

Assessment of Proposals for the Regional Implementation Team for the East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot

Summary of the Application and Review Process

On 19 December 2012, immediately following final approval of the *Ecosystem Profile for the East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot* by the CEPF Donor Council, the CEPF Secretariat launched an open call for proposals to fill the role of regional implementation team (RIT). Following the terms of reference approved by the Donor Council, CEPF will separate the role of the RIT into two distinct grants, both for eight years: the RIT-Administration, with a maximum grant amount of \$900,000; and the RIT-Programs, with a maximum grant amount of \$600,000. As such, the Secretariat released two separate requests for proposals (RfPs), RfP 1 for Administration and RfP 2 for Programs (Annex 1 and Annex 2), inviting individual organizations and consortia of organizations to apply for either one or both roles.

Proposals are expected to cover the three countries in the hotspot: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, for a period of eight years.

The calendar of events to date has been as follows.

19 December 2012	Opening date for RfP 1 (RIT-Administration) and RfP 2 (RIT-Programs)
7 February 2013	International conference call / bidders' conference
18 March 2013	Closing date for receipt of proposals for both RfPs
15 April 2013	Requests for clarification sent to applicants
27 April 2013	Closing date for receipt of clarifications

Upon release of the RfPs, 22 organizations contacted CEPF expressing interest. Representatives of interested organizations participated in a conference call on 7 February. During the call, CEPF Secretariat staff gave an overview of expectations for the two RIT roles, reiterated points in the bidding documents, and answered questions. A recording of this conference call is available on the CEPF website.

As of 18 March, the Secretariat received the following offers:

- Proposals for RIT-Administration and RIT-Programs from IUCN Oceania, based in Suva, Fiji.
- Proposals for RIT-Administration and RIT-Programs for Tigona Development Services, based in Porta Vila, Vanuatu.
- A proposal for RIT-Administration from Conservation International's Pacific Island Program based in Apia, Samoa, working in partnership with Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme.
- A proposal for RIT-Programs from the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, based in Apia, Samoa, working in partnership with CI.

A preliminary review of the submissions from the four proponents revealed that the proposal submitted by Tigona Development Services for RIT-Programs did not respond to the RfP and instead was a proposal titled “Ahivo Biodiversity Hotspot and Ecotourism Development Project.” This proposal, and its partner for RIT-Administration with the same title were disqualified and omitted from further review.

This review of proposals has benefited from the recent experience pertaining to the selection of the RIT for the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot conducted from February to April 2013, and as such has been altered in the following ways:

- An initial review of the proposals was conducted, and the Secretariat requested clarification from applicants on a series of issues.
- For the purposes of this assessment to the Working Group, the Secretariat decided to present the Programs and Administration components of each application as a single proposal package.
- The Secretariat analysis is presented in a comparative table that focuses on seven key issues: experience, personnel, approach, geographic coverage, travel, budget and institutional stability.

Analysis of the Proposals

The CEPF Secretariat conducted a comprehensive review of the remaining proposals, the results of which are summarized in this document. This process entailed scoring each proposal against detailed evaluation criteria included in the two Requests for Proposals. Clarification of the short-listed applicant’s proposals was requested, received, and reviewed together with the original proposals. The summary results are presented here and in Table 1 below.

Experience

Both applicants demonstrate relevant experience in the greater Pacific region and with managing projects similar to the size of CEPF. CI performed the role of RIT for Polynesia-Micronesia, and three staff in the Samoa office are listed in their proposal. In terms of the hotspot, IUCN has field programs in all three countries, and numerous ongoing projects. They demonstrate fruitful relationships with a wide range of stakeholders in the hotspot including local communities.

CI/SPREP does not demonstrate current experience or on the ground presence in the hotspot. Although present in the hotspot during the last decade, CI does not currently have ongoing programs in the hotspot. CI did have an office in the Solomon Islands but closed it in 2008. SPREP does have solid relationships with numerous governments and partners in the region, but lacks the on the ground presence essential to the local engagement that is so important to CEPF.

Given that IUCN has field programs in each of the countries, and numerous ongoing projects in the hotspot, this applicant is ranked highest with respect to Experience.

Personnel

Based on levels of effort and placement of staff, IUCN ranks higher than the CI/SPREP/MSG consortium. With FTE of 4.1 staff and national coordinators in each country, IUCN is superior to CI/SPREP/MSG, which only has FTE of 2.15 staff, and a single person in the region—a regional coordinator based in Vanuatu. IUCN’s staffing plan would need to be modified during

negotiations, however based on level of effort and commitment of resources to staffing, as well as the location of the proposed staff, the Secretariat favors IUCN.

Approach

IUCN has presented a good approach, while the CI/SPREP approach does not elaborate on how they will deliver capacity building, and the proposal is insufficient in the logframe and workplan. IUCN's approach is superior because they propose to have national coordinators based in-country who speak the local languages.

Geographic coverage

Both applicants propose to cover all three countries in the hotspot. However, IUCN proposes to have three national coordinators based in-country, while CI/SPREP/MSG proposes to have one regional coordinator based in Vanuatu. CEPF's experience demonstrates that in-country presence of the RIT is important for program execution and oversight and without it the RIT's ability to support and monitor grantees is greatly compromised. IUCN's approach of in-country presence is a better strategy for CEPF.

Travel

IUCN has proposed a modest travel budget that is restricted to domestic travel. This proposal may mean that there is insufficient interaction of senior staff in the hotspot. CI/SPREP/MSG do allocate travel funds for the RIT manager to visit the region, and the regional coordinator has a travel budget of nearly \$18,000 per year. While neither travel budget is ideal, it is essential that sufficient funds be allocated for local travel to work with applicants and to monitor grants. An overemphasis on international travel may not be the best use of funds. Therefore the budget that is closer to the needs of the investment is that of IUCN.

Budget

Table 1 presents a comparison of the budgets line by line, but we can point out that the CI/SPREP/MSG consortium allocates \$138,461 less for salaries than IUCN does (noting the CI's subgrant of \$300,000 has been included in their figure for salaries). CI/SPREP/MSG budget lines for telecommunications and for travel are much higher than those of IUCN, corresponding roughly the amount not allocated to salaries. Thus it appears that in the CI/SPREP/MSG consortium proposal, because there are fewer staff in the region, CEPF funds would be used to compensate for this with travel and telecommunications. CEPF prefers more on the ground presence and therefore ranks the budget for IUCN as being a better option from which to negotiate.

Institutional stability

There is no indication that IUCN has any upcoming changes in its future. Neither CI nor SPREP indicate any changes either.