



FORMAT FOR REPORTS

OF THE PARTIES

**AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY
WATERBIRDS (The Hague, 1995)**

Implementation during the period 2005 – 2008

Contracting Party: BELGIUM

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1. Overview of Action Plan implementation

Summary of progress to date

Belgium is a federal country. Nature conservation in a broad sense has been under the jurisdiction of the regions since 1980 except at sea which is a federal territory. The development of national policies/strategies or legislation is thus also the responsibility of the three Belgian administrative regions: Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region (BCR).

The AEWA-agreement was approved for Belgium through the Law of February 13, 2006.

- Flemish Region

The Flemish Region is obviously the most important of the three Belgian administrative regions when it comes to the numbers and distribution of the waterbird species covered by AEWA.

The general low lying character of Flanders, at the western end of the North-West European Plain, and the presence of slow moving rivers and broad floodplains are an indication for its wetland potential. The combination of these landscape features with the relatively mild winters make it an area of high importance for wetland birds.

For the Flemish Region, the AEWA-agreement was approved by the Flemish Parliament through the Decree of May 14, 2003. Ratification by the Flemish Government followed on May 23, 2003.

- Walloon Region

There is a new Walloon Government arrest on the use of firearms and shots (October 1, 2005). Article 3 of this arrest forbids the use of lead shots to shoot waterbird game species at less than 50 meters from a marsh, a lake, a pond, a water reservoir, a river or a canal. New sites are protected via legal statuses.

- Brussels Capital Region

Due to its limited area ($\pm 160 \text{ km}^2$) and high urbanization level no locations of international importance for waterbirds do occur. Nevertheless the development of the Blue network continues with different restoration and conservation projects.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

Nature conservation on land is a competence of the three administrative regions of Belgium: the Flemish Region (Flanders), the Walloon Region (Wallonia) and the Brussels Capital Region (BCR), (see below). As far as the Belgian part of the North Sea (BPNS) is concerned, the Federal Government is competent.

The Belgian part of the North Sea (BPNS) is despite its relatively small area, of international importance for migrating seabirds. The BPNS is a "bottle neck" for sea birds that migrate between their northern breeding areas and southern wintering areas. More than 5% of the biogeographical population of the 12 species migrates through this area (Courtenis and Stienen, 2006). Marine biological valuation of seabirds in the Belgian Part of the North Sea;

INBO report 25p).

1.2 Outline of planned actions for national implementation over the next three years

- Flemish Region

The Flemish Government designated 24 Special Protection Areas, several of those for migratory bird species. The planning is to develop conservation objectives for the relevant bird species and for the habitats they use by end of 2010. On the basis of these conservation objectives measures for restoration and nature development will be outlined and prioritised for implementation over the next years. For some of those areas management plans already exist and restoration measures are being implemented such as under LIFE-Nature projects, INTERREG-projects or local nature development projects. Monitoring programmes are being harmonised with the aim to develop an integrated monitoring scheme.

- Brussels Capital Region

A strong focus will go to actions on non-native (water)bird species.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

In its policy declaration, the Minister in charge of the marine environment (Prime Minister Leterme) proposes the following steps, with relevance for AEWA: the development of policy plans for the marine protected areas in the Belgian part of the North Sea (BPNS), the selection of marine protected areas in the Exclusive Economic Zone of the BPNS, a close collaboration between the Federal authorities and the Regional Fishery authority to address the biodiversity issues in view of the EU and international biodiversity policy context.

The Policy Plans for the 5 MPAs (of which three are EU-Special Protection Areas for the conservation of sea birds) have been proposed in May 2008 by the competent administration. After public consultation and political decision (later in 2008), these plans will be instrumental for the necessary protection and conservation measures that will have to be taken over the next three years.

1.3 Outline of priorities for international co-operation over the next three years

- Flemish Region

The Flemish Region has given technical and financial support to Wetlands International for the publication of a wader atlas, similar to the publication that has been made about the swans, geese and ducks of the Agreement area (Scott D. & Rose P.M., 1996, 'Atlas of Anatidae Populations in Africa and Western Eurasia'). This wader atlas will be about the development of wader populations in the African-Eurasian region. The preparation of this publication is currently in a final stage.

This publication will be of immediate relevance to AEWA. It builds on, and will give added value to, data from many African and European wader sites. It will provide important information about the distribution and the flyways of waders, pointing at important ecological concerns along the flyways and make proposals for solving these problems.

The Research Institute for Nature and Forest, a scientific institute of the Flemish Government, is a partner in the FRAGILE project (FRagility of Arctic Goose habitat: Impacts of Land use, conservation, and Elevated temperature). This is a research project funded under the European Commission's Framework 5 Programme (RTD priority 2.2.1: Ecosystem Vulnerability), with a collaboration between 13 research groups from six European countries. A three-year programme of research started in January 2003. The purpose of this study is to provide stakeholders with a predictive framework of outcomes for fragile tundra ecosystems in relation to European land-use policy, goose conservation and management, and the effect of climate change acting in tandem with these factors.

The extension and further implementation of cross-boundary projects for nature rehabilitation and management in the coastal zone, the IJzer river and Schelde river estuaries and the Grensmaas river. These are all sites of high importance for migratory waterbird species.

The development of the conservation objectives for the Birds Directive Special Protection Areas (SPA's) and Ramsar sites, as well as for other wetlands of international importance.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The Federal administration collaborates with French, Dutch and UK experts to strengthen the network of MPAs in the North Sea. This collaboration functions by means of bilateral contacts or as within the framework of the OSPAR Biodiversity Committee (OSPAR BDC).

The development of the conservation objectives at sea for the Birds Directive Special Protection Areas (SPA's) and Ramsar sites, as well as for other wetlands of international importance.

2. Species conservation

Legal measures

2.1 Has a national policy/strategy or legislation to protect and conserve species covered by the Agreement (Table 1: column A; column B) and their supporting important areas been developed?

- Flemish Region

There is no specific policy/strategy or legislation for the species covered by the Agreement.

Notwithstanding, *legislation* for the direct protection of some of the species covered by the Agreement has been developed, in the form of the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981 (a). This decision is not specifically for water bird species covered by the Agreement. It covers all bird species occurring in the Flemish region and the European Union as a whole. A revision of the Flemish species protection legislation, including the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981, is foreseen to take place in the immediate future, aiming at a better protection of species, including (water) birds.

There is also legislation for the protection of important areas for birds, including water bird species covered by the Agreement (b). Specifically aimed at waterbirds, there is the Royal Executive Decision of September 27, 1984, for the designation of wetlands of international importance. This is the implementation of the Ramsar Convention on wetlands.

Moreover, the Flemish Government Decision of October 17, 1988 has designated a number of Special Protection Areas (SPA's) for birds in Flanders, based on the provisions of the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC; quite a few of these areas are mainly designated for their strong importance for waterbirds. In total, 24 of such SPA's have been designated. By the Flemish Government Decision of July 22, 2005, a new 24th SPA was designated. This latter SPA was specifically set up for the protection of the large tern colony (*Sterna hirundo*, *Sterna sandvicensis* and *Sterna albifrons*) in the harbour of Zeebrugge.

Finally, there is the Decree of October 21, 1997 on nature conservation and the natural environment (in short: the Nature Conservation Decree), as revised on July 19, 2002, which is a considerable progress for a better and more efficient nature conservation policy in Flanders, including the conservation of species of international importance, Birds Directive Special Protection Areas (SPA's) and wetland areas (c).

A plan has also been developed to undertake swift and efficient action when future incidents should occur at the coast in which large numbers of birds are the victim of oiling (d).

For the 24 SPA the conservation objectives for the relevant bird species and their habitats will be developed by end 2010. On the basis of the objectives measures for restoration and nature development measures will be prioritized for implementation over the next years.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The legislation to ensure environmental protection of the Belgian part of the North Sea is found in the federal Law of January 20, 1999 on the protection of the marine environment in sea areas under Belgian jurisdiction. This is a framework law, dealing with both pollution and nature conservation at sea.

A section of this law is dedicated to species protection. The Belgian part of the North Sea is an important area for breeding, migrating and wintering species covered by the Agreement. This species protection provisions are further developed in the Royal Executive Decision of December 21, 2001.

If so:

a. *What are the main features of the policy/legislation?*

- Flemish Region
- a) Concerning the direct protection of specimens of species covered by the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981.
- Waterbird species covered by the Agreement have full protection except for two species of gulls that have partial protection, as these species can be controlled under certain circumstances and except for those species that are included in the Hunting Decree of July 24, 1991:
- the two gull species are Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* and Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*. These species can be controlled year round for reasons of air traffic safety and public health on civil and military airports and on one specified open garbage dump, if there is no other satisfying solution (article 4 of the Royal Executive Decision mentioned above);
 - the Agreement species covered by the Hunting Decree and thus not protected by the Royal Executive Decision are: Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*, White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*, Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*, Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, Pintail *Anas acuta*, Garganey *Anas querquedula*, Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*, Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Eurasian Golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*.

All other waterbird species covered by the Agreement are protected as followed.

- Article 3 of the Royal Executive Decision: it is always and everywhere prohibited to kill and transport specimens of these species, recognizable parts of specimens or products obtained from these species. It is prohibited to disturb or destroy occupied nests or nests in the building phase of these species. Even so, it is prohibited to photograph these species at or near their nests.
- Article 5 of the Royal Executive Decision: it is always and everywhere prohibited to possess, to sell, to buy, to have in store for sale, to offer for sale or to request for sale any specimen of these species, recognizable parts of specimens or products obtained from these species.
- Exceptions to these protection principles are possible. Derogations from the initial protection can be given by the competent authority (the Agency for Nature and Forests) for the following reasons, under certain conditions and if there is no other satisfying solution:
 - for the sake of public health and public safety
 - for the sake of air traffic safety
 - to prevent important damage to crops, cattle, forests, fisheries and surface waters
 - for the protection of fauna and flora.
 The granting of such derogations is kept to a minimum, and only a limited number are given each year.

It is also possible to keep captive bred specimens of these species under certain conditions. As the issue of captive bred specimens is beyond the scope of the Agreement, this possibility is not mentioned in further detail.

b) Concerning the protection of supporting important areas of species covered by the Agreement.

1) The Royal Executive Decision of September 27, 1984, for the designation of wetlands of international importance designates four areas in Flanders considered to be wetlands of international importance. These four areas cover a total of 5.571 hectares. This decision is the implementation of the Ramsar Convention on wetlands.

2) The Flemish Government Decision of October 17, 1988 for the designation of Special Protection Areas in the sense of article 4 of the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC, has designated 23 such Special Protection Areas (SPA's) in total in Flanders. In 1998 an extensive area along the Schelde river was added as SPA for the compensation of an area in the port area of Antwerp and by the Government Decision of July 22, 2005, a new 24th SPA was designated at the coast. The total area covered by these SPA's is now 98.243 hectares.

c) The actual protection of the areas designated by the above mentioned decisions is included in the Nature Conservation Decree of October 21, 1997, as changed on July 19, 2002. The purpose of this decree is the development of a Flemish Ecological Network. Relevant in the sense of important areas for Agreement species are the following provisions of this decree.

- Article 2, 20° specifies the definition of wetlands: areas with marsh, fens, bogs and other water areas, of natural or artificial origin, with a temporary or lasting character, with stagnant or running water, fresh, brackish or

salt, including sea water, of which the depth is less than 6 meter at low tide.

- Article 2, 21° specifies the definition of wetlands of international importance: wetlands that have been designated in accordance with Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, signed in Ramsar on February 2, 1971.
- Article 13 § 1, 1° stresses that the Flemish Government can take all necessary nature conservation measures in a number of designated areas for the protection, the conservation, the development and the restoration of natural and semi-natural habitats and ecosystems, including wetlands.
- Article 13 § 1, 3° stresses that the Flemish Government can take all necessary nature conservation measures for the protection, the conservation and the development of the native wild fauna and flora and for migrating wild animals and their habitats.
- Article 18: hydrological management measures to be taken in the Flemish Ecological Network includes the reduction of drying out threats for these areas, the restoration of natural areas that have dried out, and the management of watercourses for the conservation and rehabilitation of their natural values, in a way that areas outside the Network do not undergo disproportionate effects.
- Article 19: The Flemish Government decides about the projects, plans or activities with direct hydrological effect on areas of the Network, for which the initiator or the watercourse manager concerned is required to carry out hydrological studies, in collaboration with the Institute of Nature Conservation, including the ecological effect, with a view to take effective measures and to achieve a better balance of effects with the present and potential natural elements.
- The preservation, restoration and/or adjusting of natural elements of high natural quality of the hydrological regime, such as the water quality, the water quantity and the natural structure of watercourses and their peripheral areas in a way that the surrounding areas outside the Network do not undergo disproportionate effects.

- d) A huge incident in the winter of 2002/2003, during which thousands of waterbirds fell victim to an oil spill in the North Sea after several accidents with ships, provoked the drawing of an action plan to deal with similar incidents in the future. This action plan is a co-operation between the Belgian federal government and the Flemish regional government.

This plan should make sure that, when similar incidents would happen in the future, swift and efficient action can be taken by all relevant authorities and parties. This includes efficiently dealing with the beached birds, taking care of the birds, rehabilitating the birds, releasing the birds, monitoring the incident and it's impact, co-operation between the relevant parties (both government and non-governmental),...

The North Sea, including the parts of it within Belgian territorial waters, is of high importance to many species of waterbirds, including many that are covered by the Agreement.

- Walloon Region

All wild birds of the European continent, normal or mutant, alive, dead or stuffed are strictly protected (art. 2. of the Natura 2000 Decree).

The following actions are prohibited for these species:

- all forms of deliberate capture and deliberate killing;
- the deliberate disturbance of wild birds, particularly during the period of breeding, rearing and hibernation;
- the deliberate destruction or taking of eggs and nests from the wild or keeping these eggs and nests ;
- to possess, to trade, to sell, to give, to buy, to transport, even for transit, birds, eggs, clutch, feathers, part of the animal, or any product made of a bird easily identifiable or any product with a packing telling it contains protected species, except for importation, exportation and transit on non indigenous species

These prohibitions are not valid for poultry, for domestic pigeons, for hunted species and for mutants and hybrids of *Serinus canarius* with a non-protected species.

A Government bill regulates the breeding of birds in order to guarantee the bird's protection.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The Law of January 20, 1999 deals both with marine pollution and with nature conservation at sea. It covers both direct species protection and indirect habitat protection. The Royal Executive Decision of December 21, 2001 specifically offers protection to a set of species, further developing the Law. It covers a considerable number of waterbird species that use the North Sea area: divers *Gaviidae*, grebes *Podicipedidae*, scoters *Melanitta species*, Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*, terns *Sterna species* and plovers *Charadriidae*. The Belgian part of the North Sea is an important area for breeding, migrating and wintering species covered by the Agreement.

This legislation also regulates the aspect of introduction of non-native species into the sea.

b. Which organisations are responsible for implementation?

- Flemish Region: Agency for Nature and Forests.
- Walloon Region: the Nature and Forest Department of the Walloon Region
- Brussels Capital Region: The Brussels Institute for Management of the Environment (BIME)
- Federal level: Belgian marine territory: the Federal Public Service for Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, Directorate General for Environment., Marine Unit.

c. How does it relate to other national initiatives (e.g. national Biodiversity Action Plans)?

- Flemish Region

Species protection and habitat rehabilitation and protection for Birds Directive SPA's and Ramsar sites are included as priority actions under the Theme 'Biodiversity' of the Environment and Nature Policy Plan, covering the period 2003-2007. The overall objectives of this Theme are given by the Countdown 2010 objective for biodiversity, and include the main strategy lines for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, agreed on the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit. The new Environment and Nature Policy Plan 2008-2010 foresees for the continuation of those policy lines and highlights the priority for the development of the conservation objectives for Natura 2000 sites. Meanwhile restoration and nature development projects for Natura 2000 sites are continued especially in the framework of LIFE-projects.

- Walloon Region

It is also responsible for the Biodiversity action plan, which is in preparation.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory and Federal competence in BPNS

Species protection and habitat rehabilitation and protection for Birds Directive Special Protection Sites (SPA's) and Ramsar sites are included as priority actions under the Theme 'Biodiversity' of the Environment and Nature Policy Plan, covering the period 2003-2007. The overall objectives of this Theme are given by the Countdown 2010 objective for biodiversity, and includes the main strategy lines for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, agreed on the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit.

2.2 What legal measures or practices has your country developed to prohibit or regulate for the following (refer also to section 4 on hunting):

a. Taking of, and trade in birds listed in Column A and B of Table 1 (where utilization or trade contravenes the provisions set out in paragraphs 2.1.1 (a) and 2.1.2 of the Action Plan)?

- Flemish Region

Column A: wild specimens of bird species listed in Column A all have full protection in Flanders. Taking of wild birds and their eggs and trade in these birds, their eggs and recognizable parts of these birds are not allowed.

Column B: One species of Column B can be hunted in the Flemish Region, under the Hunting Decree, namely the Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. The hunting status of this species is specific and very limited however. It is strictly confined to civil and military airports, in the interests of air traffic safety and where there is no other satisfactory solution.

Sport hunting of this species is not allowed. The Hunting Decree prohibits the taking, the deliberate destruction, the transportation and the trade in eggs and nests of this species.

The taking from the wild of specimens and the taking of their eggs of all other species in Column B is forbidden. Trade in and transport of these species is also forbidden.

Species of Column B which also occur in the Hunting Decree are: Pink-footed goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*, Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, Pintail *Anas acuta*, Garganey *Anas querquedula*, Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*. Hunting of these species is not allowed, and they have a de facto protection that is similar to birds covered and protected by the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981.

- Walloon Region

The following actions are prohibited for all wild birds of the European continent (art. 2. of the Natura 2000 Decree):

- all forms of deliberate capture and deliberate killing;
- to possess, to trade, to sell, to give, to buy, to transport, even for transit, birds, eggs, clutch, feathers, part of the animal, or any product made of a bird easily identifiable or any product with a packing telling it contains protected species, except for importation, exportation and transit on non indigenous species

These prohibitions are not valid for poultry, for domestic pigeons, for hunted species and for mutants and hybrids of *Serinus canarius* with a non-protected species.

The Law on Hunt identifies as waterfowl the following species which are in the annex 2 of the agreement: *Anser brachyrhynchus*, *Anser albifrons*, *Anser anser*, *Anas penelope*, *Anas strepera*, *Anas crecca*, *Anas platyrhynchos*, *Anas acuta*, *Anas querquedula*, *Anas clypeata*, *Aythya ferina*, *Aythya filigula*, *Aythya marila*, *Gallinula chloropus*, *Fulica atra*, *Pluvialis apricaria*, *Vanellus vanellus*, *Gallinago gallinago*, *Lymnocyptes minimus*.

Hunt is not open for the following species, but their destruction is authorized to insure air safety : *Anas penelope*, *Anas acuta*, *Anas querquedula*, *Anas strepera*, *Anser albifrons*, *Anser anser*, *Anser brachyrhynchus*, *Anser fabalis*, *Aythya ferina*, *Aythya fuligula*, *Aythya marila*, *Branta canadensis*, *Gallinago gallinago*, *Lymnocyptes minimus*, *Pluvialis apricaria*, *Vanellus vanellus*, *Gallinula chloropus* (arrêté du Gouvernement wallon du 18 octobre 2002).

Shooting season for the following species: *Anas crecca*, *Anas platyrhynchus*, *Fulica atra*. (from the 15/10 to the 31/01 for *Anas crecca*, *Anas penelope* et *Fulica atra*, from the 15/08 to the 31/01 for *Anas platyrhynchus*).

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The Law of January 20, 1999 prohibits the hunting of any bird species at sea. More specifically, the Law of January 20, 1999 and the Royal Executive Decision of December 21, 2001 fully prohibit any taking or trading of the birds that have been listed in the Royal Executive Decision: divers *Gaviidae*, grebes *Podicipedidae*, scoters *Melanitta species*, Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*, terns *Sterna species* and plovers *Charadriidae*.

b. Methods of taking?

- Flemish Region

a) According to the Flemish Government Decision on hunting in the Flemish Region for the period from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2008, the following methods of taking waterbirds are allowed:

- hunting with guns
- hunting with birds of prey kept for falconry.

Besides these, the following other methods are explicitly prohibited by the Hunting Decree of July 24, 1991: nets, snares, bait, poison or any other device useful to catch or kill huntable species or to make the catching and killing of these species easier.

The use of living decoy birds is also explicitly prohibited by the Flemish Government Decision on hunting in the Flemish Region for the period from July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2008.

b) For the two other species for which the taking is legally allowed, under the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981, namely the Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* and the Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* (see answer a) to question 2.1.a)), the following methods of taking can be exercised according to the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981:

- hunting with guns
- hunting with birds of prey kept for falconry.

Besides these, the following methods are explicitly prohibited by the Royal Executive Decision:

- snares, lime, hooks, blinded or mutilated living birds used as decoys, taping and electrocution devices
- artificial light sources, mirrors and other light related devices
- explosives
- nets, traps, poisoned or anaesthetic bait
- automatic or semi-automatic guns of which the magazine can hold more than two cartridges.

- Walloon Region

For *Anas crecca*, *Anas platyrhynchos* and *Fulica atra* shooting is authorized.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

Since no taking of birds is allowed in the marine areas under federal jurisdiction, no provision are made about the methods of taking.

c. Setting of taking limits and monitoring these limits?

- Flemish Region

For the huntable species, covered by the Hunting Decree, the Flemish Government settles at least every five years, in a Flemish Government Decision, the limits of taking. This includes which species can be taken under which conditions, during what time of the year,

and which methods can be used. The current decision covers the period from July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2008. A new Decision will be taken by the Flemish Government before June 30, 2008.

For the non-huntable species that can be taken, namely both gull species mentioned above, the limits are set in the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981. The relevant provision in this decision indicates under which conditions the birds can be taken, by who, during what time of the year, by who and which methods can be used.

- Walloon Region

There is no game harvest plan for waterfowl species.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

Since no taking of birds is allowed in the marine areas under federal jurisdiction, no provision are made about the methods of taking.

d. Sustainable hunting of species listed in Categories 2 and 3 (and marked by an asterisk) in Column A only?

- Flemish Region

No species in Column A is a huntable species in any of the Belgian regions.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

Since no taking of birds is allowed in the marine areas under federal jurisdiction, no provision are made about the methods of taking.

e. Exemptions to the provisions set out in paragraphs 2.1.1, 2.1.2 and 2.1.3?

- Flemish Region

Similar to the provisions set out in paragraph 2.1.3 of the Action Plan, the Royal Executive Decision of September 9, 1981 has a provision that allows the competent authority (the Agency for Nature and Forests) to grant derogations to differ temporarily from the initial protection of wild birds, if there is no other satisfactory solution. Such exceptions can be made for the following reasons:

- for the sake of public health and public safety
- for the sake of air traffic safety
- to prevent important damage to crops, cattle, forests, fisheries and surface waters
- for the protection of fauna and flora.
- for purposes related to science and education

- Walloon Region

The Government can give exemptions to bird species protection measures (art. 5. §1^{er}).

The exemption is only given if no other satisfactory measure exists and if the exemption will not be of any danger for the population of that specie. In that case, the exemption can be allowed for one of the following reason:

- in the interests of public health and safety,
 - in the interests air safety
 - to prevent serious damage to crops, livestock, forests, fisheries, water
 - for the protection of flora and fauna
 - for the purposes of research and education, of repopulating, of reintroduction and for the necessary breeding;
 - to permit, under strictly supervised conditions, on a selective basis and to a limited extent, the taking, keeping or other judicious exploitation of certain wild birds in small numbers.
-
- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

Similar to the provisions set out in paragraph 2.1.3 of the Action Plan, the Royal Executive Decision of December 21, 2001 has a provision that allows the minister competent for the marine environment to differ temporarily from the initial protection of birds in the marine areas, if there is no other satisfactory solution.

Such exceptions can be made for the following reasons:

- for the protection of the wild fauna and flora and the conservation of natural habitats and biodiversity
- for the sake of public health, air traffic safety, public safety and other reasons of great public importance
- to prevent damage to crops, fishing areas and other properties
- for reasons of research and education, as well as reintroduction.

Single Species Action Plans

2.3 Of the species covered by the Agreement (species listed in Table 1: column A), which spend part or all of their life history in your country, which have formal international (Category 1, species marked with an asterisk) or national (column A) Single Species Action Plans:

- a. Proposed?*
- b. In preparation?*
- c. Being implemented?*

Please append a list of species and their action plan status. (For international plans indicate which other countries are involved in plan development/implementation.)

- International SSAP's

On behalf of the European Commission, Birdlife International has set up a number of Species Action Plans for some of Europe's most threatened bird species. These plans are already in the *implementation phase*. Only a limited number of species for which such a plan has been developed spend (a part of) their life history in Belgium. Most of them are very rare. The other countries involved in the implementation of these plans are the Member States of the European Union.

The species of this group that occur in Belgium are listed below. Only two of these are regular (but still very) breeders, the others being very rare winter or passage visitors:

- **Great Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*: this is a very rare breeding bird (most recent population estimate: 12-20 pairs).
- **Lesser White-fronted Goose** *Anser erythropus*: this is a very rare but yearly visitor, mixed in with other goose species in traditional goose wintering areas. Measures for the conservation of more commonly occurring goose species in Belgium could benefit this species, but, given the rarity of Lesser-white Fronted Goose, species-specific actions are not relevant.
- **Red-breasted Goose** *Branta ruficollis*: this is a very rare but yearly visitor, mixed in with other goose species in traditional goose wintering areas. Measures for the conservation of more commonly occurring goose species in Belgium could benefit this species, but, given the rarity of Lesser-white Fronted Goose, species-specific actions are not relevant.
- **Corncrake** *Crex crex*: a very rare breeding bird (21-44 breeding pairs in Belgium in the period 1995-2002, the majority being found in the Walloon region).
- **Great Snipe** *Gallinago media*: a very rare passage migrant, not even recorded on a yearly basis. Given the rarity of Great Snipe, species-specific actions are not relevant.

Other Single Species Action Plans are initiated by AEWA, as a joint initiative with the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

Such a plan has recently been finished for the **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca*. In Belgium this is a rare species, occurring on migration and in winter, among flocks of other *Aythya* species. Measures for the conservation of more commonly occurring *Aythya* species could benefit this species. Given the rarity of Ferruginous Duck, species-specific actions are not relevant.

- National SSAP's

- Flemish Region

- A national Single Species Action Plan exists for the **White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia*. This is a joint initiative of Natuurpunt (NGO) and the Agency for Nature and Forests (government). This action plan is already being implemented since 1999. This plan is aimed at the monitoring of the Flemish breeding population of the White Stork and its migration strategy. It also includes taking measures to increase the population numbers and the raising of public awareness among the general public about the species and its (habitat) requirements. The latter happens through regular website and media information, school web follow up, brochures and leaflets.

- A protection scheme exists for so called '**meadow birds**'. This is not really a single species action plan as such, but it does cover a number of species covered by the AEWA Agreement, and thus merits to be mentioned in this respect. The plan includes birds that are dependent of open grassland areas for breeding. This plan is not solely aimed at waterbirds, but the majority of the species concerned do belong to the group of species covered by the Agreement (both ducks and waders). The plan is under the responsibility of the Flemish Land Agency (government). Important species covered by the plan are Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* and Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*. The plan involves the creation of suitable conditions for these meadow bird species through management agreements under the Rural Development Programme with land users, mainly farmers.

- o Walloon Region

“Les Marais d’Harchies”, “ Etang de Virelles”, and “Lac de Bambois” have nature conservation oriented management measures. These sites are of particular importance for the Walloon populations of Anatidae and Ardeidae.

Many River Contracts have habitats restauration measures that are beneficial for waterbirds http://environnement.wallonie.be/contrat_riviere/index.htm (the transboundary River Contract of the Haute Sûre benefits from a Interreg project <http://www.crhs.eu>).

The Life project on military camps, the life project on restoration peatlands in the plateau de Saint-Hubert and the LIFE project on the restaoration of peatland in the Haute-Fagnes area have habitats (including wetlands) restauration measures that are beneficial for waterbirds.

- o Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The proposed policy plan for the MPAs foresees also the development of Species Action Plans for threatened marine species (including marine migratory bird species occurring in the BPNS)

Emergency measures

2.4 Describe any bilateral or multilateral co-operative action that your country has undertaken to develop and implement emergency measures to conserve species in response to unfavourable or endangering conditions occurring in the Agreement area.

- Flemish Region

- **Financial support to the AEWA-project ‘the development of a Guideline on waterbirds and infrastructural development’**

The Agency for Nature and Forests has granted financial support of 30.000 euros to the

AEWA Secretariat after a request by the Secretariat to member states to the Agreement to pledge financial support to projects that were selected from the list of International Implementation Priorities AEWA 2006-2008, as adopted by the 3rd Meeting of the Parties, by resolution 3.11.

The sum was granted to the AEWA Secretariat in February 2008 and the carrying out of this project is expected to take place in the nearby future.

The reason why the Agency for Nature and Forests was eager to support this project lies in the situation that can be found in the Flemish Region. On one hand, the Flemish Region is a highly industrial region, densely populated and with several large seaports, including two of the largest in Europe, where enormous infrastructural development has taken place and will be taking place in the future. On the other hand, the Flemish Region is also situated in the lowlands of North-Western Europe, where the combination of wetlands and mild winter temperature provide excellent conditions for large numbers of migrant and wintering waterbirds, especially geese and ducks. The infrastructural developments that are inherent to a region with a dense human population and a strong industrial development often take place in low lying areas also important for waterbirds. As a member state of the European Union and as a party to international agreements like AEWA, Belgium in general and the Flemish Region in specific have great responsibilities to preserve areas for waterbirds. The Flemish Region has already taken considerable measures (see the Development Plan for the Schelde estuary OS 2010 described below) to combine economical and ecological needs, without one need excluding the other. Therefore, the Flemish Region wishes to support a project that aims at composing guidelines and tools that can combine both the need for infrastructural development and the ecological need to preserve areas where waterbirds can find safe havens.

The Flemish-Netherlands Development Plan for the Schelde estuary OS 2010 includes a joint long term vision for the Scheldt estuary and its functions of flood safety, ports accessibility and conservation of important natural ecosystems. The basic idea is "Developing a healthy and multifunctional water system, supporting human needs in a sustainable way". Besides measures against flooding by restoring the natural flooding zones along the river, the development of 600 ha of estuarine nature along the Western Scheldt in the Netherlands and 1,100 ha of estuarine nature and wetlands along the Sea Scheldt in Flanders are the main nature development projects. Both countries will also jointly monitor the evolution of the estuary and the effects of the implemented projects in order to extend the knowledge of the estuary and to facilitate possible corrections.

For the Grensmaas the Netherlands and Flanders are also carrying out several joint programmes for the restoration and management of flooding zones, wet meadows, natural sand banks, etc... all habitat types that are also important for wading birds.

For the Zwin area at the coast, an important salt marsh area for birds, a transboundary action plan is being developed with the Netherlands for the restoration of the coastal habitats and dunes.

Re-establishments

2.5 Has a policy on species re-establishments been developed in your country? If yes, please outline the main features of the policy and give details of any re-establishment programmes for species covered by the Agreement.

- Flemish Region

For the time being there is no specific policy on this topic. Currently, the re-establishment or re-introduction of native species is not regulated in the legislation.

However, a revision of the Flemish species protection legislation is foreseen to take place in the immediate future, and the new legislation would include aspects on re-establishment. The current proposal of revision starts from a principle that prohibits the introduction into the wild of any animal. However, exceptions can be granted, when certain conditions are met. These conditions would be inspired by the internationally accepted IUCN/SSC Guidelines For Re-Introductions, set up by the IUCN, the World Conservation Union. Thus the current situation of non-regulation would be changed into a situation where re-establishment is initially prohibited but with exceptions to this rule being possible. Of course, this passage is under the precondition that it is still only a proposal.

Introductions

2.6 Has your country developed and implemented legal measures to prohibit the introduction of nonnative species? Please provide details, particularly describing measures to control the release or introduction of non-native species (please indicate which species and their status).

Belgium participates in a working group focusing on a strategy on invasive alien species at the European union level.

Region specific information is mentioned below.

- Flemish Region

Legislative measures have been taken in this respect. The Flemish Governmental Decision of April 21, 1993, on the introduction into the wild of non-native animal species deals with this.

This decision contains two definitions, defining 'non-native animal species' and 'introduction into the wild':

- *non-native animal species*: animal species which do not occur in Belgium in the wild under natural circumstances and animal species that have started to occur in the wild in Belgium since less than 50 years from the entry into force of the Decision. An exception is made for animal species that have known a natural range expansion.

- *introduction into the wild*: the deliberate release animals in all sorts of places and all sorts of sites that have not been enclosed by a continuous construction from the adjoining lands, thus making the free access to these lands impossible, no matter what the condition and state of these places and sites are.

The Decision prohibits the introduction into the wild of non-native animal species, including waterbirds, unless a special permit has been granted.

Such a special permit will only be granted after it has been assessed what the influence of the requested introduction into the wild would be on the native fauna and ecosystems and after it has been investigated what the chances are of spread into adjoining lands from the introduction site. These introductions can not be allowed when there would any expected negative influence on the native fauna and flora.

In order to protect the native flora, the native vegetation and the native fauna, the Flemish minister responsible for nature conservation can take all necessary measures to control or remove non native animals species and their offspring who have been introduced into the wild non-deliberately or as a violation of the Decision of the Flemish Government of April 21, 1993.

However, no such executive measures have been taken yet.

Thus, every non-native animal species is covered by this regulation. Especially the past 10 years, a considerable number of non-native animal species have started to occur in Flanders, many of them now breeding in the wild and the majority of them being waterbirds. Well known examples are Canada Goose and Egyptian Goose.

- Walloon Region

In Wallonia, the introduction of non indigenous species or indigenous species of non indigenous origin in nature is forbidden except for species used for agriculture and forestry (Natura 2000 Decree).

A national contact group has been set up in order to ensure a scientific background to political decisions and to provide an adequate feedback from the international decision-making scene to the scientific community. The steering committees focus on administrative and political aspects in order to prepare Belgian positions for international meetings, to write thematic reports and elaborate programs related to Belgian international obligations.

The National Biodiversity Strategy (adopted in 2006) has 2 operational objectives directly related to IAS (n°3.7.: "Avoid the introduction and mitigate the impact of invasive alien species on biodiversity" and n°5.7.: "Consider the potential impact on biodiversity, and in particular the invasiveness of species, in making import and export decisions")

The Belgian Forum on Invasive Alien Species BFIS (<http://www.biodiversity.be/bbpf/>) aims to provide and gather scientific knowledge about invasive alien species in order to encourage interdisciplinary cooperation among scientists and favours information exchange and dissemination as a support to develop measures dedicated to the prevention and the mitigation of the impacts of invasive species.

The BFIS is responsible for preparing and updating the reference list and a database of alien species invading terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems in Belgium.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The Law of January 20, 1999 prohibits the introduction non-native species into Belgian marine areas. Measures can be taken to control or remove non-native species. No such executive measures have been taken yet, however.

3. Habitat conservation

Habitat inventories

3.1 Has your country developed and published inventories of important habitats for species covered by the Agreement? If yes, please provide details, including any provisions to maintain or update these inventories.

- Flemish Region

The Biological Valuation Map is a vegetation and land-use map covering the whole of the Flemish Region. This map gives a good indication of the different habitat types in Flanders and is updated by the Institute for Nature and Forest Research on a regular basis.

In 2007, an extensive book about nature in a European Union Natura 2000 context in Flanders and the Belgian North Sea has been published by the Institute for Nature and Forest Research. This book gives a description of all habitats and species in Flanders (including several migratory waterbird species) that are protected by the EU Habitats and Birds Directive (Decler (ed.), 2007, in Dutch). Currently, conservation objectives for all these species and habitats and for the Natura 2000 sites are being developed for final adoption by the end of 2010.

- Walloon Region

In 2008, we have 273 Nature reserves (government nature reserve and chartered nature reserve) covering approximately 8 979.4ha, 49 wetland's of biological interest covering ~ 1068.5 ha, 12 Forest reserves covering 547.9 ha.

Several initiatives have been carried out since the late 70's in order to have an inventory of the biological resources of the Walloon Region. These initiatives have lead to the creation of lists of sites of great biological value ("Sites de Grand Intérêt Biologique" or SGIB). These lists of major sites are of major importance to the elaboration of the ecological network and in order to have a basis for political negotiation. The high biological value of these sites is due to the presence of protected or threatened habitats or species or even sites or species considered as having a great interest by naturalists.

Naturalists associations (Ardenne et Gaume, Aves, Virelles Nature, Réserves Naturelles RNOB) also play a very important role in identifying and protecting important habitats.

- Brussels Capital Region

No specific inventories of important habitats for agreement species have been developed.

Inventories have been made for all Natura 2000 sites. Some priority habitats are also beneficial for the agreement species. The Biological Valuation Map made for the Flanders region also includes the Brussels Capital Region.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

Two inventories have been made:

- Derous S., Verfaillie E., Van Lancker V., Courtens W., Stienen E.W.M., Hostens K., Moulaert I., Hillewaert H., Mees J., Deneudt K., Deckers P., Cuvelier D., Vincx M., Degraer S., 2007, *A biological valuation map for the Belgian part of the North Sea: BWZee, Final report*, Research in the framework of the BELSPO programme “Global chance, ecosystems and biodiversity” – SPSD II, March 2007, pp. 99 (+ Annexes).
- Courtens, W. en E.W.M. Stienen. 2006. Marine biological valuation of seabirds in the Belgian Part of the North Sea. INBO rapport A.2005.122: 25p

3.2 Has your country undertaken a strategic review of sites to develop a national network of important sites or areas for species covered by the Agreement? Please append a list of identified sites of international importance.

- Flemish Region

At the Institute for Nature and Forest Research, a regular update is made of all wetland sites that hold internationally important numbers of waterbirds (exceeding 1 % criteria), based on the most recent available data. The actual list for Flanders contains 17 sites (species for which the 1 %-criterium has been reached at least once since 2003 are mentioned):

Vlaamse kust	<i>Arenaria interpres, Larus argentatus (argenteus)</i>
Blankaartgebied + IJzerbroeken	<i>Anser albifrons, Anas penelope, Anas clypeata, Larus canus (roost), Larus ridibundus (roost)</i>
Oostkustpolders	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus, Anser albifrons, Anser anser, Anas penelope, Cygnus columbianus</i>
Havengebied Zeebrugge	<i>Anser anser, Anas clypeata</i> <i>Breeding: Sterna hirundo, Sterna albifrons, Sterna sandvicensis, Larus fuscus</i>
Krekengebied + polders Noord-Oost-Vlaanderen	<i>Cygnus columbianus, Anser albifrons</i>
Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen Drongen	<i>Anser clypeata</i>
Gentse Kanaalzone	<i>Anas strepera, Anas clypeata, Larus ridibundus (roost)</i>
Zeeschelde Gent-Zandvliet	<i>Anser anser, Anas strepera, Anas crecca, Anas acuta, Aythya ferina, Avosetta recurvirostra</i>
Rivierengebied Mechelen-Willebroek	<i>Anas strepera, Anas acuta</i>
Netevallei Lier-Duffel	<i>Anas strepera, Aythya ferina</i>
Kanaalzone Wintam - Rupel	<i>Anas strepera, Anas acuta</i>
De Kuifeend Oorderen	<i>Anas strepera, Anas clypeata</i>
Blokkersdijk Antwerpen	<i>Anas strepera, Anas clypeata</i>
Havengebied Antwerpen LO + RO	<i>Anser anser, Anas strepera, Anas clypeata</i>
Schulensbroek	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Vijvergebied Midden-Limburg (inclusief Maten)	<i>Anas strepera, Anas clypeata</i>
Maasvallei (Vlaanderen)	<i>Anser albifrons, Anas strepera</i>

- Walloon Region

See above for ecological network at regional scale. Besides, the Natura 2000 network is also of major importance notably for waterbirds.

There are 4 sites registered on the Ramsar List of wetland's of international importance: "Les Marais d'Harchies Hensies Pommeroel", the "Vallée de la Haute-Sûre", the "Hautes Fagnes" and the "Grotte des Emotions" which are respectively marshes, a transboundary wetland, peatlands and a karst. The 3 first sites are particularly important for migratory birds.

- Brussels Capital Region

There are no sites of international importance for waterbirds in this region. Hence, there is also no network of such sites and no strategic review.

Conservation of areas

3.3 Describe the legal frameworks and other measures through which sites (including transfrontier sites) including of international importance gain practical protection. (Please append a list of internationally important protected sites.)

- Flemish Region

For the implementation of the EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC and the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC, protected areas have been designated. For the Habitats Directive, these protected areas are called Special Areas for Conservation (SAC's); for the Birds Directive they are called SPA's. The SAC's cover a total area of 101.891 hectares in Flanders, which is about 7,5 % of the Flemish Region. The SPA's cover a total of 97.745 hectares, which accounts for about 7,2 % of the Flemish Region. There is some overlap in these two types of protected areas: 36 % of the SAC's is located within SPA's. Within these protected areas, applications for permits for construction, changes of vegetation or hydrology have to be assessed properly following the EIA procedures. For each activity, plan or programme that may have a significant impact on the SPA or SAC, namely on the habitats and species for which the site has been designated, an EIA has to be included with the application for a permit. If the EIA indicates a possible significant impact, the permit can not be granted. Derogations have to follow the procedure of article 6 of the Habitats Directive, as transposed in article 36 ter of the Nature Conservation Decree. A derogation can only be granted if the indication that there are no alternatives is accepted and that the activity, project or plan is of overriding public interest. This framework is for all the Special Protection Areas, including the ones that are designated because of their importance for species covered by the Agreement.

In view of the general Flemish spatial planning policy, a Flemish Ecological Network (FEN) has been developed (also see 2.1 a) above). Within this FEN, vegetation and hydrological balance are strictly protected. Moreover, permits that can cause unavoidable and irreversible damage to the natural values can not be granted.

For both SPA's and FEN, Nature Objective Plans, have to be developed. These plans describe site specific objectives, based on the conservation objectives for the species and

habitats in the specific site, and the targets for nature within these protected areas and the specific measures that can be imposed. Applications for permits have to be assessed against these plans and their targets.

- Walloon Region

The protection of habitats is ensured through several statuses in the Walloon Region:

- government and chartered nature reserve
- forest reserve
- wet area of biological interest
- underground cavity of scientific interest
- Natura 2000 sites
- Ramsar Sites

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The Law of January 20, 1999 creates a frame for the protection of marine areas in the North Sea. The designation of several types of protected areas is under finalisation. The administration of the minister responsible for the protection of the marine environment is currently preparing a royal decree on Marine Protected Areas (designation of SPA's and SAC's).

The Policy Plans for the 5 MPAs (of which three are EU-Special Protection Areas for the conservation of sea birds) have been proposed in May 2008 by the competent administration. After public consultation and political decision (later in 2008), these plans will be instrumental for the necessary protection and conservation measures that will have to be taken over the next three years.

Internationally important area: Coastal area of the BPNS (see above reference to Courtens and Stienen 2006) in particular the three marine Special Protection Areas, SBZ1, SBZ2, SBZ3 (Natura 2000)

3.4 Has your country developed a management planning process for protected sites? If yes, please outline the types of management plans and organisations responsible for development and implementation.

- Flemish Region

The following types of protected areas are relevant in relation to AEWA.

- Birds Directive Special Protection Areas (SPA's).
- Habitats Directive Special Areas for Conservation (SAC's).
- Flemish Ecological Network (FEN).
- Nature reserves and forest reserves, both Flemish and NGO-owned.
- Areas zoned for nature conservation according to the Zoning Plan.
- Protected Landscapes.

There is considerable overlap among these different types of protected areas.

The homologation and designation of reserves is based upon the approval of a management plan for the site. Private individuals and legal persons can also obtain subsidies for the implementation of that site management plan. Such a plan contains an extended area

description, a description of the management aims that will be strived for and to which a concrete and detailed plan of the management measures to be implemented are attached.

The overview of the management measures to be implemented has to contain both visions on the aspects of content, as well as perception of the practical aspects including: time planning, actions to be undertaken in certain seasons, budgetary implications, implementation of the management and of the monitoring, as well as a plan opening the site to the public. More attention is paid to the management of coastal areas, collaboration with military authorities for the management of military areas and the drawing-up of management plans for protected landscapes.

The following types of management plans can be mentioned in relation to AEWA, with reference to the responsible authority (between brackets)

- Nature Objective Plans, containing conservation objectives (government).
 - Management plans for nature reserves. All reserves must have management plans (government and NGO's).
 - Management plans for protected landscapes (government).
 - Water management plans for river catchment areas (government).
 - Zoning plans (government).
-
- Walloon Region

Natura 2000 sites will have management plans when their designation bills will be elaborated. These will be defined from 2008 to 2013.

3.5 How many protected sites have formal management plans (please append a list of sites and their management planning status):

- a. Proposed?*
- b. In preparation?*
- c. Being implemented?*

- Flemish Region

For the moment, six Nature Objective Plans have been prepared for larger areas in the SPA/SAC/FEN and are now in public consultation. About 9.400 hectares of military training areas in which attention will be given to nature values have management plans in preparation in the framework of a LIFE-project in cooperation with the ministry of Defence. The water management plans that have to be developed for the EU Water Framework Directive for all river catchment areas are also in public consultation.

At the end of 2007 there are 76 nature reserves of the Flemish Government (managed by the Agency) with a total surface of 6008 ha and 323 recognised nature reserves of NGO's with a total surface of 12.626 ha. For its recognition an approved management plan is compulsory, as well as monitoring of the management measures and of specific species relevant for the site.

More information on the status and trends can be found on <http://www.natuurindicatoren.be/>

- Walloon Region

All our sites having a legal protection status have management plans (government and chartered nature reserve, forest reserve, wet area of biological interest, underground cavity of scientific interest, Natura 2000 sites) and also our Ramsar Sites.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The Policy Plans for the 5 MPAs (of which three are EU-Special Protection Areas for the conservation of sea birds) have been proposed in May 2008 by the competent administration. After public consultation and political decision (later in 2008), these plans will be instrumental for the necessary protection and conservation measures that will have to be taken over the next three years.

3.6 What measures does your country have in place to ensure the wise use of wetland habitats and to prevent habitat degradation e.g. pollution control and managing water resources? Please provide examples of best practice initiatives particularly involving cross-sectoral co-operation or public participation.

- Flemish Region

The Decree on Integral Water Management, being an implementation of the EU Directive 2000/60/EC of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, is the main legislation in this field.

The aim of this legislation is to reach a good ecological quality in all Flemish surface waters by 2015.

In execution of the EU Directive 2000/60/EC River basin management plans are under preparation; An important chapter in these plans are the programmes of measures. For Flanders several measures are included concerning the development of wetlands and the reinforcement of ecological quality in and along the waterbodies. Based on the conservation objectives of the site and the overall objectives for environmental sustainability, one of the priorities are water resources rehabilitation and conservation. A participatory approach for the planning and the implementation process is one of the pillars of this, until now based upon existing co-operation with local authorities and NGO's. A final version of these River basin management plans will be available in december 2008.

Also see the answer to question 3.3 in this respect.

- Walloon Region

- The Walloon Region has a legal status to protect wetlands: "**Wetlands of Biological Interest**" (Zones Humides d'intérêt biologique, bill of June the 8th 1989). This status insures to strictly protect flora and fauna but allows hunting and fishing for the species identified as huntable in the bill on Hunting (...).
- The "**Code de l'eau**" was adopted by a decree on the 27th of May 2004. This decree insures the transposition of the Water Framework

(2000/60/CE). One of its objectives is to maintain Wetlands ecosystems in a good conservation state. It plans to take measures to elaborate a register of protected areas in each water basin.

- Management measures to protect biodiversity in forest ecosystems (**Circulaire Biodiversité en Forêt**, « Normes de gestion pour favoriser la biodiversité dans les bois soumis au régime forestier ») plans actions to forbid filling up wetland's when building roads in forests.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The Law of January 20, 1999 creates a frame for the conservation of the marine areas. It includes five general principles of environmental protection: the principle of preventive action, the principle of precaution, the principle of sustainable management, the principle of the 'polluter pays' and the principle of recovery. Protocol agreement between Federal Minister in charge of the Marine Environment and Ministry of Defence (aerial surveillance), between Federal Minister in charge of the Marine Environment and Regional authorities in relation to coast-guard related issues (Kustwacht Coördinatie).

Rehabilitation and restoration

3.7 Does your country have a policy for the identification, rehabilitation and restoration of wetlands important for species covered by the Agreement? Please provide examples of rehabilitation and restoration projects and initiatives undertaken.

- Flemish Region

Considering the identification of wetlands important to Agreement species, the Research Institute for Nature and Forest makes a yearly update of all wetland sites that hold internationally important numbers of waterbirds (exceeding 1 % criteria), based on the most recent available data.

As for wetland rehabilitation and restoration, there is no comprehensive policy for the whole of Flanders. However, a considerable numbers of initiatives are taken, on various levels, to restore and rehabilitate wetlands.

Hereby included is an extensive, albeit non-exhaustive overview of important projects and initiatives in this field.

- Natura 2000 is the network of Special Protection Areas (SPA's), designed to contribute to the implementation of the two important EU nature directives, the EU Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC and the EU Birds Directive 79/409/EEC. In order help establish an efficient Natura 2000 network, the European Union has set up the LIFE-fund, which provides financial support for nature projects within the SPA's. Several projects in Flanders have also gotten this financial support, and are thus called *LIFE-projects*. Although having a wider scope, projects aimed at waterbirds and their wetland habitats are also included. An important example of this is the LIFE-project 'Uitkerkse Polder'. This is a coastal polder area of high importance to waterbirds, both as breeding and

wintering ground, as well as on migration. The project aims at the restoration of the typical old polder grasslands, which provide excellent habitat for thousands of waterbirds. This area is especially important for Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*, White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* and Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*.

- The *Long Term Vision for the Schelde river 2030* is an initiative which implies the creation of a development plan for the estuary of the Schelde river. This plan was initially inspired by the need to offer protection from flooding. Gradually, it was realized that wetlands can have a great buffer capacity in this respect and the plan was extended in this respect. The current aim of the plan is to provide safety from flooding, to secure the accessibility of the river for economic purposes and to secure the natural richness of the river. A phased approach to this Long-term Vision has been agreed. The first phase is called the Development Plan 2010; this phase is a co-operative initiative between the Flemish Government and the Netherlands. Wetland rehabilitation and restoration projects covered by this plan are:

- the enlargement of the Zwin, one of the largest salt marsh areas in Belgium and an important area for wetland birds such as Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* and White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*, along the border with the Netherlands, in the province of West-Vlaanderen (Flanders). The present dikes would be replaced by new dikes further inland, hence restoring wetland areas that are currently reclaimed agricultural polder land.
- the creation of a 600 hectares wetland in the Kalkense Meersen, along the Schelde river in the province of Oost-Vlaanderen.

- The Nature Conservation Decree of October 21, 1997, provides in so called *Nature Development Projects*. The goal of Nature Development Projects is to conserve the existing natural values in the project area in optimal conditions, as well as to restore and develop nature. These projects are carried out by the Flemish Land Agency; 25 projects are currently underway, several of these aiming at wetland restoration and the creation of habitat for waterbirds. Examples of wetland projects are the following:

- Nature Development Project Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen (province of Oost-Vlaanderen): relicts of the floodplains of the river Leie, being an important area for migrating and wintering waterfowl, especially Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Common Teal *Anas crecca* and Shoveler *Anas clypeata*. This project was finalized very recently and is already yielding very interesting results, with considerable numbers of waterbirds using the newly created wetland area.

- Nature Development Project 'het Vinne' (province of Vlaams-Brabant): includes the restoration of the largest natural freshwater lake of Flanders. This project was finalized very recently and is already yielding very interesting results, with considerable numbers of waterbirds using the newly created wetland area.

→ Nature Development Project 'de Blankaert' (province of West-Vlaanderen) includes the restoration of natural borders along the lake, and of the surrounding wetlands and marshes by restoring the natural water flow and level. For to intensive agricultural use in the surrounding area the water level was kept low over years by artificial means (small dams, drainage systems) so that the wetlands surrounding the lake dried out and the vegetation changed due to high nutrient levels. Despite the degraded ecological system the area is still important for birds. The overall aim of this project is to rehabilitate the wetlands to allow for restoration of the bird populations.

- In order to compensate for the loss of breeding areas for terns in areas predetermined for industrial development in the harbor of Zeebrugge (province of West-Vlaanderen), a '*Tern Island*' has been created within the boundaries of the harbor. This is an artificial site, 8 hectares in size, created and managed specifically to meet the needs of breeding terns. This area is very important in both a Belgian and a European context for Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* and Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*. Up to 4 % of the bio-geographical population of Common Tern breeds in this area, together with up to 2 % of the world population of Sandwich Tern!
- Following the extension of the Antwerp harbor within the boundaries of the designated Birds Directive SPA 'Schorren en Polders van de Beneden-Schelde' and the designated Habitats Directive SAC 'Schelde- en Durme-estuarium van de Nederlandse grens tot Gent', a large scale nature development is planned on the *left bank of the Schelde river*. The aim of this project is to ensure the conservation objectives in the above mentioned areas. This project includes the restoration of 450 hectares of reclaimed land, thus leading to the development of a large area of tidal mud and sandflats. The area connects with 'Het Verdrongen Land van Saeftinge', just across the border with the Netherlands, the largest area of raised brackish marsh in Europe. Hence, this very important area will be strongly enlarged. The realization of this project is well underway and it is already yielding very interesting results, with considerable numbers of waterbirds using the newly created wetland area.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The Federal Policy for the marine environment foresees the selection of additional MPAs in the Belgian part of the North Sea.

4. Management of human activities

Hunting

4.1 Outline the main features of legislation or legal measures in your country to control hunting of the species covered by the Agreement (e.g. use of lead shot and poisoned baits, and to eliminate illegal taking).

- Flemish Region

The Flemish Government Decree on hunting in the Flemish Region for the period from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2008, permits the hunting of *Anser anser*, *Anas penelope*, *Anas platyrhynchos* and *Vanellus vanellus*.

The hunting of *Anser anser* is permitted from August 15 to September 30.

The hunting of *Anas penelope* is permitted from October 15 to December 31, but only when serious crop damage has been demonstrated; the hunt is forbidden in so-called "bird-rich areas", which are delimited in the above mentioned Decree.

The hunting of *Anas platyrhynchos* is permitted from September 1 to January 15.

The hunting of *Vanellus vanellus* is strictly limited to airports, in the interests of air traffic safety and in case there is no other satisfactory solution.

Hunting of other species covered by the agreement is strictly forbidden.

A total ban on the use of leadshot has been adopted in 2003, by a Flemish Government Decree from September 19, 2003, on the use of firearms and ammunition for hunting in the Flemish Region. In a temporary provision, it has been determined that the ban outside some protected areas (e.g. Special Protection Areas under the Birds Directive and Ramsar-wetlands) will only be effective from July 1, 2008 onwards.

The use of poisoned baits is strictly forbidden by the Flemish Parliament Act on Hunting from July 24, 1991.

- Walloon Region

Prohibition to kill birds, to take eggs of all European wild bird species is included in the Law on nature conservation, except for game species (Loi sur la conservation de la Nature telle que modifiée par le Décret du 6 décembre 2001 relatif à la conservation des sites Natura 2000 ainsi que de la faune et de la flore sauvages).

Law on hunting (28 February 1882) and its bills:

Bill of the Walloon Government of May 2006 gives the dates at which shooting begins and stops from 2006 to 2011.

There is a new Walloon Government arrest on the use of firearms and shots (05 October 2005). Article 3 of this arrest forbids the use of lead shots to shoot waterbird game species at less than 50 meters from a marsh, a lake, a pond, a water reservoir, a river or a canal.

The different measures elaborated to reduce illegal hunting are:

- In general: The law, Police units and the Forest and Nature division of the Walloon Region
 - In particular: the unit against poaching aiming particularly at fighting against illegal hunting.
 - Fines have also been increased.
- Brussels Capital Region

Hunting is not allowed following the ordonnance of August 28, 1991 concerning the protection of the wild fauna and hunting.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

Hunting is prohibited in the Belgian marine areas.

4.2 Does your country monitor hunting levels? If so, how is this information collated and reported?

- Flemish Region

Flemish hunters are encouraged to organize themselves in so called 'Game Management Units' (GMU), which can be recognised and financially supported by the government. Those GMU's are obliged to report on game numbers and bag statistics. The information is received and analyzed by a scientific institute from the Flemish government, the Institute for Nature and Forest Research.

- Walloon Region

Not for waterfowl.

4.3 Describe action undertaken by hunting clubs and organisations to manage hunting activity e.g. cooperative action, issuing of licences and proficiency testing of individual members.

- Flemish Region

In order to obtain a hunting license, a Flemish candidate-hunter has to succeed in a hunting test, in which he demonstrates his both theoretical and practical knowledge of the different aspects of hunting, as well as his shooting skills.

Hunting organisations are involved in the organisation of this test.

The organisation of hunters (see answer to question 4.2) in Game Management Units (GMU) increases control within the hunting community and it is a check against illegal activities.

- Walloon Region

A proficiency test is organised each year by the Hunting direction of the Nature and Forests Department of the Walloon Region (Walloon Government arrest of april the 2nd 1998). It includes two parts. The Hunters must succeed in this test in order to be allowed to hunt.

Theory:

- Knowledge of the Law on Hunt and on the Law on Nature Conservation
- Knowledge on game species, management of their populations, biology of gamespecies....
- Knowledge on weapons and on ethic issues on hunt.

Practical:

- Recognition of weapons
- Identification of birds
- Use of weapons
- Shooting test

Eco-tourism

4.4 What is the status of eco-tourism programmes or initiatives in your country? Please provide examples of projects with an indication of the significant outcomes.

- Flemish Region

In a large number of wetland preserves, both government-owned and NGO-owned, various eco-tourism activities are organized: bird hides, information panels, guided tours and so on.

- Walloon Region

Several wetland sites offer educational guided tours, educational panels and environmental education center (Les marais d'Harchies, l'étang de Virelles, les Hautes Fagnes...). Birds are one of the main concerns. The nature center of Botrange (in the Hautes-Fagnes) promotes "soft tourism" in order to protect the sites the visitors go through.

The development of tourism is one of the goals of Natural Parks in Wallonia. This tourism is to be developed with respect for nature and could be called "green tourism".

- Brussels Capital Region

Due to its highly urbanized level, natural and semi-natural structures are of great importance for recreation in the BCR. Although no real eco-tourism programmes exist. Ecological impact of recreation infrastructure in protected areas is always taken into consideration and reduced or compensated.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

Voluntary agreements have been set up with recreational organizations with a view to their respect of the natural values of marine protected areas (the designation of which is under finalization). At the same time, a free phone number is also available for all recreants at sea to report e.g. encounters with marine mammals, etc.

4.5 What social and economic benefits accrue to the local communities from the conservation of important waterbird sites?

- Flemish Region

The conservation and restoration of wetlands is important for the flood control along waterways. By conserving and restoring wetlands, which can serve as reservoirs for superfluous water, the homes and livelihoods of people living along these waterways are also being protected from flooding.

In the framework of the agri-environment measures under the EU Rural Development Programme actions to protect nesting meadow birds are financially supported. In 2006 these contracts covered a total surface of 724 ha.

Other human activities

4.6 Does your country carry out Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of activities potentially affecting protected sites or areas important for species covered by the Agreement? If yes, briefly describe the main features of your EIA policy and procedures.

- Flemish Region
 - A specific procedure for impact assessment and derogation has to be followed for infrastructure projects that may have an impact on FEN sites (art 26bis of the Decree for Nature Conservation) or on Natura 2000 sites (art 36ter, 3-6 of the same Decree that includes the transposition of art. 6 of the EU Habitats Directive). For each EIA study an interdepartmental steering committee is established to ensure proper follow up of issues relevant to each of the concerned sectors. This procedure has been enhanced to the Strategic EIA.
 - Guidelines have been set up to consider the impact on wind turbines on birds. The Research Institute for Nature and Forest has published a map which contains the principal routes for bird movements in Flanders. The Flemish Government has decided that this map should be considered when wind turbines are planned in an area and that turbines should be planted in areas where the impact on (migratory) birds is minimal.

- Walloon Region

- The Natura 2000 Decree foresees, in his article 29 §2, that each plan or project subject to licensing [...] which is not directly linked to or necessary for the management of a Natura 2000 site, but susceptible to affect the site significantly [...] is subject to an impact assessment as foreseen in the legislation.

- The Environment Code identifies the projects requiring an impact assessment

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The obligation of an appropriate environmental impact assessment procedure and licensing regime is adequately met by the royal Decrees (in pursuance of the MMM law of 20/01/1999): the RD of 09/09/2003 establishing the rules related to the environmental impact assessment and the royal decree of the 07/09/2003 establishing the procedures for granting permits and authorisations for some activities in the marine spaces within the jurisdiction of Belgium. The royal decrees provide for a comprehensive regime that is specifically for the marine environment.

The Belgian Federal Government has transposed the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (SEA Directive) for plans and programmes that are developed by authorities or have to be approved by the competent parliament. (Law of 13 February 2006, BS of 10.03.2006)

4.7 Please describe the main features of your planning policy and provide examples of practical implementation (e.g. activities to minimising disturbance of species populations or limit the impact of species populations on crops or fisheries). Please summarize any land-use conflicts especially emphasising successful solutions to problems encountered in promoting the wise-use of waterbirds and their habitats.

- Flemish Region

An example of a land-use conflict involving waterbirds is the conflict between wintering geese and farmers in the intensive farmland areas of the province of West-Vlaanderen, especially in the northern part of the province. Every winter, tens of thousands of geese stage in this area, mainly White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons* and Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus*. In order to tackle this conflict, a hunting ban on all goose species was set up, to allow the geese to spread out over a large area. This will spread the grazing pressure and reduce agricultural losses. The increasing amount of naturally managed grasslands will also help to settle this problem by keeping away the geese from more intensively managed agricultural land.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The obligation of an appropriate environmental impact assessment has been instrumental in the permit procedures for wind mill farms in the Belgian part of the North Sea so as to monitor the effect of the construction and operation of the wind mills on migratory sea birds.

5. Research and monitoring

Status of research and monitoring programmes for species

5.1 How are priorities for research identified in your country? Please briefly describe your country's research programmes, including any bilateral or multilateral co-operative action, for wetland habitats and for species covered by the Agreement (e.g. studies into species population, ecology and migratory patterns). Please append a list of research activities initiated, ongoing or completed in the last three years.

- Flemish Region

- **Seabirds.** The Institute for Nature and Forest Research conducts several research and monitoring projects on seabirds. Counts of overwintering seabirds are held and beached birds along the Belgian coast are mapped. The percentage of birds that with oil contamination among the seabirds found washed ashore has been proven to be indicative for the chronic oil pollution of the sea and is monitored in Belgium since 1962. Since 1997, the reproductive output and the feeding regimes of chicks of Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* and Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* are monitored in the large breeding colony of these species at Zeebrugge. For breeding gulls, a colour ring project has been set up. Seabirds at sea are regularly counted from ships and fluctuations in seaduck numbers are monitored from airplanes since 1986.

- **Birds and windfarms.** In commission by the Flemish government in May 2000 the Institute for Nature and Forest Research started a project to study the impact of wind turbines on birds, to produce an atlas of important bird areas and migration routes in order to build up the necessary policy knowledge, and to act as a consultancy for proposed windfarms on land. At several wind farm locations, a long-term independent project to study the impact of the turbines on birds (nature) is still going on. In 2006, a similar project – funded by the federal government - started to study the impact of wind farms on the North Sea.

- **Geese.** In October 2008, a new project will start to study the impact /damage of grazing geese on farmland (grassland and arable land), both in winter and in spring. This study will be conducted by the Institute for Nature and Forest Research and the Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research.

Information of status and trends of species(groups) can be found on <http://www.natuurindicatoren.be/>

- Brussels Capital Region

A breeding bird atlas has been published in 2007 (Weiserbs & Jacob, 2007)

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

The Belgian Science Policy Office (Belspo) has financed a number of marine biodiversity projects as part of various science policy programmes (wee www.belspo.be).

5.2 What monitoring activities does your country undertake, including any bilateral or multilateral cooperative action, of wetland areas and species covered by the Agreement (e.g. national monitoring schemes, International Waterfowl Census)? Please append a list of monitoring activities or programmes initiated, ongoing or completed in the last three years

- Flemish Region

- **Waterbird counts.** In Flanders, six waterfowl counts are organized every winter. The coordination is in the hands of the Institute of Nature and Forest Research. These counts take place from October until March, during one fixed weekend in the middle of the month. The mid-January count makes part of the 'International Waterfowl Census', a monitoring project of Wetlands International. About 500-600 sites in Flanders are counted on a regular basis, including at least all major wetlands. Most areas are counted by amateur field ornithologists. In addition, counts of roost sites of Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* and gulls *Larus species* are conducted on a yearly basis.

The aim of these counts is to study population size and trends, distribution and habitat choice of waterfowl species. The results are also important as a basis for the protection and management of Flemish wetland sites.

- **Seabird counts.** Counts of overwintering seabirds are done and beached birds are mapped along the Belgian coast (see above, answer to question 5.1).

- **Rare breeding birds.** Since 1994, a monitoring scheme on breeding birds, the project 'Bijzondere Broedvogels Vlaanderen', has been set up in Flanders. The species involved include all colonial breeders, rare breeding species (less than 150-200 pairs in Flanders) and all exotic (feral) birds, altogether about 60 species. They are censused on a yearly basis and in a standardized way. The field work is mainly executed by volunteer field ornithologists. All potential breeding habitats are visited several times during the breeding season. During these visits, territories are mapped and breeding pairs are counted. Completed standardized observation forms (paper or digital) and maps indicating breeding sites are sent back to the Institute for Nature and Forest Research where data are checked, processed and analyzed. The project is conducted in cooperation with 'Natuurpunt' (the largest NGO concerning nature conservation and nature study in Flanders).

- **Common breeding birds.** In Flanders, a new monitoring project for common breeding birds started in 2007, in cooperation between the Institute for Nature and Forest Research and 'Natuurpunt' (NGO). Fieldwork is conducted by both volunteers and professionals in a randomly selected subset of 1200 plots (1x1 km), stratified over 6 common habitat types (farmland, woodland, urban, suburban, heathland and marshland). The census is based on a three year cycle in order to increase the geographical scale and sample size.

- **Monitoring of specific wetland areas.**

+ **Birds and Habitats Directive areas in harbours.** The ports of Antwerp and Zeebrugge are situated within the perimeter of Birds and Habitat Directive areas. The construction of docks and other harbour infrastructure has a negative impact on the protected species and habitats in the area and must be compensated for. The effectiveness of the compensation measures is assessed by means of monitoring programs. The main focus of these monitoring plans is on birds: breeding and non-breeding birds on Annex I of the European

Birds Directive (79/409/EEG), breeding birds of the Flemish Red List of threatened species, as well as migrating and wintering birds that occur in numbers of international importance (Convention of Ramsar). For some species also breeding success is assessed. The hydrology of the study area is also investigated, in order to link surface- and groundwater levels and quality to developments in vegetation and fauna. The monitoring results are reported to the European Council as an evaluation of the compensation measures.

+ waterbird counts. In some areas that are internationally important for waterbirds, more intensive monitoring programs for non breeding waterbirds are carried out, e.g. the Zeeschelde estuary, the coastal polders (geese counts) and the IJzer valley.

- Ringing of birds by the Royal Institute of Natural Sciences

- Walloon Region
 - Monitoring of wintering birds (by Aves). Counting of waterbirds from October to March. Data's are published in the « Bulletin Aves » magazine and communicated to Wetlands international.
 - Breeding birds of Wallonia Atlas (co-ordination Aves): Elaboration of an atlas project (points d'écoute et données spécifiques). This atlas will enable us to identify all breeding birds (approximately 175), even introduced species (approximately 12), to assess their repartition and their populations. A special attention is given to rare species. This atlas will probably be published in 2009.
 - Implementation of methods to collect data's on birds in the framework of the elaboration of the Natura 2000 site's designation bills.
 - Monitoring of common birds (started in 1990 by AVES).
 - Monitoring of birds for the State of the Walloon Environment "Etat de l'Environnement wallon" <http://environnement.wallonie.be/eew/default.aspx> .
 - Ringing of birds by the Royal Institute of Natural Sciences.

- Brussels Capital Region

Counting wintering waterbirds since 2003. Waterbirds are counted every year in the valley of the Woluwe, one of the most important wintering places of waterbirds in the Brussels Capital Region.

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

Monitoring of marine birds : the Flemish Institute for Nature and Forest Research (INBO) monitors since 1992 in a standardized way the marine avifauna in the BPNS. Additionally, sea bird counts are taking place ad hoc (such as part of the environmental impact assessments in the marine environment).

6. Education and information

Training and development programmes

6.1 Describe the status of training and development programmes which support waterbird conservation and implement the AEWA Action Plan.

There are no training and development programmes on waterbird conservation.

6.2 What bilateral or multilateral co-operative action is your country undertaking to develop training programmes and share examples of good practice?

- Flemish Region

See answer to question 2.4, where the financial contribution for project on the development of a Guideline on waterbirds and infrastructural development is mentioned.

Raising public awareness

6.3 Describe activities to raise public awareness of the objectives of the AEWA Action Plan. Please outline any particular successes generating public interest in, and securing support for, waterbird and wetland conservation (e.g. campaigns, information notes or other initiatives)?

- Flemish Region

There is no specific AEWA related policy of raising public awareness to of the objectives of the AEWA Agreement. However, several initiatives do exist to raise public awareness of nature conservation in general and of the issue the conservation of migratory (water)birds and their habitats in specific.

Examples of such raising of public awareness are:

- The Agency for Nature and Forests runs several nature visitor centers, where the public is informed on a large spectrum of nature conservation issues. In total, six such visitor centers exist, four of which are situated in areas that have a significant importance for waterbirds. In these centers, visitors are informed about waterbirds and their habitat requirements.
- In order to broaden the public support for the above mentioned SIGMA-plan (see answer to question 3.7 above), an information campaign was been set up about the natural richness of the Schelde river: 'De Schelde Natuurlijk!'. This campaign focuses on the huge importance of the river and it's estuary for tens of thousands of waterbirds, for breeding and wintering and during migration. This information campaign was a joint initiative between Belgium and the Netherlands, involving both governments and several NGO's
- The Nature Conservation Decree of October 21, 1997 contains provisions

about the accessibility of nature reserves for visitors. Visitors are allowed in these reserves under certain conditions, in order to permit the public to get acquainted with nature and its conservation. For reserves owned by NGO's, subsidies can be granted in order to take measures to promote the accessibility of the reserves, such as the construction of paths, bird hides and information panels. Public accessibility is an integrated part of the management plan of reserves owned by the Flemish government. The ecological capacity of the reserves is considered in this respect. This policy is of course also applicable to reserves containing species covered by the Agreement. Thus the general public can get acquainted easily with waterbirds and their habitats.

- Nature conservation NGO's also pay attention to raising public awareness about nature conservation in general, including waterbirds and wetland ecosystems.
- The 'Kustactieplan' – 'Coast Action Plan' is a co-operative plan between the Flemish government and Natuurpunt NGO, co-financed by the EU LIFE fund, aimed at the promotion of the coastal area. Nature is considered to be an integral part of the coast in this plan, that wants to ensure a better co-existence of coastal nature and coastal tourism. This implies informing the general public about the rich nature in the coastal area and the need for conserving this biodiversity. The plan covers both the coastal wetlands as well as the actual North Sea, both being important areas for many waterbird species.
- Each LIFE-project has its own website and public awareness actions

- Walloon Region

- Naturalists' associations are financed in view to organize public awareness and education activities. Nature protection organizations such as the WWF, AVES, the 'Ligue Royale pour la Protection des Oiseaux' (LRBPO), the 'Réserves naturelles et ornithologiques de Belgique' (RNOB), 'Ardenne et Gaume', 'Les Cercles des Naturalistes de Belgique', 'Jeunes et Nature' and 'Forêt Wallonne' all have educational activities oriented towards nature conservation (e.g. excursions, visits of nature reserves, management of nature reserves, publications, etc.) or towards specific thematic areas (e.g. forests, quality of watercourses, etc.).
- Public education and awareness is one of the missions of Natural parks. They often organize activities related to inland waters, birds (as our Ramsar sites do too).
- Life projects also include information and public awareness of potential stakeholders and local communities.

Publications:

- Preparation of an atlas on breeding birds (Aves).
- Website of the Walloon region:
- <http://mrw.wallonie.be/dgrne/sibw/especes/home.html#oiseaux>)

- Federal level: Belgian marine territory

A national campaign was launched in April 2005 in order to create a social basis for the different “values” of the sea (natural value but also economic and social-recreational values). Activities were organized during the whole summer period in coastal cities, in particular with young children. Public awareness raising is a major topic of the proposed Policy Plans for the marine protected areas.

7. Final comments

7.1 General comments on the implementation of the AEWA Action Plan

7.2 Observations concerning the functions and services of the various AEWA bodies

- a. The Agreement Secretariat*
- b. International organisations*
- c. AEWA NGO partners*

7.3 How might the Action Plan be further developed as a practical aid for national and international conservation of migratory waterbirds?

As this is still relevant we wish to repeat our remarks listed in the previous report related to the lack of harmonization in the reporting formats of the various tools for the international protection of birds in general and waterbirds in specific. The national focal points who are responsible for completing these reporting formats are confronted with several formats on similar topics: AEWA, Ramsar-Treaty, EU Birds Directive. The objective of these tools is similar: ensure the conservation and appropriate protection of birds and the areas they need for survival, including both direct species protection on the individual level and indirect habitat protection on the population level. The objectives and goals are similar but the concept of the reporting formats is different for each tool, different enough not to allow a similar responding approach to the various tools.

We want to stress that we do acknowledge the importance of all these international tools for a satisfactory protection of waterbirds, including AEWA. We believe, however, that a high degree of harmonization would increase the strength of each of the above mentioned international tools and emphasize the synergies. A harmonized co-operation between these conventions and agreements can only create a stronger back up for a thorough protection of waterbirds and the habitats on which they depend.

In this respect, we would also stress the importance of ‘*indicators*’. The current reporting format does not really use the concept of indicators. Indicators can be described as ‘blinkers’, which give signals and indications of situations and trends; they do not reveal the full story but they give important clues and indications. Another term to describe indicators is ‘performance measures’. Projected on the situation of AEWA, indicators could show how well which goals of the Agreement are being reached in a rather easy way. The great advantage would be that the use of indicators would allow a high degree of standardization in the reporting process. Sets of indicators have been developed at EU-level for the Natura 2000 Network, for biodiversity action plans and for the Countdown 2010 target for halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010 under the SEBI 2010 programme. Those sets could form a

basis for specific indicators for the AEWA Action Plan.

The combination of a *harmonized and streamlined approach* to the reporting format for the various conventions and agreements focusing on waterbirds and the use of *indicators* in the reporting process could strongly contribute to an effective protection of waterbirds and their habitats.

8. Progress to implement Resolutions and Recommendations of the Meeting of the Parties

Please summarize progress to implement decisions of previous Meetings of the Parties.

Little has been done explicitly for the implementation of these resolutions and recommendations. However, on a broader scale, considerable action has been taken in order to comply with the EU directives relevant from the wetland conservation point of view: the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive.

9. OPTIONAL SECTION – Planned and future actions

Contracting Parties are invited to outline below any further information regarding the aims of the Agreement, for example, planned actions or other informative examples.

1. Species conservation
2. Habitat conservation
3. Management of human activities
4. Research and monitoring
5. Education and information

List of abbreviations and acronyms used in the report

- GMU: Game Management Unit
- BCR: Brussels Capital Region
- SPA: Special Protection Area
- SAC: Special Areas for Conservation
- FEN: Flemish Ecological Network
- EIA: Environmental Impact Analysis
- BPNS: Belgian Part of the North SEA
- Natura 2000: (EU network of protected areas, consisting of Special Protection areas for bird species and Special Areas of Conservation for other species groups and habitats).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Status of Single Species Action Plans

Appendix 2: List of sites of international importance

- Flemish Region

(list based on most recent data (2003-2008))

Vlaamse kust	<i>Arenaria interpres</i> , <i>Larus argentatus (argenteus)</i>
Blankaartgebied + IJzerbroeken	<i>Anser albifrons</i> , <i>Anas penelope</i> , <i>Anas clypeata</i> , <i>Larus canus (roost)</i> , <i>Larus ridibundus (roost)</i>
Oostkustpolders	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i> , <i>Anser albifrons</i> , <i>Anser anser</i> , <i>Anas penelope</i> , <i>Cygnus columbianus</i>
Havengebied Zeebrugge	<i>Anser anser</i> , <i>Anas clypeata</i> , <i>Larus canus (roost)</i> Breeding: <i>Sterna hirundo</i> , <i>Sterna albifrons</i> , <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> , <i>Larus fuscus</i>
Krekegebied + polders Noord-Oost-Vlaanderen	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i> , <i>Anser albifrons</i>
Bourgoyen-Ossemeersen Drongen	<i>Anser clypeata</i>
Gentse Kanaalzone	<i>Anas strepera</i> , <i>Anas clypeata</i> , <i>Larus ridibundus (roost)</i>
Zeeschelde Gent-Zandvliet	<i>Anser anser</i> , <i>Anas strepera</i> , <i>Anas crecca</i> , <i>Anas acuta</i> , <i>Aythya ferina</i> , <i>Avosetta recurvirostra</i>
Rivierengebied Mechelen-Willebroek	<i>Anas strepera</i> , <i>Anas acuta</i>
Netevallei Lier-Duffel	<i>Anas strepera</i> , <i>Aythya ferina</i>
Kanaalzone Wintam - Rupel	<i>Anas strepera</i> , <i>Anas acuta</i>
De Kuifeend Oorderen	<i>Anas strepera</i> , <i>Anas clypeata</i>
Blokkersdijk Antwerpen	<i>Anas strepera</i> , <i>Anas clypeata</i>
Havengebied Antwerpen LO + RO	<i>Anser anser</i> , <i>Anas strepera</i> , <i>Anas clypeata</i> , <i>Larus ridibundus (roost)</i>
Schulensbroek	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Vijvergebied Midden-Limburg (inclusief Maten)	<i>Anas strepera</i> , <i>Anas clypeata</i>
Maasvallei (Vlaanderen)	<i>Anser albifrons</i> , <i>Anas strepera</i>

Appendix 3: Status of management plans for sites of international importance

Appendix 4: List of research and monitoring programmes and projects

Appendix 5: List of national institutions involved in migratory waterbird conservation

Appendix 6: List of relevant World Wide Web addresses for national institutions involved in migratory waterbird conservation

Appendix 7: List of relevant migratory waterbird and habitat conservation projects initiated, ongoing or completed in the last three years

