

MRC progresses with development goals

The preparation of MRC's Strategic Plan 2006-2010 is making good progress and has involved consultation with member countries, NMCs, staff members, partners, donors and the civil society.

Dr Olivier Cogels made the announcement in his CEO report at the 22nd Joint Committee meeting held in Vientiane on 30-31 August.

The meeting was an opportunity to highlight recent achievements made by MRC's various programmes. JC members were informed that the BDP planning process has allowed the identification of more than 300 projects, which are now stored in a projects database. The BDP has completed an initial short list of 69 joint projects. It has also drafted a document on Strategic Directions for Integrated Water Resources Management in the Lower Mekong Basin to serve as a blueprint for development of water and related resources in the next 20 years.

Dr Cogels said that the Environment Programme has also been working steadily toward its two milestones for 2005: The Basin Report Card on



The Joint Committee members made positive moves towards programme development.

Environmental Conditions as well as Guidelines for a Transboundary EIA System.

The Joint Committee approved the Guidelines for the Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement and endorsed the text of the Procedures for the Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream.

This latter agreement will facilitate the approval of this procedure by Council in December this year and marks an important milestone for the

Water Utilisation Programme.

These procedures concern the maintenance of acceptable minimum monthly flows of the Mekong mainstream in the dry season, the acceptable natural reverse flow of the Tonle Sap (in Cambodia) during the wet season, and the prevention of unnatural peak flows.

In addition to providing benchmark flows against which to assess future development proposals, these procedures will also help put in place a

framework for drought forecasting and management.

The JC also reviewed and approved a concept paper on the MRC's Hydropower Programme.

The JC heard that one of the year's key achievements was the start-up of the Flood Management and Mitigation Programme. The flood forecasting function was relocated from the MRC Secretariat to the Regional Centre in Phnom Penh in June 2005. The existing flood forecasting system will now be further enhanced and new tools will be developed to improve forecasting. A regional kick-off meeting is planned for October 2005 to finalise the Programme Implementation Plan.

Preparations have also been continuing for the formulation of the Decision Support and Information Management Programme.

Dr Cogels added that, following a visit to Beijing in June at the invitation of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the MRC had identified a number of potential areas for concrete cooperation with China. ~

Gender mainstreaming project kicks off

The MRC's Gender Mainstreaming project has moved into phase II with the appointment of a Gender Project Coordinator attached to the Human Resources Section in MRCS.

The second phase, which was launched in July 2005 and will extend into 2007, will deal with Gender Mainstreaming in Water and Related Resources Development in the LMB and is funded by NZAID.

The overall objective of the Project is to bring the MRC's Gender Policy into operation. This will ensure there is a gender mainstreaming perspective in all MRC development efforts, ensuring that they benefit men and

women equally, according to their different needs, and with the input and equal participation of men and women at all levels.

In 1996 the Human Resources Development unit of MRCS initiated a project on Studies of Roles of Women in Water Resources Development in four riparian countries. Funded by the New Zealand Government, this project was the first attempt to bring gender issues to basinwide attention.

In 1997 researchers and study teams presented country reports at the Regional Workshop in Nong Khai, Thailand and called for the need to address gender concerns in

development at both project and institutional levels. The formulation of MRC Gender Strategy was one of the key recommendations from this Project, and it was approved by the MRC Council in October 1998.

The next year 19 gender trainees from four riparian countries formulated the MRC Gender Action Plan and in 2000 the Council approved the MRC Gender Policy.

During this time work was also under way within the Fisheries Programme. In 1998-1999 (with support from DANIDA) the FP initiated a small project on Women in Fisheries and integrated the issues into

Programme activities.

Women in Fisheries Focal Points were formed in 2000 and a network set up in the four riparian countries. The network was subsequently changed to the Network for the Promotion of Gender in Fisheries (NGF).

In 2004 SIDA granted a three-year project to the Technical Advisory Body (TAB) called "TAB Gender and Women in Fisheries" to assist the riparian line agencies integrate gender issues into fisheries management.

For further information contact Napat Gordon napat@mrcmekong.org.



INSIDE

- Local fishers join research team
- River health results in
- MRC to host International Forum

The 12th Meeting of the MRC Council

to be held in Chiang Rai, Thailand on 29-30 November 2005

For information about the MRC please contact: Tel: 856 21 263 263 Email: mrcs@mrcmekong.org Website: www.mrcmekong.org

Fishers prove net worth to programme

Mr Kung Chanthy from Stoeng Treng, Cambodia has been fishing for 26 years and makes his money from selling fish, growing crops and raising livestock. But the 39-year-old has another important role to play: he is one of the vital cogs in the Fisheries Programme's research team spread throughout villages in the basin.

Since April 2003 Mr Kung and his friends have been recording their daily catches for the programme's Assessment of Mekong Capture Fisheries component (AMCF).

The AMCF component has been employing fishers and traders for some years now to capture all types of statistics at the base level and their information has proved invaluable.

The fisherman was one of three local people who rely on the Mekong fishery for their living who brought their grassroots stories to the MRC Fisheries Programme's 12th Annual Meeting held in Siem Reap, Cambodia, from 2-4 June 2005.

Mr Kung said that while there were still many big fish in his part of Mekong, they are fewer than 10 years ago and there are more people are fishing nowadays.

His catches had declined from 70-80 kg per day in the peak period 20 years ago to only 5-20 kg for the peak period today. He thought this was due to lower water levels causing deep pools to become shallow, coupled with overfishing and use of illegal fishing gears, poisons, and explosives in the dry season.

Another local Ms Nyaim Vantha, has been selling fish for 22 years. She buys her fish from Boeng Cheung Aik, a large wetland south of Phnom Penh. She and her daughter have been recording their fish sale



Mr Kung measures a trey kaek (*Labeo chrysophekadion*) part of his daily catch.

data in logbooks since August 2003. She told the meeting that her fish were easy to sell but it was more difficult to buy fish now as she had to buy from more fishers and the area of water was less. Her income had stayed the same, but inflation had cut the value of her earnings.

Mr Tey Hon, 41, is predominately a rice farmer, but with nine mouths to feed in his family in 2001 he branched out into aquaculture to meet his increasing financial demands. His new venture now constitutes 12% of his income and reduces his reliance on agriculture and raising animals.

Pond aquaculture is not as common in Cambodia as in the other MRC member countries and the Fisheries Programme is promoting it where suitable. Mr Tey said he preferred to stock indigenous fish rather

than alien species and was now also educating neighbouring villagers on the importance of fish culture with indigenous fish species. He wants the fisheries programme to identify other indigenous fish species for aquaculture.

These three people exemplify those the Fisheries Programme is trying to help. The delegates agreed that their participation demonstrated the value of the involvement of rural communities in the success of the programme and the use of accurate and extensive monitoring of catches as a means to value the fisheries and identify changes in fish populations. They said these surveys should be incorporated into the work programmes of national fisheries agencies.

The delegates applauded the continued uptake of co-management among fishing

communities across the region and the Fisheries Programme's work in fostering these practices, which has already increased the size of catches in targeted localities.

Dr Chris Barlow, Fisheries Programme Manager updated delegates on the planned work programme and the funding status of Fisheries Programme Phase 2. Other MRC programmes and agencies in the fisheries sector gave presentations on their activities as well. The MRC Environment Programme reviewed work relating to integrated basin flow management (particularly its impact on fisheries) and the WUP-FIN Programme presented data on the consequences of changes in flow on the Great Lake and the delta region.

Delegates heard about the Fisheries Programme's work related to IFReDI and the Mekong Field Academy. Oxfam America presented work on income security for subsistence fishers in the Lower Mekong Basin. The IUCN-Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Programme described initiatives to preserve the Mekong giant catfish. The FAO reviewed fisheries enhancements in the Asia-Pacific region. WorldFish Centre described its Mekong Initiative and SEAFDEC reviewed its plan for inland fisheries in the LMB. NACA also described its work on genetics and biodiversity for resource management and animal health.

Deputy Director of the Cambodian Department of Fisheries Mr Sam Nuov co-chaired the meeting and also presented a new film on the Tonle Sap fisheries.

The strong support provided to the Fisheries Programme by Danida, Sida, ACIAR and MRAG was recognised with gratitude. ~

EP ready with river health results

The MRC has monitored chemical water quality in the Mekong Basin since 1985. But over the past 20 years, approaches to monitoring river health have evolved.

Recently, the MRC has developed methods to conduct direct biological assessments of river health. After testing some possible methods in 2003, sampling programmes were conducted at 20 sites in 2004 and a further 16 sites in 2005. Sampling is conducted by an international team of experts from the 4 countries working with 2 international mentors.

Following each sampling campaign the team holds a workshop to analyse the results and compare their findings. The most recent workshop, held from the 8-10 August at the Mekong River Commission Secretariat, considered all the results to date.

Most of the 36 sites studied were in good ecological health, but there were some sites where conditions were not so well off, including sites near some major cities. Further studies will be

conducted at these sites to establish the causes of, and propose possible solutions to, the problems.

Monitoring on the Mekong is used to ensure that the aquatic life and ecological balance of the river is protected. Such efforts can be used to detect problem localities where the ecological balance may have been disrupted. It can also detect trends over time – ultimately whether the river health is being maintained or deteriorating.

However researchers know that monitoring alone is not sufficient to ensure that the ecological health of the river is being maintained. No chemical monitoring programme can measure all the possible contaminants that can affect the biota of a river. There are too many possible contaminants, and some are very expensive to measure. The best that can be done is to focus on contaminants most likely to cause problems – which is what the MRC's current chemical monitoring programme does.



Two of the regional water quality testers discuss their data during an analysis workshop in Vientiane.

The ecological balance of a river may be disrupted by a number of factors other than water pollution. For example the habitats of the riverine organisms may be altered through engineering works, or even driftwood harvesting by local people. Changes in river flows can also impact the biota, which is adapted to the natural flow regime.

Four biological indicators are being used for the ecological health monitoring. These are invertebrates, insects, worms, snails and crustaceans, from the middle of the channel and the river edge, zooplankton which drift in the water, and diatoms, microscopic algae which grow on rocks and other solid objects in the river. ~

MRC Events

MRC on display around the world

The MRC shared a booth with the Challenge Programme on Water for Food (CPWF) during World Water Week, this year 21-27 August, in Stockholm, Sweden. (The MRC is the coordinating institution for the CPWF in the Mekong region). Dr Kim Geheb manned the booth, and said the display received a large numbers of visitors and queries. Mr Thim Ly also attended the conference, and Mr Choomjet Karjanakesorn, team leader of the MRC's Water Utilisation Programme, made a presentation. Two days later, the MRC hosted an additional display at The Southeast Asian Water Forum in Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia, 29 August - 3 September. Manned by Mr Esben Sverdrup-Jensen, Mr Oudomsack Philavong and Dr Kim Geheb, the booth presented the relevance of the MRC in Southeast Asia, the organisation's experience in transboundary water management, monitoring and cooperation and attracted many visitors with queries. Dr Geheb, on behalf of the Flood Management and Mitigation Programme, also convened a session entitled 'Reducing Vulnerability to Floods, Drought and Other Water



The Southeast Asian Water Forum in Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia



World Water Week, held this year in Stockholm, Sweden

Related Disasters'. The MRC co-convened this session with the Japan Bank for International Cooperation and the International Flood Network. Six papers were presented during the session, which included one by Dr Chayanis Manusthiparom, Dr Chusit Apirumanekul and Ms. Manithaphone Mahaxay entitled 'Flood Forecasting and River Monitoring System in the Mekong River Basin'. Results from the session and recommendations were presented to the SEAWF Plenary, for reference to the Forum's Ministerial Meeting and for delivery to the World Water Forum, to be held in Mexico in March 2006. The MRC sent several delegates, as did the National Mekong Committees, funded by the FMMP and WUP. ~

Papers welcome for Technical Symposium

The MRC Fisheries Programme will hold its 7th Technical Symposium on Mekong Fisheries in Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand on 15-16 November 2005. The symposium will feature both oral presentations and poster sessions. As in previous years, the structure of the symposium will centre on the topics of the Fisheries Programme's three components: Assessment of Capture Fisheries, Aquaculture of Indigenous Mekong Fish Species and Management of River and Reservoir Fisheries.

The symposium will be held at the Art and Culture Centre, Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University, Muang district, Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand. A field excursion to visit the fishery station at Pak Moon dam and the Pha Taem National Park will follow on 17th November.

People wishing to give presentations or display posters should submit abstracts to the appropriate MRC Fisheries Programme Component Advisor by 1 October 2005.

Guidelines detailing the procedures, formats and standards authors should use when preparing presentations, posters and papers can be obtained by contacting Dr Tim Burnhill at tim@mrcmekong.org. ~

Latest information products

Environmental Training Kit



This CD-ROM contains eight courses designed for environmental scientists from operational to expert levels and covers integrated resource management, tools techniques and decision making and cumulative effects assessment. All materials are available in Khmer, Lao, Thai or Vietnamese. Also soon to be available as a free download from www.mrcmekong.org. US\$5.00 (plus postage)

Catch and Culture Riparian edition



A compilation of selected articles translated into Khmer, Lao, Thai and Vietnamese. Also available as a free download on www.mrcmekong.org. Free (postage costs apply)

Proceedings of the 12th Annual Meeting of the MRC Programme for Fisheries Management and Development Cooperation



This CD-ROM contains the proceedings of the 12th Annual Meeting of the MRC Fisheries Programme conducted in Siem Reap, Cambodia from 2-4 June 2005 including text of presentations, text of PowerPoint presentations and photographs. US\$3.00 (plus postage)

Proceedings of the 3rd Annual Mekong Flood Forum



This CD-ROM contains the proceedings of the Third Annual Mekong Flood Forum - Flood Management and Mitigation in the Mekong Basin, which

was conducted in Vientiane, Lao PDR from 7-8 April 2005 including text of presentations, text of PowerPoint presentations and photographs. US\$3.00 (plus postage)

Proceedings of the Second International Symposium on the Management of Large Rivers for Fisheries (LARS2)

This CD-ROM contains the edited papers from LARS2 held from 11-14 February 2003 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The theme of the conference was Sustaining Livelihoods and Biodiversity in the New Millennium. The papers are in PDF form in two volumes. Also available as two hardback volumes.



CD US\$5 (plus postage)
Hard copies US\$50 (plus postage)



Technical data maps are available from the Documentation Centre.

How to order

All products can be ordered from the MRC Secretariat's Documentation Centre. Postage costs apply. Mekong region government agencies may write to the MRC to obtain free copies.

Check the MRC website for a full list of products. Credit card sales are also available through the website.

Contact

Documentation Centre
Mekong River Commission Secretariat
P.O. Box 6101, 184 Fa Ngoum Road, Unit 18, Ban Sithane Neua,
Sikhottabong District, Vientiane 01000, Lao PDR
Phone: (856 21) 263 263 ext: 1122 **Fax:** (856 21) 263 264
Email: doc.centre@mrcmekong.org **Website:** www.mrcmekong.org

Screening toolkit speeds up project

The Basin Development Plan (BDP) team has developed a Project Screening Toolkit that is now being used to screen the initial set of 69 joint development projects identified under the project's first phase. This process will continue until the end of BDP Phase 1.

The member countries have selected these joint projects as those they see of maximum benefit to their shared development goals.

The design of the Project Screening Toolkit has been based on past discussions of the Resource Allocation Model (RAM, an economic valuation of resources), the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) instruments.

This social, economic and environmental screening assesses the available project outlines by using checklist questions (coming from earlier discussions of SIA, SEA and

RAM) and relying on project information taken from a simplified Project Identification Note stored in the BDP Projects Database.

The purpose of the screening is mainly to ensure that projects meet three important aspects (economic, social and environmental sustainability) of project design. The whole process of project identification, screening and prioritisation has computerised support through the recently established BDP Projects database.

To date, the BDP team at the MRC Secretariat has screened nine joint projects and programmes. The National Mekong Committees in each country are responsible for screening their own national priority projects. Projects screened by the BDP project and endorsed by the JC will establish a projects shortlist, which will be continuously refined and updated, and used to promote development

priorities in the Basin.

The first phase of the BDP saw the development and formulation of a number of planning systems and acquired substantial knowledge, which can be used by other MRC programmes, NMCs, Line Agencies and others working in the Lower Mekong Basin.

Most importantly, this includes an established process of transboundary consultation between the member states; a well-developed public participation process and the use of "sub-areas" as geographical planning units. The development of basin-wide scenarios, integrated river basin planning training modules and the set-up of a specific hydropower database are further achievements.

The BDP has also established a core library of its research documents and reports, which is now available on www.MekongInfo.org.

Watershed team boosts regional information skills

There is a great need for better information and knowledge management in the Mekong region and the Watershed Management Project of the Mekong River Commission (MRC)/GTZ Cooperation Programme is working to improve this situation.

Over the past few months the WMP has held training workshops on Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) in the riparian countries. The first three training workshops were held in Bangkok, Vientiane and Phnom Penh in July. A fourth training workshop took place in Hanoi in mid-August.

In each of the four riparian countries 15 participants from government institutions, non-government organisations, universities and the private sector attended the two-day training workshops.



Workshop participants learn more about information and knowledge management.

The training aimed to improve information and knowledge sharing and networking between the MRCS and the countries as well as within the countries.

The different sessions introduced participants to the basics of IKM, to the work of the MRC, as well as to the information provided by the MRC Secretariat on the Internet, including the web-based information system MekongInfo.

Trainers provided instruction on using advanced Internet search

functions in order to show the participants better ways of sourcing information on the Internet.

The MRC/GTZ Cooperation Programme also conducted an information needs assessment and a group discussion on approaches used with information and knowledge sharing so it can further improve support to regional information and knowledge management.

Shared ideas add balance to strategy

The MRC's strategic planning team got together with representatives of civil society in Vientiane in August at the first regional stakeholders meeting to be held by the MRC.

The main reason behind the meeting was to obtain input from others working in the region on what they perceived as the strengths and weaknesses of the MRC and discuss how they could work together for the future of the Basin's people.

It was important to take into account the views and suggestions of everyone with whom the MRC worked, or might work, when formulating the strategic plan for 2006-2010, CEO Dr Olivier Cogels told the group.

He said the MRC had always recognised the important role played by stakeholders and civil society within the basin and it was now trying to put this on a firmer footing by instituting regular discussion groups, such as this one, to share ideas and integrate feedback.

For its part, the MRC would like to share access to its knowledge base and planning tools, to allow partners to see how simulation of the impacts of development on the river and the flow regime can help them make the right choices.

"We want to use this capacity to support development programmes to improve the lives of the people of the basin," Dr Cogels said.

Representatives of Oxfam America, the FAO, UNEP, UNDP, IUCN and the World Food Programme attended the meeting.

The 7th Technical Symposium on Mekong Fisheries
15-16 November 2005, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand
Contact: Barlow@mrcmekong.org

12th World Water Congress of IWRA
Water for Sustainable Development Towards Innovative Solutions.
22-25 November 2005, New Delhi, India. <http://cb.cbip.org:5050/index.jsp>

12th Meeting of the MRC Council
29-30 November 2005, Chiang Rai, Thailand
Contact: Schiefer@mrcmekong.org

12th Meeting of the Donor Consultative Group
1 December 2005, Chiang Rai, Thailand
Contact: Schiefer@mrcmekong.org

4th International Water History Association Conference: Water and Civilization
1-4 December 2005, Paris, France
http://www.unesco.org/water/water_events/Detailed/917.shtml

1st International Conference on Water Resources in the 21st Century
26-28 December 2005, Alexandria, Egypt
http://www.unesco.org/water/water_events/Detailed/1066.shtml

The International Forum on IWRM of the Mekong River Basin
January 2006 (date to be confirmed) Chiang Rai, Thailand.
Contact: kim.geheb@mrcmekong.org

Mekong News is published quarterly by the Mekong River Commission Secretariat in Vientiane, Lao PDR. Please send comments, queries and ideas to: Communications Officer, Office of the CEO, MRC Secretariat, Phone: (856-21) 263 263 ext. 1122 Fax: (856-21) 263 264 Email: virginia@mrcmekong.org