

8 August 2023

CONSULTATION PAPER

Introducing a Bill to make provision for the incorporation of The Hong Kong Institute of Qualified Environmental Professionals

Purpose

The Hong Kong Institute of Qualified Environmental Professionals is soliciting views from the stakeholders for the incorporation of the Institute by statute so that it will be a legal entity with perpetual succession and to ensure the existence and independence of the Institute in the long run.

The Reason and Benefits

Our Mainland's national policy to achieve carbon peaking in 2030 and carbon neutrality goals in 2060 under the new development philosophy has laid out key specific targets and measures for upcoming decades to establish a green, low-carbon and circular economy. Given all the infrastructure and environmental-related initiatives that need to be implemented in Hong Kong as well as in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) within the next few decades to achieve the national policy, it is important to address the question of whether we have the volume of quality skills and expertise to meet these challenges.

Long-term youth development work in future is also an important agenda as our President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China, in his important speech delivered on the Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, reiterated that

“A nation will prosper only when its young people thrive”,

“Hong Kong will prosper only when its young people thrive”,

“Hong Kong will develop only when its young people achieve well-rounded development”,

“Hong Kong will have a bright future only when its young people have good career prospects”.

The Hong Kong Institute of Qualified Environmental Professionals was established in 2015 by a group of interested parties from the corporate sector, public sector, academia, and existing environmental professional institutions, not only to address these challenges, but to turn this into an opportunity for Hong Kong as well as the Greater Bay Area (GBA). The Institute aims to transform Hong Kong into a centre of excellence in environmental services that is aligned with and supportive of developing the environmental services industry as one of the pillar professional industries of Hong Kong. It could help create more quality jobs for our future and young generations to pursue green and sustainable career by providing a clear professional pathway.

With increasing awareness of environmental sustainability, climate change and carbon neutrality, there is a growing demand for skilled environmental professionals. Enhancing the qualifications of these professionals could create new jobs in various sectors such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable transportation, sustainable agriculture, waste management, and environmental consulting. Qualified environmental professionals could also help in securing financing for environmentally sustainable projects, providing technical expertise to assess the feasibility of projects and identifying potential environmental risks and opportunities. The qualified environmental professionals could conduct environmental due diligence to assess the environmental risks and opportunities associated with an investment, including the assessment of its environmental impacts, the regulatory compliance of the project, and the potential for environmental liabilities. Reviewing the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) disclosures and providing independent professional verification could also ensure that the investment aligns with ESG criteria. This could help identify any potential greenwashing or misrepresentation of environmental impact. With the quality in assessment and scrutinization, this could attract investors who are interested in ESG-related investments.

Further to job creation and attracting investment, environmental professionals with expertise in sustainability could help companies to improve their environmental performance, reducing their carbon footprint, and meeting ESG-related targets. Developing the qualification of the environmental professionals could motivate and attract young talents to join the profession due to the importance of their future work in addressing climate change and carbon neutrality, protecting natural resources, and promoting sustainability to make a positive impact.

The Institute was established to promote, develop and maintain a qualification system covering the professional assessment of all six environmental areas namely (1) environmental science, management and policy, (2) air, (3) noise, (4) environmental impact assessment and hazard assessment, (5) waste, and (6) water by way of open examination, satisfying the passing requirements as well as other membership criteria for the eligibility to attend a professional panel interview. Notwithstanding the stringent professional assessment requirements, more than 1,100 participants have taken part in the closed-book examinations from 2015 to 2022, and the Institute is now a local body with a growing professional membership of more than 660 Hong Kong-based professionals working in the environmental protection industry both in Hong Kong and the GBA.

Members of the Institute have, in their professional capacity, participated in the all aspects of environmental protection in Hong Kong. To name a few, (1) many pledging companies from a wide range of industries, including property developers, engineering firms, consultancies, public utility companies and statutory bodies supported the continuous professional development of qualified environmental professionals in Hong Kong, and pledged to recognize qualifications accredited by the Institute for environment-related positions, and to encourage relevant staff to pursue the Institute's professional qualifications, (2) the Youth Summit 2022 discussed and demonstrated how young environmental professionals across different sectors could take an active role in achieving carbon neutrality in the GBA, (3) the Graduate Environmental Mentoring Scheme (GEMS) launched in response to the Government's initiative under the Green Employment Scheme facilitated the continuous development of environmental graduates and connected the graduates and the environmental industry professionals, providing opportunities to share experience and knowledge, (4) the Accreditation Scheme with a focus on encouraging academic institutions to provide environmental degree programmes with appropriate breadth in fundamental environmental principles and depth in specific areas, and to forge better collaboration between academic and practicing environmental professionals, accredited various undergraduate programmes at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University and The University of Hong Kong, and (5) a certification scheme to identify and certify modelling practitioners was launched to support and encourage professional development of our Members in air and noise modelling which is a significant component in the environmental impact assessment and land use planning process in Hong Kong, and (6) the development of an Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG)

programme with a focus on environmental and sustainability perspectives as ESG reporting is a significant component in the development of green finance in Hong Kong.

Apart from above, Members also actively participated and expressed environmental professional opinions in stakeholder engagement exercises in the Long-Term Decarbonisation Strategy, Land Supply for Hong Kong, Promoting the Use of Electric Vehicles, Securities and Futures Commission's Consultation Paper on the Management and Disclosure of Climate-related Risks by Fund Managers, Waste Disposal (Charging for Municipal Solid Waste) (Amendment) Bill 2018, Public Consultation on the Producer Responsibility Scheme on Plastic Beverage Containers, Clean Air Plan for Hong Kong 2035, and Chief Executive's Policy Addresses.

Today, the profession of the qualified environmental professionals is a well-established and highly-respected. They play an important role in meeting the current and future environmental expertise needs, supporting the development of the environmental industry and maintaining a register of suitably qualified environmental professionals in Hong Kong.


Financial Implication

The proposed incorporation of the Hong Kong Institute of Qualified Environmental Professionals does not relate to any public expenditure, political structure or the operation of the Government and has no financial implication.

Consultations of Stakeholders

The Institute has long-standing support from the Environment and Ecology Bureau and Environmental Protection Department in the pursue of a qualification system and the continuous development for environmental professionals, and this support has been instrumental in recognising the importance of professional qualifications in tackling global challenges such as climate change and carbon neutrality, and in meeting the increasing demand for skilled professionals in the field.

We are now inviting various stakeholders to offer their views before the introduction of the Bill to the Legislative Council according to the Rules of Procedures. Please feel free to use the appended Reply Slip to provide your valuable views or comments to the above proposal on or before 20th August.

Reply Slip	<p data-bbox="507 546 1007 622">https://hkiqep.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/reply_slip_EXIP.pdf</p> 
------------	---