

Waterbird Harvest Specialist Group

Terms of Reference

September 2013

Background

The Waterbird Harvest Specialist Group (WHSG) can trace its origins back to the IWRB “Hunting Research Group” which was founded in 1969, it later became the Wetlands International “Waterbird Hunting Specialist Group”. It is now being reconstituted to carry out the important work of evaluating and promoting the sustainable harvest of waterbirds.

In this period our understanding of sustainable use has progressed, however our understanding of harvesting has not been brought together into a coherent framework. The term harvesting is all encompassing and little progress has been made on differentiating between the different types and motivations for and of harvesting. As an example hunting is only one form of harvesting and yet hunting itself can be a function of a number of different interacting motivations, which at the most basic include recreation, livelihood, management and commercial motivations. In some areas there is already an enormous knowledge pool and framework for the sustainable harvest of waterbirds, such as the recreational hunting of waterbirds in North America. In other areas there is a growing body of proxy knowledge, such as our understanding of bushmeat and livelihoods. However, to date these have not been brought together into a more coherent understanding of the harvest of waterbirds.

Whilst it is most practical and important to work on different aspects of the sustainable harvest of waterbirds, it is also vital that these are brought together into a common framework to create greater coherence. Through this it should be feasible to provide a better understanding of the harvest of waterbirds and the tools by which this can be made/kept sustainable.

The WHSG can offer the structure to bring this about.

Purpose

The main purpose of the WHSG is to support science-based decision-making concerning the harvest of waterbird populations to ensure that their use is ecologically, socially and economically sustainable.

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Guiding Principles

The harvesting of waterbirds and hunting in particular is not without controversy and in order to avoid misconception and to provide a sound basis for the work of WHSG it is important to have a set of guiding principles in order to fulfil its purpose. In order to cater for a variety of opinions the following text has been adopted from the *IUCN Policy Statement on Sustainable Use of Wild Living Resources*, adopted at the IUCN World Conservation Congress Amman, October 2000¹.

In this the IUCN conclude that:

- a) Use of wild living resources, if sustainable, is an important conservation tool because the social and economic benefits derived from such use provide incentives for people to conserve them;*
- b) When using wild living resources, people should seek to minimize losses of biological diversity;*
- c) Enhancing the sustainability of uses of wild living resources involves an ongoing process of improved management of those resources; and*
- d) Such management should be adaptive, incorporating monitoring and the ability to modify management to take account of risk and uncertainty.*

Given the global remit of the WHSG, the over-arching basis should be the Convention on Biological Diversity and the *Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines for the Sustainable Use of Biodiversity*² which offers guidance for the sustainable consumptive use of biodiversity.

Scope

The WHSG will be open to serve as a global forum for sharing knowledge and practical experience on waterbird harvesting. In order to progress the issue the practical work will be organised according to the major flyway instruments. Given the background and current knowledge and practice the initial focus will be on the Agreement Area³ of the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds Agreement (AEWA). This area encompasses a wide range of harvest and governance regimes for shared populations. In addition this area has a useful policy framework, AEWA, through which to structure clear deliverables.

Notwithstanding this, the work of the WHSG will still be informed by policies, processes and issues in other flyways, and in covering such a diversity of regimes will in itself provide guidance for other flyways. It should therefore be clear that the

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http://intranet.iucn.org/webfiles/doc/SSC/SSCwebsite/Policy_statements/The_IUCN_Policy_Statement_on_Sustainable_Use_of_Wild_Living_Resources.pdf

² <http://www.cbd.int/sustainable/addis.shtml>

³ http://www.unep-aewa.org/map/map_large.htm

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WHSG will remain open to all initiatives that can contribute to the overall purpose of the WHSG.

Due to the diversity of waterbird harvests it will be necessary first to review the different harvest regimes/types (e.g. recreational, commercial, livelihood and management) and to sub-divide work into those categories.

In addition knowledge and understanding will be required on population demography and dynamics and how it relates to harvest mortality.

Specific Guidance and Relevant Processes

In addition to AEWA there are, within the AEWA Agreement Area, a number of guidelines and processes that are relevant and the following should offer a useful starting point.

In Europe, the European Charter on Hunting and Biodiversity⁴ of the Bern Convention and the Guidance Document on 'Hunting under the Birds Directive'⁵ offer useful guidance for sustainable recreational hunting and hunting tourism. In respect of management harvesting the AEWA International Species Management Plan (ISMP) for the Svalbard population of the Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)⁶ should be highly informative. Whilst in relation to livelihood harvesting the bushmeat discussions under the UNEP/CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA)⁷ should be informative and linkages should be established to the IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group⁸ and the emerging discussions within the CBD and IUCN to develop a Collaborative Partnership on Sustainable Wildlife Management.

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan⁹ also offers a very useful theoretical framework and practical guidance on adaptive harvest management in relation to recreational hunting. Elsewhere the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership offers the possibility for future development.

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<https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=1883368&SecMode=1&DocId=1436274&Usage=2>

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/conservation/wildbirds/action_plans/guidance_en.htm

⁶ http://www.unep-awa.org/meetings/en/pfg/meeting1/pfg_ismpl1.htm

⁷ <https://www.cbd.int/sbstta/>

⁸ http://www.iucn.org/about/union/commissions/sustainable_use_and_livelihoods_specialist_group/

⁹ <http://www.flyways.us/>

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Structure

The WHSG shall be constituted by these Terms of Reference and shall seek to be affiliated to Wetlands International in the first instance, and potentially with the IUCN Species Survival Commission as a Specialist Group if deemed appropriate.

The WHSG shall consist of the following

- **Chair** – the Chair responsible for the running of the WHSG and leads all discussions and or negotiations on behalf of the WHSG. The Chair is proposed to the Board/Members by a nominations committee who will consist of a maximum of six persons and include a representative from each of the following: AEWA, Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU (FACE), Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) and Wetlands International.
- **Board** – the Board is the main decision making body of the WHSG and shall consist of no less than eight and no more than 15 persons. These must include the following: i) the Chair, ii) a representative from each of AEWA, WWT, Wetlands International, Migratory Birds of the Western Palearctic (OMPO) and FACE and iii) two internationally recognized technical experts from independent research institutions/universities. The individual experts are proposed by the Chair and approved by the existing members of the Board.
- **Secretariat** – the role of the Secretariat is to assist the Chair in managing the work and interactions of the group and facilitating meetings of the group. The Secretariat of the group should be hosted by an organisation who should supply a focal point. The hosting of the Secretariat should be agreed by the Board and the mandate of the Secretariat must be renewed by the Board on a four year cycle.
- **Sub-Groups** – the Board may establish Sub-groups as and when the need arises; these may be permanent Sub-groups such as Flyway Groups, Population modelling groups or maybe *ad hoc*. working groups. Each Sub-group should have a specific mandate with clear aims, objectives, deliverables and timelines.

Governance & Mode of Working

The work of the WHSG shall be governed by the Board who should meet at least once a year. The Board can, if required, establish its own Rules of Procedure. The Chair can assume the powers and responsibility of the Board between their meetings.

The Board must be informed of all Sub-group meetings and their outcomes and as a matter of principle the Chair should be invited to all Sub-group meetings.

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The WHSG should aim to have Member Meetings at least every two years.

If feasible an online forum should be established in order to facilitate the work of the WHSG and also to facilitate the retention of the institutional memory.

Membership

Membership will be open to both individuals and organisations. Membership applications should be directed through the WHSG Secretariat and must be approved by the Board. The criteria for membership are as follows:

- members shall have a proven record in technical and/or scientific aspects of waterbird harvest management (biological, socio-economic)
- members shall have proven record of working on and supporting sustainable management of waterbirds
- members will work towards building trust between relevant stakeholder group

Aims

To bring about a knowledge-driven process for the sustainable harvest of waterbirds that is consistently applied and tuned to local needs; balances conservation, wildlife management and recreational needs, while taking account of conservation, and in particular to:

- bring together a competent group of experts and partners who will progress our understanding of harvest regimes/types.
- identify the extent and types of harvest taking place within all major waterbird flyways.
- identify what information is critically required to manage waterbird populations sustainably.
- identify any significant knowledge gaps that may hinder the identification or assessment of harvest sustainability.
- develop technical solutions or policy proposals in order to fill the gaps.
- collaborate with other stakeholders and groups working on issues of direct relevance to the purpose of the WHSG.
- promote interdisciplinary research, in particular social and economic science, into all aspects of the use and conservation of waterbirds.
- provide useful decision making tools for harvest management.
- communicate the work of the group and its relevance to key stakeholders, including AEWA, relevant government bodies, indigenous and local communities, resource managers, hunters, key conservation NGO's, the bird watching community and where feasible the general public.

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Key Objectives

In addition to the above, the Board will, at its inaugural meeting and then every two years thereafter, review its key objectives and criteria for success for both the short and medium term.

Financial Support

The Chair, with the support of the Board and Secretariat, will be responsible for securing funding for the key objectives.

Outputs & Reporting

- The WHSG will make regular progress reports to Wetlands International.
- The WHSG will produce input into the work of the major flyway instruments, such as AEWA.
- The WHSG will strive to publish its findings in scientific journals.

Communications

The Chair of the WHSG, or their delegated spokesperson, has the sole authority to speak on behalf of the WHSG.

The onus will be on Members of the WHSG to communicate their involvement in the WHSG in an appropriate manner. This should include a sensitivity filter that should amongst other factors include a consideration of confidentiality, role and acknowledgement of other Members and organisations and donor stipulations. Where necessary, appropriate consultations should be conducted prior to communicating.