

***Second Regional Stakeholder Forum on
the Pak Beng Hydropower Project
5th May 2017,
Vientiane, Lao PDR***

Welcome Speech

by

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Dear forum participants,

I warmly welcome you to the Second Regional Stakeholder Forum on the Pak Beng hydropower project.

Globally, it is recognized that stakeholder participation is critical to sustainable and equitable development. But effective involvement of stakeholders is perhaps even more important when it comes to planning and implementing of hydropower projects in the Lower Mekong River Basin. The Mekong River Commission recognises this, and is placing increasing emphasis on involving stakeholders in, not only its prior consultation processes, but in all its activities. It is therefore particularly gratifying to see so many of you here today. The last forum back in February 2017 in Luang Prabang had 184 participants.

Reliable electricity supply is vital to meeting the needs of the region's growing economies, and Lao PDR has made the supply of hydropower to meet these needs central to its growth and development trajectory. Yet hydropower development on a unique river system like the Mekong can also have considerable impacts, impacts that can be felt far beyond the immediate surrounds of the hydropower dams. Keeping the balance requires careful attention these impacts, particularly where they may impact the millions of people who rely on the river for their livelihoods.

As our motto says, the Mekong River Commission does its best for **“Meeting the needs, keeping the balance.”**

To do this we must know what everyone's needs are, and we must understand what measures we can take to keep the balance. As always, the MRC appreciate your concerns, and your aspirations for the sustainable development and use of this

unique River ecosystem. We cannot do this without your constructive inputs and comments.

Learning from the 2 previous prior consultation processes at Xayaburi and Don Sahong, we have increased the transparency and effort put into stakeholder engagements both at the regional and national levels. This forum is just one of those initiatives. During the course of the day you will hear of other initiatives we have taken to open up the results of the technical review process to a wider audience, and I would like to invite you to study the huge volume of information on the Pak Beng project, the review process, and the prior consultation process on our website.

As this is the last forum before the end of the official six months Prior Consultation process, I am delighted to see high interest from such a broad range of stakeholders as well as the variety of groups represented. As we participate in the forum today; listen to what we achieved from the last forum in Luang Prabang; pay attention to the specialists presenting the preliminary technical review of the Pak Beng hydropower project; and after that, discuss, share your voices, opinions and recommendations on the project.

Today, you will also hear what our plans are for completing the 6-month Prior Consultation process, and what we hope to do after the official Prior Consultation process ended in order to maintain open and transparent engagement in the ongoing development of the Project.

Dear participants,

Our fruitful discussions in the first Forum in Luang Prabang, provided valuable comments and inputs. We registered about 150 comments, inputs and suggestions. We have taken care to build this into the technical review process so far. My hope is that this forum will build on that first event, and that this forum just like the first one will be positively received.

During the first Forum, we livestreamed the main parts of the meeting, and we are livestreaming some parts on Facebook today, so you have every reason to put your best foot forward, and to engage in lively and positive discussion. We will take the outcomes of today's forum forward into the final version of the Technical Review

Report and discussions in the Special Session of the MRC Joint Committee which will conclude the official 6-month Prior Consultation period.

We value your contributions. We are committed to supporting the Mekong countries in meeting the needs of national development, whilst keeping the balance and recognizing the concerns of all who depend on this River System. Toward these ends identifying all reasonable measures to avoid, minimize and mitigate potential transboundary impacts lies at the heart of the Prior Consultation process, your inputs are vital to ensuring that the process does indeed identify potential impacts and corresponding possible measures.

Lastly,

I would like to thank the Government of Lao PDR for co-hosting this second Regional Stakeholder Forum.

My special appreciation and sincere thanks to Vice Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Mme Monemany Nhoibouakong for your presence today. I hope that the views and opinions as well as recommendations from participants will be well received by all of us here, and by the Lao Government.

My thanks and appreciation also go to the MRC Secretariat staff for their hard work and devotion in getting all materials prepared, and distributed in a timely and organized manner.

I look forward to fruitful discussions from all of you.

Thank you.