

# VIETNAM NATIONAL WORKING GROUP (NWG)

## MEKONG WATER DIALOGUES (MWD) PHASE II

### DATE/LOCATION

January 27, 2011 at ITB conference room, 268A Nam Kỳ Khởi Nghĩa, District 3, HCMC

### AGENDA

08:30 Introductions and review of agenda  
08:45 Presentation on NTP on water resources  
09:05 Keynote: state of IWRM in Mekong Region  
09:25 IWRM discussion  
10:15 Coffee break  
10:35 Other agenda items  
11:30 Conclusion  
12:00 Lunch

### PARTICIPANTS

#### NWG members

Dr. Đào Trọng Tứ, Chair, Vietnam Water Partnership (absent)  
Ms. Giang Thanh Binh, MONRE/DWRM  
Ms. Nguyễn Kỳ Nam, MARD/VNMC  
Dr. Dương Văn Ni, Cần Thơ University (absent)  
Dr. Lê Phát Quới, Institute for Environment and Natural Resources, National University, HCMC  
Hoàng Anh Tuấn, MARD/DWR (absent)  
Hoàng Việt, WWF  
Nguyễn Đức Tú, IUCN

#### IUCN

Dr. Robert Mather  
Jake Brunner

#### Guests

Torkil Jonch-Clausen, GWP and DHI  
Dr. Vũ Ngọc Long, ITB and Vietnam Rivers Network  
Nguyễn Hữu Thiện, ICEM and ForWet

### SUMMARY

GTB gave a presentation on the NTP on Improving Effectiveness of Water Resources Use and Protection. The NTP has been submitted to the PM and is awaiting comments from other ministries before approval. It has a budget of VND 9.4T or \$500M through 2020 with 40% coming from international sources. Major activities including revising the 1998 Water Law to be completed in 2011 and implementing water allocation and protection plans in three priority river basins (Red-Thai, Dong Nai, and Mekong) by 2015. 60% of the budget will go on baseline studies, inventory, and assessment and the development of a national water resource information and monitoring system.

TJC provided an overview of the development of IWRM, which is now explicitly referred to in laws in 60 counties. Vietnam faces growing demands for water, which is resulting in competition and conflicts between sectors and user groups. He pointed out that energy is a major water user by both hydropower and cooling of thermal power plants. Because of this competition over a fixed resource, which inevitably results in winners and losers, IWRM is essentially a political not a technical challenge.

In the Mekong Region, the impacts of hydropower on water flow far exceed those of climate change, at least in the short term. Climate change, while real, should not divert us from doing what needs to be done irrespective of climate change. A first step in IWRM is to manage water at the level of river basin. This is being done in Indonesia, Philippines, and Malaysia. In Europe, governments are legally obliged to manage water at the river basin level. In Vietnam, MONRE Decree 120 in 2008 established river basin organizations in all the major river basins but no RBOs have been implemented.

A problem with IWRM implementation in Vietnam is that different agencies have management power at different levels. At the river basin level, MONRE is in charge (in principle), at the level of province the people's committee is in charge, and at the level of the district or sub-basin DARD is in charge. Making IWRM work means that different agencies, including dam operators, need to surrender authority in favor of a common good, which of course they are reluctant to do. Dam operators, for example, want to maximize power generation. That's why IWRM is so hard to implement in practice.

MRC's 2011-15 strategy refers to IWRM. But the growing importance of dams on the Mekong is a challenge in terms of balancing the interests of different stakeholders. Vietnam has a benefit sharing decree to compensate communities that are directly affected by dams, but it is, in practice, impossible to compensate downstream communities for lost fisheries and damaged livelihoods because the impacts are so long term and geographically diffuse. For example, it was 20-30 years before the Mississippi Delta started to shrink as a result of upstream dams, an outcome that is of great relevance to Vietnam. (A 2009 Nature paper classified the Mississippi and Mekong as "deltas in peril: reduction in aggradation plus accelerated compaction overwhelming rates of global sea-level rise.")

Because MONRE has so few qualified staff, implementing the NTP represents a huge operational challenge. Rather than tackle everything at the same time, MONRE should prioritize. In Laos, RBOs exist in law as the basin level but are being piloted at the sub-basin level. Key to making progress on IWRM is collaboration between MARD and MONRE. In terms of where to pilot, it is hard to avoid dams. Indeed, a major risk is cascades of dams that are managed independently of each other. In many basins, EVN and the private sector are now major stakeholders.

Three options to pilot IWRM were proposed: (1) Huong (where IUCN ran a project five years ago), Srepok (IUCN is likely to receive SDC funding to support IWRM on the Srepok, Sesan, and Srekong), and in the Mekong Delta (where MWD is supporting wetlands management). The Srepok is the preferred option because of the opportunity to work on both sides of the Vietnam-Cambodia border.

TJC would be available to visit Hanoi to meet with Vice-Minister Nguyen Thai Lai to discuss MWD support for IWRM piloting.

There will be a workshop in Vientiane, probably March 28-31, to discuss French, Spanish, and Asian RBO experiences, the latter through the Network of Asian River Basin Organisations (NARBO) and ADB. TJC will explore possibility of getting MWD invited.

HHT briefed members on a new project that will be run by ForWet, a new HCMC-based NGO established by ex-Sub-FIPI director and Winrock PES advisor Nguyen Chi Thanh. The project aims to increase high level understanding of the risks that dams pose for the Mekong Delta with a focus on An Giang, Can Tho, and Soc Trang. It will be funded by the McKnight Foundation. ForWet will submit a co-funding proposal to MWD to support more detailed work on fisheries and sediment flows.

JB briefed members on the outcome of the joint meeting between the MRC Council and the Donor Consultative Group on January 26 in HCMC. The development partners statement (which was circulated to NWG members) highlighted concerns over the public consultation process leading up to a decision in the Xayabouri dam in Laos. At the meeting, the Vietnamese delegation strongly requested the Lao government to slow down and properly assess the downstream impacts. The concern is not so much the Xayabouri dam but the fact that if approved the dam would trigger proposals to build dams closer to the Mekong Delta. If those dams were built, the sediment flow to the economically vital delta would be cut off and its survival threatened. The decision over the Xayabouri dam is, in effect, a matter of national security for Vietnam. MONRE Minister Pham Khoi Nguyen who chaired the meeting requested the Lao authorities to work harder with the dam developers to provide more precise information about the potential downstream impacts. He also urged groups in Vietnam to be proactive in requesting information.

Also of interest was the growing concern about dry season water shortages, which is of growing concern in Vietnam: the peak flood entering Vietnam has declined steadily over the last 11 years; there was much less discussion about flooding.

After the meeting, JB met with DVN to discuss possible MWD support for a workshop in early March to brief National Assembly members and provincial leaders on the implications of the Xayabouri and other proposed Mekong mainstream dam. DVN will submit a concept note to MWD.

JB, RM, and NDT met with Florian Moder of the WISDOM project (<http://www.wisdom.caf.dlr.de/>), which is building a GIS-based water and land use information system for the Mekong Delta, to discuss a workshop in Phu Quoc on April 28-29 on remote sensing and land use mapping in the delta. Several NWG members may be interested in participating in this workshop.

IUCN will circulate to NWG members for review a TOR for TJC to serve a senior advisor to the NWG.