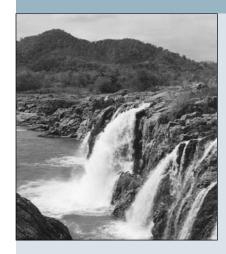
# A DAM RUSH ON THE MEKONG?

The Mekong River Basin's diversity and productivity is threatened by plans for scores of dams (this map shows just a few key projects). Here's a look at what's in store and what's at stake for one of the world's great rivers.



#### A Natural Paradise

Laos' Si Phan Don is a stunning region of steep limestone gorges and beautiful water features. The river here is dotted with some 4,000 small islands and frequented by freshwater dolphins playing in the deep pools. Khone Falls is the only waterfall on the lower Mekong. The falls stretch

over 10 kilometers (six miles) of the river's length, and are the main reason why the river remains unnavigable between Cambodia and Laos.

## **A Fabled Fishery**

The Mekong supports one of the world's most diverse and productive inland fisheries. More than 1,500 species of fish live in the river basin; the Mekong River Commission estimates the commercial value of the

fishery at US\$2 billion per year. The Mekong Giant Catfish is the world's largest freshwater fish and can grow to 3 meters (9 feet) in length and weigh as much as a tiger. The giant catfish is now listed as critically endangered by IUCN.





### The Dynamic Delta

The Mekong fans out into nine tails to form its delta – one of the most densely populated areas on Earth, and one of the most productive. The Delta produces upwards of 16 million metric tonnes of rice annually for domestic consumption and export in addition to highly productive shrimp farms, orchards and market gardens. Major developments upstream could have a serious impact on the Mekong Delta's ecosystem and productivity.

## The People's Victory

The site of the first great Mekong dam struggle, the Pak Mun Dam was completed in 1994 on the Mun River, the Mekong's largest tributary. As a direct result of the dam, more than 20,000 people have been affected by drastic reductions in fish populations upstream. In 2002, after a 12-year battle, villagers were successful in convincing the Thai government to open the dam's gates for four months per year to allow for fish migrations. Villagers continue to fight for permanent decommissioning of the dam.



Original map courtesy PER/TERRA