



Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme

Historic End to the Fishing of Mekong Giant Catfish in Thailand

April 2006, Chiang Khong, Thailand

An agreement has been signed in Thailand to cease fishing of the Mekong Giant Catfish, *Pangasianodon gigas*, from this year onwards.

The agreement was made at a milestone meeting in Chiang Khong on 29 March 2006, and signed by the Department of Fisheries, the Senator of Chiang Rai, the Mekong Giant Catfish Club (MGC Club), Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP)*, Chiang Khong Head of District and Wildlife Fund Thailand.

The meeting, organised and facilitated by the MWBP, provided a platform to continue dialogue and develop possible solutions on Giant Catfish issues and wider aquatic biodiversity conservation issues in Chiang Khong.

Commitment to abide by the decision was provided by the MGC Club, if members were compensated on their investment for nets. In response to this request, conservation organisations and government departments committed to raise funds for compensation.

This agreement and the willingness of the people to commit to stop hunting giant catfish is indeed a big achievement, not only for Thailand but all the people within the Mekong basin.



Photo: Zeb Hogan/ MWBP

The Mekong Giant Catfish is a Mekong endemic and candidate for the world's largest freshwater fish. In 2003 it was listed as Critically Endangered by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). Fishing is the most easily identifiable threat to *P. gigas*. It is very rare and the species can no longer support any fishing pressure. Large scale water infrastructure development, navigation improvement projects, and habitat destruction also threaten the giant catfish. The MWBP identified the fish as a flagship species to address wider aquatic biodiversity conservation issues in the Mekong River, and is now a partner in the Mekong

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Giant Catfish Conservation Group contributing to the development of a conservation strategy for the giant catfish.

This decision is of global significance as the people of Chiang Khong made a commitment despite a history of annual fishing for the giant catfish. Chiang Khong is the only place in the world where there has been intentional fishing for this Critically Endangered species during their annual upstream migrations for spawning.

Another outcome of the successful meeting was the agreement of community members and the MGC Club to designate a fish conservation zone along the Mekong River adjacent to Had Krai village. This deep pool is known to be an important area for dry season fish refuge and possible spawning area of selected fish species. There will be no fishing permitted in this area. The official declaration of this fish conservation zone was made during the Giant Catfish Festival in Chiang Khong on 17-19 April 2006.

*The Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) is a joint programme of the four riparian governments of the Lower Mekong Basin – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam – managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC), in collaboration with other key stakeholders. With funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and other donors, the programme addresses the most critical issues for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the Mekong wetlands.