

NGOs set one-year deadline to stop Xayaburi dam

March 31 2014



Progression and impacts of xayaburi dam constructiob. Credit: fmkellogg

Leading non-governmental organisations (NGOs) today issued a joint declaration in opposition to on-going construction of the Xayaburi dam on the Mekong River mainstem, and called on the Thai government to cancel the Power Purchase Agreement relating to the controversial hydropower project.

The declaration, signed by 39 international and national NGOs and civil society groups, including International Rivers and WWF, comes ahead of this week's Mekong River Commission (MRC) Summit, attended by heads of government from the four Lower Mekong countries. The summit will address challenges facing the Mekong River Basin and regional cooperation.

As the first dam to enter the MRC's consultation process, the Xayaburi project is a crucial test case for 10 other dams proposed for the Lower Mekong mainstem. The MRC process requires countries to jointly review projects proposed for the Mekong mainstem with an aim to reach consensus on whether they proceed or not.

"Cambodia and Viet Nam have never approved of the Xayaburi dam. Nevertheless, Laos is marching ahead with construction without agreement among its neighbours," said Kraisak Choonhavan, leading environmental activist and former Chairman of Thailand's Senate Foreign Affairs Committee. "The Xayaburi project severely weakens the legitimacy of the MRC and threatens the health and productivity of the Mekong River and Delta, which could leave millions facing food insecurity. The Mekong Summit is the critical moment for Cambodia and Viet Nam to take a strong stance and make their concerns heard loud and clear before it's too late."

According to Pöyry, the Finnish consulting firm advising Laos on the dam engineering, a coffer dam - used to divert the river's flow away from the in-river construction site - will be built in the first quarter of 2015. This will be the first direct intervention in the river bed during the dry season, and will mark the start of major irreversible environmental impacts.

Thailand main consumer of energy produced by

Xayaburi dam



Thailand is slated to be the prime consumer of the electricity produced by the \$US3.8 billion Xayaburi dam, and a syndicate of six Thai banks is financing the project, despite the acute environmental and social costs, and the uncertainties surrounding the financial return of the project.

"It's not too late to stop this disastrous dam before irreversible harm occurs early next year," said Dr. Saranarat Oy Kanjanavanit, Secretary-General of Thailand's Green World Foundation. "Thailand must act responsibly and cancel its premature power purchase agreement until there is regional consensus on mainstem Mekong dams. And if the Thai

banks reconsider their risk assessments, and value their international reputation and financial returns, they'd do well to pull out of this project."

One of the world's most damaging dams

In the joint declaration, the organizations recognise the Xayaburi project as one of the potentially most damaging dams currently under construction anywhere in the world, constituting the greatest transboundary threat to date to food security, sustainable development and regional cooperation in the Lower Mekong, and that the project's Environmental Impact Assessment does not meet any internationally-accepted standards.



Expert reviews of Xayaburi dam have identified serious gaps in data and weaknesses with the proposed fish passes for the mega dam, and confirmed the Xayaburi project will block part of the sediment flow, destabilising the river's ecosystem upon which farmers, fishers and many other economic sectors depend.

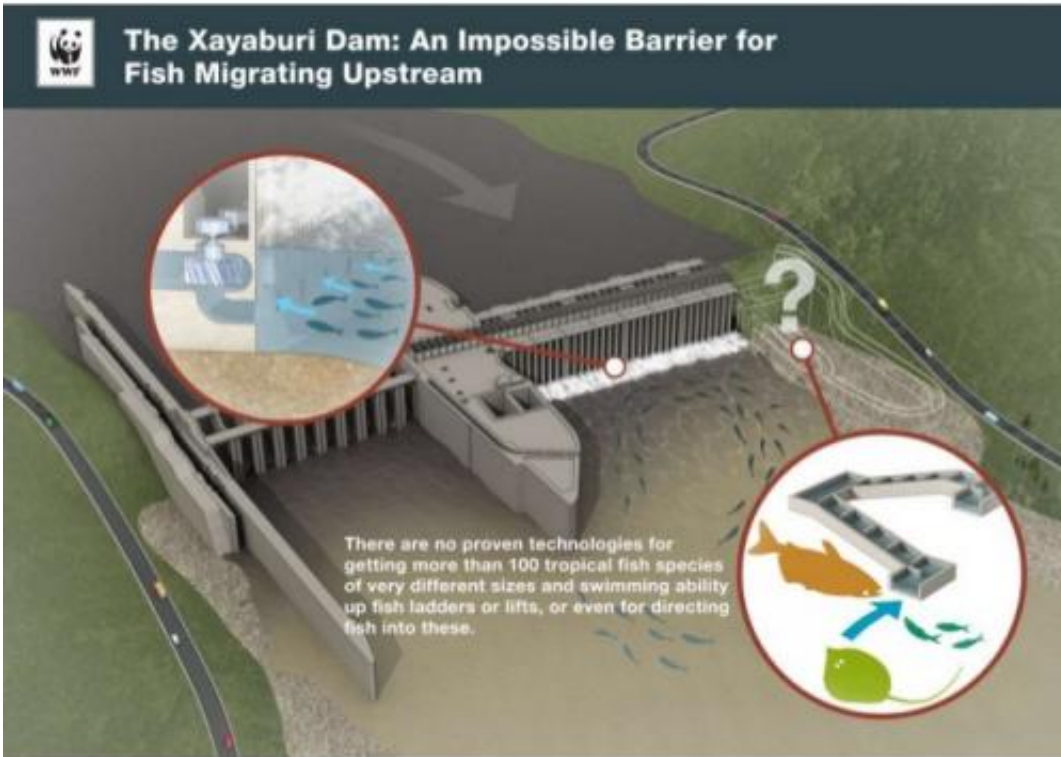
"Without the results of the on-going environmental studies, dam development on the lower Mekong mainstream is now largely guesswork," said Ame Trandem, Southeast Asia Programme Director for International Rivers. "But Laos expects its neighbours to take a dangerous leap of faith and trust that the risks associated with this project will somehow be resolved while construction moves ahead. This dubious approach not only pre-empt the conclusions of the studies, but clearly contravenes international best practice."



The Lower Mekong, one of the world's last large untamed stretches of river, supports nearly 60 million people with its rich fisheries. In order for migratory fish to move up and down the river they would need swim through the dam via the proposed fish passages.

No proven solutions for mitigating Xayaburi dam's impacts

"There are no internationally accepted, technologically proven solutions for mitigating the Xayaburi [dam](#)'s impacts on fish migrations and sediment flows," said Marc Goichot, Sustainable Hydropower Lead with WWF-Greater Mekong. "Resting the future of the Mekong on flawed analysis could have dire consequences for the livelihoods of millions of people living in the Mekong Basin."



The NGO coalition supports Viet Nam's official response to the MRC's consultation process on 15 April, 2011 in which Viet Nam strongly requested "that the decision on the Xayaburi hydropower project as well as all other planned hydropower projects on the Mekong mainstem be deferred for at least 10 years", a recommendation previously stated by the MRC's 2010 Environmental Assessment for proposed mainstem dams.

Provided by WWF

Citation: NGOs set one-year deadline to stop Xayaburi dam (2014, March 31) retrieved 5 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-03-ngos-one-year-deadline-xayaburi.html>

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