

**Global biodiversity mechanisms:
a thematic review of recent developments and future evidence needs**

Strand Palace Hotel, London 20th May 2009

MEA Briefing

**Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian migratory
waterbirds (AEWA)**

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Briefing note: AEWA - Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian migratory waterbirds

AEWA is a daughter Agreement of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) which was finalised in 1995 and came into force in 1999. It is one of the largest of the CMS Agreements with its own Secretariat and covering 118 Range States. Of these, 62 are currently Contracting Parties (as of November 2008). The Agreement aims to achieve a visionary objective – ‘*the need to take immediate action to stop the decline of migratory waterbird species and their habitats ... for the benefit for present and future generations...*’. The 4th Meeting of the Parties (MoP 4)¹ was convened in Antananarivo, Madagascar from 15-19 September 2008.

The MoP recognised that the overall status of migratory waterbird populations in the Agreement area of Africa, the Middle East and western Eurasia was acknowledged as poor and declining. Despite international targets to reduce and halt the decline of biodiversity loss by 2010, monitoring evidence suggests that for waterbirds the overall situation is actually becoming worse rather than showing signs of improvement.

The MoP expressed concern that “*the trend status of waterbirds in the Agreement area has worsened between 1999 – when the Agreement came into force – and 2008, with twice as many populations (41%) showing decreasing rather than increasing trends (21%).*” It further expressed deep concern as to the continued negative trend of the Red List Index for all AEWA species “*which indicates that the overall conservation status of all migratory waterbirds continues to decrease within the Agreement area.*” The main causes of these declines were identified as continued widespread habitat loss and degradation, and locally unsustainable waterbird harvesting. The effects of pollution, including the widespread continued use of toxic lead gun-shot throughout most of the Agreement area was highlighted, together with the consequences of climate change on habitats and species which will result in further unwelcome and unpredictable impacts.

Responses to the looming crisis were characterised in debates as inadequate with the Contracting Parties *stressing “the need to take such immediate action in light of the progressively worsening status of Africa’s and Eurasia’s migratory waterbirds, and that much more needs to be done by the Parties to this Agreement if [the 2010 biodiversity] targets are to be attained.”* In large part, this is because through much of the Agreement area, the sheer scale of the negative impacts (whether direct, such as locally unsustainable harvests, or indirect, such as wetland loss and degradation) is simply overwhelming the important and positive actions that have been stimulated by the Agreement. Actions are often too little and too late (despite the best intentions of the relevant governmental and other decision-makers).

¹ A full report of the MoP is available at: www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop4_docs/mop4_report.htm, with Resolutions at http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop4_docs/mop4_final_resolutions.htm and information documents at http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/en/mop/mop4_docs/mop4_docs.htm. An analysis by the Earth Negotiations Bulletin is at: www.iisd.ca/cms/aewa-mop4.

Accordingly, a range of responses were identified for priority implementation, including the need to:

- undertake adequate Environmental Impact Assessments for development proposals that may have an impact on important wetland habitats;
- enhance monitoring and reporting so as better to understand the distribution and status of populations and thus improve their management;
- implement fully-funded Action Plans for most threatened species;
- develop greater human capacity and training within developing countries (and especially in Africa) so as to improve the development and implementation of effective national conservation policies and programmes; and
- enhance international co-operation concerning the conservation of shared migratory species.

Key wetlands continue to be threatened or even lost to development, and in recent years many sites of major importance for waterbirds have been lost or damaged. A proposal that would have severely damaged Lake Natron in Tanzania – home to 75% of the world’s lesser flamingos *Phoenicopterus minor* – was a topical example. The Parties agreed a new process which will allow the AEWA Secretariat to work with a country in the event of future threats to important sites or species. Whilst such things can appear to be creating further international bureaucracy, this was actually an enormously important step in defining the ways that the AEWA Secretariat, on behalf of the Contracting Parties, can enter a dialogue with a country concerning reported threats. A similar process established under Ramsar some decades ago has, on many occasions, used international expertise and experience to help find positive solutions to difficult national conservation problems.

The scientific assessment under-pinning most of the AEWA Resolutions was – in major part – a substantive review published by Wetlands International (AEWA/MOP 4.8: [Report on the conservation status of migratory waterbirds in the Agreement area](#)). This status review includes substantial UK data submitted by Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) to the International Waterbird Census.

Other major reviews informing MoP 4 conclusions are listed below including several which were prepared for AEWA by WWT and BTO:

- seven new species action plans, included those for Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* and Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*; and a progress report on the implementation of previously adopted action plans;
- progress report on phasing out lead shot for hunting in wetlands;
- review of the hunting and trade legislation;
- review of waterbird re-establishment projects in the AEWA area and best practice recommendations;
- review of the status of introduced non-native waterbird species;
- report on effects of climate change on migratory bird within the African-Eurasian flyways, together with AEWA Conservation Guidelines on measures needed to help waterbirds to adapt to climate change; and
- AEWA Conservation Guidelines on how to avoid, minimize or mitigate impact of infrastructural developments and related disturbance affecting waterbirds.