



Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

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16TH MEETING OF THE CMS SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

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Agenda Item 11.2

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME

(Prepared by Pierre Devillers, Vice-Chair of the Council, in consultation with councillors who attended the Activity Planning Meeting, 13 June 2009)

Background

1. At its Fourteenth Meeting, held in Bonn on 14-17 March 2007, the Scientific Council examined the status of the small-scale projects funded by CMS. Dr. Marco Barbieri, Scientific and Technical Officer, provided an overview of the CMS Small Grant Programme, focusing on its future funding. He provided a brief summary of the issues raised in document CMS/ScC.13/Doc.4, highlighting that the programme had been supported primarily through withdrawals from the Convention Trust Fund surpluses. Since such reserves were close to exhaustion, there was an increasing need for a shift towards funding from current contributions of the Parties to the Convention. Furthermore, since at least some of the budget scenarios to be examined by the Conference of the Parties did not guarantee the availability of funds, there was a need to consider securing extra resources through voluntary contributions. He said that the anticipated changes in funding might necessitate a reconsideration of the ways in which project proposals were identified and selected. One approach might be for the Scientific Council to assemble a list of priority projects for adoption by the Conference of the Parties, which could be used as the basis for attempts to locate resources. The Scientific Council was asked to consider the future status of the Small Grant Programme and the substance of any recommendations to be made to the Conference of the Parties on the matter.

2. In the subsequent discussion, there was general agreement that the Small Grants Programme constituted a vital tool for implementing the Convention's scientific and research work. Summarizing the discussion, the Chair identified a number of key conclusions, among which: the Small Grant Programme remained an important priority for the Convention and the Scientific Council, particularly given the leverage that the funding conferred; strong emphasis should be placed on ensuring that projects undertaken under the Small Grant Programme were sustainable; such projects were of particular importance to developing countries, which sometimes lacked the resources to focus on environmental issues; selection of projects should continue to be undertaken by the Scientific Council; the Scientific Council should recommend to the Conference of the Parties that the Small Grant Programme be sustained and funding be secured through the Convention's regular budget rather than by means of ad hoc fund-raising exercises.

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3. The chair thus drafted a statement on financing of research and conservation projects which was endorsed by the meeting and included in the report, to be brought to the attention of the COP and its Standing Committee. The statement reads: *“Having reviewed, in part through the analysis conducted by its taxonomic working groups, the achievements of the first half of the 2005-2008 triennium, the Scientific Council reiterates its opinion that the concrete conservation actions that it has identified, selected, prioritized and recommended for funding have been and are one of the principal assets, and a unique trademark of the Convention, as well as the main pathway through which the convention will contribute to the 2010 target. The Council thus expresses its deep concern at the difficulties of funding that have impeded during the first half of the triennium both the continuation of ongoing actions and the initiation of new ones, in sharp contrast with the situation of past periods. The Scientific Council regards the guarantee of secure funding for the actions it reviews and recommends a vital requirement if the quality of the implementation of the Convention and its relevance to effective conservation are to be maintained and if the credibility and the usefulness of the work of the Scientific Council are to be preserved. Such a secure and predictable level of funding existed in the past as a fixed budget allocated by each COP, taken from Convention reserves. Two possible ways to recreate this situation appear to exist: • Either the COP undertakes to again allocate a fixed budget, taken from its resources, and this without reducing the support given to other necessary Convention activities; • Or the secretariat expands its present fund-raising programme to generate sufficient resources allowing a fixed sum to be reserved for projects selected by the Council procedure.”*

4. At its Fifteenth Meeting, held in Rome on 27-28 November 2008, the Scientific Council again examined the situation of the small-scale projects funded by CMS. Introducing the item, Mr. Barbieri, Acting Scientific and Technical Officer, recalled that the practice of funding small-scale conservation and research projects under the Small Grants Programme had changed substantially since the eighth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CMS in November 2005. Until that time, such projects had been funded mainly by resources from the Trust Fund of the Convention originating from surpluses. The programme had supported some 50 conservation and research projects selected by the Scientific Council amounting to some US\$ 1.5 million. Since 2005, however, owing to exhaustion of the Trust Fund, that funding system had been replaced by one based on voluntary contributions.

5. In the ensuing discussion, it was emphasized that small-scale projects were a vital showcase for activities pioneered by the CMS. They were its very backbone, not least in view of their distinctive nature and positive impact in the field. The establishment of a sustainable and predictable funding mechanism with enough flexibility for rapid response was therefore deemed essential to the continuation of such projects, which suggested the need for a return to budget funding. Indeed, wide support was expressed for a strong recommendation to that effect. While not a prerequisite, the provision of seed money or local counterpart funding by countries submitting project proposals was also suggested as a means of encouraging top-up funding. Among the arguments made in favour of budget funding was the fact that environment - let alone the conservation of individual species - was not a priority for developing countries owing to competing needs and they would be in no position to implement the Convention without firm funding for their small-scale conservation projects. Another advantage of such projects was that their worth exceeded the financial outlay because they often triggered other conservation-related activities. The Small Grants Programme was, therefore, an effective and relatively inexpensive way of launching such activities and initiating future agreements. A reallocation of budget resources to enhance the efficiency of that tool might therefore be extremely appropriate, particularly given that lack of funding was seen to hamper development in the case of other

agreements. That view was confirmed by the representative of the Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans of the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS), who informed the meeting that funding systems based on voluntary contributions involved so much uncertainty as to be essentially unworkable, whereas an alternative funding system could provide opportunities for synergy with the CMS family of agreements. Given the overwhelming consensus in favour of reviving the Small Grants Programme through a sustainable source of funding, the Chair said that he would draft a strong recommendation to that effect for further discussion by the Council with a view to its submission to the Conference of the Parties.

6. The chair thus drafted a statement which was endorsed by the plenary meeting, with the recommendation that it be transmitted to the Conference of the Parties. The statement reads: *"The Scientific Council regards the Small Grants Programme as an essential, and possibly the most essential, tool for the implementation of the Convention. Created at the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties in 1994, from 1994 to 2005 the Small Grants Programme was the main instrument through which the Convention was able to bring seed money to significant conservation projects. It changed the nature of the Convention from a somewhat formal administrative instrument to a dynamic and respected conservation tool. It was used to prepare the Action Plans that have been the basis of many of the agreements concluded under the Convention and to support activities in the field of conservation. It had an impact that went well beyond the funds mobilized by the Convention as it was a powerful catalyst to generate much larger funds coming from the Range States themselves or from international donors. Without it, many projects that made a substantial contribution to raising the profile of the CMS and resolving essential conservation issues would never have been possible, particularly in developing countries where funds would not otherwise have been available to initiate projects. Without this dependable, predictable resource that is allocated according to conservation needs, the nature of the Convention would be profoundly changed and its appeal as an effective conservation tool gravely damaged. This essential mechanism functioned extremely well until 2005. During the past triennium, a change of policy left the funding to the vagaries of donor interest. Predictably, this approach has failed, as the most needed actions are, almost by definition, often the least susceptible to attracting the interest of donors. Indeed, this interest is strongly guided by media potential and will privilege fields that already enjoy widespread attention, rather than those in which the Convention is the best or only tool, and thus can truly make a difference. The Scientific Council urges the Conference of the Parties to take all necessary measures to revive and sustain the Small Grants Programme in the form it had between 1994 and 2005, namely, that of a predictable, regulated source of funds for real-world conservation, driven only by conservation needs and scientific quality, not by attractiveness to potential donors. This very strong plea was expressed in interventions at plenary sessions of the Scientific Council by the Councillors for the European Community, the Netherlands, Côte d'Ivoire, France, Belgium, Germany, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Australia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, by six Conference-appointed Councillors and by the Executive Secretary of ACCOBAMS, and was unanimously supported by the Council."*

7. At the Activity Planning Meeting, held in Bonn on 13 June 2009, the Scientific Councillors present noted that the Council's appeal for the SGP to be properly funded had fallen on deaf ears at COP9, a reality already reflected in paragraph 280 of the Report of the Ninth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Even the allocation of €170,000 made in the core budget for the triennium for scientific work, alluded to in paragraph 280, could not be regarded as a contribution to SGP funding. Indeed, Marco Barbieri indicated that those resources were needed for a number of purposes, including paying for consultants on specific issues, which would

normally take up most of the budget. In addition, the invitation by parties at COP8 and COP9 to plough back the 13% levied by UNEP on voluntary contributions into conservation projects and supporting meetings had not so far been followed by concrete results.

8. The councillors also noted that the Convention was still benefiting from the momentum achieved through some of the \$1.4 million spent on projects over the years, seed funding for pilot projects, which later developed into significant programmes. The Parties had decided to shift the onus onto voluntary contributions, resulting in a few donors bearing the lion's share of the burden. The economic climate probably meant that donor countries would not be as generous as before. Donors were also more selective in the projects they supported, so there was no guarantee that the projects of greatest priority for the Convention as a whole would be supported. The funding was haphazard, so it was impossible for the Council to manage the overall Programme.

9. Although the Councillors agreed that the disregard for their repeated appeals by the decision-making organs of the Convention may leave no choice but to formally present COP10 with the unpleasant truth that without funding the Council cannot do its work, a last attempt should be made to find a satisfactory solution. A detailed discussion took place on the broad principles around which such a solution could realistically be developed. A consensus was reached between the Councillors present and the Secretariat on a mechanism of the type outlined below. It was agreed that the Councillors present, in liaison with the Secretariat, would formulate proposals to be discussed by the full Council at ScC 16. After this discussion a definitive document would be prepared by the ScC and formally submitted to the COP.

Proposed funding mechanism

10. The key issue in preserving the credibility and the usefulness of the work of the Scientific Council and the appeal of the Convention as an effective conservation tool is the reestablishment of a secure, predictable and sufficient source of funding for projects that can be reviewed and selected by the Scientific Council through a regulated procedure based on conservation needs, and subsequently monitored by the Council. There are at least four possible ways to construct that resource:

1 Core budget

11. The COP reserves at the beginning of each triennium a part of the core budget for the financing of conservation actions selected by the Scientific Council. This is the old procedure. It is certainly the best approach, and the one favoured by the scientific Council, as indicated by ScC 13 and, formally, by ScC 14 and ScC 15. It was de facto rejected by COP 8 and COP 9, but a change of attitude would, of course, be welcome.

2 Voluntary contributions by the parties

12. It is the course chosen by COP 8 and COP 9. The difficulty here is to insure the indispensable conditions of security and predictability of the funds, and the independence of the Scientific Council evaluation procedure. ScC 14 and ScC 15 noted that with current arrangements these did not exist. A possible procedure that would recreate them was outlined at the June 2009 ScC meeting and would run as follows:

13. At the beginning of each triennium Parties would pledge contributions to a parallel voluntary fund dedicated to the development of conservation programmes and the preparation and implementation of seed projects. These funds would be allocated to the general programme and not to earmarked projects. Donors could however indicate a preference for one or more of the large taxonomic groups that are defined in the work plan of the Scientific Council, and/or for one or more geographical areas.

14. With a firm commitment on the total sum available, selection of projects could be undertaken by the Scientific Council through the procedures that had been established, and were successfully applied until the funds dried out. This would, as in the past, include estimation of the maximum budgetary allocation, and identification of focal point councillors and operators.

15. The contributions could be in cash or in kind, provided that, in the second case, the personnel contributed is directly under the responsibility of a Scientific Councillor, and operating costs are met, so that any part of project preparation or coordination delegated to that personnel is entirely integrated in the work plan of the Scientific Council.

16. As the allocation of in-cash or in-kind contributions prior to the identification of projects may raise difficulties with the administrative rules of some parties, a system of "virtual common pot" inspired by the mechanism that has been introduced in the application of Article 169 of the EC Treaty could be installed. The parties would pledge contributions, in cash or in kind, at the beginning of the triennium, but would not have to make them immediately available. Once projects have been selected, and focal point councillors and operators identified, a detailed work plan, list of deliverables and budget requirements, would be prepared for each project by the focal point councillor or councillors, with the assistance of the CMS secretariat Scientific and Technical Support Officer, and part of the pledged in-cash or in-kind contributions allocated to the project, taking into account, as much as possible, the preferences indicated by the donors. Once this process had been completed for a project the contributions thus allocated to it would be made available to either the CMS Secretariat or, if the donor preferred, directly to the project operator. In either case the donor would be fully and explicitly associated with the project and its conservation benefits.

3 Fund-raising

17. One of the possible approaches suggested by ScC 14 was for the secretariat to expand its fund-raising programme to generate sufficient resources allowing a fixed sum to be reserved for projects selected by the Council procedure. We are pleased to note that this proposal at least may have been heard, as the appointment of a Fund-raising Officer, and of one with an excellent record of work with the ScC, is a step in the right direction. Of course, to fulfil the criteria of security and predictability of the funds, and the independence of the Scientific Council evaluation procedure, the funds would have to have been raised prior to the ScC procedure. Nevertheless, funds raised after the procedure could be used to reduce the recourse to the core budget, thus enabling the core reserve to accrue from triennium to triennium.

4 Project operator contributions

18. As noted at the June meeting, project operators must be encouraged to pledge a contribution when they introduce a project for consideration, as favoured, or even requested, by other funding schemes. However this can never be imposed, as, in the case of CMS, this could sometimes prevent the most adequate operators from submitting proposals.

19. A combination of the four approaches is probably needed. On the one hand, recent experience suggests that without approach 2 (which in any case, represents the will of the COP), sufficient means will not be available. On the other hand, it is doubtful that recourse to approaches 1 and 3 can be entirely dispensed with. Indeed, much of 2 and 4 may be in kind, and, without a sufficient amount of the total sum pledged in cash, adequate financing of local partners will be difficult, bearing in mind however that the small grants are intended for the preparation and development of projects, not for the actual funding of substantial conservation efforts. For these the use of the small grants would be limited to the -- essential -- actions of conception, drafting, promotion and monitoring.

Action requested

- Scientific Council members are invited to consider and give their views on the proposal for the future of the programme.