

Description of thematic session objectives and contents

Thematic session 1: Methodology and Tools for Protection of the Mekong Environment.

Due to the pressures of population and economic development in the lower Mekong River Basin the Mekong environment is being degraded in parts of the river, sometimes permanently. This has been recognized and the riparian countries began placing restraints on activities that caused environmental degradation. A range of methodologies and tools has been created and applied for protection and adapting to the various environmental issues. Still there is not full agreement on the extent of the environmental impact of human activity and protection measures are occasionally criticized. In the Mekong River context this is further complicated by the potential of transboundary pollution. Protection of the Mekong environment is necessary for which experiences and approaches on various methodologies and tools for protection of the transboundary water environment are required to address the Mekong environment issues including:

- River Environment Monitoring (Water quality, Biology);
- Water pollution prevention technology and water resource protection measures.
- Indicators to evaluate the health of the river life
- River wetland and biodiversity protection
- Related laws, regulations, and management systems applied for protection of the water environment.

Thematic session 2: Environmental knowledge sharing for the Mekong River

Environmental changes including climate change have become major threats to the Mekong countries. Impacts of these threats have already been felt in parts of the Lower Mekong Basin. Resilience of the vulnerable communities is highly dependent on the accessibility to information on the changes as well as on options for alternative livelihood strategies. However, knowledge sharing is limited for the communities as well as concerned institutions and organizations and the available information may not be in a form that is useful and meaningful for the stakeholders. With the aim to improve public participation in decision-making regarding possible impacts, preparedness, resilience, and adaptation in the Lower Mekong Basin this session will focus on the issues of:

- Access to environmental information (including knowledge and information sharing),
- Targeting information and communication approaching concerned communities and institutions,
- Securing access to up to date information
- Practical and innovative approaches to environmental knowledge sharing.

Thematic Session 3: Bridging environmental policy, decision makers and stakeholders on Mekong environmental protection and conservation plans of action

Given the high demand for use of the Mekong water and its related resources supporting socio-economic development in the Lower Mekong Basin countries, one of the big challenges will be meeting the needs of the Member Countries in the years to come while at the same time protecting the environment and water resources of the Mekong River and its tributaries. One of the related challenges is how to ensure that the environmental policy, decision makers and stakeholders (implementers, NGOs, affected people) are interconnected effectively for protection, conservation and management of environmental resources in the region.

It is an opportune moment for stakeholders of the Mekong region to come together and discuss the progress made and challenges ahead of bridging environmental policy, decision makers, investors, NGOs and affected people on Mekong environmental protection, conservation and management. This session will explore practical experiences and lessons learned on how Mekong water related environment has been and will be managed, protected and conserved through these linkages for the well-being of the people in the LMB. It includes aspects such as:

- Environmental management experiences for the Mekong River Basin
- Impact assessment of development projects in the Mekong River Basin- lessons learned
- Strategic Environmental Assessment and Transboundary environmental impact assessment
- Public participation to bridge the gap between environmental policy making and stakeholders.

Thematic Session 4: Preparedness and Adaptive Capacity to the Mekong Environmental Changes and Climate Risks

With rich natural resources endowment, the Mekong River Basin continues to experience robust economic development supporting livelihoods and the economy for over 60 million people of the Lower Mekong Basin Member Countries. But this growth may reach a point when the Basin's natural resources and environment can not sustain its productivity and the environmental health would be adversely affected. In addition, global warming and climate change are predicted to exert added pressure on the natural resources and economic growth in the Basin.

The combined impacts of environmental degradation and climate change will be felt by all sectors and at different strata of society, though the scale of vulnerability may vary from country to country depending on geographical setting and adaptation capacity. The Mekong Basin people must be prepared to address those issues by building knowledge and capacity to reduce their vulnerability, to increase their resiliency and build adaptation capacity to response to those changes. The objective of this session is to improve our understanding on the environmental changes caused by socio-economic development in the Mekong River Basin, the potential effects of global warming as an added pressure on sustainable development and to explore

ways for the Mekong Basin people to adapt and reduce their vulnerability to these combined changes. It will cover aspects such as:

- Future developments and trends of environment and climate change in the Mekong River Basin
- Scientific foundation facilitating integration of development and climate change adaptation planning
- Tools and methodologies for vulnerability assessment and adaptation planning at local and basin wide scale
- Preparedness and adaptation to climate change and other environmental risks

Thematic session 5: Partnership and collaboration for a sustainable Mekong environment

Many international organisations, development partners and NGOs are working in the Mekong Region to support the Mekong Countries on sustainable development of their economies considering environmental protection, conservation and lately also related to climate change issues. Information and experience sharing, appropriate collaboration, coordination and partnership are necessary to ensure that these efforts are effective and avoid repetition and overlap of activities. In this context, the role of regional and inter-government organisations such as MRC is very important serving as mediator, moderator or regional knowledge hub, to convene regional forums for environmental protection as well as climate change adaptation to gather experts working on these important fields to provide inputs to the Mekong Country Governments.

With this vision, the objective of this thematic session is to explore the opportunities of effective partnership and collaboration of different regional, international and national partners for protecting, improving environment and adapting to current and future climate risks in the Mekong region. It will provide an arena for different partners and organisations to share their information, knowledge, experiences, best (or bad) practices and lessons learned. The following topics will be covered:

- Partnerships and other means of regional collaboration and sharing of experiences on environmental protection and climate change adaptation
- Innovative approaches to reach beyond regional coordination and ensure added value of regional collaboration
- Regional collaboration on capacity building, awareness raising and communication