



## Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds

Secretariat provided by the United Nations Environment Programme

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[Honourable Mayor] Distinguished Delegates, Friends

Thank you so much for this honour. Nothing could give me greater personal pleasure than to have this formal association with Gerard Boere, the Patron of, Father to, the Agreement, whose energy did so much to bring AEWA into existence. I very much consider myself a subsidiary Patron!

My association with the Agreement extends almost over my working life, from early discussions in the 1980s to the present, where it is lovely to be back again in South Africa, nearly 20 years after the first Meeting of Parties. In those years, AEWA has gone from strength to strength. When just 22 Parties met in Cape Town, it didn't seem possible that two decades later, they would be joined by a further 55 from across the entire Agreement area, from the high arctic to here at the southernmost terminus of African Eurasian migration systems.

And there are more signatories to come....

As well as gaining coverage across a significant extent of the Agreement area, AEWA is supported by an active Secretariat with talented and deeply committed staff – acting as the vital organs of the Agreement.

AEWA has grown taxonomically as well as geographically. Migratory seabirds have latterly been brought within its scope, and progressively – as will be discussed – their conservation needs are being considered.

And latest assessment presented in the *Conservation Status Review* – the detail of which we will hear later today – indicates that AEWA is making a real difference.

The strength of the treaty is not just its focus on actions for endangered species - crucially important though these are. It's unusually wide vision seeks to address multiple issues related to waterbirds – and not just through traditional conservation models.

For example, the Agreement created a framework for the close involvement of the hunting community as a key element of its mission. From cautious beginnings in the early negotiations, hunting organisations now contribute significantly not only to AEWA's technical work, but importantly, also to implementing practical conservation actions 'on-the-ground', such as seeking to eliminate the use of lead gunshot from wetlands – an activity that, as is known, results in significant additional mortality for many waterbirds (and indeed other species).

AEWA has yet further scope.

It has always seen education and awareness building amongst the public as a core activity – pioneering World Migratory Bird Day since 2006 and developing a wide variety of outreach materials. People need birds, and birds need people to do the right things.

Yet sometimes the interactions between birds and people go wrong, and AEWA's role in helping to address and resolve conflicts between waterbirds and human interests has always been a key element. Whilst perhaps not being seen as highest priority in early years, recent initiatives such as the European Goose Management Platform have the scope to make a real difference in addressing acute conflicts with other interests. We urgently need to learn lessons from other parts of the world – such as from North America – where belated policy responses to rapidly increasing goose populations in particular, have had major economic and other consequences. The Action Plans to be considered at this MOP have scope to help resolve such problems.

Yet the central focus of the Agreement will always remain the restoration of threatened populations that are in decline. And such activity is needed more urgently than ever.

**AEWA has come such a long way, but there is further to go...**

'Our' waterbirds face threats at so many scales.

- Locally, through impacts at key sites.
- Through the more profound problems arising from widescale degradation and loss of habitat.
- And from the global and multi-faceted consequences of climate change whose effects remain difficult to predict.

The Preamble to the Agreement - **Recognises** "the need to take immediate action to stop the decline of migratory waterbird species and their habitats ...;"

Never has there been more of a need for a Strategic Plan that is ambitious in its vision and scope – and recognising that need for immediacy.

As we look to the future, it is critical that **all** those involved with AEWA significantly step-up their actions to ensure that future landscapes still contain waterbirds.

An ambitious AEWA with committed signatories can help bring that about.

Thank you once again