

# MRC International Conference 2-3 April 2023: Draft Session Outlines

## Updated: 23 Dec 2022

### DAY 1

#### OPENING SESSION: MEKONG DEVELOPMENTS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Opening Session will consist of a panel of senior government officials from the six Mekong River Basin countries, and the CEO of the Mekong River Commission Secretariat. They will reflect on critical developments, challenges and opportunities in managing the Mekong River responsibly and sustainably. The discussion will set the stage for the knowledge and information sharing and stimulating policy and technical conversations over the remainder of the conference, with a focus on identifying innovative policy, technologies and cooperation pathways by addressing the conference theme of *'Innovation and Cooperation for a Water Secure and Sustainable Mekong'*.

Reflecting on the set theme, four high-level keynote speakers will address the conference in this opening session, sharing their insights and challenging the audience to think on the following topics:

- **Innovation in policy:** Advancing the Mekong agenda through intersectoral policy coherence, regional to national policy alignment and breaking through barriers to progress
- **Innovation in transboundary cooperation:** Working better together through more efficient and effective processes that focus on impact at regional and national levels
- **Innovation in technology and infrastructure** for climate resilient river basin planning and management under conditions of uncertainty
- **Green energy policy:** What it means for the Mekong and for Sustainable Development Goals

#### **Session 1a: How cooperation is yielding benefits for transboundary water management**

#### **Session 1b: How innovative technologies are transforming transboundary water management**

This Session will initiate discussion around identifying solutions to the challenges and opportunities and exploring further some of the key insights, presented by speakers in the Opening Session. It will also explore opportunities for innovation in policy, technology and cooperation that can help give effect to the identified solutions discussed in Session 1. There will be four parallel sessions, one with a panel discussion and one with a question-and-answer format following a series of short presentations.

#### **1a1: Cooperating to avoid, minimise and mitigate transboundary impacts**

Proposals for presentations are invited on topics such as: dynamic and adaptive inter-sectoral planning approaches; trade-off analysis and decision-making; options identification; setting objectives for a water secure basin; river and floodplain spatial planning; identifying and progressing joint projects; regional energy grid and power market developments and the implications for secure water resources; and food security and energy security and its implications for basin rivers.

#### **1b1: Innovative technologies for river monitoring, modelling, and forecasting**

Proposals for presentations are invited on topics such as: hardware and gadgets/technology use for river monitoring, including the Internet of Things; AI and machine learning for river management; advanced technologies for short-, medium- and/or long-term forecasting; data and information exchange; communication protocols; optimizing decisions between competing objectives; cost and benefit sharing; and managing emergencies and vulnerable river communities.

### **Session 1a2: Cooperating for better data, information, and coordination of dam cascade: meeting multiple objectives**

Proposals for presentations are invited on topics such as: upper-lower basin cooperation (mechanisms); mechanisms for coordination including governance, processes and systems; data and information exchange; communication protocols; optimizing decisions between competing objectives; cost and benefit sharing; policy and regulatory enablers; managing emergencies and vulnerable river communities; role of water infrastructure in regulating flow; cascade dam operations; and whole of river system monitoring.

### **Session 1b2: Innovative decision support systems for integrated water resources development and how they support decision-making (cases of application)**

Proposals for presentations are invited on topics such as: modern decision support systems for river basin management; regional to national alignment; earth observation and remote sensing products and datasets; ground monitoring and in-situ sensors; basin river monitoring network; enhancing flood and drought forecasting and early warning – last-mile connectivity; data management, exchange and sharing; technology for demand management; and technology for engaging citizens and water users for improved management.

## **DAY 2**

### **Session 2a: How cooperation in innovative financing can make a difference**

### **Session 2b: How cooperation in gender inclusion and mainstreaming is making a difference in water resources management**

This Session will explore discussions around responsible financing in river basin management, taking the perspective of the banking industry or the private sector, governments and communities. It will also ways in which these actors can work together through innovative cooperation mechanisms facilitated by a river basin organization or equivalent body. The session will also explore how we can advance gender inclusion and equity in water resources governance that will benefit riverine communities and those who may be affected by development projects. It will also explore the role of the private sector and civil society organizations in that cause.

### **Session 2a1: Cooperation between the public and private sectors for responsible financing and sustainable development**

Proposals for presentations are invited on topics such as: broader trends in energy planning and investment across Southeast Asia; role of hydropower and other renewables in countries meeting their NDCs under the Paris Agreement; leveraging finance for sustainable investments; role of public-private sector partnership in promoting responsible investments; public-private partnerships for improved water and environmental outcomes;

### **Session 2b1: Innovation for advancing gender equality and responsiveness for water resources management**

Proposals for presentations are invited on topics such as: local engagement strategies and dialogue; gender and water resource governance; basin organization and gender advancement; media and broader outreach to engage citizens in planning and management solutions; citizen science and

integrating with established monitoring programs; policy-making and water diplomacy; experience from other river basins and from other resource management problems; aligning national and regional policy responses; innovation in the policy-making process; different voices, different perspectives; unintended consequences and lessons learned – diplomatic course correction; and leveraging a crisis and making the most of unforeseen events.

#### **FINAL SESSION: RECAP AND PARTING CONFERENCE MESSAGES**

The final session will involve a recap of key messages heard throughout the conference and some final thoughts for participants to take home and continue the conversation with their colleagues and stakeholders as we work together for a more water secure and sustainable Mekong River Basin.