

## Wetlands and Biodiversity

Despite the various services known to be provided by wetlands in the Mekong Basin, these ecosystems are under great threat. Some of the key issues affecting wetlands in the Lower Mekong Basin are:

### Destruction and degradation of wetland habitats

- Drainage and reclamation
- Modification of land-use
- Inappropriate wetland management

### Loss of wetland ecosystem integrity

- Alteration of the hydrological regime
- Pollution
- Industrial waste and agro-chemical run-off.

### Depletion of species abundance and diversity

- Over-harvesting of plant and animal products
- Destructive harvesting practices
- Small-mesh nets
- Tree-felling
- Change in indigenous species composition
  - Spread of existing invasive alien species
  - Introduction of new alien species

Through partnership at the regional, national and site level, the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) is addressing some of the critical issues affecting the wetlands of the Lower Mekong Basin. A wide range of tools and approaches are being used to tackle these issues above.

See inside to learn more about some of the thematic areas the MWBP is working on.



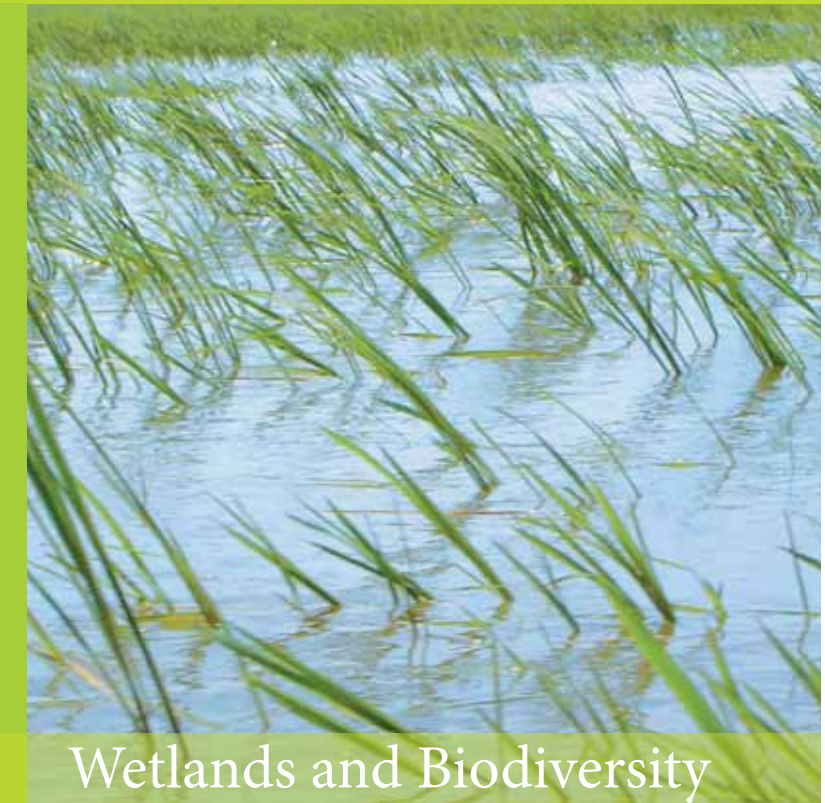
## Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme

The Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) is a joint programme of the four riparian governments of the Lower Mekong Basin – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam – managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC), in collaboration with other key stakeholders. With funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, The Royal Netherlands Government, MRCS, the Water and Nature Initiative (WANI) and other donors, the programme tries to address the most critical issues for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the Mekong wetlands.

The programme aims to strengthen the capacity of organisations and people to develop sustainable livelihoods and manage wetland biodiversity resources wisely.

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## Wetlands and Biodiversity in the Lower Mekong Basin

A JOINT UNDP - IUCN - MRC GEF-FUNDED PROGRAMME





## Let the Rivers Flow

Water flows have ecological, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. The subject of environmental flows (E-Flows) covers each of these dimensions. E-Flows refers to water provided within a river, wetlands or coastal zone to maintain ecosystems and their benefits where there are competing water uses. In most river basins the natural flows have been modified to some extent, to meet the needs of human settlement, irrigation, flood control, or energy generation. The E-flows approach acknowledge these different uses, but argues that ecosystems are another valid user, and that ecosystems and livelihood services must also be valued and included in negotiations.

MWBP brings together many stakeholders which enables the programme to facilitate dialogue and promoted discussions between stakeholders for the adoption of regional guiding principles to ensure landuse planning, sustainable river infrastructure development and management (infrastructure, dams, irrigation) to be implemented

at national and regional level through these guiding principles. This will ultimately contribute to maintaining of water flows that support more productive wetlands and well-being of wetland communities.

## Flagship Species for Biodiversity

The Mekong River Basin consists of many unique ecosystems and provides habitat to a wide array of globally threatened species. The four species that have been selected as flagship species of the MWBP are the Irrawaddy Dolphin, Sarus Crane, Siamese Crocodile, and Mekong Giant Catfish. These species fulfill one or more criteria for selection of flagships:

- inhabit a broad diversity of important wetlands and therefore are representative of threatened wetland habitats and their associated fauna
- are regional in distribution and trans-boundary in nature
- provide an opportunity for enhancing regional collaboration for conservation and management of biodiversity and ecosystems



The flagship species approach is another tool to address wetland and biodiversity conservation issues in the Mekong basin. By addressing issues affecting the flagship species, the programme is also addressing the similar issues that are affecting associated wetland resources. The MWBP is also facilitating the development and implementation of Species Conservation Action Plans (SCAPs) for the flagship species in the Mekong Basin.

## Biodiversity Overlays

Information on wetland biodiversity in the Mekong Basin is scattered within various departments and NGOs within and outside the region. To combat this issue MWBP will be producing biodiversity overlays (or biodiversity maps). The process of developing these biodiversity overlays will initially require compilation of the existing information and developing a clearing house under MWBP. The next stage will involve translating this valuable information into standardised GIS dataset as a tool to support the development planning process in the Mekong.

## The Ramsar Convention



The Ramsar Convention on wetlands is a multi-lateral Environmental Agreement for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Of the six states within the Mekong Region, all except for Lao PDR (currently considering ratification) are Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. MWBP realises there is a need for increased cooperation on trans-boundary wetland and water resource management issues, and is proposing a Mekong Region Ramsar Initiative. The purpose of the initiative to improve implementation of the principles and priorities of the Ramsar

Convention by national agencies through increased regional cooperation. The Mekong Region Ramsar Initiative will build upon existing wetland conservation and water resource management efforts at the regional, national and site level.

## Invasive Alien Species (IAS)



Wetlands in the Lower Mekong Basin have not been spared from the threat of IAS. Some significant species affecting the ecology and livelihood include the Giant Mimosa (*Mimosa pigra*) and the Golden Apple Snail (*Pomacea sp.*). With a specific emphasis on threats to wetland ecosystems and associated livelihoods, the MWBP is developing specific interventions to combat IAS issues. The MWBP is also building on existing efforts and networks working on IAS in the region.

Through partnership, the MWBP will be developing and facilitating the implementation of a strategy to combat IAS affecting wetlands in the Lower Mekong Basin. In particular, the MWBP will build of the past an on-going efforts of the Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG) and other experts on invasive alien species.