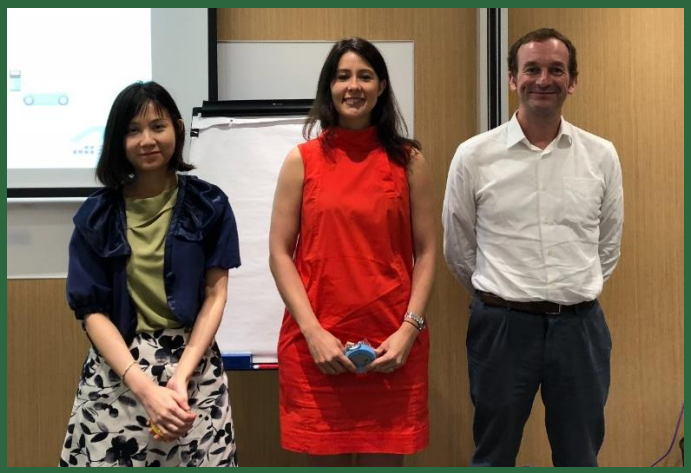
Speakers: Prof. Kenneth Leung, HKU and Ms. Clara U, EPD

1.8: Air and Wildlife, 19 Apr 2018

Speakers: Mr. Freeman Cheung, AECOM and Dr. Gary Ades, Kadoorie Farm

1.9: Water Quality and Airport Environmental Management, 18 Jun 2018

Speakers: Ms. Amy Cheung, Black & Veatch Hong Kong Limited and Ms. Kristy Tan, Airport Authority Hong Kong



2.0: How could a professor fail in an environment qualifying examination, 23 Aug 2018 & 4 Oct 2018 (Re-run)

Speaker: Prof. Kin-che Lam, CUHK

2.1: Feasibility of Hong Kong Golf Club for Land Supply, 17 Sep 2018

Speaker: Mr. Timothy J. Peirson-Smith, Executive Counsel Limited

2.2: Lok Ma Chau Wetland, 29 Nov 2018

Speaker: Mr. Paul Leader, AEC Limited

Kathy IP

HKIEIA Event Highlights

IAIA18: Environmental Justice in Societies in Transition, South Africa, 16-19 May 2018

The annual conference of the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) was held on 16 to 19 May 2018 at Durban International Convention Center of South Africa with over 1,000 delegates from 90 countries participated.

Under the theme “Environmental Justice in Societies in Transition”, the honorable South African human rights activist and judge Albie Sachs kicked off the conference by sharing their local value – ***Ubuntu*** – it’s our humanity that makes us respect and care for nature, regardless of our skin colours.

Throughout the 4-day conference, 12 concurrent sessions were set up with topics ranging from climate change, biodiversity, public participation, indigenous people, equality, governance to health, risk and social impact assessments.

Two sessions of forum were jointly organised by HKIEIA and Appraisal Center for Environment and Engineering (ACEE) on Day 2 under the topic “China’s EIA Process: Adapting for a sustainable future” to share the Chinese experience in SEA, public engagement and policy reform, which initiated discussion with delegates from worldwide.

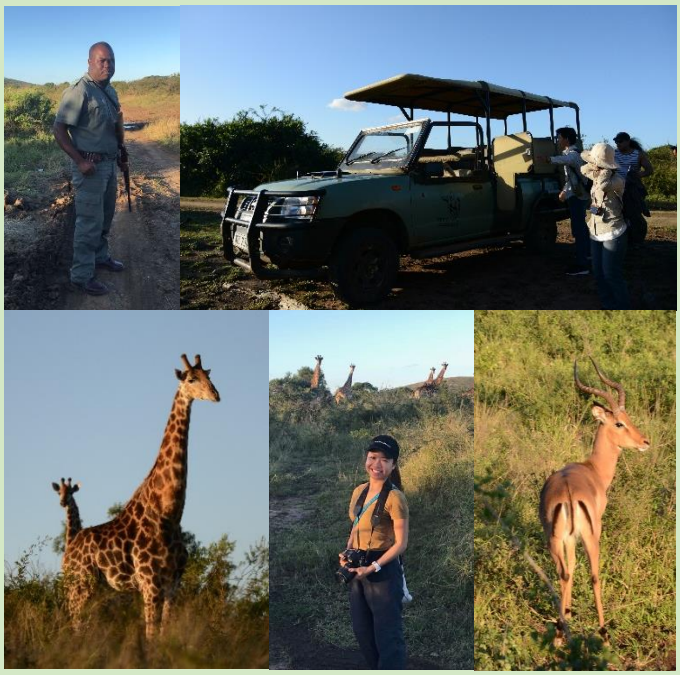
Before and after the conference, there were training sessions and technical visits for delegates to explore the built and natural environment as well as to understand the impact assessment practice in Durban.

One of the most impressive visits was South Africa's first UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1999 – **iSimangaliso Wetland Park** of over 324,000 ha spanning 280 km of coastline. The EIA was undertaken in 1996 – national government decided not to mine Eastern Shores of Lake St. Lucia, and restored the lake from salinity 300ppt to 35ppt. Restoration included removal of 12,000 ha of alien plants, pine and *Eucalyptus* plantations (gum trees), game reintroduction, infrastructure redevelopment, capacity building for co-management with local residents as well as equity partnerships for tourism such as ecolodges, game drives, park rangers, tour guides.

During the game drives, night safari and boat trip, we have seen most of the "Big Five" – African elephants, black rhinos, cape buffalos and we believe we will see lions and leopards next time. Apart from the giants, antelopes, giraffes, zebras, hippos, crocodiles, Egyptian goose and other mammals, birds, insects and plants were thrilling too. The rich and abundant biodiversity of the wetland demonstrated a remarkable example of restoring a contaminated land into a world-class Ramsar Site.

Another incredible visit was the oldest proclaimed reserve in Africa since 1895 – **Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park** of 96,000 ha. It has the largest population of white rhinos in the world but it is currently under threat of coal mining at the park boundary. The locals shared with us their on-going efforts with the park and surrounding communities on a campaign to fight against mining and constructions for preserving their homeland.

We had several game drives to enjoy the natural habitat and amazing biodiversity of this precious reserve. What's more exciting, we got a guided trail walk with an armed game guard to closely observe the giants' habits! We also visited the **Thula Thula Game Reserve** to understand how locals fought the battle to save the endangered species – rhinos and elephants.



David GALLACHER
Kathy IP

Annual General Meeting 2018, 14 Jun 2018

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Hong Kong Institute of Environmental Impact Assessment (HKIEIA) and the Hong Kong Institute of Environmental Impact Assessment Limited (HKIEIA Limited) was held at the Regal Hong Kong Hotel, in Causeway Bay on 14 June 2014.

Our Chairlady Clara reported on the various achievements of the Institute in the past year, including the series of well-received capacity building workshops and the 5th China SEA Forum. Our connection with the mainland counterparts had been strengthened through co-organising the SEA Forum and co-chairing the themed session at IAIA 2018. Membership of the Institute increased over 10% in the past year. The Honorary Treasurer also reported a generally healthy financial condition for the HKIEIA and HKIEIA Limited in the past financial year.

Following the AGM, Kathy Ip, a young member sponsored by the Institute to join the IAIA 2018, reported on her exciting trip to South Africa in April, including her close encounter with the safari “big five”. Afterwards, members and friends of the Institute gathered for a casual Chinese dinner. It was a pleasant family reunion.

Jackie YIP

HKIEIA Visit – Greater Bay Area, 16-17 Nov 2018

The Greater Bay Area (GBA) development strategy will enhance the overall competitiveness of the region and bring about new opportunities for the development of Hong Kong. In order to enhance the exchange of our professionals with our mainland counterparts, and our understanding of the latest development in environmental, innovation and technology industries in the GBA, a visit was held for HKIEIA members on 16-17 November 2018.

Some highlights of the visit – We visited Dongguan Songshan Lake Science and Technology Industrial Park, Foshan Nanhai Environmental Protection Park and Foshan Electrical and Lighting Company Limited.

Karen LEE

HKIEIA Visit – Sha Po & Lok Ma Chau Wetland, 7 Dec 2018

Following on from the Capacity Building Series talk for Lok Ma Chau, a technical visit to this mitigation wetland was held for HKIEIA members to experience the site itself. The wetland helps to maintain biodiversity by providing various habitats as the marshes, fishponds and reedbed areas of the wetland provide important roosting sites for migratory birds.

This was combined with a visit to the restored Sha Po marsh, also in the Northwest New Territories. This wetland restoration was a result of striking a balance between conservation and residential development through thorough survey and careful planning and design.

David STANTON

Contributors Wanted!

We're always on the lookout for new and interesting material to add to the HKIEIA Newsletter. Do you have any articles you'd like to contribute? Upcoming events you'd like to publicize? Photos from recent events you'd like to share? We'd love to hear from you! Please feel free to contact us on: info@hkieia.org.hk or www.facebook.com/hkieia.

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