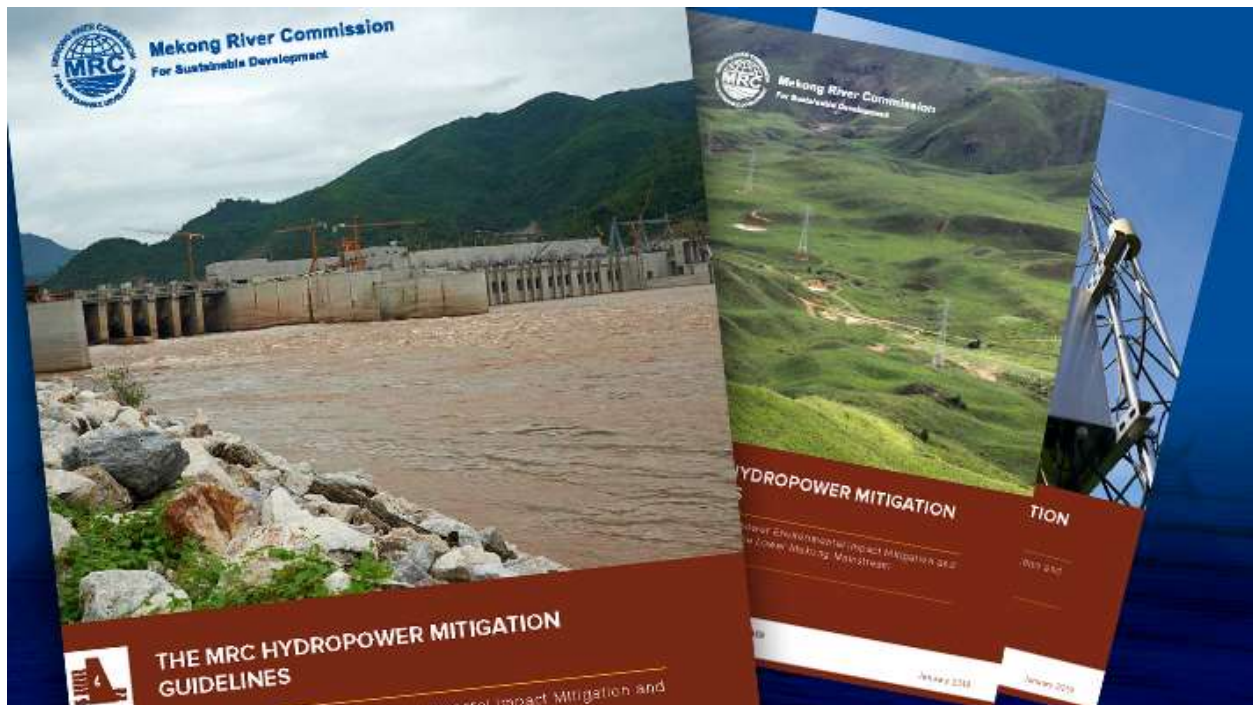


New guidelines for Mekong hydropower released to help optimise benefits, reduce risks



Vientiane, Lao PDR, 29 Sep 2020

Vientiane, Lao PDR, 28 September 2020 – Hydropower developers, their consultants and relevant government agencies can now take stock of new technical guidelines to help optimise benefits and mitigate social and environmental impacts from hydropower projects throughout their lifecycle, says the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Secretariat.

Released today, the MRC's Hydropower Mitigation [Guidelines](#), which include three technical volumes of 738 pages (vol 1 & 2), address a range of known risks during hydropower development through an assessment of five major themes. They include river hydrology and downstream flows, geomorphology and sediments, water quality, fisheries and aquatic ecology and biodiversity, natural resources, and ecosystem services.

“The aim of the Guidelines is to provide risk management and mitigation guidance for the design and operation of hydropower facilities to support whole-of-basin planning and management as well as immediate project development requirements,” said Dr An Pich Hatda, MRC Secretariat Chief Executive Officer.

According to the Guidelines, during the planning, feasibility study and design process hydropower developers can take various steps to optimise benefits and avoid adverse impacts. They include, for instance, selecting the most appropriate project locations, adopting alternative project scales such as lower dams, and using alternative energy sources.

During the construction and operation phases where certain impacts cannot be reduced, developers have various forms of mitigation options to consider. These include options to offset adverse impacts, for example, by providing alternative fish spawning habitats or by leaving certain river reaches free of development to allow for fish migration.



Workers are standing on a dam in Lao PDR that is under construction.

Dr Hatda added that the new Guidelines are an important complement to the MRC's Preliminary Design Guidance (PDG) – a specific set of requirements to guide project design that developers use for project preparation and that the MRC refers to when reviewing the technical compliance of proposed mainstream dams during a six-month prior consultation process.

While the new Guidelines document specific mitigation approaches to address the various risks, the CEO said that region-wide cooperation on hydropower planning and mitigation efforts is vital to prevent large-scale impacts.

“Basin-scale mitigation requires integrated systems planning at the basin level as well as ongoing cooperation between Member Countries and Dialogue Partners. This is as important as the coordinated operation of cascade dams and benefit-sharing options,” he said.

Over the last decade, intensive hydropower development has brought substantial economic benefits to the Mekong countries. That being said, the gains have resulted in trade-offs with other key sectors across economic, environmental and social spheres.

Developed under the MRC's former Initiative for Sustainable Hydropower, the Guidelines went through numerous rounds of national and regional consultations with hydropower developers, interested stakeholders and MRC Member Countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, Viet Nam.

Read the news in [Khmer](#), [Lao](#) or [Vietnamese](#).

Note to editors:

The Mekong River Commission is an intergovernmental organization established in 1995 for regional dialogue and cooperation in the lower Mekong river basin. Based on the Mekong Agreement between

Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam, the Commission serves as a regional platform for water diplomacy as well as a knowledge hub of water resources management for the sustainable development of the region.

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