

Mainstreaming best practice guidelines for assessing and monitoring impacts on birds at wind energy facilities in South Africa

The Energy Task Force (ETF) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) is a multi-stakeholder platform that works towards reconciling energy developments with the conservation of migratory species. **BirdLife South Africa is an ETF observer which champions the environmentally responsible development and management of renewable energy facilities in South Africa**

Project Overview

When South Africa was poised to welcome the rapid expansion of wind energy, it lacked standard requirements to assess and monitor impacts on birds. In response, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) - BirdLife South Africa and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) - published [Best-Practice Guidelines for assessing and monitoring the impact of wind-energy facilities on birds in southern Africa](#) (Best Practice Guidelines). These guidelines outline recommended data collection protocols for scoping, pre-construction monitoring and impact assessment, as well as monitoring during the operational phase.

The first edition of the guidelines was released in 2011 and was developed in accordance with international best practice and in conjunction with local and international specialists. However, it required significant changes to the duration and scope of impact assessments typically conducted for wind energy facilities in South Africa at the time. A multi-pronged strategy was adopted to promote the uptake of the guidelines.

Key receptors: Environmental assessment practitioners and consulting bird specialists, wind farm developers and operators, decision-makers.

Project partners: BirdLife South Africa, EWT and the Birds and Renewable Energy Specialist Group (consulting bird specialists and independent experts).

Location: South Africa

Solutions and Actions Taken

- ✓ The guidelines were endorsed by key stakeholders - i.e. the International Association for Impact Assessment South Africa, CapeNature (a provincial conservation authority), Eskom (South Africa's only power utility) and the South African Wind Energy Association.
- ✓ A list of consulting bird specialists that had committed in writing to comply with the guidelines was made available.
- ✓ Although the competent authority did not officially adopt the Guidelines at first, they did agree to advise that it be considered in relevant environmental impact assessments (EIAs), with operational-phase monitoring included as a condition of approval.
- ✓ If the EIA failed to take the guidelines into account and impacts were not adequately assessed, environmental authorizations for wind energy facilities were appealed.
- ✓ A *Protocol for the Specialist Assessment and Minimum Report Content Requirements for Environmental Impacts on Avifaunal Species by Onshore Wind Energy Generation Facilities* was gazetted in 2020 – this requires that all tasks are undertaken in accordance with the latest version of Best Practice Guidelines.



Enabling Conditions for Success

- ✓ National legislation that requires EIA for proposed wind energy facilities.
- ✓ A national wind energy association that acknowledges that the “continued development of a sustainable and environmentally sensitive wind energy industry ... can only be achieved through responsible and careful development”.
- ✓ Support from key stakeholders, including industry.
- ✓ Collaboration and communication among consulting bird specialists, NGOs and other experts (e.g. through Birds and Renewable Energy Specialist Group) and availability of international best practice, research and expertise to draw on.
- ✓ Project financiers’ requirements (i.e. more rigorous impact assessments, conducted in addition to the legislated EIA process).
- ✓ Case studies that exemplify the challenges brought about by inadequate impact assessments.

Next steps

Update Best Practice Guidelines as required and in collaboration with key stakeholders; ensure that they remain aligned to legislated protocols, international best practice and guidance.

Support the analysis and interpretation of data collected by avifaunal specialists (the Guidelines focus on data collection, not analysis).

Continue to collate and review results of monitoring and ensure relevant information is fed back into strategic environmental assessments, site screening and EIAs, and informs research priorities.

About CMS and the ETF

CMS, also known as the Bonn Convention, works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through the negotiation and implementation of agreements and species action plans.

The ETF brings together governments, multilateral environmental agreements, investors, the private sector and non-governmental organizations with an aim of avoiding and minimizing the negative impacts of energy developments on migratory species.

“Surveying and monitoring both before and after deployment of renewable energy technologies (are necessary) to identify impacts on migratory species and their habitats in the short and long term, as well as to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of mitigation measures, making modifications where necessary”

(UNEP/CMS/COP13/Doc.26.4.2.1)



Getting involved

If you wish to learn more about the work of the ETF, become a member or engage otherwise, please contact the ETF coordinator:

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