

High Speed Craft Consultative Committee
Local Vessels Advisory Committee
Pilotage Advisory Committee
Port Operations Committee

Preliminary Boundaries and Management Plans of the Proposed Southwest Lantau and Soko Islands Marine Parks

1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to brief and seek members' views on Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD)'s proposal on the preliminary boundaries and management plans of the proposed Southwest Lantau Marine Park (SWLMP) and Soko Islands Marine Park (SIMP).

2. Background

2.1 The Government announced in 2000 a plan to designate the waters of Southwest Lantau and Soko Islands as marine parks for the protection of Chinese White Dolphins (CWD) and for the long-term conservation of the marine environment there. The boundaries of the proposed SWLMP and SIMP drawn up in 2002 are shown in **Figure 1**, enclosing about 660 and 1,270 hectares of water space respectively. However, strong reservations were expressed by fishermen organisations and Rural Committees during previous consultations in 2000 to 2002 and 2009, worrying that the designation of new marine parks would further reduce fishing grounds in Hong Kong waters, and therefore the proposals were not supported.

2.2 In response to the public concern about protection of CWD, the Government re-affirmed in early September 2014 its commitment to the designation of SWLMP and SIMP. The Government aims to proceed with the designation expeditiously in order to enhance the CWD conservation programme implemented by the AFCD.

2.3 Since late 2014, AFCD has also been undertaking a detailed study on the design and management of SWLMP and SIMP. Findings of the detailed study have been taken into consideration in preparing the preliminary boundaries and management plans of the two proposed marine parks.

3. Updated Information

3.1 A review on the latest available information was conducted from late 2014 to early 2015 to update the environmental, ecological profiles and marine usage of the waters of Southwest Lantau and Soko Islands. The up-to-date information re-confirms that the waters of Southwest Lantau remains as key habitats for CWD while the waters of Soko Islands is an unique location where both CWD and Finless Porpoises (FP) are regularly sighted.

3.2 The Dolphin Habitat Index methodology, which was previously used in the design of the proposed The Brothers Marine Park (BMP), has been adopted to evaluate the importance of the waters of West and Southwest Lantau to CWD and FP. Dolphin Habitat Index and Porpoise Habitat Index have been prepared with sighting data between 2005 and 2014 (**Figure 2**), which show that a majority of the waters of West and Southwest Lantau is important for CWD, while certain areas around Soko Islands are important FP habitats.

3.3 There are a number of existing and planned marine facilities and usages in the waters of West and Southwest Lantau, which must be taken into account carefully in taking forward the proposals. These include the Lantau Channel Traffic Separation Scheme (LCTSS) in the Lantau Channel mainly for ocean going vessels and the recommended Traffic Separation Scheme at South of Lantau (SLTSS) mainly for high speed passenger ferries (**Figure 3**).

3.4 AFCD commissioned BMT Asia Pacific to conduct a Marine Traffic Impact Assessment (MTIA) in December 2015 to assess potential marine impacts and navigational risks posed by the proposed marine parks, and to propose mitigation measures to address any impacts and risks identified. The assessment recommended that an inshore traffic zone of about 300m to 400m in width shall be maintained between the boundary of the proposed marine parks and the nearby LCTSS / SLTSS to allow an unrestricted and safe channel for navigation and to minimise potential impacts to marine users (**Figure 4**).

4. Preliminary Boundaries and Management Plans

4.1 Taking into consideration the up-to-date scientific data and the MTIA findings, we propose to set the preliminary boundaries of the proposed SWLMP and SIMP as depicted in **Figure 4**. The areas of SWLMP and SIMP are maintained at about 660 ha and 1,270 ha respectively.

4.2 The two proposed marine parks would be managed and controlled in a similar manner as the existing marine parks in accordance with the Marine Parks and Marine Reserves Regulation (Cap. 476A) for conservation, recreation, education and scientific research purposes. Activities such as boating and dolphin watching will be allowed in the proposed marine parks. Eligible bona fide fishermen will be allowed to continue fishing within the marine parks (except the Core Area) under a permit system.

4.3 Clear demarcation is essential for the effective management of marine parks. Marine parks in Hong Kong are marked on navigation charts and demarcated by boundary light buoys such that marine users can identify these areas easily. In view of the marine traffic characteristics of the waters surrounding the SWLMP and SIMP and in consultation with Marine Department, light buoys will be laid at suitable locations as illustrated in **Figures 5 and 6** for the demarcation of the boundaries of SWLMP and SIMP.

4.4 The proposed Core Area of SIMP (**Figure 6**) would contribute to the enhancement of fish stocks in the region and benefit the sustainability of fisheries resources in the area. It is also proposed to set up recreational fishing areas along the shoreline of the three islands, namely, Cheung Muk Tau, Ma Chau and Tau Lo Chau of the Soko Islands. AFCD would monitor the fisheries resources within the proposed marine parks including the proposed Core Area and recreational fishing areas for future management consideration.

5. Potential Implication on Marine Usage

5.1 The waters in the vicinity of SWLMP and SIMP are currently used by the public and the Government; the major usage include:

General Users

- Fishing vessels operating in the vicinity of Southwest Lantau and Soko Islands;
- Vessels plying through the waters around Southwest Lantau and Soko Islands; and
- Vessels using the LCTSS and the recommended SLTSS, including operators of the high speed passenger ferries servicing between Hong Kong and Macau/PRD ports.

Government-related Users

- Environmental Protection Department (EPD) vessels to and from the

- Low-level Radioactive Waste Storage Facility on North Soko; and
- Marine Department's, Fire Services Department's and Hong Kong Police Force's launches patrolling in the vicinity of the Southwest Lantau and Soko Islands.

5.2 The MTIA identified that the waters within the proposed marine parks are not engaged with busy marine traffic. Potential impacts will mainly be to small craft travelling near to the coastline of Lantau and to and from Soko Islands at speeds exceeding 10 knots within the future marine park areas, which have alternative route options. The proposed inshore traffic zones of about 300m to 400m in width between the boundary of the proposed marine parks and the nearby LCTSS / SLTSS are also expected to be effective in accommodating the nearby marine traffic.

5.3 According to the Marine Parks and Marine Reserves Regulation (Cap 476A), vessels speed should not exceed 10 knots within marine parks. Apart from the 10-knot speed limit, there is no special restriction or regulation on the entry or passing through the proposed marine parks for marine traffic. Whilst, no person shall moor or anchor a vessel in a marine park except under and in accordance with a permit or at mooring buoys or mooring sites provided by AFCD.

6. Consultation

6.1 As there are existing uses of the waters, including the LCTSS and the SLTSS in the vicinity of SWLMP and SIMP, we would like to collect views from marine users on the boundaries and management plans of the proposed marine parks. Views and opinions collected during this meeting will be taken into consideration to refine the boundaries and management plans of SWLMP and SIMP.

7. Programme

7.1 Following the consultations with stakeholders, statutory procedures as required under Marine Parks Ordinance (Cap 476) will be followed for designating SWLMP and SIMP. It is expected that the draft maps will be prepared for public inspection by August-September of 2016 and the designation of the proposed marine parks to be in effect by 2017.

8. Advice Sought

- 8.1 Members are invited to comment on the proposal set out in this paper.
- 8.2 In case there is any enquiry on details of the project, please contact Dr. YM Mak of AFCD by phone at 2150 6872, email of ym_mak@afcd.gov.hk and fax at 2152 0060.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
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Figure 1: The Proposed Boundaries of SWLMP and SIMP in 2002.

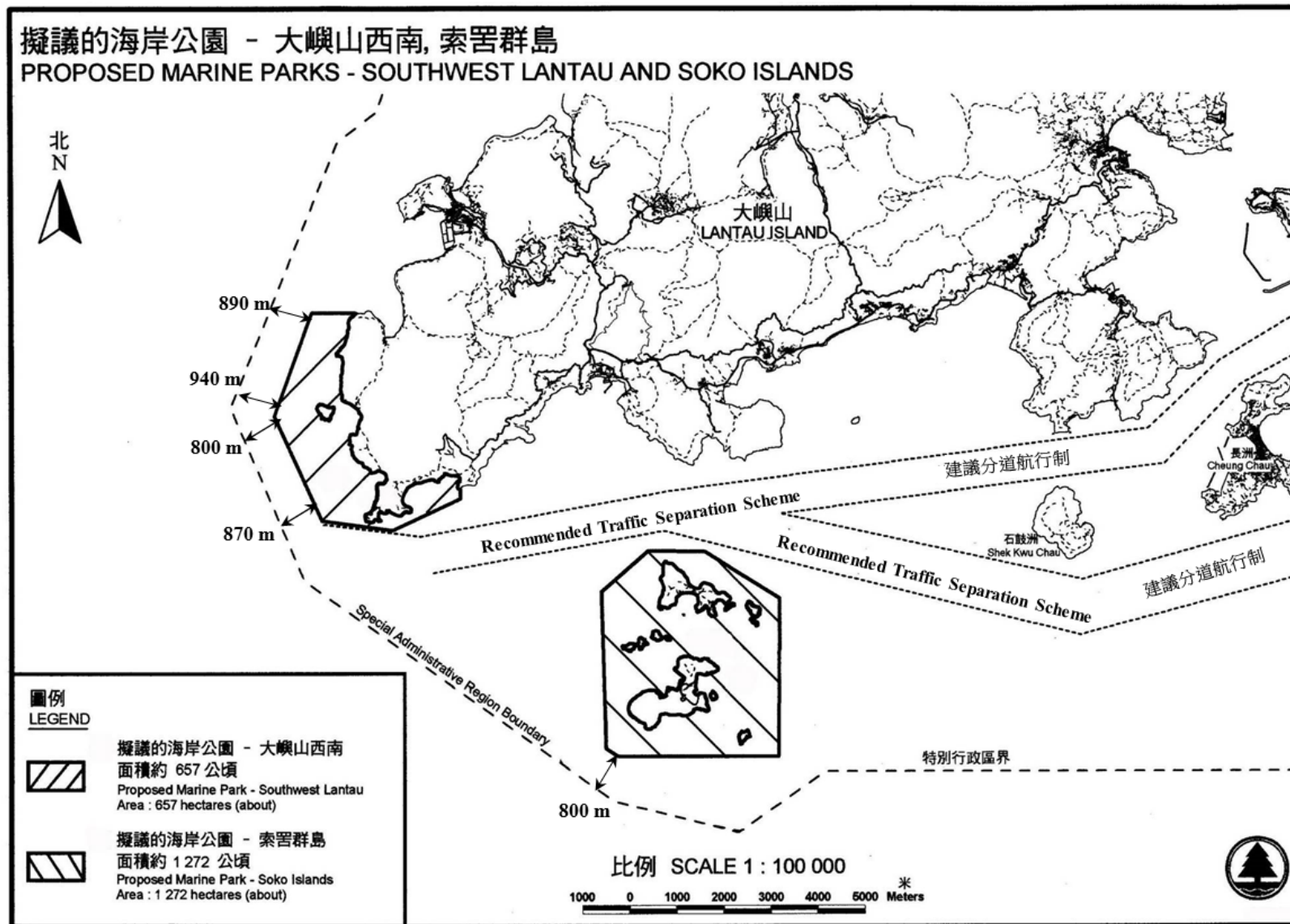
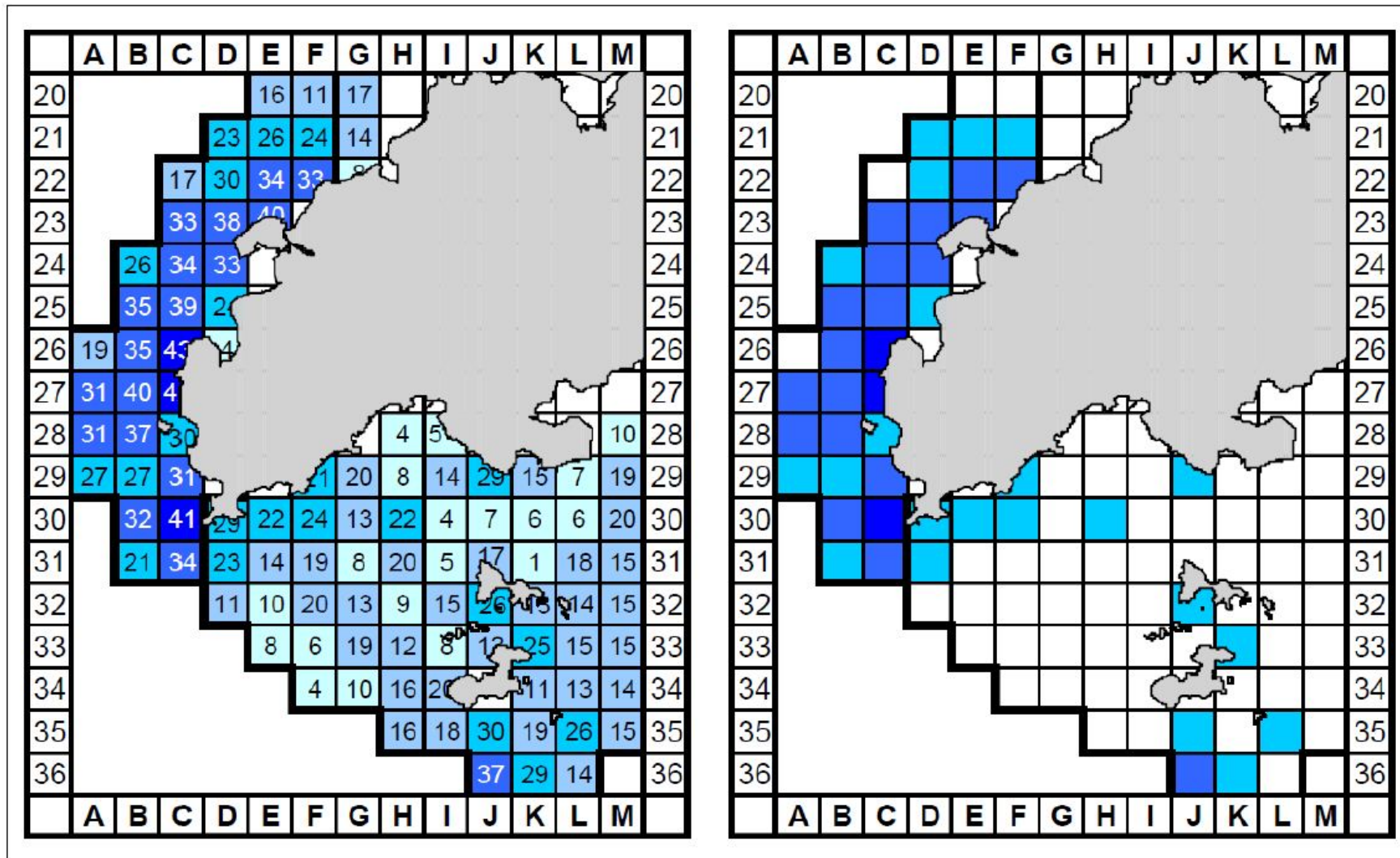


Figure 2: Combined Habitat Ratings of Chinese White Dolphins and Finless Porpoises Collected during 2005 to 2014.



(left) Combined habitat ratings of dolphins and porpoises using quantitative habitat use information collected during 2005-14 (no. within grids represents the sum of scores totaled from 18 selection criteria); and (right) Grids rated as above average, important and critical marine mammal habitats.

(左) 採用量化的棲息地使用率而得出的合併海豚及江豚棲息地指標 (網格的數字代表18個評估標準的總分數); 及(右) 被評為高於平均、重要及要緊的海洋哺乳動物棲息地的網格。

Figure 3: The Existing or Planned Marine Facilities in the Vicinity of the Proposed SWLMP and SIMP

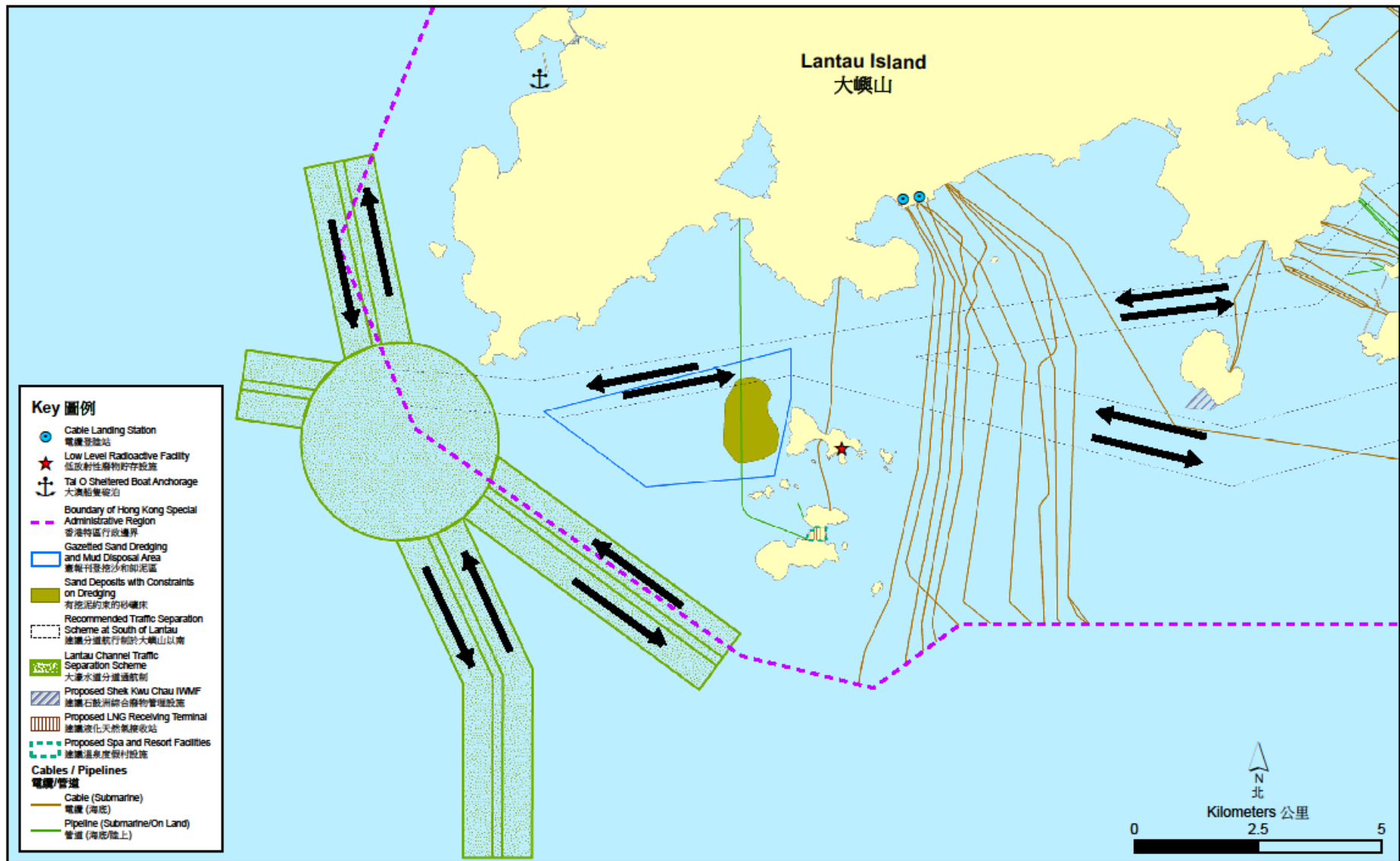


Figure 4: The Preliminary Boundaries of the Proposed SWLMP and SIMP

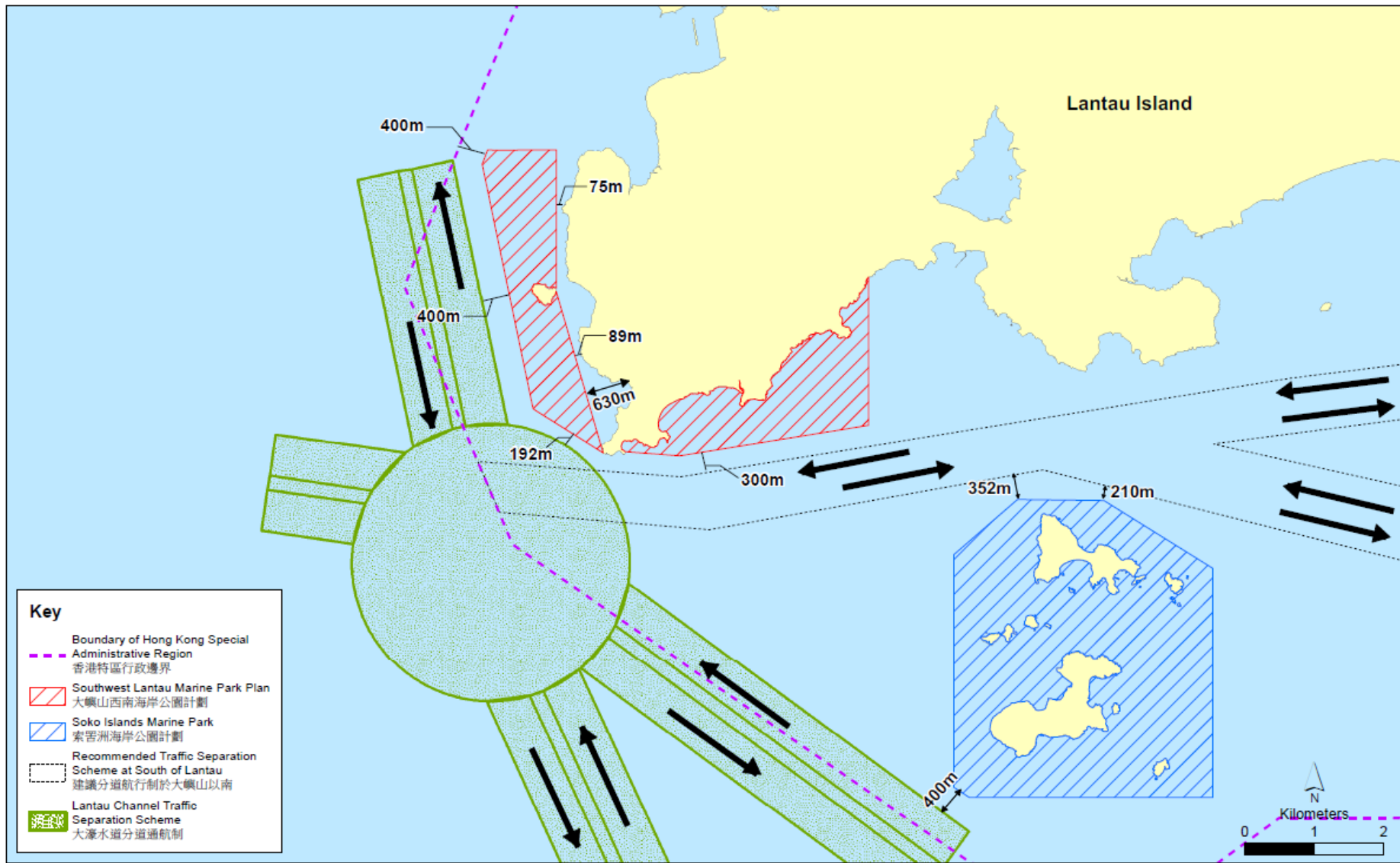


Figure 5: The Management Plan of SWLMP

