



# Annual Report 2014

# Mekong

## River Commission



A silhouette of a wooden bridge over a river at sunset. Several people are walking across the bridge, and a bicycle is being pushed. The sky is a deep blue with wispy white clouds. A power line runs diagonally across the upper right portion of the image.

# The Mekong River Commission

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## Vision: Mekong River Basin

An economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally sound Mekong River Basin

## Vision: Mekong River Commission

A world class, financially secure, international river basin organisation serving the Mekong countries to achieve the Basin Vision

**Mission:** To promote and coordinate sustainable management and development of water and related resources for the countries' mutual benefit and the people's well-being



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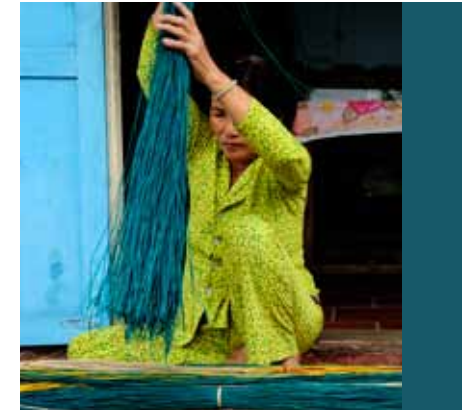


# List of Acronyms

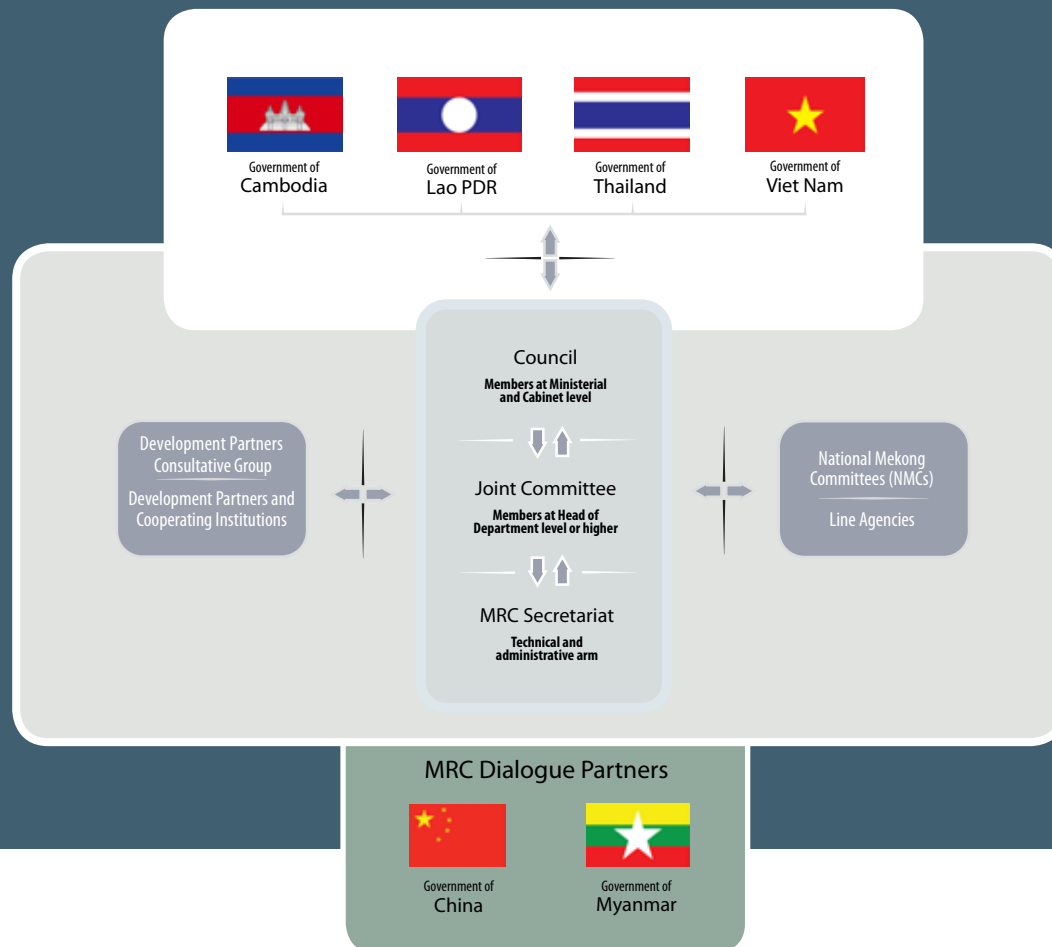
AIP	Agriculture and Irrigation Programme	JRP	Junior Riparian Programme
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
BDP	Basin Development Plan Programme	LMB	Lower Mekong Basin
BDS	Basin Development Strategy	MAF	Management and Administration Fee
CCAII	Climate Change and Adaptation Initiative	M-IWRMP	Mekong Integrated Water Resource Management Project
CEO	Chief Executive Officer	MRC	Mekong River Commission
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor	MRC-FFS	Mekong River Commission's Flood Forecasting System
DMP	Drought Management Programme	MRC-FFGS	Mekong River Commission's Flash Flood Guidance System
DP	Development Partner	MRC-IS	Mekong River Commission's Information System
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment	MRCS	Mekong River Commission Secretariat
EP	Environment Programme	NAP	Navigation Programme
ESA	Ecologically Sensitive Area	NMC	National Mekong Committee
EU	European Union	NMCS	National Mekong Committee Secretariat
FMMP	Flood Management and Mitigation Programme	OEB	Operating Expenses Budget
FP	Fisheries Programme	PDIES	Procedures for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit	PNPCA	Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement
ICBP	Integrated Capacity Building Programme	RAP	Regional Action Plan
ICCS	International Cooperation and Communication Section	RSAT	Rapid Basin-wide Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Tool
IKMP	Information and Knowledge Management Programme	SIMVA	Social Impact Monitoring and Vulnerability Assessment
ISH	Initiative on Sustainable Hydropower	USD	US Dollar
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature		
IWRM	Integrated Water Resource Management		
JC	Joint Committee		
JCWG	Joint Committee Working Group		



## The Lancang–Mekong Basin



# Mekong River Commission Governance Structure

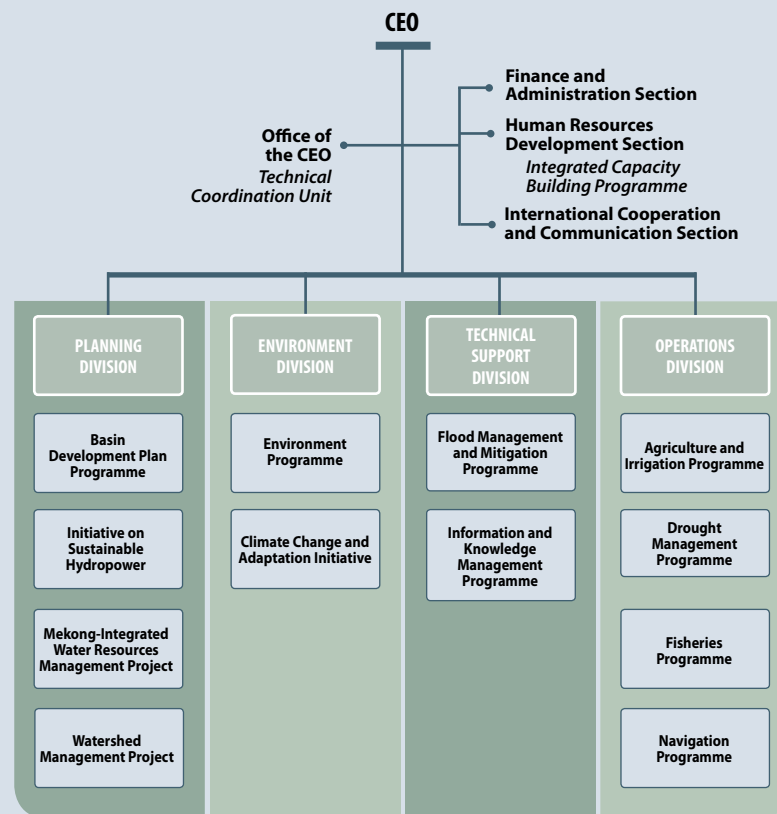








# Mekong River Commission Secretariat Operational Structure







# Introduction to the Mekong River Commission (MRC)

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) is a river basin organisation built on a foundation of nearly 50 years of knowledge and experience in the region dating back to 1957 when it began as the United Nations-founded Mekong Committee.

On 5 April 1995, the governments of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam signed The Agreement on Cooperation for Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin (also known as The Mekong Agreement), and agreed on joint management of their shared water resources and development of the economic potential of the river. The agreement created the Mekong River Commission (MRC).

The MRC looks across all sectors, including fisheries sustainability, identification of opportunities for agriculture, freedom of navigation, flood management and preservation of important ecosystems. It also helps its Member Countries face the future effects of more extreme floods, prolonged drought and sea level rise associated with climate change. In providing its advice, the MRC aims to facilitate dialogue among governments, the private sector and civil society.

A dialogue mechanism has been set up with China and Myanmar, the two upstream countries. This is a framework of cooperation under which joint activities take place. In 2002, the MRC and China signed an agreement on the provision of hydrological information on the Lancang/Mekong River in the flood season. Through it, China contributes to the MRC's flood forecasting activities.

The work of the MRC is governed by the wishes of the four Member Countries who hold regular consultations to decide strategy and policy. It is led by a Council, whose membership consists of water and environment ministers from each country. It meets once a year. The MRC Joint Committee consists of one member from each country at no less than head of government department level and meets twice a year to approve budgets and strategic plans. It reports to the Council and functions as a Board of Management.

The MRC Secretariat manages the day-to-day operations and provides technical, advisory and administrative services to the Member Countries. It facilitates regional







meetings of the Member Countries and provides technical advice on joint planning, coordination and cooperation. It also works closely with the four countries' coordinating bodies, the National Mekong Committees (NMCs), and other state agencies, known as Line Agencies.

National Mekong Committees in each Member Country provide a link between the MRC and national governments and coordinate MCR-related activities at the national level through Line Agencies.

The MRC is funded through the contributions of Member Countries and Development Partners (governments and international development aid agencies) from various countries. It has partnered with a broad coalition of stakeholders, including the governments of Member Countries, development banks, United Nations agencies, the private sector, other intergovernmental organisations such as ASEAN, and civil society.



# Message from the Chairperson of the MRC Council for 2013–2014

On behalf of the Mekong River Commission (MRC), I am pleased to present this Annual Report 2014. The MRC is concluding its fourth year of implementation of the Strategic Plan 2011–2015, and it has worked as hard as ever in the transition to become an organisation based on core river basin management functions.

One of this year's significant achievements was the Second MRC Summit, in Ho Chi Minh City in April 2014, where leaders of the four Member Countries renewed their commitment to the MRC at the highest political level. The Summit was preceded by an international conference on "Cooperation for Water, Energy and Food Security in Transboundary Basins under Changing Climate" that brought together experts, government officials and stakeholders.

The MRC Programmes made progress towards the implementation of their activities to meet the targets and objectives of the Strategic Plan 2011–2015. The MRC is updating its Basin Development Strategy for 2016–2020, which will be implemented through the Strategic Plan for that new period.

The MRC Secretariat has continued to address the effects of climate change in the Lower Mekong Basin through various studies and assessments from the Climate Change and Adaptation Initiative, the Environment Programme and the Agriculture and Irrigation Programme.

The Navigation Programme has worked with the Member Countries to protect river ecology and improve water quality through a series of trainings, risk assessments and the publication of useful guidelines for the transport of dangerous goods and waste management.

In line with the Hua Hin Declaration of 2010 and the Ho Chi Minh City Declaration this year, the MRC is expediting the implementation of the Council's Study on Sustainable Management



**General Dapong Ratanasuwan**

*Chairperson of the MRC Council for 2013–2014  
Minister of Natural Resources and Environment  
Chairperson of Thai National Mekong Committee  
Member of the MRC Council for Thailand*

and Development of the Mekong River including the impacts of mainstream hydropower projects, to provide sound advice and recommendations on sustainable development in the basin.

The Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation, and Agreement (PNPCA) were implemented after Lao PDR submitted the Don Sahong Hydropower Project for Prior Consultation in June 2014. The project was submitted for Notification last year, but upon the recommendation of the other three notified countries, Lao PDR submitted it for Prior Consultation which allows them to discuss the project's potential transboundary impacts. Under the guidance of a Joint Committee Working Group, the MRC Secretariat has produced a Technical Review Report to inform the Joint Committee to make a decision at the end of the six-month timeframe early next year.

The decentralisation and organisational reform was one of this year's priorities and both the Joint Committee and the MRC Council agreed on fourteen recommendations for implementation. The national and regional roadmaps were approved and the process will carry on progressively during the next few years.

Efforts continued to hire the MRC's first Riparian Chief Executive Officer and selected candidates will be interviewed in early 2015.

Cooperation with China has been strengthened through official technical visits, meetings and hydrological information sharing. Delegates from the Chinese Ministry of Water Resources and Tsinghua University visited the Office of the Secretariat in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in March, and in November, a delegation headed by Vice-Minister of Water Resources, H.E. Mr. JIAO Yong, visited the Office of the Secretariat in Vientiane, Lao PDR. China and Myanmar, the Dialogue Partners of the MRC, also participated in the Second MRC Summit.

On regional cooperation, the Secretariat has strengthened ties with different international organisations and intergovernmental bodies. The MRC increased its international exposure through the pre-summit International Conference in April in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam; the First Mekong-Rhine Symposium on Climate Change in Koblenz, Germany in May; and the Regional Workshop on interaction between environmental sustainability and human rights-based approach, in Bangkok, Thailand, in May.

The continuing support from the Development Partners has contributed to the achievements of the MRC in 2014. The MRC signed several agreements with Australia, Finland, Japan and Germany. Discussions with these and other Development Partners continue for the potential establishment of a pool fund as part of the organisation's financial reform.

I take this opportunity, on behalf of the MRC, to thank our Development Partners, Dialogue Partners and other stakeholders for their meaningful input into the work of the organisation as it enters another year of transition and strategic changes. As we move into 2015, which marks 20 years of Mekong cooperation, I hope our partnerships become stronger and I am confident the MRC will continue to effectively address the new challenges facing the basin.



General Dapong Ratanasuwana  
Chairperson of the MRC Council for 2013–2014  
Minister of Natural Resources and Environment  
Chairperson of Thai National Mekong Committee  
Member of the MRC Council for Thailand









## The Second MRC Summit and the Ho Chi Minh City Declaration

***“We note that the development of water resources of the Mekong River Basin has contributed largely to the socio-economic development of the region, such as for navigation, energy and food production, but also has negative environmental and social impacts in the Basin that need to be fully and effectively addressed.” Ho Chi Minh City Declaration***

On April 5, the heads of government of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam gathered in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam for the Second MRC Summit where they reaffirmed their commitment to Mekong cooperation, to follow up the implementation of the Hua Hin Declaration of 2010, and set priorities for the MRC to address regional opportunities and challenges including population growth, increasing demand for water, food and energy and climate change.

The Ho Chi Minh City Declaration was adopted by the Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, H.E. Mr. Nguyen Tan Dung; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen; the Prime Minister of Lao PDR, H.E. Thongsing Thammavong; and the Special Envoy of the Kingdom of Thailand, H.E. Mr. Sihasak Phuangketkeow.

The leaders prioritised the need to expedite studies and research such as the MRC Council Study and the Mekong Delta Study, which will provide a basis for better understanding about potential risks and benefits of development initiatives.



The Council Study on Sustainable Management and Development of the Mekong River, including the impacts of mainstream hydropower projects—initiated by the MRC Council— aims to provide a better picture on potential transboundary impacts due to mainstream developments.

The Declaration added that the MRC will focus on avoiding, reducing and mitigating risks to river ecology, food security, livelihoods and water quality posed by intensive agriculture, aquaculture and irrigation as well as hydropower, navigation and other development activities.

The document acknowledges the progress made since the First Summit in Hua Hin in 2010 and reiterates the need for the Member Countries to work through the mechanisms of the MRC to manage the shared waters.

The leaders also stressed the importance of the MRC's relationships and cooperation with its Dialogue Partners—China and Myanmar— and Development Partners.


The MRC Summits gather Primer Ministers of the MRC Member Countries, delegations from China and Myanmar along with other regional leaders, water experts and diplomats.

The Third MRC Summit will take place in 2018 in Cambodia.

All information about the Summit and the International Conference is available at: <http://www.mrcsummit.org>







## Summary of the Ho Chi Minh City Declaration

### Water, Energy and Food Security in the Context of Climate Change for the Mekong River Basin

**April 5 2014**

The Heads of the MRC Governments reaffirm the importance of the sustainable use and management of the water and related resources of the Mekong River Basin, and their political commitment to implement the 1995 Mekong Agreement, and also recognise the achievements made since the last Summit. The Declaration highlights the following issues:

- **Regional opportunities and challenges over the next decade** including population growth, increasing demand for water, food and energy, and climate change will place burdens on the Mekong resources. New cooperation opportunities with other regional and international initiatives will be explored to face these challenges.
- **Priority areas of action** including the implementation of the MRC's *Council Study on Sustainable Management and Development of the Mekong River Basin*, including the impacts of mainstream hydropower projects, and the Mekong Delta Study initiated by Viet Nam; furthering

efforts in disaster risk reduction of floods and droughts; measures to maintain good water quality and avoid, reduce and mitigate risks to river ecology, food security and livelihoods; improving the implementation of the MRC Procedures; expanding cooperation with Dialogue and Development Partners.

- **Moving ahead** by committing to strengthen the role of the MRC in integrated water resources management and supporting the decentralisation process aimed at self-financing by 2030; prioritising capacity building for the Member Countries.





# Cooperation for Water, Energy and Food Security in Transboundary Basins under Changing Climate: the International Conference

The MRC held a two-day international conference ahead of the Second MRC Summit in Ho Chi Minh City to focus on the areas of climate change adaptation, sustainable development and benefits of cooperation.

Under the theme “Cooperation for Water, Energy and Food Security in Transboundary Basins under Changing Climate”, the conference gathered more than 300 participants including chief and senior representatives from some 20 transboundary river basin bodies, international and regional organisations, government officials and non-governmental organisations. They called for the governments of the Mekong countries to include water, energy and food into their continued dialogue across water sectors through innovative means as the needs for water resources increase.

In a statement released at the end of the conference, participants added that the interaction with policy-makers should be intensified to have an effective science-policy dialogue with real impact and that, for the benefits of cooperation, interests among different players need to be balanced and strengthened.



They acknowledged that progress has been made because of increased cooperation, especially at the transboundary level. However, they also agreed that important areas such as water quality, fish population and ecosystem impacts still have gaps that need to be jointly addressed through existing mechanisms and institutions.

It is intended that the outcome of the conference will be useful in future policy-making and to bring worldwide attention about water issues in upcoming international events.





# Technical Paper on Transboundary Cooperation

The MRC published a technical paper highlighting the benefits of cooperation and the role of river and aquifer basin organisations in managing transboundary basins based on the pre-Summit international conference. The publication, entitled *Cooperation for Water, Energy and Food Security in Transboundary Basins under Changing Climate* is a collection of case studies and the views shared by international experts and participants on three key issues: sustainable development, climate change adaptation in a transboundary context and benefits of cooperation.

The publication was introduced at the 24th World Water Week, in Stockholm, Sweden on 2 September 2014 by Mr Hans Guttman, Chief Executive Officer of the MRC Secretariat, and Mr Fritz Holzwarth, one of its authors and formerly Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, Germany. The document stresses that the interconnection between water, energy and food security requires integrated planning, policy and management, and that the nexus approach provides a useful policy framework for development that involves stakeholders from multiple sectors across boundaries.

Through it the MRC aims to deliver the key messages of the conference to a wider audience and offer an important reference on the current global thinking around the interconnection between these sectors.

The publication is available for download here:

<http://www.mrcmekong.org/assets/Publications/conference/MRC-intl-conf-publ-2014.pdf>





## Unusual Water Levels on the Mekong

In early 2014 water levels on much of the Mekong River were higher than the long-term average since November 2013 with unusual fluctuations observed in December 2013 and February 2014.

Residents from some riverside communities in the border between Thailand and Lao PDR raised concerns over unusual fluctuations along the Mekong River, including what they considered to be lower-than-normal levels for that time of the year.

The MRC's monitoring and forecasting data showed that water levels had been significantly above normal for most mainstream monitoring stations in Lao PDR, Thailand and Cambodia since November 2013, and in many cases above the earlier highest record for that time of the year. However, the MRC observed unusual fluctuations in the levels and flows.

The rapid changes at the beginning of this year suggest that the water level was influenced by human activities because there was no associated rainfall. Local man-made activities such as sand dredging can change the sediment flow and morphology at certain stretches of the Mekong and can consequently cause unusually low water levels in respective areas.

Later on, during June to September, the water levels at Chiang Saen were low compared to the long-term average due to low inflows from the Lancang River into the Lower Mekong Basin. Unprecedented peak flows were registered in July 2014 in Pakse, Lao PDR and in Kratie, Cambodia, caused by abnormal heavy rainfall. Water levels fluctuated greatly around their long-term average and even reached to minimum levels below the long-term average at both locations from August to November 2014.

The continuing low water levels are due to low rainfall over the Lower Mekong Basin from August to October.

The outflow contribution in September from the Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia to the Mekong is lower than average and is expected to remain low during the dry season in 2015.



Amid speculation about the role of Chinese dams in the fluctuating water levels downstream, and the potential for sudden peaks, China's Ministry of Water Resources reassured the MRC in September that there were no plans for extreme water releases, and that any discharges would be below a volume of 4,500 cubic metres per second. The monitored discharged rates from the Jinghong dam were far below 7,000 cubic metres per second, which is what the MRC's modelling simulations suggest could cause overflows downstream.

The MRC monitors daily water levels along 23 stations on different reaches of the Mekong mainstream, from Southern China to Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Viet Nam, and provides daily updates on the websites: [www.mrcmekong.org](http://www.mrcmekong.org) and <http://ffw.mrcmekong.org>. Five-day water level forecasts for each station are also provided. Through this system, the MRC provides warnings on the website and to national government agencies once water levels at certain stations reach alarming or flood levels.

## Turbid Waters in the Mekong

An unusual increase in sediment concentration was observed in large parts of the Lower Mekong Basin in early 2014. The MRC conducted desk and field studies between 17–22 January by collecting water samples and analysing measured water levels in the Mekong stretches in southern Lao PDR and northern Cambodia as well as the mouth of the Sekong River, a tributary of the Mekong.

Some local residents in Cambodia claimed that they could not use the water for immediate cooking or drinking during the reported period, while some residents in Lao PDR said that highly turbid water caused an itchy rash.

The MRC's findings suggested that the turbidity was likely caused by extremely high runoff and consequent rising water levels due to strong rainfall in mid-December 2013. Turbidity usually increases sharply during heavy rainfall when particles from the soil surface are washed into the river and the river bed sediment is re-suspended.

Although the MRC's preliminary assessment implied that the observed sediment concentrations and turbidity levels were not higher than what is usually expected during the wet season, they were indeed unprecedented for the dry season, based on MRC records.

The trend decreased quickly in the downstream direction and by the end of January turbidity was close to normal for that time of the year.



# Highlights from the MRC Programmes in 2014

## **Agriculture and Irrigation Programme (AIP):**

- The AIP identified risks in the agriculture sector to ecology, livelihoods and food security for rural communities.
- The programme implemented pilot projects to assess the safe groundwater yield and develop a plan for sustainable groundwater use in agriculture for each site.
- AIP and the Fisheries Programme are developing the guidelines for fish-friendly irrigation schemes.
- The Climate Change and Adaptation Initiative and the AIP are collaborating in a Basin-wide assessment on climate change impacts on food security and adaptation options in the Lower Mekong Basin.

## **Climate Change and Adaptation Initiative (CCAI):**

- The programme held the 2nd Mekong Climate Forum from 6–8 October, in Siem Reap, Cambodia, focusing on the status of climate change, adaptation strategies and action plans in the Lower Mekong Basin. The results will help CCAI draft its First Report on the Status of Climate Change and Adaptation in the LMB and lay the foundation to establish the Mekong Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan by the end of 2015.
- CCAI completed a review on international experiences on the formulation and implementation of transboundary climate change adaptation strategies that will be published in the first quarter of 2015.
- 25 officials from the MRC Member Countries attended The 1st Rhine-Mekong Symposium: Climate Change and its Influence on Water and Related Sectors in Koblenz, Germany and the study visit to the Elbe River “Transboundary





Flood Management: Current Practice and Mid- and Long-term Planning for Adaptation to Climate Change”, from 8–16 May. The objective was to exchange experiences from other river basin organisations in transboundary climate change adaptation and flood management.

- CCAI launched the 2nd batch of local demonstration projects focusing on capacity building, adaptation planning and its integration into provincial and local action plans. The projects will help local authorities and communities become better prepared to cope with the effects of climate change.

### **Drought Management Programme (DMP):**

- The DMP and CCAI developed a scope assessment report as part of a basin-wide study of climate change impacts on drought and its severity. The report aims to help Member Countries to mitigate drought impacts.







### Environment Programme (EP):

- In cooperation with the Member Countries, the EP continued the routine water quality monitoring in accordance with the agreed Technical Guidelines for the implementation of the Procedures for Water Quality. The programme prepared plans for decentralisation of water quality monitoring and capacity building for laboratories.
- EP contributed to the MRC Secretariat's preliminary review of the Environmental Impact Assessment of the Don Sahong Hydropower Project (impacts on water quality, dolphins, and ecosystem health).
- The programme engaged with academic and research institutions such as the Inland Fishery Research and Development Institute in Cambodia; the National University of Lao PDR; Khon Khaen University, and Chiang Mai Rajabhat University in Thailand; and Can Tho University in Viet Nam to carry out Ecological Health Monitoring activities.
- An Ecological Health Monitoring handbook (guidelines) was published in the riparian languages and disseminated.

### Fisheries Programme (FP):

- The Fisheries Programme provided the results and data of its time series and routine regional fisheries monitoring for the Council Study, the Viet Nam Delta Study and the Technical Review of the Don Sahong Hydropower Project.
- FP trained staff of national fisheries agencies in management, research tools and methods, to improve inter- and intra-sectoral dialogue and decision-making for sustainable fisheries management in the Lower Mekong Basin.



## Flood Management and Mitigation

### Programme (FMMP):

- FMMP helped the Member Countries extend their network of rainfall stations required for the medium-term (5–10 days) flood forecasting, especially in the Mekong main tributaries.
- The programme provided useful analysis of the unusual fluctuations in water levels during the dry season in 2014, which helped the MRC Secretariat to address public concerns.

## Information and Knowledge Management

### Programme (IKMP):

- The programme handed over the 47 Hydro-metereological stations (HYCOS) to the Member Countries as part of the MRC's decentralisation. IKMP will still provide annual operation and maintenance support to Lao PDR and Cambodia until the end of 2015.
- IKMP responded timely to data requests from the Member Countries, the MRC Secretariat and others on unusual fluctuation of water levels in the dry season, which contributed to clear communication with stakeholders and the general public.
- The programme's hydrology, hydrolic and sediment data was used in the formulation of the new Basin Development Strategy and Strategic Plan for 2016–2020 as well as in the ongoing Delta Study, the Council Study, the MRC Technical Review of the Don Sahong Hydropower Project and the reports on high turbidity concentration in the Mekong mainstream.
- Near real-time dataset on hydromet and the regular data collection on sediment and discharge benefited





the national relevant Line Agencies in flood forecasting, low flow and drought monitoring, basin development plan, flow variability monitoring and analysis, water use monitoring and sediment and geomorphology monitoring.

- Finalised the map for the land cover project and information catalogue. A core data package of updated land cover data and information, and land use pattern/situation within the LMB countries has been developed.
- A series of national and regional trainings on national information system and data quality assurance/quality control were organised.
- National line agencies agreed to enhance the integration between national and regional activities on data quality assurance, data standardisation and regular data updating.
- IKMP finalised the Modelling Tool Box interface and other detail analysis tools, which are used to support analytical and assessment works of related water resources planning activities within the Mekong context.
- Completed the revamping of the MRC Data Portal, Community Website, and Mekong Info. The new information and service system will provide an improved channel for data, information, master catalogue, research finding and publications and learning tools.

### **Initiative on Sustainable Hydropower (ISH):**

- ISH promoted regional and national practices for sustainable hydropower. The programme held the Second Dam Safety Regional Workshop with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to discuss water management and planning for dams built in cascade.
- The Member Countries are considering investigating benefit sharing options from a national to local scale. International experience was discussed and the countries showed interest in a pilot project to test possible national benefit sharing concepts.
- China is reviewing the Rapid Basin-wide Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Tool (RSAT) after discussions with ISH staff. The RSAT is a multi-stakeholder dialogue and assessment tool designed to help identify: development strategies, institutional responses, and management measures that can be developed to optimise the benefits



- of hydropower development and reduce the risks.
- Cambodia and Lao PDR completed their updates of the hydropower project database required for planning and management (which began in 2012). The database remains in strong demand from the MRC and external actors, and is available in the MRC Data Portal.
  - ISH will soon publish a report about international practice related to fish passage. It proposes options for upstream and downstream fish passage that may be applied in the Mekong and substantial research requirements needed to test these technologies for Mekong fish species. GIZ (the German government's development aid agency) supported the project.
  - A number of reports for the study Improved Environmental and Socio-Economic Baseline Information for Hydropower Planning were prepared including the Guiding Considerations on Transboundary Monitoring for LMB Hydropower, and Information Sources to Support LMB Hydropower Information Needs. They draw on and document the MRC's and the Member Countries' substantial body of data and information. The reports have already benefited Viet Nam's Delta Study and the MRC Council Study.
  - ISH held back-to-back consultations on Baseline Information needs, multipurpose hydropower evaluation (economic, social, and environmental evaluation) and the identification of ecologically sensitive sub-basins for hydropower planning.
  - The programme is pilot-testing the technical aspect of its project: Identification of Ecologically Sensitive Sub-basins for Hydropower Planning to: identify Ecologically Sensitive Areas (ESAs), classify hydropower schemes, and conduct a risk assessment. In November a test was done in Buon Ma Thout (Viet Nam) based on data collected previously in the Sre Pok Basin. It identified significant pressures on rivers and ESAs in the area.





- ISH is developing Guidelines on multi-purpose evaluation of hydropower reservoirs to help Member Countries optimise hydropower planning. The guidelines include a defined process for financial and economic valuation of benefits and impacts. A pilot project is taking place in the Sre Pok Basin.

### **Navigation Programme (NAP):**

- The NAP evaluated the aids to navigation systems in Cambodia along the stretches between Kompong Cham and Phnom Penh; between Phnom Penh and the Cambodia-Viet Nam border; and between Phnom Penh and Chhnock Trou. The systems need to be repaired and this will take place in early 2015.
- The programme and the Thai Marine Department took immediate action to train skippers and dock labourers after the explosion of a Lao boat carrying 42,000 litres of petroleum.
- The programme completed the Guidelines on the Storage and Handling of Dangerous Goods, the Vessel Inspection Guidebook and Checklist, and the Waste Management Guidelines in Cambodia and Viet Nam. These guidelines promote navigation safety and can help save lives and protect the environmental health of the river.
- The NAP conducted the short training courses: Sustainable Management of Dangerous Goods in Test ports/Terminals in Cambodia and Viet Nam.
- 22 Riparian experts were trained at an overseas technical course in Antwerp Port, Belgium as part of the Sustainable Transportation of Dangerous Good Project.
- The programme conducted a Risk Analysis for the Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Transport of Dangerous Goods along the Mekong River that included clear recommendations to reduce the risks of explosions, oils spills and pollution, and to enhance emergency response and regional coordination.







# Time for an Update: the Basin Development Strategy and the Strategic Plan 2016–2020

The current MRC Basin Development Strategy 2011–2015 (BDS) will soon come to an end. It was adopted in January 2011 as the first ever Integrated Water Resources Management-strategy that identifies priorities that provide direction and support to the MRC Member Countries to capture development opportunities and minimise risks. It also contributes to an adaptive planning process that links regional and national planning in the Lower Mekong Basin.

The MRC will review and update it every five years to ensure that decision-making is based on up-to-date knowledge and feedback from stakeholders.

In 2014, the Basin Development Plan Programme updated the Basin Development Strategy and the Member Countries are discussing the draft for the 2016–2020 version with the support from a Joint Committee Task Force. Several national and regional consultations were held, including the 4th Regional Stakeholder Forum on the Mekong IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy in November, in Siem Reap, Cambodia, to get feedback from stakeholders.

The key messages from the forum are being used in the finalisation of the updated strategy, which will be available for approval by the MRC Council in 2015.

The main elements of the updated BDS for 2016–2020 include a review of the achievements and lessons learnt from implementing the current strategy, a summary of the present and long-term outlook for the Mekong basin; an assessment of the long-term development needs, opportunities and risks; the identification

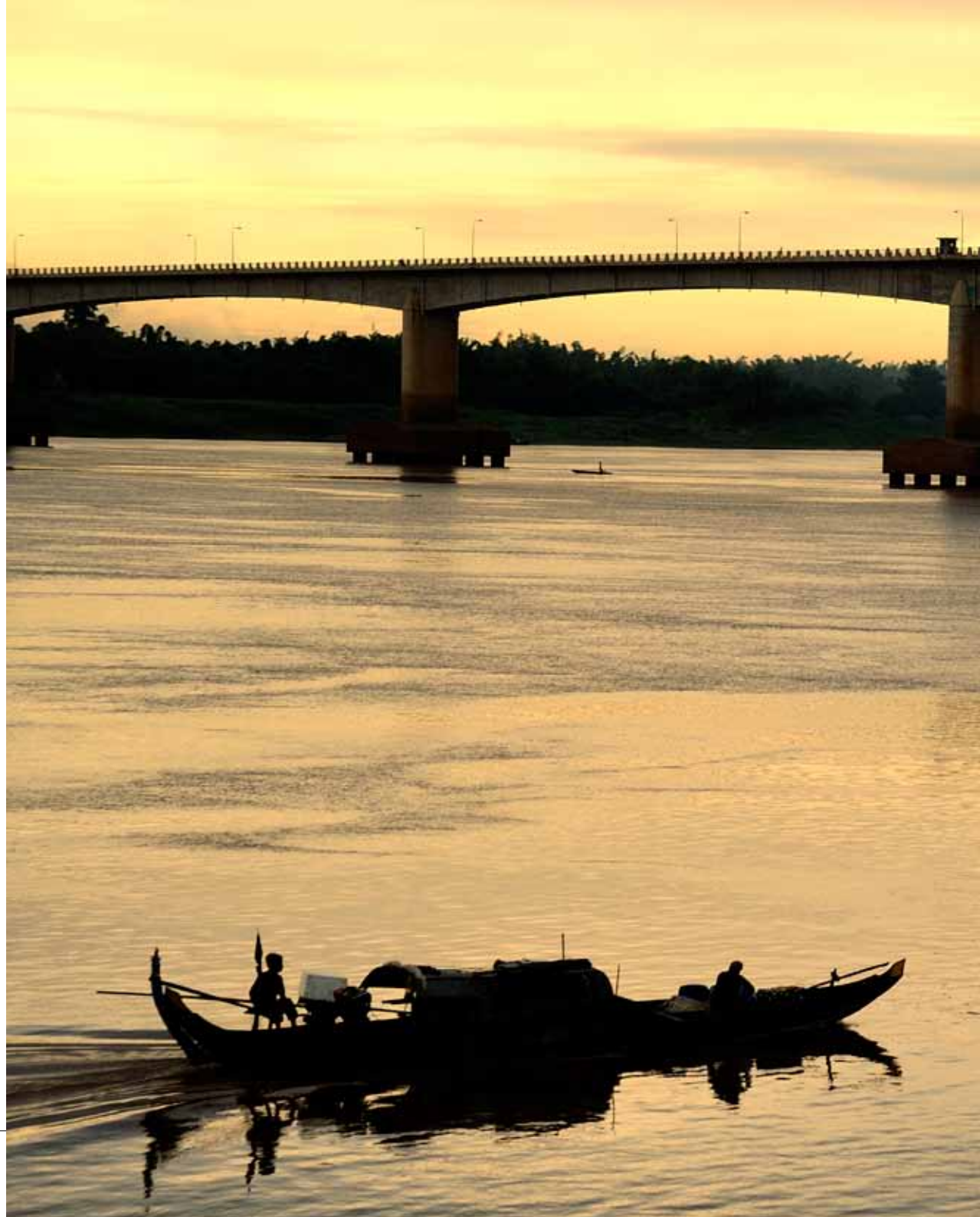






of development opportunities for basin and national implementation; medium-term strategic priorities (10–20 years) for all relevant actors to optimise opportunities and minimise risks; near-term strategic actions to be undertaken by the MRC in the next five year period; and ways in which the updated BDS will be implemented through the MRC Strategic Plan 2016–2020 and the updated National Indicative Plans.

The Strategic Plan 2016–2020 is being prepared based on the priorities and actions in the updated BDS and the feedback from national consultations in December. It will take into account the road map for the Commission's reforms, including the decentralisation of core river management functions. The draft will be shared with the Member Countries and the MRC's Development Partners early in 2015.





# Prior Consultation: the Don Sahong Hydropower Project

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In 2014 the Mekong River Commission carried out prior consultation for the Don Sahong Hydropower project, a dam that will produce 260 megawatts of electricity and will be situated in one of the braided channels in the Mekong River's Siphandone area of Southern Lao PDR. The process started on 25 July, and the Member Countries have been discussing and evaluating benefits and associated risks of the project, which may have significant impacts on the environment and people in the Lower Mekong Basin.

The prior consultation has a timeline of six months and although it is expected to conclude in January 2015, it can be extended upon the agreement of the MRC Joint Committee (JC), the governing body comprising one high-level government official at no less than Head of Department level from each Member Country. The JC is conducting the process with technical and administrative support from the MRC Secretariat and a working group.

On June 30, Lao PDR sent an official notice to the MRC Secretariat to inform the other Member Countries (Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam) of its intent to submit the project for this process. The project had been submitted for Notification in 30 September 2013, but in their initial response Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam stated that the project needed to undergo the more rigorous Prior Consultation, citing concerns especially on adverse impacts on water flows and fish passage and migration. Prior Consultation allows the notified countries to discuss these concerns and the potential ways to address them.







It is one of three procedures required for the development of different types of water-use projects in the Lower Mekong Basin as specified in the Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement (PNPCA) established under the 1995 Mekong Agreement. It applies to proposed water-use projects on the mainstream in the dry season, diversion of water from the mainstream to other basins during the wet season, and diversion of surplus water to other basins in the dry season.

Over the course of the consultation the MRC Secretariat has coordinated a technical review of the project's submitted documents. The review, which is in its final stage, will determine compliance with the MRC's Preliminary Design Guidance for Proposed Mainstream Dams in the Lower Mekong Basin. It will be presented to the JC upon its completion.

National public consultations and information sharing meetings are taking place in the Member Countries to allow stakeholders to learn more about the project and to voice their concerns.

On 12 December the MRC Secretariat held a regional public consultation in Pakse, Lao PDR to complement the national consultation and information sharing activities and to provide an additional platform for those who may not have access to the national meetings. Representatives from the Member Countries and various stakeholder groups raised questions to the MRC Secretariat and the developer on several technical aspects of the project.





The main concerns related to flows control, the effects of turbines on fish migration, sediment management and the lack of studies on potential transboundary effects. Representatives from the developer—Mega First Corporation Berhad— and experts from the MRC Secretariat provided scientific information to address some of these concerns.

On the eve of the regional public consultation, participants visited the proposed location of the project and talked to representatives from the developer who explained some of the major features of the dam and the proposed measures to minimise and mitigate any potential impacts.

A special webpage for the Don Sahong Hydropower Project was created to provide all available information to the public and to allow stakeholders to submit their feedback and comments.

The outcome of these regional and national consultation and information sharing activities will be presented to the JC as part of the feedback to be considered during the prior consultation.

Towards the end of the process, the notified countries will submit their official reply forms to the MRC Secretariat to have their comments on record. The final stage is for the Joint Committee to hold a meeting to discuss the outcomes of the prior consultation with an aim to reach an agreement to achieve an optimum use and prevention of waste of water, and to issue a decision that contains agreed-upon conditions for the project.

This is the second time that the MRC carries out the Prior Consultation. The first one was in 2010 following Lao PDR's submission of the Xayaburi Hydropower Project.









## Public Participation in the MRC

This was an active and successful year for public participation at the Mekong River Commission.

In October, the Climate Change and Adaptation Initiative held a three-day forum in Siem Reap, Cambodia, for government officials, academics, experts, representatives from river basin organisations, the Development Partners of the MRC, development agencies, civil society and the private sector to exchange their knowledge, experience and progress in undertaking measures to adapt to climate change. The event, entitled *Adaptation to Climate Change in the Transboundary Context*, gave attention to initiatives dealing with transboundary effects of climate change, especially ways to connect them with national adaptation strategies, and ensure their effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

The outcomes of the forum will provide additional input to the MRC's 1st Report on Status of Climate Change and Adaptation in the Lower Mekong Basin and the formulation of the Mekong Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan, scheduled for 2015. The forum was the second MRC regional platform on climate change (the first took place in Bangkok, Thailand in February 2009).

In November, the Basin Development Plan Programme held its 4th Regional Forum on the Basin Development Strategy under the theme *Moving towards optimal development of the Mekong River Basin*. The event discussed pressing issues affecting development in the Mekong region including hydropower development, regional benefit sharing, climate change, food security and transboundary cooperation. It aimed to collect feedback from stakeholders to update the basin development strategy that will guide the actions of the Member Countries and other relevant actors to promote cooperation, improve national development planning, address key gaps in knowledge and strengthen basin management procedures.



The event gathered scientists, representatives from civil society and non-governmental organisations, government officials, the MRC's Development Partners, the MRC's Dialogue Partners (China and Myanmar), the private sector and the media.

Participants called for the MRC to promote broad-based stakeholder engagement to examine development options, costs, benefits and trade-offs that may need to be considered by riparian governments. The outcome of the forum will be useful in the finalisation of the MRC's updated Basin Development Strategy and in future policy-making.

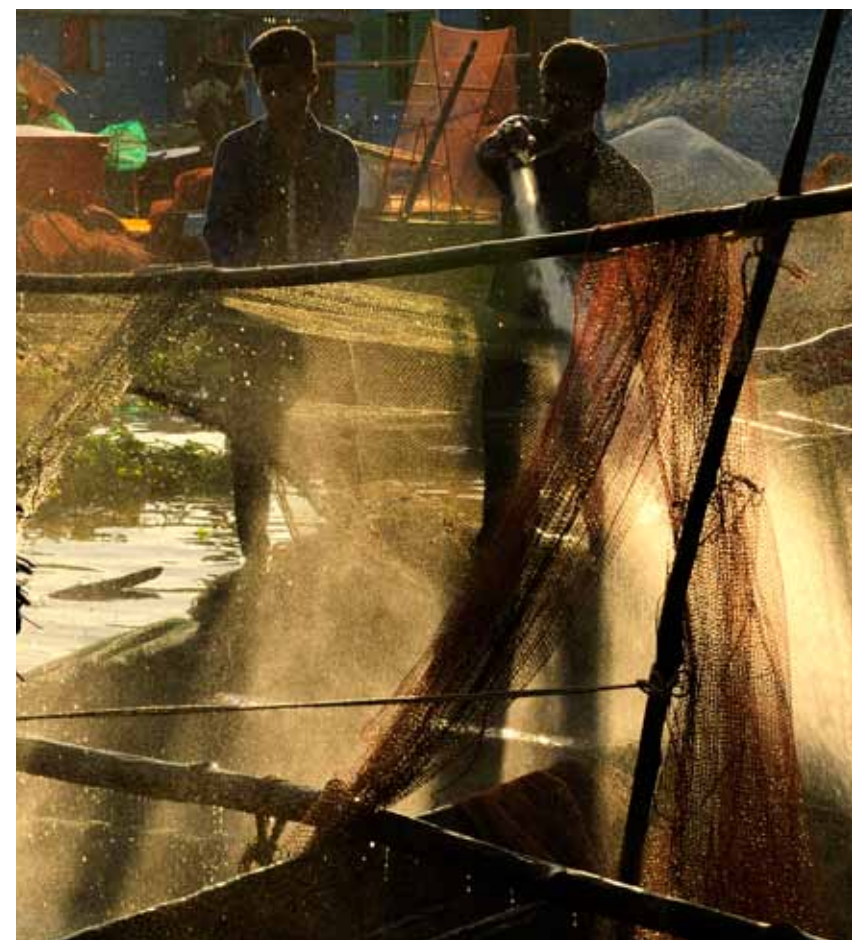
In December, the MRC Secretariat conducted a regional public consultation for stakeholders to learn more about the Dong Sahong Hydropower Project and to voice their concerns about the potential impacts of the dam. The event complemented the national consultation and information sharing activities of the Member Countries and provided an additional platform for those who may not have access to the national meetings.

Stakeholders can also submit their feedback online on the special webpage of the Don Sahong Hydropower Project.

The outcome of the regional and national consultations will be presented to the JC as part of the feedback to be considered during the prior consultation.

Public participation seeks and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision and/or a project. It strengthens mutual understanding to enhance decision-making and implementation.

As Member Countries increasingly take over implementation and funding of the MRC's river basin management activities, public participation will take place within and through their national systems.





## The Council Study: a Fuller Picture of Mekong Development, Sustainability and its Impacts

In 2011, the Mekong River Commission Council agreed to conduct the *Study on Sustainable Management of Development of the Mekong River including Impacts by Mainstream Hydropower Projects*, also known as “the Council Study.”

The study will fill the knowledge gaps and minimise the uncertainty in the predictions of impacts caused by different uses of water and related resources in the Mekong River Basin. It will include results and findings from other relevant studies and build on the current work of the MRC Programmes. The work will focus specifically on predicted impacts from development and management, and will aim to address the largest effects in the near and medium term. The study will also develop recommendations for addressing the impacts in terms of generation of opportunities, prevention, and mitigation or compensation options.

The results of the study will feed directly into the knowledge base used for updates and development of the MRC Basin Development Strategy, and address the need for building capacity in the Member Countries with respect to scientific studies.

A number of subject-specific studies and assessments will be integrated into a technical series, with six thematic reports and one main synthesis report summarising the main conclusions and elaborating on its recommendations. It is expected to be completed by the end of 2015.



# The Mekong Delta Study

Viet Nam is conducting the *Study of the Impacts of Mainstream Hydropower on the Mekong River*, also referred to as “The Mekong Delta Study”, to assess the cumulative effects of the entire cascade of hydropower development on the Mekong Delta of Viet Nam. Its aim is to build a suitable scientific evidence-base that would inform decisions on the sustainable development of the Mekong River.

The main objectives of the study are: 1) To develop a complete database on baseline conditions for the LMB, particularly the Mekong Delta (floodplains of Viet Nam and Cambodia); 2) To quantitatively assess impacts of proposed mainstream hydropower projects on the downstream system including: the flow regime; transport of sediment and nutrients; biodiversity; water quality;

fisheries; navigation; and related socio-economic issues; 3) To facilitate achieving consensus on the results of impact assessment of the proposed mainstream hydropower projects on the Mekong Delta and determine avoidance, mitigation and enhancement measures through close consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Viet Nam is conducting the study in cooperation with experts from Cambodia and Lao PDR and with support from Thailand. The baseline assessment has been carried out and the detailed assessment of the impacts and proposed mitigation measures is expected in 2015. The study is scheduled to be completed by the end of next year.



# The MRC in Transition:

## Decentralisation and Structural Reform

The MRC is undergoing an organisational transition and restructuring known as “decentralisation” aimed at creating a leaner, more efficient and effective organisation by 2030.

It will consist of three major reforms: structural and operational reform (a different structure for the MRC Secretariat), staffing reform (a new staffing policy, including a reduction in the number of staff) and a financial reform (an improved financial framework, including a pooled fund and a gradual increase in Member Country contributions).

In 2014 the MRC finalised the four National Roadmaps and the Regional Roadmap; the latter includes 14 overarching recommendations the Joint Committee and the MRC Council agreed on in March and June respectively.

The roadmap outlines how the MRC will move from its current structure of programmes funded by Development Partners, to one financed by the Member Countries focusing on core functions and core river management functions. Some of these will be performed mostly by the MRC Secretariat (in the short- to medium term) and others by national agencies. The Secretariat will gradually transfer responsibilities to them according to a timeline.

The MRC Core Functions are defined as follows:

### Corporate services core functions:

- Secretariat administration and management
- Promotion of dialogue, coordination, facilitation
- Communication, reporting and dissemination

### Core river management functions:

- Data acquisition, exchange and monitoring
- Analysis, modelling and assessment
- Planning support
- Forecasting, warning and emergency response
- Implementation of the MRC Procedures

Under the new financial plan, the Member Countries are expected to increase their contributions as funding from the Development Partners decreases. The organisation will operate under a pool funding or “basket funding” structure that will allow it to allocate money more equitably to its activities.

Decentralisation is a gradual process that will take a few years and will produce results accordingly. The MRC is still discussing its plans for the organisational structure of the Secretariat, but it intends to phase out the current programmes and replace them with a single corporate structure with units aligned to the core functions.







# Commitment to continued cooperation: the MRC and China

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China and the MRC continued to demonstrate their commitment to cooperation through several official technical visits and exchange meetings in 2014.

In March, Chinese delegates from the Ministry of Water Resources of the People's Republic of China and Tsinghua University met officials from the Cambodia National Mekong Committee at the Office of the Secretariat in Phnom Penh (OSP), followed by a visit to the Lower Reach of the Mekong River, including the Tonle Sap Lake.

A delegation from the MRC Secretariat, made up of staff from the IKMP and the National Mekong Committees, visited the Jinghong and Man'An Hydromet Stations, and the Kunming Data Terminal Centre in China's Yunnan Province in May.

On 7 November, a delegation from China—headed by Vice-Minister of Water Resources, H.E. Mr. JIAO Yong—visited the Office of the Secretariat in Vientiane, Lao PDR. The Vice-Minister emphasised that China would work with the MRC on a joint scientific study on water fluctuations of the Mekong-Lancang River and on the organisation of the 2nd MRC-Ecosystem Study Commission for International Rivers (ESCIR) Symposium, among other existing and upcoming activities.

The study will be a joint assessment of water level fluctuation at hydro-met stations in the Chiang Sean District of Chiang Rai Province in northern Thailand, and in Vientiane, Lao PDR.

The Vice-Minister said that China plans to build a regulating reservoir to manage and control the fluctuation in water levels from the water releases of the Jinghong and Nuozhadu dams. He added that, if needed, China may reach out to the MRC's experts during the development of this project. China emphasised that the operation of their larger dams on the Mekong-Lancang goes beyond electricity generation and include also flood control, water supply and ease of navigation.

China has been a Dialogue Partner of the MRC since 1996. The MRC and China cooperate in several areas including navigation, water resources, and hydropower development, through activities such as knowledge, information, and technological exchanges.

As Dialogue Partner, China participates in the MRC's International Conferences, the four-yearly Summits and the annual Dialogue Meetings. It also joined the Junior Riparian Professionals (JRP) Programme, the MRC's on-the-job training for young professionals from the four Member Countries, China and Myanmar. This year, three Junior Riparian Professionals from China worked for the



Information Knowledge and Management Programme (IKMP) and the Flood Management and Mitigation Programme (FMMP). In 2014 China participated in the Second MRC Summit, the International Conference, and the Basin Development Planning Forum.

On 1 April 2002, China signed an agreement on the provision of hydrological information on the Mekong-Lancang River. Under this agreement China provides water-level data in the flood season from two stations located on the Lancang River in China. This information is fed into the MRC's flood forecasting system. The agreement was extended in 2013 and China now provides hydrological data twice a day from 1 June until 31 October every year. It also states that during an emergency, the data will also be provided upon request. This information is essential for the MRC's regional daily forecasts of downstream water levels during the flood season, which can save lives and reduce damage to property and crops. China contributes 13.5 per cent of the flow of the Mekong River.



# Cooperation with Myanmar

Modest progress has been made on the cooperation with Myanmar, the other Dialogue Partner of the MRC. In general, cooperation on water borne transportation continues. Myanmar still participates in every Navigation Advisory Body Meeting. In April 2014, a delegation from Myanmar, led by the Union Minister of Foreign Affairs, attended The Second MRC Summit in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam. At the Summit, a bilateral meeting with the MRC Secretariat was conducted to discuss possible areas of future cooperation, and the delegation invited the MRC to submit its proposal on fisheries monitoring, drought management, and agriculture and irrigation for their consideration. Cooperation with Myanmar in capacity development under the Junior Riparian Professional Project continued. From September 2013 to March 2014, one Junior Riparian Professional (JRP) received on-the-job training with the Climate Change and Adaptation Initiative under the project called, "How to use river water for environmental protection". There was no JRP from Myanmar for the rest of 2014.









## Development Partners in Support of the MRC

The MRC has the financial support of 12 active Development Partners: Australia, Belgium, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and the World Bank. It has 27 ongoing agreements for the 13 programmes, institutional support and the Council Study. Although the Member Countries are working towards self-financing by 2030, the MRC still relies on these agreements to conduct some of its work.

This year the MRC ensured new funding agreements with the Government of Japan for US\$3.44 million, of which US\$1.54 million will be allocated to the Drought Management Programme (DMP), and US\$1.9 million to the Flood Management and Mitigation Programme (FMMP). Six funding agreements expired and twelve have been extended.

The German Development Bank (KfW) is finalising its agreement for US\$2.12 million to support wetland management and conservation in the Mekong. The MRC Environment Programme, Cambodia and Lao PDR will implement the regional and national components respectively. The MRC expects to sign the Financing Agreement in 2015, before the year's implementation phase.

The German government has also earmarked EUR 4 million (US\$4,525,000) for the Phase II of Support to the MRC Initiative on Sustainable Hydropower, which aims to further anchor sustainability assessment tools for hydropower planning and implement the subsequent recommendations. The funds are expected in 2016.

Also this year, the proposals from the Japan ASEAN Integration Fund for DMP and FMMP were approved. Through its Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry,



the Government of Japan will continue to fund the Agriculture and Irrigation Programme (AIP) with a three-year commitment from June 2014–June 2017.

Belgium will continue to fund the Navigation Programme (NAP) during the next Strategic Plan with a pledge of EUR 3 million (US\$3.3 million) for the outstanding activities of 2015–2017, and another EUR 3 million (US\$3.3 million) for the period 2018–2020.

Meanwhile, the Australian Embassy in Vientiane is expected to contribute AUD 6,000,000 (US\$4.6 million) for the next strategic cycle 2016–2020.

The multi-year (2011–2015) funding agreements for the Work Programme Budget, institutional support and the Council Study Trust Fund amounted to approximately US\$102 million. The Development Partners have already pledged more than US\$20 million for the 2016–2020 Strategic Planning period. Discussions continued in 2014 on the proposal to establish a basket-fund that would replace the existing programme-related funding in 2016. The new Strategic Plan 2016–2020 will outline the overall funding requirements for that period and the MRC will work closely with its Development Partners to find a balance between identified needs and available resources. It is anticipated that most of the current Development Partners will continue to support the MRC during the new strategic planning period.







## Finance and Human Resources

The MRC has continued to maintain the sound management of the Operating Expenses Budget (OEB) and the programmes' budgets. Even though some programmes did not meet their expected disbursement rates compared to their financial plan revised in June 2014, the financial management generally improved. The total cash balance of the MRC programmes as of 31 December 2014 was US\$36,597,893. The budget balances of all Development Partners as of the end of the year were positive.

The total income from the contribution of the Member Countries amounted to US\$2,849,633 (132.5%).<sup>1</sup> The interest earned from the MRC Secretariat's bank accounts reached US\$95,752 (87%), while the total income from the Management and Administration Fee (MAF) was US\$2,062,321 (111.5%). The total expenditures as of 31 December 2014 were US\$3,426,586 (85.8%). The spending on personnel-related costs under the OEB 2014 was US\$2,541,979 including the training cost of US\$59,892 or about 100% of the annual budget. Only 61.9% of the travel budget was spent. A saving of about US\$28,000 from contractual services was lower than expected.

The overall expenditures on the budget series of the MRC Meeting Expenses were low because only one Council Meeting was held and the planned Dialogue Partners' meeting did not take place. The budget to support the National Mekong Committees was spent as planned.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Thailand already partially contributed US\$699,585 for 2015.



## SUMMARY OF INCOME AND EXPENSES FOR 2014:

Income: US\$5,018,052

Expenditures: US\$3,426,586

Surplus: US\$1,591,467

## STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURES

For the year ended 31 December 2014

Currency: USD

### INCOME

	2014
Contributions from Riparian Governments	2,849,633
Treasury Management	95,752
Management and Administration Fees	2,062,321
Miscellaneous	10,346
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>5,018,052</b>

### EXPENDITURES

	2014
Administrative Expenditures	2,541,979
Personnel Costs	59,892
Training Costs	18,577
Official Travel	83,997
Contractual Services	294,831
General Operating Expenses	29,569
Supplies	61,699
Furniture & Equipment	263,027
Meetings	73,015
Support to NMCs & Programmes	
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>3,426,586</b>



## Human Resources

As of the end of the year, 150 staff work for the Secretariat. 60 are based at its office in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and 90 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. 73 are riparian professionals and 76 are support staff. The Secretariat is recruiting personnel for nine positions. Of the riparian professionals 30 are from Cambodia, 12 from Lao PDR, 19 from Thailand, and 13 from Viet Nam.

Staff turnover in 2014 decreased to levels similar to 2011 and 2012. Last year's increase was because of the phasing out of the Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) positions.

The MRC continued the recruitment of a new Riparian Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The Secretariat has short listed the potential candidates and the process will carry on into early 2015 when the selected applicants will be interviewed. The new CEO is expected to join at the beginning of the 2nd quarter of 2015, once the Joint Committee and the Council give their approvals.

### **MRC Workforce**

Total: 150

General Support: 76

Riparian Professional: 73

International Professional: 1







# List of publications in 2014



Please note that these are available at <http://www.mrcmekong.org/publications/>

Rapid Basin-wide Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Tool (RSAT) – Full Report, Joint Initiative, 2 December 2014



MRC International Conference Publication: Cooperation for Water, Energy and Food Security in Transboundary Basin under Changing Climate, 3 September 2014







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# Mekong

River Commission