



A proposed amendment to the Environmental Protection Law was handed to the Standing Committee of the National People Congress on Wednesday, says an article in Beijing News Daily. Excerpts:

But the Ministry of Environmental Protection's proposal raises new concerns, because it does not entitle the environmental authorities to the powers and rights they deserve and there is still no legal support for the public to take part in environmental impact assessment.

Instead, governments and other administrative departments still have the power to interfere with the professional decision-making process on environmental protection.

The proposal states that economic and social development should be coordinated with environmental protection.

But it omits wording that exists in the current law, stating that environmental plans must be included with plans for economic and social development. Replacing must with should will make the environment more vulnerable under pressure from economic growth. Is this progress or regression?

China faces serious challenges on environmental pollution, and the environmental authorities have long been blamed for their weakness. The new law should address these challenges by giving the authorities more powers and rights and also open the door for non-governmental organisations and the public to have their say on environmental protection.

If this door is not opened, the public will open it and make their presence felt more vehemently.

The amendment to the law is a golden opportunity to solve existing problems. It is expected that China's lawmakers will take this opportunity, thus preventing further trouble in the future.