

Wind farm debate moves up a gear

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The need for more renewable energy has long been recognised. The potential for the use of wind power in Hong Kong is, perhaps, limited by our city's relatively small size. But the move by CLP to develop a wind farm in Sai Kung is a step in the right direction.

Wind farms come with their own environmental problems. So it is good to see that CLP intends to use eco-friendly technology to build the offshore base without harmful dredging of the sea bed. This reduces the impact on marine life, but other concerns have been raised. The project must be handled sensitively.

Under the plan, as many as 67 turbines, each up to 150 metres tall, will be built nine kilometres off Clear Water Bay no later than 2016. The company hopes to first install a data mast in the water to collect information about the climate. A special method adopted by offshore oil refineries will be used to sink the foundations into the sea bed. Hopefully details gathered by the data mast will help determine how best to take the project forward.

Conservationists are, however, not put at ease. The fact that the farm is to be located at a site tipped to be listed soon as a world geopark may further dampen support for the project, which will cost up to HK\$7 billion. Critics may also argue that the benefits will be negligible. The power to be generated would be enough for use by only 80,000 of the two million-plus households covered by CLP. With a modest target of ultimately meeting 3 per cent of energy needs with renewable energy, the would-be output of the wind farms, as green groups say, could be achieved simply by cutting energy consumption more vigorously. But there is every reason to step up efforts in developing renewal energy. The uncertainties arising from the nuclear disaster in Japan early this year has made the search for other sources more important. Hongkong Electric has already launched preparatory works for a smaller-scale wind farm near Lamma. The companies should be sensitive to the impact on the environment when moving ahead.