

MRC must strengthen cooperation to meet development needs of basin



H.E. Mr Asang Laoly, Vice Prime Minister of Lao PDR addresses the guests at the anniversary celebration.

The Mekong River Commission would need to accelerate its operations and strengthen cooperation ties if it is to meet the growing needs of the Lower Mekong Basin. H.E. Mr Asang Laoly, Vice Prime Minister of the Lao PDR told guests at the MRC's 10th anniversary celebration held in Vientiane on 5 April 2005.

H.E. Mr Asang said that while the past decade had been a decade of improving the MRC's strength in many ways, it would be hard for the Lower Mekong Basin to cope with growing demands for water resources and water related resources in the future.

It was important for the organisation to accelerate operations, especially in the hydropower, agriculture and forestry, irrigation, navigation, flood and drought management and tourism sectors.

He urged member countries to speed up the strengthening of cooperation ties, so the

MRC could move forward in its goals to eradicate poverty and move closer to other developed countries in the region.

H.E. Mr Asang was addressing MRC Council members and Joint Committee members from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam as well as members of the international diplomatic and donor community who attended the celebration to commemorate the signing of the Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin, which took place in Chiang Rai, Thailand on 5 April 1995.

He said that the Lao government was keen to keep expanding cooperation within the framework of MRC as well as the Greater Mekong Sub region.

"In future, we wish to see the Mekong River as the River of Peace and cooperation within the region, a river which

meets all needs," he said.

H.E Mr Somphong Mongkhonvilay, Chairman of the MRC Council for 2004/2005 formally named 5 April as Mekong Day and asked that communities in the region to join with the MRC each year in a celebration of Mekong Day to increase awareness of the region's progress in the wider world.

He said that the Mekong River Commission had given true meaning to the concept of a shared vision. The MRC was now a well-established, well-run organisation with a solid network of regional, national and international partnerships in place.

All four member countries were committed to long term cooperation to ensure the economic, social and cultural prosperity of the 60 million people of the basin, and future generations.

FMMP takes centre stage at 3AFF

Nearly 130 delegates from around the world gave an enthusiastic welcome to the MRC's new Flood Management and Mitigation Programme at the 3rd Annual Mekong Flood Forum (3AFF) held in Vientiane on 7-8 April 2005.

The FMMP was the main focus of the 3AFF, which took the new programme as its theme: "Flood Management and Mitigation in the Mekong Basin".

The Mekong River Commission's Flood Management and Mitigation Programme will be the first programme of its kind to operate on a regional basis, bringing together the needs of the four member countries. The new Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre in Phnom Penh, Cambodia will be the first time such a permanent, regional centre has been established.

The forum, which was sponsored by The Royal Netherlands Government, the Government of Germany and the Government of the United States, gave

participants the opportunity to become familiar with the programme's five components and the FMMP's aims as well as providing an opportunity to discuss the problems facing the basin and how countries and organisations can find solutions by working together.

International experts from the MRC member countries of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam, Dialogue Partners China and Myanmar and experts from Japan, Germany, France and Nepal gathered for the two-day conference to discuss ways of managing the floods which claim many lives and cause untold damage every year in the Mekong Basin.

Topics under discussion at the 3AFF included disaster preparedness, early warning systems, forecasting tools, structural measures for flood proofing, capacity building, land management and the economic value of floods. International experts provided the benefit of their experience and the forum concluded with a



Experts from around the globe gathered to exchange knowledge and share lessons at the Flood Forum.

discussion on new areas of cooperation.

Participants also heard an overview of recent Mekong River Basin floods and reports from each country.

Forum organisers said that 3AFF achieved its objectives of familiarising participants with the FMMP, as well as

sharing of technical knowledge and best flood management practices and identifying future needs within the four member countries.

The MRC's partners provided some

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- Navigation Master Plan project under way
- 21st Joint Committee meeting report

The 22nd Meeting of the MRC Joint Committee to be held in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 30-31 August 2005

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Wetlands survey team sights croc hatchlings

A survey funded by the new Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) has made sightings of rare siamese crocodile (*Crocodylus siamensis*) hatchlings in Lao PDR, confirming that the country is a globally important region for conservation of the one of the MWBP's flagship species.

In March 2005, the first national survey programme for the siamese crocodile, which is ranked as "critically endangered" by the IUCN - The World Conservation Union, was initiated by the Lao Government, through the Living Aquatic Resources Research Centre and Wildlife Conservation Society Lao Program and funded by MWBP.

Prior to this, preliminary surveys had not reported sightings of many wild crocodiles, although local reports confirmed that breeding populations persisted. However, the first surveys in March found a small breeding population of siamese crocodiles, in a small (11ha) swamp in Savannakhet

province, central Lao PDR. Researchers observed a crèche of hatchling crocodiles with their mother in the wild. This is one of the rare occasions when hatchlings of this species have been observed anywhere in the wild.

From March to April, surveys were conducted in 15 wetlands in central and southern Lao PDR. No crocodiles were observed at other surveyed wetlands, but crocodile signs (tracks, dung) were recorded and local residents reported they had observed breeding.

The survey's preliminary findings indicate that siamese crocodiles are still widely distributed in some regions of central and southern Lao PDR, but are threatened by habitat loss and degradation due to swamp drainage, cultivation, weed invasion and burning. No commercial hunting has been recorded.

Ongoing surveys are examining new regions. The project is also generating awareness of the species among local

agencies, and forestry staff who accompany surveys are trained in crocodile survey techniques.

The current programme ends in June 2005, and next step will be to develop a national conservation plan for the species, and begin management actions in high-priority sites.

The MWBP is jointly managed by UNDP, IUCN - The World Conservation Union and the Mekong River Commission

with funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, The Royal Netherlands Government, MRCS and The Water and Nature Initiative (WANI).



MWBP/WCS: M. Becauijen

Master Plan charts course for future of waterborne transport on the river



Jim Holmes

The Project Management Team behind the Design of the Master Plan for Waterborne Transport on the Mekong is gearing up to tackle some challenging issues facing the river.

The plan's priorities are to solve the problems of providing access to remote villages along the Mekong; to create awareness with decision-makers that navigation is an environmentally sound and economic mode of transportation; and to facilitate transit of inland and sea-going ships through the Mekong in Viet Nam to reach Phnom Penh.

The Navigation Programme's Design of the Master Plan for Waterborne Transport on the Mekong project commenced in April

2005 and is now in its start-up phase. The 18-month project, which is based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, is currently focusing on recruitment of Cambodian and international experts, institutional and operational set-up, and establishing partnerships in Cambodia

The main objective of the project is to rehabilitate and improve the rural, domestic and international transport network using the Mekong River system in Cambodia. Within Cambodia the vast network of rivers, canals and tributaries is traditionally used as communication link between the remote villages and the larger market centres. The low cost of river transport allows small-scale traders as well as larger businesses to contribute to creating better livelihoods for

the people sharing the river.

The Mekong represents a window of opportunity for maritime trade with other countries in Asia, connecting the entire Mekong region to important markets in the north and south, and to the global trade system.

The project team's goal is to ensure the provision of safe and efficient waterways and ports which would attract crucial private and public investments that could contribute to improving neglected fleet and waterway facilities, as well as introducing physical safety measures on board and inland.

The regional development of water transport can still ensure the Mekong remains one of the cleanest rivers in the

world, as long as the highest standards for ship construction, safety and operations are applied, especially with regards to the carriage of hazardous goods.

The team believes that if there are transparent, efficient and cost-effective water transport facilities in place, and if navigation beyond the borders is free from administrative and physical limitations, private entrepreneurs will invest in water transport links, bringing with them increased employment opportunities.

The project is being funded by the Directorate General for Development Cooperation, Belgium with participation from the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) and the Ministry of Public Works and Transport.

The Cambodia National Mekong Committee is acting as Coordinating Agency and the project will team up with ministerial agencies, local freight forwarders, boat operators, and civil society to jointly formulate the programme. It will also involve the investment banks and bilateral donors from the onset to participate in the planning process so they can assist ensuring the action plans materialise.

Close cooperation with the MRC's Navigation Programme will make it easier to deal with the cross-border issues.

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FMMP takes ...

important and useful input in the form of their papers and the discussions these provoked. Working relationships were strengthened and the programme leaders took note of the many sound suggestions the participants made about how the FMMP should be implemented and what the programme needed to do in the future. It was a very good start to the programme.

Participants listened to many excellent presentations from different parts of the world including from Europe, America, South East Asia, and Japan as well as hearing real life lessons of best practices from regional and European flood centres.

MRC Chief Executive Officer Dr Olivier Cogels emphasised that it was important to take the practice of flood management to the grass roots level, in particular to encourage communities to implement easy-to-use early warning systems. He said the production of much more detailed topographic data in flood prone regions also was crucial.

MRC's Flood Management and Mitigation Programme, with continued assistance from the US Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance, the Cambodian Red Cross, the American Red Cross and Action Against Hunger last year expanded its flood early warning system from six villages to a total of 40 in five flood-prone areas of Cambodia and the project will now be expanded to Champassak province in Lao PDR.

Vice Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and Member of the MRC Joint Committee for Lao PDR H.E. Mr Sitaheng Rasphone

said the FMMP would play an important role in future years in coordinating transboundary issues. "MRC member countries are committed to managing the natural resources of the basin in a sustainable manner and for mutual benefit," he said.

"They recognise the need to conserve the beneficial economic and environmental impacts of floods. By adopting the principles defined in the FMMP they have agreed to an integrated approach to management and mitigation of Mekong River floods."

The 4th Annual Mekong Flood Forum will be held in late 2006.

Mekong River Commission celebrates 10 years of cooperation



On 5 April 2005 The Mekong River Commission celebrated the 10th Anniversary of the Signing of the Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin. This historic agreement was made between the four countries that share the Lower Mekong Basin: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam in Chiang Rai. Thailand on April 5 1995.

The countries agreed to co-ordinate and promote co-operation in all fields of sustainable development, utilisation, management and conservation of the water and related resources of the Mekong Basin. At the same time they agreed to work together on formulating several procedures that would allow the water resources of the basin to be shared on an equitable basis.

These procedures cover such important areas as notification of proposed use of water in any of the member countries, prior consultation on developments, the basin development plan, protection of the environment and freedom of navigation.

But the story did not begin there. Cooperation regarding the Mekong begins in the middle of the 20th century with the formal signing of the Geneva Accords, when the newly independent nations of Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam took their places on the world stage.

Studies of the Mekong by the United Nations' Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) and the US Bureau for Reclamation sparked interest in the Lower Mekong countries and at the newly established ECAFE for a grand scheme to develop what was thought of as one of the world's great "untamed rivers".

No international river body had ever attempted to take on such encompassing responsibilities for financing, construction, management and maintenance of projects on an international river.

The "Mekong Project" was the

largest single development project the fledgling United Nations organisation had ever undertaken. When the new Mekong Committee began its work, there were no models to follow. In its early days, the Committee was guided and supported by ECAFE and the United Nations Development Agency.

Lack of stability in the region resulted in the interruption of Mekong Committee sessions in the late 1970s. In response to Cambodia's absence, in 1977 Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet

water and related resources of the Mekong River Basin, such as navigation, flood control, fisheries, agriculture, hydropower and environmental protection.

Over the past 10 years the organisation has achieved significant progress toward its goals through a variety of agreements on water use, quality and quantity. Member countries have concurred on the need for data and information sharing and exchange, a flood management and mitigation strategy, a hydropower strategy and have made a formal agreement with China on the exchange of hydrological and other data.

In the future the MRC is keen to encourage investment in water

resources in the basin in all areas in order to reduce poverty and improve the livelihoods of the basin's

many government aid agencies.

The World Bank is a partner in programmes such as the Basin Development Plan and the Water Utilisation Programme and the ADB is funding a component of the new Flood Management and Mitigation Programme. The MRC is keen to play a role within the ADB-financed Greater Mekong Sub-Region initiative.

Today the member countries gain from the close cooperation with their neighbours in many ways. There is a regular exchange of information about new developments, support with technical expertise and knowledge to be gained in such areas as environmental testing of water quality, fishery management and sound hydropower development. There are many transboundary issues such as the provision of safe navigation, protection of watersheds and flood management and mitigation, which MRC programmes are working to institute in all the countries. It would not be possible to deal with these big issues alone.

The MRC is currently seeking funding for a tourism programme. There is huge untapped potential for making the river an exciting and

PM calls on nations to share Mekong spirit



Nam adopted a new statute forming the basis of the Interim Mekong Committee.

When Cambodia finally requested readmission in 1991, lengthy discussions began which led to the eventual transformation of the Mekong Committee through the 1995 Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin.

The 1995 Agreement was a coming-of-age for the Mekong Committee, which now became the Mekong River Commission. Its Articles give full management responsibility of the Commission to a Council of Ministers of member countries. Following the 1995 Agreement the MRC shifted its focus from the development of large-scale projects to sustainable development and management of natural resources. It consolidated all the knowledge gleaned from 30 years of surveys and studies into a "knowledge base".

The MRC member countries agreed to work together in all fields of sustainable development, utilisation, management and conservation of the

residents. The people of the basin are predominately rural and are some of the poorest in the world.

The MRC's Regional Cooperation Programme for Integrated Water Resources Management and Development of the Mekong River Basin is intended to help member countries make the best use of their water resources.

The MRC works closely with many organisations either directly as partners or indirectly through information exchange, including UN agencies such as UNDP and UNESCAP; ASEAN; the World Wildlife Fund; the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and

economically advantageous addition to the tourism industry.

The MRC is looking forward to another decade of challenges and successful cooperation. Its new orientation will see the MRC concentrate on delivering concrete development actions based on broad partnership and cooperation, which will have direct benefit to the member countries and, most importantly, to the poor people of the basin.



1995

- On April 5, 1995 Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam signed the 1995 Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin. They agreed to cooperation in a constructive and mutually beneficial manner in all fields of sustainable development, utilisation, management and conservation of the water related resources of the Mekong River Basin.
- A five-year Fisheries Programme commenced with the focus on capture fisheries and resource management; assessment of Mekong fisheries; aquaculture and institutional strengthening and information dissemination. First issue of the FP's newsletter *Catch and Culture* produced.

1996 -1998

- The initial years following the signing of the 1995 Agreement formed a period of intensive planning and capacity building to establish the core programmes which formed the basis of the new MRC.
- A human resources strategy was formulated in 1996 and this took on the role of meeting one of the key goals of developing the MRC into a highly effective, professional, international organisation.
- The capacity of the National Mekong Committees and line agencies was strengthened to enable them to implement the MRC strategic plan.
- A study of the water resources and environmental situation in the basin was completed.
- The hydrographic atlas of the Mekong River in Lao PDR and Thailand was completed in 1997 with printing and mapping activities in Cambodia and Vietnam completed in 1999.
- In September 1998 The MRC Secretariat moved from Bangkok to Phnom Penh.
- Flood forecasting on the mainstream began and in late 1998 a new information network was established using radios and internet in combination, daily hydrometeorological data was collected from more than 30 stations in the basin.
- The book *Fishes of the Cambodian Mekong* published.

1999

- The Upgrading of Ferry Facilities in Cambodia was completed.
- The detailed planning phase of the Basin Development Plan process was completed.
- The MRC Council fully endorsed the Water Utilisation Programme.
- A basinwide study documenting local knowledge on fish migrations was completed. The study showed the importance of riparian people's traditional knowledge in MRC activities and conclusively demonstrated the extensive migrations of many fish species in the Mekong.

2000

- The Environmental Training Programme Block 1 was completed.
- The Water Utilisation Programme commenced activities to establish and negotiate mechanisms, including basin modelling tools and procedures for water utilisation to improve water resources management in an environmentally sustainable manner.
- An MRC Information System was initiated and a new web portal developed and the MRC started expanding its dissemination of technical and scientific information.
- In October 2000 the Council approved the new programme approach, which focused activities on core and sector programmes and a support programme. The approach integrated all MRC activities into basinwide strategies of riparian countries, focusing on regional rather than national activities.
- The Technical Advisory Body for Fisheries Management was established.
- The Gender in Fisheries network, originally established in the 1990s, was affiliated regionally.
- The documentary film *Mekong the Mother* was produced.

2001

- The Environment Programme began operation in January 2001.
- The MRC Council adopted the first set of procedures - the Procedures for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing - in November 2001.
- The Basin Development Plan began activities in late 2001.
- An overall Flood Management and Mitigation Strategy for the MRC was approved by the MRC Council in November 2001, setting the stage for flood issues to become a major focus of MRC's work.

Left hand column from top: The signing of the draft agreement; the signing of the 1995 Agreement; the first MRC Council meeting; the first Donor Consultative Group meeting; and the first Joint Committee meeting.

Right: The MRC leaves Bangkok.

Right hand column: The first upgraded Cambodian ferry sets sail; signing the first water procedure; winning the Theiss River Prize; signing the agreement with China; and a history of publications.



- The MRC Development Series and Conference Proceedings Series was established.

2002

- An agreement with China on the provision of hydrological information on the Lancang/Mekong River during the flood season was signed at the MRC Secretariat on 1 April 2002. The agreement was another step towards a closer relationship with upstream countries.
- In July 2002, the MRC Joint Committee approved the Guidelines on Custodianship and MRC-IS Management to effectively implement the Procedures for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing.
- In September 2002, the MRC was awarded the Thiess Services International Riverprize at the Brisbane River Symposium. It was the first time the prize had been won for management of a river shared by developing countries.
- In October 2002, the MRC member countries decided to gradually increase their annual contributions to the MRC. The decision makes it possible to reduce the need for additional support from donors to the infrastructure of the organisation and to maintain riparian ownership of the organisation.
- The Council signed the second set of procedures - the Preliminary Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement - in November 2002.
- The Junior Riparian Professional Programme, one of the MRC's important capacity building activities, had its first intake of young professionals from the four lower Mekong countries.
- In late 2002, the MRC was selected as regional coordinator for the CGIAR Challenge Programme on Water and Food. The role involves promotion and coordination of research priorities related to water and food security in the Mekong River Basin.
- The Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry Programme commenced.
- The Joint MRC-ESCAP Harmonisation of Aids to Navigation Systems along the Mekong River project was completed.
- MRC Technical Report Series established.
- The documentary film *Where There is Water, There is Fish* was produced.

2003

- An international scientific symposium on Management of Large Rivers for Fisheries was held in Phnom Penh in February 2003.
- The final Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement and the Procedures for Water Use Monitoring were adopted by the MRC Council in November 2003.
- The Environment Programme revised its programme and revitalised its water quality monitoring network in the Lower Mekong Basin with new equipment and training of staff. Information from the network was complemented by a study of water quality in the river basin.
- Development of a common wetland classification system. This now forms the basis for basinwide mapping of wetland types, together with an inventory and assessment of the ecological, economic and social functions and values of important wetland types.
- Development of guidelines for a transboundary system of environmental impact assessment (EIA).
- Publication of the first State of the Basin report, the Social Atlas of the Lower Mekong Basin and the People and the Environment Atlas on CD-ROM.
- Production of the educational interactive CD-ROM the River Awareness Kit, which later won an international award and recognition.
- MRC completed the construction and outfitting of the Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute in Cambodia, providing a focal point for fisheries research and development.
- Publication of *Fishing Gears of Cambodia*.

2004

- Completion of the Decision Support Framework (DSF), a powerful simulation modelling tool. The DSF has now been extensively used to provide support to the BDP in its assessment of basinwide scenarios and to support the hydrological analyses of the Integrated Basin Flow Management activities.
- Completion of the digitised version of the Hydrographic Atlas and Navigation Charts in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand.
- Adoption of a new orientation based on Integrated Water Resources Management at a basinwide level.



MRC to make concrete action the priority

After a decade of capacity development supported by the international donor community, MRC has built up an efficient regional cooperation mechanism as well as a fount of knowledge and expertise. It has coupled this with the development of powerful mathematical models and planning tools that can be used to formulate sustainable water resources development strategies and action plans for the Mekong basin.

During the past 10 years, the MRC team has completed some excellent work, but we believe that more can be done to put its capacity and knowledge to more practical uses: to bring direct gains to the people we are here to serve - the poorest people of the basin.

When our member countries came together to create the MRC, their main goal was to promote sustainable development in the region. Essentially the MRC was set up to encourage regional cooperation for well-balanced development of irrigation, hydropower, navigation, flood management and fisheries, while protecting the environment and the ecological balance of the basin.

Now it is time to put the original ideas from the agreement into action and to use the MRC capacity, knowledge and cooperation mechanism to deliver economically tangible results with the goal of alleviating poverty and stimulating sustainable economical growth.

The basin has some pressing development needs in water related sectors. In the sector of irrigated agriculture, the region's water infrastructures are ageing; irrigation systems are in need of modernisation and improved management; there are problems with salinisation and pollution. Many farms are still affected by frequent severe droughts. The MRC can play a key role in promoting more efficient irrigation and drought management solutions.

Ease of navigation will bring about enormous benefits to all the countries of the Lower Mekong Basin. The MRC needs to help the countries improve and expand safe and efficient navigation.

The countries of the region wish to further develop their hydropower potential in order to achieve their long-term plans to eliminate poverty. The MRC can play a role in helping with this development in a way that has the least social and environmental impacts.

By
**Dr Olivier
Cogels**
Chief
Executive
Officer
MRC



The fisheries of the Mekong Basin are an integral and vital part of the socio-economic structure of the MRC countries. Conservatively estimated at being worth \$2000 million per year, the fishery has great economic potential if it is monitored carefully and not over-exploited. The MRC can help member countries manage and develop their fisheries so they remain healthy and more profitable.

Along with this development the MRC has the necessary expertise to avoid, minimise and mitigate harmful effects that might occur to the environment.

There is no doubt that, through its training programmes, the MRC has already greatly improved the capacity of the basin's people and the time is right for these people to help their countries move forward.

We have analysed the needs of the people through our Basin Development Plan; we have screened their priority needs at grassroots level - now we need to give them what people expect: sustainable economical growth and improvement of their livelihoods, through optimal use and development of the Mekong's water and related resources.

Our member countries and donors want to see more concrete results. They want to see how their money can have real impact on the life of the Mekong people.

There is still an unacceptable level of poverty in the basin. The MRC must become a key actor in promoting sustainable economic growth throughout the basin in a

move to alleviate poverty. As an intergovernmental organisation, owned and managed by the countries themselves, the MRC is in an ideal position to act as a promoter and facilitator of well-coordinated investments in the water and water-related sectors in the region, in close cooperation with the donor community and investment institutions.

The role of the MRC is very complementary to the role of investment institutions and closer partnership is therefore essential. The MRC's Regional Cooperation Programme for Sustainable Water Resources Development of the Mekong basin can become a more concrete contribution to the broader Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Economic Cooperation Programme. The MRC programme is also enhanced by other regional initiatives such as the ASEAN Mekong Basin Development Cooperation, and the Programme of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP).

Sustainable water resources development of the Mekong basin requires a holistic view of the needs and interests of all the countries sharing the Mekong River. Better integration of the different water related sectors, through the approach of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is also needed. With this approach, the MRC believes a well-balanced, peaceful, equitable and sustainable development process can be facilitated for the mutual benefit of all Mekong riparian countries.

On this basis, the MRC is currently preparing its Strategic Plan 2006 - 2010, addressing development needs in the areas of navigation, flood management, fisheries, irrigated agriculture, hydropower, environment management, watershed management, tourism and capacity development.

What we need is not a short-term fix for poverty, but a long-term plan that will involve a process of shared decision-making whereby all countries' needs are examined in the scope of shared benefits as well as of potential impacts on each other.

The next decade for the MRC will be one of concrete development actions based on broad partnership and cooperation. It is time to take visible steps towards an economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally sound Mekong River Basin.



In June 1984 the MRC Secretariat moved into a new headquarters in Vientiane.

- Identification of BDP priority development projects to be instituted on a national level.
- MRC Secretariat moved to Vientiane, Lao PDR in June 2004.
- Completion of a basinwide survey of ecological health of the river.
- Completion of a basinwide diagnostic study on water quality.
- Completion of a basinwide study on catch monitoring, consumption and marketing of fish.
- First Policy Dialogue on Watershed Resources held in Lao PDR.
- Launch of the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Programme in conjunction with IUCN and UNDP.
- Completion of 10 Sub-Area Reports and Sub Area Analyses covering the complete Mekong River Basin as part of the Basin Development Plan.

2005

- The Flood Management and Mitigation Programme began full-scale implementation as a core programme of the MRC.
- In April the MRC celebrated its 10-year anniversary in Vientiane.
- Volume 11 of *Catch and Culture* produced, celebrating 10 years of continuous publication.
- Organisation of five Transboundary Meetings for joint planning between the member states.

The MRC has also ...

- Put MRC on the World Wide Web
- Become an acknowledged knowledge centre through its technical expertise and wide-ranging research, much of which is available on the Internet through MekongInfo and the MRC website.
- Built capacity throughout the region through the training and employment of Riparian professionals and managers in core programmes.
- Built up a strong participatory approach to development within the basin engaging local community members from all sectors of society..
- Established partnerships with international banks, research centres, universities, river organisations and international NGOs which share a common goal for development of the Lower Mekong Basin.

The work of the MRC would not be possible without the close co-operation of the National Mekong Committees and line agencies and the valuable assistance of our many donors and partners.

MRC Events

Training kit talks your language

The Environment Programme has produced a new CD-ROM designed to help riparian environmental scientists from operational to expert levels study disciplines including integrated resource management, tools techniques and decision making, and cumulative effects assessment.

The CD-ROM has been produced in Khmer, Lao, Thai and Vietnamese as well as English and is intended to present teaching tools in an accessible way.

It contains material for eight courses developed through the Environment Programme. Course material covers: sustainable development and environmental awareness; an introduction to environmental science, integrated resource and environmental management; environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedures and decision making; EIA scientific tools and techniques. ISO 14001 environmental management systems; cumulative effects assessment and strategic environmental assessment.

Users can also access 19 case studies from all around the region covering topics ranging from community involvement in resource management to urban wetland conservation, as well as many EIA studies, to support and complement the course material.

The English version of the course material also includes slide and PowerPoint presentations.

All the necessary software has been packaged with the CD-ROM for ease of use and users can access files either as PDFs or they can download material in word format for easy access or distribution to others. The new CD is now available for purchase through the MRC website www.mrcmekong.org.

MRC at SE Asia Water Forum

The MRC will be convening a session at the Second South East Asia Water Forum to be held in Bali, Indonesia from August 29-September 3 2005.

The session, entitled Reducing Vulnerability From Floods and Droughts and Other Water-Related Disasters, will be convened in conjunction with the Japan Bank for International Cooperation and the International Flood Networks.

The theme of the second SEAWF is Better Water Management Through Public Participation and its aim is to build a regional commitment toward enhancement of integrated water resources management and effective water governance among IWRM practitioners in recognition of the need for implementing IWRM principles and processes as well as formulating a water

efficiency plan to start in 2005. The plan is one of the expected outcomes of the forum. For further information contact kim.geheb@mrcmekong.org.

Forecast system nearer start date

The implementation of the new Mekong-HYCOS (Hydrologic Cycle Observing System) project is on track, following a regional workshop on project formulation held on 9-10 March 2005 at the MRC Secretariat.

A river basin monitoring and forecasting system within the scope of FMMP, the Mekong-HYCOS project proposes the establishment of a near-real time basinwide hydro-meteorological information system, which spatially covers the mainstream and main tributaries of the Mekong river system. This system would be integrated into the existing MRC monitoring system, while improving the national hydrological networks and river monitoring/forecasting capacities.

About 40 participants from French AFD, the French Embassy, the National Mekong Committees, national line agencies and the MRC attended the workshop. All four participating countries agreed in principle on the Draft Project Document including amendments. The Final Project Document was submitted to the countries for their

official endorsement in May 2005 prior to the appraisal of the Mekong-HYCOS project in June 2005. Implementation of the project is expected to start in early 2006. The Government of France has indicated interest in providing support for the project.

New initiatives for Mekong Info

Mekong Info, the MRC's interactive system for sharing information and knowledge about participatory natural resources management, has added two new information sources to its database for public use.

- The Basin Development Plan library is the first batch of a collection of documents that have been compiled within the framework of the BDP. Some of the documents have been placed into specific thematic categories since they deal with sector specific issues such as fisheries, irrigated agriculture or watershed management. The majority of the initial BDP documents posted are the national sector overviews and sub-area analyses from each country.

- The *Mekong Research* periodical, a joint initiative between the MRC, the Challenge Programme on Water and Food and GTZ, summarises research findings from the Mekong region in an easily understood format.

Latest information products

Environmental Training Kit



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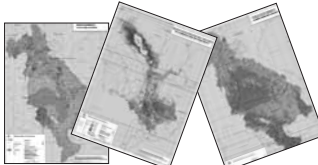
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This CD-ROM contains the proceedings of the Second Annual Mekong Flood Forum conducted in Phnom Penh, Cambodia from 28-29 October 2003, including text of presentations, PowerPoint presentations and photographs.

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Steady progress sets scene for adoption of new strategy



Virginia Addison

MRC Joint Committee Chairman Dr Siripong Hungspreug and CEO Dr Olivier Cogels listen to the delegates' comments at the 21st JC meeting.

The MRC's programmes were making good progress toward meeting their goals and had recorded many achievements the MRC Joint Committee heard at its 21st meeting, held in Pattaya, Thailand on 24-25 March 2005.

The JC noted that the MRC Secretariat was now well established in its new headquarters in Vientiane and that the operating expense budget accounts had a positive balance generating a surplus towards the administrative reserve fund and this was a good step toward the goal of self sustainability. Continued donor support was also encouraging with funding agreements totalling more than US\$15.6 million being concluded since August 2004.

The coming months were an important time for the future of the MRC in this time of a new orientation. Defining this orientation was now under way with the preparation of the MRC Strategic Plan for 2006-2010. Member states were asked to participate actively in the preparation of this plan to help shape the MRC's future.

The Basin Development Plan, one of the MRC's core programmes, stimulated lively discussion as the JC considered the BDP Phase 2 programme document. Phase 1 had resulted in the projection of scenario

analyses; planning cycle guidelines; a project database; a GIS-based Planning Atlas; a draft integrated water resources management (IWRM) strategy for the Lower Mekong Basin and many other studies. An initial list of 69 suggested joint development projects arising from Phase 1 was submitted to the JC.

The meeting heard that the BDP's IWRM Strategy and the MRC Strategic Plan 2006-2010 would be prepared by a joint team and the IWRM Strategy would provide the reference framework for the Strategic Plan.

Better integration between the BDP and other programmes needed to be ascertained and the project database and MRC work programme needed to be merged into an integrated water resources development programme.

Major programme achievements for the past six months included:

- The Water Utilisation Programme's completion of the first phase of the Integrated Basin Flows Management.
- The Environment Programme's completion of the basinwide diagnostic study on water quality and the implementation of water quality monitoring. The EP also completed the assessment of ecological health based on BDP sub-areas

and a basinwide map of wetland types.

- The launch of the Flood Management and Mitigation Programme and the establishment of a Flood Management and Mitigation Centre in Phnom Penh.

- The implementation of the Fisheries Programme's Technical Advisory Board work plan; increased consultation between Thai and Cambodian Departments of Fisheries; and generation of fisheries information to be used by riparian governments in management and planning.

- The Navigation Programme's completion of technical and financial preparations for the design of the Master Plan for Waterborne Transport of the Mekong River system in Cambodia. The NAP had also produced a fully digitised hydrographic atlas of the LMB and organised workshops on safety regulations for vessels.

- Progress on the implementation of the Procedures for Data Information Exchange and Sharing, and development of the Guidelines for the Management of the MRC Hydrometeorological Network.

- The establishment of national working groups on watershed management in all countries and the selection of pilot watersheds for programme activities. Baseline studies on national and local planning systems have also been finalised.

- The completion of the main data collection phase of the water use efficiency component and the establishment of experimental plots. Analysis of this data on the multi-functionality of paddy fields is now under way. A basinwide GIS map on rice farming has also been established.

- Continued expansion of relations with upstream Dialogue Partners China and Myanmar and consultation with Myanmar on suitable location for a hydrological measuring station.

Dr Siripong Hungspreug, Chairman of the Joint Committee for 2004/2005 and Alternate JC Member for Thailand chaired the meeting. ~

Workshops lift technical knowledge

The MRC's Flood Management and Mitigation Programme moved to improve the technical knowledge within the region, through workshops held in Siem Reap, Cambodia and Bangkok, Thailand in April, May and June 2005.

The workshops were in cooperation with the US Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, (OFDA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and US Geological Survey (USGS).

The first workshop posed the question "Why use satellite rainfall estimation and forecasts?" and provided a forum in which OFDA and its US partners in cooperation with MRC could inform Asian partners about available rainfall estimates and rainfall forecast grids, and their application to flood and drought monitoring. It helped participants to understand national and regional requirements and encouraged them to discuss possible applications in the Mekong countries.

Member countries prepared proposals on the requirements for applying the satellite rainfall estimation technology. MRCS will compile these reports and submit them to OFDA for funding.

The workshop on Radio Internet introduced the FMMP to participants. The workshop's aim was to facilitate the preparation of one or more pilot programs to strengthen flood-forecasting and warning information throughout the Lower Mekong River basin.

In June the programme held a workshop on flash flooding.

Workshops and events

Environmentally Sustainable Development, First International Conference
26-28 June 2005, Abbottabad, Pakistan
<http://www.ciit-atd.edu.pk/ESDev>

The 2005 Watershed Management Conference
19-22 July 2005, Williamsburg, Virginia
Email: conf@asce.org Website:
www.asce.org/conferences/watershedmanagement2005

Second South-East Asian Water Forum
28 August-3 September 2005, Denpasar, Bali
Contact: sekretariat@inawater.com or s_sutardi@hotmail.com
Website: www.inawater.com

The 22nd Meeting of the MRC Joint Committee
30-31 August 2005, Vientiane, Lao PDR
The 10th Dialogue Meeting
1 September 2005, Vientiane, Lao PDR
Contact: thuy@mrcmekong.org

River Basin Management 2005

6-8 September 2005, Bologna, Italy
<http://www.wessex.ac.uk/conferences/2005/rm05/index.html>

International Conference on Natural Resources Related Conflict Management in Southeast Asia

6-8 September 2005, Khon Kaen, Thailand.
Contact: Ang Ming Chee: Tel: 66-4320 2425, Fax: 66-4320 2788, Mobile: 66-9620 9552 <http://www.seacsn.net>; <http://idr.kku.ac.th>

8th International River Symposium

6-9 September 2005, Brisbane, Australia
Water And Food Security - Rivers In A Global Context plus the International and National Thiess Riverprize
<http://www.riversymposium.com/>

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