



(Translated from Thai language letter)

18 November 2013

Re: Requesting the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, as the representative of Thai government to Mekong River Commission Council, to take an opposing stand against Lao PDR's Don Sahong Dam Project and investigate all dam projects on the mainstream Mekong

To: H.E. Mr. Vichet Kasemthongsri, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment

Attachment: 1. Research on Impacts of Hydropower Dam and Climate Change on Mekong Communities
2. A copy of 2011 letter from international academics

Dear Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned group of civil societies, peoples' network, communities along the mainstream and tributaries of Mekong from 8 provinces of Thailand, and Mekong and ASEAN environmental organizations, are requesting the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, as the Thai National Mekong Committee for the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Council, to clarify Thai government's position on the issue and status of Don Sahong Dam Project to the Thai public and civil societies as well as to do whatever is needed to **immediately stop** any further action by Lao PDR.

For the past two decades, large-scale hydropower dams on the mainstream and tributaries of Mekong have become one of the most significant threats to the people in this region. It has also become a great threat to the world. Dams are the destroyer of biodiversity and ecology and food sources. Dam project proposals, from upstream area in China to lower area in Lao PDR—who claims itself to be "Asia's battery"—are the main reasons that lead to the destitute of our water resource and fishery. Additionally, this exacerbates international conflicts in the region.

We believe Thai government understands the problems caused by mainstream 6 Chinese dams on communities in northern and northeastern part of Thailand, along with conflicts caused by the 1,285-megawatt Xayaburi Dam, the first dam on the lower mainstream Mekong which was proposed by Lao PDR in 2010. Thailand's giant construction company, Ch Karnchang, was awarded the concession as the project developer. Nonetheless, Xayaburi Dam's proposal and construction process remain inconclusive and uncertain. Regardless of the persevering protesting voice from civil societies and the people of this region, Lao PDR continues to push forward this dam project. Once Xayaburi Dam is completed, it will be the most painful lesson for Mekong River and all countries who depend on this mother river. For Xayaburi Dam, Thailand, as the buyer of the generating electricity, will become the defendant that needs to answer questions posed by all parties in the region and around the world.

Impacts created by dams on the Mekong River, especially impacts on this region's economy, are studied and collected by the Thailand's northeastern peoples' network as attached to this letter.

We are sending this open letter to you to call the Ministry of National Resources and Environment, as Thailand's representative and Thai National Mekong Committee, to review status of and opinions on large dams in the Mekong region, specifically on the grievous affliction of our citizens. We urge you to investigate and oppose Lao PDR's second large-scale dam on the Mekong, Don Sahong Dam Project, in haste.

It is time for Thai government to learn from its mistakes on dam projects in the Mekong. It is time to evaluate and contemplate on its position. It is time for Thai government to finally act for the benefit of its people.

The following are issues that need to be investigated and the reasons why Thailand must oppose Lao PDR's second dam on the mainstream Mekong, the Don Sahong Dam Project in Siphandone (also known as Khone Falls) in southern Laos, which was proposed to start its construction by this November:



1. **Immeasurable negative impacts for some tiny benefits** – The proposed Don Sahong Dam will have a capacity of 260 megawatts, or a size of two Thailand's Pak Mun Dam. Its run-of-river system will be the same as Pak Mun Dam which means that the dam will act as a pondage and require the river to be unearthed deeper. Electricity will be generated by flowing water. Yet, only 1 in 3 of its capacity can generate electricity—the same result as we experienced at Pak Mun Dam. It should be noted that Don Sahong Dam was proposed at the most important river channel of Siphandone where fish migrate year-round to lay eggs and breed. Siphandone is the most crucial space for the reproduction of Mekong fish. Hou Sahong, a river channel in Siphandone, opens this space for fish to migrate upstream from Tonle Sap in Cambodia—another important focal point for Mekong fish consisting three tributaries namely Sekong, Sesan, and Srepok—and the Mekong Delta. If Hou Sahong is blocked by this dam, Laos and its constructor from Malaysia will be the only two entities who benefit from this. Other Mekong countries will face calamity, immediately. The relationship between the unperceivable harmonious and inseparable system of Mekong mainstream and its watersheds and fisheries in the lower Mekong will be greatly harmed by the dam. Thai people from various communities will not be able to avoid this immense impact.

Impacts on Mekong fisheries have been studied and reported by academics from various nations. When Lao PDR proposed Don Sahong Dam Project for the first time in 2011, academics from around the world immediately sent letters to oppose the project.

2. **This is a distortive process and Lao PRD violates the 1995 Mekong Agreement** – Lao PRD claimed that Don Sahong Dam Project is located on the tributaries, not on the mainstream. This obfuscates the truth. In fact, Don Sahong is located on Mekong's *distributaries*, where the mainstream river branches out into smaller rivers by numerous islands in Siphandone. These distributaries later meet again in the lower part of Siphandone before the river enters Cambodia. In addition, Don Sahong Dam was registered as one of the 12 mainstream dams proposed earlier and all MRC country members were informed of this. By engaging the 'prior notification' process instead of the 'prior consultation' reveals Lao PDR's action to distort information in order to quicken the construction process. This proves to all country members that each country member needs to **show its stand and oppose this project immediately**, especially when Lao PDR notified earlier in September that it would start constructing the dam this month (November 2013).

All these times, Thai people and civil societies have already witnessed the failures of MRC Council and the 1995 Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin among Thailand, Lao, Cambodia, and Vietnam. None of these was able to resolve any conflict on the Mekong or among the people in this region. One of the aspects of this failure is the incessant claim of MRC Secretariat saying that it solely works according to the proposal presented by the government of country members; it cannot act upon the requests of the Mekong Region citizens.

We urge the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, as a representative in MRC, to clarify Thai government's position on Don Sahong Dam Project to the people and civil societies of Thailand and **immediately stop Lao PDR** from taking any further action on this project. With its power as a body of MRC and other authoritative powers it already possesses, it is necessary to show the direction of how this problem will be resolved and which regional-level mechanism this government will pursue as a country member.

Moreover, we request the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to submit a concrete plan to seek further information and resolve problems caused by the increasing number of dam projects in the Mekong region. This plan must include public involvement.

We are sending this letter to Thailand government to provide information relating to aforementioned requests. We hope to see Your Excellency's response and answers as requested for the benefit of Thai people and the citizens of Mekong Region.

Yours respectfully, the undersigned:

(Being signed by 103 organizations as of 15 November 2013)