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During the flood season, the Mekong River Commission broadcasts daily flood forecasts on its website, [www.mrcmekong.org](http://www.mrcmekong.org)

## Mekong River Commission wins award for river Management

The Mekong River Commission has been awarded the Thies Services International Riverprize at this year's Riversymposium, an annual event held in Brisbane, Australia. The International Riverprize is the richest award of its type in the world, to the value of AUD 100,000. The prize recognizes excellence in river management.

This is the first time the prize has been awarded for management of a river shared by developing countries.

On receiving the award on 5 September in Brisbane, MRC Chief Executive Officer Mr Joern Kristensen said, "This prize is, for us, a confirmation that the concept of river basin management that we are developing is the right one. We are now confident that MRC represents international best practice and responds adequately to the needs of the people of the Mekong region. We are seen to be serious about the need to secure livelihoods, and to enable economic and social prosperity."

The Thies International Riverprize has been awarded annually since the year 2000. The prize is open to an individual, organization, agency or group of organizations that can demonstrate outstanding achievement in river management, and provides an incentive to further the worldwide effort of restoring healthy rivers. The judging panel for the prize included representatives from international universities and from organizations such as the Global Water Partnership, the International Water Association and the Australian Academy of Science.



MRC Chief Executive Officer Mr Joern Kristensen and MRC Director Mr Chanthavong Saignasith receive the International Riverprize in Brisbane on 5 September.

Commenting on the unique qualities of the Mekong management arrangements, Mr Kristensen said, "The cooperation between Mekong countries has started before there is a crisis of water management. Water scarcity is not a predominant problem and the water of the Mekong is still relatively clean. There is time for us to learn from both the successes and failures of other river basin organizations of the world. The Mekong is the living, breathing hope for the future of millions of people."

Previous Riverprizes have been awarded for management of the Mersey River in the United Kingdom and the Grand River in Canada. The shortlisted nominees this year were the Danube River in Europe, the Fu-Nan River in China, the Humber River in Canada, and the Kissimmee River in the United States.

An exhibition on the work of the winner and finalists is currently on show at the Queensland Museum, Brisbane.

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## Experts on large rivers to meet

Preparations for the 2nd Large Rivers Symposium (LARS2) in February next year are well under way as more than 130 abstracts of scientific papers have come in, dealing with over 70 rivers around the world including the Ganges-Brahmaputra, the Amazon, the Zambezi, the Yangtze, the Mississippi, the Mekong and many others.

The Symposium, jointly organised by the Mekong River Commission, the Cambodian Department of Fisheries and the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), will be a global forum for the sharing of information related to fisheries in large rivers. It will include concerns about such issues as livelihoods, participatory management, conservation of biodiversity and rehabilitation of river ecosystems.

The Symposium will be run as a series of sessions chaired by panels of experts who will synthesise the knowledge presented and provide plenty of time for debate and discussion. Alongside the main sessions, there will be opportunity to view papers presented, discuss issues with individual authors, and see accompanying poster displays.

Session topics will be on the status of representative large rivers on various continents, the economic valuation of river fisheries, fisheries ecology and conservation, traditional and co-management strategies for large inland fisheries, methods of data collection and analysis, and international mechanisms for dealing with rivers. A final synthesis session will form conclusions and recommendations for management of transnational rivers.



*Fishermen at Chiang Khong, Thailand.*

The International Large Rivers Symposium 2 will be held at the Hotel Le Royal, Phnom Penh, Cambodia from 11 to 14 February 2003.

To register, visit the LARS2 website at [www.lars2.org](http://www.lars2.org) or contact Jane Williams at the Mekong River Commission: fax (855-23) 720-972 or email: [jane@mrcmekong.org](mailto:jane@mrcmekong.org)

## Protected areas in Mekong region set to expand

Areas protected under national conservation systems will expand in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam in the near future, as the countries recognise the benefits of conservation in the context of broad social and economic development. This is the view of experts involved in a study of key conservation areas in the four Lower Mekong countries, due to present findings to government decision-makers at a regional work-shop in Phnom Penh on 17-18 October.

The process to review protected areas regionally has brought together economists, environmental experts and senior staff of protected area management agencies from the four member countries of the Mekong River Commission, as well as Myanmar and China. An earlier workshop on 6-7 May this year reviewed the past 10 years' experience of managing protected areas in the Mekong River region, focusing on the value of protected areas to economic development, and aiming to streng-

The four Lower Mekong countries together have more than 13 per cent of their area under national systems of protection. More land and sea territory is being brought under protected area management. Over the next 10 years, this proportion is expected to cover more than 15 per cent of the Mekong River region, including areas in Myanmar and Yunnan province in China.

Since 1980, Cambodia has gone from having no protected areas to declaring over 20 per cent of its territory to be protected. Lao PDR has gone from one per cent to 12.5 per cent. In the same time period, Thailand has gone from 10 per cent to 17 per cent, and Viet Nam from 3 per cent to 7 per cent.

At the opening of the 1st regional workshop on Protected Areas and Development in May, Chief Executive Officer of the MRC Mr Joern Kristensen said, "This national and world heritage area is a unique resource, not only to Mekong peoples but to all humanity. The biodiversity of the Mekong River Basin is equal only to that of the Amazon. Every year up to 1.75 million tonnes of fish are

caught in the Mekong, valued at US \$ 1.45 billion. Fish and fish-based products make up 70 per cent of the animal protein in the diet of ordinary Cambodians."



*Forest produce at weekend market in Som Det, Northern Thailand*

Technical support for the review has been provided by the Mekong River Commission, the United Nations Development Programme, World Wide Fund for Nature, Birdlife International and the International Centre for Environmental Management (ICEM) in partnership with the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The review is sponsored by DANIDA, AusAID, the Swiss Development Corporation and the Mekong River Commission.



# Study of sub-areas to show cross-border impacts

Member countries of the Mekong River Commission have each selected a "pilot" area in their country for an immediate study of the potential cross-border impacts of development. The pilot areas are the Tonle Sap area in Cambodia, the northern area of Lao PDR, the Chiang Rai area in Thailand, and the Mekong Delta in Viet Nam.

They are the first four in a selection of 10 areas (known as 'sub-areas') to be studied as part of MRC's Basin Development Plan (BDP), a general planning tool and process for developing the water resources of the Lower Mekong River Basin. The BDP is a core programme of the MRC, approved by the MRC Ministerial Council. The heart of the BDP's brief is to promote coordination of planning across sectors and countries, and to ensure that the effects of development outside the immediate area are taken into account.

The sub-areas chosen are catchments of particular significance to the overall river flow and water quality. In the case of Lao PDR, the mountainous northern area was chosen for the pilot study, spreading over six provinces including Luang Prabang, Phongsaly and Bokeo. The choice was made in line with the Lao government's poverty alleviation priorities, which focus on the mountainous regions. The Chiang Rai region in Thailand was chosen because it is adjacent to the Lao area under study; hence the potential for new economic and social development, and its possible impacts on the environment, can be easily studied on both sides of the river. The area has seen increased trade over the past one year, as more shipping from China has come into the ports of Chiang Kong and Chiang Saen.

Both the Tonle Sap and Mekong Delta areas are crucial to food security in the region, and therefore are a priority for further study. All the areas are served



by a network of hydrological stations that monitor water levels, flow and quality.

The potential cross-border effects of water resources development will be assessed mainly in terms of changes to water flow and quality in the river system. The information for these assessments will be drawn from a variety of sources: from hydrological and water quality models being developed under the MRC's Water

Utilisation Programme and Environment Programme, from forums in the sub-areas bringing together representatives of local users of natural resources, and from briefings by local provincial government officials. The studies covering all sub-areas are expected to take over a year to complete, with work due to begin before the end of 2002.

When completed, information from the studies will be used to create development strategies and scenarios, which can then be shaped into proposals for sustainable development projects in the Lower Mekong Basin.



Ethnic minority girls, Lao PDR

## Workshops and events

**MRC Joint Committee study tour on resolution of transboundary environmental issues to Switzerland, Poland, Germany and Czech Republic**

5-15 October 2002

Contact person: Siriporn Kunlapatanasuwan, siriporn@mrcmekong.org

**Regional workshop for formulation of Flood Management and Mitigation Strategy Implementation Plan**

18-19 October 2002

Annex building, MRC Secretariat  
Contact: Bun Veasna, bveasna@mrcmekong.org

**Workshop review of Protected Areas and Development in 4 Lower Mekong Basin countries**

17-18 October 2002

Cambodiana Hotel, Phnom Penh  
Contact: Chin Samouth, samouth@mrcmekong.org

**Regional workshop for formulation of MRC Navigation Strategy**

21-22 October 2002

Cambodiana Hotel, Phnom Penh  
Contact: Lieven Geerinck, geerinck@mrcmekong.org

**Annual meeting of MRC Council and Donor Consultative Group**

11-14 November

Ho Chi Minh City  
Contact: Luong Thu Thuy, thuy@mrcmekong.org

**5th Technical Symposium on Mekong Fisheries**

11-13 December 2002

Khon Kaen, Thailand  
Contact: Dr Chumnarn Pongsri, chumnarn@mrcmekong.org

## CNMC: Returning from the years of silence

**T**he National Mekong Committees in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam were established in 1957 as coordinating bodies for operations of the former Mekong Committee. Due to internal turmoil, for some time Cambodia was a dormant member of the Mekong partnership. In this interview with Mr Pich Dun, Deputy Secretary-General of the Cambodian National Mekong Committee (CNMC), it is clear that the years of silence are over.



The Secretariat of the CNMC in Phnom Penh

When Mr Pich Dun joined the CNMC in 1991, he was an irrigation engineer working on a reappraisal of the Prek Thnot project in Kompong Speu province, on a tributary of the Mekong.

The Prek Thnot dam project had been planned in the 1960s for irrigation and hydropower. From 1969 to 1972, a third of its construction was completed. During Khmer Rouge rule in the 1970s, most of the dam was broken down again and the building materials used for other purposes.

Following a reappraisal of the original project and CNMC discussions with donors, the Japanese government agreed to provide funding of around US\$ 40,000 for an agriculture project in the Prek Thnot area, an easy 90-minute drive to the markets of Phnom Penh.

It is one of many changes that the CNMC has seen over the years, as plans from the early years of the Mekong Committee have been revised or changed completely to be in line with a broader view of sustainable development.

When the CNMC was re-established after the years of instability, resources were scarce. Three years ago, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched a Capacity-Building Programme with the four National Mekong Committees. More staff have been recruited and trained, and the office equipment and premises have been upgraded.

Pich Dun recalls, "From 1957 to 1975, each member country would propose its own plans for development. It was not like now, when we think basin-wide. Poverty reduction is the first priority for Cambodia."

For the CNMC, that means working on increasing production of rice and general agricultural products, and ensuring sustainable management of the inland fishery, which employs over 1 million Cambodians and feeds many more. The Committee also wants to see improvements in port facilities at the key locations of Phnom Penh Port, at the Tonle Sap in Siem Reap, and at river locations that feed into the Great Lake in the provinces of Kompong Chhnang and Pursat, which are important points for fish landings and domestic trade in general.

The Secretariat of the CNMC is due to begin more intensive work on the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve programme, with a fresh infusion of funds from the Asian Development Bank and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through UNDP in 2003.

Developing countries also want infrastructure development, and Cambodia is no exception. "As the country develops, we would expect to see more roads and bridges being built," said Pich Dun. "Cambodia now has its own Mekong bridge at Kompong Cham, built with Japanese funds." The Cambodian government has recently requested further aid to



Phnom Penh port

build another two bridges across the Mekong, at the Cambodia-Lao border in Stung Treng province and at Neak Leung, an important crossing point not far from the capital.

The question of hydropower is still an important one for Cambodia. "Cambodia right now lacks power," said Pich Dun. "We use diesel-fuelled power plants and the cost is very expensive. Right now there is only one hydropower plant in the whole country with the capacity to eventually produce 10 to 11 megawatts of power. This is at the newly inaugurated Kirirom hydropower plant."

The make-up of National Mekong Committees varies from country to country. Members of the CNMC represent 10 line ministries. The Committee's Secretariat is located in the Beng Keng Kang area, close to many aid organisations. The Minister for Public Works, His Excellency Khy Tainglim, is Chair of the CNMC and represents Cambodia on the MRC Council, its highest ruling body. There are three Vice-Chairmen of the CNMC: the Minister for Water Resources and Meteorology H.E. Lim Kean Hor, the Minister for Environment H.E. Mok Mareth, and the current chair of the



## Severe flooding hits Mekong basin

Most of the Mekong basin experienced serious flooding this season, with Thailand and Lao PDR awash in some of the heaviest floods in living memory.

In Udon Thani province, northeastern Thailand, floods killed at least 13 people and closed the airport in the provincial capital, which was 80 per cent under water. In the northern and northeastern provinces of Thailand, flooding caused an estimated US\$ 24.5 million worth of damage overall.

In mid-August, Vientiane and Luang Prabang experienced their highest floods since 1966, with flash floods also occurring in some northern provinces.

### CNMC : Returning from ...

MRC's Joint Committee H.E. Sin Niny, formerly a Director-General at the Ministry of Agriculture. In charge of day-to-day operations at the CNMC is H.E. Hou Taing Eng, its Secretary-General.

This concentration of high-ranking representatives of the Cambodian government ensures that the CNMC can maintain a high profile amongst the various line ministries. In 1999, Mekong Units were set up in CNMC member ministries, to promote coordination with the CNMC Secretariat. Over the next few months, the CNMC will undertake a series of outreach visits to place Mekong issues firmly on the development agenda of line ministries in Phnom Penh and provincial headquarters around the country.

This is important, for more than 85 per cent of Cambodia lies within the Lower Mekong Basin. As a downstream country, it watches upstream developments with a careful eye. The CNMC has been involved in discussions with Viet Nam on the Se San issue, and on the building of dikes as part of the So Ha - Cai Co Channel Improvement project close to the Viet Nam-Cambodia border. It is just one example of work that reflects the strategic role played by the CNMC in the workings of the Mekong River Commission.

- This feature on the CNMC is 1st in a 4-part series about the National Mekong Committees.

As the waters began to recede by the end of August, water levels rose in the southern provinces, traditionally the most flood-prone areas.

In Cambodia, floods affected almost half a million people in six provinces. Surprise flooding occurred in Prey Veng province due to backflow from the Mekong,

displacing 95,000 people for several days. The combination of both flood and drought in Cambodia this year may mean severe food shortages next year.

It appears that the peak periods in the upper stations and Cambodia may now be past, but the rainy season is not usually considered over until



*Flooded from their homes by the Mekong: Children wait by their waterlogged homes in Lao PRD*

mid-October.

At press time, the Mekong Delta areas of Tan Chau and Chau Doc are still in flood, with water levels continuing to rise. During the past month of floods in the Delta, 53 people have drowned, most of them children who fell into the water from their stilt houses.

## Coming soon New publications from MRC

**Freshwater aquaculture in the Lower Mekong Basin**  
Technical Paper No. 7, October 2002.

**Threats to healthy fisheries in the Mekong Basin**  
Technical Paper No. 8, October 2002.

Technical Papers cost US\$5, plus postage costs. Publications can be ordered from the MRC Secretariat's Documentation Centre, phone: (855-23)720-979 ext 1030, fax: (855-23)720-972, or email: [doc.centre@mrcmekong.org](mailto:doc.centre@mrcmekong.org)

Mekong government agencies can write to the MRC to obtain free copies.

Address: Documentation Center, MRC Secretariat, P.O. Box 1112, 364 M.V. Preah Monivong, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

## MRC Events

### Getting ready for the floods

The Mekong River Commission marked the start of this year's flood season by hosting the Australian government's official handover of floodplain manuals to the Cambodian Red Cross.

Australian Ambassador H.E. Louise Hand presented the manuals to Lok Chum Teav Bun Rany Hun Sen, Chairperson of the Cambodian Red Cross and wife of the Cambodian Prime Minister, and to H.E. Khy Tainglim, Minister for Public Works and Cambodian Council member of the Mekong River Commission, on 26 June at a ceremony at the MRC Secretariat. The manuals present "best practice" principles and guidelines for land-use management in floodplain areas, management of emergency situations, and development of warning messages.

The Secretary-General of the Cambodian Red Cross, H.E. Professor Okhna Viseth Vichea Mey Samediy, also attended the handover.

On 15 and 16 July, officials from the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM), governors, deputy governors, government staff and community workers from flood-prone provinces in Cambodia attended a workshop on Flood Forecasting and Early Warning Systems at the MRC Secretariat. The workshop, jointly organised by the MRC and the NCDM, drew over 40 people to a day and a half of presentations on flood preparedness measures and the general hydrology of the Mekong. The workshop also provided training on how to use the information provided in the MRC's flood forecasting web pages. H.E. Nhim Vanda, Vice-Chairman of the NCDM, presided over the opening of the workshop.



*Lok Chum Teav Bun Rany Hun Sen (right) with H.E. Khy Tainglim (center) as he receives manuals from H.E. Louise Hand (right). Ms. Clare Murphy of the International Federation of Red Cross in the background*

### Mekong Issue profiled in Johannesburg

Mekong River issues featured amongst the many discussions at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in September, with two representatives from the Mekong River Commission taking part in a range of events alongside the Summit meeting, which drew an estimated 60,000 visitors to Johannesburg, South Africa.

MRC staff were part of a panel discussing experiences of involving the public in river basin management issues, organised by the Washington D.C.-based Environmental Law Institute. They also took part in a panel organised by the IUCN (World Conservation Union) called "The Last Drop of Water", discussing MRC's process of negotiating maximum and minimum water flows in the Mekong.

The MRC also took part in a meeting organised by the Water In Rivers Secretariat at the Dutch Pavilion in the Water Dome, on the establishment of networks to share information on flood management and mitigation strategies.

Probably the most high-profile events to involve MRC staff were a kick-off meeting of the 3rd World Water Forum's Ministerial Conference, and a brainstorming session of agencies

seeking opportunities to further the achievements of Johannesburg at the 3rd World Water Forum when it takes place in Kyoto, Japan in March 2003. During the Summit, an exhibition of materials and a movie screening of "Mekong: The Mother" were also held at the Water Dome in the Asian Development Bank pavilion.

### Key meetings open to MRC partners

Partner organisations of the MRC will be invited to observe meetings of the Joint Committee and Ministerial Council, its two governing bodies, when relevant issues are discussed.

This decision, taken by the MRC Council (a Ministerial level grouping) at its November 2001 meeting, was affirmed by the MRC Joint Committee at its 10-11 July meeting this year. The decision opens the way for the MRC to invite observers with a wide range of expertise, as long as they are engaged in a specific partnership with the MRC.

In the near future, new observers are likely to include representatives of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the International Union for Conservation

## MRC Events

of Nature (IUCN). The ADB, WWF and IUCN have signed partnership agreements with the MRC.

Attending governing body meetings will provide observers with insights into the positions of member countries and the nature of day-to-day cooperation with the Secretariat. It will also help promote the specific development needs of the Lower Mekong Region to a global audience. To date, observers to Joint Committee and Council meetings have been from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for the Asia-Pacific (ESCAP). The governments of China and Myanmar attended as observers.

Other MRC partner organisations at present include the Murray-Darling Basin Commission in Australia, the Asian Institute of Technology, the World Meteorological Organisation, the United Nations Environment Programme's International Environmental Technology Centre, UNESCO's Institute for Water Education Cooperation, the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre and the Network of Aquaculture Centres in the Asia-Pacific (NACA).

The Joint Committee of the MRC meets two to three times a year. The MRC Council meets annually.

### Floods and notification on Council agenda

Flood matters will be high on the agenda when the Council, MRC's Ministerial-level ruling body, has its ninth annual meeting in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam on 11 and 12 November. The Council, made up by Cabinet ministers from each of the four member

countries, will be presented with an implementation plan for MRC's regional flood management strategy, which spells out nine different components for flood management and mitigation in the Lower Mekong Basin.

Over the years, the thinking of planners regarding flood management has changed. In the past, flood control and prevention was the aim, but planners now understand the annual cycle of Mekong floods to be an integral part of the ecosystem, driving a high production of fish and replenishing the soil with nutrients.

The programme concept of "Living With Floods", therefore, aims to give people living in flood-prone areas prior warning, so that they can move to safer areas or take other precautions when necessary. The plan is based on improved forecasting, warning and dissemination measures; regional networking and exchange of information on land-use; development of agreed upon guidelines and principles for land-use planning; better analysis of flood risk; and development of guidelines for flood-proofing of buildings.

The Council is also expected to sign off on Preliminary Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement regarding proposed uses of Mekong water, a key step in an ongoing process of developing "rules" for water utilisation between the four countries of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam. The "rules" process is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the World Bank over a 6-year period, with parallel co-financing by the Governments of Japan, France and Finland. Last year, the Council approved Procedures for Data and Information Exchange.

The Mekong River Commission began broadcasting five-day flood forecasts, updated daily, on its website at [www.mrcmekong.org](http://www.mrcmekong.org) on June 15. The forecasts will continue till the flood season ends.