

Terms of Reference

Consultancy to conduct an impact assessment of the Nagao Wetland Fund

Background

The Convention on Wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty, which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.

The Nagao Natural Environment Foundation (NEF) is a non-governmental organization existing under the laws of Japan, and the mission of the NEF is dedicated to promoting nature conservation in developing countries, mainly in the Asia-Pacific region, through comprehensive programme for conservation research and activities, research grant scheme and scholarship scheme.

The Nagao Wetland Fund, established in 2016 in collaboration between NEF and the Convention on Wetlands, is a small grant programme to support developing countries in the Asia and Oceania regions to implement the Convention, and in particular the goals and targets of the Convention's Strategic Plan. Over the past decade, NWF has played a catalytic role in advancing conservation and the wide use of wetlands, especially, in Wetlands of International Importance. The 10-year anniversary of the Nagao Wetland Fund represents a significant milestone. It offers a unique opportunity to celebrate its achievements and impacts, raise its visibility among governments and partners, and explore pathways to ensure sustainable financing for wetlands.

The NEF has decided to work with the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands to have external experts conduct an impact assessment of projects supported by the Nagao Wetland Fund.

The consultancy is to conduct a systematic assessment on the impact of NWF, including the role of NWF in wetland conservation within the landscape of regional/international wetland finance in Asia/Oceania and provide the strategic direction of NWF in the coming years.

2. Purpose and Objectives

The Secretariat seeks a consultant/consulting agency to conduct an impact assessment that will:

1. Review and map existing financing instruments (with emphasis on small grants and similar mechanisms) relevant to implementing the Convention in Asia and Oceania, and identify organizations using these instruments for wetland conservation.
2. Assess the state of wetland finance in Asia and Oceania, identifying key gaps, opportunities, and trends, including the role of the NWF in catalysing wetland conservation and enabling access to follow-on finance.
3. Assess the impacts of the Nagao Wetland Fund in recipient countries, synthesizing lessons learned from past NWF projects (challenges, best practices, and recommendations).
4. Provide actionable recommendations to enhance the NWF's programme direction, reach, visibility and accessibility, and catalytic impact.

3. Scope of Work

The consultant will undertake the following tasks and produce a consolidated report with findings and recommendations.

A. State of Wetland Finance in Asia and Oceania

1. **Mapping of financing instruments**

- Identify and catalogue relevant wetland / water-related financing instruments (with priority on USD ~5,000–1,000,000 small grants, but including adjacent mechanisms where relevant for scaling).
- Instruments may include: public and private grant schemes, regional and international funds, national environment funds, foundation grants, bilateral programmes, multilateral small-grant windows, and relevant trust funds.

2. Analysis of instrument characteristics

- For each instrument, summarize: scope, eligible applicants, geographic coverage, thematic priorities, funding size range, co-financing requirements (if any), application frequency and complexity, decision timelines, reporting requirements, and accessibility (including language and administrative burden).

3. Pipeline and “step-up” pathways

- Identify organizations (NGOs, CSOs, community groups, research institutions, government agencies where eligible) using these instruments for wetland conservation.
- Analyse how small grants enable follow-on projects and whether there are observable pathways from smaller to larger instruments (e.g., concept development → pilot → scale-up).

4. Regional synthesis

- Provide a regional overview of wetland finance: key donors and funders, thematic and geographic trends, gaps and underserved areas, barriers to access, and emerging opportunities (including climate adaptation/mitigation, NbS, blue carbon where relevant to wetlands).

B. Impact Assessment of the Nagao Wetland Fund

1. Desk review of NWF portfolio

- Review NWF project proposals, progress reports, and final reports for an agreed assessment period (e.g., last 10 years or defined triennia—use what the Secretariat provides).
- Develop a portfolio overview: geography, themes, applicants, grant sizes, outputs, and reported outcomes.

2. Consultations and validation

- Conduct structured consultations/interviews with:
 - NWF project recipients (implementing entities);
 - National Focal Points / Heads of Administrative Authorities in recipient countries (as relevant);
 - Selected stakeholders (e.g., local partners, implementing agencies, relevant networks).
- Ensure representation across subregions (e.g., South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Central/West Asia, Pacific) and project themes.

3. Impact analysis

- Assess contribution to wetland conservation/wise use results, including:
 - tangible conservation outcomes (where measurable),

- institutional capacity strengthening,
 - policy/management plan influence,
 - community engagement and local stewardship,
 - monitoring/knowledge products,
 - replication or scaling.
- Identify enabling conditions, bottlenecks, and contextual factors affecting performance.

4. Lessons learned and recommendations

- Identify best practices and lessons learned from successful and challenging projects.
- Provide recommendations to improve NWF design and delivery, including:
 - programme direction and thematic focus,
 - selection criteria and review process,
 - support to applicants (capacity building, templates, guidance),
 - monitoring and results reporting,
 - communications/visibility,
 - catalytic pathways to follow-on finance and partnerships.

The Consultant is expected to work closely with the Advisory Group and reflect inputs on the report to improve the Final Report. The Advisory Group will be established by the Secretariat consisting of the Secretariat, Nagao Natural Environment Foundation, and experts from key environmental financing mechanisms or grant programmes in the region. The objective of the advisory group is to review the progress of the consultancy and provide inputs on the report to contribute to strengthening knowledge of the wetland finance landscape. The group would meet three times during the consultancy – at the beginning, mid-point, and conclusion – to provide comments and help strengthen the study. In case of not being able to participate in the meeting, group members will provide written comments according to the timeline of meetings.

Expected Outputs

- Inception Report (Workplan, annotated outline, methodology)
- Draft Report
- Stakeholder Consultation
- Final Report including executive summary, findings, recommendations

Consultancy Timeline

- Start Date: March 2026
- Submission of Inception Report: within 4 weeks of contract start
- Submission of Draft Report: Month 4
- Submission of Final Report: Month 6

HOW TO APPLY

Consultancy Proposals

The consultant should submit an Expression of Interest addressing the Terms of Reference that includes:

- Demonstrated understanding of the project and the required outcomes;
- Details of the proposed approach to the project that is clear, realistic and feasible to implement within the proposed timeline and budget;
- CV and examples of previous experience and relevant projects, and experience and roles of team members, and contact details of at least two referees;
- Evidence of capacity to complete the project as specified within the indicative timeline;
- A fixed-priced quotation for project, inclusive of all costs (including travel and materials), and fees itemised for core tasks;
- A statement regarding pecuniary, actual or potential conflict of interest.

Proposals that can show proven experience in mobilizing wetland finance at the regional and/or international level are desirable.

Compliance with regulations

The consultant must comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and organisational policies.

Proof of appropriate licenses or certifications, where required, must be provided.

The consultant must be registered on the relevant professional or trade register of the country of establishment (or residence, if self-employed) and in full compliance with the obligations relating to payment of social security contributions and applicable taxes.

Deadline for Proposals

The closing date for Expressions of Interest is 20 February 2026. Please submit your written proposal (in one PDF document) to asia.oceania@ramsar.org. Applicants are encouraged to contact Ms. Aisha Oyabu for any clarifications or questions regarding the call for proposals.