

Agenda item 12.3

**Operational Guidelines for the Ramsar Small Grants Fund in the
triennium 2006-2008**

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to review and approve the Small Grants Fund Operational Guidelines for 2006-2008. The Standing Committee is further invited to confirm that the revised OECD DAC List of overseas development aid recipients should also form the basis for the allocation of funds by the Secretariat for sponsored delegates to Ramsar meetings, when not otherwise established by Resolutions of the Conference of Contracting Parties.

1. The Operational Guidelines for the Ramsar Small Grants Fund (SGF) provide guidance to Contracting Parties and others wishing to submit funding proposals, establish the project review and assessment procedures followed by the Secretariat, and publish the project cycle and timing for each of the three years of a triennium. They are considered and approved by the Standing Committee.
2. The draft Operational Guidelines for the 2006-2008 triennium, prepared by the Secretariat, are attached to this note. These are derived from those approved for the 2003-2005 triennium, with some proposed modifications which are summarised below.
3. So as to initiate the 2006 project cycle in a timely manner, the Secretariat has already made available to Contracting Parties these draft Operational Guidelines, noting that they are regarded as provisional pending approval by the 34th meeting of the Standing Committee.
4. No major amendments are proposed by the Secretariat to the structure and content of the Operational Guidelines, or to the procedures to be followed. Aside from minor language and editorial corrections to update the terminologies used in the text, the following modifications, based on the experience of the Secretariat staff in assessing and handling proposals during the 2003-2005 triennium, are drawn to the attention of the Standing Committee:
 - i) The text in Section A subsections II and III concerning eligibility to apply for funding and the forms of funding assistance available has been amended so as to make clearer which countries can apply, and which forms of assistance are available to Contracting Parties and which to non-Parties, and these clarifications are also reflected in Section B.1 (Project Summary and Endorsement Form). As before, eligibility is based on the OECD List of Aid Recipients (DAC list), but note that an updated DAC list was issued by OECD in December 2005 (see below), and this will now form the basis of countries' eligibility.

- ii) The project cycle in Annex I has been updated for 2006-2008, and the Standing Committee may wish to note that owing to the anticipated timings of its future meetings it will be necessary to circulate and consult electronically on the Secretariat's recommendations for project approvals, at least for the 2006 cycle.
 - iii) Following difficulties in the submission of clear budget information in a significant number of projects in recent years, the guidance and budget tables for the provision of project budget information in Section B.2 (H.) have been restructured and clarified.
5. In December 2005, the OECD issued an updated Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list of overseas development aid recipients, for reporting on 2005, 2006 and 2007. This list is included in the SGF Operational Guidelines as Section G. The Standing Committee may wish to reaffirm the terms of its Decisions SC25-28 and SC26-40 that this DAC List should form the basis of eligibility for SGF funds and the allocation of funds by the Secretariat for sponsored delegates to Ramsar meetings, when not otherwise established by Resolutions of the Conference of Contracting Parties. It should be noted that the new DAC List is no longer divided into Parts I and II, and that countries with economies in transition no longer form a separate category. The new List contains four categories of countries and territories: Least Developed Countries, Other Low Income Countries, Lower Middle Income Countries and Territories, and Upper Middle Income Countries and Territories.
6. On this basis, the Secretariat suggests that the Standing Committee's decision on this matter could read as follows:
- a) the OECD DAC List of Aid Recipients should continue to be used *mutatis mutandis* as applying to Ramsar Contracting Parties, and other countries that are eligible for accession, for eligibility for the Small Grants Fund as established by Resolution VI.6;
 - b) the Secretariat, when allocating assistance for participation at Ramsar meetings, should use the OECD DAC list in the following order of priorities, when not otherwise established by Resolutions of the Conference of Contracting Parties:
 - i) Least Developed Country (LDC) Contracting Parties;
 - ii) Other Low Income Contracting Parties;
 - iii) Contracting Parties which are Lower Middle Income Countries and Territories; and
 - iv) Contracting Parties which are Upper Middle Income Countries and Territories.
 - c) in case funds are still available, they should be allocated to a second delegate from LDCs; and
 - d) in case funds are still available, they should be allocated to a second delegate from other eligible countries in order of priority as in b) above.