

**Speech held by Dr. Gerard C. Boere on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of
AEWA
Monday 4 July 2005, Museum Koenig, Bonn, Germany**

Minister, guests, colleagues and friends,

First of all let me join the Minister and other speakers in congratulating AEWA with its 10th Anniversary and with its spectacular growth in Parties since November 1999 when it came into force.

You may all know that feeling that sometimes similar ideas come to the surface at the same time at different places independently, that time and people are ready to undertake something and are motivated to get it done.

From the very beginning of the development of the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement that feeling was very strong with me given the support the Netherlands Government and I personally have received when work on the development of AEWA started by the end of 1987 after the initial work by Dr. Nowak.

That support does not mean that the development of AEWA was an easy piece of cake, not at all. Within EU countries particularly groups were at the beginning not amused and slowed down the process considerably.

Credit should be given to the AEWA and CMS Secretariats, but also to an organization like Wetlands International, that since AEWA is functioning this opposition has turned into support as for instance shown by the recent financial contribution from OMPO (Migratory Bird of the Western Palearctic; French hunters) for waterbird monitoring activities and related publications like the Waterbird Conservation Status Review for AEWA; from opponent to supporter: well done and what a great positive development.

Has AEWA brought on international bird conservation level what those who have been closely involved in its development expected it should have brought? What I said before is already a good positive example.

In general it may be too early to judge that in a balanced way as we all know that the implementation of international treaties for many good but also many bad reasons works slowly.

Not surprisingly my answer is anyway yes; however there are also more independent sources.

Let us for a while go back to early April last year: the Conference "Waterbirds Around the World". Close to 500 enthusiastic participants from 90 countries for a week together in Edinburgh and a closing session with a strong speech by HRH Prince Charles, ministers present and over 600 people in the room.

There has almost been no speech, no presentation, no session where AEWA has not been mentioned as THE example of what a flyway approach should be and how well it functions.

That in itself is a success for AEWA. It did what it should do: providing an instrument that brings coordination and provides clear targets for all involved in waterbird conservation. It has greatly stimulated many discussions and initiatives co-operation among the hundreds of participants all aiming for the same goal: actions for the conservation and sustainable management of migratory waterbirds worldwide. The Edinburgh Declaration has perfectly captured that enthusiasm and the wealth of ideas floating around.

At AEWA MOP 3 next October in Senegal the Summary Booklet with the main results of the conference will be launched and distributed.

In the future 4-5 flyway agreements of a similar status like AEWA could provide a world wide legal protection of migratory waterbirds.

Other migratory bird species is a more complex story and many groups are worth their own instruments under CMS as could be achieved with e.g. the Albatross- and Petrel Agreement. However, the political and financial realities and priorities of this world are not particular helpful to achieve this.

Most promising are the developments in the Central Asian Flyway with its geographical overlap with AEWA; half of the countries involved are within the AEWA region. A pragmatic approach would be to legally include the region into AEWA, but on substance it should in fact be treated differently; for instance its own Action Plan, otherwise the concept of a flyway approach becomes meaningless.

The Declaration of Intent for the Conservation of North American Birds and their Habitats signed on 17 May 2005 by Gale Norton, Secretary of the Interior, USA, together with representatives of Canada and Mexico is another interesting development.

It has so much striking similarity with the aims and goals of AEWA but differs considerably in other aspects. In no way it is a binding instrument neither it provides for a co-ordination structure nor for a structural budget.

Together with the North American Migratory Birds Conservation Act as the financial instrument now potentially American flyways have instruments for their entire range and do not artificially stop at the south Mexican border. The declaration also provides for a simple procedure to be joined by other countries on a flyway level.

However, it is unfortunate that an integrated flyway instrument for that region or part of it under CMS is probably further away than ever.

There are big challenges ahead for AEWA, for instance the implementation of the major GEF project, which is also substantially supported by the German Government and others.

The success so far of AEWA is a good basis to be optimistic that these challenges will be met: provided it becomes not too bureaucratic.

AEWA is a species oriented Agreement and that is where its great conservation potential is: species are close to the people, at large to those working on the ground

in the whole region; to the thousands of volunteers managing reserves, undertaking the bird surveys and keeping an eye on endangered species and so adding tenths of millions of Euros worth of their time, free labor and data for which countries could never pay.

In spite of all the emphasis on sustainable development, climate change, poverty treatment etc. in the global policy, these more simple approaches can be very effective to also achieve some of the greater challenges for conservation. I know that the large amount of people attending the Edinburgh Conference has been an eye-opener in this respect for a number of high level officials from several countries including at least one minister.

Therefore AEWA is all people involved in its functioning and implementation. Continue to stay close to the original aims and goals: conservation of migratory waterbird species throughout their annual cycle and along the whole flyway for the benefit of the species themselves and for the people on the ground.