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## Chinese dams held back Mekong waters during drought, study finds

Kay Johnson

BANGKOK (Reuters) - China's Mekong River dams held back large amounts of water during a damaging drought in downstream countries last year despite China having higher-than-average water levels upstream, a U.S. research company said in a study.



FILE PHOTO: [A general view of the future site of the Luang Prabang dam is seen on the Mekong River outskirts of Luang Prabang province, Laos, February 5, 2020.](#)

REUTERS/Panu Wongcha-um/File Photo

China's government disputed the findings, saying there was low rainfall during last year's monsoon season on its portion of the 4,350-km (2,700-mile) river.

The findings by Eyes on Earth Inc., a research and consulting company specialising in water, published in a U.S.-government funded study, could complicate tricky discussions between China and other Mekong countries on how to manage the river that supports 60 million people as it flows past Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and through Cambodia and Vietnam.

Last year's drought, which saw the Lower Mekong at its lowest levels in more than 50 years, devastated farmers and fishermen and saw the massive river recede to expose sandbanks along some stretches and at others turned from its usual murky brown to bright blue [here](#) because waters were so shallow and lacking in sediment.

“If the Chinese are stating that they were not contributing to the drought, the data does not support that position,” said Alan Basist, a meteorologist and president of Eyes on Earth, which conducted the study with funding from the U.S. State Department's Lower Mekong Initiative.