

**The 6<sup>th</sup> MRC Regional Stakeholder Forum**  
***The 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Stakeholder Information Sharing on the Prior***  
***Consultation Process for the Proposed Pak Lay Hydropower Project***  
**17<sup>th</sup> January 2019**  
**Luang Prabang, Lao PDR**

**Welcome Speech**  
by  
**Dr. An Pich Hatda**  
In-coming Chief Executive Officer  
Mekong River Commission Secretariat

***Distinguished Participants,***  
***Ladies and Gentlemen,***

Good morning!

On behalf of the Mekong River Commission Secretariat and my own, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to our 2<sup>nd</sup> Stakeholder Forum for the proposed Pak Lay Hydropower Project today.

For those who could not make it here but are following our livestream on Facebook, thank you for your interest.

To the MRC, this physical and virtual participation mean a lot.

It shows your interest; it shows your stake in the prior consultation process; it shows how much you care about what makes a good project; it tells us that you want to contribute by being involved in the process, feeling it and making impact to it.

As I have always stressed, and I wish to make it clear again that the inclusion of stakeholder participation is crucial to our work – very important to this prior consultation process.

**Why is it so?** The reason is simple, but not simpler.

The prior consultation process, besides helping to facilitate discussion between governments, gives stakeholders, including non-government organizations, civil society groups and technical experts, the opportunity to ask questions and raise their concerns. These concerns and suggestions will be recorded formally and treated highly in our Technical Review Report to be submitted to the member countries.

Although some may believe that their participation has no impact or meaning in the process, I'm afraid this is a wrong perception. Some may also have a perception that the MRC will take their participation as an endorsement to the proposed project, I can say that this is again a complete misunderstanding. In fact, their participation and your participation do not imply any endorsement; rather, it is a mechanism to share legitimate concerns and make suggestions for improvements. **This is because the prior consultation process is not an approval process.** No country has the right to veto another country's use of water. On the other hand, no country has a unilateral right to move ahead without taking into account the other countries' rights and concerns.

The prior consultation process is, arguably, the only basin-wide water diplomacy platform for publicly evaluating hydropower projects proposed for the Mekong mainstream with potential adverse transboundary impacts.

It is our task to make sure this happen. It is our task to make sure that you make your voice heard and responded to by the member countries. It is mandate of the MRC to facilitate and inform the prior consultation process, including by supporting regional and national stakeholder consultations and by sharing scientific data and knowledge. The MRC seeks to address technical concerns, such as dam safety, fish passes, and more, within the scope of our mandate, and not beyond that.

**That's why, Ladies and Gentlemen,** we provide this platform for you to discuss.

During this six-month process, which is drawing to a close in late March, we have organized two regional forums so far, today's forum included. At the national level, the Member Countries have conducted their own national stakeholder consultations, whose findings will also be presented in today's forum.

Our active and fruitful discussion in the first forum in Vientiane offered various comments and suggestions that are vital to our Technical Review Report. In other words, we have built our current version of the Report through your voice and feedback in the first forum.

This first draft Technical Review Report will be presented to you shortly to solicit further comments and suggestions. This means that your active participation and constructive feedback become paramount in the process. And indeed, it has meaning.

Outcomes of today's forum will determine the final version of the Technical Review Report and the discussion of a "Statement" in the

Special Session of the MRC Joint Committee to be followed by the future development of a Joint Action Plan. So, it all depends on us; it depends on how we want to see the outcomes. The better we want them to be, the more we should contribute.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Before I end, I would like to thank the Government of Lao PDR for co-hosting this forum today.

My high appreciation also goes to the MRC Secretariat staff for their hard work and devotion in making this event possible. This also goes to our core team in doing all other technical work to prepare the Technical Review Report.

I hope with your active and fruitful discussion today our forum will be a great success again.

Thank you.