



Mekong Water Dialogues

www.iucn.org/asia/mekong_dialogues

Robert Mather, 25 March 2013





MEKONG WATER DIALOGUES

Goal and Objectives

- Aims to improve water governance in the Mekong Region as a way to enhance livelihood security as well as human and ecosystem health
- Seeks to facilitate transparent and inclusive decision-making around water resources and wetlands
- Promotes collaboration between government, civil society and the private sector





What we knew when we started in 2008

Productivity, livelihoods, food security

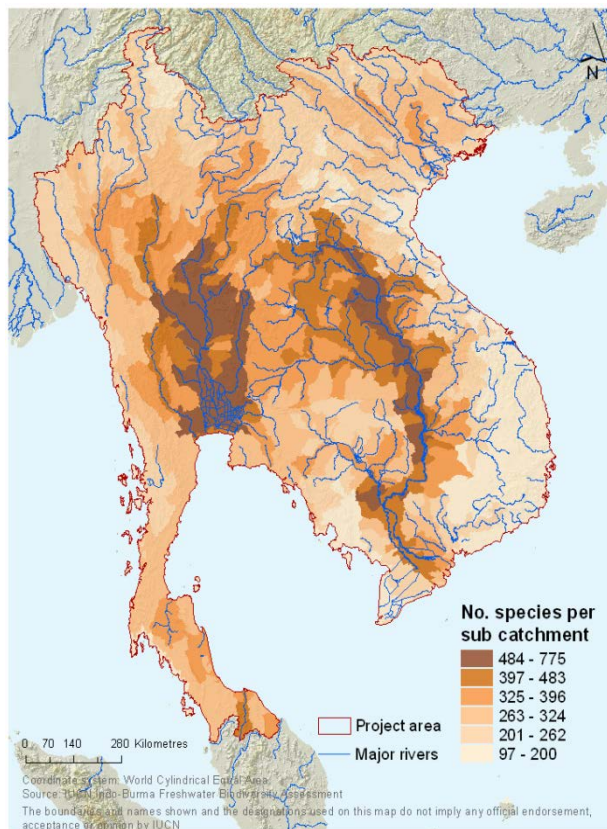
- ❑ Lower Mekong most productive inland fishery in the world: 2 -10% of GDP of each Mekong country
- ❑ Main source of animal protein for 60 million people, valued at >\$3 billion/year at first sale
- ❑ Productivity depends on flow of water, sediment/nutrients and fish migration

Status of Species

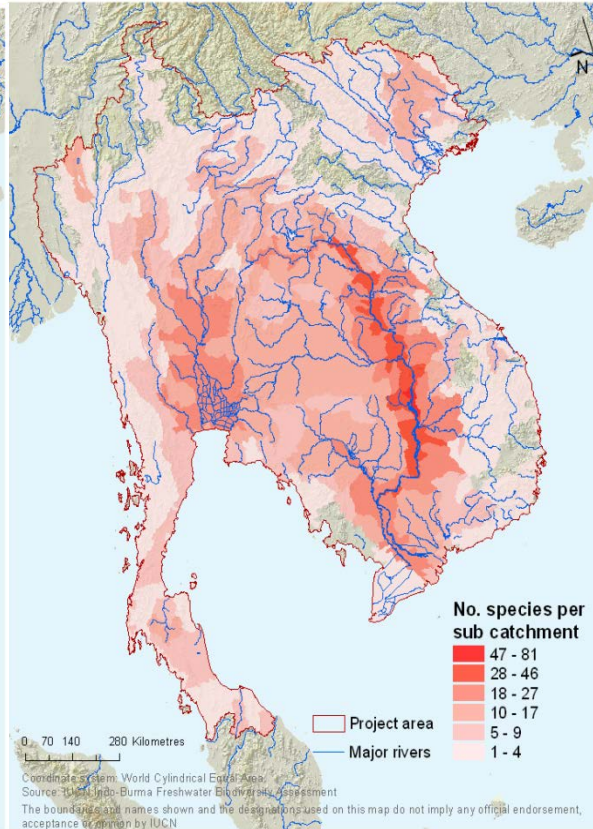
- ❑ 13,000 spp. of freshwater fish – over 1,000 in Mekong but only 76 assessed
- ❑ 5,000 species of freshwater molluscs in the world -no Mekong species assessed
- ❑ 6,000 aquatic plant species in the world – only 5 species assessed in the Mekong



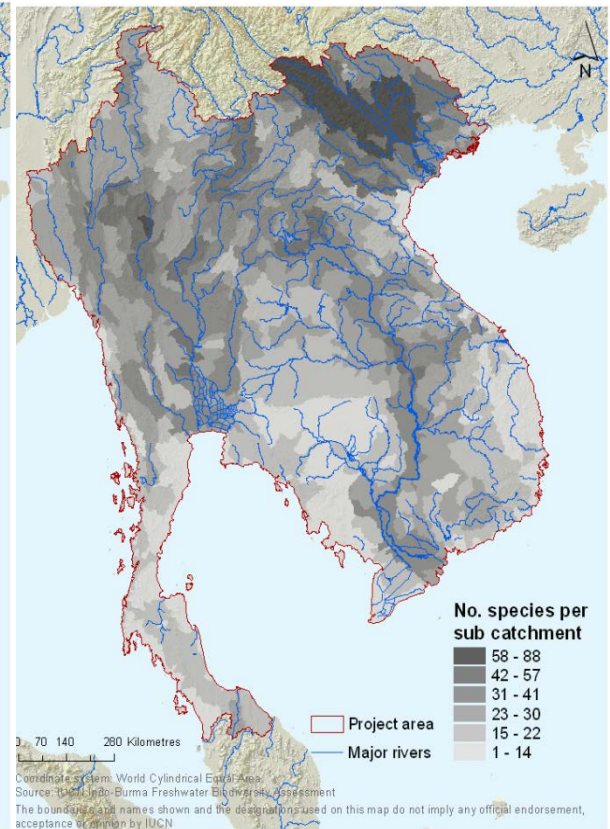
IUCN 19% of Mekong Region freshwater fish threatened



All Species



Threatened Species



Data Deficient Species.









UNDERLYING GOVERNANCE ISSUES

- Inadequate policy and/or law, institutions, and/or processes
- Well-intentioned but poorly implemented laws/norms, institutions and processes,
- Agency mandates unclear and overlapping
- Sectoral planning dominates
- Mechanisms to involve civil society stakeholders lacking
- Rivers and wetlands have no/unclear legal status making them open-access resources
- Traditional management and customary governance mechanisms breaking down



Governance Reform

Lao PDR :

- National Water Policy/Strategy
- Ramsar Accession, site designation, local institutions
- Decree on RBOs

Cambodia:

- Suspension of commercial fishing lots in Tonle Sap

Viet Nam:

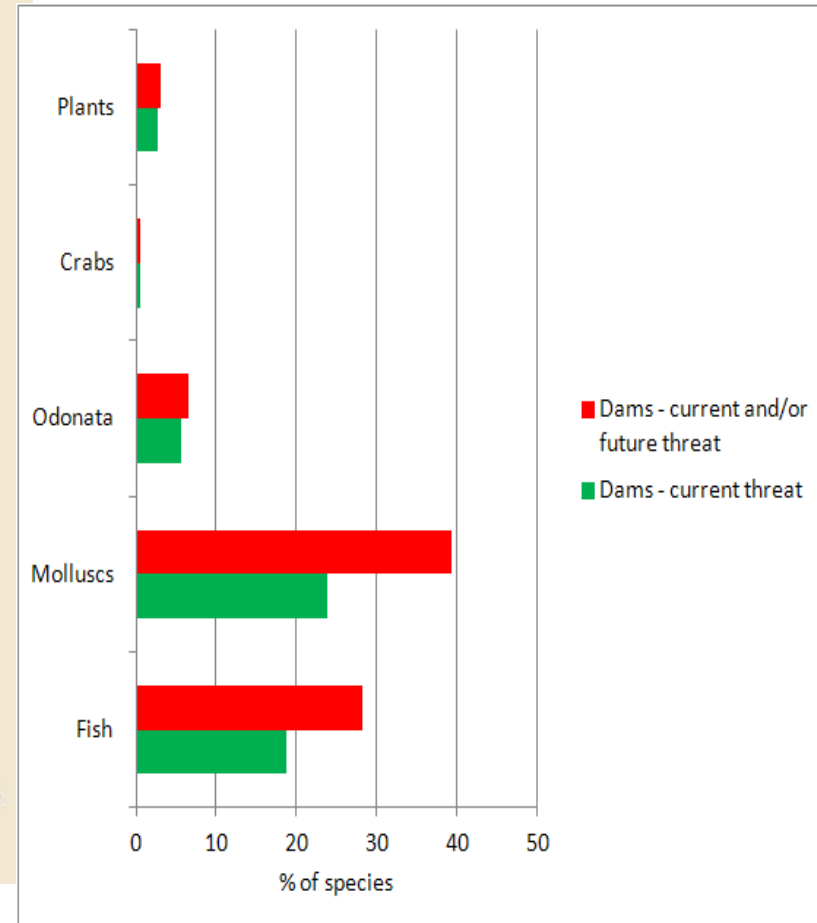
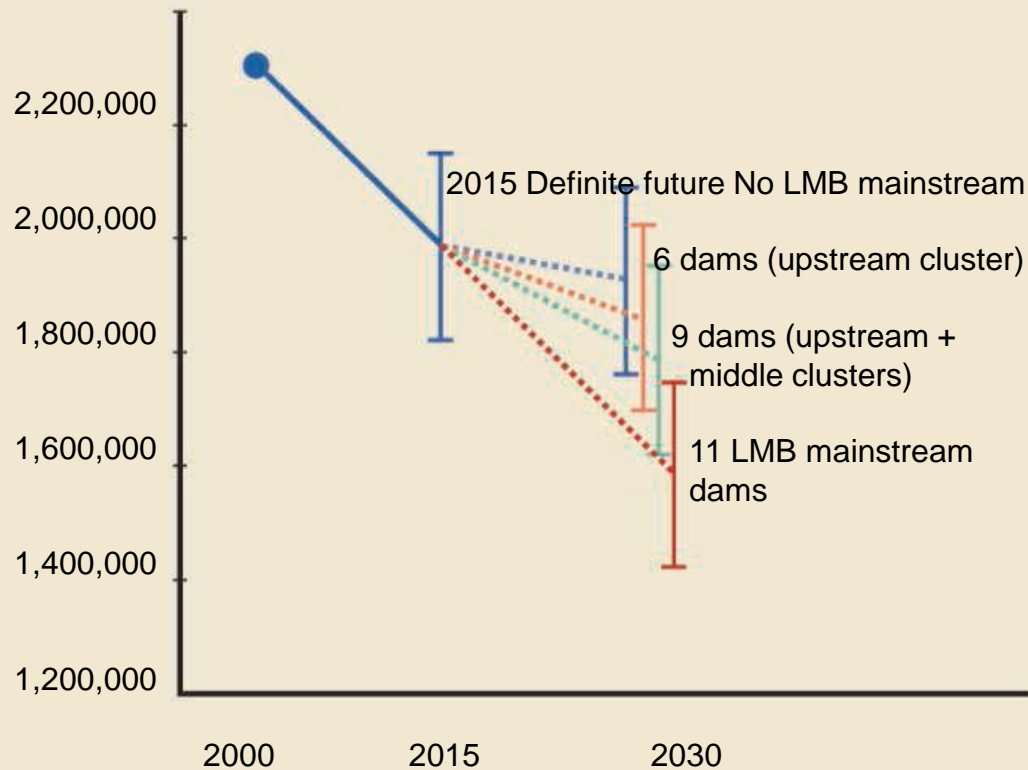
- New Water Law 2012
- 3 new Ramsar Sites

Thailand:

- Water Law development



Mainstream Hydropower: Transboundary Impacts on Fisheries Production and Species

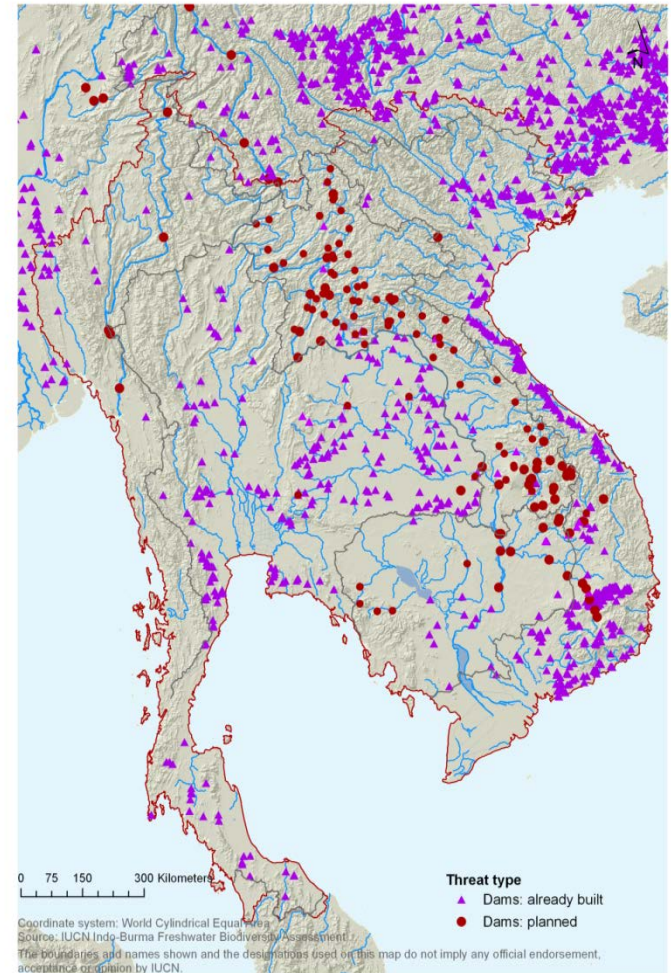


Hydropower Challenges and Regional Governance

- **Upper Mekong (Lancang) in China:** lower riparian concern but no channel for discussion - “Fluvicide”
- **Major tributaries** Pak Moon, Yali Falls, now LS II: Community voices “after the fact”
- **Lower Mekong mainstream-** first Xayaburi, and then...?: decision-making behind closed doors, EIA limited, SEA findings ignored

A sense of hopeless inevitability?

Still a possibility for alternative futures?



What is really needed?

Legal basis & institutional mechanism for:

- conducting cumulative transboundary impact assessments using agreed standards for proposed mainstream dams.
- assessment and payment for claims for compensation arising from transboundary impacts
- an independent recourse mechanism in the case of irreconcilable disagreements between parties.
- compensation payments for offsetting foregone revenue of not developing some mainstream dams.



How might this happen?

- Strengthening 1995 Mekong Agreement and reform of MRC
- Ratification of the UN Convention on Transboundary Watercourses
- ASEAN/ASEAN+China

Initial steps:

- Improved MRC process for next dam
- Scientific assessment of which dams/ combinations are most harmful
- Strengthening civil society networks
- Assessment of possibilities for more equitable sharing of costs and benefits



Thank You

