

Draft Final Meeting Notes
of the 4th RTWG Meeting on the Council Study,
10 March 2015
MRC Office of the Secretariat in Vientiane
Revised: 15 May 2015 (Incorporating Comments Received from MCs)

I Objective and Opening

1. The 4th RTWG meeting was held at OSV on 10 March 2015. Due to the unavailability of the senior representation of the LNMCS as Chair, Director So Sophort, the OIC of the Mekong River Commissions Secretariat chaired the meeting and delivered the welcome and opening remarks.

II Presentations and Discussions

2. At the outset following the Agenda, Dr. Henry Manguerra, the CS Coordinator presented the proposed draft agenda to the meeting and asked for feedback. The agenda was then adopted. He then continued with the presentation on the overall progress of the CS. The following are comments from the countries on the overall progress of the CS.
3. Lao PDR questioned how the consultants were recruited and suggested that information about the proposed international and national consultants should be shared with the countries for no objection. MRCS should check the ToR of RTWG on its role. Lao PDR further commented on challenges in the management and administration of the six thematic and five disciplines teams of the Council Study and suggested to have just one Programme or Division to manage the Council Study. Lao PDR also requested for MRCS to provide options for the supervision of the Council Study Coordinator.
4. Lao PDR mentioned that only the modeling framework was approved by TACT. Details of modeling approach have to be provided and expressed need to improve DSF models. All MCs have to be involved in the update of the DSF and would like to see more participation from Viet Nam and Cambodia.
5. Cambodia took note of challenges and requested for clarification on funding gap. Cambodia questioned why the schedule is compressed, while it should be comprehensive. Website is fine, but should be updated with new information. Cambodia recognized difficulty in agreeing with schedule. Council Study belongs to all countries and should agree on schedule and not delay results. Cambodia further asked for response from MRCS on logistical

arrangement for field visit in Cambodia and suggested to make sure the meeting will have enough time in the afternoon for discussion of these challenges.

6. Thailand echoed the issues raised by LNMC on TACT and uncertainties with the WUP/FIN activities, and wished to hear more details. Thailand questioned why there are national consultants from only one country (Viet Nam) in the BioRA team since the Mekong Delta also includes the Delta in Cambodia. Also, expressed need for training and dissemination of DRIFT to MCs.
7. The MRCS OIC responded that the internal implementation arrangement of the CS is under OCEO. The MRCS has assigned Director of TSD to supervise the CS Coordinator, if we change this arrangement we need to consult with the countries. .
8. The CS coordinator responded to the question raised by Thailand that the consultants from Viet Nam who were included in the list of the Biological Resource Assessment (BioRA) Team experts were recruited as regional and not national consultants with expertise and experience in the entire Delta. Four national consultants from each MC are currently being recruited as part of the BioRA Team.
9. Thailand expressed that the internal arrangement in MRCS is an internal matter but also questioned if the internal arrangement made by the former CEO is sensible? All directors should be involved in the CS. Lao PDR added that MRCS should send official letter to the countries on issue of Directors. Vietnam stressed that they respected the internal arrangement for conducting the CS by MRCS and the overall responsibilities lies with the O-I-C/CEO but not any directors.

Presentation on Proposed Development Scenarios, Climate Change Scenarios and Baselines for the Council Study Part 1 and Part 2

10. Thailand suggested that (on recap of objectives) the phrase “water resources development” should always come with “management” for the Council Study. On Objective 3 it is not only capacity building but also raising awareness and building trust. On agreed thematic areas of the scenarios, flood protection should include not only structural but also non-structural measures. Floodplain management is not limited to infrastructure and Thailand has benefited in nonstructural measures in the lower floodplains. There has to be a better explanation about the proposed use of 1985-2007 as the baseline hydrologic period considering one Chinese dam was finished in 2003 and others may have been completed before 2007. Land use is a major issue. Available land use is 2002 so how does it relate to a 2007 baseline. On Exploratory Scenario, selecting up to 5 scenarios is not consistent with what was presented in lessons learned which has shown that there are so much uncertainties associated with long term scenarios. Probably do not need 5 scenarios. Only two will be sufficient to cap the upper and lower limits

11. Cambodia commented that the briefing materials are good. Also, suggested that the Study should concentrate efforts on Definite and Planned scenarios, and questioned capacity to handle more than this? Questioned whether data is available for planned 2040 scenario.
12. Viet Nam emphasized that the Study should strictly follow the Concept Note that has been approved by the Council and the TOR that has been approved by the JC to cover 6 thematic areas and impact areas, and deliverables as instructed in the approved documents. The objective is to provide scientific evidence of impacts of the 6 thematic areas on impacts areas that are clearly defined in the ToR. To study impacts, everyone should have the same understanding of baselines. On question of duplication of different studies, Viet Nam indicated that different studies have different purposes like SEA, Delta Study, etc. and Council Study has a different purpose. We should not look at reasonable and equitable distribution based only on distribution of benefit and cost as there are many other factors to consider. The CS is a technical study, it should be comprehensive, each thematic area should have indicators. Viet Nam pointed out that the conceptual framework is not clear at the moment, but it is clear in the Concept Note that we agreed already on 6 thematic areas and that we should look at impacts based on thematic assessment first, then cumulative impacts. A separate scenario to address the impacts of mainstream hydropower projects should be included as instructed by the leaders and highlighted in the title of the Study. Viet Nam also expressed the need for a breakdown of the indicators (i.e., number, relationships, etc.). Viet Nam further indicated that they do not have comments about internal implementation arrangement, but care more about the progress. Viet Nam expects different discipline and thematic teams to deliver reports. Viet Nam also expects a technical note to discuss in more details scenario and how to close gaps and address uncertainties in the formulation.
13. MRCS (Ton) responded to the question on why the period 1985-2007 can be used for the hydrologic baseline period. The period still represents natural conditions in the mainstream Mekong flow similar to 1985 – 2000 that was used in BDP2 study. MRCS (Anoulak) clarified that while the CS is comprehensive that involves six thematic areas and has not been done before, but what situation to assess has not yet been agreed upon, that was the reason behind the proposed scenarios.
14. In response to the comment of Thailand, the CS Coordinator stated that flood scenarios could also include floodplain management and not just flood protection infrastructure. He reiterated that there is a need to make decision soon on which baseline hydrologic period will be used. MRCS (Suthy) also noted that 2013 land cover (not land use) data is available for use.
15. GIZ (Philipp Magiera) questioned where developments that are not on the plans, or changes in the plans are included? Also questioned if the alternative plan scenario represents better

integration of the planned scenarios. GIZ expressed that it does not understand the Early Development Scenario (2007) and suggested to consider it as baseline instead?

16. DFAT (John Dore) encouraged countries to identify national consultants, but also cautioned that requesting for no objection on every appointment from all MCs for the international/regional consultants will slow down the process. He also suggested that not every decision should need clearance from the MCs. He also recognized that HR has a huge recruiting/contracting task for the Council Study and questioned if end of 2015 to complete all technical tasks is realistic given the budget constraint. He expressed that MRC should make a decision on the schedule and inform DPs as soon as possible.

Presentation on Proposed Development Scenarios, Climate Change Scenarios and Baselines for the Council Study Part 3

17. Lao PDR supported TNMC to use more up to date data (land use, soil, etc.) for SWAT modelling and also agreed with proposed development scenarios.. Lao PDR suggested to put the management under one Programme or the Planning Division since one of the objectives of the Study is to enhance BDP process.
18. Cambodia supported the proposed development scenarios but suggested to focus on Planned Development Scenarios.
19. During the discussion the CS Coordinator asked the MCs for agreement on the proposed scenarios. Thailand agreed with Lao PDR and Cambodia in supporting the development scenarios but expect to see additional details in the formulation. Viet Nam agreed with the first three development scenarios (2007, 2020 DFS, and 2040 Planned) but must follow ToR, Concept Note, and Inception Report. Viet Nam also indicated that there is a need to agree on baseline condition. Thailand agreed with Viet Nam and suggested a small group of 2 persons from each country to discuss the baseline. Cambodia added that these 2 persons should also be able to make the decision. Viet Nam suggested MRCS to spend more time working on details of scenarios. Thailand agreed with Viet Nam's suggestion that more details are needed and that the countries should also agree on the process on how to formulate the details. Thailand suggested the Scoping Note (document) for the formulation of development scenarios and baselines can be used as the working document. Thailand also noted that the proposed development scenarios should be presented in a public forum with technical justifications and assumptions clearly presented. All countries agreed on the first 3 scenarios. Lao PDR suggested having one integrated assessment for all themes and not a sector-based assessment.

Presentation on Progress Update by the Hydrologic Assessment Team

20. Suthy updated the meeting on progress of modelling team. WUP-FIN modelling consultant (Jorma) commented that the WUP-FIN models have received been developed by MRC more

than 10 years, a lot of the development work has been completed and therefore, the modeling tasks and the required integration can be completed within the proposed schedule.

Lao PDR has no objection in the use of the proposed models but expressed that VMOD should be improved

21. Thailand pointed out that technical instruction has already been given by TACT and understood that modelling activities will be based on the existing DSF. The expectation to use WUP-FIN is mainly on sedimentation, not sure if existing SWAT has the capacity to address the issue. Thailand therefore concluded that WUP-FIN only provides added value on certain parts only. Thailand also commented that eWater Source was recommended during the TACT meeting to be used for the Council Study, but not many people from NMCs are familiar with it. There is a need to demonstrate eWater Source to MCs and consider sustainability issues not only for CS but also for future work. Thailand further commented on IKMP slide on Next Steps that 1985-2008 is not consistent with the proposed baseline period (1985 -2007) in the Scoping Note for Development Scenarios.
22. MRCS (Suthy) responded that WUP-FIN team has not been engaged by the modelling team due to funding issue. All concerns will be clarified in the coming months. MRCS is now in discussion with Finland in covering WUP-FIN team and submitted funding proposal to Finland Embassy. eWater Source will supplement DSF and WUP-FIN on sediment information. MRCS further clarified that 1985-2007/2008 should be used to be consistent.
23. GIZ (Philipp Magiera) raised their concern about human resources policy of MRCS and the turnover in the IKMP modeling team. He noted that while having a good model is important, experienced people who run the models are even more important. He raised the question of whether the schedule is realistic with uncertainties on whether modelers will be in place to implement the schedule.
24. Viet Nam questioned why water quality cannot be modeled in SWAT, ISIS, and IQQM since functionality is in the model. Viet Nam expressed that justification in using other models should be clear including providing details on what models will be used for what purpose.
25. Cambodia indicated that they have no objection on the use of eWater Source, and questioned how to compromise if some countries have no sufficient data and the schedule proposed by IKMP. Thailand noted that IQQM has the water quality modeling functionality but lack the data to implement it. In addition, the modelling scope does not cover every parameter of water quality, but only some parameters. Thailand further noted that it is critical to get the modelling going and suggest for the schedule to be discussed with the small technical group proposed for the baseline hydrologic period.
26. WUP-FIN modelling consultant commented that the slide on “The Scope and Capacity of the DSF Models” is confusing. WUP-FIN will complement DSF. He also noted that IQQM has water quality modeling functionality in theory but 1-D approach is not suitable.

27. Lao PDR asked for MRCS modeling team to share modeling results. DFAT (John Dore) commented that eWater Source is supported by 30 people and that he has been working with the eWater Team on several modeling projects in several countries and sustainability should not be a concern. eWater Team is committed to working in the region and DFAT is providing financial assistance in the short term.
28. Viet Nam noted that the application of 2D model is difficult. Viet Nam confirmed agreement in use of the WUP-FIN models as per the modelling framework. Also, noted that it is good to involve national modellers.
29. WUP-FIN modeling consultant (Jorma) noted that 1D will be used to provide flow in channel and the overflow is picked up by the 2D model. 3D model cannot be used for the entire basins, possibly in hotspots.
30. MRCS (Suthy) responded to the meeting that the current modellers who will finish their 6 years term will get Special Service Agreement contract (SSA). MRCS will also engage national modelers. WUP-FIN exists at MRCS for a long time and therefore, it is a good opportunity for the CS to use this. DSF remains the primary tool and WUP-FIN will supplement DSF. Viet Nam commented that WUP-FIN is simply to add value and not replace DSF. MRCS responded to Cambodia that there is sufficient information and data. Original plan is to finish baseline modeling by June 2015, but will be adjusted based on inputs from discipline teams.
31. Lao PDR indicated that the countries have national and assistant modellers and will make sure all outputs will be shared with countries. Lao PDR also requested countries to nominate their modellers. Viet Nam suggested that the countries should agree on modelling framework to be used in CS, and urged IKMP to work with WUP-FIN. Thailand noted and all other countries concurred that more details needed on the modeling approach.

Presentation on Progress Update of the Biological Resources Assessment Team

32. Concerning field visit plan in Cambodia, CNMC proposed two options and suggested option 2, and asked if there is any other plan on other parts of Tonle Sap. Viet Nam pointed out fisheries and biological resources are not the same and this Group should address not only the bio but also fisheries. Thailand requested for more technical information and expectation on national teams so they can prepare themselves. Viet Nam supported Thailand's request on more technical information, especially on DRIFT. Thailand suggested that the countries also need to help themselves in getting information like WUP working papers, etc. Cambodian raised their concern on timing and the need to coordinate among the teams.

33. Lao PDR agreed with Thailand and suggested that MRCS should get the countries involved in site selection and identification of indicators to get better support. Lao PDR also questioned if the timeframe for BioRA is still realistic based on what was presented at the 4th RTWG. Concerning the number of experts, it was not decided in the last meeting, Lao PDR suggested that MRCS needs to inform RTWG for no objection, and CVs of international consultants should be shared with the countries. Lao PDR commented that BioRA team looks like a biodiversity team and questioned why it is under FP and if we have enough time and budget to do everything? Lao PDR noted that there is a lot of data that we can build on.

Presentation on Progress Update of the Socio-Economic/MacroEconomic Assessment Teams

34. Thailand indicated that they understood the overall picture of the socio-economic assessment, but raised concern on the many teams that are involved and how to effectively manage the timing of outputs from each team. Thailand suggested to consider streamlining the activities of many teams so the countries can more effectively participate. Lao PDR supported Thailand in this regard.

Presentation on Progress Update of the Climate Change Assessment Team

35. Thailand pointed out that there is inconsistency with previous presentation on the periods, 1986 -2005 and 2081-2100. Thailand also asked where the information is from for the slide on defining future climate scenarios (on transboundary adaptation planning)? Thailand further indicated that they understood that CCAI has enough time and resources. DFAT questioned if the CS is now in CCAI work schedule? Lao PDR took note and will organize national consultation to discuss this, will also discuss in Hanoi.

36. In response to Thailand, MRCS (Dr. Phan) clarified that the time period 1986-2005 is used as the baseline period and 2081 - 2100 is used for climate change factor reference period.

37. DFAT (John Dore) asked whether CCAI project fits into existing CS schedule. In response to DFAT, MRCS noted that CCAI can do the CS work as the work is similar to of the CCAI. Thailand indicated that it is clear that CCAI follows IPCC, but suggested to be clear and consistent with the use of terminologies and to make them Mekong-relevant.

Presentation on Reviewing Comments from 3rd RTWG Meeting

38. Thailand noted that progress has been made this period. Questioned why CS Coordinator is now under TSD Director, but not Planning Division and requested the OIC to look into this.

39. Cambodia pointed out that timeframe is a main challenge and questioned the role of the Steering Committee that the briefing note refers to. Cambodia also requested to see overall picture of coordination. Thailand added that a Steering Committee may not be needed and

RTWG has this role. Cambodia then questioned why MRCS referred to this. MRCS clarified that the Steering Committee as suggested by VNMC is to have more strategic guidance, for example on extension of the schedule and who will make the decision? Thailand referred to comment made by DFAT that we should not make things too complicated. Cambodia questioned who will be responsible if CS does not deliver. DFAT suggested that if CEO and JC are responsible? Cambodia responded that the JC may not have the capacity. Viet Nam now suggested that we should not create more bodies, RTWG should provide the oversight needed. Thailand suggested OIC to raise this in the next JC meeting. MRCS OIC responded that we understand that existing mechanism (RTWG) can play this important role. Laos suggested to check the RTWG ToR and supported Thailand on Planning Division taking the lead.

40. The TSD Director, Dr. Tien, explained how the former CEO assigned him as technical advisor, because of his seniority and time involved with CS before and SSM has no comments. If now that countries think it is not reasonable, it should be put under OIC. Viet Nam commented that the CS Coordinator should not be under any Director, need someone to support OIC. The CS Coordinator may need another international expert to assist. Cambodia suggested to ask for JC's guidance.

Presentation on Challenges and Potential Correction Actions Including Alternative Overall Schedule

41. Viet Nam asked what will be discussed in the next RTWG meeting. Suggested that more information on the overall framework before making a decision on schedule extension. Thailand indicated that extension is a major issue and beyond RTWG mandate to approve. The MRCS OIC should take this information to JC. Cambodia supported the extension of the CS but MRCS needs to convince the countries, as everybody knows this was planned originally to be completed by March 2016. One year extension is a major issue. Cambodia mentioned that coordination of the Council Study may need to be strengthened. MRCS reiterated that based on the alternative schedule, we can realistically deliver concrete products (reports) by June 2016, not March 2016. Development of scenarios will take more time than what was planned based on past experience of the teams. Lao PDR supported Thailand to raise to the JC, but if the countries agreed how can MRCS can guarantee that results will be available as planned. MRCS responded that there is no guarantee but the alternative schedule puts us in a better position to deliver the results according to plan. Dr. Vitoon shared with the meeting on comment from the DPs that they will need a more realistic timeframe before they can consider additional funding for the Study.

Presentation - Recap

42. The following are the key points during the recap presentation:
- Modeling framework has been approved by TACT. Details including improvements in the WUP-FIN model (VMOD) and involvement of national consultants/experts need to be provided

- Decision: Approved the first three proposed development scenario: Early Development (up to 2007); DFS 2020 (up to 2020); and 2040 Planned (with 2-3 CC scenarios)
- Decision: Organize a small technical working group meeting (composed of 2 participants from each MC one of which is a TACT member) that will meet and work closely with the Secretariat CS Team to discuss and agree on the baseline period for the Council Study. The group will have the decision making ability.
- Be guided by the Concept Note/TOR approved for the Council Study: i) Scientific evidence of impact of developments in six sectors; ii) Focus on impact areas: fisheries, water quality, sediment, flood, etc.; iii) Produce thematic reports and cumulative reports; Any proposed adjustments should be documented and approval secured.
- Action Item: MRCS CS Team to put together a plan on how to coordinate inputs of the thematic teams and engage the MCs in formulating scenarios (directly and through the National Consultants of the Thematic Teams)
- Modeling Framework has been approved by the TACT. Additional details on the approach are needed by RTWG including addressing questions/comments raised including the following: i) DSF is the primary model and WUP-FIN will supplement DSF; ii) Modeling capacity; iii) Sustainability and capacity building; and iv) Sharing modeling result. The detailed modeling approach will be presented/discussed to the small technical group proposed for discussing/selecting baseline
- Decision in using eWater Source in Council Study should consider: i) in house capacity and availability of external resources to augment; ii) sustainability of its use. Action Item: prepare work plan on how to engage eWater and integrate Source within the CS Modeling approach
- Socio-economic/Macroeconomic Assessment: Consider other implementation arrangements for more effective coordination and timing of technical inputs from the different teams
- Challenges and Corrective Actions: OCEO and MRCS Council Study Team will raise to the Joint Committee the challenges and proposed corrective actions including major adjustments in schedule to complete the Council Study and/or implementation arrangement.

Post Meeting General Comments of Lao PDR dated 20 March 2015 on the 4th RTWG Meeting

Lao PDR Comments (20 March 2015)	Secretariat Response
National experts should be recruited and have participation in all teams before commencing work plans/field work	Lao PDR is probably referring to national consultants. To the extent the overall schedule of the Council Study allows, every effort will be made to schedule tasks so that national consultants can be recruited on time. However, based on past

	<p>experience, not all national consultants can be successfully identified and recruited on schedule. Adhering strictly to this proposal will significantly delay the work of the Council Study. The Secretariat and in conjunction with the international/regional experts will have to cover some of the tasks of the national consultants to keep the Council Study moving.</p>
<p>We agree with the 5 sets of proposed development scenarios. This in line with our Council Member comment during the 21st Council Meeting. Because we need a full and complete picture of water resources development – in the past, planned, exploratory, with and without climate change. We are glad that all member countries also agree</p>	<p>Only three of the five proposed cumulative scenarios have been agreed to by all the Member Countries. These are 1) Early Development Scenario (2007), 2) Definite Future Scenario 2020, and 3) the Planned 2040 Development Scenario.</p>
<p>As stated in the concept note on the scoping of scenarios, the Council Study must assess only integrated scenarios looking at all agreed six thematic sectors using common methodology and approach, relevant experts from the thematic teams should participate in one assessment team</p>	<p>Each scenario that will be assessed is by definition an integrated scenario since each will include the six development thematic areas/sectors with each sector representing a level of development. So a cumulative scenario is by definition an integrated scenario and will be used primarily as the basis for preparing the Cumulative Assessment Report which is a required output deliverable as per the Terms of Reference and Inception Report. A thematic scenario is also by definition an integrated scenario. Accordingly, these thematic scenarios will be primarily used as basis for preparing the Thematic Reports which are required output deliverables as per the Terms of Reference and Inception Report. Thematic scenarios will be formulated to assess the sensitivity of the impacts on changes or deviations from the 2040 Planned Scenario.</p>
<p>We continue to raise concerns about the DRIFT tool. For a successful evaluation of risk, mitigation, and avoidance, as well as for a comprehensive proposal for benefit and cost sharing, the assessment tools should permit us to quantify gain or lost. We do not believe that DRIFT and the methodology it implies can obtain credible quantification. Therefore, we need to ensure that those numbers are obtained from a reliable quantification methodology, meaning one that has been proven successful previously within MRC context</p>	<p>It should be noted that during the 4th RTWG Meeting, Lao PDR did not raise any concern on DRIFT except for one “inappropriate” comment from one of its delegates noting that “it was his first time to hear about DRIFT”. Obviously, that was an unfortunate comment especially from an RTWG delegate who is supposed to be knowledgeable and familiar with the Council Study activities as per the TOR of the Council Study RTWG. For this reason, the comment was in fact intentionally not included in the draft meeting notes of the 4th RTWG. The TOR of the RTWG was resent to the Council Study focal points to remind RTWG members of their responsibility.</p>

DRIFT has been discussed in detail during the Startup Workshop and is clearly specified in the approved Inception Report as one of the tools that will be used. Several technical documents and presentations about DRIFT have been shared with the Member Countries and are also available through the Council Study Web Site. A half-day national consultation with Lao PDR (attended by LNMCS and line agencies) was conducted with DRIFT methodology presented. More recently, Lao PDR representatives have also attended the BioRA Field Visit which provided them hands-on knowledge of and experience with the DRIFT methodology.

It should also be noted that the Cambodia, Thailand, and Viet Nam have not raised any significant concern on DRIFT. In fact, Cambodia during the 3rd RTWG meeting commented that DRIFT methodology appears to be a good approach and appreciated the new thinking and strategy. They also commented that the response curve based methodology is an excellent tool to predict future benefits.

The Council Study Team remains committed in working with Lao PDR in addressing their DRIFT-related concerns and questions including conducting additional information session. In fact, in an email dated 1 March 2015 to the Lao PDR focal point, the Council Study Coordinator specifically offered to meet in person with Lao PDR while the DRIFT experts were in town. Unfortunately, Lao PDR was not able to meet.

The Council Study Team requests Lao PDR to explain in more technical detail the basis for the statement that they do not believe that DRIFT and the methodology it implies can obtain credible quantification. This is the only way the CS Team can expeditiously address the concerns and questions of Lao PDR and further improve the use of DRIFT in the Council Study.

Following the Inception Report which clearly states the use of DRIFT for the Council Study, MRC has already spent/obligated significant budget in using

	<p>DRIFT and in acquiring/using DRIFT consultants. A change will have significant budget and schedule ramifications.</p>
<p>We strongly agree with the comments from other member countries on the need to improve the current management and implementation arrangements of the Council Study consideration. This should include also the new proposed timeline as requested by the RTWG. This is because after three years, we have lessons learned that 6 thematic teams and work plans have not worked. We can foresee that it will be very difficult to manage without proper arrangement and planning. Different teams contacting and working with member countries will be a big burden and not the most efficient use of limited resources. In this connection, a streamlined plan on implementing the scenario formulation and assessment as well as consolidating the work of different teams is needed. Based on MRC experiences and international practice, a study of this size can be accomplished only by subcontracting it to a company or by letting one central team lead it. For these reasons, we would kindly suggest to move the management and technical direction of the CS under the Planning Division which already has two of the most experienced programmes with this kind of assessment, namely BDP and ISH. CS is a planning study for a sustainable development of the Mekong and therefore should be led by the planning staff working with all Programmes. The CS has an objective of enhancing the BDP process. BDP is the only Programme with expertise, data and past experience in accomplishing a comprehensive multi-sector study of this kind, while ISH has experience with hydropower assessment (which is one key aspect of the study) which can effectively support BDP. We echo our development partners wish for a rapid development, and in this regard, we firmly believe that we will achieve substantive progress with the CS only by improving its current configuration and management</p>	<p>The JC Members during the 41st JC Meeting unanimously agreed to extend the implementation schedule of the Council Study. The proposed 6-month extension was supported by Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam but Cambodia suggested to reevaluate and to discuss the proposed duration of the extension during the next RTWG Meeting.</p> <p>During the 41st JC Meeting, Cambodia, Thailand, and Viet Nam stated that the current implementation arrangement should be kept and its management to continue under the OCEO as per the Council Study TOR and Inception Report.</p> <p>It should be noted that the delay in the Council Study was primarily due to the extended time needed to complete the following planning documents and not during the implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept Note (15 January 2013) • Terms of Reference (21 January 2014) • Inception Report (27 October 2014) <p>Therefore, the delay during the planning phase cannot be attributed to the Council Study implementation arrangement.</p> <p>It is recognized that the coordination and management is more challenging and difficult because of the complex implementation arrangement. However, the MCs agreed to structure the Council Study this way not only to take advantage of existing expertise and resources in the Programmes but also promote synergy, transparency, capacity building, and scientific discourse and collaboration (page 69 of Inception Report).</p> <p>The Council Study is less of a planning study and more of a scientific study. Its objectives are to close knowledge gaps, reduce uncertainty, understand impacts, build a reliable scientific base, and enhance MRC knowledge base. This enhanced knowledge base is expected then for an improved and better-informed basin development planning process. In fact, all the MRC Programmes have</p>

	<p>significantly contributed to enhancing the MRC knowledgebase and in the Council Study, all Programmes are again expected to contribute “equally” in closing remaining knowledge gaps. The primary approach adopted to close these knowledge gaps is to go through a number of scenario assessments that include both cumulative and thematic assessments. While scenario assessment is one of the 6 stages of the Basin Development Planning Process, again its use in the Council Study is to primarily understand the positive and negative impacts of developments and close the knowledge gaps. The development of the plans should remain the responsibility of the MCs with the support of the MRC regional planning programme/unit.</p>
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