

AEWA EUROPEAN GOOSE MANAGEMENT PLATFORM



**5th MEETING OF THE
AEWA EUROPEAN GOOSE MANAGEMENT
INTERNATIONAL WORKING GROUP**

15-18 June 2020, Online conference format



**DEFINING FAVOURABLE REFERENCE VALUES
FOR THE GREYLAG GOOSE AND THE BARNACLE GOOSE**

Minutes of Expert Workshop

31 January 2020

DEFINING FAVOURABLE REFERENCE VALUES FOR THE GREYLAG GOOSE AND THE BARNACLE GOOSE

Expert Workshop

Friday 31 January 2020
European Commission, Avenue Beaulieu 5, Room C - Brussels

Attendance

European Commission
European Environment Agency
Natura 2000 Group
AEWA Secretariat
Representatives of:
Finland
Germany
Netherlands
Denmark
Latvia
Belgium
FACE
BirdLife International

1. Introduction

DG Environment (EC) welcomed participants to a NADEG workshop held at the request of Member States. The EC summarised its objectives which were to clarify various issues in relation to work under the European Goose Management Platform (EGMP) of the African-Eurasian Waterbirds Agreement (AEWA). In particular, the meeting aimed to:

- better understand the concepts underlying current EGMP work, in particular Favourable Reference Values (FRVs), and their interaction with population targets (when applicable for the species concerned);
- better understanding the approach proposed by AEWA for setting FRVs for the Greylag Goose *Anser anser* and the Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*; and
- preparing the way for an agreement on FRVs at the next meeting of the EGMP's International Working Group (IWG), scheduled to meet in Finland in June.

The EC stressed the relevance of work being undertaken through the EGMP for the Birds Directive and the need to have a common approach agreed between Member States prior to the fifth meeting of EGMP's IWG. It was important that the outcomes (which involved technical concepts) were fully accessible to audiences of both policy-makers, and others without technical backgrounds.

The draft agenda was adopted without changes.

AEWA noted that it was useful to have the meeting to give an opportunity for dialogue with Range States within the EU. They needed to make rapid progress on outstanding EGMP issues. Given a three-month deadline for IWG5 documents there would be a need to deliver outcomes in the next few weeks.

2. Main principles for setting FRVs established by EU processes¹

The EEA outlined the principles established for setting FRVs which had been established in relation to reporting on conservation status through Article 17 of the Habitats Directive.

The EEA summarised the development and recent revision of guidance relating to the setting of FRVs. This included the latest reporting guidelines for the period 2013-2018² and supporting material by a contractor (report³ & worked out examples⁴ by Wageningen Environmental Research).

They outlined the main established principles in relation to setting of FRVs, namely that:

- FRVs should be set on the basis of ecological and biological considerations, and use best available knowledge and scientific expertise;
- they should take into account the precautionary principle and include a safety margin for uncertainty;
- FRVs should not, in principle, be lower than the values when the Habitats Directive came into force, as most species have been listed in the Annexes because of their unfavourable status. However, the distribution (range) and size (population) at the date of entry into force of the Directive does not necessarily equate to the FRV;
- FRVs do not automatically correspond to a given 'historical maximum', or a specific historical date; however, historical information (for example a past stable situation before changes occurred due to reversible pressures) should inform judgements on FRVs;
- FRVs do not automatically correspond to the 'potential value' (carrying capacity) which, however, should be used to understand restoration possibilities and constraints;
- the FRV for population is always bigger than the minimum viable population for demographic and genetic viability; and that
- FRVs are not necessarily equal to 'national targets'.

The EEA summarised the two main approaches to FRV setting set out in EU guidance. These were the:

¹ The power point presentations are available here: <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/fcb355ee-7434-4448-a53d-5dc5d1dac678/library/ddcf7cf7-2cbc-48a5-ac3f-52247c17923a>

² https://cdr.eionet.europa.eu/help/habitats_art17

³ <https://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/wurpubs/fulltext/469035>

⁴ <https://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/wurpubs/fulltext/468534>

1. **Reference-based approach**, which is founded on indicative, historical references that correspond to a documented (or perceived) good condition; and the
2. **Model-based approach**, which is founded on **biological considerations**. Typically, population viability analysis (PVA) and minimum viable population (MVP) may be useful tools, and this approach also considers the structure of populations/metapopulations, and issues such as dispersal capacity.

However, the EEA stressed that setting FRVs often requires a combination of both approaches or use of elements from both approaches, to inform understanding of a situation.

In discussion, the Commission recalled that the formal Article 17 guidance agreed by the Habitats Committee⁵ had interpretive supremacy over the supplementary guidance published in 2019 by Wageningen Environmental Research in case of any contradictions.

BirdLife International noted that it was useful to have clarification that FRVs were not equal to maximum carrying capacity, and that the interactions of national populations within a wider metapopulation framework were important to consider.

3. Context for setting FRVs under EGMP, and AEWA's approach for setting FRVs for Barnacle and Greylag Geese

The AEWA secretariat introduced the context for, and work of, the EGMP. It noted that the overarching goal of the International Single Species Management Plans (ISSMPs) for both the Barnacle Goose and the Greylag Goose was to “*maintain the population in Favourable Conservation Status while taking into account ecological, economical and recreational interest*”.

The AEWA secretariat also outlined the legal cross-linkage from AEWA to the definitions of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) with respect especially to defining conservation status. Conceptually, these were very similar to the definitions of the Habitats Directive for species conservation status but had minor and important differences.

In March 2017, the AEWA Technical Committee had adopted guidance on the interpretation of Favourable Conservation Status in the context of setting population targets for AEWA International Species Action and Management Plans. It noted that further work was being undertaken and that Resolution 7.5 had stated:

“that the AEWA Technical Committee is working on producing a more detailed interpretation on the Favourable Conservation Status in the context of AEWA. In the interim, Action Plan compilers are advised to follow the key concepts and approaches presented in the explanatory notes and guidelines under the EU Habitats Directive Article 17.”

⁵ Extract re. FRVs: <https://circabc.europa.eu/sd/a/94a148a0-dc47-47e1-b853-0e78ad18a115/Guidance%20on%20FRVs-Art-17.pdf>

The AEWA secretariat outlined the process to develop FRVs for Barnacle and Greylag Geese following EGMP IWG4 held in Scotland in June 2019, and that that meeting had also agreed that the process to develop FRVs should follow the guidance developed for Article 17 of the Habitats Directive.

In discussion, the Commission stressed the different legal status of Barnacle and Greylag Geese with respect to the potential for management.

The AEWA secretariat then presented a detailed outline of the approach used to propose FRVs for the two species using existing EU guidance, and summarised material in relevant IWG documents⁶.

In discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Whether the Barnacle Goose was ecologically a generalist or specialist species – an issue of categorisation that potentially has process consequences. Whilst AEWA considers it a generalist, other considered it a specialist and it is categorised as such in the Netherlands.
- It was noted both that some aspects of the natural saltmarsh habitat of the species in Germany had deteriorated in recent decades in part stimulating a move to farmland, and thus requiring an evaluation of the quality of existing salt-marsh habitat. It was noted by the Commission however, that if the deteriorated saltmarsh (or other coastal habitats such as machair that are important for the species), especially if occurring within SPAs, then remedial management measures would be necessary as Article 4.1 of the Birds Directive requires EU Member States to take habitat conservation measures and SPAs need to be optimally managed for the needs of relevant qualifying species. AEWA noted that the EGMP process anyway requires Member States to make their own assessments of habitat extent and quality within the context of setting FRVs.
- The need to avoid using the term “over-abundant” in respect of a species’ status given that this then posed further definitional challenges.
- Consideration of issues of range and its definition. AEWA noted that for the purposes of the Agreement there was no option other than to use the CMS definition given that this is within treaty text. It was noted by one MS that setting range at its current extent has the risk that control measures result in its restriction. Yet it was pointed out that that reduction in numbers does not necessarily or directly result in reduction of range – unless complete (local) eradication of a species occurs which would be highly unlikely. However, EEA stressed that ‘range’ was not the same as ‘distribution’. The former relates to the specific areas used, whilst the latter is a broad envelope that outlines the geographic occurrence of a taxon. For the purposes of setting FRVs, range could and should be defined broadly.

⁶ For Barnacle Geese: revision of Doc. AEWA/EGMIWG/4.17/Rev.1
For Greylag Geese: second revision of Doc. AEWA/EGMIWG/4.16/Rev.1

- The acknowledged inapplicability of management targets for Barnacle Geese, and the need for any derogations for control both to have a firm science base and be in accordance with existing guidance relevant to Article 9 of the Birds Directive.
- As indicated by Habitats Directive guidance, that assessment of conservation status involves three parallel tests relating separately to population size, to range, and to habitat.

4. Closed session for Member States

A closed session for Member States was held.

5. Exchange of views on the proposed approach for setting FRVs in general, and especially for Greylag and Barnacle Geese

A further discussion was held on the general issues.

None of those attending indicated any general problem with the methodology being adopted by the EGMP process.

In discussion, the following issues were raised:

- The risk of the current process setting inadvertent precedents for other species. However, that risk could be minimised and managed by the inclusion of a very clear caveat on relevant EGMP documents to the effect that the approaches described just apply to the two species within the context of AEWA implementation only. Setting FRVs always requires a case-by-case approach.
- Problems of terminology. The undesirability of using the term “over-abundant” in respect of a species’ status given that this then posed further definitional challenges. Rather, “secure and in conflict” was considered a better and more accurate descriptor.
- The need for FRVs to be robust against potential legal challenge.
- Issues of range definition and the need to define this broadly and at wide scale (*i.e.* differently from distribution).
- The need for both species to better understand the interface between use of natural habitats and farmland.
- The need for a simple, high-level summary document to communicate approaches being proposed.
- The fact that existing guidelines are just that – and not instructions. Thus, there is always scope for flexibility in their use.
- That ‘Current Values’ (*i.e.* values estimated on a certain year, not a moving value) could relate to data from most recent reporting rounds as available. Current Values are necessary to assess how far the current situation is from FRVs but does not necessarily influence the setting of FRVs.

The Commission noted that management of the two species, through whatever means it happens, needs to take place in a 'safe space' greater than defined FRVs. The desirability of management conforming to adaptive approaches, with monitoring of both take and population size was stressed.

They noted that no Member State had raised issues of substance with respect to the AEWA documentation, albeit that a number of issues of editorial detail and clarification had been raised by Member States before the meeting.

6. Conclusions

The Commission thanks all participants for attending. They considered the workshop had been a useful opportunity for developing understanding. Related species management issues raised a series of difficult issues but the EGMP process provided a gateway for discussion of such issues.

To develop robust outcomes, it was inevitable that the process would be iterative to a degree and involve learning.

The Commission offered to circulate an outline document that would attempt to provide an over-arching summary of the issues hopefully accessible to a non-technical audience. They indicated that they would circulate as soon as possible after the meeting, with a two-week period for comment. This would ideally permit a final text to be agreed by the end of March. Participants agreed this would be useful.