

KEY MESSAGES OF THE FORUM

- The riparian states reconfirmed their commitment to the principles of sustainability and equity in the development of the Mekong water and related resources, and recognised that in order for such sustainable and equitable development to take place national decision makers need to take note of basin perspectives. There must also be a good understanding of what 'sustainable' really means and who precisely will benefit. Since there are few, if any, win-win situations, it is necessary to identify the winners and the losers. In their opening remarks, both the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Joint Committee Member for Thailand and the Chief Executive Officer of the MRC Secretariat (MRCS) highlighted this vital requirement, and emphasised the importance of building a clear understanding of sustainability and of the beneficiaries.
- The Forum was encouraged by the statement from the Government of the People's Republic of China indicating their commitment to the environmental protection of the riverine system and to working together with the MRC to make this happen.
- The Forum recognised that the current regional developments trends and plans will bring about changes in the Mekong River flow regime. The key question for the Basin Development Planning (BDP) process is how to capture the opportunities and mitigate the risks resulting from these changes. The answer lies in the application of the principles and practices of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) which conveys the necessary knowledge to the decision makers and thus helps to ensure that the Basin's development perspective is integrated in national decision making.
- The Forum recognised that the three current critical water-related issues are those of (i) the hydropower developments on the Mekong mainstream; (ii) the agricultural developments in the Lower Mekong Basin (LMB); and (iii) climate change.
- The Forum realised that the ambitious plans for large-scale developments of water resources bring both 'synergies' and 'trade-offs'. For example, the synergies between hydropower, irrigation and upland watershed management may bring benefits for all, while at the transboundary level although hydropower dams may benefit some, the trade-offs will be some blockages of fish migration routes.
- The Forum acknowledged that water resources developments and, in particular, the construction of mainstream dams are now threatening the Mekong fisheries, one of the world's largest inland fisheries, which provide livelihoods for the 60 million people living in the Basin. The key issues are (i) the existing technology in respect of fish passages is unable to cope with the high fish tonnage and the diversity of species; (ii) the development of mitigation measures is not only cost intensive but also time consuming; and (iii) reservoir fish production cannot compensate for the loss of Mekong fisheries.
- In addition, water resources development is essential to address the issue of food security. Water is needed for irrigation to expand the agricultural areas, and so produce higher yields and satisfy the ever increasing demand for food.

- The Forum recognised that climate change is also a development issue and should be addressed as part and parcel of the development process. As climate change impacts include a predicted sea level rise in the Viet Nam Mekong Delta and the observed impacts of flow regime changes on livelihoods throughout the Basin, it is important to consider adaptation in a basin wide context, involving both the upstream and downstream countries, i.e. both those countries creating effects and those being affected. China is willing to cooperate in addressing climate change in the region. At the same time, all Member Countries should cooperate with other regions in addressing this global issue.
- For the Basin-wide development scenarios, it is of the utmost importance to ensure stakeholder participation, transparency in the dissemination and the use of assessment results to influence decision making and the integration of different sector assessments.
- The Forum participants recognised that the hydropower dams and, in particular, the large storage dams in the Upper Mekong Basin, may lead to increased dry season flows. However, uncertainties in the hydrological assessment of these scenarios must be addressed with better information including information on the operating rules of the hydropower dams in the Upper Mekong. China is strongly committed to continue cooperation with the MRC for data sharing and exchange of hydrological modelling results.