



10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the
Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

“Healthy wetlands, healthy people”

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Agenda item XV

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**Promoting international cooperation for the conservation of
waterbird flyways**

Submitted by the Scientific & Technical Review Panel (STRP)

1. RECALLING that the conservation of waterbirds has been and remains an important driver for wetland conservation worldwide, especially through the designation of Ramsar sites as a means of establishing linked networks of protected wetlands, and that since its inception the Convention has actively promoted such activities through decisions such as Recommendations 6.4 and 7.3, Resolutions V.9, VI.4, VII.3, VIII.37 and VIII.38, as well as through the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Resolution VII.11);
2. NOTING the priorities for waterbird conservation highlighted in 2004 at the “Waterbirds around the World” international conference (Annex I to this Resolution);
- 2bis RECOGNISING the Arctic as the source of most of the world’s known flyways, NOTING that Arctic wetlands are especially vulnerable to climate change [COP10 DR24], and AWARE of the recent development of international cooperation between Arctic countries;
3. ALSO RECALLING the previous relevant decisions of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA);
4. AWARE that international cooperative efforts to conserve flyways of migratory waterbirds have also been promoted by many other international bodies and initiatives such as CMS, AEWA, the East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the Western Hemisphere Migratory Species Initiative, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN), the West/Central Asian Site Network for the Siberian Crane and other waterbirds (WCASN), the European Union’s Natura 2000 site network, individual flyway management plans for threatened species, and CMS’s recent Action Plan for the Central Asian Flyway; and that close technical cooperation among

these bodies, the Ramsar Convention, and its International Organization Partners has been crucial to success;

5. CONSIDERING that flyway conservation should combine species- and ecosystem-based approaches and be coordinated throughout migratory ranges, and CONSCIOUS of the urgent need to further strengthen international cooperation and partnerships among governments, intergovernmental and nongovernment organizations, local communities, and the private sector;
6. ALARMED at the continuing decline in abundance of many waterbirds throughout the world, resulting not only from unsustainable exploitation, but especially from the loss and degradation of wetland habitats (in particular through both small-scale and larger-scale land claims and other land use changes of intertidal wetlands), and AWARE that anthropogenic impacts on habitats, including climate change, are increasingly concentrating the distribution of birds into fewer and smaller areas, such as to increase their vulnerability to diseases and inadvertently contribute to the spread of disease such as Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) [(as outlined in Resolution [COP10 DR 21])], which also has impacts on humans and domestic agriculture, as well as the loss of, and increased competition in, reduced feeding, roosting and breeding areas;
7. RECALLING the target set in 2002 by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) for a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological diversity by 2010, and AWARE that waterbird status can provide a wider indicator of the status of wetland biodiversity, not least because migratory waterbirds depend on the maintenance of the ecological character of multiple wetlands in many countries;
8. AWARE that waterbirds using the East Asian-Australasian Flyway are the most poorly known of all flyway populations, that the greatest number of globally threatened waterbird species occur there, and that that flyway extends across the most densely populated part of the world, where there are extreme pressures not only on unprotected wetlands but also on protected sites, and NOTING the crucial challenges in ensuring effective wise use of key sites and sustainable consumptive uses of waterbirds;
9. NOTING that a small number of sites are of critical importance to long-distance migrant shorebirds and that human activities at these sites can result in dramatic declines in shorebird populations;
10. NOTING IN PARTICULAR the intense pressure on intertidal wetlands in the East Asia-Australasian flyway, which not only provide critical waterbird habitat, but through multiple ecosystem services such as fisheries also support very large numbers of people and their communities and outcomes of the pre COP10 International Symposium on East Asian Coastal Wetlands, Changwon, October 2008 (Annex II to this Resolution);
11. CONSCIOUS of the poor population status of waterbirds that are either non-migratory, occur on islands, or are intracontinental or southern hemisphere migrants;
12. RECALLING that in Resolution VII.21 on *Enhancing the conservation and wise use of intertidal wetlands* (2002), the Contracting Parties resolved “to review and modify existing policies that adversely affect intertidal wetlands, to seek to introduce measures for the long-term conservation of these areas” and “to identify and designate as Wetlands of International

Importance a greater number and area of intertidal wetlands, especially tidal flats, giving priority to those sites which are important to indigenous people and local communities, and those holding globally threatened wetland species”;

13. NOTING the WSSD Type II Flyway Partnership in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway as a Ramsar Regional Initiative and CONGRATULATING Flyway Partners on their cooperative efforts to date in support of the conservation of migratory birds and the sustainable use of their habitats; and FURTHER CONGRATULATING Australia, China, and the Republic of Korea on the recent signing of their respective bilateral migratory bird agreements (Republic of Korea – China and Republic of Korea – Australia);
14. WELCOMING the recent development of flyway-scale collaboration between North, Central and South America and Caribbean nations, based on the Western Hemisphere Migratory Species Initiative and a Waterbird Conservation Plan for the Americas;
15. NOTING that in African-Eurasian flyways, generally good knowledge of waterbird distribution, abundance, and habitat needs is not always effectively transferred into necessary national and local actions by stakeholders, such that many conservation efforts have been ineffective at maintaining or restoring a favourable status of populations, including those of globally threatened species;
16. WELCOMING the multi-partner Wings Over Wetlands GEF project in Africa and western Eurasia, in particular its demonstration projects, its capacity-building activities, and its innovative Critical Site Network Tool for disseminating key data and information on wetlands and waterbirds to support conservation actions by site managers, stakeholders, and other decision-makers; and
17. STRESSING the urgent need to integrate waterbird conservation fully as part of sustainable development, to the greater benefit of local communities and other stakeholders dependent on wetlands as well as for the conservation of wetland biodiversity;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

18. STRONGLY ENCOURAGES Contracting Parties and other governments actively to support and participate in relevant international plans and programmes for the conservation of shared migratory waterbirds and their habitats, including *inter alia* the East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership, AEWA, WHSRN, WCASN, Central Asian Action Plan for Migratory Waterbirds and their Habitats and other flyway initiatives;
19. URGES Parties to identify and designate as Ramsar sites all internationally important wetlands for waterbirds on migratory flyways, that meet the Criteria in the *Strategic Framework and guidelines for the future development of the List of Wetlands of International Importance* (Resolution VII.11, as amended), in line with the long-term targets established for these Criteria;
20. WELCOMES the statement by the Republic of Korea to the 35th meeting of Ramsar’s Standing Committee that intertidal mudflats should be preserved and that no large-scale reclamation projects are now being approved in the Republic of Korea, and ENCOURAGES all Contracting Parties in their efforts to protect such habitats in future and to monitor them and mitigate any past development impacts on or losses to them;

21. URGES Contracting Parties, other governments and relevant organizations urgently to enhance their individual and collective efforts to address the root causes of the continuing decline in waterbird status, especially in the light of implications for the achievement of WSSD's 2010 target on wetland biodiversity;
22. URGES the governing bodies of flyway initiatives to take steps to share knowledge and expertise on best practices in the development and implementation of flyway-scale waterbird conservation policies and practices, including successful means of disseminating critical supporting data and information to stakeholders and others, and ENCOURAGES the Secretariats of Ramsar, CMS, AEWA and the biodiversity programme of the Arctic Council to work together with their governance and scientific subsidiary bodies and other interested organizations to establish a mechanism for such sharing of knowledge and experience;
23. REQUESTS Wetlands International to draw upon status information from *Waterbird Population Estimates* to report periodically on the state of the world's waterbirds to the Contracting Parties of the Ramsar, CMS, AEWA and CBD, and URGES Contracting Parties and others to contribute the necessary financial support to enable the production of such international assessments and to support the coordinated International Waterbird Census (IWC), which contributes to these population estimates and assessments and the provision of much other relevant knowledge; and
24. INVITES the Convention's International Organisation Partners, particularly BirdLife International and Wetlands International, to provide consultative and other technical services to Contracting Parties in addressing the decline of waterbirds through facilitating and assisting collaborative participation of Contracting Parties, non-contracting parties and the private sector in the implementation of flyway initiatives at national level, supporting the updating of national wetland inventories and monitoring of sites for waterbirds [(see COP10 DR 15)].

Annex I



The Edinburgh Declaration

An international conference on waterbirds, their conservation and sustainable use was held in Edinburgh, Scotland, from 3-8 April 2004, and was attended by 456 participants from 90 countries.

Conscious that waterbird flyways are biological systems of migration paths that directly link sites and ecosystems in different countries and continents;

Recalling that the conservation and wise use of waterbirds is a shared responsibility of nations and peoples and a common concern of humankind;

Recalling also the long history of international cooperation for waterbird conservation developed over a hundred years with treaties such as that concerned with migratory birds in 1916 between USA and UK (on behalf of Canada), and that over 40 years ago, the first European Meeting on Wildfowl Conservation held in St. Andrews, Scotland in 1963, started a process leading to the establishment of the Convention on wetlands especially as waterfowl habitat in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971;

Noting that major international conferences in Noordwijk aan Zee, The Netherlands (1966), Leningrad, USSR (1968), Ramsar, Iran (1971), Astrakhan, USSR (1989), St. Petersburg Beach, Florida, USA (1992), Kushiro, Japan and Strasbourg, France (1994), have further developed international technical exchanges on waterbird conservation;

Aware of the development of further intergovernmental cooperation through the establishment and implementation of further treaties, agreements, strategies and programmes; and of the development of considerable nongovernmental national and international cooperation in waterbird conservation and monitoring;

Conscious that at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002, world leaders expressed their desire to achieve “a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological diversity” by 2010, and that in February 2004 this target was further developed by the Seventh Conference of the Parties to the Biodiversity Convention, and **aware that** achieving this target will require significant investments and highly focused and coordinated conservation activity on all continents, and **recognising that** communication, education and public awareness and capacity building will play a key role in achieving this target;

Further conscious of the urgent need to strengthen international cooperation and partnerships between governments, intergovernmental and nongovernment organisations, local communities and the private sector;

Alarmed at the perilous state of many populations of waterbirds, in both terrestrial and marine ecosystems, and at the continued decline in quality and extent of the world's wetlands;

Noting the conclusions and priorities for further action identified by the many technical workshops and presentations made at this conference, and recorded subsequently in this Declaration.

Welcoming the joint initiative of Wetlands International, and government authorities in the United Kingdom and The Netherlands, with the support also of Australia, Denmark, USA, Japan, Germany, Sweden, Ireland, Belgium, Switzerland, UNEP/CMS, UNEP/AEWA, FACE, and CIC and with the input of many other organisations and individuals, in convening the conference *Waterbirds Around the World* in Edinburgh so as to review the current status of the world's waterbirds;

The Conference Participants, assembled together in Edinburgh —

Consider that although significant progress has been made to conserve waterbirds and their wetland habitats leading to some major successes, overall there remain important challenges, which, together with uncertainties about implications of future changes, requires further efforts and focused actions;

Reaffirm that, in the words of the Ramsar Convention, “waterbirds, in their seasonal migrations may transcend frontiers and so should be regarded as an international resource” and “that the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna can be ensured by combining farsighted national policies with coordinated international action” and accordingly **urge that** efforts between countries to conserve waterbird populations and their wetland habitats are extended, not only for the values that waterbirds have in sustaining human populations, but also for their own sakes;

Consider that flyway conservation should combine species- and ecosystem-based approaches, internationally coordinated throughout migratory ranges;

Acknowledge that the conservation and sustainable use of waterbirds and wetland resources require coordinated action by public and private sectors, dependent local communities and other stakeholders;

Call in particular for urgent action to:

- Halt and reverse wetland loss and degradation;
- Complete national and international wetland inventories, and promote the conservation of wetlands of importance to waterbirds in the context of surrounding areas, especially through the participation of local communities;
- Extend and strengthen international networks of key sites for waterbirds along all flyways;
- Establish and extend formal agreements and other cooperation arrangements between countries to conserve species, where possible within the frameworks provided by the Conventions on Migratory Species, Biological Diversity and Wetlands;

- Fund and implement recovery plans for all globally threatened waterbird species;
- Halt and reverse recently revealed declines of long-distance migrant shorebirds through sustainable management by governments and others of human activities at sites of unique importance to them;
- Restore albatross and petrel populations to favourable conservation status through urgent and internationally coordinated conservation actions, especially through the framework provided by the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels;
- Substantially reduce pollution in the marine environment and establish sustainable harvesting of marine resources;
- Underpin future conservation decisions with high-quality scientific advice drawn from coordinated, and adequately funded, research and monitoring programmes notably the International Waterbird Census, and to this end, urge governments and other partners to work together collaboratively and supportively;
- Develop policy-relevant indicators of the status of the world's wetlands, especially in the context of the 2010 target, using waterbird and other data generated from robust and sustainable monitoring schemes;
- Invest in communication, education and public awareness activities as a key element of waterbird and wetlands conservation;
- Assess disease risk, and establish monitoring programmes in relation to migratory waterbird movements, the trade of wild birds, and implications for human health.

Urge that particular priority be given to capacity building for flyway conservation in countries and territories with limited institutions and resources, given that the wise use of waterbirds and wetlands is important for sustainable development and poverty alleviation;

Strongly encourage countries to ratify and implement relevant conventions, agreements and treaties so as to encourage further international cooperation, and to make use of available resources including the Global Environment Facility in order to finance action required under this Declaration;

Consider that, with the long history of cooperative international assessments, waterbirds provide excellent indicators by which to evaluate progress towards achievement of the 2010 target established by world leaders in 2002, and to this end **Call on** the Conventions on Migratory Species, Biological Diversity and Wetlands, and other international agreements to work together and with other partners on such assessments, and in particular with Wetlands International to further develop the analytical content, of the triennial publication *Waterbird Population Estimates* and its use;

Stress the need for wide international dissemination of this Declaration and the technical outcomes of this Conference [All papers published and available at www.jncc.gov.uk/worldwaterbirds]; and

Agree to meet again as a conference in ten years' time to review progress.

In support of the recommendations above, the Conference concluded the following:

- For the Flyways of the Americas, collaboration between North, Central and South America and Caribbean nations is developing, based on conclusions of the conference of nations to consider the status of migratory birds held during the VIIIth Neotropical Congress in Chile, and in the recent completion of a Waterbird Conservation Plan for the Americas. Despite more than a century of conservation efforts in North America and emergence of a shared vision for biologically-based, landscape orientated partnerships, it is clear that international cooperation amongst Pan-American countries sharing migratory birds should increase.
- In African-Eurasian Flyways, the generally good knowledge of waterbirds is not being effectively transferred into necessary national and local actions. Nor have conservation efforts led to maintaining or restoring the health of many waterbird populations, including globally threatened species. There are urgent needs to integrate waterbird conservation as part of sustainable development, to the greater benefit of local communities and other stakeholders dependent on wetlands as well as benefiting biodiversity. The African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (UNEP/AEWA) provides a good basis to achieve this.
- Intra-African Flyways are extremely poorly known and would benefit from greater attention.
- Many of the waterbirds of the Central Asian Flyway appear to be declining, although information on status and trends is generally poor. In most countries there has been little previous investment in conservation and low involvement of local stakeholders in the sustainable management of wetlands. An international framework for the development of conservation initiatives for migratory waterbirds in Central Asia is urgently required to promote cooperative action. Better information is needed to identify priority conservation issues and responses.
- The waterbirds of Asian-Australasian Flyways are the most poorly known, and the greatest number of globally threatened waterbirds occur here. This flyway extends across the most densely populated part of the world, where there are extreme pressures not only on unprotected wetlands but also on protected sites. Effective protection of wetlands of major importance is a critical need, as in other regions of the world. There are huge, and crucial, challenges in ensuring effective wise use of key sites, as well as ensuring that consumptive uses of waterbirds are sustainable.
- Conservation of pelagic waterbirds in the open oceans gives a range of unique challenges. The entry into force of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels is a most welcome development, and its full implementation is an urgent need. Addressing issues of seabird bycatch, especially by illegal and unregulated fisheries remains a critical need to reverse the poor conservation status of many species, as is the general need to achieve sustainable marine fisheries.
- Most of the world's known flyways originate in the Arctic. The recent development of international cooperation between arctic countries is welcome, as is the recognition of the crucial need to involve local communities and their traditional

local knowledge in waterbird management. Austro-tropical Flyways also require research.

- Climate changes are already affecting waterbirds. The consequences of climate change for waterbirds will be multiple, and will greatly exacerbate current negative impacts such as habitat loss and degradation. There is a need for wide-scale planning, at landscape and flyway scales, to reduce or mitigate the impacts on waterbird populations and their habitats. Research that explores a range of potential future scenarios will be required to underpin this planning and will need data from long-term monitoring and surveillance.
- The conservation status of non-migrant waterbird populations around the world in many cases is poorer than that of migrants, and these waterbirds generally have less focused international attention than migrants. Addressing conservation requirements of non-migrant waterbirds should also be given national and international priority.
- On a densely populated planet it is crucial that waterbird conservationists focus on their relationships with communities and governments as the means both of reversing the causes of poor conservation status, and of resolving conflicts with protected species. Adequately funded programmes of communication, education and public awareness need to be the core of all waterbird conservation initiatives.
- Science has identified the critical importance of a small number of key sites to long-distance migrant shorebirds and that human activities at some of these are responsible for recent dramatic declines in certain shorebird populations.
- Recent research has highlighted the genetic and demographic risks incurred by species that have small populations. These have implications for the design of species recovery programmes.
- The frequency and magnitude of disease losses among waterbirds (from emerging or re-emerging disease agents) have increased to the extent that they demand attention. These diseases not only affect waterbirds but have impacts on humans. Solutions require a multidisciplinary approach.
- An integrated approach to the monitoring of waterbirds gives cost-effective identification of the reasons for waterbird population changes. There are good examples of the collection of demographic information and its integration with census data. Further such national and especially international schemes should be strongly encouraged and funded.
- Systematic analyses for atlases confirm the value of ringing studies in assessing the conservation status of breeding, wintering and stop-over sites within flyways. To this end, there should be integration of data from conventional ringing and colour-marking, telemetry, stable isotope analyses and genetic markers.

Annex 2

Importance of conserving intertidal wetlands in the Yellow Sea Ecoregion

Conclusions from the international symposium on East Asian Coastal Wetlands, Changwon, Republic of Korea, 27th October 2008

The international symposium on East Asian coastal wetlands was held on 27th October in Changwon, Republic of Korea, as an Associated Event of the 10th Conference of Parties to the Ramsar Convention. The symposium was organised by the Getbol ('tidal flats') Forum, Republic of Korea in collaboration with BirdLife International, the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, the UNDP/GEF Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (YSLME) Project, and the Tidal Flat Research Center of the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute. Wetlands International and WWF also provided considerable support through their presentations on coastal wetlands and the flyway. The symposium was hosted by the Ministry of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs, and the Province of Gyeongsangnam-do, Republic of Korea. Participants from East and South-east Asia, Australasia and Europe attended the symposium.

The following were the main conclusions from the symposium based on a consideration of scientific and wise-use principles:

1. The intertidal wetlands and associated habitats of the Yellow Sea Ecoregion are of global importance for biodiversity conservation, with outstanding economic, cultural and landscape values. The intertidal mudflats are amongst the largest worldwide, and the Yellow Sea ranks alongside other great wetlands such as the Wadden Sea in Europe and Sundarbans in South Asia.
2. The Yellow Sea has outstanding socio-economic values. Tens of thousands of artisanal fishers depend on the area, catching fish, and collecting shellfish, sea-cucumber and other marine resources (e.g. sea grass for housing). The region is a vital spawning ground and nursery for fish and other commercially exploited species. These wetlands also provide other crucial but often ignored services for coastal populations such as acting as a barrier preventing erosion, flooding and salt-water intrusion. They also act as a carbon sink and hence are important in climate change regulation, and they are vital in absorbing nutrients and sediments that would otherwise end up in the open sea.
3. A good indication of healthy wetlands is a high diversity of waterbirds since different species feed on different parts of the food chain. The Yellow Sea is a critical region for migratory shorebirds, providing an irreplaceable stop-over and re-fuelling hub for birds on migration between their breeding grounds in Siberia and wintering grounds in South-east Asia and Australasia. Millions of shorebirds use the area in spring and autumn. The nature of the flyway causes the birds to fly thousands of kilometres, making the need to stop-over at the Yellow Sea a matter of life and death. These migratory shorebirds link countries and peoples along the flyway, and their conservation is a matter of international importance and concern.

4. The Yellow Sea is facing a multitude of threats, from pollution, siltation, and particularly past and ongoing large-scale conversion of tidal flats for agriculture and urban and industrial development. Socio-economic and ornithological studies have demonstrated the significant negative impacts of wetland conversion in the Yellow Sea on local livelihoods and migratory shorebird populations.
5. Although progress has been made in designating some critical intertidal areas as nature reserves, this falls well short of the 10% target agreed upon at the Convention on Biological Diversity and only a few areas have been designated as Ramsar Sites. Moreover, enforcement of regulations within these critical areas remains a focus issue.
6. Conservation of the Yellow Sea intertidal wetlands and associated habitats should be advanced at an ecosystem scale through integrated coastal zone management and international co-operation. Conservation measures should include the designation of the highest priority sites as Marine Protected Areas, and/or their listing as Ramsar Sites in recognition of their outstanding international importance. The contribution of wetlands towards a healthy society should be acknowledged, and no further large-scale conversion of intertidal wetlands should be approved. Wherever possible, intertidal wetlands should be restored. Public consultation over any planning that may impact on intertidal wetlands or provide opportunities for restoration is essential. These measures are in line with commitments made in the Ramsar Resolution on tidal wetlands (Resolution VII.21).
7. The East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership is a regional initiative of the Ramsar Convention, and the UNDP/GEF YSLME and WWF/KORDI Yellow Sea Ecoregion Support projects provide an excellent foundation for conservation and collaboration together with local NGO's and organisations. Co-operation and exchange of experience between wetland managers in the Yellow Sea and Wadden Sea should also be developed. Experience from the Wadden Sea has demonstrated the need for a scientific justification and a shared vision amongst stakeholders, on a transboundary and ecosystem scale. It has also demonstrated how quickly conservation and wise use can become mainstream thinking and practice and a basis for co-operation amongst government and civil society.
8. The 10th Conference of Parties to the Ramsar Convention, being held at Changwon, Republic of Korea, 28th October to 4th November 2008, provides an excellent opportunity to highlight the problems and opportunities in the Yellow Sea Ecoregion, and a platform for future conservation and international co-operation.