

**Asia's World City and
a Model of Sustainable Development
Hong Kong Can Do It!!
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I Introduction

- 1.1 Hong Kong's positioning as the economic model of China is well accepted. But Hong Kong can, and should, also become a model of sustainable development. Asia's world city should be a leader not only economically, but also in social development and environmental sustainability.
- 1.2 A world city must have a global view. Being an active member of the World Trade Organisation, Hong Kong's view of economic relations and trade is global enough. But trade is only part of the "new global order" – of People, Planet and Prosperity, the global concerns epitomised in the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in August and September 2002. To be a truly world city that befits our prosperity, we must be no less assertive in People (social development) and Planet (environmental protection).
- 1.3 Hong Kong should aspire to become a model of sustainable development as a good global citizen. But it is also in the SAR's own self-interest to be concerned about sustainable development.
- 1.4 Firstly, the world has been disappointed by the WSSD. The aim of the Johannesburg Summit was to flesh out a "Plan of Implementation", but in the end the agreement was so highly compromised that it looked more like a re-statement of established principles rather than a plan of action. Despite that, the WSSD has made a significant stride in equipping civil society, galvanising public will and mobilising community action to defend the cause of sustainable development. While the achievement in the political declaration may be meagre, a vast market place of activities was created in the five major venues of the WSSD in Johannesburg over two weeks. They have energised green groups, social welfare bodies, business councils, parliamentarians and local governments alike to engage in Type II partnership for action (i.e. partnership among different sectors of the community, as opposed to "Type I partnership" between governments). There is an emerging consensus that the failings of the governments notwithstanding, the saving grace may yet lie in concerted action among different sectors in putting the sustainable development principles into practice. Herein thus lies an opportunity for Hong Kong. Even though many improvements are needed in many areas – as we shall detail in this paper – the Conservancy Association believes that Hong Kong has a lot of strength in sustainable development compared to other cities and economies. We are not far behind, so there is no need to be defensive. Instead, Hong Kong as a whole should "re-engineer" itself with a view to becoming a model of sustainable development. This will be all the more important as Hong Kong strives to reinforce its status as Asia's world city.
- 1.5 Secondly, it is clear from the Johannesburg experience that the sustainable development agenda has progressed well beyond environmental preservation and become an effective focus for action in social development and community building. Sustainable development stands for social cohesion and harmony – the attributes of society which seem to be eluding the SAR for the past few years. As demonstrated by many examples in the WSSD, sustainable development *works*.
- 1.6 The message of Johannesburg is that we need to move from talk into action. In accordance with the WSSD Plan of Implementation, the SAR government should immediately formulate and elaborate a "strategies for sustainable development and begin

their implementation by 2005” (para 145b). This strategy should be supplemented by a “10-year framework of programmes” on sustainable production and consumption (para 14). The key to success, however, lies not in any grand plan drawn up by the government, but in the forging of a genuine partnership among different sectors.

1.7 Our experience from Johannesburg has fully convinced us that “Hong Kong can do it”. We invite the SAR government to join in this community-based partnership to work towards a better quality of life and a better future for Hong Kong. This should be achieved through developing a community-based Local Agenda 21 for Hong Kong.

II. Local Agenda 21 for Hong Kong

2.1 Sustainable development involves a wide range of issues, from pollution to conservation to poverty to equity to energy to economic growth. The challenge is to find a way to combine these different and wide-ranging efforts. We believe the key lies in the Rio-inspired “Agenda 21”.

2.2 In 1993, fresh on the heels of the Rio Earth Summit, the Conservancy Association published a green group’s “Agenda 21 for Hong Kong”. Although this had the effect of heightening discussion on sustainable development, no such Agenda has been developed for Hong Kong, notwithstanding repeated urging by the Association. While Hong Kong has looked on, 6416 local governments in 113 countries have already engaged themselves in Local Agenda 21 (LA21) process in response to the call to adopt LA21 in Chapter 28 of Agenda 21.

2.3 Now that the WSSD has provided another impetus for sustainable development, it is high time to engage all sectors to formulate an actionable sustainable development strategy through a Local Agenda 21 for Hong Kong (HKLA21). This is also emphasised in the WSSD Plan of Implementation, which calls for “measures to strengthen sustainable development institutional arrangements at all levels within the framework of Agenda 21” (para 121). In particular, this should lead to the objective of “enhancing participation and effective involvement of civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the implementation of Agenda 21, as well as promoting transparency and broad public participation” (para 121g).

2.4 As Hong Kong is starting late, there is no shortage of experience from other jurisdictions. Typically, LA21 in other places includes the following seven features:

- (1) a participatory process with local citizens,
- (2) a consensus on the vision of a sustainable future,
- (3) addressing economic, social and ecological needs together,
- (4) the establishment of a roundtable, stakeholder group, forum or equivalent multi-sectoral community group to oversee the process,
- (5) an action plan with concrete long-term targets,
- (6) the establishment of indicators to monitor progress,
- (7) a monitoring and reporting framework.

2.5 Partnership is the key word in the Hong Kong Local Agenda 21 (HKLA21) process: green groups, the government, the business sector and the local community will all have to play a part. We would emphasise at the outset that the key in such partnership lies in commitment. In a cross-sectoral cooperative relationship, there may be a natural inclination to expect resource-rich sectors (government and business) to provide funding to

resource-poor sectors (green groups and local community). While this should remain important, it should not be the only, nor even major, role for government and business, especially in the present economic and fiscal climate. In addition to funding, therefore, government should commit to devoting resources to effect community building as well as make institutional changes to facilitate that. For the business sector, there is already a growing realisation that corporate citizenship is more than corporate giving. There are plenty of examples from the WSSD showcasing the business sector's contribution to capacity building of the local community. Another major step could be a campaign to promote triple bottom line reporting among the business sector itself.

2.6 With a commitment to partnership, we believe many of the solutions to our problems will not be difficult to find, even though they may be unglamorous local measures. An example we encountered in Johannesburg is the 4,000 hectare Rietvlei Nature Reserve, a wetland rehabilitation experiment combined with an eco-tourism project (a nature reserve), which served an additional function of providing employment to the underprivileged and vulnerable groups, at a mere cost of HK\$2.4 million over three years. We need to apply our own ingenuity to conduct projects that address the social, environmental and economic dimensions in an integrated manner. On our part, the Conservancy Association is, among other things, developing a pilot conservation project in Long Valley in cooperation with local farmers, using the partnership concept. Local innovation, multi-stakeholder dialogue and an open mind are what we need to create small successes, step by step – such is the essence of HKLA21.

III. Partnership and participation

Information, access and empowerment

3.1 Para 119.ter of the WSSD Plan of Implementation calls on governments to “ensure access.to environmental information and judicial and administrative proceedings in environmental matters, as well as public participation in decision-making, so as to further principle 10 of the Rio Declaration.” While such information is indeed available in the SAR, public access means more than the mere depositing of that information. Para 146.bis of the WSSD document, for instance, states that all governments should promote public participation “through measures that provide access to information regarding legislation, regulations, activities, policies and programmes. They should also foster full public participation in sustainable development policy formulation and implementation.” In other words, it is not just access which is important, but participatory access. Central to this is the concept of empowerment, of enabling the public to partake in policy formulation and implementation, not just to know what is going on. The government must have the confidence in the public's ability to organise itself and to lead, not just follow, initiatives in sustainable development.

The People's Council on Sustainable Development

3.2 It is almost three years since the Chief Executive committed in his 1999 Policy Address to establish the Council for Sustainable Development, yet the Council has not yet been formed. Taking the lessons from Johannesburg, we believe civil society should take the lead, hence the Hong Kong NGOs which joined the WSSD have come together with a view to forming a People's Council on Sustainable Development in 2003. To that end a preparatory

committee has already been formed and it has formulated an action plan to establish the People's Council before June 2003.

3.3 The People's Council is a purely community initiative, a council of the people. To safeguard its independence, we do not seek government funding or resources towards its establishment. In the spirit of sustainable development, however, the People's Council is intended to be a partner, not an adversary, of the Council to be created by the SAR government. In that regard, we call on the SAR government to provide the necessary cooperation to facilitate that partnership. This will be in line with the spirit espoused in the WSSD Plan of Implementation, that governments should "promote the establishment or enhancement of sustainable development councils and/or coordination structures. in order to provide a high-level focus on sustainable development policies", and that "multi-stakeholder participation should be promoted" (para 147).

3.4 Government's cooperation could take several forms. First, it is important to establish an institutional linkage between the People's Council and the government. This could be achieved, among other measures, through cross-membership of the People's Council and the government council. Secondly, the government and the People's Council can undertake joint projects to strengthen public participation in sustainable development policy, such as the "Access" initiative championed during the WSSD. Thirdly, the People's Council should be eligible, as an independent entity, to seek funding from the Sustainable Development Fund to undertake its own projects on a non-prejudicial basis. One of such projects would be to convene a regular People's Forum for engendering public participation.

Education and awareness

3.5 Part of the drive towards sustainable consumption is to "develop awareness-raising programmes on the importance of sustainable production and consumption patterns, particularly among youth" (para 14d). The WSSD also calls for the integration of sustainable development into the education systems at all levels of education "in order to promote education as a key agent for change" (para 114). To that end, the Hong Kong SAR government should also "develop and adopt effective, transparent, verifiable, non-misleading and non-discriminatory consumer information tools to provide information relating to sustainable consumption and production, including human health and safety aspects." (para 14e) Again, this is a task that should not be left to bureaucrats, but should be the product of a partnership between government and the community.

Engaging the corporate sector in sustainable development

3.6 The WSSD obliges governments to increase investment in cleaner production and eco-efficiency through "incentives and support schemes and policies directed at establishing appropriate regulatory, financial and legal frameworks." (para 15). Accordingly Hong Kong government should undertake the actions outlined in para 15 of the Plan of Implementation, namely:

- Establish and support cleaner production programmes and centres and more efficient production methods by providing incentives and capacity-building to assist enterprises, especially small and medium-sized enterprises;
- Provide incentives for investment in cleaner production and eco-efficiency such as state-financed loans, venture capital, technical assistance and training programmes for small and medium-sized companies;

- Provide training programmes to small and medium-sized enterprises on the use of information and communication technologies

3.7 Cultural and eco-tourism is another area where a business-community partnership could be used to bring benefits both to the economy and the environment, and already an energetic effort is now going on among the tourism sector. However, we would emphasise that there must be genuine cross-sectoral partnership between different parties if the aim of “maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity and enhancing the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and natural heritages” is to be achieved (para 41), and to that end the government, through both the Commissioner for Tourism and the conservation departments, should take on a neutral facilitating role rather than merely acting as an advocate for the economic interest of tourism.

3.8 In the WSSD there is recognition that much needs to be done to enhance corporate environmental and social responsibility and accountability (para 17). The Plan of Implementation urges governments to “encourage industry to improve social and environmental performance through voluntary initiatives, including environmental management systems, codes of conduct, certification and public reporting on environmental and social issues”, using mechanisms such as the Global Reporting Initiative. Perhaps the way to start is for the government to start to practice this itself. No doubt a government-sponsored campaign to promote this to the corporate sector would also be very helpful.

3.9 Public procurement policy is one area to which the government can make a direct contribution. The WSSD calls on governments to “promote public procurement policies that encourage development and diffusion of environmentally sound goods and services” (para 18c). The Government Sustainable Development Unit, the Government Supplies Department and the Management Services Agency should jointly work out a programme to put that into practice.

IV. Governance and institutional structure

4.1 A recurring message of the WSSD is that institutional change is as important as, if not more important than, concrete programmes of action. The Plan of Implementation calls on governments to “continue to promote coherent and coordinated approaches to institutional frameworks for sustainable development, including through, as appropriate, the establishment or strengthening of existing authorities and mechanisms necessary for policy-making, coordination and implementation and enforcement of laws” (para 145a).

A Sustainable Development Bill

4.2 As early as 1998 the Conservancy Association raised the idea of a Sustainable Development Bill to enshrine the principle of sustainable development in the legal system. Then as now, we recognise that considerable discussion and debate will be needed. With the impetus on sustainable development provided by the WSSD, we believe now is an ideal opportunity, through the Chief Executive’s Policy Address, to provide a rallying point for the community to begin the process of discussion and debate.

4.3 To reiterate, the intention of our proposed Sustainable Development Bill is to provide the overall legal basis for sustainable development, so that developments can take place with full regard to sustainability and the long term development needs of the SAR. We

emphasise that the aim of the Sustainable Development Bill is not to become another level of legal regulation, but rather to act as a tool to ensure the integral nature of development and the SAR's long term interests. Just as the Bill of Rights uphold rather than limit human rights, a Sustainable Development Bill would uphold rather than stifle development.

4.4 We realise that a Sustainable Development Bill is a rather novel concept, but it is by no means unprecedented – witness the Environmental Management Act of South Africa. We believe the idea of the Bill is worth examining seriously; as we advocated above, Hong Kong wants to be a model, not a follower, in sustainable development. We should have the self confidence to go beyond the existing system and be more innovative in building up our own institution for sustainable development – our proposed Bill, an environmental law court, etc. A serious debate over these issues will, in the least, lay the foundation for the important process of institution building that should be integral to our sustainable development regime. Our idea of a bill is thus both an end and the means.

Reform of the structure of governance

4.5 The Conservancy Association, together with other green groups, has submitted a paper to the government regarding reform of the advisory committee structure. In accordance with Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration, we have proposed that there should be both access to information by the public and access to participation in decision-making. We have put forward the principle that all government advisory committees should be as representative as possible, with members nominated from stakeholder groups. The meetings and papers of these committees should be made transparent to the public, and the committees should be supported with resources to conduct independent assessment of their own. On the basis of the above, we urge the government to restructure the current advisory committees and to be more responsive to the public's views.

4.6 The review of advisory committees is intimately related to that of the government's own structure. We have supported the Principle Officials Accountability system ("ministerial system") introduced by the Chief Executive in July, but at the same time we remained critical of the new structure of the various bureaus. We maintain our view that the government system should be further re-structured with the creation of a new bureau for "environment and resources" to address issues on environmental protection, conservation of ecological, cultural and historical heritage as well as other environmental resources (including fresh water, recyclable materials and energy resources). This bureau and the associated departments will be in charge of the following tasks:

- Pollution control and environmental planning currently undertaken by Environmental Protection Department
- Waste management by a new Waste Management Authority to take over the work of waste management from Environmental Protection Department and waste collection from the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. It should also have an enhanced function on waste reduction.
- Development of an energy policy and promotion of alternate energy and energy efficiency by a new Energy Department which is currently the responsibility of the Energy Efficiency Unit of EMSD.
- Water supply and conservation by Water Services Department
- Management of our agriculture and fisheries resources by a new Rural Resources Department that will take over the agriculture and fisheries work of AFCD

- A new Conservation and Countryside Management Department that takes over the conservation of natural (such as ecological, geological and landscape), cultural and historical heritage (currently under the remit of different departments such as AFCD, Planning Department, AMO, CED). It should also manage our country and marine parks.
- Greening and landscaping of Hong Kong currently undertaken by various departments

Standards and indicators

4.7 The WSSD recognises the importance of developing indicators for sustainable development (paras 119.quinquies, 119.sexties), the wider application of environmental impact assessments (para 119.diciens), as well as development of methodologies at policy, strategy and project levels for sustainable development decision-making (para 119.undeciens). This is an important element in the institutional arrangement for sustainable development which must not be overlooked. It also provides the link between the technical and professional aspect of sustainable development on the one hand, and the public access and participation on the other.

V. Sustainable development and resources conservation

Biodiversity and conservation

- 5.1 For a small place, Hong Kong is blessed with an exceptionally rich biodiversity. Yet the government's effort to conserve it has been disappointing, the long awaited conservation policy still on the drawing board. That task should now be given a boost from the WSSD, so that measures be urgently developed to "promote and support initiatives for hot spot areas and other areas essential for biodiversity and promote the development of national and regional ecological networks and corridors" (para 42g). Accordingly, we should extend our conservation effort beyond passive and defensive preservation, to proactive programmes in enriching biodiversity. A worthwhile start would be for the Administration to begin a phased programme of re-introducing lost species into suitable Conservation Areas. We owe it to ourselves, our children, our nation and the world to conserve our biodiversity.
- 5.2 We were encouraged by the recognition given in the WSSD Plan of Implementation to efforts in controlling invasive alien species, "one of the main causes of biodiversity loss" (para 42i). Over the past years the Conservancy Association has worked diligently in both education and work programmes in controlling weeds such as Mikania, and it is clear to us that this aspect of conservation is not well appreciated by the policy officials. The WSSD should put its significance in perspective.
- 5.3 In particular, being blessed with wetland of world class standard, Hong Kong should respond to the call to implement the Ramsar Convention (para 31e) and take a proactive stance towards preservation of our Ramsar sites. We urge a comprehensive stock taking of our wetland resources. A number of wetland of proven value should be declared Ramsar sites, including Long Valley and Sha Lo Tung. They should also be priority areas for the application of the long awaited conservation policy.
- 5.4 One of the rare tangible outcomes of the WSSD is the agreement to implement the 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (para 30). The aim is to cease destructive fishing practices and establish marine protected areas and network by 2012, and to

maintain or restore fisheries stocks to levels that can be sustainably harvested by not later than 2015. As a community devoted to seafood eating, Hong Kong should also heed the fisheries agreement and begin formulating measures, both in government policy and in education of the public, about responsible consumption and sustainable harvesting of fishing stocks.

- 5.5 One conservation issue which is specific to our highly urbanised city is that of preservation of trees. We have long called for an establishment of a “Tree Council” to protect valuable trees as well as formulate an urban greening strategy to enhance our quality of life. A census of the territory’s “champion trees” being already available, we urge that as a first step, a Tree Protection Ordinance should be enacted to preserve Hong Kong’s valuable old trees. The Ordinance can be modeled upon the Antiquities Ordinance, with a view to a possible future expansion into a more comprehensive Tree Ordinance to cover the protection of forests.
- 5.6 In the course of our conservation efforts, we emphasise that the focus should not be limited merely to ecological conservation. As detailed in the Association’s previous paper on conservation strategy for Hong Kong, other aspects of conservation such as culture, heritage and landscape are no less important, from the point of view of sustainable development. In agriculture, for instance, the WSSD Plan of Implementation also recognises the importance of conserving for the “sustainable use and management of traditional and indigenous agricultural systems” (para 38r), as well as the strengthening of indigenous models of agricultural production. Our agricultural land is at the same time part of our community, our rural landscape and our heritage. The current agricultural policy addresses none of these. It is limited to a narrow view of agriculture as a dying industry; under such a policy agriculture is inherently inefficient. This narrow view of agriculture must be replaced by a more sustainable policy which respects the various aspects of agriculture. We call on such a policy to be formulated, if not by the conservation department, then by the Sustainable Development Unit.

Sustainable energy

- 5.7 Energy policy lies at the heart of many global problems such as climate change. With the WSSD Plan of Implementation as guidance, Hong Kong government can commit to a number of measures in energy conservation and management, as follows.
- 5.8 Hong Kong should develop and advocate renewable energy such as solar and wind energy (para 19c), if necessary, through regulatory or legislative means, such as Germany’s Renewable Energy Act. The government should commit to a target level of renewable energy – we recommend 15% of total energy demand – by 2010.
- 5.9 The use of renewable energy should be combined with the drive for greater energy efficiency (para 19d). In the case of Hong Kong, the regulatory regime for energy efficiency of buildings, vehicles and electrical appliances should be strengthened.
- 5.10 Hong Kong should heed the call of the WSSD Plan of Implementation regarding the better functioning of the energy market, with the aim of achieving greater stability and predictability and to ensure consumer access to reliable, affordable, economically viable, socially acceptable and environmentally sound energy services (para 19o). The SAR government should take the opportunity of the current review of the Scheme of Control

governing the electricity suppliers to liberalise market access as well as rationalise the regulatory regime.

- 5.11 By nature emissions that cause climate change are trans-boundary. Naturally, trans-boundary problems call for trans-boundary solutions. We were encouraged by recent discussions over the possible design and implementation of an emission trading regime with Guangdong Province; this is consistent with the recommendation of the WSSD Plan of Implementation (para 37). We urge this work to be speeded up.
- 5.12 Apart from the trans-boundary dimension, the principle of emission trading can apply to our local context as well. Much of the localised air pollution problem originates from small mobile sources such as vehicles. The use of monetisation and market forces to regulate such emissions should be seriously studied. Through the use of a properly designed credit system, a link could conceivably be provided between vehicles, as final dissipants, and source providers of emissions such as oil companies.

Sustainable transport

- 5.13 The WSSD Plan of Implementation provides the justification for the integration approach in transport and planning advocated by the Association. It says that governments should “promote an integrated approach to policy-making .for transport services and systems to promote sustainable development, including policies and planning for land use, infrastructure, public transport systems and goods delivery networks, with a view to providing safe, affordable and efficient transportation, increasing energy efficiency, reducing pollution, reducing congestion, reducing adverse health effects and limiting urban sprawl.” (para 20) Government should re- formulate of our transport policy objectives in accordance with the sustainability principle.
- 5.14 It is encouraging that a new thinking seems to be emerging in our transport policy, and we urge that this be reflected more visibly and bolder steps be taken in reforming our transport system. A rationalisation of the railway system (whether through merger of the two rail companies or otherwise) would be a very welcome move and should be speeded up. This would also enable more sustainable transport concepts to be implemented, e.g. the Southern Island rail link instead of Route 7, a full pedestrianisation of areas like Tsim Sha Tsui, etc. More importantly, as our transport system is intimately linked to that of the Pearl River Delta, our transport planning and regulatory regime should also be modernised to take account of the cross-boundary dimension. Thus cross-boundary infrastructure projects (such as the Deep Bay Link) should be subject to the same standard of planning, impact assessment and monitoring as any major infrastructure project within Hong Kong.

Sustainable water consumption

- 5.15 One of the major focus of the WSSD was water conservation and management, an issue which is highly relevant to the everyday life of Hong Kong residents. The need for an integrated plan will become more acute as more cities will be competing for the same water resources of the Pearl River Delta, Hong Kong’s main supplier of water. The current Dongjiang water supply arrangement is expensive, inefficient, and unsustainable. Supply pressure could quickly build up as demand rises, while quality falls, from rapid economic growth in Guangdong. The WSSD target of developing an integrated water

resources management and water efficiency plans by 2005 (para 25) should become a commitment of the SAR government.

VI. International obligation

External aid

6.1 Para 79 of the WSSD Plan of Implementation states that governments of developed economies should aim to contribute 0.7% of GNP as overseas development aid to developing countries. While this does not apply to China as a developing country, as a developed city Hong Kong should have an obligation to contribute to aiding the less advantage societies of the global community. Using the 0.7% GDP as benchmark, Hong Kong should contribute HK\$8,950 million as aid resources. This is not to suggest that all should come from the government, but as the public sector takes up more than 21% of our GDP, the government should not shirk its responsibility from this global duty. We recommend that the SAR government should undertake to devise an aid strategy, perhaps starting with the poorer parts of our own country.

Climate change

6.2 Now that China has signed the Kyoto Protocol of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, Hong Kong needs to fulfill its international obligation. To meet the minimum standard is not good enough; Hong Kong should not discharge its Kyoto obligations as a city of a third world country. We strongly advise the SAR government to be proactive and to self-impose a standard that befits a world class city. A practical and reasonable standard would be to go beyond that for Annex I countries of the Kyoto Protocol, and aim for the global average sustainable target emission of around 4 tonnes per capita or a reduction of 50% below the 1990 level in the next fifty years. It would be a reflection of Hong Kong's contribution to the country and to the world, a contribution which will surely be well appreciated.

VII. Conclusion

7.1 Despite the failures at the inter-governmental level, an important achievement of the WSSD is to have empowered civil society to embark upon a path of renewed confidence and partnership. Representatives from various sectors of Hong Kong, including the government, made a good start in Johannesburg when the NGO delegation convened an experience sharing workshop with delegates from other countries on Local Agenda 21. We are confident that Hong Kong has the ability not just to reach the standards of others, but to excel and become a model for others.

7.2 Within Hong Kong, the community is facing many challenges, not least the growing gap between the rich and the poor. The HKLA21 process can be used to turn these challenges into opportunity, to rally the community to address our shared concerns. As Robert Swan, the only explorer to have walked unsupported to both the North Pole and the South Pole, said at the WSSD, "What is lacking is not information, but inspiration." What we seek from the government is not to provide all the resources or solutions, but to be a partner to provide the inspiration for the Hong Kong community towards the goal of a world-class model of sustainable development. Hong Kong can do it.