

Regional Communication Training starts today

□ VICKY S. MENDOZA

THE Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Programme (MWBP) will hold a four-day training on communication skills starting today until July 8 at the Taipan Hotel in Vientiane, gathering nine officers of the MWBP from across the region and with the aim of enhancing and improving their communication skills.

Communication and information officers of the programme coming from Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam and Laos are attending this training.

Topics to be covered include communication strategy development, writing skills, dealing with the media and branding, and are aimed at imparting techniques to increase the general communication capacity of the participants.

Regional Communications and Networks Coordinator Ms

Sarah Wood emphasised that, "this is a unique opportunity to provide sustainable skills transfer through the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Programme.

Over the four days participants will be exposed to a number of communication topics through presentations from communication professionals. Speakers include UNDP-Lao's Public Information Officer Mr Damian Kean, who will give a talk on how to make effective presentations and advocacy programmes, Mekong River Commission Communication Officer Ms Virginia Addison, who will give tips on how to deal with the media, Australian volunteer and KPL newspaper's Human Resource Officer and sub-editor Paul Mitchell, who will share techniques on media release writing, and UNDP MWBP team leader Peter-John Meynell, who will emphasise on the key role of

communication in the MWBP. Learning will be highly interactive through the use of exercises, group work and an excursion. Group participation and creative thinking will be highly encouraged.

Lack of awareness plagues most environmental conservation programmes, being relegated to the background, behind economic and political concerns. Ultimately, this training programme is a significant step in bringing the issues, problems and proposed solutions of the Mekong wetlands closer to those who will benefit the most from MWBP's efforts—the people living along the Mekong and its surrounding areas.

"Communications is an integral component of every organisation, programme and project, and we should concentrate on improving capacity across the region", she added.

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, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam – managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), IUCN – 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 addresses the most critical issues for the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in the Mekong wetlands. MWBP aims to strengthen the capacity of organisations and people to develop sustainable livelihoods and manage wetland biodiversity resources wisely.