



[MOU/2020/ Science Division/1706]

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

BETWEEN

The UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)

AND

MEKONG RIVER COMMISSION (MRC)

WHEREAS the United Nations Environment Programme (hereinafter referred to as UNEP) is the leading organization within the United Nations system in the field of environment and has as a major area of focus of its global mandate, the conservation, protection, enhancement and support of nature and natural resources, including biological diversity, worldwide;

WHEREAS UNEP through its Science Division has the mandate to keep under review the world environmental situation in order to ensure that emerging environmental problems of wide international significance are prioritized and receive appropriate and adequate consideration by governments, and to promote the contribution of the relevant international scientific and other professional communities to the acquisition, assessment and exchange of environmental knowledge and information. In pursuing this mandate, the Science Division has the responsibility for the early warning of environmental emerging issues, assessment and monitoring, environmental data and information management and sharing. This includes water quality monitoring in freshwater ecosystems, and the production of relevant assessments of water quality worldwide. UNEP's Global Environment Monitoring System for Freshwater (GEMS/Water) Programme, established in 1978 to collect global water quality data for assessments of status and trends in global inland water quality, forms a key part of UN Environment's global mandate in the area of water. The GEMS/Water Programme aims at improving water quality monitoring in freshwater ecosystems. The data and information on water quality provided by participating countries provide a global overview of the condition of water bodies and statements on changes and trends at global, regional and local levels. The Programme maintains a water quality database GEMStat (gemstat.org) and provides capacity development on all aspects of water quality monitoring;

WHEREAS Mekong River Commission (MRC) (hereinafter referred to as "MRC") a inter-governmental river basin organization has the mandate as per the 1995 Mekong Agreement to facilitate regional cooperation in the management of shared resources of the Mekong River Basin to achieve balanced and socially just development in the Mekong River Basin while protecting the environment and maintaining the region's ecological balance. The MRC was established by the riparian country governments of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam. The MRC Secretariat is the technical and administrative arm of the organization with its headquarters in Vientiane, Lao PDR and Regional Flood and Drought Management Centre in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The MRC is also a platform for water diplomacy and regional cooperation in which the governments of four Member Countries share the benefits of common water resources and is a regional knowledge hub on water resources management that helps to inform the decision-making process based on scientific evidence. Under the 1995 Mekong Agreement the Article 3 on Protection of the Environment and Ecological Balance and within the MRC Secretariat, the Environmental Management Division leads the MRC work in environmental planning, assessment, monitoring and reporting, including water quality issues in the Mekong basin. The MRC works with many different partners through Memoranda of Understanding and jointly funded activities including research and

mutual exchanges and learnings. At MRC, Water Quality Monitoring, since its inception in 1985 has been one of the key environmental monitoring activities and has provided a continuous record of water quality in the Mekong River and its tributaries. The routine water quality monitoring under the WQMN has become one of the key environmental monitoring activities at MRC. The Procedures for Water Quality (PWQ), one of the five Procedures of the MRC for basin management, establish a cooperative framework for the maintenance of acceptable/good water quality to promote the sustainable development of the Mekong River Basin;

WHEREAS UNEP and MRC (hereinafter collectively referred to as "Parties") share common objectives with regard to the conservation, protection, enhancement and support of nature and natural resources, including biological diversity worldwide, and wish to collaborate to further these common goals and objectives within their respective mandates and governing rules and regulations, including the MRC Procedures on Data, Information Exchange and Sharing (PDIES);

WHEREAS the Parties intend to conclude this Memorandum of Understanding (hereinafter referred to as "MOU") with the aim of consolidating, developing and detailing their cooperation and effectiveness to achieve the common objectives in the field of environment;

NOW, THEREFORE, UNEP AND MRC HAVE AGREED TO COOPERATE UNDER THIS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING AS FOLLOWS:

Article 1

Interpretation

1. References to this MOU shall be construed as including any Annexes, as varied or amended in accordance with the terms of this MOU. Any Annexes shall be subject to the provisions of this MOU, and in case of any inconsistency between an Annex and this MOU, the latter shall prevail.
2. Implementation of any subsequent activities, projects and programmes pursuant to this MOU, including those involving the transfer of funds between the Parties, shall necessitate the execution of appropriate legal instruments between the Parties. The terms of such legal instruments shall be subject to the provisions of this MOU.
3. This MOU represents the complete understanding between the Parties and supersedes all prior MOUs, communications and representations, whether oral or written, concerning the subject matter of this MOU.
4. Any Party's failure to request implementation of a provision of this MOU shall not constitute a waiver of that or any other provision of this MOU.

Article 2

Duration

1. This MOU shall be effective upon the last date of signature of the approving officials and remain in force until 31st December 2023, unless terminated in accordance with Article 15 below.

Article 3

Purpose

1. The purpose of this MOU is to provide a framework of cooperation and understanding, and to facilitate collaboration between the Parties to further their shared goals and objectives in regard to the water quality monitoring work carried out by both parties. The joint activities must be in line with the MRC Strategic Plan and its Annual Work Plan. Any deviation must be approved by MRCS Management and the Joint Committee of the MRC.
2. The objectives of this MOU shall be achieved through:
 - Regular dialogue and meetings between UNEP and MRC;
 - Execution of a separate legal instrument between the Parties to define and implement any subsequent activities, projects and programmes pursuant to Article 1.2.
 - Collaboration on activities of mutual interest and benefit in the following areas: (1) Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Development; (2) Consultancy Services; (3) Networking and Outreach; (4) Data and Information Sharing and Management

Article 4

Areas of Cooperation

1. Areas of Cooperation are agreed jointly through the cooperation mechanism in the MOU. Policies and priorities under this MOU may also be jointly reviewed 6 months by the Parties pursuant to Article 5 to allow the Parties to respond to newly emerging issues in the realm of environment and sustainable development.
2. The Parties have agreed to the following preliminary and areas of cooperation for this MOU, which form part of UNEP's mandate and programme of work and have been approved by UNEP's Governing Council. The items listed below are also priorities or ongoing activities of MRC, in accordance with its mandate. All could be strengthened through the cooperation of the Parties.
 - Knowledge sharing and capacity development: (i) Exchange up-to-date knowledge and information on water quality monitoring globally, regionally, and locally; (ii) Organize training workshops to support capacity building for water quality monitoring and reporting for different stakeholders (Further, see point 3. Networking and outreach); (iii) Exchange information and facilitate coordination in curricular development; (iv) Exchange expertise, e.g. staff/lecturers/experts/trainees/student exchange; (v) Organize/promote organization of Workshops, Seminars and Symposia on aspects relevant to water quality and aquatic ecology monitoring and management in the Mekong River basin and other river basins; and (vi) Facilitate/support participation to events organized by the two parties, and cooperate by sending participants, contributors and resource speakers.
 - Consultancy Services: (i) Collaborative consultancy by drawing on the expertise of UNEP and MRC Core Functions "Consulting and Services" and networks of government agencies and independent organizations; and (ii) Support to find consultants to conduct projects or work.
 - Networking and outreach: (i) Share contacts and information on water quality focal points in countries; (ii) Conduct joint outreach activities on water quality monitoring to promote engagement in activities of each party; and (iii) Use the convening power of the MRC to connect GEMS/Water to other transboundary and catchment organizations.
 - Data and Information Sharing and Management: (i) Support data quality assurance procedures; (ii) Provide cooperation and facilitation of information sharing in accordance to existing procedures (e.g. MRC Procedures of Data and Information Exchange and Sharing - PDIES, GEMS/Water Data Policy and policies and protocols of relevant parties); and (iii) Conduct information development, exchange and dissemination.
3. The above list is not exhaustive and should not be taken to exclude or replace other forms of cooperation between the Parties on other issues of common interest.

Article 5

Organization of the Cooperation

1. The Parties shall hold regular bilateral meetings on matters of common interest, in accordance with an agenda agreed to in advance by the Parties, for the purpose of developing and monitoring collaborative projects. Such meetings shall take place at least once every 12 months to:
 - a. discuss technical and operational issues related to furthering the objectives of this MOU;
 - b. review progress of work undertaken by MRC pursuant to a separate legal instrument in the priority areas of cooperation mentioned in Article 4 above.
2. Within the context defined above, further bilateral meetings at desk-to-desk and at expert level shall be encouraged and set up on an ad hoc basis as deemed necessary by the relevant UNEP divisions and MRC to address matters of common interest for the implementation of activities in specific areas, countries and regions.
3. In implementing activities, projects and programmes in the agreed priority areas, the Parties shall execute a separate legal instrument appropriate for the implementation of such initiatives in accordance with Article 1.2 above. In identifying the areas of cooperation under this MOU, due regard shall be given to MRC's geographic coverage; capacity for implementation and experience in the related field.
4. Where MRC is organizing a meeting with external participation at which policy matters related to the aims of this MOU shall be discussed, MRC shall, as appropriate, either invite UNEP to participate in the meeting or update UNEP on relevant policy matters discussed at the meeting. Each Party undertakes to share knowledge and information in its area of operations and expertise relevant to the MOU with the other Party.

Article 6

Status of the Parties and their Personnel

1. The Parties acknowledge and agree that MRC is an entity separate and distinct from the United Nations, including UNEP. The employees, personnel, representatives, agents, contractors or affiliates of MRC, including the personnel engaged by MRC for carrying out any of the project activities pursuant to this MOU, shall not be considered in any respect or for any purposes whatsoever as being employees, personnel, representatives, agents, contractors or affiliates of the United Nations, including UNEP, nor shall any employees, personnel, representatives, agents, contractors or affiliates of UNEP be considered, in any respect or for any purposes whatsoever, as being employees, personnel, representatives, agents, contractors or affiliates of MRC.
2. Neither Party shall be entitled to act or make legally binding declarations on behalf of the other Party. Nothing in this MOU shall be deemed to constitute a joint venture, agency, interest grouping or any other kind of formal business grouping or entity between the Parties.

Article 7

Fundraising

1. To the extent permitted by the Parties' respective regulations, rules and policies, and subject to sub-article 2, the Parties may engage in fundraising from the public and private sectors to support the activities, projects and programmes to be developed or carried out pursuant to this MOU.
2. Neither Party shall engage in fundraising with third parties in the name of or on behalf of the other, without the prior express written approval of the other Party in each case.

Article 8

Intellectual Property Rights

1. Nothing in the MOU shall be construed as granting or implying rights to, or interest in, intellectual property of the Parties, except as otherwise provided in Article 8.2.
2. In the event that the Parties foresee that intellectual property that can be protected shall be created in relation to a particular activity, project or programme to be carried out under this MOU, the Parties shall negotiate and agree on terms of its ownership and use in the relevant legal instrument concluded as per Article 1.2.

Article 9

Use of Name and Emblem

1. Neither Party shall use the name, emblem or trademarks of the other Party, its subsidiaries and/or affiliates, or any abbreviation thereof, in connection with its business or for public dissemination without the prior expressly written approval of the other Party in each case. In no event shall authorization of the UN or UNEP name or emblem be granted for commercial purposes.
2. MRC acknowledges that it is familiar with the independent, international and impartial status of the UN and UNEP, and recognizes that their names and emblems may not be associated with any political or sectarian cause or otherwise used in a manner inconsistent with the status of the UN and UNEP. This is also applicable for MRC name and emblem.
3. The Parties agree to recognize and acknowledge this partnership, as appropriate. To this end, the Parties shall consult with each other concerning the manner and form of such recognition and acknowledgement.

Article 10

United Nations Privileges and Immunities

1. Nothing in or relating to this MOU shall be deemed a waiver, express or implied, of any of the privileges and immunities of the United Nations, including its subsidiary organs. This is also applicable for MRC as an international body.

Article 11

Confidentiality

1. The handling of information shall be subject to each Party's corporate confidentiality policies.

2. Before disclosing internal documents, or documents that by virtue of their content or the circumstances of their creation or communication must be deemed confidential, of the other Party to third parties, each Party shall obtain the express, written consent of the other Party. However, a Party's disclosure of another Party's internal and/or confidential documents to an entity the disclosing Party controls or with which it is under common control, or to an entity with which it has a confidentiality agreement, shall not be considered a disclosure to a third party, and shall not require prior authorization.

3. For UNEP, a principal or subsidiary organ of the United Nations established in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations shall be deemed to be a legal entity under common control.

Article 12

Responsibility

1. Each Party will be responsible for dealing with any claims or demands arising out of its actions or omissions, and those of its respective personnel, in relation to this MOU.

2. MRC shall indemnify, hold and save harmless and defend at its own expense, the United Nations and UNEP, their officials, personnel and representatives, from and against all suits, claims, demands and liability of any nature or kind which may arise in relation to this MOU due to any actions or omissions attributable to and MRC¹.

Article 13

Dispute Settlement

1. The Parties shall use their best efforts to settle amicably any dispute, controversy or claim arising out of this MOU. Where the Parties wish to seek such an amicable settlement through conciliation, the conciliation shall take place in accordance with the UNCITRAL Conciliation Rules then prevailing, or according to such other procedure as may be agreed between the Parties.

2. Any dispute, controversy or claim between the Parties arising out of this MOU which is not settled amicably in accordance with the foregoing sub-article may be referred by either Party to arbitration under the UNCITRAL Arbitration Rules then in force. The arbitral tribunal shall have no authority to award punitive damages. The Parties shall be bound by any arbitration award rendered as a result of such arbitration as the final adjudication of any such controversy, claim or dispute.

Article 14

Notification and Amendments

1. Each Party shall promptly notify the other in writing of any anticipated or actual material changes that will affect the execution of this MOU.

2. The Parties may amend this MOU by mutual written agreement, which shall be appended to this MOU and become an integral part of it.

Article 15

Termination

1. Either Party may terminate this MOU by giving 3 months' prior written notice to the other Party.

2. Upon termination of this MOU, the rights and obligations of the Parties defined under any other legal instrument executed pursuant to this MOU shall cease to be effective, except as otherwise provided in this MOU.

3. Any termination of the MOU shall be without prejudice to (a) the orderly completion of any ongoing collaborative activity and (b) any other rights and obligations of the Parties accrued prior to the date of termination under this MOU or legal instrument executed pursuant to this MOU.

4. The obligations under Articles 8-13 do not lapse upon expiry, termination of or withdrawal from this MOU.

¹ This sub-Article requires that, in case there are third party claims against UNEP, MRC is responsible for conveying information regarding UNEP's immunity from jurisdiction to the court where actions may have been instituted.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the Undersigned being duly authorized representatives of the Parties affix their signatures below

For United Nations Environment Programme



Name: Jian Liu

Title: Director, Science Division

Date: 14/01/2020

For: Mekong River Commission (MRC)



Name: An Pich Hatda

Title: CEO, MRC Secretariat

Date: 16.01.2020