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Australia's interest and plans for assisting the people of the **Mekong River Basin**

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Introduction



Australia's long interest and involvement in the Mekong Subregion

- > Mekong Committee (1957-1975)
- > Interim Mekong Committee (1978-1995)
- > 1995 Agreement that established today's Mekong River Commission (MRC)



Key development challenges

Agriculture

- > Nearly 75 percent of population is employed in agriculture, fisheries and forestry



Fisheries

- > One of the world's most diverse and prolific natural fisheries, engaging about 40 million people





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Key development challenges *cont'd*



River transport ...

- > ... provides an efficient means for the people to access different areas, move goods and establish links with regional and global markets



Key development challenges *cont'd*

Renewable energy and the environment

- > Lower Basin has about 30 000 MW hydropower potential. Only a small part is developed, but demand is growing rapidly

Floods

- > Annually, floods cause loss of life and property in the four riparian countries. Climate Change threatens increased uncertainty for future river flows.



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4 key themes of the White Paper

Foundation for Australia's Greater Mekong
Subregion development assistance
strategy 2007-11

- > Accelerating economic growth
- > Fostering functioning and effective states
- > Investing in people
- > Promoting regional stability and cooperation.



Lessons learnt – past engagement

- > Mekong Basin has abundant water resources but evidence mounting that it is at risk
- > National Mekong Committees (NMCs) have pivotal roles but influence on line ministries and government vary
- > Establishing a data base is essential to building capacity of Mekong River Commission (MRC). Data management and analysis requires ongoing resources
- > Closer cooperation with China is important to the future role of the MRC.



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Australia's Mekong ...

... water resources strategy 2007-11

> Aim:

To promote sub-regional cooperation to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development through equitable and efficient use and management of the water resources of the Mekong River and its tributaries.





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Australia's Mekong ...

... water resources strategy 2007-11

> **Strategy** will be pursued through three objectives:

1. Help strengthen MRC and NMCs to improve IWRM in the Mekong Basin
2. Reliable and available scientific data
3. Support Basin development planning



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Objective one

Help strengthen MRC and NMCs to improve IWRM in the Mekong Basin

- > IWRM approach takes into account social, economic, agricultural and industrial demands and use of the river's waters
- > Focus on assisting the Integrated Capacity Building Program
- > Strengthen both NMCs and MRC Secretariat



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Objective one *cont'd*

Help strengthen MRC and NMCs to improve IWRM in the Mekong Basin

- > Enhance cooperation between China and the MRC - possible support to upgrade navigation systems in the Upper Mekong
- > Wider regional cooperation through World Bank, ADB and the Mekong Water Resource Partnership (MWARP).



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Objective two

Reliable and available scientific data

- > Maintain 18 hydrological stations and integrate into new MRC hydrological cycle observing system (HYCOS)
- > Fund Senior Technical Program Coordinator for MRC



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Objective two *cont'd*

Reliable and available scientific data

- > Renew the Strategic Liaison Partnership between the MRC and the Murray Darling Basin Commission
- > Collaboration between Australian research institutions ACIAR, CSIRO, Universities.



Objective three

Support basin development planning

- > Rapid growth in energy demand - increasing pressure to develop hydropower capacity
- > Need for a strategic analysis of hydropower options to identify options with the least potential to cause environmental damage



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Objective three *cont'd*

Support basin development planning

- > Impact of climate change in extreme weather events and shifts in rainfall volume and patterns has implications for agriculture, growth and sustainability
- > MRC and CSIRO Land and Water Division.



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Conclusions



- > High priority for Australian aid program
- > Commitment to strengthen links with development partners, Mekong Basin countries and other development stakeholders.



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thankyou

