Short Report by the Chief Executive Officer on the outcomes and key messages of the International Conference

The two-days MRC International Conference, with the theme **Joint Efforts and Partnerships towards Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Mekong River Basin,** concluded on 3rd April 2018. The conference welcomed about 400 stakeholders from Mekong country governments, non-governmental organisations, academia, the private sector, and other river basin organisations.

Overall, there was a wide appreciation for the work of the MRC. At the same time, a number of views and recommendations was expressed, exchanged and debated lively and constructively towards enhancing our joint efforts and partnerships. The following reflect diverse but consolidated views from the Conference participants:

Mekong River Commission: riparian ownership and direction
Unprecedented steps have been taken to achieve the Member countries' goal of full riparian ownership and direction of the Commission, in line with the reform and decentralization roadmap:

- Recruitment of the first 'riparian' Chief Executive Officer.
- Recruitment of all regular staff from Member Countries for the first time.
- Increased financial contribution from Member Countries.
- Agreement to fully fund MRC core functions by 2030.
- Partner financial contributions to a 'basket fund' managed by the Commission
- MRC work underpinned by cooperative and joint efforts of Member Countries– from conducting assessments together to developing and implementing guidelines, strategies and procedures, to joint monitoring and state of basin reporting, to work with partners and stakeholders in the basin and from around the world.

These included the Basin Development Strategy, the National Indicative Plans, including Joint projects, the Mekong Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan, the Basin-wide Fisheries Management and Development Strategy, the Council Study and other assessments. Support from partners from around the world is well appreciated.

Mekong Agreement
The signing of the Mekong Agreement in 1995, reflecting the Mekong Spirit, is historic and progressive and its implementation has yielded significant achievements. After 23 years of implementation new needs and challenges require adaptation of, and strengthening of the implementation of and compliance with the Agreement, considering relevant best practices and experiences from water-related agreements in other basins around the world.

Mekong River Commission and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
The MRC work and activities, within the framework of its objectives set out in the 1995 Mekong Agreement, is comprehensive for achieving sustainable development. The SDG 6 on water is connected to ALL 17 SDGs, and particularly to SDGs on gender, hunger, inequality, energy, environment, climate change, infrastructure, peace and institutions, and partnerships.

Mekong development needs, opportunities and challenges
MRC has been made considerable progress in the past four years, in particular through:
- providing a water diplomacy platform for member countries to discuss and address transboundary issues and challenges
- exploring sharing of benefits through the agreed Joint Projects, and
- conducting basin-wide assessments to support better decision making.

The MRC Council Study and other studies
The Council Study provides a sound scientific reference (with gaps to be filled) to guide policy making. The results reveal both the positive benefits and negative impacts of developments. Enhancing positive benefits and minimizing negative impacts will require substantial cooperative and joint efforts by the Member Countries, with technical and facilitation support by the MRCS and in relevant collaboration with partners, including:
- identifying multi-sector investment needs to sustain water-food-energy-environment security
- assessing location and design options from a basin-wide perspective
- establishing and maintaining protected areas in the Mekong
- development of plans and projects that optimize benefits and minimize costs including considering alternative water and energy sources,
- putting in place sound mitigation measures,
- exploring innovative co-financing and co-ownership by the Mekong-Lancang countries.

Flood, drought and climate change
Participants called for increased joint efforts on mainstreaming regional results at national levels to improve informed, participatory decision-making processes, especially articulating results with national socio-economic development plans. Opportunities for synergies by sharing data and coordinating complementary know-how, including that of local communities, should be explored. Partnerships can help better assess gender-differentiated impacts. Participants recommend a more systematic combination of structural and non-structural measures to improve resilience to flood, drought and climate change.

Data and information
MRC Decision Support Framework and the PDIES have been implemented to conduct joint assessments and promote sharing of data among countries. However, there is more to be done. New opportunities to improve the way we manage our water resources are becoming available because of new technologies. So the call for action for our joint efforts to be strategic, invest more, modernize our data and systems infrastructure, and expand the scope and extent of data sharing among countries and its Dialogue Partners through the PDIES. We should pursue new and improved partnerships to seek new data (like satellite data), share best practices, and work together on innovations and research and development.

Dialogue Partners
MRC Dialogue Partners China and Myanmar were well represented and welcomed at the Conference. Senior Chinese representatives committed to close cooperation with the MRC. There are important opportunities to cooperate between the Mekong Lancang Cooperation and the Mekong River Commission, including integrated basin-wide planning, data and information sharing, joint studies, capacity building and exchanges, and coordination of infrastructure projects.