

DRAFT Meeting Notes
of the 3rd RTWG Meeting on the Council Study,
14 November 2014
MRC Office of the Secretariat in Vientiane

I Objective and Opening

1. The 3rd RTWG meeting was held at OSV on 14 November 2014 after the Council Study (CS) Start-up Workshop held on 12-13 November at the same meeting venue. The Start-up Workshop results summary including progress update on the inception report, work plan, staffing plan, baseline and development scenarios formulation, and coordination and progress monitoring were then presented to the RTWG for discussion and advices. Due to the unavailability of the senior representation of the LNMC as Chair, with the agreement of the meeting Mr. Hans Guttman, the CEO of the Mekong River Commissions Secretariat, chaired the meeting and delivered his welcome remarks referring to the two productive days of discussion for the Start-up Workshop. He stressed the importance of an effective coordination between Programmes and made a point about the synergies between the CS and the Mekong Delta Study (MDS).

II Presentations and Discussions

2. Dr. Henry Manguerra, the CS Coordinator, presented the proposed draft agenda to the meeting and asked for feedback. The following comments were made on the draft agenda:
 - The use of the term “Draft Final “Inception report might not be correct as the report has not reached the stage of finalization.
 - Question was raised on how the CS and MDS can be synergized as the two studies are intended to be independent?
 - Cambodia shared similar view that the two studies should be kept independent.
 - Lao PDR noted that it will be difficult to synergize the two studies given the short time.
 - Thailand expressed remaining concerns about some parts of the Work Plans that need to be worked on.
3. The CS Coordinator presented a summary of the changes in the latest version of the Inception Report. He explained the reason the term “draft final” was used was to signify the culmination of the several rounds of comments received and addressed. The CEO specifically added that comments and recommendations from the 2nd RTWG meeting in Phnom Penh have been incorporated into the Inception Report and the record of the meeting have been shared with the Member Countries. From that meeting the MRCS was expected to

finalize and use this Inception Report as a basis for the implementation of the Study. The CEO agreed to strike out the phrase “draft final” and simply use the title “Inception Report”. During the meeting, the MCs agreed that this version of the Inception Report will be used as basis for moving forward with the implementation of the Study.

4. The CS Coordinator clarified that the intention of the presentation about the potential synergy between the CS and the MDS was to present information and tools, to demonstrate the processes of both studies and what advantages and benefits the studies can gain from each other. The following points were made related to potential synergies between the MDS and the CS.
 - The CEO stated that identifying synergies between the two studies has been supported by the Joint Committee (JC). MRCS is tracking the MDS closely so that all opportunities for synergy are identified, whether they are taken up or not. MRCS participates in the MDS Technical Working Group meetings, and the CS Coordinator will use these meetings to identify further opportunities for synergy.
 - Several MC participants suggested that the CS and the MDS should be kept separate so that the outcomes can be compared and contrasted. It was noted that any opportunities to share data, information, tools and/or models (for the benefit of the CS) will need to be reviewed and approved by the RTWG before they are implemented.
5. The Technical Coordinator, Dr. Cate Brown, presented a comparison between Environmental Flow Assessment (EFA) tools. This is in response to the request from the 2nd RTWG meeting to provide more detail about DRIFT at the Start-up Workshop. In response to this request, a nearly full-day technical session on DRIFT was conducted on Day 2 of the Start-up Workshop. The summary comparison of EFA methodologies relative to DRIFT was prepared for the 3rd RTWG participants.

The key messages of the presentation were:

- Large proportion of available EFAs are prescriptive and cannot describe consequences of flow change;
 - DRIFT compares well with other available decision support systems;
 - Shortcomings shared by many DSS especially with respect to use of expert opinion.
6. Cambodia noted that Mekong River Basin is facing new challenges that are difficult to solve due to the complexity of the river and the pressure from the poverty reduction agenda. It was also noted that the new methodology (DRIFT) appears to be a good approach and appreciated this new thinking and new strategy. However, Cambodia also questioned whether the new methodology can support future solution. The response curve based methodology is an excellent tool to predict future benefits but it was suggested to be clear with what are needed to be achieved at the end of the study for the tool to be successful.
 7. Lao PDR sought clarification on how existing methods for water quality monitoring and ecological monitoring can be used to collect the data within short time frames.

8. Thailand wished to remind the meeting that the purpose of the study is to quantify the transboundary impacts. It is imperative to select the methods for the implementations of the Study in the context that internal capacity is limited. Another challenge noted by Thailand is how to bridge the knowledge gaps, and noted that there is a need to look at other component in the time series data and not only hydro-biological information.
9. Other points raised during the session are the following:
 - MCs need to see the formulated development scenarios and how they are linked with the BDS.
 - MCs expressed need to select an early baseline to capture the fact that some countries are still under-develop relative to others.
 - Capacity building is the main challenge in the next 10-20 years.
10. The CS Coordinator presented the “Consolidated Plan and Staffing Plan”. The following are the comments made after the presentation:
 - There were repeated and shared requests from a number of MCs for increase national consultations either through CS-focused national consultations or, preferably, in conjunction with Program activities. National consultation activities for other MRCS Programmes should include the CS in their agendas.
 - MCs requested information on how progress, including deliverables, will be monitored in the CS and clarity on the role of the NMCs in this monitoring (i.e., check IBFM experience). There is lack of monitoring mechanism to monitor inputs and outcomes.
 - Viet Nam noted the importance of a strong monitoring mechanism for progress and suggested for the CS to have a criteria for M&E. It was also suggested that the roles and responsibilities of the National Committees for monitoring be revised. The CS Coordinator recognized the need to monitor progress and that part of the role of the CS Coordinating Group is to do progress self-monitoring.
 - Thailand reiterated their comment made during the Start-up Workshop that additional details are required in the work plans of the various CS teams especially with respect to the use of the international and regional consultants, and integration of the CS activities into existing activities and schedules, e.g.:
 - BDP’s role in formulation of development scenarios.
 - BDP’s deliberations with respect to the socio-economic and macroeconomic assessments (cost-benefit sharing, in particular sharing of cost of dealing with transboundary environmental impacts associated with developments).
 - EP’s role in the Biological Resources Assessment.
 - IKMP’s capacity to handle the modeling, in terms of time available and technical skills
 - In contrast, the work plans for Navigation, CCAI, and Hydropower are clear.
 - Thailand suggested for each Programme to develop a concise list (i.e. framework) of Programme activities that will help the MCs understand the activities better. Possibly use FP document that was presented during a Workshop on Fishery as a template for other Programmes.

- Thailand suggested that literature reviews in the CS should include information on the source of the literature cited: MRCS, Member Countries, and external organizations.
- Viet Nam needs support from MRCS on setting up National Working Group for the CS. This can be combined with other activities.
- It was noted that MCs are currently conducting water quality and ecological monitoring and wonder how their data can be applied for the benefit of the CS within short time frame.

11. The CS Coordinator presented “Coordination and Progress Monitoring through MRCS Coordinating Group”. The following comments were made after the presentation:

- The CS is planning to conduct self-monitoring through the CS Coordinating Group.
- DFAT raised the point that the CS Website can serve as a potential mechanism for communication/coordination and making it available for the CS sooner than later is a priority.
- Consider possible expanded roles of the MCs National Working Group in the CS.
- On national consultations, Thailand was not insisting on having quarterly national consultations. This will depend on how far and how effective the team can move with disseminating the information to the MCs.
- Thailand suggested that the practice of requesting supporting budget must be consistent in all MCs.
- Thailand noted that the MCs may need to conduct national consultations prior to the regional stakeholders consultation in January 2015.
- Viet Nam asked how MRCS can support the setting up of national working group for the CS and what is the framework for sectoral/thematic coordination? It was noted that coordination between sectors/thematic areas is important especially when one theme impacts another.
- Viet Nam noted that DMP Programme is missing in one of the organizational charts. The CS Coordinator indicated that DMP is not leading a thematic team but is providing support including Climate Change Discipline Team as per the Inception Report.

12. The CS Coordinator and CCAI presented selected technical topics which include baseline selection, and formulation of development scenarios and climate change scenarios. Proposed road maps for making decisions on these technical topics were presented. It was noted that the road maps may include reviewing and possibly adopting/refining what other programs have already done in the past such as the following:

- Baseline (IKMP and CCAI)
- Scenario Development (BDP)

The following comments were made after the presentation.

- It was noted that the 1985 – 2000 baseline that was used in the past captures the flow variability related to climatic variability.
 - 1998 – dry year

- 1999 – normal year
 - 2000 – wet year
 - Thailand had no issue in accepting this baseline. The baseline should cover the period from 1995 to make a reference to the 1995 Mekong agreement and reflect the fulfillment of the agreement and the implementation of procedures.
 - However, Thailand also noted that the current baseline may need to be reconsidered as the 1985 -2000 baseline does not include the Chinese dams.
 - Lao PDR proposed to have a baseline back to 60's. It was noted that Lao PDR will conduct national consultation about the baseline.
 - MRCS (IKMP) noted that the DSS-DSF models have been updated to simulate 1985-2007. MRCS would need additional data from MCs to extend the baseline to 2014.
 - The CEO noted that proposed options for baseline should be presented from a technical point of view. The recommended option should be well documented in the report.
13. The presentation on Decision Support Framework covered DSF present modeling capabilities (i.e., flow/water level), future capabilities (i.e., sediment/water quality), and justification for extending baseline hydrologic period from 1985 up to 2007/2008. The following comments were made after the presentation.
- IKMP has identified many challenges related to data gaps. Some parts of the region have more data than others. These challenges apply to the CS. IKMP has requested required data from MCs but has not had a good response to this request.
 - IKMP has a detailed inventory of data sets available in the MRCS and MCs.
 - The CS Coordinator mentioned that Table 3.4 of the Inception Report shows deficiencies of the DSF-DSS models with respect to simulating 2-D sediment and water quality and mentioned possibility of exploring other models or approaches to supplement DSF-DSS models. 2-D sediment modeling is needed for the Delta and Tonle Sap.
 - Thailand suggested to organize a special TACT meeting in December to discuss models for use in the CS. TACT can recommend the way forward for the CS.
 - Given the short time, the CEO suggested seeking approval from the MCs via focal points (by email) instead of waiting until the next TACT meeting.
 - Thailand pointed out a difference between this presentation and the information described in the Inception Report about using the existing DSF. Some models presented by IKMP are not addressed in the Inception Report.
 - For IWRM tools, Thailand is not sure whether the MRCS and MC can use them and this has not been discussed by the national teams yet. This needs to be discussed with all MCs.
 - DFAT noted that why MRCS is not considering other models outside of DSF when DRIFT which is not one of the DSF “models” will be used.
14. Viet Nam made presentation on the progress of the Mekong Delta Study (MDS). No additional comments received. Note that MDS related comments were made in earlier presentations.

15. The Technical Coordinator presented potential synergies between the CS and the MDS. The following comments were made:
- Viet Nam stated that a strong implementation mechanism is missing in the CS. For the MDS, a Steering Committee has been established and works in close coordination with line agencies and to report to the Deputy Prime Minister on a quarterly basis.
 - Viet Nam thanked Lao PDR and Cambodia for providing valuable data for the MDS.
 - The CS Coordinator reminded the participants that the MDS and the CS are two parallel initiatives. Potential opportunities for sharing ideas, information, and knowledge are explored through MRCS focal point and participation of MRCS in MDS TWG meetings.
 - The CEO referred to the statement made at the 2nd MRC Summit in HCMC in April where the leaders made commitment to moving forward with the two studies and the MRCS is to ensure coordination between the studies. However, there is no commitment to working together and sharing information for a joint study. This matter needs to discuss with the MCs. The CEO also informed the participants that the MRCS BDP coordinator was nominated focal point to work with the focal point for the MDS.
 - Cambodia stated that potential synergy is a stronger set of results and recommendations if the two studies have independently generated consistent/complementary results. Models from the two studies can also be combined to improve results of prediction and accuracy.
 - DFAT noted that the two studies are both significant and have similar objectives and both offer great benefits to the whole region.
 - DFAT raised the question that in terms of communication and public awareness, what mechanisms does the MRCS envisage to use: the Programmes can share information to be presented to the public or to combine the stakeholder consultation of Don Sahong PNPCA and the CS?
 - MRCS (TCA) suggested that the Inception Report can be posted on the MRC website to be available for the regional consultations meeting in January. However, he noted that difficulty to disseminate the information about the progress of the CS to general public as the MRC disclosure policy, which describes the process of information dissemination and to what audience, has not been approved yet.
 - On combining the stakeholder consultation between BDS and the CS, the CEO mentioned that MRCS has discussed this already and decided against it. The audience of the two forums might not be the same and it may create confusion about the expectations on the BDS and the CS. However, the MRCS should proactively address the expectations from the public on both the BDS and the CS. There is a need to discuss with the MCs.

III Conclusion

At the end of the meeting the CEO made the following conclusions:

- The CS has made significant progress in the last few weeks

- The Assessment methodology is taking shape
- We have begun to engage MCs on a regular basis
- Plans are made to reach out to stakeholders
- To keep information exchange with the MDS
- MRCS is committed to prioritizing the CS.

IV Post-Meeting Comments

After the RTWG meeting, LNMC sent more comments listed below to the MRCS by email on 18 November 2014.

- LNMC does not agree with the current staffing plan for the Biological Resources Assessment Team which includes only the FP Programme. We propose that this team be managed, coordinated and implemented with participation from different Programmes
 - MRCS: The Biological Resource Assessment Discipline Team now includes two staff from EP (fish biologist and water quality specialist).
- The number of proposed activities and experts for the biological resources assessment is too many. Some activities are not necessary and not realistic within the timeframe for the council study (15 Month only). LNMC suggests to replace biodiversity survey with ecological health if possible.
 - MRCS will consider the suggestion, but this will have to be discussed more. The work plan and staffing plan of the Biological Resources Team and all the other CS teams are being reviewed and refined.
- Why "mining" is included in the thematic "agriculture and land use"? Normally it should be a specific theme because mining creates a lot of negative impacts and this is a highly sensitive issue.
 - MRCS: Mining is not a separate theme but is recognized as an important activity that needs to be evaluated. Sand mining is also included as an important activity in the Domestic and Industrial Water Use Thematic Area.
- How the countries can be involved in the process because this is important for us and need to know how to prepare ourselves to contribute and participate efficiently.
 - MRCS: MCs are involved through the following mechanisms: Regional and national consultations, participation in technical working groups, and contribution of national consultants/experts. These activities are reflected in the schedule. MRCS will also provide advance notice and meeting materials to allow MCs to prepare for the meetings.
- Need to review Team Personnel and Work Plan and revised accordingly.
 - MRCS: As noted earlier, the work plans and staffing plans are being reviewed and refined.
- When we look at attachment 1 on compilation of Work Plans and Staffing Plans, It seems like thematic and discipline teams should not be paid by using Programme or Council budget since all of staff who has name on the list in attachment are staff who work for MRCS already. Therefore, their payment should be in-kind as their salary, for

Example: In Work Plan of Hydrologic assessment, the Budget Table shows the Programme has to pay additional money (about USD 806,000) to technical support staff who already work under MRC IKMP Programme

- MRCS: Existing Programme salaried staff are not covered by Council Study budget. Programme and Council Study budgets shown in the Budget Table are intended to cover consultants only and as suggested, existing staff should be noted as covered “in-kind”. The abovementioned Budget Table has been revised to make the corrections as well as part of the effort to revise/refine the work plan and the staffing plan.