



## MRC's looming crisis of legitimacy and relevancy challenges new CEO

Today, 51 citizens groups and individuals from the six Mekong countries sent a letter to Jeremy Bird, the newly appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Secretariat, challenging him to solve the MRC's crisis of legitimacy and relevancy, recently exemplified by its failure to respond to civil society concerns over plans to dam the lower Mekong mainstream.

The MRC has yet to respond to the letter sent last November by 201 citizens groups and individuals from 30 countries that demanded the MRC uphold the 1995 Mekong Agreement to protect the river from threats posed by the proposed mainstream dams.

“The situation surrounding the proposed Mekong mainstream dams is too critical for the MRC to say that its only role is to serve its member states. This cannot serve as an excuse for its inaction and failure in addressing threats to the river and its people. We urge them to meet their responsibilities and obligations,” says Premrudee Daoroung, Director of TERRA.

In a Development Partners Consultative Group statement issued on 15 November 2007 in Siem Reap, Cambodia, the MRC's donors admitted they are particularly concerned that “the cumulative impacts of dams on fisheries and food security are not being given adequate attention.”

Plans for up to eight large scale hydropower dams on the lower Mekong mainstream are moving rapidly ahead. On 13 February 2008, the proposed Don Sahong dam in southern Laos took a marked step forward when a Project Development Agreement was signed between the Lao government and a Malaysian company. And earlier this week, the Thai and Lao governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding to allow a private company to study the proposed 1,800 MW Ban Kum dam, located on the Thai-Lao border. Damming the mainstream would have significant transboundary impacts, particularly on fisheries which would have devastating consequences for the food security of riparian communities.

“The new CEO must clearly state what steps the MRC will take in response to widespread concerns over the proposed mainstream dams. It can start by immediately releasing to the public all analyses relating to the Don Sahong dam undertaken by the MRC,” says Premrudee.

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