



Fast Facts on the Mekong River Commission

Who we are

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) is an inter-governmental body working to facilitate cooperation on the sustainable development and management of the Mekong River Basin. Its members are Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

The MRC acts as a platform for water diplomacy and regional cooperation through which the Member Countries share the benefits of common water resources and address transboundary challenges in the basin, despite diverging national interests. The commission also serves as a knowledge hub that promotes evidence-based policy making. It provides technical assistance and develops practical tools to help its Member Countries make informed decisions.

The MRC was created when Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam signed the [Agreement on Cooperation for Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin](#), known as the Mekong Agreement, on 5 April 1995. The Member Countries agreed to cooperate on areas such as fisheries, flood control, irrigation, hydropower, and navigation. China and Myanmar, through which the upper reaches of the Mekong River flows, have been Dialogue Partners of the MRC since 1996.

Our organisation and governance

The [MRC](#) facilitates dialogue and negotiation on water resources management among governments, the private sector, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders. It plays an active role as a neutral facilitator seeking to strike a balance between national and basin-wide interests, between the countries, and between development needs and environmental sustainability.

The MRC Secretariat Office is hosted in Vientiane, Lao PDR, while Phnom Penh is home to its Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre. The secretariat, responsible for the commission's daily operations, has more than 60 professional and support staff. It reports to the MRC Joint Committee, the main management body of the MRC.

The MRC Joint Committee sets direction and priorities in collaboration with the Member Countries' National Mekong Committees and through consultation with the MRC's Development Partners and stakeholders. The MRC Council is the highest decision-making body in the MRC. It makes decisions on all policy-related matters concerning implementation, including organisational policies, basin-wide strategies and plans, strategic cooperation partnerships, and resolution of differences.

The MRC is funded by its Member Countries and Development Partners, including currently Australia, Belgium, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and the World Bank. The estimated budget for the strategic plan period from 2016 to 2020 is US\$65 million, which represents a 35% decrease in budget compared to the previous period. This reflects the MRC's on-going decentralisation

process, which is expected to make it fully self-sustained through funding from the Member Countries by 2030.

Our work

The Mekong Agreement provides the foundation for the MRC to support [basin-wide planning processes](#), based on principles of [integrated water resources management](#). The commission looks across all sectors to meet multiple objectives, including [sustaining fisheries](#), fostering [sustainable hydropower](#), identifying opportunities for irrigated [agriculture](#), maintaining the freedom of [navigation](#), improving [flood and drought](#) management, and preserving important [ecosystems](#). Its goal is to promote and coordinate sustainable development and management of water and related resources of the Mekong River Basin for the countries' mutual benefit and the people's well-being.

Our recent achievements

- The preparation and approval of the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy (BDS) 2016-2020, the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 to implement the BDS by the MRC, and the National Indicative Plans 2016-2020, including the agreement to cooperate on five Joint Projects to implement the BDS by the Member Countries are notable successes.
- Major reforms have taken place since 2016 with a new MRC Secretariat structure focusing on core functions (moving away from programmes- and projects-based approach), a basket fund mechanism whose spending priority depends on MRC, a fully riparian staffing and riparian CEO.
- Member countries agreed to a new contribution formula with equal sharing by 2030, a major sign of commitment by the MRC member countries to continually increase contribution and make the Organisation self-sustained in the future.
- For the current Strategic Plan period, over 90% of funding is secured from Member Countries and development partners.
- In recent years, the MRC has significantly strengthened its partnership, engagement, communication and outreach efforts. For example, in 2017 the MRC hosted six regional stakeholder forums, all of which aimed to foster open and constructive dialogue on pressing issues affecting the Mekong River Basin and the MRC's role in addressing these. The MRC has also increased its engagement with the press and use of social media to improve access to information and knowledge for the wide public. The MRC has signed and concluded various agreements with partners around the world.
- In 2017, the MRC completed a six-year study on the Sustainable Management and Development of the Mekong River, known as the [Council Study](#). The impacts, risks, and benefits of development projects in six sectors, including mainstream hydropower projects, have raised critical discussion, awareness, and ongoing activities in addressing the issues in MRC work and national planning and implementation.
- During its lifetime, the MRC has supported its Member Countries to develop five sets of water utilisation procedures: In 2001, the MRC Council adopted the first set, which were for [exchanging and sharing data and information](#) between the four countries. This

agreement was fundamental to MRC operations, enabling it to develop a knowledge base for integrated water resource management. Since then, the MRC Council has agreed to four other sets of procedures: Two sets of rules for [monitoring water use](#) as well as [notifying and consulting](#) with other members about uses of Mekong waters, one on [maintaining flows](#) along the Mekong mainstream, and one on [water quality standards](#).

- In 2017, the MRC facilitated an agreement by the member countries at the end of the six-month prior consultation process for Pak Beng hydropower project. The MRC's work in previous prior consultation process led to various improvements in project designs to address critical transboundary issues. Recently MRC member countries agreed to set up joint environment monitoring of mainstream dams.
- The MRC recently finalised the [Guidelines for Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment](#). The guidelines, which are set for official approval in March 2018, are intended to support increased transboundary environmental cooperation in the Lower Mekong Basin.
- In efforts to address significant climate change impacts, the MRC facilitated the development of the [Mekong Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan on Climate Change](#). It was approved by the Member Countries in 2017.
- The basin-wide Fisheries Management and Development Strategy 2018-2022, aiming to improve coordination on fisheries management, was approved by the MRC Council in 2017.
- The MRC has stepped up collaboration with China, including by co-organising the 3rd MRC-China Joint Technical Symposium and launching, together with the Lancang Mekong Water Resources Cooperation Center, the [Joint Research](#) on Hydrological Impacts of the Lancang Hydropower Cascade on Downstream Extreme Events in 2017. In 2016, the MRC collaborated with China on a [joint evaluation](#) of water supplement from dams on the Lancang (Upper Mekong) River in response to severe drought in the lower parts of the basin.
- The MRC recently completed the development of the [Guidelines](#) for Hydropower Environmental Impact Mitigation and Risk Management in the Lower Mekong Mainstream and Tributaries to provide guidance and best practices for mitigating adverse impacts of hydropower dams in the Lower Mekong Basin.

Our priorities

During the [current strategic planning](#) period, from 2016 to 2020, the MRC's priorities are focused on continuing its important work to foster sustainable development of water and related resources across the Mekong River Basin. Selected focus areas are highlighted below.

1. Increasing the awareness and use of the evidence available to policy makers and project planners. For example, the MRC's [Data Sharing and Information System](#) comprises several websites and databases that facilitate the exchange of information relevant to integrated water resources management. In 2017, interactive maps for climate change, water quality, and flood forecasting were published online for any user to use for analysis or decision

making. The key findings from the Council Study and others will continue to be promoted for discussion at policy and technical levels and integrated into MRC work.

2. Supporting national sector planning agencies to improve environmental management and water resources development, optimising plans and activities for basin-wide benefit sharing. For example, the Joint Projects from the NIPs will step up implementation. MRC's basin-wide strategies and plans such as the Master Plan for Waterborne Transport, the MASAP, and the BFMS will continue to be pushed. The BFMS is a testament to a level of consensus across the basin and represents ownership of fisheries management at the national level. It also brings together data from the entire basin for the first time in support of more effective decision making for the sustainable management of fisheries.
3. Sharing guidelines on the development and management of water and related projects and resources with national planning and implementing agencies for their uptake. For example, the [hydropower impact mitigation and risk management guidelines](#) would support hydropower developers during project preparation and foster long-term sustainability in the Mekong Basin.
4. Ensuring effective and coherent implementation of MRC procedures by Member Countries. This includes the Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement ([PNPCA](#)) process, which allows the MRC Member Countries to discuss and evaluate benefits and risks of any proposed water-use project that may have significant impacts on the Mekong River mainstream.
5. Facilitating effective dialogue and cooperation between Member Countries and strategic engagement with regional partners and stakeholders on transboundary water management. In 2017, the MRC convened regional stakeholder forums on various issues, a practice that will be continued in coming years.
6. Strengthening basin-wide monitoring, forecasting, impact assessment, and dissemination of results to support better decision making by Member Countries. This includes improving centralized and decentralized monitoring systems, flood and drought forecasting, management and access of data and information, and state of basin reporting.
7. Continuing the reform process and striving towards being a more efficient, effective, and sustainable organisation, in line with the reform plans.

Our road to 2030

The MRC's decentralisation process has been under way since the [1st MRC Summit](#) in 2010.

The process, which is still on-going, aims to fulfil three goals:

- Making the MRC core work fully financed by its Member Countries by 2030;
- Decentralising some core functions to the Member Countries; and
- Shifting the MRC Secretariat to a leaner organisation focused only on functions relevant to its mission.

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