



9th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

“Wetlands and water: supporting life, sustaining livelihoods”

Kampala, Uganda, 8-15 November 2005

Resolution IX.23

Highly pathogenic avian influenza and its consequences for wetland and waterbird conservation and wise use

1. AWARE that since late 2003, outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) (subtype H5N1), which are historically unprecedented in their geographical scope and virulence, have had major impacts on rural livelihoods linked to the keeping of domesticated birds (mainly poultry) and on nature conservation values (including major mortality of waterbirds on at least three Ramsar sites), and CONSCIOUS of the increasing number of countries in which HPAI has recently been detected following its westward spread through Eurasia;
2. VERY CONSCIOUS of the global health, social and economic consequences of a human influenza pandemic if the current subtype of HPAI either genetically re-assorts or adaptively mutates into a form transmissible between humans;
3. NOTING in particular the difficulties that developing countries face in responding adequately to the current spread of HPAI, especially given the significance in many countries of both domesticated and wild birds as the basis of rural livelihoods;
4. MINDFUL, however, that all currently known cases of human infection with the current strain of HPAI have been through contact with, or by consumption of, infected poultry and none through contact with wild birds, and RECOGNIZING that public attitudes and support for wetland conservation, particularly Ramsar sites and other wetlands of importance for waterbirds, could be negatively affected by concerns as to the possible role of waterbirds in the spread of HPAI (subtype H5N1);
5. NOTING that HPAI is considered to have been spread between countries by a number of different vectors, including through the movement of poultry, other avian livestock and cage birds and associated activities to service the respective industries, and through both the legal and illegal trade in birds, and through migrating waterbirds, and AWARE that the relative significance of these different modes of spread have varied and that evidence of causal links in many cases is weak or lacking;
6. GREATLY WELCOMING the major involvement in this issue of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), notably through the publication in May 2005 of a *Global Strategy for the Progressive Control of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza* and its implementation, *inter alia*, through regional programmes of *Emergency Assistance for Early Detection and Prevention of Avian Influenza*;

7. ALSO NOTING that although development of surveillance schemes and contingency planning will need to be determined nationally, there are significant benefits from international cooperation;
8. AWARE of the Convention's participation in various coordinating mechanisms, including *inter alia* the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza convened in late August 2005 by the Convention on Migratory Species, which comprises representatives and observers from nine international organisations, including four UN bodies, and ALSO NOTING Resolution 3.18 of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) on "Avian Influenza";
9. GREATLY CONCERNED, however, that in many countries there is a significant lack of information and, in some countries, public misunderstanding, on important issues related to the spread of HPAI, the risks it may pose, and how to anticipate and respond to outbreaks of HPAI;
10. RECOGNIZING the particular importance of extensive and long-term data sets and the networks of experts behind these data sets relating to bird movements and waterbird counts as an essential information resource that allows exploration of possible scenarios of the current HPAI spread, including identification of areas of higher relative risk along migratory flyways, and their role in helping to inform possible policy responses to outbreaks, but NOTING the need urgently to access and analyze such data, networks, and other information and to fill outstanding gaps in scientific understanding of these factors;
11. RECALLING ALSO that, although outbreaks of H5N1 in Hong Kong in 1997, in Japan in 2004, and of H7N7 in The Netherlands, Belgium and Germany in 2003 were all successfully stamped out using rigorous control and biosecurity measures, HPAI now appears to be endemic in some parts of Asia, highlighting the practical difficulties of control in countries with limited veterinary capacity;
12. RECOGNIZING national ongoing actions and plans for monitoring wetlands and waterbird populations for HPAI;
13. NOTING the need to strengthen research and monitoring related to waterbird migration and trade in waterbirds, as well as disease processes in wild bird populations, especially that research identified by the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza, and for rapid and continued sharing of information given the potential significance of this information in terms of bird conservation and population regulation, so as to enable or improve risk assessments and be better prepared to improve conservation of waterbirds and future management of avian disease outbreaks;
14. ALSO RECOGNIZING the potential risk of transmission of HPAI between wild waterbirds and captive birds and other animals at wetland centres and zoological gardens, being mindful both of animal welfare requirements and the important role such sites play in wetland communication, education and public awareness; and
15. AWARE of the decision of Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Waterbirds (Resolution 3.6) to request the support of the Ramsar Convention and others to establish a long-term funding regime in order to develop long-term monitoring of

waterbird populations *inter alia* via the International Waterbird Census and its derived outputs, and further to Ramsar Resolution VIII.38, as a means of informing a wide range of national and international conservation policies, including risk assessment for HPAI;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

16. CALLS for fully integrated approaches, at both national and international levels, to address HPAI by bringing ornithological, wildlife, and wetland management expertise together with those traditionally responsible for public health and zoonoses, including veterinary, agricultural, virological, epidemiological, and medical expertise;
17. SUPPORTS the conclusions of WHO, FAO and OIE that attempts to eliminate HPAI in wild bird populations through lethal responses such as culling are not feasible and may exacerbate the problem by causing further dispersion of infected birds;
18. EMPHASISES that destruction or substantive modification of wetland habitats with the objective of reducing contact between domesticated and wild birds does not amount to wise use as urged by Article 3.1 of the Convention, and also may exacerbate the problem by causing further dispersion of infected birds;
19. REQUESTS the continued participation in the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza by the Convention (through appropriate representatives of STRP and the Secretariat) and as resources and competencies permit, noting that this group communicates electronically;
20. UNDERLINES the importance of developing and implementing national contingency or action plans related to the potential risk of disease transmission, and the need for national preparedness to instances of detection of HPAI in birds, notably wetland-dependent species;
21. REQUESTS the Secretary General to explore possibilities for establishing partnerships so as to support the development of long-term funding for monitoring schemes that are relevant to the Convention's interests, and as soon as possible;
22. NOTES the essential need for adequate standards for farming and aquaculture, and the need to develop strategies that limit the risk of disease transmission between wild and domestic birds through enhanced biosecurity;
23. URGES the STRP, with the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza, to provide relevant input on practical measures to reduce the risk of disease transmission between wild, captive and domesticated birds, to those agencies developing contingency and wetland management plans related to HPAI; and
24. REQUESTS the Secretariat working with the STRP to assist, with relevant international agencies and the Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza, in sharing information, including practical advice that will assist countries to respond to this serious and rapidly developing situation, and to report back on progress to the Standing Committee and to COP10.