AGREEMENT ON THE CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS

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"Migratory waterbirds and people - sharing wetlands"

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE WATERBIRD MONITORING IN THE AFRICAN-EURASIAN FLYWAYS

Compiled by Wetlands International and the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat

The role of international waterbird population status assessment in AEWA

Waterbird monitoring is essential for the implementation of AEWA in many respects. Article II.1 requires that Parties shall take coordinated measures to maintain migratory waterbird species in a favourable conservation status or to restore them to such status. Furthermore, Article III.2 (b) of the Agreement requires that Parties shall „*...ensure that any use of migratory waterbirds is based on an assessment of the best available knowledge of their ecology and is sustainable...*".

Article VI.8 requires each MOP to consider actual and potential changes in the conservation status of migratory waterbirds and the factors which may affect them. To this end, Paragraph 7.4 of the AEWA Action Plan requires the preparation of an international review report on the status and trends of populations (aka Conservation Status Report or CSR) which serves as a basis to amend Table 1 on the status of the populations of migratory waterbirds in the Annex 3 of the Agreement.

Paragraph 5.3 of the AEWA Action Plan also recognises that the proper assessment of the status and trend of migratory waterbirds is the most meaningful at population level and, therefore, requests Parties to „ *...cooperate to improve the measurement of bird population trends as a criterion for describing the status of such populations...*".

The AEWA Strategic Plan 2009-2017 adopted by Resolution 4.7, specifies a range of indicators based on information about trends, conservation status and threat status of waterbird populations.

International waterbird monitoring in the AEWA region

By now, five editions of the AEWA Conservation Status Reports were produced by Wetlands International. The key sources of the AEWA Conservation Status Reports were the International Waterbird Census (IWC), the two editions of „Birds in Europe" and the specific status assessments made by some Species Specialist Groups of Wetlands International and IUCN, particularly the International Wader Study Group and the Goose Specialist Group. From these sources, it is only the International Waterbird Census that collects annual count data and it also serves as a source for many of the other assessments. Other sources of information are based more on periodic collection of data.

The 5th edition of the Conservation Status Report has clearly highlighted that:

(i) currently, international trend analyses are only possible with a five year time lag;
(ii) the coverage of the International Waterbird Census is insufficient in many subregions of the Agreement area to allow monitoring-based assessment of the status and trend and other data sources are also poor;
(iii) populations of several waterbird species (e.g. geese, swans, seaducks, farmland waders) cannot be effectively monitored by generic schemes such as the IWC.

Efforts to strengthen waterbird monitoring under AEWA so far

The AEWA MOP3 in 2005 adopted Resolution 3.6 which requests the support of the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on Biodiversity, donor organisations and others to establish a long-term funding regime in order to enhance the monitoring of waterbird populations *inter alia* via the IWC and its derived outputs. MOP Resolutions 3.11, 4.2 and 4.10 as well as the *Hague Declaration*[1] adopted at the AEWA 15th Anniversary Symposium also underlined the importance of strengthening the IWC/Waterbird Population Estimates (WPE) processes. The latter has called for establishing a funding regime by the end of 2010. Target 3.1 of the Strategic Plan aims at having necessary resources in place to support the international processes for gathering monitoring data for status assessment on a long-term basis. The indicator for this target is linked to the timely production of annual IWC summary reports, the CSR and the WPE as well as a 50% increase of species/populations, the status of which, is being assessed with regular monitoring data.

In 2009, the UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee funded a stakeholder consultation process which was followed by an external review in 2010. This process has reviewed, in detail, the information requirements of various international conservation instruments, the skills and processes needed to fulfil these needs and made an estimation of the costs of running the scheme.

The review has concluded that a major benefit of the IWC programme is that one streamlined data aggregation process can contribute to the information needs of several international conservation instruments in particular AEWA, the EU Birds Directive and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. These information needs can be satisfied through the combination of policy-relevant analyses and making available population and site network level overviews. The former typically includes the calculation of certain indicators of effectiveness such as some of the ones identified in the AEWA Strategic Plan or certain Ramsar Indicators of Effectiveness (see the top layer of Figure 1). The latter can be made available through regularly up-dated information products or services (e.g. the Waterbird Population Estimates, the AEWA Conservation Status Reports, including (flyway) population level trend analyses, and the Critical Site Network Tool (see the middle layer of Figure 1). The costs of these information services and products have been already covered by the institutions which need the policy relevant product. However, the costs of gathering and aggregating the data internationally and improving the coverage of the network (the bottom layer of Figure 1) are not covered by these institutions.

African-Eurasian Waterbird Monitoring Partnership

The review and the subsequent discussions with stakeholders have also led to the realisation that monitoring of waterbird populations cannot be implemented without forming a close partnership amongst a wide range of organisations and different components of the overall scheme might be led by different partners.

In June 2011, the African-Eurasian Waterbird Monitoring Partnership was formed. It includes all participating national coordinators who meet regularly at sub-regional meetings. A Technical Working Group has been established to address technical coordination issues related to organising counts, managing data, quality control, and network development. It consists of representatives of the organisations making a significant technical contribution to the waterbird monitoring programme in the African-Eurasian flyways,

[1] http://www.unep-aewa.org/meetings/symposium/docs/the_hague_action_statement.pdf

sub-regional representatives of the national IWC coordinators and of the WI/IUCN SSC waterbird Species Specialists Groups. In addition, a Strategic Working Group was set up to monitor and evaluate the implementation of each component of the overall scheme, enhance synergies between the different components, institutions and other policy relevant processes, to identify and mobilize resources and to promote the Partnership. Initially this group includes the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat, the Aarhus University, BirdLife, International, BTO, EBCC, FACE, SOVON, Wetlands International, WWT, but the participation is open for any organisation with a strong strategic interest in the development of waterbird monitoring in the African-Eurasian flyways.

Scenarios for future development

Business as usual

This scenario assumes that the costs of IWC would be covered from core funding to Wetlands International with some additional project and in-kind supports from donors and partner organisations. Although significant improvements have been made by reorganising the team managing the IWC at Wetlands International, the organisation can afford to guarantee only the basic data gathering and reporting, but has no resources left for regional coordination, networking, capacity building, supporting schemes in developing countries or organising special counts without managing to raise extra funding through projects or having to rely on the efforts of others. Although some progress has been made through the waterbird monitoring partnership, this set up has no solid funding base for long-term sustained expansion of the scheme. This results in sporadic data collection in a large part of the Agreement area.

Incorporate the costs of IWC into the products

Another scenario that has been advocated is to incorporate the costs of the IWC into the products. Although this option may sound attractive at first, it appears less feasible in practice. The main impediment is that the production of the policy-relevant products represents only a tiny proportion of the total costs in a three-year cycle of the scheme. The majority of the costs are related to regional coordination, networking, capacity building and supporting developing countries financially to carry out the counts. For instance, the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat paid for the production of the latest Conservation Status Report ca. EUR 60,000 and the Ramsar Secretariat for the Waterbird Population Estimates ca. EUR 20,000. This total income of EUR 80,000 compares to ca. EUR 400,000 that would be needed to cover the costs of only the regional coordination and the support to developing countries to carry out the counts over three years. This means that the cost of these products should increase six-fold to cover their own production plus contribute to counts in developing countries and regional coordination and would still not be generating funds to invest into targeted capacity building or special counts and would assume that Wetlands International continues to bear the costs of data management from its core resources. In practice, this would mean a cost of EUR 360,000 for the AEWA Conservation Status Report and EUR 120,000 for the Waterbird Population Estimates. However, the financial sustainability of the scheme would be in jeopardy if any of these costs would not come through and this is a fairly realistic risk when the production of such reports is not part of the core budget.

Incorporate costs of IWC into the AEWA core budget

During and following the consultation process about the future of the IWC, some Contracting Parties have suggested that the costs of IWC should also be incorporated into the AEWA core budget. The main argument being that this would ensure a more equitable and predictable sharing of the cost than the other options mentioned previously. Using as a reference the budget approved by MOP4 in 2008, the required EUR 400,000 would represent ca. 16.5-17% increase to the AEWA core budget over three years, including the 13% UNEP Programme Support Cost (PSC).

Additional contributions to the AEWA Trust Fund

An alternative solution could be to keep the cost of monitoring separate from the core budget of AEWA, but request all Contracting Parties to pay an additional percentage of their regular AEWA contribution into a dedicated budget line of the AEWA Trust Fund for voluntary contributions (AVL). Under this option, the financial implications for the Contracting Parties would essentially be the same, but it would be less restrictive on AEWA's budget and would provide a more flexible financial framework by allowing additional contributions not only from Contracting Parties, but also from the corporate sector. This solution

could take advantage of the existence of the AEWA Trust Fund. Also under this scenario there would be an additional 13% overhead charge.

Contributions to a separate Waterbird Monitoring Trust Fund

A similar option but without the 13% overhead charge would be the establishment of a separate Waterbird Monitoring Trust Fund, or an equivalent mechanism, established by Wetlands International and supervised by the Strategic Working Group of the Waterbird Monitoring Partnership where the UNEP/AEWA Secretariat is represented.

Action requested from the MOP

MOP5 is requested to review the proposed options for the basic long-term financing of IWC and formulate its decision on the next steps (draft Resolution AEWA/MOP5 DR22 *Establishing a Long-Term Basic Structural Funding Regime for the International Waterbird Census in the African-Eurasian Region).*

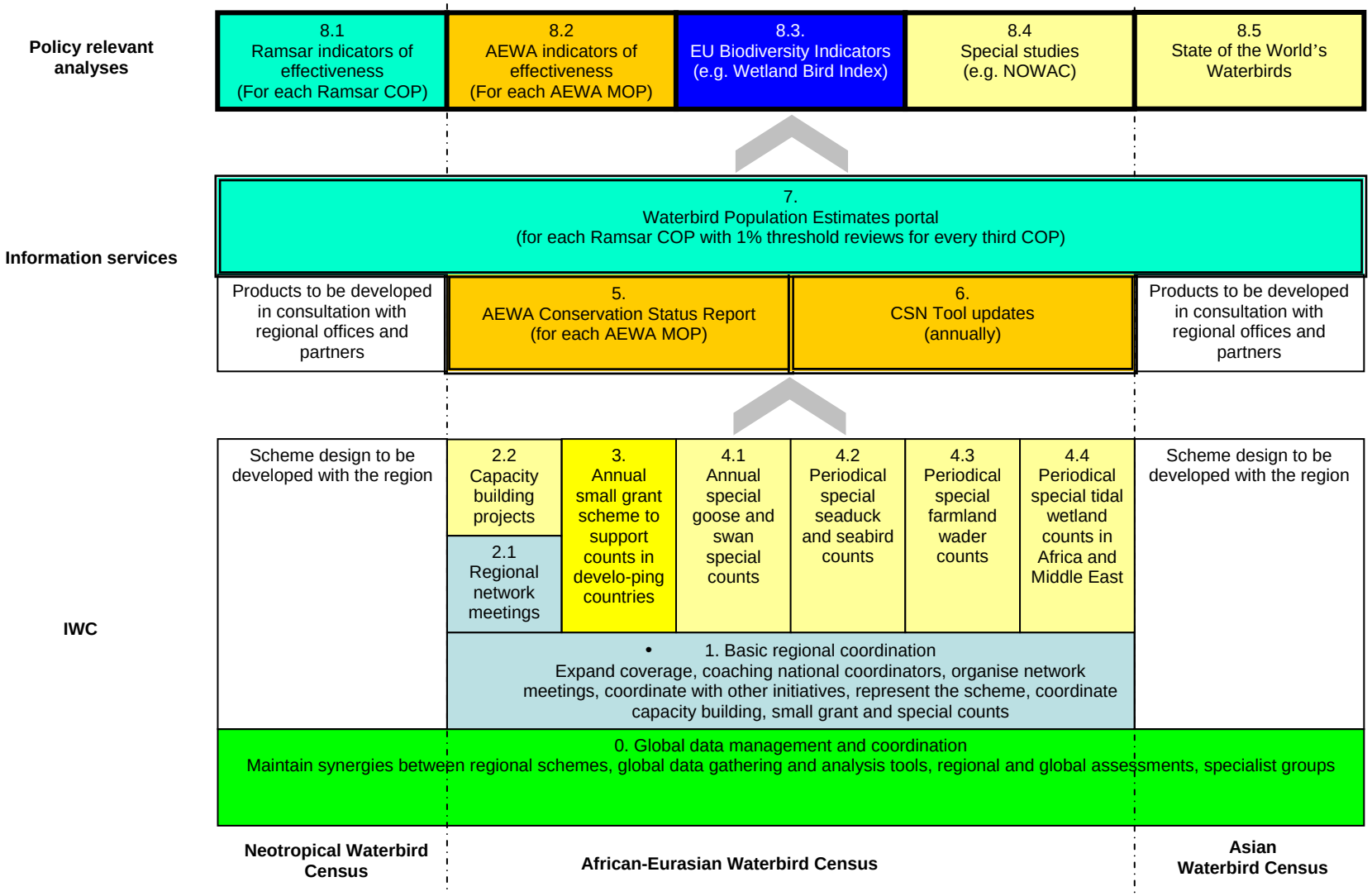

Figure 1. A schematic representation of the components of the International Waterbird Census and complementary schemes to monitor waterbirds in the non-breeding season and derived information products and policy relevant analyses.

Components mentioned in Figure 1 and their estimated costs

0. **Global coordination and data management:** to maintain synergies between regional schemes, to coordinate the development of global data gathering and analysis tools, ensure that data is collected in formats that allow regional and global assessments and to facilitate the work of the waterbird specialist groups. (ca. € 100,000 p.a., WI's own contribution from its unrestricted resources)

1. **Basic regional coordination (included into IIT 15[2])**: to expand coverage, to improve technical capacity of the network of national coordinators by providing guidance and advice, to maintain the network developed through capacity building projects (see 2.2 below) organise network meetings, coordinate with other initiatives, represent the scheme, coordinate capacity-building activities with partners, facilitate small grant and special count schemes, provision of guidelines, producing annual technical and project reports, servicing some data requests, to facilitate the work of the African-Eurasian Waterbird Monitoring Partnership (ca. € 65,000 p.a.).

2. **Regional network development**
   - 2.1. **IWC coordinators' meeting**: taking place within different subregions (Africa, Southwest Asia, Europe) to improve cohesion of the scheme and to facilitate exchange of experience (ca. € 30,000 p.a.)
   - 2.2. **Capacity development in countries with insufficient coverage of key sites (IIT 23)**: to increase capacity of national coordinators and national networks in selected countries. This activity is to be implemented through projects implemented in partnership with other organisations. Earlier examples include the monitoring capacity development project in East Africa led by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. Current examples include the Mediterranean IWC project led by Tour du Valat, the Conserving Migratory Birds in West Africa led by BirdLife International.

3. **Small grants for general IWC counts in developing countries (included into IIT 15):** to ensure that selected key sites are regularly counted in all countries across the flyway even in developing countries with insufficient resources. The external review has estimated the cost as € 80,000 p.a. which should be considered as a conservative estimate compared to Point 16 of the AEWA International Implementation Tasks (Resolution 4.10) which estimated it at € 635,000. The basic coordination of the scheme includes time for the management of a small grant scheme, but support can also be provided directly through various arrangements such as twinning between protected areas or NGOs.

4. **Special counts (IIT 16)**: to obtain more reliable estimates of species and populations that are not well covered under the general IWC counts. They are intended to be implemented in collaboration with the relevant specialist groups and coordination can be done directly by the group or by WI staff.
   - 4.1. **Geese and swans**: repeated counts including agricultural areas and roosts.
   - 4.2. **Seaducks and other seabirds**: annual counts in the Baltic and North Sea and special aerial surveys in the Black Sea and Caspian regions once every three years.
   - 4.3. **Tidal wetlands in Africa and Middle East**: to cover the large tidal wetlands with high influence on population sizes and trends at least once every three years.

[2] As in AEWA/MOP5 DR3 *AEWA International Implementation Tasks for [2012-2016] [2}12-2015]*

4.4. **Wader counts on agricultural and grassland habitats**: to improve estimates for species like Northern Lapwing, Golden Plover at least once every three years.

5. **AEWA Conservation Status Report:** Article 7.4 of the AEWA Action Plan already requires the Secretariat to produce a report on the status and trends of waterbird populations in the Agreement area. The terms of reference drawn up by the AEWA Technical Committee very closely resembles the technical scope defined in the external review for the technical report on the status and trends in the AEWA region (including documentation of trend analyses and proper documentation of all other popoulation size and trend estimates). Therefore, this report also summarises and interprets the results of the IWC activities in the region. It is envisaged that the cost of producing this report will be about the same as the current cost and that funding by AEWA will continue through voluntary contributions from the Parties. (ca. € 55,000)

6. **CSN Tool up-date (IIT 3)**: the Critical Site Network Tool has been produced to provide up-to-date information on waterbird populations in the Agreement area. The CSN Tool needs to be up-dated annually in order to provide timely feedback to the network and to provide up-to-date information to a wide range of users (current estimate is ca. € 50,000 p.a., but application has been submitted to reduce cost by automating processes).

7. **Waterbird Population Estimates**: provides 1% thresholds to support the identification of internationally important wetlands under Criterion 6 of the Ramsar Convention and through this also under the Birds Directive, the Emerald Network and the IBA programme. The existing paper editions of Waterbird Population Estimates will be replaced by a database to reduce publication and dissemination costs and the estimates will be updated before the Ramsar COPs (ca. € 30,000).

8. **Policy relevant indicators**: results of the information generated by IWC and synthesised through 5–7. above will feed into various policy-relevant indicators such as the Ramsar indicators of effectiveness at global level, the AEWA indicators of effectiveness at the flyway level and a wetland bird indicator could also complement the existing farmland and forest bird indicators in the EU. These products will be developed in close collaboration with the Secretariats of the relevant MEAs.

9. **Special studies**: Wetlands International's waterbird monitoring programme aims not only at detecting changes in waterbird populations, but also at identifying the causes of these changes. To this end, joint studies will be implemented with the Waterbird Specialist Groups and academic institutes on a project basis.

Financial overview

all costs x1,000 €

Component	Total	WI	AEWA Trust Fund	AEWA	Projects
Annually recurring activities					
Global coordination and data management	100	100			
Basic regional coordination	65		65		
IWC coordinators' meeting (one meeting per region per year, three regions)	30				30
Capacity development in countries with insufficient coverage of key sites	min. 40				min. 40
Small grants for general IWC counts in developing countries	min. 80		65		min. 15
Goose and swan counts	min. 22				min. 22
Seaduck counts coordination	min. 16				min. 16
Total of annual costs	**min. 353**	**100**	**130**		**min. 123**
Triannual costs					
Seaduck counts	85				85
Tidal wetland counts in Africa and the Middle East	70				70
AEWA Conservation Status Report	55			55	
CSN Tool update	50				
Waterbird Population Estimates	min. 30				min. 30
Policy relevant indicators	n.a.				n.a.
Special analyses	n.a.				n.a.
Total periodic costs	**290**			**55**	**235**

Keys:
min.: indicates a minimum cost estimate, but projects with enhanced content may actually cost more.
n.a.: indicates that the activity responds to needs to be defined bilaterally and it is not possible to estimate the costs here.