POSITION STATEMENT

The effect of wind energy facilities on birds

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The wind energy industry is expanding rapidly in southern Africa. Global experience suggests that wind energy facilities may have adverse effects on birds through the destruction of habitat, the displacement of populations, and mortality as a result of collisions with wind turbines and associated powerlines, and electrocution by power lines. These effects can be highly site and taxon-specific. A wide range of bird species can be impacted, but raptors are likely to be among the most vulnerable groups affected.

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA POSITION STATEMENT

BirdLife South Africa supports the responsible development of wind energy facilities (WEFs). We recognise the need to generate power that is clean and does not contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, we acknowledge that some WEFs can be hazardous to birds and their habitats.

BirdLife South Africa's position is aligned to resolutions and guidelines adopted in Multilateral Environmental Agreements (e.g. Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement) which recognise the need to ensure that renewable energy developments are developed in harmony with nature.

Negative environmental impacts of wind energy can be minimised through careful site selection and planning. Habitats of conservation importance, particularly for collision-prone birds, should be avoided (e.g. Protected Areas, IBAs, migratory routes, Ramsar sites and nesting, foraging and roost sites). BirdLife South Africa recommends that developers consult with bird experts and conservation NGOs during site screening; we welcome the opportunity to discuss potential sites with developers.

BirdLife South Africa encourages the use of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to assess opportunities and cumulative risks associated with WEFs. If important data are lacking or incomplete, SEA processes must allow for additional data collection and/or analysis. SEAs must also be complemented by site-specific data collection and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Site-specific EIA is necessary to identify potential impacts, and options to avoid and mitigate significant impacts at the scale of a wind farm. EIAs for WEFs must include an avifaunal impact assessment, conducted by a qualified and experienced avifaunal specialist, with data collected in accordance with BirdLife South Africa and EWT's *Best Practise Guidelines for assessing and monitoring the impact of wind- energy facilities on birds in Southern Africa*. The scope of data collection may need to be increased beyond the minimum recommended in these guidelines if there is a risk of significant negative impacts. BirdLife South Africa's series of guidelines on assessing, monitoring and mitigating impacts on priority species (e.g. Cape Vulture and Verreaux's Eagle) should also be consulted.

The mitigation hierarchy must always be applied (i.e. first seek to avoid impacts, over mitigation) in EIAs. Biodiversity offsets should only be considered if it has been demonstrated that there are no feasible alternative sites available.

Potential cumulative effects must be assessed in EIAs; all projects that have environmental approval within a biologically meaningful area should be included in these assessments, with impacts considered over the lifespan of these facilities.

EIA reports must clearly indicate which operational-phase mitigation measures have been considered. The applicant must confirm that these measures are feasible. Options to address all potentially significant impacts must be outlined in the Environmental Management Programme (EMPr), linked to unambiguous environmental management objectives and outcomes. The applicant must ensure legal (e.g. landowner agreements) and financial provision is made for monitoring and mitigation.

Applications to amend and/or renew environmental authorisations must include an assessment by a bird specialist to determine if the receiving environment has changed, and to revisit, and if necessary update, the mitigation strategy.

Post-construction monitoring must start on or soon after the Commercial Operation Date. A culture of shared-learning is encouraged – monitoring reports should be widely available, results should be published in >>

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peer-reviewed scientific journals, raw data made available for further analysis, and data submitted to databases such as the Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2 (e.g. by logging sightings using the BirdLasser application).

If significant impacts on birds are recorded during operation, WEFs should voluntarily mitigate impacts in accordance with their Duty of Care to the environment and their EMPr. If significant impacts cannot otherwise be feasibly mitigated, conservation action to compensate (offset) losses should be implemented. BirdLife South Africa will always first seek to engage constructively WEFs to resolve significant impacts before considering other options available (e.g. enforcement).

For more information, and to download BirdLife South Africa's above-mentioned guidelines, visit *www.birdlife.org.za* or email *energy@birdlife.org.za*

See the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals' (CMS) Energy Task Force (*www.cms.int/en/taskforce/energy-task-force*) for relevant international guidelines and resolutions adopted by the CMS and African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement.

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