HKIQEP Position Paper: Leveraging Environmental Professionalism to Serve and Connect under Hong Kong's Five-year Plan

Issued by: The Hong Kong Institute of Qualified Environmental Professionals (HKIQEP)

Date: August 2026

1. Introduction & Background

As the nation embarks on the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030), environmental governance has evolved into a comprehensive, high-quality green transition across all economic and social sectors. The national plan explicitly calls for “accelerating the comprehensive green transformation of economic and social development” and “using carbon peaking and carbon neutrality as the driving force”. Against this background, Hong Kong's strategic role has elevated to "integrating into and serving the overall development of the nation".

As a statutory professional body incorporated under the *Hong Kong Institute of Qualified Environmental Professionals Ordinance (Cap. 1183)*, HKIQEP maintains that a qualified professional workforce is a core enabler for sustainable development and climate goals. To support high-level national environmental blueprints, Hong Kong can act as a proactive services provider and standard-bearer. Hong Kong’s first Five-Year Plan consultation document has comprehensively addressed green living, low-carbon transition, power generation, transport, building and technology innovation, signalling the Government’s increasingly focused and systematic attention to the green economy. This position paper outlines HKIQEP's institutional stances on how Hong Kong can deploy its unique professional capabilities to meet these upcoming regional and national needs.

2. HKIQEP Institutional Positions & Recommendations

A. Developing and Aligning Greater Bay Area (GBA) Environmental Standards

The emphasis on high-quality development demands greater policy and standard alignment across regional borders. Hong Kong's environment sector is well-positioned to act as a bridgehead for standard innovation, helping to create frameworks that leverage local scientific expertise. In this regard, HKIQEP supports Hong Kong playing a constructive role in the setting of GBA Standards in environmental practice and green finance, ensuring they are based on sound science and our unique regional capabilities. Establishing harmonized, high-quality frameworks within the GBA will create a more favourable environment for green investments, ensure consistency across cross-border projects, and drive regional policy innovation.

HKIQEP is actively pursuing professional qualification recognition under CEPA to facilitate mutual recognition of environmental professional qualifications between Hong Kong and Chinese Mainland. We believe that bridging the professional qualification requirements would break down institutional barriers and significantly expand Hong Kong's green talent pool to serve the entire GBA region.

B. Developing Green Finance and Safeguarding Environmental Integrity

Robust green finance and ESG practices rely fundamentally on credible environmental data, sound scientific assessment, and professional judgment. Financial mechanisms and sustainable investments require rigorous quality assurance to maintain long-term market confidence. To achieve this, HKIQEP advocates for strengthening the role of qualified environmental professionals in green finance, sustainability assessment, and risk evaluation processes to enhance the credibility and robustness of green financial products and market disclosures.

The HKMA's Sustainable Finance Taxonomy has now entered its second phase, introducing a dedicated "transition" category subdivided into "transition activities" and "transition measures," each with time-bound sunset dates to mitigate greenwashing risks. This clear transition framework responds to the decarbonisation financing needs of high-emission sectors, allowing projects with clear decarbonisation pathways to access transition financing. HKIQEP supports exploring how the Taxonomy can be further extended to cover nature-based solutions through adaptation finance framework.

As part of our continuous commitment to professional development, HKIQEP successfully completed an Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) project in 2024 focused on the education of ESG in the community. Building upon this success, we are currently executing a new, ongoing ECF project to further advance ESG education across the community, this time in strategic collaboration with the Capacity-building Alliance of Sustainable Investment (CASI).

Furthermore, the Institute is actively promoting initiatives such as a Sustainability Assurer Certification Scheme to verify non-financial disclosures and environmental KPIs, ensuring that assurers are competent, independent, and consistent in verifying critical metrics like greenhouse gas emissions, resource efficiency, pollution control, and biodiversity considerations. Furthermore, we support exploring innovative nature-finance mechanisms, encouraging the issuance of blue-green bonds to finance ecological infrastructure (such as smart wetlands and eco-shorelines), and building local capacities through a unified Natural Capital Pilot Platform to certify nature-based solutions and nature-related risk assessment services.

- Integrating ESG into Megaprojects: Consider how the Government can strategically integrate ESG requirements as binding conditions within tendering frameworks for mega-developments like the Northern Metropolis to systematically de-risk infrastructure projects for institutional investors.
- Taxonomy Alignment: Comment on how future project frameworks can align explicitly with international sustainability standards and green taxonomies—such as the Hong Kong Green Taxonomy and the Common Ground Taxonomy—to seamlessly leverage alternative funding structures and green finance platforms.

C. Assisting Mainland Enterprises to Set Up in HK & "Go Global"

As Mainland enterprises continue to expand their international reach, navigating global sustainability expectations, environmental compliance, and ESG disclosure requirements becomes increasingly important. Hong Kong can serve as an ideal strategic platform and a double-sided bridgehead for these firms. HKIQEP looks forward to providing professional advisory and compliance support to help Mainland enterprises establish their international sustainability presence in Hong Kong. Concurrently, when these firms "Go Global", Hong Kong's environmental professionals are well-equipped to offer project sustainability management and risk auditing services, helping them adapt to international regulatory landscapes smoothly and successfully.

D. Positioning the Northern Metropolis as a Living Test Bed for Green Technology and Nature-Based Solutions

The Northern Metropolis, with its mix of new development areas, wetlands, and farmlands, presents a unique opportunity to pilot nature-based solutions (NBS) such as sponge-city infrastructure, blue-green corridors, and ecological networks. The Government has already committed to integrating NBS design principles into the planning and development of the Northern Metropolis to enhance climate resilience and promote biodiversity. The recently launched Hong Kong Nature-Based Solutions Design Guidelines by the Civil Engineering and Development Department and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department provides a foundational framework.

HKIQEP recommends that the Northern Metropolis be designated as a "Green Technology Sandbox" where Hong Kong and GBA enterprises can test and refine their components—green infrastructure for wetland or eco-corridor, AI driven biodiversity monitoring, smart flood barriers, renewable energy devices, and smart energy management systems—in real-world conditions. This would fill a critical gap: while the

GBA possesses a strong manufacturing supply chain, it lacks internationally recognised validation platforms. Hong Kong, with its international standards and legal framework, is well placed to perform technology integration and testing.

Upon successful validation, we recommend a joint promotion to market these "Hong Kong–GBA proven solutions" to Belt and Road countries (particularly in Southeast Asia and the Middle East), thereby transforming local infrastructure investment into an export-oriented industry and creating new economic opportunities. The Northern Metropolis should also serve as a demonstration site for blue-green bonds and other innovative financing mechanisms to fund ecological infrastructure such as smart wetlands and eco-shorelines, with HKIQEP professionals providing independent verification of environmental outcomes.

E. Industrialising Green Development and Environmental Protection to Capture Low-Carbon Transition Opportunities

The “15th Five-Year Plan for Green and Low-Carbon Development of Industry", recently issued by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, explicitly calls for "coordinating and promoting industrial greening and green industrialisation" and "accelerating the deep integration of green technology innovation and industrial innovation". This represents a fundamental shift from viewing green development as a compliance cost to recognising it as an engine of economic growth and industrial competitiveness.

Hong Kong must seize this opportunity to industrialise its green development and environmental protection sectors. Specifically, HKIQEP recommends:

- **Green Manufacturing and Recycling Industries:** Hong Kong should move towards high quality, intelligent recycling operations, leveraging smart technologies to enable more precise sorting and processing, and developing high-value resource recycling industries. The Government should explore establishing a green industrial park or dedicated zones within the Northern Metropolis to attract green technology manufacturers, recyclers, and clean energy producers.
- **Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and New Energy Industries:** The 15th Five-Year Plan explicitly requires "promoting low-carbon substitution in transport energy". Hong Kong is already seeing pioneering projects in sustainable aviation fuel production. HKIQEP recommends that the Government actively support the development of a complete SAF industry chain in the GBA, leveraging Hong Kong's international airport and financial centre status to foster a regional hub for green fuel trading and certification.

- **Green Technology R&D and Commercialisation:** Hong Kong's research strengths in green technology can complement the Mainland's industrialisation capacity. The Government should channel resources into R&D funding and accelerate green infrastructure development. HKIQEP's qualified professionals can provide the independent verification, certification, and advisory services needed to bridge the gap between R&D and commercial deployment.
- **Green Finance Supporting Industrialisation:** Hong Kong enterprises can leverage green bonds, industry funds, and other financial instruments to provide funding support for projects such as wind-solar-storage-hydrogen integration bases and zero-carbon industrial parks in the Mainland. HKIQEP supports the development of green insurance products and transition financing mechanisms to de-risk green industrial investments.

F. Professional Capacity Building, Certification and Talent Retention

To satisfy the growing demand across the environmental sector and the broader business community, fostering a steady pipeline of qualified professionals is essential. HKIQEP works on qualifying environmental professionals and providing continuing professional development (CPD) for members to support ongoing capacity building. Through regular technical briefings, specialized knowledge-sharing resources, and structured cross-sector collaboration, the Institute supports industry practitioners in advancing their understanding of science-based environmental principles. Ultimately, our professional qualification and certification mechanisms—including benchmarks like the Sustainability Assurer Certification Scheme—aim to safeguard the quality, competence, and consistency of environmental practitioners and qualified professionals, ensuring they are well-equipped to uphold rigorous sustainability practices and deliver credible environmental outcomes for the industry.

G. Integrating Green Upskilling into a Talent Retention Strategy

Globally, there is fierce competition for professionals in climate finance, carbon auditing, and nature-based design. Without clear career progression and upskilling pathways, Hong Kong risks losing its engineers, surveyors, property managers, and environmental practitioners to rival cities. The Government's "Green and Sustainable Finance Training Pilot Scheme", launched in late 2022, has received over 7,600 applications, demonstrating strong demand for green skills development. The scheme has now been extended to further nurture local green finance talent. However, we need to identify skill transition gaps for other sectors more systematically and develop upskilling programme to fill the gaps. HKIQEP urges the Government to expand this model into a comprehensive "Green Upskilling and Talent Retention 2030" initiative, which should:

1. Update the Qualifications Framework to incorporate green competency modules across relevant sectors, creating clear career ladders for environmental professionals.
2. Expand Continuing Education Fund (CEF) coverage to subsidise internationally recognised certifications (e.g., BEAM Pro, ESGCP, and HKIQEP's own professional qualifications).
3. Establish fast-track training partnerships with universities (HKU, PolyU, HKUST) and professional bodies (HKGBC, HKIQEP, etc) to reskill and retain 10,000 practitioners by 2030.
4. Create practical validation opportunities through demonstration projects such as the "Carbon Neutrality" demonstration sites and "Zero-Carbon Smart Space" testbeds, allowing returning and local talent to participate in projects of regional scale and influence.
5. Support CEPA-based professional qualification mutual recognition to enable Hong Kong environmental professionals to practice seamlessly across the GBA, expanding their career horizons and strengthening retention.

This is not merely a training programme—it is a talent retention strategy that signals to the industry that Hong Kong offers a future with international vision and career prospects in the era of climate change and to accelerate net zero transition.

3. Conclusion

The National 15th Five-Year Plan timeline represents a promising period for Hong Kong to demonstrate its value to national environmental governance. True environmental progress acts as a "Common Good" that serves the entire populace and forms the baseline for long-term prosperity. The 15th Five-Year Plan for Green and Low-Carbon Development of Industry has shifted the paradigm from focusing on industry's own green development to emphasising industry's supporting role in the comprehensive green transformation of economic and social development, calling for the coordinated promotion of industrial greening and green industrialisation. Hong Kong must position itself at the forefront of this transformation.

HKIQEP stands ready to work closely with the Government, legislators, and regional stakeholders to provide the professional workforce, robust certification schemes, and standard-setting expertise needed to advance the green transition from operationalising the Northern Metropolis as a green technology platform, to industrialising green development, to institutionalising upskilling for talent retention.