

July 27<sup>th</sup> 2000

European Commission  
B-1049 Brussels

## The Bay of Torslandaviken – rejectable limitation of the SPA-area

According to a press release July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2000, Swedish authorities have designed the wetland Torslandaviken (SE0520055) as a Special Protection Area (SPA) under Art. 4 of the Bird Directive 79/409/EEC. Bird species referred to, are Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, Smew *Mergus albellus* and Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*. Earlier, after preparatory work of engaged ornithological societies, BirdLife International has adopted the area as an Important Bird Area (IBA) in Europe with special regard to Whooper Swan, Scaup *Aythya marila* and Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*.

At the preparation of the latter proposal, available areas with habitats of important bird species were assigned on a map. However, the present proposal worked out by local authorities and presented by the Department, vital parts to the function of the area in relation to the species mentioned have been excluded. No facts are given why this considerable reduction is performed. Nor are any statements and evaluations given about which surrounding interests that are judged more important and consequently favoured through this new and narrow boundary.

Familiar with earlier statements from exploitation interests about demands of fill areas<sup>1</sup>, it



A view towards the south of the Bay of Torslandaviken. Brackish water is entering from the Rivö Fjord in the back ground through the **Arendal Channel (AC)** into the **Northern Basin (NB)** and then into the **Great Basin (GB)**. The embankments of the **Southern Basin (SB)** are bordering towards the south. (Photo 2000-07-25).

<sup>1</sup> Pehrsson, O. 1996. Torsviken: ekologisk restaureringsmodell. Manuscript. (In Swedish)  
[www.ekologikonsult.se](http://www.ekologikonsult.se)



The outer part of the Arendal Channel (Photo 2000-07-25).

may be expected that all wetland areas outside the new border are intended for deposit, industrial and other exploitation purposes. In the following chapters negative effects are given resulting from the elimination of ecologically important parts of the original area:

**1. Water circulation.** – The Arendal channel, i.e. the straight connecting the remaining basins of Torslandaviken with the estuary of the River Göta älv, is an area left outside the border. Dumping and filling of this channel is still proceeding – even with toxic digested sludge.

If this part is totally filled up – which cannot be avoided outside a reserve (SPA-area) border – the brackish water supply is stopped, and the remaining parts of Torslandaviken becomes a freshwater environment that moreover is not supplied with nutrients from the river mouth.. Then the estuarine environment is ceasing. Thereby also the production of submersed brackishwater plants should disappear, i.e. species of *Ruppia*, *Potamogeton*, *Zannichellia* and *Chara*.

Among the bird species mentioned, especially Whooper Swans and Goldeneyes should be overtaken. Whooper swans depend on vegetative parts of the plants and resting and moulting Goldeneyes feed on seeds and fruits of these plants<sup>2</sup>. The vegetative parts are also used by the Pochard *Aythya ferina*.



The smew is a regular resting and wintering visitor.  
(Photo Lars Carlsson)

**2. Benthic invertebrates.** – The estuarine environment with rich submerged vegetation also imports an abundant invertebrate fauna that is utilised by Smew, Scaup and Goldeneye but also by the nowadays red-listed dabbling duck species Shovler *Anas clypeata*, Garganey *A. querquedula*, Pintail *A. acuta* and Gadwall *A. strepera*. Deficient brackish water should also disfavour the red-listed Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* and Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps*

<sup>2</sup> Pehrsson, O. 1976. Food and feeding grounds of the Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* (L.) on the Swedish west coast. *Ornis Scand.* 7:91-112.

*auritus*. Thus, the present feeding habitats of all these species are threatened by the new boundary.

**3. Eel-Grass meadows.** – The Arendal channel with its submerged meadows of Eel-grass *Zostera marina* forms an important part of Torslandaviken to several diving water bird species, and is also visited by the Smew. Both seeds and vegetative parts of this plant are used. Since this part lies outside the new border, it is still threatened by filling.



In the inner part, birds and the environment of the Arendal Channel are threatened by stone blocks, malodorous black digested sludge and un-sold vehicles on the left side and a concentration of wind power plants on the right side. (Photo 2000-07-25).

**4. Nesting and resting places.** – The new boundary along the majority of the area is placed on the water edge. This means that nesting and resting water birds will have considerable difficulties to find open, natural and confidential nesting and resting places within the reserve. They cannot have their nests on the water surface. Moreover, this border imports difficulties in the restoring of de habitats.

**5. Shore meadows.** – In the northern part of the Great Basin, the only place with natural shore meadows, which were earlier regularly flooded depending on the water level of the sea, more than half of the meadow area is excluded through the narrow border. The upper levels of



The shore meadows on the opposite side along the northern edge of the Great Basin are narrow and do not allow any dividing. (Photo 2000-07-25)

the meadows are obviously reserved for some – so far unknown – kind of exploitation. These shore meadows were earlier considered the most valuable part of Torsviken by the local authorities, but now the valuable parts are left outside. The new border considerably reduces wader bird habitats to the adduced Ruff and other red-listed wader species like Black-Tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* and Bar-Tailed Godwit *L. lapponica*. Since cattle grazing is a supposition to proper management of the area, unflooded areas must be available at high water levels. This habitat type is a cultural environment, the values of which need active management according to the Department.

**6. Dry land area.** – The dry land area between the Great Basin and the Arendal Channel / the Northern Basin is an ecologically important part of the area, which is left totally outside the border. The area is regularly passed by water birds shifting between feeding habitats on both sides and is thus worth protection even as nesting habitat. The vegetation in the area is highly seed producing and is thus attractive to seed-eating rodents and passerines. This has attracted resting, wintering and breeding raptorial birds i.e. the red-listed Short-Eared Owl *Asio flammeus* and Eagle Owl *Bubo buto*. In the area, also a big nesting colony of Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* is found. They feed on the abundant insect fauna produced in the surrounding waters, especially chironomids. Local authorities are planning wind power plants in the area, which may disturb several types of birds.



The Southern Basin is a suitable compensation area. (Photo 2000-07-25)

**7. The Southern Basin.** – The southern basin, which is now filled with dredged material but that is fenced by an embankment, may preferable after finished dumping be given a finale shape as a shallow wader habitat. Thus it should be placed inside the border. No pronounced and specified exploitation interests are given beyond the present dredge dumping that is just finished. The flat and shallow basin bottom has at times been used by large numbers of resting water birds that have found a habitat corresponding to their winter quarters in the Wadden See. Since productive estuarine environments in many directions on earth have been destroyed through unscrupulous exploitation, it is urgent – where it is possible – to artificially restore and create such lacking aquatic habitats. This strategy is applied in other countries, while Swedish authorities primarily have argued that the remaining parts of Torslandaviken are not worth protection because they form heavily disturbed and affected environments.

**In summary:** The presented area limitation of the SPA-area the Bay of Torslandaviken hardly disagrees with the pronounced aim of the Swedish authorities to protect different species and nature environments through application of the Bird and Habitat directives. It is serious that Swedish authorities without own ecological evaluations and statements deliver the border determination of a SPA-area to the discretion of nature exploiters. At the same time as scientifically verified facts are rejected, regional authorities are satisfied with proposals from landowners, authorities and community officials.

It is remarkable that Swedish authorities (Miljödepartementet) fail in taking a lesson from the criticism obtained from the European Commission<sup>3</sup>. The directives refer to areas (SPA) with, as was presented as IBA-area, a minimum acreage of vital habitats with a continuous function and not – as in the present proposal to the Bay of Torslandaviken – to the remainder that is left, when all other possible economic interests have been satisfied.

**The author** of this report is a wetland scientist, who has specialised on the ecology of wetland birds and their habitats in both fresh and saline waters. After disputation (Pehrsson, O. 1976. The importance of food in the regulation of some diving duck populations. Department of Zoology, University of Göteborg. Thesis.) applied studies have been performed in a lot of wetlands resulting in management and restoration plans. Among these, also some CW-listed areas are found, i.e. Lake Hornborgasjön, Lake Östen, Lake Kvismaren and Getterön. An international reward is obtained from The Foundation for Environmental Conservation as recognition of published results (Pehrsson, O. 1990. The history of Lake Hornborga: A lesson in wetland function and management from Sweden. Environmental Conservation 17(3): 245-255).

At the commission of local ornithological societies

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<sup>3</sup> Europeiska Kommissionen / Margot Wallstöm. 1999-11-05. Motiverat yttrande till Sverige i enlighet med artikel 226 i EG-fördraget angående bristande överensstämmelse med direktiv 79/409/EEG om bevarande av vilda fåglar. Utrikesdepartementet Dnr:2547.

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