

Statement of the Development Partners at the occasion
of the Ministerial Conference of the Mekong River Commission

Siem Reap, 4 April 2018

1. We, the Development Partners of the Mekong River Commission, are pleased to take the opportunity of this Ministerial Conference to exchange views with the MRC Member Countries and Dialogue Partners.
2. We will reiterate tomorrow, during the Summit, our **strong support for the MRC and its mandate** to manage the sustainable development of the Lower Mekong Basin, reduce poverty, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

We would like to take the opportunity of this Ministerial Conference to follow up on more specific points.

3. We **congratulate** the MRC for the achievements made since the last Summit.
 - a. The Basin Development Strategy and the MRC Strategic Plan have become **reference documents** for the development of the Lower Basin.
 - b. We continue to see great value in the further implementation of the MRC's five procedures, which enable cooperation in important areas such as data-sharing; notification and consultation on new water infrastructure; and joint water monitoring along the Mekong River. In particular, the Procedure on '**Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement**' for the Pak Beng Hydropower Project has been led efficiently and effectively, through consultation of a wide range of stakeholders. For the first time, it ended with a joint statement from the four Member Countries agreeing to adopt and implement a Joint Action Plan.
 - c. The recent release of the **Study on the Sustainable Management and Development of the Mekong River Basin**, including Impacts of Mainstream Hydropower Projects (the "Council Study"), is a good illustration of the MRC's role to generate and disseminate scientific and objective information related to the Basin's development, thereby strengthening the link between science and policy decisions.
 - d. **Important strategies and guidelines** have been approved or are in the process of finalization. They include: the Gender Action Plan; the Mekong Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan; the Basin-wide Fisheries Management and Development Strategy; and the Regional Drought Management and Mitigation Strategy. Technical Guidelines for the procedures on Water Quality and for the Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream have been adopted. These are positive developments.
 - e. We commend the MRC Secretariat's **reorganization**, which we hope will improve coordination and coherence between the different activities. The MRC's **decentralization process** has reaffirmed Member Countries' ownership of core functions such as the monitoring of near real-time hydrometeorological parameters and the monitoring of rainfall and water levels. The MRC Countries are also developing action plans to improve fisheries and watershed management in their border areas and implementing bilateral transboundary projects.
 - f. The Member Countries decided to increase annual contributions to the MRC to achieve **financial self-sustainability by 2030**. These contributions help fulfill the Commitment made at the 2010 and 2014 Summits.
 - g. **Cooperation with China and Myanmar** has continued and improved, with more data sharing and more technical discussions held.
 - h. We congratulate the MRC for the successful **international conference** held earlier this week. It showcased the MRC's role in building and disseminating knowledge on the Mekong Basin and engaging meaningfully with a range of stakeholders.

We believe the MRC has significantly evolved and has yielded many successes.

4. We **welcome the release of the MRC Council Study** and take note of its findings. The Study provides a sound and neutral basis for understanding the likely trade-offs and distribution of benefits and losses across the Lower Mekong Basin. Given the severity of the projected impacts of planned and ongoing investments on fisheries, food security, health and livelihoods, as well as the region's commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, we look forward to seeing how the Member Countries translate the findings of their Council Study into policies, agreements and actions. We encourage the Member Countries to revisit their development models to ensure that these capitalize on new knowledge and alternative technologies to ensure that public and private investments are economically and ecologically sound.
5. In the same spirit, we encourage the MRC to take into consideration all activities that could impact the river system, such as **riverbed sand mining** and **groundwater extraction**, which have already had serious impacts in the delta.
6. Furthermore, we observe that certain **projects on the tributaries** can have at least as much transboundary impact as projects on the Mekong Mainstream, especially on hydrology and sediment trapping. We encourage the MRC to give more consideration to projects on the tributaries in the process of reviewing the Preliminary Design Guidance and updating the Sustainable Hydropower Development Strategy.
7. **Poverty reduction** and **gender equality** are essential to achieve the sustainable development of the Lower Mekong Basin and should be given more consideration in the development and implementation of the MRC's plans and activities. We regret that the Council Study lacks gender differentiated analysis.
8. We would be interested in getting more information on the upcoming regional stakeholder forum for the **Pak Beng Hydropower Project**, as well as on the status of the related **Joint Action Plan**.
9. As for all regional and national consultations, we encourage the MRC to ensure **adequate public and civil society participation** and invite the MRC to provide a clear timeline or process for how stakeholder comments will be incorporated.
10. We look forward to the release of the final **review of the design changes of the Xayaburi and Don Sahong** hydropower projects for public comment and review. This is particularly important given that the Member Countries' Joint Statement issued at the conclusion of the Prior Consultation for the Pak Beng hydropower project noted that the Xayaburi's fish passage and mitigation measures will inform the design of the Pak Beng dam, and presumably any future dam.
11. We support the request of the MRCS on **Thailand's proposed water use projects** to obtain the results of the feasibility study and details on planned activities as this information is critical to prepare the State of Basin Report and Basin Development Strategy.
12. We look forward to the finalization of the **Guidelines for Transboundary Impacts Assessment** and the second phase of the **initial studies on the flood risks**.
13. We look forward to the **Mid-Term Review** of the Strategic Plan 2016-2020, assessing both the technical and organizational progress achieved since the adoption of the Strategic Plan. The review will be carried out mid-2018, under the shared leadership of the MRCS and the Development Partners.
14. Once again, we **thank the MRC** for this opportunity of exchanging views with regional leaders, and we thank in particular the Cambodian National Mekong Committee, and the Kingdom of Cambodia, for successfully organizing this Summit, Ministerial Meeting and International Conference of the Mekong River Commission. We are grateful for this opportunity to engage in this productive dialogue.

This Statement is endorsed by Australia, Belgium, the European Union, France, Germany, IUCN, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States and the World Bank.