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MRC ministerial council approves a drought management strategy, other policies, boosting Mekong countries' ability to prepare for future disaster

Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 26 Nov 2019

Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 26 November 2019 - Ministerial delegates from the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Council today at their annual gathering in Phnom Penh approved a drought management strategy for 2020-2025, allowing Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam to prepare for and manage drought collectively.

The approved strategy came as the region is undergoing one of the worst droughts that has brought the Mekong water levels to their lowest points in living memory or at least since the last 60 years.

"As we gear up for drought preparedness and mitigation, this strategy will help us reduce the vulnerability of our people and water resource systems to droughts, improve the adaptive capacity of our governments, and advance our information sharing, forecasting and early warning systems," said Mr. Lim Kean Hor, Cambodia's Minister of Water Resources and Meteorology and Chairperson of the Cambodia National Mekong Committee.



Chairperson of the MRC Council for 2019 and Minister of Water Resources and Meteorology of Cambodia, Mr. Lim Kean Hor, who is also the Member of the MRC Council for Cambodia chairs the 26th Meeting of the MRC Council today in Phnom Penh.

The Minister, who is also the Chairperson of the MRC Council for 2019, added that this strategy is part of the "MRC's ongoing effort to assist its Member Countries to combat the present and future droughts that have both national and transboundary impacts".

Recent MRC studies show that drought events in the lower Mekong basin have increased in frequency and severity in the past decades. The latest drought in 2016, for example, brought serious economic losses to Thailand, estimated at US\$1.7 billion.

The strategy is set to focus on five priority areas that have been assessed as "poorly functioning" and requiring "immediate attention" to address droughts. They include drought indicator monitoring, which covers ground, soil moisture and crop condition monitoring, and agreed dry season flow monitoring; drought forecasting and early warning; capacity building in drought assessment and planning; mitigation measures; and information sharing systems.

The five-year strategy will be implemented with funding from MRC Member States and Development Partners.



Head of MRC Development Partners Group, Mr. Jean-Bernard Carrasco (third from right), who is also the Australian Ambassador to Lao PDR, attends the 26th Meeting of the MRC Council in Phnom Penh, along with other members of the MRC Development Partners Group.

The Council, who is the highest, ministerial body of the organization composed of water resources and environment ministers from the four Member Countries, also approved the annual work plan for 2020 - 2021, with a budget of about \$13 million. The annual work plan is the detailed operational plan, activities and tasks along with associated budgets to implement the organization's strategic plan at the regional level.

The approved plan focuses on finalizing the new basin development strategy 2021-2030 and strategic plan 2021-2025, and a basin-wide environment strategy for protecting key environment assets. It also prioritizes on, among others, completing the prior consultation process of the Luang Prabang hydropower project, implementing the joint environmental monitoring for mainstream dams and drought and hydropower strategies, and advancing partnership with China and Lancang Mekong Cooperation.

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Media advisory: Drought, hydrological condition and other policy issues on top agenda of MRC Council meeting next week Every year, water and environment ministers of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam who are members of the MRC Council convene to review and come to mutual conclusion on the management and development of water and related resources of the lower Mekong

Drought continues to hit Mekong countries, risking stress on crop production, water shortages Severe to extreme drought is expected to hit countries in the lower Mekong basin from now until January 2020, warns the Mekong River Commission. Thailand and Cambodia would be hardest hit compared to Lao PDR and Viet Nam.

Avenues to make MRC's prior consultation process more meaningful should be explored, says a public regional forum Opportunities to make the Mekong River Commission's Prior Consultation process more meaningful should be explored, and the required data and information on the Lao PDR's proposed Luang Prabang hydropower project should be supplied, according to a public r

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Improving information management and sharing, moving towards coordinated operation of dams, increasing cooperation with Mekong related frameworks, creating more space for community engagement, and increasing efforts to protect environmental assets were so

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In its yesterday's preparatory meeting for the Council meeting today, the MRC governing body Joint Committee endorsed the organization's new Finance Manual and the design concept for reinvigorating the MRC's data, information, modeling, forecasting and communication systems.



Members of the MRC governing body, Joint Committee, hold their preparatory meeting yesterday in Phnom Penh for the 26th Meeting of the MRC Council today.

The new Manual, updated from the 2006 Manual, covers solid mechanisms for better internal control and management of the organization's financial resources, contributing to mitigating risks and enhancing transparency and accountability in financial management.

Aiming to provide faster reactions to address emerging changes, such as sudden water release from reservoirs in the upper basin, to track basin state and development, and to strengthen one of the MRC's key roles as the regional knowledge hub, the MRC's systems reinvigoration covers data collection and acquisition, data and information management, data analysis and assessment, and data and information reporting and communication.

The two-day annual meeting will end tomorrow. Next year, Lao PDR will be the host as the country becomes the Chair of the MRC Council for 2020.

Read the news in [Khmer](#).

Note to editors:

The MRC is an intergovernmental organization for regional dialogue and cooperation in the lower Mekong river basin, established in 1995 based on the Mekong Agreement between Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The organization serves as a regional platform for water diplomacy as well as a knowledge hub of water resources management for the sustainable development of the region.

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