

Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme

Mid-term Evaluation

**United Nations Development Programme
IUCN – World Conservation Union
&
Mekong River Commission**

**Global Environment Facility
Royal Netherlands Government**

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List of abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BCCI	Biodiversity Corridor Conservation Initiative
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CEDAC	Centre for the Study and Development of Agriculture Cambodia
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEPA	Culture and Environment Preservation Association (Cambodia)
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of flora and fauna
CNMC	Cambodia National Mekong Committee
COP9	Conference of the Parties (The 9 th COP of the Ramsar Convention was held in Kampala, Uganda, in November 2005)
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor
DARD	Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (in Vietnam)
DG	Director General
DNCP	Department of Nature Conservation and Protection (Cambodia)
DoE	Department of Environment (Cambodia)
DOST	Department of Science & Technology (in Vietnam)
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EP	Environmental Programme (of MRC)
FCZ	Fish Conservation Zone
FIPI	Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (Vietnam)
FFI	Flora and Fauna International
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GoC	Government of Cambodia
GoL	Government of Lao PDR
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
iNGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation and Nature & Natural Resources; now called IUCN - World Conservation Union
LARReC	Living Aquatic Resources Research Centre (Lao PDR)
LNMC	Lao National Mekong Committee
LSWR	Lang Sen Wetland Reserve
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (Lao PDR)
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (Cambodia)
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development (in Vietnam)
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Environment (Cambodia)
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources & Environment (in Vietnam & Thailand)
MOWRAM	Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (Cambodia)
MRC	Mekong River Commission

MRCs	Mekong River Commission Secretariat
MSP	Medium-Sized Project (of GEF)
MTE	Mid Term Evaluation (-team)
MWBP	Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme
NAFRI	National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (Lao PDR)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NGPES	National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (Lao PDR)
NMC	National Mekong Committee
NPO	National Programme Office
NSC	National Steering Committee
ONEP	Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (of MONRE; Thailand)
PD	Paris Declaration (on Aid Effectiveness: Ownership, Harmonisation, Alignment, Results and Mutual Accountability; March 2005)
PDF	Project Development Facility (of GEF); PDF-A, PDF-B and PDF-Cs are recognised ¹
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
PMU	Programme Management Unit
PPC	Provincial People's Committee (Vietnam)
PPO	Provincial Programme Office
PSTEO	Provincial Science, Technology and Environment Office (Lao PDR)
RAF	Resource Allocation Framework (of GEF)
SCAP	Species Conservation Action Plan
SMT	Senior Management Team
STEA	Science, Technology and Environment Agency (Lao PDR)
TCNP	Tram Chim National Park
TNMC	Thailand National Mekong Committee
TOR	Terms of Reference
TRAC	Target for Resource Assignment from the Core (a UNDP fund)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VEPA	Vietnam Environment Protection Agency
VNMC	Vietnam National Mekong Committee
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WANI	Water and Nature Initiative (of IUCN)
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WWF	World-wide Fund for Nature

¹ A PDF Block A grant (maximum of \$25,000) is intended to support the earliest stages of programme or project identification. PDF As are approved through UNDP-GEF, or the other GEF implementing agencies. A PDF A is used in preparation for work on a medium sized project or a full project. A PDF Block B grant (maximum of \$350,000 for single country projects; \$700,000 for projects involving more than one country) provides funding for the information gathering necessary to complete full project proposals and the essential supporting documentation. PDF B grants are approved by the GEF CEO. A PDF B grant is accessible only for the preparation of a full project. In highly exceptional cases, a PDF Block C grant (maximum of \$1 million) may be requested under specific circumstances.

Executive summary

1. The Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) aims at wetland conservation and sustainable resource management in four countries in the lower Mekong region: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. The programme has had a very long gestation period, as it was first initiated in 1995 and subject to a PDF-B² in the late 1990s. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) Project Brief was completed in 2001, but due to delays in GEF support, 'pre-implementation' activities during 2002-2004 were low key, funded (among others) by the International Union for the Conservation and Nature and Natural Resources³ (IUCN) and Wetlands International. In June 2002, IUCN secured interim funding (\$600,000) from the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Bangkok, through UNDP, for the development of a programme document, to start recruitment processes and to facilitate negotiation on agreements between the four governments, UNDP, MRC and IUCN. MWBP began officially in July 2004, but the start-up has been slow, with project offices, staff recruitment and management systems taking 6-12 months to be fully in place.

2. This has also been the case at the demonstration sites, where activities have been ongoing for only a year (or even less, in Vietnam). In spite of the slow start, significant progress has now been made at all of the demonstration sites. Provincial Programme Offices (PPOs) are fully established, equipped, staffed, and have management systems in place. In Lao and Thailand the PPOs are located within local government host agencies, whilst in Vietnam and Cambodia, they are located elsewhere. Ongoing activities are appropriate – certainly in terms of livelihoods and sustainable utilisation – and at times quite innovative. Biodiversity conservation related activities are sometimes less clear, and are progressing at a slower rate of delivery. During the remainder of Phase A, these initiatives will need to be strengthened and accelerated.

3. National Programme Offices (NPOs) are generally well-embedded in their respective host agencies, and cooperation between NPOs and their hosts is generally good. Relationships with other agencies are generally also quite good, although not always with the National Mekong Committees (NMCs) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) country offices. Effectiveness of NPOs varies between countries and institutional settings.

4. The Programme Management Unit (PMU) for MWBP is based in Vientiane, located in an office linked with IUCN Lao PDR. The PMU has both a management function and a programmatic function. In its management function, the PMU serves the MWBP by managing the country components' finances, reporting, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and by providing technical support. The programmatic function of the PMU takes form as the Regional Component (see below), with a regional perspective and support to national programmes.

² Project Development Facility (of the Global Environment Facility).

³ Now called IUCN - World Conservation Union

5. MWBP is executed by UNDP, and implemented by IUCN and the Mekong River Commission (MRC), along with the four national governments and other key stakeholders. With the bulk of the implementation by IUCN, it is unfortunate that the partnership with MRC (and the NMCs) is less than ideal, as MRC has a lasting regional mandate and regional influence.
6. PPOs and demonstration site activities are directly managed by the PMU and not the NPO, although there is also a reporting line from PPO to NPO and national host agency. As a result of the weaker link, NPOs are generally less involved at demonstration site level and it is often not clear how positive developments at demo site level will have effect at policy level.
7. The highly centralised management model for the MWBP, whereby key decisions and planning is led by the regional PMU, has worked against country ownership of both the national and regional programmes. Some NPOs are little involved in what is going on at demonstration site or PPO level, and this holds even stronger for the national host agencies. The centralised management also comes at a very high financial cost (see below).
8. The MTE team understands that it was not clear to MWBP until late 2005 that GEF had committed itself to funding of Phase A only, and that there would not automatically be funding for Phase B subject to a positive Mid-Term Evaluation. During the past six months, it has also emerged that GEF funding for biodiversity conservation will not be available for regional programmes – a change introduced by recent restructuring of GEF financing in response to the Resource Allocation Framework (RAF) for GEF4. This has led to uncertainties about the future for MWBP, and has inevitably influenced the focus of the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE).
9. Phase A of MWBP was designed for developing an ‘enabling environment’, a term that is not well defined in either the Project Brief (2001) or Project Support Document (2004). However, the MTE team’s assessment is that the extent to which the enabling environment will be in place by the end of Phase A is likely to vary substantially between countries. In Thailand and Vietnam, it would seem highly likely that an ‘enabled environment’ will be in place, while for Lao PDR, and to a lesser extent Cambodia, this remains uncertain. In order to consolidate what has been achieved to date and (in the case of Lao PDR and Cambodia) achieve basic results, Phase A should be extended – at least until the end of June 2007. The focus of the extension should be on consolidating activities already started and implementing other priority activities. Efficiency on the speed of delivery will need to be improved.
10. There are significant differences in capacities between the various countries. Thailand and Vietnam are well ahead in terms of capacities of local and national agencies, both for management of natural resources and (in the case of Thailand) in promoting sustainable livelihoods, while Lao PDR and Cambodia lag well behind and require more time and support.
11. MWBP’s Regional Component remains unclear and unfocused, and lacks an overall strategy. It has not been successful in establishing a regional ‘enabling environment’, and seems unlikely to be able to do so in the remainder of Phase A. The Regional Component has been a significant financial burden to the overall MWBP, as overall PMU costs comprise 70-75% of the utilised budget. The MTE mission understands that some of these costs are used to support activities at national and demonstrate site levels. Nonetheless, the costs of PMU operations and activities consume by far the largest proportion of the overall programme budget.

12. Greater country ownership is required for MWBP. At present, all management and the main reporting lines are via the PMU, and NPOs and national host agencies generally feel little involved in shaping activities at the demonstration site level. This is not surprising, since they have a limited role in both financial management and the setting of priorities. In what remains of Phase A, management and financial responsibilities should be transferred to the NPOs as much as possible and there will be opportunities to take this process further during Phase B.
13. Phase A funding has mainly been by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, The Royal Netherlands Government, MRC and the IUCN Water and Nature Initiative (WANI), along with minor contributions by other donors (e.g. Danida contribution to livelihoods component executed by CARE on the Vietnam Component).
14. Funding options for continuation of the country programmes after MWBP Phase A vary from country to country. Funding as GEF Medium Sized Projects (MSPs) as recently suggested by IUCN and UNDP seems a viable option only in the case of Cambodia. In the other countries there is either too much competition for scarce GEF resources, or there are other priorities or lack of support for this option by local agencies. In Thailand, global significance of biodiversity at Songkhram is not well articulated, but funds appear available at provincial and national level for continuation of the livelihoods and sustainable development activities underway. In Vietnam, funding is available to protected areas management boards from the Vietnam Conservation Fund and will be available from the forthcoming National Wetland Support Programme, while in Lao PDR bilateral donor support could be obtained for the livelihoods programme.
15. Funding of the Regional Component will remain an issue. It has been suggested that this could be funded out of GEF Adaptation to Climate Change funds, but there is little national government support for this approach. Also, while such funds seem highly appropriate for funding continuation of MWBP activities carried out by the MRC (e.g. using e-flows and wetland mapping as tools for better understanding possible consequence of climate change), they do not seem entirely appropriate for other regional activities.
16. Financing options and opportunities vary for the four country programmes, as do their points of departure in terms of achieved capacities. Country programmes are likely to move forward at different starting dates, and be supported by different funding sources. This will be a constraint for developing a coherent Phase B for the four country programmes, and certainly form a challenge to an eventual regional component.
17. The MTE report lists a number of short and medium term recommendations designed to maintain and develop key aspects of MWBP Phase A, which are identified as being in the interest of biodiversity conservation in the Lower Mekong Basin in the longer term. These include a revision of the current management structure of the programme, developing the approach to biodiversity conservation when seen in terms of livelihoods, and nurturing greater national ownership of the programme. A number of useful lessons can be drawn from the MWBP thus far – e.g. phasing of programmes, national ownership, and managing regional programmes – which are emphasised in the text.

Acknowledgements

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The team would also like to thank, in particular, UNDP Lao, the PMU, the four NPOs and the four PPOs for making arrangements for meetings, preparing background materials and CD-ROMs, and organising the logistics of the field visits; their meticulous attention to detail enabled this complex mission to run very smoothly. Lastly, we would like to thank all those who provided comments on the first draft of this report, which was circulated on 28 June 2006 • the Government of Lao PDR, UNDP Cambodia, UNDP Thailand and IUCN-ARO.

1 Introduction

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 – executed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and implemented by IUCN – The World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC), in collaboration with four participating governments and other key stakeholders. With funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, The Royal Netherlands Government, MRC, the IUCN 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.

MWBP has been designed to be funded in two phases: Phase A Creating the enabling environment, and Phase B Full implementation. Funding for Phase B was dependent upon a mid-term evaluation and a proposal for a Phase B programme document. However, recent changes within GEF have closed the option of funding Phase B as originally conceived (see below).

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

The main purpose of the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) is to assess whether MWBP has been successful during Phase A in creating an enabling environment, which can pave the way for an eventual Phase B. The MTE is also to assess effectiveness and efficiency of the programme in creating the enabling environment, to review the strategies that have been developed and to assess their continuing relevance to the changing conditions within the region and the four countries. Bearing in mind the overall objective of the MWBP – the conservation and sustainable use of Mekong wetland biodiversity – the MTE is also to assess if the strategies and approaches adopted continue to address this primary objective, and if they should continue or be adapted in an eventual Phase B. A secondary purpose of the MTE is to advise on future implementation of an eventual Phase B, through an assessment of the relevance of the project content and design to the current situation.

Recent changes in GEF criteria have mean that, under GEF-4, GEF would no longer provide regional funding for biodiversity conservation. This, in effect, closed the option of implementing Phase B as it had originally been conceived, and as a consequence alternative options are to be sought. The MTE is also to advise on different funding mechanisms proposed, including GEF with its revised Resource Allocation Frameworks, the proposed strategy of developing four national medium-sized projects (MSPs) and one umbrella regional MSP in the GEF's Adaptation to Climate Change window.

1.2 Key issues addressed

The MTE focuses on the following key questions:

- § Which results have been achieved on the four country programmes and the regional programme to date, and how do these relate to the overall objective of MWBP?
- § How cost-efficient and effective has the approach been on the four country programmes and the regional programme, and do they need to be adapted?
- § Have the four country programmes and the regional programme been successful in creating the enabling environment, i.e. developing the preconditions for a second phase? These preconditions include developing the capacity of key stakeholders, establishing programme management structures, developing partnerships, generating understanding and awareness, creating government ownership and paving the way for sustainability.
- § What are the funding options for continuation of the four country programmes and the regional programme in an eventual second phase (Phase B)?

1.3 Methodology of the evaluation

The evaluation was carried out from 28 May – 15 July 2006 and largely followed the methodology outlined in the TOR provided by UNDP Lao PDR Country Office (Annex 1). Fieldwork was carried out in the four countries from 29 May – 21 June by an MTE team consisting of three international and four national consultants. The three international consultants were Wim Giesen (Team Leader), Ross Hughes (Wetlands biodiversity specialist) and Mike Ounsted (Community development and livelihood specialist), while the four national consultants were Mam Kosal (Cambodia), Bounsouane Pomsupha (Lao PDR), Phairat Phromthong (Thailand) and Tran Phuong Dong (Vietnam).

The approach adopted by the MTE team involved:

- § reading and evaluating project documents such as reports, strategies, proposals, fact-sheets and guidelines;
- § meetings, discussions and interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, including UNDP officers in the four countries, IUCN officers in the four countries, Mekong River Commission Secretariat staff and staff of the four National Mekong Committees, Programme Management Unit staff, National Programme Office staff, Provincial Programme Office staff, national host agency staff, partner organisations, steering committee members and management committee members (meeting notes are attached in Annex 6; Results are summarised in Annex 4);
- § visiting the four demonstration sites, provincial offices and counterpart agencies, discussing approach and impacts of the programme, communications and management, future options and assessing lessons learned to date;
- § team discussions on findings, and developing presentation of findings for final briefing to UNDP, MRC, IUCN and the PMU in Vientiane on 20 June;
- § correspondence with key stakeholders following return to home base;
- § production of draft MTE report at home bases of international consultants, circulated for comments on 28 June;
- § incorporation of comments from national governments (notably Lao PDR), UNDP (Cambodia and Thailand) and IUCN (ARO), and preparation of a final draft MTE Report for MWBP on 15 July 2006, the closure date of our contract (see Annex 1 - TOR); comments from other programme partners, government agencies or PMU had not been received by that date.

1.4 Structure of the evaluation report

The MTE report is structured in the following way:

Chapters 1-3 are all introductory in nature, and include a general introduction (1), an overview of the MWBP and its development context (2), and a chapter on how the programme was formulated (3).

Chapters 4-7 assess the four country components, i.e. Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, respectively, and focus on:

- § Programme design (institutional setting, demonstration project & national priorities, stakeholder participation);
- § Programme implementation (country-ownership, implementation approach, monitoring & evaluation, stakeholder participation, financial planning, execution & implementation modalities)
- § Programme results (creating the enabling environment, technical effectiveness, sustainability); and
- § Implications & recommendations (remainder of Phase-A, and a possible Phase-B approach)

Chapter 8 is similar to chapters 4-7, but assesses the regional programme in terms of design, implementation, results and implications for the future.

Chapters 9 and 10 draw conclusions from chapters 4-8 for Phase A and Phase B, respectively, while Chapter 11 provides recommendations.

A series of annexes provide the TOR (Annex 1), itinerary (2), list of persons interviewed (3), summary tables of field visits (4), list of documents reviewed (5), and comments by stakeholders summarised in meeting notes (6).

2 MWBP Programme & its development context

2.1 Programme start and its duration

The potential for a regional GEF project was first discussed in 1995 in a joint initiative between Wetlands International and IUCN. Funding was secured to develop a GEF PDF A proposal, which was subsequently prepared by the two organisations. Between 1999 and 2002 IUCN prepared the GEF PDF B project brief, which the GEF Council approved in March 2002. This approval was for the programme, now called the MWBP, to receive funding in two phases: Phase A Creating the enabling environment, and Phase B Full Implementation. Funding for Phase B was dependent upon a mid-term evaluation and a proposal for a Phase B programme document. In June 2002, IUCN secured interim funding (\$600,000) from the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Bangkok, through UNDP, for the development of a programme document, to start recruitment processes and to facilitate negotiation on agreements between the four governments, UNDP, MRC and IUCN. Only in May 2004 did the GEF CEO approve the project document, and this was followed by the formal completion of agreements by UNDP – as the programme executing agency, MRC and IUCN – as the implementing agencies, and the governments of Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand – as the recipient host countries. The preparatory process was completed in January 2005, when Vietnam gave final approval to the project document.

During the period July 2004 June 2005 there were a number of start-up set backs, which are referred to in this report; the countries also moved forward at different paces. However, June 2005 saw full recruitment and key procedures in place, and from this date MWBP moved rapidly forward. An underspend and reduced outputs in the first year of the programme made it possible to gain GEF approval to extend Phase A to December 2006. A no-cost extension beyond end-2006 was discussed by the main parties in May 2006, but no formal mandate was given; this needs to be approved by the Steering Committee first.

The MTE team understands that it was not clear to MWBP until late 2005 that GEF had committed itself to funding of Phase A only, and that there would not automatically be funding for Phase B subject to a positive Mid-Term Evaluation. Early in 2006, MWBP was notified that changes in GEF criteria meant that, under GEF-4, GEF would no longer provide regional funding for biodiversity conservation. This, in effect, closed the option of implementing Phase B as it had originally been conceived. Senior MWBP staff has since proposed alternative strategies for Phase B, and recommendations from the MTE are put forward for consideration.

2.2 Problems that the Programme seeks to address

MWBP identifies wetland loss and degradation in the Lower Mekong Basin as the root cause of biodiversity loss. The programme focuses on five issues and themes:

Root cause of wetland degradation and loss	MWBP theme
Lack of integration between sectors in development planning	Multi-sector planning at national and regional level
Lack of supportive policies and incentives for wetland conservation and sustainable use	Strengthened policy and economic framework
Lack of knowledge about wetland biodiversity and its use, and lack of awareness amongst decision makers and public	Increased awareness and information
Lack of capacity for wetland management and wise use at all levels	Enhanced human and technical resources
Lack of viable livelihood alternatives for local communities using wetland resources	Four sustainable resource-use demonstration projects

2.3 Immediate & development objectives of the Programme

MWBP firmly states as its guiding principle that “it is not possible to conserve the biodiversity of Mekong wetlands without addressing issues of sustainable use, livelihoods and poverty”. The Programme Document has a clear sustainable livelihoods strategy based on development thinking and best practice at the time the document was prepared. This underlying working principle that takes a people-centred ‘ecosystem approach’ has not been clear to all stakeholders, who may have been confused by a somewhat contradictory emphasis on the conservation of globally significant biodiversity in the Project Brief and by the complexity of the programme logframe (Results Framework), and its revisions. Together with an emphasis on ‘flagship’ species, the logframe appeared to promote species conservation *per se*, even if this was not its intent. ‘Conservation’ was seen as a threat to development.

However, the logframe has undergone significant changes since the Project Brief was accepted. The Logframe was first adapted as the M & E system was developed, and a further revision of the logframe is dated January 2006. This most recent revision is far more workable than its predecessors although its formal status is not clear; it reflects the reality of the wetland management interventions in the region and a realistic approach to the implementation of the MWBP.

2.4 Main stakeholders

In the original design, as specified in the GEF program brief, the main stakeholders were anticipated to be managers and users of wetlands throughout the Lower Mekong Basin. This included the Mekong River Commission at regional level, the four Governments at national level, and provincial and district authorities at the four demonstration sites. It was also anticipated that international environmental NGOs would be involved in the programme wherever possible, mostly in terms of providing technical advice and services and that local people would be involved in strategies to protect and conserve wetland biodiversity. There was no explicit stakeholder participation plan in the project design, but instead, participatory actions were integrated into various components and actions, particularly those at demonstration site level.

2.5 Results expected

Results anticipated in the GEF Project Brief (September, 2001), the Project Support Document (July 2004) and the revised logframe (January, 2006) are all rather different. The M&E system is based on the logframe presented in the Project Support Document and so it is not entirely clear how this will now apply to the revised logframe under application since January 2007 and presented to the MTE as the current basis of planning.

The regional nature of the programme design gave rise to a broad range of proposed outputs and results. There was a strong focus on achieving results relating to biodiversity conservation in the original design approved in the GEF Project Brief, particularly as part of the regional program. However, the logframe was revised extensively by PMU in January 2006 to place much more emphasis on livelihood aspects and to reduce the focus on biodiversity conservation activities.

The realization that GEF funds had not been approved for Phase B prompted a further reduction in the focus on biodiversity conservation, at least for Phase A, evident in the workplans for 2006. For example, budgets for preparing and funding management plans, strategies and action for conservation at Attapeu and Stung Treng demonstration sites have been very substantially reduced, and most activities and spending at these sites is now for livelihood related activities. Plans to develop a transboundary, sub-regional plan for the Mekong between Pakse and Kratie now seems to have been removed from planned activities, preparation of biodiversity overlays and regional biodiversity assessments have been postponed to a possible Phase B.

This apparent change in emphasis on proposed results and outcomes, as reflected in the revised logframe, does not seem to be understood fully by MWBP partners or government and provincial host agencies, perhaps because it seems that there has, as yet, been no official endorsement of the revised logframe.

3 MWBP Programme formulation

3.1 Relevance

The programme is broadly supportive of global, national and local development policies. At the global level, the original design of the programme sought to address globally important biodiversity in a region that is coming under rapidly increasing demographic and development pressures. However, the recent revisions to the logframe reduce the relevance of the program to global biodiversity conservation priorities (see above). At national level, the program supports broad national development and environmental management priorities, as set out in various strategic policy documents and plans (for example, Vietnam's Socio-economic development strategy, nationalized MDGs) and specifically seeks to support national capacities to implement obligations under the Ramsar Convention, to which three of the four countries participating in the MWBP are signatories.

Activities at national and demonstration site level address conservation issues for biodiversity of national importance, particularly of fish diversity in Thailand and Lao PDR, and remnant populations of Sarus Cranes in Vietnam. The latter is considered to be 'vulnerable' globally, but only small numbers now visit the Tram Chim and Lang Sen demonstration sites, with the largest numbers of non-breeding birds now at sites in Eastern Cambodia. The program addresses international conservation priorities at Stung Treng Ramsar site, although the downscaling of biodiversity conservation in the revised logframe and workplans for the remainder of Phase A will severely constrain the conservation impacts the programme is likely to have.

The program design seeks to address global and national conservation priorities at the local level, and so by focussing on the use of the livelihoods approach, the program has been able to be supportive of local development priorities.

For Phase B, defining the niche and relevance of the MWBP at the regional level will become somewhat more difficult, since there are now a wide range of regional development and environmental initiatives working throughout the region. MWBP sees its added value as being in the 'holistic' and 'ecosystem' approach to wetlands management. However, other regional initiatives also lay claim to adopting approaches that are at least 'integrated' in nature.

The most obvious of these in the MRC – established in 1995 and working on behalf of the 4 riparian countries of the lower Mekong basin. This does not have a specific 'wetland' focus, but is a core institutional partner, on paper at least, of the MWBP and has a long track record of working on environmental management, fisheries, flood management, water flows etc. MRC has strong links into national governance structures, whereas the regional component of MWBP notably lacks such links.

Another important regional initiative is the ADB-coordinated 'Core Environment Program' and this includes a substantive Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative (BCCI) – currently focussed more on terrestrial habitat, but increasingly interested in supporting work on wetland systems.

Sida is providing substantial funding support for the Wetland Alliance (comprising AIT Outreach Program, WWF, CORIN and Word Fish Centre) and this will also work throughout the Mekong region – supporting work on innovative approaches to wetlands management, including livelihoods based approaches, and with a strong focus on building local capacity.

The Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF) has recently secured long-anticipated funds for supporting work on freshwater biodiversity conservation in the Mekong basin system. CEPF is planning to establish its coordinating mechanism shortly, and will seek to provide support to national partners (governmental and non governmental) to address key conservation priorities.

WWF's Living Mekong Programme, operating in the 4 MWBP countries, plus China aims to 'marry' successful biodiversity conservation with sustainable development, particularly using tools and approaches of Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM), and is pursuing this through country offices supporting on-the-ground implementation an a small regional team providing coordination support.

The IUCN Water and Nature Initiative (WANI), also a partner to the MWBP, has aspirations to continue and expand further up the basin to include Myanmar and China. For biodiversity, there are now existing regional initiatives e.g. the Giant Catfish Working Group, the Mekong Dolphin Conservation Program, the International Crane Foundation, the IUCN-SSC Crocodile Specialist Group. A number of other organizations work at national level, throughout the region and therefore also argue that they bring a regional perspective to their implementation support work at national level, amongst them WCS, FFI and WWF. Oxfam America also implement a regional Mekong programme and the Oxfam family have considerable experience in working with community fisheries and livelihood issues throughout the Mekong region.

3.2 Conceptualisation & design

Root causes: MWBP is designed to address five main root causes of wetland degradation and loss of wetland biodiversity along five main themes (see 2.2). The root causes are well identified and this approach is therefore appropriate. Lessons learned from other programmes and projects were taken on board in the design.

Logframe: The logical framework of MWBP has undergone significant changes since the programme's inception. The logframe included in the Project Brief of 2001 (approved by GEFSEC) followed the logic of addressing the five main root causes. However, indicators in this first logframe were at activity and output level, rather than at the desired outcome level, and as a result it became mired in complexity by including 43 outputs, 126 indicators and 153 activities. This was recognised as being too unwieldy to properly monitor and manage. An opportunity for simplifying this was lost during preparation of the Project Support Document (2004). During development of the M&E system (2005), however, the logframe was revised, and a further revision occurred in January 2006. This most recent revision is far more workable than its predecessors although its formal status is not clear; it reflects the reality of the wetland management interventions in the region and a realistic approach to the implementation of the MWBP. In this latest revision, outputs remain the same, but activities and indicators have been refined, with indicators developed for all outcomes. The latest version also has a separate logframes for each components, which greatly simplifies it's use.

Implementation arrangements: MWBP's implementation arrangements are complex, which is to be expected for a programme that spans four countries and includes a regional component. The original arrangements included an overall Programme Steering Committee, a Regional Co-ordination Subcommittee and four National Steering Committees. This was modified to an overall Executive Regional Steering Committee, a Programme Management Committee (PMC), four National Steering Committees and four Provincial Management Boards. The latest revision proposes having a Regional Steering Committee and abolishing the PMC.

Phasing of MWBP: MWBP was designed for implementation in two phases: Phase A for developing an 'enabling environment' and Phase B implementation of activities and outputs. In hindsight, the merit of this approach was questionable given that the four countries varied significantly in their individual capacities and that the enabling environment was poorly defined. The lack of guaranteed funding for Phase B further undermined the appropriateness of this approach.

Overall assessment: Programme conceptualisation & design

Highly satisfactory

Satisfactory

Marginally
satisfactory

Unsatisfactory

Rationale: MWBP's complexity is partly explained by its history, as it was developed and designed over a period of almost 10 years, and is the product of many persons and agencies. As the programme 'matured', more was added and it was never really overhauled until implementation, when development of the M&E system made it necessary to make significant changes in design, and programme management structures were overhauled for practical reasons.

3.3 Replication approach

While certain MWBP outputs and outcomes certainly contribute to sustainability and replication, MWBP has not specifically incorporated replication or sustainability strategies in its design. Such sections – which are standard fare in GEF project briefs – have not been included in either the Project Brief of 2001 or the Programme Support Document of 2004. A brief 4-page Programme Sustainability Strategy document has been drafted in 2005, but this is not much more than a discussion document, as it does not really present a full strategy on how to achieve sustainability.

It is too early for MWBP to be actively pursuing opportunities for replication or scaling up, as implementation of most components has only been ongoing for just over a year, and the first positive results and lessons learned are just emerging. Approaches for replication are therefore still at an embryonic stage, although it is recognised by programme implementers that opportunities exist and are to be incorporated.

4 Cambodia Component Assessment

4.1 Project design

4.1.1 Institutional setting of PPO and NPO in Cambodia

The National Program Office is hosted by the Ministry of Environment, with formal reporting to the MWBP PMU. Within MoE, the National Programme Director position is filled by one of two Director Generals of MOE. The DG also has responsibility for overall supervision over technical aspects of the ministry including the Department of Nature Conservation and Protection (DNCP) – the competent national authority for Ramsar. This arrangement has worked reasonably well, but DNCP expressed strongly the need for considerable improvement, perhaps because internal reporting and information sharing within MoE has not functioned as well as planned. For whatever reason, DNCP do not feel they are sufficiently engaged or informed of the progress of the programme.

Reporting responsibilities of both NPOs and PPOs are to the PMU. This has two important implications. Firstly, the NPO has no direct responsibility for management of provincial activities – this is the role of the regional PMU. Secondly, reports to MoE come from the regional level, not the provincial or national level, so MoE are, in effect, simply informed of the programme performance as a whole through reports (described by MoE as unclear and confusing) and through discussions at the National (Program) Steering Committee. However, the NPC also reports on a regular basis to the NPD, both on the national and regional component. If a possible Phase B initiative is to focus more at the Stung Treng Ramsar site level, then consideration should be given to better integration of the PPO within DNCP.

The National (Programme) Steering Committee has been established and meets regularly. However, it has not been possible to reach agreement between line ministries on the establishment of a National Wetlands Committee – a feature of the original design, but no longer present in the revised logframe. The Ramsar steering committee has yet to be established. CNMC – an active participant in the National Steering Committee, expressed the hope that a National Wetlands Committee might eventually evolve out of the National (Programme) Steering Committee, but first there must be stronger engagement of senior line ministries in the NSC, especially the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MOWRAM) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF). These ministries have been asked to co-chair the NSC with this aim in mind.

IUCN no longer has a representative office in Cambodia, and so all technical support from IUCN is delivered from the regional/PMU level.

The MTE was not able to assess adequately the efficacy of the NSC since a number of key steering committee members were unable to meet with the mission. However, CNMC and MoE report that the NSC has proved useful in providing a forum for cross-sectoral discussions on wetlands - and there have been recent improvements in the MWBP servicing of this committee (previously, key papers including budgets and work plans were made available at too short notice for prior review).

At provincial level, the PPO is hosted by the Department of Environment, Stung Treng Province. Due to capacity and funding constraints, there are no staff assigned from DNCP to the DoE in this province, so DoE is responsible for DNCP functions at provincial level (responsibility for PAs and Ramsar sites is directly under DNCP), including responsibility for the Ramsar site and reporting on progress to DNCP at national level. Due to space constraints, the PPO has moved to an adjacent building, and so is no longer housed within the DoE. Institutional capacity of DoE is extremely low and realistically, this constrains the extent to which the PPO can engage with DoE on technical work.

The PPO reports to the regional PMU, so reporting procedures and formats are more complicated and very different from those of the DoE. This also introduces formidable language barriers (as communications and reporting to PMU is in English). This works against active DoE engagement since DoE staff do not read or speak English. An added complication is that the revised logframe shifts the focus of work away from areas where DoE have institutional responsibility, the effect of which will be to further marginalize their role in the programme implementation. The DoE and PPO co-managers meet regularly, and there is strong commitment from PPO to engage with the DoE. Despite this, DoE expressed strongly the view that they do not feel part of the programme, have not been involved in work plan or logframe revision and therefore feel they have very little role in planning and decision-making.

The issues outlined above reflect significant programme design problems that will need to be rectified for the remainder of Phase A, to ensure that new arrangements are 'bedded-in' by the start of any possible Phase B. The overall assessment of design is that the institutional structure operates more or less in parallel with government systems, both at national and provincial level, and reduces substantially the role that government can play in the programme.

4.1.2 Demonstration project & Cambodian national priorities

The demonstration project inherently seeks to support Cambodia's efforts to fulfil its obligations under the Ramsar Convention, by providing lessons and experience on integrating livelihood and biodiversity conservation objectives at site level. On paper, both the national and demonstration site components are supportive and compatible with national priorities.

Poverty reduction and biodiversity conservation, particularly a shift towards community management of fisheries resources, are among many priorities addressed in government policy. Thus the overall approach at the demonstration site - addressing livelihood and protection of flagship species, does respond well to the national interest. However, from the host agency's perspective, the strong focus on livelihoods does not support sufficiently the Ministry's efforts and mandate to ensure that all aspects of biodiversity conservation are addressed – not just fish diversity, but also threatened habitats and species.

4.1.3 Stakeholder participation

Stakeholder participation during the prolonged design phase was not assessed in depth by the MTE team although a number of international partners referred to their contributions to early design parameters. The rather weak role for government host agencies in project implementation, at both the national and provincial levels, might indicate that the design process took place largely outside government structures, and perhaps that government did not play a strong role in the design process. The scale and sheer complexity of the original design would also have worked against active engagement of many stakeholders.

Overall assessment: Stakeholder participation in design – Cambodia			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Rationale: Weak government roles suggest insufficient participation during the design phase.			

4.2 Programme Implementation

4.2.1 Ownership/Country drivenness

The overall picture for ownership is mixed, with most ownership issues tracing back to the institutional set-up discussed above. In general, ownership does not appear to be high – a conclusion supported by M&E reporting for 2005 which rates ownership as ‘low-medium’.

The project design process was exceptionally prolonged, during which numerous consultations and workshops were held at national and regional level. It was not possible to assess the extent to which the programme design took on board the key issues raised during these consultations, but it is assumed that this was assessed by UNDP prior to programme approval.

At national level, there is a reasonable level of support amongst MoE - and strong commitment to make progress on the wetland agenda was expressed by the Secretary of State, informed by his MWBP-supported participation in Ramsar COP9 in Uganda and a strong endorsement from the CNMC.

Discussions with DNCP indicate somewhat low ownership, something of a concern given their status as the competent authority for Ramsar). Concerns were cited over (perceived) likely outcomes of sector policy work (at national level) and the slow progress on the Ramsar agenda at site level (demarcation, and management planning). They appear to be adopting a ‘wait-and-see’ attitude, rather than one of active engagement. As a whole, the host agency made clear that they do not feel they were consulted sufficiently on logframe development and revision and they perceive their inputs do not influence MWBP planning and decision-making.

It was not possible to assess ownership of other line ministries as requests made by the NPO for meetings were either not confirmed or were attended by junior and/uninformed staff. Whether this can be construed as an indicator of low levels of engagement and ownership or because of understandable ‘mission fatigue’, could not be established.

Ownership amongst external, non-government partners is generally rather low. Appreciation was expressed by Health Unlimited (at provincial level); and constructive engagement and support from the World Fish Centre was evident. However, several iNGO partners referred to the MWBP’s efforts in Cambodia as ‘regionally-driven’, ‘lacking focus on key priorities’, and several partners referred to ‘non-delivery’ on expectations raised earlier in the programme cycle.

4.2.2 Implementation approach

The PMU guides the development and drafting of work plans – these are then discussed and agreed with the NPO and presented to the NSC for endorsement. This is also the case for staff contracts of both the NPO and the PPO. The NPO provides support to the NSC, but also has to backstop communications etc between the PPO and PMU, since language issues sometimes constrain clear communication. The NPO also manages relationships with GoC partners in MoE and other ministries, and with external partners for work on other national activities, such as the sector policy review work. Feedback from partners was that the NPO performs this role effectively, despite limited resources and tight timeframes. In the absence of an IUCN country representative office in Cambodia, there is no in-country backstopping support from IUCN.

The logical framework has not been used to a great extent at national or PPO level. The NPO and the PPO were aware of the revised logframe (the PPO only vaguely so), but neither office were involved in the logframe revision process – this is seen as a PMU responsibility. Government and external partners did not seem to be aware that the logframe had been revised at all.

The workplan is the key management tool at both national and provincial level, and in both cases, the workplans were considered (generally) realistic and appropriate. Budgets and targets set for 2006 seem realistic, even given the reductions forced upon the programme due to a lack of a confirmed budget for Phase B (see below for more detailed review comments). The work of the Cambodia programme is also summarized succinctly on the (excellent) MWBP website – and thus there is a clear and useful functional supportive link here between the PMU and the country programme.

Work on flagship species is managed mostly from the regional level, since, until recently, the NPO and the PPO has lacked access to biodiversity management expertise. The NPO has recently engaged the services of a short term national consultant with expertise in biodiversity, but this contract expires in July.

Budgets are also set by the PMU, based on the workplan. However, budget frames were reported to change frequently and this has sometimes placed the PPO in difficult situations, since they have sometimes entered into commitments with partners at provincial level, which then require re-negotiation. This was reported to have been a feature of regionally-supported biodiversity work, although opinions on this issue diverge substantively between partners and PMU. The PPO expressed a hope that the PMU would in future consult more, prior to changes being made to agreed budget levels.

At the demonstration site level, the work plan was deemed useful and has been updated regularly to reflect progress. However, it does not seem to respond to the new focus of the revised logframe. The main implementation approach at site level has been to sub-contract key aspects of the work to relevant local NGOs – Health Unlimited for preventive health and nutrition work, CEDAC for agricultural development and CEPA for community fisheries. The PPO has managed this process extremely well, and the approach has been extremely successful. Work has been undertaken to a high and impressive standard, and relations between these provincial partners and the PPO are excellent. The PPO is strongly commended by the MTE for their performance at demonstration site level.

Most communications on work planning and budgeting are conducted in English, either between PMU and NPO, or between the PMU and PPO. In some cases, the PPO has had to work through the NPO, or seek their detailed support, in order to deal with language-based communication problems. This becomes more of an issue when the VSO officer is not on-site.

Overall assessment: Implementation approach - Cambodia			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory

Rationale: This is rated marginally satisfactory, due to low levels of ownership (mostly resulting from initial design; weak budget planning; and lack of clarity in the use of Logframes – the LF appears to have been revised in response to current practice, rather than being used for adaptive management. The excellent and committed work of the PPO staff and sound management by the NPO were noted.

4.2.3 Monitoring & evaluation

Time constraints prevented an in-depth evaluation of M&E progress and so MTE findings are somewhat general on this issue. Both NPO and PPO supply information to the PMU through a sophisticated reporting system, and annual reports summarize briefly the status of progress on 18 performance indicators for Cambodia and various indicators for outputs. These performance indicators are not included in the revised logframe. A particular strength of the regional contribution to the national Cambodia component is the annual milestone overviews. These summarize which milestones are on target, delayed, rescheduled or have been retired because they have been achieved or are no longer valid – providing a clear and concise overview of overall progress.

In the revised logframe, there are no indicators that can assess progress in monitoring impacts on key species and habitats and thus far, baseline surveys for biodiversity have not been completed – but should be in place by end of Phase A. In the absence of clear and measurable indicators for biodiversity conservation in the revised logframe (e.g. relating to condition or extent of key habitats; breeding numbers for key species) it will not be possible to assess whether real progress has actually been made on biodiversity conservation, nor whether the strengthened capacities referred to in the programme purpose will actually deliver biodiversity conservation.

Performance indicators feature in the M&E reporting system outputs (e.g. the M&E Annual reporting January 2006), and detailed indicators are included in the revised logframe. However, as the latter do not appear in the last reporting outputs⁴, it is unclear exactly what indicators are being used for M&E, and what indicators will be used in future was unclear to the MTE and is not well understood at NPO and PPO level.

A protected areas management effectiveness tracker tool (Chambers/PPO, Jan 2005) was completed by the VSO adviser at Stung Treng in January 2005, and identified over-fishing and mainstream dam construction in China as the top two priority threats to the protected area. This information should make a useful contribution to the baseline information, but requires integration into the M&E system.

M&E reporting is impressive, and the results presented in the 7th quarterly report indicate that most activities are on schedule for completion.

⁴ Performance indicators are assessed on a six-monthly basis, and are not included in quarterly reports.

In terms of external monitoring and supervision, the UNDP Cambodia office has yet to visit the demonstration site, and does not play an active role in supervision of the national programme. This may change following the approval earlier this year of UNDP TRAC funds for sector policy analysis.

Overall assessment: Monitoring & evaluation – Cambodia

Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
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Rationale: The M&E system delivers impressive clarity in reporting on indicators but there was a lack of clarity over the selection of indicators (should these be based on the revised logframe?) and ambiguity in indicator selection in some cases.

4.2.4 Stakeholder participation

There does not appear to be a specific stakeholder participation plan. However, stakeholders have been engaged at different levels. At site level, stakeholder involvement is highly satisfactory, starting with the Participatory Poverty Assessment and then ongoing through participatory approaches adopted for preventative health work, local knowledge-based approaches to developing community fisheries work, and through the initial planning on sustainable agriculture planning. On the latter however, there is a considerable risk that programme – local relationships will be jeopardised if adequate funding is not secured to maintain momentum on sustainable agriculture aspects for the remainder of Phase A.

Stakeholder involvement at provincial level was also mixed. At the village and site level, participatory approaches have been applied and these have contributed greatly to a sense of local ownership, at least for the Sala Phoum work. At broader provincial level, participation of local service providing NGOs also seems to have been good. At the broader provincial level, stakeholder involvement has been constrained by the delayed establishment and convening of the provincial management board. This is the key mechanism through which inter-sectoral discussions should take place. The less than optimal engagement of DoE in planning and priority setting is also a significant factor. However, other provincial agencies were positive and looked forward to closer future role in the demonstration site work (e.g. provincial DoF and IFRDI).

At national level, the picture is more mixed. The NSC is a key mechanism and now appears to be working well. However, strong reservations were expressed by a number of iNGO ‘partners’ vv (WWF, WCS, FFI) perception that key planning, priority setting and budgeting processes were controlled by the regional PMU with insufficient consultation. The MTE appreciates that such views may often reflect vested interests, strong competition for scarce funds and even personal agendas, but these perceptions of MWBP will constrain the efficacy of partnership-based approaches. Phase B might learn from this experience and explore alternative approaches to allocating funds, with a stronger role for government agencies in priority setting and decision-making.

Overall assessment: Stakeholder participation - Cambodia

Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
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Rationale: NSC meetings play an important role, and stakeholder involvement also working well at demonstration site level. Given that the design is rather top-down, with a dominant role for the regional PMU in planning, the project has done well at both national and provincial level to involve a broad range of stakeholders. Attention is now needed to ‘bringing on board’ those organizations who feel marginalized by MWBP activities.

4.2.5 Financial planning

Budget allocation. The PMU is responsible for most aspects of financial planning, and inputs are sought from the NPO and PPO. Work plans and budgets are then approved by the NSC (although CNMC pointed-out that documents are circulated at short notice prior to meetings so the role for line ministries to comment and contribute to the budget planning process is very limited).

The MTE reviewed briefly the consolidated budget/expenditure report for 2005 and the budget for 2006. These show that spending is scheduled to increase substantively for 2006, with most of the increase on spending on activities, reflecting the work being undertaken on sector policy review, fisheries, sustainable agriculture and health during 2006. There will also be a modest increase in staffing costs, office operations and cost for travel and meetings.

The national programme budget for 2005 accounted for 13% of total MWBP expenditure, or around 32% of the annual budget of the PMU. For 2006, spending will comprise around 15% of overall MWBP expenditure, or around 36% of PMU expenditure. Spending on activities accounted for 35% of in-country expenditure in 2005, but will increase to around 61% in 2006.

Sixty percent (\$288,655) of national programme spending (\$471,592) will be on activities at national and PPO level, and the remaining one third on operating expenses at national or provincial level. Around 44% of the activities budget will be spent at demonstration site level. For comparative purposes, spending on activities at site level at Stung Treng Ramsar site will be around 10% (\$130,210⁵) of the PMU budget (\$1,291,360) for 2006 and will amount to 4% of the overall MWBP budget (\$3,138,285) for 2006. For national activities, the figures are 12% and 5% respectively.

The MTE would suggest that a more definitive analysis of budget allocation and planning information is undertaken to ensure that errors of interpretation have not been made. However, these 'indicative' figures may partly explain why host agencies at both national and provincial level would like to see a much stronger emphasis on achieving tangible outcomes on both livelihoods and conservation at site level – backed by more realistic budget allocations. The figures also underscore that some impressive returns have been achieved at national and site level, despite their very modest share of budget allocations.

Budget predictability NPOs, PPOs and external 'partners' referred frequently to the unpredictable nature of PMU budget allocations - citing frequent revisions to budgets. These have contributed significantly to tensions with partners at provincial and national levels.

Leveraging cofinancing The project has been successful in leveraging additional co-financing from UNDP TRAC funds (for sector policy work) and from Darwin Initiative (for integrated biodiversity, economic and livelihood assessment methodological work at Stung Treng) and various sources of funds and in-kind contributions have been leveraged to supplement regional biodiversity funding in Cambodia (e.g. National Geographic support for expertise on 'megafish' studies, including Mekong Giant Catfish). Additional funds are also required to complete work on sustainable agricultural development.

⁵ Based on figures presented in the 2006 workplan.

4.2.6 Execution & implementation modalities

MWBP has made impressive progress in recruiting staff, mobilizing consultants, initiating partnerships with local and national partners and establishing national and provincial offices.

Financial management systems have been put in place and appear to be working well, despite complex reporting requirements for multiple donor sources and for UNDP GEF funds in particular. Reporting systems are operational and thorough. Minor adjustments are required to reporting formats to make quarterly reports more accessible to national host agency. However, the complexity of reporting procedures and formats has created problems, especially for the PPO, and has required high levels of inputs from PPO staff.

NPO and PPO staff are committed, competent and respected by government and external partners. At provincial level, the PPO is supported by an international adviser provided through VSO. The VSO has been effective, has helped underpin the work of the PPO on technical and communications aspects and has the respect and support of provincial staff. The VSO will complete his assignment in September, and there will be a likely minimum two month gap before a replacement VSO is in place. The NPO office appears to have competent and strong management, and should be capable of assuming greater management responsibilities for the remainder of Phase A.

Execution arrangements are largely in parallel to existing government systems and staffing structures (see above) and so a clear exit strategy is needed that will ensure stronger ownership and integration of management responsibilities into existing structures.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Effectiveness – the enabling environment

Overall, the enabling environment is not yet in place, and rated as marginally satisfactory, but this rating could improve given that time remains before closure of Phase A, provided a concerted effort is made for the remainder of Phase A.

There is now a functioning National (Programme) Steering Committee but initial plans/indicators included in the project brief for a National Wetlands Committee have now been withdrawn and the National Ramsar Committee has yet to be established. The review of the National Wetlands Action Plan has yet to start and the sector study is ongoing, scheduled for completion in 2006. The support of CNMC for the National (Programme) Steering Committee and a stronger role for MOWRAM and MAFF as co-chairs offers some prospects that this mechanism might be sustained under a future Phase B and could perhaps transform into a National Wetlands Committee at some stage over the longer term.

At provincial level, the provincial management board has been established officially, but has not yet been convened and meetings are not yet scheduled. Work on reaching agreement between key stakeholders on Ramsar boundary delineation has yet to start in earnest and there is now a risk that this will not be completed prior to the end of Phase A.

The MTE considers that clear agreement on objectives, roles and responsibilities for Ramsar site management is a vital element of the enabling environment at demonstration site level. Unfortunately, there appears to have been very little progress on these aspects. This is not an issue where responsibility

can be placed wholly on the project – there have been 3 governors in two years in Stung Treng province, and the province in general has not been active in making progress on the provincial management board – the reasons for which are unclear to the MTE. Logically, these agreements would take the form of a Ramsar management plan (although this is not included explicitly as an output of Phase A activities⁶). Based on progress to date, it seems unlikely that this will be in place by the end of 2006.

Baseline surveys for biodiversity are ongoing and vegetation and fish surveys are planned and budgeted for remainder of Phase A. The extent to which other baseline that will enable monitoring of changes in other aspects of the national and provincial work (e.g. for indicators included on commune development plans, awareness of natural resource management issues, civil society responses to policy analysis etc) is unclear.

Overall assessment: Effectiveness: the enabling environment -Cambodia			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Rationale: Partial establishment of enabling environment - provincial steering committee is not yet operational and there are no agreements yet in place over roles and responsibilities for Ramsar site management.			

4.3.2 Effectiveness/impact – technical

In most cases, it is too early to assess progress and impacts associated with outcomes specified in the revised logframe. Furthermore, assessment of impacts and progress by the MTE was hampered by substantial differences between outcome indicators included in the revised logframe with those included in the M&E system and project support document logframe. For the purpose of this report, assessment is made against the indicators included in the revised logframe, since the MTE was advised that this had been endorsed by the regional steering committee.

At provincial level, biodiversity issues are addressed through livelihoods-based approaches – principally through supporting traditional knowledge-based surveys and analysis of fisheries and medicinal plants, undertaken by village-based ‘researchers’. This research is then translated into practical resource management strategies (e.g. establishment of fish conservation areas, restrictions on damaging fishing techniques etc). This approach is based on the Thai Baan approach supported by MWBP in the Lower Songkhram basin in Thailand and Thai Baan researchers recently visited Stung Treng to share their knowledge and experience directly with villagers in the Stung Treng Ramsar site. This interaction has proved very useful, and the approach adopted in Stung Treng, known as Sala Phoum, offers extremely good prospects for sustainability and long-term impacts on fisheries management, providing that there is substantial take-up in other villages. There is no clear strategy in place yet, but there is an assumption that this approach will be scaled-up to other villages and communes. Measures to support this should be a feature of any phase B proposal.

⁶ Other than organisation of a planning and consultation meeting, the MWBP workplan does not anticipate supporting the development of a management plan for the Ramsar site. However, the development of such a plan features in the indicators for the demonstration plan : “Active involvement of various local authorities in development of a Ramsar site management plan ... by 2006” and reference to an assumed existence of a management plan is included in another indicator on Ramsar ranger capacity. Apparently, uncertainties regarding the legal status of the site need to be cleared first, before significant progress can be made in this area.

The project has also been supporting important work on malaria prevention (the area has a very incidence of the deadly falciparum malaria), on water-borne disease prevention (especially diarrhoea) and on nutrition advice. The health work, undertaken by Health Unlimited, addresses important local development priorities, and for the project, provides a platform for working on broader natural resource management issues. The work has already made some early progress on health awareness and some simple behavioural changes are evident already (e.g. clearance of vegetation close to houses and covering water storage vessels to prevent malaria breeding). It is too early to identify health impacts (the malaria season is only now starting) and inclusion of health indicators will be needed if impacts are to be measured.

The Sala Phoum work alone does not, however, offer likely prospects for success in addressing other (non fisheries) biodiversity priorities in the demonstration site area, not least, threats to critically-threatened species (e.g. sandbar nesting species such as river terns and stone curlews; white-shouldered ibis and Siamese crocodiles) and habitats (e.g. river-side gallery forests and mainstream flooded forests). To meet conservation challenges for these species and habitats will require different approaches. Timmins (2006) reports 'staggering' loss of gallery vegetation between November 2005 and March 2006. Timmins (2006) sets-out clear recommendations to address these challenges, including targeted awareness work, the introduction of nest protection schemes (modelled on successful approaches used elsewhere in Cambodia) and support for effective patrolling. In all cases, these could involve local villagers and the (currently under-resourced) Ramsar rangers. It is very important that the demonstration site takes an adaptive approach to these recent findings, by revising workplans accordingly and piloting these approaches without delay, consistent with the demonstration model approach.

Work leading to anticipated outcomes for the national programme is mostly ongoing, and baselines were not always clear to the MTE, and so the assessment below is necessarily based on informed opinion rather than objective and rigorous assessment.

Outcome N1 – (Functioning national wetland institutions in place). Given the recognition that a national wetlands committee will not now be convened, then most indicators should be met, although uncertainty as to whether NMC will reach agreement on flow regimes that maintain important habitats, given that this work is still at an early stage at regional level. Confidence levels at NPO on meeting the milestones for the national rapid wetland assessment and inventory did not appear to be high.

Outcome N2 – (Conservation and sustainable use incorporation in wetland responsible line ministries). Indicators for this outcome are rather open and vague, and so assessment was not possible based on information available during the review. The MTE assumes that the UNDP TRAC funded sector policy review activities fit within this outcome of the programme. Concerns were expressed at the very tight timeframe available for the UNDP TRAC-funded work on the sector policy review. World Fish Centre withdrew their contractual interest in this work in part because the timeframes set by UNDP spending requirements were considered unrealistic if quality outcomes were to be expected. The contract with CBNRM LI has also not been finalised, for similar reasons. In any case, the late stage at which the policy review is being conducted will leave very little time for the project to work with government line ministries to support the integration of findings into sectoral policy. There is therefore a considerable risk that, in the absence of a national level component for Phase B (for which there seems to be only limited support in MoE) the sector policy review will remain persist only as a paper exercise.

Outcome N3 (line ministries with infrastructure integrating wetlands into policies and plans)– as above – difficult to assess due to nature of indicators, but senior participation in NSC meetings shows prospects of improving with decision to share co-chairing and more prominent role for MOWRAM. Assessment could

not be undertaken for other line ministries (Department of Fisheries and MOWRAM did not have relevant staff available to meet with the MTE, and Ministry of Planning could not schedule time to meet with the review).

Outcome N4 (civil society participation in policy and planning) – as above, difficult to assess progress against indicators as these are vague and ambiguous.

Outcome L1 (planning mechanisms in place) – significant risk that this outcome will not be met, since the status of development plans for the Ramsar management plan is unclear and not progressing at present, Ramsar rangers are not equipped nor fully trained and provincial line departments are not playing an active role in programme implementation at site level. Economic assessment of the site has been undertaken at a general level, but as yet unclear whether this information has been integrated into commune development plans.

Outcome L2 – prospects are very good for complete fulfilment of this by end of Phase A. At output level, Output 2.2 will not be met as the Ramsar Committee has yet to be established, but prospects are good for meeting most of the remaining outputs highlighted in the revised logframe, in full or in large part.

4.3.3 Sustainability

Various aspects of programme sustainability have been dealt with above. There is no explicit sustainability plan (or exit strategy) and it is likely that further external support will be needed to build on existing achievements and provide support for implementing activities, particularly at the Ramsar site level. At national level, there is now greater awareness of wetland sustainable management and use issues and concepts.

The parallel institutional set-up for this programme, with several key management responsibilities resting at regional rather than national or site level will work against future sustainability and there is a recognition at both national and regional level that Phase B support will need to feature a much stronger role for national institutions in planning, decision-making and management. For the remainder of Phase A, progress is needed on devolving management responsibilities, providing support to NPO and PPO to assist in the execution of these responsibilities and supporting the development of a viable Phase B strategy. For the remainder of Phase A, the PMU will need to continue to play a key role in consolidating accounts, providing financial management support to NPOs and PPOs and reporting based on the M&E system.

At local level, the Sala Phoum work has excellent prospects for sustainability. Other activities initiated during Phase A, such as work on preventive health and sustainable agriculture will leave a legacy requiring further technical and financial support beyond Phase A, if local expectations are to be respected. Provisions to continue and develop this work must therefore be included in any Phase B strategy.

4.4 Implications & recommendations for Cambodia

4.4.1 Remainder of Phase-A

Institutional and implementation arrangements

Building ownership. Building greater national and provincial level ownership of the programme is the most important challenge facing the MWBP in Cambodia. Current institutional arrangements whereby key

management aspects are undertaken by the PMU, are clearly working against development of ownership at both national and provincial levels. This needs to be addressed with some urgency.

The MTE recommends the Cambodia National Project Office is given a much stronger role in national and provincial programme management, including principle responsibility for budget and work planning, provincial project office supervision and support and requesting inputs from PMU technical staff, partners and consultants. This change should be implemented as soon as technically possible. The MTE recognizes that careful thought will be needed to ensure existing contractual arrangements are respected, and it can be foreseen that the PMU will need to continue to play a key role in consolidating financial information and reporting to donors.

Staffing at the NPO will need to be adjusted to ensure there is sufficient management capacity at the NPO to fulfil this function. For the remainder of Phase A, the PMU will provide support to the NPO to enable this transition to proceed as smoothly as possible.

At provincial level, the relationship between the PPO and host agency – the DoE need to be strengthened to ensure that the demonstration project provides greater support for DoE's official responsibilities for the Ramsar site. This will require joint revision of the workplan and budget to ensure that DoE priorities are addressed to the extent possible, and may also require adjustments to reporting arrangements at provincial level. One option for consideration might be for the PPO to report through DoE to national level – this would have the support in principle of the NPO and national host agency. The PMU should assist NPO and PPO to elaborate options and ensure these are implemented as soon as possible.

Focus of activities and outputs

Given the limited time and financial resources available to the MWBP in Cambodia, the MTE recommends that remaining resources are focussed to ensure key outcomes are delivered. An obvious priority at national level is the successful completion of UNDP TRAC-funded sectoral policy review work and subsequent follow-up on key recommendations. Strong servicing of the NSC and liaison with government partners and the PMU on Phase B design would be another priority. Conversely, consideration might be given to scaling back other activities to ensure that resources are freed-up to fulfil the above functions effectively, including PPO and national programme management. This might feature transfer of responsibilities for awareness activities to MoE, or sub-contracting awareness work to a national NGO, and re-thinking whether there is sufficient time and technical capacity available for the Cambodia rapid wetland assessment work at such a late stage in Phase B. MRC should be requested to provide advice to the NPO on this latter issue as part of the MWRB partnership process.

Deliverables

By end of third quarter, 2006, a revised work plan and budget to reflect revised management responsibilities, enhanced institutional integration at national and provincial level, and a clear focus for remaining resources (as detailed above). Support for DoE priorities should be addressed to the extent possible (e.g. equipping and training Ramsar rangers). The workplan (ideally also the logframe) should also include clear biodiversity conservation indicators and for the demonstration site, should respond to recent recommendations made by Timmins for urgent interventions on species/habitat conservation awareness, patrolling support and nest protection schemes, wherever possible involving local villagers and village-based Ramsar rangers.

By end of 2006, clear baseline survey data in place, based on which, clear strategies for ensuring that urgent biodiversity conservation priorities are addressed as part of demonstration site functions (e.g. for the urgent priorities identified by Timmins 2006⁷) in the preliminary survey report).

By end of 2006, a PDF A for Phase B agreed with MOE & submitted to GEF Secretariat. Discussion on the PDF A should take place between the NPO and MoE, and will serve to engage MoE early in discussions on Phase B support.

Funding support for the sustainable agriculture sub-component, already initiated, should also be secured by end of 2006 to ensure continuity.

By end of Phase A, the project should be able to demonstrate that it has provided clear advice, support to DoE/DNCP and commune development councils on the delineation and demarcation of Ramsar boundaries. The wording of the existing workplan needs to be adjusted to reflect a somewhat less ambitious approach, since the project itself cannot necessarily deliver on agreed and demarcated boundaries itself.

On Ramsar management planning, the MTE could not establish whether the programme intends to support the development of a management plan for the Ramsar site – to demonstrate how planning can play a role in balancing different roles and responsibilities at site level. The PMU should work with the NPO and PPO to discuss options for providing this support. Clearly, DNCP is expecting this type of practical support, but this might not now be possible given the limited budget and time remaining. By end of Phase A, a financing package in place for Phase B activities.

4.4.2 Phase-B approach for Cambodia

Institutional and implementation arrangements Institutional and implementation arrangements would be elaborated during Phase B design. There must be a strong role for national/provincial partners in design and implementation (including budget planning) – much more so than in Phase A. MoE would be responsible for selecting appropriate implementation partners.

Focus of activities and outputs The focus of Phase B support should be elaborated during design, starting at the PDF A stage. MoE/DNCP expressed preference for a much stronger focus on action (c.f. Phase A) and at site level and the financial analysis presented above would suggest that activities should be supported by a more realistic budget share. The focus could be to strengthen Ramsar management at Stung Treng, perhaps adding one or more Ramsar sites in the Mekong system in Cambodia, including implementation of agreed Ramsar management plans using a range of different implementation approaches.

Funding opportunities The recommended approach for Phase B would comprise a UNDP-GEF MSP with bilateral co-financing. Given the transboundary location of this wetland system, BCCI support could be considered for co-financing (although Stung Treng is currently not in a recognised corridor). Bilateral co-financing might be sought to cover technical assistance and training activities, and possibly support for strengthened implementation of commune development plans, consistent with policy on decentralization.

⁷ Timmins, R.J. (2006). *An Assessment of the Biodiversity Conservation Significance of the Mekong RAMSAR site, Stung Treng, Cambodia. Preliminary summary.* June 2006.

5 Lao PDR Component Assessment

5.1 Project design

5.1.1 Institutional setting of PPO and NPO in Lao PDR

The long formulation phase of MWBP that led to its endorsement by the Lao PDR (GoL) Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) in 2004 spanned a period during which most of the government's current policies on environment, water resources, biodiversity conservation, fisheries and poverty reduction and related planning were formulated or reformulated. The responsibility for MWBP implementation was given to the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), which passed the implementing authority to its sub-department, the Living Aquatic Resources Research Centre (LARReC). LARReC was established in 1999 and its current mandate focuses on adaptive and applied research, but not on policy formulation, which, with regard to MWBP, lies with NAFRI. LARReC is also tasked to summarise and provide the relevant information/results and data obtained from the research for national policy formulation and decision making process. Changes in the responsibilities of ministers and senior officials have not encouraged ownership among those now responsible for the implementation of MWBP.

During the implementation phase, July 2004 – present, there has been a further structural change in government and decentralisation of authority, which has been of significance to the present positioning of the project. One of the core priorities of the government continues to be the eradication of poverty through the provision of an enabling environment for growth and development, which includes private sector development. The government is guided in its attempts by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy (NGPES) 2004 sets the goal of halving poverty by 2015 and eradicating it by 2020. In conjunction with the priority NGPES, GoL sets a great deal of weight on the Paris Declaration and its emphasis on nationally led development initiatives.

Although the management of wetland areas, especially lowland wetlands, might play a considerable role in supporting the goal of the NGPES, 'wetland' is a new word in the Lao language, and there is a struggle to understand the values of wetland benefits and services. GoL has been considering its possible accession to the Ramsar Convention for two years, but has not yet concluded where the focal point for Ramsar would be placed. It has not yet agreed to a site for inclusion on the list of wetlands of international importance, nor how a National Wetland Committee would be formed and a National Wetlands Action Plan developed. MWBP and its partner IUCN-Lao have been able to help GoL in formulating an understanding of and mechanisms for accession to the Convention in the near future.

Decentralisation has devolved considerable and increasing power to the provinces. The MWBP-PPO and demonstration project are sited in one of Lao's poorest and least densely populated provinces – Attapeu. However, Attapeu's rich resource base and location with respect to expanding markets and planned trade routes between Vietnam and Thailand (the highway linking Attapeu to Ho Chi Minh City opened in 2006) means that it is facing enormous pressure and rapid economic growth, which will continue to intensify. GoL is concerned that economic development in Attapeu – one of the few remaining frontier provinces – is adequately planned and regulated. The province already faces numerous proposals for development, including mining, forestry and agro-tech. By its own admission, the province is not adequately prepared to

deal with such a development scenario and at the same time stimulate appropriate economic activity to reduce poverty. Although both central and provincial governments are equally committed to the national priority of poverty reduction, there are different emphases of approach from a more holistic need for national spatial planning from central government to a more service-delivery emphasis in the province.

In its formal constitution, MWBP has established a National Steering Committee chaired by Dr. Phouang Parisak Pravongviengkham, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), made up of members from the Lao National Mekong Committee (LNMC); Environment Unit at the Science, Technology and Environment Agency (STEA); Department of Planning, MAF; Irrigation Department, MAF; National Agricultural and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI); Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Department, Attapeu; Department of Livestock and Fishery, MAF; and a Provincial Management Board chaired by the Vice Governor and including cross-sectoral interests in its membership.

5.1.2 Demonstration project & Lao PDR national priorities

Given the above scenario, the Attapeu demonstration project has to show that it complies with both provincial and central demands. At the onset of the project, and in the process of its establishment, the MWBP had created a perception that biodiversity conservation necessitated site protection and would inhibit development. Much of this was a problem of presentation and interpretation; for example, the Project Brief (2001), Project Support Document (2004) and work plan placed a strong emphasis on biodiversity conservation actions rather than actions to support sustainable livelihoods. Only when the office reached its full complement of trained staff, and the National Steering Committee and senior officials from IUCN and UNDP visited the PPO in June 2005, were these problems of perception addressed, and the province recognised the potential of MWBP to support poverty reduction through a sustainable livelihoods approach.

There has been a rapid change in the relationship. The PPO in Attapeu is now a model for project and governmental partnership. The project and provincial co-management arrangements function in such a way that the project is institutionalised within the provincial government (not strictly as in the organisational structure flow chart). The project formally reports and plans through the Provincial Co-manager to the Provincial Office, and the Vice Governor is well informed of project activities. Furthermore, the other provincial departments, notably the Provincial Science Technology and Environment Office (PSTEO) and the Provincial Health Department, are active supporters of the programme and members of the Provincial Management Board. The four target villages, which may not have been ideal as demonstration sites from the project's perspective, were selected by the province on the basis that they received no other development support. Two of the villages are very remote and impoverished.

Development planning for the NPGES is being undertaken through an area-based planning system that recognises local administrative units (commonly coinciding with watershed boundaries), village clusters and land-use zones for protection and production, and these define development and poverty reduction activities and budgets for these areas. This system provides a common language for either work planning or communication purposes, which has not yet been taken up by MWBP. The extent to which the project can realistically contribute to this planning approach through the lessons learned at the demonstration site has to be assessed and acted upon. It is possible that much could be done by building on existing data held and being gathered by GoL, the Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS) and other agencies.

5.1.3 Stakeholder participation

Information is not available on consultations undertaken during the PDF-B, and there was no Stakeholder Participation Plan in the Project Support Document. This lack of engagement with planning processes, whether perceived or real, has been a recurrent theme of the Lao component of the MTE. This is likely to have been exacerbated by the lack of documentation in the Lao language.

A useful Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) was carried out by ActionAid and the situation analysis developed for Attapeu Province by the PMU has clearly had input from a range of stakeholders; it analyses ways of addressing poverty through wetland management and suggests an indicative strategy for a wetlands approach to development.

Overall assessment: Stakeholder participation in design – Lao PDR

Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
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Rationale: Although village and provincial levels score very highly, the need for better participation by central government in the project is paramount.

5.2 Programme Implementation

5.2.1 Country-ownership/Drivenness

As previously stated, the ownership expressed by Attapeu Province is very high, yet full government ownership has been constrained by a combination of factors outlined in 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 above. Addressing these issues remains the highest priority for Phase A of the project. Provincial and central government have differing approaches and expectations, but these differences are sometimes differences of perception rather than of reality. Given more time and recognition of the issues that have restricted national ownership, a reversal of the present situation is achievable.

The NPO 2005 Progress Report identifies the limitations of LARReC's responsibilities as the MWBP host agency. MWBP's goal of policy planning interventions on national and regional scales is only partly compatible with LARReC's mandate as a research organisation. However, the NPO has taken positive steps to address these issues: for example, the government has agreed the rotation of chairmanship of the Regional Programme Executive Steering Committee. Although LARReC has some internal reservations about its influencing role within MWBP, the institute itself is very much engaged. In particular, the National Director plays a very active role in supporting and leading the project at every level in addition to strengthening linkages with the MRCS through the fisheries programme. This key role played by the National Director is singled out for commendation.

Misperceptions about the potential contribution of MWBP to national priorities have their origin in the early and slow formulation of the GEF Project Brief (2001), which, even on completion, did not specifically refer to poverty reduction. During the decade it took to complete the brief, priorities and approaches changed so that contemporary thinking was not adequately reflected in either the final Project Brief (2001) or the Project Support Document (2004). The GEF support for MWBP quite rightly emphasised the development of a 'comprehensive wetland strategy and action plan' (in line with the government's forest classification programme). It was designed to review and make recommendations for the possible expansion of the existing National Biodiversity Conservation Areas so as to ensure adequate representation of wetland ecosystems. In addition, the GEF Project Brief states 'Local threats to the biodiversity values of the sites will be removed through targeted interventions integrated with the planning support programme'. Whilst

the GoL saw the benefits of wetland mapping and assessment for its spatial planning processes it was unclear how this related to its emerging priority for Poverty Reduction.

In fact, the Project Support Document clearly refers to these conservation activities' being linked to development and livelihood initiatives, in keeping with government policy as expressed in the Environmental Action Plan 1994–2000.

In addition, whilst there can be advantages in hosting the Programme Management Unit (PMU) in Lao, the PMU's regional function has not been understood. It is seen as a top-heavy overhead and is confused with the MWBP Lao component, and sometimes with the separate IUCN-Lao programme.

There has therefore been a combination of timing and perception factors, which have not encouraged central government ownership. This situation is reversible, and the option of utilising available TRAC funds might be the catalyst for that change.

5.2.2 Implementation approach

The original logical framework contributed to some of the perceptions referred to above. The logical framework was characterised by attention to detail and appears prescriptive rather than an outcome of a participatory process. The revised logframe (dated January 2006) is a much more satisfactory document; it follows a change of emphasis in the programme and its de facto start-up in July 2005 when the full complement of staff was in place. However, the revised logframe appears to be more a reflection of what the project is doing than a document that sets direction. Almost none of those interviewed recognised the revised logframe document or felt that they had been part of its development.

That said, there had clearly been joint and participatory development of the 2006 work plan, which managers adhere to very closely. The work plan's weakness is that budget allocations are sometimes changed without reference to the PPO and NPO managers. Variations in annual budget agreements mean that meeting targeted outputs within stated time frames has not always been possible. The current 2006 work plan is dated 12.05.06, which may indicate that some readjustments have already been made. It could perhaps focus more directly on achieving an enabling environment for the activities as conceptualised as preparation for Phase B. Although one of the tasks of management is to make informed judgements that give continuity to the project interventions, many of the planned activities lead to an expansion of development activities without clearly showing how these will link to MWBP objectives.

Within the MWBP, reporting systems for Lao are satisfactory and well utilised. However, the use of reports is limited to English-language readers. Reporting to government is strongly constrained by the use of English. A further concern seems to be a duplication or multiplicity of reporting requirements, with the PPO and NPO reporting separately to the PMU and to the province and GoL (through NAFRI). This is particularly difficult for the NPO Finance Office, where figures for the whole Lao programme have to be obtained from different and circumambulatory sources.

MWBP has taken a partnership approach to its implementation, but the partners also claim little engagement in programme development processes. These partnerships are naturally shaped in different ways, and such flexibility is required, but some partners feel their partnerships to be one-directional – for the benefit of MWBP. The complex but principle partnership between IUCN and MRC is viewed in this way, which is not surprising given that MWBP is a small player in the MRCS programme. However, because the MRCS is based in Lao, and because GoL has specifically requested assistance in spatial

planning through mapping, data gathering and social and economic analysis, Lao should be the primary focus of the IUCN-MRCS partnership. Other partners seem to engage with MWBP more on the basis of contractual agreements than partnership. Ideally one would like to see more mutually beneficial arrangements in which both parties contribute and gain more commensurate benefits from a partnership. Some partners feel aggrieved that the expectations that led to their initial contributory commitments have not been realised, and this has led to non-productive relationships.

The primary partnership difficulties have been with the conservation agencies; there has been a better rapport and more productive outputs where IUCN has engaged with agencies that have skills outside its own core competence. The relationship with Health Unlimited (HU) seems particularly strong, and collaboration with MWBP has led to discussion of future joint programmes with IUCN and the drafting of a joint proposal for the European Commission. Considerable budget allocations have been made to the HU partnership, yet the related HU programme does not refer to a link between health and biodiversity or livelihoods.

There is also a question as to why some partnerships have not been made. WWF has commenced a programme Aquatic resources management to improve rural livelihoods of the Xe Kong River basin, supported by the DGIS TMF. Oxfam Australia has been implementing a programme of fisheries management in 14 villages in Attapeu for some time, and there are other similar projects in neighbouring Pakse. MWBP could have a coordinating role in these projects, which would provide added value for all the partners concerned. These programmes appear to have very similar implementation processes and objectives.

A repeated concern, especially of GoL staff, is that they 'do not understand what the project is about'. Although the senior MWBP staff has explained the objectives and opportunities offered by MWBP, there is still a lack of understanding. This comes about partly because the emphasis of the programme has changed, partly because the whole notion of wetlands and their values are quite new in Lao, and partly because long documents in English are not read and noted. However, key documents have been translated into Lao, so the issue is probably mainly one of complexity.

The managerial competencies of both the PPO and NPO staff are strong. The financial management of both offices seems excellent. There are two concerns: a) the two offices report separately to the PMU, and b) there is a lack of clear budgetary planning and authority. These issues need to be addressed.

The PPO has strong expertise in development issues, but limited skills in biological sciences (despite the enthusiasm of individual staff). To date, the biodiversity work (on fish biodiversity) has been undertaken through LARReC and expatriate expertise, but the programme will need specific guidance on showing the link between livelihoods and biodiversity if this approach is to be incorporated into national policy and planning. If this connection is not made, the programme will remain a rural development programme rather than developing its own unique demonstration of the link between wetland biodiversity and poverty reduction. The need for this specialism was identified in the proposal to the Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE) in the project's application for support for its livelihoods programme.

The NPO has national staff with specialist skills: in addition to the LARReC fisheries researchers, there are MWBP positions covering policy and communication & training. LARReC and the NPO might also benefit from additional skills if the MWBP were able to produce evidence of the importance of biodiversity in poverty reduction. At present, the Programme Manager (PM) brings livelihoods skills to all four country

demonstration projects, but in the present structure and during the development phase the PM also has a significant management responsibility.

Overall assessment: Implementation approach – Lao PDR

Highly satisfactory

Satisfactory

Marginally satisfactory

Unsatisfactory

Rationale: Having overcome initial difficulties the project has made good progress in terms of its overall approach, but concerns have been identified. It suffers because it is very wide ranging, both in its programme and its link to regional interests, and few people can grasp its holistic design.

5.2.3 Monitoring & evaluation

The project document provides ambitious impact indicators for the satisfactory completion of Phase A, which, it states, are to be used in the MTE. These include significant progress towards:

- 'Institutional arrangements are in place to allow local people to use and manage wetland resources in a sustainable manner.
- Government accepts community management arrangements in wetlands.
- MRC has recognised the need to take full cognisance of ecosystem functions and values in its core programmes.
- Commitment exists to the need for regional wetlands policy.'

These overly ambitious indicators have not been met in Lao, and this raises the question of whether the stakeholders named were fully involved in the setting the indicators. However, MWBP Lao has made commendable progress towards realising these 'objectives', and a way should be found to continue the momentum of these efforts.

As a tool for M&E, the *2005 Annual Progress Report MWBP – NPO* is a model document. It provides a self-critical analysis of progress in 2005 and sets a work plan (in Lao) with a budget for 2006. This plan identifies gaps in the overall programme for Phase A and shows the underspend in the 2005 programme and how the 2006 budget v activities will complete progress towards the creation of an 'enabling environment' by 2007. There is an honest acknowledgement of areas of difficulty, for example in the area of national wetlands policy, and the reasons for these difficulties are identified realistically. The report concludes that overall the programme is 65% satisfactory, with eight areas described as 'unsatisfactory with some positive elements'; the most important of these is a response to the question 'given the objectives of the programme, are the appropriate institutions being assisted?' and a note that 'most counterparts know the MWBP as the IUCN project'.

The quarterly reports coordinated by the PMU also give narrative summaries of output v work plan and have been completed in timely way. These are quite complicated documents for the majority of the Lao staff, who have a limited command of English. What is lacking in these reports is financial reporting against activity, as stated in the work plan, and an overview of how the country programme fits onto the regional strategy - although such reporting may be available.

Reports from the Steering Committees – Provincial, Regional and National – also serve as significant checks and directional guidance. Measures put in place to strengthen the NSC and rotate the chairperson will further assist programme monitoring. Of particular help was a review by the NSC and a delegation from the IUCN ARO that took place in June 2005 at a time when the provincial programme was struggling for recognition. Because this was a reflection by senior objective reviewers with a stake in ensuring the success of the project the guidance given at that time was helpful to all parties and has been acted upon.

The observations and recommendations made at that time also serve as milestones, and the project has demonstrated significant progress in the intervening year. Setting biodiversity/poverty indicators is an exceedingly difficult task, and such indicators may be in the experimental stage. However, since the programme has taken the initiative to approach biodiversity conservation through a basic needs-livelihoods-nutrition-health improvement-poverty reduction approach, it would be well worth attempting to set measurable indicators of success. Conservation projects that start as development programmes and aim to transition into biodiversity conservation are rarely if ever successful. Government will need this evidence that poverty reduction through good wetland management is possible if this approach is to be included in wetland management planning.

Overall assessment: Monitoring & evaluation – Lao PDR			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Rationale: The self-evaluation by NPO is highly commended.			

5.2.4 Stakeholder participation

At the demonstration site, village-level participatory processes are extremely good and form the basis for project interventions. Attention is given to gender inequities and minority interests. Within the province, consultation and participation are a prerequisite of the PPO’s planning practice; information on project activities is usually available and shared through personal interactions, but the use of English in much reporting is an inhibiting factor. Whilst there is room for further developing relationships with the departments answering to central ministries, the PPO and provincial government collaboration demonstrates outstanding joint implementation processes. This is a great achievement after the initial implementation year, when the project objectives were not understood and the PPO made some programmatic adjustments.

LARReC is also well engaged in the project both directly and indirectly through the engagement with the MRCS Fisheries Department outside MWBP. The link to the MRC through the Lao National Mekong Committee is unsatisfactory, and there appears to be no engagement. Other GoL research institutions, Environmental Research Institute (ERI) and the Science Technology and Environment Agency (STEA), reported their active participation in joint activities within MWBP. All agencies involved in the Ramsar and Uganda wetlands exposure study tour expressed appreciation of how their participation in this event had influenced their thinking and understanding of wetlands.

However, more generally, a lack of participation is voiced as a repeated concern amongst central GoL staff, who additionally express dissatisfaction about interpreting and relating financial and narrative reports to departmental, provincial and GoL goals, which may appear to differ from the MWBP work plan. No member of the MWBP team or NSC recalled participating in the development of the logframe revised in 2005 (presented to the MTE dated January 2006).

Partnership participation is variable; there is close engagement with HU in project implementation, but other contracted partners do not feel that they are part of the MWBP process. Again, as referred to in 5.2.2, there is also a question of engagement by other actors not formally included in MWBP but involved in very similar or complementary work.

The engaged participation of IUCN-Lao would appear to be an obvious key relationship for MWBP with mutual benefits. IUCN-Lao has build up a long-standing programme in the country, and good relationships with several GoL sectors, and its in-country presence will be needed long after the lifespan of the MWBP.

Ensuring the benefits of collaborative participation and avoiding potential conflicts of interest should be a priority for both parties.

The UNDP-Lao office has taken a close interest in the MWBP Lao component and visited its demonstration site. Because the UNDP executing office and the PMU are both located in Vientiane, there is naturally a greater overview of the Lao country component and its relationship with the MWBP regional programme.

The above points to a somewhat *ad hoc* arrangement for engagement with MWBP stakeholders, bearing in mind that most stakeholders are not formal MWBP partners.

Overall assessment: Stakeholder participation – Lao PDR			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Rationale: Good at the local and provincial level, but strong criticisms from central GoL reduce the rating.			

5.2.5 Financial planning

Information provided on financial management by the PPO and NPO showed a high degree of accountability and accuracy. An audit had just been completed. Financial planning and budgeting are different issues.

The total budget allocation per country rests with the PMU. Budgets are largely set by the PMU and presented to NPO and PPO for discussion, after which there may be some modification. NPO (together with PPO?) develops detailed work plans against the prescribed budgets. In Lao, this has been done effectively and in some detail. Whilst central control and distribution of funds is one way of maintaining overall control the programmatic content of the MWBP, it is not in line with more contemporary practice that encourages project managers to set their own budgets, recognising the constraints and realities of the programmes for which they are responsible. Further, to encourage transparency, ownership and capacity strengthening in GoL, giving direct responsibility to unit managers might be helpful. These managers feel this would be a better approach.

The operational cost of the Lao Component for 2005 was \$217,482, while the cost of activities was \$124,221, for the same period. Revised targets had been set in July 2005. Total country expenditure was 18% over budget. The main difficulty in compiling this information was that the PPO and NPO report separately to the PMU, whereas it is the NPO's responsibility to report to GoL on total country expenditure.

Documentation on the source of funds do not specify the distribution of Lao-specific funds for 2005 to different operations and activities but states that the total available from GEF for Phase A was \$678,000 with an under spend as at December 31 2005 of \$553,000. Dutch funds for livelihood support in Phase A total \$125,000 of which only \$24,000 was spent up to 31 December 2005. This means that the considerable sum of \$654,000 is available for 2006. The projected budget for 2006 is not broken down into individual donor contributions. Operational costs for 2006 are projected to be \$195,146 and activities \$215,600. This leaves a surplus to carry forward to 2007 of \$243,254. With the inclusion of TRAC funds, \$368,256 would be available for 2007, if donors permitted a carry forward.

The work plan and fund distribution for 2006 set good targets of increasing spend on activities (\$215,600) and reducing operational costs (\$195,146). PMU assistance and budget contributions to the Lao operation

are for ongoing technical support (wetland inventory, biodiversity surveys, economic studies, livelihoods guidance), and assistance to the regional programme (including catfish and dolphin work).

The financial position would seem to place MWBP Lao in a good position to make considerable progress towards achieving a solid national platform from which to launch a national wetlands programme and simultaneously undertake a number of related projects.

5.2.6 Execution & implementation modalities

All parties agree that difficulties with recruitment have been a major, perhaps the major, factor in the slow start to the project. This is not necessarily a reflection on management since the capacity of nationals in the specialist areas demanded by the project is limited and the recruitment pool is small. It is also difficult to recruit staff who will be located in remote Attapeu. At the start, there was probably the pressure of urgency which led to unsuitable appointments. However, at the start of the second year excellent senior appointments were made that have accelerated project development and given it a stable base. High MWBP salaries and employment conditions encouraged applicants for the appointments.

However, of greatest importance has been the successful secondment of a member of GoL staff to the position of Co-provincial Manager despite the disparity in remuneration between IUCN and GoL staff. The co-management of the PPO, which could potentially be difficult, is extremely strong; it sets an example for the whole team and contributes to the evident, high level of motivation. In both the NPO and PPO there are other staff of a high calibre and competence, many of whom have interests in the project beyond their specific responsibilities⁸.

In effect, the Lao component of the project started in July 2005. Staff has very quickly learned to take advantage of the elaborate management systems set up by the PMU and to take ownership of the project. In the PPO, staff are so intensely engaged it might be appropriate to spend time reflecting on the lessons learned thus far and how the programme might go forward to a second phase.

5.3 Results

5.3.1 Effectiveness – the enabling environment

Although in the short life of the project there has been progress towards the establishment of an 'enabling environment', the indicators referred to in 5.2.3 show that MWBP in Lao is not yet ready for a second phase. However, the term 'enabling environment' is so vague, and since it is not specified what this environment is to enable, the achievements in Lao could be underrated. By gradual degrees, capacity has been built within GoL to start the process of undertaking wetland planning and management. How and within which ministry/department wetlands are to be dealt with in the future is not certain. As a latecomer to 'wetlands', GoL has some advantages over other countries in that wetlands can be considered for their multi-purpose use involving many sectoral interests and not just as areas designated for wetland protection. It does not appear that MWBP's flagship-species approach was right for Lao, nor in a future programme would the platform built by MWBP be appropriate for funding following the GEF-4 criteria.

⁸ Project Co-manager Souksavanh and Technical Advisor Mark Dubois were not available throughout the course of this review, although both were subsequently interviewed. It is an indication of the strength of the PPO and a credit to Co-manager Souksavanh that the PPO team hosted the MTE mission in an exemplary way in their absence.

Given that there are other actors specialising on globally threatened species, MWBP in Lao might provide a greater contribution to GoL and biodiversity conservation through its livelihood approach.

Achieving success in Lao relies on good relationships and, for external organisations, clearly shared concepts and support to the GoL to deliver the commitments it has made to the Lao people. Taking this into account, and addressing any constraints that are holding back full ownership of MWBP by GoL, it would be timely to ensure the extension of Phase A – and build on its current momentum.

The establishment of an enabling environment at the field level is referred in 5.2.3.

Overall assessment: Effectiveness: the enabling environment – Lao PDR			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
<p>Rationale: GoL is not yet convinced of the value of MWBP in building its capacity to address wetland issues. Stronger government ownership might avert this mistrust. It will be possible to identify when an enabling environment is reached at field level only if positive conservation/biodiversity results are demonstrated.</p>			

5.3.2 Effectiveness/impact – technical

The delay in project implementation has meant that at the national level effectiveness and impact are not strong. The NPO progress report 2005 records that ‘progress delayed’ is the conclusion of many activities. As Phase A is designed to establish an environment for achieving technical and policy and practice change results, the project should not be judged on impact to date. Although a number of technical reports, both biological and sociological, have been produced, and policy reviews have taken place, these have not yet been taken up as management or policy recommendations. The relationship between MWBP and GoL has to be right before that can happen. About 50 people have received national-level training, although the evaluations of the effectiveness of these trainings are not conclusive.

MRCS has produced maps of the demonstration site, but these do not seem to be readily available for use because of uncertainty about property rights.

Perhaps the greatest impact resulting from MWBP to date has resulted from the Ramsar COP9 and Uganda study tours, undertaken in November 2005. This has clearly had a strong impact in helping key officials consider options for wetland management and policy implications. In fact, more simply, the tour helped considerably in promoting an understanding of the wetland ecosystem and the values of the environmental services provided by wetland systems. GoL has not yet acceded to Ramsar, but this study tour and other related activities have been important.

In Attapeu Province and at the demonstration sites the project has proved its effectiveness beyond planned expectations. The success has been serendipitous, but the reality of on-the-ground effectiveness is to be able to respond opportunistically to circumstances. Two events stand out:

- *At Nong Lom wetland, MWBP was asked by the District Chief to help resolve a conflict between two villages fishing and harvesting in the same wetland. The District Chief said that he had not been able to resolve the dispute. The result of the MWBP intervention was not only agreement on fishing regulations but also a comprehensive management programme that the two villages devised and are implementing together.*

- *Commercial gold mining consortia (at least 30 dredgers) moved into an area of the Xe Kong that local people had traditionally hand-panned for gold. The result of this activity was water turbulence and pollution impacting on local fisheries and a Fish Conservation Zone (FCZ). The villagers did not complain about their mineral rights but about the loss of their fishery livelihood. Supported by MWBP the local communities and the PSTEO learned the methodology for undertaking a credible Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the gold dredging activities that was given as evidence of the concerns to the Governor. The EIA was a key contributory factor in the Governor's imposing a moratorium on the dredging activity and, from this experience, for PSTEO to want to develop its EIA skills.*

These are notable achievements within the project's short life, and they are highly replicable.

Impacts in the case study villages have also been marked. Simple and comparatively inexpensive support – the provision of wells, mosquito nets, drug stores and livestock management training – have transformed the confidence of the people of Ban Hat Oudomxay (the village visited on the MTE mission), who now hold effective village meetings. Many villages are designating FCZs and regulating fishing practices with local by-laws (not only through the MWBP). The case studies are excellent rural development programmes, but their importance as demonstration sites and the implication for poverty reduction through biodiversity conservation have yet to be tested. MWBP will have to formulate indicators to measure their success.

5.3.3 Sustainability

If there is a discernable shift in emphasis towards government ownership, the prospects for a second phase of MWBP within a national wetland committee or an existing structure are strong. GoL is going to require support for the evolution of its wetland policy and management programmes for a considerable time to come. MWBP in Lao has and should have a targeted shelf life. This strategy is not yet defined, and in fact discussions with the PMU suggest that there is no agreement on such a strategy.

Policy and capacity building support in the province will also be required for the foreseeable future, but this need not necessarily be part of a 'project'. The early indications of uptake of provincial government ownership promise to facilitate a process of managed phase out.

Paradoxically, it is in the case study villages where there has been the greatest relative impact yet where clarification of the PPO's connection to the core MWBP and a strategy for sustainability is most needed. The expectations of the villagers are high, and although MWBP interventions are described as a 'demonstration project' this is certainly not how the villagers see it. MWBP has entered a development dilemma: it is doing an effective job on a small scale, the pressures to expand to other villagers are enormous, and the PPO could continue development work for the foreseeable future. Although an exit strategy has been discussed, this needs to be thought through and decisions taken as to whether these 'case studies' are to remain part of an MWBP programme, which requires lessons learned to form effective evidence for GoL planning, or whether they should become part of a rural development programme in its own right. There is a social obligation to continue this work in one form or another.

5.4 Implications & recommendations for Lao PDR

5.4.1 Remainder of Phase-A

Institutional and implementation arrangements

Although not considered ideal by some, the institutional arrangements for the programme are soundly in place with good personnel in key posts. Any major change in the overall structure of the Lao component would set back the momentum of the work in progress. Where weaknesses have been identified (mostly by the team itself) that are holding back some deliverables, it is better to strengthen these weaknesses rather than make change. LARReC should remain the host agency during the remainder of Phase A and should use TRAC funds to strengthen its influence with higher government.

As part of the strengthening of LARReC, which should also be seen as strengthening of GoL ownership, the NPO and PPO should consider the appropriateness of streamlining planning, reporting and budgeting systems and the option of their forming a 'seamless team' headed by the National Programme Director. Other countries are considering a similar format, in which a single head of the country programme would represent the national interest in a Senior Management Team (SMT) that would have executive control and responsibility over the planning, budgeting and expenditure of MWBP as a whole and be delegated responsibility for the Lao programme. The PMU would provide financial and administrative services, but the Lao programme team would determine programme direction, work plans and budget setting, and be responsible for contracting supporting expertise, making partnership arrangements and especially forming linkages with other MAF and other ministry departments and institutions.

Focus of activities and outputs

The 2006 work plan is achievable; it needs a mid-year review but otherwise remains the plan for the year. However, it would be worth making a draft plan through to July 2007 (as funding to this date has been agreed). There could be a shift of approach by the team to support the establishment of the enabling environment and facilitate delivery of key outputs; it could, for example:

- Strengthen support for high-level wetland planning and management. Devise a methodology to bring together lessons learned in the demonstration site, the spatial information produced by MRC, and the traditional knowledge and scientific data gathered in the programme to contribute to national wetland planning.
- Review the internal structural changes proposed above and see if these would meet the need for stronger national ownership and strengthened vertical linkages. In particular, the proposal should streamline the administrative and financial reporting by establishing a 'one-door' process. If the structure proposed above is not viable, suggest and agree something more suitable.
- Complete the TRAC funding proposal and ensure that it supports a shift towards stronger national ownership.
- Devise a set of indicators to demonstrate progress towards poverty reduction through biodiversity conservation.
- Finalise the biodiversity assessment and make it relevant to national government needs.

Work on a continuation of and/or exit strategy for the Lao programme as a whole and the component parts individually. In particular, prepare a written strategy for future engagement with villagers at the demonstration site.

Deliverables

- As in the work plan and including the continuation and/or exit strategies referred to above.
- Successful completion of TRAC fund application.
- Documentation of lessons learned.

5.4.2 Phase-B approach for Lao PDR**Institutional and implementation arrangements**

The conclusion of Phase A provides the opportunity to reconsider the institutional arrangements for a Phase B – a new, legally binding arrangement would be made. This would depend on the overall direction of the programme, which at this time is not certain; i.e. would MWBP be a programme of community development or a programme to support national wetland policy and planning? The ideal would be to combine these, but a realistic assessment has to be made as to whether this is possible. If the emphasis is on national wetland policy and planning, it would be worth considering placing MWBP B higher in MAF, perhaps in the Planning Department. It would also be worth considering whether and how MRC could take a stronger role in supporting GoL using the ground-truthing knowledge developed in the MWBP team, and whether IUCN-Lao could and should be a more suitable agency through which to deliver the MWBP support. However, before finalisation of Phase A, it should be clear where GoL intends place the focal point for wetlands, and this would be the obvious host agency for a MWBP extension.

Focus of activities and outputs

GoL has made it clear that its overriding need is for support for national wetland policy and planning. Once the strength of the enabling environment the achievements of Phase A has been assessed, a judgement can be made as to how the competence and knowledge developed in MWBP can best support the government's priorities. A lesson learned from Phase A may be that the conservation of globally threatened species is not central to the MWBP Lao mandate, and that there are other actors better placed to promote appropriate, critical conservation measures.

Recognising that the GoL's overriding priority is poverty reduction and poverty eradication by 2020, the MWBP in Lao, or its successor, has a unique opportunity to demonstrate the value of wetland biodiversity – especially fish and rice in terms of nutrition and health and the implication of improved human well being for poverty reduction. Whilst the project recognises that protection of globally rare species is of critical importance and that conservation areas must remain one element of an integrated approach (which is largely being taken care of other actors), MWBP has recognised that wetland biodiversity is central to rural livelihoods and poverty reduction. Further, as the Mekong countries rapidly open up to national and international trade, the value of these essential natural resources to the rural poor in both lowland and upland wetlands is of great concern to GoL: it wants to ensure that economic development is adequately planned and regulated in the interests of all Laotians, and economically and socially excluded people in particular. MWBP Lao should use Phase B to develop and disseminate the lessons learned from its innovative livelihoods work and encourage new thinking about the broader and applied values of wetland biodiversity. This would also contribute to the implementation of the Ramsar COP 9 Resolution 14 on Wetlands and Poverty Reduction, at the time that Lao accedes to the convention.

Funding opportunities

The first priority is to complete the agreement for the use of TRAC funds for the satisfactory completion of Phase A.

Opportunities for Phase B can be assessed only once MWBP has determined its niche for future interventions. Given the indication that the conservation of globally threatened species may not be the MWBP's future direction in Lao, the acquisition of GEF funds under the RAF is national priority. There has been no indication of interest in a Regional Climate Change GEF option.

A number of bilateral donors may be interested in the 'biodiversity through livelihoods' approach developed by MWBP Lao with the possibility of directing support through the MRC and so as to strengthen the environmental aspects of the MRC's Basin Development Plan and Environment Programme, about which donors have expressed concern. Bilateral donors will want to follow the guidelines of the Paris Declaration (PD), on which GoL places great importance. AusAid, for example, has recently restructured its aid programme and will no longer support NGOs except under a partnership agreement with four already identified INGOs. AusAid will not support livelihoods work in future. Following PD guidelines, donors are likely to be unwilling to support the high overheads identified by many of the contributors to this review.

IUCN has indicated that it is likely to have funds from two sources available for the continuation of the livelihoods work.

6 Thailand Component Assessment

6.1 Project design

6.1.1 Institutional setting of PPO and NPO in Thailand

The NPO of the Thailand Component is housed in Bangkok within the premises of Thailand's Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP), of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE). This office was created on 3 October 2003, when the Office of Environmental Policy and Planning was transferred from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment to MONRE and renamed as ONEP. The responsibilities of ONEP, as specified in Ministerial Regulation "Ministerial Subordinates of the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in B.E. 2545 (2002), include:

- To formulate policy and plans for natural resources and environment conservation and administrative management.
- To coordinate the formulation of natural resources and environmental management plans in accordance with the Enhancement and Conservation of National Environmental Quality Act of 1992 and other related laws, as well as coordinating practical implementation.
- To study, analyze, coordinate and formulate measures for the assurance of ministerial regulation for environmentally protected areas.

ONEP is probably the correct host agency for MWBP's Thailand Component, given its mandate for natural resources management and conservation, and given that it also houses both the Ramsar and GEF focal points, who play a key role in wetland biodiversity management in Thailand.

The PPO of the Thailand Component is located in Sri Songkhram (rather than in the provincial capital Nakhon Phanom, as proposed in the Project Brief), where MWBP has a small office within the District Authority headquarters, and a separate, larger project office located in a separate (non-government) building near the centre of the town. This setting has allowed MWBP to be close to activities on the ground in the various sub-districts (tambon; see below), while maintaining a good relationship with local authorities at district level. Relationships at provincial level (Nakhon Phanom Province) are also good, and MWBP has excellent rapport with the Provincial Co-Manager, who heads the Provincial Agricultural and Cooperative Office, and the Provincial Wetland Committee (PWC) chaired by the Provincial Governor, which was established after several officials attended Ramsar COP9 last year. The PWC has no direct contact with the National Wetland Committee, nor do PWC or MWBP have any contact with the River Basin Organisation (RBO) established for Area 3, Khong Basin (which includes the Songkhram⁹). The Songkhram RBO is reportedly not a very strong organisation, as it rarely meets, and when it does it only considers issues dealing with water usage and infrastructure (e.g. dams), and does not deal with environmental issues. Provincial ONEP are considering creating a wetland unit – at present they have only

⁹ The RBO was established by Department of Water Resources, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (which was in turn established on October 2002 under a government reform policy). There are 25 RBOs in Thailand and the Songkhram River basin is part of the Mekong Basin part 2, covering Nakhon Phanom, Sakon Nakorn, Mukdaharn and Amnatcharoen provinces.

a general natural resources and environment unit, but they would first like to recruit several specialists, including one for wetlands and one for data management.

The lower Songkhram River basin straddles three other provinces as well, namely Udon Thani, Nong Khai and Sakhon Nakhon. However, given the size of the basin, the MWBP has made a wise choice by opting to start in one Province first, and Sri Songkhram – which includes the mouth of the river – is logical as it includes most of the lowland wetland habitats and faces the usual spectrum of issues. Up-scaling can always take place in Phase B, or even at a later stage, once positive lessons learned are replicated.

6.1.2 Demonstration project & Thai national priorities

The National Inventory of Natural Wetlands (prepared 1996-1999, funded by DANCED) identified wetlands of international, national and local importance for Thailand. A total of 61 sites were listed as wetlands of international importance, including the Songkhram River¹⁰, listed as site No. 17. The Songkhram has also been identified by OEPP (in 1999; now ONEP) as one of 12 national wetland systems of “internationally recognised importance”, and may soon (2006) be proposed as Ramsar Site by ONEP. While a full baseline study has yet to be completed, initial studies indicate that the most important biodiversity is likely to be that of fish, and at least 183 species have been identified during past Department of Fisheries surveys, including giant Mekong catfish (*Panagasianodon gigas*), the world’s second smallest fish species (*Boraras micros*), and perhaps as many as 12 rare and endangered species.

Until recently, the Songkhram River was the only major tributary of the Mekong in Thailand that had not yet been dammed – since then, a dam has been constructed in the upper reaches, but it still remains largely a natural river system. Like many major river systems in Thailand, it has been affected by logging, expansion of irrigation, mega-project development, rubber and eucalyptus plantations and decline of fishery production (although still highly important). In spite of development, there is still a high dependence on wetland resources among local communities. The Lower Songkhram River basin is the last remaining example of a functioning floodplain ecosystem, with extensive seasonally flooded freshwater swamp forest in north-eastern Thailand.

One may conclude that the demonstration site meets Thai national priorities, both in terms of wetland biodiversity and conservation priorities, and in terms of economic priority of a natural ecosystem that is under threat and requires support for sustainable management of natural resources. Looming over both priorities, however, is the threat of dam construction on the lower Songkhram River that may significantly affect livelihoods and natural systems if ever implemented.

6.1.3 Stakeholder participation

It is difficult to assess the level of stakeholder consultation and participation in the Songkhram area during the project design phase, as this is not documented in either the Project Brief (2001) or Project Support Document (2004). However, the proponents have taken pains to actively engage local community members in subsequent stages of the programme, and have actively involved a wide range of stakeholders on many aspects of the Thailand Component.

¹⁰ The Songkhram River was not included on the earlier Directory of Asian Wetlands (D.A. Scott, editor, IUCN, 1989)

Overall assessment: Stakeholder participation in design - Thailand

Highly satisfactory

Satisfactory

Marginally satisfactory

Unsatisfactory

Rationale: Not well documented in project documents, but assumed to be satisfactory, given the level of involvement in implementation, right from the programme's inception.

6.2 Programme Implementation

6.2.1 Country-ownership/Driveness

The MTE was impressed by the sense of local ownership of the Thailand Component of MWBP, a feature that is also recognised by ONEP at national level. At PPO level, there is an excellent interaction between Project Co-Manager and the Provincial Co-Manager, and the relationship with sub-district, district and provincial authorities is good. An office is shared with district authorities, who view the Thailand Component of MWBP as 'their' project. At provincial level, authorities see MWBP as a good vehicle for assisting local sub-district (tambon) offices (see Box, below) in preparing their development plans for incorporation into the Provincial Integrated Management Plan – it fits well into their overall planning and development programme. There is excellent rapport, and authorities see the programme as being there to help them – it is 'their' project, and not something that has been dropped on them from outside.

Box: Sub-district (Tambon) Administration Office (TAO)

- § The TAO is a recent innovation under the government reform policy (2002). Under this new policy, the tambon have greater influence on sub-district community development planning and human resources management, along with a greater budget allocation, and so on.
- § Sri Songkhram TAO, for example, consists of:
 - 10 communities with a total population of 4,313 persons in 983 households, and has eight schools, 14 rivers or streams, and 17 natural swamps or lakes.
 - Human resources: 18 government officers and community representatives consisting of 14 persons (normally two persons per village).
 - Budget features: 4.6 million Baht in 2003, 5.0 million Baht in 2004 and 10.5 million in 2005.
- § The head of the TAO and management team is elected by villagers, while community representatives are elected by villagers every three years.
- § The TAOs have to formulate development plans, which are to be drafted at community level and submitted by the communities.
- § The awareness level of villagers is important and can influence decision making of the TAO, particularly regarding issues related to natural resources management.

There is also a very good relationship between the National Project Office and the host agency, to the extent that ONEP might prefer to see a continuation of NPO management of finances, should there be sufficient GEF biodiversity funds available to for Phase B support. MTE is satisfied that the NPO has made strong efforts to engage with TNMC and improve this relationship, which is quite strained (see 7.2.2). The relationship of the NPO with the Royal Thai Department of Fishery should be strengthened, to ensure long term technical support at various levels (national, provincial, district), such as related to fishery law, monitoring of fishing in the Songkhram River, fish taxonomy, Mekong Giant Catfish, and so on.

This good sense of national ownership is a fairly recent development that has occurred since the active engagement of the NPC. Reportedly, national ownership as a hot issue raised in many PMC meetings, and prior to the (late) establishment of the NPO, a communication gap existed, especially between the Songkhram demonstration site, PPO and the national host agency. PMC members such as MONRE, ONEP, MRC and TNMC had little information about what was happening on the ground, and how they could actively support or make use of the good work at the demonstration sites. Thanks to the good efforts by the NPC this information gap has been resolved, and good national ownership has been effectuated.

6.2.2 Implementation approach

The approach taken by the Thailand Component of MWBP to implementation has been flexible and responsive to opportunities. The result is a comprehensive programme of good, community-based livelihood activities, packaged together with training, awareness, baseline resource studies (biodiversity studies by researchers and Thai Baan studies), fisheries conservation, alien invasive plant eradication, and habitat restoration activities. The mission was impressed by the sheer number of activities undertaken field visits confirmed that, through partnerships and cooperative action, much was being achieved. It must be noted that the Thai Baan approach was initiated elsewhere (in the Mun catchment), but has been successfully built upon and expanded by MWBP in the Songkhram area.

The logical framework – either that of the Project Brief (2001), Project Support Document (2004) or the recently drafted revised logframe (Jan. 2006) – is not actively being used in the context of the Thailand Component, other than at the PMU level. The NSC, NPO, PPO and host agency are aware of these documents and have seen them, but have generally not actively contributed directly to their production, and do not use them as a tool in project planning or implementation. The recent changes made to the logframe (Jan. 2006) reflect the realities on the ground and feedback from M&E, and this version is certainly an improvement on earlier logframes.

The NPO and PPO use the Thailand Component work plan as a management tool to guide their planning purpose, and this adequately serves the purpose. As mentioned above, the Thailand work plan reflects an adaptive management approach. Budgets and targets set for 2006 seem realistic, even given the reductions forced upon the programme due to a lack of a confirmed budget for Phase B.

MWBP has developed an excellent M&E system that consists of a digital database (Access-based), and is used to monitor country programmes and the entire MWBP. It has also developed an excellent programme website (www.mekongwetlands.org) that is highly professional, and apart from general pages on MWBP, includes pages on the country programmes, including the Thailand Component.

Relationships with most institutions are good to excellent. NPO and PPO staff are widely regarded as effective, and they are valued both by partners at national level and by external partners. Management of the Thailand Component (NPO and PPO) are assessed as effective and efficient. The only blot on the institutional landscape is the relationship with TNMC, which can be regarded as very poor, in spite of many efforts by the National Project Coordinator to rectify this. TNMC regards MWBP as an 'IUCN project' that 'by-passes' TNMC, bringing few benefits for Thailand and mainly benefiting IUCN. TNMC was also sceptical about transparency in the recruitment process and considered that IUCN was simply introducing favoured experts into the Steering Committee. However, the MTE is satisfied that the NPO and especially the NPC has made strong efforts to engage with TNMC and improve this relationship (including organising a study tour for TNMC participants in 2004).

The technical skills of the Thailand Component staff are assessed as by the host agency as being complementary to existing skills in ONEP. The mission was impressed by the degree of involvement of the NPC in project implementation at demo site level, and the skills and level of commitment of key technical staff involved (NPC, PCMs, Outreach Officer, and Technical Advisor).

Significant progress has been made in achieving various outputs and outcomes, which perhaps also reflects the fact that IUCN had been involved at the site well prior to MWBP's inception in July 2004. This meant that issues and viable approaches were well understood, and good relationships and trust had been forged.

One area that could be strengthened is the link between demonstration site level achievements and national level policies. While lots of good things have been achieved at the demonstration site, the lessons from these sites need to be embedded or at least reflected in national policy. It is still fairly early on the MWBP, but efforts should be initiated to ensure that more resources are mobilised for maintaining ecosystems and livelihoods, and that large scale developments (such as dams) will need to adequately deal with local level needs and considerations.

Overall assessment: Implementation approach - Thailand

Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
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Rationale: The approach to implementation has been holistic and flexible. Relationships are good, as are technical capabilities, and good use has been made of new technologies. Skills match the needs at various levels, and there is an excellent level of commitment.

6.2.3 Monitoring & evaluation

There is a supportive relationship in place between the regional PMU, the NPO and the PPO and this appears to result in close monitoring and evaluation at both the national and site level. As discussed above, the MTE was impressed that the project is responsive to opportunities and emerging priorities, identified through day-to-day working and through monitoring and evaluation activities.

However, improvements in reporting formats need to be considered – the host agency, UNDP and the Royal Netherlands Embassy (the principle funding source for activities in Thailand) all referred to confusing reports that were difficult to follow and to develop a sense of the overall picture.

The M&E reporting shows that baseline information is incomplete and this may constrain assessment of impacts at end of Phase A. For example, a preliminary biodiversity assessment has been undertaken, but the lead consultant will not be able to document the findings due to personal circumstances. It is now uncertain whether a baseline survey will be available by end of year, and scant funds remain to undertake a new baseline survey by end of Phase A. According to the seventh quarterly report, the Thailand component appears to be well on track. Understandably, there are some activities that are delayed. These include: integrated assessment of E Flows (so far only various discussions, but few if any tangible outputs) and the delayed start-up to the promotion of income generating activities, including organic agriculture,

Overall assessment: Monitoring & Evaluation - Thailand

Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
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Rationale: Basic systems for M&E are in place, and there exists an impressive system for monitoring and reporting. However, baseline data is still incomplete.

6.2.4 Stakeholder participation

The provincial programme demonstrates high levels of participation; the closer the programme is to the grass roots, the greater the participation. Not surprisingly, this close participation focuses on immediate livelihood issues and food security rather than on developing ideas for community wetland resource management. The Thai Baan methodology has been readily adopted in the demonstration sites but the data gathered have not yet been resulted in communities planning for the use of their natural resources. The designated fish conservation areas and fishing regulations have followed traditional knowledge rather than through analyses of species and habitats. 65% of Thai Baan researchers are women, yet most key decision makers are men. The original Thai Baan movement was a voluntary process that empowered villagers to respond to a threat rather than the MWBP process where the threat of livelihood loss is more covert. The schools water monitoring programme was particularly admired especially as, more generally, youth participation is very limited.¹¹

The close alignment of government and project staff has fostered the participation of district and provincial officers. However, the great number of infrastructure development proposals in the Songkhram basin stretches the capacity of government officials to participate in the site specific intervention. MWBP is generally seen as 'anti-dam' (though this is not its policy) and the high local and national interest to control the natural, annual flood in the basin make it difficult for them to engage with MWBP. MWBP has therefore to maintain a neutral position and focus on filling gaps in knowledge of the value of the livelihood services that wetlands provide. The establishment of a Provincial Wetlands Committee, directly encouraged by the project, is an indication of a strong willingness to adopt participatory processes.

Participation by ONEP is reserved but active. With the GoT priority of poverty reduction in accordance with the MDGs, ONEP has shown a strong interest in the role of wetland management in poverty reduction (as presented in the Ramsar resolution on wetlands and poverty reduction) and the values of traditional knowledge. There is a commitment to form the National Wetland Committee by the end of 2006, which, especially if linked to the Provincial Wetlands Committee (s) should consolidate the opportunities for the vertical integration of participatory processes. There has been no active participation in MWBP Thailand by the Thai National Mekong Committee (TNMC) other than taking part in a study tour in 2004 and, since the MRC is an implementing partner it will be important to continue to seek areas of cooperation. As stated earlier, this lack of cooperation is not because MWBP has not offered opportunities – it reflects a reluctance by TNMC.

Several commentators remarked that technical expertise within Thai institutions was not being sufficiently taken up in the MWBP project. Thailand, unlike the other MWBP countries, also has a wealth of formal and informal NGO knowledge and strength on which it can draw and with which it can network. However, the MTE has observed that in many instances MWBP does seem to be using local technical expertise, so this may simply be an issue of perception. The challenge of participation in Thailand is for MWBP to support both GoT and civil society participation when the two may be at odds.

¹¹ Participation of youths (10 schools in the Lower Songkhram Basin) in water quality monitoring is very active, but should be formally integrated into the local curriculum of the targeted schools (this is planned). In this way, the youths will not work only on a voluntary basis, but this activity will form part of their studies, and the information on water quality can be used to build up awareness of aquatic resources management in children, women, families and communities in the basin, for longterm sustainability.

Overall assessment: Stakeholder participation - Thailand

Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
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Rationale: There is a high degree of participation, limited by the engagement of one or two stakeholders.

6.2.5 Financial planning

Financial management arrangements are unsatisfactory at present, as they depend on *ad hoc* arrangements made because of lack of an MOU between IUCN Thailand and the government. At present, Programme Operating bank accounts have been issued in the name of project managers, and operate according to a number of simple rules to prevent abuse. These measures appear satisfactory, but they have also lead to delays and difficulties in servicing project needs. IUCN is in the process of securing documentation required for an MOU with the government, and are negotiating with the Finance Ministry for approval for establishing an IUCN bank account.

Budgets are developed by PMU and PPO, and presented to NPO for discussion, after which there may be some modification. ONEP is not actively involved in financial planning. Accounts are operated as revolving funds of 40-60 thousand baht (\$1000-\$1500) for office needs, with separate requests needed for activities.

Operational cost of the Thailand Component for 2005 was about \$226,000, while the cost of activities was about \$57,000 for the same period. Compared to the other country components, operational costs are high, while the amount spent on activities is very low. Operational costs of the three other country programmes is in the range of \$160,000-\$217,000, which is not much lower given the higher personnel costs in Thailand, and given that the lower figure was for the Vietnam Component, which did not operate the whole year. The cost of activities in the three other countries ranges from \$115,000-\$164,000, which means that the Thailand Component was spending half of what the other components were spending in 2005.

The budget, for 2006 as included in the 2006 Work Plan for the Thailand Component, totals \$384,000 (\$448,000 in consolidated budget for 2006). However, this budget was made before it was fully understood that funding for Phase B was not budgeted by GEF, and in order to extend Phase A, some of these proposed budgets will be cut. About two-thirds of the budget allocated for 2006 will go towards four outputs: Output 4.03 *Recommendations for wetland management and policy* (11.5% of 2006 budget), Output 4.07 *Integrated planning processes in the Lower Songkhram Basin strengthened* (28.8%), Output 4.10 *Networks of resource users strengthened in the LSB* (14.7%), and Output 4.11 *Education and awareness-raising programme* (10.1%). On the whole, allocations appear cost-effective, without unusually high allocations for activities that may seem inefficient, given the need to reduce overall spending so that Phase A can be extended.

No GEF funds have been spent on the Thailand Component, as this has been entirely funded from non-GEF sources, most notably from the Netherlands government (100% in 2005, and 86.7% in 2006) and UNDP RBP (13.3% in 2006). In 2002-2004, Wetlands International contributed €100,000 to the start-up of the Thailand Component.

6.2.6 Execution & implementation modalities

Establishing fully operational offices at ONEP in Bangkok (the NPO) and at the District Office in Sri Songkhram (the PPO) took until the third quarter of 2005, while recruiting of key staff took until the fourth

quarter. Particularly the recruitment of the NPC proved difficult, with promising candidates being interviewed, but accepting other positions at the last minute. While the process was time consuming, the result is that both PPO and NPO teams consist of qualified, motivated and committed staff, and the mission was duly impressed. Tasks and responsibilities on the Thailand Component have been adequately defined and are considered appropriate. Sufficient guidance has been provided regarding M&E reporting and financial procedures, and where necessary, training has been either provided or facilitated by the PMU.

6.3 Results

6.3.1 Effectiveness – the enabling environment

MWBP has operated in Thailand at the right time for its support to be commensurate with the GoT's own commitment to implement wetland policies and planning and management procedures. To a large extent, the ambitious baselines set in the Programme Document have been met; institutional arrangements are in place to allow local people to use and manage wetland resources in a sustainable manner, the government accepts community management arrangements in wetlands and commitment exists to the need for national (though not yet regional) wetlands policy. A caution is that the GoT's development priorities in line with the National Poverty Reduction Strategy is for poverty reduction with growth, and that growth is seen raising the macro economy by increased trade (including the opening of Mekong navigation options), power (though hydropower) and water for irrigation (though water transfer and water storage). National food security is also a priority and so an emphasis on the importance of livelihoods derived from wetlands could also be a priority. The slow response to MWBP from the TNMC, may be an indication of conflicting priority interests and that TNMC is not strongly committed to regional wetland planning.

The final trigger may be the establishment of the National Wetland Committee later in 2006. MWBP Thailand has good internal operating procedures and a good relationship with its host agency ONEP. UNDP TRAC funds are in place and ONEP has been given overall responsibility to manage these funds. This core funding by UNDP Thailand will be used to bridge between phase A and the uncertain phase B, and for establishing linkages between local and national level, including the upscaling of achievements at the Songkhram demonstration site.

The devolution processes put in place by GoT have opened up opportunities for both civil society and the private sector to take support from MWBP as each use their relative autonomy to realise their separate objectives.

Overall assessment: Effectiveness – the enabling environment - Thailand

Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
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Rationale: This would rank higher but for a lack of commitment by TNMC.

6.3.2 Effectiveness/impact – technical

In general, it is still too early to assess effectiveness and impacts. Most tangible progress appears to have been made at the demonstration site level, where the support for Thai Baan and with local schools provides some obvious signs of local ownership. These activities are generating information of real value to local stewardship of resources and are now beginning to be integrated into local (formalised) planning approaches. There are also interesting innovative approaches that could offer useful insights of broader

relevance throughout the basin, for example, on piloting new approaches for composting the invasive shrub species, *Mimosa pigra*.

Questions remain over the programme strategy to support the scaling-up of Thai Baan work to adjacent tambons and districts in the lower Songkhram and greater clarity on this issue is needed. Outstanding issues also remain – recognized by the program, on how best to address some of the ‘bigger picture’ issues that threaten the ecological integrity, and hence wetland dependent livelihoods. These include a proposal for a flood control sluice on the Songkhram River, land use management in the upper catchment and the impacts of major land use changes, including land development, by agribusinesses. Each of these may have very significant impacts on wetland resources of the lower basin.

However, the overall assessment is that there is a strong likelihood of very positive impacts and the review is also aware that a single programme such as MWBP cannot be expected to resolve all issues in a sub-basin the size of the lower Songkhram.

6.3.3 Sustainability

There has been considerable progress on the Thailand Component of MWBP, especially in various areas associated with sustainable livelihoods and community management of resources. Notable are the achievements in Thai Baan research, participatory planning, establishing fisheries conservation areas, forest restoration, and control programmes of alien invasive species. However, these achievements are all of a very recent date and need to be consolidated during the remainder of Phase A, to ensure that they remain firmly embedded in local approaches to natural resource management.

MWBP has not developed a full sustainability strategy (only a 4-page discussion paper on such a strategy; see 3.3), something that has been missing from the design phase of the programme, as this was missing in both the Project Brief (2001) and Project Support Document (2004). Plans for dam construction on the Songkhram River threaten the sustainability of what has been achieved to date, as such wide-reaching developments may wipe out any achievements made during MWBP implementation. At national level MWBP should focus on awareness and policy change, so that such developments will have to deal with issues related to sustainability, resource use, and local interests. In terms of sustainability, MWBP could establish a formal People’s Organisation or Community-Based Organization (e.g. Lower Songkhram Basin Thai Baan Research Association) in the Lower Songkhram Basin in Phase B, and build up their capacity, linking Songkhram issues with Academic Institutions, GOs and NGOs for longterm sustainability.¹²

Together with sub-district (tambon) administration, MWBP is formulating plans that will be submitted to district and provincial authorities for incorporation into the Provincial Integrated Development Plans (due in October 2006). The provinces have been allocated significant resources (by the central government) for funding the IDPs, and this seems an ideal opportunity for sustainability of promising approaches to NRM tried in the lower Songkhram basin.

¹² An Environmental Conservation Club has already been established in Nakhon Phanom, but this does not want to become a formal organisation; also, they are concerned with issues at a provincial level, not only along the Songkhram.

6.4 Implications & recommendations for Thailand

6.4.1 Remainder of Phase-A

Institutional and implementation arrangements

The PPO currently reports directly to, and is managed by the PMU, while the NPO is only kept informed of the PPO's activities and receives reports. During the remainder of Phase A, PPO and NPO should establish closer links, with PPO reporting directly to, and eventually being managed by the NPO. Given the depth of understanding that the NPC already has of what is happening at the demo site and at the PPO, it is expected that the NPO will be able to assume full management responsibility over the PPO in a relatively short time, and certainly by the end of Phase A. Contractual arrangements are currently between PPO and PMU, however, and this may affect a full hand-over. This transition is to be initiated by the PMU as soon as possible, and where needed, additional training should be provided.

Focus of activities and outputs

During the remainder of Phase A, activities of the Thailand Component should focus on the following activities and outputs:

Given that there are plans to tap into GEF biodiversity and/or other conservation funds for Phase B continuation of the Thailand Component, it will be necessary for MWBP to improve articulation of international biodiversity relevance of the lower Songkhram area. Baseline biodiversity studies will be required.

At present, the 'system boundary' of the lower Songkhram River basin demo site has not been fully defined, which means that programme staff are always struggling to define the area. This needs to be rectified as soon as possible, as it leads to confusion, and will certainly be required if future GEF funding is to be considered.

Socioeconomic studies, economic analysis and valuation studies are to be carried out to determine the economic importance of various wetland resources, help determine local priorities, and formulate the Integrated Development Plans at tambon level.

The approaches to sustainable natural resource management in the lower Songkhram basin should be tested for replicability and attractiveness in districts adjacent Sri Songkhram. This up-scaling can be carried out by developing IDPs for Sri Songkhram tambons, assisting with formulation of the district-level IDP, and using this as a model for other districts to obtain provincial funding. Provincial authorities have expressed interest in this approach, and this should be attempted during the remainder of Phase A, especially as the time frame being used for IDP development is mainly during the coming months (finalising in October 2006).

While the Thai Baan approach is empowering local people and generating a lot of information that is very useful for natural resource management, there is some criticism (especially at national level) that the information is not very sound. This issue can be dealt with by integrating traditional technical and scientific approaches with the Thai Baan approach – which has already been initiated by MWBP – so that information generated has a firmer footing.

The provincial host agency has been requested to provide a model for sustainable NRM in wetland areas of the lower Songkhram, to be used on a government programme for regional development that was

identified by her Royal Highness, the Queen of Thailand, and is locally known as 'the Queen's project'. The PPO should support the host agency where it can in formulating this model (which is required on sort notice), as this also provides an opportunity for up-scaling approaches that have proved to be viable¹³.

Deliverables

- Deliverables by the end of Phase A should be carried out as presented in the Detailed Work Plan for the Thailand Component 2006, as these deliverables are relevant and there are few that could be considered redundant given the change in prospects for Phase B funding.
- Working linkages between provincial and national wetland committees, as these have no contact at present and need to coordinate and cooperate where possible.
- An effective design for the Queen's development project in the lower Songkhram area.
- Baseline information available on wetland inventory, socio-economics, wetland valuation and biodiversity.
- A coherent funding strategy for Phase B, focussing on national support (e.g. via Provincial IDP funds).

6.4.2 Phase-B approach for Thailand

Institutional and implementation arrangements

Institutional arrangements during Phase B are to largely be as outlined for the remainder of Phase A, with a greater role for the NPO, with direct responsibility for the PPO. During Phase B, technical expertise at the national level (NPO) should be expanded with a national wetland biodiversity expert. In Phase B, there will not be a fully centralised management located within a PMU – instead, a centralised unit will be small, and have no direct management responsibilities for national programmes and demonstration sites. Instead, it will provide technical support at national levels as required, coordinate regional activities, especially for exchange of information and lessons learned between countries.

Funding opportunities

Opportunities for GEF funding of the Thailand Component are considered slim. Firstly, under the current RAF allocation for Thailand there is a ceiling of \$3 million¹⁴ for the entire country for three years, which is very little given the number of areas and biodiversity concerns. Secondly, many proposals for biodiversity funding are already in the pipeline, and funding proposals for Phase B of MWBP will have to compete with these for scarce resources. Lastly, the Thailand Component has not made a significant case for the lower Songkhram basin being of global significance for biodiversity, as baseline biodiversity studies have yet to produce results.

On the other hand, work carried out so far at the demonstration site provides a firm basis for sustainable livelihood development and sustainable NRM. If these approaches can be incorporated into tambon, district and provincial Integrated Development Plans, there is ample opportunity for funding at least some of these activities in Phase B. The Royal Netherlands Embassy could be approached to provide some co-funding of these sustainable livelihood and poverty alleviation activities, in continuation of their funding for Phase A.

¹³ Related to the Queen's project: usually all provincial government organisations have to involve in the programme, and a budget will be allocated for all activities. If the programme success and MWBP is involved, MWBP will be recognised by other organizations and that model can possibly be expanded to others area.

¹⁴ This may be increased to the next level, but even then this will only be \$5-10 million for 3 years.

7 Vietnam Component Assessment

7.1 Project design

7.1.1 Institutional setting of PPO and NPO in Vietnam

The NPO for the Vietnam Component is housed within the Vietnam Environment Protection Agency (VEPA) - part of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE). Prior to the establishment of MONRE in 2002, VEPA was known as the National Environment Agency, and was housed within the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE).

VEPA has broad responsibility for environmental matters, including wetland conservation and management, which is stipulated in Decree No. 109/2003/ND-CP of September 23, 2003 on “Conservation and sustainable development of wetlands”. This decree also appoints VEPA as the Ramsar focal point agency. Both MONRE and VEPA are young organisations, and must deal with challenges facing all new agencies: their staff is young and lack capacity, and the agency as a whole needs to define a clear role in the institutional landscape of government. However, both agencies are also dynamic and growing, and are capable of adapting to new situations and changes, and are willing to adopt new policies. A National Wetland Office is soon to be established within VEPA, new staff with wetland expertise is being recruited by the Ramsar Focal Point, and the government has announced that soon a separate budget line will be created in the state budget for wetlands.

Although VEPA is responsible for overall wetland management and conservation, it has no direct jurisdiction over (wetland) protected areas such as Tram Chim National Park (TCNP) and Lang Sen Wetland Reserve. State management responsibility for most protected areas in Vietnam is mainly the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD)¹⁵. Tram Chim is one of a small number of protected areas managed directly by MARD from the central level in most cases, management responsibilities are decentralized to management boards established at, and reporting to the provincial level. Lang Sen Wetland Reserve is an exception, as it is Vietnam’s first wetland reserve and is managed by MARD’s Department of Science and Technology (DOST). Given the focus of MWBP (on both biodiversity conservation and sustainable use), and VEPA’s state management responsibilities for wetlands, there is no doubt that VEPA is the most appropriate institutional home for the programme.

At provincial level, the PPO is based in Cao Lanh, Dong Thap province in rented office space, and is not aligned to a specific agency. This is appropriate, since the neutral setting enables the office to cooperate with various provincial agencies such as both management boards, DARD, DOST and the Provincial People’s Committee (PPC).

¹⁵ Ministry of Fisheries will have responsibility for Marine Protected Areas once established formally.

7.1.2 Demonstration project & Vietnamese national priorities

Both Vietnamese demonstration sites are located in the Plain of Reeds, which formerly extended over 700,000 hectares. Only a handful of small reserves – including TCNP and LSWR – remain of the natural grassland and sedgeland habitat, and occur isolated like islands of biodiversity in a ‘sea of rice’. Both Tram Chim and Lang Sen have been planted to some extent with *Melaleuca* forest, but grasses and sedges remain important features. Although small and somewhat impoverished, these small reserves are all that remain and are therefore highly important for maintaining biodiversity in the region. Species of global significance are found at both demonstration sites, the most notable of which is the Eastern Sarus Crane, one of MWBP’s flagship species.

Natural wetlands of the Plain of Reeds are of national priority for conservation and are acknowledged as such by VEPA (e.g. the Ramsar focal point) and MONRE (e.g. the GEF focal point). The two demonstration sites are therefore well chosen and appropriate. The focus of the demonstration project on ‘fire and water’ and ‘livelihoods and co-management’ is highly appropriate. The fire and water strategy aims at achieving an ecosystem approach to wetland management, rather than a more typical forestry approach taken by DARD that has led to degradation of *Eleocharis* sedgelands at TCNP. Until recently, co-management was not considered an option in Vietnamese protected areas, but the revision of the Forest Protection and Development Law in 2004 has created more opportunities for exploring these approaches. The potential role that co-management could play is recognised by VEPA, MONRE and MARD at national level, and by the Southern Sub-Institute of the Forest Inventory and Planning Institute (Sub-FIPI) located in Ho Chi Minh City.

7.1.3 Stakeholder participation

Stakeholder consultation and participation in the project design phase has been good, but MWBP has had to revisit this during project inception due to significant changes in institutional setting since the production of the Project Brief in 2001. The main stakeholders have been consulted and have participated in project design. MWBP has tried to involve local commune members, albeit at a modest level, but that is the maximum that could be achieved under the given circumstances. There has been a long history of both development and conservation agencies working with the communities living around TCNP. This may be significant as relationships between the authorities, NGOs and local people were already established before MWBP started work there.

Overall assessment: Stakeholder participation in design - Vietnam

Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
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Rationale: Stakeholders have been well involved during project design, which is reflected by the good degree of participation during implementation.

7.2 Programme Implementation

7.2.1 Country-ownership/Driveness

There is a good sense of local ownership of MWBP’s Vietnam Component. Managers of the two demonstration sites are closely involved with MWBP in planning and implementation of activities, and are convinced that the programme’s priorities are aligned with those of the PA. This is more the case at TCNP than at LSWR, due to well established structures and better communications at the former site, which makes it easier for MWBP to engage.

There is good rapport with the programme at District and Provincial levels, and local authorities agree that MWBP is focusing on key issues at both demonstration sites. Conservation priorities are the same, and the programme meshes well with local authority plans, especially their poverty alleviation programme and plans for developing ecotourism. They view MWBP as ‘their’ project, and a good vehicle for achieving common goals.

At a national level, there is also a good sense of ownership. After a slow start, co-operation between NPO and VEPA has improved to the point that VEPA now regards the NPO as part of VEPAs own resources. There is a good exchange and rapport, and VEPA plans to merge the NPO into the National Wetland Office once this is established. Goals and interest are well aligned, and VEPA considers the approach taken at TCNP and LSWR as appropriate and important.

7.2.2 Implementation approach

On the whole, the approach to implementation has been good and pragmatic, both at NPO and PPO levels in Vietnam. Opportunities that have arisen (e.g. fire trials, visit of the Vice-Minister to TCNP in April 2006) have been well utilised, and this level of flexibility has contributed to their success. One aspect of implementation that has not been favourable is the direct management of the PPO by the PMU, with insufficient direct involvement by the NPO, something that has frustrated VEPA. While this may have made sense initially when the project was being started up, it does not add to the sense of ownership, nor does it contribute to the building of national capacities. It also means that the PPO must report in English, which adds to the burden of PPO staff, not only because of the language requirement, but they also need to report in Vietnamese to local authorities.

The logical framework – either that of the Project Brief (2001), Project Support Document (2004) or the recently drafted revised logframe (Jan. 2006) – does not appear to be actively used in the context of the Vietnam Component, other than at the PMU level. The NSC, NPO, PPO and host agency are aware of these documents and have seen them, but have not significantly contributed directly to their production, and do not use them as a tool in project planning or implementation. The recent changes made to the logframe (Jan. 2006) reflect the realities on the ground and feedback from M&E, and this version is certainly an improvement on earlier logframes.

The NPO and PPO use the Vietnam Component work plan as a management tool to guide their planning purpose, and this seems to adequately serve the purpose. The Vietnam work plan reflects an adaptive management approach, but not one that is entirely realistic. It was assumed at the time that the budget for Phase-B would be forthcoming, and the plan then was to proceed as originally designed. By January 2006, however, it became clear that funds were not available for the second phase, and at that time further cuts were made at NPO and PPO level. This has not been fully incorporated in revised work plans distributed at NPO and PPO level, and hence remains unclear. Changes in management arrangements have not been made, and these have been fairly rigidly applied from the start.

MWBP has developed an excellent M&E system that consists of a digital database (Access-based) that has fields that need to be filled out on a regular basis for reporting purposes. While very professional, it is largely regarded by PPO (and to a lesser extent, the NPO) as a burden rather than a useful tool, as it is time consuming, and they still have to produce separate reports parallel to this for their host agencies and local partners. Also, reporting both in English and Vietnamese is an issue at PPO level, but not at NPO level.

MWBP also has an excellent programme website (www.mekongwetlands.org) that is highly professional, and apart from general pages on MWBP, it also includes pages for the country programmes, including the Vietnam Component. The latter is both in Vietnamese and English, and includes articles, information on activities and events, and media releases. The aim of the website is to function as a portal for informing the general public, and not for supporting programme implementation. There is no programme intranet, but extensive use is made of internet and email, except with the Lang Sen site, which is poorly linked with the national communications grid.

The relationship with the national host agency is good, as VEPA sees MWBP as being part of VEPA, and many staff are closely involved on an almost daily basis on various issues. VEPA are generally positive about managerial and technical aspects of the programme, but would like to see communication enhanced, as they are not always fully informed about all aspects (e.g. issues with CARE). VEPA are aware of importance of links with MARD, MONRE and MOFI for implementation of MWBP, but there is no close cooperation in this field. Nevertheless, the relationship between MWBP's NPO and (partner) organisations such as VNMC, MARD, MONRE, MOFI and IUCN Vietnam are generally good. At PPO level, communications and relationships with agencies are good to excellent, be it at site level (with TCNP & LSWR management), district level (district administration), provincial level (PPC) and regional level (e.g. DARD, DOST, Sub-FIPI). These positive relationships have undoubtedly contributed to the progress made by the programme over the past year.

An exception to the above is perhaps the livelihoods component, carried out by the local partner, CARE Vietnam. This has been weakened by staff changes, with three consecutive CARE programme managers being replaced over the course of 12 months. While MWBP does not appear to be at fault, it may be advisable to change the implementation arrangements and revisit the contract with CARE. Relationships at national level are non-existent (contacts and contracts are via the PMU), while at PPO level they have been variable.

At PPO level, technical capacities are adequate to good, and certainly at managerial level there is good technical expertise and knowledge. The Project Co-Manager in the PPO holds an MSc degree in Conservation Biology and Sustainable Development and a Bachelor degree in Water Work Engineering from Can Tho University, while the Co-Managers have a major in Irrigation and Water Works Engineering, or are the Head of DOST. Other regional experts have also been involved on a needs basis, including resource economists from Can Tho University, a Mimosa control expert from Can Tho University, and forestry experts from Sub-FIPI in Ho Chi Minh City. Technical expertise has on occasion been brought in from outside Vietnam, for example, the fire management programme recruited a North American fire management expert who had previously been involved in the region, and a hydrologist from the Netherlands (based in Vientiane) contributed significantly to the water management strategy. Technical capacity at the NPO level is quite strong, as the NPC has a Water Resources Engineering degree from AIT, and the NPO is further strengthened with a National Communications and Training Coordinator with a strong background in computer science and communications.

Overall assessment: Implementation approach - Vietnam

Highly satisfactory **Satisfactory** Marginally satisfactory Unsatisfactory

Rationale: On the whole, the approach to implementation has been very reasonable to good, with appropriate approaches taken, skilful persons employed, and good techniques chosen. Relationships with partner organisations are good and conducive to successful implementation. The reporting line PPO to PMU needs to be loosened, while at the same time the NPO needs to become more involved with the PPO, starting with opening of direct reporting lines and ending with full management.

7.2.3 Monitoring & evaluation

The MWBP Quarterly Reports and the highly sophisticated M&E system provide an adequate oversight mechanism for monitoring progress and flagging potential difficulties. The Quarterly Reports list milestones and progress per activity for the Vietnam Component, and provides summary reports under progress headings. In addition, MWBP also produces periodic milestone updates that serve to illustrate which milestones are on target, delayed, rescheduled or have been retired because they have been achieved or are no longer valid. Unusually, the (much delayed) involvement of CARE on the livelihoods component is not listed under either 5.08 or 5.09.

A Mid-year Review was held in 2005, coordinated by the PMU. This document has proved useful for determining what is on schedule relative to the work plan, and what needs strengthening. It also provides recommendations for what needs to be done to improve performance.

Although required by GEF for all biodiversity projects funded out of GEF-3, the GEF-biodiversity tracking tool has not been used on the Vietnam Component. It would be highly advisable for MWBP to support the management boards to undertake these exercises, not only because they provide extremely useful baseline information on management effectiveness, but also because these are required if these sites are to seek funding available from the Vietnam Conservation Fund (see below). MWBP M&E reports are timely, and relatively easy to follow, provided one knows the project structure and setup. However, for outsiders this may be more difficult. Key programme staff (e.g. NPC, PCM) spend 1-2 days per quarter in providing inputs to these quarterly reports. Although this is not very time consuming, it is regarded as tedious, as they also need to provide reports to host agencies in Vietnamese.

In terms of external monitoring and supervision, the UNDP Vietnam office has yet to visit the demonstration site, and does not play an active role in supervision of the national programme. This may change following approval of UNDP TRAC funds. A proposal for UNDP TRAC funds was submitted by MWBP to UNDP Vietnam early in June 2006, but this has yet to be approved.

Overall assessment: Monitoring & Evaluation - Vietnam

Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
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Rationale: The M&E and reporting system that has been put in place is highly sophisticated and certainly adequate to provide oversight on what is being achieved on the programme. Shortfalls are soon detected – at least within a quarter – and dealt with.

7.2.4 Stakeholder participation

Stakeholder participation in the Vietnam Component is variable, and while there are few complaints, the mission considers this aspect not entirely satisfactory. At a local level, TCNP management staff is closely involved, but there is little engagement with management staff of LSWR, partly due to communication difficulties. There is little direct MWBP engagement with local villagers and communes at both demo sites, as this is left up to the component implemented by CARE Vietnam. The MWBP Project Co-Manager meets with district level authorities on a quarterly basis, but these complain about a lack of (written) reporting. These reports are submitted at the provincial level, but not copied to district authorities. At provincial level, communications are fine, and there is a good level of participation, who view MWBP as complementary to their own programme (e.g. of poverty alleviation). At a national level, engagement and active participation of VEPA is good. The Ramsar focal point indicated that at present she spends about half of her time working on MWBP related issues, and at times this input is almost full-time. Other VEPA staff are also involved at times, on a needs basis.

Few partner organisations appear to be involved on the Vietnam Component, other than CARE, but as part of Output 5.01, a first meeting of wetland experts in the network (94 identified in all in Vietnam) was held in Hanoi on 10 March 2006. There is a relatively good partnership with Can Tho University, and with Sub-FIPI in Ho Chi Minh City. Local resource users are being actively involved on the programme, as part of Outputs 5.08 and 5.10, albeit on a modest scale at present, and certainly not at a decision making level. Various media are used by MWBP for information dissemination, including mass media, website, World Wetland Day events, quarterly and annual reports, and oral reports during meetings. The overall communications strategy of the programme is strong and well developed, also in Vietnamese. A Stakeholder Participation Plan was not produced as part of the Project Brief or Project Support Document, and this may have lead to *ad hoc* decisions in the past.

Overall assessment: Stakeholder participation – Vietnam

Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
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Rationale: Quite variable. Some aspects are very good (e.g. communications), or simply good (e.g. national and provincial level), while stakeholder participation at other levels are less satisfactory (e.g. local communes, district, other partners).

7.2.5 Financial planning

Finances on the Vietnam Component are coordinated between the NPO and the IUCN Vietnam Country Office, which follows IUCN's rigorous financial procedures. According to VEPA, financial procedures between the NPO and IUCN Vietnam are cumbersome and slow, indicating some frustration.

Budget revisions are made by PMU and sent to NPO and PPO for them to acknowledge. Neither NPO nor PPO has a good idea of total budgets up front, and only the PMU has access to this information. Once approved, the figures are made available in the work plan.

Operational costs of the Vietnam Component for 2005 were about \$160,000, while the cost of activities was about \$165,000 for the same period. Compared to the other country components, both operational and activity costs are high. Operational costs of the three other country programmes is in the range of \$206,000-\$226,000, but this is for a full 12 months, compared to only 6-7 months (PPO) or 9 (NPO) months for the Vietnam Component. However, it must be pointed out that there are two sub-offices and two site offices because of the focus on both Tram Chim NP and Lang Sen WR. The cost of activities in the three other countries ranges from \$57,000-\$124,000, making the Vietnam component by far the most expensive during 2005. However, one needs to bear in mind that in Vietnam these costs also include start-up costs and investments in capital goods such as office equipment, boat and vehicles.

The budget, for 2006 as included in the 2006 Work Plan for the Vietnam Component, totals \$495,000 (\$516,000 in consolidated budget). However, this budget was made before it was fully understood that funding for Phase B was not budgeted by GEF, and in order to extend Phase A, some of these proposed budgets will be cut. The work plan budget includes substantial sums for Output 5.7 - PA site management (35.4%), Output 5.8 - Community-based conservation and sustainable use of wetlands (16.2%) and Output 5.3 – Recommendations for wetland management in Vietnam formulated (12.2%). Together these comprise about 64% of the budget for 2006. Much of this (about half, or 1/3 of the total budget for 2006) is towards studies carried out (mainly) by external experts. This may not be the best use of scarce funds, and should be revisited if this has not been revised already. More use of local expertise – for example, hydrologists on the fire and water studies – could be considered, as this would significantly reduce costs.

Co-financing has been leveraged on the Vietnam Component, most notably IUCN-WANI funds for flow/hydrology studies, and Royal Netherlands Embassy and Danida funds, mainly contributing to the livelihoods component. In 2005, GEF funds totalled about \$241,000 (75%), while the Dutch contribution to the Vietnam Component totalled about \$82,000 (25%). Danida funds are very modest (<\$10,000), and have only recently been brought in via CARE Vietnam. The Vietnam programme is on the verge of leveraging additional funds – notably government funds from the poverty alleviation programme that will contribute to MWBP's livelihood activities in the buffer zones of TCNP and LSWR.

7.2.6 Execution & implementation modalities

Overall, MWBP experienced significant delays in recruitment procedures, and in assigning of experts on their respective assignments. This was particularly the case in Vietnam where due to national approval procedures the start of the Vietnam Component was delayed by more than six months. While other country programmes began in July 2004, in Vietnam this did not start until approval was received on 5th January 2005. At that date no progress had been made on establishing the Hanoi NPO office, although its location within VEPA has been confirmed, and no start had been made upon setting up the PPO in the Plain of Reeds. Interviews were held in January-March 2005 of staff for PPO and NPO, while the PPO facility in Cao Lanh was not fully functional until July 2005. This means that, although MWBP has been ongoing for almost two years, the Vietnam Component has only been ongoing for just over one year. This delay of the Vietnam Component has been recognised and is criticised by most partners.

Tasks and responsibilities have been adequately defined and are deemed appropriate and sufficient guidance has been provided regarding M&E reporting and financial procedures. Where necessary, training has been provided. Staff of both NPO and PPO are well qualified and committed, and the mission was impressed by their competence and degree of dedication. The mission was unable to meet with the VSO, who was on sick leave during the time of the evaluation.

7.3 Results

7.3.1 Effectiveness – the enabling environment

As indicated in the TOR for the mid-term review, there was no definition of what the 'enabling environment' that was to be achieved in Phase A was to involve. Also, as all four countries have their own particular circumstances these are likely to differ from country to country. In the Vietnam context, major obstacles – embedded in policy – to sustainable management and conservation of wetland resources are:

- Most of Vietnam's protected wetlands are under state management by regulations applying to Special use Forests, issued by MARD. These regulations are poorly suited to wetland management. From the point of biodiversity concern, the most important habitats are the non-forested ones. This leads to inappropriate management decisions, such as raising water tables at Tram Chim to reduce fire risk, as fires are of major concern to foresters in MARD.
- Lack of involvement of local communities in management of resources in wetland protected areas, since existing management regulations for Special use Forests (particularly Decision 08/2001) require management boards to strictly control access and resource use. This works against approaches based on co-management and sustainable use.

Over the past 12 months, MWBP has been successful in pioneering change at Tram Chim, and to a lesser extent at Lang Sen. They have been able to convince protected area managers, local authorities (district and provincial), Sub-FIPI and central government (MARD, MONRE and VEPA) of the need for major changes. They have reached agreement on lowering of water tables to mimic natural hydroperiods, and

have obtained written approval from MARD to carry out trial burning at Tram Chim, which would be a one of the first examples of this in Vietnam¹⁶. Recognised poor members of the local community that are fully dependent on Tram Chim for their livelihood have, on a trial basis with 100 families, been organised into user groups who will be issued with forest protection contracts (known as ‘green books’) that will essentially legalise their use of PA resources. Part of the process involves identifying restrictions on resource use and establishing self-regulatory resource management systems.

These changes need to be consolidated during the time that remains for Phase A, as the co-management trials need to be implemented, as do the actual trial burns (delayed due to prolonged rains). At an institutional level, MWBP has been successful in establishing good cooperation and generally good communications with the host agency, being firmly embedded in the VEPA structure, and good cooperation at the local/field level. Overall, one may conclude that MWBP, with the strong support of the host agency - VEPA, has been quite successful in establishing an ‘enabling environment’ in Phase A and certainly rates ‘satisfactory’.

Overall assessment: Effectiveness – the enabling environment - Vietnam			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Rationale: Major changes in approach to wetland management and co-management have been initiated, but need to be consolidated during the remainder of Phase A.			

7.3.2 Effectiveness/impact – technical

As mentioned in 8.3.1, progress on the Vietnam Component of MWBP has been satisfactory and looks promising, in spite of a very slow start. This progress is well balanced between technical and social aspects in terms of planning, but is not as balanced geographically (Tram Chim being well ahead of Lang Sen) or by rate of delivery (co-management is lagging behind).

Delays in co-management have primarily been caused by several changes in key staff of the livelihoods and co-management programme of the Vietnam Component, which is implemented by CARE Vietnam. Their programme manager based at Cao Lanh has been replaced twice already, and during the mission it emerged that the third manager had just resigned. It would appear that there is a structural problem, either in the cooperation at PPO level, or in the approach taken by CARE, or a combination of these factors. As the programme has created expectation, these delays are doing MWBP a disservice and could be damaging.

¹⁶ Controlled burning has been used as a grassland management tool at Cat Tien National Park since 2003, and has proved highly successful.

MWBP has met a large number of indicators listed in the revised logframe of January 2006¹⁷, and is on track for meeting most of those that remain for 2006, such as Outcome L.1 *Management Plans and Investment plans endorsed by province authorities*, Outcome L.2, *Number of households that are a member of an operational interest <i.e. resource user> group*, and Output 5.7 *Ecotourism plans developed*. Targets that are unlikely to be met are:

- Outcomes:
 - VNMC agreement on flow regime that maintains important wetland habitats. (N.1)
 - Indicators and systems for monitoring of ecological health, biodiversity and wetland dependent livelihoods identified by institutions. (N.2)
- Outputs:
 - Tools for implementing the existing NWAP completely reviewed and solutions recommended (5.4)

It needs to be pointed out, however, that many of the output and outcome indicators listed do not have an 'achieved by' date or are to be achieved by a later date, and there are no intermediate targets. (20 indicators are to be achieved by 2006, 3 by the end of Phase A, 3 by 2009, and 43 are undated, presumably meaning by the end of Phase B). In a number of cases, indicators are vague and need to be specified further, with clear targets established (e.g. 'capacity for improving the national wetlands action plan improved', 'infrastructure for ecotourism improved', or 'gender balance on training courses'). Intermediate targets should be set for the end of Phase A for those indicators where this is possible (e.g. number of issues prioritised by civil society, number of NRMGs established).

7.3.3 Sustainability

MWBP has made progress in various important areas on the Vietnam Component, most notably on ecosystem management (e.g. fire and water strategy) and co-management in wetland protected areas. However, most of these initiatives are of recent date, as the programme began only a year ago, and in the case of the PPO, even less than one year. In order to become sustainable, significant consolidation will be required during the remainder of Phase A, otherwise progress to date is unlikely to have any lasting effect. Whether the remaining time will be sufficient for incorporation into policy is uncertain and perhaps even unlikely, as such significant changes take time to be fully absorbed, and policy change targets were originally set for Phase B. Certain tangibles will remain, such as updates, reports and possibly also the network of wetland experts, but these are peripheral to the real key achievements that appear to be within reach.

MWBP has not developed a sustainability strategy (only a 4-page discussion paper on such a strategy; see 3.3), something that has been missing from the design phase of the programme, as this was missing in both the Project Brief (2001) and Project Support Document (2004). Economic and financial instruments for sustainability of what has been achieved so far on the Vietnam Component have not yet been put in place.

¹⁷ Although this version of the logframe has not yet been endorsed by the PSC, the mission will use it for evaluation as it incorporates the new outputs indicators that have been endorsed.

However, opportunities are being explored at present, such as:

- tapping into funds made available for development of ecotourism;
- national funds for poverty alleviation that are being distributed via the provinces and can be used in the MWBP livelihoods programme; and
- developing proposals for the World Bank-GEF-Netherlands Government funded Vietnam Conservation Fund.

7.4 Implications & recommendations for Vietnam

7.4.1 Remainder of Phase-A

Institutional and implementation arrangements

The relationship between PPO and NPO needs to change. At present, the PPO reports directly to, and is managed by the PMU, while the NPO is only kept informed of the PPO's activities and receives reports. During the remainder of Phase A, PPO and NPO should establish closer links, with PPO reporting directly to the NPO, and by the end of Phase A the NPO should also manage the activities of the PPO. This process will take time and require capacity building, and so it should be initiated by the PMU as soon as possible. The PPO also needs to strengthen its links with LSWR and improve communications with management of this protected area. It should also improve communications with district authorities. Once the National Wetland Office is established within VEPA, the NPO should be housed within this unit. As outlined in the general recommendations, the PNC should become a member of the Senior Management Team, which will assume management responsibility for MWBP in the course of the remaining Phase A period.

Focus of activities and outputs

Emphasis during the remainder of Phase A should be on:

- Achieving as much as possible on the ground, with concrete activities and outputs, and less emphasis on studies and analysis.
- Paving the way for incorporation of key outcomes into national policy, especially in the field of ecosystem management (notably fire and water strategies) and co-management of wetland resources.

The Vietnam Component should focus on consolidating the 'fire and water strategy' and the co-management and livelihoods programmes, as these are the most important aspects of the programme. So far, important first steps have been taken, and these need to be built upon and expanded during the remainder of Phase A, so as not to lose momentum.

At various levels, government authorities have requested that MWBP assists with the speedy production of an eco-tourism master plan for TCNP and LSWR. Government funds are currently available for development of tourism in the area, and in order to guide this properly and ensure that it is appropriate such a plan would be most useful and should proceed during Phase A.

Although known to be important for biodiversity (e.g. Sarus Cranes also visit regularly) and perhaps more so than Tram Chim (as it is more diverse), little is known at present. It is therefore recommended that baseline studies on biodiversity be carried out at Lang Sen.

Plans such as the ecotourism master plan, fire and water strategy, and co-management strategy, need to be embedded into an overall plan, and it is therefore important that MWBP produces a draft investment

and management plan for TCNP and LSWR during the remainder of Phase A. This should follow the format required for the Vietnam Conservation Fund, so that both PAs can tap into these resources, for example, in the transition to an eventual Phase B. In order to achieve the above, funds will need to be reallocated from other budget lines, also to enable the drafting of a proposal(s) for Phase B.

Deliverables by the end of Phase A

Key deliverables that should be completed by the end of Phase A are:

- A successful and well-documented co-management strategy, implemented and tested on a trial basis at both TCNP and LSWR.
- A clear and well-documented fire and water strategy that has been tested at TCNP.
- National workshops held on the fire and water strategy, and on co-management of protected area resources. These are to be well documented, and used to promote these concepts at the highest levels of government.
- The livelihood programme should be up-scaled so that it will have assisted at least 200+ of the poorest families and all poor families living in the enclave at LSWR.
- Draft should be available of the Eco-tourism Master Plan, Investment and Management Plans, baseline biodiversity surveys, along with an identification of conservation priorities based on the biodiversity baseline studies.

7.4.2 Phase-B approach for Vietnam

Institutional and implementation arrangements

Institutional arrangements during Phase B are to largely be as outlined for the remainder of Phase A, with a greater role for the NPO, perhaps operating out of a National Wetlands Office in VEPA if this has been established. During Phase B, technical expertise at the national level (NPO) should be expanded with a national wetland biodiversity expert. In Phase B, there will not be a fully centralised management unit located within a PMU – instead, a centralised unit will be small, and have no national management responsibilities. Instead, it will provide technical support at national levels as required, coordinate regional activities, especially for exchange of information and lessons learned between countries.

Focus of activities and outputs

In Phase B, there should be clear biodiversity and co-management goals, for example along the following lines:

- Biodiversity goals, such as:
 - Lower numbers of birds, mammals and reptiles being hunted (with a reduction percentage given).
 - Recovery of XXX ha of *Eleocharis* sedgelands (by a certain date).
 - Impacts of draft species conservation plans (still to be identified).
- Co-management and livelihood goals, such as:
 - 30% of poor families actively engaged in co-management,
 - 50% of poor families targeted by livelihood programme,

It is recognised that the two PAs are two small islands of biodiversity located in a vast sea of rice, and for the programme to have a greater impact it should seek to broaden its scope. There are two avenues for this that should be explored in Phase B, namely an integrated environment and health programme in the buffer zone, and creating corridors between biodiversity 'islands'.

For the buffer zones, an IBA-type approach involving integrated pest management (IPM), awareness, training and trial programmes could bring significant effect. This could combine well with the current move away from three consecutive annual rice crops being promoted by local government, based on human health and economic studies carried out by Can Tho University, with support from MWBP. This has significant potential for up-scaling to well beyond the programme's system boundaries, and well beyond Phase B.

During the past decade, various programmes and projects in the Mekong Delta promoted integrated *Melaleuca*-based production systems that produced fuel wood, poles, essential oils, honey, fish and reeds, requiring low inputs and giving good returns. However, for various reasons these have not been highly successful, and lessons learned could provide a basis for further development in this area, as such systems would provide productive systems with an added biodiversity value, which could serve to link up existing PAs and provide a corridor. These systems should be promoted under Phase B, starting in the area between TCNP and LSWR – not aimed at establishing a contiguous forest link, but rather creating more stepping stones.

Funding opportunities

Funding a Phase B of MWBP out of GEF Medium Sized Project (MSP) funds is unlikely to be a successful strategy. Firstly, while the Plain of Reeds wetlands are of great national (and international) biodiversity significance, there are many more competing biodiversity priorities in Vietnam, and as the total allocation under the current RAF for GEF4 is limited to \$5-10 million for the next three years, the chances are slim. Also, UNDP Vietnam Country Office does not support the MWBP, and is unlikely to be supportive of proposals.

However, there are ample opportunities other than the GEF. The forthcoming National Wetlands Support Programme (to be Netherlands government funded) and the ongoing Vietnam Conservation Fund (funded by World Bank-GEF and the Netherlands Government) will provide more than adequate funding opportunities for the Vietnam Component of MWBP in an eventual Phase B. These are to be delivered through government channels.

8 Regional Component Assessment

8.1 Project design

8.1.1 Institutional setting of PMU

The PMU was established and designed to provide technical services to MWBP and to elevate its national initiatives into a regional framework. The PMU is not institutionally embedded within existing regional or national institutional structures. The PMU is located in Vientiane, Lao PDR, in an office shared with IUCN Lao's Country Office. The PMU and the programme are commonly regarded throughout the region, by government and non governmental partners, as an 'IUCN programme', despite concerted communication efforts to establish the MWBP in its own right. Initially, MRC was also considered an option for the institutional setting of the PMU, but this was rejected during the programme's inception phase and not pursued further.

The MWBP is one of a large number of political, economic, governmental and non-governmental regional initiatives (including MRC's Environment Program, Wetland Alliance, IUCN WANI, WWF's Living Mekong Programme, the multi donor Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative and for species work, Crocodile Specialist Group, Mekong Dolphin Conservation Program, Giant Catfish Working Group, International Crane Foundation, AMRC, Mekong Watch, RWSEA, Oxfam Mekong Learning Initiative and more).

8.1.2 Country support

Partner and national host agencies view the Regional Component of MWBP as being 'something external', and not as a programme on which they are actively involved. On the whole, national host agencies respond positively about various achievements of the regional programme, although their mandates are to focus on national priorities rather than regional issues. Government officers appreciated being able to attend Ramsar's COP9 in Uganda but did so more out of national rather than regional interest. The MWBP has also been appreciated for its achievements regarding Giant Mekong Catfish conservation, provision of training and attendance of workshops. Inter-regional community exchanges also fostered regional understanding in terms of sharing concerns and local solutions to using livelihoods sustainably. The Regional Component responds to perceived needs, many of these quite legitimate, but it cannot be regarded as being country driven.

8.2 Programme Implementation

8.2.1 Implementation approach

Implementation of the Regional Component is closely interwoven with the activities of the PMU, and the two are not easily unravelled. In the absence of a Regional Component Strategy that outlines what the aim is of this component it appears that the purpose of the Regional Component is to "Strengthening of capacity at regional level for wetland biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in the Lower Mekong

Basin”, but regional activities are not guided by a formulated strategy. As a result, the various outputs appear to be *ad hoc* arrangements, rather than a coherent package.

The logical framework – either that of the Project Brief (2001), Project Support Document (2004) or the recently drafted revised logframe (Jan. 2006) – is being used at the PMU level, but only to a limited extent (e.g. for cross-checking indicators). For M&E purposes, the monitoring database developed by MWBP is used, while the ‘Detailed Work Plan for the Regional Component’ is used for planning purposes. Significant changes have been made to the original logframe, which demonstrates that the PMU actively responds to M&E feedback. One of the main responses has been the development of a fully revised logframe, and the production of a project document on project indicators.

MWBP has developed an excellent M&E system that consists of a digital database (Access-based), and is used to monitor country programmes and the entire MWBP. It has also developed an excellent programme website (www.mekongwetlands.org) that is highly professional, and apart from general pages on MWBP, includes pages on the country programmes, but nothing specifically on the Regional Component.

Relationships between Regional Programme/PMU and other institutions involved on MWBP are variable. The relationship with country host agencies is generally good, but the relationship with UNDP and MRC/NMCs is at times strained. It would seem that the obvious primary vehicle through which MWBP could develop and deliver its regional objectives is through the MWBP co-partner the MRC – and with some specific outputs, this is happening. However, in general terms, the MRC does not demonstrate a commitment to MWBP; the CEO of the MRCS has never visited the PMU office, although these offices are within close proximity, and both LNMC and TNMC are very negative about the programme. The MRC MWBP point person does not regularly attend PMU meetings. Access to MRC data is often difficult as access is constrained by formalized information sharing protocols, agreed amongst MRC riparian states. The UNDP Country Office in Vietnam is also very negative towards MWBP, which has made cooperation difficult at times (e.g. submittal of proposals for UNDP TRAC funding). The relationship with ‘partner’ organisations (e.g. NGOs) at the regional level is variable and often associated with expectations created (e.g. regarding possible funding for cooperation), and disappointment experienced when these have not been met – which has been the experience of at least several partners. There is also a risk of either duplication or unproductive competition.

Technical capacities within the PMU are good, and this has been the strength of the unit and of the Regional Programme. However, PMU technical assistance has often been directed at national needs rather than regional implications. Staff engaged for regional support can become hands on to support national interests. This has been most notable in the case of the wetland ecologist, who has tried to cover vast areas both in terms of geography and subject matter. As a result, wetland biodiversity activities are deemed by local partners to be disjointed (e.g. in Cambodia), of variable technical standards or have yet to start (e.g. in Vietnam).

Since a number of activities implemented at national level are part of the regional, rather than national programmes, tensions have also been created with both governmental and non governmental partners over selection of priorities and specific implementation arrangements. This is particularly apparent in Cambodia where prioritization of dragonfly and mollusc survey work is not seen as a clear priority at either national or demonstration site level, and where there have been tensions and prolonged delays over issues relating to the institutional alignment of funds for Siamese crocodile conservation work.

Overall assessment: Implementation approach - Regional Component			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory

Rationale: The implementation approach taken is marginally satisfactory, given the constraints of staffing, budget, institutional setting, and the way in which the programme was designed. The programme has been adaptive, made use of logframe, work plans and new technologies, while technical capacities are also good. However, relationships are at times poor, and this has hampered at least some of the progress, and may be an issue in the future.

8.2.2 Monitoring & evaluation

MWBP Quarterly Reports and the highly sophisticated MWBP M&E system provide an adequate oversight mechanism for monitoring progress and signalling potential difficulties. Quarterly Reports list milestones and progress per activity for the Regional Component, and provides summary reports under progress headings. In addition, MWBP also produces periodic milestone overviews that illustrate which milestones are on target, delayed, rescheduled or have been retired because they have been achieved or are no longer valid. A Mid-year Review was held in 2005, and this has proved useful for determining what is on schedule relative to the work plan, and what needs strengthening. It also provides recommendations for what needs to be done to improve performance. The use of the 'five stories' approach to make the findings of M&E easier to comprehend has been innovative and is commendable.

Overall assessment: Monitoring & Evaluation - Regional Component			
Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory

Rationale: The M&E and reporting system that has been put in place is highly sophisticated and adequate for providing oversight on what is (not) being achieved on the programme.

8.2.3 Financial planning

The budget of the Regional Component is combined with that of the PMU, which also includes support to national programmes, and hence the general perception is that PMU costs (and programme overheads) are very high. According to the budgets in the Detailed Work Plan for the Regional Component for 2006, the budget for Output 1.01 Regional and national support structures for all programme activities established and operational is a staggering 84% of the overall budget for the Regional Component. In addition to direct PMU costs, this also includes (PMU) support to national programmes and aspects such as programme systems, regional meetings and M&E, which are all operated by, and out of the PMU, and justifiably also part of PMU costs. As a result, only 14% of the 2006 budget for the Regional Component (1.01-1.10) actually goes towards achieving Regional Outputs.

The actual cost of the Regional Component is not very high, but since this requires an expensive PMU – the investment is not particularly cost-effective. Given that all of the 'Regional Component' costs that are not associated with country programmes are associated with the regional programme, this means that MWBP spends twice the amount running the regional programme as is spent on actual regional activities (\$681,500 versus \$308,585).

Most of the budget for Regional Outputs in 2006 has been allocated for 1.06 Tools developed and used to integrate wetland biodiversity considerations into regional development planning. This has a total budget of \$226,300 or 73% of the Regional Outputs budget. Much smaller amounts are reserved for networks,

workshops, and training sessions. Most of these activities are for coordinating and implementing biodiversity surveys and drafting of Species Conservation Action Plans. Most of these SCAPs and surveys are carried out by external agencies (e.g. FFI, WCS), and it is unusual that MWBP spends significantly larger amounts on coordination than on actual implementation.

While the overall programme has been successful at leveraging co-financing (almost \$900,000 from the Netherlands government, \$264,000 from UNDP-RBAP in 2006), and some of the country programmes may end up being successful (e.g. TRAC funds, VCF in Vietnam), the Regional Component has not been successful in leveraging regional co-funding.

8.2.4 Execution & implementation modalities

MWBP has been slow in recruiting staff for the PMU and Regional Component. While the programme began in July 2004, it took until March-April 2005 before many of the staff were actually on board, which is 9-10 months after the starting date. While there may have been legitimate reasons (e.g. lengthy UNDP recruitment procedures), this is far too time consuming for a programme that under Phase A may last only 2.5 years.

On the whole, staff quality is good to excellent. The definition of tasks and responsibilities appears to be clear, and the outputs by PMU staff has generally been good (e.g. communications, M&E, training).

8.3 Results

8.3.1 Effectiveness – the enabling environment

The Regional Programme has not been effective in establishing an enabling environment, and even with 6-12 months left, the likelihood of this being achieved is small. For a regional programme, establishing what the enabling environment entails is quite difficult. However, it should include at least the following:

- A baseline of information upon which to base informed decisions regarding wetland biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.
- Strong ownership from national government as a platform for continuation and active engagement in a possible Phase B regional initiative.
- The establishment of a regional network of intergovernmental institutions, willing to discuss (wise) wetland management practices that will survive beyond MWBP.
- General principles for wise use established for wetland resources of the LMB.

While some progress may be achieved in what remains of Phase A of the first point (e-flow studies, ecological studies, SCAPs), the other two points will not be achieved, as budgets have been cut (1.02.03 & 1.03.02) and activities are not planned.

Overall assessment: Effectiveness – the enabling environment - Regional Component

Highly satisfactory	Satisfactory	Marginally satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
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Rationale: The Regional Programme is unlikely to achieve an enabling environment by the end of Phase A, even if it is extended until mid-2007.

8.3.2 Effectiveness/impact – technical

The MWBP Regional Component has carried out the following activities during the period 2004-mid-2006:

- Convening and sharing activities, such as the ministerial round table meeting on Mekong water resource issues organized at World Conservation Congress in November 2004, a Mekong Regional Ramsar Initiative meeting organized at Ramsar COP9.
- Establishing partnerships with a wide variety of organisations working with wetlands and livelihoods in the region, and networking with regional partners and collaborating organisations.
- Regional training on a variety of different wetland aspects, participation of all four countries in the Boston IAIA conference, and training on biodiversity and EIA, and organisation of exchange visits and study tours between communities.
- A study tour to Uganda (linked to Ramsar COP9), linkage with IUCN Commissions and species specialist groups, and spread of methodologies for local knowledge development and use in planning (e.g. Thai Baan studies).
- World Commission on Dams translation and dialogue meetings in all countries, influence upon decisions concerning the Upper Mekong navigation agreements.
- Transboundary meetings on dolphin management between Cambodia and Lao PDR, Giant Mekong Catfish agreement facilitated in Thailand and in progress in Lao PDR, and regional working groups for flagship species established and facilitated.
- Provision of technical advice at all levels, bringing in regional and global perspectives to national and local work.
- Proposal preparation and leveraging of funds.

In spite of the achievements listed above, progress on the Regional Component of MWBP has not been very satisfactory overall, as it does not seem likely that this component will be able to create an enabling environment by the end of Phase A (see 9.3.1). In terms of achieving indicators listed in the revised logframe of January 2006, the following targets are unlikely to be met:

- Outcomes:
 - Outcome R1. Indicator: Official endorsement of Flagship Species Management Plans by Regional Steering Committee and other organisations, by 2006. These plans are unlikely to be ready by the end of 2006, let alone endorsed.
 - Outcome R4. Indicator: Number of times MWBP staff is invited to give presentations to the Chinese/Myanmar government per year. WANI has contact with Chinese and Myanmar counterparts, but there is no link with MWBP.
- Outputs:
 - Output 1.2, indicator: Level of participation of Chinese and Myanmar NGOs in Regional Wetland Coordination Forum.
 - Output 1.6 indicator: Biodiversity overlays produced by 2006. The regional biodiversity work has yet to start, and with detailed work just starting at some of the demo sites, it is unlikely that this will be completed by the end of Phase A.

Many of the output and outcome indicators listed do not have an 'achieved by' date or are to be achieved by a later date, and there are no intermediate targets. In a number of cases, indicators are vague and need to be specified further, with clear targets established (e.g. 'use of training tools by governments and NGOs for wetland programmes' and 'gender balance on training courses'). Intermediate targets should be set for the end of Phase A for those indicators where this is possible (e.g. number of mechanisms to combat alien invasive species, or Number of NGO members of the RWCF).

8.3.3 Sustainability

The Regional Component of MWBP has not achieved sufficient progress in creating an enabling environment for Phase B, which would be a prerequisite for continuity and sustainability. Most networks established, such as the Regional Steering Committee and the Regional Wetland Coordination Forum, are unlikely to survive beyond the life of the project, and outputs such as SCAPs are not embedded in a lasting regional structure or in national programmes or plans. Exceptions are the Giant Mekong Catfish conservation group, which has wide support and will continue in some form or other, and work carried out by MRC on e-flows, which will be taken further by the agency's Environmental Programme.

MWBP has not developed a sustainability strategy (only a 4-page discussion paper on such a strategy; see 3.3), something that has been missing from the design phase of the programme, as this was missing in both the Project Brief (2001) and Project Support Document (2004).

The MTE notes that there is a strong view from the PMU and IUCN ARO that a regional programme should continue, but there is no clear proposed strategy for a future regional programme, and therefore the MTE was not in a position to comment on the viability of future plans. But in terms of the establishment of an enabling environment for a future regional programme, the MTE concludes that this is not in place, and is unlikely to be by the end of Phase A.

8.4 Implications & recommendations for Regional Component

8.4.1 Remainder of Phase-A

Institutional and implementation arrangements

There is broad recognition amongst national partners that the PMU has been successful in training coordination and delivery, communications, and in establishing management structures – including M&E, reporting and financial procedures. The tasks of the PMU on these aspects are now mostly complete. There is a consensus that the PMU now needs to be streamlined, to ensure that a) national programmes have an opportunity to develop their own capabilities for managing MWBP operations and engaging in regional discussions, and b), to ensure that remaining resources are used efficiently. Given the lack of tangible outputs of the Regional Component to date and the highly uncertain outlook for sustainability, it is recommended that the Regional Component / PMU be reduced to a minimum during the remainder of Phase A. PMU's role should be reduced to a coordinating task to facilitate proposal development and endorsement of support for the four Country Components, and scaling back of regional activities by ensuring that regional biodiversity conservation and livelihood thinking is integrated into existing regional mechanisms to the extent possible (see below).

Downsizing of the PMU should commence during the third quarter of 2006, with a revised staffing structure fully-in place by January 2007. To complement this process, and develop a stronger role for national programmes in work planning and budget allocation, a Senior Management Team (SMT) – comprising coordinators of NPOs, and chaired by the UNDP Team Leader, should be established.

Most of the day-to-day responsibilities for demonstration sites, PPOs and national country budgets should be devolved to the NPOs, to provide opportunities for strengthening local capacities and involvement. At the same time, delivery of technical support needs to be reorganised. The UNDP Programme Manager

should be re-positioned into either UNDP Thailand or UNDP Lao (– a decision that needs to be taken by UNDP based on regional management considerations). This reduced PMU – with a facilitating and coordinating role – should consist of the Programme Manager, assisted by the M&E officer, financial officer, secretarial support and driver. Training, livelihoods, biodiversity and economics are to become the responsibility of the NPOs that are to recruit this expertise of a needs basis. Contracts of PMU technical staff that are up for renewal should therefore not be extended beyond 2006.

Terms of reference for the SMT are required, and will include: a) drafting proposed country budget allocations prior to the next Programme Steering Committee meeting; b) coordinating and guiding the development of revised national work plans and budgets, and c) sharing experience and identifying issues where regional issues can be addressed through national programmes. Support to the SMT should be provided by UNDP, IUCN and MRC, which will include technical guidance on national component work plan content and monitoring to ensure a suitable balance of livelihood and biodiversity conservation outcomes is achieved in each national work plan. If possible, the SMT should be constituted as an interim measure as soon as possible to propose national budget allocations, and then be established formally following endorsement at the next Regional Steering Committee meeting.

Focus of activities and outputs

The focus of the PMU / Regional Component during the remainder of Phase A should be facilitating the devolution of responsibilities to country programmes, ensuring that implementation of MWBP country programmes proceeds well, simplification of M&E and reporting, coordination between country programmes, continuation of some regional component activities, and developing a regional strategy for Phase B.

Streamlining and simplification of the M&E system will need to be undertaken with a view to future use by national agencies in Phase B. Responsibility and budgets for training, communications, biodiversity and economics support will be devolved to NPOs to enable these funds to be targeted better to national needs.

Regional Component activities that are to continue are activity 1.02 (networks), 1.03 (SWAMP database), 1.04 (e-flow), part of 1.06 (wetland mapping, SCAPs) and 1.10 (training on SEA and wetland ecology). Most of these activities are being carried out by partner organisations such as MRC (SWAMP, e-flows, wetland mapping) and RECOFTC, which means that PMU involvement in Regional Component implementation will largely focus on maintaining networks (such as the Regional Steering Committee) and in finalising the SCAPs. The focus of the latter should be in coordinating and funding this work by partner organisations (ICF for Sarus Crane, WCS/FFI for Siamese crocodile and Irrawaddy dolphin), but with MWBP continuing with its lead role on the Giant Mekong Catfish SCAP until the end of 2006.

During the remainder of Phase A, the PMU/Regional Component is to develop a strategy for a regional programme for Phase B, which is to have a considerably different focus to that of Phase A (see below).

Deliverables

By the end of Phase A:

- Responsibilities of PPO management and national budgets are to be completely devolved to NPOs.
- The MRC-based SWAMP database is to be operational and accessible, also from outside the MRC LAN.
- The environmental flow studies are to be fully documented, and to include recommendations for riparian states.
- Wetland maps are to be prepared by MRC and made available to MWBP/national host agencies.
- SCAPs are to have been prepared for all flagship species.
- Training in Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Wetland Ecology to have been provided by RECOFTC.
- Strategy for a regional component of Phase B to have been drafted.

8.4.2 Phase-B and a Regional Component

Although the Regional Component of MWBP has not performed well, and recognising that a full enabling environment has not been achieved, there could be justification for a Regional Component in Phase B, if it took a significantly different focus. Given the regional mandate enjoyed by the MRC, this regional programme should be jointly designed with MRC, to ensure that it is embedded in lasting regional structures. The following regional roles could be included in Phase B:

1. Programmatic support for MRC's Environment Programme to scale-up work on environmental flows, floods, wetland mapping and database development. This should also include provision of systems to ensure that access to this information is improved. <GEF Adaptation to Climate Change funding support might be an appropriate source here; during the remainder of Phase A, MWBP could work with MRC to put in place a strong PDF A and MSP proposal, for MRC execution>
2. Coordination, harmonisation and joint programming between the vast number of regional initiatives that exist (including IUCN-WANI, WWF's Living Mekong Initiative, BCCI, Wetland Alliance, and species oriented initiatives by partner NGOs). The Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund (CEPF) will also be providing funds through partnerships with national and regional initiatives for biodiversity conservation of freshwater Mekong systems. The regional programme should not focus on implementation, but coordinate with agencies that have in-house expertise, and assist by facilitating access to funding and supporting proposal development. This component might be provided with a small operating budget to enable the regional component to commission inputs from appropriate technical service providers as needed.
3. Providing support to country programmes, including exchange of information between countries, expanding lessons learned, providing regional training, and stimulating promising in-country initiatives by providing small grants.
4. In view of the extensive livelihoods-biodiversity work initiated during Phase A of MWBP and the rapid expansion of pan-regional trade in wetland derived products, fish and rice in particular, there could also be grounds for looking at the importance of biodiversity for the well being of the socially and economically excluded people, who make up 80% of the LMB population. Biodiversity is not normally seen in livelihood terms and such a programme would respond to the overriding priority of all four LMB countries, which is to reduce and eliminate poverty.

9 Consequences for Phase-A

9.1 Institutional & organisational

Cambodia: The key institutional changes required in Cambodia will seek to strengthen national management responsibilities, with the objective of strengthening national management capacity and ownership in preparation for possible Phase B support. This will require a shifting in the focus of activities – more towards supporting the National Programme Committee and providing management support to the demonstration site, and scaling back (perhaps through sub-contracting) responsibilities for day-to-day management of activities (e.g. the sector policy review, and the rapid wetlands inventory). At provincial level, management arrangements for the demonstration site need to be re-visited to build a stronger role for the DOE, and a stronger focus in the work plan to assist DoE in implementing its responsibilities (e.g. support for Ramsar rangers, targeted support for key species and habitat conservation).

Lao PDR: Although the Lao programme was slow to start, this may not disadvantageous in the long term. Lao is only just beginning to establish wetland planning and management procedures to the extent that most sectors are still trying to define what a 'wetland' is and its relevance to their sectoral responsibilities. Accession to Ramsar is pending. This may prove to be a good entry moment for the programme. But the emphasis of Phase A should be on strengthening the government's capacity to address wetland issues, within the structures it finds most appropriate, rather than to encourage government ownership of MWBP, as a short-term project. In Attapeu province, the institutional arrangements are sound, and a strong community development programme is emerging. However, the provincial demonstration project is de-linked from GoL's prescribed national wetland planning needs. To more effectively support central planning, the NPO and the host agency, LARReC must be strengthened. Streamlining the Lao programme reporting procedures and a closer liaison with IUCN Lao could be one way of doing this. It might also be helpful for the TA to work more closely with the NPO, since the demonstration project (where the TA has been based) is now functioning well. At the same time, the demonstration project needs to determine its own future niche. Starting from a lower base line, Lao needs more time than its neighbouring countries to realise the full potential of Phase A. Fortunately, there are funds available to do this and to extend Phase A beyond 2007 if need be.

Thailand: Although the links between PPO and NPO are good, these should be further strengthened during the remainder of Phase A, with PPO reporting directly to, and eventually being managed by the NPO. Given the depth of understanding that the NPC already has of what is happening at the demo site and at the PPO, it is expected that the NPO will be able to assume full management responsibility over the PPO in a relatively short time. At demonstration site level, institutional links at sub-district (tambon), district and provincial level are good and need to be maintained at least at current levels. For scaling up, linkages are to be firmed up and/or established with other tambon in Songkhram District. The Provincial Wetland Committee needs to establish links with the National Wetland Committee, as this is lacking to date, and initiatives at demo site level can provide valuable lessons. The Songkhram PPO needs to establish a working relationship with the Songkhram River Basin Organisation, and attempt to instil sustainable NRM into the RBO's *modus operandi* by means of engagement and capacity building.

Vietnam: During the remainder of Phase A, PPO and NPO should establish closer links, with PPO reporting directly to the NPO, and by the end of Phase A the NPO should also manage the activities of the PPO. This process will take time and require capacity building, so it should be initiated by the PMU as soon as possible. The PPO also needs to strengthen its links with LSWR and improve communications with management of this protected area. While communications at provincial level are good, this needs to be improved at district level. Once the National Wetland Office is established within VEPA – which is expected soon – the NPO should be housed within this unit. The relationship with the UNDP Vietnam Country Office needs to be improved – a process that can be initiated by providing an overview of what has been achieved to date under the Vietnam Component, and inviting key staff to visit the demonstration project. The working relationship with CARE Vietnam needs to be vastly improved, so that more progress is achieved on the livelihoods programme.

Regional: The PMU needs to be streamlined, to ensure that a) national programmes have an opportunity to develop their own capabilities for managing MWBP operations and engaging in regional discussions, and b), to ensure that remaining resources are used efficiently. PMU's role should be reduced to a coordinating task to facilitate proposal development and endorsement of support for the four Country Components. Downsizing of the PMU should commence during the third quarter of 2006, with a revised staffing structure fully-in place by January 2007. This reduced PMU – with a facilitating and coordinating role – should consist of the Programme Manager, assisted by the M&E officer, financial officer, secretarial support and driver. To complement this process, and develop a stronger role for national programmes in work planning and budget allocation, a Senior Management Team (SMT) – comprising coordinators of NPOs, and chaired by the UNDP Program Manager, should be established. Support to the SMT should be provided by UNDP, IUCN and MRC, which will include technical guidance on national component work plan content and monitoring to ensure a suitable balance of livelihood and biodiversity conservation outcomes is achieved in each national work plan. If possible, the SMT should be constituted as an interim measure as soon as possible to propose national budget allocations, and then be established formally following endorsement at the next Regional Steering Committee meeting.

9.2 Financial & reporting

Cambodia: The changes outlined in the section above will mean that primary reporting from the provincial level will be to the national level, and from there to the regional level for financial and progress reports. The role of the PMU will change to providing support to the NPO and host agency for financial management and to assist in development of a possible Phase B proposal, starting with preparation of a PDF A application. PMU and NPO should explore with the host agency the opportunities for harmonizing reporting to the extent possible through existing government systems and procedures such that reporting lines are shifted, to the extent possible, from the Stung Treng DOE to MoE in Phnom Penh (if necessary, via the province) and then to the PMU. The NPOs will need to work closely with the PMU to simplify existing reporting procedures.

Lao PDR: In Lao, the narrative and financial reporting concerns made apparent during the MTE must be addressed. Apart from obvious efficiencies, flowing line-reporting procedures that correspond to government formats and in Lao language will strengthen understanding of the value of MWBP for all stakeholders. The PPO and NPO should review the MTE proposals for overall and country structural changes and devise the most appropriate way for similar streamlining to be applied in Lao – as soon as possible. While the PPO should retain its decision making autonomy, the principle proposed in the Lao country report is that the PPO (in addition to its provincial reporting procedure, which is working effectively) should

report to the NPO headed by the National Director, who also represents Lao in a Senior Management Team. This 'seamless team' would have the authority to set budgets and work plans, to bring in the technical assistance that it identifies as needed, and report through one channel.

Thailand & Vietnam: Changes in institutional arrangements advocated in 9.1 will automatically result in changes in financial and reporting requirements. Closer cooperation between PPO and NPO, with the NPO eventually managing the PPO will mean that reporting lines become simplified, and can be in Thai or Vietnamese (at least the reporting from PPO to NPO). This will also simplify communications with (sub-) district and local level authorities, as there will no longer be a need for dual reporting. Based on allocations proposed by the SMT and approved by the RSC, the NPO is to establish a budget for the national component together with the national host agencies (ONEP and VEPA, respectively) and the PPO, for further approval by the RSC. In Thailand, UNDP TRAC funds are to be utilised for the linkages programme, as per the proposal approved by the country office, and plans need to be drafted for incorporation into the tambon, district and provincial Integrated Development Plans. In Vietnam, the NPO should seek to secure UNDP TRAC funds for implementation of key parts of the Phase A programme, as per the proposal drafted in June 2006, and the livelihoods programme should seek to mobilise district and provincial funds as recommended by local authorities.

Regional: PMU and Regional Component reporting requirements will not change substantially during the remainder of Phase A, except for individual reporting for positions that are recommended to be discontinued (e.g. after contracts expire), such as training, communications, livelihoods and biodiversity. Funds that become available in this way are to be made available for the country programmes – excluding Thailand, as MWBP GEF funds are not to be used on the Thai Component (which has been funded by Dutch funds for livelihoods and poverty alleviation).

9.3 Focus for remainder of Phase-A

An overview of what the four country components and the regional component are to focus on during the remainder of Phase A, along with an overview of deliverables for this period, is provided in sections 4.4.1, 5.4.1, 6.4.1, 7.4.1 and 8.4.1, respectively.

10 Consequences for Phase-B

10.1 Phase B: opportunities

MWBP was originally designed in two phases: during Phase A the focus would be on establishing an enabling environment, and – providing that this enabling environment had been created – Phase B, during which the focus would be on implementation. However, funding of Phase B was never firmly committed by the GEF, and due to changes in GEF policies under the current Resource Allocation Framework of GEF-4, regional programmes such as MWBP are no longer eligible for funding under of the biodiversity focal area.

MWBP programme partners have proposed to seek funding the four country programmes as GEF Medium Sized Projects (MSPs), and try to have the regional component funded under the GEF's adaptation to climate change facility. However, the assessment of funding opportunities in the four countries strongly suggests that funding as MSPs will not be possible in all four countries (only Cambodia, and perhaps Lao PDR seem assured of GEF funding). Other funding sources are available, however, including local funds and bilateral aid. As a result, funds in a second phase are likely to stem from different sources, and are highly likely to be out of synch between the four countries. Funding from GEF's adaptation to climate change funds seems appropriate for MRC's activities on the regional programme, but not for continuation of other aspects, and other funding sources are to be identified.

These funding uncertainties will make it difficult to have a regional programme linked to four coordinated country programmes, and Phase B (or a continuation of the individual programmes) is likely to take on a different form than originally designed or anticipated.

10.2 Institutional setting of MWBP

Country programmes: The institutional setting of the four country programmes can largely continue as is at present, with the exception of the Lao PDR country programme. The setting at national level of the NPOs in MoE (Cambodia), ONEP (Thailand) and VEPA (Vietnam) is appropriate and effective, and is generating national ownership – although the latter can (and should) be improved by devolving responsibilities from the PMU to the NPOs (see 10.3). The setting of the Lao NPO in LARReC is less suitable, given the relatively weak position of this agency. LARReC's mandate focuses on adaptive and applied research, but not on policy formulation, which lies with the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), of which it is a Sub-Department (NAFRI, in turn, is a department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry). If the emphasis is on national wetland policy and planning, it would be worth considering placing MWBP higher in MAF, perhaps in the Planning Department. It would also be worth considering whether and how MRC could take a stronger role in supporting GoL using the ground-truthing knowledge developed in the MWBP team, and whether IUCN-Lao could and should be a more suitable agency through which to deliver the MWBP support.

The institutional setting of the PPOs is more varied in terms of effectiveness and appropriateness. In Stung Treng, Cambodia, the PPO is aligned with the Department of Environment, and on paper this seems the best institutional setting. However, in practice cooperation is below par, as both offices are physically

separate, and lack of daily exchanges and communication has led to a relatively poor working relationship which needs to be addressed in Phase B. In Attapeu, Lao PDR, the PPO is now a model for project and governmental partnership and should be continued. The project and provincial co-management arrangements function in such a way that the project is institutionalised within the provincial government, and the project formally reports and plans through the Provincial Co-manager to the Provincial Office. In Thailand, the PPO has an office within the Songkhram District Office, but maintains a larger, separate office because of lack of space; however, the working relationship and location appear fine and are to be continued in Phase B. In Vietnam, the PPO is located in a building that is separate from the provincial and district offices, which appears to be the best solution, as the two sites (Tram Chim NP and Lang Sen Wetland Reserve) are located in two adjacent provinces (Cao Lanh and Long An). The working relationship with both provinces seems fine, partly because the PPO maintains a sub-office for the Provincial Co-Manager at Long An.

PMU & Regional Programme: The PMU is not institutionally embedded within existing regional or national institutional structures, but is located in Vientiane, Lao PDR, in an office shared with IUCN Lao's Country Office. As a result, MWBP is often regarded as 'an IUCN project' with little local or regional ownership. In Phase B – should funding be secured – it would be better if the Regional Component was located within an institution with a regional (or broader) mandate, such as MRC or UNDP (e.g. in the country office of either Lao PDR or Thailand).

10.3 Internal MWBP organisation

PPOs: Under the current management arrangement, the PPOs are managed by the PMU and report only indirectly to the NPO. In a second phase (Phase B or otherwise), the PPOs should be directly managed by the NPOs, and only have a reporting requirement to the PMU. This will simplify reporting procedures – which will be more direct and can be in the national language rather than in English. The latter makes it easier to share reports with local authorities and agencies, saves time, and simplifies communications.

NPOs: Under the current arrangements, the NPOs report to the PMU and are only weakly linked with the PPOs, for which they have no management responsibility. In a second phase (Phase B or otherwise) of MWBP, the PPOs should be directly managed by the NPOs, which will be responsible for reporting (to the PMU and the National Steering Committees), establishing directions of the programme (together with host agency and PMU), and financial management of the country programme. Responsibility and budgets for training, communications, biodiversity, community development and economics support would be devolved to NPOs to enable these funds to be targeted better to national needs. This devolution of responsibility will lead to better communications with the national host agencies, and generate greater national ownership of the programme. The four National Programme Coordinators (which head the NPOs) take part in the Senior Management Team (SMT; see below).

PMU: In a second phase (Phase B or otherwise) of MWBP, the PMU will only be required in a scaled down form, as many of the current responsibilities are to be devolved to the NPOs (see above). In addition to the UNDP Programme Manager, the restructured PMU is to retain an M&E specialist, financial expert and secretarial support. The PMU will also be responsible for a modest regional component, which will consist of three main thrusts: i) Programmatic support for MRC's Environment Programme to scale-up work on environmental flows, floods, wetland mapping and database development; ii) Coordination, harmonisation and joint programming between the vast number of existing regional initiatives; and iii) Providing support to country programmes. More details are provided in 10.4 on the regional programme.

SMT: A Senior Management Team is to be established that consists of the four National Programme Coordinators (which head the NPOs) and the PMU's UNDP Programme Manager. The SMT will serve as a platform for coordination between the country programmes. A TOR is required for the SMT, which includes: a) drafting proposed country budget allocations prior to the next Programme Steering Committee meeting; b) coordinating and guiding the development of revised national work plans and budgets, and c) sharing experience and identifying issues where regional issues can be addressed through national programmes. Support to the SMT should be provided by UNDP, IUCN and MRC, which would include technical guidance on national component work plan content and monitoring to ensure a suitable balance of livelihood and biodiversity conservation outcomes is achieved in each national work plan.

10.4 Demonstration projects & national priorities

By definition, the MWBP site-based demonstration projects set out to provide evidence that a particular technique or approach improves wetland management and wetland biodiversity. The purpose of these projects is to encourage changes in policy and practice that eventually become imbedded in planning and legal processes. As such, the establishment of the demonstration projects developed in Phase A is an intrinsic part of the 'enabling environment': they are designed to demonstrate the importance of good wetland management; whilst the concept of Phase B is that the knowledge gained from this demonstration, and even 'seeing by doing', is taken forwards as evidence for policy and policy and practice interventions. The lessons learned from these demonstration projects should and can be taken forward elsewhere, but the MWBP demonstration projects should have finite lives with clearly defined exit strategies.

Even within the very short life-span of Phase A, all four of the demonstration projects are beginning to produce information that could be useful to the MWBP-targeted decision makers. However, the value of this information tends to be site specific and locally and/or country specific. The ability to influence policy change is probably most advanced in Vietnam, with the prospect of substantial changes in the way that communities can become involved in National Park management and new fire prevention practices. Effecting policy change from the lessons learned at the Stung Treng Ramsar site in Cambodia remains a distant goal, though the MWBP presence there stresses the biodiversity importance of the site.

It may be that the approaches to biodiversity conservation in the context of human well being and poverty reduction that are being developed principally in Thailand and Lao could indicate a way forward for a second phase of the project. Whilst the four LMB countries set varying importance on biodiversity conservation per se, each country has the same overriding national priority of poverty reduction, prioritising national economic growth as the means to that end. While the growth of national economies may be the ultimate goal, ensuring a diversity of the fish, rice and aquatic products (biodiversity) that form the basic and often only nutritional intake of the majority of the population of the LMB must underpin the transition to their becoming growth economies. As the Mekong countries rapidly open up to national and international trade, the value of essential natural resources to the rural poor is of concern to all governments so that they can ensure that economic development is adequately planned and regulated in the interests of all citizens and of the economically and socially excluded in particular.

The conservation of globally threatened 'flagship' species identified by MWBP is largely being covered by the governments concerned together with MWBP partners, who recognise that if these species are to survive they will require protected sites. Some of the MWBP partners have indicated that they would continue their specific species conservation work, now under the umbrella of MWBP, even if the project had no second phase. Furthermore, now that MWBP has completed its initial Phase A tasks, national

ownership of the Stung Treng, Tram Chim and Lang Sen sites has been strengthened and MWBP should withdraw. The use of TRAC funds can help ensure a smooth handover.

However, what has not yet been widely recognised is that poverty reduction and even the survival of millions of wetland dwellers will also depend on wise-use management of wetlands and their biodiversity assets. By being responsive to the context in which they were developed, the demonstration projects in Songkhram and Attapeu have effectively become pilot development projects (as opposed to demonstration projects), and local and provincial expectations for the expansion of the present initiatives are high. MWBP not only has a responsibility not to exit from these programmes but could also add value to this site-based work by demonstrating the importance of biodiversity conservation for nutrition, health, human well being and poverty reduction.

10.5 Regional programme

For the remainder of Phase A and for Phase B, the view of the MTE is that regional programme needs to change its focus substantively to ensure that national host agencies and provincial agencies have greater capacity to manage possible Phase B support and have a greater sense of ownership for the program activities, at both national and regional level.

To achieve this, the PMU will need to shift its focus from 'implementation' to 'facilitation' and coordination. For the remainder of Phase A, the focus of the regional program will need to be confined to completing ongoing tasks, delegating responsibilities and resources where possible and feasible, and providing support to national host agencies and NPOs for Phase B planning, on request of the host agencies, through the NPOs. The PMU should, by the end of 2006 latest, relinquish direct management control over demonstration sites and should have re-oriented its relationship with NPOs accordingly. PMU responsibilities for financial and progress reporting to the regional steering committee, program management committee and to donors will continue. Conversely, national host agencies will need to be willing to adopt a stronger role in planning, management and decision-making. This will include a much stronger role in budget planning, albeit for remaining resources only.

For Phase B, the first priority of the PMU is to develop a clear strategy for regional wetlands support, in close consultation with national and regional partners. In the absence of such a strategy, the MTE was not able to provide an in depth assessment. However, the MTE remains convinced of the need to retain a strong institutional link with MRC for Phase B, with some elements of Phase B work under strong MRC operational management (e.g. on environmental flows, wetland mapping, database management). MWBP should assist MRC to leverage funds to continue with this work during the remainder of Phase A (see below). This work could be very relevant to the GEF Adaptation to Climate Change operational programme.

The MTE also sees a niche for coordination and facilitation of better linkages between the plethora of different regional and national wetlands-related linkages (see section above on relevance). This role would need to lie outside MRC, and could perhaps be housed within IUCN ARO in Bangkok.

A third role could be to provide inter-country support to country programmes developed under Phase B, focusing on lessons learned, and providing regional training and small grants. Careful coordination would be required here with the Wetlands Alliance, and it may indeed be possible for Wetlands Alliance to assume lead responsibility for this group of activities.

11 Recommendations

The MTE mission recommends the following for urgent consideration by UNDP and the partner implementing agencies IUCN and MRC.

11.1 Remainder of Phase A

§ **Recommendation 1: Building stronger national ownership of MWBP planning and priority-setting:** Strong national ownership will be the key constituent of an environment that will enable the development and implementation of a subsequent phase of MWBP Phase A. Many of the recommendations below are designed to support that end. As a guiding principle for all countries, institutional realignment should seek to advance harmonization with government structures and reporting systems.

The MTE reached a broad consensus that provincial project offices (PPOs) demonstration sites should, by the end of Phase A, be managed by NPOs, and report to agencies at provincial and national level embedded within government structures. This would build greater understanding of demonstration site activities at national level, improve communications (by reducing language barriers) and would provide better alignment with national systems for management and reporting, including financial management and reporting. The transition to this re-arrangement should start as soon as possible. For Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, it would be possible to complete this transition relatively soon, but it is acknowledged that this process may take longer in Lao PDR. Some strengthening of staffing and capacities of the NPOs would be needed and recommendations are also made (see country sections) to streamline and focus the work of NPOs to ensure that NPOs are able to devote sufficient time to these new tasks. Reporting from PPO to NPO can be in national languages rather than in English, although it would remain the responsibility of the NPO to report in English to the PMU and Regional Steering Committee. Opportunities for adjusting institutional arrangements to achieve closer alignment within each country exist at both national and local levels and these are outlined in the country sections of the report.

TRAC funds should be utilised to facilitate this process and, together with cost savings outlined below, it may be possible to further extend MWBP Phase A in countries (Lao?) where further time is needed to complete the conditions for a new project phase.

§ **Recommendation 2: Establish a Senior Management Team to complement a restructured Project Management Unit:** the MTE recommends that the four NPCs form a Senior Management Team (SMT) – to be chaired by chaired by the UNDP Programme Manager. This ‘SMART’ Team would be complemented by the PMU, which would be given new terms of reference.

There is broad recognition amongst national partners that the PMU has been successful in training coordination and delivery, communications, and in establishing management structures -including M&E, reporting and financial procedures. The tasks of the PMU on these aspects are now mostly complete and the PMU could now be streamlined, so as to provide SMT with the essential system services which the PMU team has successfully established. Programmatic support would be a matter for the individual country managers to determine outside the PMU. This would ensure that a).national

programmes have an opportunity to develop their own capabilities for managing MWBP operations and engaging in regional discussions, and b) to ensure that remaining resources are used efficiently.

Timing: So as to maximise the benefits of this arrangement, the MTE recommends that these structural changes commence as soon as possible and preferable during the third quarter of 2006, with a revised staffing structure fully-in place by January 2007.

Overall management responsibility: Devolution of most day-to-day responsibilities for demonstration sites and national country budgets to the NPOs provides opportunities for strengthening local capacities and involvement, and re-organizing the delivery of technical support. The MTE recommends that the **UNDP Programme Manager** be re-positioned into either UNDP Thailand or UNDP Lao PDR (– a decision that needs to be taken by UNDP based on regional management considerations). This position should be supported by the services of the **M&E officer, the financial officer and secretarial support**, until the end of Phase A.

Detailed review: The above MTE' recommendations are formulated with only limited financial information and limited information on contractual obligations. A more detailed review of the financial and legal position of MWBP would determine the extent to which these recommendations can be implemented and the budget flexibility for NPOs and the extent to which they would be able to contract specialist support in the revised structure. Most importantly a detailed review would determine the potential for further extension beyond December 31 2006. To determine these facts, the MTE recommends that an independent business review is conducted as soon as possible.

Streamlining and simplification of the M&E system would need to be undertaken with a view to future use by national agencies in a possible Phase B. Responsibility and budgets for **training, communications, biodiversity, community development and economics support** would be devolved to NPOs to enable these funds to be targeted better to national needs. For work on flagship species, funds should be earmarked to ensure they are used to support achievement of clear species conservation objectives.

Terms of reference for the SMT are required, and should include: a) drafting proposed country budget allocations prior to the next Programme Steering Committee meeting (see recommendation below); b) coordinating and guiding the development of revised national work plans and budgets, and c) sharing experience and identifying issues where regional issues can be addressed through national programmes. Support to the SMT should be provided by UNDP, IUCN and MRC, which would include technical guidance on national component work plan content and monitoring to ensure a suitable balance of livelihood and biodiversity conservation outcomes is achieved in each national work plan. If possible <UNDP is to check if this is possible, by consulting with national partners>, the SMT should be constituted as an interim measure as soon as possible to propose national budget allocations, and then be established formally following endorsement at the next Regional Steering Committee meeting.

Terms of reference for the revised PMU will also be required and should be developed jointly by the SMT and the restructured PMU. One issue that is frequently mentioned at the national level is the perception that MWBP is an IUCN project, which is contrary to the spirit of national ownership and potentially brings confusion with the programmes of the IUCN's own country offices. The restructured PMU could help establish its true role and strengthen the IUCN – MRC partnership if the PMU was rehoused in the MRCS (an offer extended by MRCS CEO).

- § **Recommendation 3: Increase and clarify country budget allocations to enable clear budget planning:** Concerns were expressed from a number of NPOs, PPOs and MWBP partners concerning the dominant role of the PMU in funds management, a general lack of involvement in allocating budgets and frequent changes to budget allocations coming 'top-down' from the PMU. Frequent changes to budgets have imposed high transaction costs on NPOs, PPOs and partners alike, and this has served to undermine both performance and external confidence in MWBP. To address this issue, the MTE proposes giving a stronger role to NPOs, host agencies and partners in budget allocation, and ensuring that budgets are set and respected at the beginning of the annual planning process. Funds 'freed-up' by the re-organisation of regional management should be shifted into country budgets. Cambodia and Lao PDR probably have greatest need for additional budget resources, and this should be reflected in re-allocation planning. Country components must be given clear budgets for the remainder of Phase A, to enable NPOs and host agencies to better plan remaining funds and activities. Again, this change would lead to greater national engagement and ownership. Country budgets would be agreed by the interim SMT in early July 2006, based on revised work plans, and budget availability. The budget allocation process would be supported with advisory inputs (work plan and budget reviews etc) from UNDP, IUCN and MRC. Budget allocations should then be proposed to the Regional Steering Committee for review and endorsement at the next meeting. Once national budget allocations have been approved, it would then be the responsibility of NPOs and host agencies to ensure that these funds are managed effectively for the remainder of Phase A.
- § **Recommendation 4: Strengthen engagement of technical partners in work plan development and implementation:** Relationships with existing (non government) partners require improvement in some circumstances. NPOs would have responsibility for ensuring that partners are engaged actively in national work plan revision, starting with work plan consultation workshops with partners in all countries immediately after country budget approval. Wherever possible and feasible, funds should continue to be delegated to government agencies, institutes and non-government partners, where these have added value in working at national and site level.
- § **Recommendation 5: Shift focus towards demand-driven technical support:** Based on work plans, NPOs would have responsibility for identifying and contracting-in technical support as required e.g. on environmental economics, communications, biodiversity conservation, training and M&E. Other than the positions outlined above in support of the UNDP programme manager, there would be no core funding of technical expertise from GEF or Netherlands funds directed through UNDP. It is expected that technical expertise – in the fields of biodiversity conservation and livelihoods, for example – would be locally available in Thailand (local experts) and Cambodia (via locally-based international agencies), while in Lao PDR and Vietnam this expertise may need to be brought in accordance with work plans (via IUCN or other sources).
- § **Recommendation 6: Retain and strengthen institutional linkage with MRC:** Institutional linkages with MRC have not proven as active as anticipated, but the mission still considers this a very important linkage. The mission therefore recommends that this link be maintained and strengthened, in particular, through securing agreement on more senior-level engagement from environment programme at key meetings (bearing in mind that MRC EP capacity is also very stretched), and taking opportunities to engage MRC technical inputs into decentralized work planning for country components (see above). For Phase B, linkages would be developed on a country-by-country basis. In Cambodia, the CNMC plays a particularly important role in brokering senior level ministerial engagement, and this linkage should be maintained and strengthened during Phase B. Links are also healthy with VNMC, but much less so with LNMC and TNMC.

- § **Recommendation 7: Strengthen the biodiversity focus of work across the programme:** The enabling environment established by MWBP must be capable of delivering positive biodiversity outcomes in all partner countries. Cambodia and Lao PDR need to make considerable progress on this issue in the time remaining if a platform for future GEF support is to put in place. In the case of Thailand, a clearer articulation of the global biodiversity benefits of support is needed. To enable progress to be monitored, baseline assessments need to be put in place in all partner countries, and clear biodiversity conservation indicators are required in the logframe and national/site work plans, focusing on key species and habitats. Budgets need to be made available to ensure that progress on these aspects of the programme is accelerated. The MTE recognises the pioneering work undertaken within MWBP on livelihoods but needs to clarify the apparent divide between biodiversity – in terms of threatened species, and biodiversity – in terms of livelihoods, nutrition, health and poverty reduction. This affects both MWBP's alignment with national priorities and options for funding support.

11.2 Phase B development

The MTE considers that substantial investment made by MWBP in phase A and the resulting successful establishment of enabling environments, albeit at differing levels in the four countries, warrants the further work. Recognising the country variations and despite the need for a regional overview, a Phase B or it's a second phase is likely to take different forms in the each country.

If all four country programmes go their own separate ways in terms of funding, a regional component may have its limitations and may be seen as an imposition by the country host agencies. However, there are areas where a regional programme would have merit and could certainly be of value. It must be emphasized, though, that a regional programme in a future phase (Phase B or second phase) should be limited in size, scope, staffing and use of funds (see recommendation 10).

- § **Recommendation 8: Initiate discussions and Planning for Phase B at country level:** NPOs (in conjunction with the respective country offices) should commence discussions with host agencies as soon as possible on options for Phase B, building on Phase A achievements, and seeking to ensure that a) ongoing livelihood components continue to receive support where needed and b) biodiversity conservation outcomes are supported, particularly at site level (especially Cambodia).
- § **Recommendation 9: Proposals for Phase B financing should be diversified and less 'GEF dependent'.** The prospects for GEF support vary from country-to-country, requiring tailored financing strategies to be developed for each case. The MTE urges a re-think of recent MWBP ideas for GEF financing of country and regional work from GEF funds – via 4 national MSPs and an Adaptation to Climate Change MSP to support regional inputs. The MTE agrees that GEF might provide a realistic option for Cambodia, but not for Vietnam and probably not for Thailand and Lao PDR also. The rationale for this is that access to GEF funds is shaped by a number of factors, including: a) the willingness of country partners to prioritize phase B support from GEF; b) UNDP country office willingness to facilitate access to GEF funds; and c) whether the MWBP approach is likely to be considered a national priority for GEF biodiversity support in with regard to competition with other priorities; d) whether Phase A will create a robust platform (or enabling environment) that offers prospects for success for Phase B funding; and e) the availability of alternative financing. The outcome of MTE discussions on these issues in relation to country support from GEF are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of GEF funding support for Phase B

	Focal point willingness (indicative only)	UNDP country office willingness	Competitive with other national biodiversity priorities?	Enabling environment for further GEF support	Alternative funding available?	UNDP GEF-able?
Cambodia	√	√	√	√?	X	Yes
Lao PDR	?	√	√	X	?	Probably not
Thailand	√ (?)	√	X?	X	√	Probably not
Vietnam	X (?)	X	X	√	√	No

This does not mean the prospects for financing Phase B are bleak – there are very good prospects for support from alternative sources in Vietnam, and also from national and local government sources in Thailand. The mission has thus far not been able to determine whether alternative funds might be available for Lao PDR, but was assured by the UNDP Resident Representative that funding might not be a problem, providing there were strong ownership in place and a sound basis for joint working.

On technical merit, further GEF funding is a priority for Cambodia, to sustain approaches to address critical biodiversity values at the Stung Treng site through both livelihood and biodiversity conservation approaches (not just the former as per ongoing implementation). For Vietnam, the forthcoming National Wetlands Support Programme (to be Netherlands funded) and the ongoing Vietnam Conservation Fund will provide more than adequate funding, delivered through government channels. Funds for technical support also feature in NWSP. GEF funding for Thailand depends largely on whether these will be directed to support biodiversity of international importance, whether sufficient national allocation will be available and whether the Royal Thai Government opt to prioritize this support. Not likely under current allocation, but may be possible if allocation is increased. In any case, there is strong ownership of the Thai Baan approach and strong indications that tambons and provincial funds could be made available to continue supporting this work consistent with increasing decentralization of government financial management.

There are also other options for building on the MWBP platform outside direct donor funding into a 'MWBP' project. Current and new partners have indicated that they would be interested to move forward with specific activities, for example The Mekong Wetland Alliance with capacity building, WWF and others with specific species initiatives and there are potentially several options for livelihood interventions. MRC donors might also be interested to encourage MRC to take a more central role in a biodiversity and livelihood issues whether or not this was within a Phase B MWBP. A sharing or transfer of initiatives responds to the MWBP's sustainability strategy.

Given the likelihood that funding sources and opportunities will vary between the four countries during an eventual Phase B, it is likely that these programmes will advance 'out of synch' with each other. This has implications for forming a coherent Phase B for four country components, and would certainly affect any regional component.

- § **Recommendation 10: Refocusing the Regional Component:** For the remainder of Phase A, most existing regional functions will be assumed by the streamlined PMU providing support to the SMT. For Phase B, the MTE considers that the Regional Component should be more modest than that undertaken during Phase-A, with less emphasis on directly providing technical inputs, and with more emphasis on coordination, establishing linkages, developing proposals to secure additional finances, and providing small grants for innovative approaches. The mission proposes a joint regional programme designed together with MRC, and consisting of the following: i) Programmatic support for MRC-EP to scale-up work on e-flows, floods, wetland mapping, and database development; ii) Coordination, harmonisation and joint programming between regional initiatives (WANI, WWF's Living Mekong Initiative, BCCI, Wetland Alliance, and for species work, the Crocodile Specialist Group, Mekong Dolphin Conservation Program, the Giant Catfish Working Group, and the International Crane Foundation); iii) Inter-country support to country programmes, expanding lessons learned, providing regional training and providing small grants to innovative approaches. Funds from the Adaptation to Climate Change operational programme are not considered appropriate for regional support or for nationally-executed wetland components, since this issue is not considered by partner countries, MRC, NPOs nor some demonstration sites as a key priority, given the range of challenges faced already at national and site level. The immediate priority is to secure funding for ongoing and planned work at country and, especially, demonstration site level.
- § **Recommendation 11: Technical support strategies should be selected on the basis of added value, and should draw on expertise within the partner agencies.** Technical support arrangements will vary between countries. In Vietnam, a stronger role for the IUCN Country programme should be explored in delivery of support at national and provincial level. In Cambodia, engaging technical support from an established and competent conservation NGO would seem to be an obvious priority, to complement ongoing work on development/livelihood aspects, and inputs from host and line ministries and research institutes. In Thailand, technical support by local experts can easily be identified, while in Lao PDR external assistance (e.g. from IUCN Lao PDR, or other agencies) is likely to be required.
- § **Recommendation 12: Livelihoods and biodiversity:** Through the work at all the demonstration sites during Phase A, particularly in Lao and Thailand, MWBP is starting to gain an insight into the value of wetland biodiversity – especially fish and rice in terms of nutrition and health and the implication of improved human well being for poverty reduction. Whilst the project recognises that protection of globally rare species is of critical importance and that conservation areas must remain one element of an integrated approach (which is largely being taken care of other actors), MWBP has recognised that wetland biodiversity is central to rural livelihoods and poverty reduction. Further, as the Mekong countries rapidly open to national and international trade the value of these essential natural resources to the rural poor, who form the majority of the 'Mekong' population, is of concern to all governments so as to ensure that economic development is adequately planned and regulated in the interests of all citizens and economically and socially excluded people in particular. MWBP should use Phase B to develop and disseminate the lessons learned from its innovative livelihood work and encourage new thinking about the broader and applied values of wetland biodiversity. This would also contribute to the implementation of the Ramsar COP 9 Resolution 14 on Wetlands and Poverty Reduction, in which all four MWBP countries have expressed a strong interest.

Annex 1 Evaluation TOR

Terms of Reference for Mid-term Evaluation

I. INTRODUCTION

UNDP/GEF Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) policy.

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) policy at the project level in UNDP/GEF has four objectives: i) to monitor and evaluate results and impacts; ii) to provide a basis for decision making on necessary amendments and improvements; iii) to promote accountability for resource use; and iii) to document, provide feedback on, and disseminate lessons learned. A mix of tools is used to ensure effective project M&E. These might be applied continuously throughout the lifetime of the project – e.g. periodic monitoring of indicators, or as specific time-bound exercises such as midterm reviews, audit reports and final evaluations.

In accordance with UNDP/GEF M&E policies and procedures, the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) should undergo an independent, midterm evaluation of phase A. This is required before proposals for additional funding of subsequent phases of the programme can be considered for inclusion in another GEF work programme. However, this evaluation is not intended to be an appraisal of the follow-up phase.

GEF evaluations are intended to assess the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the project. It looks at early signs of potential impact and sustainability of results, including the contribution to capacity development and the achievement of global environmental goals. It will also identify/document lessons learned and make recommendations that might improve design and implementation of other UNDP/GEF projects.

The Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Programme and its context within the region.

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 – executed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and implemented by IUCN – The World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC), in collaboration with four participating governments and other key stakeholders. With funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, The Royal Netherlands Government, MRC, the IUCN 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 is a five-year (2004-2009) intervention at three levels – regional, national and local – with demonstration wetland areas in each of the four countries: in the Songkhram river basin, Thailand; in Attapeu province in southern Lao PDR; in Stung Treng, Cambodia; and in the Plain of Reeds in the Mekong Delta, Viet Nam. These sites are part of the strategy to illustrate wetland issues and demonstrate wetland management approaches; both within each country, and between the different demonstration sites.

The programme, a partnership between governments, aid agencies, international organisations and NGOs, provides a framework for complementary work for wetland conservation and sustainable livelihoods in the Lower Mekong Basin.

Programme purpose

The programme purpose is to strengthen capacity at regional, national and local level for wetland biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in the Lower Mekong Basin. More in particular it aims to:

- § Improve coordination for wetland planning from regional to local levels
- § Strengthen policy and economic environments for wetland conservation
- § Generate and share information
- § Train and build capacity for the wise use of wetlands
- § Create alternative options for sustainable natural resource use and improve livelihoods

In developing its M & E system, the MWBP has used the concept of “stories” to describe its work and progress towards the outcomes of the programme. There are five stories:

- § “Let the river flow” which covers the work on environmental flows, environmental impacts upon wetlands of broad scale infrastructure changes in the river
- § “Flagships for biodiversity” covering the biodiversity aspects, wetland mapping and inventory, species conservation action plans etc.
- § “People using wetlands” covering the livelihoods and sustainable use of wetland resources aspects, economic valuation and incentive mechanisms
- § “Towards wise use of wetlands” covering wetland policies and guiding principles, support for Ramsar Convention
- § “Programme implementation and cross cutting issues” covering overall programme management, training and communications and capacity building

Defining the Enabling Environment for MWBP

The MWBP started in July 2004 and Phase A was scheduled to run for 2 years until July 2006. Since then it was agreed that Phase A should be extended to the end of December 2006. During this time the principal aim was to establish what was called the “enabling environment”, so that full implementation in Phase B could be undertaken for 3 years from July 2006 to July 2009 (now January 2007 to end December 2009). After a year and half of implementing Phase A, the mid-term evaluation presents an opportunity to look ahead towards what will be required for moving into Phase B, both in terms of the strategic directions, approaches used and the developed capacity to deliver.

What is the enabling environment? Little real guidance was provided on how one defines the meaning of the term “enabling environment in the context of such a regional programme as the MWBP. During the implementation of Phase A, a greater understanding of what is meant has developed.

A briefing note was presented at the PMC meeting in October 2005 in Bangkok to enable a discussion on the way forward towards Phase B. This provides the basic areas of assessment for the enabling environment.

Setting up structures for implementation – setting up and equipping offices and staffing

Training – Developing and implementing of Phase A training strategy focusing on providing training for MWBP staff and government partners.

Establishing programme management mechanisms – This aspect includes the various steering committees and management boards at different levels. Developing clearer and more transparent operational and financial management guidelines.

Attitudes and Understanding - The MWBP is a complex programme and it requires continuing efforts to raise awareness and understanding of what it is trying to do and the ways in which it is working, particularly amongst the government agencies involved. This needs to happen at all levels at which we are working – regional, national, provincial, district and community.

Developing partnerships – The effectiveness of the programme depends upon the partnerships that can be developed. A great deal of this depends upon the mutual understanding of the roles that each partner plays in this and the development of trust between the partners. In a complex programme like this, there are often initial misunderstandings and uncertainties about how the programme is meant to run, the operational mechanisms as well as the objectives and activities. Regular communications and briefings and the development of joint workplans are a key to this, as are transparency of operations. The different partnerships include:

- UNDP, IUCN and MRCS,
- Government partners – host agencies, other associated line agencies,
- UNDP country offices
- National Mekong Committees
- IUCN Country offices
- other organizations – both international, regional and national

Government ownership and Sustainability – Government ownership is another key to success and its sustainability. Initially the programme was developed by IUCN, and to a large extent driven from the regional perspective. In the countries, it has been seen as an IUCN project because implementation is largely carried out through IUCN. But there is a recognised shift taking place as the understanding of the MWBP grows, as workplans are developed that are in line with government plans, and as experience of the work done is shared.

Raising Co-finance for MWBP – At the outset the MWBP was not fully funded and efforts have been geared towards raising co-finance and parallel finance through partnerships with other organizations.

2. EVALUATION AUDIENCE

This mid-term evaluation is initiated by the UNDP Lao PDR as the GEF Executing agency. The TOR has been drafted by the Programme Team, circulated to partner organisations – IUCN – The World Conservation Union and the Mekong River Commission, and to host agencies in the four governments of the Lower Mekong, the GEF Regional Unit based in Bangkok, and the Embassy of the Royal Netherlands Government in Thailand. The evaluation team will be selected by UNDP, The Royal Netherlands Embassy and the GEF Regional Office.

This evaluation is commissioned by GEF, UNDP and the Royal Dutch Government and managed by UNDP Lao PDR.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE MID-TERM EVALUATION

This evaluation is being undertaken mid-way between implementing Phase A and moving on to Phase B of the MWBP. The principal objective of the evaluation is to assess the extent to which the Programme has

been able to establish the “enabling environment”, and the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme in doing so.

In the words of the Project Brief: “The independent evaluation will utilize a combination of impact and process indicators to establish whether the enabling environment is suitable for implementation of Phase B. The combination of impact and process indicators is necessary because assessing impact after a relatively short period of national activities will be difficult.”

However, the mid-term evaluation is also an opportunity to review the strategies that have been developed and to assess their continuing relevance to the changing conditions within the region and the four countries. Bearing in mind the overall objective of the programme – the conservation and sustainable use of Mekong wetland biodiversity – do the strategies and approaches adopted, continue to address this primary objective, and how should they be changed in Phase B.

There will thus be a secondary objective to the evaluation, which will be to look ahead and advise on future implementation of Phase B, through an assessment of the relevance of the project content and design to the current situation. This is especially necessary in the light of the need to develop different funding mechanisms, including GEF with its revised Resource Allocation Frameworks, and the proposed strategy of developing four national medium-sized projects (MSPs) and one umbrella regional MSP in the GEF’s Adaptation to Climate Change window.

4. PRODUCTS EXPECTED FROM THE EVALUATION

There will be three main products:

- § Mid-term evaluation report fulfilling the evaluation requirements of UNDP, GEF and Royal Netherlands Government, including an executive summary.
- § Expanded recommendations for use by the programme team in the design of Phase B Programme Document
- § A power-point presentation of the findings of the evaluation so that this can be used in discussions for developing Phase B programme documents with partners and with potential donors for sourcing additional funds.

The Mid-term evaluation report will clearly indicate to the GEF Council, the extent to which the enabling environment has been established and the continuing relevance of the strategies and approaches used. In addition it will identify strengths and weaknesses of the programme so that the report can also be used for developing Phase B proposals and assessment of these proposals by donors.

The report will also contribute towards the design of Phase B and thus assist the MWBP executing and implementing agencies in securing additional finance. The recommendations section should be expanded in a stand alone report for the use by the Programme, to advise on suggested improvements in the design and implementation of the programme, so that these can be used in the development of the Phase-B Programme Documents.

A summary evaluation report should also be produced that can be used in marketing the achievements of the MWBP. In this sense, the evaluation report will provide a “marketing” product that will help the three executing and implementing agencies (UNDP, IUCN and MRC) in raising additional finance.

Indicative outline of the evaluation report

1. Executive summary
 - § Brief description of project
 - § Context and purpose of the evaluation
 - § Main conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned
2. Introduction
 - § Purpose of the evaluation
 - § Key issues addressed
 - § Methodology of the evaluation
 - § Structure of the evaluation
3. The project(s) and its development context
 - § Project start and its duration
 - § Problems that the project seek to address
 - § Immediate and development objectives of the project
 - § Main stakeholders
 - § Results expected
4. Findings and Conclusions
 - § Based on the headings and issues outlined in the scope of the evaluation
5. Recommendations
6. Lessons learned
 - § This should highlight the best and worst practices in addressing issues relating to relevance, performance and success.
7. Evaluation report Annexes
 - § Evaluation TORs
 - § Itinerary
 - § List of persons interviewed
 - § Summary of field visits
 - § List of documents reviewed
 - § Questionnaire used and summary of results
 - § Comments by stakeholders (only in case of discrepancies with evaluation findings and conclusions)

Deadlines

The first draft of the main report should not be longer than 50 pages, and should be submitted within 2 weeks of completion of the mission and in any case not later than 10 June 2006. It should be submitted to the Resident Representative of UNDP Lao PDR, and circulated for comment to:

- The members of the Programme Management Committee:
- National Programme Directors of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam
- IUCN Asia Regional Office
- Mekong River Commission Secretariat
- UNDP Team Leader
- IUCN Programme Manager
- MRC Programme Manager

Comments to the draft should be received by 30 June 2006 and these comments incorporated into the final version by 15 July 2006. If there are discrepancies between the impressions and findings of the evaluation team and the aforementioned parties these should be explained in an annex attached to the final report.

5. SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

The scope of the evaluation will cover

- § the entire GEF-funded programme components of the MWBP, including those undertaken by UNDP Lao PDR, IUCN and the MRC.
- § the co-financed components such as The Royal Netherlands Government funds, UNDP Regional Bureau funds, the UNDP TRAC funds in each of the four countries, the in-kind contributions for the National Governments, IUCN Water and Nature Initiative and the Mekong River Commission, including the direct funding by the Royal Netherlands Embassy to the MRC that have been included in the programme workplan.

The programme will be assessed using the criteria outlined below. In addition to a descriptive assessment, all the criteria marked with (R) should be rated using the following divisions: Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory, Marginally Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory.

5.1 Project Formulation

Relevance. The degree to which the project responds to global, national and local environmental and development priorities, especially in view of the directions the programme should take in Phase B. This should include an assessment of the continuing relevance of the programme to changing conditions within the region.

Conceptualization/Design (R). This should assess the approach used in design and an appreciation of the appropriateness of problem conceptualization and whether the selected intervention strategy addressed the root causes and principal threats in the project area. It should also include an assessment of the logical framework and whether the different project components and activities proposed to achieve the objective were appropriate, viable and responded to contextual institutional, legal and regulatory settings of the project. It should also assess the indicators defined for guiding implementation and measurement of achievement and whether lessons from other relevant projects (e.g., same focal area) were incorporated into project design.

Stakeholder participation (R) Assess information dissemination, consultation, and “stakeholder” participation in design stages.

Replication approach. Determine the ways in which lessons and experiences coming out of the project were/are to be replicated or scaled up in the design and implementation of other projects (this also related to actual practices undertaken during implementation).

Other aspects to assess in the review of Project formulation approaches would be UNDP comparative advantage as executing agency for this project; the consideration of linkages between projects and other interventions within the sector and the definition of clear and appropriate management arrangements at the design stage.

5.2. Project Implementation

Implementation Approach (R). This should include assessments of the following aspects:

- (i) The use of the logical framework as a management tool during implementation and any changes made to this as a response to changing conditions and/or feedback from M&E activities if required.
- (ii) Other elements that indicate adaptive management such as comprehensive and realistic work plans routinely developed that reflect adaptive management and/or; changes in management arrangements to enhance implementation.

- (iii) The project's use/establishment of electronic information technologies to support implementation, participation and monitoring, as well as other project activities.
- (iv) The general operational relationships between the institutions involved and others and how these relationships have contributed to effective implementation and achievement of project objectives.
- (v) Technical capacities associated with the project and their role in project development, management and achievements.

Monitoring and evaluation (R). Including an assessment as to whether there has been adequate periodic oversight of activities during implementation to establish the extent to which inputs, work schedules, other required actions and outputs are proceeding according to plan; whether formal evaluations have been held and whether action has been taken on the results of this monitoring oversight and evaluation reports.

Country-ownership / Drivenness. Recipient country commitment and ownership and/or interest. Assess the extent to which the project idea/conceptualization had its origin within national, sectoral and development plans and focuses on national environment and development interests.

Stakeholder participation (R). This should include assessments of the extent of stakeholder participation in programme implementation and the mechanisms for information dissemination in project implementation, emphasizing the following:

- (i) Involvement of governmental institutions in project implementation and decision making, the extent of governmental support of the project.
- (ii) The establishment of partnerships and collaborative relationships developed by the project with local, national and international entities and the effects they have had on project implementation.
- (iii) Local resource users and NGOs participation in project implementation and decision making and an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the approach adopted by the project in this arena.
- (iv) The production and dissemination of information generated by the project.

Financial Planning: Including an assessment of:

- (i) The actual project cost by objectives, outputs, activities
- (ii) The cost-effectiveness and efficiency of implementation and achievements
- (iii) Financial management (including disbursement issues)
- (iv) Co-financing – to what extent has the MWBP been able to leverage co-financing for Phase A.

Execution and implementation modalities. This should consider the effectiveness of the recruitment, assignment of experts, consultants and national counterpart staff members and in the definition of tasks and responsibilities; quantity, quality and timeliness of inputs for the project with respect to execution responsibilities, enactment of necessary legislation and budgetary provisions and extent to which these may have affected implementation and sustainability of the Project.

5.3. Results

Effectiveness (R) – the enabling environment: Evaluation of effectiveness will provide a description and rating of the extent to which the “enabling environment” for Phase A of the programme was achieved. The programme document and various internal M&E reports provide a selection of indicators and baselines that can be considered.

Effectiveness / Impact - technical: The technical and socio-economic results that the programme has achieved during Phase A will be assessed in a descriptive manner as a contribution to the outcomes and impacts anticipated, and for the effectiveness in which the results have been achieved. The M & E

operational guidelines will provide guidance for indicators and baselines for assessing the different technical and social aspects of the programme. Impact considers both the positive and negative, foreseen and unforeseen, changes to and effects on society and the environment caused by the programme. However, it should be borne in mind that given the relatively short time period for implementation of the programme, it will often not be possible to see effects on the ground. The emphasis of the evaluation will be upon the strategies, approaches and processes established for addressing these aspects, the methods being used and the likely effectiveness and impact of these processes.

In those areas, where the MWBP did not establish a baseline (initial conditions), the evaluators should seek to determine it through the use of special methodologies so that achievements, results and impacts can be properly established.

Sustainability. Extent to which the benefits of the project will continue, within or outside the project domain, after it has come to an end. Relevant factors include for example: development of a sustainability strategy, establishment of financial and economic instruments and mechanisms, mainstreaming project objectives into the economy or community production activities. Since the programme has only been in operation for less than two years, the assessment of sustainability will focus on the sustainability strategy of the programme.

5.4: Lessons learnt and recommendations for Phase B

The recommendations for developing Phase B should be developed both from an assessment of the institutional structures and practices and the range of activities that have been implemented to date, and from the changes in these that are being developed for the future. Any changes to the strategies and approaches to be used in the future should be highlighted, especially in light of the new regional focus of adaptation to climate change of conservation and sustainable use of wetland biodiversity in the Lower Mekong.

Strength and weaknesses: What are the strengths on which the programme can build, and what weaknesses need to be addressed for Phase B?

Lessons learnt: Knowledge generated by reflecting on the experience of phase A and its preparation that has the potential to improve future action of the programme

Recommendations:

- § Corrective actions for the design of Phase B, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project
- § Actions to follow up or reinforce initial benefits from the project
- § Proposals for future directions underlining main objectives and strategies
- § Ways in which the programme can better reflect the priorities of the different partners?
- § Other recommendations that have been made by different programme partners.

6. METHODOLOGY OR EVALUATION APPROACH

The Evaluation will be carried out by the team through:

Documentation review (desk study); the list of documentation to be reviewed is included as an Annex to the TORs. All of these documents are available in the PMU in Vientiane and excerpts are available on the MWBP website – www.mekongwetlands.org.

Interviews will be held with the following organizations and persons as a minimum

UNDP Lao PDR, Vientiane – Resident Representative, DRR, Head of Environment Unit.

Other UNDP offices in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam

GEF Regional Office in Bangkok

Royal Netherlands Embassy in Bangkok

IUCN – Asia Regional Office, Bangkok – Regional Director, Head of ELG1, Regional Water and Nature Initiative Coordinator, also IUCN offices in Lao PDR, and Vietnam

Mekong River Commission Secretariat, Vientiane – CEO, Environment Programme Director, Environment Programme Coordinator, other associated programmes, e.g. BDP, WUP, Fisheries, Watershed Management,

Programme Management Unit, Vientiane – UNDP Team Leader, IUCN Programme Manager, MRC Programme Manager (based in MRC). Technical and administrative team

National Programme Offices in each of the four countries – National Programme Director, National Programme Coordinator and staff

Provincial Project Offices in each of the four demonstration areas – Provincial Co-Manager, Project Co-Manager and staff

Key staff ministries/departments in each of the four countries

- § Cambodia – Ministry of Environment, Cambodia National Mekong Committee, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, Stung Treng Province
- § Lao PDR – Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, NAFRI, LARReC, STEA, Lao National Mekong Committee, Attapeu Province
- § Thailand – Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, ONEP, Thai National Mekong Committee, Department of Fisheries, Nakhon Phanom and Sakhon Nakhon Province
- § Vietnam - Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, VEPA, Vietnam National Mekong Committee, MARD, Ministry of Fisheries, Dong Thap Province, Long An Province

Other organizations – WWF, WCS, CARE in Vietnam, Health Unlimited, Wetlands Alliance (AIT, Wetlands International, World Fish, WWF), RECOFTC

Steering Committee – the Programme Steering and management committee meetings will not hold meetings during the evaluation. However, there will be opportunities to meet and have discussions with a number of individual members of these committees during visits to relevant agencies.

Field visits should be made to the following demonstration sites and provincial offices

- § Stung Treng Ramsar site in Cambodia
- § Attapeu Province in Lao PDR
- § Lower Songkhram river basin in Thailand
- § Plain of Reeds, Vietnam -Lang Sen Nature Reserve and Tram Chim National Park

Semi-structured interviews – the team should develop a process for semi-structured interviews with the different interviewees to ensure that the different aspects are covered. Focus group discussions with programme beneficiaries will be held as deemed necessary by the evaluation team.

7. EVALUATION TEAM

There should be a team of international and national evaluators for this mission. The Team leader should be a specialist in institutional and operational structures, skilled in assessing capacities to implement a complex programme such as the MWBP at all levels. The other two international specialists should cover:

- § Technical aspects of Wetlands Biodiversity issues
- § Local Community use of wetlands, livelihoods and poverty issues¹⁸

There should be four national consultants, one each for Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam to facilitate the evaluation process in each country. It is recommended that these should have expertise in institutional and operational aspects, rather than technical or social aspects, although experience or expertise in wetlands and natural resource management would be an advantage.

Roles and responsibilities

The Team Leader is responsible for:

- § Overall design, approach and methodology of the evaluation
- § Leading the evaluation team and directing the evaluation
- § Collation of the different contributions and editing of draft and final reports
- § Covering institutional issues, including partnership development, national ownership, operational systems established and capacity for implementation
- § Networking and communication aspects
- § Capacity building and training achievements
- § Monitoring and evaluation processes

The Wetland Biodiversity specialist is responsible for:

- § Providing written contributions to draft and final reports
- § Covering technical aspects, including approaches and methods proposed by the MWBP for wetland biodiversity assessment, wetland mapping, species conservation action plans, environmental flows, wetland management planning and policy development etc.

The Wetland Community-use and Livelihoods specialist is responsible for:

- § Providing written contributions to draft and final reports
- § Covering social and community development aspects, including approaches and methods proposed by MWBP for wetland co-management, community-based natural resource research, alternative livelihoods and poverty alleviation, local networking, environmental economic assessments.

The four national specialists are responsible for

- § Providing written contributions to draft and final reports on the work of the MWBP in their particular country
- § Facilitating meetings and discussions in each country, and translating for the international team where necessary
- § Commenting on the particular institutional situation and capacity of the MWBP in their country, its strengths and constraints
- § Commenting on the relationships with partner organizations in their country

¹⁸ One of these two team members would be selected by the Netherlands Embassy in Bangkok.

Profiles

The profiles of the specialists are as follows:

The Team Leader

- § Institutional and operational specialist with appropriate higher degree qualifications and at least 13 years relevant experience, and at least 5 years in Asia
- § Proven experience in the implementation and evaluation of GEF projects
- § Familiarity with donor policy and strategies – particularly the GEF and Dutch
- § Proven experience in leading evaluation and other assessment teams
- § Experience in natural resource management projects, preferably of wetlands
- § Excellent report writer in English
- § No previous substantive involvement with the MWBP during programme development of implementation

The Wetland Biodiversity specialist:

- § Wetland biodiversity specialist – with appropriate higher degree qualifications and at least 8 years experience in wetland assessment and management, preferably in Asia
- § Proven experience of implementation and/or evaluation of wetland projects
- § Excellent report writer in English
- § No previous substantive involvement with the MWBP during programme development of implementation

The Wetland Community-use and Livelihoods specialist:

- § Social and community development specialist with appropriate higher degree qualifications and at least 8 years experience in community development, preferably in Asia
- § Proven experience of implementation and/or evaluation of community development and livelihoods projects
- § Excellent report writer in English
- § No previous substantive involvement with the MWBP during programme development of implementation

The four national specialists:

- § Institutional and management specialist with appropriate higher degree qualifications
- § Experience in the implementation and/or evaluation of natural resource management projects in their country
- § Ability to facilitate meetings and discussions for the rest of the international team
- § Excellent report writer in English
- § No previous substantive involvement with the MWBP during programme development of implementation

8. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

Management arrangements

The principal responsibility for managing this evaluation lies with UNDP Lao PDR, assisted where necessary by the UNDP country offices in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. The UNDP Lao PDR Country Office is the main operational point for the evaluation responsible for liaising with the project team to set up the stakeholder interviews, arrange the field visits, co-ordinate with the Government the hiring of national consultants and ensure the timely provision of per diems and travel arrangements within the

country for the evaluation team. These Terms of Reference follow the UNDP GEF policies and procedures and have been agreed upon by the UNDP/GEF/Regional Coordinating Unit, UNDP Lao PDR, the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Bangkok and the Executive Regional Steering Committee. These three parties will receive a draft of the final evaluation report and provide comments on it prior to its completion. Liaison with the four Government agencies involved will be undertaken through the UNDP country offices, with assistance of the National Programme Offices of the MWBP.

Time frame

The time of the evaluation will be from mid-May to Mid-June 2006, with the draft report being available for comment within 2 weeks after the completion of the mission and the report being finalised by end of July 2006¹⁹. A schedule of activities is set out below. It is noted that in order to cover visits to the project offices in all four demonstration sites and the national offices in each country, the international team will have to split up and work with the appropriate national consultant.

Resources and logistical support

The following resources required and logistical support are needed:

- § Team Leader – 30 days, including 25 days on mission, and 5 days report preparation and finalisation
- § Wetlands Biodiversity specialist – 25 days, including 24 days on mission and 1 day for report finalisation
- § Community development and livelihoods specialist – 25 days, including 24 days on mission and 1 day for report finalisation
- § 4 national consultants – 15 days

In addition, it is expected that at least one member of the PMU would accompany the team during the visits to the national and provincial levels in each country in order to facilitate and provide clarifications where necessary.

The following indicative schedule and travel arrangements may be required within the region in addition to any international travel for the international consultants:

During their time in Vientiane at the beginning and end of the assignment for about one week each, the team will require office accommodation. This could be provided either at the PMU (library) or in the UNDP Lao PDR offices.

¹⁹ The contracts issued to the international consultants ends on 15 July 2006, which is therefore regarded as the closure date.

Itinerary	Number of international	Number of national	Mode of transport
First visit to Vientiane	3	3	Flight
First visit to Vientiane (return)		2	
Vientiane to Songkhram	3	1	Overland
Songkhram to Bangkok	1	1	Flight
Bangkok to Plain of Reeds	1		Flight
Hanoi to Plain of Reeds		1	Flight
Plain of Reeds to Hanoi	1	1	Flight
Hanoi to Vientiane	1		Flight
Songkhram to Attapeu	1		Overland
Vientiane to Attapeu		1	Flight
Attapeu to Vientiane	1	1	Flight
Songkhram to Stung Treng	1		Overland
Phnom Penh to Stung Treng		1	Overland
Stung Treng to Phnom Penh	1	1	Overland
Phnom Penh to Vientiane		1	Flight
Second visit to Vientiane		3	Flight

During their time in Vientiane at the beginning and at the end of the assignment for about one week each, the team will require office accommodation. This could be provided either at the PMU (library) or in the UNDP Lao PDR offices.

ANNEX: LIST OF DOCUMENTS TO BE REVIEWED BY THE EVALUATORS

The following documents are essential reading for the evaluators:

- § Project Brief and Annexes approved by GEF Council in December 2001
- § Programme Document signed by four countries and three implementing partners in July 2004
- § Website – www.mekongwetlands.org
- § M & E Operational Guidelines
- § Financial and Administration guidelines for MWBP
- § Training Strategy and assessment of first year training implementation
- § Communications and Networking Strategy
- § Quarterly Progress Report summaries and detailed activity progress reports
- § Minutes of Executive Steering Committee and Programme Management Committee meetings

Other products and reports produced by the MWBP including:

- § Facts sheets that provide a two page synopsis of key aspects
- § Strategy documents, concepts and sub-project proposals
- § Situation analysis of the demonstration sites
- § Species Conservation Action Planning process and reports
- § Wetland maps for the demonstration sites
- § Tales of Water project documentation (video and book)

Policy documents of donors

- § Terminology in the GEF guidelines for terminal evaluations.

Annex 2 Itinerary

Date	Itinerary	Notes
Sun 28 May 06	Two international consultants leave for Vientiane.	Mike Ounsted from UK, Wim Giesen from the Netherlands.
Mon 29 May 06	Three international consultants & four national consultants arrive in Vientiane.	Ross Hughes arrives from Hanoi, Mom Kosal from Cambodia, Bounsouane Pomsupha (Lao PDR), Phairat Phromthong (Thailand) and Tran Phuong Dong (Vietnam).
Tue 30 May 06	Introduction by UNDP, Introduction by Evaluation Team, Formal presentations by MWBP/PMU team (project history, structures, issues, logframe, substantive areas); later afternoon meeting with MRC/ Hans Guttman, Charlotte MacAlister	Lao Plaza Hotel meeting room.
Wed 31 May 06	PMU presentations (continued). Afternoon meeting at UNDP office with Finn Reske-Nielsen, UNDP Resident Representative, Deputy ResRep Ms. Setsuko Yamazaki, and UNDP Laos Env. Unit Manager, Katihanna Ilomaki	At UNDP office.
Thu 01 Jun 06	Briefing by PMU continues with presentations, question and discussion (Management, M&E, Finance). Afternoon meetings at MRC, with the CEO Olivier Cogels, Worawan Sukrarook (Programme Officer IBFM) and Meng Monyrak (Ecology Specialist, Environment Division), Dirk Vanderstighelen, Chris Barlow (Fisheries) and Jorma Koponen (Deputy Team Leader, Modelling Specialist, WUP).	At PMU office in morning, and MRCS in the afternoon.
Fri 02 Jun 06	National consultants flight back to countries. MO and WG meet at UNDP office; meetings with PJM and KI. RH travels to Bangkok, Thailand and meets with Kent Jingfors (IUCN Asia Program Coordinator) and Joseph D'Cruz (Regional Technical Adviser, UNDP GEF).	At IUCN, discussions cover IUCN thinking on Phase B planning and financing, and improving MWBP integration with IUCN country offices. With UNDP/GEF, discussions cover MWBP financing issues, UNDP/GEF experience with MWBP and expectations for the MTR.
Sat 03 Jun 06	MO and WG work at UNDP office; reading and draft outline of report. RH travels back to Vientiane, Lao PDR.	UNDP office, Vientiane.
Sun 04 Jun 06	Vientiane- Sri Songkhram. Thai National consultant arrives Sri Songkhram. Entry Meeting and presentations in Sri Songkhram PPO. Travel to Nakhon Phanom. B. Nong Batao, <i>Mimosa</i> control project, Ban Chaiburi (Mekong confluence).	Travel by project vehicle to Sri Songkhram (4-5 hours). Dinner at River Beach Restaurant, stay at River View Hotel.
Mon 05	From Nakhon Phanom to Sri Songkhram,	Sacred forest and fish conservation areas were

Date	Itinerary	Notes
Jun 06	discussion at District Office. Meet village leaders and Thai Baan researchers at Don Phu Ta Sacred Forest, Ban Yang Ngoi for discussions. Boat trip on Songkhram, lunch at Ban Tha Bor. School children water quality testing programme. Discussions at Ban Don Daeng village (mat weaving), boat trip to Nong Chaiwan wetland. Bai-Sri Soo Khwan local ceremony.	impressive, as was the water quality monitoring programme, which is carried out with much enthusiasm by local school children. Nong Chaiwan is a flooded forest that is now permanently inundated; as a result, the trees (<i>Nauclea?</i>) appear highly stressed.
Tue 06 Jun 06	Morning: round table discussion with key project partners from government institutions, universities, NGOs and civil society about MWBP. Late morning & early afternoon: sub-group discussions (biodiversity, institutional, livelihoods groups). Late afternoon exit meeting with PPO staff and IUCN Programme Manager.	Meeting room at River View Hotel, Nakhon Phanom.
Wed 07 Jun 06	ALL: Flight from Nakhon Phanom to Bangkok. WG & Phairat: Travel to TNMC for meeting with Director (Pakawan Chufamanee); Meeting with DoF Dr. Chumnarn Pongsri at Kasetsart Univ.; meeting at RECOFTC with Ronnakorn. MO and RH: presentation by NPC and Mahdu, meeting with ONEP (Ms. Nirawan Pipitsombut) Dr. Sansanee Choowaew, Programme Director – Mahidol University, Salaya Campus; Meeting with Mr Barry Hall, Danida project; RH: meeting at WFT (Wildlife Fund of Thailand) with Hamnarong Yaowalert. RH, WG & Phairat: Meeting with Mr Peter Keulers, councillor – Dutch Embassy.	Meet at NPO office at ONEP; after a brief meeting with the NPC and introduction to the NPO team, the MTE team splits up for further meetings with various agencies in Bangkok. Stay at Windsor Suites Hotel, Bangkok.
Thu 08 Jun 06	Meeting at UNDP country office, meet with Hakan Bjorkman, Deputy Resident Representative, Ms. Phansiri Winichagoon. Lunch meeting with Dept. of NPWP Dr. Kasemsun Chinnvaso, and Dr. Nawarat Krairapanond. Afternoon meeting at IUCN ARO with Andrew Inglis and John Dore.	WG: evening meeting with Masakazu Kashio, Forest Resources Officer FAO – RAP.
Fri 09 Jun 06	Morning: meeting with Nick Innes-Taylor, Wetlands Alliance. Exit meeting with NPC (Tawachai) & UNDP Programme Manager (PJM).	After the exit meeting, the team splits up, with each international team member visiting another country.
Cambodia Country Component		
Fri 09 Jun 06	Afternoon: travel to Phnom Penh, Cambodia (Ross Hughes)	Together with Mam Kosal, entry meeting with NPO, including presentations by Sok Vong & Mao Kosal.
Sat 10 Jun 06	Travel to Stung Treng, en route, brief meeting and field visit to dolphin pool with MDCP staff. Entry meeting at PPO office in Stung Treng.	Brief presentation and field visit to discuss MDCP issues in Kratie, followed by entry presentations at PPO Stung Treng. En route, discussions with Alvin Lopez, MWBP Biodiversity Specialist.

Date	Itinerary	Notes
Sun 11 Jun 06	Field visit to Stung Treng Ramsar site and meetings with villagers, Sala Phoum researchers and Commune Development Council leaders in Koh Sneng village	Discussions include Sala Phoum presentations, discussion with villagers on health issues, development expectations and integration of Sala Phoum research with commune development planning. The MTR also met with a Ramsar ranger, visited the site of a proposed sustainable agricultural development sub-project and a brief visit to view mainstream flooded forests and gallery forests in the southern part of the Ramsar site. Accompanied throughout by staff of the PPO and Alvin Lopez (PMU).
Mon 12 Jun 06	Meetings with DoE (provincial host agency), provincial fisheries department, CEPA, UNDP SEILA program and with provincial governor. Exit meeting and discussions with PPO.	Discussions focussed on provincial, host agency and local partner experience with the MWBP.
Tue 13 Jun 06	Travel back to Phnom Penh. Background reading and writing meeting notes evening.	
Wed 14 Jun 06	Further discussions with NPO, and meetings with IFReDI (part of Department of Fisheries), UNDP Representative Office, MOWRAM, CNMC.	Briefing for UNDP implementing agency and discussion of UNDP Cambodia experience with MWBP. Discussions with IFReDI focussed on MWBP support on fisheries, including work on Mekong Giant Catfish. Wide ranging discussion with CNMC, with a focus on the role CNMC is playing on facilitating institutional engagement of other senior ministries. MOWRAM discussions were constrained as the official assigned for the meeting had little experience of MWBP.
Thu 15 Jun 06	Meetings with partners (including WWF, WCS, FFI, CEAC, World Fish Centre) and national host agency (Ministry of Environment and DNCP/MOE).	Discussions with national and international NGO partners on their experience in working with MWBP, and with MoE as host agency.
Fri 16 Jun 06	Exit meeting with NPO followed by departure for Vientiane.	
Fri 23 Jun 06	Follow-up meeting (Mam Kosal only) with Ken Serey Rotha, director CBNRM Learning Institute.	Discussion on CBNRM LI's experience of working with MWBP.
Mon 26 Jun 06	Follow-up meeting with H.E. Lonh Heal, Director General, MOE and Cambodia program co-coordinator.	Due to unavailability during main MTR visit, Mam Kosal followed-up to discuss experience, particularly in relation to DNCP's agenda and working relationship with NPO.
Lao PDR Country Component		
Fri 09 Jun 06	Flight Bangkok - Ubon (Mike Ounsted & Richard Friend). Drive to Pakse. Overnight Pakse	Useful open discussions with RF on whole project. Meet BP.
Sat 10 Jun 06	Drive to Attapeu	Excellent clear briefing from Phutavong
Jun 06	PM Project briefing	Ladouanglerd (outreach officer) and HU staff led by Vongthong Gnodleusay Co-Manager. Unfortunately Souksavanh Sisouvong (Co-Manager) and Mark Dubois (TA were not available because of sickness
	Evening visit to Ban Saise (District Saysetha)	

Date	Itinerary	Notes
		<p>and maternity leave - though both were met later). Informal discussion with other staff. Discussed fish conservation and farming activities. Fish/rice production. EIA and gold mining issues. Also met with village children gathering aquatic invertebrates from paddy fields. They do this every evening for family consumption.</p>
Sun 11 Jun 06	Travel to and overnight in Hat Oudomxay (District Sanamxay)	<p>This was a large group accompanied by Head of Provincial Department, Head of PSTEO, and District Governor. On river shown fish conservation activities, now dysfunctional gold mining dredgers. Discuss issues. Discuss project with villagers. Shown water pumps, drug store, livestock management new crops and much more. Observe an important village meeting in the evening. Very well attended. This trip provided an excellent opportunity to discuss all aspects of the project with villagers and officials.</p>
Mon 12 Jun 06	Return to Attapeu. Visit Nong Lom near Ban Somanouk and Ban Sisomphone Villages	Significant conflict resolution intervention by PPO at the request of the District Governor.
Tue 13 Jun 06	Meetings with: Kenthong Sisouvong, Head of Provincial Steering Committee (Deputy Provincial Governor), Soukchay Sinlapa, Deputy Head of National Steering Committee (Deputy Head of Provincial Governor Office), Dr. Pounpen, Member of Provincial Steering Committee (Head of Provincial Health Department), Nawarath Nouanethong, Member of Provincial Steering Committee (Head of PSTEO), Health Unlimited, Thavone Sangavong WB IDA, Khampheng Sixaya WB IDA, PPO Finance Officer, Secretary, Attend evaluation of village researchers training, Exit meeting with Provincial team.	Notes recorded for all meetings.
Wed 14 Jun 06	Travel to Pakse Via Ban Kasom (District Samakysay) and return to Vientiane Briefing from NPO at LARReC Debriefing Katihanna Ilomaki, UNDP Unit Manager (Environment)	
Thu 15 Jun 06	Meeting with: Somphanh Chanphengxay, Dep Dir General Dept Livestock and Fisheries Khamphet Roger, Dep Dir LARReC Mark Bezuijen, Coordinator Species WWF Marc Goichot, Coordinator IRBM WWF Michael Hedemark, Program Coordinator WCS	
Fri 16 Jun 06	Meeting with: Andy Inglis, Country Coordinator IUCN Lao, Kate Lazarus, WANI Lao, Chanthavong Saygnasith, Head of LNMC,	

Date	Itinerary	Notes
	Lonkham Atsanavong, LNMC, Sourasay Phoumavong, LNMC, Somsanouk Dep Plan of STEA (formerly Ramsar FP), Monemany Nhoibouakong, Act Dri Gen ERI, Dr. Phouang Parisack Pravongviengkham, Perm Sec MAFF, Chair of LNSC, Soulivanthong Kingkeo, Dep Dir Gen NAFRI.	
Sat 17 Jun 06	Telephone interview with: Latsamay, Country Director of IUCN Lao. Saygnalat Chomphonpakdy, Director of PAF in Attapeu province.	Meeting with PJM.
Sun 18 Jun 06	Meetings with: Jonathan Cornford, Oxfam Australia, Advocacy Coordinator, Khunkeoka Khamlouang, Country Director Oxfam Australia, Alvin Lopez, MWBP Ecologist	Useful outsider perspective Oxfam has a very similar community fisheries programme in Attapeu with 14 villages.
Mon 19 Jun 06	Exit meeting NPO at LARReC	
Tue 20 Jun 06	Meeting with Souksavanh Sisouvong, Co-Manager PPO	Important meeting as had not met before due to Souksavanh's ill health.
Sat 1 Jul 06	Meeting Mark Dubois TA	In the UK.
Vietnam Country Component		
Fri 09 Jun 06	Later afternoon travel to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (Wim Giesen).	Vuon Sai Gon Hotel.
Sat 10 Jun 06	Meet up with Tran Phuong Dong and Martin van der Schans (PMU), travel to Cao Lanh; at PPO, briefing by Project Co-Manager Nguyen Huu Thien, Outreach Officer Vu Thi Bich, and CARE project manager Vo Van Phong.	Stay at Dong Thap Guesthouse in Cao Lanh
Sun 11 Jun 06	Travel to Tram Chin National Park, for field visit and discussion with Provincial Co-Manager Huynh The Phien; visit Lang Sen Wetland Reserve – field visit and discussion with LSWR manager. Travel back to Cao Lanh.	Visitor's Centre at TCNP; burnt area at TCNP; sites for spillways; goat control of <i>Mimosa</i> ; members of LSWR user group. Accompanied by Thien, Dr. Ni (Can Tho University), and Martin van der Schans (PMU).
Mon 12 Jun 06	Mr. Le Van Be, Vice Chair of Tam Nong District People Committee, Tam Nong office. Work at Cao Lanh PPO; meetings with CARE and PPO staff, and presentations by PPO staff.	
Tue 13 Jun 06	Meeting with Le Minh Hoan, Deputy head of Dong Thap PC, chair of Dong Thap PMB; travel to Long An; meeting and lunch with Le Phat Quoi (Provincial Co-manager) & Truong Phuc Thuan (head of Long An Department of Science and Technology) and Huynh Thi Phep (member of Provincial Management Board Long An and deputy director of Long An's Department of Environment). Travel to Ho Chi Minh City; late afternoon meeting with Nguyen Chi Thanh (Head	Stay at De Syloia Hotel in Hanoi.

Date	Itinerary	Notes
Wed 14 Jun 06	of MWBP Technical Advisory Group & director of the regional Sub-FIPI; fly to Hanoi in evening. Entry meeting at NPO; meeting with Tran Hong Ha, General Director of VEPA, NPD of the MWBP, and his colleagues; meet with Nguyen Hong Toan, Secretary General, VNMC; meeting with NSC member Pham Van Mach, Deputy Director of Department of Science and Technology, MARD; meeting with NSC member Mr Nguyen Xuan Ly, Director of Department of Science and Technology, MOFI.	VEPA are generally positive about MWBP, and see many prospects for close cooperation, especially if a Wetlands Unit is established at VEPA. VNMC, MOFI and MARD are all positive about MWBP.
Thu 15 Jun 06	Meet with UNDP Sustainable Development Cluster (Koos Neefjes & Dao Xuan Lai); meeting with Tran Thi Minh Ha, Director of International Cooperation Department, MONRE; meeting at IUCN with Bernard O'Callaghan (Programme Coordinator & Acting Country Representative), Ly Minh Dang (Programme Officer) and Doan Thi Nga (Finances); afternoon meeting with TRAFFIC (Sulma Warne, Programme Coordinator); late afternoon meeting with CARE International (Rolf Herno and Nguyen Van Mai).	UNDP Vietnam is particularly negative about MWBP, although they have never visited the PPO or demo site, and know little about the programme. TRAFFIC have been involved on two surveys: at Attapeu and Stung Treng (1 dry season, 1 wet season). IUCN Vietnam basically does the admin and finances for the NPO/PPO.
Fri 16 Jun 06	Exit meeting for VN Component (National and Provincial), attended by Thien, PJM, IUCN VN and VEPA. Afternoon meeting with Ben Zech, First Secretary Forestry & Biodiversity, Royal Netherlands Embassy.	Discuss funding options for Phase B of MWBP with Ben Zech.
Sat 17 Jun 06	Flight to Vientiane in morning (Wim Giesen).	
ALL, in Vientiane, Lao PDR		
Sat 17 Jun 06	Late morning and afternoon meeting and discussions: international team members.	
Sun 18 Jun 06	Morning: write up; afternoon discussions with international team members; report writing.	
Mon 19 Jun 06	Discussion with all team members and preparation of PowerPoint presentation for general briefing. Conference call with Aban (IUCN ARO).	National team members arrive in Vientiane.
Tue 20 Jun 06	Presentation of findings to UNDP, MRC, IUCN and PMU, from 09:00-12:00 at the Afternoon: report writing.	Andrew Inglis joins from IUCN ARO Bangkok.
Wed 21 Jun 06	Report writing. RH flies back to Hanoi. National consultants return to home bases.	
Thu 22 Jun 06	Flights back to UK (Mike Ounsted) and the Netherlands (Wim Giesen).	

Annex 3 List of persons interviewed

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
30 May	Hans Guttman	Head of MRC's Environment Division	Partner organisation, supervises MRC inputs to MWBP
30 May	Charlotte MacAlister	Aquatic Ecosystems Specialist, Environment Division	MRC Programme Manager MWBP
31 May	Finn Reske-Nielsen	Resident Representative UNDP Lao PDR Country Office	Implementing Agency MWBP
31 May	Setsuko Yamazaki	Deputy Resident Representative UNDP Lao PDR Country Office	Implementing Agency MWBP
31 May	Katihanna Ilomaki	Unit Manager/Environment Specialist Environment Unit UNDP	UNDP Task Manager for MWBP
1 June	Worawan Sukrarook	Programme Officer ENV Integrated Basin Flow Mgt. MRC	Partner organisation, IBFM link to MWBP
1 June	Meng Monyrak	Ecology Specialist, Programme Officer ENV MRC	Partner organisation, ecology/mapping link to MWBP
1 June	Olivier Cogels	CEO of MRC	Partner organisation
1 June	Virginia Addison	Head of Communications, MRC	Partner organisation, informal co-operation with MWBP communications
1 June	Jorma Koponen	Deputy Team Leader, Modelling Specialist, MRC's WUP	2 out of 3 WUP sites overlap with MWBP demo sites
1 June	Chris Barlow	Manager, MRC's Fisheries Programme	Partner organisation; informal cooperation in fisheries-related areas
1 June	Dirk Vanderstighelen	Programme Manager, Agency for Geographic Information Flanders	Consultant for MRC, initial design of IKMP.
2 June	Peter-John Meynell	Team Leader MWBP	MWBP TL
2 June	Alvin Lopes	Wetland Ecologist, MWBP	MWBP – WE
2 June	Katihanna Ilomaki	Unit Manager/Environment Specialist Environment Unit UNDP	UNDP Task Manager for MWBP
2 June	Kent Jingfors	Regional Programme Coordinator, Asia Regional Office	Overall regional coordination of IUCN operations
2 June	Joseph D'Cruz	UNDP Regional GEF coordinator	Responsible for supervising UNDP GEF funds in region
Thailand Country Component			
4 June	Tawatchai Rattanasorn	NPC of MWBP Thailand	NPC
4 June	Rattaphon Phitaktapsumbut	Project Co-Manager, Songkhram PPO	PPO-PCM
4 June	Sopon Navuchairusol	Outreach Officer	PPO team member
4 June	Aom Momthairat	Assistant Researcher	PPO team member
4 June	David Blake	Technical Advisor	PPO team member

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
4 June	Sansonthi Boonyothayan	Provincial Co-Manager	PPO Co-Manager
5 June	Head of Sri Songkhram District	Head of the Sri Songkhram District Office	All demonstration sites located in this district
5 June	Village leaders and Thai Baan researchers	Ban Yang Ngoi village	Target village of demonstration project
5 June	Village leaders and Thai Baan researchers	Ban Don Daeng village	Target village of demonstration project
6 June	Manusak Khumpongpun	Head of Nakom Phanom Strategies Working Group Acting Chief of Executive Office of Governor	Involved on Provincial MB
6 June	Apichai Ritthikan	Head of Environmental Working Group, Provincial Natural Resources and Environment Office, Nakom Phanom	Involved on Provincial MB
6 June	Sopsan Petchkam	Sakon Nakhon Rajabath University	Partner
6 June	Suriya Katamee	Head Pak-Yam Village	Demonstration site
6 June	Chainarong Sretthachachau	Mekong Livelihoods Advisor on Thai Baan	Partner
6 June	Smanchai Suwan Aumpai	School teacher Tambon Sisongkram	Partner
6 June	Dr. Preecha Prathepha	Walai Rukhavej Botanical Research Institute, Maha Sarakham University, Maha Sarakham Province	Partner
6 June	Mr. Chumphol	Provincial Natural Resources and Environment Office, Sakon Nakorn Province	Partner
6 June	Mr. Peera	Office of National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, Udon Thani Province	Partner
6 June	Miss. Patcharin	Mekong Reservoir and River Fisheries Program, Fisheries Program, Mekong River Commission, Udon Thani Province	Partner
7 June	Pakawan Chufamane	Director of TNMC	Partner organisation
7 June	Thitima Phuavong	Assistant to National Environment Programme Coordinator, TNMC	Partner organisation
7 June	Dr. Chumnarn Pongsri	Head of DoF	Former member of Regional Steering Committee, when he was head of MRC' s Fisheries Programme
7 June	Ronnakorn Triraganon	Capacity Building Coordinator, RECOFTC	Partner

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
7 June	Peter Keulers	Counsellor, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Bangkok	Donor to Thai Component of MWBP
7 June	Nirawan Pipitsombut	ONEP	National Host Agency
7 June	Harnnarong Yaowalart	Head of Wildlife Fund of Thailand	Partner
8 June	Hakan Björkman	Deputy Resident Representative UNDP Thailand	Partner organisation
8 June	Phansiri Winichagoon	Manager of Environment Unit, UNDP Thailand	Partner organisation
8 June	Kasemsun Chinnavaso	Deputy Director General, National Park, Wildlife & Plant Conservation Department, MONRE	RSC member MWBP
8 June	John Dore	Coordinator for Asia, Water and Nature Initiative, Regional Wetlands and Water Resources Program (RWWP)	Coordinates WANI support to MWBP
8 June	Andrew Ingles	Regional Group Head (Ecosystems and Livelihoods)	Supervises MWBP for IUCN at regional level
9 June	Nick Innes-Taylor	Coordinator of AIT Aqua Outreach Programme, and head of Wetlands Alliance.	Partner
Cambodia Country Component			
9 June	Sok Vong	National Programme Coordinator	Responsible for implementation at national level
9 June	Mao Kosal	National Wetlands Communications and Training Coordinator	Responsible for awareness and training activities at national level
10 June	Phay Somany	Mekong Dolphin Conservation Project	MDCP is a partner organisation supported by MWBP
10 June	Richard Zamry	Mekong Dolphin Conservation Project	As above
10 June	Pech Darong	Stung Treng Demonstration Project Co-Manager	Responsible for co-management of Stung Treng demonstration component
10 June	Dr. Marcus Chambers	Stung Treng Demonstration Project Technical Adviser	Provides technical support to the PPO
10 June	Sous Sivutha	Stung Treng Demonstration Project Outreach Officer	Responsible for outreach activities at the Stung Treng demonstration site
11 June	Ms. Sous Navy	Health Facilitator, Health Unlimited	Provincial partner organisation responsible for implementing health activities at Stung Treng demonstration site
11 June	Ms. Yath Socheat	Nutrition Worker, Health Unlimited	As above
11 June	Koh Sneng: Villagers and Commune Development Council members	Villagers and commune officials	Demonstration site Beneficiaries

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
12 June	Chea Kim Sien	Head, Dept of Environment, Stung Treng Province and Demonstration	Demonstration site co-manager - DOE is the host agency at provincial level.
12 June	Hak Vimean	Deputy head, Dept. of Environment, Sung Treng Province	DOE is the host agency at provincial level
12 June	Tum Nyro	Head, Fisheries Dept. Stung Treng Province	Partner. DoF hopes to engage more in future
12 June	Yen Run	Provincial Co-manager, Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA)	CEPA facilitate community fisheries and Sala Phoum work.
12 June	Chim Saren	Provincial coordinator, UNDP/RGOC SEILA programme	SEILA supports decentralization process in province
12 June	Long Phal	First Deputy Governor, Stung Treng Provincial Government	Responsible for issues related to resources conservation and environmental protection
14 June	Srun Lim Song	Director, Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute (IFReDI)	Partner for fisheries flagship species work
14 June	Lieng Sopha	Deputy Director, Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute (IFReDI)	Partner for fisheries flagship species work
14 June	Hap Navy	Head of Socioeconomics, Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute (IFReDI)	Partner for fisheries flagship species work
14 June	H.E. Sin Niny	Vice-Chairman, CNMC	CNMC is a key institutional facilitator
14 June	H.E. Kol Vatthana	Deputy Secretary General, CNMC	As above
14 June	Isabelle Degryse-Blateau	Deputy Resident Representative (Programme)	Implementing agency in Cambodia and has granted TRAC funds for sector policy work.
14 June	Lay Khim	Environment and Energy Cluster, Team Leader and Assistant Resident Representative UNDP	Implementing agency in Cambodia and has granted TRAC funds for sector policy work.
14 June	Eeva Härmä	Environment Analyst, Energy and Environment Cluster, UNDP	Implementing agency in Cambodia; has granted TRAC funds sector policy work
15 June	Teak Seng	Director, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Cambodia	Partner iNGO
15 June	Joe Walston	Director, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)	Partner iNGO
15 June	Prak Sereyvath	Director, Cambodian Centre for Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC)	Partner NGO
15 June	H.E. Tann Vutha	Secretary of State, Ministry of Environment	Senior official responsible for wetlands at MoE
15 June	Neou Bonheur	Deputy Director, DNCP	DNCP is Ramsar focal point

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
15 June	Blake Ratner	Regional Director, Greater Mekong Sub Region, World Fish Centre	iNGO partner
15 June	Boyd Simpson	Crocodile Program Officer, Fauna and Flora International Cambodia	iNGO partner
23 June	Mr. Ken Serey Rotha	Director of CBNRM Learning Institute	NGO partner
26 June	HE, Dr. Lonh Heal	Director General, MOE	National Programme Director
LAO PDR Country Component			
10 June	Dr Richard Friend	IUCN Programme Manager	PMU
10 June	Vongthong Gnodleusay	Co-Manager PPO	PPO
10 June	Phutavong Ladouanglero	Outreach Officer	PPO
10 June	Vanhnee Souvanxay	Finance and Administration Officer	PPO
10 June	Phongchanh Pongtaychak	HU Health & Nutrition Communicator (part of team)	Partner
10 June	Boukong Inthilath	Health & Nutrition Communicator (part of team)	Partner
10 June	Viengxay Saydara	Admin- Assistant	PPO
10 June	Amphaphone Saygnaseng	Secretary	PPO
11 June	Soulipha	Head of fisheries Ban Saise village	Beneficiary
11 June	Village children	Ban Saise	Beneficiaries
11 June	Villagers	Ban Saise	Beneficiaries
12 June	Khamtanh	Head Hat Oudomxay	Beneficiary
12 June	Vongphanh,	VHV Hat Oudomxay	Beneficiary
12 June	Villagers	Hat Oudomxay	Beneficiaries
12 June	Khamboun	Sanamxay District Governor	Beneficiary
12 June	Village Chief	Nong Lom	Beneficiary
13 June	Kenthong Sisouvong	Deputy Provincial Governor (Attapeu)	Head of PSC
13 June	Soukchay Sinlapa	Dep Head of Provincial Governor's Office,	PSC and Dep Head of LNSC
13 June	Sayalath Chomphonpakdy	Head of PAFO	PSC
13 June	Bounpene Sangsomsak	Dir Provincial Health Department	PSC
13 June	Nawarath Nouanethong	Head of PSTEO	PSC
13 June	Dr Phetdara	Manager of HU Project in Attapeu	Partner
13 June	Thavone Sangavong	World Bank IDA	Same office building as PPO
13 June	Khampheng Sixaya	World Bank IDA	Same office building PPO
14 June	Katihanna Ilomaki	UNDP Unit Manager (Environment)	MWBP Point person
14 June	Duangkham Singhanouvong	National Director LARReC	MWBP

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
14 June	Singha Ounniyom	IUCN NP Coordinator	MWBP
14 June	Chanthiva Prasasouk	Finance and Administration Officer, LARReC	MWBP
14 June	Phatsakorn Detvongsa	National Communication & Training Coordinator	MWBP
14 June	Khampheng Hommsombath	National Programme Officer LARRec	Ramsar link person
14 June	Amphavanh	Secretary	NPO
15 June	Somphanh Chanphengxay	Dep Dir General Dept Livestock and Fisheries	LNSC
15 June	Khamphet Roger	Dep Dir LARReC	
15 June	Marc Goichot	Integrated River Basin Management Coordinator, WWF Greater Mekong Program	Indirect link.
15 June	Mark Bezuijen	Coordinator Species, Habitats and Ecosystems, WWF Living Mekong Programme	Partner
15 June	Michael Hedemark	Program Co-Director, Wildlife Conservation Society, Lao PDR	Former partner
16 June	Andy Inglis	Country Programme Coordinator, IUCN Lao	Partner
16 June	Kate Lazarus	IUCN WANI	Part MWBP
16 June	Chanthavong Saygnasith	Head of LNMC	LNSC
16 June	Lonkham Atsanavong	LNMC	Partner
16 June	Sourasay Phoumavong	Dep DG LNMC	Partner
16 June	Somsanouk	Head of Planning STEA	LNSC
16 June	Monemany Nhoibouakong	Act DG ERI	Research Partner
16 June	Dr. Phouang Parisack Pravongviengkham	Perm Sec MAFF,	Chair of LNSC
16 June	Soulivanthong Kingkeo	Dep DG NAFRI	LNSC
16 June	Monemany Nhoibouakong	Acting DG ERI	Research partner with WANI
16 June	Bounthong Saphakdy	Chief, Technical Division, DLF Vice dir planning MAF	LNSC
17 June	Latsamay Sylavong (phone conversation)	Country Director, IUCN Lao	
17 June	Saygnalat Chomphonpakdy, (Phone call)	Director of PAF in Attapeu province	PSC
17 June	Peter-John Meynell	UNDP Team Leader	Head of MWBP
18 June	Jonathan Cornford	Oxfam Australia Advocacy Coordinator	None
18 June	Khunkeoka Khamlouang	Oxfam Australia Country Director	None

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
20 June	Souksavanh Sisouvong	Co-manager PPO	PPO
1 July	Mark Dubois	TA to the PPO	PPO
Vietnam Country Component			
10 June	Nguyen Huu Thien	Project Co-Manager	PPO
10 June	Vu Thi Bich	Outreach Officer	PPO
10 June	Vo Van Phong	CARE project manager	Programme partner
11 June	Huynh The Phien	Provincial Co-Manager, Director of Tram Chin National Park	Demo site manager
11 June	Mr. Phuc	Director of Lang Sen Wetland Reserve	Demo site manager
12 June	Mr. Le Van Be	Vice Chair of Tam Nong District People Committee	District where TCNP is located
13 June	Mr. Le Minh Hoan	Deputy head of Dong Thap PC, chair of Dong Thap PMB	Province where TCNP is located
13 June	Mr. Le Phat Quoi	Provincial Co-manager, Long An DOST	Heavily involved at LSWR, PPO
13 June	Mr. Truong Phuc Thuan	Head of Long An Department of Science and Technology	Involved with PPO at LSWR
13 June	Ms. Huynh Thi Phep	Member of Provincial Management Board Long An, Deputy Director of Long An's Department of Environment	Involved with PPO at LSWR
13 June	Mr. Nguyen Chi Thanh	Director of Regional Sub-FIPI in Ho Chi Minh City	Head of MWBP Technical Advisory Group
14 June	Dr. Tran Hong Ha	General Director of VEPA	NPD of the MWBP
14 June	Nguyen Thi My Hoang	Officer, International Cooperation Division VEPA	Cooperation with NPO
14 June	Pham Dinh Viet Hong	Wetland Expert, Nature Conservation Division, VEPA	Close links with NPO
14 June	Ms Nguyen Hong Phuong	NPC of MWBP	NPC
14 June	Mr Nguyen Hong Toan	Secretary General, VNMC	NSC member
14 June	Mr. Nguyen Thu Linh	Programme Officer VNMC	
14 June	Mr. Pham Van Mach	Deputy Director of Department of Science and Technology, MARD	NSC member
14 June	Mr Nguyen Xuan Ly	Director of Department of Science and Technology, MOFI	NSC member
15 June	Mr. Koos Neefjes	Head of UNDP Sustainable Development Cluster	Partner organisation
15 June	Mr. Dao Xuan Lai	Programme Officer, UNDP Sustainable Development Cluster	Partner organisation
15 June	Dr Tran Thi Minh Ha	Director of International Cooperation Department, MONRE	On behalf of Vice Minister Pham Khoi Nguyen, NSC Chairman
15 June	Mr. Bernard O'Callaghan	Viet Nam Programme Coordinator and Country Rep. IUCN Viet Nam	Partner organisation

Date	Person	Position	Relation to MWBP
15 June	Doan Thi Nga	Finance Officer, IUCN Viet Nam	Partner organisation
15 June	Ly Minh Dang	Programme Officer, Wetlands and Water Resources, IUCN Viet Nam	Partner organisation
15 June	Mr. Sulma Warne	Programme Coordinator TRAFFIC Southeast Asia - Indochina	Partner
15 June	Mr. Rolf Herno	Rural Development Advisor, CARE International, Vietnam	Partner
15 June	Mr. Nguyen Van Mai	Programme Manager, CARE International, Vietnam	Partner
16 June	Mr. Ben Zech	First Secretary, Forestry & Biodiversity, Royal Netherlands Embassy, Hanoi	Donor of wetland programmes in Vietnam

Annex 4 Summary of field visits

Field Assessment Data Sheet: Stung Treng, Cambodia

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
MT Evaluation Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, positive assessment, particularly ongoing work managed by PPO on community fisheries and health. • Good NPO management with capability to assume a stronger managerial role for PPO/ demonstration activities. • Central government ownership difficult to establish during the mission - a number of key agencies were not well represented during key meetings (Dept of fisheries, Min of Planning and MOWRAM in particular). • NPO and PPO lack technical biodiversity expertise (NPO and PPO rely on inputs of regional wetland ecologist) . NPO has recruited a short term national wetland ecology adviser, reporting to NPO and PMU and working on both national and demonstration site tasks. Ongoing work tasks include molluscs and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impressive progress on community fisheries management and health aspects, especially given the short time frame. • Staff commitments are evidently very high. • Strong community/livelihood benefits anticipated from CEPA-facilitated Sala Phoum work (current focus on fisheries and traditional medicine work). This should lead to fisheries/aquatic biodiversity conservation impacts associated with community-managed sustainable use initiatives (conservation areas, prohibition of damaging fishing techniques etc). The approach may prove sustainable in longer term and perhaps only limited monitoring will be required in the future. • Partnership with Health Unlimited, focussing on nutrition awareness, sanitation and malaria also very 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional PMU commissioned a recent preliminary biodiversity assessment of the Stung Treng Ramsar site, and this was shared with the MTE in draft form. The report summarizes key findings of work undertaken in November 2005 and identified key wildlife conservation priorities. The report is clear and to a high standard and confirms there are strong grounds for conservation action, given the presence of a number of critically-threatened species and habitats. The report makes clear recommendations for focussing work on biodiversity aspects. • Progress on Ramsar site demarcation, delineation and management planning has not advanced substantively, in part due to difficulties convening the provincial management board. Rapid progress will need to be made during the

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	<p>dragonflies – a focus that might be revisited in light of the urgency of critical species and habitat protection priorities identified by Timmins et al. The short term ecologist contract expires shortly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VSO support for the PPO seems to be working very well and there is a good relationship between the VSO and PPO team (including with HU). The VSO term ends in September, and there will be a minimum gap of 2 months before the arrival of a replacement. This will leave a gap in much-needed support for the PPO, especially given English language needs required for working with the PMU. • Departure of the VSO and the looming end to the short term ecologist position will leave PPO without access to technical support on natural resources and biodiversity management expertise. The PMU's medium-term strategy to deal with 	<p>promising, but at an early stage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of baseline information to enable monitoring of progress against the indicators included in the revised logframe remains unclear. PPAs undertaken at the start of the demonstration site phase may provide some qualitative baseline information. • Local level ownership is weak with the host agency, but better with other provincial partners and the province as a whole. • Slow progress on Ramsar delineation, baseline surveys and conservation of critical biodiversity. 	<p>remainder of Phase A if a solid foundation for follow-up GEF support is to be put in place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Species work supported by regional funds assessed as positive for giant catfish, but limited in scale. A regional wildlife trade assessment also looked at the likely impact of wildlife trade at Stung Treng. This did not present much data to indicate that wildlife trade is a particular management problem at Stung Treng, although capture and trade in wildlife is a feature throughout the area, consistent with what is known throughout the region. • Frequent changes to budget allocations and alignment issues with govt institutions/species plans have undermined relationships with key partners on species work (particularly on Siamese crocodiles, and to a lesser extent dolphins). • Strategy and action for addressing biodiversity critical conservation

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
	<p>this gap is not yet clear.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact of regionally-deployed biodiversity funding at national level has been mixed – support for Giant Catfish is positive, but for Siamese crocodiles, and to a lesser extent, dolphins, impacts have been mixed., partly due to reduced budget availability and because of institutional conflicts over who should be awarded species conservation funds. 		<p>priorities at ST is unclear, since these do not feature strongly in the work plan, and there are no indicators for this in the revised logframe. Strategy appears rather <i>ad hoc</i>, using PMU-managed funds and expertise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-country partner expertise on biodiversity conservation is engaged at national level for work on dolphins (through the WWF MDCP), cranes workshop support for ICF, Siamese crocodiles – in prolonged planning and negotiation (constrained by budget availability and conflicts over institutional responsibilities at national level) and Mekong giant catfish (plus other migratory fish species) Ongoing focus of work of the national and international wetland ecologist on dragonflies and molluscs is not seen as a priority by the PPO staff and some external partners, who feel more attention should be given to other priorities.

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The original logframe included the identification of key species management requirements at the Stung Treng Ramsar site, followed by the introduction of measures to implement these. The revised logframe (the status of which is unclear to the PPO and MTE) does not include these aspects, and focuses more on 'process aspects' (e.g. assessments, databases, studies, action plans, study tours, workshops and consultations) and 'indirect measures' - preventive health outcomes (malaria, diarrhoea); exploring local systems of resource use through traditional knowledge-based research (Sala Phoum) and sustainable use of wetland products. The workplan and revised logframe for MWBP no longer proposes support for species or habitat conservation, nor capacity-building for local authorities and rangers in basic aspects of protected areas management. These aspects were included in the original work plan, prior to its revision in early 2006. DoE in Stung Treng clearly believes that this support is vital, but since the DoE were unaware of the new logframe, it is not clear whether they realise that their priorities for support are no longer a focus of the project. This change in emphasis may also not be apparent to other external partners, and may explain the frustrations concerning the lack of progress on tangible conservation outcomes. This is also an issue of conservation concern, given the critical situation of key species and habitats at Stung Treng - and since the measures adopted at Stung Treng are unlikely to deliver benefits to critical (non fish) species in the near to medium term. 	

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National Host Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong commitment and support was shown from the Secretary of State, MoE, and he has engaged actively when appropriate. DNPC concerned at poor relationship between the project and host agency, perhaps attributable to institutional arrangements within DNCP that constrain effective engagement. DNPC also requested improvements to the clarity of reporting formats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The provincial host agency (DoE) feels excluded from planning and key decision-making and does not feel it has benefited sufficiently from support from MWBP vv hands-on capacity building and addressing needs for essential field and office equipment. The PPO has tried hard to ensure close cooperation. These efforts have been constrained by a work program agreed and fixed nearly 3 years ago; frequently changing budget allocations; physical separation of the PPO from the office of the host agency, and the use of English as the primary means of communication to PMU line management – DOE is unable to communicate directly with visiting PMU staff because of language barriers. The PPO and DoE have resolved to try to improve relations. DOE stated that PMU staff has yet to visit their offices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DNCP would like a stronger focus on conservation priorities, and wants to ensure that the demonstration site work provides real guidance for MoE on balancing conservation with development goals within the context of Ramsar. DNCP are concerned that ongoing work may not do this – with too little to show in terms of progress on Ramsar delineation, management planning and conservation. DNCP would like to see more delivery of tangible outputs and progress on this aspect. They do not seem convinced that work on the sectoral policy review will deliver results that will influence policy.

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NMC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CNMC are supportive of MWBP, and seek to play a role in facilitating better engagement from line ministries, e.g. MAFF & MOWRAM • CNMC sees a weakness of the MWBP as being too concerned with 'high level' meetings, and insufficiently focussed on promoting working level dialogue –there are only 2 SC meetings per year at senior level, but no regular meetings at working level. • CNMC cite a weakness of MWBP as poor preparation for steering committee meetings – most line ministries have, until recently, received key papers, such as budgets and work plans far too late for internal discussion prior to steering committee meetings. This was better for the last meeting. • CNMC wonders what MWBP plans are to turn the steering committee into a nationally-owned and managed mechanism? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CNMC made little comment on the demonstration site work but would like to see a better balance achieved between conservation and development 	

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
<p>UNDP Country office</p> <p>Other implementation partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TRAC funds for sector policy analysis have required UNDP to engage in the process. • They have not seen programme reports since June last year, although this seems likely to be a reflection of weak information flows within UNDP – reports to the UNDP country offices should be sent from UNDP Lao. • General support for the aspirations that MWBP seeks to achieve, and respect for the work of staff at NPO and PPO. • A common feature of these reservations relate to frequent changes to budget frames for particular activities leading to a loss of confidence amongst several MWBP partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNDP generally not well informed of demonstration activities and have not fielded supervision missions, nor visited the demonstration site • The local community would like the project to facilitate the repair of water pumps to enable them to respond to the health messages promoted by Health Unlimited. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From what they understand of the project, they would like to see a stronger focus on action, and question role and competence of MWBP on national policy analysis. • IFReDI appreciates the support it has had for fisheries work. • WCS, WWF and FFI expressed a range of strong opinions on the inputs of international advisers/experts from the PMU - deployed to assist the PPO and NPO. These covered a perceived lack of focus (particularly on action for biodiversity conservation), incompetent and opaque funds management, failure to follow-through on discussions and negotiations with partners, lack of technical expertise, repeat failures to

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
<p>Project beneficiaries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Villagers at Koh Sneng supportive of project in general. However, a number of comments referred to the frequency of visits of outside experts, and lack of tangible action on development needs. This highlights a need for consistent follow-through of planning into implementation. The current uncertainty over Phase B financing is therefore a particular concern. Another concern is the ability of the project to deliver on sustainable agriculture work initiated at the demonstration site, but with a budget inadequate to enable completion during phase A. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciation of villagers at Koh Sneng for introducing the Sala Phoum approach. There was a sense of pride that local villagers were now able to stand before outsiders to present their work and refer to using the Sala Phoum work to influence commune development planning. • Appreciation expressed for the advice and awareness work of Health Unlimited. • They report that there have been no perceptible declines in fish abundance in recent years, although some species are now becoming 	<p>deliver on initial promises of support etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WCS and WWF drew attention to the strong national biodiversity management capacity now available in Cambodia which they believe should be engaged more - a strategy that would be more cost-effective and build more capacity.

Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues) Assessment by:	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
	<p>rarer and harder to find. However, there is a belief that community work on fisheries management would help them to respond to outsiders coming to their fishing grounds, using nylon nets that are now much more commonly available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ramsar rangers at site level have not been paid for nearly two years and would like the project to bring this to the attention of provincial and national authorities (i.e. DOE and MOE). • Ramsar rangers have no boats, fuel or equipment, and had received very little training, so they are unable to do their work effectively. They feel the programme should provide these basic requirements. • Villagers would like to see more tangible development work, ('fewer researchers and more development') 	

Field Assessment Data Sheet: Lao PDR

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
MT Evaluation Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally a blur between PMU and Lao specific component. There are some advantages in this but generally there issues of perception. • Ditto with MRC. MRC EP linkage rather weak and needs improvement. • Strong MWBP teams in PPO and NPO. Concerns that LARReC may not be the best governmental department to present policy change issues. But LARReC is fully engaged with the programme and there are some advantages of its hands on approach. • Excellent progress in province in implementing a development programme with some novel ideas on biodiversity in relation to health and poverty reduction. • In line with government strategies on poverty reduction. • Not yet in line with GoL plans for spatial planning of production and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very strong benefits in terms of services (water, medicine, alternative crops). Actual health improvements cannot be measured yet. • Strengthened FCZ and interest in them. • Ban.Saise livelihood benefit rearing and fish/rice production + fund • Approach excellent in all areas – local and governmental • EIA success for gold mining. Definite MWBP added value. • Nong Lom. MWBP called in! • Some change. At a turning point! • Large potential. • Some demonstrations outside project site. • Partners bring strong specialist skills (HU) • Strong social skills which help to motivate and mobilise. Strong scientific advice on fish from LARReC. Might need more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity conservation based on livelihood value • Many new fish species being identified • No stated interest in flagship species. Location does not relate to named siamensis crocodile for which this demo location was identified. • Local level conservation measures not scientifically proven. • Conservation indicators are vague.

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	<p>conservation zones.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little or no connection with regional programme. • Well managed in all aspects. • Outreach strong. • Management strong. • Good communications (internal) with PMU. Poor with some other actors. • No position on infrastructure development (need to prepare for this). • At the start, Province thought that this was a conservation project contrary to government policy. • Introduction of EIA processes. • Intuitional arrangement now satisfactory and steering committee regular. • Some specific examples of how MWBP contributes where other agencies fail. • At provincial level: Building staff capacity but some controversy about this. 	<p>ecological expertise. (nb TA is an ecologist but did not meet him on site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership approach. • Easily replicable – and similar projects supported by other actors. 	

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
National Host Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No exit defined strategy. Potential for conflicting interests with IUCN Lao. The level of understanding by government officials of wetland management is very basic. LARReC outside NPO: Sees this as an IUCN project. Much criticism of IUCN (in relation to MWBP). Feels ownership is in IUCN/PMU (not IUCN Lao). Strong criticism about PMU expenditure and control. Could be strengthened by being hosted by NAFRI or non-research department? Or MAF Dep Plan. Programme Dir works 60% MRC. NPO do not feel that LARReC is the right agency to host MWBP but not clear if not who? (This suggests a lack of ownership). Could be hosted by NWC if/when established. Good technical inputs. Technical input good. LARReC gains from cross-sectoral learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good community benefits, positive conservation benefits, needs to back up local approach with science. Recognise good at provincial level but further developed at national level eg EIA. Good for replication but is that the purpose of a demonstration project. LARReC not well represented at Provincial level. MAFF better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good on Ramsar but it seems to be IUCN that is setting the agenda. (lack of GoL ownership). Interest in flagship species not clear. Working on Giant Catfish, though this would happen without MWBP. No added value recognised.

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
NMC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NPO: Responsibility for the Lao project should be with the NPO. Province should report to NPO both technical and financial.(Cannot actually pull up financial reports for Lao component which government requires). • Well managed in office. • Not well enough integrated into government. NSC still weak. • LARReC not really set up for influencing policy. LARReC good on fishery law not wider wetland implications. • Provides a bigger breath of thinking – health, nutrition, livelihoods etc. • LARReC has various related projects and options. Sida (report due), GoL funds, FAO proposal. • Concern about dual reporting procedures (MWBP and GoL). • Negative. • Did not feel that MWBP was helpful. • Seen as anti development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No apparent connection. • NMC deals with trans-boundary issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
<p>UNDP Country office</p> <p>Other implementation partners</p> <p>Project beneficiaries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good support (partly because of location in Vientiane with insight into whole project). Has visited demo project. • Aware of many of the difficulties. • Res Rep advises that there is 'loads of money' available. • HU. Very supportive. • WCS Very negative. MWBP did not meet expectations. • WWF appreciated catfish coordination but unclear on added value of MWBP (Might do this work anyway). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial Government: Very supportive. MWBP well aligned. No regional benefits perceived. • Head of Provincial Health and Environment Department very supportive. More capacity building requested. Study tour on dams. • Some strengthened capacity in terms of thinking processes, probably good at district level too. • District heads met were very supportive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial Government: • No interests expressed other than general awareness of biodiversity significance of the area. Pointed out the conflicting demands of conservation v development. • Local people: no species conservation identified. Concern about conservation of fish stocks. New interest in FCZs.

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
<p>Others</p> <p>IUCN-Lao</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of important issues identified: concern that IUCN-Lao programme can be negatively impacted by poor image of MWBP in Lao, when it should boost and provide openings for IUCN-Lao. • Potential duplication of activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local people: active participation and engagement. No opposition seen. • Development benefits apparent and appreciated. Villagers thinking more about future needs and plans. • Local researchers trained. • Concerns as with overall MWBP. 	

Field Assessment Data Sheet: Songkhram, Thailand

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
MT Evaluation Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of PMU & NPO • Semi-separation of institutional alignment seen as effective by both MWBP and ONEP, but closer alignment/harmonization will be needed if impacts are to be scaled-up and sustainability achieved. • Financial management arrangements unsatisfactory - depend on ad hoc arrangements • During phase B, added value of MWBP might be on willingness and ability to manage GEF funds outside ONEP (ONEP appear supportive of this) but all technical and policy management aspects happen in GoT • NPO and PPO staff is effective, valued by partners at national level and by external partners. Management assessed as effective and efficient. • Technical skills assessed as complementary to existing skills in ONEP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall, very positive and impressive performance. • Appropriate approaches and innovative (composting, water quality, local knowledge etc). • Strengths in use of traditional/local knowledge systems • Good team working • Excellent working relations between project, community and with local authorities at tambon, district and provincial level (with most sub-depts) • Good relations with external agencies (e.g. universities). However, need to integrate better scientific/technical into the local knowledge based systems – this is an opportunity waiting to be seized! • Improved buy-in is needed of some provincial departments (national parks and fisheries). • Linkages need to be established between provincial and national wetland committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity focus is not articulated well – this will be a concern for GEF • Traditional knowledge approaches through Thai Baan has been extremely effective in developing knowledge of biodiversity, but need to be strengthened with greater inputs from scientific and technical institutes • Early days – collecting information, but clear idea of how this data will be used for tackling other key threats, mostly external, is not yet convincing. (e.g. land use changes, water infrastructure) • Notable lack of awareness and understanding amongst key stakeholders on key threatened biodiversity, even in Songkhram basin.

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
National Host Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully leveraged UNDP TRAC funds and there is considerable future potential from provincial funding, UNDP GEF and SIDA funds through Wetlands Alliance • Seen as effective by host agency (ONEP) and has made efforts to maintain links with TNMC (perhaps not reciprocated) • Generally happy with technical, managerial and financial arrangements. • Info overload, but not getting info required. Not involved in revision of logframe, but had commented on work plan. Communications with national programme is very good, but with regional programme is lacking. • Too early for policy implications. • Generally positive about institutional alignment, although not positive about MRC. • Added value: positive. • Strong movement into socio- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNDP TRAC funds need to be used to strengthen and structure local-national linkages • Very good relationship with demo project, local administration and local people. There should be a more natural movement upwards. • Importance of economic valuation: strong demand for economic evaluation to be scaled up to provincial and national level. • Both Thai Baan approach and info gathered has been good. • Appropriateness of approach has been fine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow in defining the project area for a proposed Ramsar site. • More formal taxonomic work should have come in – in support of Thai Baan approach, e.g. if Ramsar is to be designated. • Perhaps not the first choice in terms of biodiversity priority.

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
<p>NMC</p> <p>UNDP Country office</p>	<p>economic area; Ramsar & poverty reduction; think that the mix is good. Good, after a shaky start.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would not go for GEF funding with the present ceiling of \$3M/3yr, but if this moved up one level they might be interested. • Technical and managerial aspects are fine. • Unrealistic institutional arrangements – unrealistic to expect chair of TNMC to participate in steering committee • TNMC attitude to project negative and disinterested from outset, and very limited engagement fro NMC, despite efforts from NPO • Perceived as ‘IUCN project’ that ‘bypasses’ TNMC • Few benefits perceived fro Thailand, but is seen as benefiting IUCN • Insufficient work to help strengthen the new RBO • Doubts that there is strong national ownership e.g. of revised logframe, even though officially ‘approved’ by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Top heavy” and few funds reach demo site. • Believes that support for local people at demonstration sites should be a higher priority than is accorded by project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should expand to upper Songkhram to cove entire basin

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
	<p>countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional program lacks social scientist • Role of IUCN should not be managerial and are weak in this role. • Regional component should restrict itself only to issues that cannot be addressed at national level, i.e. specifically transboundary issues • Regional arrangement duplicates, in part, MRC and this leads to friction • Overall program not clear to country partners, and sometimes not relevant to Thailand's priorities. • Relationship with MRC is weak, but they do not believe that regional component should be integrated into MRC • UNDP would be a more appropriate implementing agency for the program • IUCN inputs should be to provide technical inputs on a contract basis • Project broadly addresses environment MDG 		

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationale for funding regional component from OP Adaptation to Climate Change not convincing, although funds may be available • Project has leveraged \$125,000 UNDP TRAC funds to improve local-national learning linkages and in future, UTAP funds available for leveraging further GEF support if deemed GoT priority • UNDP does not think existing CTA should be seconded from IUCN to UNDP • UNDP Lao should be institutional home for regional component 		

Field Assessment Data Sheet: Plain of Reeds, Vietnam

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
MT Evaluation Team	Evaluation of PMU & NPO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a good sense of ownership at the beneficiary level (PA management), but less so at the district level. • Technically, MWBP is doing well, and inputs provided are generally of good quality and appropriate. Exceptions are the reports on ecotourism (too general) and co-management (inappropriate), which will be redone. • Changes in staffing and the slow response by CARE to problems on the livelihoods programme has affected the delivery time. Response by the PMO has been appropriate, but delays are evident and inevitable. • MWBP appears to bypass the district level in project implementation. This was particularly the case when the previous CARE project manager was 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The prospect for real change – in terms of poverty alleviation – is present, with legalised access to PA resources and provision of loans. However, only a few families are targeted at TCNP in this first phase, and activities are at an early stage. • Direct conservation benefits are emerging from the fire and water programme (controlled burning, manipulating water levels to encourage <i>Eleocharis</i>) and general awareness raising. • Some approaches are highly innovative in the Vietnamese context (e.g. control burning, green contracts with villagers for co-management of PA resources) and appear highly appropriate. However, MWBP needs to work more closely with commune leaders. These are shaping an influence on policy and practice. • If successful, there is significant scope for replication, both locally and 	

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
National Host Agency	<p>involved on the project. There is a need for an increase in direct communications with district level administration. Reporting according to the PMU's format is a burden to the project, and does not have any added value at the provincial or local level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the demonstration site level there is definitely an added value of MWBP. The programme not only has an important local effect (on livelihoods and ecosystem management), but if successful, they are likely to significantly affect national policy. <p>National ownership is good – VEPA sees MWBP as being part of VEPA, and many staff are closely involved on an almost daily basis on various issues. They are generally positive about managerial and technical aspects of the programme, but would like to see communication enhanced, as they are not always fully informed about all</p>	<p>in other protected areas and wetlands throughout the country.</p> <p>VEPA is positive about activities at the demonstration sites. They have attended meetings at provincial level, but do not have a strong focus on technical aspects at site level. They have a strong influence on policy and practice, and are positive about what is emerging from MWBP in this area.</p>	<p>The Mekong Wetlands are of high national priority, and both VEPA and the national GEF coordination unit (MONRE) agree that these feature high on the national priority list.</p>

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
NMC	<p>aspects of the programme (e.g. CARE). Financial procedures between NPO and IUCN Vietnam are cumbersome. VEPA are aware of important links between MARD, MONRE and MOFI for implementation of MWBP, but there is no close cooperation in this field. VEPA is actively seeking additional NL funds for the programme, but are also strongly considering GEF MSP funds. Strongly supportive of MWBP. National ownership needs to be enhanced in Phase-B, and IUCN should provide TA only. Role of VNMC should perhaps also be more active in next phase; they would like to link MWBP more with the Water Resources Management Programme of MRC, for example. Exchanges between countries should be strengthened under Phase-B, to ensure that lessons learned are shared. Regarding funding options for Phase-B, MWBP needs to identify activities first before seeking (bridging or other) funds.</p>	<p>Tools to improve livelihood for the local people should focus on training and awareness. MWBP has had a slow start, but we now have real achievements, such as the fire and water strategy. Because of the brief time available for implementation we need to take care that the quality of the outputs remains high. The up-scaling of activities in the Plain of Reeds should be the responsibility of the government.</p>	

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
UNDP Country office	<p>The UNDP Country Office is highly critical of MWBP: i) they question the role of VEPA (too broad a mandate, no site responsibility); ii) they wonder if the outputs to date (e.g. fire and water, and co-management) are attributable to MWBP; iii) any regional component should not be managing the programme, but should only be involved in knowledge-sharing. They also question the MSP approach for funding of Phase-B, as the pipeline is over-subscribed, and VEPA would not want an MSP when it could have a FSP for the MWBP. Critical of MWBP management, as this has not managed to draft a proposal on time for UNDP core funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNDP Country Office has little knowledge of what is happening at provincial or field level, as they have not visited the sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wetlands are a high priority, and certainly the wetlands in the Mekong Delta are as well. National priorities (e.g. for GEF funding) may be determined by other factors as well, though.
Other partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DA: Local ownership is good; programme activities are linked with district's initiatives, and local user group strategies for co-management are ideas from the protected areas. • Technical aspects of MWBP are functioning well, but managerial 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DA: project is only just starting, and it is too early to determine actual benefits. • Scope for benefits is promising, especially regarding community benefits, as MWBP activities are complementary to district's poverty 	<p>DA: There is agreement with the conservation approach taken by MWBP, as this supports national regulations and decisions. However, at the local level these must combined with livelihood concerns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
Project beneficiaries	<p>aspects and communications are performing less adequately.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional alignment is appropriate, as programme works with TCNP and LSWR, which both report to district authorities. • Positive response to added value aspect, but remarked that the project is still at a very early stage. • District funds are available for poverty alleviation programme, linked with MWBP livelihood activities (e.g. business plans). The district is able to mobilise funds for investment in eco-tourism, pending the production of an eco-tourism master plan. • Management of both PAs have a good sense of ownership of the project, and are much involved. • Communications with TCNP is close and good, while that with LSWR is reasonable, but more difficult because of more difficult access (e.g. poor telecommunications, lack 	<p>alleviation programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation benefits are already apparent, mainly because of increased awareness. • Approaches are suitable and appropriate, and there is scope for replication and up-scaling. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community benefits look very promising, but have yet to become tangible, mainly due to delays caused by CARE issues. • Conservation benefits are evident from increased awareness, but also from changes in management (e.g. increase in <i>Eleocharis</i> due to 	

Assessment by:	Assessment of: MWBP (ownership, technical, managerial, communication, policy implications, institutional alignment, added value, financing options, other issues)	Demo project (community benefits, conservation benefits, appropriateness of approaches, influence on policy and practice, scope for replication)	Wetland conservation priorities (themes, locations, species)
	<p>of road).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MWBP is important to both PAs, and has a significant added value in terms of changing management approaches, accessing funds, and improving local livelihoods and relationships with local communities. 	<p>changed water regime). Co-management is likely to benefit conservation, once it becomes effective, as the local community will respect the natural resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	

Annex 5 List of documents reviewed

- § Project Brief and Annexes approved by GEF Council in December 2001
- § Programme Support Document signed by four countries and three implementing partners in July 2004
- § M & E Operational Guidelines
- § Financial and Administration guidelines for MWBP
- § Training Strategy and assessment of first year training implementation
- § Communications and Networking Strategy
- § Quarterly Progress Report summaries and detailed activity progress reports
- § Minutes of Executive Steering Committee and Programme Management Committee meetings
- § Facts sheets that provide a two page synopsis of key aspects
- § Strategy documents, concepts and sub-project proposals
- § Situation analysis of the four demonstration sites (4 documents)
- § UNDP TRAC funding proposals for MWBP
- § Partnership Strategy
- § Programme Sustainability Strategy
- § Species Conservation Action Planning process and reports
- § Wetland maps for the demonstration sites
- § Tales of Water project documentation (video)
- § Fire Management Plan for Tram Chim NP
- § Fire and Water Strategy for Tram Chim NP
- § Sustainable Livelihoods Strategy
- § Thai Baan Research in the Lower Songhram River Basin
- § Participatory Poverty Assessments for the four countries demonstration sites
- § Cambodian Mekong Dolphin Conservation Strategy
- § Development and Implementation of a SCAP for the Giant Catfish.
- § Mekong Giant Catfish observation and commenys on handling.
- § Website – www.mekongwetlands.org

Annex 6 Comments by stakeholders

Comments from the following are attached below (and in this order):

- UNDP Cambodia
- UNDP Thailand, on the chapter on the Thailand Component
- Response to UNDP Thailand by the NPC and Project Co-Manager
- IUCN Asia Regional Office, Bangkok
- MWBP team

Comments by UNDP Cambodia*by Lay Khim (Mr.)**Assistant Resident Representative**Team Leader of Environment & Energy Cluster UNDP Cambodia*

I really appreciate great efforts of the review team to put together the draft of the mid-term review report on the above mentioned project. We appreciate the progress and achievements the project has been made so far and we take note of the weakness of the project in general and of the Cambodia component in specific. We don't have any specific objection to any recommendation, rather than to offer our opinions and recommendations for improvement of the report that the mission may wish to consider. In this regard, we would like to offer the following comments and recommendations to improve the Cambodia component.

- § We have noted that the UNDP Trac funded project has been very slow in project delivery since the start up of the project in early 2006. We want to be ensured that the UNDP Trac funded project together with the end of the Phase A will produce outputs and tangible progress that can be documented and shared in the COP10 Ramsar Convention in South Korea in 2008 to raise the profile of Cambodia efforts in wetland management in the international forum.
- § Please take note of the opportunity and the need to build synergy and complementarily between the National Action Plan to combat land degradation and the future UNDP Trac supported National Wetland Action. Baseline information of wetland need to be developed to support the future wetland classification of the country.
- § While we welcome to have a National Wetland Action Plan reviewed and finalized under the support of UNDP Trac funded project, we also have a great concern that the action plan will take some years to get it approved, if communications, consultation and bringing right stakeholders in the right process are not ensured. There is also a need to link the National Wetland Action Plan with a future possibility of having a National Environmental Sustainability Action Plan (CMDG 7). National coordination for ensuring environmental sustainability is necessary (many committees and technical working group on wetland, biodiversity, agriculture, forestry, fishery, land, rural energy.....), thus the existing committees including the future set up Wetland Steering Committee needs to be reviewed, assessed and integrated for the sake of efficiency and effectiveness in coordination.
- § As far as <the> Phase B approach for Cambodia is concerned, we would like to leave the option flexible in terms of implementation arrangement. The decision on the implementation arrangement for the Phase B will need to depend on the capacity assessment of any proposed national lead institution and that should be carried out objectively and independently by external experts. The findings will be put for discussion between various key relevant stakeholders including MoE, the Department of Fishery and UNDP and other on the decision for implementation arrangements.

- § UNDP <would> prefer to go for PDF-B for Phase B <of MWBP> in Cambodia. The scope of Phase B for Cambodia should focus on stabilizing the Mekong Fishery Production through the establishment of Mekong fishery conservation areas from Stung Treng Ramsar site down to Kratie and Kampong Cham. The effort to make a Transboundary Ramsar site between the Lao PDR and Cambodia should be proceeded if this would not be achieved during the Phase A. The Phase B will need to be in line with the Fishery Action Plan and the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP).

- § The focus of the activities and outputs should include Mekong fishery based line generation, establishment of the fishery conservation areas, monitoring, education, community fishery conservation, community livelihoods and the Stung Treng Ramsar site management.

Comments by UNDP Thailand on Chapter 6. Thailand component assessment

*by Ms. Phansiri Winichagoon
Programme Manager, Environment Unit
UNDP Thailand*

6.1.3 Stakeholder participation (in design).

As far as I could investigate with relevant stakeholders, Thailand national agencies like ONEP and TICA had been actively involved in the programme preparation process. However, due to the not-yet ratification of CBD, Thailand was not eligible for GEF support. With great efforts, the programme can draw support from Netherlands government later. However, their criteria of support were for community level only. Therefore, there was no Songkhram participation in the design process.

6.2.1 Country Ownership/ Drivenness

National ownership was the hot issue raised in most of the PMC meeting. With an absence of NPO until very late stage of phase A, communication gap existed, especially between the Songkhram demo, PPO and the national policy agencies. It was obvious that PMC members represented by MONRE, ONEP, MRC, and TNMC had little information of what's going on and how they could actively support or make use of the good work at demo sites (as reported in the meeting). Thanks to the NPC efforts once he got into the post <this has been significantly improved.>

MTE team response: This has been added to 6.2.1.

6.2.2 Implementation approach

I fully agree with the observation that LFA is not actively being used in the context of the Thai component. I am still in doubt about LFA and programme work plan for Thailand which ONEP mentioned occasionally that they had no idea what this was based on. Considering more than 10 outputs to be delivered and late involvement of the NPC, it was quite ambitious to achieve this unrealistic work plan.

Regarding the M&E system, I think the other aspect might be to prove its applicability i.e. accessibility, users visit, and application of the tools provided.

Speaking for TNMC, the problems were not only the "bypass", but skepticism on transparency in the recruitment process before the present NPC was in place and also the judgment that IUCN introduced their favourable expert into the Executive Steering Committee.

MTE team response: This has been added to 6.2.2.

Key of success in better relationship between NPO (with ONEP) and other levels may lie upon the clever working approach of the NPC. I may say that this is a personality and sincerity. This lessens a lot of tension by the conventional donor-driven approach.

It is noted that MWBP implementation approach was too happy with the safeguard of good results of the demo sites. In fact, MWBP could not claim the whole credit for the success of Songkram Thai Baan research since this was not initiated by the MWBP. Songkram people got through all hardship in protecting their homeland of traditional wetland livelihoods, with petition to the Queen and got an award some years ago. Songkram people were special in this aspect and this is a good foundation for whatever activities created. It might be more interesting to point out the niche that MWBP added value to the Thai Baan research and the Songkram initiatives. Then, MWBP can claim the credit with real pride.

Significant weakness of MWBP was the linkages of good work at demo sites and the recognition of the policy level in order to help solving the big policy issue that harm the local good efforts (e.g. dam construction) and mobilize more resources to maintain the ecosystem and livelihoods.

MTE team response: Agreed, this has been added to 6.2.2.

6.2.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

UNDP did not testify suggestion to improve the reporting format. But I agreed with what had been stated. Actually, I am more interested in evaluation of scientific/technical assessment done by MWBP. How far the studies could serve the project stakeholders. How well MWBP could verify the tangible outputs both at demo sites, provincial and national level.

6.2.4 Stakeholders Participation (in implementation)

While the report stated that the provincial programme demonstrates high level of participation, in fact, there was still a gap in drawing support from provincial level to help Songkram people in community planning. Participation should not be defined merely showing up in meetings with promise of support but no real actions. The contradicting fact was the dam construction which reflected least understanding of the officials on wetland ecosystem and Songkram livelihoods. Should this be MWBP niche? with plenty of technical experts and studies, to convince the policy level and advocacy network both at national and regional level. There are various strategies to make the “neutral position” more meaningful, not just providing a plain studies and being out of troubles.

6.3.1 Effectiveness – the enabling environment

It is not fair to state that “the slow response to MWBP from TNMC, may be an indication of conflicting priority interests and that Thailand is not strongly committed to regional wetland planning”. In fact, TNMC have various regional projects also, ONEP has been highly committed to the regional wetland planning.

In the last paragraph of page 46 I would like to clarify that TRAC funds is UNDP Thailand core funding committed to the Thailand component. It is unfortunate that the evaluation team did not recognize this at all. UNDP Thailand core funding is timely used to bridge between phase A and the uncertain phase B. If the evaluation team got through the project document I provided, you will find the strategy of this bridging project to fill the gap of linkages between local and national level, including the upscaling of Songkram good work in terms of networking. To solve the complicated modality in project execution, ONEP (not MWBP, please correct) has been given overall responsibility to manage these funds of 125,000 USD. Upon good results of this bridging project it will form a good justification for the national MWBP phase B to be submitted for GEF support. We will work closely with MONRE, the national GEF operational focal point, which GEF strategic priority the national project will fit in. This is considered an exit strategy if the regional MWBP phase B is unlikely.

MTE team response: The MTE team is aware that TRAC funds are UNDP core funding, but agree that this could have been formulated better in 6.3.1 – the text has been adjusted accordingly.

6.3.2 Effectiveness/ impact - technical

I agree with paragraph 2, please see my comment on 6.2.4 above. It's true that MWBP can not be expected to resolve all issues in a sub basin like Songkram. However, considering the project geographical coverage, it's about the size which a regional programme like MWBP could make more significant results.

6.3.3 Sustainability

It seems sustainability of Songkram efforts is threatened by the lack of policy advocacy. However, the ending sentence makes us so desperate since “there is not much that MWBP can (or should) do about such threats other than take note. I still have hope that the policy agencies are rationale enough if we can provide convincing evidence-based information, given that we can also draw alliances with non-offensive actions.

MTE team response: Agreed, a more pro-active stance should be taken, and this is now reflected in the wording.

6.4.1 Remainder of phase A

UNDP TRAC fund is proposed for what should be done in the remainder of phase A. Actions in second and third paragraph of page 49 are identified as UNDP TRAC project activities.

Regarding the system boundary, I wonder if the “FLOW” studies can help defining the areas.

Response to UNDP Thailand's comments by Tawatchai Rattanasorn, NPC & Khun Rattaphon, the Project Co-Manager of Thailand Component of MWBP.

Thai Baan research work at Songkram

- First, I agreed with you that “Songkram people were special... and ...a good foundation for whatever activities created.” There are, some details regarding the history of participatory wetland management that are easily overlooked in this case. There is occasionally some confusion about the Songkram people's movement from the earlier PER, TERRA programme working here between 1996 and 2001, therefore I will provide you with my best understanding of the history at Songkram:
- Between 1990 and 2001 a network of local people in Ban Dongsarn, Ban Tha Rae and a few other villages, was created to protect their natural resources and livelihoods since the incursions of the Suntech company planting eucalyptus on public lands and opposition to the Songkram Dam project from 1990-2001. But that people's network was different from the Songkram Tai Baan Research Network which was started in a process by IUCN – MWBP during the preparation phase (in four villages) since 2003.
- Songkram Tai Baan Research was initiated by IUCN-MWBP, with SEARIN acting as consultants and partnership with the Nakhon Phanom Environmental Conservation Club (NECC), given the interest of key local people to visit the earlier Tai Baan Research process at Rasi Salai. This was followed by a series of Training workshops with Research Assistants and local Tai Baan researchers. The process involved building on and adapting earlier lessons on the Mun River. Furthermore, I feel strongly that the Tai Baan methodology initiative by local people may not have taken place without the strong support and facilitation by IUCN-MWBP over three years of implementation.

Weakness in policy level work:

- Thai Baan research is boosting the understanding of communities and local government officials of the links between rivers, wetlands, lands, forests, and rural livelihoods. Thai Baan research has rapidly gained credibility by ‘bringing in’ and respecting the knowledge of local fishers and farmers, and effectively communicating their knowledge to other actors through photo exhibitions, posters, Thai and English booklets, and videos etc. As well as providing a wealth of information and local knowledge, Thai Baan research has become a vehicle for developing networks of local people to share experiences, as it provides a forum for analysis and dialogue, which can then attempt to deal with immediate management issues as well as large scale infrastructure.
- Thai Baan research has earned respect and recognition for the reasons I mention above. And the continuation of the UNDP TRAC project on “Support to Thailand Wetlands Management Policy and Implementation” .These qualities are precursors to influencing policy; therefore I hope you can agree that good progress has been made towards bridging the gap between the work at the demonstration sites and changes at the policy level. The communities also have greater influence in presenting a case in policy processes as they are able to present local knowledge in a systematic way, based on empirical knowledge. I believe that a Highly Satisfactory assessment of the implementation approach signifies the MTE recognition that this is a step-by-step process.

Additional comments:

- TNMC and DWR representatives visited Songkram in late 2004 and were given a tour of flooded forest and wetlands at Ban Tha Bor, plus a description of TB Research by local people. Hence, they should understand the Songkhram situation and history well by now.
- The Queen's Royal Project was not initiated until late 2005, and Army personnel came to MWBP for advice on how they might proceed with project implementation and details about the TB Research. This was provided to them by MWBP Songkram Demonstration Site, and the Project Co-Manager (Rattaphon) was invited to be a Committee member, along with Khun Sansonthi (govt. sector MWBP Co-Manager) as Secretary. Hence, this came well after Thai Baan Research had proved successful.

Comments by IUCN Asia Regional Office, Bangkok

by Andrew W. Ingles
Regional Group Head
Ecosystems & Livelihoods, Bangkok

1. IUCN seeks further clarification from the MTE team regarding the use of the term "country ownership". Let me explain why this is sought. IUCN has learnt about and responded to concerns about "country ownership" of the MWBP as expressed by the Government of Lao PDR (GoL) only. This related to the work of MWBP in Attapeu Province. In this case, the "ownership" issues were explored in some depth, understood and handled successfully. No other Governments have expressed "country ownership" concerns directly to IUCN, rather we are hearing about them as an over-riding concern indirectly through the UNDP country offices and the MTE review team. For this reason, IUCN would appreciate more information about the specific issues being alluded to and clarity about where they have originated from? Wherever "country ownership" is used in the report, can the MTE team please explain exactly what is being said, by which part of Government?

MTE team response: This has been added. In Cambodia, the conclusion that ownership does not appear to be high is actually supported by MWBP's M&E reporting for 2005, which rates ownership as 'low-medium'. In Thailand, this was the view of most members of the NSC until recently (see 6.2.1), while in Lao PDR a repeated concern mentioned at central level during this MTE was that this was an IUCN project not a GoL project.

2. It is pleasing to see that the good work of the PMU, NPOs, PPOs, and field teams has been recognised by the MTE team. However, this recognition is then put aside and a negative picture presented via the MTE assessments about progress in establishing an "enabling environment". These MTE assessments are presented without the necessary context about what the MWBP was supposed to do in the first 2 years, what sort of funding was available for what in the period, how MWBP performed in regard to the original standards and how the MTE has changed the definition of the required "enabling environment" and applied new standards retro-actively in its evaluation.

MTE team response: What MWBP was to achieve during Phase A is unclear, not only to the MTE but also to government and NGO partners. This is partly due to an unclear original design of the programme, which, for example, lacked a clear definition of the 'enabling environment'. It is also due to changes made to the logframe by the PMU – while the MTE finds that these changes make the logframe clearer, the development of this revised logframe by the PMU has clearly not involved the main stakeholders. The MTE does not find that it has changed the definition of the enabling environment. As indicated in the TOR for the MTE, the enabling environment involves both the establishment of structures and capacity for programme implementation (offices, staffing, training, management mechanisms, partnerships), and creating attitudes, understanding, national capacity and ownership that lead to sustainability. PMU achievements to date have largely been administrative and 'technical', and these successes are about putting systems in place that are related to the establishment of a project. The more difficult but more important part of establishing an enabling environment is creating an environment in which governments feel confident and have the tools to engage with wetland/biodiversity issues. The lack of achievement on the latter is partly understandable, given that the programme has been effectively operating only one year due to a slow start-up, and the MTE acknowledges that more progress may be made during the remainder of Phase A. However, more needs to be achieved with national host agencies and in achieving ownership of the programme, so that real progress can be made in terms of sustainability.

IUCN understands that the recent changes to GEF funding mean that national ownership of wetland conservation activities is an important issue for assessing an enabling environment for the future of the programme, because decision-making for GEF resources is shifting much more to the country level. While it understands this, IUCN believes that it is unfair not to make this changed nature of the MTE assessment clear in the report. Indeed, the assessments as they stand do not offer an accurate picture of how MWBP performed according to its original and agreed plans. This weakness of the draft report is further compounded by the fact that the MTE report appears to offer judgements on performance in a two year period based on a five year design. IUCN thinks that the MWBP has done a good job, so we are disappointed that the judgements that are now being made as a result of political changes to the GEF Resource Allocation Framework (and hence re-definition of the enabling environment) do not allow for MWBP's successes to be fully appreciated and presented in this report.

MTE team response: The changes at GEF have not affected the position of the MTE team regarding the evaluation of MWBP. As mentioned above, the MTE team has based itself on what the TOR states in terms of the enabling environment, and it is not our understanding that this has been affected by recent changes in GEF policy. The MTE team's assessment has been based on agreed to work plans, and on the TOR, no more, no less. The MTE team categorically refutes the notion that MWBP has been judged on the basis of recent GEF RAF and policy changes – it has been evaluated on the basis of achievements relative to work plans and goals. When looking to the future – as the MTE has been required to do – we have obviously had to take note of these changes at the GEF as they have major consequences for an eventual Phase B.

3. There have been misconceptions about the proportion of the budget allocated to regional versus other results, and the costs of project management versus technical work. It was hoped that the MTE would be able to present a clear picture of budget use and costs to address these misconceptions. I understand that the MWBP team will be re-presenting the necessary data to the team.

MTE team response: The MTE team has worked on the basis of figures and explanations provided by the PMU, including an overview of regional versus PMU costs provided by PMU after the MTE presentation on 20 June in Vientiane, and stands by its analysis. PMU presented the argument that some of the regional costs could be construed as being national costs, which the MTE team is willing to accept, but the overall picture remains the same. The MTE team was informed that PMU planned to recategorise costs in the near future, but we have not received any such revisions. The key point is that the imbalance between regional/PMU costs versus national costs is likely to remain.

4. The significant contribution and role of non-GEF funds and activities in supporting MWBP implementation, such as from IUCN's Water and Nature Initiative are not given due recognition in the report, which means the influence and leverage power of the GEF funds achieved by the MWBP is not recognised.

MTE team response: Leveraging of funds by MWBP is given recognition in the draft MTE, in sections 4.2.5, 6.2.5, 7.2.5 and 8.2.5, and co-funding by IUCN-WANI is specifically mentioned in 7.2.5.

5. There are several references to the absence of a regional strategy driving the MWBP. IUCN disagrees that this is the case. I understand that the MWBP team will respond with more detail, but it should be pointed out that the "operational strategy" for the first two years was to focus on establishing the country level and demonstration site components of the programme, weaving national policy and practice together, exploring trans-boundary and cross-sector issues and commencing the participatory development of a regional strategy. It is a pity that the MTE team did not recognise better the approach, elements and necessary evolution of a regional strategy with broad-based ownership that goes beyond a single species or theme.

MTE team response: The MTE observes that there is no regional strategy. For one, it is not documented in the Project Brief, Programme Support Document, or in subsequent strategy documents – nor has PMU been able to provide evidence of a clear strategy. The approach (which is not a strategy) is as you outline above: this can be summarised as MWBP focusing on national programmes and exploring various transboundary and cross-sector options, out of which a strategy will evolve. The MTE team agrees that creating broad-based ownership for a regional strategy takes time, and goes beyond single species or themes. However, MWBP seems to have missed an opportunity as this would seem to be one of the key areas on which to focus during Phase A. While a strategy could not have been drafted early on the programme, it should be one of the key outputs of Phase A, which should aim to provide a robust framework and rationale for Phase B support. The MTE team believes that it is advisable for the MWBP to put this in place prior to the end of Phase A, and has made some suggestions for the ‘pillars’ for such a strategy.

6. IUCN believes there is a need for a regional programme such as MWBP and regrets that the MTE team apparently does not share this view. Not only does the effective management of wetland ecosystems and ecological processes in the Mekong region demand a trans-boundary approach, but the efficiencies and gains possible by coordinating efforts and addressing issues at a regional scale should be self-apparent. Apart from GEF, the rest of the world is orienting itself more and more into regional constructs, institutions and associations (including the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands). IUCN's vision has been for the MWBP to be a flagship programme to follow this trend in regard to the management of wetland ecosystems. The structural changes in GEF can be seen as a regression. If the GEF RAF had not been changed, I believe we would not be in this situation arguing the value of a regional programme with the MTE in an obvious situation of competition over inadequate financial resources.

MTE team response: The MTE team recognises the importance of regional coordination and dialogue, and this is amply reflected in the draft MTE report, including some practical suggestions on the scope of a future regional programme. The MTE team emphasizes it does not see the need to continue managing on-the-ground activities at national and demonstration site level from a regional structure. This must be one of the outcomes of a successful Phase A – why is the programme creating an enabling environment for, otherwise? MWBP must see that, due to its success in Phase A in creating the enabling environment at national level at least, there can and should be less regional/PMU involvement in national programmes in Phase B. This approach is well-outlined in our recommendations, e.g. Recommendation 10: “For Phase B, the MTE considers that the Regional Component should be more modest than that undertaken during Phase-A, with less emphasis on directly providing technical inputs, and with more emphasis on coordination, establishing linkages, developing proposals to secure additional finances, and providing small grants for innovative approaches.” The MTE emphasises the value of regional projects and programmes (and lists a great number operating in the region) but finds that the MWBP approach is not working in a regional context and might do better to align itself with these other projects/programmes by WWF, Wetlands Alliance, Oxfam and so on, or with MRC programmes, on which MWBP has so far failed to build. These aspects and recommendations have perhaps been overlooked by IUCN.

In closing I would urge the MTE team not to dismiss so easily and unfairly, the current and future value of MWBP as a regional initiative (as well as its value at the local and national scales), given the clear logic for it, the significant investment already sunk, and the remarkable progress achieved in a short time towards important national and regional interests in wetland biodiversity and livelihoods.

MTE team response: IUCN fails to appreciate that, if a programme is successful in the field of capacity building, it makes itself at least partly redundant. The MTE team is not dismissing what has been achieved to date, but values what has been achieved and sees that this forms the basis for a positive continuation of largely successful country programmes alongside a continued regional programme/PMU but on a much more modest scale than during phase A.

Comments by the MWBP team (PMU + National and Provincial offices)

The following comments are a synthesis of the comments provided to the UNDP Team Leader by various members of the MWBP team at regional, national and provincial levels.

The MTE team appreciates the detailed comments from the MWBP team, but as these arrived after the date of submittal of the final report (which was due 15 July), only obvious factual errors could be corrected. The rest of the MWBP team's comments are included here, apart from the specific comments not related to the recommendations.

The comments are organized in terms of

1. General observations
2. MTE process
3. Clarifications of major issues
4. Specific issues and correction of fact

1. General Observations

- The MTE was conducted in a very brief time period and had to cover a large geographic and technical area. Inevitably it has not been possible to follow-up on all the different aspects that were discussed with the different stakeholders, with the result that some errors and misconceptions have arisen – this set of comments attempts to address these both for the record, and because in some instances the analysis and recommendations may need to be changed.
- Whilst the overall findings of the MTE are generally very positive, the MWBP staff consider that roles and responsibilities of the PMU and the regional component have been misrepresented and misunderstood. This has led to conclusions about the regional work that have missed the point leading to a devaluation of this work and its importance for the future.
- With the new GEF funding situation requiring a very different structure for Phase B, there has been a tendency for the MTE team to consider the Phase A as a stand-alone project rather than as the “inception phase” for a complex and major programme. This has meant that the project is sometimes being assessed for what it intended to do in 5 years rather than in the 2 years of Phase A, e.g. the discussion on the achievement of regional indicators. Such a view tends to overlook the long-term objectives and strategy of Phase A which was to establish the national and provincial work, with less emphasis upon the regional, which was always intended to develop in Phase B once these had been established.

2. The MTE Process

- During the course of the MTE, there appeared to be a view by the team that this evaluation was done on behalf of the GEF alone, and not including the other major donor, the Royal Netherlands Government. This was pointed out on several occasions by the staff, but this view appears to be continued in that the title page of the report mentions only the GEF and not the Netherlands. There is also very little reference and analysis of the Dutch funding of the MRC components to the MWBP, such as the IBFM work and guiding principles.
- At the beginning of the evaluation, it was expected that the team would present their approach and methodology. As a result of delays in arrival and shortage of time thereafter, this was never presented formally to the MWBP. The use of a questionnaire is mentioned in Annex 6 of the report, together with the findings. However, no sample of the questionnaire was provided, despite

requests for clarification of the methodology. The result of this lack of transparency was that the MWBP staff were often unclear of the point and direction of questions, and so were less able to provide all the relevant documentation and clarification.

- Whilst staff members from the PMU and national and provincial offices attended the entry and exit meetings and were able to respond to issues and questions raised at these meetings, the general feeling from staff is that the team rarely came back to them to check the validity of statements discussed with other stakeholders, particularly when these were critical. Various key members of the PMU in particular have expressed a feeling that the team did not really interview them on their work, achievements and challenges.
- At the final exit workshop, the recommendations were presented, admittedly as ideas that had not been fully thought through. Some of these raised significant areas of discussion and questioning of appropriateness and time frame. These discussion points do not seem to have been taken on board. In retrospect, it would probably have been better to have presented the analysis of the issues found, with some of the options that could be considered, rather than as a prescriptive recommendation. This would have been a more constructive and inclusive way of developing the ideas for the continuation of the programme rather than presenting premature and seemingly prejudged recommendations.

3. Clarifications

Running through all of the report there are several themes often based upon misunderstandings, which need to be clarified more generally rather than in the specific comments on the country components.

These relate to:

1. Logframe
2. Workplanning and Budgeting
3. Balance of expenditures between Regional and national components

3.1 Logframe

The logframe in the original programme brief was changed in the programme document to show a regional and four national components, with very similar structures and outputs. This logframe was developed in consultation in each of the four countries and agreed by them. The budget allocations from the GEF were allocated to some, but not all, of the outputs. These outputs have remained the same throughout the implementation and the workplans have been derived from them.

When the programme started in 2004, the logframe was revised by refining and clarifying the indicators and assumptions, especially at the outcome level. This process was undertaken by the M&E JPO (co-finance from IUCN Headquarters) and the Programme Administrator, with assistance from an international consultant (based in Lao PDR) and national consultants in Lao PDR and Cambodia. Through a consultative process in both Lao and Cambodia, involving national and provincial offices, and host agencies, the revised logframe was produced, presented and approved by the 2nd Executive Regional Steering Committee. Subsequently during 2005, after an M & E training workshop attended by all country offices and with representation from host agencies, which was followed by visits by the M & E team to those offices, the logframe elements for Thailand and Vietnam were developed. There were also some minor clarifications of the indicators and assumptions for the Cambodia and Lao components. This finalised logframe was attached as an annex to the report on indicators in January 2006 and presented at the 3rd ERSC, though it was not formally approved at that meeting.

Once in place the logframe has been principally used for monitoring. Whilst it is the guiding document, it is not used regularly by all involved, and so it is understandable that with the movement of staff in agencies working with the programme over time, that some people may be less aware of the logframe than others.

3.2 Workplanning and Budgeting

The logframe outputs have always been the basis for the development of the workplan, and this is the operational document developed each year and recorded in the programme database. At the beginning in 2004, the workplan was sketched out for each component, principally by the PMU, because staff at the national and provincial offices were not yet in place. This workplan was approved by the first ERSC after the signing ceremony. The purpose of this first workplan was to show the sorts of activities anticipated in each of the outputs. Subsequent workplans were always developed by the national and provincial offices with guidance from the PMU. During the later stages of 2004, the 2005 workplan was developed, again in consultation with offices and partners, e.g. planning workshop in Stung Treng in November 2004, but the degree of involvement depended upon the status of the offices and the staff there – thus there was little process in Vietnam in 2004 because they had not yet signed the document.

The role of the PMU in this process has come in for criticism by some people interviewed by the MTE as being overly directive. Actually there has been an intentional shift from the initial development of the workplan by the PMU before the project started, through to a much greater development by the national and provincial offices for the 2005 workplan and this will continue. This is part of the capacity building process, and there should not be so much emphasis upon the early stages of Phase A in which the PMU did play a directive role. It should also be remembered that Phase A is a DEX modality and so the overall responsibility for ensuring that a) the workplan activities and budgets are appropriate to the outputs in the programme document and b) the workplan is realistic and achievable, lies with the PMU.

During the development of the workplan for 2006 in late 2005, the process was undeniably difficult and long for all offices and this probably added to the feeling that the PMU was overly directive. It was however, the first time that this had been done as a team. The reasons for this were several in that the actual amounts available for 2006 were not entirely clear – different sources of funds for different purposes, how much would the carry over be from 2005, what was committed under contracts etc. The clarification by GEF that the funds could be applied more generally rather than to specific outputs helped a more flexible approach, but this only came in October 2005.

As the workplan was developed by the national and provincial offices, guidance by the PMU often tended to be geared towards making the workplans more realistic in what could be achieved in the time, and the application of the funds between the different countries. The first trial workplans for 2006 were often very optimistic, and were significantly overbudgeted, so these had to be corrected by the PMU through an iterative and often tedious process for all concerned. The fact that there was an underspend on activities in 2005 and the first half of 2006 indicates that there is a difference between what is in the workplan and what can actually be achieved, i.e. a lower capacity to deliver everything that the offices would want.

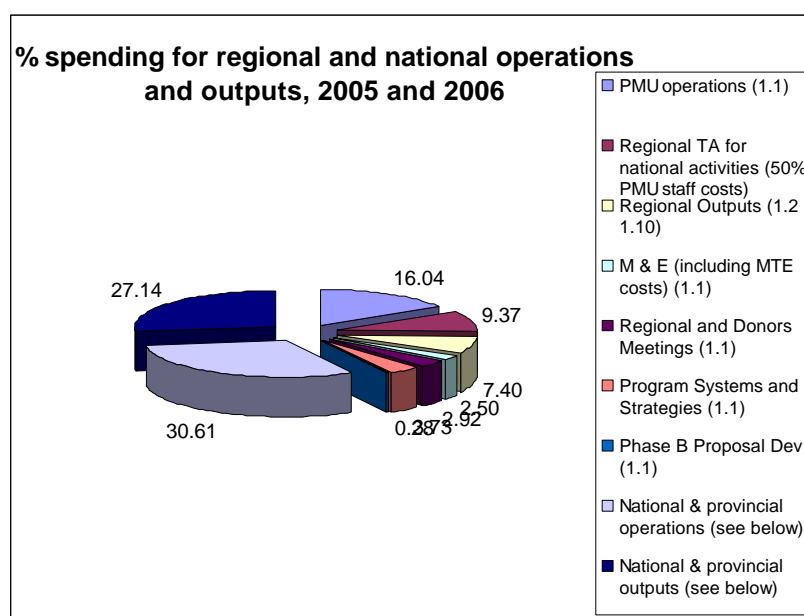
3.3 Balance of expenditures between Regional and national components

The MTE makes a considerable emphasis upon the expenditures of the regional compared to the national components, making reference to the burden that the national components have to bear in supporting the regional component. This is a misconception that needs to be corrected. It stems from the fact that all of the regional, national and provincial operating costs were originally lumped together in output 1.1 and this output carries the bulk of the funds. It also does not take into account the fact that at least 50% of the staff time from the PMU is spent in providing technical advice for specific activities at the national and provincial levels.

A clearer analysis of the spending between regional and national components has been made, and this should be used in describing expenditures. The table and pie-chart below shows the balance between the PMU and regional activities, and the national components. This analysis shows that some 16% of the total expenditure of the core funds (from GEF, UNDP and Dutch) is spent on the regional PMU costs, with an additional 9% of the total being contributed as TA from the PMU to the national activities. Each of the country operations and outputs are more or less the same (about 15% of the total expenditure). Note that Thailand outputs are lower because it does not receive GEF funds, but operations are higher because of higher salaries in Thailand etc. The total of the national components plus the regional TA to national comes up to 67% of the total expenditure. The Regional outputs are only 7.4% of the total expenditure, a figure which reflects the original low budget allocations for Phase A of the GEF in the programme document.

The MTE is requested to make appropriate changes to correct any misconceptions about these financial aspects.

		Actual spend	Budget	
	% of total	2004+2005	2,006	TOTAL
PMU operations (1.1)	16.04	454,413	411,650	866,063
Regional TA for national activities (50% PMU staff cost)	9.37	236,132	269,850	505,982
Regional Outputs (1.2 - 1.10)	7.40	90,911	308,585	399,496
M & E (including MTE costs) (1.1)	2.50	17,527	117,550	135,077
Regional and Donors Meetings (1.1)	2.92	58,238	99,565	157,803
Program Systems and Strategies (1.1)	3.73	117,116	84,160	201,276
Phase B Proposal Dev (1.1)	0.28	15,000		15,000
National & provincial operations (see below)	30.61	809,722	842,623	1,652,345
National & provincial outputs (see below)	27.14	461,001	1,004,302	1,465,303
TOTAL		2,260,061	3,138,285	5,398,346
Cambodia operations (in 1.1)	7.21	206,113	182,937	389,050
Cambodia outputs (2.1 - 2.14)	7.48	115,249	288,655	403,904
Lao operations (in 1.1)	7.64	217,482	195,146	412,628
Lao Outputs (3.1 - 3.14)	6.30	124,221	215,620	339,841
Thailand operations (in 1.1)	8.94	226,395	256,400	482,795
Thailand outputs (4.1 - 4.14)	4.61	57,416	191,673	249,089
Vietnam Operations (in 1.1)	6.81	159,732	208,140	367,872
Vietnam outputs (5.1 - 5.14)	8.75	164,116	308,354	472,470



4. Comments on Recommendations

Many of the recommendations have been discussed in the context of the national and regional components, but one or two points should be made:

- Recommendation 1: Building national ownership undoubtedly is an aim and there are a number of different routes to this. The practicality of an immediate change over of reporting lines from PPO to NPO is questioned. Whilst it is recognized that this will happen as national Phase B projects are developed, a more realistic timetable will be the end of Phase A, whenever this is. In the meantime steps can and will be taken to strengthen the coordination linkages between the NPO and PPO.
- Recommendation 2: the downsizing of the PMU and establishment of an SMT. This is premised on the assumption that release of additional funds for national work will then be made available for national components. This needs to be checked out, but the recommendation that another independent business review should be commissioned to follow-up an already expensive mid-term evaluation, should be questioned. An alternative would be to request the PMU team to develop different scenarios for completing the Phase A activities identified by the MTE, whilst at the same time addressing issues of national ownership; these alternatives could then be discussed by the PMC meeting. It had been hoped that the MTE itself would have been able to provide several options for this.
- Recommendation 3: Who helps the NPOs and PPOs to raise additional co-finance and Phase B proposals? The re-budgeting process will start in early August with an already anticipated team meeting in Vientiane.
- Recommendation 7: strengthen biodiversity focus of the work. This is part of the ongoing work, and whilst the MTE recognizes the pioneering work on the livelihoods side, it has not recognized the state of the art work on Wetland Inventory Assessment and Monitoring, that characterizes all of the wetland biodiversity work in each of the demonstration sites. This may be because there has been an emphasis from UNDP and the nations for livelihoods work on the ground, and all of the biodiversity work is seen as studies that do not lead anywhere.
- Recommendation 9: the table of GEF funding support needs to be amended, in the light of the new GEF rule that not more than 50% of the available Resource Allocation Framework allocations to each country can be used within the first two years of GEF 4. This has significant implications for the availability of GEF funds especially for Cambodia and Thailand. The Lao NPO wished for greater clarification of the question marks in this table.