

**Save the Mekong Coalition Statement on the Occasion of World Water Day
March 22, 2018**

On the occasion of World Water Day, the Save the Mekong Coalition, together with civil society and community partners from Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam, make this statement to express our concern for the Mekong River and the communities our river supports.

The series of eleven large hydropower dams planned on the Mekong River's lower mainstream, along with over a hundred dams planned on Mekong tributaries, pose a major threat to the ecological health and economic vitality of the region. These dams place the livelihoods and food security of millions of people at risk. We are extremely concerned by plans for extensive hydropower construction, which fail to consider the knowledge, cultures, and voices of the Mekong Basin peoples whose livelihoods and beliefs are deeply connected with the Mekong River.

Planning and decision-making processes for hydropower and other developments on the Mekong River lack public participation, transparency and accountability. The Xayaburi and Don Sahong Dams, under construction on the Lower Mekong mainstream, are now nearing completion, yet comprehensive information on these projects has not been made public despite repeated requests from communities, civil society and other stakeholders. This includes details of project design and assessments demonstrating how mitigation measures such as fish passages will prevent the destruction of Mekong basin fisheries and other impacts on the river ecosystem. Despite this lack of transparency, the Xayaburi Dam is being touted as a model for other mainstream Mekong dams.

Decision-making on hydropower projects is made on a project-by-project basis, ignoring cumulative and basin-wide impacts. We call on the Lower Mekong governments and the Mekong River Commission to ensure that the findings of the MRC Council Study and other basin-wide studies, which provide assessment of the losses and trade-offs inherent in these projects, meaningfully inform decisions on individual dam projects.

We call into question the need for destructive hydropower development in the Mekong Basin to meet the region's energy and development needs. Renewable energy technologies, demand-side management and energy efficiency measures should be fully considered in assessing alternatives to destructive hydropower projects on the Lower Mekong mainstream and within the basin. We urge regional governments to prioritize introduction of renewable and decentralized electricity technologies that are increasingly available and cost-competitive, without the harmful social and environmental impacts of large-scale hydropower dams.

Current proposals for regional energy trade from hydropower development must not proceed without considering the lack of protection and accountability to affected communities. Plans to import energy from hydropower in Laos and Cambodia risk exacerbating human rights violations and environmental degradation where public participation and free, prior informed consent are weak or non-existent. Mekong citizens must be meaningfully involved in the development of national power development plans and proposals for regional energy trade.

The Mekong region needs leadership and vision to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) while preserving the region's rich fisheries and water resources that are essential to poverty alleviation and development for current and future generations. By adopting national and regional energy policies that encourage investment in renewable energy, the Mekong region could enjoy an era of truly sustainable growth without losing the benefits that healthy rivers bring.