

Asia-Pacific Working Group on Migratory Waterbirds and Avian Influenza

Working Group Meeting, Beijing, 17 November 2007

Terms of Reference

Background

Since its discovery in 1996, the highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 virus subtype has been largely confined to domestic poultry, primarily chickens and humans. This virus has caused the death/culling of over 250 million birds and the loss of over 100 human deaths in Asia and since 2005, also in Africa and Europe. There were also reports of incidental deaths of wild bird species in East and Southeast Asia. In mid-late 2005, dramatic and large scale mortalities of wild waterbirds in the People's Republic of China, Mongolia and Russia, over 7,000 individuals of more than five species mortality raised concern of the potential impact the virus may have on the conservation of wild birds, including the large number of threatened species of Asia. Additionally, as the major of species affected are migratory, there was great concern that some species may have the potential to carry the virus within their flyways and across the flyways to other areas of the world, especially after its rapid geographic expansion into the Caspian Sea and Europe during the northern winter where it affected mainly wild birds.

In early 2006, the Asia – Pacific Working Group on Migratory Waterbirds and Avian Influenza (APWG-MWAI) was established under the auspices of the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Committee, the predecessor of the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAF) and the Central Asian Flyway (CAF) Action Plan. At the first meeting of the EAAF Partnership in November 2006, the Working Group was officially endorsed as a Working Group of the EAAF Partnership to address Outcome 11 of the Flyway Partnership Implementation Strategy (Knowledge of the potential role of migratory waterbirds in disease transmission, especially Avian Influenza, is enhanced).

Goal

To coordinate, facilitate and promote collaboration on avian influenza related migratory waterbird programmes and activities in the East Asian – Australasian and the Central Asian Flyways.

Objectives

The objectives of the Working Group are to, within the Asia – Pacific region:

1. Annually compile information on avian influenza surveillance activities with a focus on migratory waterbirds.
2. Promote sharing of information data on avian influenza surveillance of migratory waterbirds.
3. Promote the development and sharing of knowledge of migration strategies of priority waterbird species generated through coordinated monitoring and marking programmes.
4. Facilitate the development of a coordinated flyway-wide AI surveillance programmes with a focus on migratory waterbirds.

Geographic Scope

The Working Group covers the geographic area of the East Asian – Australasian and the Central Asian Flyways. The Working Group will review its geographic scope as additional capacity and collaboration opportunities arise in the Central Asian Flyway.

Membership

The membership is open to representatives of the EAAF Partnership, the Chairs of other Flyway Partnership Working Groups, and interested government agencies, international organisations and experts in the East Asian – Australasian and Central Asian Flyways.

Leadership arrangements

The Working Group will have a Chair designated by the members of the Working Group. The second meeting designated Dr Taej Mundkur as Interim Chair.

Wetlands International and the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations have indicated that they are willing to provide coordination support to the Working Group.

Meetings

The objectives of the Working Group do not require it to meet on a regular basis. The Working Group will conduct most of its business by email and through its web site. In-person meetings will be open but only be held when funding is available.

- The Chair in consultation with representatives will determine the timing and location of meetings.
- The Host Partner is responsible for providing logistical support for face-to face meetings.
- Email discussion will be used for communication between Group members inter-sessionally.

Expenses

Funding is currently received from the Global Avian Influenza Network for Surveillance (GAINS) for Wild Birds and FAO, but needs to be secured on an annual basis to continue to support the coordination activities of the Working Group.

Unless there is prior arrangement, representatives and other attendees are responsible for their own travel and associated expenses.

Communication

The Working Group has communicated using a dedicated e-group established as a Yahoo Group to benefit from an existing and reliable e-group system. This will be reviewed with a view to incorporation of the web site of the Partnership.

Information on the Working Group and its outputs (a website ongoing and past satellite tracking and colour marking work of waterbirds in the Asia-Pacific, the Asia-Pacific Working Group on Migratory Waterbirds and Avian Influenza, national contacts for banding schemes in the Asia-Pacific) is being maintained by Wetlands International on a website (<http://www.wetlands.org>).

Reporting/coordination

The Working Group will liaise, on issues related to its objectives, with other flyway groups and initiatives, including:

- UNEP/CMS Central Asian Flyway Action Plan
- Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Migratory Species
- Global Avian Influenza Network For Surveillance (GAINS)

Supporting Implementation of the East Asian - Australasian Flyway Partnership

The Working Group will primarily contribute to Outcome 11: Knowledge of the potential role of migratory waterbirds in disease transmission, especially Avian Influenza, is enhanced.

In undertaking this task it will also contribute to:

Outcome 7: Scientifically sound information is available on the Flyway wide status and trends of waterbird populations and their habitats.

Outcome 8: Information is available on the internationally important sites for migratory waterbirds in all countries of the Flyway.

Outcome 10: Knowledge of the ecology and migratory strategies of waterbirds is enhanced to support conservation action.

Supporting Implementation of the Central Asian Flyway Action Plan

The Working Group will primarily contribute to Action 4.4.5 which states that "Range States shall monitor disease occurrence in wild waterbirds and, using a multi-disciplinary approach, assess disease risk and implications for human health, in relation to poultry husbandry and trade practices, trade in wild waterbirds and migratory waterbird movements."

In undertaking this task it will also contribute to the following Actions of the Plan:

- 4.5.1. Range States shall endeavour to establish an international network of specialists and organizations involved in research, monitoring and conservation of migratory waterbirds and wetlands. If necessary, these networks at the national levels shall be strengthened through appointment of national coordinators.
- 4.5.3. Range States shall support international efforts to collect/collate available data and publish reviews on the level of understanding of migration strategies, routes, and important habitats of waterbird populations. In particular, they shall encourage the examination of ringing/markings data.
- 4.5.4. Range States shall cooperate with a view to determining the migration routes of all populations listed in Table 2, using available knowledge of breeding and non-breeding season distributions and census results, and by participating in coordinated marking programmes.
- 4.5.7. Range States shall support the development of new local, national and international research projects for better understanding of ecology, migratory strategies and population dynamics of waterbird species, and their use of important sites, in order to determine their specific requirements as well as the techniques which are the most appropriate for their conservation and management. Taking advantage of the advances in satellite telemetry to study the precise routes and sites of importance for populations shall be supported.
- 4.5.8. Range States shall endeavour to be involved in regular monitoring programmes, such as the International Waterbird Census, complemented by surveys of important breeding grounds, staging and non-breeding (wintering) sites. The results of such surveys shall be published and disseminated widely. The results will also be sent to appropriate international organizations, to enable reviews of population status and trends.