

30. November 2019

## **Compiled and updated responses to AEWA recommendations**

Implementation Review Process: plans for lowland afforestation in Iceland threatening breeding habitats of AEWA-listed waterbird species

Abbreviations:

MENR – Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources

IINH – Icelandic Institute for Natural Heritage

IFS – Icelandic Forest Service

NPA – National Planning Agency

NFS – National Forest Strategy

NCR – Nature Conservation Register

IEA – Iceland Environment Agency

### **1.**

Development of a schedule/responses to the recommendations.

### **2.**

An agreement between the Environment Ministry and IINH for a project supporting the implementation of AEWA is active. The agreement states that the IINH is responsible for day to day implementation of the convention in Iceland as stated in the text of the convention. The IINH is also responsible for producing the national report for the convention and that the IINH acts as the active member in committees, workgroups and projects. Also that the IINH nominates national focal points.

*This will be an ongoing work.*

### **3.**

Development of network of protected areas continues through implementation of the new Nature Conservation Act from 2015 and its main instrument the Nature Conservation Register (NCR), for the establishment of such a network, based on a systematic assessment of habitat types, habitats and species abundance and status. The first plan for implementation of new NCR sites will be put forward as parliamentary resolution that is in progress led by the Ministry. The IINH has published two important scientific reports in this regard; on habitat types in Iceland and important bird areas. The IINH is working on a comprehensive monitoring plan for key ecological elements in Icelandic nature, including birds and habitats. Identification and nomination of areas for inclusion in tentative list of Emerald Network sites will eventually follow.

*This is an ongoing work. The aim is to publish the Nature Conservation Register with a basis in the Nature Conservation Act 2015 in 2020/21. There is already around 22% of the land area of Iceland under legal protection as protected areas. MENR leads this work, but the IINH and IEA have considerable roles.*

#### 4. – 5.

It is appropriate update on those two recommendations jointly, as they relate to the very recent institutional reforms within the forest sector. A new legislation on forests and forestry passed the parliament in Iceland in May 2019. The provisions of the new legislation are now effectively put into action. What relates directly to recommendation 4 and 5 are the now legally binding National Forest Strategy and new regional forest conservation and afforestation plans.

According to the new legislation, the work on a National Forest Strategy has just started. The legislation establishes a committee, appointed by the Minister, that is responsible for the work. The committee constitutes members with different background, representing different interests and one of the committee members an ornithologist with a Phd specialisation in birds and land use. The committee needs to be inclusive in its work, collaborating with local governments, civil society and academia. It is expected that the work takes around one and half year. It is then the minister that receives the work to refine and publish the strategy. The National Forest Strategy is subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment and will that be done concurrently. This work has already started and the committee will be informed about the AEWAs recommendations nr 4 and 5 to inform its work and approach. If this goes as planned, the National Forest Strategy and its SEA will be published early 2021. The strategy is supposed to have 10 years horizon but is subject to an update every fifth year.

This should therefore be in alignment with the recommendations put forward nr 4 and 5.

*The overall responsibility for the National Forest Strategy is by the MENR. The IFS has important role in collaboration with other actors as outlined in the legislation. It is planned that the first National Forest Strategy and its SEA will be published in 2021.*

#### 6.

The IINH has revised the status of most Icelandic bird species, mapped important bird areas and habitat types. IINH has drafted monitoring plan for bird habitats and bird species, including waterfowl. The monitoring plan will also cover habitat types in general, including the conjunction with afforestation sites. The IINH has also in 2018 issued new updated Red list for birds and simultaneously assessed the favourable conservation status of birds. It should also be noted that the MENR has made monitoring of nature with a focus on conservation areas (goes beyond protected areas) a priority and asked IINH to lead that new initiative. The preparations for that have already started, but this comes with considerable increase in permanent funding for monitoring of nature, including birds.

*This is the task of the IINH in collaboration with others, including the eight local Nature Research Centres. The new monitoring program on nature will take off on national scale in 2020.*

**7.**

All afforestation proposals are subject to EIA screening. There are thresholds for class B but class C is without thresholds and therefore case by case appraisal. The outcome of the screening process regarding a particular forestry project may well be that it should be subject to an EIA (class A) depending on the relevant criteria in Annex II. This process will now be better supported by the new Habitat Type maps from the IINH.

*This will be an ongoing work.*

**8.**

Individual afforestation contracts are already carried out in this way and the newest available information from the IINH will be used when developing afforestation plans and providing guidance to land-owners.

*This will be an ongoing work. IFS makes the contracts.*

**9.**

In the new forest act are provisions for both a NFS and regional forestry action plans as key venues for formal liaison. These are new instruments for improving stakeholder involvement and decision making in planning and management of forestry across various agencies and for public participation. These processes involve both NGO's, academic experts and civil society.

*This will be an ongoing work.*

**10.**

The Ministry for the Environment is in the process to update and revise the current biodiversity strategy and action plan. The aim is to have it completed and published as an updated and revised strategy following the CBD COP15 in China in 2020.

*The MENR aims to publish the updated strategy in 2020/21.*

**11.**

In our earlier exchange on this, there is a request from AEWA to get an overview of what exactly this research is. Please find in appendix a list of some scientific publications related to water-birds and land use, including forestry. We also recall information already provided regarding research already conducted as part of the IceWood program which was a partnership program by the IFS, IINH and the Agricultural University of Iceland. An example and overview of its publications from in the comprehensive report: Effects of afforestation on ecosystems, landscape and rural development. <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:702668/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

*This will be an ongoing work. Research within this field is conducted by IFS, IINH and Universities, mainly University of Iceland, Agricultural University and Local University Centres.*

## **12.**

Current bylaw for afforestation programs no 285/2015 sets criteria for afforestation planning and is based on former guidelines on “good environmental practice”. This bylaw will now be updated and aligned with the provisions of the new forest act. That’s the responsibility of the Ministry and will be completed concurrently with the publication of the National Forest Strategy (see points 4 and 5).

As already stated all new afforestation projects are reviewed and need to be approved by municipalities. Guidelines for Municipalities on forestry and planning were issued in 2017, but the local governments at municipal level are responsible for spatial planning in Iceland. Please find this here but only available in Icelandic:

[http://www.skipulag.is/media/attachments/Skograektogskipurlag\\_2017\\_lores.pdf](http://www.skipulag.is/media/attachments/Skograektogskipurlag_2017_lores.pdf).

*This will be an ongoing work. This is a responsibility of IFS and MENR but requires collaboration with other actors.*

## **13.**

There are already ongoing initiatives to restore drained wetlands in collaboration with land owners, as indicated in the recommendation. This comes mainly via a program led by one of the MENR agencies, the Soil Conservation Service. This targets land-owners that get financial support to re-wet drained wetlands in favour of nature conservation as climate change mitigation. This is funded via MENR. The ministry has further funded a pilot study led by the Agricultural Extension Service and other agencies to explore the possibilities to work on other topics in favour of nature conservation with land-owners that has already generated positive outcomes and indicated considerable interest.

*This will be an ongoing work. This is a responsibility of Soil Conservation Service but requires collaboration with other actors*

## **14.**

The MENR will report to the AEWCA convention the progress of this on your request as needed.