Opening address to AEWA MOP9 (11 - 14 November 2025, Bonn, Germany)

Colleagues and friends,

I have the honour of speaking on behalf of both BirdLife International and Wetlands International at this important Meeting of Parties that reflects upon the first 30 years of AEWA achievements and looks forward to a new strategic plan to boost action further for migratory waterbirds along the African-Eurasian flyway.

There are huge opportunities ahead to build on the leadership AEWA has shown in this flyway in the past three decades. Not least, the African-Eurasian Flyway Initiative that has just been launched by the World Bank and BirdLife last week, to ensure the integration of conservation of migratory birds and their habitats into World Bank operations, and jointly mobilise innovative funding along the flyway. This builds on the successful partnerships BirdLife has with Development Banks in the East Asian-Australasian and Americas Flyways to unlock funding for flyway conservation.

Looking at the agenda of this MOP, a key item for BirdLife is the draft resolution on seabirds and sea-level rise. This is urgent to address the ongoing declines of more than 50% of all AEWA-listed seabirds, as well as rapidly growing impacts on waterbirds from sea level rise. This could also not be more timely given the opportunities ahead: firstly because the new High Seas Treaty is coming into force in January and within the Agreement area AEWA allows us to connect this work to the coast, and secondly given the draft resolution on "marine flyways" coming up in March at the CMS COP15, aiming to extend the flyway concept to the global oceans.

Do come to our seabird side event on Thursday at 11.15 am in Room 2, that BirdLife is organising together with France, Mauritius, South Africa and the UK and find out more.

We believe in AEWA because amongst all the environmental treaties out there it is focussed, applied and has proven, often innovatively, to facilitate effective action on the ground. Because we believe in AEWA we have as BirdLife International and Wetlands International committed a lot of staff and capacity to strengthen implementation including through policy over the past 30 years.

Precisely because we believe in AEWA, we are currently very concerned that the overall momentum under the Agreement has slowed, with rather fewer major agenda items and historically low reporting rates from Parties.

Yet, the Conservation Status Report (CSR) highlights that the work of AEWA is far from being complete, with around 40% of AEWA species still in decline. The CSR covering threats is an important advance. It shows where our efforts need to be focussed. To stop and reverse those declines redoubling of efforts is needed on at least three key actions.

Firstly, we must be more effective at stopping the loss and degradation of key waterbird sites due to threats such as infrastructure developments. Mainstreaming conservation action for waterbirds across sectors and industries will be critical. The Unique Selling Point of CMS is key – namely leadership on ecological connectivity. Conservation not just of sites, but of site networks. To be effective in this, AEWA needs to link more closely to other site and landscape protection commitments on the international agenda – from the Ramsar and World Heritage Conventions across to the EU Nature Restoration Law and 30x30. And the 60% of AEWA Parties that have not yet identified and communicated their nationally and internationally important waterbird sites to the AEWA Secretariat need to get on and do it without delay. BirdLife Partners and Wetlands Offices stand ready to help in this task!

Secondly, we need to prevent unsustainable hunting. In this regard we recognise the outstanding leadership of AEWA in the sphere of Adaptive Harvest Management – a major achievement of the past decade. With a new CMS Global Initiative on Illegal and Unsustainable Taking of Migratory Species currently building, there is an excellent opportunity to spread the AEWA best practice across the wider CMS Family. However, there is also an urgent need of applying the adaptive harvest management to declining but still huntable AEWA populations (listed in Column B in Table 1). Parties should ensure that AEWA remains a treaty for the conservation of migratory waterbirds and does not become just an instrument for the management of "problem species".

Thirdly, we need to revitalise the implementation of species action plans for the most threatened species, an area where AEWA has previously been a world leader. Without this, we risk the ultimate failure; more birds following the Slender-billed Curlew to global extinction.

We urge Parties and other stakeholders to take the time here in Bonn to focus on the opportunities for a stronger triennium, not least to deliver an ambitious but realistic next strategic plan for adoption at MOP10 to set the stage for an effective second 30 years. Because we believe in AEWA we are confident that it can adapt, through the innovation it has previously deployed to such great effect, to an operating environment very different now than it was even a decade ago, to make AEWA a relevant and effective tool, synergising with other processes for effective delivery of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Strategy.

The Slender-billed curlew is the ultimate wake-up call to all of us – and now as we hear the warning bells ring for other threatened AEWA species throughout the flyway from Atlantic Puffin and White-headed Duck to Sociable Lapwing, African Penguin and Greenland White-fronted Goose, let's heed this alarm and boost action! Together. Because we believe in AEWA.

Thank you.