



Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme

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First National Wetland Specialist Network Set up in Lao PDR

Networking is a powerful tool for building collaboration and sharing information, as well as developing principles and good practice for wetlands conservation and sustainable use, and for advocating these principles.

In recognition of the importance of networking, and to contribute towards its goal of strengthening capacity, the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) instigated the establishment of the first ever National Wetlands Specialists Network in Lao PDR.

The network will be a knowledge network, consisting of groups of experts/specialists working together on a common concern, strengthening each other's research and communications capacity, sharing knowledge and developing solutions that meet the needs of both decision-makers and resource users. It will play an important role in and be the main vehicle for gathering and disseminating information and research, and a major resource for training activities and capacity building for the MWBP staff, government counterparts, partners and network members.

The process of establishing the network involved a range of techniques to identify and engage members, including surveys, meetings and interviews. From the information collected a database of wetland specialists for Laos has been developed.

The MWBP has identified the network as one of the key outputs towards strengthening capacity for sustainable management of wetland resources in Lao PDR. The network was developed with the approval of the Living Aquatic Resources Research Center (LARReC) and National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI).

The process of establishment

In carrying out this work, the MWBP National Programme Office hired a local consultant to support and coordinate establishment of the wetlands specialist network. During the four week assignment, the consultant conducted a survey on the existing wetlands related networks and data collection on wetlands specialists in Vientiane Capital and Attapeu province where the MWBP demonstration site is located.

As a result of the initial stage of establishment, data and information from 28 wetland specialists was collected through formal and informal interviews and entered into wetland specialist network database. The survey and data collection on wetlands specialists is based on the wetlands specialist criteria or wetlands specialist classification internally viewed by the MWBP.

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Following on from completion of the survey and data collection, under the approval of the Living Aquatic Resources Research Center (LARReC) and National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), an official meeting was convened on 25 April 2006 to present the findings of the survey and formalise establishment of the network. Participating in this meeting were 26 wetlands specialists, other technicians and MWBP management committee from key departments of Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry such as LARReC, NAFRI, DLF, Irrigation Department, and other line agencies National University of Laos (NUOL), Science Technology and Environment Agency (STEA), Lao National Mekong Commission Secretariats (LNMCS) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

The meeting was proceeded under a good atmosphere and a mutual understanding between the participants. The participants actively and creatively expressed their points of view and with many comments and feedback from the meeting being useful for further improving and maintaining the network.

