Reflection paper Science-Policy

Building Climate Resilience along the Flyway: Considering Migratory Waterbird Conservation in Management and Policy

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The 9th Meeting of Parties to AEWA (11–14 November, Bonn, Germany) brought together delegates from across the African–Eurasian region to advance joint actions for migratory waterbirds and their habitats under the theme "United for Flyways". Despite broad recognition that migratory waterbirds serve as essential indicators of wetland ecosystem health and climate change impacts, the evidence generated through monitoring and research and their identified conservation needs remain insufficiently integrated in national climate and biodiversity policies. This gap is limiting progress toward global biodiversity goals and underscores the need for more systematic integration of scientific findings into environmental decision making.

The Climate Resilient East Atlantic Flyway Project (CREAF), supported by International Climate Initiative of the German government, used the side event to emphasise the importance of strengthening collaboration between researchers, site managers, and policy makers to ensure that monitoring data and climate related insights effectively inform management and policy processes. Discussions focused on key challenges and practical opportunities to enhance science policy linkages, reinforcing the shared responsibility to build a climate resilient East Atlantic Flyway.

OVERALL CHALLENGE

Participants identified a persistent disconnect between research and monitoring efforts, and policy processes as the key challenge limiting the effective use of scientific evidence in decision making.

More specifically, this includes:

- Competing governmental priorities reducing attention to migratory waterbird and wetland issues.
- Weak institutional coordination and fragmented responsibilities across organisations, leading to insufficient communication between policy makers, scientists, conservationists, and local knowledge holders.

- Research priorities that do not always address policy relevant questions, leading to critical information gaps.
- Misalignment between the rapid information needs of policy processes and the slower timelines required to conduct robust research.
- Restricted or inconsistent access to data, with findings not systematically shared with policy makers or not taken up in policy frameworks.
- Limited capacity in interpreting monitoring results within agencies and local authorities.
- Lack of harmonised data formats and standards, making data integration and cross-site comparisons difficult.
- Variable or poor data quality that reduces confidence in results and limits relevance for policy decisions.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Participants called for improved science–policy communication by creating clearer pathways for integrating research findings into national decision making and ensuring policy makers actively seek and use new evidence.

Key areas for improvement:

- Build institutional capacity through targeted training and better resources for data interpretation, coordination, and implementation.
- Expand data access and usability through better sharing, harmonised systems, and user-friendly platforms that support evidence-based decisions.
- Translate scientific outputs into clear, actionable messages tailored to policy and management.
- Advance modelling approaches and scenario analysis to assess future climate and ecological risks and support balanced planning between conservation, climate adaptation, and human development.
- Strengthen participatory approaches by involving researchers, conservationists, NGOs, CSOs, and local communities in decision making, drawing on their knowledge of wetland functionality and benefits.
- Improve community understanding of research–policy links by explaining how scientific findings guide management and how local actions affect wetland health.
- Integrate wetland and migratory waterbird topics into school curricula to increase awareness and future stewardship.