

From: Jón Geir Pétursson <jon.g.petursson@uar.is>
Sent: Monday, December 2, 2019 2:00 AM
To: Sergey Dereliev <sergey.dereliev@unep-aewa.org>
Subject: RE: AEWA IRP case: lowland afforestation in Iceland - report to the Standing Committee

Dear Sergey,

Thanks for the constructive conversation we had on Friday on this issue.

Please find here updated and extended responses to the inquire from AEWA regarding the mission report and the recommendations it put forward. Let us recall our earlier and prompt responses to the recommendations in 2017 and our additional comments submitted on your request in 2018. The comments provided in 2018 were lacking details as we discussed, due to the status of various policy reforms that were in process then.

Please find here document where the earlier responses have been edited and expanded considering recent institutional and organisational developments and reforms within the land use sector in Iceland. Many of those reforms were comprehensive, aiming for more inclusive and strategic policy making within forestry and land restoration in general.

We would especially like to inform and highlight following issues that are of relevance for many of your recommendations on the intersection between forestry and breeding habitats of AEWA-listed water-bird species:

- There have been major organizational reforms within the forest sector with the dissolution of the former regional afforestation programs and merger with the central forest government authority. This has come in the form of new, consolidated agency with the aim to harmonize and streamline the operations there were earlier more dispersed. This is still an ongoing reform
- There has been published a major work defining habitat type classification and important bird areas in Iceland (in 2018). Further, a preliminary survey of the conservation value of it has been completed. This is an outcome of year-long work, led by the Institute of Natural History on the behalf of the ministry. This is a milestone in all land use decision making (planning and management) in Iceland and sets a new reference for all land restoration and afforestation activities. This has been made well available to all stakeholders on a web -based platforms. It is further guiding the process of establishing protected area network in Iceland additional to what is already under conservation, with a basis in the Nature Conservation Act from 2015. This further gives the Icelandic government the needed scientific basis for designation of Emerald Sites in Iceland under the provisions of the Bern Convention. There is further ongoing work to bring most of the public lands of the central highlands of Iceland into National Park that might encompass ¼-1/3 of the country and include the already existing protected areas in the highlands.
- New forest legislation passed the Icelandic Parliament in 2019, replacing the old legislation from 1955 as the specific legislation on the regional afforestation programs from 2006. The new forest legislation has not yet been translated in English, but the translation is forthcoming and will be made available online.
- Concurrent with the new forest legislation, a new legislation on soil conservation and land restoration has also been set, replacing also an old legislation from 1965.

- Among the lead policy instruments the new forest act creates and sets legal basis for is a comprehensive National Forest Strategy that is subject to Strategic Environmental Impact assessment. Also, the legislation outlines frameworks for regional forest plans.
- In 2018, an updated Red list for birds was published in Iceland by the Institute of Natural History. This was an update of the list from the year 2000. This gives essential information and policy guidance about status of the Icelandic avifauna.
- The Ministry for the Environment is initiating process to revise the current biodiversity strategy and action plan. The aim is to have it completed and publish the updated and revised strategy following the CBD Cop in Yunnan in 2020.

The Ministry wants to highlight these issues that jointly link to the recommendations from AEWA.

Related to our earlier correspondence, is it our understanding that the committee had the interest to know more about and receive further details and complements related to recommendation 4,5,9, 11,12 and 13. Please find here compiled document, based on the earlier action plan/comments with smaller amendments and then additional details related the six recommendations.

Best regards
Jón Geir



Jón Geir Pétursson Ph.D., skrifstofustjóri / Director General
Skrifstofa landgæða / Department of Land and Natural Heritage
Umhverfis- og auðlindaráðuneytið / Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources
Skuggasund 1, 101 Reykjavík, Iceland
Sími / Tel: (+354) 545 8600
www.umhverfisraduneyti.is - [Fyrirvari/Disclaimer](#)

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