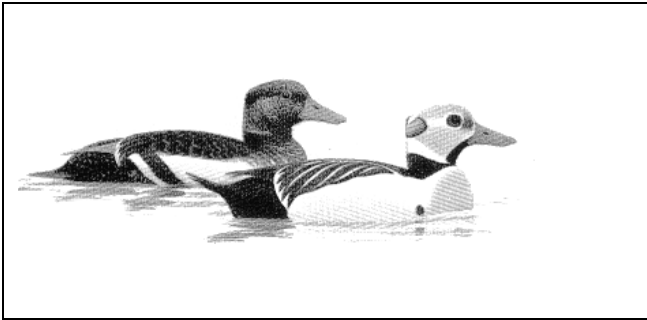


## Nomination

*Polystica stelleri* Steller's eider



## Geographical extent

OSPAR Regions; I

Biogeographic zones: 2,12,13

Region & Biogeographic zones specified for decline and/or threat: as above

Steller's Eider breeds along the Arctic coast of Alaska and the eastern half of Siberia. Most birds winter in the northern Pacific, but the main European areas used by non-breeders in summer and wintering birds are the coastal areas of northern Norway, Estonia and Lithuania (Anon, 1999). Studies of Steller's eider in 2000/01 along the Lithuanian coast in the Baltic (outside the OSPAR Maritime Area) indicated that the ducks congregated in a narrow stretch of coast, feeding on crustaceans, bivalves and gastropods. In spring they gather at herring spawning grounds and fed mainly on fish eggs (Žydelis, 2002).

In the OSPAR Maritime Area there are both wintering and summering birds in the Varangerfjord in northern Norway. These are found in flocks of varying size, in sheltered and shallow bays on the outer coast. While most flocks are of 10-100 birds, dense flocks of up to 3,000 individuals have been reported from Vadsø in the Varangerfjord (Frantzen, 1985). Moulting birds have been recorded from late May in the Varangerfjord (Frantzen & Henriksen, 1992)

In 1995 the size of the population wintering in northern Europe was believed to be between 30-50,000, compared to an estimated 400-500,000 in the 1960s, (Nygard *et al.*, 1995; Tucker & Heath, 1994). With the world population decreasing the species was considered to be globally threatened. In Europe there is particular concern about recent decreases of seaduck (Steller's eider and Common eider) in the Baltic (S.Pihl, Seaduck Specialist Group).

## Application of the Texel-Faial criteria

There was one nomination for Steller's Eider citing the regional importance of the OSPAR Area for this species and sensitivity, with information also provided on threat.

### *Regional importance*

Nygard *et al.* (1995) estimated that there were between 25,000 and 40,000 Steller's Eiders wintering in the Barents Sea representing between 15-20 % of the world population at that time. The wintering population in the OSPAR Maritime Area is found predominantly within the Varangerfjord, northern Norway which has typically supported between 5,000 – 8,500 birds from the early 1980's to early 1990's.

### *Sensitivity*

Steller's Eider are particularly sensitive to oil pollution and are known to have suffered mortality following contact with oil from spills. This species also appears to be especially sensitive to disturbance as the ducks spend a large part of the day feeding. Loss of foraging time through disturbance might therefore adversely affect the ability of the birds to satisfy their daily energetic requirements (Žydelis, 2002)

### *Threat*

Within the OSPAR Maritime Area, Steller's Eider are most threatened when the non-breeding birds congregate in large numbers in restricted areas.

Incidental capture in fishing gear is a major threat to this species. In Norway, birds have been known to get caught and drown in the set nets placed in shallow water where Steller's Eiders feed (Frantzen & Henriksen, 1992). In the Baltic gill nets are a serious threat to the small numbers of ducks that winter on the Lithuanian coast and one study has estimated that up to 10% of birds wintering along this coast might drown in fishing nets annually (Žydelis, 2002).

Oils spills have been a cause of mortality in the past with 2,500 duck (many of which were Stellar's eider) being killed by a minor spill in Vadsø harbour in 1973 (Grastveit, 1975) and a spill in Varangerfjord in 1979 killed 20,000 seabirds, including Steller's Eider (Barrett, 1979). This is because the birds are often close to harbours in the Varangerfjord. A relatively new threat is offshore development of windfarms. The likely effects on the seaduck are unknown at the present time.

## Relevant additional considerations

### *Sufficiency of data*

There are available on the population at the main non-breeding sites in the OSPAR Maritime Area at Varangerfjord in Norway, where numbers have been recorded since 1980. Very few studies have been carried out on breeding Steller's eider.

### *Changes in relation to natural variability*

It is not possible to gauge the effect of natural variability on population trends of this species at the present time.

### *Expert judgement*

The global population of Steller's Eider is believed to have decreased by about 50% throughout its range over the last 30 years (Anon, 1999). In Europe it was believed to be stable/ fluctuating or increasing in the early 1990's (Tucker & Heath, 1995). More recent views are that, within Europe, the Baltic populations may also be declining but as this does not appear to be the case in the OSPAR Maritime Area it has been nominated for the OSPAR list on the basis of threat to the population.

### *ICES evaluation*

ICES make no recommendation with respect to Steller's Eider as they consider this species has a stable, or possibly increasing, population within the OSPAR area, and because it was not clear how much the status and trends outside the OSPAR area should affect a decision to list this species. They note that Steller's eider is severely threatened elsewhere in the world. ICES supports the view that the main threats to this species in the OSPAR area are oil pollution and incidental capture.

## Threat and link to human activities

### *Cross-reference to checklist of human activities in OSPAR MPA Guidelines*

*Relevant human activity:* Fishing, hunting, harvesting; shipping & navigation, oil and gas exploration & exploitation. *Category of effect of human activity:* Biological – removal of non-target species; Chemical – hydrocarbon contamination

The main threats identified for this species in the OSPAR Maritime Area (incidental catch, oil pollution, disturbance and offshore development) all have clear links to human activities.

## Management considerations

A European Species Action Plan for Steller's Eider was published in 1999 with a recommendation that it should be reviewed every five years unless there is a need for an emergency review. Objectives have been suggested in relation to policy and legislation, species and habitat conservation, monitoring and research and education and training (Anon, 1999).

Management measures relevant to this species in the OSPAR Maritime Area will need to be focused on the few locations where they are concentrated. This could include protected areas, safeguards to reduce the risk of pollution incidents and contingency planning measures. The global decline in this species does however mean that measures will need to be taken to throughout its range to safeguard this species.

Steller's eider is listed on Annex II of the Bern Convention and Annex II of the Bonn Convention. It is also listed as 'Vulnerable' by IUCN.

## Further information

### *Nominated by:*

BirdLife International

### *Contact persons:*

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### *Useful References:*

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