



THIRD MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE
04 - 05 July 2005, Bonn, Germany

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

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 at its 5th meeting in March 2004.

The Committee considered the proposals to be a useful way forward, but that the Working Group considering this issue should assess possible criteria against 'real-life' examples, and that any criteria would need to be able to cope with the many populations where there are 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 WSG's review (http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/stats/adu/wsg/pdf/iws15_annex2.pdf) has collated information on current trends and compares this with previous assessments published in *Waterbird Population Estimates 1 & 2*.

Benefits of using this dataset were that the species included show 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.

ACTIONS REQUESTED FROM THE STANDING COMMITTEE

The Standing Committee is requested to review the proposed guidance from its end and approve it for submission to MOP.

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

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

Further to the request of MoP2 (Resolution 2.1) for the Technical Committee "to develop guidelines for the interpretation of the term “significant long-term decline” in the context of Table 1 of the Action Plan;" the Committee recommends the following guidance to the Meeting of Parties.

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.

Guidance for the application of this definition

- 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.
- Where one biogeographical population shows different trends in different countries, a decline in over half the countries for which information is available indicates that the population is in significant long-term decline.
- 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, typically for a minimum of nine years.
- 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. Raw count data will always need expert interpretation.
- The mid-point of population size ranges should generally be taken as the basis of population trend calculations.
- 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.

The Technical Committee consider that further work to develop guidelines for the assessment of other criteria used in Table 1 of the Action Plan would be valuable, notably:

- the degree of concentration on a small number of specific sites at any stage of annual cycle;
- the dependence on a habitat type which is under severe threat; and
- the extent of fluctuation in population size or trend.

The Committee recommends that relevant broad guidance is developed for submission to MoP4.