



# Mekong River Commission

P.O. Box 6101, Vientiane 01000, Lao PDR  
Telephone: (856-21) 263 263 Facsimile: (856-21) 263 264  
Email: [mrcs@mrcmekong.org](mailto:mrcs@mrcmekong.org) Website: [www.mrcmekong.org](http://www.mrcmekong.org)

## MEDIA RELEASE

# ***Mekong Prime Ministers agree to prioritise climate change as summit ends***

## ***China agrees to increase cooperation with basin countries***

**Hua Hin, THAILAND**

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**Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam have agreed that adjusting to the challenges posed by climate change is a regional priority, as high-level talks in Hua Hin come to a close today.**

On behalf of delegates at the summit, H.E. Abhisit Vejjajiva, Prime Minister of Thailand, summarized nine areas of “priority action,” for Mekong River Commission Member Countries, which included climate change and responding to droughts. He called on the countries present to “avoid the risks of harmful effects that might result from natural occurrences and man-made activities, and to protect the immense value of the Basin’s natural ecosystems.”

“We encourage the MRC to further integrate climate change adaptation in its work,” said Mr. Abhisit, “and to significantly expand cooperation with Dialogue Partners, Development Partners and other stakeholders. In this connection, we welcome and call on upstream Riparian States to join the MRC in the future.”

In the past, the MRC has said that the Mekong region is one of the most vulnerable in the world to the long-term impacts of climate change, due to a relatively high proportion of people living on low incomes and regional low government capacity to deal with the issue.

“Besides committing to increasing efforts to adapt to climate change across the basin, the Mekong governments have agreed to intensify efforts to protect people at risk from flooding; encouraging river navigation and trade; improve basin water quality; and evaluating the opportunities and challenges of proposed hydropower schemes,” said Jeremy Bird, the CEO of the Mekong River Commission (MRC), which, together with host country Thailand, organised the summit.

The declaration endorses a statement issued earlier in the week by an international conference of over 200 experts in river and water management that called on Mekong Countries to work together to protect water resources in the region when considering any future development projects.

The upper basin includes parts of China and Myanmar and both countries have been Dialogue Partners to the Mekong River Commission since 1996. China has been increasing technical cooperation in recent years.

Meanwhile, China has agreed to share information on its river flows and dam operations. In a side meeting between the MRC and China at the Summit, China provided further hydro-meteorological data concerning the operation of its dams on the mainstream Mekong during the current dry season.

“This is a significant step forwards in engagement between China and the countries of the Lower Mekong Basin as it improves transparency. It is the first time that China has shared this dry season data with downstream countries,” said Mr. Bird, “and is a significant increase in the level of cooperation also seen by the participation of a high level delegation from China at the summit.”

“It is hoped that access to this kind of data is another step towards an open understanding of how Chinese dams operate and we look forward to expanding the range of data that is shared,” said Mr. Bird.

This follows earlier moves by China to release hydro-meteorological data from Jinhong power station on the mainstream Mekong and the Man'an tributary.

Activists have recently claimed water shortages in northern Thailand and Lao PDR, are caused by Chinese dams on the mainstream of the Mekong. The MRC has said in earlier statements that there is no evidence to back up this claim, reiterating that current water shortages are due to the regional drought.

The summit reaffirmed its commitment to shared sustainable water resources in the basin.

**Notes to editors:**

**Further quotes:**

"Climate change is just one of the concerns facing the countries of the Mekong basin," says Jeremy Bird. "Flooding and drought cause millions of dollars worth of damage per year; the opportunities and risks of proposed hydropower schemes need to be fully understood; and the biodiversity, ecological health and fisheries resources of much of the basin is under threat."

**Photos available on request**

**A full agenda and the text of the Declaration are available on request.**

The summit meeting took place at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Hua Hin 5 April 2010 and marks the 15 year anniversary of the signing of the 1995 *Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin*, which established the independent Mekong River Commission as an international agency.

Attending and adopting the declaration were Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister, Royal Government of Cambodia; H.E. Mr. Bouasone Bouphavanh, Prime Minister, Lao PDR; H.E. Mr. Nguyen Tan Dung, Prime Minister, The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam; H.E. Abhisit Vejjajiva, Prime Minister, Royal Kingdom of Thailand; and delegations from The People's Republic of China and Union of Myanmar.

**The summits goals included:**

- Reaffirmation at the highest level of political commitment of Member Countries to the Mekong Agreement;
- Strengthening the MRC's working relationship with China and Myanmar;
- Increasing cooperation between the MRC and the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS); and
- Increasing cooperation between the MRC, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Worldbank, ASEAN and other Development Partners.

**Nine priority areas of action mentioned in the Declaration:**

- Adopting and implementing the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy;
- Intensifying efforts to effectively manage the risks from flood, drought and sea level rise including establishment of forecasting and warning systems across the whole basin;
- Facilitating an international legal framework that encourages river navigation and trade;
- Researching and addressing the threat to livelihoods posed by climate change and cooperating with other regional partners in addressing haze pollution;
- Monitoring and taking measures to improve water quality in priority areas of the Basin;
- Sustaining the existing and future uses of water and related resources, and aquatic biodiversity, wetlands and forests in the Basin;
- Identifying and advising on the opportunities and challenges of hydropower and other infrastructure development in the Basin, especially risks as they pertain to the protection of food security and livelihoods;
- Continuing to improve the implementation of the Procedures for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing, the Procedures for Water Use Monitoring, the Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement and the Procedures for Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream and finalise the Procedures for Water Quality;
- Exploring and identifying opportunities for expansion of cooperation between the organisation's current Dialogue Partners and Development Partners, in particular to address common water resources and climate change challenges, as well as identifying new Development Partners and other stakeholders.

Although no-one knows exactly how rising world temperatures will impact on the basin, according to global climate modelling that has been downscaled to basin level, a change in rainfall patterns, which could increase

the risk of flooding in some areas; an increase in the number and severity of extreme weather events; an increased risk of extremes of hot and cold in different parts of the basin, increasing the risk of drought; and changes in the flow of the river and tributaries, which could influence fish migration patterns, run-off and alluvial deposits are all likely scenarios and will have serious consequences for Lao farmers.

In the Mekong Delta, sea level rises of up to one metre are predicted, making it one of the five most vulnerable deltas in the world and this could cause significant displacement of people and migration into urban areas.

The MRC is the intergovernmental body responsible for cooperation on the sustainable management of the Mekong Basin whose members include Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam. In dealing with this challenge, it looks across all sectors including sustaining fisheries, identifying opportunities for agriculture, maintaining the freedom of navigation, flood management and preserving important ecosystems.

Superimposed on these are the future effects of more extreme floods, prolonged drought and sea level rise associated with climate change. In providing its advice, the MRC aims to facilitate a broad range of dialogue among governments, the private sector and civil society on these challenges.

**For more information, contact: Damian Kean, Communication Advisor, Tel: +856 20 752 7500 (Lao PDR) + 66 861 030 710 (Thailand) e-mail: [damian@mrcmekong.org](mailto:damian@mrcmekong.org) [www.mrcmekong.org](http://www.mrcmekong.org)**