

AEWA MOP-4 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER 2008

The fourth Meeting of the Parties (MOP-4) to the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) opened today in Antananarivo, Madagascar. Delegates heard opening statements, addressed organizational matters and witnessed the AEWA Award Presentation Ceremony. They also addressed reports on: the implementation of the Agreement and Action Plan; phasing out lead shot for hunting in wetlands; and international reviews of five technical issues. The meeting was concluded with an official opening ceremony.

OPENING PLENARY

Lila Andriambalo (Madagascar) welcomed participants and recalled the importance of the protection of nature and biodiversity as a basis for development.

Lydie Raharimaniraka, Ministry of the Environment, Forests and Tourism of Madagascar, described biodiversity as an important resource and a living heritage, and called for leadership on waterbird conservation.

Bert Lenten, AEWA Executive Secretary, highlighted the reviews conducted since MOP-3. Noting that, of the 522 waterbird species for which data exist, 41% are in decline, he stressed the need for continued conservation efforts. Lenten pointed to continuing threats such as habitat loss, as well as to emerging threats such as climate change, and called for the adoption of the AEWA Strategic Plan 2009-2017 and the commitment of resources for its implementation.

In a video message, Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, stressed that parties must ensure that short-term interests do not undermine their abilities to maintain the flyways and conditions that allow migratory species to survive. He asked that the MOP set forth an agenda for moving forward on conservation.

Harison Edmond Randriarimanana, Madagascar's Minister of Environment, Forests and Tourism, urged government coordination with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local communities and the private sector for enhancing the implementation of AEWA. He called for a focus on intra-African studies, habitat restoration, strengthening of legal frameworks, monitoring, flyway management and coordination, knowledge of wetland trends, capacity-building, and synergies with other conventions.

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS: Delegates adopted the rules of procedure (AEWA/MOP 4.2) with some amendments, including an option for electing more than one Vice-Chair, and reference to a two-thirds rather than a simple majority vote.

Delegates elected Tovondriaka Rakotobe (Madagascar) as Chair of the meeting, and Abdoulaye N'Diaye (Senegal) and Olivier Biber (Switzerland) as Vice-Chairs. France, Kenya, Syria, and Nigeria were elected to the Credentials Committee. Chair Rakotobe noted that additional Sessional Committees could be created if needed.

Regarding the adoption of the agenda (AEWA/MOP 4.3), EGYPT suggested deleting the item on nominating the Great Rift Valley as a World Heritage Site. KENYA asked for clarification and further consultation. Chair Rakotobe suggested, and delegates agreed, to defer discussion on this issue to allow for further consultation. Executive Secretary Lenten requested an opportunity, at the end of the session, to report on the pre-MOP training session for anglophone African states on negotiation. Some minor amendments were also suggested. The agenda was adopted with these changes.

Delegates admitted the observers listed in document AEWA/MOP 4.4, as well as Côte D'Ivoire.

OPENING STATEMENTS: The following non-contracting parties reported on progress towards accession to the Agreement: ANGOLA, BOTSWANA, BURKINA FASO, CAMEROON, CÔTE D'IVOIRE, the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, ETHIOPIA, LIBERIA, MAURITANIA, MOROCCO, SOMALIA, SWAZILAND and ZAMBIA. Identifying inhibiting factors in this regard, the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO and CÔTE D'IVOIRE noted political instability, and ETHIOPIA cited new institutional arrangements. France, on behalf of the EUROPEAN UNION (EU), pledged EU member states' commitment to the Agreement. The AFRICAN UNION outlined relevant ongoing activities in the region.

AEWA AWARD PRESENTATION CEREMONY

Sergey Dereliev, AEWA Secretariat, introduced the AEWA Awards. He said they had been established by the Standing Committee in 2005, and are presented at each MOP to recognize institutions and individuals within the Agreement area that have significantly contributed to the conservation and sustainable use of waterbirds.

Dereliev announced that the winner in the individual category was Mark Anderson (South Africa), in recognition of his long-standing involvement in waterbird conservation, particularly relating to South Africa's lesser flamingo.

In the institutional category, Guy-Noël Olivier (France) received the award on behalf of Oiseaux Migrateurs du Paléarctique Occidental (OMPO), which had been recognized for its role in increasing AEWA membership, assistance in scientific research, and support of the Agreement's implementation.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGREEMENT AND ACTION PLAN

Sergey Dereliev, AEWA Secretariat, introduced the synthesis report based on the information contained in the national reports submitted over the past triennium (AEWA/MOP 4.5). He noted that the rate of submission of the reports was slightly lower than that of the last triennium, and that only 50% of African parties had submitted their national reports. He stated that the quality of information in the reports was variable, and suggested parties instead devote their attention to the conclusions of the international reviews, which he said provide stronger background for prioritization and decision making than the national reports. He highlighted future priorities, including implementing and drafting site management plans, strengthening monitoring of hunting, bolstering enforcement and implementation, addressing governance gaps, and applying environmental impact assessments.

REPORT ON PHASING OUT LEAD SHOT FOR HUNTING IN WETLANDS

Catherine Lehmann, AEWA Secretariat, introduced the synthesis of national reports on phasing out lead shot (AEWA/MOP 4.6), and the related progress report (AEWA/MOP 4.7) and draft resolution (AEWA Res. 4.1). She said only 18% of range states have fully phased out the use of lead shot for hunting in wetlands, and relevant legislation is lacking in 60% of range states, including all of the African range states.

Regarding national-level measures, Lehmann recommended: the development, implementation and enforcement of legislation; awareness raising and dialogue between hunters and authorities; education for hunters; and improved availability of lead-free shot. Regarding international-level actions, she suggested the Technical Committee look into potential development of AEWA policy on the use of lead shot in terrestrial habitats and on restricted use of lead for fishing weights. She recommended increasing efforts with regard to regional workshops and the dissemination of existing information, and announced the production of a popular brochure showcasing experiences in those countries that already have legislation in place, to be published by the end of the year.

MACEDONIA raised the issue of lead shot export from the EU. BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL and Executive Secretary Lenten stressed that education materials are amply available, and identified a problem with their effective dissemination. MALI called for cooperation with other conventions and organizations. Raising the issues of cost and availability of lead-free shot, TUNISIA suggested that legislation and enforcement be regarded as final steps.

INTERNATIONAL REVIEWS

Conservation status: Dereliev presented the report on the conservation status of migratory waterbirds in the Agreement area (AEWA/MOP 4.8) and the related draft resolution (AEWA Res. 4.2). He emphasized the shift from a descriptive to an analytical approach, referring to the addition of IUCN Red List data for AEWA species and an analysis of waterbird population trends in Europe. He called for: increased quality and quantity of monitoring, surveillance and international coordination; sophisticated analysis of census and ringing data; and more research into the causes of both population increases and decreases. Executive Secretary Lenten announced the Secretariat's intention to publish a brochure by the end of the year that will outline the ten key messages of the report. WETLANDS INTERNATIONAL raised concern over the limited funding available for the International Waterbird Census, cautioning that this financial deficit negatively impacts the effectiveness of the Agreement.

Hunting and trade legislation: Lehmann introduced the report on hunting and trade legislation (AEWA/MOP 4.9) and the related draft resolution (AEWA Res. 4.3), which summarizes a survey of range states' legislation pertaining to hunting and trade, and the related draft resolution (AEWA Res. 4.3). She highlighted recommendations to enhance implementation of the Agreement, including: training workshops on the subject; stronger enforcement measures; clarity of provisions; and focus on knowledge gaps.

Re-establishment projects: Dereliev introduced the review on re-establishment projects (AEWA/MOP 4.11) and the related draft resolution (AEWA Res. 4.4). He described a database for information pertaining to waterbird re-establishment in the AEWA region, an assessment of re-establishment projects according to IUCN guidelines, and progress on project implementation. Among recommended actions, he cited the development of advisory groups for re-establishment projects, conduct of comprehensive feasibility studies, strict adherence to IUCN guidelines, secured financial and political support, sufficient habitat for projects, and a standard set of evaluation criteria.

Single Species Action Plans: Dereliev also presented the stage of preparation and implementation of Single Species Action Plans (SSAPs) (AEWA/MOP 4.10). He described population trends for the 15 AEWA species for which there are SSAPs, and outlined factors that have influenced the rate of SSAP implementation, including: relevant regional legislation, the availability of funding mechanisms, species distribution, and cooperation between governments and NGOs. MOROCCO emphasized its development of a national action plan for the northern bald ibis. OMPO called for the incorporation of ringing data analyses and genetic information into action plans.

Non-native species: Dereliev introduced the report on the status of introduced non-native waterbird species (AEWA/MOP 4.12) and the related draft resolution (AEWA Res. 4.5). He said that breeding of introduced species and hybridization are significant and increasing, a trend which negatively impacts species and habitats. He outlined recommendations such as: strengthening, improving and enforcing legislation; including introduced species in monitoring schemes; and supporting research on the effects of introduced waterbirds. He also called for coordination on eradication and control schemes, and said AEWA should consider action plans on introduced species.

OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY

Participants gathered in the evening for a welcome ceremony hosted by the Government of Madagascar, where Minister Randriamanana welcomed the group, calling the atmosphere of the conference warm and convivial, and describing the cultural heritage of his country as part of its rich diversity. Delegates then watched a traditional dance and music performance before dinner.

IN THE CORRIDORS

By Monday morning, delegates were already well into discussions, with many swapping lists of bird sightings from pre-meeting field excursions along with expectations for MOP-4.

Some participants from anglophone African states who attended a two-day pre-meeting negotiation training session expressed optimism that they were better prepared for the meeting as a result of this session. Yet, one delegate remarked, "While I feel much more knowledgeable, I realize that I'm still behind the others. It's far from a level playing field."

Some anticipated a week filled with challenging negotiations, with one delegate mentioning that financing issues would prove "difficult to resolve." While many of the potentially contentious issues were discussed only at the coffee breaks, one thorny issue – relating to the possible nomination of the Great Rift Valley as a World Heritage Site – surfaced immediately, with one party requesting that the item be taken off the agenda altogether. Many parties said they hadn't seen this coming, and wondered if more wild cards would surface during the week. One delegate expressed concern and said, "We can hardly implement the modest goals we set out to accomplish, with limited budget, and yet we keep raising new issues."