

ELEVENTH MEETING OF PARTNERS OF THE EAST ASIAN – AUSTRALASIAN FLYWAY PARTNERSHIP
Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, 12-17 March 2023



Draft Decision 8

Maintaining up-to-date Population Estimates and Trends of Migratory Waterbird Populations for the EAAFP

Submitted by the Philippines, Shorebird Working Group, BirdLife International and Wetlands International with input from the EAAFP Secretariat

Summary

In accordance with Decision 10.12 the Partnership adopted a systematic process to produce and maintain up-to-date information on waterbird population estimates, trends and 1% thresholds through the preparation of a periodic EAAF Conservation Status Review (CSR).

The EAAFP Secretariat had contracted Wetlands International to produce a first CSR. This was done in collaboration with the EAAFP Science Unit/Secretariat who supported extensive consultation with Working Groups, Task Forces, Partners, and other experts. In addition to information on waterbird populations, the CSR1 process has resulted in important recommendations for improving population estimates, trends and 1% thresholds for the future, including on ways to improve monitoring of waterbirds and the wetland sites they depend upon.

The EAAFP Technical Sub-Committee reviewed and approved the CSR1 technical report for use by the Partnership in July 2022 and the information has been made accessible on the Waterbird Populations Portal <http://wpp.wetlands.org/>.

Partners at the 11th Meeting of the Partners are requested to adopt this Decision including to:

- Accept and apply the latest CSR1 population size and trend estimates and 1% thresholds for future EAAF Flyway Network Site designations and prioritization work.
- Instruct inclusion in the work plan of the Technical Sub-Committee the development and implementation of a cooperative flyway-wide framework for integrated monitoring of waterbirds, with standardised national guidance and monitoring protocols to improve population size and trend estimates. In addition, for the work plan to include development of a framework for monitoring of Network Sites and other important wetlands used by migratory waterbirds.
- Initiate plans and identify resources to support preparation of CSR2.

Background

1. The East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) provides an informal and voluntary international framework for the conservation of migratory waterbirds in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway (EAAF) and aims to enhance the conservation status of the migratory waterbird groups covered by the Partnership.
2. The EAAFP Strategic Plan 2019-2028 in Objective 3 prioritises the need to “*Enhance flyway research and monitoring activities, build knowledge and promote exchange of information on waterbirds and their habitats*”. Key Result Area 3.2 states “*Conservation status reviews for waterbird populations are produced and updated to set and adapt priorities for action*”, for which two Indicators have been identified: 3.2.1 Data on migratory waterbird population estimates, trends and distributions is maintained by the Partnership, and 3.2.2 Two updates have been produced and published by 2028.
3. As per Decision 7.4, the EAAFP uses the “*Waterbird Population Estimates*” (WPE) process to: (a) provide updated information on waterbird population sizes and trends, and (b) provide the basis for deriving the EAAF Flyway Site Network thresholds (1%).
4. The WPE process is led on by Wetlands International and provides an authoritative list of recognised migratory waterbird species and their biogeographic populations in the EAAF and all other flyways with the most recent available estimates of their population sizes. The WPE process has evolved over time and currently feeds into a global dataset, accessible through the Waterbird Population Portal (WPP: <http://wpp.wetlands.org>) that contains the agreed most up to date available estimates of population sizes and the 1% thresholds derived from these. As such the WPP replaces the series of WPE publications, the last global update of which, WPE5, was published in 2012. Several initiatives have resulted in flyway/regional updates of population sizes since WPE5, including the latest editions in the Conservation Status Review (CSR) process in the African Eurasian Flyway.
5. In line with and learning from the CSR processes in the African Eurasian Flyway, as per EAAFP Decision 10.12 of 2018, entitled *Development of a Conservation Status Review of Migratory Waterbird Populations for the EAAFP*, Partners agreed on the following actions:
 - a. *Adopts* a systematic process to maintain up-to-date information on waterbird population estimates, trends and 1% thresholds through the preparation of a periodic EAAF Conservation Status Review;
 - b. *Calls* on the Partners and the Secretariat to support periodic production of the EAAF Conservation Status Review (at least every alternate MoP or not more than four yearly) as appropriate within national circumstances.
 - c. *Mandates* Wetlands International to coordinate preparation of the EAAF Conservation Status Review in consultation with the Technical Sub-Committee, Science Unit of the Secretariat, Partners, Working Groups, Task Forces and other experts, with a target for a first edition to be produced by end 2019;
 - d. *Calls* on Secretariat in liaison with Wetlands International to ensure that the output of the periodic EAAF Conservation Status Reviews feed into the global WPE updates.

- e. *Calls* on the Monitoring Task Force to develop standardised guidance required for development and implementation of comprehensive national waterbird monitoring programmes.
6. The EAAFP Secretariat contracted Wetlands International in early 2021 to produce the first Conservation Status Review of Migratory Waterbird Populations for the EAAF (CSR1) with financial resources provided by Secretariat and the Norwegian Environmental Agency. Wetlands International provided in kind resources for the consultation and report finalisation process.
7. The CSR1 was produced in close coordination with the EAAFP Science Unit/Secretariat who supported extensive consultation with the Technical Sub-Committee, Partners, Working Groups, Task Forces and other experts. The preparation of the CSR was undertaken in close consultation with all stakeholders; with plans and proposed timeline agreed in a webinar in April 2021, the draft report being presented at a second webinar in May 2022 and a finalised approved report presented to the EAAFP MOP11 preparatory webinar in August 2022.
8. The EAAFP Technical Sub-Committee reviewed and approved the CSR1 Summary Report to be considered for use by the Partnership in July 2022. Thereafter, the CSR1 Summary Report was made accessible on the EAAFP (<https://www.eaaflyway.net/csr-1-launch/>) and Wetlands International websites (<https://www.wetlands.org/eaaf-conservation-status-review1/>) for download.
9. The EAAFP Secretariat in liaison with Wetlands International has made CSR1 population size and trend estimates, 1% thresholds and boundary maps available on the Waterbird Populations Portal (WPP) (<http://wpp.wetlands.org/>).
10. The CSR1 provides the latest information on 276 EAAF biogeographic populations of 216 migratory waterbird species, including:
 - a. Size estimates and 1% thresholds for 248 (90%) populations;
 - b. 22 (8%) populations have population size estimates and 1% thresholds for the first time (since the WPE5);
 - c. 32 (12%) of 1% thresholds are lower than previous assessments (WPE5) and 57 (21%) are higher;
 - d. Of the 159 populations with a known trend, 67 (42%) are decreasing and only 43 (27%) are increasing, with 48 (30%) stable or fluctuating; while trends could not be assessed for 118 (43%) populations;
 - e. 34 (16%) of the EAAFP populations belong to species on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2021 and a further 25 (12%) are of Near Threatened species, reflecting the high proportion of threatened and near threatened species in the EAAF.
 - f. Boundary maps for all biogeographic populations have been produced for the first time.
11. Eight families of seabirds, namely Alcidae (auks, murres and puffins), Oceanitidae (Austral storm petrels), Procellariidae (shearwaters & petrels), Stercorariidae (skuas and jaegers), Phaethontidae (tropicbirds), Hydrobatidae (Northern storm petrels), Sulidae (gannets and boobies), Fregatidae (frigatebirds) have not been included in the CSR1. Biogeographic populations with populations size

and trend estimates and population boundaries of these species need to be defined for review by the Technical Sub-Committee to enable the populations be included in future CSR editions.

12. The CSR1 identifies major gaps and limitations in knowledge about the distribution, size estimates and trends of many populations exist and provides the detailed recommendations (see CSR1 Summary Report, accessible on <https://www.eaaflyway.net/csr-1-launch/>) to address these major gaps, including:
 - a. Improve information on waterbird population size estimates and trends,
 - b. Improve understanding of distribution and definition of biogeographic populations, and
 - c. Improve the procedures for the preparation of future EAAFP CSRs.

13. Decision 10.12 also called on the Monitoring Task Force to develop standardised guidance required for development and implementation of comprehensive national waterbird monitoring programmes. Additionally EAAFP Decision 7.6 called for reporting on status of Network sites, including current and future threats to the sites and its migratory waterbirds. In response to these and above listed recommendations from the CSR1, a proposal for development and implementation of a cooperative flyway-wide framework for integrated monitoring of waterbirds, to be overseen by the Waterbird Monitoring Task Force, has been prepared (Annex II). The framework would include development of standardised national guidance and monitoring protocols with a focus on (a) improving knowledge of population size and trend estimates to ensure accurate, precise and up to date information to support the work of the Partnership, and (b) monitoring the status of Network Sites and other important wetlands used by migratory waterbirds.

Decisions:

At the EAAFP MOP11, Partners will be invited to adopt this draft decision, including to:

1. Welcome and note the preparation and finalisation of the CSR1 report that was approved by the Technical Sub Committee in July 2022 and that the information has been made publicly available on the Waterbird Populations Portal.

2. Accept the latest population size, trend estimates and 1% thresholds from the CSR as available through the WPP for future EAAF Flyway Network Site designations and prioritization work of the Partnership.

3. Instruct inclusion in the work plan of the Technical Sub-Committee the development of a cooperative flyway-wide framework for integrated monitoring of waterbirds with standardised national guidance and monitoring protocols to (a) improve knowledge of population size and trend estimates to ensure accurate, precise, and of up to date information to support the work of the Partnership, and (b) monitor Network Sites and other important wetlands used by migratory waterbirds.

4. Prioritise, facilitate and resource the periodic preparation of the CSRs through the Secretariat budget, starting with preparation of CSR2 for completion by 2026.

Annex 1

Draft Decision 8

Maintaining up-to-date Population Estimates and Trends of Migratory Waterbird Populations for the EAAFP

Submitted by the Philippines, Shorebird Working Group, BirdLife International and Wetlands International with input from the EAAFP Secretariat.

Aware that the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) provides an informal and voluntary international framework for the conservation of migratory waterbirds in the EAAF and aims to enhance the conservation status of the migratory waterbird groups covered by the Partnership with the goal that “Migratory waterbirds and their habitats in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway are recognised and conserved for the benefit of people and biodiversity”.

Recognising that up-to-date information on the status of populations of migratory waterbirds in the EAAF is required for a range of purposes, including: (a) deriving the EAAF Flyway Site Network thresholds (1%), (b) providing an international context for periodic prioritization of populations, (c) providing a technically sound basis to develop and implement conservation action plans for these populations, and (d) assisting in measuring the success of the Partnership in achieving its overall goal.

Recalling that Objective 3 of the EAAFP Strategic Plan 2019-2028 on enhancing flyway research and monitoring activities, calls for Key Result Area (KRA) 3.1 that states “National monitoring systems to assess the status of migratory waterbirds and their habitats are established, maintained and further enhanced.” for which two Indicators have been identified: 3.1.1 A standardized monitoring methodology for migratory waterbirds and their habitat is developed and used in nationally coordinated monitoring programmes, and 3.1.2 All country partners have nationally-coordinated monitoring programs in place. In addition, KRA 3.2 states “Conservation status reviews for waterbird populations are produced and updated to set and adapt priorities for action” of the Strategic Plan; for which two Indicators have been identified: 3.2.1 Data on migratory waterbird population estimates, trends and distributions is maintained by the Partnership, and 3.2.2 Two updates have been produced and published by 2028.

Recognising that EAAFP Decision 10.12 *Development of a Conservation Status Review of Migratory Waterbird Populations for the EAAFP* inter alia “Calls on the Partners and the Secretariat to support periodic production of the EAAF Conservation Status Review (at least every alternate MoP or not more than four yearly) as appropriate within national circumstances”.

Taking into account that the first Conservation Status Review of Migratory Waterbird Populations for the EAAF (CSR1) was produced in July 2022 and provides the latest information on the 276 EAAF biogeographic populations of 216 migratory waterbird species and boundary maps for all biogeographic populations for the first time. And noting the CSR1 Summary Report was made accessible on the EAAFP website (<https://www.eaaflyway.net/csr-1-launch/>) in July 2022.

Acknowledging the role of Wetlands International for the preparation of CSR1 in coordination with the EAAFP Science Unit/Secretariat and in consultation with the Technical Sub-Committee, Partners, Working Groups, Task Forces and other experts.

Thanking the EAAFP Technical Sub-Committee for its approval of the CSR1 Summary Report in July 2022 and for the advice for it to be used by the Partnership.

Acknowledging the financial resources provided by the EAAFP Secretariat, the Norwegian Environmental Agency and Wetlands International for preparation of the CSR1.

Noting that the EAAF Secretariat in liaison with Wetlands International has made all CSR1 population size and trend estimates, 1% thresholds and boundary maps available on the Waterbird Populations Portal (www.wpp.wetlands.org).

Further noting that the CSR1 has identified major gaps and limitations in knowledge about the distribution, size estimates and trends of many populations exist and provides the following recommendations to address these major gaps:

1. *Improve information on waterbird population size estimates and trends:*
 - a. Develop and resource a comprehensive flyway monitoring programme covering all EAAFP waterbird populations.
 - b. Give priority to the 28 populations for which no population size estimate exists and populations for which no recent size and trend estimate are available (nearly 70 populations). This should include breeding surveys, migration surveys, and special monitoring efforts for small and threatened populations, secretive populations, those occurring outside wetlands and offshore populations.
 - c. Provide national monitoring guidance (as called for by MOP Decision 10.12), including advice and standards for the appropriate methods to monitor different waterbird populations.
 - d. Strengthen national monitoring efforts, through incorporation of waterbird monitoring activities as a priority action within EAAFP national and site partnerships (including through their incorporation into new EAAF guidelines being developed by the Partnership in 2021-22) [as covered by MOP11. DD 6].
 - e. Establish a partnership of organisations with international experience of waterbird monitoring to develop and support implementation of an EAAF monitoring programme, including development of national monitoring guidance.
 - f. Strengthen and resource ongoing national and local waterbird monitoring efforts in all EAAFP countries (in line with KRA 3.1 of the EAAFP Strategic Plan 2019-2028) to ensure

- regular monitoring at all sites of national and international importance (incl. EAAF Network, Ramsar and World Heritage Sites).
- g. Strengthen and expand the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) in areas with currently low coverage and capacity gaps.
2. *Improve understanding of distribution and definition of biogeographic populations:*
 - a. Establish a procedure linked to the CSR to review the list of species and populations covered by the EAAFP to incorporate taxonomic updates, review of new information, update delineations or definitions and authorise changes to populations prior to the review of size estimates and trends.
 - b. Prioritise research to determine the international movement patterns of populations for which information is limited (as called for by MOP Decision 9.9).
 3. *Improve the procedures for the preparation of future EAAFP CSRs:*
 - a. Produce CSR updates in a regular reporting cycle (every three years, or “at least every alternate MOP or not more than four yearly” as called for by MOP Decision 10.12) that ensures familiarity and establishes a routine, both for data reporting from monitoring programmes and for experts contributing to the consultation process.
 - b. • Identify ways to enhance and strengthen involvement of the existing EAAF Working Groups and Task Forces in future CSR developments.
 - c. • Establish additional EAAF Working Groups to cover taxonomic gaps and to contribute to future reviews.

Recognising that these CSR1 recommendations can only be addressed by strengthening existing monitoring programmes, establishing new monitoring programmes and improving the systems, protocols and procedures to collate and synthesise new information. This will require local and national stakeholder engagement along with international partnerships,

Commending Partners that are already supporting international monitoring activities and initiatives, including Japan with the ongoing annual support to the regional coordination of the Asian Waterbird Census undertaken by Wetlands International and to the ASEAN Flyway Network Project coordinated by the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity that has helped to address geographic gaps in the ASEAN region between 2019-2020,

Further recalling that the Waterbird Fund <https://waterbird.fund> was established in response to calls of the Ramsar Convention and CMS and AEWA to receive and channel resources to support implementation of waterbird monitoring and ongoing support from other funding schemes in the flyway,

Further noting the latest CSR1 population size and trend estimates and 1% thresholds are already being applied by Partners for recent EAAF Flyway Network Site designations, in updating Network Site Information Sheets and in informing prioritisation of important sites for the Regional Flyway Initiative led by the Asian Development Bank and BirdLife International,

Further noting that the biogeographic populations of 8 families of seabirds, namely Alcidae (auks, murre and puffins), Oceanitidae (Austral storm petrels), Procellariidae (shearwaters & petrels), Stercorariidae (skuas and jaegers), Phaethontidae (tropicbirds), Hydrobatidae (Northern storm petrels), Sulidae (gannets and boobies), Fregatidae (frigatebirds) need to be defined for review by the Technical Sub-Committee to enable the populations be included in future CSR editions,

Noting in relation to the updating of the global Waterbird Population Estimates, the Ramsar COP14 Resolution XIV.xx. requests its Scientific Technical Review Panel “to develop a technical proposal to enable the resourcing of both the update process and data collection. The technical proposal will address the process for the future Waterbird Population Estimates updates, in consultation with Contracting Parties, Secretariat, relevant flyway agreements and partnerships, Wetlands International and interested entities.”, and

Recalling the EAAFP Monitoring Task Force recommendation to MOP9 for development of a cooperative programme that builds on the existing monitoring activities, to strengthen and enhance waterbird and site monitoring across the Flyway, Decision 10.12 that called on the Monitoring Task Force to develop standardised guidance required for development and implementation of comprehensive national waterbird monitoring programmes and Decision 7.6 that called for reporting on status of Network sites.

The 11th Meeting of Partners of the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership

In relation to the CSR,

1. *Agrees* that the latest population size, trend estimates and 1% thresholds from the CSR process as available through the WPP are used by the Partnership, including for future EAAF Flyway Network Site designations;
2. *Requests* Wetlands International (as per Decision 10.12) to coordinate preparation of a proposal and budget for the CSR2 to be developed in consultation with the Technical sub-Committee, Science Unit of the Secretariat, Anatidae-, Shorebird-, Crane-, Seabird- and Black-faced Spoonbill Working Groups, Scaly-sided Merganser-, Spoon-billed Sandpiper-, Far Eastern Curlew- and Waterbird Monitoring Task Forces, other expert networks and Partners;
3. *Further requests* the Seabird Working Group as a priority to propose the delineation, size and trend estimates of biogeographic populations of 8 families of seabirds, namely Alcidae (auks, murre and puffins), Oceanitidae (Austral storm petrels), Procellariidae (shearwaters & petrels), Stercorariidae (skuas and jaegers), Phaethontidae (tropicbirds), Hydrobatidae (Northern storm petrels), Sulidae (gannets and boobies), Fregatidae (frigatebirds) in time for inclusion to CSR2;
4. *Encourages* the Secretariat to prioritise, facilitate and resource the periodic preparation of the CSRs through the Secretariat budget, starting with preparation of CSR2 for completion by 2026;

5. *Calls* on Partners and the Secretariat to contribute resources to support maintenance and updates of the Waterbird Populations Portal to improve delivery of information and support the work of the Partnership;

In relation to improving waterbird size and trend information through development/ strengthening of comprehensive national waterbird monitoring programmes

6. *Instructs* inclusion in the work plan of the Technical Sub-Committee the development of a robust EAAF collaborative monitoring framework jointly with the Anatidae-, Shorebird-, Crane-, Seabird- and Black-faced Spoonbill Working Groups, Scaly-sided Merganser-, Spoon-billed Sandpiper-, Far Eastern Curlew- and Waterbird Monitoring Task Force and other expert networks. This will need to include development of national guidelines, to ensure standardised monitoring to improve (a) waterbird population estimates and trends and (b) wetland status monitoring of EAAF Network Sites and potential network sites, building on the Asian Waterbird Census <http://www.wetlands.org/awc> and other monitoring programmes;
7. *Urges* Partners to provide technical and funding resources to progress development and implementation of the EAAF collaborative monitoring framework, including for organisation of regional workshops, training of trainer courses and mentoring;
8. *Further encourages* Partners and others who are already supporting international monitoring initiatives to continue and strengthen their support and invites other Partners to contribute to the development and maintenance of waterbird and wetland monitoring and particularly to establish and support initiatives for species/populations for which there is poor or outdated estimates and in those geographic regions where monitoring is lacking or is insufficient;
9. *Further urges* Partners and other donors to provide financial contributions for roll out of national waterbird and wetland monitoring and research through the Waterbird Fund or other international and national funding mechanisms, and
10. *Encourages* the Waterbird Monitoring Task Force, working with the TsC, to report to each MOP on development and implementation of the EAAF collaborative monitoring framework.