

ENVIROSERIES CONFERENCE - 19 MAY 2016

A LOW CARBON AND RESILIENT HONG KONG: TRANSFORMING AWARENESS INTO ACTION

Summary

BEC EnviroSeries Conference, May 2016, brought business leaders, government, academics, NGOs and students together to discuss what Hong Kong can and should do to play its part in ensuring the success of the Paris Agreement. The potential for business to play a leadership role in transforming awareness into action, in particular through setting clear targets, timelines, and putting plans in place, was the key theme of the event.

To set the scene and inform discussion, Hong Kong Observatory's Director explained current trends highlighting that global temperatures were expected to be the highest on record this year, and that sea level rise could be significantly above the approximate 1 metre rise, under the business as usual scenario, with melting of the Greenland Ice Sheet and parts of the Antarctic Ice Sheet. The Under Secretary for the Environment presented on the current state of play in terms of government policy and emphasised the Government's determination to operationalise the Paris Agreement in accordance with 4 principles: Targets, Timelines, Transparency and Together.

The Chair of BEC Climate Change Business Forum Advisory Group put the case for business playing a leadership role. He highlighted extensive involvement by the business community in supporting an agreement in Paris and its subsequent implementation, as well as the importance of business setting science-based targets.

Speakers in relation to the supply-side explained the limitations in terms of local generation of renewable energy as well as the opportunities. An industry view was given on the challenges of waste to energy, and a presentation made by an academic on the potential from a holistic approach to waste and energy policy as pioneered in Denmark. The case for greater use of natural gas for power generation in the medium term and developing the infrastructure to avoid over-reliance on a single source was put forward by power companies and recognised by the

Government. Focusing on energy efficiency which would enable renewable energy to become a more significant source of energy was posited as a partial alternative by an environmental NGO.

On the demand-side, the role of urban planning in a low carbon and resilient city was explained with 6 themes drawn out: energy efficiency, renewables, resilience, mobility, liveability and urban greening. As buildings are the main user of energy in Hong Kong, case studies were presented on retrofitting Hong Kong's existing building stock and the returns on investment involved, showing that good design and technology had reduced emissions from an exemplar building by around 60%. On resilience, The Drainage Services Department explained the potential from innovative and holistic thinking on flood resilience and reduction of carbon with reference to its activities on storm water management.

The theme of the conference is related to BEC's Low Carbon HK Project focused on supporting business set carbon reduction targets for a maximum 2°C temperature rise. The project relates well to the Government's 4Ts: targets, timelines, transparency and together. The report is therefore structured as an articulation of these themes from a business perspective.

The report incorporates the points made by speakers and panelists and highlights messages that emerged. It does not seek to summarise each speakers' contribution or to set out an agreed position on the part of BEC.

It is hoped that the conference combined with this report stimulates a process of action and target-setting with regard to the long-term objectives of the Paris Agreement and contributes to internal discussion within business as to the level of ambition and breadth and to further discussion in the business community about the policy framework needed to support continuing change.

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