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SAMARBEIDSÅDET FOR
BIOLOGISK MANGFOLD

Ramsar Secretary General
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SWITZERLAND

Trondheim/Oslo 12 September 2014

Plans for highway and railway concerning the Ramsar site Tyrifjorden, Buskerud, Norway – an initiative designed to stop the destruction of a wetland system and a request for an urgent Ramsar advisory mission

Dear Christopher Briggs,

Your visit to Oslo 28-30 August 2014 and the Tyrifjorden wetland system on 31 August together with County Governor representative Eldfrid Engen was a great opportunity for Birdlife Norway (the Norwegian Ornithological Society) and SABIMA to inform about and show you the unique wetlands and cultural landscape in this part of Southern Norway. The area is calcareous, also containing several other key biodiversity sites of national value. We were proud to get this opportunity, and hope you gained the needed insight into the plans that now threaten the area. In order not to lose these nature values, we deem it important that the Ramsar Convention urgently request active dialogue with the Norwegian government with advice and reminders of our obligations.

The Northern Tyrifjorden Wetland System was designated as a Ramsar site in 1996 (International No. 802, National No. 15). Norway became a Contracting Party in 1974, being amongst the first seven Contracting Parties required in order for the Ramsar Convention to enter into force. The Ramsar Bureau's Regional Coordinator Tim Jones visited Norway in June 1997. He spent two days studying the Northern Tyrifjorden Wetland System during his stay in Norway. Before Mr. Jones' visit, Secretary General Delmar Blasco sent a letter to the Norwegian Parliament pointing out threats to the Tyrifjorden wetland values in the form of infrastructure projects. At that time Norwegian authorities planned a railway through this wetland system, and a proposed bridge across Kroksund (west of Sundvollen - north of Rørvik) was a key issue in 1997. Kroksund has no official protection status, but is an important part of the wetland system. Mr. Jones advised against a railway bridge across Kroksund. He commented upon this to the press. In his report to the then Directorate for Nature Management (now the Norwegian Environment Agency) in Trondheim and the Ramsar Secretary General dated July 1997, he wrote the following about the threats to Kroksund as a part of the wetland system:

- "To meet its obligations under the Ramsar Convention, Norway should select the rail and/or road development route(s) with the lowest direct and indirect impacts on the ecological character of the wetland system."
- "Kroksund is clearly a key point in the ecological functioning of the whole region; proposals for new road and rail crossings should therefore be treated with particular caution."

This recommendation and the letter from Secretary General Delmar Blasco were of great importance for later management and solutions in Norway. When the Norwegian Parliament in December 2002 debated and contemplated route selection for a railway between Oslo and the city Hønefoss (County Buskerud), the integrity of the wetland system values and the obligations within the Ramsar Convention were crucial for the choice of route. The Parliament decided that a possible later railway should be situated east of the wetland system, hence discarding the bridge solution over Kroksund.

Since 2005 a new plan for including more protected areas in this Ramsar site has been developed. In 2011 the County Governor of Buskerud proposed the protection plan for expansion of existing and new protected wetlands in the Tyrifjorden area for The Norwegian Environment Agency in Trondheim. The Norwegian Environment Agency sent their recommendation to the Ministry of Climate and Environment in 2012.

During recent years, plans for a new highway between Sandvika (15 km west-southwest of Oslo) and Hønefoss have been presented. In 2013 The Norwegian Public Roads Administration (NPRA - Statens vegvesen) has elucidated conclusions for building a new highway for the final stretch distance between Sandvika and Hønefoss. NPRA's report has been published with several proposed corridors for a four-lane highway along this distance. Most of the corridors include one or several bridges across sites in the Northern Tyrifjorden Wetland System:

<http://www.ringerike.no/assets/files/RU%20sidene/Kortversjon%20av%20KU%20E16%20Skaret%20-%20Honefoss.pdf>

In addition several corridors are very close to key sites in this wetland system. Altogether four proposed four-lane highway corridors include bridge solution over Kroksund west of Sundvollen in Hole municipality. The importance of this site in the wetland system is the same as in 1997. One corridor (green) is planned with two bridges through the Tyrifjorden wetland system. Beside the bridge over Kroksund, a proposed 700 meter long bridge across Storelva - the main river further north in the wetland system. This part of the river, including the Busund area, has been proposed by the County Governor and The Norwegian Environment Agency as a part of an expanded nature reserve (number 1 on the enclosed map).

In January 2014 NPRA and the Norwegian National Rail Administration commissioned to coordinate and clarify questions about how new rail and road through the Hole and Ringerike municipalities can be planned in relation to each other. The first report from this coordination was presented in June 2014. Here the Ramsar Convention was not mentioned at all. This despite that the Norwegian government is planning a comprehensive transportation project with both highway and rail through the wetland system in the Tyrifjorden area with Ramsar designated areas (see figure 1 below).

Important to know is the fact that there are suitable alternatives. A shortened railway between Oslo and Hønefoss could be established without passing through Sandvika west of the capital. The shortest alternative is more or less along the straight line between Oslo and Hønefoss - through a tunnel underneath most of the forested area north of the capital named Nordmarka (see figure 2 below). It is also an alternative to use the existing railway system from Oslo to Hønefoss east of Nordmarka. The train between Oslo and Bergen went until some years ago along this line. This railway is shown with violet color in figure 2. This railway track is today used for trains between Oslo and Gjøvik (north of Lunner). From Oslo this railway line passes Brekke and Hakadal, and just north of Harestua it is possible to establish a 12.5 km long tunnel towards west to Nordhagen (Jevnaker). It will be necessary to upgrade this railway line between Oslo and Hønefoss, but this option will not influence the Tyrifjorden wetland system or the valuable culture landscape in the municipalities Hole and Ringerike south of Hønefoss.

Establishing several tunnels will save the important sites in the Tyrifjorden wetland system. The best solution is not to continue the highway north of Sundvollen towards Hønefoss but improve the current road (E16). There is no need for a four-lane highway on this short stretch (about 10 km). In addition to the internationally important wetland qualities in the two municipalities we find here one of the most important areas in Norway in terms of cultural and historical values (including several viking king sites - reflecting key events in Norwegian history).

The Norwegian Environment Agency (previously the Directorate for Nature Management) has sent a letter of concern to the Ramsar Convention Secretariat where they, in line with the provisions and obligations, inform that there are plans for a highway through Northern Tyrifjord Wetland System. The letter was dated 3 March 2013 and is titled "Possible change of ecological charter - RS 802 - N Tyrifjord WS - Norway". SABIMA and Birdlife Norway are very concerned about what is now going on and, **we request the Ramsar Secretariat to urgently execute a Ramsar Advisor Mission.**

Letters from the Ramsar Convention Bureau should in particular be addressed to:

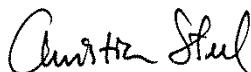
The Norwegian Parliament's Presidency
(Stortingets presidentskap)
Stortinget
N-0026 OSLO
NORWAY

Copy to:
Minister of Transport and Communications Ketil Solvik-Olsen
The Norwegian Environment Agency

Yours sincerely



Kjetil Aa. Solbakken
Director BirdLife Norway



Christian Steel
Director SABIMA



Viggo Ree
BirdLife Norway

Figure 1

Planned bridge-crossings (blue line) in the Northern Tyrifjorden Wetland System (both highway and railway). Numbers refer to new proposed protected areas in the wetland systems.

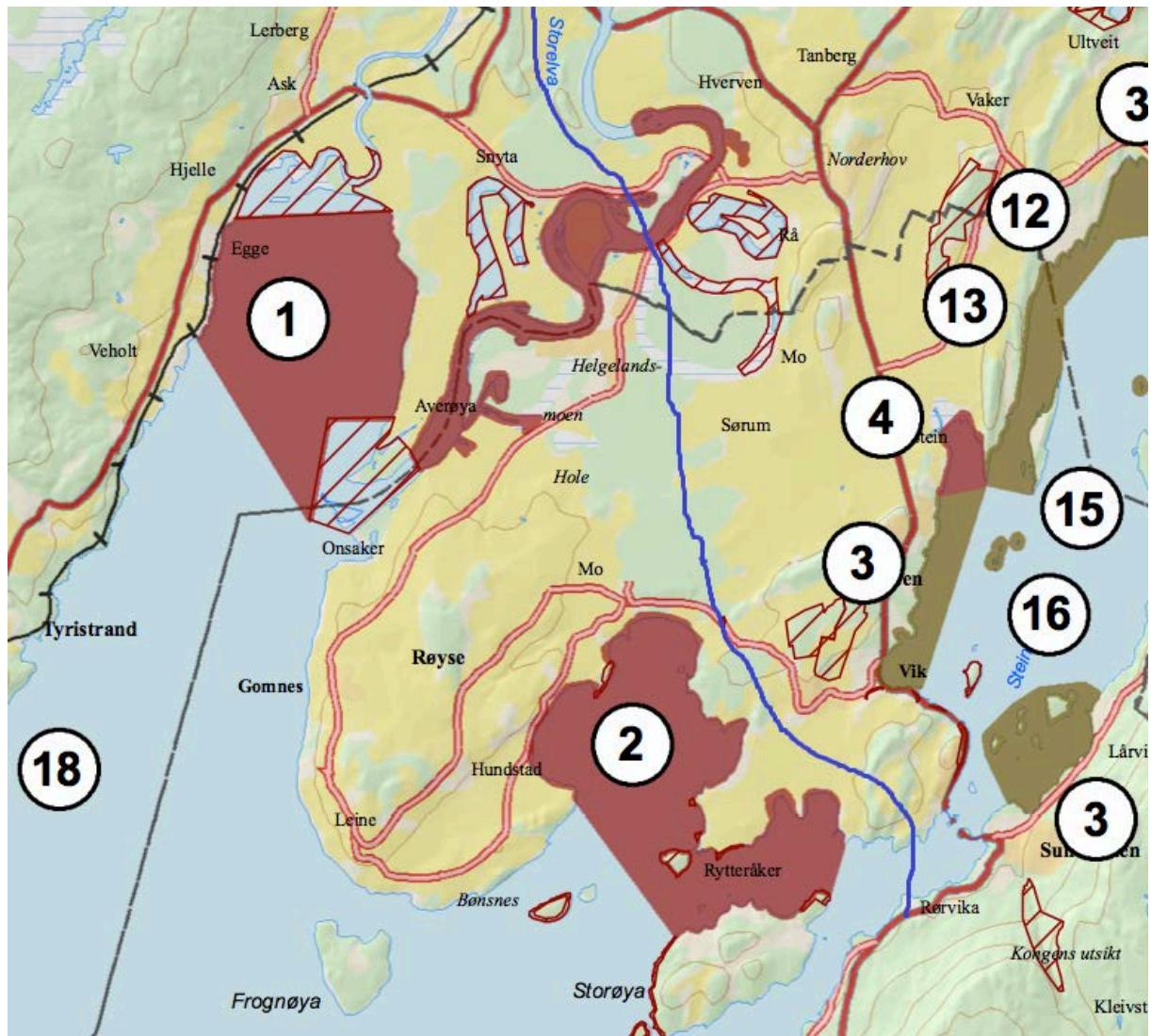


Figure 2

Map of the area with alternative railway solutions between Oslo and Hønefoss. Existing railway line is marked with in violet color. Possible new railway solutions that can save the wetland system are marked with black lines.

