



Date: 26 April 2012

## 5<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

14 – 18 May 2012, La Rochelle, France

*“Migratory waterbirds and people - sharing wetlands”*

---

### CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE PERIODICITY OF SESSIONS OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

*Prepared by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat*

#### Introduction

The African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) currently operates according to a three-year cycle, with sessions of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP) held roughly every three years and with a corresponding budgetary cycle covering expenditures for three years. A four-year cycle was approved for the first time by MOP4, and, on the basis of that experience, the question arises whether the Agreement should now maintain a four-year cycle (for the next and possibly future cycles) or go back to the three-year cycle.

Following discussions within the AEWA Agreement bodies, the suggestion has been made that AEWA operations could benefit from making the change to a four-year cycle, moving to a quadrennium instead of triennium, at least for the foreseeable future.

This would require the Meeting of the Parties to adopt a core budget covering four years instead of three which would, however, not affect the level of the AEWA core budget. In addition, certain timetables for agreed processes and implementation decisions would need to be adjusted - such as the implementation period of the AEWA Strategic Plan - to match the revised MOP periodicity.

The issue of the periodicity of sessions of the MOP was discussed by the 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the AEWA Standing Committee (StC7), in the context of its consideration of the budget proposal for the next cycle. The meeting recommended to separate the discussion on the frequency of the sessions of the MOP from the discussion on the budget, and instructed the Secretariat to compile a separate draft resolution on the periodicity of future sessions of the MOP and a paper summarizing the possible advantages and disadvantages of a 3 versus a 4 year cycle.

In fulfillment of the StC7 instructions, this document presents some of the possible benefits and disadvantages of moving away from the present three year cycle to a four year cycle as identified by the Secretariat. A deeper analysis and a consultation with other stakeholders of the possible implications, was unfortunately not possible due to time constraints. Therefore this document necessarily reflects a Secretariat's perspective towards the issue. However, in undertaking this analysis, the Secretariat has made reference to and benefited from similar deliberations made within the frameworks of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The main issues highlighted here will hopefully provide Parties with a sufficient overview of the main effects that the suggested change would have on the Agreement.

Under the terms of Article VI. 2 of the Agreement, a change in the frequency of the MOP can be made by decision of the Meeting of the Parties, which is reflected in the two first options proposed in the Draft Resolution on the Periodicity of the Sessions of the Meeting of the Parties to AEWA (AEWA/MOP5 DR23).

Options one and two of the draft Resolution foresee the Meeting of the Parties deciding to modify the AEWA MOP cycle from three to four years for the foreseeable future or on an experimental basis respectively. Option three of draft Resolution AEWA/MOP5 DR23 reflects a decision of the Meeting of the Parties to maintain the current three year cycle, and option four reflects a decision to maintain the three year cycle coupled with a decision to review the issue again at MOP6.

### **Action requested from the Meeting of the Parties**

The Meeting of the Parties is requested to:

- 1) Review the following considerations with the aim to take a decision concerning the future periodicity of MOP sessions;
- 2) Review, finalize and adopt draft Resolution AEWA/MOP5 DR23 *Periodicity of the Sessions of the Meeting of the Parties to AEWA*.

## **The frequency of meetings of the parties**

### Routines of the current triennial cycle

The Meeting of the Parties is the main governing and decision-making body of the Agreement and the adequate preparation and execution of each session of the Meeting of the Parties is a main priority of the Contracting Parties and the other AEWA Agreement bodies.

However, the burden placed on all those involved in the preparatory work for a MOP session continues to increase due, amongst other things, to an increasing number of Contracting Parties and delegates participating in meetings and a growing substantive agenda without a corresponding growth in human and financial capacity within the Agreement bodies. Securing adequate funding every three years from voluntary contributions to cover the travel and subsistence costs of participants from countries eligible for financial support is, in particular, becoming an increasingly difficult task.

In the year running up to the MOP significant tasks fall on the other bodies of the Agreement as well as on the Contracting Parties. These include the preparation and submission of extensive National Reports by the Contracting Parties, the preparation of a growing number of substantive documents by the Technical Committee and the Secretariat followed by the subsequent discussion and approval of the documents by the Standing Committee.

Under the current three year cycle, the Secretariat begins preparations for the next MOP shortly after the close of the previous one. In practice, during one entire year before a MOP the Secretariat focuses nearly all its efforts on the preparation of the session. This, in turn, means that for one third of the triennium the Secretariat can pay very little attention to its other responsibilities, which also continue to grow significantly. This is particularly reflected in a limited capacity to promote, support and fundraise for implementation activities.

### Advantages of the extension to a quadrennial cycle

Moving to a four-year cycle would not cause any changes to the MOP process itself, but the processes and pressures mentioned above - including the costs they involve - would take place less frequently. A change in the number of meetings of the AEWA Standing or Technical Committees could, on the other hand, be considered in order to continue the effective monitoring of implementation progress and to provide sufficient guidance during the inter-sessional periods.

As mentioned above, the move to a four-year cycle would require the Meeting of the Parties to adopt a core budget covering four years instead of three. This would, however, not affect the level of the AEWA core budget. Instead, the cost of organizing the MOP would occur every four years instead of three. Apart from the actual meeting costs themselves, the current core budget does not include the necessary funds to pay for the travel and subsistence costs of MOP participants. In addition, the translation of all relevant MOP documents into the two official languages of the Agreement is an ever-growing cost factor as the amount of substantial matters under the Agreement continues to expand. Fundraising to cover the MOP costs not covered by the core budget is becoming increasingly difficult – not least due to the current prevailing economic climate. Donor countries find their budgets increasingly tightened and often face simultaneous requests for funding from MEAs each year. Several AEWA donors have voiced their preference to focus the limited available funds towards funding implementation activities.

In addition, several Contracting Parties as well as members of the AEWA Standing and Technical Committees have remarked that the focus of AEWA should now shift more towards on-the-ground implementation of the various provisions already adopted under the Agreement, rather than on issuing new ones. A longer interval between the MOPs would give Contracting Parties more time to implement the decisions taken at MOP and enable them to report on their implementation progress in their National Reports in sufficient time before the MOP.

## Disadvantages of the extension to quadrennial cycle

There also appear to be, however, certain potential disadvantages of moving to a four year cycle which need to be taken into consideration. One such concern is that the Meeting of the Parties might be less able to address and react promptly to emergency situations such as rapidly emerging threats to migratory waterbirds. An extension of the interval between successive sessions of the MOP could logically hinder a timely response. To avoid a situation where the Agreement is not able to respond conveniently through the MOP, emergency matters, could in future, be addressed by the AEWA Standing and Technical Committees informing the MOP as necessary. In addition, the possibility of convening extraordinary sessions of the MOP in emergency situations remains a possibility already foreseen by the Agreement.

Concerns have also been voiced that moving to a four-year cycle would decouple the AEWA MOP from the current Ramsar COP cycle which might, in turn, potentially hamper synergies in decision-making between the two MEAs and production of reviews and reports of common interest. As regards the latter consideration, the periodicity of the production of relevant reports and reviews under the two treaties is currently not in place to an extent that would be significantly affected by a decoupling of the cycle of the two treaties. As regards synergies in decision-making, a consideration that can be made is that AEWA MOPs are already not in pace with respect to the COPs of other important relevant treaties, in particular the COP of CMS. Other relevant MEAs such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are also understood to be considering lengthening their COP/MOP cycles.

Concerns have also been raised, that organizing sessions of the Meeting of the Parties only every four years could decrease the visibility of the Agreement. This is of course difficult to assess, but during the MOPs there certainly tends to be a rise in activities focused around the Agreement with an increase in the visibility of AEWA in the MOP host countries in particular. Also, in the preparatory phase of the MOP, the attention of the Agreement's closer constituency is more focused on the Agreement than in other periods. On the other hand, activities closely related to AEWA such as the Wings Over Wetlands (WOW) Project, or the annual World Migratory Bird Day campaign have generated a very high general visibility for the Agreement on a yearly basis, not to mention other Secretariat driven awareness-raising activities.

## **Conclusion**

Possible advantages:

- Decreased burden placed on all those involved in the preparatory work for a MOP;
- Decreased financial burden;
- Additional time for implementation and national reporting.

Possible disadvantages:

- Lessened ability to address emergency situations;
- Decoupling of AEWA MOP from the current Ramsar COP cycle;
- Decreased visibility of AEWA.

As shown above, lengthening the current MOP cycle from three to four years could - from the viewpoint of the Secretariat - have major positive implications for the Agreement. This would particularly be the case in terms of cost savings to the Agreement and the Contracting Parties and increasing the time for national and regional implementation of Agreement decisions as well as the Secretariat's ability to execute a growing number of non-MOP related tasks. However, certain possible disadvantages could also arise which would have to be taken into account and tackled accordingly if the decision is taken to make a more permanent move to a four year MOP cycle.