

Comment matrix from Stakeholder Forum on the Preparation of BDS 2021-2030 on 05 November 2019, Vientiane, Lao PDR

No.	Questions and Comments	Responses/ Consideration in the BDS
	Question from morning session	
1	For proactive approach to basin planning, what is MRC plan to engage extra powerful stakeholders, like other regional actors and influencing donors such as LMC, ASEAN, GMS, Japan, US, Korea, etc?	MRC is well prepared to implement the technical activities related to the proposed proactive regional basin planning approach. For the political/foreign relations process, the MRC will engage with its cooperation partners through its existing relationships and through enhanced coordination activities outlined in the BDS/SP Results Chain
2	Does MRC have any thoughts about other energy production sources that would eliminate the need for so many dams along the Mekong?	Until now, MRC has assessed the impacts of the dams that the countries are planning. Under the proposed proactive regional planning approach, MRC will also assess alternative basin-wide development scenarios that will include other projects related to water resources than the countries are planning. This could include complementary floating solar or other renewable and non-renewable sources
3	The SOBR has missing data for trade-off consideration, what strategy is it to collect data and fill the white dot? How can DAGAP help to fill the data limitation?	See also the answer on the previous question. Trade-off considerations have been hampered since 2010 because regional planning has been limited to assessing the acceptability of the transboundary impacts of existing national plans. No alternative projects or plans have been put on the table for trade-off discussions. The SOBR is a report on the status of conditions and trends. It is not an assessment of alternative scenarios and tradeoffs. Implementing the DAGAP will help ensure there is sufficient data to report in the next SOBR on all aspects of the MB-IF
4	Drought occurs more and more frequently recently, does MRC plan to work further on this?	This is a focal area of the BDS 2021-2030. Flood and drought management figures prominently as part of the sustainable development opportunities (mitigation of floods and droughts

		requires also infrastructure) and in the results-chain where it is one of the 5 strategic priorities. The MRC Council recently approved a Drought Management Strategy and the changing of the name of the MRC's operation arm to the Mekong Flood and Drought Management Centre further highlights the increasing importance of drought issues
5	What are strategy priorities of the BDS? What success looks like? What are achievement indicators?	The 5 defined strategic priorities and 12 outcomes of the BDS are directed towards achievement of relevant SDGs. The performance indicators are taken from the Mekong Basin Indicator Framework, which is also used for the periodic updating the State-of-the Basin Report. Success is improvement of the Mekong State of the Basin. The first full draft of the BDS in early 2020 will include the proposed Strategic Priorities, Outcomes and Indicators for the next BDS period
6	How to cope with salinity intrusion and erosion in the Mekong delta?	The BDS promotes investment projects that could increase dry season flows, which has the potential to reduce salinity. The proposed assessment of alternative basin-wide development scenarios will explore the most acceptable measures for increasing dry season flows and transporting more sediments towards the delta. Mitigating erosion in the delta also requires actions ranging from socio-economic/ spatial planning to the reduction of sand mining. Due to the range of threats involved, both of these issues also require national planning and action to resolve
7	How can MRC address the urgency of environmental impacts happening in the Mekong river?	Drawing on the SOBR 2018, the BDS identifies the urgent environmental issues facing the Mekong River and outlines a Strategic Priority to address the most pressing ones, in particular in relation to sediment, fish and environmental assets such as wetlands. Three Outcomes and several Outputs are proposed to help guide the work of all actors to cooperate in addressing these issues. A response to environmental issues is also prevalent throughout the BDS including

		in the consideration of more sustainable development pathways and in flood and drought management.
8	How can MRC relate local best practices to trends and outlooks, to bring local communities and civil society into planning and implementation, for better outcomes and results?	The draft BDS 2021-2030 is based on the outcomes of stakeholder engagement events in support of several MRC activities during the last few years (State-of-the Basin report, PNPCA consultations, regional sector strategies, and the BDS preparation. Implementation of the BDS by the national agencies and others will provide further opportunities for engagement with local communities and civil society.
9	Hydropower sector seems contribute largely to employment and increment of incomes in the Mekong region. Is it possible to assess the development scenarios from other sectors to have a more comprehensive picture?	The impacts of the basin countries' national plans in all water related sectors have been assessed in terms of employment, incremental benefits and many other indicators as part of the 'Council Study' (and earlier as part of the basin-wide cumulative assessment of the MRC/BDP Programme.
10	How gender related issues will be considered and viewed in the updated BDS? Gender aggregated data on some sectors?	For the first time, gender has been mainstreamed in all chapters of the BDS 2021-2030. This has been a challenge since gender disaggregated data are still scarce in the Mekong Basin countries. A focus of the strategy will be on addressing the needs and opportunities of people in vulnerable situations by supporting inclusive economic growth and improved water, food and energy security for all
11	How to engage more stakeholders' comments in the process?	MRC engages more stakeholders than most other RBOs and all stakeholder comments are being considered.
12	How can development be inclusive for the people in the basin?	For the first time, the BDS includes a social strategic priority (and related outcomes, outputs and activities) that is directed towards inclusive development, including for the poor, water-related resource users in vulnerable situations. Development opportunities have also been identified that focus on livelihood development and social

		wellbeing, including through joint projects an national projects of basin-wide significance
13	How is social inclusion and gender equity integrated in the new BDS?	See the above answer and the answer on question 10. Social inclusion and gender equity will be reflected throughout the BDS Results Chain, to help align the work of all actors working on these issues
14	What does it mean social dimension? It should have a specific definition and guideline for social dimension.	The draft BDS defines a social strategic priority, 2 social outcomes, and 5 social outputs that are directed towards inclusive development in terms of water, food and energy security; improvement of employment and livelihoods for both men and women; and reduction of poverty and inequality through less direct dependence on natural resources. The narrative of the Basin Vision, which is intended to guide implementation of the whole BDS, also seeks to identify what the countries see as a socially just society by around the year 2040
15	How can MRC make the industrial developments returning back its revenues and social corporate responsibility for further development and improvement of local and transboundary livelihood?	The BDS touches on this issue in the section on funding of BDS implementation. The MRC can explore options for the basin countries to consider, such as the set-up of a 'Mekong Fund'.
	Breakout Group Discussion	
16	The watershed, wetland area is reducing, salinity intrusion and erosion is getting more serious. Mekong delta is sinking. These issues should be addressed thoughtfully in the next Basin Development Strategy.	The BDS 2021-2030 responds to these related basin-wide issues through sustainable development opportunities (including for wetlands, watersheds, joint projects) and the draft outcomes and outputs in the results-chain, including the preparation and implementation of a basin-wide sediment plan. Many of the most pressing issues in the delta also require coordinated national and local action, such as through Vietnam's Decree 120 on the <i>Sustainable and Climate Resilient Development of the Mekong Delta</i> .

17	The issue on sediment management should be in immediate action not to wait until the updated BDS.	Sediment monitoring and the management and analysis of the collected data is being improved. Numerous guidelines and tools have been developed to improve the design and operation of infrastructure that could have an impact on sediment transport and these need to be taken and applied in a systematic way. The preparation of the proposed basin-wide sediment plan will also likely be initiated in 2020 given the urgency of this issue
18	The presented content of the joint research is quite technical for public understanding. The findings and results should be simplified for ease of understanding by the publics.	Agreed. We will prepare easy to understand leaflets and PPTs and publish these
19	There is a need to have a mechanism that applying technology to timely coordinate for information sharing regarding emergency flood and drought situation as early warning support system that accessible by local people.	Yes. This is a focal area of the BDS. The possible mechanisms and technology are known. The main issue might be to agree among all parties on the effective communication protocols and response action plans
20	There should have coordinated effort of cascade dam operations to ensure minimum flow, water quality for sustainability of biodiversity, environment as well as livelihoods and agriculture activities.	Coordination of basin management operation is a focal area of the BDS. The coordination of cascading dams is a national responsibility, but regional guidance and/or coordination guidance is needed to achieve the best outcomes at the basin level, including for sediment transport towards the delta
21	The joint research should include Xayaburi's operation in the future and also to reconsider or define natural flow periods.	The MRC's Joint Environmental Monitoring initiative is evaluating the impacts of mainstream hydropower operations and this will provide guidance to further improvements that could be made. Enhancing regional cooperation, including through data sharing, notification and release protocols for hydropower operations is a key focus of the BDS. Cooperation will be important not only between countries but with infrastructure operators. The capacity of national agencies to oversee these operations is also an area of focus over the next BDS period.

22	To set the baseline for assessment, consumptive and non-consumptive water use should be considered, with an attention to the term change flow regime	Yes, in studies, such as in the Council Study, consumptive and non-consumptive water use have been considered to set the baseline for the assessment of flow regime changes and other impacts of development and climate change. This practice will continue for the proposed assessment of alternative basin-wide development scenarios.
23	The trends and outlook mainly focus on development perspectives, we should also discuss and consider management perspectives.	The trends and outlook section also considers environment and social perspectives. Nevertheless, we have reviewed and updated the trends and outlook section where necessary and appropriate
24	The trends and outlook also should include information on China and Myanmar	Yes, the BDS has been prepared for the entire Mekong. Depending on the availability of data, the trends and outlook section includes information on the China and Myanmar parts of the Mekong Basin.
25	Need to consider how to enhance the cooperation between Mekong and Lancang, the upper and lower basin need to work together.	Agree. The proposed proactive regional planning and the coordination of basin management operations can be implemented only on a basin-wide scale. Therefore, the BDS promotes further cooperation between the MRC and the Lancang Mekong Cooperation – Water Resources Cooperation (LMC-Water), starting with the establishment of a few joint basin expert groups to direct and oversee the planning and coordination work, as well as the enabling improvement of data collection, sharing and information management.
26	It is important that Member Countries take the strategy into their national plans	Yes, national agencies, regional organizations, the private sector and others need to implement the strategy. To facilitate the implementation of development opportunities, the strategy provides conditions, guidance and an advisory service. And to facilitate the uptake of outputs produced by regional organizations such as the MRC, the strategy suggests impact pathways, which illustrate what needs to be done to help ensure the outputs will contribute to the outcomes and in turn to achieving the strategic priorities.

27	Alternatives for energy production should be sought out, i.e. solar, wind, etc., as we are talking about a future vision until 2040. It should not be limited to hydropower and thermal energy.	Yes. The energy generation mix will not be limited to hydropower and thermal. The BDS promotes also other renewable energy sources, including new technology such as floating solar on hydropower reservoirs
28	Analysis of energy efficiency and green building could be included in the BDS.	Energy efficiency and green buildings are beyond the scope of the BDS, which is focused on regional water resources management and development
29	Tributary hydropower development, including international best practices and ICOL standards and WB standards, should be explored and incorporated into the BDS priorities	The BDS section on sustainable development opportunities provides conditions and guidance for all hydropower development that are based on these best practices and standards, including those mentioned. One of the BDS strategic priorities includes the implementation and updating of the sustainable hydropower strategy for the Mekong Basin.
30	Entire activities of MRC under the new BDS should consider the balance of economic, social and environmental perspectives as the main target to SDGs	Yes. All the draft strategic priorities and outcomes of the BDS are directed towards achieving relevant SDGs. The strategic priorities seek a balance between economic development, social justice and environmental integrity, with climate resilience and regional cooperation a cross-cutting focus. All dimensions are equally important to achieving the sustainable development.
31	The BDS should also take into account the reduction of plastic utilization in relation to SDG12 (responsible consumption and production) and SDG14 (life below water)	The BDS should focus on regional water resources management and cooperation. While the MRC and other regional cooperation mechanisms can support monitoring of transboundary issues such as plastic pollution in waterways, addressing these issues is principally a national responsibility through industrial policy and waste management.
32	The BDS should identify greater social inclusion as an opportunity to provide the entry point to identify next steps on social issues and strategic ways to address them	The BDS defines a draft strategic priority, 2 outcomes, and 5 outputs in the social dimension that are directed towards inclusive

		development, including of poor natural resource users in the basin who are vulnerable to impacts from water resources development
33	Language barriers are a huge issue. The materials and key information need to be interpreted into riparian languages for the needs of different community groups, including women and children. The documents should be participatory facilitation with gender dimension	Yes, we will consider this suggestion when we elaborate the BDS results-chain.
34	The BDS could be a strategy that incites member countries to further fund smaller projects as well as to attract regional and national funds	Yes, the BDS sustainable development opportunities as well as the results chain under each of the 5 strategic priorities offers opportunities for smaller investment projects and non-structural and enabling activities
35	Food security, health security and water security are very important for the social dimension. Bridging gaps between urban and rural in terms of water management, food water and energy nexus in the social dimension should be a focus	Yes, this is the aim of the new social strategic priority that is directed towards inclusive development in terms of water, food and energy security; improvement of employment and livelihoods for both men and women; and reduction of poverty and inequality through less direct dependence on natural resources
36	Gender, climate change and data sharing are cross cutting issues and should be in all dimensions. BDS should have a section that clarifies how MRC is going to mainstream gender in the BDS and in the SP	Yes, these are issues that cut across the environmental, social and economic strategic priorities of the BDS. The BDS has a section on gender that explains how gender and vulnerability has been mainstreamed throughout the BDS
37	River-based tourism should be taken into account and well-recognized in the BDS	River-based tourism is a focal area of the navigation strategies and master plans that are being implemented by cooperation arrangements in the basin, including the navigation master plan, the implementation of which is led by the MRC
38	Groundwater resources should be recognized in terms of water knowledge, information gap and the transboundary impacts	The BDS recognizes the role of groundwater for storage and (conjunctive) use. Major groundwater surveys and studies were implemented in the basin in the 1990s (which indicated limited

		transboundary aquifers). These could be reviewed and updated, as necessary
39	Environmental assets protection alone will not work alone, it should be included in the whole process including assessment to define the value	It is understood that effective protection of assets first requires their values to be defined, and preferably the limits of acceptable change to ecological conditions. Defining these limits can help inform assessment of alternative development pathways and the selection of more sustainable options that protect sufficient environmental assets for the basin's ecosystem services to continue to be provided. The draft strategic priority and outcomes in the environment dimension seek to take a more holistic approach than the previous BDS, recognizing the importance of the ecological function of the system and its contribution to ecosystem services.
40	More focus on transboundary protection of mutually agreed environmental assets	The identification of joint projects and projects of basin-wide significance should also include projects that improve transboundary environmental outcomes. The development opportunities section of the draft BDS identifies some opportunities in this regard.