Joint Development Partners’ Statement  
on the occasion of the 24th MRC Council Meeting  
Pattaya, 29 November 2017

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Development Partners thank the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Member Countries and Secretariat for this opportunity to engage in a constructive dialogue, and thank the Government of Thailand in particular for hosting the 24th Council Meeting.

2. We reiterate our strong support to the MRC and its mandate of engaging stakeholders for the sustainable development of the Mekong Basin.

3. We congratulate the MRC on a number of outstanding achievements during 2017, especially the Prior Consultation for the Pak Beng hydropower project, the approval of the Mekong Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan, and the Gender Action Plan.

4. Poverty reduction and gender equality should be central considerations in all plans and activities of the MRC. We encourage the MRC to continue to strengthen the Gender Action Plan and its implementation, as well as to ensure the development of country gender action plans and increased gender capacity at all levels of the organization.

5. We look forward to the finalization and uptake of the Council Study, the approval of the Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment Guidelines, the revision of the Design Guidance for mainstream and significant tributary dams, as well as the update of the Sustainable Hydropower Development Strategy.

6. We reiterate our appreciation of the work of the Secretariat throughout the Prior Consultation process for the Pak Beng hydropower project, and welcome the Member Countries’ first Joint Statement on a proposed mainstream hydropower project. We look forward to concrete actions for the finalization, publication and implementation of the Joint Action Plan as mentioned in the Joint Statement.
   a. We are pleased to note that the regional Prior Consultation process has engaged a wide range of stakeholders, including the civil society. We look forward to reviewing the Joint Action Plan, and hope that it will include timelines and be implemented transparently, and with public consultations.
   b. Furthermore, we encourage adequate baseline data be collected before project agreements are concluded, and construction activities commence. We note that the socio-economic analysis, including gender-related impacts, as well as the fisheries data and the fish passage plans, would benefit from further elaboration.
7. We look forward to the publication of the complete technical review of the design changes of the **Xayaburi hydropower project**. This review is of utmost importance in setting a benchmark for other mainstream hydropower projects.

8. We welcome the Secretariat’s efforts on the Post-PNPCA process, and look forward to the development of the **Joint Environmental Monitoring Program and its implementation at Xayaburi and Don Sahong hydropower projects**.

9. We welcome the initiative of Lao PDR to study the feasibility of a **Coordination and Monitoring Center** of mainstream **hydropower projects**, and stress the importance of linking it with MRC tools and structure to ensure the sustainable management of the cascade of dams planned along the Mekong mainstream.

10. We wish to receive information on **MRC’s review of Thailand’s proposed water use and diversion projects**.

11. We value the implementation of MRC-facilitated **transboundary projects**, such as the Cambodia-Lao transboundary fisheries project. Such initiatives have potential to inspire increased cooperation between Member Countries as proposed in the National Indicative Plans through the Joint Projects.

12. We encourage the National Mekong Committees and the Secretariat to enhance public and civil society participation in national consultations, relevant MRC governance meetings and Expert Groups. We promote the strengthening of the **Regional Stakeholder Platform**, including initiating yearly MRC-wide forums.

13. We welcome the decision to create the **Expert Groups**, and look forward to their mobilization. We encourage gender equality and civil society representation in these expert groups.

14. We appreciate the efforts made by the Secretariat and Member Countries to address the challenges associated with the **decentralization process**, and encourage Member Countries to ensure proper allocation of resources and adequate mechanisms in support of this process.

15. 2018 will be a crucial year for the **implementation of the MRC Strategic Plan 2016-2020** as it reaches its midterm. We express concerns with the current capacity of the MRC to achieve the objectives of the plan, noting the slow pace of implementation to date. We stress the need to strategically prioritize the different tasks outlined in the MRC’s Annual Work Plan, and to ensure sufficient human and financial resources are allocated accordingly.

16. Based on the financial information provided, we observe that the **available funds are not a limiting factor** for the implementation of the Strategic Plan. We therefore encourage the MRC to strengthen its implementation capacity of the Strategic Plan.

17. The basket fund was established based on principles of transparency and accountability, and relies on the implementation of sound **financial management**, and **monitoring and evaluation** system. This requires adequate allocation of resources, including the online application of the monitoring and evaluation system based on high-quality indicators. These systems should be the
basis for high quality documents submitted well ahead of governance meetings to allow meaningful engagement by all participants.

18. We recommend that the Secretariat, as part of its work on the **Financial Manual**, reviews the budget implementation guidelines presented in the 2018 Annual Work Plan to ensure cost effectiveness and efficiency. We suggest MRC defines clear guidelines for the Administrative Reserve Fund and further strengthens internal financial control mechanisms.

19. We look forward to actively working with the MRC in 2018 on the independent **Mid Term Review of the MRC Strategic Plan**, which shall cover technical, organizational and governance aspects.

20. Finally, we encourage Member Countries to use the occasion of the 3rd **MRC Summit** to reaffirm their commitment to the MRC’s mandate and financial self-sustainability by 2030, and to deepen MRC’s ties with Dialogue Partners and ASEAN.

21. As in previous years, we look forward to a written response to this statement within one month after this meeting.

We thank the Government of Thailand for hosting this meeting. We highly value the opportunity to engage with the MRC on issues of great importance to the region, and we thank the Members Countries for their continuous engagement with us.

This statement is endorsed by:

Australia, the European Union, France, Germany, IUCN, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and the World Bank.