

# PLOVER COVE HOUSING PLAN FLOATED

**Reclaimed reservoir could provide 300,000 homes for up to 1.2 million people**

**Sophie Hui**

A research team from the University of Hong Kong says the government should re-start large-scale reclamation, including filling up Plover Cove Reservoir to provide 1,200 hectares of land on which to build 300,000 homes.

The team from the Ronald Coase Centre for Property Rights Research, HK UrbanLab, said the government should solve the long-term land problem through reclamation which is "the most significant and efficient historical mode of new land supply."

However, green groups slammed the plan and called it nonsense.

Chair professor Chau Kwong-wing said the government should build a huge land bank to reduce housing price volatility, to increase living space and to improve life quality.

"This will reduce the chance of panic buying in the housing market," he said.

Professor Lawrence Lai Wai-chung said the government should have a long-term vision for land sup-

ply and should revamp a high-level decision-making body so that it can plan strategically for a sustained stream of land supply.

Lai said Hong Kong has had no large-scale reclamation for the past 20 years. The suspension of reclamation plans resulted in the loss of 176 hectares of land at Green Island and 300 hectares at Kai Tak which could have housed 420,000 people.

The team said Plover Cove Reservoir should be reclaimed and turned into a new town, providing about 300,000 housing units with an average size of 650 square feet, to house 800,000 to 1.2 million people.

The team believes reclamation of the reservoir will do little damage to nature as the reservoir is artificial and the damage to the environment had already been done many years ago when building the reservoir. In addition, the cost was paid off many years ago.

Apart from Plover Cove, Lai thinks New Territories West, including areas near Castle Peak, Tin Shui Wai and Tuen Mun, and areas near Peng

Chau and Hei Ling Chau, can also be considered for reclamation. These sites could provide about 2,000 hectares and 1,200 hectares of land.

The team also believes that major developers own 1,000 hectares of land. It suggested the government take back undeveloped or idle land in the New Territories owned by major developers after the leases expire in 2047.

"The government should not exercise its discretion to automatically renew these leases for another 50 years," Lai said.

However, green groups hold opposite views. Green Sense said the reclamation suggestion is nonsense and that the researchers did not provide sustainable solutions for the city's development.

Mark Mak Chi-kit, senior research officer of Green Sense, said just building houses will not solve the problem.

"It is endless and irrational if we only rely on building houses to solve the problem," he said.

He said the society should think about how to reduce population growth and to balance the needs

Plover Cove Reservoir is located within Plover Cove Country Park in the northeastern New Territories.

It was built to ease the demand for fresh water following the great population growth of the 1950s. The idea of turning a bay into a reservoir came from director of water supplies T O Morgan.

Work on the reservoir began in 1960 and was completed in 1968. It was the world's first "reservoir in the ocean."

Its main dam is 2 kilometers long, the longest in Hong Kong, and 28 meters tall, with a water storage capacity of 230 million cubic meters.

The dam was one of the largest in the world at the time of its construction, disconnecting Plover Cove from the sea to become Hong Kong's largest reservoir in terms of area, and the second largest in terms of volume, after High Island Reservoir in Sai Kung.

Since the fresh water in Hong Kong is now mainly imported from Dongjiang, Plover Cove Reservoir has become a natural fish pond with a variety of wildlife and freshwater fish, attracting many people to go there for fishing.

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of development instead of just considering how to increase housing.

He believes mainland China immigrants are the biggest cause of the population growth and the government should reduce the one-way permit quota.

Mak said that Plover Cove Reservoir not only supplies fresh water but it is also in a country park with high ecological value.

He said reclamation has an "extinctive" impact on the environment, citing the reducing number of Chinese white dolphin as an example.

Conservancy Association campaign manager Roy Ng Hei-man said in addition to its ecological value, Plover Cove is a multi-purpose site which provides recreation as well as good scenery.

He said in addition to houses, the government will have to build supporting facilities which will have a negative impact on land near the site.

He said instead of using reclamation to increase land supply, the government should clarify the condition of the population and its needs, as the impacts of reclamation are irreversible.