



# Mekong River Commission

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## TERM OF REFERENCE

### 1. Consultancy Summary:

Consultancy Title:	International Consultant to Support the Development of a Methodology for Long-term and Cost-Effective Monitoring of Plastic Waste in the Lower Mekong River in the frame of the ongoing MRC Water Quality Monitoring activity and the MRC partnership with the UNEP and contribution to the UNEP CounterMEASURE project Phase II.
Consultancy type:	Special Service Agreement (SSA), type (a) One-time assignment
Duration:	35 working days from April 2020 to December 2020 – additional working days will be allocated from January 2021 to December 2021 if funding allows
Division:	Environmental Management Division (ED)
Working station:	Home-based with possible travel to MRC Secretariat and MRC Member Countries (MCs)
Total budget:	

### 2. General background:

#### 2.1. Background and objectives of the consultancy:

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) was established by the 1995 Agreement on Co-operation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin, between the governments of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam. The role of the MRC is to coordinate and promote cooperation in all fields of sustainable development, utilization, management and conservation of the water and related resources of the Mekong River Basin.

The MRC Secretariat (MRCS) is the operational arm of the MRC. It provides technical and administrative services to the Joint Committee and the Council to achieve the MRC's mission.

The Environmental Management Division (ED) is responsible for environment monitoring, assessment, planning and management to support basin planning management and development for sustainable development of the Mekong River.

The Mekong River Basin is one of the largest and most biodiverse river basins in the world, spreading over more than 795,000 km<sup>2</sup> and extending over 5,000 km through six different countries and providing a home to more than 70 million people alone in its lower reaches (Lower Mekong Basin). However, the Mekong River is also one of the 10 major contributors to marine plastic pollution. Collectively these major contributors discharge about 95% of the plastic strangling the world's oceans.

In 2019 the United Nations Environmental Assembly agreed on measures aiming at curtailing global plastic pollution and leakage into the world's oceans with the commitment of 180 countries including the MRC Member Countries. The main aim is to reduce the use of single-use plastic products. However, it is known that this will not be enough to effectively address the magnitude of plastic waste that pollutes our freshwater ways and our oceans.

The MRC has six core functions including assessments and analysis, monitoring of environmental status and trends and the implementation of MRC procedures. Among the five MRC procedures are the Procedures for Water Quality (PWQ) and the Procedures for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing (PDIES). One of the key objectives of the MRC core function for monitoring is the continuous assessment and identification of basin changes of 5 different disciplines: i) Hydrology and Hydraulics, ii) Sediment and Discharge, iii) Water Quality, iv) Aquatic Ecology, and v) Fisheries. The MRC has long-lasting experience with environment and fisheries monitoring of key disciplines. The MRC WQM activity dates back to 1993 and to date presents 22 WQM sites spread throughout the LMB. The MRC Fisheries monitoring began in 1994 and to date presents 38 sites and soon to have several more sites based on recommendations from the Joint Environmental Monitoring (JEM) Programme for the Mekong mainstream hydropower projects. These procedures and monitoring activities lay the groundwork for this assignment.

The MRC and UNEP have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to, among others, work on water quality monitoring including plastic waste leakage into the Mekong river system. Under this partnership arrangement in 2019 the MRC has been supporting the first phase of the UNEP "Project on Promotion of Countermeasures Against Marine Plastic Litter in Southeast Asia" (CounterMEASURE) including regional workshops, capacity mapping for plastic pollution in the Mekong basin and support to the pilot projects in the 4 MRC Member Countries Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam.

To build on the initial efforts under the first phase of the CounterMEASURE project, the MRC and UNEP have agreed on several areas of cooperation including the **identification of sources of plastic waste leakage** and the **development of a methodology for plastic waste assessment and monitoring** in the Mekong River. The final objective is to provide timely data and information on **transboundary plastic waste pollution status and trends** and to report on these status and trends to inform policy decision making processes.

To achieve this, the MRC has planned two key activities for 2020. It is planned to carry out a **review of the status and trends of plastic waste management** in Lower Mekong Countries and to develop a **concept note** for a long-term and cost-effective **assessment and monitoring methodology of plastic waste in the Mekong River**. After completion, and upon the availability of funds for the MRC Annual Work Plan 2021, it is planned to **develop and finalize a detailed methodology** for the long-term and cost-effective assessment and monitoring of plastic waste in the Mekong basin, followed by **national and regional capacity building** to implement such methodology.

To facilitate the review of the status and trends of plastic waste management in the LMB, and to support the preparation of a concept note for the development of a plastic waste assessment and monitoring methodology, the Environmental Management Division of the MRC Secretariat is looking for a competent international consultant who has extensive knowledge and experiences in large river environmental management and monitoring,

particularly the Mekong River Basin, to undertake the following tasks to obtain the following expected outputs and achieve the specific objective.

The **specific objectives** of this assignment are to prepare the methodology and facilitate the implementation of **regional review of status and trends of plastic waste management** and to prepare a **concept for a long-term and cost-effective assessment and monitoring methodology for plastic waste in the Mekong basin**. If funding allows, this contract may be amended to include two further objectives for the development of a detailed assessment and monitoring methodology and capacity building to implement said methodology.

## 2.2. Expected final products in 2020:

- A **regional review report** on the current situation of plastic pollution in the Lower Mekong River, including the national approaches and methodologies and tools of plastic pollution monitoring of the four (4) LMB countries, national policies and regulations, institutional supports, etc.; and
- A **concept note on the methodology and tool** for long-term and cost-effective monitoring of plastic waste in the Lower Mekong River, including the identification of hotspots for plastic waste leakages into the Mekong River.

## 2.3. Potential additional products in 2021 (based on availability of funding):

- A **detailed methodology developed** for the long-term and cost-effective monitoring of plastic waste in the Lower Mekong River, including the identification of hotspots for plastic debris leakages into the Mekong River; and
- A **training and training materials** on the identification of hotspots of plastic waste leakages and the application of the methodology and tool for long-term and cost-effective monitoring of plastic waste in the Lower Mekong River.

## 3. Required deliverables, timelines and responsibilities

### 3.1. Deliverables and concrete timelines for 2020<sup>1</sup>:

A tentative schedule of key deliverables is provided below. The exact schedule will depend on the timing of the contracting with the successful consultant, but it is anticipated that the assignment will commence on 1 April to 31 December 2020.

No.	Deliverables	Estimated Time (days)	Deadline
1.	Draft and finalize a methodological approach for a review and assessment of the current situation of Lower Mekong Countries' plastic pollution.	5	15 April 2020
2.	A Term of References (ToR) for national consultants to support the review and preparation of national reports on the current situation of Mekong Countries' plastic pollution.	3	30 April 2020
3.	Coordinate, review and support the finalization of four (4) national reports on the current situation of	6	31 July 2020

<sup>1</sup> Deliverables and timelines for 2021 will be incorporated into the amended ToR and contract if funding becomes available

No.	Deliverables	Estimated Time (days)	Deadline
	LMB countries' plastic pollution, prepared by four national consultants.		
4.	First draft of a regional report on the current situation of LMB countries' plastic pollution based on literature reviews and the four national reports	6	25 August 2020
5.	First draft Concept Note on the methodology and tool for long-term and cost-effective monitoring of plastic waste in the Lower Mekong River, including the identification of hotspots for plastic waste leakages into the Mekong River.	6	31 August 2020
6.	Materials for and attendance in EMEG Meeting on the second drafts of a regional review report and a concept note	4	7 October 2020
7.	Second and final draft Concept Note on the methodology and tool for long-term and cost-effective monitoring of plastic waste in the Lower Mekong River, including the identification of hotspots for plastic waste leakages into the Mekong River based on EMEG meeting outcomes ((including the briefing note for submission to Mekong Joint Committee's information)	3	25 October 2020
8.	Second and final draft of a regional report on the current situation of LMB countries' plastic pollution, by consolidating the four national reports based on EMEG meeting outcomes (including the briefing note for submission to Mekong Joint Committee's information)	2	31 October 2020
<b>Total</b>		<b>35 days</b>	<b>April – December 2020</b>

### 3.2. Required tasks and responsibilities:

- Draft and finalize a methodology and approach for a review of the current situation of plastic pollution in the Lower Mekong basin to be carried out at the national level in the four (4) MRC Member Countries (MCs) by national consultants. The methodology should target the identification of current trends and status of plastic pollution in each MC and the national policies and regulations, institutional arrangements, and supporting frameworks to address plastic waste leakage into freshwater ways or rivers. The review and assessment methodology should build upon the outputs and lessons learned in the first phase of the UNEP "CounterMEASURE" Project. Results and outcomes will be shared by the MRCS to the consultant;
- Draft and finalize the Terms of Reference for four (4) national consultants to carry out the national reviews and assessments of the status and trends on plastic pollution in each of the four (4) MRC MCs Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet

Nam. The ToR shall be based on the content of the review methodology mentioned above. Once the national consultants are on board, the service provider will support the MRCS in coordinating the implementation of the review, will revise the draft national reports and will facilitate the finalization of said reports;

- Draft and finalize a regional report on the status and trends of plastic pollution in the Lower Mekong Basin by consolidating the national review reports. The consultant shall compare the outcomes of the “CounterMEASURE” project Phase I with the results of the national reviews and prepare a consolidated report on the current status and trends of plastic pollution and plastic waste management in the LMB with the aim at providing the needs and drivers for a monitoring and assessment methodology to allow for long-term monitoring of plastic waste in the basin. After preparing a first draft, the MRCS experts will provide comments and inputs for the consultant to finalize the first draft to be presented at Environmental Management Expert Group (EMEG) Meeting;
- Draft and finalize a concept methodology to monitor and assess the changes in status and trends of plastic waste leakage into the Mekong river with an aim at a long-term and cost-effective implementation approach. The methodology shall build upon, be in alignment with and possibly integrated into the current and ongoing routine environmental monitoring activities of the MRC. Therefore, to prepare the concept the consultant will review the existing MRC monitoring activities and consult closely with the MRCS monitoring experts to ensure effective integration and alignment. After preparing a first draft, the MRCS experts will provide input and the consultant will finalize the first draft to be presented at EMEG;
- The first draft concept and report will be presented at EMEG to allow MRC MCs to provide further input for the consolidation of the final draft. The consultant will prepare presentations and workshop materials ahead of time to ensure a meaningful stakeholder engagement. The consultant will facilitate the national consultation meetings with the support and guidance of the MRCS experts; and
- The second and final draft concept and report, after the integration of the outcomes of the EMEG meeting, will be prepared, with a briefing note, for the submission to MRC Joint Committee for information.

#### **4. Working Arrangement:**

##### **4.1. Director supervisor:**

The consultant will be working under the overall supervision of the Director of the Environmental Management Division (ED).

##### **4.2. Communication line:**

The consultant will be working under the direct supervision of the Chief Environment Management Officer of the MRCS ED as well as in close consultation with the MRCS ED Water Quality Officer.

#### **5. Payment mode:**

Since there will be several milestones to be completed and to avoid many administrative works, payment by instalment will be selected for this assignment and it is shown below.

- The 1<sup>st</sup> payment will be paid upon signing of the Contract (20% of the total budget);
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> payment will be paid upon submission and acceptance and satisfaction by MRCS ED on the completion of key deliverables 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 under this given period (55% of the total budget); and
- The final payment will be paid upon submission and acceptance and satisfaction by MRCS ED on the completion of key deliverables 6, 7, and 8 (25% of the total budget).

#### **6. Qualifications and Requirements:**

- Must be the nationality of non-riparian Member Countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand or Viet Nam);
- University degree (Master/ Doctoral degrees or equivalent minimum) in Environmental Management, Ecosystem Management, wetland management or other relevant fields;
- Minimum 10 years experiences in environmental management and policy and strategy development, including transboundary environmental governance;
- Minimum 10 years experiences in plastic waste management, monitoring and evaluation in environmental management and/or inland pollution control and waste management;
- Has demonstratable specific knowledge and experience in designing environmental monitoring and assessment methodologies for plastic waste management, preferably in inland waterways or rivers;
- Strong experience in dealing with regional and international environment related organizations and institutions and national and/or regional environmental and waste management policy frameworks;
- Specific knowledge and experience in international development cooperation and transboundary resources management;
- International experiences and relations, and regional knowledge of the Mekong River Basin;

- Specific knowledge and experiences with relevant international agreements and practices such as the UNEA Resolution 4/6 on Marine plastic litter and microplastics (2019) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs);
- Excellent inter-personal skills and able to negotiate constructively shared position in a Mekong or/and Southeast Asia institution and cultural context; and
- Fluent in English, verbal and writing and strong analytical skills.

**7. Intellectual property rights:**

Intellectual property rights - IPR: Information, data, database, knowledge resources in the forms of briefings, reports, proceedings, articles, essays, etc. issued by and for the MRCS will be the MRCS property. Any utility, announcement and disclosure that are without MRCS highest levels of authority' permission is considered illegal and will be charged by relevant local and international legal procedures.

**8. Signature Block:**

**MRCS ED's CEMO**

Name: So Nam

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Consultant**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**MRCS ED's Director**

Name: Hak Socheat

Date: \_\_\_\_\_