

**Closing remarks of Mr. Jeremy Bird, Chief Executive Officer, MRC Secretariat
at the 2nd Regional Stakeholder Forum on the MRC Basin Development Plan**

15-16 October 2009, Chiang Rai, Thailand

Delegates from Mekong Countries,

Excellencies and Distinguished Dialogue Partners

Dear Participants,

It has been a tremendous two days of fruitful discussions and dialogue. On behalf of the Mekong River Commission, I would like to thank each of you for sharing your diverse insights, suggestions as well as constructive criticisms. They demonstrate the broad local, national, regional and global interest in the future of the Mekong River Basin and its importance for the livelihoods of millions of people who depend on the riverine natural resources.

We have heard reconfirmation of the commitment from MRC's member countries for sustainable and equitable water resources development and for the BDP process.

We discussed the opportunities and risks associated with various future development scenarios of water resources in the LMB and why it is necessary for the planning process to be transparent, to be more inclusive and to build on local knowledge and experience.

You have provided valuable comments and suggestions for the integrated assessment that the MRC is currently working on and this will help us to make sure that a clear picture is available on the benefits, costs and impacts.

In that regard, we have heard that poorly planned projects can lead to significant adverse impacts and so there is a need to look beyond trade-offs between winners and losers and think more strategically on how losses can be minimized and risks turned into opportunities.

Consideration of benefit sharing mechanisms at a range of different geographic scales is an important principle to consider.

The MRC BDP Programme has captured these discussions. Our perspectives of possible ways forward, building on the established BDP process at national, sub-basin and regional levels was shared with you in the excellent presentation from the representative of the Advisory Group.

I would like to thank all the facilitators and presenters for your invaluable work to make the discussions fruitful. I thank the partner organizations: AusAID/John Dore, Sida/ Karin Isaksson, Danida, IWMI/Andrew Noble, IUCN/Robert Mather, World Fish/Alan Brooks and Mark Dubois, WWF/Geoffrey Blate, Centre for Development Oriented Research, Cambodia/Suon Seng, Dr. Chayuth Suksri of Chulalongkron University, and Chayanis and John Soussan of SEI, for your cooperation and particular support to make this event a success. Thank you Dr. Apichart Anukulampai, for your inspiring dinner speech last night.

Let me pause there to follow up on one of his key themes – “Integration” – the first word in the all embracing term of IWRM. We have heard of the multi-sectoral facets of this process, for example in the parallel sessions on hydrology, economics, social issues and the environment.

But the BDP Strategy and Plan will not merely be a compilation of these individual elements. They are inherently inter-related and so we need to take an inter-sectoral not multi-sectoral approach – an approach in which each of them is reflected in the principles, policy directions and guidance material prepared under the BDP. This is altogether a much more challenging task – one which has been demonstrated in the discussions over the past couple of days.

Returning to those that have contributed to making this meeting a success, I would also like to thank our Dialogue Partners, especially the Chinese delegation, for their active participation, for their commitment to cooperation with MRC and its member countries, and to the openness of their engagement. You spoke of listening and gauging the emotions of the interventions. One of

the emotions we would like you to take back to Beijing from this meeting, is a spirit of warmth and fraternity from the member countries of the MRC.

Especially I would like to thank the Thai National Mekong Committee for their hospitality and the excellent logistical support for the event.

Last but not least, I thank my colleagues in the MRCS BDP team for their hard work that made this Forum a success and in particular to Mme Hang, Suparek, Ton Lennaerts, and Director Sourasay and all their colleagues and advisers that I know have worked intensively on this meeting. As indeed has Dr Vitoon, who had the unenviable task of keep us all on track. Also many thanks to all other MRC programme staff and partner organisations who have added their experience to the body of knowledge shared over the past two days.

As we said at the beginning of the Forum, we convened this meeting with the ambitious aim of making a change. We all realize that the next 9 to 12 months will require an intensification of the challenge as we work further on the first drafts of the Basin Development Strategy and Plan. For this we will need your continued engagement in the BDP process and the MRC looks forward to that.

I wish you an enjoyable field trip tomorrow and for those who will leave today, a safe journey home. Thank you all for your contributions to this meeting and we look forward to your participation in next year's third BDP regional stakeholder forum.