

ELEVENTH MEETING OF PARTNERS OF THE EAST ASIAN – AUSTRALASIAN FLYWAY PARTNERSHIP  
Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, 12-17 March 2023



## Draft Decision 9

### Monitoring and Reducing Impact of HPAI and other avian diseases along the East Asian Australasian Flyway

*Prepared and submitted by the Crane Working Group of the EAAFP. Co-sponsored by the International Crane Foundation, the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, the Wild Bird Society of Japan, the Spoonbilled Sandpiper Task Force, the Dalmatian Pelican Task Force and the Black-faced Spoonbill Working Group.*

#### Summary

Since late 2021 several devastating HPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza) outbreaks occurred in western Eurasia. Since November 2022, more than one thousand wintering cranes (mostly *Grus monacha* but also *Grus vipio*) were found dead in Japan (and a lower number found in Republic of Korea). We propose establishing a more efficient and effective coordination and information sharing system along the East Asian Australasian Flyway to prevent further loss of birds.

#### Background

1. Since November 2021, a series of unprecedented massive HPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza) outbreaks occurred in Israel, Scotland, Greece and North Atlantic coasts, resulting in significant losses of a wide spectrum of wild birds (notably cranes, geese, pelicans and other seabirds).
2. Since November 2022, a devastating HPAI outbreak occurred at Izumi, Japan (EAAFP Flyway Network Site since 1997) with more than 1,000 cranes found dead by the end of November 2022. Cranes that died of HPAI were also recorded from sites in the Republic of Korea since mid-November 2022.
3. The EAAFP Working Group on Avian Influenza did not react to these crises.
4. The Crane Working Group held an emergency meeting on 12 December 2022 with recommendations for immediate actions to be taken and proposed a list of long-term actions to confront not only HPAI but also other potentially devastating avian diseases in EAAF countries. The proposal has been circulated to other EAAFP species/species-group Working Groups and Task Forces for further input.

**Decisions:**

*The following long-term actions to be discussed and implemented in the forthcoming MOPs of EAAFP, and/or special meetings under the auspices of the EAAFP to be convened preferably in 2023.*

1. *Facilitate* the development of coordinated flyway-wide Avian Influenza surveillance programmes with a focus on migratory waterbirds and seabirds.
2. *Develop and share* practical management guidance for sites to reduce and manage HPAI and other disease risks (i.e., artificial feeding and separation of poultry from wild birds being key issues)
3. *Establish* an efficient information sharing/warning system on avian disease (including HPAI) outbreaks along the EAAF to reactivate or replace the existing Asia – Pacific Working Group on Migratory Waterbirds and Avian Influenza (APWG-MWAI) (<https://www.eaflyway.net/avian-influenza-working-group/>). Information should be available in national languages of EAAF countries.
4. *Establish* links for all flyway network sites to relevant species working groups/task forces, CMS Task Force, and veterinary experts.
5. *Ensure* all species groups/task forces have good representation of national government representatives, veterinarians, and scientists for effective and efficient responses to address outbreaks of avian diseases.
6. *Establish or enhance* monitoring at important gathering sites for waterbirds and seabirds, including breeding colonies, migratory stop-overs and wintering sites.
7. *Establish or enhance* environmental sample collection at sites known to be important gathering for waterbirds and seabirds, including breeding colonies, migratory stop-overs and wintering sites to prevent or reduce impacts of HPAI or other avian diseases.
8. *Support* research on migration, particularly for less well-known and threatened species, to better understand their migratory routes and important sites.
9. *Increase* support for attempts to identify alternative wintering sites for over-concentrated wintering species and strengthen protection and management.

## Annex 1

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#### Monitoring and Reducing Impacts of HPAI and other avian diseases along the East Asian Australasian Flyway

*Submitted by Crane Working Group (EAAFP), International Crane Foundation*

*Recalling* the vision of the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (since 2006) and its predecessor the Flyway Reserve Networks under the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy (Phase I: 1996-2000; phase II 2001-2005/6) were derived from the Kushiro Initiative (1994) and its ultimate aim was “the current decline in the numbers of migratory waterbirds in the flyway and the degradation and loss of wetland habitats on which these species depend, should be stopped and reversed”

*Recognizing* that avian disease such as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), avian cholera and even non-contagious avian botulism can devastate a significant percentage of threatened birds, especially species that congregate in large numbers.

Also *recognizing* that certain groups of waterbirds including cranes are particularly at risk due to their behavioural traits and global conservation status.

Since late 2021 unprecedented HPAI outbreaks have devastated several important waterbird and seabird sites in western Eurasia, the most notable examples being:

- about 8,000 (about 5% of the regional population) Eurasian Cranes *Grus grus* at Hula Valley, Israel since December 2021\*
- about 8,000 – 10,000 (about 20% of the regional population) Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis* in Scotland since November 2021\*
- more than 2,400 (over 40% of the European population) Dalmatian Pelicans *Pelecanus crispus* in SE Europe (particularly Greece and Romania) since February 2022\*\*
- tens of thousands of seabirds (Northern Gannets *Morus bassanus*, Sandwich Terns *Thalasseus sandvicensis*, Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* and Great Skuas *Stercorarius skua* in particular) at various locations in Northern Atlantic during the breeding season in 2022\*\*\*

Since November 2022, more than 20,000 seabirds with the majority (about 17,000) Peruvian Pelicans *Pelecanus thagus* found dead from HPAI in Peru and Chile. The wave of massive seabird infection arrived in the Pacific Rim, although there were earlier cases of scores of Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybrida* found dead in eastern Taiwan (May 2022) and hundreds of seabirds suspected to be died of HPAI in southern Kuril islands in August 2022.

Since 1 November 2022, HPAI hit the EAAFP Flyway Network Site of Izumi in Japan. More than 1,000 Hooded Cranes *Grus monacha* and dozens of White-naped Cranes *Grus vipio* died as recorded by early December 2022. This is the worst case of crane mortality in eastern Asia in many years. In late November reports of cranes that died of HPAI had also been recorded in the Republic of Korea. In Hokkaido, Japan, one sick Red-crowned Crane *Grus japonensis* was captured and tested to be positive in HPAI in late November 2022, raising fear of possibility of infection of the Red-crowned Crane population in Hokkaido.

We acknowledge that a Working Group on Avian Influenza has been established under the auspices of the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Committee, the predecessor of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership, however, the Working Group seems to be dormant for years and has not taken the lead to tackle the issues in the face of the present disaster. Therefore, we hope this decision paper:

### The 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Partners of the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership

*Instructs* the Secretariat to provide administrative and financial support to re-establish and reform the Avian Influenza Working Group into a working group on avian diseases, develop and disseminate relevant guidance on avian influenza (and other avian diseases) to Partners and Flyway Network Sites and support a long-term strategy on tackling HPAI and other avian diseases in the EAAF.

*Urges* Partners and other stakeholders to note and implement relevant provisions of this Decision as a matter of priority.

*Encourages* Partners to provide technical and/or financial assistance to support activities outlined in the Decision.

The Crane Working Group called for an emergency meeting on immediate responses to be taken on 12 December 2022, and proposed the following long-term actions to be discussed and implemented at the MOP 11 of EAAFP, and/or a special meeting under the auspices of the EAAFP in 2023.

1. *Facilitate* the development of coordinated flyway-wide AI surveillance programmes with a focus on migratory waterbirds.
2. *Develop and share* practical management guidance for sites to reduce and manage HPAI and other disease risks (i.e., artificial feeding and separation of poultry from wild birds being key issues)
3. *Establish* an efficient information sharing/warning system on avian disease (including HPAI) outbreaks along the EAAF to reactivate or replace the existing Asia – Pacific Working Group on Migratory Waterbirds and Avian Influenza (APWG-MWAI) (<https://www.eaaflyway.net/avian-influenza-working-group/>). Information should be available in national languages of EAAF countries.
4. *Establish* links for all flyway network sites to relevant species working groups/task forces, CMS Task Force, and veterinary experts.

5. *Ensure* all species groups/task forces have good representation of national government representatives, veterinarians, and scientists for effective and efficient responses to address outbreaks of avian diseases
6. *Establish or enhance* monitoring at important gathering sites for waterbirds and seabirds, including breeding colonies, migratory stop-overs and wintering sites.
7. *Establish or enhance* environmental sample collection at sites known to be important gathering for waterbirds and seabirds, including breeding colonies, migratory stop-overs and wintering sites to prevent or reduce impacts of HPAI or other avian diseases.
8. *Support* research on migration, particularly for less well-known and threatened species, to better understand their migratory routes and important sites.
9. *Increase* support of attempts to identify alternative wintering sites for over-concentrated wintering species and strengthen protection and management.

\* CMS FAO Co-convened Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds (2022). Scientific Task Force on Avian Influenza and Wild Birds statement. H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in poultry and wild birds: Winter of 2021/2022 with focus on mass mortality of wild birds in UK and Israel.

Available at: [https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/uploads/avian\\_influenza\\_0.pdf](https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/uploads/avian_influenza_0.pdf)

\*\* Alexandrou O., Malakou M, and Catsadorakis (2022) The impact of avian influenza 2022 on Dalmatian pelicans was the worst ever wildlife disaster in Greece *Oryx* , Volume 56 , Issue 6 , November 2022 , pp. 813. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0030605322001041>

\*\*\* From various sources, including Cunningham E.J.A. et al (2022) The incursion of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) into North Atlantic seabird populations: an interim report from the 15th International Seabird Group conference. *Seabird*, 34. (In Press)