



15th MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
09–11 April 2019, Bonn, Germany

**PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL FOR AN INVENTORY FRAMEWORK OF INTERNATIONALLY
AND NATIONALLY IMPORTANT SITES**

Introduction

According to Article III.2(c) Parties shall “*identify sites and habitats for migratory waterbirds occurring within their territory and encourage the protection, management, rehabilitation and restoration of these sites, in liaison with those bodies listed in Article IX, paragraphs (a) and (b) of this Agreement, concerned with habitat conservation*”.

According to Paragraph 3.1.2 of Annex 3 to the Agreement (the AEWA Action Plan) “*Parties shall endeavour, as a matter of priority, to identify all sites of international or national importance for populations listed in Table 1*”. In addition, according to Paragraph 3.2.2 “*Parties shall endeavour to give special protection to those wetlands which meet internationally accepted criteria of international importance*”.

According to Paragraph 7.4(c) the Agreement secretariat, in coordination with the Technical Committee and the Parties, shall prepare an international review on “*the networks of sites used by each population, including reviews of the protection status of each site as well as of the management measures taken in each case*”.

Target 3.1 of the AEWA Strategic Plan 2019-2027 states that “*Known sites of national or international importance for populations listed in Table 1 of the AEWA Action Plan have been reviewed and confirmed (in conformity with Paragraph 3.1.2 of the Action Plan) and at least three-quarters of the priority site gaps¹ are filled in the case of Contracting Parties*”. The Strategic Plan notes that neither the Agreement text, nor that of the AEWA Action Plan, provides guidance on interpreting these provisions. Therefore, the AEWA Strategic Plan 2019-2027 tasks the Technical Committee to develop and disseminate a simple framework for this inventory of sites of national and international importance. It adds that “*This framework should include provision of brief guidance to Parties on interpreting AEWA Action Plan references to “sites of international or national importance” and “internationally accepted criteria of international importance”. It should also take into account existing site network criteria, including those used to identify EU Special Protection Areas, Ramsar Sites, Emerald Network Sites (Council of Europe/Bern Convention) and Important Bird & Biodiversity Areas (BirdLife International)*”. The plan also recognises the special relevance of AEWA Resolution 5.19 on *Encouragement of Further Joint Implementation of AEWA and the Ramsar Convention* here.

Action a) requires the Parties to review and confirm an inventory of the known nationally and internationally important sites in their territories by MOP8 taking into consideration existing site inventories and using the framework developed by the Technical Committee. This means that the Technical Committee shall provide this framework as soon as possible.

¹ As identified in *Consolidated Report on the Subregional Gap Identification Workshops under the Wings Over Wetlands Project* WOW Technical Report 12, 2008.

Action b) of the same Target requires updating the Critical Site Network Tool with the revised site information communicated by the Parties by MOP9.

Action c) foresees that gap-filling surveys will be implemented at national level by MOP10 and the results will be incorporated also into the Critical Site Network Tool. This action recognises that not all nationally and internationally important sites have been identified yet.

Action d) foresees that Parties will review and update their site lists as necessary and communicate any changes to the AEWA Secretariat by MOP10 and every other MOP thereafter. This means that the AEWA Strategic Plan foresees a periodic update of the site information based on site monitoring.

This means that a framework for a site inventory should tackle the following issues:

1. Interpretation of the terms of “*sites of international or national importance*” and “*internationally accepted criteria of international importance*”;
2. Definition of information to be included into the Critical Site Network Tool;
3. Designing a process for the review and confirmation of known sites of international importance that represents a minimal administrative burden for the Parties.

Interpretation of the term ‘*internationally accepted criteria of international importance*’

It appears from the formulation of Paragraph 3.2.2 “*Parties shall endeavour to give special protection to those wetlands which meet internationally accepted criteria of international importance*” that the Agreement does not envisage the application of one set of criteria of international importance, but it recognises that there are more than one internationally accepted sets of criteria of international importance.

This view is consistent with the part of Article III.2(c) of the Agreement which states that Parties shall identify sites “*in liaison with those bodies listed in Article IX, paragraphs (a) and (b) of this Agreement, concerned with habitat conservation*”. Paragraph (a) names the Secretariats of CMS and its instruments, the Convention on Wetlands, CITES, the African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitat and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Paragraph (b) names “*the secretariats of other pertinent conventions and international instruments in respect of matters of common interest*”: this includes but is not restricted to the secretariats of the World Heritage Convention, the CAFF, HELCOM and OSPAR Conventions, the Barcelona Convention, etc. and it shall include the European Commission in its capacity of overseeing the implementation of the EU Birds Directive.

A more permissive interpretation would also include other criteria of international importance relevant for migratory waterbirds adopted under international processes such as the [Important Bird Areas \(IBA\) Programme of BirdLife International](#). The relevance of the IBA inventories to identify Ramsar Sites was recognised by the Secretariat of the Convention that provided a foreword to all three volumes of the [Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas and potential Ramsar Sites in Africa, Asia and Europe](#). In the European Union, the relevance of IBAs in identifying SPAs under the EU Birds Directive has been confirmed in numerous decisions of the European Court of Justice.

[Critical Sites](#) were identified during the Wings Over Wetlands Project to support the implementation of the relevant site identification provisions of AEWA and the Ramsar Convention. Two criteria were developed in consultation

with the Technical Committee. One to identify sites for globally threatened waterbirds (CSN 1), the other to identify sites that support 1% of a biogeographic population (CSN2).

The [Global Standard for the Identification of Key Biodiversity Areas](#) prepared by the IUCN Species Survival Commission and the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas in association with the IUCN Global Species Programme builds on the IBA Criteria and was designed to aid the identification of sites of global importance for species conservation.

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) has developed the [Critical Habitat concept](#) in its Performance Standard 6 (PS6) on Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Resources. The importance of this is that a number of multilateral banks have policies closely aligned with PS6 and more than 75 private banks have signed up to the Equator Principles and have an implicit commitment to PS6.

Interpretation of the term ‘site of international importance’

Based on the discussion above, it is proposed that the Technical Committee adopts the following interpretation: *“The term ‘site of international importance’ includes any site qualifying for one or more populations listed on Table 1 of AEWA’s Annex 3 under the site selection criteria of (a) an international convention or another legal instrument operating in the Agreement area or (b) the global or the relevant regional criteria for Critical Sites defined under the UNEP/GEF African-Eurasian Flyway Project (Wings over Wetlands), Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas defined by BirdLife International or Critical Habitats defined under the International Finance Corporation’s Performance Standard 6 (PS6) on Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Resources”.*

Interpretation of the term ‘site of national importance’

It is understandable that there are no generally accepted criteria to identify sites of national importance. The inclusion of sites of national importance in the suite of sites to be inventorised recognises that there are many cases when AEWA populations would benefit from special site management measures even if these would not meet relevant criteria of international importance. One typical case includes important breeding areas for dispersed species, a typical situation for some waders and waterfowl. Often, these have certain areas that are more important than others for their conservation and management efforts should target these areas to maintain national breeding populations. An example for such areas is the meadow bird areas in the Netherlands. Another example includes congregations of species that have very large 1% thresholds (e.g. > 20,000 individuals) either because the population has a large range and population size or because the population size is insufficiently known. The Black Tern, a colonial breeding species with a 1% threshold of 4,000 individuals, would illustrate such situation. Protecting sites at the edges of the range might be also well justified maintaining genetic variability.

Based on the discussion above, it is proposed that the Technical Committee adopts the following interpretation: *“‘Sites of national importance’ are sites that do not meet any criteria of international importance but identified as being important for one or more populations listed on Table 1 of AEWA’s Annex 3 either through protected area designation or in any national site inventory process recognised by the respective national AEWA administrative authority as relevant for this purpose”.*

Definition of information to be included into the Critical Sites Network Tool

Site info

- site name
- site location (central coordinates)
- (approximate) site boundaries

Population data

- species name (only species listed on Annex 2 of AEWA)
- population name (only populations listed on Table 1)
- minimum and maximum site population estimate in total individuals
- start and end years of estimate

Pressures or Threats

Note: This is the most debated area of site inventories. Details to be elaborated under the task dealing with site monitoring.

Conservation measures

- Existing protected area* designations of the area
- Type of overlap (e.g. protected area included into or intersect with the site, or the site includes the protected area).
- Coverage (i.e. the extent of overlapping area between the site and the protected area)
- Management (just simple classes of management like no management, no management, but management plan exists, management plan exists and partly implemented, management plan exists and fully implemented. Categories to be defined under the task dealing with site monitoring).

Process for the review and confirmation of known sites

Parties generally prefer synergies and are keen to avoid reporting multiple times the same information. Therefore, we propose a process that builds on the information that is already available in the CSN Tool (Critical Sites and IBA data) or can be sourced from the secretariats of the conventions or instruments mentioned in Article IX (a) and (b).

The process would include the following steps:

- (1) In 2019, the Secretariat compiles a list of identified sites based on the above-mentioned sources;
- (2) In 2019, the Secretariat sends this list to the Parties for a comprehensive review.
- (3) In 2020, Parties can:
 - (a) confirm an identified site;
 - (b) reject an identified site explaining the reason of the rejection;
 - (c) add a new site;
 - (d) confirm the site information provided by the Secretariat;
 - (e) update the site information provided by the Secretariat.

- (4) In 2021, the Secretariat reviews the revised list of identified sites in consultation with the Parties and the Technical Committee and confirms the final agreed list.
- (5) In 2022, the Secretariat incorporates the agreed AEWA flyway network sites into the CSN Tool 2.0.

Action requested from the Technical Committee

The Technical Committee is invited to review this proposal for an inventory framework and decide on the modalities of the framework that will be put in place.