



THIRD MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE OF THE AGREEMENT ON THE
CONSERVATION OF AFRICAN-EURASIAN MIGRATORY WATERBIRDS (AEWA)
TANZANIA, 27-28 MAY 2002

**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, research, training and 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, taking into account 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 meeting of the Technical Committee this issue was discussed again 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 4-9 December 2001 in Gland, Switzerland.

At the last Technical Committee meeting Mr David Pritchard informed the meeting about the concerns on the administrative burden for the Ramsar Bureau regarding managing the SGF funds. Furthermore he pointed out the funding problems and the accompanying frustration of staff. During the Ramsar Standing Committee these problems with the SGF were thoroughly discussed. From the side of the Ramsar Bureau a proposal was tabled to establish a special Trust Fund that could be filled by voluntary contributions up to a few million dollars. The idea is that the interest would be used for SGF project. 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. In the following proposals I will come back to this point.

Proposal of the Secretariat

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 donor, 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 side, development cooperation agencies are sometimes reluctant to give funds for "environmental protection" because 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 AEW 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 AEW 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 species and/ or sites used by AEW 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 AEW 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 about accruing the necessary funds. In general Contracting Parties or organisations are 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. Again the Secretariat reiterates that it should be investigated if the establishment of a common Wetlands and Waterbird Trust Fund for AEW and Ramsar Convention would be feasible and desirable. Being aware the Ramsar Convention is a global treaty there is of course a need to elaborate this idea more 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 AEW/ 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 AEW. 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 AEW Secretariat. As Secretariat you have less influence in decision making process of a common Trust Fund than if you have your own Trust Fund.

The PROS are:

In the Final Act of the Negotiation meeting on AEW 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 AEW Secretariat. Establishment of a common Trust Fund would stimulate close co-operation between Ramsar Bureau and AEW Secretariat. A common Trust Fund would make it also possible that the Trust Fund is administrated by Ramsar Bureau/ IUCN, which would be more cost effective probably than administration through UNEP/ UNON. Joint activities in seeking the necessary funds would be probably highly appreciated by donor countries and it might leverage more funds. Through close co-operation between the Ramsar Bureau, the AEW 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.

Being aware that Ramsar Standing Committee has its reservations on the establishment of a Ramsar SGF Trust Fund as described above the Secretariat requests the Technical Committee members to provide some advice on this. Some positive responses on the idea of creating a common Fund have been received from some countries and organisations.

Taking into account that the MOP1 already established an AEW SGF the Secretariat proposes for the short term with the assistance of the Technical Committee to seek potential sponsors for sponsorship. According to the UN Rules and Regulations it would probably not be possible to establish solely for AEW a SGF Fund outside the UN. The main concern of the Contracting Parties is that 13 % of any contribution to this Trust Fund will be taken by UNON to cover the administration cost. Although this seems to be quite high the difference between this figures and figures used by International NGOs/ IGOs being 7,5-10 %. 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 many funds are available for that year and to request projects proposal for year 2. During year two the Secretariat will seek resources to replenish the SGF so that by the end of year 3 again announcement could be made on how much it would be available for year 4 and so on. Similar to the current procedure regarding the Ramsar SGF the Secretariat will screen all project proposals carefully and will rate them according to a very objective system of points and will submit them to the Technical Committee for approval.

Finally to enable the Secretariat to elaborate more the proposals before MOP2 the Technical Committee is requested to provide the Agreement Secretariat with some advice and guidance.