



*AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF  
AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS*

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**AEWA COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

*(as approved by MOP6)*

# AEWA COMMUNICATION STRATEGY



Communication Strategy for  
the African-Eurasian Migratory  
Waterbird Agreement (AEWA)



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The following Communication Strategy outlines AEWA's future approach to strategic communication based on key messages for portraying its work and niche and how these fit into the bigger picture of global biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. It also establishes objectives, approaches and principles which are aligned to those of its parent convention, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

The Communication Strategy is intended as a guiding document for all of AEWA's main communication actors or 'stakeholders', which include the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat and the CMS Family, member countries or Parties, their national representatives, as well as partners including observers or representatives of various sectors with an interest in waterbird conservation and management.

The overall aim of the strategy is to guide the communication work of all the relevant players with the goal of supporting the implementation of the Agreement as well as further improving the recognition of AEWA as the international authority on migratory waterbird conservation across the African-Eurasian Flyway.

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## **Foreword**

The annual migration of waterbirds, such as cranes, storks and geese, is a source of inspiration for people all around the world. The sight and sound of the birds suddenly appearing evokes emotions, their trans-boundary, often inter-continental journeys fascinate and amaze us.

Migratory waterbirds – in their innumerable forms – are an important part of global biodiversity. They have tremendous environmental and ecological value and they provide economic, social, cultural and recreational benefits to millions of people living along their migration routes, known as ‘Flyways’.

Migratory waterbirds are considered a valuable resource for many people, providing us with various cultural (birdwatching, hunting, etc.) and provisioning (meat, feathers, eggs, etc.) services. As an important part of biodiversity, migratory waterbirds play essential roles in the wetlands and aquatic ecosystems through which they pass - as predators, pest control, seed dispersers, fertilizers, and nutrient recyclers. They provide supporting, habitat and regulating services, and act as biological indicators of the health of the environments upon which we depend.

It is precisely the recognition of this ever-growing, universal value of migratory waterbirds and the desire of countries to work together to conserve them, - collectively and for the future generations of humankind - , that has led to the creation of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA).

## **1. What is AEWA?**

### ***Conserving migratory waterbirds and their habitats across the African-Eurasian Flyway.***

The Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) was created in 1995 to protect hundreds of different species of migratory waterbirds, by finding ways to address the threats they face. Migration exposes waterbirds to a number of threats across their migratory range, or ‘Flyway’, making them particularly vulnerable to endangerment or extinction. They are also heavily dependent on an intact network of critical sites, consisting of a wide range of different habitats they need to survive.

As a specialized inter-governmental treaty, AEWA is an instrument that countries have put in place to try to effectively conserve and manage migratory waterbirds as well as their habitats across the African-Eurasian Flyway - the geographic area of the African-Eurasian waterbird migration system.

In twenty years since its creation, AEWA has grown to become the leading international authority on migratory waterbird conservation across the African-Eurasian Flyway and is considered one of the most effective flyway-scale conservation tools in the world. The agreement area spans over three-fifths of the world’s countries, (known as ‘Range States’), the countries which share the range of the migratory waterbirds protected under AEWA, a large majority of which have become ‘Parties’ to the Agreement.<sup>1</sup> It is also the largest regional Agreement concluded under the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and is one of the Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

## 2. Communications Supporting AEWA's Objectives

Communication efforts support a number of AEWA objectives - such as to support implementation of the treaty, to increase public awareness of migratory waterbird conservation issues, and to reinforce AEWA's reputation amongst decision-makers as the leading, neutral and credible UN authority for migratory waterbird conservation in the African-Eurasian region. AEWA's strategic communication efforts will thus focus on working closely with key players on priority topics in order to:

- **Highlight the Achievements and Effectiveness of AEWA** - as the leading international authority on migratory waterbird conservation across the African-Eurasian Flyway - by consistently communicating AEWA's vision, mission and niche and by showcasing successful conservation efforts underway to implement the Agreement;
- **Convey Reasons Why Waterbirds Matter** - including the different values attached to migratory waterbirds, their significance for biological diversity, role in ecosystem services, and relevance for sustainable development - to generate interest in and attention to migratory waterbird conservation, and to increase the level of priority given to waterbird conservation on the political agenda (both nationally and internationally);
- **Demonstrate 'How Flyway Conservation Works' and the Effectiveness of AEWA, as an Instrument for Conserving Migratory Waterbirds along the African-Eurasian Flyway** - by raising awareness on the successful examples of international, flyway-scale cooperation and conservation actions which are taking place in the framework of AEWA. From the collective decisions made by countries and their actions to implement them, to the adoption of international guidelines, the capacity building underway in the framework of the AEWA African Initiative, to the creation and successful implementation of action and management plans for a number of AEWA species;
- **Draw Attention to Threats to Waterbirds** - such as illegal killing, unsustainable harvest or hunting, poisoning, habitat loss due to pollution or barriers, and climate change - by outlining steps that can be taken to address the threats and ensure that any use is sustainable, thus helping to reverse behaviours and trends leading to migratory waterbirds becoming endangered.

It is expected that with time, strategic communication efforts - emphasizing achievements made, the importance of conserving migratory waterbirds and their habitats, and ways to address threats faced - will also help AEWA to achieve its overarching objectives to:

- **Win new Parties and reinforce the commitments made by existing Parties and donors;**
- **Engage partners and mobilize resources for migratory waterbird conservation;**
- **Avoid the extinction and further decline of migratory waterbird species and their habitats in the African-Eurasian Flyway.**

### 3. **AEWA's Vision and Mission - Relevance to Sustainable Development and Biodiversity**

The flyway-scale conservation of migratory waterbirds and their habitats has an impact on a number of international policy areas, especially those relevant to sustainable development and biodiversity. For development to be sustainable, it must consider the needs of people, as well as the environments in which they live - of which wild animals, including migratory waterbirds, are an integral part. Together with the CMS Family and the other biodiversity-related MEAs, AEWA contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by helping to balance the conservation and sustainable use of migratory waterbirds - as well as the protection of their flyway habitats, by recognizing the different values attached to waterbirds and the livelihoods they support.

AEWA helps to curb the loss of biodiversity by encouraging waterbird conservation and wide recognition of the ecosystem services migratory waterbirds provide. In recognition of this, AEWA Parties have committed themselves to achieving a number of targets on biodiversity conservation - together with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and many other partners - as part of their Strategic Plans, an increasing number of which are based on the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.<sup>2</sup>

The communication work of AEWA and of the CMS Family is essential to achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Target on public awareness of the values of biodiversity (Target 1) - of which migratory, wild animals and especially migratory birds play a key communication role as they are one of the most generally recognizable forms of the Earth's biological diversity. To achieve this first biodiversity target and the primary goal of the Strategic Plans to raise public awareness, which also refers to positive support and engagement at political levels, AEWA's shared communication vision is:

***Living in harmony with nature – where migratory waterbirds and their habitats (along with all biodiversity) are valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, thereby contributing to global sustainability.***

AEWA and the CMS Family play a crucial role in preventing the extinction of known threatened migratory animals (in AEWA's case migratory waterbirds) and improving the conservation status of those most in decline (Aichi Biodiversity Target 12), as well as conserving the habitats through which wild animals migrate (Target 11). For communication purposes, AEWA's shared mission is to:

***Avoid the extinction and further endangerment of migratory waterbirds, and ensure the ecological integrity, connectivity and resilience of their migration systems along the African-Eurasian Flyway.***

### 4. **Defining AEWA's Niche**

By defining and emphasizing AEWA's niche and building its reputation - **as the leading international authority on waterbird conservation across the African-Eurasian Flyway** attention is drawn to AEWA's achievements and potential for protecting migratory waterbirds and their habitats.

**Legally Binding, Specialized Agreement under CMS:** Whereas CMS has a global reach covering avian, terrestrial and aquatic species of migratory animals - AEWA is more focused and specialized in conserving all species of migratory waterbirds, from the most endangered to the most common species which are harvested. Specifically, AEWA is dedicated to the conservation of all categories of waterbirds that migrate across the African-Eurasian Flyway. Like the Convention, AEWA is a MEA in accordance with intergovernmental treaty law, and is legally binding.

**UN Treaty for Migratory Waterbirds:** AEWA is the only inter-governmental treaty organization or MEA established under the United Nations (UN) system (as part of the UNEP and CMS Family), dedicated exclusively to the international, flyway-scale conservation of migratory waterbirds as well as their natural habitats. The Agreement helps to elevate the policy relevance of migratory waterbirds and habitat conservation both nationally and internationally within and even beyond the Agreement Area. It is an innovative and effective tool for protecting migratory waterbirds, and it complements other global agreements and conventions, especially those working on issues related to biodiversity and habitat conservation - including the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention.

**Connecting Continents and Countries – “Making Flyway Conservation Happen!”:** A clear niche of AEWA is its ability to get countries and the wider international conservation community to work together effectively to conserve migratory waterbirds across the African-Eurasian Flyway. The cooperation is based on the recognition by AEWA Parties that the investment in one particular country is often not sufficient to ensure the future survival of these travellers and that international cooperation is essential to address the numerous threats migratory waterbirds face along their migration routes, which often span multiple countries and continents. The threats they face during their recurrent migrations are often the same global threats and pressures affecting a wide range of species as well as people. Effective international protection entails conserving the wetland and other habitats and ecosystems waterbirds depend on along their regular Flyways.

**Balancing Waterbird Conservation and Consumption/Sustainable Use:** Parties to AEWA recognize that migratory waterbirds are valuable - to people and to the Earth - for different reasons. For example, waterbirds are a source of food and income and provide us with many services including cultural, recreational or scientific enrichment. They are also a shared resource and indicators of the biological and genetic diversity of our Earth, providing ecological services in the wetland habitats and coastal ecosystems along their Flyways. By respecting these various values, the Agreement helps to find mutually beneficial solutions for maintaining healthy populations of endangered migratory waterbirds, while ensuring that any use is sustainable and does not jeopardize their long-term survival.

### **5. Key Players (Community of Actors)**

As an inter-governmental treaty established to foster international cooperation amongst countries and other interest groups, AEWA brings together a community of actors that are all dedicated to the conservation and management of migratory waterbirds across the Agreement area. These actors include a number of key players – which are often involved as strategic partners in communication but can also be target audiences for communication activities.

#### **Key Players:**

The main communication actors are:

- **Countries** (Especially Parties)
- **The Secretariat**
- **AEWA's Bodies:** Technical Committee, Standing Committee and Meeting of the Parties
- **UNEP, CMS and other UN Agencies and related Conventions**
- **Non-Governmental Organizations** (NGOs) and other partners
- **Donors** (both government and private sector)

AEWA's Parties are represented by appointed National Focal Points (NFPs) in the related ministries in their countries, but important national communication actors are also the designated National CEPA Focal Points as well as other ministries and conservation organizations in the countries. The Secretariat, as a communication actor has a key facilitation role in bringing the different key players together and to provide the tools and international guidance which is needed to support the overall communication efforts. In addition, donors (government, private sector and others), UNEP and other UN Agencies, international and national NGOs and related Conventions play a key role.

It is important to note, that all of the above key actors might act as executors of communication activities and take the role of strategic partner, advocate, or even intermediary - while depending on the context, they can also be target groups for communication efforts.

### **Target Groups:**

AEWA's most common target audience groups include the governments and in particular the **decision-makers of both Parties and non-member Range States**. In addition, the press and media are an important tool for reaching a wider audience, and the 'general public' in fulfilments of AEWA's mandates.

However, the **target audiences must be narrowed down and specified depending on the topic, context and specific communication campaign being planned** - for example, to include children and youth, people living in or around wetlands, waterbird consumers such as the hunting community, the tourism or energy sector, or developers – always depending on the context and goals of the communication efforts.

## **6. Strategic Communication Approach**

AEWA will work closely with CMS and relevant key players to shift future communication work towards a more strategic approach to communication, through:

- **Branding as Part of the CMS Family (and UNEP), Guided by Mandate** - to improve their effectiveness, AEWA's communication efforts will be aligned with the overall branding for the Convention and CMS Family, as part of UNEP, to build and further strengthen a common identity around priority species, themes and topics. These priorities should be guided by the overall mandate established by the Convention and Agreement texts, and the decisions and resolutions adopted by Parties.
- **Developing a Culture of Communication** on various organizational levels - within AEWA and across the entire CMS Family - around shared objectives. This culture is supported by planning and coordination to improve communication processes, building momentum through



partnerships and advocacy, and evaluating the impact and effectiveness of communication efforts being conducted.

In accordance with the global CMS communication strategy, an emphasis is placed on:

- **Thematic Campaigning Approach** – to facilitate planning and communications campaigning according to the topics, issues and species prioritized together with the Convention Family and in line with the overall CMS Family branding efforts;
- **Strategic Partnerships** - by working in cooperation with key players to more strategically address shared objectives, while linking joint efforts to AEWA and the CMS Family. This might include identifying relevant influencers (advocates, ambassadors, spokespersons);
- **Timing and Special Events** - efforts timed to complement the AEWA and CMS Family processes at peak-times of global and media attention - especially around main conference (COPs), meetings (MOPs) and other events, taking into consideration the events of other key organizations to take advantage of heightened media attention and to facilitate partnership building.

### 7. Communication Principles

AEWA's communication work is guided by the same communication principles described in detail in the global CMS Communication Strategy, these include:<sup>3</sup>

- **Neutrality** (as an international treaty)
- **Scientific Base** - Status Reports
- **Migratory Animals / Flagship Species Focus**
- **Content is Key** (story-telling, targeted messages and information, imagery and visuals)
- **Packaging for Audiences** (cultural, geographic, social-economic, generational differences, etc.)
- **Languages** (English and French as much as possible, others where appropriate)
- **Evaluation and Monitoring**

### 8. Tools and Channels

AEWA's primary communication tools and channels are similar to those used by CMS and are described in detail in the global CMS Communication Strategy, they include:

- **Website as Centre**
- **Key Outputs** (Conservation Status Reports, Resolutions, and Guidance)
- **Press and Media**
- **Audio-Visual and Digital**
- **Social Media**
- **Special Events and Campaigns** (World Migratory Bird Day and other UN Observances and related campaigns)
- **Communication, Education & Public Awareness** (CEPA)
- **Fundraising Strategy** (to support national and international communication efforts)

## **9. Communication Planning**

In accordance with the strategic communication approach, principles and tools outlined in this strategy and in the global CMS communication strategy, targeted communication plans, preferably around specific issues and topics, should be developed.

While AEWA's communication actors should be ready to communicate and react to emerging issues such as avian influenza, oil spills and other catastrophic events affecting migratory waterbirds in a quick and effective way (crisis communication), general emphasis should be placed on advanced planning and better targeting of communication efforts. This includes the involvement of key players and communication partners in both the development and execution of future communication plans.

Targeted communication plans should be prepared by all key communication actors and should be regularly updated and shared with the Secretariat. The Secretariat will, as capacity allows, also play an active role in facilitating and supporting the process of developing such plans for thematic, issue-based campaigns in future.

In principle, all future AEWA communication plans should:

- Be guided by this Communication Strategy;
- Cover a one to three-year period to complement the Agreement process;
- Narrow down a small number of priority issues or topics (especially that effect various species or are cross-cutting);
- Specify the expected outcomes and results as well as the required outputs, tools and actions;
- Specify estimated costs over the full life-cycle of the plan (including planning, evaluation and follow-up of communication efforts);
- Outline available resources, and resource requirements supplemented by a targeted fundraising strategy, where necessary;
- Be developed in partnership, specifying main partners, roles and responsibilities.

### **List of Acronyms**

<b>AEWA</b>	African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement
<b>CP</b>	Contracting Party
<b>CBD</b>	Convention on Biological Diversity
<b>CMS</b>	Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Migratory Animals
<b>COP</b>	Conference of the Parties
<b>MEA</b>	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
<b>MOP</b>	Meeting of the Parties
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NFP</b>	National Focal Point
<b>Parties</b>	Member Countries of the Convention and Family
<b>Ramsar</b>	Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SMPS</b>	Strategic Plan for Migratory Species
<b>STC</b>	Standing Committee
<b>TC</b>	Technical Committee
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme

## **Annex**

Extended version of the **Communication Principles** and **Tools and Channels** section from the Global CMS Communication Strategy. (To be added once available)

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<sup>1</sup> As of August 2015, AEWA covers 119 Range States (out of 193 countries, or 62% of the world's countries), of which 75 have become member or contracting Parties (63%).

<sup>2</sup> Compare to the 'Strategic Plan for Migratory Species 2015-2023' (SPMS) of the Convention on Migratory Species (UNEP/CMS), and the AEWA Strategic Plan 2009 - 2017. CBD members have recognized CMS as the lead partner in the conservation and sustainable use of species of wild animals, over their entire migratory range (CBD COP Decision X/20).

<sup>3</sup> The full description of both the "Communication Principles" and "Tools and Channels" from the Global CMS Communication Strategy will be added as an annex to this document as soon as they have been finalized by the UNEP/CMS Secretariat.