

Agenda item 6.4

The operation of the Ramsar Small Grants Fund during the triennium 2009-2011

Action requested: The Standing Committee is invited to take note of the outcome of the work of the contact group of the Subgroup on Finance, with a view to considering and endorsing the contact group's proposal to complement the annual Small Grants Fund cycle with a Small Projects Portfolio, in order to attract additional funds to support a larger number of projects. Standing Committee is further invited to review and adopt the attached Draft Resolution for submission to COP10.

1. In Resolution IX.13, the Contracting Parties urged the Standing Committee, with the assistance of the Ramsar Secretariat, to actively pursue alternative funding mechanisms to resource the Ramsar Small Grants Fund (SGF). They also requested the Standing Committee to bring to the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties new proposals for establishing a more vigorous mechanism to support the SGF, including the possible development of regional support funds.
2. The Standing Committee addressed this issue during its subsequent meetings, based on the analysis and proposals provided by the Secretariat. Furthermore, the Standing Committee Subgroup on Finance established a contact group, chaired by the USA, to develop a concrete proposal on how to improve the funding situation. The contact group presented its proposal to the 36th meeting of Standing Committee and clarified in further discussions the remaining points to conclude on a way forward.
3. The commonly agreed aim is to maximize the number of projects, amongst all of the valuable proposals submitted in line with the Operational Guidelines adopted for the annual SGF cycle, that can be funded each year.
4. The first priority is therefore to raise voluntary, unrestricted donations for the SGF. Since the Fund's beginning, the Parties have stated that such unrestricted funds should ideally amount to 1 million Swiss francs annually. Standing Committee should continue to make annual funding decisions, based on the evaluation of the project proposals by the Secretariat according to the criteria detailed in the Operational Guidelines, with a view to equitable spread across the regions, as in the past.
5. This will be followed by a subsequent phase in each annual cycle. All valuable SGF projects that remain without funding, due to a lack of sufficient funds, will be grouped into a Small Projects Portfolio (SPP). The Ramsar Secretariat will then submit this Portfolio to additional donors, whenever an opportunity arises, inviting them to fund specific projects according to their preferences, funding rules, or particular conditions.

6. Trial periods with a Small Projects Portfolio over the last two annual cycles, comprising valuable SGF projects remaining unfunded due to a lack of SGF funds, have demonstrated that this is a comparatively successful way to raise additional voluntary funds to finance a substantial number of additional projects among those initially submitted to the SGF and evaluated as being eligible and valuable for funding.
7. The attached draft Resolution proposes that the grant solicitation and review process will continue as at present. The annual Standing Committee meetings will take a decision on how to allocate available funds to the top-ranked projects submitted to the Fund. All other proposals that have been evaluated and approved as worthy of funding will be included in a Small Project Portfolio. The SPP can then immediately be used for additional fundraising until the next annual SGF grant cycle. To the extent possible, the SPP will seek new donors, different from those that traditionally support the SGF.
8. Standing Committee will adopt the Operational Guidelines for the triennium 2009-2011 during its 40th meeting in early 2009, based on a proposal to be prepared by the Secretariat, including minor improvements of the current Guidelines.
9. Senior Regional Advisers at the Secretariat in particular, along with everyone associated with these grant programmes, will make efforts to become more aware of related small grants funds. Consideration will also be given to inviting potential donors in future to Ramsar regional meetings. Individual donors must be acknowledged and listed in any project outcomes.
10. Standing Committee 37 is invited to review and adopt the attached Draft Resolution for submission to COP10.

Draft Resolution X.00

Optimizing the Ramsar Small Grants Fund during the triennium 2009-2011

1. RECALLING Resolution VI.6 (1996) which renamed the Wetland Conservation Fund, originally established through Resolution IV.3 (1990), as the Ramsar Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF), reviewed its operation, and made recommendations on its level of funding;
2. NOTING WITH PLEASURE that since its inception in 1991 the SGF has provided funding for 203 small projects in 53 developing countries and countries in economic transition for a total amount of 7.6 million Swiss francs;
3. EXPRESSING SINCERE APPRECIATION to those Contracting Parties and organizations that have made voluntary contributions to the SGF over all these years;
4. NOTING WITH CONCERN that the level of voluntary contributions has only been sufficient to fund 17 valuable projects during the triennium 2006-2008, while another 77

valuable proposals submitted by eligible Contracting Parties could not be funded because of a serious lack of funds;

5. RECOGNIZING the desire of the Standing Committee to broaden the current spectrum of potential donors through the submission of non-funded valuable projects to a different group of donors subsequent to each annual SGF evaluation cycle; and
6. COMMENDING the Ramsar Secretariat for its initiatives to improve the project assessment process, administration and monitoring of projects supported by the SGF, as well as for its fundraising efforts for the Fund;

THE CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING PARTIES

7. REAFFIRMS its conviction that the Ramsar Small Grants Fund for Wetland Conservation and Wise Use (SGF) should continue to be an extremely valuable mechanism for facilitating the implementation of the Convention in developing countries and countries with economies in transition;
8. REITERATES its conviction that the level of resources available to the Ramsar SGF should be increased to 1 million Swiss francs annually and INVITES Contracting Parties to make voluntary donations to the SGF and to seek the assistance of other organizations to meet this target in time for each annual funding cycle;
9. INSTRUCTS the Secretariat to package those project proposals that were evaluated and approved for SGF funding but could not be funded because of a lack of money in the unrestricted SGF fund into an attractive, low-cost Small Projects Portfolio (SPP), once the annual SGF allocations have been made by Standing Committee from within the available unrestricted SGF funds, and to make that Portfolio as widely available to additional potential donors as possible;
10. ENCOURAGES all potential donors who are not able to make an unrestricted voluntary contribution to the Small Grants Fund to contribute to the funding of specific projects described in the Ramsar Small Projects Portfolio, with a view to funding a maximum total number of valuable projects each year;
11. FURTHER ENCOURAGES potential donors to actively contact the Ramsar Secretariat whenever funding opportunities may arise in order to make voluntary donations to the Small Grants Fund, or if such unrestricted funding is not possible for them, to fund specific projects initially submitted to the SGF that form part of the Small Project Portfolio; and
12. INSTRUCTS the Ramsar Secretariat to report to the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties on the functioning and success of the combined project funding strategy of the Ramsar Small Grant Fund and its Project Portfolio.