



9th MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
20 - 23 April 2009, Zagreb, Croatia

A preliminary list of ongoing and emerging issues for the conservation and management of African-Eurasian migratory waterbirds

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INTRODUCTION

The remit of AEWA's Technical Committee includes requirements to:

- “(a) provide scientific and technical advice and information to the Meeting of the Parties and, through the Agreement secretariat, to Parties;
- (b) make recommendations to the Meeting of the Parties concerning the Action Plan, implementation of the Agreement and further research to be carried out;”

Many aspects of the implementation of the Agreement are brought to the attention of Technical Committee meetings through workplan tasks arising from decisions of the Meeting of Parties. However, it is important that the Committee has the opportunity of bring issues to the attention of the Parties, which may be ‘emerging’ as factors likely to affect the status of waterbirds either directly or indirectly.

The work-programme of Ramsar's Scientific and Technical Review Panel includes similar considerations of ongoing and emerging issues, many of which are likely to be much the same as those affecting AEWA species (corresponding to the concerns of wetland conservation).

ACTION REQUESTED FROM THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Annex presents a non-exhaustive list of issues (not in any order of priority), which are, or may become, of significance for waterbird conservation in the AEWA area. However, most of these are not currently addressed by the tasks instructed by MoP 4.

1. It is suggested that the Technical Committee briefly consider each of these at its ninth meeting to determine whether or not it is currently an issue for AEWA, and if it is, how it may be pursued.
2. It is also suggested that the Committee add other issues to the list (of which there will certainly be several) and maintain this list for discussion at future meetings as a standing agenda item.

Annex: preliminary list of ongoing and emerging issues for AEWA

1. Emerging diseases

Emergent diseases have been identified as a major issue for waterbird conservation (e.g. by the Waterbirds around the world conference: http://www.jncc.gov.uk/PDF/pub07_waterbirds_part4.2.1.pdf). A workshop at the Edinburgh conference (http://www.jncc.gov.uk/PDF/pub07_waterbirds_part4.2.pdf) reached the following conclusions:

“The following four recommendations were made:

1. There is a need to increase awareness, and to educate others, that disease in waterbird populations should be viewed in an ecological context, responsive to environmental changes and perturbations.
2. A global wildlife health policy should be instituted that provides standardized methods for investigation, diagnosis and reporting of mortality events in waterbirds and other wildlife (similar to those put in place for domestic animals and humans, by, for example, the World Health Organisation and the World Organisation for Animal Health - OIE).
3. Discourse and interaction between conservation biologists, animal welfare proponents and the food animal industry should be strongly encouraged so that animal welfare considerations do not jeopardise wildlife conservation (*i.e.* proximity of open range animal production to wetlands).
4. Active steps should be undertaken to curtail the excessive movement of wild animals through the exotic pet trade so as to reduce the risk of disease transmission and to enhance the conservation of wild species.

The workshop called, in particular, for urgent action to mitigate disease emergence and losses in waterbirds by integrating fundamental disease concepts into global strategies for waterbird conservation.”

Some aspects of that agenda have been developed in the specific context of HPAI H5N1 and AEWA’s response to it (via the Task Force and Resolutions 3.18 and 4.15). However, are there other aspects that AEWA should be developing??

CMS established a Task Force on Wildlife Disease to establish co-ordination between MEAs on non-HPAI issues (see [CMS Res 9.08: Responding to the Challenge of Emerging and Re-Emerging Diseases in Migratory Species, including HPAI H5N1](#)). AEWA should participate in the work of that group as appropriate.

2. Promoting waterbird conservation through ‘non-traditional’ sectors of society

Some sectors of society can have considerable influence on the decisions that communities take about environmental resource use. Women’s groups in particular can be influential and BirdLife International in particular has many examples of the importance of reaching such groups in order to gain community support for conservation actions for critically threatened species. Schools and faith groups are other examples. Should AEWA be aiming to work with and communicate through such sectors of society?

3. Invasive species (including impacts of aquatic weeds)

A review of two case studies from Africa on impacts of aquatic weeds on wetland habitats has been completed. There have not been clear proposals from the TC as to how to bring this work, and Guidelines based on it, to the MOP. Where do we want to take this work?

4. Waterbirds in urban environments

Increasing urbanisation and wetland losses are increasingly bringing waterbirds into closer proximity to human settlements. Issues include:

- Disease transmission risk (to and from waterbirds e.g. salmonella)
- Opportunities for education and awareness

Would guidance be valuable for urban authorities (quite a lot exists but probably not very accessible)?

5. Traditional knowledge and harvest regimes

Much waterbird harvesting is undertaken on a traditional basis. What do we know about this? Is loss of that knowledge an issue for conservation (rather than loss of cultural aspects for human society)?

6. Ensuring consumptive harvests are sustainable

In some parts of Africa especially, considerable numbers of waterbirds are harvested as food. With growing human populations, the extent of such harvest may increase. What do we know about the scale of this taking and the extent to which it is or is not sustainable for the populations concerned?

7. Impacts of pollution

Do we have any sort of oversight of pollution levels (body burdens of pollutants) in waterbirds at international scales? National monitoring schemes exist in some countries, but is this information collated? Is that an issue?

8. Seabird bycatch

With the addition of 20 seabird species to the AEWA list in 2008, the issue of bycatch appears of higher significance for the Agreement. How can AEWA develop synergies and support work of other MEAs in this area?

9. Impacts of agricultural chemicals on waterbirds

Historically a cause of occasional mass mortality – typically through the ingestion of recently sown grain coated with toxic fungicides etc. A Review was prepared for AEWA focussing especially on situation in Africa some years ago but has yet to be finalised. Where do we want to take this issue?

10. Extractive industries

Major impacts on wetlands. Review currently being undertaken jointly with Ramsar STRP.

11. Waterbirds and corporate industry

Corporations and especially Trans National Corporations (TNCs) wield substantial resources and their operations can have major impacts on the natural environment. Should AEWA be engaging more closely with TNCs?

12. Reducing airstrike risk from waterbirds

Is this an issue for AEWA?

13. AEWA Conservation Guidelines

AEWA has produced twelve sets of guidelines covering different conservation aspects. However, there is no clear feedback whether they are being used or not. If not, why not?

Note that there are strong links to results from a review undertaken by Ramsar's STRP which assessed the degree to which its guidance documentation – which is conceptually similar to that of AEWA's - is being used (see http://ramsar.org/cop10/cop10_doc21_e.pdf which is well worth reading). Many of the findings and recommendations from that assessment are probably equally relevant to AEWA in its thinking on future guidance production.

This would seem to be an area where there would be benefits in the TC working closely with Ramsar's STRP in trying to improve the style, accessibility and use of guidance documentation.

14. Conflicting renewable energy development

Two desk studies have been envisaged as part of IIT 2009-2016 one focusing on winfarms and another on other renewable energy sources. Meanwhile many new wind-farms are being planned not only in Europe, but in Africa and other parts of the Agreement area, including in areas of conflict with biodiversity, particularly migratory birds. Hydro-power stations and large biofuel plantations are in the pipeline and will replace prime waterbird habitats.

What role shall AEWA play in helping avoid conflicting planning and development?

15. Power lines as barriers

Large numbers of man-made artefacts act as barriers to waterbird migration. Amongst them power lines appear to take the highest toll from populations of certain species. There are possible solutions developed, but they are not being necessarily applied widely throughout the Agreement area. How do we make sure that mortality caused by power lines is reduced to a minimum? What role should the Agreement play?