



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

5 - 9 October 2021, Budapest, Hungary

### DRAFT REVISED AEWA CONSERVATION GUIDELINES NO. 1: GUIDELINES ON THE PREPARATION OF NATIONAL SPECIES ACTION PLANS FOR MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS

#### Introduction

The first [Guidelines on National Single Species Action Plans](#) were prepared by Wetlands International and adopted at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Meeting of the AEWA Parties in 2002 followed by an update in April 2005, which focused mainly on updating references and improving the layout and formatting of the Guidelines.

A revision of the Guidelines has long been on the workplan of the AEWA Technical Committee and was most recently requested by the 7<sup>th</sup> Session of the Meeting of the Parties in 2018 through [Resolution 7.5](#) on the Adoption, Revision, Retirement, Extension and Implementation of International Species Action and Management Plans.

The current revision has been prepared by the Secretariat in response to this request from the Parties as well as frequent requests submitted to the Secretariat by various other stakeholders asking for updated guidance with respect to the development of National Action Plans or similar national processes, further highlighting the need for these revised Guidelines as well as the specific expertise on action-planning which has been amassed under the auspices of AEWA.

The draft revision reflects, amongst other issues, advancements made in the preparation of International Species Action Plans under the Agreement. The original mandate in the AEWA Action Plan in paragraph 7.3 calls for guidelines to be provided on the development of Single Species Action Plans. But just as International Species Action Plans are increasingly being considered and developed for groups of species facing similar threats, countries are also moving to develop both national single and multi-species Action Plans. This is also captured in the revised format for AEWA International Species Action Plans. Hence, the revised Guidelines encompass both single and multi-species action-planning, as the processes are in general the same for both.

The draft was presented to the AEWA Technical Committee for further input at its 16<sup>th</sup> meeting on 25-29 January 2021 and was subsequently approved by the Committee following some modifications. The Standing Committee approved the draft Guidelines for submission to the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the Meeting of the AEWA Parties for subsequent adoption at its 16<sup>th</sup> meeting on 4-6 May 2021, subject to some few final technical amendments, which have since been carried out by the Secretariat.

#### Action Requested from the Meeting of the Parties

The Meeting of the Parties is requested to review the final draft revised Guidelines and to adopt them for further use.

# AEWA Conservation Guidelines No.1

## [DRAFT Revised] Guidelines on the Preparation of National Species Action Plans for Migratory Waterbirds

Revision 1<sup>1</sup>

*prepared by the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat*

July 2021

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<sup>1</sup> First revision based on the [Guidelines](#) developed by Wetlands International and adopted by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Meeting of the Parties to AEWA in 2002 (Last update 19-4-2005).

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Milestones of the production of the guidelines (2nd edition):

- 1<sup>st</sup> draft presented to the 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the AEWA Technical Committee on 25-29 January 2021;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> draft submitted to the 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the AEWA Standing Committee on 4-6 May 2021;
- [final draft adopted at the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the Meeting of the AEWA Parties in October 2021].

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Picture on the cover: [...]

Disclaimer:

The presentation of the material in this document does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNEP/AEWA.

## **AEWA Conservation Guidelines - Introduction**

In Article II of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds, Parties agree, as a fundamental principle, to take coordinated measures to maintain migratory waterbird species in a favourable conservation status or to restore them to such a status. To this end, the Parties agree to apply within the limits of their national jurisdiction a number of general conservation measures prescribed in Article III of the Agreement, as well as a number of more specific actions determined in the Action Plan appended to the Agreement.

In paragraph 7.3 of the Action Plan, the Agreement Secretariat is required to coordinate the development of a series of Conservation Guidelines to assist the Parties in the implementation of their obligations under the Agreement. The Conservation Guidelines, which should be prepared in co-ordination with the Technical Committee and with the assistance of experts from Range States, are submitted to the Sessions of the Meetings of the Parties for adoption after which they are published (Article IV, paragraph 4 of the Agreement).

The Technical Committee keeps the guidelines under review, and formulates draft recommendations and resolutions relating to their development, content and implementation for consideration at sessions of the Meeting of the Parties (paragraph 7.6 of the Action Plan).

Paragraph 7.3 of the Action Plan gives a list of some of the topics that should be covered by the Conservation Guidelines. These are as follows:

- (a) single species action plans;
- (b) emergency measures;
- (c) preparation of site inventories and habitat management methods;
- (d) hunting practices;
- (e) trade in waterbirds;
- (f) tourism;
- (g) reducing crop damage;
- (h) a waterbird monitoring protocol.

The Conservation Guidelines adopted under the Agreement can be found on the [AEWA website](#).

## BRIEFING: Developing National Single and Multi-species Action Plans

### Introduction

In accordance with Paragraph 2.2.1 of the AEWA Action Plan (Annex 3 to the Agreement), Parties to the Agreement shall co-operate with a view to developing and implementing International Species Action Plans for populations of migratory waterbirds listed in Category 1 of Column A Table 1 of Annex 3 as a priority and for those populations listed with an asterisk in Column A of Table 1.

Under the provisions of AEWA there are, in addition, two mandates for Contracting Parties to the Agreement to produce National Species Action Plans: one for the national implementation of International Action Plans for species/populations listed in Category 1 of Column A or populations in Categories 2 and 3 marked with an asterisk (Paragraph 2.2.1). The other, arises from the obligations of Parties to develop National Species Action Plans for populations listed in other categories of Column A (Paragraph 2.2.2).

A Species Action Plan is defined as a prescriptive plan for a species or a population of a species, aimed at recovering the target species (or population of that species) to a favourable conservation status. Species Action Plans can also cover a group of multiple species/populations which share the same habitats and conservation challenges, i.e. a Multi-species Action Plan.

Successful species conservation and recovery often requires coordination amongst a suite of actors and policy fields. Species Action Plans, if developed correctly, are an effective tool for coordinating species conservation action both at the international as well as national level. The key is to run a transparent process which includes all relevant stakeholders and brings together the best available scientific knowledge. This will help to ensure that there is a common understanding and agreement on the status quo as well as what needs to be undertaken for the species' recovery and where responsibilities for implementation lie.

### Step Chart: Step-by-step approach

In the preparation of National Species Action Plans, countries are recommended to take the following step-by-step approach, as applicable:

Step 1	Establish a national process for the prioritisation, development and adoption of National Species Action Plans (as applicable), including the identification of a coordinating organisation and agencies to be involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Take stock of the national situation (Does a process for species-action planning already exist?).</li> <li>➤ If not or if there is room for improvement, consider what type of process would be most appropriate (formal/legal – or more informal?) and take steps to establish such a process.</li> <li>➤ Consider the establishment of a National Species Action Planning Task Force or Working Group established by a government agency to coordinate and oversee the work.</li> </ul>
Step 2	Identify and prioritise the species in need of a National Species Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Prioritize which species are in most urgent need of coordinated conservation action in your country, also taking into account possible international obligations and processes such as the existence of an International Species Action Plan.</li> </ul>
Step 3	Produce and adopt the National Species Action Plan using a standardised format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Develop and run an inclusive and transparent process based on the best available scientific knowledge.</li> <li>➤ Make use of existing formats developed and adopted for species action-planning under AEWA.</li> </ul>
Step 4	Implement the National Species Action Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Establish certain procedural elements to facilitate the implementation of national species action plans such as a National Species Working Group, a Coordinator and a more detailed 2-3 year workplan.</li> </ul>

Step 5	Monitor the implementation and impact of the National Species Action Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Monitor not just the species but also implementation progress and the impacts of the Plan from the start.</li> <li>➤ Ideally monitor progress on actions annually.</li> </ul>
Step 6	Review and revise at periodic intervals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Plan for a mid-term evaluation (typically at the 5-year mark for a 10-year Plan).</li> <li>➤ Note possible international reporting requirements under AEWA (and other relevant frameworks).</li> <li>➤ Produce a more extensive evaluation report near the end of the term of the Action Plan against the indicators therein.</li> <li>➤ Based on the outcome of the evaluation, decide whether to revise, extend or retire the National Species Action Plan.</li> </ul>

### Useful references

- International Species Action Plans adopted under AEWA can be found on the [AEWA website](#);
- Revised Format for AEWA International Single and Multi-Species Action Plans *[link to be included after MOP8]*;
- Format for AEWA International Single and Multi-Species Management Plans *[link to be included after MOP8]*;
- Overviews on the status of preparation and implementation of AEWA International Species Action and Management Plans as produced by the AEWA Technical Committee and AEWA Secretariat ([AEWA website](#));
- [IUCN – SSC Species Conservation Planning Sub-Committee. \(2017\). Guidelines for Species Conservation Planning. Version 1.0. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. xiv + 114 pp.](#);
- [IUCN SSC Action Plan Series](#);
- [IUCN Red List Threats Classification Scheme](#);
- [Conservation Evidence](#).

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENT: Developing National Single and Multi-species Action Plans

### 1. Introduction

A Species Action Plan is defined as a prescriptive plan for a species or a population of a species, aimed at recovering the target species (or population of that species) to a favourable conservation status. Species Action Plans can also cover a suite of multiple species/populations which share the same habitats and conservation challenges, i.e. a Multi-species Action Plan.

In accordance with Paragraph 2.2.1 of the AEWA Action Plan (Annex 3 to the Agreement), Parties to the Agreement shall co-operate with a view to developing and implementing International Species Action Plans for populations of migratory waterbirds listed in Category 1 of Column A Table 1 of Annex 3 as a priority and for those populations listed with an asterisk in Column A of Table 1<sup>2</sup>.

AEWA also foresees the sustainable use of migratory waterbirds by Contracting Parties. Therefore the Agreement also provides for the development of International Species Management Plans, which either provide for the sustainable use of populations listed under the Agreement on flyway-level on the basis of adaptive harvest management or which deal with populations which are causing significant damage that may or may not be open for hunting. As the current national practice with respect to the implementation of International Species Management Plans follows a different process, these guidelines have not been extended to cover Species Management Plans.

Under the provisions of AEWA there are two mandates for Contracting Parties to the Agreement to produce National Species Action Plans: one for the national implementation of International Action Plans for species/populations listed in Category 1 of Column A or populations in Categories 2 and 3 marked with an asterisk (Paragraph 2.2.1). The other, arises from the obligations of Parties to develop National Species Action Plans for populations listed in other categories of Column A (Paragraph 2.2.2).

Be it for one population, one species or many - why do we need International and National Species Action Plans? Because some species cannot be adequately protected by ecosystem- or habitat-oriented measures alone. This is particularly pertinent for migratory waterbirds: during migration, waterbirds may depend on locations that cannot be fully protected, or they may be particularly threatened by unsustainable use or other causes of excess mortality. Because migratory species cross national boundaries, it is also essential that measures for the protection of these species and conservation of their habitats be coordinated at an international, regional as well as national scale.

At the national level in particular, different management actions typically fall under the jurisdictions of different governmental departments (such as environment, agriculture, forestry, water management, hunting), involve multiple site management organisations (national and provincial governmental bodies, NGOs etc.), and should also involve various stakeholders (landowners, hunters, fishermen, etc.). Species Action Plans provide an effective tool for a coordinated approach.

Indeed the International Species Action Plans adopted under the Agreement usually only set the agreed framework for the action to be undertaken in each country and as such do not necessarily go into the details of how exactly range states are to implement certain actions. For prioritized International Species Action Plans the AEWA Secretariat endeavors to establish inter-governmental [International Species Working Groups](#) under the remit of which the actions are further prioritized and made more concrete in the form of rolling non-binding workplans. National Species Action Plans break down the internationally agreed activities and provide more practical detail: who is responsible for doing what, where, when and with which resources. There are also cases where no International Species Action Plan exists, but a National Action Plan is warranted due to the particular importance of the country in question for the recovery of a species or population.

The action-planning process as described below has been developed under the Agreement in an effort to **ensure a transparent process that includes all relevant stakeholders and brings together the best available scientific**

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<sup>2</sup> The latest adopted updated version of the AEWA Agreement Text can be found on the [AEWA website](#).

**knowledge**<sup>3</sup>. Both of these elements – the transparent and inclusive process, as well as working on the basis of best available science – are crucial elements for enabling the subsequent implementation of both International and National Species Action Plans once adopted.

In practice, national species action-planning is often conducted ad hoc in many countries, depending on the availability of resources and as opportunities present themselves to do such work. The existing experience varies greatly from country to country. Some countries have standard policy processes in place for the facilitation of action-planning whilst others lack experience in action-planning completely. The step-by-step approach to action-planning outlined below is a process which – resources permitting – will allow countries to take a more strategic long-term view to national species action-planning, taking into consideration both international and national priorities, including establishing some form of national process to deal with the prioritisation, development, adoption and implementation of such plans.

It should also be noted that not all countries implement conservation action for priority species by developing and adopting National Species Action Plans, but they may have some other policy mechanism(s) in place which serve the same purpose. Regardless of the mechanism used, the main steps in the action-planning process outlined below – coupled with the references provided to additional information – will still be useful keeping in mind that any such effort will require the same long-term government support, transparency amongst all stakeholders, coordination as well as dedicated resources and monitoring of results to ensure successful implementation ultimately leading to the restoration of a species or population to a favourable conservation status.

*Box 1: Overview of types of International and National Species Action and Management Plans with examples*

Type of Plan	Definition	Example
International Single Species Action Plan	Prescriptive plan for a species or a population of a species, aimed at recovering the target species (or population of that species) to a favourable conservation status. For migratory species/populations, these Plans usually encompass the entire range.	[ <i>AEWA International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Common Eider (Somateria mollissima)</i> – link to be added after MOP8]
International Multi-species Action Plan	Same as above, but instead of focusing on one species/population, Multi-species Plans cover a suite of species which share the same habitat and/or face similar threats. These may not always cover the entire range of the species in question but can also focus on an area of particular concern (for example breeding or wintering areas).	<a href="#">AEWA International Multi-species Action Plan for the Conservation of Benguela Current Upwelling System Coastal Seabirds</a>
National Species Action Plan	Prescriptive plan for a species or a suite of species, aimed at recovering the target species to a favourable conservation status within a country. Can be developed under the auspices of an International Action Plan but can also be developed independently.	<a href="#">Swedish National Action Plan for the Conservation of Threatened Grassland Waders (2015-2019)</a>  <a href="#">Plan d’Action National pour la conservation de la Barge à queue noire <i>Limosa limosa limosa</i> au Sénégal</a>
International Species Management Plan	Plans which either provide for the sustainable use of populations on flyway-level on the basis of adaptive harvest management or which deal	<a href="#">AEWA International Single Species Management Plan for the Greylag Goose Nw/Sw European Population (<i>Anser anser</i>)</a>

<sup>3</sup> Overview on the status of preparation and implementation of AEWA ISSAPs and ISSMPs as well as Multi-Species Action Plans 2015.



	with populations which are causing significant damage that may or may not be open for hunting.	
Adaptive Flyway Management Programme	Programme which provides the framework for joint management of a population under the auspices of an adopted International Species Management Plan to ensure that the fundamental objectives are achieved.	<a href="#"><u>Adaptive Flyway Management Programme for the Nw/Sw European Population of the Greylag Goose (<i>Anser Anser</i>)</u></a>

## 2. Step Chart

In the preparation of National Species Action Plans, countries are recommended to take the following step-by-step approach, as applicable to their existing policy workflows:

*Box 2: Proposed step-by-step approach to address species action-planning*

Step 1	Establish a national process for the prioritisation, development and adoption of National Species Action Plans (as applicable), including the identification of a coordinating organisation, agencies and other key stakeholders to be involved
Step 2	Identify and prioritise the species in need of a National Species Action Plan (which could be a Single or Multi-species Plan)
Step 3	Produce and adopt the National Species Action Plan using a standardised format
Step 4	Implement the National Species Action Plans
Step 5	Monitor the implementation and impact of the National Species Action Plans
Step 6	Review and revise at periodic intervals

### **Step 1** – Establish a national process for the prioritisation, development and adoption of National Species Action Plans

Species action-planning is a useful tool for coordinating conservation and management efforts for prioritised species. This is true both internationally amongst the Range States for a certain species as well as nationally amongst the various relevant government entities and other stakeholders concerned.

As noted above, in practice national species action-planning is often conducted ad hoc, depending on the availability of resources and as opportunities present themselves to do such work – for example within the framework of a larger national or international project. The EU LIFE projects are a good example: National Species Action Plans for priority species are often developed within the framework of these larger projects to ensure government buy-in and longer-term commitment to the continuation of project activities<sup>4</sup>. As such, the funding mechanism has driven the development of national species action-planning in many EU Member States.

The experience in national action-planning also varies greatly from country to country. Some countries already have standard policy processes in place for the facilitation of national action-planning – including provisions for National Action Plans to be formally adopted by their governments - whilst others lack formal provisions for action-planning completely. Also, not all countries choose to implement conservation action for priority species by developing and adopting National Species Action Plans, but rather have an alternative policy process in place within the conservation administration which allows them to coordinate conservation action and dedicate funds without a formal national action-planning process.

For countries where no coordination for species action-planning exists, it could be worthwhile to consider approaching species-action planning in a more structured manner by establishing a national process for the prioritisation, development and adoption of National Species Action Plans, as appropriate within the respective national policy environment.

Keeping in mind that the situation in each country is different in terms of administration, capacity etc., such a process could include the following elements:

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<sup>4</sup> As an example, three National Action Plans for the conservation of the globally threatened Lesser White-fronted Goose were adopted in Bulgaria, Hungary and Greece as part of the EU LIFE project LIFE10 NAT/GR/000638 (more information available on the [project website](#)).

- A national Task Force or Working Group established by a government agency (for example with the [AEWA Focal Point](#) taking the lead on behalf of his/her organisation) comprising representatives from other relevant implementing agencies as well as national experts from NGOs, research institutes etc.
- The remit of such a Group could be to:
  - a) develop and promote the establishment of a process for the adoption of National Species Action Plans (as appropriate);
  - b) carry out the prioritisation of species for action-planning;
  - c) coordinate the various action-planning processes (identification of funds, Action Plan compilers, ensure that action-planning processes are carried out to a set standard etc.);
  - d) overseeing monitoring of implementation of adopted National Species Action Plans and changes in the species' status as well as coordinating reporting to international processes (AEWA, AEWA International Species Working Groups and others as applicable);
  - e) consider the extension, revision or retirement of National Species Action Plans when these come to the end of their set terms (usually ten years).
- Further guidance on the possible tasks of such groups can be derived from the generic Terms of Reference for AEWA International Species Working Groups developed and adopted by the AEWA Technical Committee in 2009 (Annex I).

How and whether National Species Action Plans are adopted also varies greatly between countries and their existing nature conservation policies and culture. In some countries National Species Action Plans are never formally adopted by a government body but perhaps published by the Ministry responsible which is sufficient for implementation to start amongst the identified lead organisations and for government funds to be made available.

In some cases, however, it may be pertinent to establish a more formal adoption procedure for National Species Action Plans to ensure the commitment of all relevant sectors to the implementation of the Plan as well as to increase chances of securing government funding for implementation. Formal adoption of Action Plans can have benefits and consequences. It can, for instance, be useful to legally require that these plans be taken into consideration in various authorization processes – e.g. in the impact assessments which inform development applications, or when determining whether to grant a permit allowing the taking of a protected species.

Over the years the AEWA Secretariat has received numerous requests for guidance on the establishment of such formal adoption procedures both from government contacts and stakeholders who have started work on an Action Plan only to find that they first need to get a decree or other form of legislation passed within their national governments before the Plan in question can be approved and formally adopted. This is particularly relevant when National Species Action Plans are being developed under the framework of larger projects and the acceptance of the associated costs by donors are linked to the Plans being formally adopted by the national government in question.

Some guidance as well as a few examples of formulations derived from existing national legislations in AEWA Contracting Parties for the establishment of a national process for the development and adoption of National Species Action Plans are provided in the box below as outlined in the [AEWA Conservation Guidelines No. 15 on National Legislation for the Protection of Species of Migratory Waterbirds and their Habitats](#). It is likely that no two countries share the exact same adoption procedure – as this is linked to national legislation, each country will have to consider the best way forward within their existing conservation legislation. The AEWA Secretariat and Technical Committee can be approached for additional advice, if needed.

*Box 3: Guidance on the establishment of national legislation for the development and implementation of National Species Action Plans. Excerpt from the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the AEWA Conservation Guidelines No. 15 on National Legislation for the Protection of Species of Migratory Waterbirds and their Habitats, pages 66-68.*

National legislation should provide that planning processes are based on scientific data and are target-oriented. It can identify mandatory sources or authorities to be consulted in the planning process. It can also address requirements for participation in the process by government agencies and the public.

The planning must also encompass multiple levels of activity, taking into account a range of activities and factors. In many countries, the planning process occurs initially at one level and then is adopted at others. For example, the law could require that a draft plan be initially developed at the district (local) or provincial (sub-national) level, and that all of these plans then be submitted to the central authority for a process of rationalisation and for the creation of a “national plan.” It is equally possible to begin by developing the plan at the national level, and require that local or sub-national plans be developed in conformity with basic planning. Where an International Single Species Action Plan or an International Single Species Management Plan exists, Parties should ensure that their national plans are aligned therewith (also see Introduction II.2(c)).

Many countries have legislation for management planning for conservation and sustainable use, which can be made applicable for planning for the management of migratory waterbirds. For example, the Environmental Protection Act of Bulgaria provides for long term and annual plans and programmes for conservation of renewable wildlife resources, while South Africa’s Biodiversity Act provides for the development of biodiversity management plans for certain ecosystems and species, including migratory species protected under international law (see practical examples 38 and 39).

**Practical example 38:**

**Bulgaria, Environmental Protection Act, 2002 (amended 2011)**

**Article 53**

- (1) Long-term and annual plans and programmes shall be elaborated for conservation and use of forests, game, fish, herbs, mushrooms and other renewable wildlife resources.
- (2) The plans and programmes referred to in Paragraph (1) shall be prepared under terms and according to a procedure established by the relevant special laws.

**Practical example 39:**

**South Africa, National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 2004**

**Section 43**

- (1) Any person, organization or organ of state desiring to contribute to biodiversity management may submit to the Minister for his or her approval a draft management plan for - ...
  - (c) a migratory species to give effect to the Republic’s obligations in terms of an international agreement binding on the Republic.
- (2) Before approving a draft biodiversity management plan, the Minister must identify a suitable person, organisation or organ of state which is willing to be responsible for the implementation of the plan.
- (3) The Minister must-
  - (a) publish by notice in the Gazette a biodiversity management plan approved in terms of subsection (1);
  - (b) determine the manner of implementation of the plan; and
  - (c) assign responsibility for the implementation of the plan to the person, organisation or organ of state identified in terms of subsection (2).

Finally, national legislation should provide for the implementation of such plans, including by providing for such regulations as are necessary for zoning, authorisation of users, and other elements of the plan. It should ensure that agencies developing or implementing plans have sufficient capacity and authority. Legislation may also provide for plans to be implemented by private persons or non-governmental organisations, as illustrated by South Africa’s Biodiversity Act (see practical example 39).

**Actions suggested for AEWPA Parties:**

- Ensure that national legislation establishes appropriate processes for developing species action, management and re-establishment plans for AEWA populations, and requires that such plans are based on scientific data and are aligned with existing international plans.
- Ensure that national legislation provides for the implementation of these plans, including by providing the necessary authority to the agencies/persons responsible for implementation.

Ultimately it will be up to each country to consider which approach – more formal and anchored in national legislation or more ad hoc – will be more appropriate and effective in their circumstances. Regardless of the approach or process taken (government or NGO-driven), good Action Plans will ultimately deliver on these essential elements: facilitating an agreement amongst the stakeholder on what needs to be done and who is willing to do it.

## Step 2 – Identify and prioritise the species in need of a National Species Action Plan

As outlined above, in accordance with Paragraph 2.2.2 of the AEWA Action Plan (Annex 3 to the Agreement), Parties shall prepare and implement National Species Action Plans for all populations of waterbirds listed in Column A of Table 1 of Annex 3<sup>5</sup>. Depending on the occurrence of Column A species in a country, this would potentially call for the development of very many National Action Plans.

It is therefore proposed to take a more pragmatic yet strategic approach by prioritising those species, which are most urgently in need of coordinated national action – also by assessing for which migratory waterbird species the country in question is of particular relevance for restoring to their favourable conservation status. Alternatively, development of multi-species action plans for species whose distributions largely overlap and which share the same habitats could address the needs of multiple species in one planning and implementation process as these may be subjected to the same threats and may require similar conservation response.

To facilitate the national decision-making on this issue the following prioritisation of species/populations for international species action-planning under AEWA as adopted by the AEWA Technical Committee at its 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting in 2021 as outlined below in Box 4 can be used as a reference.

*Box 4: Guidance on the prioritisation of species for national action-planning based on the prioritisation of species/populations for international species action-planning under AEWA as adopted by the AEWA Technical Committee (January 2021).*

### **Prioritisation of species for national action-planning:**

- **Priority 1:** Globally Threatened and Near-Threatened species listed on Annex 2 of AEWA based on their global Red List Status;
- **Priority 2:** populations of Least Concern species listed in Categories 1(a), 1(c), or 2 or 3 and marked with an asterisk in Table 1 and in long- or rapid short-term decline;
- **Priority 3:** populations of Least Concern species listed in Category 1c not in long- or rapid short-term decline.

### **Priority 1 species**

It is recommended to rank first Globally Threatened and Near-Threatened species in descending order: Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN), Vulnerable (VU) and Near-threatened (NT). This list should exclude all species that are already adequately covered by a plan under another national framework or process.

Then use the following factors as additional filters to select the priority species for action-planning amongst the Globally Threatened and Near Threatened ones:

1. Exclude species of which your country regularly hosts less than 1% of the global population of the species, i.e. for the global recovery of which your country does not play a major role.

<sup>5</sup> The AEWA Agreement Text with the latest adopted updated version of Table 1 Column A can be found on the [AEWA website](#).

For priority 1 species which remain after this elimination step, the following factors could be considered as advantages and could lead to moving the species up in the ranking on the list by 2-8 steps depending on the number of criteria which are met of those listed below:

2. The causes of decline are understood;
3. Remedial actions have been successfully developed and tested;
4. The species is subject of utilisation;
5. The recovery is dependent not only on habitat conservation measures but also on species management actions;
6. The species population can be subject of one or more Multi-species Action Plans;
7. There is a potential government, NGO or private sector champion for the species to fund the planning and implementation process;
8. There is a potential coordinator for the development and implementation of the Action Plan.

### **Priority 2 and 3 species**

Species in these categories to be ranked within their own categories in an increasing order of their population size whilst excluding populations that are adequately covered by a plan under another national framework or process.

## **Step 3 – Produce and adopt the National Species Action Plan using a standardised format**

By this stage a decision has been taken to develop a National Single or Multi-Species Action Plan for a species or suite of species in need of coordinated conservation action – either resulting from an international mandate/process, a national prioritisation of species for action-planning, a national recognition of the need for coordinated action or a combination of all of the above. Regardless of how the decision has been reached: it is time to move to the actual development and adoption of the Action Plan.

The key to any successful action-planning process is the involvement of all critical stakeholders from the outset and ensuring that the process followed is clearly structured and transparent. Ensuring the ‘buy-in’ of both relevant government agencies and other key stakeholders is an essential factor not only for the successful production and adoption of an Action Plan, but especially for the ultimate purpose of such Plans: their successful implementation as a means to improving or maintaining the conservation status of a species. This hinges on broad support and requires the long-term commitment of all stakeholders far beyond the process of negotiation and adoption.

Action Plans should not adopt a top-down approach that does not take into account the concerns of people living and working in the places where the species in need of an Action Plan occurs. Such an approach may increase tensions and problems and may prove counterproductive. Stakeholders should be fully involved in the action-planning process from the beginning, so that they feel they ‘own’ the plan and have a personal interest in its successful implementation.

The action-planning process under AEWA is typically structured as follows<sup>6</sup>:

- Following the decision to develop a Species Action Plan, the coordinating Working Group or Task Force will identify **funding for the process as well as a person or organisation to compile the Plan** (lead compiler). In some cases, a decision may be taken to establish a drafting team comprised of several experts coordinated by the lead compiler;
- A crucial component in ensuring the early involvement of all relevant stakeholders in any action-planning process is the organisation of a multi-stakeholder **action-planning workshop**. The agenda for the workshop should be prepared by the leading government agency, the lead compiler as well as the workshop facilitator, if applicable. Invitations should be sent to **all relevant stakeholders** that have a direct impact on the conservation and status of the species (government departments responsible for environment, water

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<sup>6</sup> [Overview on the status of preparation and implementation of AEWA ISSAPs and ISSMPs as well as Multi-Species Action Plans 2015.](#)

resources, fisheries, agriculture, infrastructure etc.) and statutory agencies; universities; representatives of relevant NGOs; specialised institutes; hunters' organisations and other stakeholders such as landowners, farming and fisheries representatives etc.);

- The selection of a dedicated **experienced facilitator** to run the action-planning workshop is recommended – in particular if disputes are expected amongst the various stakeholder groups at the workshop. It is often the case that clashes between key stakeholders have been ongoing for some time and someone perceived by the group as neutral will have a better chance to lead the discussion in a productive manner allowing the group to achieve meaningful compromises which take into consideration all views;
- If time allows, a **biological assessment** of the species in the country (also put into international context) can be prepared before the workshop. This biological assessment should be a straightforward, factual assessment and relatively easy to produce, but will need to be validated by the workshop participants. After that, discussions should focus on **agreeing on the main threats and the assessment of their impact**, followed by the discussion and agreement on the **framework for action** (objectives, results and actions with their associated indicators as well as knowledge gaps). If an International Single or Multi-Species Action Plan already exists, it will be important to ensure that what is agreed nationally is aligned with the internationally agreed goals, results and actions. National actions should deliver against what has been agreed internationally on a flyway scale. They also need to take into account how circumstances may have evolved in the period since the adoption of the International Species Action Plan (e.g. new/emerging threats). Discussions can also be held on possible urgent activities that may need to be implemented immediately before the formal adoption of the Plan;
- Useful sources of information in addition to existing International Species Action Plans may include National Action Plans for the species from other countries; other literature on the species concerned; scientific databases; expert knowledge as well as field research, to fill in any gaps identified from the above;
- For AEWA Contracting Parties the AEWA Secretariat may also serve as a source of information with respect to contacting international species or topical experts, if additional advice is required for the implementation of a certain action.

It should be noted that Species Action Plans are frameworks for the coordinated conservation of species/populations – they are not scientific papers for peer-review. Although Action Plans should summarise the best scientific knowledge available at the time of development, gaps in scientific knowledge should not be seen as a reason for delaying the development and subsequent adoption of a Plan. Instead, such knowledge gaps and assumptions made in the absence of hard data should be duly noted in the Plan and activities to close such gaps, ideally in cooperation with all relevant range states, where applicable, should be added.

National Action Plans should be developed following an agreed and standardised format. The format developed and adopted for AEWA International Single and Multi-species Action Plans, which is accompanied by detailed guidance on how each section should be completed, represents the most up-to-date format for species action-planning and countries are advised to follow it, as applicable.

A slightly revised table of contents for the format (taking into account that the goal is to develop a National Species Action Plan) is presented in Box 3 below. The accompanying guidance, which includes specific information on elements such as establishing favourable reference values, running the threat assessment and prioritisation of actions etc. can be found on the [AEWA website](#).

Box 5. Suggested format for National Species Action Plans<sup>7</sup>

<p><b>Front Cover</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• National Single Species or Multi-Species Action Plan for the [<i>insert: species' name + scientific name - also mention for which sub-species or population if relevant</i>];</li></ul>
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<sup>7</sup> The most up-to-date version of the format can be found on the [AEWA website](#).

- Lifespan of Plan;
- Portrait/picture of the species;
- Logos of the organisations leading on the production of the plan, donors supporting the planning process and organisation that adopted the Plan (*if applicable*).

### Inside Front Cover

- Titles of the organisation that has adopted the Plan, organisations leading on the production of the plan and donors supporting the planning process;
- Compiler(s) including contact details;
- List of contributors (names and countries and/or organisations);
- Date of adoption (and number of edition if not the first edition);
- Lifespan of Plan;
- Milestones in the production of the Plan;
- Name and contact details of the official National Species Working Group (if applicable) including the following text: “*Please send any additional information or comments regarding this Action Plan to the [Working/Expert] Group, email: [xxx].*”, or specify another more appropriate contact, including an email address.
- Recommended citation, including ISBN, if applicable.

### Introduction

One paragraph outlining justification for the National Species Action Plan.

### 1 – BASIC DATA<sup>8</sup>

- Species and populations covered by the Plan;
- Distribution of the species in the country, key protected areas supporting nationally or internationally important numbers;
- Global, Regional, sub-regional and national Red List status;
- International and national legal status (as applicable, with regard to geographic range of the species/population in question):
  - AEWa Table 1 status
  - CMS
  - CITES
  - Bern Convention
  - EU Birds Directive
  - Others, if applicable
- National protection status. (If the species is huntable: hunting seasons and restrictions)

### 2 - FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

- **Goal:**
- Indicator and method of verification for goal:
- **Purpose:**
- Indicator and method of verification for purpose:

<sup>8</sup> The Basic Data shall be limited to 1-2 pages.



- **Favourable Reference Values** (following either option A) or B) below):

Option A) Favourable Reference Values [if established during the action-planning process]

Option B) Favourable Reference Values (FRVs) will be elaborated and agreed by the relevant national (and if relevant) international stakeholders during the implementation phase of the Action Plan within its first full cycle of implementation.

- **Action framework table** showing the **objectives** (including indicators and methods of verification for each objective), associated **problems**, **results** and **actions** with their priorities, time-scales and organisations responsible for implementing them. Produce a separate table for each objective:

**Table 1. Framework for Action**

<i>Direct problem:</i>	<i>Objective 1:</i>				
<b>Underlying problems<sup>9</sup></b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Priority</b>	<b>Time scale</b>	<b>Organisations responsible</b>
	Result 1.1	1.1.1. Description of action			
		1.1.2. Description of action			
	Result 1.2	1.2.1. Description of action			

### **Annex 1. BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT<sup>10</sup>**

- Distribution throughout the annual cycle in the country;
- Habitat requirements;
- Survival and productivity;
- Description of population size and trend provided in Table 2.

**Table 2. Population size and trend by relevant subnational regions**

<sup>9</sup> For details, see Annex 2 in the revised AEWA Format for International Single and Multi-species Action Plans [*link to be added after MOP8*].

<sup>10</sup> The Biological Assessment shall be limited to maximum 1-2 pages in length (excluding Table 2).

Breeding numbers	Quality of data	Year(s) of the estimate	Breeding population trend in the last 10 years (or 3 generations)	Quality of data	Maximum size of migrating or non-breeding populations in the last 10 years (or 3 generations)	Quality of data	Year(s) of the estimate

## Annex 2: PROBLEM ANALYSIS

- General overview
- Full list of all identified threats or problems (including the name of the threat or problem; description; estimate of the scope, severity, timing and impact)
- Figure 2. Problem tree

## Annex 3: JUSTIFICATION OF CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

- Predicted population trajectories for 3 generations under (at least) the following scenarios:
  - Business-as-usual (no recovery or control measures taken)
  - Action Plan implemented as planned
- Description of methodology used, including models, their parameters and assumptions.

## Annex 4. REFERENCES

- List of the relevant literature used for the preparation of the Action Plan. This should not be an exhaustive bibliography of everything ever published on the species.

After the action-planning workshop the lead compiler (together with the drafting team, if applicable) has the task of drafting the Action Plan based on the workshop outcomes in cooperation with the facilitator and the leading government agency. Depending on the time available and whether the biological assessment was prepared in advance, this usually takes between one and three months. The draft should then be circulated to the workshop participants as well as those government representatives and experts that were invited but not able to attend.

This first consultation round is meant to ensure that all the necessary substantive details as well as actions for the species are reflected as discussed at the workshop. Following the feedback from the workshop participants, the lead compiler prepares a new draft which is submitted to the leading government agency. With the final draft in hand, the leading agency will then facilitate the adoption procedure according to the agreed national process for the development and adoption of National Species Action Plans.

## Step 4 – Implement the Plan

After a species action plan is adopted (as per the relevant national procedure and custom), the real work starts for the conservation and management of the species concerned.

If the actions, responsible actors as well as required resources etc. have been scoped in detail during the action-planning process, commencing the implementation phase will be easier. It is also useful to use the momentum of the action-planning process itself – particularly the action-planning workshop or any other stakeholder meetings – to already start implementing the most urgent agreed priority activities<sup>11</sup>.

As the actions to be undertaken will be species-specific, no general guidelines can be given on the actual implementation of the conservation or management activities themselves. Guidance on this can be sought from other countries working on the same species, the other [AEWA Guidelines](#) focusing on specific conservation challenges as well as a multitude of other resources covering conservation interventions. As mentioned above, for AEWA Contracting Parties the [AEWA Secretariat](#) may also serve as a source of information with respect to contacting international species or topical experts, if additional advice is required for the implementation of a certain action.

There are, however, procedural elements worth establishing to facilitate the implementation of national species action plans:

- **National Species Working Group** (this can be very informal and should consist of representatives from the major organisations charged with implementing the Plan; establish a mailing list via email or some other form of communication like a WhatsApp group where information on implementation progress, species status updates etc. can be shared regularly and with a very low threshold of administrative resources;
- Assign a **coordinator** responsible for monitoring progress in Action Plan implementation and for reaching out to the main organisations/people responsible for the actions, coordinate project development and fundraising efforts etc. This person does not have to be from within the national government, but should have good relations with the government and all other key stakeholders and will be responsible for reporting back to the National Working Group or Task Force dealing with action-planning in general;
- Consider developing and agreeing on a more detailed 2-3-year **workplan**, if the adopted Action Plan does not go into the level of detail necessary to ensure implementation in practice. In a workplan, activities can be broken down into smaller tasks with more concrete deadlines, assigned to specific people to take the lead on and also budgeted for in more detail.

Surveys amongst range state governments and stakeholders in relation to the implementation of AEWA International Species Action Plans pinpoint (i) the lack of sufficient resources, (ii) the lack of government engagement and input, and (iii) the lack of power within the conservation community (including the relevant government agencies) to influence influential industries and related policy as the three main barriers to successful Species Action Plan implementation<sup>12</sup>.

**Resourcing:** Obviously conservation and management activities require both human and financial resources. As the drafting and implementation of National Species Action Plans within the AEWA framework are considered government commitments, funding should primarily be the responsibility of the government. However, in practice it will not always be feasible to mobilise government funding. Where government funding is not available, the Working Group and its Coordinator should seek funds both from other national as well as international sources (including but not limited to NGOs, international funding agencies or the corporate sector). Raising public awareness is an essential part of the implementation of Species Action Plans and can be especially useful in mobilising funds.

**Government engagement:** establishing a government-led national action-planning process and/or involving relevant government agencies from the outset will hopefully minimise any implementation barriers.

**Industries too big to influence:** successful long-term conservation of many migratory waterbirds will hinge on our abilities to engage with large-scale industries – many of which are vital to the national and international economy such as fisheries, agriculture, infrastructure development etc. Under AEWA international solutions are being sought for the collaboration with some of these. In principle, under Plans adopted by the national governments can also be

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<sup>11</sup> The rolling workplans developed by AEWA International Species Working Groups can be found on the AEWA website. For example, the [2021-2023 workplan](#) of the AEWA European Seaduck International Working Group.

<sup>12</sup> [Overview on the status of preparation and implementation of AEWA ISSAPs and ISSMPs as well as Multi-Species Action Plans 2015](#).

legally required, or strongly promoted through policy guidance, that Species Action Plans be taken into account in development applications.

These and other barriers to successful implementation will exist in each country depending on the local circumstances – some will be within the scope of the Working Group to tackle; others may require wider support (also internationally) as well as innovative problem-solving. Here again a look to similar conservation interventions that have been successful in other countries may prove useful<sup>13</sup>.

### **Step 5 – Monitor implementation and impacts of the Plan**

Monitoring not just the species but also implementation progress and the impacts of the Plan should be planned and budgeted from the start. Ideally monitoring of progress on actions should take place annually. It is a good practice to have annual working group meetings and other communication tools to communicate between the annual meetings. Social media might be useful to attract supporters and volunteers.

### **Step 6 – Review and Revision**

Plan for a mid-term evaluation (typically at the 5-year mark for a 10-year Plan). Note that if an AEWA International Species Action Plan exists there are reporting requirements under the Agreement on progress made with respect to their implementation (i.e. the Report on the Implementation of AEWA Species Action Plans which is submitted to the AEWA MOP every six years, the triennial AEWA National Reports as well as the National Reports submitted under the Plan of Action for Africa). If, in addition, the implementation of such an International Plan is being coordinated by an AEWA International Species Working Group, reporting requirements on annual basis or to every meeting of the Working Group may also exist. In this case, it will be pertinent to schedule implementation stock-taking exercises of national Species Action Plans so that this information can feed into these wider international evaluations.

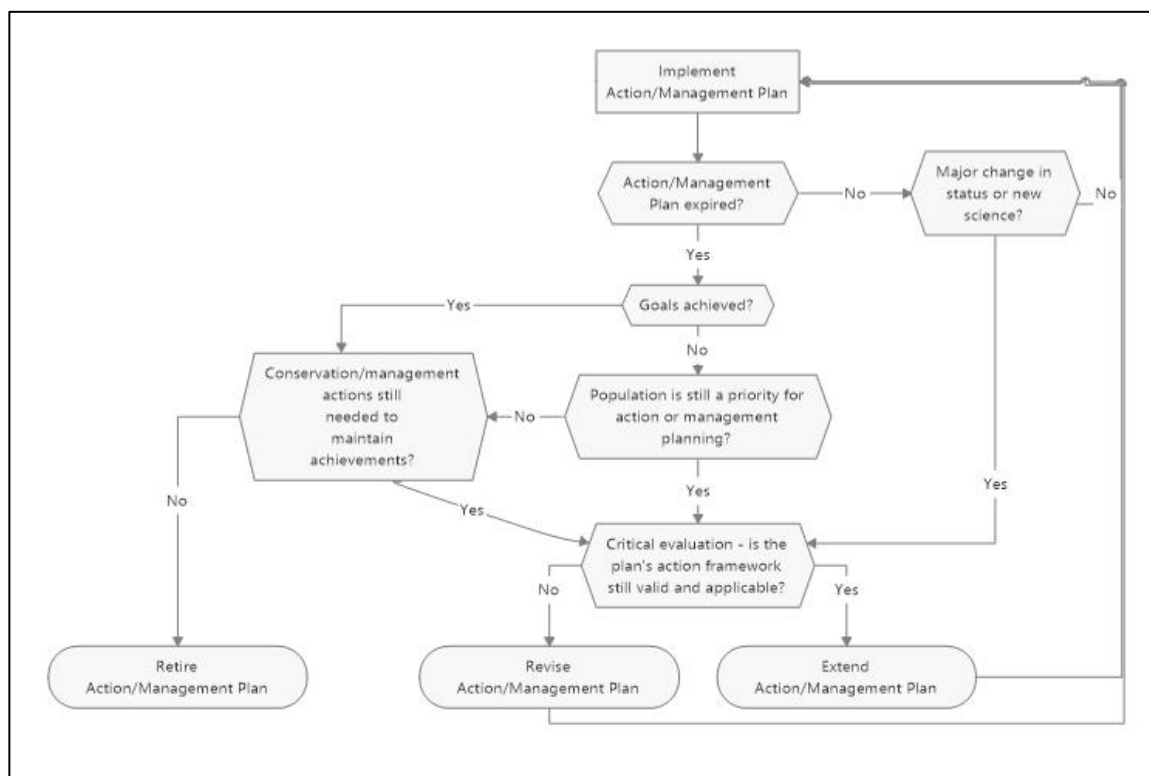
As the Action Plan nears the end of its 10-year term a more extensive evaluation report should be produced against the indicators set out therein. This may lead to a decision to revise, extend or retire the National Species Action Plan. The decision-making flowchart below in Box 6 has been devised and adopted by the AEWA Technical Committee to visualise the thought process when it comes to deciding whether International Species Action Plans adopted under the AEWA should be recommended for revision, extension or retirement at the end of their tenures. This flow-chart can also support such discussions on national level.

Species Action Plans which have served their purpose (i.e. their objectives have been achieved and the species in question has been returned to a favourable conservation status) should be formally retired.

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<sup>13</sup> See for example the effectiveness of conservation actions collated under [Conservation Evidence](#) as well as Action Plans developed under the [IUCN SSC Action Plan Series](#).

Box 6. Decision-making flowchart for the extension, revision and retirement of AEWI International Species and Management Plans.



### 3. References and useful web sites

- All International Species Action Plans adopted under the Agreement can be found on the [AEWA website](#), including joint Plans with other frameworks (CMS, EU, Bern Convention, East-Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership, etc.);
- Information on established AEWA International Species Working and Expert Groups, including rolling workplans, can also be found on the [AEWA website](#);
- Revised Format for AEWA International Single and Multi-Species Action Plans *[link to be included after MOP8]*;
- Format for AEWA International Single and Multi-Species Management Plans *[link to be included after MOP8]*;
- Overviews on the status of preparation and implementation of AEWA International Species Action and Management Plans are regularly compiled by the AEWA Technical Committee and AEWA Secretariat ([AEWA website](#)) – see in particular the “[Overview on the status of preparation and implementation of AEWA ISSAPs and ISSMPs as well as Multi-Species Action Plans 2015](#)”, which includes an overview of the international species action-planning process under the Agreement;
- [IUCN – SSC Species Conservation Planning Sub-Committee. \(2017\). Guidelines for Species Conservation Planning. Version 1.0. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. xiv + 114 pp.](#);
- [IUCN SSC Action Plan Series](#);
- [IUCN Red List Threats Classification Scheme](#);
- For an overview of effective conservation action see [Conservation Evidence](#).

For more information, including up-to-date examples of National Action Plans, please visit the [AEWA website](#) or contact the [Secretariat](#) or [AEWA Technical Committee](#).

## **AEWA INTERNATIONAL Species Working Group**

### Terms of Reference

**Goals** [usually as per the SSAP, see four example bullet points]

- To restore the species populations to a favourable conservation status.
- To move the species population(s) from Column A to Column B or C of Table 1 of the AEWA Action Plan.
- To remove the species from the IUCN Red List of threatened animals.
- In the short-term, to maintain the current population size and distribution of the species throughout its range, and in the medium to long term to promote increase in population size and range.

### **Role**

The role of the AEWA Species Working Group will be to:

- 1) coordinate and catalyse the implementation of the International Single Species Action Plan (SSAP) approved by the AEWA Meeting of the Parties;
- 2) stimulate and support Range States in the implementation of the SSAP; and
- 3) monitor and report on the implementation and the effectiveness of the SSAP.

### **Remit**

The AEWA Species Working Group will:

- set priorities for action and implement them;
- coordinate the overall international implementation;
- raise funds for implementation;
- assist Range States in producing national action plans;
- ensure regular and thorough monitoring of the species populations;
- stimulate and support scientific research in the species necessary for conservation;
- promote the protection of the network of critical sites for the species;
- facilitate internal and external communication and exchange of scientific, technical, legal and other required information;
- assist with information in determination of the red list status and population size and trends of the species;
- regularly monitor the effectiveness of implementation of the SSAP and take appropriate action according to the findings of this monitoring;
- regularly report on the implementation of the SSAP to the AEWA Meeting of the Parties through the National Focal Points; and
- update the international SSAP in [year when the SSAP is due for revision] or as required.

### **Membership**

The AEWA Species Working Group will comprise (1) designated representatives of national state authorities in charge of the implementation of AEWA and (2) representatives of national expert and conservation organisations as invited to the national delegations by the state authorities from all major Range States.

**Countries regularly supporting the species:** [list of the core Range States as per the SSAP]

The Chair of the AEWA Species Working Group may invite and admit international expert and conservation organisations as well as individual experts as observers to the Species Working Group, as necessary.

### **Officers**

A Chairperson of the Species Working Group will be elected amongst its members.

A full-time or part-time Coordinator post will be based in an institution or an organization, ideally from one of the major Range States. The Coordinator will be in charge of the day-to-day operations of the Species Working Group and shall act in close cooperation with the Chairperson and the AEWa Secretariat.

The designated representatives of national state authorities will act as National Focal Points for the SSAP and will be the main contact persons for the Chairperson and the Coordinator.

### **Meetings**

The Species Working Group should aim to hold face-to-face meetings once every three years. Other face-to-face meetings may be arranged as circumstances allow (e.g. back-to-back meetings with other international fora). Between meetings, business will be conducted electronically via Species Working Group's website and list server.

### **Reporting**

A thorough report on the implementation of the SSAP will be produced according to a standard format with contributions from all Range States and submitted for inclusion into the general International Review on the Stage of Preparation and Implementation of Single Species Action Plans to the AEWa Meeting of the Parties. Reports shall also be prepared by each Range State to a format agreed by the Species Working Group and presented at each face-to-face meeting of the Species Working Group. Other reports will be produced as required by the AEWa Technical Committee or the AEWa Secretariat.

### **Financing**

The operations of the Species Working Group, including the coordinator post, are to be financed primarily by its members and, if applicable, by its observers; the AEWa Secretariat cannot commit regular financial support and may only provide such if possible. Funding for SSAP activities of the Species Working Group or its members is to be sought from various sources.