

PRESS STATEMENT- update 15 NOVEMBER 2007

Comments by Mr Do Manh Hung, Officer-in-Charge, Mekong River Commission Secretariat, regarding the press briefing on 13 November held in Bangkok, Thailand by Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA)

15 NOVEMBER 2007, Siem Reap: MRC would like to respond to the press statement issued on Tuesday 13 November by TERRA which makes reference to the MRC's "abdication of responsibility" on not commenting on six proposed dams on the Mekong mainstream.

We would like to point out that the responsibility of the Mekong River Commission is to support its Member States. It is an intergovernmental organisation, not a supragovernmental one. This means that the MRC's primary role is to serve its Member States in ways it is requested to. It is owned and governed by its Member States, and as such cannot nor should not presuppose decisions of the governments of the Member States.

The MRC however is fully aware of the importance of downstream developments on the Mekong and it has, therefore, at its meeting held today of the Joint Committee considered the role of MRC and its Secretariat with regard to these mainstream projects.

If these Member States request the MRC Secretariat (MRCS) to become involved in environmental impact assessments or supply technical data which would help them in their decision making, the MRCS will respond as requested.

On the subject of the 1995 Agreement, its essence is "meeting the needs, keeping the balance" it is an agreement to support and facilitate cooperation for sustainable development of water and related resources of the Mekong Basin. The areas where the Member States have agreed to cooperate include hydropower and the need to minimise any harmful effects arising therefrom. This is where the MRC structure allows for mitigation of transboundary issues and provides an avenue for the countries who may be involved to discuss the challenges any such infrastructures may bring.

The role of the MRC in protecting the ecological balance is judged as equally important which is why the Mekong Agreement includes Article 3 and MRCS is involved in water quality testing, environmental flow work and research on fisheries. It is only with such research MRCS can provide its Member States with good quality data which can be used to measure costs and benefits of any planned development.

The MRCS provides commentary to Member States on both a formal and an informal basis on numerous matters relating to the use of the Mekong's resources in line with MRC procedures for information sharing. MRCS is continuously consulting with Member States as to what advice emanating from MRCS is released to the public. On the other hand, the results of research and review of literature are made publicly available, as

can be seen from the range of publications produced by MRCS, and available on the MRC website.

Our development partners are fully aware of the mandate of the MRC and strongly support the MRC. They have increased support to the MRC in the past three years.

On the topic of notification, Member States which are contemplating any significant infrastructure which may have effects on riparian neighbours have agreed to notify the MRC when the construction of the structure is likely to go ahead. Obviously this would happen after full EIAs and other preliminary surveys, and due diligence processes at the national level were complete. At this stage the fellow members of the MRC would be in a position to discuss any impacts and mitigation proposed.

The MRCS has been providing technical support and transboundary assessments of economic and social impact as per its mandate.

Source: http://www.mrcmekong.org/MRC_news/speeches/press-statement15Nov07.htm