



International alarm raised on dams across Mekong mainstream, MRC must wake up to its responsibilities

As the Mekong River Commission (MRC) and its donors prepare for their annual consultative meeting, 201 organisations and individuals from 30 countries around the world, including 126 citizens groups in the Mekong countries, have sent a resounding wake up call to the MRC. This action comes in response to news of the revival of six proposals to dam the Lower Mekong River.

Civil society groups are demanding the MRC fulfil its obligation to protect the Mekong, in light of compelling scientific evidence that warns of the disastrous consequences of damming the lower Mekong.

- Research published by the MRC in 2004 identifies dams as the “overriding threat to the future of the Mekong’s fish and fisheries”.
- The proposed sites for the Don Sahong dam in southern Laos and the Sambor dam in northern Cambodia are considered by many scientists to be “the worst possible” locations due to the vital role these areas play in sustaining the world’s largest productive fishery.
- A recent report published under the Cambodian National Mekong Committee “found no examples of positive long-term impacts of dams on fisheries, nor any effective mitigation measures in the Mekong Basin.”

“For thousands of rural communities living along the Mekong and Tonle Sap, any decline in riparian fisheries directly threatens their food security and livelihoods,” said the civil society letter sent to the MRC and its donors today.

In spite of tremendous risk to people and the environment, the Commission has sounded no alarm. Under the 1995 Mekong Agreement, the MRC is required “to make every effort to avoid, minimize and mitigate harmful effects that might occur to the environment... from the development and use of the Mekong River Basin water resources” (Article 7).

There is little indication that the MRC has made any effort to advise member governments against building dams on the mainstream. Moreover, the MRC has largely failed to inform the public of the immense risk of such developments, at times censoring and withholding information.

The letter states that, “if the MRC does not act now to uphold the 1995 Agreement and defend the ecological integrity of the Mekong, the institution is a river authority in name only and does not deserve the tens of millions of dollars worth of grants and technical assistance that it receives from international donor agencies annually”.

Premrudee Daoroung, Director of TERRA said “the public need to be aware of the role of the MRC and what they can expect from them concerning the impending plans. The MRC must reconfirm its commitment to protecting the river and publicly declare its standpoint.”

A press conference will be held tomorrow, 13 November, 10.30am at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand (FCCT) with the following speakers: **Associate Prof. Surichai Wun’gao**, Member, National Legislative Assembly, Thailand and Director, Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (CUSRI) **Premrudee Daoroung**, Director, Towards Ecological Recovery & Regional Alliance (TERRA) **Pianporn Deetes**, Coordinator, Living Rivers Siam-SEARIN.

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