



Mekong River Commission facing crisis of legitimacy

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) is facing a crisis of legitimacy, noted panellists at a press conference at the FCCT this morning. The MRC, established in 1995 with the signing of the Mekong Agreement, was meant to signal a new commitment to sustainable development, environmental protection and management of the river for a wide range of users. Twelve years on, however, the MRC has failed to uphold the Mekong Agreement.

Premrudee Daoroung, Director of TERRA said, “the MRC has failed to facilitate an open discussion to ensure a more equitable and sustainable use of the Mekong River”.

Pianporn Deetes from Living Rivers Siam (SEARIN) pointed out that people who have least power to influence decisions – those who rely on the Mekong’s resources for their subsistence - are usually also those who suffer most from the negative impacts of development projects. “When we visit dam affected areas, we find the public have not been informed about the dams or been allowed to participate meaningfully [in any decision making processes],” she said.

“The MRC system needs to be reformed,” said Associate Professor Surichai Wun’gaeo, Director of Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute. “It needs to be more responsive to civil society voices – not just the riparian governments.”

Questions over the purpose and role of the MRC are mounting with the recent revival of plans to build up to six hydropower dams on the lower Mekong mainstream. The dams pose a significant threat to the world’s most productive fisheries that sustain the livelihoods of millions of people.

Despite the significant trans-boundary implications of the dams, the MRC has to date remained silent.

“The MRC cannot cope with the complexity of the region,” affirmed Surichai. “It should prove its usefulness in the eyes of the public and civil society in the region, not only its usefulness for business or certain other interests”.

A letter addressed to the MRC and donors was sent yesterday, signed by 201 organisations and individuals. It states that “if the MRC does not act now to uphold the 1995 Agreement and defend the ecological integrity of the Mekong, the institution is a river authority in name only and does not deserve the tens of millions of dollars worth of grants and technical assistance that it receives from international donor agencies annually”.

The civil society letter was sent to coincide with the MRC's annual governance meetings – (Dialogue Meeting, Donor Consultative Group Meeting, and MRC Council Meeting) - which will be taking place at the Apsara Hotel in Siem Reap, Cambodia on 14-17 November 2007.

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