

MRC turns spotlight on Mekong challenges at 4th World Water Forum

Local Actions for a Global Challenge was the theme of the 4th World Water Forum held in Mexico City from March 16-21 and a delegation from the Mekong River Commission took this opportunity to discuss the challenges facing the Lower Mekong Basin with water experts from around the world.

Representatives from the four National Mekong Committees, Line Agencies and a delegation from the MRCS participated enthusiastically in the 4th World Water Forum, which attracted around 11,000 attendees.

The MRC was also represented in the World Water Fair where its stand illustrating the work of the MRC and the Mekong Programme drew a wide range of international visitors from water-related organisations, government bodies, research facilities and civil society.

MRCS CEO Dr Olivier Cogels made three presentations at the forum: The first, on hydropower potential in the Mekong River Basin, was made in association with the Worldwide Fund for Nature at the session on Ensuring Dams are a Platform for Growth and Sustainable Development and the second, on the Mekong Programme, was made at the synthesis session on Transboundary Basin Management: Regional Consensus as a Driving Force for Progress and Development.

At the second talk Dr Cogels joined a panel which included experts from Israel, Palestine, Finland, Japan, Canada and Belgium and took the opportunity to explain the challenges facing the Mekong Basin and then detailed how the MRC countries are working together meet these challenges and successfully dealing with transboundary issues.



The MRC stand attracted a wide range of interested visitors from around the world.



H.E. Mr Wang Shucheng, China's Minister of Water Resources, shares a friendly exchange with Dr Cogels.

The third presentation on Hydropower Potential and Development in the Mekong River Basin was made at a session on Transboundary Integrated Water

Resources Management held in the French Pavilion.

Navigation Programme Officer Mr Sin Chhay gave a presentation on Regional Economic Integration through Improved Mekong Navigation at the session on Water and Transport, while Flood Management and Mitigation Programme Chief Technical Advisor Mr Nicolaas Bakker discussed Satellite Observations With Regard to Floods at the session on Space-Based Water Observations – Alliances for Providing Information Essential for Managing the World's Water Resources.

The MRC was also well represented at the session on Sustainable Paddy Water Use and its Multifunctionality with Better Governance with Operations Division Director Dr. Trong Dao Tu on the discussion panel.

NMC delegates, Line Agency representatives and MRCS staff were

kept busy attending multiple sessions of interest to their work and relevance to their programmes. The forum, which was spread over five days, was an excellent opportunity for all participants to build capacity by upgrading their knowledge and meeting counterparts from many other countries to discuss ideas about water resources management and exchange experiences.

Dr Cogels was also present at the Ministerial Meeting to inaugurate the Asia Pacific Water Forum, which will include Japan and China as members. He took this occasion to explain the important role MRC played as a river basin organisation in the region and how it demonstrated the importance of transboundary management. He said MRC was happy to support this new forum as it would further enhance transboundary management capabilities within the region.

"The 4th World Water Forum represented a wonderful chance for MRC to promote its work and the Mekong Programme, as well as giving our delegates an avenue to meet people from all over the world who are working in river basin organisations or involved in water management," Dr Cogels said.

"It gave us a chance to interact with senior members of governments and to cement our good relationships with some of our donor countries and international organisations who are interested in working in partnership with MRC. It also provided an opportunity for a friendly discussion with China's Minister for Water Resources H.E. Mr Wang Shucheng."

The forum also presented the MRC with the chance to explain its work to representatives of the international press and other interested parties.



INSIDE

- Introducing Mekong from Space
- 4th Annual Mekong Flood Forum
- JRPs evaluate programme achievements

4th Annual Mekong Flood Forum
Angkor Century Hotel, Siem Reap, Cambodia 18-19 May 2006

For information about the MRC please contact: Tel: 856 21 263 263 Email: mrcs@mrcmekong.org Website: www.mrcmekong.org

French help MRC in fight against floods

In January Agence Française de Développement (AFD - the French Development Agency) signed an agreement with the Mekong River Commission for an 800,000 Euro (around US\$966,000) grant to finance an institutional support project and as a first contribution to develop the Mekong-HYCOS - a regional hydrological cycle observing system.

The MRC Secretariat's Chief Executive Officer Dr Olivier Cogels signed the agreement with Mr Etienne Weitellier, Director of AFD in Vientiane, in the presence of H. E. Maurice Portiche, Ambassador of France to Lao PDR.

The main objective of the Mekong-HYCOS, which has been developed in partnership with the World Meteorological Organisation, is to establish an efficient, reliable and accurate real-time hydro-meteorological data collection and transmission system at basin level, while also strengthening relevant national and regional capacities. This information will be shared between Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam.

The development goal of the project is to minimise the loss of lives and property through reducing flood vulnerability in the Mekong River Basin, by strengthening integrated water resources management in the context of transboundary river basin management.



From left: H. E. Maurice Portiche, Dr Cogels and Mr Etienne Weitellier sign the agreement.

The Mekong-HYCOS project will establish a basin wide hydrometeorological information system, which spatially covers the mainstream and main tributaries of the Mekong river system. It is expected that under the project, more than 20 hydro-meteorological stations will be upgraded. The Mekong-HYCOS system will be integrated into the existing MRC monitoring system, while improving the national hydrological networks and river monitoring/forecasting capacities.

The project will be managed by the Information and Knowledge Management Programme, which will ensure that all data collected basin wide are available in a timely manner at the Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Each country will be responsible for the operation and maintenance of its part of the system with the support and co-ordination of the MRC.

The funding agreement has three components.

1. Financial support of 150,000 Euros for programme coordination.
2. A further 150,000 Euros to be allocated to the MRC Water Management Trust Fund to allow for short-term consultancies to help satisfy member countries' requests.
3. The first contribution of 500,000 Euros to develop the Mekong-HYCOS regional hydrological system. A complementary financing of 2.5 million Euro from the AFD and the French Global Environment Facility is expected to finalise the Mekong-HYCOS financing plan in 2006. ~

Improved warning systems key theme for 4th Flood Forum

The Mekong River Commission's Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre will hold its 4th Annual Mekong Flood Forum from 18-19 May 2006 at the Angkor Century Hotel in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

The theme of this year's forum is: "Improving Flood Forecasting and Warning Systems for Flood Management and Mitigation in the Lower Mekong Basin".

The 4th Annual Mekong Flood Forum aims to raise the awareness of the current state of flood forecasting and warning systems at the national and regional levels in the Lower Mekong Basin (LMB) and will also provide an opportunity for participants to discuss emerging needs within the basin and to review the progress each country has made towards a holistic and balanced flood management plan.

Flooding is an annual event on the Mekong and each year it takes a huge economic and social toll on the people of the basin. Now the magnitude of flood damage in the LMB is increasing due to human intervention, i.e. rapid economic and infrastructure development and intensified land use.

One way to minimise the flood damage is to improve flood forecasting and warning systems and in recent years, the demand for accurate flood information has increased both at a national level at within those communities most affected. There is now a real need to improve the quality of this information to be more accurate, be more timely and be more easily understood by all users

The MRC's Flood Management and Mitigation Programme believes that reliable flood forecasting and warning systems will give people at risk enough time to prepare for floods and give them confidence to start planning with a long-term perspective. MRC's ultimate goal is to ensure the safety and security of the public and to protect property and the environment.

Stakeholders from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam, Line Agencies, donor agencies, representatives from MRC programmes, regional and international scientists and researchers, upstream dialogue partners China and Myanmar, international and national civil society organisations, and local communities are expected to participate in the 4th Annual Mekong Flood Forum. ~

For more information contact:
hatda@mrcmekong.org

Website offers snapshot from space

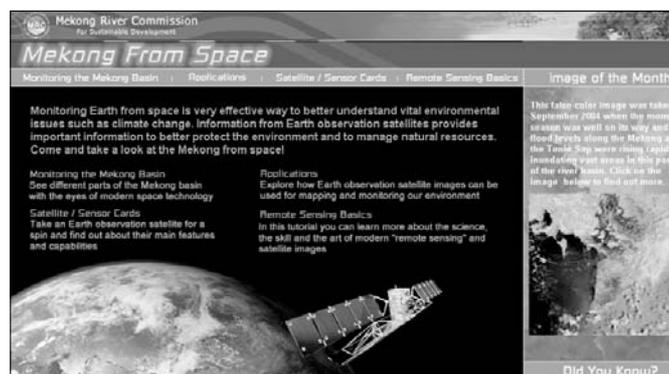
The MRC's Information and Knowledge Management Programme launched its MRC-IS Portal web service for internal use in January 2006 at the Secretariat.

At the same time the Secretariat's communications function launched a redesigned, user-friendly MRC website, (www.mrcmekong.org), followed one month later by the addition of a new educational segment called Mekong from Space.

The portal and the Mekong from Space page were developed with the assistance of the Canadian Space Agency, the Canadian Centre for Remote Sensing, Hatfield Consultants and Strata60.

Designed to attract a younger audience to the MRC website, its easy-to use design allows the user to learn about the environment, topography, climate etc of the Mekong Basin through quizzes, informative illustrations and sections on the uses of satellite imagery.

The MRC-IS portal is a web-based gateway to data and information on the Mekong Basin including powerful tools to search, view and, in a controlled fashion, also download data and information. It is intended as



Check out how earth looks from space and learn more about satellite imagery.

a "one-stop-shop" for data and information on the basin. It offers access to interactive maps, all MRC metadata and spatial (GIS) data, the MRC Document Management System (which facilitates sharing and exchange of soft copy documents such as reports, presentations and tabular data) and a search function for the MRCS Documentation Centre.

There is an imagery archive that contains a user guide and data catalogues for online satellite and aerial imagery available in the MRCS soft copy and hard copy imagery archive, while the maps archive

contains a user guide and data catalogues for online maps available in the MRCS soft copy maps archive, as well as hard copy maps kept in the MRCS Archive Repository.

Data and information in the MRC-IS comes from the member countries, line agencies and ministries, MRC Programmes and projects and through partner organisations.

At present the MRC-IS Portal is restricted to internal use, but there are plans to integrate it into the MRC website and it is hoped that it will become available to external users in the near future. ~

TAB powers ahead with ambitious work plan

The Technical Advisory Body for Fisheries Management (TAB) is not only meeting its goals, it is progressing so well it has achieved 70 percent of its three-year work plan in only 18 months.

Members attending the TAB meeting held in Vientiane in February heard that the TAB had now reached the halfway point in its three-year work plan and as well as making such headway it was also well on schedule to successfully complete this challenging programme.

The TAB provides a regional forum where senior representatives from national fisheries agencies and National Mekong Committees can develop an understanding of the issues that span the borders between their countries. The body makes recommendations about the uptake of regional fisheries related issues into national policies and action plans.

The TAB's 2004-2006 Work Plan is an ambitious programme of management training, targeted research and information flow – all designed to increase knowledge of regional fisheries issues and improve capacity among fisheries managers.

During the year, TAB members and senior fisheries managers from each member country helped design and prepare training courses on regional fisheries management for mid to senior level managers.

These courses were run in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR and Siem Reap, Cambodia and more are planned in



Attendees at a TAB-promoted workshop on the management of deep pools held at the Technical Symposium late last year.

early 2006 in Viet Nam and Thailand.

One of the TAB's major functions is the commissioning of research into areas of particular interest and using the results for management and development of fisheries in the Mekong Basin. Three of these studies were completed in 2005:

- *Triggers for Fish Migrations.* This study provides a synthesis of the knowledge on cues for fish migrations available in literature in the public domain. It discusses possible effects water-resource developments may have on these triggers, fish migrations and stocks.

- *Livelihoods and Fisheries in the Lower Mekong Basin.* This study examines the application of "livelihood approaches" in understanding the role of fish and fisheries in the livelihoods of rural

communities. It advocates the use of these approaches in fisheries and resource management

- *Gender and Fisheries in the Lower Mekong Basin:* This study looks at the role of women in the fisheries of the LMB and at ways gender issues can be addressed at a regional level. It involved input from all members of the Gender in Fisheries Network.

The MRC will publish these reports later in the year.

During 2005 the TAB published the first three of its Mekong Fisheries Recommendations. These 4-6 page booklets provide a précis of technical studies commissioned by the TAB and are considered important vehicles for transfer of information and knowledge to fisheries managers.

In 2005, TAB members also

participated in several international and regional conferences, workshops and forums, including the Meetings of Regional Fisheries Bodies, held by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in Rome.

The FAO is keen for the Mekong River Commission/TAB's involvement in these meetings as it considers the TAB to be an example for other developing countries of a functioning fisheries management body for inland fisheries.

TAB members also attended the Regional Consultation on Rights-based Fisheries and Co-management systems for Small-scale Fisheries, in Jakarta in July 2005. This meeting developed regional collaborative mechanisms that will facilitate future developments in small scale fisheries. ~

Information products

Proceedings from the International Forum on Integrated Water Resources Management

Chiang Rai, Thailand 28-29 November 2005



This CD contains edited papers, abstracts and PowerPoint presentations, a summary of discussion and a selection of photographs from the International Forum on Integrated Water Resources Management in the Mekong Basin, held in Chiang Rai, Thailand.

March 2006. US\$3.00 (plus postage)

Fisheries Information in the Lower Mekong Basin (Version 2)



This two CD set holds the complete portfolio of the MRC Fisheries Programme's technical publications up to mid 2005 in PDF format. It also contains a set of databases relating to catch assessment and migration and spawning, an extensive library of high-quality photographs, a bibliography detailing many fisheries related papers and books and 18 pre-made GIS maps.

February 2006. US\$10.00 (plus postage)

Proceedings from the Annual Technical Meeting of the Environment Programme

Siem Reap, Cambodia, 2-3 November 2005



This CD contains the proceedings of the Environment Programme's Annual Technical Meeting held on 2-3 November 2005 in Siem Reap Cambodia as well as proceedings from its 2004 Annual Technical Meeting. It contains papers, PowerPoint presentations and a summary of discussion.

February 2006. US\$3.00 (plus postage)

Overview of the Hydrology of the Mekong Basin



This report is intended as an introduction to the hydrology of the Mekong River, based on analysis of the most recently observed data. It provides basic insights into the regime of the river.

December 2005 \$10 (plus postage)

For access to the latest reports and research on development issues visit www.mekonginfo.org

How to order

All products can be ordered from the MRC Secretariat's Documentation Centre. Postage costs apply. Mekong region government agencies may write to the MRC to obtain free copies.

Check the MRC website for a full list of products. Credit card sales are also available through the website.

Contact

Documentation Centre
Mekong River Commission Secretariat
P.O. Box 6101, 184 Fa Ngoum Road, Unit 18, Ban Sithane Neua,
Sikhottabong District, Vientiane 01000, Lao PDR

Phone: (856 21) 263 263 ext: 1122 Fax: (856 21) 263 264

Email: doc.centre@mrcmekong.org Website: www.mrcmekong.org

Workshop evaluates JRP project

The MRC Secretariat's Junior Riparian Professional (JRP) project is coming to the end of the current phase in June 2006 when the third batch of JRPs complete their second year on-the-job training and assignment at the MRC Secretariat and the Human Resources Department took this as a good time to reassess the programme.

In December 2005 past and present Junior Riparian Professionals (JRPs) representatives from MRC Programmes and National Mekong Committees (NMCs) were invited to attend an evaluation workshop to assess the impact of the project and come up with some concrete recommendations on improvements for the next phase.

The workshop also aimed to gauge the benefits gained by individual JRPs and the NMCs and sought strategic inputs and comments to aid further development of the project within the MRC's Integrated Capacity Building Programme (ICBP)

The positive outputs of the project were considered to be as follows:

- Over the period the project has been operating nine young professional from the Mekong riparian countries have been recruited and received technical training on water related issues at the MRC Secretariat, at institutes within the riparian countries and in the region



Inthaseth Norasingh

Today's JRPs are tomorrow's managers.

- The JRPs have been introduced to a multicultural work environment and multinational experts in different fields, which will help them build a foundation of common understanding within the region and beyond.
- The JRPs gained theoretical and practical knowledge through intensive training courses and working in close collaboration with experts.
- Each JRP had the chance to be involved in a full range of programme activities including discussions, planning and practical work.
- The programme is seen as a good way for the MRC to work to build future pools of expertise in the Lower Mekong Basin.

The Evaluation workshop also identified some areas where the project could be improved.

- There is a need to have flexibility in regard to the duration and type of the training under the project, depending on the identified needs of each individual JRP, NMCs and line agencies.
 - The training cycle needs redesigning to ensure that all JRPs acquire basic integrated water resources management and integrated river basin planning competencies and practical experience in their respective specialised fields..
 - There is a need to create a critical mass of young professionals in IWRM and extend the JRP opportunity to young professionals working in administration and coordination as well as academics from the Mekong tributary river basin organisations.
 - There is a need to address gender imbalance. Out of the nine JRPs in phase one, only two are women.
 - There is a need for better coordination between the Project Team and targeted institutions in order to respond to the needs and priorities of the MRC related agencies at national and provincial levels.
- The MRC and its ICBP will now take these comments on board for the second phase of the project. ~

MRC hosts Challenge Programme meetings

In February 2006, the MRC Secretariat in Vientiane, Lao PDR hosted a series of meetings held by the Challenge Programme on Water and Food (CPWF). CPWF is an international research programme that aims to develop methods to improve water productivity in agriculture; an issue in which the MRC has a keen interest.

On February 13-14, the programme held a Workshop on Impact Pathways Analysis. This is an innovative system of identifying desired impacts, monitoring progress to attaining them, and then assessing whether they can logically and realistically be expected.

On February 16-17, CPWF Project Leaders from four of the CPWF's "Benchmark River Basins" – the Karkheh (in Iran), the Indo-Gangetic, the Mekong and the Yellow River – held their meeting. Presentations addressed a very wide range of issues, including basin management and governance, landscape management, integrated farming systems and improved crop varieties.

Project Leaders provided overviews of their projects, their progress, early results and innovation, and these presentations provided insights into issues of water productivity, associated technology and management systems from both the Mekong and elsewhere in Asia. ~



Mr Nam Seng is the 10,000th user.

10,000th user for MekongInfo

In January 2006 MekongInfo - the MRC's public information database celebrated the registration of its 10,000th user. Mr. Nam Seng is a young Cambodian, who holds a BSc in agronomy from the University of Agriculture and Forestry in Thu Duc, Ho Chi Minh City.

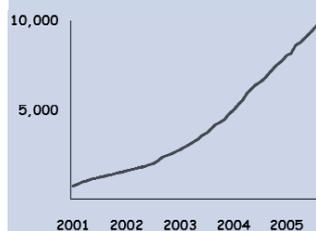
Some 200 to 300 new users join MekongInfo every month. MekongInfo also gets many visits from unregistered users, and

altogether records more than 500,000 hits per month.

A recent survey has shown that MekongInfo's users come from many different backgrounds: government agencies, the private sector, development agencies, universities, and many others. We are especially proud that about half of the users come from the Lower Mekong Basin countries – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam. ~

MekongInfo Users

The number of MekongInfo's registered users has been growing rapidly since about mid 2003, as this chart shows:



Upcoming events

4th Annual Mekong Flood Forum

18-19 May 2006. Angkor Century Hotel, Siem Reap, Cambodia
hatda@mrcmekong.org

International Conference on Rivers and Civilization: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Major River Basins

25-28 June 2006, La Crosse, Wisconsin, U.S.
http://www.unesco.org/water/water_events/Detailed/1166.shtml

2006 World Water Week in Stockholm

20-26 August 2006. Stockholm, Sweden
www.worldwaterweek.org E-mail: sympos@siwi.org

9th International Riversymposium

4-7 September, 2006, Brisbane, Australia
www.riversymposium.com Email: emily@riverfestival.com

10th International Conference on Wetland Systems for Water Pollution Control

23-29 September 2006, Lisbon, Portugal
Organiser: International Water Association (IWA)
http://www.unesco.org/water/water_events/Detailed/1202.shtml

3rd International Symposium on Integrated Water Resources Management

26-28 September 2006, Bochum, Germany.
Mrs Jana Radoi, +49 3641 35 33 221, Fax: +49 3641 35 33 271,
water@conventus.de.

Mekong News is published quarterly by the Mekong River Commission Secretariat in Vientiane, Lao PDR. Please send comments, queries and ideas to: Communications Officer, Office of the CEO, MRC Secretariat, Vientiane, Lao PDR
Phone: (856-21) 263 263 ext. 1122 Fax: (856-21) 263 264
Email: virginia@mrcmekong.org