



**3rd SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE AGREEMENT ON THE
CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS (AEWA)**

23 – 27 October 2005, Dakar, Senegal

**PROPOSAL FOR GUIDANCE ON THE DEFINITION OF THE TERM “SIGNIFICANT
LONG-TERM DECLINE” OF WATERBIRD POPULATIONS**

INTRODUCTION

At its 5th meeting in March 2004, the Technical Committee discussed the request from MOP2 to develop guidelines for the interpretation of the term “significant long-term decline” in the context of Table 1 of the Action Plan. A working group, established at the 4th meeting of the Technical Committee, had prepared a proposal for guidance. The Committee considered this to be a useful way forward, but felt that the Working Group should assess possible criteria against 'real-life' examples, and that any criteria would need to be able to cope with the many populations for which there were poor or non-existent data on trends (*i.e.* allow for non-quantitative approaches).

The Working Group has assessed the International Wader Study Group's recent collation of data on status and trends of migratory waders in Africa and western Eurasia (Stroud *et al.* 2004¹): <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/wsg/index.html>. In particular, Annex 2 of the WSG review has collated information on current trends and compares this with previous assessments published in *Waterbird Population Estimates 1 & 2* http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/wsg/pdf/iws15_annex2.pdf.

Benefits of using this dataset were that the species included showed a wide range of different ecology and distributions throughout the AEWA region, and that there are examples of both data-rich and data-poor populations.

As a result of discussions on the issue at its 6th meeting in May 2005, the Technical Committee agreed on a proposal for guidance on definition of the long-term decline of waterbird populations that is attached hereto. The Standing Committee at its 3rd meeting in July 2005 approved this document for submission to MOP3.

ACTION REQUESTED FROM THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES

The Meeting of the Parties is requested to review the proposed guidance and approve it for further use.

¹ Stroud, D.A., Davidson, N.C., West, R., Scott, D.A., Hanstra, L., Thorup, O., Ganter, B. & Delany, S. (compilers) on behalf of the International Wader Study Group (2004). Status of migratory wader populations in Africa and Western Eurasia in the 1990s. *International Wader Studies* 15: 1-259. www.waderstudygroup.org

Guidance for interpretation of the term “significant long-term decline” of waterbird populations

Definition

A population in 'significant long-term decline' is one where the best available data, information or assessments indicate that it has declined by at least 25% in numbers or range over a period of 25 years or 7.5 generations, whichever is the longer.

Guidance for the application of this definition

1. Where there are only poor quantitative assessments of trends at the international scale, international trends should be assessed on the basis of best expert knowledge and other available information bearing in mind the scale of decline indicated in the definition above.
2. Where one biogeographical population shows different trends in different countries, a decline of at least 25% in numbers or range over a period of 25 years or 7.5 generations in over half the countries for which information is available indicates that the population is in significant long-term decline. If for certain populations information is available for a period of more than 25 years this would be preferred.
3. Trend information for biogeographical populations at international scales is not always available over 25 year periods or 7.5 generations. In such situations, equivalent rates of decline may be used over shorter periods, but not shorter than 9 years, and based on a sustained decline of at least 1 % per year.
4. The delimitation of decline rates resulting from natural fluctuations should be based on the best expert knowledge, including information on the availability of suitable habitats.
5. Care is needed in applying this definition to monitoring data uncritically. There may be instances where a change of a population's range or distribution results in a decrease in numbers of a population counted, as a consequence of a greater proportion of the population now occurring in areas where there is less monitoring. Lower thresholds may be appropriate for decreasing range where it is accompanied by population decrease. Raw count data will always need expert interpretation.
6. The geometric mean of population size ranges should generally be taken as the basis of population trend calculations. Following IUCN Red List criteria definitions, generation length is the average generation length of parents of the current population. Each significant long-term decline revealed by the above-mentioned calculations will be examined, analysed and approved by the Technical Committee.

Where the size of a population is known to be low (<100,000), expert judgements as to trend status should be undertaken on precautionary basis. This is especially important given recent findings of a low genetic variation of a number of waterbird populations - the implication being that the effective population size is much (possibly by a factor of 10) smaller than observed population size. In these cases, a population may become long-term unviable (owing to vulnerability to changing environmental events) at a higher population sizes than previously thought.