



SECOND SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES TO THE AGREEMENT ON THE  
CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS (AEWA)  
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## **OPERATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT OF THE AEWA SMALL CONSERVATION GRANT FUND**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Article V, paragraph 3, of the Agreement authorizes the Meeting of the Parties to establish a conservation fund from voluntary contributions of Parties or from any other source for the purpose of financing monitoring, researching, training in projects relating to conservation including protection and management, of migratory waterbirds. At the first session of the Meeting of the Parties (November 1999, South Africa) it was decided to establish a Small Conservation Grant Fund. At the same time the Agreement Secretariat was instructed, to consider the advice of the Technical Committee and lessons learned from the experience of the Ramsar Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use, to submit to the second session of the Meeting of the Parties proposals for operation of the Fund, including administration, eligibility criteria, allocation of funds and fund-raising. Management of the Fund by an appropriate international organisation should be taken into consideration.

At the second as well as at the third meeting of the Technical Committee this issue was discussed and the general feeling was that the SGF would be a useful tool for promoting the Agreement. As promised, the Executive Secretary discussed the running of a SGF with the Ramsar during the Ramsar Standing Committee meeting, which took place from 4 to 9 December 2001 in Gland, Switzerland.

The Technical Committee took note of the concerns of the Ramsar Standing Committee regarding the administrative burden for the Ramsar Bureau on managing the SGF funds. Furthermore it was noted that frustration occurs among applicants as well as staff members due to funding problems. Good proposals had to be turned down due to lack of funds. Therefore within the Ramsar Bureau a proposal was developed and tabled at the Standing Committee meeting to establish a special Trust Fund that could be filled with voluntary contributions up to a few million dollars. The idea is that the interest would be used for SGF projects. By doing this at least the sustainable flow of budget annually would be secured. Through an intervention the AEWA Secretariat urged the Ramsar Standing Committee to consider the establishment of a common Trust Funds for Wetlands and Waterbirds for the Ramsar Convention and AEWA. The following proposals will come back to this point.

## Proposal of the Secretariat

The lessons learned from the Ramsar Bureau experiences regarding the SGF for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use are:

- the Ramsar SGF is an extremely important tool to raise awareness on the Convention which encourage Range States to accede to the Convention;
- Irregularity of the contributions causes serious planning problems. The transparent functioning of the SGF relies on public calls for proposals, but the Bureau staff never knows in advance how much money is going to be available. Hence the strong disappointment for institutions submitting good proposals, at the Bureau's invitation, which later have to be turned down due to lack of sufficient resources;
- Country eligibility and funding sources. For donors, it is not clear whether the SGF is a development cooperation fund or an environmental fund. Ramsar Administrative Authorities (in general, nature conservation agencies) who are willing to give funds might be reluctant because they are not supposed to give funds for development cooperation work, which is the competence of other institutions. On the other hand, development cooperation agencies are sometimes reluctant to give funds for "environmental protection" as their agenda is clearly linked to poverty alleviation. Some development cooperation agencies want to concentrate on "least developed countries" or have priority countries and regions and are therefore not willing to give unrestricted funds that might be used in richer countries;
- Monitoring of the project is difficult, due to the project size (maximum of SFr 40,000) and the availability of staff. Also the cost of systematic *in situ* monitoring is far too expensive;

These are some of the concerns the Ramsar Bureau has to deal with.

Although the AEWA SGF has been established by the Meeting of the Parties at its first Session by adopting Resolutions 1.7. Until now no funds have been accrued for this. Voluntary contributions have been received from several countries but these were earmarked for the projects mentioned in the International Implementation Priorities AEWA 2000-2004. To avoid any misunderstanding in the future it should be determined which kind of projects would be eligible for funding. The Secretariat proposes the use of similar terms of reference as used by the Ramsar Bureau and which would read as follows:

- a) activities that clearly contribute to the implementation of the Agreement;
- b) responses to emergencies affecting populations of AEWA species and/ or sites used by AEWA species;
- c) grants for small project up to a maximum of US \$ 15,000.
- d) only developing countries and countries with economies in transition eligible for funding.

The main problem however will be probably the irregularity of contributions to the AEWA SGF. The Secretariat studied the proposal of the Ramsar Bureau to establish a Trust Fund, which would have two 'windows'; a 'sinking fund window' and an 'endowment fund' window. According to the information received from the Senior Advisor on Environment and Development of the Ramsar Bureau it would be feasible to accrue voluntary contribution to fill the endowment fund and in the proposal discussed at the Ramsar Standing Committee it was mentioned that the critical mass is EUROS 4 million. The sinking fund window will be used for voluntary contributions to earmarked projects and later on to revert yearly the benefits of the endowment fund. The Agreement Secretariat is in favour of such an approach but has its concerns regarding accruing the necessary funds. In general Contracting Parties or organisations are not eager to provide voluntary contributions without requesting a certain output. Perhaps a feasibility study should be done before proceeding with the implementation of this idea. The Secretariat reiterates that it should be investigated if the establishment of a common Wetlands and Waterbird Trust Fund for AEWA and Ramsar Convention would be feasible and desirable. Being aware that the Ramsar Convention is a global treaty there is of course a need to further elaborate this idea in close cooperation with the Ramsar Bureau to divide the available funds among the certain teams and regions.

In the view of the Agreement Secretariat the establishment of a common AEWA/ Ramsar Trust Fund has some pros and cons.

The CONS are:

As said before the SGF is an important tool to promote the Agreement or Convention. The question is if a common SGF Fund would have the same positive impact for the Ramsar Convention as well as for AEWA. This will probably be one of the cons. Furthermore, the selection of the projects to be approved has to be done by a common group of experts. In addition clear common operational guidelines have to be drafted to clarify each other responsibility and in particular the role of the Ramsar Bureau and AEWA Secretariat. As Secretariat you have less influence in the decision making process of a common Trust Fund than if you had your own Trust Fund.

The PROS are:

In the Final Act of the Negotiation meeting on AEWA the meeting welcomed the intention of the UNEP/ CMS Secretariat and the Ramsar Bureau to create a formal basis for their future co-operation and concerted action, for the purpose of facilitating implementation of the Agreement, and recommended that organs of the Agreement, once established, be included in these arrangements. Last year the Agreement Secretariat put quite some efforts in the development of the Joint Work Plan between Ramsar Bureau, CMS and AEWA Secretariat. The establishment of a common Trust Fund would stimulate close co-operation between the Ramsar Bureau and AEWA Secretariat. A common Trust Fund would make also possible that the Trust Fund is administrated by the Ramsar Bureau/ IUCN, which would be more cost effective probably than administration through UNEP/ UNON. Joint activities in seeking the necessary funds would probably be highly appreciated by donor countries and it might leverage more funds. Through close co-operation between the Ramsar Bureau, the AEWA Secretariat and the common special committee, which is involved in selection of the project, duplication of activities could be avoided and some synergies could be gained.

Taking into account that the MOP1 already established an AEWA SGF the Secretariat proposes for the short term with the assistance of the Technical Committee to seek potential sponsors. According to the UN Rules and Regulations it would probably not be possible to establish a SGF Fund outside the UN solely for AEWA. The main concern of the Contracting Parties is that 13 % of any contribution to this Trust Fund would be taken by UNON to cover the administration costs. Although this seems to be quite high the difference between these figures and figures used by International NGOs/ IGOs being 7,5-10 % is small. The benefit of establishing a Trust Fund under United Nations is that the funds are really secured for the future and not relying on the financial situation of a specific organisation.

The idea is to fill this SGF fund in year one and to announce in year two how much funds are available for that year and to request project proposals for year two. During year two the Secretariat would seek resources to replenish the SGF so that by the end of year two again announcement could be made on how much it would be available for year three and so on. Similar to the current procedure regarding the Ramsar SGF the Secretariat would screen all project proposals carefully and would rate them according to a very objective system of points and would submit them to the Technical Committee for approval.

This proposal was discussed and approved at the third meeting of the Technical Committee.