

ELEVENTH MEETING OF PARTNERS OF THE EAST ASIAN – AUSTRALASIAN FLYWAY PARTNERSHIP
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Draft Document 13

Issues and considerations for improving the structure, content and utility of the EAAFP Site Information Sheet (SIS) for Flyway Network Site (FNS) designation

Prepared by EAAFP Technical Sub-committee Chair

This information paper provides additional supporting information and rationales for the amendments to the SIS proposed for MOP11 approval in Draft Decision 5.

1. Background

- 1.1. The EAAFP has its origins in the 1996 *Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy*. In 2002 the EAAFP was recognised as a Type II initiative by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), and as a Ramsar Regional Initiative in 2005. The EAAFP was formally launched in 2006.
- 1.2. The identification and nomination of internationally important Flyway Network Sites (FNSs) is a key component (Objective 1 of the Partnership) of EAAFP Partners' implementation of the Partnership. Partners nominate such sites by completing a Site Information Sheet (SIS).
- 1.3. At EAAFP MOP1 (Indonesia 2006), Partners adopted Recommendation 5 that “endorsed a standardised Site Information Sheet, based on a simplified version of the Ramsar Information Sheet as the documentation to be used for the nomination of new sites to the Flyway Site Network.”
- 1.4. There appear to have been three versions of the Site Information Sheet (SIS) issued:
 - At MOP2 (2007) a first SIS template was agreed. This had two sections, of which the first part sought basic information essential to be completed, with a second part for optional additional information. This SIS was derived from the then Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) format.
 - At MOP7 (2013) a new version of the SIS was provided to Partners, but this is not currently accessible and so it is not clear how this differs from the MOP2 version.
 - At MOP9 (2017) it was reported in the Meeting report that there was now a simplified version of the SIS, with three sections (management, CEPA and status of FNS).

- 1.5. The current version of the SIS is its 2017 version (available at: <https://www.eaaflyway.net/become-a-site/>) is modelled on, and derived from, the Ramsar Convention's Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (RIS) – 2012 revision.
- 1.6. At EAAFP MOP10, the Technical Sub-committee was requested to review and assess if the SIS could be simplified so as to ease its application by Partners. This forms Task C3 of the TSc Work Plan.
- 1.7. In undertaking this review, and informed by the recent experience of the EAAFP Secretariat and TSc in handling and reviewing draft SISs for proposed FNSs, (and updates to designated SISs) a number of further issues with the current structure and content of the SIS and its (lack of) associated guidance are identified. These are explained below.

2. Summary of recommendations

- 2.1. In summary, the following recommendations are made for improving the FNS designation process and the SIS structure and content:

1. Re-affirm at MOP11 that individual SISs should be updated at intervals of not more than six years after FNS designation (i.e. for EAAFP not more than three MOP cycles); and add a field to the SIS concerning whether it is for a new FNS or updated SIS for an existing FNS.

2. Consider SIS restructuring/simplifying. There are three options can be considered:

Option 1. If the 'optional' SIS fields have been used, demonstrate their utility, and retain these, but re-structure the SIS into two clearer Sections: Section 1 *Required fields* followed by Section 2 *Optional fields*.

Option 2. If the 'optional' SIS fields cannot be demonstrated as having utility and are not being used by the Partnership, simplify the SIS format to include only the *Required fields*.

Option 3. Make no changes to the SIS v2017 structure and content, except for the addition of a field concerning nomination of new FNS/update of existing FNS (see Recommendation 2).

As set out below, Option 1 is recommended, pending any further analyses of the use (or not) of all SIS fields.

3. SIS field 10 (Justification of Flyway Site Network criteria) needs to be re-structured to have a separate section for each Criterion as follows:

i. Is this Criterion being applied? Yes; No

ii. A table to fill in with columns for numbers counted for each of the most recent 5 years of counts; the average number for the years counted, (and for Criteria B and E, the 0.25% or 1% threshold being applied for each species/population).

iii. A free-text box for providing further information/explanation of the Criteria justifications.

- 4. The issue of FNS vs Ramsar Site Criteria justifications needs making much clearer in the guidance/advice to Partners on FNS Criteria application.**
- 5. The EAAFP Secretariat/Science Unit should assess and advise on the extent to which the qualitative Criterion (Partnership text Criterion C) has been applied in FNS designations, as a basis for advising if it should be retained for future FNS designations.**
- 6. The FNS Criteria should be revised and reformulated for better consistency and clarity, for consideration and adoption by Partners at MOP11. The following revised texts are suggested for the FNS Criteria:**

“For inclusion of a site as internationally important in the Flyway Site Network, one or more of the following Criteria must be met:

Criterion A. It regularly supports >20,000 migratory waterbirds.

Criterion B. It regularly supports >1% of the individuals of a biogeographic population of a migratory waterbird.

Criterion C. It regularly supports [appreciable numbers] of a biogeographic population of a globally threatened (Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN) or Vulnerable (VU)) migratory waterbird species.

Criterion D. It is a “migratory staging site” that regularly supports >5,000 migratory waterbirds during the migration period for the site.

Criterion E. It is a “migratory staging site” that regularly supports >0.25% of a biogeographic population of a migratory waterbird during the migration period for the site.

[Criterion F. It supports migratory waterbirds at a stage of their life cycles important for the maintenance of their flyway populations, including as a refuge during adverse conditions.]” (see Recommendation 5. above concerning assessing whether or not this qualitative Criterion should be retained.)

7. Delete the current SIS v2017 Annex 1 providing the text of Appendix IV of the Partnership text, and at the next available opportunity update the Partnership text Appendix IV to reflect the revised Criteria [if adopted by MOP11].

8. Prepare guidance for Partners on the correct application of the following five aspects of the FNS Criteria:

- i. applying the FNS Criteria for only waterbird species/populations listed as ‘migratory’ in Annex 6 of CSR1 (see 2.21 above);**
- ii. applying the terms of “regularly supports” for FNS Criteria A, B, C, D & E.**
- iii. counts to use in assessing qualification under FNS Criteria A and D.**
- iv. choosing the correct 1% population threshold for applying Criteria B, C & E, when more than one biogeographic population of a species occurs at the site.**

v. applying the term “appreciable numbers” under Criterion C.

9. Provide the additional guidance for Partners on the correct application of the FNS Criteria as a new Annex 1 to the SIS.

10. Explore ways and means of establishing a coded database, with online search facilities, for the data and information in each SIS.

3. Current SIS purpose, structure and content

3.1. The SIS-v2017 has 30 data and information fields (questions) for a Partner to fill in in its nomination of an FNS. Each is a simple ‘free-text’ field. In its “Notes for compilers” the 2017 SIS says:

“The Site Information Sheet will provide the basic information of the site and detail how the site meets the criteria for inclusion in the Flyway Site Network. When there is a new nomination or an SIS update, the following sections with an asterisk (), from Questions 1-14 and Question 30 [threats], must be filled or updated at least so that it can justify the international importance of the habitat for migratory waterbirds.”*

3.2. Note that it is not clear when and why the requirement for Question 30 [threats] was singled out to be a required field in the SIS format, nor why it should be considered as “essential” to justify the international importance of the site.

3.3. There are several other issues that need further consideration and clarification:

3.4. **Updating SISs.** The Ramsar Convention has adopted guidance that expects that updates to Ramsar Site information (RIS) should be made at intervals of not more than six years. EAAFP MOP2 (2007) affirmed that SISs should be “reviewed on a six-year basis to coincide with the Ramsar process”. This update process was re-affirmed at MOP8 (2015).

3.5. As the EAAFP matures there are an increasing number of SISs which are overdue an update. For example, a recent analysis of FNSs in four Indo-Burma Partner countries found that the SISs of six of 11 (55%) SISs are now >6 years old. Such updates are important so as to confirm that the site continues to qualify as an FNS, especially given the considerable number of changes to population size estimates (and hence 0.25% and 1% population thresholds) recently provided in the 2022 1st EAAFP Conservation Status Review (CSR1).

Recommendation 1: re-affirm at MOP11 that SISs should be updated at intervals of not more than six years after the previous SIS was submitted (i.e. for EAAFP not more than three EAAFP cycles).

3.6. However, the current SIS (v2017) does not have a field for the Partner to identify if the SIS being submitted is for the nomination of a new FNS or is an update of an existing FNS. The lack of such a field has recently caused considerable confusion with the submission by a Partner of what eventually proved to be an update to an existing FNS, but with a different name, rather than a new FNS.

Recommendation 2: add a field (as an essential field) to the SIS concerning whether it is for a new FNS or updated SIS for an existing FNS.

- 3.7. **Essential (required) and optional SIS fields.** Currently the SIS compiler's notes (see para. 2.1 above), state that SIS sections 1-14 and 30 must be filled in (i.e. they are essential fields). So, implicitly, completing all other SIS fields (15-29) is optional (but desirable).
- 3.8. Sections 1-11 essentially cover the "who, what, where and why" of the FNS nomination:
- Who and when?** Which Partner is submitting the nomination/update, who is the compiler(s) and contact point(s). [SIS fields 1 & 2]
 - What?** Site name. [SIS field 4]
 - Where?** Country, location, map, area, general description, wetland types. [SIS fields 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11] *Note: adding an additional field to identify if the site is an inland natural wetland, and/or coastal natural wetland and/or human-made wetland could be helpful.*
 - Why?** Justification for application of each FNS Criterion. [SIS field 10]
- 3.9. SIS v2017 essential fields 12-14 concern information on jurisdiction, management authority and the provision of bibliographic references.
- 3.10. Current essential SIS field 30 concerns reporting on threats to the site. But it is not clear when or why completing this particular field has been identified as essential rather than optional, specifically for EAAFP purposes. Note that the only reported analysis of FNS threats to date appears to be a threats assessment for 61 FNSs reported to MOP7 (2012).
- 3.11. Non-essential SIS fields (15-29) largely concern providing additional information on the different aspects of the "ecological character" of the site and its values, and on conservation measures (management) and research.
- 3.12. **Why are the SIS 'optional fields' needed, and if 'yes' - for what purpose(s)?** If partners are to be expected to also fill in all these 'optional fields' it needs to be established that they are used by Partners and/or third parties, and for what purposes. It is currently unclear to what extent these fields are (or have been) used. Potential uses may be:
- 3.12.1 **At the site level.** Potential uses at the site scale are for management authorities/site managers as summary information to inform their management planning processes. But it is unclear if this is the case – management authorities need to be asked this question. Such compiled information can be used to inform regular Partners' reporting to the FP on Strategic Plan implementation – particularly if the SISs have been regularly updated.
 - 3.12.2 **At the flyway network level.** A second category of optional field use can be for analyses by Secretariat/third parties of such SIS information across all FNSs. An example would be an assessment of patterns of threats to FNSs – also informing other third-party processes. But very little such analysis seems yet to have been done (perhaps worth mentioning assessment for 61? FNSs reported to MOP7 (2012).
- 3.13. Undertaking such 'across-FNSs' analyses is hindered by there not being a searchable database of SIS information fields (see also section 6 below) of the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) <https://rsis.ramsar.org>. Hence, to make any such analyses each SIS has to be separately downloaded from the EAAFP website (and noting that finding the way of doing such downloads is not easy), and then relevant information extracted and compiled for analysis. From personal experience this is a very time-consuming process indeed.

Recommendation 3. Consider SIS restructuring/simplifying. There are three options:

Option 1. If the ‘optional’ SIS fields can be demonstrated as having utility/are being used retain these, but re-structure the SIS into two clearer Sections: Section 1 *Required fields* followed by Section 2 *Optional fields*.

Option 2. If the ‘optional’ SIS fields cannot be demonstrated as having utility/are being used by the Partnership, simplify the SIS format to include only the *Required fields*.

Option 3. Make no changes to the SIS v2017 structure and content, except for the addition of a field concerning nomination of new FNS/update of existing FNS (see Recommendation 2).

3.14. Some guidance is provided in the SIS on what to fill in for almost all of its data-fields, but very surprisingly not any guidance for the key field 10 (Justification for Criteria application).

3.15. **Is SIS field 10 (Justification of Flyway Site Network criteria) fit for purpose?** The simple answer is “No”. It currently provides just a single ‘free-text’ field for all the information and justifications of the Criteria. This has led to very different forms of justification information being provided in nominations, and not always clear if this adequate for justifying which Criteria are being applied – or indeed even which Criteria are being applied. This is not helped by the absence of any SIS guidance on the application of each of the Criteria (see also Section 5. below).

3.16. To make it much clearer what data and information is needed to be provided in SIS field 10 this field needs to be much clearer, more structured and more consistent. There should be a separate field for each Criterion. This would have the structure, for each Criterion:

- i. Is this Criterion being applied? Yes; No
- ii. A table to fill in with columns for numbers counted for each of the most recent 5 years of counts; the average number for the years counted, and the 1% threshold being applied for each species/population (not needed for the globally threatened species Criterion).
- iii. A free-text box for providing further information/explanation of the Criterion justifications.

Recommendation 4. SIS field 10 (Justification of Flyway Site Network criteria) needs to be restructured to have a separate section for each Criterion as follows:

i. Is this Criterion being applied? Yes; No

ii. A table to fill in with columns for numbers counted for each of the most recent 5 years of counts; the average number for the years counted, (and for Criteria B and, E the 1% threshold being applied for each species/population).

iii. A free-text box for providing further information/explanation of the Criteria justifications.

3.17. In addition, guidance notes are needed to support the provision of correct data and information for different aspects of the application of each Criterion (see further assessment of these guidance needs in Section 5 below).

3.18. **Nomination of an FNS already designated as a Ramsar Site.** In its “Notes for compilers” the 2017 SIS says:

“If the site proposed for the Flyway Site Network is an existing Ramsar site then the documentation process can be simplified.”

3.19. This is largely correct advice, since the SIS fields are modelled on the Ramsar Information Sheet – 2012 revision.

3.20. However, there is one very important distinction which needs to be much better clarified to EAAFP Partners in this advice, concerning SIS field 10 *Justification of FNS Criteria*.

3.21. This is because the FNS Criteria are derived from, but not the same as, the Ramsar Site Criteria. This is because the FNS Criteria cover *migratory species/populations only* whereas the Ramsar Criteria cover *all waterbird species/populations (both resident and migratory)*. A much larger question to the Partnership arising from this is why is EAAFP (as also for AEWA) limited to only migratory populations (however they are defined). There is a case for EAAFP Partners to consider the FP covering all waterbird populations. This issue is outside the scope of this current analysis, but may be an issues for Partners to consider at MOP12.

3.22. So, the waterbird numbers and 1%*s* listed in a Ramsar Site designation should not just be ‘cut-and-pasted’ into the SIS justifications. A filter first needs to be applied to exclude resident species/populations in the FNS justifications, and only those migratory species/populations listed in Annex 6 of the CSR1 included in the justifications. It has not been assessed as to how many FNS Criteria justifications have been incorrectly cut-and-pasted from earlier Ramsar Site designation justifications.

3.23. In essence this means that the ‘bar’ for qualifying as internationally important under FNS designation currently can be rather higher than that for Ramsar Site designation.

Recommendation 5. The issue of FNS vs Ramsar Site Criteria justifications needs making much clearer in the guidance/advice to Partners on FNS Criteria application.

See further assessment of FNS Criteria issues needing guidance in Section 5 below.

4. FNS designation Criteria: wording issues and inconsistencies

4.1. This matter is at the core of FNS designation issues. The SIS 2017 version has as its Annex 1 the list of Criteria as adopted in the Partnership text. These are the three Ramsar Criteria (2, 5, 6) plus the FNS staging Criteria plus one other which is essentially derived from Ramsar Criterion 4¹ (importance for maintaining life-cycle stages). These remain as Appendix IV in the post-MOP10 updated Partnership text.

4.2. This Appendix IV of the Partnership text says:

"To be considered for inclusion in the Flyway Site Network, this Partnership adopts the following criteria:

¹ Ramsar Criterion 4: “A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.”

a. Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971) criteria for internationally important sites for migratory waterbirds. That is:

Criterion 2: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.

Criterion 5: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds.

Criterion 6: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.

b. The staging criteria as applied under the Asia - Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy. That is:

i. A staging site should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 0.25% of individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbirds on migration.

ii. A staging site should be considered internationally important if it regularly supports 5,000 or more waterbirds at one time during migration.

c. Under exceptional circumstances [in the EAAFP Criteria, but is similar to Ramsar Criterion 4] a site can be nominated if it supports migratory waterbirds at a level or stage of their life cycle important to the maintenance of flyway populations. Justification of such nominations will be considered by the Partnership on a case by case basis.”

4.3. However, in Field 10 of the SIS 2017 version, these Criteria are differently formulated for FNS designation purposes. These Field 10 Criteria say as follows:

“Please provide waterbird count information (with year of latest count) that demonstrates that the site meets the criteria of the Flyway Site Network (Annex 1). That is:

- it regularly supports > 20 000 migratory waterbirds [cf Ramsar Criterion 5]; or,
- it regularly supports > 1 % of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of migratory waterbird [cf Ramsar Criterion 6]; or,
- it supports appreciable numbers of an endangered or vulnerable population of migratory waterbird [cf Ramsar Criterion 2]
- it is a “staging site” supporting > 5 000 waterbirds, or > 0.25% of a population stage at the site.” [additional FNS Criterion]

4.4. Note also that this list is missing the Partnership text Appendix IV “criterion c.” concerning the importance of the site for maintain life-cycles.

4.5. There is a huge potential for confusion in the application of these two different sets of Criteria formulations provided in different parts of the SIS. Fixing this issue is very urgent if the FNS SIS process is to work correctly and effectively. Furthermore, it is not clear as to when these revised (SIS Field 10) Criteria were introduced, and whether or not there has been any MOP mandate adopting these revisions. Note also that any amendments to the Criteria texts may need also to be reflected in the Partnership text.

, these revised versions should have been read back into the Partnership text and adopted by Partners at a MOP, for consistency.

- 4.6. There are numerous differences in the SIS Field 10 Criteria formulations of those in Appendix IV of the Partnership text. These are notably:
- a. the lack of inclusion of the Partnership text Criterion c. concerning a qualitative Criterion justification, which is itself a reformulation of Ramsar Criterion 4;
 - b. the correct addition for FNS of the word ‘migratory’ preceding ‘waterbirds’ in the SIS v2017 Criteria version the context of the scope of the Flyway Partnership.
 - c. incorrect wording in Criterion C that currently refers to only “endangered or vulnerable populations”. First, more correctly this should refer to “populations of species that are endangered or vulnerable”, since the IUCN Red List is at the species, not the population, level. Second, Critically Endangered (CR) species are not included. *Note* that under the IUCN Red List three categories are recognised as ‘globally threatened’: Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN) and Vulnerable (VU). Also *note* that Near Threatened (NT) species do not contribute to justifying this Criterion, although listing these in the Criterion justification can provide useful additional information.
 - d. also for FNS Criterion 201 version, the wording is “supports appreciable numbers of...”. This is an additional but possibly helpful rewording of the formulation of Ramsar Criterion 2, which only requires the species to be present (which can mean that that the Criterion could be justified if only one individual is present at any one time!). *Note* that no advice in the SIS is provided concerning what constitutes “appreciable numbers” – such advice is needed. If this term is to be retained, clear and justifiable guidance on its application must be provided – see below.
 - e. the FNS Criterion concerning globally threatened species is missing the ‘regularly’ supports component of the other FNS Criteria, which would be helpful to include for consistency across the FNS Criteria.
 - f. the merging of the two separate components of the migratory staging criterion in Partnership text Appendix IV into a single staging Criterion (Criterion D), which is inconsistent with the separate Criteria treatment of these components under Criteria A and B.
- 4.7. Concerning point 4.6.a above on a qualitative Criterion, to inform whether or not to retain this Criterion it would be very helpful for the EAAFP Secretariat/Science Unit to check the designated FNSs to establish the extent to which it has (or has not) been applied. If it has not been applied (or only very seldom applied) then it should be considered unhelpful/redundant and a subsequent decision taken by MOP as to whether or not it is retained?

Recommendation 6. The EAAFP Secretariat/Science Unit should assess and advise on the extent to which the qualitative Criterion (Partnership text Criterion c.) has been applied in FNS designations.

Recommendation 7. The FNS Criteria should be revised and reformulated for better consistency and clarity, for consideration and adoption by Partners at MOP11.

Recommendation 8. The following revised texts are suggested for the FNS Criteria:

“For inclusion of a site as internationally important in the Flyway Site Network one or more of the following Criteria must be met:

Criterion A. It regularly supports >20,000 migratory waterbirds.

Criterion B. It regularly supports >1% of the individuals of a biogeographic population of a migratory waterbird.

Criterion C. It regularly supports [appreciable numbers] of a biogeographic population of a globally threatened (Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN) or Vulnerable (VU)) migratory waterbird species.

Criterion D. It is a “migratory staging site” that regularly supports >5,000 migratory waterbirds.

Criterion E. It is a “migratory staging site” that regularly supports >0.25% of a biogeographic population of a migratory waterbird.

Criterion F. It supports migratory waterbirds at a stage of their life cycles important for the maintenance of their flyway populations, including as a refuge during adverse conditions.]” (see Recommendation 6 above concerning assessing whether or not this qualitative Criterion should be retained.)

Recommendation 9. Delete the current SIS v2017 Annex 1 providing the text of Appendix IV of the Partnership text.

4.8. **Important procedural note.** If any such amendments to the FNS Criteria are adopted at MOP11, they should, for consistency, also then replace the current Appendix IV criteria text in the Partnership text. However, any such proposed amendments to the Partnership text would have to have been issued by 13 October 2022. So pragmatically a MOP11 approach would be to first adopt these amendments and then refer these back to MOP12 for any amendments needed to the Partnership text

5. Guidance needed on aspects of the application of the FNS Criteria

5.1. The SIS -2017 version provides some guidance to Partners on how to fill in almost all of the SIS fields.

5.2. However, and very importantly and rather bizarrely, the SIS does not provide any guidance on the application and justification of FNS Criteria (Field 10 of the SIS), which is making it difficult for Partners’ to correctly apply these FNS Criteria.

5.3. Missing guidance which needs to be provided to support the correct application of the FNS Criteria includes:

- i. applying the FNS Criteria for only waterbird species/populations listed as ‘migratory’ in Annex 6 of CSR1 (see above);
- ii. applying the terms of “regularly supports” for FNS Criteria A, B, C, D & E.
- iii. what counts should be used to assess qualification under FNS Criteria A and D.
- iv. choosing the correct 1% population threshold for applying Criteria B, C & E, when more than one biogeographic population of a species occurs at the site.

v. applying the term “appreciable numbers” under Criterion C.

Recommendation 10. Provide guidance for Partners on the correct application of the following five aspects of the FNS Criteria:

i. applying the FNS Criteria for only waterbird species/populations listed as ‘migratory’ in Annex 6 of CSR1 (see above);

ii. applying the terms of “regularly supports” for FNS Criteria A, B, C, D & E.

iii. counts to use in assessing qualification under FNS Criteria A and D.

iv. choosing the correct 1% population threshold for applying Criteria B, C & E, when more than one biogeographic population of a species occurs at the site.

v. applying the term “appreciable numbers” under Criterion C.

5.4. Guidance on applying some aspects of these is provided in the Ramsar Strategic Framework for Site Designation of Wetlands of International Importance, which for consistency could usefully be followed for FNS designations.

5.5. Issues and recommendations for guidance on these five aspects of applying the FNS Criteria are outlined below.

5.6. **Applying the FNS Criteria for only species/populations listed as ‘migratory’ in Annex 6 of CSR1**
As per Recommendation 5 above, this issue of FNS cf. Ramsar Site Criteria justification needs making much clearer in the guidance to Partners on FNS Criteria application.

5.7. **Applying the term “regularly supports” for FNS Criteria A, B, C, D & E** (4.3.v. above). The Ramsar “Strategic Framework” provides guidance on applying this term, but it is well-hidden in the Glossary at the back of this very large document, and it is unlikely that many of those preparing FNS designations will have seen it.

5.8. In the preparation of guidance for Ramsar Criteria application (as part of the recent Norway-Myanmar project on wetlands), some uncertainties and ambiguities in the terms of the Ramsar definition of ‘regularly occurring’ have been identified, particularly relating to the uses and meaning of the word “season”, which is not defined, and needs clarifying.

5.9. The Ramsar definition of ‘regularly supports’ (Strategic Framework Appendix G Glossary, p. 127) provides two options which can be applied. The definition is:

“regularly (Criteria 5 & 6) - as in supports regularly - a wetland regularly supports a population of a given size if:

i) the requisite number of birds is known to have occurred in two thirds of the seasons for which adequate data are available, the total number of seasons being not less than three;

or

ii) the mean of the maxima of those seasons in which the site is internationally important, taken over at least five years, amounts to the required level (means based on three or four years may be quoted in provisional assessments only)."

- 5.10. Concerning regularly occurring definition i), the requirement is for at least three 'seasons' being defined for the site. However, there is considerable ambiguity as to what is meant by "season" here. If 'season' is taken to mean different seasons of the year, this can work for regions such as northern temperate with four 'seasons' (spring, summer, autumn, winter), but not in more tropical areas where there may be only two seasons (e.g. wet season, dry season). Or it could be that it is a specific part of the year (e.g. autumn) over several years.
- 5.11. Alternatively, 'season' could be interpreted as breeding season, southwards staging season, non-breeding season, northwards staging season.
- 5.12. However, in particular with the EAAFP having also separate staging site Criteria D and E, this approach (however 'season' is defined) does not work well. It is recommended that this option for 'regularly occurring' is not applied to the designation of EAAFP FNS sites.
- 5.13. It is recommended that 'regularly occurring' option ii. (in para 5.9 above) is applied for FNS designations.
- 5.14. Application of this option requires that there is at least an annual count for five years. These should be recent, but not necessarily consecutive years. This should be for counts from the most recent five years available. Given that population sizes of many migratory waterbird populations are known to be changing (see CSR1), counts from more than 10 years ago should not be used.
- 5.15. The correct approach to assessing qualification under these Criteria is, for each population, identify the highest (peak) count in each year. Then calculate the average number for the multi-year period being assessed. If this average number (mean of peaks) exceeds the 1% (or 0.25% for migratory staging periods) population threshold, then the site qualifies for designation under these Criteria.
- 5.16. Note that the highest (peak) numbers counted at the site do not need to exceed the relevant population threshold in all years under consideration: it is the average number over the multi-year-period that is used to assess qualification.
- 5.17. An example of how this information should be presented in the SIS for the application of FNS Criterion B is provided below, for a biogeographic waterbird population which qualifies under Criterion B. Years in which the maximum count exceeds the 1% threshold are highlighted in grey tint.

Species	Population	1% threshold	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Average Years 1-5	% of population size
Species A	Population A	1,000	1,500	450	1,250	3,000	2,100	1,660	1.66

- 5.18. The second example below is for a population which, despite maximum counts in two of the most recent five years exceeding the 1% threshold, does not qualify under Criterion B.

Species	Population	1% threshold	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Average Years 1-5	% of population size
Species B	Population B	1,000	1,500	450	1,250	250	900	870	0.87

5.19. Note that under this ‘regularly occurring’ option, if counts are available for only three or four recent years, these can be included as a provisional assessment of Criterion qualification.

5.20. **Counts to use to assess qualification under FNS Criterion A and D (the site supports >20,000 migratory waterbirds; >5,000 migratory waterbirds during migration seasons) (4.3.iii. above).**

5.21. If there is only a single annual waterbird count for the site, use this peak known count (for only migratory species/populations listed in CSR1) for each of the most recent five years of counts (see ‘regularly occurring’ above) to assess whether **the site supports >20,000 migratory waterbirds.**

5.22. However, the situation is more complicated if there are multiple waterbird counts within a year. This is because different waterbird species/population often occur in their largest numbers at a site in different months of the year.

5.23. In the situation of there being more than one count in a year, the appropriate approach is to first identify the highest count of each waterbird species within each year. Then to add up these highest counts to give a total migratory waterbird number for that year. Then repeat this exercise for each of the five most recent years of counts.

5.24. **Choosing the correct 1% population threshold for applying Criteria B, C & E when more than one biogeographic population of a species occurs at the site (4.3.iv above).** The Ramsar Strategic Framework provides guidance on this issue, as follows:

“201. Mixed populations. At some sites, more than one biogeographical population of the same species can occur, especially during migration periods and/or where flyway systems of different populations intersect at major wetlands. Where such populations are indistinguishable in the field, as is usually the case, this can present practical problems as to which 1% threshold to apply. **Where such mixed populations occur (and these are inseparable in the field), it is suggested that the larger 1% threshold be used in the evaluation of sites”.** However, if the consequence is to be of a conservation problem to the disadvantage of there being the known presence of there being a very rare population as well as a more abundant one being present.

5.25. Consistent with the Ramsar Sites designation approach, the following additional guidance on this issue is suggested for the application of the FNS Criteria:

“When more than one biogeographical population of the same migratory waterbird species is considered to occur at the site, select the larger 1% threshold for the application of FNS Criteria B, C and E.”

5.26. **Applying “appreciable numbers” under globally threatened species Criterion C (4.3.v above).** If this term is to be retained in the FNS Criteria, guidance is needed on what is an “appreciable

number” of a globally threatened species using a site. The equivalent Ramsar Criterion does not include this term and so there is no Ramsar guidance to help here.

5.27. It is important to be clear that “appreciable numbers” does not necessarily mean a “large numbers” of individuals. This is because the total population size of many globally threatened species/populations is small, and so even small numbers of individuals can be a considerable proportion of that population.

5.28. It is more relevant to consider the “appreciable numbers” as an appreciable percentage of a population of a globally threatened species. The question then is: what percentage of such a population should be considered as “appreciable”?

5.29. This issue needs to be referred back to the TSc for further consideration.

6. Providing additional guidance on the application of FNS Criteria in the SIS

6.1. Given that the additional Criteria application guidance recommended above (section 5) will be quite lengthy it is not recommended that it is added to Field 10 of the current version of the SIS.

6.2. Rather, it is recommended that this additional guidance is provided as a new Annex 1 to the SIS, with a cross-reference to this guidance to be read before applying the Criteria added to SIS Field 10.

Recommendation 11. Provide the additional guidance for Partners on the correct application of the FNS Criteria as a new Annex 1 to the SIS.

7. Providing improved access to SIS information through the EAAFP website

7.1. Currently, lists of designated FNSs are provided country by country on the EAAFP website on: <https://www.eaaflyway.net/the-flyway/flyway-site-network/> But they are very hard to find, and it is not possible to access SISs through the front end this web-page.

7.2. It is not obvious that to access and download individual SISs requires scrolling down this page, where SISs are served up country-by-country. It is not possible to open a page with all FNSs/SISs available.

7.3. To access information in SISs requires going to each of these country pages, then opening and downloading each FNS SIS separately.

7.4. For anyone (Secretariat, TsC, Partners, third-parties) needing to access and analyse data and information within SISs for analyses across the Flyway Network this is a very cumbersome and time-consuming process.

7.5. Ways and means should be sought for establishing a coded database, with online search facilities, of the data and information in each SIS, along the lines of the Ramsar Sites Information Service (RSIS) <https://rsis.ramsar.org>.

Recommendation 12. Explore ways and means of establishing a coded database, with online search facilities, of the data and information in each SIS.