

Xayaburi Dam: Timeline of Events

(Last updated: April 2014)

4 May 2007	Lao government signed memorandum of understanding with Thai company Ch. Karnchang to develop the Xayaburi Dam.
25-27 Sept. 2008	MRC convened international fisheries experts, who conclude that no fish passage technology exists that can handle Mekong River fish migration.
Oct. 2008	Thai company Team Consulting and Swiss company Colenco completed the Xayaburi Dam's feasibility study for the Ch. Karnchang.
May 2009	The International Centre for Environmental Management (ICEM) began work for the MRC on a Strategic Environmental Assessment of the proposed Mekong mainstream dams.
June 2009	French consultant Compagnie Nationale du Rhône (CNR) completed an optimization study for the Lao government that identifies locations for the nine proposed Mekong dams in Laos.
June 2010	Ch. Karnchang established the Xayaburi Power Company Limited as the project company and retains majority ownership.
June 2010	ICEM presented the findings of the Strategic Environmental Assessment to the MRC governments. The study recommended delaying Mekong mainstream dam development for 10 years to allow time for further studies.
Aug. 2010	Thai company Team Consulting completed the final draft of the Xayaburi Dam's environmental and social impact assessments. Later, experts in the region widely criticized the poor quality of the assessments. Among other concerns, the assessments examined impacts only 10 km downstream from the dam site.
20 Sept. 2010	Lao governments submitted the Xayaburi Dam to the MRC's PNPCA process. Documentation included the feasibility study, environmental and social impact assessments, but no assessment of the dam's potential transboundary impacts.
15 Oct. 2010	The MRC Secretariat published the final version of the Strategic Environmental Assessments of the proposed Mekong mainstream dams, which recommended a 10 year delay while further studies are carried out.
20-22 Oct. 2010	The MRC began its first ever PNPCA process when the MRC Secretariat provided the Cambodian, Thai, and Vietnamese governments with Laos' documentation about the proposed Xayaburi Dam.
22 Oct. 2010	The World Bank endorsed the recommendations of the Strategic Environmental Assessment and confirmed it will not invest in any Mekong mainstream dams.
29 Oct. 2010	The Lao government and Xayaburi Power Company signed a concession agreement for the project.
Late 2010	Ch. Karnchang began implementing the Xayaburi Dam project, according to its 2010 Annual Report published the following year.

Jan. – Feb. 2011	The MRC governments of Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam held consultations and accepted public comments on the proposed Xayaburi Dam. The Lao government did not hold any consultations with Lao citizens.
14 Feb. 2011	The feasibility study was released to the public. Civil society organizations raised concerns that these documents should have been provided before, rather than after, the MRC consultation period.
24 Mar. 2011	The MRC Secretariat released its independent technical review of the Xayaburi Dam. The study identified significant gaps and concerns in Laos' documentation and recommended further collection of baseline data and transboundary impact studies.
17 Apr. 2011	A Bangkok Post investigation revealed that the Lao government and Ch. Karnchang had already begun implementing the project. The investigation revealed that access roads were constructed and villagers had received as little as USD \$15 in compensation and were being resettled.
19 Apr. 2011	At a special session of the MRC's Joint Committee in Vientiane, Laos, the four MRC governments "agreed that a decision on the prior consultation process...be tabled for consideration at the ministerial level, as they could not come to a common conclusion on how to proceed with the project." Cambodia and Vietnam requested a delay in the project, so that further transboundary studies could be carried out.
22 Apr. 2011	The Lao government claimed that the MRC prior consultation for the Xayaburi Dam automatically ended on this day.
23 Apr. 2011	The Prime Ministers of Cambodia and Vietnam met bilaterally and expressed concern over the Xayaburi Dam's transboundary impacts. They expressed a desire for the four governments and MRC Secretariat to conduct joint studies.
5 May 2011	The Lao government hired Finnish engineering company Pöyry to evaluate the Xayaburi Dam's compliance with MRC standards. At the time, Pöyry was also nominated to become the government's engineer for the project, as well as working jointly with Ch. Karnchang on another hydropower project in Laos, raising questions of conflict of interest.
7 May 2011	During a side meeting at an ASEAN Summit, the Lao Prime Minister told the Vietnamese Prime Minister that Laos would temporarily suspend the Xayaburi Dam. Both leaders agreed to conduct joint research on the Xayaburi Dam through the MRC framework.
8 May 2011	In response to revelations that Xayaburi Dam access roads were being built, Laos' Vice Minister of Energy and Mines told the Bangkok Post that "while there of course if a risk that the project will not proceed, the road upgrading was a significant benefit to the residents of the area and that is in line with the local authorities' policy to improve the livelihood of their people." In fact, local people were never provided permission to use the access roads freely.
8 June 2011	Despite the results of the April 2011 MRC meeting, Laos sent a letter to Ch. Karnchang reporting Pöyry's finding that the MRC prior consultation was finished and the project could move forward.
10 June 2011	The Lao government told Radio Free Asia that it planned to carry out a new environmental impact assessment of the Xayaburi Dam, which would focus on the impacts on fisheries. The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) later confirmed Laos' intention to carry out a new assessment. Pöyry's compliance report was later mistaken for being an impact assessment, when in fact it collected no additional baseline data.

July 2011	A visit by International Rivers to the Xayaburi Dam site revealed that project implementation was well underway, with the construction of worker camps, access roads, and land clearing.
8 Aug. 2011	Pöyry completed its compliance report for the Lao government, in which it concluded that the project is “principally in compliance” with MRC standards despite identifying over 40 additional studies that were still needed. Pöyry recommended that any additional studies could be conducted after construction was already underway.
5 Oct. 2011	The Lao government sent a letter to the Thai Ministry of Energy, citing Pöyry’s finding that the MRC prior consultation process had finished. The Thai government then proceeded to finance the project and purchase its electricity.
29 Oct. 2011	EGAT signed an agreement with the Xayaburi Power Company to purchase electricity from the Xayaburi Dam. The Cambodian and Vietnamese governments were not notified of this agreement.
15 Nov. 2011	The Thai cabinet approved a resolution allowing Thai government-owned Krung Thai Bank to co-finance the project.
15 Nov. 2011	The Cambodian government reviewed the Pöyry report and told the Cambodia Daily that the government “would not agree with this report—we strongly disagree with it.”
23 Nov. 2011	The Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Association organized a meeting of Vietnam’s leading Mekong experts in Ho Chi Minh City to review the Pöyry report. The participants concluded that the report was an unacceptable basis for decision-making on the Xayaburi Dam.
25 Nov. 2011	The MRC Secretariat completed a review of Pöyry’s August 2011 report at the request of Vietnam. The review concluded that the Xayaburi Dam would not fully comply with MRC standards even if all of Pöyry’s recommendations were followed. The review also recommended that construction be delayed to allow time for transboundary impact studies to take place.
8 Dec. 2011	The MRC Council, composed of the four governments’ water and environment ministers, agreed to conduct “further study” on the sustainable development and management of the Mekong River, including impacts caused by mainstream hydropower development projects. Cambodia and later Vietnam indicated their expectation that the Xayaburi Dam would be delayed while these studies were carried out.
Jan. 2012	Project implementation continued, as the Lao government resettled the first village located at the Xayaburi Dam site.
Jan. 2012	The Lao government hired CNR, which had conducted Laos’ 2009 optimization study on the Mekong dams, to conduct a peer review of Pöyry’s widely criticized report.
20 Feb. 2012	At a Thailand Human Rights Commission hearing, four Thai commercial banks confirmed that they had financed the Xayaburi Dam. The banks indicated that they had relied solely on Pöyry’s report as evidence that the project was environmentally and socially responsible.
Mar.– Apr. 2012	The Xayaburi Dam developers began to dig in the Mekong riverbed.
30 Mar. 2012	CNR completed its peer review of Pöyry’s work. CNR focused on the issue of sediment flows and did not review Pöyry’s work on fisheries. CNR itself acknowledged that the report was only a “desk study” and that further studies were needed.

30 Apr. 2012	Representatives of more than 130 civil society organizations launched a report demonstrating that electricity from the Xayaburi Dam was not needed in Thailand, and that growing electricity demand could be met by cheaper alternatives.
4 May 2012	The Cambodian representative to the MRC sent a letter to his Lao counterpart demanding that construction on the Xayaburi Dam halt.
14-18 June 2012	An investigation by International Rivers revealed that Xayaburi Dam implementation had advanced rapidly, with resettlement, digging in the riverbed, and building of structures on the riverbanks. Interviews with villagers revealed significant food security risks at the resettlement sites.
6 July 2012	The Cambodian and Vietnamese governments announce their intention to write a joint letter to the Lao government asking for the Xayaburi Dam to be suspended.
13 July 2012	The Lao Foreign Minister publicly announced that the Xayaburi Dam was suspended. The Lao Ministry of Energy and Mines quickly retracted this statement.
16-17 July 2012	At the request of MRC donors, the Lao Ministry of Energy and Mines invited around 70 delegates from foreign governments to visit the Xayaburi Dam site. The Lao government told that delegation that project implementation would continue and that transboundary impact studies were not necessary. Pöyry led the site visit and presented its plans to redesign the dam. The meeting coincided with a series of articles in the Lao government's Vientiane Times in support of the project.
17 July 2012	The Lao government announced in the Vientiane Times that the Xayaburi Dam had been redesigned to address cross-border concerns.
17 July 2012	The chairman of Ch. Karnchang told the Bangkok Post that the project continued on schedule and that the company had never received official word from the Lao government that the project was postponed.
19 July 2012	The Lao government's Vientiane Times claimed that the Xayaburi Power Company had spent \$100 million to redesign the dam to address the concerns of neighboring countries.
22 July 2012	An investigation by the Bangkok Post confirmed further activities at the dam site, including construction of a dike on the river.
22 July 2012	Laos' Vice Minister on Energy and Mines told the Bangkok Post that it had not allowed "any construction on the Mekong River that is permanent." The Vice Minister also said that decisions by the MRC Council "should not be a factor to base a judgment on whether the Xayaburi Dam should be built or not."
2 Aug. 2012	CNR issued a press release clarifying that the recommendations in its April 2012 were only conceptual and needed to be further developed. Laos ignored this statement and continued to portray CNR's and Pöyry's work as conclusive evidence that the dam would have no harmful impacts.
7 Aug. 2012	Thai villagers filed a lawsuit in Thailand's Administrative Court, arguing that the Thai government had violated their constitutional rights in agreeing to purchase the dam's electricity.
20 Aug. 2012	The Lao government reported in the Vientiane Times that the dam had been redesigned and neighboring governments' concerns had been fully addressed.
Aug. 2012	Both Ch. Karnchang and the Thai Ministry of Energy made public statements indicating that the project was proceeding on schedule.

6 Sept. 2012	The Lao government reported in the Vientiane Times that the dam was in full compliance with MRC standards and would move forward. As evidence of cooperation with neighboring countries, the Lao government also claimed that “no permanent works had been allowed to be undertaken in the Mekong.”
7 Sept. 2012	The President of Vietnam warned that dam construction in the Mekong created a risk of regional conflict.
12 Sept. 2012	The Lao Energy Minister told Radio Free Asia that the Cambodian and Vietnamese governments are not opposed to the dam, and that the project will go forward.
13 Sept. 2012	Cambodia’s MRC representative told reporters that its concerns with the project remain unanswered.
9 Oct. 2012	The Vientiane Times reported that a redesign of the Xayaburi Dam was nearly complete and will successfully mitigate any impacts on neighboring countries.
Oct. 2012	Cambodian and Vietnamese government delegations separately visited the Xayaburi Dam site and hear presentations by Pöyry.
5 Nov. 2012	Laos’ Vice Minister for Energy and Mines told reporters on the sidelines of the Asia Europe Summit in Vientiane that the Xayaburi Dam’s groundbreaking ceremony would take place on November 7 th .
6 Nov. 2012	The Thai Foreign Minister announced that the Thai government “is not opposed to the project.”
7 Nov. 2012	The Lao government held the groundbreaking ceremony for the Xayaburi Dam. Cambodian and Vietnamese government officials attended, indicating that both governments had withdrawn their opposition to the project. By this time, construction on the project was already well underway.
7 Nov. 2012	The CEO of the MRC Secretariat told the New York Times that, as of the date of the groundbreaking ceremony, the Secretariat had not seen Laos’ plans for a “redesign” of the dam. The Cambodian and Vietnamese governments also had not been provided with this information.
9 Nov. 2012	Pöyry announced that it has been selected as the Lao government’s engineer for the Xayaburi Dam.
7 Dec. 2012	Laos’ National Assembly, widely seen as a rubber-stamp parliament, approved the Xayaburi Dam.
11 Jan. 2013	Cambodia’s Environment Minister was quoted in the Cambodian Daily saying, “Prime Minister Hun Sen said there has to be an environmental impact study first to see how it affects [us] and we asked Laos to respect the suspension.”
17 Jan. 2013	At the annual MRC Council meeting, the Cambodian and Vietnamese delegations expressed ongoing concerns with the Xayaburi Dam. The MRC’s donor governments also expressed their concerns. Laos refused to sign the official minutes of the meeting.
5 Feb. 2013	In the Vientiane Times, the Lao government pledged to share the details of the new Xayaburi Design with the MRC.
19 Feb. 2013	The Thai Administrative Court denied a lawsuit filed by Thai villagers in August 2012 against the government’s signing of the Xayaburi power purchase agreement. The villagers appealed the decision.
16 May 2013	The Lao government’s Vientiane Times reported that the Xayaburi Dam was 9.18% completed and that construction proceeded on schedule.

20 May 2013	At the 2 nd Asia Pacific Water Summit in Thailand, Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister called on ASEAN countries to ratify the UN Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses.
18 June 2013	Lao government officials told Radio Free Asia that villagers resettled by the Xayaburi Dam would receive assistance for one year, although the government also expects the villagers to take more than five years to adjust to the resettlement.
19 June 2013	A Finnish government committee determined that Pöyry did not violate the OECD corporate social responsibility standards for its role in the Xayaburi Dam. Civil society groups immediately criticized the decision, which did not address key areas of their June 2012 complaint that initiated the investigation.
30 June 2013	An investigation by Radio Free Asia found that the majority of people resettled by the project to Houay Hip village were unemployed, had no access to farmland, and had lost access to electricity.
13 December 2013	The 5 th Mekong-Japan Summit took place in Tokyo. The summit was part of a larger meeting between ASEAN countries to commemorate 40 years of friendly and cooperative ties between the nations. The summit marked two years since an agreement between the Mekong governments to conduct further study on the sustainable development and management of the Mekong River, including the impacts of dams on the Lower Mekong River's mainstream. The "MRC Council Study" has yet to be completed.
19 December 2013	The Vientiane Times reported that construction on the Xayaburi Dam was halted as the Mekong River rose, flooding the site. The Xayaburi Power Company, announced that "work on the dam's spillway had to stop when water flowed over the temporary barriers and lower parts of the area were submerged."
12 March 2014	The Government of Laos reported that construction on the Xayaburi Dam is 30% complete.
9 April 2014	A formal OECD Guidelines complaint was filed against Austrian company Andritz AG for their involvement in the Xayaburi Dam, which violates international standards on ethical corporate conduct.