

Mekong River Commission

**MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE
MEKONG RIVER COMMISSION STRATEGIC PLAN 2006-2010**

CONSULTANT'S FINAL REPORT

May 2009

MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE MRC STRATEGIC PLAN 2006-2010

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DISCLAIMER

This report was compiled by Mr Des Cleary of Mona Vale, Australia, drawing on Contributing Papers of the MRC Member Countries, International Development Partners, the MRC Secretariat and other stakeholders. The Contributing Papers of the MRC Member Countries were facilitated by Mr Khuon Komar of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Ms Sengmanichanh Somchanmavong of Vientiane, Lao PDR, Mr Apichai Sunchindah of Bangkok, Thailand and Mr Nguyen Nhan Quang of Hanoi, Viet Nam.

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The conclusions and recommendations of this report are the responsibility of the consultants.

**PREFACE
BY THE MRC SECRETARIAT
TO THE CONSULTANT'S FINAL REPORT OF THE
MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE MRC STRATEGIC PLAN 2006-2010**

**SUMMARY RECORD
OF THE REGIONAL MEETING HELD AT THE MRC SECRETARIAT ON 6 MARCH 2009**

1. This Summary Record reflects the views of delegates to the Regional Meeting held at the MRC Secretariat on 6 March 2009.
2. Since the MRC Strategic Plan 2006-2010 (SP) was adopted, development in the Mekong Basin has been accelerating which is changing the context within which MRC undertakes its activities. In April 2008 the Twenty-seventh Meeting of the MRC Joint Committee agreed on the need for a mid-term review (MTR) of the SP. This MTR would take stock of the progress achieved by the MRC in the implementation of the SP, and to make recommendations for any adjustments that are required.
3. The MTR began in July 2008. It captured the perspectives of the four MRC Member Countries, the International Development Partners (IDP), and the MRC Secretariat, through six independently produced Contributing Papers. The MRC Dialogue Partners PR China and Myanmar and other stakeholders contributed to the review process in various forms. The MTR covered five broad questions:
 - Progress of the implementation of the SP – is the implementation on track?
 - Alignment of MRC programmes – in particular with the 1995 Mekong Agreement, the SP, and with other regional initiatives;
 - MRC's orientation towards UN Millennium Development Goals;
 - Prioritisation for the remaining period of the SP; and
 - Preparation of the next SP.
4. Two regional meetings, with participation of a range of MRC stakeholders, were held on 21 October 2008 and on 6 March 2009. Whereas the first meeting provided the opportunity to consolidate diverging perceptions and discuss the MTR findings, the second meeting concluded the process by agreeing on a way forward for the remaining period of the current SP. The second meeting also set the broad conceptual lines and outlined the participatory process for the next SP. The meeting agreed on the following points:
5. Documentation of outcomes of the meeting:
 - *Outcome:* In addition to this summary record of the meeting, presented as a preface to the Consultant's Final Report, further documentation of the meeting is annexed to the Consultant's report. This includes the slide presentations, updated with received recommendations for improvement, as Appendix P.
6. Stakeholder participation:
 - *Outcome:* The MTR process experienced a weak participation from broader stakeholder groups, e.g. civil society organisations.
 - *Action points for MRC:* (i) MRCS will compile comments of civil society relevant to the MTR and the formulation of next SP, as expressed at BDP Stakeholder Consultations (in March and November 2008), the Regional Hydropower Consultation (in September 2008) and meeting on stakeholder engagement in MRC activities (in November 2008); and (ii) develop a clear plan for more pro-active engagement with civil society for the formulation of the next SP.
7. Progress against SP goals and contributions towards MDG:
 - *Outcome:* Whereas the assessment of MRC progress against the SP is generally positive, it was noted that the assessment remained somehow qualitative and subjective, as the current SP does not provide clear indicators and targets, the prioritisation offered in an annex to the SP may not have been fully founded on country consultations. A significant attribution gap between MRC

outcomes and MDG exists. Bridging this attribution gap, is a common challenge faced by development organizations.

- *Action points for MRC*, to be taken up during the formulation of the next SP: (i) Setting of clear thematic and institutional development priorities, and establishing a clear set of criteria for future re-prioritisations, to respond to emerging challenges during the next SP cycle; (ii) Defining key performance indicators and (annual) performance targets; (iii) Setting more realistic objective statements and addressing the attribution challenge with methodological approaches such as the 'accountability chain' developed and applied by UN organisations.

8. Portfolio rationalisation:

- *Outcome*: A portfolio rationalisation, as suggested in contributing papers to the MTP, is recommended. Priority drought management and tourism activities shall be integrated into other MRC programmes.
- *Action points for MRC*: The MRC Secretariat needs to translate this into an action plan, detailing which priority actions are taken up in which programme / initiative, as well as specifying funding sources and timeline of delivery. The action plan would require agreement at the Joint Committee level, tentatively at the Thirtieth Meeting in August 2009.

9. Programme prioritisation:

- *Outcome*: Priorities for many programmes are already clear having been set by their respective advisory bodies or steering committees. Some further review is needed to ensure alignment with SP outputs or to respond to funding constraints.
- *Action points for MRC*: Clearer criteria for prioritisation and their transparent application for the 2010 MRC Work Programme process are required, respective sub-chapters could document the set priorities at the level of the individual programme / initiative.

10. Next Strategic Plan:

- *Outcome*: A general consensus was reached on focusing the next SP on core river basin management functions. The MRC Secretariat presented a first roadmap for the formulation of the next SP, which synchronises the planning process to the upcoming MRC governance meetings in the second half of 2009 and in 2010. It uses these occasions as platform for intermediate decision making. Subject to the inclusion of comments from the meeting, the roadmap is approved in principle.
- *Action points for the MRC*: (i) The current discussion on defining long term core river basin management functions of MRC is a critical input to the next SP planning process and needs to be followed through with rigor; (ii) The roadmap for next SP formulation needs to be improved with more details added.

11. International Development Partner Support to MRC:

- *Outcome*: The meeting also provided the opportunity for IDP to reflect on MRC's relevance and effectiveness, and share their objectives for and constraints in continued support to the MRC. They highlighted that poverty focus, expressed against the MDG paradigm, and the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness as well as the Accra Action Plan are important benchmarks in their portfolio appraisal. The formulation of the next SP shall be taken as an opportunity to further explore IDP budget support to MRC. Future IDP contributions to the region may potentially shrink, as a result of aid re-allocation to least developed regions, but also in response to budgetary constraints resulting from the current financial crisis.

12. The full MTR documentation including this Preface, the Executive Summary, the Main Report, and Appendices is available at http://www.mrcmekong.org/free_download/report.htm.