

# Evaluating development and diplomacy outcomes through AWP partnerships in the Mekong

**An evaluation by Strategic Development Group**

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Prepared by Strategic Development Group, for the Australian Water Partnership.

## Disclaimer

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# 1 Executive Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

The program under review is the Australia-Mekong Water Facility (AMWF), which started in early 2019 and is due to be completed in June 2024. AMWF was established through a grant agreement between DFAT's Vientiane Post and eWater Group to strengthen Australia's bilateral relations with Mekong countries in the water sector. AMWF forms one component of DFAT's broader Mekong Australia Partnership Water Energy Climate (MAP-WEC) program.

The primary objective of the evaluation is to focus on how partnerships have contributed to development and diplomacy outcomes from AMWF under AWP Phase 2. The effective consideration and delivery of Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) within the different partnerships is a priority focus of the evaluation.

As set out in the Evaluation Plan, the evaluation conducted a mixed-methods approach. Partners (both Australia-based and those representing the respective Mekong governments) were consulted through a combination of remote and in-person interviews conducted in Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam. Data collection also included documentation compilation, review, and analysis; processing and analysis of secondary project data; and validation presentations both to Post in Bangkok, and to AWP. In total 66 partners participated either in key informant interviews or focus group discussions that were held in Australia and in the Mekong, the majority of which were conducted in person.

Responses to the first round of interviews from partner governments were lower than expected, but this was addressed during in-country visits when Mekong government partners met with the team. All scheduled meetings with Mekong governments took place as planned. No other major data collection issues affected the evaluation.

## 1.2 Key Findings

### 1.1.1 Relevance

The relevance of AMWF to Australia's broader relationship with partner country governments varies greatly within the Mekong region. This is in large part due to the different development trajectories of each country within the region. As such it is useful to consider the relevance of the program at an individual country level. In Lao PDR AMWF is central to Australia's relationship with the Lao government and provides considerable visibility. In Thailand, AMWF provides important support under the broader Strategic Partnership, although the support is tiny in comparison to the value of trade between the countries. Vietnam displays elements of both Laos and Thailand in terms of the relevance of the AMWF to Australia's broader objectives in the country, and whilst the investment is small it provides a valuable mechanism for Post to respond to requests from the Vietnamese government. The evaluation did find, however, that AMWF's work is highly relevant to Australia's work in Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam.

### 1.1.2 Effectiveness

The review examined both the efficacy of the partnership modality, and the extent to which AMWF has been effective in delivering development and diplomatic outcomes. As part of the evaluation a

rubric was developed to measure the quality of partnerships under selected AMWF projects. The rubric is expected to have significant value for AWP as a way of monitoring key elements of partnerships over time. The rubric was used during the evaluation to gain a snapshot of the partnerships. The following observations can be drawn from partner responses:

- AMWF responds to the policy priorities of Mekong governments, and increasingly Mekong government leadership is supportive and engaged in projects supported by the AMWF.
- Long-standing relationships underpin many of the partnerships, and where this has not been the case it has been a sharp learning curve for partners to work together effectively.
- Good governance of projects has ensured partners working towards shared visions, and effective reporting has fostered transparent and accountable practices within the partnerships.
- Many projects adapted and/or expanded actions accordingly in response to shifts in the priorities of Mekong governments, but not all.
- Quality of inputs by partners was well received, and a standout feature of partnerships facilitated by AMWF.
- AMWF has facilitated effective partnerships within which partners have grown to trust and respect each other.
- Partners have consciously and constructively made sure that all partners within the partnership are given a genuine voice.
- Not all partnerships have been wholly successful at resolving conflicts, but again this is in part due to the complexities of the operating context.
- Sustainability is a challenge for projects, which is not surprising noting the short-term nature of many activities, but many partnerships have put in place mechanisms to enhance sustainability, including a strong focus on localisation.

Our overarching finding with regards to partnerships is that AMWF has been effective in facilitating effective partnerships which have been built on mutual respect, promoted collaborative ways of working, and delivered what was expected to a high quality.

### **1.1.3 Development Outcomes**

Despite the brevity of actions supported by AMWF, noteworthy developmental outcomes have been achieved, although unsurprisingly longer-term Tier C activities tended to achieve more substantial outcomes. Policies, practices and tools delivered by AMWF have contributed to promoting higher standards for water infrastructure and water governance in the Greater Mekong region in support of greater water, food and energy security. The realisation of development outcomes has enhanced the standing of Australia in the region. The challenge going into the future will be to maintain this level of efficacy to ensure that Australia remains a partner of choice.

### **1.1.4 Diplomatic Outcomes**

AMWF augments Australia's international water diplomacy by providing a responsive and flexible mechanism for Australia to further enhance existing water-related partnerships with the governments of the Mekong region. This has been achieved at a modest cost to partner government requests, simultaneously creating a high level of visibility and demonstrating Australia's commitment to strengthening water resource management in the Mekong. The success of partnerships to date has led to many Mekong governments request continued support. AMWF has helped increase Australia's influence in the management of the region's strategic water resources. AMWF has supported initiatives that have given Australia visibility at key events such as the MRC summit, and its work to translate key reports into local languages (such as the Water Scarcity Profiles).

Whilst there was insufficient evidence to compare outcomes of regional versus bilateral partnerships, the review did establish that both types of partnerships were conducive to producing meaningful outcomes, and that there is value in continuing to nurture both types of partnerships. Moreover, partnerships at the regional level, such as with the MRC, were seen to be effective in providing independent advisory support to help the MRC address both national and regional interests.

### **1.1.5 Efficiency**

The AMWF is efficiently managing its operations. Whilst 20% of total AMWF funds received have been used on non-project costs such as governance and management and maintaining the Expert Review Panel, this is not considered excessive given that AWP implements a relatively large number of small projects. Partners largely view AWP as efficient in their dealings with the program team, although the level of reporting is seen as onerous given the size of activity budgets. The majority of projects have been procured through direct sourcing given requests by Mekong governments and DFAT for continuation of specific activities and partners, and short time frames in which to expend grant funding. This is an efficient approach, especially where in-country and Australian partners have an existing relationship that can be built upon. AWP is aware however of the tension this creates around only drawing on a small pool of Australian experts and will need to be managed in the next phase.

### **1.1.6 Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion**

AWP has increasingly integrated gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) across its operations, and has been responsive to DFAT requests for greater focus on disability inclusion. There is some evidence of positive GEDSI actions and/or outcomes, but despite AWP efforts to support systematic integration of GEDSI throughout the AMWF activity cycle, results appear to be somewhat limited. There has been some pushback on certain activities, where partners have found that GEDSI was not just difficult to achieve, but sometimes inappropriate, and when Australian partners weren't engaged in the design of a much wider intervention (such as WEIDAP for instance) it was difficult to insert GEDSI after the fact. The availability of a dedicated GEDSI expert to the Australian partner throughout implementation appeared to be the main factor contributing to progress on GEDSI.

### **1.1.7 Climate Change**

Under AMWF partnerships have been strongly focused on delivering tangible outputs to assist respective Mekong Governments mitigate the effects of climate change in the context of water resource management. Many activities included specific capacity building activities to strengthen ability of the respective Ministries address climate change issues. Partners did acknowledge that climate change issues did sometimes create a source of tension in partnerships, with the Australian partners advocating for greater focus on climate change, and local partners wanting to address what they saw as more basic rights, such as access to water.

### **1.1.8 Knowledge, Partnerships, Events and Communications**

Knowledge, Partnerships, Events and Communications (KPEC) complement all of AMWF's work. To enhance progress towards outcomes AMWF generates and then disseminates knowledge through AMWF activities to improve climate resilient and sustainable water resource management in the Mekong region. Events and communication products also help showcase Australia's technical expertise and commitment to addressing critical water resource management issues in the region. AMWF is seen to be both effective and efficient in organising events, and in bringing relevant AWP

professional expertise to such events (such as on water management, GEDSI, Climate Change, partnership brokering and so on) to represent Team Australia, showcasing the work of not only AWP, but demonstrating that it can effectively and efficiently engage with other Australian organisations and departments working on water issues.

### 1.1.9 Monitoring and Evaluation

To continue to strengthen the programmatic approach to monitoring and evaluating partnering, and help strengthen AMWF's ongoing collection of evidence to demonstrate progress towards expected outcomes, the evaluation team believe that AMWF needs to:

1. Be clear about what is meant by partnership and its purpose;
2. Be clear about the role of AMWF/AWP in the partnership;
3. Be clear about what is being measured within the partnership;
4. Link partnership actions to project outcomes;
5. Be clear about what monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should look like at the activity level; and
6. Be clear about what M&E should look like at program level.

## 2 Conclusion

The overall conclusion is that AMWF-supported activities have delivered noteworthy development and diplomatic outcomes, underpinned by an effective use of a mixture of Australia-based and nationally recruited partners within the Mekong region. Whilst the outcomes achieved by AMWF-supported activities are impressive, so too is the means by which activities achieved these outcomes. The manner in which Australian partners embraced the notion of partnership was seen to have enhanced the effectiveness of activities. AMWF has also demonstrated how to ensure development and diplomatic outcomes intersect in a meaningful way.

Based on the findings of the evaluation the evaluation team made a set of recommendations summarised as follows (for the full list of recommendations and accompanying justification [See Section 5 – Lessons Learned and Recommendations](#)):

1. There are no short-cuts to effective partnership brokering, and AWP will need to continue to work on what is meant by partnership and its purpose (we have proposed using both a Partnership Rubric and a Partnership Charter to help with this process).
2. AWP needs to continue to work closely with DFAT to maintain the strategic use of the facility in the region, and continue to work with DFAT to help the facility maintain close alignment to DFAT's strategic objectives in the region.
3. AWP needs to incorporate a M&E plan into future activity designs which speak to both the expected outputs (all projects) and outcomes (Tiers B and C only).
4. Terms of Reference for AMWF activities must specify more clearly the expectations in relation to gender (including factoring in the nature of the GEDSI support AWP can provide).
5. AWP should establish a draw down facility for post-project activities to provide ongoing implementation support to help Ministries implement outputs (policies, practices, tools) delivered by activities, e.g. 20 days over 12 months.



## 2 Introduction

In May 2015, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) established the AWP, and appointed [eWater Group](#) (eWater) to manage the investment, under a four-year grant agreement (value \$20M). In October 2018, a new grant agreement for AWP Phase 2 (known as the Phase 2 core grant) was signed between DFAT and eWater. This grant runs until June 2024 (value \$33.4M). The Australian Water Partnership's vision is to support sustainable water resource management and water security in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

In early 2019 the Australia – Mekong Water Facility (AMWF) was established, through a grant agreement between DFAT's Vientiane Post and eWater to strengthen Australia's bilateral relations with Mekong countries in the water sector. AMWF forms one component of DFAT's broader Mekong Australia Partnership Water Energy Climate (MAP-WEC) program. The MAP-WEC program goal is to build environmental resilience in the Mekong subregion by improving water security, enhancing access to affordable and clean energy, and taking action to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

AMWF supports a number of pillars of the MAP-WEC program including supporting regional cooperation, bilateral partnerships, social inclusion, evidence & analysis, agriculture, ecosystems, and to some extent sustainable electricity through providing technical assistance on sustainable hydropower.

The AMWF commenced in March 2019 with \$9M from the former Greater Mekong Water Resources Program (GMWRP). In April 2019, additional funding of \$0.86M was provided to support bilateral water cooperation with Thailand. In 2021 GMWRP was combined with the new Mekong Australia Partnership (MAP) environmental resilience pillar to form the MAP Water Energy Climate (MAP-WEC) program. An additional \$5M was allocated from MAP-WEC to the AMWF in early 2022, with an extension to June 2024<sup>1</sup>. As of 30 June 2023, \$12.22 of the total \$14.86M was committed (82%).

AMWF augments Australia's international water diplomacy by providing a responsive and flexible mechanism for Australia to further enhance existing water-related partnerships with the governments of the Mekong region. AMWF initially operated in six countries, but activities are currently limited to Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam. In partnership with partners based both within the Mekong and Australia, AMWF has been implementing a range of different actions to improve sustainable and equitable water management (including governance, policies, strategies and equitable service delivery) within the region.

Partnerships form a core component of AWP's work, as they do within AMWF, and the program offers a direct line of engagement between the Australian government (drawing on expertise from specific Australian partners) and Mekong governments to support Mekong priority areas in the water sector, whilst also facilitating and strengthening bilateral and regional diplomatic relations in the Mekong sub-region.

AMWF expects partners to bring together a combination of appropriate technical skills, and a range of other skills including relationship building, local expertise, cultural awareness, and diplomacy. Nevertheless, AMWF acknowledges that successful partnerships can take time, and often require a combination of skills that are specific to the water sector combined with skills in relationship building, knowledge exchange, communication, and negotiation. AWP has therefore commissioned this evaluation to identify which partnerships have been most successful, the elements of the partnership

<sup>1</sup> In 2023 AWP received additional funding from Hanoi Post (Vietnam bilateral funds) but this is administered under the Core Grant for contractual purposes and hence is not included in this evaluation.

that have contributed to this success, as well as the challenges and obstacles that have limited success.

## 2.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to focus on how partnerships have contributed to development and diplomacy outcomes from AMWF under AWP Phase 2. Specifically, the objectives of the evaluation are to answer the following four questions:

1. What (if any) development and diplomatic outcomes have been achieved as a result of AMWF activities, or are expected to be achieved into the future?
  - a) How do outcomes compare between shorter versus longer-term investments?
  - b) How do outcomes compare between regional versus bilateral partnerships?
2. For each activity, how effective have partnerships been in relation to:
  - a) Building positive working relationships with Mekong governments and why?
  - b) Achieving outcomes (either short or long-term) from the activity and why?
  - c) The perspective of Mekong partners on the value of Australian knowledge exchange and expertise?
  - d) Influencing perspectives on GEDSI and climate change in the Mekong?
3. How can AWP design future activities to:
  - a) Facilitate effective partnerships?
  - b) Ensure outcomes are achieved, not just outputs such as reports?
  - c) Facilitate diplomatic outcomes and/or support diplomatic efforts?
  - d) How can support to diplomatic effects best intersect with development outcomes?
  - e) Make effective and impactful use of events including workshops and dialogues, communications, and knowledge products, which may include individuals and organisations who do not normally interact through programmed activities?
4. What monitoring and evaluation does AWP and/or partners need to undertake during an activity to ensure outcomes are achieved and to strengthen partnerships?

In addition, the effective consideration and delivery of GEDSI within the different partnerships is a priority focus of the evaluation.

## 2.2 Primary Users of the Evaluation

This evaluation is an internal piece of work for AWP and as such the main users of the report will be AWP staff and the program donors, DFAT. Other interested stakeholders who may use the report to inform decision-making include DFAT's Mekong Posts who may use elements of the findings in the broader MAP-WEC program and other initiatives in the region.

Internally to AWP, the AWP Advisory Committee and the eWater Board will also be interested in the report findings. Whilst the AMWF does not fall under AWPAC's remit members are provided with updates on the AMWF, and they are also engaged in the AWP Annual Report which covers AMWF. AMWF has a separate 'advisory committee' known as the Facility Coordination Group (FCG) which comprises 2 DFAT and 2 AWP members (and many observers). The FCG will be an important role

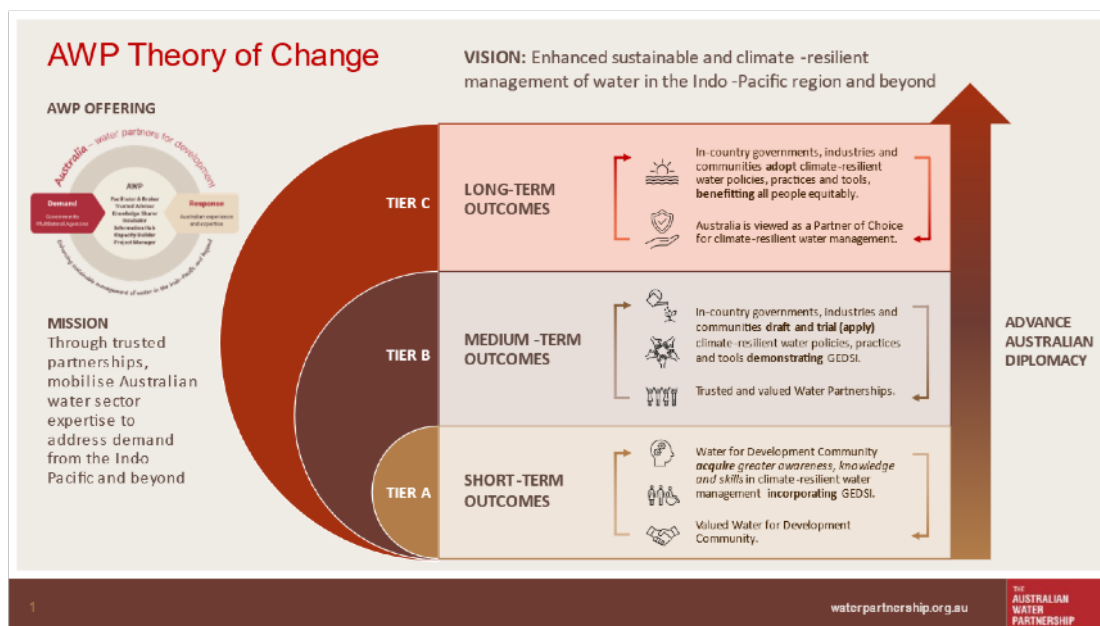
player in the evaluation and its outputs. Other AWP partners, both in Australia and abroad, will also be interested in the report as it will influence the way they interact with AWP in future iterations.

In the long term, it is hoped that the report leads to a better understanding among both AWP staff and management, and partner organisations about what makes for an effective partnership and ultimately what best contributes to effective development outcomes. Findings from the evaluation will be used to inform the design and management of new activities under AWP Phase 3 (subject to DFAT funding).

## 2.3 AWP Theory of Change

AMWF does not have its own Theory of Change (ToC) but nevertheless operates under the auspices of the AWP ToC (as articulated in the AWP Strategic Plan 2023 – 2028) and, as noted above, AMWF also aligns to key water, energy, and climate pillars of MAP-WEC. The ToC spells out how AWP will work with its partners to achieve short-term, medium-term and long-term outcomes, underpinned by the principle that partnerships are seen as a necessary condition that contributes to the achievement of development and diplomatic outcomes. GEDSI and climate expectations cut across each of the different tiers within the ToC.

Figure 1: AWP Theory of Change



The ToC is built around three tiers of engagement with in-country partners, each with different levels of expectation around ambition, outcomes, and impact reflecting the reality of the program’s modest budget and ability to influence complex water systems. Under Tier A (acquire), with its focus on short-term outcomes, can be found knowledge, communication and dissemination activities, within which those engaged with the activity are typically only expected to acquire knowledge. Tier A activities are also intended to lay the foundation for more substantial Tier B and Tier C activities.

The majority of AMWF activities are classified as Tier B (apply) activities, the expectation being that these activities will contribute to medium-term outcomes as participants in these activities apply the policies, practices and tools trialled during the implementation of the activity.

There are a limited number of Tier C (adopt) activities implemented by AMWF, but these are where AWP expect to see a more noticeable contribution to long-term development and diplomatic outcomes through adoption of climate-sensitive water management policies, practices and tools developed by these activities.

## 2.4 Our Approach

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach as outlined in the *Evaluation Plan* (25 October 2023). At the start of the evaluation, the team drafted the evaluation matrix and associated approach to data collection and evidence analysis. A partnership rubric was also developed to guide both the consultation phase and to help shape the analysis of evidence.

Partners (both Australia-based and those representing the respective Mekong governments) were consulted through a combination of remote and in-person interviews conducted in Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam. Data collection also included documentation compilation, review, and analysis; processing and analysis of secondary project data; and validation presentations both to Post in Bangkok, and to AWP.

In total, 66 partners participated either in key informant interviews, or focus group discussions that were held in Australia or in the Mekong.

To maximise the utility of the evaluation, the evaluation team initially focused on 28 projects supported by the AMWF, and then examined 5 of those in more depth in order to gain further insights regarding the main evaluation questions. The report has been shaped to reflect the findings in response to each of the evaluation questions but has also been structured in such a way as to enable DFAT's own reporting in line with relevant OECD-DAC evaluation criteria (i.e. relevance, efficiency, effectiveness) and the important cross-cutting policy priorities of GEDSI, Climate Change, and Localisation.

## 2.5 Limitations

The data collected was sufficient to answer the evaluation questions. Responses to the first round of interviews from partner governments were lower than expected, but this was addressed during in-country visits when Mekong government partners met with the team. All scheduled meetings with Mekong governments took place as planned. No other major data collection issues affected the evaluation, and all partners were very obliging in providing documents that were requested and making time to speak to the evaluation team.

## 3 Key Findings

The report is structured in accordance with relevant Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) evaluation criteria, however the key evaluation questions are addressed throughout. In instances where there was insufficient evidence to provide wide-ranging responses to certain sub-questions (e.g. on making comparisons between different procurement methods, and whether there is a difference between regional and bilateral partnerships in terms of outcomes delivered), appropriate commentary has nevertheless been provided.

### 3.1 Relevance

The relevance of AMWF to Australia's broader relationship with partner country governments varies greatly among the four Mekong countries in which AMWF operates. This is in large part due to the different development trajectories of each country within the region. As such it is useful to consider the relevance of the program at an individual country level.

#### 3.1.1 Cambodia

Australia's aid program in Cambodia is estimated at \$83.6 million in 2023-24<sup>2</sup>. The majority of this is delivered bilaterally, including the flagship \$87 million, five-year Cambodia-Australia Partnership Resilient Economic Development (CAP-RED) program. Given the significant focus on the bilateral program, only one project has been implemented under the AMWF; at least four AMWF projects have been implemented in each of the other countries.

Given other programs operating in Cambodia, the AMWF is not a priority in Cambodia currently, but DFAT is looking at opportunities under AWP Phase 3.

#### 3.1.2 Laos

The AMWF is important to Australia's relationship with Laos, which is based largely on Australia's estimated \$47.7 million development assistance program in the country<sup>3</sup>. The bilateral component of Australia's assistance represents less than half of this amount (\$23.1 million) making regional and global programs equally as important in terms of overall development and diplomatic outcomes in Laos.

While core support is provided to the Mekong River Commission, a regional organisation primarily based in Vientiane, through the broader Mekong-Australia Partnership, the AMWF represents Australia's only investment in the water sector in Laos. It is central to relationships with relevant Ministries in the Laos Government and provides Australia with visibility, including playing a leadership role in the government-donor sector working group.

The AMWF is highly relevant to Australia's work in Laos.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/development-cooperation-fact-sheet-cambodia.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/development-cooperation-fact-sheets-for-country-regional-and-sector-thematic-programs/laos>

### 3.1.3 Thailand

Australia and Thailand elevated their bilateral relationship in 2020 when the two countries' Prime Ministers signed a Strategic Partnership centred around four pillars: Political and Security Engagement; Economic Engagement and Growth; Sectoral Collaboration; and People-to-People Links. The current relationship between the two countries is largely based on trade – Thailand is Australia's 11<sup>th</sup> largest trading partner with Australia importing roughly twice as much from Thailand as it exports to the country<sup>4</sup>. Strong links exist in the education sector and around regional security cooperation also.

Thailand stopped accepting bilateral development assistance in 2003, although continues to engage with regional programs such as the Mekong Australia Partnership. In some ways, this increases the importance of the AMWF as no bilateral development program exists, but any support provided under AMWF is tiny in comparison to the value of trade between the countries. Discussions with Australian Government officials noted the value of AMWF activities in generating goodwill with the Thai Government discussions, especially around agriculture.

The AMWF is relevant to Australia's work in Thailand.

### 3.1.4 Vietnam

Vietnam displays elements of both Laos and Thailand in terms of the relevance of the AMWF to Australia's broader objectives in the country. The key strategic document between the two countries is 2018's Strategic Partnership which focuses on enhanced economic engagement, strategic defence and security cooperation and building knowledge and innovation partnerships. In November 2021, the two countries signed the Australia-Vietnam Enhanced Economic Engagement Strategy and Implementation Plan (AVEES) which reflects the fact that Vietnam is Australia's 12<sup>th</sup> largest trading partner, with the fastest 5-year growth in exports from Australia of all major trading partners.

However, Australia also has a bilateral aid program with Vietnam with an estimated annual value of \$63.3 million in 2023-24<sup>5</sup>. Regional and global programs are expected to contribute an additional \$31.8 million. Despite the AMWF being a relatively small of the total development envelop in Vietnam, the Vietnamese government see value in the manner in which the AMWF has addressed very specific technical water resource management issues in the country, and the AMWF continues to prove a very valuable mechanism for Post in allowing it to respond rapidly and appropriately to requests from the Vietnamese government.

Whilst the AMWF represents a small investment when compared with other much larger investments by Australia in Vietnam, it is nevertheless regarded as highly relevant by both the Vietnamese Government and Post.

## 3.2 Effectiveness

This section of the report begins by examining the extent to which partnerships are an effective modality for AMWF, and then reviews the extent to which partnerships have contributed to the realisation of expected development and diplomatic outcomes.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australias-goods-services-by-top-15-partners-2021-22.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/development-cooperation-fact-sheet-vietnam.pdf>

### 3.2.1 Partnerships

Rubrics (contextually-defined criteria and standards) form the backbone of the assessment of partnership effectiveness. Co-creating the rubric (as per the *Evaluation Plan*) allowed stakeholders to co-define what effective partnerships look like within the context of AMWF. The rubric also helped delineate the scope of the evaluation, and it also provides a framework for collecting (e.g. the interview guideline with key partners followed the content of the rubric) and then organising the evidence, in addition to helping to ensure an agreed set of lenses for collaboratively making sense of the evidence.

[Annex 1 - Evaluative Assessment of Partnerships](#) details key evaluative findings against the following aspects of Partnership assessed by the rubric:

- Context for Partnership
- Governance
- Ways of working
- Trust and Respect
- Results, impact, and sustainability

Criteria were assessed using the set of standards spelt out in the Rubric, which were scored on the following scale:

- Dormant
- Emerging
- Growing
- Flourishing

### 3.2.2 Context for Partnership

Two criteria assessed:

- Strong organisational support exists for partnership within individual partner organisations assessed as **Growing**
- Partnership builds on longstanding or multiple collaborations assessed as **Flourishing**

**AMWF responds to the policy priorities of Mekong governments, and increasingly leadership is supportive and engaged in projects supported by the AMWF.** As was noted in the discussion on relevance, AMWF responds to policy priorities and therefore projects are strongly aligned to specific water resource policy priorities of the respective Mekong governments. AWP working through Post, in particular the role of the Mekong Working Group, has ensured an effective means for ensuring both responsiveness to the water resource management priorities in the Mekong, and maintaining a strong link to Australia's development and diplomatic objectives in the region.

Organisational support for the projects has varied, although in most instances senior leadership within the relevant partner government did eventually engage with the activity. Time was often an important factor, whereas initially, leadership may not have fully understood what was being implemented, as the project progressed (and in some cases adapted to better fit Mekong government needs) there was better buy-in to the projects. In some projects, such as within WEIDAP, for instance, which is of a highly technical nature within a substantially larger investment by ADB, the value of Australia's support is largely appreciated within the immediate partners such as the ADB and the Central Project Office (CPO). In the case of other projects, such as the Amendment to the Water Resources Law in Vietnam, government leadership actively engaged in the outputs of the project and



became increasingly involved in the project's outcomes, which helped ensure that government adopted what was proposed.

**Long-standing relationships underpin many of the partnerships.** A key feature of the partnerships is that either partner has had some interaction with each other before (either in terms of personal relationship or through more formal means such as an MoU or earlier work for AWP), and/or that as a result of multiple phases of an activity, the relationship has been nurtured over many years. In the Water Reservoir Quality Management initiative, for instance, the key partners have worked together over several decades. The support to other groundwater initiatives in Laos (such as the activity which led to the development of a National Groundwater Profile, and the development of a Sustainable Groundwater Management Plan for the Sekong Basin) included local partners who had worked together previously and this was seen to help get implementation underway quickly even though the Australian experts could not travel due to COVID travel restrictions. In the case of WEIDAP, different partners have been engaging with one another since Australia's early involvement which began in 2016, and FAO also has a long-standing relationship with both AWP and key Australian partners engaged in multiple activities. As many different stakeholders noted, the importance of long-term relationships is that it has helped cultivate significant building of trust between partners and helped progress sensitive topics when required.

Where partners had previously not worked together these partners report that considerable time was required initially to build up an effective rapport, garner trust amongst partners, and establish an effective way of working together. Not all 'new' partnerships successfully addressed the fact that partners had not worked together previously. Partners involved in providing technical support to the Mekong River Commission Regional Flood and Drought Management Centre delivered the expected output, but the Australian partner acknowledged having to learn a lot about how to work effectively with the local partners. As one partner noted 'We started flat footed. Didn't understand operating context and difficult to understand over Teams (during Covid). Didn't get to meet until late in the activity.' In this instance, partners recognise that the full scope of work was never truly resolved (there was constant mission creep throughout the activity as partners disagreed with what was required), nor were internal politics within the MRC resolved to ensure the MRC benefitted fully from the activity. A better understanding of the organisational and institutional politics might have helped the partners at the outset to negotiate a more pragmatic solution.

Mekong governments also noted that it was important that national partners had an existing relationship with the respective government partners. Where national partners were utilised that were not known to Mekong government partners this did create a challenge in some countries, and government partners then requested that national consultants either be replaced or supplemented by national consultants that were known to the particular government partner.

### 3.2.3 Governance of Partnerships

Six criteria assessed:

- Partners share a well-articulated vision and purpose assessed as **Growing**
- Appropriate institutional/organisational leadership, management and governance arrangements exist to ensure co-creation of programs, shared decision making and a collaborative approach to partnering assessed as **Growing**
- Partners are willing to share risks assessed as **Growing**



- Partners are mutually accountable, transparent and reliable in all transactions within the partnership assessed as **Growing to Flourishing**
- Clear lines of communication exist between partners and enhance collaboration within the partnership assessed as **Growing**
- Partnership is well managed with clear roles and responsibilities assessed as **Flourishing**

**Good governance of projects has ensured partners working towards shared visions, and effective reporting has fostered transparent and accountable practices within the partnerships.** The responsive nature of projects has ensured that projects were designed from the outset to have a common vision and purpose. In practice, whilst there was a common vision there were ‘creative differences’ between partners as to how the activity should be delivered. COVID lockdowns exacerbated any differences between partners, although these were largely resolved once partners were able to meet up face-to-face. Where differences remained, this was often due to the nature of each partner. For instance, some partners (particularly those from a private sector background) were output focused, and got the task completed within the allotted workplan, whereas other types of partners were equally focused on relationship building and ensuring a more co-creative/collaborative approach to ensure consensus on the objectives of an activity.

In many of the projects, a structured project management system was created which ensured regular meetings were arranged to discuss progress. Partners shared relevant data and information with each other on a regular basis. Often the partnership agreement between partners addressed the project management side of things, and partners generally ironed out their approach at the outset to encourage transparency and accountability. Whilst partnerships were structured to ensure joint management, many partners would agree that it took some time to achieve this, especially to dispel the notion that it was the Australian partner solely managing the project.

Direct communication between partners, multiple lines of communication, and regular communication throughout implementation all greatly assisted in this process. Within the more complex programs, especially transboundary initiatives, communication was more complex, and issues of protocol had to be observed (including taking into account political sensitivities) which added extra layers to communication. National consultants, project liaison officers within respective ministries, and locally engaged staff within DFAT Posts were seen to be a very effective conduit for enhancing communication.

**Sharing of risks remains challenging, not necessarily due to a hesitation by Mekong government partners to own the risk but rather the way project funding is structured.**

Whilst partners acknowledged that they had very little formal discussion about the sharing of risks, most partners accepted that there was a sense within partnerships that responsibilities were shared. Many partners noted that whilst the financial resources were managed by the Australian partner, ‘in-kind’ support was expected from government partners within the region. So whilst partners did engage with each other to discuss and manage risks related to delivery, there was seldom much formal discussion regarding the sharing of risks.

### 3.2.4 Ways of Working

Four criteria assessed:

- Partners are flexible and responsive to jointly adapt to shifts in context assessed as **Emerging**
- Adequate resources to deliver on commitments are contributed by all partners and are commensurate with desired outcomes assessed as **Flourishing**

- Partners design and implement activities in a gender-sensitive and inclusive manner assessed as **Emerging**
- Expertise from different partners ensures a good fit between the proposed solution and the jointly identified need assessed as **Flourishing**

**Many projects adapted and/or expanded actions accordingly in response to shifts in the priorities of Mekong governments, but not all projects.** Many partners believe that whilst they were responsive to changes in context, it was not always feasible to adapt the approach due to what was prescribed in the contract. Partners reported mixed experiences with regards to adapting their scope of work, some reported they had no issues in the proposed change in scope being ratified, whilst others had found the process of adaptation challenging. Typically though where for instance, there was a notable shift in government policy priorities (such as with the TA for water resource planning in Vietnam when the scope changed and it was not feasible to develop an additional basin plan) the activity invested more in capacity building and mentoring. The longevity of certain initiatives, such as WEIDAP, has also required noticeable shifts in approach, including expanding the scope of Australia’s support to include projects that were initially not part of the original remit.

**Quality of inputs by partners was well received, and a standout feature of partnerships facilitated by AMWF.** Direct beneficiaries of the AMWF support were highly complementary of the support, and as noted below there is strong evidence that AMWF has delivered meaningful outcomes which have been of benefit to Mekong government partners. Within the different partnerships, partners were equally satisfied with the extent to which the partnerships nurtured complementarity in terms of different expertise within the partnerships. Partners also acknowledged that a key principle was to increase expertise across the partnership, and that whilst this took time initially, many partners were satisfied that different partners were able to identify a good fit between their respective expertise and the needs of the project.

Issues of efficiency and GEDSI are discussed in separate sections below.

### 3.2.5 Trust and Respect

Three criteria assessed:

- Trusted partnership allows partners to have difficult conversations and resolve any conflicts assessed as **Emerging**
- Partners demonstrate understanding of operating context and navigate challenges with respect and sensitivity assessed as **Flourishing**
- All partners have a genuine voice and their contribution is respected and assessed as **Growing - Flourishing**

**AMWF has facilitated effective partnerships within which partners have grown to trust and respect each other.** Partners have negotiated the complex operating space with respect and sensitivity, in part because many of the partners have a long history of working in culturally different environments. Partners were seen to be aware of the different contexts they were operating within and were seen to be respectful and mindful of the context. Many of the Australian partners deliberately selected people who had previous experience working within the Mekong, and/or engaged partners who had lived within the Mekong for many years and were well-known and respected within the water sector in the Mekong. In partnerships where there was a lack of previous Mekong experience, partners noted that it had been difficult to grapple with the fact that relationships are a key to successful delivery within the

Mekong (i.e. remote engagement is not feasible) and that the hierarchical nature of government is also key. As one Australian partner noted ‘this was a huge learning curve for us, and this took time to build the necessary trust to engage with the cultural differences.

**Partners have consciously and constructively made sure that all partners within the partnership are given a genuine voice.** Partnerships deliberately established opportunities for partners to voice ideas and co-create implementation approaches. Whilst during the pandemic this was difficult, face-to-face meetings/time in-country have enhanced people working through issues together. Project steering committees have also facilitated this process, provided they are genuine meeting spaces, and not meetings where ideas were being ‘rubber stamped’. Again, long-term relationships helped ensure equitable discussions, underpinned by both the technical respect between partners and the relationships that have evolved over time.

**Not all partnerships have been wholly successful at resolving conflicts, but again this is in part due to the complexities of the operating context.** Where there have been differences, partners could address those through discussion. Partners noted that the way partnerships have been organised facilitates this. Local people on the ground help to monitor and steer through conversations before conflict arises, and when necessary, partners also reported receiving helpful support from AWP in addressing conflicts. Partners also recognise the value of Post in helping resolve issues, especially locally engaged staff who understand both the Australian culture and the different cultures within the Mekong and can ‘act as a bridge’. Partners noted that where there were existing long-term relationships this made it easier to address and resolve issues rapidly.

### 3.2.6 Results, Impact and Sustainability

Five criteria assessed:

- Results achieved by the partnership are of mutual benefit to all partners assessed as **Flourishing**
- Partners are working collectively to promote, integrate and progress shared cross-cutting issues, to achieve greater impact assessed as **Flourishing**
- The partnership is achieving wider developmental and diplomatic impact and influence assessed as **Flourishing**
- Partnerships have put in place mechanisms that are likely to ensure the long-term sustainability/viability of the relationship assessed as **Emerging to Growing**
- Partners have put in place mechanisms to enhance localisation assessed as **Growing**.

In the next section, we elaborate on key results achieved by AMWF activities, paying particular attention to the extent to which partnerships have delivered development and diplomatic outcomes. All projects supported by AMWF had a strong results focus, and whilst results typically benefitted Mekong governments (as to be expected as AMWF was responding to requests for technical support to address policy priorities) **many Australian partners also derived benefit from the partnership within which they participated.**

**Sustainability is a challenge for projects, which is unsurprising noting the short-term nature of many activities, but many partnerships have put in place mechanisms to enhance sustainability.** Capacity-building initiatives and the development of policies, practices and tools have all enhanced sustainability, as have multi-phase projects which have cemented early successes. Many of the later phases of projects supported by AMWF have been about teaching and helping locals design, construct implement with Australian partner team support. Pre-existing relationships will also enhance and extend benefits beyond projects, as has working within much bigger initiatives. Both ADB and FAO, for instance, support long-term initiatives that are underpinned by a substantial programmatic approach to securing sustainability through the use of multiple different partners and donors.

**Localisation has also enhanced the likelihood of initiatives being sustained.** Activities are all driven by local need, meeting local priorities. Many of the initiatives have been focused on improving the existing/local approach to water resource management, and/or providing the technical expertise to adapt local approaches. In Lao PDR, for instance, water basin plans existed for the Nam Xam basin, but technical expertise from Australia improved the quality of the plan, and eventually the delivery of the plan. Inclusive engagement practices at the local level and local governance structures developed as part of the Nam Xam process will be replicated by Lao PDR's Department of Water Resources to develop two more major basin plans. The support to the development of a National Groundwater Profile and the development of a Sustainable Groundwater Management Plan for the Sekong Basin drew on local consultants, who with technical support from the Australian partner, have helped strengthen groundwater management and monitoring. Initiatives such as water reservoir quality in Thailand have been working at the local level to collect data, build local capacity, and adapt tools to the local context. WEIDAP (as illustrated in the text box) is focussing on building local design expertise, and the work of an international technical advisor within the MRC includes mentoring the hydropower specialist to operationalise the hydropower strategy in the Mekong. Other projects such as the amendment to the water resources law in Vietnam were underpinned by consultations at the local level.

### 3.2.7 Development Outcomes

Expected development outcomes of the AMWF are clearly articulated in the Investment Design Document (IDD). The IDD notes that water resource management is central to enhancing water, food and energy security in the Greater Mekong region, and integral to promoting economic growth, maintaining vital ecosystems and enhancing sustainable livelihoods in the region (IDD, p.1).

AMWF was established with a specific focus on enhancing rules-based governance, specifically with respect to contributing to improving water resource governance. In the original design of AMWF, the IDD identifies both an End of Facility development outcome and an intermediary outcome (p.8-9), namely:

- *Strengthening capacity and resilience of Greater Mekong governments to holistically manage water and respond to challenges posed by climate change (End of Facility Outcome)*
  - In this context, capacity is understood as the ability of partner governments to make and implement decisions that align with their own values and interests. Holistic management refers to the necessity of considering social, environmental and economic implications in these decisions. Support for more effective, sustainable and accountable water resource management is crucial as countries are making choices on how to share, develop and manage water for food and energy production, and to sustain ecosystems and livelihoods
- *Promoting higher standards for water infrastructure and water governance in the Greater Mekong region in support of greater water, food and energy security (Intermediary Outcome)*
  - The Facility will promote and facilitate the implementation of international standards around infrastructure and governance issues in order to strengthen the regulatory environment and enable countries to identify and protect their own national interests.

Demand-driven activities implemented by AMWF are expected to achieve these development outcomes, underpinned by 'co-created recommendations and solutions for greater impact' to address issues that are "commonly perceived long-term and of mutual interest" (IDD, p.10). What follows is an assessment of the extent to which the means (through the different partnerships brokered by AMWF)

contributed to the expected development outcomes, bearing in mind the small-scale nature of many of activities supported by AMWF. Nevertheless, as shown in the table below, activities at each Tier have achieved noteworthy development outcomes.

**Table I: Select Noteworthy Development Outcomes by Tier (see [Annex](#) for more examples)**

Tier	Project	Location	Development Outcome
Tier A	Thailand-Australia Water Dialogue	Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provided an opportunity for the newly established ONWR to demonstrate its role as the apex body in the water sector in Thailand</li> <li>- Two projects identified as part of the Dialogue commenced, both will provide a significant paradigm shift in Thailand in terms of Dispute Resolution and Prevention Work with River Basin Committees; and Early Warning Systems in Thailand</li> </ul>
	Support to Irrigation Services Pricing Policy Dialogue – WEIDAP	Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Support to Irrigation Services Pricing Policy Dialogue in Vietnam (January, 2024) provided significant knowledge sharing opportunities with key people from Vietnam</li> <li>- Study tour to Australia for 17 delegates from a range of Ministries to discuss water pricing</li> </ul>
Tier B	Supporting the Development of an Integrated River Basin Management Plan for the Nam Xam Basin	Lao PDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nam Xam River Basin Management Plan approved by the Prime Minister in August 2023</li> <li>- Inclusive engagement practices and local governance structures developed as part of Nam Xam process will be replicated by Lao PDR’s Department of Water Resources to develop two more major basin plans</li> </ul>
	Support to the development of a Lao PDR Groundwater Profile and Sustainable Groundwater Management Plan for Sekong Basin	Lao PDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Critical revisions made to National Groundwater Profile for Laos and the Sustainable Groundwater Management Plan and groundwater database</li> </ul>
	Fisheries monitoring in the Mekong Basin to assess impacts of mainstream hydropower projects as part of the Mekong River Joint Environment Monitoring (JEM) Program	Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supported the MRC’s JEM pilots, with a specific focus on the gap of developing and testing techniques to improve and build capacity of fish passage monitoring, including fish tagging.</li> <li>- Strengthened the capacity of MRC and Member Countries line ministries to undertake effective monitoring of their water resources (specifically on fisheries), to provide information on the impacts of mainstream hydropower projects</li> </ul>
	Technical support to the process of amending Vietnam’s Law on Water Resources	Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthened draft legislative provisions and technical support for Vietnam’s Law on Water Resources, promulgated in December 2023</li> </ul>
	Technical Support to Improve Reservoir Water Quality Management in Thailand	Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improved procedures and practices for water quality sampling and monitoring, managing aquatic weeds, and modelling of climate change incorporated into Department of Agriculture systems</li> <li>- Water Quality Index developed specifically for the Royal Irrigation Department for better water</li> </ul>

Tier C	Support to the Mekong River Commission (MRC) – sustainable hydropower	Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>quality monitoring and management in response to eutrophication</li> <li>- Over 100 RID staff trained nationally in new procedures</li> <li>- The Preliminary Design Guidance for Proposed Mainstream Dams in the Lower Mekong River Basin was published in February 2023, drawing on Australian and international experience in sustainable development of projects of major scale</li> <li>- Mentorship and essential specialist technical advice guided MRC’s sustainable hydropower initiatives</li> </ul>
	WEIDAP Phase Two – Construction Support	Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Building on long term relationships between Australian and Vietnam partners which enabled the development of modernised pressurised irrigation system for high value agriculture</li> <li>- Partnership with ADB has allowed Australia’s technical contribution to be replicated at scale</li> </ul>

**AMWF strengthening capacity and resilience of Greater Mekong governments to holistically manage water and respond to challenges posed by climate change.** Despite the brevity of actions supported by AMWF, noticeable development outcomes have been achieved, although unsurprisingly longer-term Tier C activities tended to achieve more substantial outcomes. A key distinguishing feature between the different Tiers is the extent of the change to which projects within the respective Tiers will contribute. As [Annex 2 - Select Diplomatic and Development Outcomes per Activity](#) illustrates, typically Tier C activities have led to the adoption of concepts (e.g. Australian technical expertise has been pivotal in shaping the pilots which could be leveraged as part of the approach to the modernization of irrigation in Vietnam), whilst Tier B activities can be seen to apply knowledge gained (e.g. the management of water reservoir quality in Thailand now utilise water quality monitoring instrumentation introduced through work supported by the AMWF), and Tier A activities have afforded participants with the opportunity to acquire awareness and knowledge (such as through the Australian – Thailand Water Dialogue Facility, and the recent Support to Irrigation Services Pricing Policy Dialogue as part of WEIDAP) ([Annex 2 - Select Diplomatic and Development Outcomes per Activity](#)).

AMWF is demand-driven, so whilst it can be assumed that activities were tailored to requests from respective Mekong government partners, the development outcomes achieved are nevertheless noteworthy. In many instances, the support provided has led to an important paradigm shift in the management of water resources. Support to the MRC, for instance, led to a substantial rethink of sustainable hydropower initiatives. Skilling of the Vietnamese design team within WEIDAP has allowed Vietnam to develop a modernised pressurised supply system for high-value agriculture that without Australia’s assistance would have been very difficult to implement. Australian support to Vietnam on Irrigation Services Pricing policy is highly valued by Vietnamese counterparts in the Ministry of Finance as it assists the Ministry who have been tasked with substantial rewriting of the draft decree on irrigation services pricing as part of the recently updated Law on Price in Vietnam. Capacity-building initiatives in Lao PDR around river basin plans, and groundwater profiles have transformed the approach DWR implements.



Similarly in Thailand, the initial pilot on reservoir water quality is being scaled up to additional provinces who were not part of the initial training to ensure a systematic and more rigorous approach to water quality monitoring. In Vietnam technical advice and other project activities have contributed to strengthened draft legislative provisions necessary for amending Vietnam's Law on Water Resources. The successful enactment of these amendments is seen by the Vietnamese government as essential to the government's long-term water security objectives. The Thailand-Australia Water dialogue provided an opportunity to bring together all the key actors in the Thailand water sector to debate prioritised policy issues, including recognising the necessity to strengthen early warning and flood forecasting in Thailand, and to advocate for Thailand to shift from dispute resolution to dispute mitigation within RBCs.

Climate resilient water policies, practices and tools helping **AMWF promote higher standards for water infrastructure and water governance in the Greater Mekong region in support of greater water, food and energy security**. AMWF-supported activities have been extremely successful in delivering a range of high-quality outputs ([Annex 2 - Select Diplomatic and Development Outcomes per Activity](#)) which respective Mekong governments have begun to utilise to improve the management of water resources in the region. In the case of regional support to the MRC, activities have generated, for instance, Preliminary Design Guidance promoting a higher standard of planning, design, construction and operation of hydropower initiatives in the Mekong. Support to WEIDAP has resulted in the new water management practices in the design and construction of pipeline projects as they have remedied previous failures, and a more equitable irrigation services pricing. The best practice Integrated River Basin Management Plan (IRBMP) for the Nam Xam Basin will be used by DWR to develop similar basin plans in Lao PDR. RID in Thailand is currently developing a strategy to extend reservoir water quality monitoring programs and support further capacity building in regions that have yet to receive training. The adoption of the amendments to Vietnam's Law on Water Resources in December 2023 provides a critical platform for Vietnam's Masterplan on Water Resources, bolstering Vietnam's efforts to promote a more integrated and equitable approach to the distribution of water resources.

Whilst the development outcomes achieved by AMWF-supported activities are impressive, so too is the means by which activities achieved these outcomes. Whilst Mekong government partners noted in many instances the work would have happened without AMWF support, the manner in which Australian partners embraced the notion of partnership was seen to have enhanced the effectiveness of activities. From the perspective of Mekong government partners, this included the perception that AMWF had been largely effective in brokering partnerships that delivered, and that the outputs delivered were of a level of quality that the respective Ministries valued (to such an extent that certain Ministries would not take the next step without first getting the Australian partner to quality assure plans/designs). Other important features recognised by Mekong government partners include the view that Australian partners could contribute effectively to development as 'they were part of the region, had engaged for a long time in the region, and were seen to understand the development context well'. As highlighted below under diplomatic outcomes, the realisation of development outcomes has enhanced the standing of Australia in the region. The challenge going into the future will be to maintain this level of efficacy to ensure that Australia remains a partner of choice.

### 3.2.8 Diplomatic Outcomes

The Australian Government's desired diplomatic outcomes from the Australia-Mekong Water Facility are very clearly stated in the IDD. The document references the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper which "outlines Australia's ambitions to make an important contribution to efforts to maintain sustainable sources of food, water and energy and for Australia to be a leading partner in Southeast Asia. In the Greater Mekong region, it is in Australia's national interest that water resources are effectively managed and equitably shared, high social and environmental standards are applied to water-related investments, a rules-based framework is applied to transboundary water cooperation,

and water governance is more informed and more inclusive to support the region’s future security and prosperity.” The IDD is also clear about leveraging its recognised expertise in water resources management to “increase Australia’s credentials and influence in the region” (p1).

More specifically, the IDD sets out two diplomatic outcomes for the AMWF which sit alongside the development outcomes (p2-3):

- *Augment demand for Australian expertise in water management from Greater Mekong governments. (End of Facility Outcome)*
  - Australia’s interest in maintaining water-related partnerships across the region links directly to our policy to strengthen rules-based governance systems underpinned by clear, fair and sustainable management practices.
- *Increase Australia’s influence in the management of the region’s strategic water resources. (Intermediary Outcome)*
  - Australia’s influence is understood in this context as its ability to be perceived as a trusted partner whose opinion is demanded and valued by partner governments on important decisions and/or issues related to water management. The increase of influence will be sought by profiling Australia’s interest and expertise as clearly and convincingly as possible, and by ensuring visibility and recognition of the support provided to partner governments through effective public diplomacy.

**Table 2: Select Noteworthy Diplomatic Outcomes by Tier (see Annex for more examples)**

Tier	Project	Location	Diplomatic Outcome
Tier A	Thailand-Australia Water Dialogue	Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relationship built with Thailand’s Office of National Water Resources (ONWR) with areas for cooperation agreed for the coming years.</li> <li>- Positions Australia as a key partner in the water sector as new institutions and authorities emerge within the structure of the Thai government.</li> </ul>
	Water scarcity regional publication	Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The publication showcased Australian experience with water scarcity, highlighting potential Australian based solutions for Mekong governments to consider.</li> <li>- Publication provided helpful background to shape the FAO’s Asia-Pacific Water Scarcity Program – a multi-year multimillion dollar initiative.</li> </ul>
Tier B	Technical Support to Improve Reservoir Water Quality Management in Thailand	Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Builds on other support to RID, and showcases Australian expertise to improve practices for water quality sampling and monitoring; and for managing aquatic weeds</li> <li>- Has created strong interest within RID for CSIRO’s Aquawatch program to facilitate water quality monitoring.</li> </ul>
	Supporting the Development of an Integrated River Basin Management Plan for the Nam Xam Basin	Lao PDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MONRE specifically requested Australia’s technical support in developing a comprehensive river basin management plan for the Nam Xam River Basin with the Department of Water Resources (DWR)</li> <li>- Project applied the BasinGuide - another AWP product - to the Lao PDR context demonstrating the applicability of the Basin Guide for basins in Asia.</li> </ul>



Tier C	Development of a Lao PDR Groundwater Profile and Sustainable Groundwater Management Plan for Sekong Basin	Lao PDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Australian experts, coupled with study tour showcased Australia’s leading role in sustainable groundwater management.</li> </ul>
	Fisheries monitoring in the Mekong Basin to assess impacts of mainstream hydropower projects as part of the Mekong River Joint Environment Monitoring (JEM) Program	Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Australian capability successfully piloted fish passage monitoring in the Khone Falls area.</li> <li>- Experts drafted for MRC the <i>MRC Guidelines for Fish Pass Monitoring in the Lower Mekong River Basin</i>, which once approved will shape fish monitoring in the Lower Mekong.</li> </ul>
	Support to the Mekong River Commission (MRC) – sustainable hydropower	Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Australian capability has helped MRC better negotiate on key policy issues, recognising the value of drawing on Australia expertise at multiple levels such as Australia providing crucial hydropower advice/guidance in a politically sensitive but essential component of development within the Mekong.</li> <li>- Support to MRC and other AMWF supported activities in Lao PDR reinforces Australia’s reputation with key Lao Government officials. AWP projects are Australia’s only water sector projects in the country, yet Australia continues to have a prominent role, including co-Chairing the Water Resources Sub-Sector Working Group with the Lao Government.</li> </ul>
	WEIDAP Phase Two – Construction Support	Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Australian technical expertise at the heart of the modernisation of irrigation in Vietnam</li> <li>- MARD’s CPO stipulating that final design would not be approved until Australian experts had approved the scheme.</li> </ul>

**AMWF augments Australia’s international water diplomacy** by providing a responsive and flexible mechanism for Australia to further enhance existing water-related partnerships with the governments of the Mekong region ([Annex 2 - Select Diplomatic and Development Outcomes per Activity](#)). This has been achieved at a modest cost to Australia in response to the requests from partner government, simultaneously creating a high level of visibility and demonstrating Australia’s commitment to strengthening water resource management in the Mekong. Many Mekong government ministries specifically requested Australian expertise to address specific water resource management issues. For instance, MONRE in Laos specifically requested Australia’s technical support in developing a comprehensive river basin management plan for the Nam Xam River Basin with the Department of Water Resources (DWR). Australian partner Alluvium (following the Nam Xam Basin work) was recommended by DWR for a piece of work UNDP was doing with them. Alluvium thus won extra work as a result of this relationship with DWR. The Thailand-Australian Water dialogue emanated from a specific request by OWRN to showcase strategic links between Australia and Thailand in the water sector.

**Case study: Vietnam’s Law on Water Resources – Testimonial from DWRM**

Technical advice provided by Australian experts to Vietnam, under the AWP, has validated and provided strong justification for the reform directions Vietnam is pursuing. The evidence of Australian international experience is a key supporting feature, underpinning confidence to progress Vietnam’s ambitious water reform program.

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The advice and justification provided through the project has supported buy-in from key stakeholders and decision-makers to amendments to the law, providing independent credible learnings and evidence to support confidence to change.

Successful partnerships have also created an appetite amongst partner Mekong governments for support to continue. In the MRC for instance, technical advice and mentorship provided to date by the Australian expert have been highly valued. MRC has requested to Australia that the support be extended in order to build on the achievements made in terms of sustainable hydropower policy and guidelines and consolidate learning and the transfer of institutional knowledge. In Vietnam, DWRM has expressed a desire for further collaboration, insights and technical advice to support the development of subordinate instruments under the revised Water Resources Law, capacity building, and an implementation strategy for the related water reform program<sup>16</sup>.

Initial support by AMWF has boosted other Australian investments elsewhere. Technical support to WEIDAP in enabling a modernised system and have influenced many other subsequent projects funded by ADB including Sri Lanka and Georgia (by AWP experts) and trained other ADB consultant experts in the approach. The BasinGuide<sup>7</sup> - another AWP product - was applied within the Lao PDR context demonstrating the applicability of the BasinGuide for basins in Asia.

The means of delivery is as important as the activities supported through the AMWF. Mekong government partners talked openly of Australia as a trusted partner, and that Australian partners were effective at addressing both national and regional interests where applicable (such as with regard to hydropower initiatives in the Mekong). Long-standing relationships between partners have also contributed to Mekong government partners seeking additional support from Australia. In Thailand, for instance, there has been ongoing cooperation since 2019 between Australia (through AWP) and Thailand's Royal Irrigation Department (RID) on the topic of water ordering (known as water requesting in Thailand), with a team from RID sharing and exchanging knowledge with AWP Australian partners. Based on this positive experience, RID reached out to Australia for a similar type of exchange involving the RID team working on water quality issues. Support in Lao PDR saw Australian experts, coupled with a study tour, showcase Australia's leading role in sustainable groundwater management.

**AMWF has helped increase Australia's influence in the management of the region's strategic water resources.** AMWF has supported initiatives that have given Australia visibility at key events (nationally, regionally, and globally). The Thailand-Australia Water Dialogues, for instance, saw Australia play a prominent role in dialogue across various ministries of the Thai government, including several from beyond the water sector. The dialogue provided an opportunity for Australian partners to showcase cooperation and offerings with Thai counterparts in a panel and has led to a number of follow-up opportunities for Australia to engage with which Thailand has signaled as policy priorities.

The MRC Summit highlights the role that AWP plays in terms of public diplomacy initiatives for

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<sup>6</sup> On the successful passage of the Law on Water Resources (amended) the Director General of DWRM sent a highly complementary letter to both DFAT and AWP to thank Australia for the "its continuous support in the amendment of the Law on Water Resources and other water-related issues in Viet Nam", and stated that he is "looking forward to our joint efforts to strengthen the legal framework on water resources and, more importantly, its implementation for the advancement of a sustainable water future in Viet Nam".

<sup>7</sup> <https://waterpartnership.org.au/basinguide/>

Australia in the water sector. AWP coordinated Australia's booth at the Summit, which was visited by Ministers and senior officials from all MRC Member countries. This provides excellent visibility for Australia's water sector expertise and reminds partner governments of the development initiatives undertaken in countries where Australia's aid program is dwarfed by trade and other considerations such as Thailand and Vietnam. It also reinforces Australia's reputation with key Lao Government officials where AWP projects are Australia's only water sector projects in the country, yet Australia continues to have a prominent role, including co-chairing the Water Resources Sub-Sector Working Group with the Laos Government. The summit also demonstrates how effective AMWF is in coordinating with other Australian agencies. For example, at the Summit, a senior representative from the Murray-Darling Basin Authority spoke on a panel, co-convened with the World Bank, alongside senior government officials from Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, using the AWP publication Valuing Water as the guiding document for their remarks. They also delivered closing remarks to the Summit alongside the Chief Executive Officer of the MRC Secretariat. AWP is able to provide a platform for other Australian water experts on the international stage.

Diplomatic outcomes are also derived from the translation of knowledge products that are used in the Mekong to inform projects (such as the Publication on Managing Water Scarcity). The value in these translations lies not only in making technical publications more accessible to partner country experts but in demonstrating to senior government officials that Australia respects their country and culture and values the partnership.

At a regional level, Australian capability helps MRC better negotiate on key policy issues, and the MRC recognises the value of drawing on Australia at multiple levels (e.g. provision of crucial hydropower advice/guidance in a politically sensitive but essential component of development within the Mekong). At a bilateral level, Australian partners have played an influential role in the management of water resources. Mention has already been made of the influence in Vietnam, for instance, where both WEIDAP and the Amendment of the Water Resources Law have been profoundly shaped by Australian good practice. Australia co-chairs the Water sub-sector working group with the Lao PDR Government. This group brings together all major domestic and international actors in the water sector. At a recent MRC Donor Consultative Group meeting Australian projects highlighted in presentations compared with other development partners who contribute significantly more but get very little recognition.

## a. Efficiency

The AMWF has received \$14.86 million since its inception in 2019. The majority (\$9 million) of this funding was received upon commencement, with an additional \$0.86 million received from the Southeast Asia program shortly after, and \$5 million in additional funding received in March 2022.

Approximately 20% of total AMWF funds received have been used on non-project costs such as governance and management costs and maintaining the Expert Review Panel. Given that AWP implements a relatively large number of small projects, this is not considered excessive. Each project involves significant staff time in the development and approval of the project as well as ongoing monitoring including reviewing reports. **Australian partners have indicated that AWP are efficient in their dealings with them**, although some have indicated that the level of reporting required for relatively small projects is at the upper end of their expectations. This is discussed further in the monitoring and evaluation section.

**AWP uses flexible procurement processes which allows it to single source when necessary.** Of the 28 projects considered as part of this evaluation, 9 were sourced through an open tender and 19 were direct sourced. Direct sourcing is an efficient approach, especially where in-country and Australian partners have an existing relationship that can be built upon.

However, a balance must be struck to ensure that there are opportunities for other partners to engage with AWP and that not all projects are being implemented by the same small group of Australian partners. AWP is aware of this tension, with decisions around procurement methods made on a project-by-project basis as part of the concept note approval process by the relevant governing body.

In addition to AMWF's \$14.86 million, Hanoi Post contributed an additional \$1.7 million in bilateral funding to AWP. However, for administrative reasons, this money was contributed through AWP's other main funding stream, the AWP Phase 2 Core Grant. As a result, projects implemented from Vietnam's bilateral funds are outside the scope of this evaluation. The way the funds have been structured has resulted in inefficiencies for AWP with projects being implemented in the same context subject to different governance arrangements.

For example, the project that provided support to Vietnam on the amendment of its Law on Water Resources was funded under AMWF. It was subject to approval by AMWF's usual governing body, the Facility Coordination Group (FCG), which comprises AWP Executive and Senior DFAT Post officers from the region. That project concluded in late 2023 with the successful passing of the new law. The follow-on project, designed to support implementation of the new law and started in late 2023, is funded from the bilateral funds and subject to different governance arrangements and reporting. The implementation support program has to be approved by AWP's Advisory Committee (AWPAC). There is no overlap between the members of the AMWF's FCG and AWPAC, although some members of the FCG attend AWPAC meetings as observers. It would be much more efficient if Vietnam's bilateral funding was administered by AMWF as all projects in the country would be subject to the same approval and oversight processes, with the approvers of the first phase of the process already understanding the operating context and aims of subsequent phases of the project.

**Events and communications activities implemented under AMWF are considered by DFAT Posts to be efficiently organised and delivered.** AWP is able to provide professional staff to represent Team Australia at events, who understand how to set up a booth properly to maximise exposure and have high-quality collateral that showcases Australia's work in the water sector. AWP's ability to effectively and efficiently engage with other Australian organisations and departments working on water issues, such as CSIRO, ACIAR and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) is also highly valued.

## **b. Gender, Disability and Social Inclusion**

**AWP has made considerable effort to integrate gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) across its operations - and to strengthen this over time.** The *AWP Gender Equality Disability and Social Inclusion Policy 2020 - 2023* commits AWP to focus on four areas for GEDSI integration: (i) AWP Systems, Processes and People; (ii) AWP supported activities; (iii) Partner capacity; and (iv) Communication, learning and knowledge sharing.

Key actions supporting these commitments are the **inclusion of GEDSI experts on AWP's Expert Review Panel (ERP), regular GEDSI training for AWP partners and detailed guidance for AWP partners on how to address GEDSI in AWP concepts, proposals, and tenders**<sup>8</sup>. GEDSI is included in Terms of Reference and, where applicable, contracted as a project milestone. GEDSI is one of the ten criteria against which proposals from Australian partners are assessed and the GEDSI experts on the ERP also provide recommendations about how GEDSI can be further strengthened prior to implementation. AWP has also contributed to the body of knowledge available internationally related to water resources management and GEDSI<sup>9</sup> and it was clear that some AMWF partners drew on other AWP resources to inform GEDSI analysis in their own proposals.

<sup>8</sup> Addressing Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in AWP concepts, proposals, and tenders: Guidance for Partners. 16 April 2019. Australian Water Partnership. Accessed at: <https://waterpartnership.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/AWP-GESI-Guidance-for-Partners.pdf>

A comprehensive review of GEDSI in AWP completed in early 2022 recommended a “Do No Harm” approach to GEDSI implementation, with the aim of ensuring that AWP-supported activities are not “GEDSI blind” and that efforts are made to both understand and then address the potential GEDSI impacts of every activity. This review placed further emphasis on drawing out the disability and social inclusion issues alongside gender and made recommendations for strengthening AWP’s monitoring and evaluation framework to improve accountability for progress on GEDSI.

The AMWF Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Strategy 2019-2023 outlines a twin-tracked approach to GEDSI:

- integrating GEDSI commitments into the management and operations of the Facility; and
- Taking practical measures to embed GEDSI across the various stages of the activity cycle to ensure that activities “Do No Harm” and are actually “GEDSI sensitive”.

AWP’s efforts to embed GEDSI within systems and processes have paid off to the extent that **all AMWF Australian partners interviewed understood the requirement to address GEDSI within their activities**. Whether or not this led to targeted actions during implementation, or achievement of any outcomes, varied considerably.

During interviews partners were asked to provide a rating between 1 and 4 in response to the question: “To what extent are partners designing and implementing activities in a manner that supports gender equality, disability and wider social inclusion (GEDSI)?”. The average rating was 2.8 (with the mode being 3, and most partners recorded either a 2 or a 3), indicating **partners felt that meaningful GEDSI analysis and planning was being undertaken and that GEDSI was increasingly prioritised**<sup>10</sup>. Commentary provided also showed that partners had a reasonable level of awareness about how well (or not) they had been able to address GEDSI. Even where efforts were made, partners were not convinced that they would lead to improved outcomes:

*“[GEDSI is] a gap currently being addressed. Phase 1 outcomes were disappointing (moderate achievements). Phase 2 has a much more structured GEDSI focus. [There is a government counterpart] delegation coming to Australia - will provide GEDSI guidelines and training - and then see if guidelines being implemented in practice.”*

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<sup>9</sup>Grant, M., Willetts, J., and Huggett, C. (2019). Gender Equality and Goal 6 - The Critical Connection: An Australian Perspective. Canberra: Australian Water Partnership  
Syddall, V., and Grant, M. (2023) Water, Food, and Gender Equality Synergies: Exploring the water security, fisheries and gender equality nexus learning brief. Australian Water Partnership. Accessed at: [waterpartnership.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Water-Food-and-Equality-Synergies.pdf](https://waterpartnership.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Water-Food-and-Equality-Synergies.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Note that the data mainly reflects the Australian partner perspectives with very few ratings provided by in-country partners.

There was also strong pushback from some consultants who felt that **AWP's requirement to incorporate GEDSI was not just difficult to achieve, but sometimes inappropriate, when it did not align with government counterpart priorities.**

These comments were somewhat reinforced during in-country workshops and interviews, with **no government counterparts highlighting GEDSI progress** or volunteering GEDSI commentary.

Within the activities reviewed, there is **some evidence of positive GEDSI actions and/or outcomes.**

#### **Case study – Supporting the development of an Integrated River Basin Management Plan for the Nam Xam Basin, Lao PDR**

##### *Inclusive stakeholder consultations*

Initial GEDSI activities included collaborating with the Department of Water Resources (DWR) team to map the basin stakeholders, prepare the stakeholder engagement plan, and implement the engagement in line with that plan. One of the objectives of engagement in the planning process was to enable inclusive design so that the plan considers the needs and perspectives of stakeholders from diverse backgrounds (ethnic groups, women, people with disabilities, economically disadvantaged people, and other marginalised people).

Throughout the engagement process, the activity team sought to ensure that the basin planning process was inclusive, with specific emphasis on ensuring that the stakeholders invited and supported to participate included stakeholders from diverse backgrounds (ethnic groups, women, people with disabilities, economically disadvantaged people, and other marginalised people). In invitations for engagements, organisations were encouraged to include women and young people and asked whether there were any ways we could make the sessions more accessible for any specific needs.

#### **Case study – Technical support in developing water legislation in Lao PDR on water quality and water resource protection zone management**

##### *Inclusive Stakeholder consultations*

To support GEDSI outcomes, Griffith University worked closely with the Gender Development Association on the inclusion of diverse participants in the three consultation rounds. This work focused on including female participants in addition to participants from both provincial and district levels, and other relevant sectors (private companies, universities, NGOs). GEDSI input was also included when providing recommendations for dissemination and implementation of the ministerial agreements. Overall, the participation of females and peoples with disability was low. This was directly linked to the very low number of technical female and diverse staff working in line ministries on water resources.



## Case study – Technical support to improve reservoir water quality management in Thailand

### *Identifying opportunities to increase participation*

Griffith University engaged an expert who prepared a GEDSI awareness questionnaire, which was distributed to RID. Responses to the questionnaire, together with interactions in the ensuing monthly meetings, revealed RID was largely comprised of males/engineers. Gaps were also identified in RID's existing social inclusion framework. Several initiatives have since been discussed, and during the delegation visit in December two activities were developed to elevate GEDSI in RID and the agricultural sector more broadly in Thailand.

The first activity involves the promotion of women in rice farming in small and medium enterprises (SMEs). There has already been some success in the northeast and the activity would seek to promote this success more widely throughout Thailand.

The second activity involves the employment of additional RID staff to undertake the extra water quality monitoring required to manage eutrophication. The recruitment process could be designed to ensure gender balance, with staff to be trained in communicating social inclusion.

Despite AWP efforts to support systematic integration of GEDSI throughout the AMWF activity cycle, **results appear to be somewhat disappointing overall**. There is evidence of GEDSI analysis (of varying quality) being undertaken at the proposal stage in line with AWP requirements, but this **does not always seem to carry through to implementation or reporting**. Several partners failed to follow through in implementing what was promised in their proposal. Reporting (even disaggregation of training participants) was patchy and sometimes repetitive – drawing on the same examples in successive reports - although reporting did improve over time in line with increased attention from AWP.

There is also a realisation amongst several of those interviewed that when Australian partners weren't engaged in the design of the intervention (such as WEIDAP for instance) it was difficult to insert GEDSI after the fact. With AMWF being demand-driven, there will be instances when only limited influence can be expected with regard to GEDSI as the partners were not engaged early enough to make a substantial difference.

It was clear that some Australian partners continue to focus on gender only, without considering other GEDSI aspects – people with disabilities and other groups often subject to exclusion (e.g. ethnic groups).

Factors leading to better GEDSI actions or outcomes are also difficult to pinpoint. Based on the documentation review and partner interviews:

- The level of attention provided to GEDSI during implementation did not seem to be related to:
  - The AWP Tier (A, B, or C) of the partnership
  - The dollar value or duration of the activity.
- More systematic attention was given to GEDSI in implementation and reporting when a dedicated GEDSI advisor or consultant was included in the project team.
- Dedicated GEDSI advisors were provided in all activities that were subject to open procurement.
- Most (75%) activities where the Australian partner was directly sourced, excluding individuals contracted) did not have a dedicated GEDSI advisor.
- Subsequent phases of the same activity sometimes showed incremental progress on GEDSI in response to feedback from AWP, or with improved support from the government counterpart, but this was not consistently the case.

**The availability of a dedicated GEDSI expert to the Australian partner throughout implementation appeared to be the main factor** contributing to progress on GEDSI.

## c. Climate Change

Under Principle #2 of AWP's Strategic Plan (2023 – 2028) the program commits to prioritising climate action, more specifically strengthening the link between water security and climate resilience. Under AMWF partnerships have been strongly focused on implementing this principle, and many activities have delivered tangible outputs to assist respective Mekong Governments mitigate the effects of climate change.

AMWF's support to the MRC is focused on promoting sustainable hydropower, and the activities to support the Nam Xam River Basin Management Plan, and the Groundwater Management project are focused on mitigating the impact of climate change and helping Lao PDR introduce climate mitigation strategies.

Activities such as the *Coordination of Flows in the Mekong* (Lao PDR) were conceptualised to help manage flow management issues exacerbated by climate change. Many other activities supported by the AMWF have included specific capacity building to strengthen the respective Ministries to address climate change issues. Both WEIDAP and the Nam Xam project, for instance, included capacity development activities and workshops to strengthen the response to climate change. Several other projects also provided technical expertise on issues such as drought forecasting or early warning systems for flooding (such as the work being done in Thailand with the ONWR). Other activities such as the *Technical Support to Improve Reservoir Water Quality Management in Thailand* delivered specific reports examining climate change impacts on water resources.

However, partners also acknowledge that they did face difficulties in the field in raising issues related to climate change. For some local partners, the focus for activities was more about addressing water scarcity/basic water distribution to enhance economic growth. Thus, this often created a source of tension in partnerships, with the Australian partners advocating for greater focus on climate change, and local partners wanting to address what they saw as more basic rights, such as access to water. Partners did concede that over time common ground was typically found, especially once Australian partners were given the opportunity to demonstrate the interconnections between climate change and water resource management.

## d. Monitoring and Evaluation

Partnerships are central to the work of AWP. Partners may bring together a combination of appropriate technical skills, and a range of other skills including relationship building, local expertise, cultural awareness, and diplomacy. AWP defines its approach to partnerships as follows:

*Our value proposition – how Partnership makes us different*

“AWP works through partnering, which means we broker and sustain relationships with certain attributes: mutual trust, respect, reciprocity, exchange of ideas and information, co-design (with partner governments and DFAT) and joint problem solving. A partnership is qualitatively different from an advisory or consultancy relationship.

“Through our partnerships, we continue to learn and innovate so that we can improve our co-developed strategies for improving sustainable and equitable water management. We cultivate a Water for Development Community to grow and strengthen partnerships, and communicate the learning and knowledge from partnerships back to our community.” – AWP Strategic Plan 2023-2028



As already noted above there is a strong argument to be made that partnerships have increased the positive impact of AMWF, and that working with local actors has helped foster local ownership, ensured the relevancy of AMWF's work, and has enhanced local sustainability. In addition, the symbiotic nature of the partnerships has helped partners share and learn from each other.

However, despite this strong commitment to fostering, nurturing, and brokering partnerships in all its work the evaluation team found that AWP had yet to fully unpack its assumptions about partnering (AWP commissioned an enquiry in its approach to Partnering and Partnerships, but decided to wait for Phase 3's direction to become clear to act on findings and communicate changes, because these would mean restructuring how AWP interacts with its many partners. There has therefore been systematically assessment of to what extent partnerships were in fact the optimal approach to achieving expected development and diplomatic outcomes. In addition, whilst the AMWF has been increasingly building M&E into activities by including it in ToRs, milestone deliverables, and conducting interviews with Mekong partners, and strengthening the program's focus on expected outcomes from its activities AMWF has found that its partners either still report on outputs, or question whether it is realistic that outcomes can be achieved within the timeframe of the activity.

In this section of the report, 6 key reflections are made that the evaluation team believe will help contribute to strengthening the programmatic approach to monitoring and evaluating partnering and help enhance AWWF's ongoing collection of evidence to demonstrate progress towards expected outcomes.

### **Reflection 1 – Be clear about what is meant by partnership and its purpose**

AWP have spelt out their value proposition and outlined how their approach to partnership makes them different (in addition to distinguishing between partnerships at Tier A, B, and C level as denoted in the AWP ToC). However, AWP has yet to fully articulate how it defines partnership, and what the key features are of partnership for AWP. The rubric, co-created with AWP, and piloted in this evaluation, is an important first step in identifying common features for every partnership. Further thought should be given to identifying a clear rationale for partnerships within each activity, especially developing a clear set of common characteristics for each tier to help manage expectations about the essence of partnership within different contexts, size and duration of investment, and so on. For further discussion within AWP, the principles outlined in AWP's strategy document could form the basis of a partnership agreement, which all partners within a partnership formally commit to upholding.

### **Reflection 2 – Be clear about AMWF/AWP's role in the partnership**

Feedback from stakeholders suggests that the role of AMWF/AWP is unclear in the partnership (or whether AMWF/AWP has a role to play in the partnership). Stakeholders noted that whilst AWP was seen to facilitate and broker partnerships for some it was then not visible (although not in all cases as there have been instances where AWP did step in at the request of partners), until reports were required. Whilst this may be the preferred mode of operating for AWP, AWP does need to be clear to all partners not only what it expects from partners, but also how AWP sees its role (including being on hand to address challenges should they arise).

### **Reflection 3 – Be clear about what is being measured within the partnership**

Before thinking of ways to assess whether working in a partnership increases the impact of AMWF, it is important to be clear about how partnerships are assessed or measured. For instance, is the focus on measuring the partnership, the partners, or both? The rubric piloted in this evaluation suggests that there is value in measuring both – using different criteria in order to assess how the partnership is

tracking. Getting different partners within the partnership to record their views also provides an assessment of how the partners believe each partner is performing (by comparing scores and discussing discrepancies can help foster accountability and transparency within the partnership).

The measurement process would include partner reviews (agreeing at the outset on the types of areas to focus on, such as partnership objectives, partnership process, and benefit/added value of the partnership), and a common assessment tool (the Rubric would be an obvious instrument to use in the assessment).

#### **Reflection 4 – Link partnership actions to project outcomes**

The design of AMWF-supported activities does not include a clear M&E plan/framework for the activity. Currently whilst the expected outputs are defined in detail, designs do not articulate specific/measurable outcomes. There is a need to incorporate an M&E plan into future activity designs<sup>11</sup> that speak to both the expected outputs and outcomes, noting the following:

- Outcomes must be both feasible and practicable, taking cognisance of the Tier A, B, and C differential<sup>12</sup>.
- Expected outcomes should be co-created within the partnership to ensure that partners agree that the outcomes are desirable, and that they will pursue together M&E of these outcomes in a way that reflects their ambitions of achieving a genuine partnership.
- Measures must be assigned to each expected outcome (i.e. how will you know that the expected outcome has been achieved?), and a brief explanation as to how this measurement will be conducted.
- Where appropriate it may be necessary to also distinguish within a partnership who will be responsible for measuring and reporting against specific outcomes.

The AWP GEDSI Review conducted in 2022 made several recommendations related to the monitoring and evaluation framework which would enhance accountability for GEDSI outcomes. AWP has already made efforts to improve reporting by Australian partners and these should continue.

#### **Reflection 5 – What should M&E at activity level look like?**

Many stakeholders expressed frustration at the level of reporting required, and most partners believe that they are required to report more often to AWP than to any other investment partner, even when the investments are substantially more than a typical AWP grant. Interviews with Australian partners suggest that AWP should be doing more regular informal check-ins (e.g. perhaps 3 times during the life of the activity, depending on the nature and lengths of the activity) - which would replace aspects of reporting.

At activity level, AWP should consider, where feasible, more regular informal monitoring/check-in with partners, focusing on a Partnership health check and progress (especially for new Australian partners). In addition, AWP needs to consider:

- Reducing the level of formal reporting (especially on projects of less than 12 months), guided by a minimum sufficient M&E Framework.

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<sup>11</sup> In the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase AWP should consider developing a simple M&E template, which partners can either complete themselves or AWP's M&E support team help facilitate the process.

<sup>12</sup> For further consideration is that rather than track outcomes (which are typically of a long-term nature and not suitable to short-term projects) AMWF might consider focusing on intermediate outcomes at project level, which in turn would then contribute to specific program-wide outcomes. E.g. one could identify a set of common outcomes and intermediate outcomes, and then specific projects would align to a sub-set of the intermediate outcomes (e.g. legislation, groundwater, infrastructure etc.).

- More regular touch points to check in, troubleshoot where need be, and be available for less focused and more wide-ranging discussions if applicable.

## Reflection 6 – What should M&E at program level look like?

At program level, AWP needs to tailor the M&E requirements to better manage Tier A, B and C differential. This includes managing expectations within DFAT. For instance, some projects are output-based and there is no expectation beyond this (Post driving selection). There needs to be sensitisation that some projects will not have development outcomes.

Instead, AWP should focus more on the impactful projects to identify outcomes (as opposed to trying to identify long-term outcomes across every project within the portfolio) - resourcing appropriately to identify evidence to demonstrate impact.

## e. Knowledge, Partnerships, Events and Communications

Whilst Knowledge, Partnerships, Events and Communications (KPEC) complement all of AMWF's work, it was not a core focus of this review (AWP are currently conducting a separate independent evaluation of all of its KPEC actions). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this partnership review it is instructive to consider to what extent KPEC actions have contributed to the attainment of diplomatic or development outcomes under AMWF.

To enhance progress towards outcomes AMWF generates and then disseminates knowledge generated through AMWF activities to improve climate resilient and sustainable water resource management in the Mekong region (See [Annex 3: Knowledge Products](#)). AMWF is seen to be both effective and efficient in organising events, and in bringing relevant AWP professional expertise to such events (such as on water management, GEDSI, Climate Change, partnership brokering and so on) to represent Team Australia, showcasing the work of not only AWP, but demonstrating that it can effectively and efficiently engage with other Australian organisations and departments working on water issues. Communication and events showcase not only AWP but also help demonstrate the value of Australia's technical expertise and Australia's commitment to addressing critical water resource management issues in the region.

Whilst Tier A activities under the AMWF were designed specifically to promote greater awareness and knowledge, many activities under Tier B and C have been making effective use of components of the KPEC approach to contribute to the expected development and diplomatic outcomes of AMWF.

Under Tier A, whilst difficult to quantify, a number of events supported (to various extent) by AMWF contribute to both development and diplomatic outcomes such as the MRC Summit in Vientiane, the Thailand-Australia Water Dialogue, and the [support provided to the water scarcity regional publication](#). All three examples serve multiple purposes including disseminating knowledge, providing a platform to showcase the Australian experience, and demonstrating the value to Mekong governments of Australia's technical expertise.

The [Thailand-Australia Dialogue](#) was the first activity implemented in support of the 2021 Memorandum of Understanding on Water Resource Management and the Thai Office of National Water Resources (ONWR) and provided an opportunity to outline the existing collaboration in the water sector between the two countries. The Dialogue also marked the first meeting of the Thailand-Australia Joint Steering Committee which approved areas of work for cooperation in the coming years. The dialogue also acted as a platform for a more substantial development activity, with work started as part of the Dialogue around dispute resolution in river basin committees (including

introducing an important paradigm shift from resolution to dispute mitigation, establishing clear rules around water accounting and developing water sharing plans).

Under Tier B, KPEC initiatives have also helped to bolster development and diplomatic outcomes. For instance, knowledge from earlier activities has been shared to strengthen more recent initiatives. The Nam Xam Basin initiative drew heavily on the AWP [BasinGuide](#) publication demonstrating the applicability of the BasinGuide for basins in SE Asia. Many Mekong Government ministries are willing to generate publicity (news stories, social media) around respective projects. The Support for the Development of the Groundwater Profile in Lao PDR was included in the national media in Lao PDR (television coverage of the event). Video footage generated by the project to improve Reservoir Water Quality Management in Thailand was shown on national TV in Thailand. Technical support to Vietnam's Water Resources Law has been promoted on DWRM's website, through social media, and local news in Vietnam.

Tier B activities have also participated in events and publications to disseminate knowledge and showcase Australian expertise. Researchers involved in improving water reservoir quality in Thailand have presented their findings at the International Water Association Congress (December 2023). Support to Vietnam's national water resource planning provided an opportunity for Australian experts to share experiences at the workshops arranged by DWRM on their Water Security Framework (November 2022), and public events around Nature-based Solutions to integrated urban flood management in Thailand and Vietnam included a 2-day regional conference which attracted over 200 delegates and included participation from senior Australian and in-country officials with online conference sessions conducted in 5 different languages (which helped motivate for a much larger investment on Nature-based Solutions, including a dedicated website providing public access to project information and key outputs). Publications generated under Tier B activities include, for instance, the technical support that led to the publication of the MRC's *Guidelines for Fish Pass Monitoring in the Lower Mekong River Basin*, and a journal article in the highly regarded academic journal [Water](#).

However, not all products are readily available for greater reach, especially with regard to online training materials prepared for capacity-building aspects of activities. For instance, in the Nam Xam project a number of resources were developed for use mainly by DWR, such as recordings of webinars and some online workshops; the usefulness of these is limited to the attendees and immediate colleagues involved in this project. Moreover, certain activities were not seen to be suitable for delivering communication projects, for instance the provision of technical support to the MRC's RFDMC was seen to be part of a broader JAIP project and therefore was deemed not to be feasible to deliver specific communication products.

Under Tier C activities KPEC has understandably been less of a focus. This is likely to be the result of these activities being part of much larger programs (e.g. WEIDAP, or WSP), where the core funder (such as ADB or FAO) already have their own branding and communication procedures and it is not appropriate for AMWF to be generating their own communication products when AMWF's role in these larger programs is primarily to provide specific technical advice. Nevertheless, Tier C activities have generated a social media presence (see for instance details on the [regional water scarcity program on the FAO website](#)). Tier C activities have also conducted a wide range of knowledge sharing workshops addressing technical aspects of water resource management (for instance workshops conducted under WEIDAP including the Water Pricing Workshop, Water Resource Planning and Crop Monitoring Workshops, and the Water Resource Management Workshop).

## 7 Conclusion

In response to the [4 Evaluation Questions](#), the evaluation found that AMWF-supported activities have delivered noteworthy development and diplomatic outcomes, underpinned by an effective use of a mixture of Australian-based and nationally recruited partners within the Mekong region. Mekong government partners view Australia as the partner of choice, not only because Australia is from the region, but because the relationship is underpinned by long-standing strong government-to-government relations, bolstered by Australian expertise providing effective solutions to challenges in the region.

Achievements at the outcome level of activities are within the range of what would be expected noting the short-term nature of most activities and are commensurate with the level of investment and time as per AMWF's distinction between Tier A, B and C-level activities. Tier A activities have therefore been effective in both knowledge sharing, but also providing some important diplomatic wins for Australia. Tier B activities have contributed a number of important solutions to help address water resource challenges in the region, and have successfully demonstrated, through pilots, applicable policies, practices and tools. In so doing the work under Tier B has also secured a number of noteworthy diplomatic outcomes for Australia. The longer-term Tier C activities, which have successfully built on earlier phases of support, have contributed to specific policies, tools and practices being adopted at a national and regional level to address development issues in the sector. Tier C activities have also been shown to advance Australian diplomacy and create opportunities for Australia to showcase its expertise in the sector.

The relevance of AMWF to Australia's broader relationship with partner country governments varies greatly within the Mekong region. This is in large part due to the different development trajectories of each country within the region, so whilst bilateral relations might be different in each of the three countries, the development and diplomatic outcomes achieved were nevertheless of value within the context of each country. Work done at the regional level has also been successful in enhancing the priorities of the MRC.

Whilst the outcomes achieved by AMWF-supported activities are impressive, so too is the means by which activities achieved these outcomes. The manner in which Australian partners embraced the notion of partnership was seen to have enhanced the effectiveness of activities. AMWF also has demonstrated how to ensure development and diplomatic outcomes intersect in a meaningful way. Through the realisation of development outcomes, AMWF has enhanced the standing of Australia in the region. The challenge going into the future will be to maintain this level of efficacy to ensure that Australia remains a partner of choice.

The partnership modality has played a critical role in the success of AMWF activities for a number of reasons:

- It has created the means to ensure partners work together effectively, especially where long-standing relationships already exist between partners.
- It has helped demonstrate to Mekong government partners that Australia is genuine about its aspirations to be a true partner and the partnerships provide an effective way to demonstrate this commitment through practice.
- It has ensured that partners work together to ensure a common purpose, and to realise a common vision.
- It has provided opportunities to bring in highly technical expertise that Mekong governments would not have normally been able to afford.

Nevertheless, there are areas that the next phase of the AMWF will need to address, both in terms of its approach to Partnerships and with respect to certain policy objectives of the facility:

- Contracting is seen to inhibit flexibility and adaption of projects, it leads to Australian partners carrying most of the risk, and has led to onerous reporting requirements which are not proportionate to the size of the investment.
- Sustainability of the effects of short-term projects will always be difficult, and AMWF will need to continue to find innovative ways to secure its legacy.
- Australia has developed an impressive reputation in the region, but it needs to be maintained if it wants to remain a partner of choice.

GEDSI remains a challenge. Whilst evidence supports the view that certain activities have created positive GEDSI actions and have realised some important outcomes with regard to GEDSI, partners do not always appreciate the important focus that AMWF places on GEDSI. There is also a realisation amongst several of those interviewed that when Australian partners weren't engaged in the project design it was difficult to insert GEDSI after the fact. The availability of a dedicated GEDSI expert to the Australian partner throughout implementation appeared to be the main factor contributing to progress on GEDSI.

Under AMWF partnerships have been strongly focused on addressing mitigation and adaptation aspects of climate resilience, and many activities have delivered tangible outputs to assist respective Mekong Governments mitigate the effects of climate change.

The approach to KPEC within AWMF has also been shown to have been largely effective. Noticeable success has been achieved with activities serving multiple purposes including disseminating knowledge, showcasing the Australian experience, and demonstrating the value to Mekong governments of Australia's technical expertise. However, not all products generated by Tier B and Tier C activities are readily available for greater reach, especially with regard to online training materials prepared for capacity-building aspects of activities.

To continue to strengthen the programmatic approach to monitoring and evaluating partnering, and help strengthen AMWF's ongoing collection of evidence to demonstrate progress towards expected outcomes, the evaluation team believe that AMWF needs to:

1. Be clear about what is meant by partnership and its purpose;
2. Be clear about the role of AMWF /AWP in the partnership;
3. Be clear about what is being measured within the partnership;
4. Link partnership actions to project outcomes;
5. Be clear about what M&E should look like at the activity level; and
6. Be clear about what M&E should look like at program level.

## 8 Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Based on the lessons learned from this evaluation, the recommendations of the evaluation team for the next phase of the AMWF are detailed below.

**Table 3: Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

Key Lesson Learnt	Recommendation
Facilitate effective partnerships  Trust and respect take time, as does effective ways of working.	There are no short-cuts to effective partnership brokering, but if partners are new then AWP needs to ensure contracts provide time for partners to co-



<p>Long-standing relationships underpin many partnerships.</p> <p>Local consultants/people on the ground (or even expats who have worked locally for many years) are critical to implementation.</p> <p>Having objective Australian technical support at country and regional level helps collaboration, and has helped build local capacity effectively.</p> <p>Establishing clear expectations and an agreed approach to the scope and outcome of activities at the outset of the project is important</p> <p><b>Facilitate diplomatic outcomes and/or support diplomatic efforts</b></p> <p>Projects have delivered an impressive range of outcomes, as a result of Australian expertise partner Governments might not have been able to access.</p> <p>Study visits/field trips to Australia have played a critical role in showcasing potential solutions to Mekong government partners.</p> <p>AWP working through Post – the <i>Mekong Working Group</i> is an effective means for ensuring links between Australia’s development and diplomatic objectives in the region</p>	<p>create a shared vision, governance and management of the partnership, and collaborative ways of working.</p> <p>-</p> <p>AWP needs to continue to work closely with DFAT to maintain the strategic use of AMWF in the region, and continue to work with DFAT to help the facility maintain close alignment to DFAT’s strategic objectives in the region.</p>
<p><b>Ensure outcomes are achieved</b></p> <p>AMWF’s role in partnerships is ambiguous and is not always as visible as some partners would like</p> <p>Design of AMWF supported activities do not include a clear M&amp;E plan/framework for the activities</p> <p>Partners find reporting onerous</p>	<p>AWP needs to incorporate a M&amp;E plan into future activity designs which speak to both the expected outputs (all projects) and outcomes (Tiers B and C only).</p> <p><b>At activity level</b> AWP should consider reducing formal reporting and replace with more informal verbal briefs focusing on a Partnership health check and progress. The extent to which AWP applies this approach would be based on its own assessment of risk, especially when working with new Australian partners.</p> <p>At <b>program level</b> AWP needs to tailor the M&amp;E requirements to better manage Tier A, B and C</p>

### **Sustainability of outcomes**

Short-term projects do not lend themselves to sustainability, nevertheless opportunities have arisen where further investment has ensured outputs (policies, practices and tools) have been put into practice.

Further support required to help maintain momentum and quality

### **GEDSI**

Despite AWP efforts to support systematic integration of GEDSI throughout the AMWF activity cycle, however, results appear to be somewhat disappointing overall

Some Australian partners continue to focus on gender only, without considering other GEDSI aspects.

The availability of GEDSI expertise to the Australian partner throughout implementation appeared to be the main factor contributing to progress on GEDSI

### **KPEC**

Many Mekong Government ministries are willing to generate publicity (new stories, social media) around respective projects.

Post support at events (preferably at senior level) enhances the credibility of events in the eyes of Mekong Government officials which enhances the effectiveness and impact of these events.

differential. This includes managing expectations within DFAT.

AWP should establish a draw down facility for post-project activities to provide ongoing implementation support to help Ministries implement project outputs (policies, practices, tools), e.g. 20 days over 12 months.

The draw-down facility would be managed by the local counterpart, and to be determined on a project-to-project basis.

Terms of Reference for AMWF activities must specify more clearly the expectations in relation to gender. Some activities (e.g. Individuals providing specific technical expertise) may not need to specifically focus on GEDSI issues. Some may be contributing to larger programs where other partners are responsible for leading on GEDSI. Other activities may offer opportunities to embed GEDSI perspectives in key strategic or operational documents. TORs for these activities could require the Australian partner to provide access to dedicated GEDSI expertise.

Where the same Mekong government entity is the partner on multiple AMWF activities (e.g. Department of Water Resources in Lao PDR, Department of Water Resources Management in Vietnam), AWP should consider whether targeted GEDSI support could be offered to these partners to provide a more complete picture of GEDSI needs and gaps which would also supplement the efforts under individual activities.

AMWF must tailor the KPEC approach to the type of activity (noting that Tier A activities are primarily focused on KPEC interventions whereas activities in other Tiers will have different objectives).

AMWF must work with Mekong government partners from the start of an activity to co-create an approach to KPEC, and ensure Post is part of this process to secure a common understanding.

Wherever possible, AWP should continue to learn from prior activities and experience, including the development of knowledge products (such as the



Not all projects are suitable for publicity, especially where projects are within much larger initiatives (FAO, ADB etc) as this can create conflicting branding issues

BasinGuide) to help inform the design and implementation of new projects.

AWP should continue to leverage Australian experience in the water sector, combined with learnings from AMWF projects, to produce new knowledge products on emerging issues.

## Annexes

### a. Annex I: Evaluative Assessment of Partnerships

Dimension	Criteria	Evaluative Judgement	Rationale for Evaluative Judgement
<b>Context for Partnership</b>	Strong organisational support exists for partnership within individual partner organisations	Growing	AMWF responds to requests for support, so projects are aligned to Mekong government priorities. Support from Mekong governments for projects has varied, but increasingly support has improved as the value of AMWF is realised.
	Partnership builds on longstanding or multiple collaborations	Extensive	Whilst there are few instances where partners are collaborating on multiple activities, there is strong evidence to suggest that many of the partnerships either build on existing multi-year relationships (e.g. the project is now in its second or third phase) and/or the project is the result of a long-standing relationship between partners
<b>Governance of Partnerships</b>	Partners share a well-articulated vision and purpose	Growing	Partners are working together to create a shared vision and purpose for the partnership
	Appropriate institutional/ organisational leadership, management and governance arrangements exist to ensure co-creation of programs, shared decision making and a collaborative approach to partnering	Growing	Structures are meeting regularly to enhance shared decision making
	Partners are willing to share risks	Growing	Partners have agreed on the risks, but discussions are ongoing regarding ownership of the risks
	Partners are mutually accountable, transparent and reliable in all transactions within the partnership	Growing - Flourishing	Partnership activities are programmed through a structured and transparent process  Partners have ensured timely and accessible information to all partners but there is room for improvement  The partnership has contributed to ensuring greater transparent reporting between partners
	Clear lines of communication exist between partners and enhance collaboration within the partnership	Growing	Partners have agreed on lines of communication
	Partnership is well managed with clear roles and responsibilities	Flourishing	Joint management of the partnership, and partners reliably meeting their expected

Dimension	Criteria	Evaluative Judgement	Rationale for Evaluative Judgement
			roles is contributing to mutual accountability within the partnership
<b>Ways of Working</b>	Partners are flexible and responsive to jointly adapt to shifts in context	Emerging	Variable degrees of adaption to changes in circumstances
	Adequate resources to deliver on commitments are contributed by all partners and are commensurate with desired outcomes	Flourishing	Partners have demonstrated their commitment to the partnership and its desired outcomes by ensuring they are delivering adequate resources in a timely fashion
	Partners design and implement activities in a gender sensitive and inclusive manner	Emerging	Variable success with prioritising gender and inclusion within project activities
	Expertise from different partners ensures a good fit between the proposed solution and the jointly identified need	Flourishing	Actions taken by partners demonstrate a good fit between their respective expertise and the proposed solution to the jointly identified need
<b>Trust and Respect</b>	Trusted partnership allows partners to have difficult conversations and resolve any conflicts	Emerging	Variable degrees of success with identifying areas of difference and addressing issues that arise
	Partners demonstrate understanding of operating context and navigate challenges with respect and sensitivity.	Flourishing	Partners demonstrate a high level of understanding of the operating context and navigate challenges with respect and sensitivity.
	All partners have a genuine voice and their contribution is respected.	Growing - Flourishing	Partners understand and acknowledge what each partner contributes to the partnership  Most partnerships have ensured that the voice of all partners is incorporated consciously and constructively.
<b>Results, Impact, and Sustainability</b>	Results achieved by the partnership are of mutual benefit to all partners.	Flourishing	Results have primarily been of benefit to Mekong governments, but Australian partners have also benefitted from the partnership.
	Partners are working collectively to promote, integrate and progress shared cross-cutting issues, to achieve greater impact.	Flourishing	Partners can demonstrate the progress they have made towards positive impact on selected cross cutting issues.
	The partnership is achieving wider developmental and diplomatic impact and influence.	Flourishing	The partnerships are achieving noticeable wider developmental and diplomatic impact and influence beyond just the partnership.
	Partnerships have put in place mechanisms which are likely to ensure the long-term sustainability/ viability of the relationship.	Emerging to growing	Partners are conscious of the need for sustainability, but not all projects lend themselves to long-term sustainability.
	Partners have put in place mechanisms to enhance localisation.	Growing	Partners are engaged in co-created actions, which are likely to enhance localisation.

## b. Annex 2: Select Diplomatic and Development Outcomes per Activity

Activity	Tier	Select Development Outcomes	Select Diplomatic Outcomes
		<p><b>Strengthening the capacity and resilience of Greater Mekong governments to holistically manage water and respond to challenges posed by climate change</b></p> <p><i>(End of Facility Outcome)</i></p>	<p><b>Promoting higher standard for water infrastructure and water governance in the Greater Mekong region in support of greater water, food and energy security</b></p> <p><i>(Intermediary Outcome)</i></p>
			<p><b>Augmenting demand for Australian expertise in water management from Greater Mekong governments</b></p> <p><i>(End of Facility Outcome)</i></p>
			<p><b>Increasing Australia's influence in the management of the region's strategic water resources</b></p> <p><i>(Intermediary Outcome)</i></p>
<p><b>Support to the Mekong River Commission Secretariat</b></p> <p><b>(2 projects)</b></p>	Tier C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Essential specialist technical expertise provided to guide MRC's sustainable hydropower initiatives</li> <li>Mentorship and support to the MRC's riparian Sustainable Hydropower Specialist, as well as specialist technical expertise on sustainable hydropower development and governance in the Mekong</li> </ul> <p>Substantial support to CEO to navigate complex regional political dynamics regarding conflicting invested interests with regards to hydropower</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated Preliminary Design Guidance promoting higher standard of planning, design, construction and operation of hydropower initiatives</li> <li>Substantial technical guidance to improve overarching Basin Development Strategy</li> </ul> <p>The launch of the Sustainable Hydropower Development Strategy (SHDS), Preliminary Design Guidance for mainstream dams (PDG) and Report on Experiences and Opportunities for Coordinated Operating Rules and Cooperation Arrangements on Dam Operations.</p>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MRC talk openly of Australia as a trusted partner</li> <li>MRC thought AWP was good at addressing both national and regional interests</li> </ul> <p>MRC feedback to AWP and DFAT indicates that the technical advice and mentorship provided to date by the Australian expert have been highly valued. MRC has requested to Australia that the support be extended throughout 2023 and into 2024, in order to build on the achievements made in terms of sustainable hydropower policy and guidelines and consolidate learning and the transfer of institutional knowledge.</p>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Australian capability helps MRC better negotiate on key policy issues, and recognise the value of drawing on Australia at multiple levels</li> <li>E.g. provision of crucial hydropower advice/ guidance in a politically sensitive but essential component of development within the Mekong</li> <li>At MRC Regional Council – Australian project highlighted in presentations cf. with other development partners who contribute</li> </ul>

Activity	Tier	Select Development Outcomes		Select Diplomatic Outcomes	
					significantly more but get very little recognition
<b>Australian support to Vietnam irrigation modernisation projects – WEIDAP (Water Efficiency in Drought Affected Provinces)</b>  <b>(3 Projects)</b>	Tier C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enabled Vietnam to develop a modernised pressurised supply system for high value agriculture that without Australia’s assistance would have been very difficult to implement</li> </ul> <p>Skilling of Vietnamese design team through extensive process of mentoring and targeted capacity building has ensured Vietnamese consultants can undertake design work in the future to Australian standards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As a result of AMWF support the supply system changed from canal to a pipeline which was pressurised with direct connection to farmer rather than farmers have to install numerous local storage resource planning and water allocations and crop monitoring</li> <li>Don Duong, and Cu M’gar pipeline projects are all contributing to new water management practices in the design and construction of pipeline projects as they have remedied previous failures in this area for these two projects</li> <li>Support to the Don Duong irrigation service pricing pilot is leading to the development of new practices and policies around irrigation services pricing through the ADB/AWP funded Irrigation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Australian technical expertise at the heart of the modernisation of irrigation in Vietnam</li> <li>the MARD’s CPO (MARD’s management section for WEIDAP) stipulating that the design [of the Tra Tran scheme] would not be approved until AWP experts had approved the scheme.</li> <li>This project has identified a specific Australian expertise. Vietnam, through its previous exchanges over the last 4 years, has identified, and recognised, the particular relevant expertise required. In delivering the project RMCG has not only involved its key experts but has also brought in a number of other partners from different agencies, organisations and individual consultants to share Australia’ expertise</li> <li>The CPO-03 project was fundamentally built upon the allocation methods used widely within the Murray-Darling Basin. This example is now being used within MONRE as a possible method of developing water allocations</li> <li>IrriSAT which is a crop monitoring program within MDB developed by CSIRO underpins the technology developed within the CPO-04 project.</li> <li>Supported ADB in enabling a modernised system and have influenced many other subsequent projects funded by ADB including Sri Lanka and Georgia (by AWP experts) and trained other ADB consultant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MARD’s CPO stipulating that final design would not be approved until Australian experts had approved the scheme</li> <li>When completed this project will be a demonstration of modernised irrigation pipeline supply system within Vietnam and possibly the broader Mekong region. The problem of delivering a high level of service to maximise production of high value crops is observed by AWP experts to occur in many countries and successful support through this project will encourage other countries to address this problem, possibly also with</li> </ul>

Activity	Tier	Select Development Outcomes		Select Diplomatic Outcomes	
			Services Pricing project.	experts in the approach. Wide influence throughout ADB via one of the feasibility consultants now working across many countries.	Australian support.
<b>Support to the development of a Lao PDR Groundwater Profile and Sustainable Groundwater Management Plan for Sekong Basin</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critical revisions made to National Groundwater Profile for Laos and the Sustainable Groundwater Management Plan and groundwater database</li> <li>Increased understanding by DWR on the importance of data in developing plans – previous plans desk-based exercises, real understanding of process</li> </ul>	Once DWR apply lessons learnt from activity they will be in position to use data from the groundwater database to support efforts in Laos to improve water resources management, as well as feeding findings into ongoing regional water resources dialogues through transboundary projects in the Lower Mekong Basin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Australian experts, coupled with study tour, showcased Australia’s leading role in sustainable groundwater management</li> </ul>	DWR noted that the team felt like his family. Was impressed by the way they took seriously all comments from DWR and incorporated them into the work – felt respected and valued through whole process.
<b>Supporting the development of an Integrated River Basin Management Plan for the Nam Xam Basin, Lao PDR</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A series of capacity building seminars were held with national, provincial and district level water officials in Lao PDR covering technical topics around river basin planning, including accounting for impacts of climate change. DWR is requesting further support on subsequent projects, so capacity building efforts will need to be further consolidated as it appears DWR does not have the confidence (or capacity) to complete the projects on their own.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Nam Xam River Basin Plan was approved by the Prime Minister of Lao PDR.</li> <li>Best practice Integrated River Basin Management Plan (IRBMP) for the Nam Xam Basin to be replicated across Laos.</li> <li>A river basin planning framework was developed for use in Lao PDR; it was tested during the development of the Nam Xam River basin plan and further refined. This is a useful tool for DWR</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MONRE specifically requested Australia’s technical support in developing a comprehensive river basin management plan for the Nam Xam River Basin with the Department of Water Resources (DWR).</li> <li>Project applied the BasinGuide - another AWP product - to the Lao PDR context demonstrating the applicability of the BasinGuide for basins in Asia.</li> <li>Final plan was approved by the Houaphan Vice Provincial Governor and the Vice Minister of MONRE in May 2023 prior to final approval by the Prime Minister (expected by August 2023).</li> <li>Alluvium was invited by DWR to bid for another piece of work being tendered by UNDP. Alluvium was recommended by DWR for the piece of work and have won that tender.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whilst not directly related to this project, Australia co-chairs the Water sub-sector working group with the Lao PDR Government. This group brings together all major domestic and international actors in the water sector.</li> </ul>

Activity	Tier	Select Development Outcomes		Select Diplomatic Outcomes	
			<p>particularly to use for developing other similar basin plans in the future.</p>		
<p><b>Technical support to improve reservoir water quality management in Thailand (2 projects)</b></p>	<p>Tier B</p>	<p>100+ individuals (RID staff) trained in relation to reservoir water quality monitoring/management, including field training with water quality monitoring instrumentation and aquatic weed management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SoP on Reservoir Water Quality Measurement to be rolled out by RID across the country.</li> <li>• Strong engagement with Public Works Authorities for drinking water implications of reservoir management.</li> <li>• RID developing a strategy to extend water quality monitoring programs and supporting further capacity building in regions that have yet to receive training.</li> <li>• 2nd phase currently showcasing a remote sensing capabilities which if successful could enhance the ability of RID to collect management data remotely and improve its evidence-based decision making.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There has been ongoing cooperation since 2019 between Australia (through AWP) and Thailand’s Royal Irrigation Department (RID) on the topic of water ordering (known as water requesting in Thailand), with a team from RID sharing and exchanging knowledge with AWP Australian partners. Based on this positive experience, RID has reached out to Australia for a similar type of exchange involving the RID team working on water quality issues.</li> <li>• The project has also contributed to working with other authorities such as strong engagement with Public Works Authorities for drinking water implications of reservoir management, and with DOA (Aquatic Weed management team).</li> <li>• Strong RID interest in Aquawatch program by CSIRO, and for RID to become a case-study for this CSIRO mission, to facilitate water quality monitoring.</li> <li>• RID welcomed the opportunity to strengthen Thailand-Australian relations, and recognised that they would not have afforded Australian expertise without support from AMWF.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RID have adapted and adopted Australian procedures and practices for water quality sampling and monitoring; for managing aquatic weeds; for modelling of climate changes.</li> <li>• RID believe that this was a missed opportunity to showcase joint Australian-Thai expertise elsewhere in the region (i.e. to highlight South-South relationship for problem solving) – which could be achieved through joint effort to provide training, technical exchange, and help with transboundary water quality</li> </ul>



Activity	Tier	Select Development Outcomes		Select Diplomatic Outcomes	
					issues in the Mekong.
<b>Technical support to the process of amending Vietnam's Law on Water Resources</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Built long-term capacity of DWRM and the Government of Vietnam to develop and implement appropriate amendments and the associated water reform program.</li> <li>Priority topics of interest to the National Assembly were explored through technical presentations by Australian experts providing justification to more than 100 water sector stakeholders in Vietnam. Expert knowledge exchange with the drafting team in support of amendments and implementation decree broadened understanding of rationale of recommended solutions and how they work in practice referring to the Australian experience.</li> <li>Technical advice and other project activities have contributed to strengthened draft legislative provisions in seven key areas including water exploitation volumes, integrated planning, and roles and responsibilities of river basin organisations, based on lessons from Australian experience. DWRM representatives expressed strong satisfaction and positive sentiment to the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthened draft legislative provisions and technical support for Vietnam's national Law.</li> <li>The adoption of the amendment in December 2023 is likely to support efforts within Vietnam to ensure sustainable water management outcomes are adopted, the project will contribute to achievement of the objectives of Vietnam's Masterplan on Water Resources, including to harmonise and distribute water resources fairly, provide for integrated planning and governance, and implement other measures to provide for the effective management of water resources to support Vietnam's rapid sustainable national development.</li> <li>Measures such as setting maximum water exploitation volumes and integrated planning under proposed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthened reputation and standing of Australian policy and law advice with the client/partner (MONRE). They were fielding advice from 8+ partners and Aither got feedback that the Australian offering was highly valued, relevant and had resonance.</li> <li>The engagement demonstrated value by showing how Australian expertise may be used to aid WRM law and policy reform processes in other Mekong countries.</li> <li>17 – 21 April 2023 seven Government of Vietnam officials (DG level and below) travelled to Melbourne and Adelaide for the study visit. High level govt interaction included.</li> <li>Formal engagements with the South Australian Deputy Premier and Minister for Climate, Environment and Water, the Honourable Susan Close and the Honourable Karlene Maywald provided valuable leadership insights on driving strategic planning and major water policy reforms.</li> <li>Several Australians were also extended an invitation to Vietnam to continue discussions.</li> <li>On the successful passage of the Law on Water Resources (amended) the Director General of DWRM sent a highly complimentary letter to both DFAT and AWP to thank Australia for the “its continuous support in the amendment of the Law on Water Resources and other water-related issues in Viet Nam”, and stated that he is “looking forward to our joint efforts to strengthen the legal framework on water resources and, more</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DWRM has requested Australia's support to the amendment process, through Australian experts sharing Australian and international best practice and providing inputs into policy areas to be researched for inclusion in the amended Law and its subsequent implementation.</li> </ul>

Activity	Tier	Select Development Outcomes		Select Diplomatic Outcomes	
		<p>insights and learning gained from the Australian and Vietnam visits, stating that it had provided useful information to progress law reform and water security objectives.</p>	<p>amendments informed in part by Australian experience will support socio-economic and environmental benefits in Vietnam by providing measures to transparently agree on water sharing arrangements. The project has also recommended improvements to the Law and implementation decree which are anticipated to support mainstreaming gender equality, disability and social inclusion outcomes such as through improved stakeholder engagement and information accessibility measures.</p>	<p>importantly, its implementation for the advancement of a sustainable water future in Viet Nam”.</p>	
<p><b>Valuing the contribution of nature-based solutions to integrated urban flood management in Thailand and Vietnam</b></p>	<p>Tier B</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Built the capacity of national institutions and experts in the use of tools for Nature-based solutions (NbS) benefit valuation and investment option evaluation.</li> <li>Built capacity of senior national experts - two from each country - and by involving national training institutions and technical staff from relevant government agencies throughout the project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute to the promotion of NbS as integral to water infrastructure design and governance in the Greater Mekong region.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project has been leveraged into a substantially larger Australian investment, operating across multiple sites in the region</li> <li>The project brings together the CRCWSC and ICEM in collaboration with DFAT, the Australian Water Partnership and the World Bank providing access to leading Australian research institute</li> <li>WSCA contracted directly by DFAT since early 2022 to deliver the <a href="#">Resilient Urban Centres and Surrounds (RUCaS) investment</a>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opened the door to new collaboration partners and working in new geographies. Working also on a larger scale. Approach was to start smallish, get proof of concept and then scale up. Next phase will build pilots.</li> </ul>

Activity	Tier	Select Development Outcomes		Select Diplomatic Outcomes	
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity to work regionally. Did lots of projects on a one country at a time.</li> <li>• The Guide, case studies and relationships developed t will support engagement and application both within Thailand and Vietnam and with other Greater Mekong countries.</li> </ul>
<b>Fisheries monitoring in the Mekong Basin to assess impacts of mainstream hydropower projects as part of the Mekong River Joint Environment Monitoring (JEM) Program</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supported the MRC’s JEM pilots, with a specific focus on the gap of developing and testing techniques to improve and build capacity of fish passage monitoring, including fish tagging.</li> <li>• Strengthened the capacity of MRC and Member Countries line ministries to undertake effective monitoring of their water resources (specifically on fisheries), to provide information on the impacts of mainstream hydropower projects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produced a means for monitoring fish passage in hydropower projects to be developed along the Mekong, which could lead to improvements in the design of the fish passage structures in the future.</li> <li>• Produced design guidelines for future development – 9 more power stations that haven’t been built yet. Good guidelines with technical details. MRC technical publication. Influencing all future hydropower developments in the fish monitoring space.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian capability successfully piloted fish passage monitoring in the Khone Falls area.</li> <li>• Experts drafted for MRC the <i>MRC Guidelines for Fish Pass Monitoring in the Lower Mekong River Basin</i>, which once approved will shape fish monitoring in the Lower Mekong.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generated region-first data that was in demand by Mekong governments to enable better policy for industry decision making, especially around fish passage monitoring and fish migration ecology to inform developments across the region.</li> </ul>

Activity	Tier	Select Development Outcomes	Select Diplomatic Outcomes		
<b>Technical support to the FAO Asia Pacific Water Scarcity Programme (WSP)</b> <b>(3 projects)</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Influencing policy and regulatory change</li> <li>The Water Scarcity Action Plans (WSAP) provide a practical and short-term framework to address key risks that climate change poses to the Mekong region – namely inter-annual and seasonal drought</li> <li>Supported initiatives to build national capacity to drive sustainable water resources management and manage water scarcity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthened water accounting and water allocation frameworks via the ‘National Water Accounting and Allocation Trainings’, the development of ‘National Water Accounting Roadmaps’ and the ‘Regional Water Accounting Practitioner Guide’.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FAO see as a key benefit being able to access to Australian technical expertise which they would not have been able to afford otherwise, especially technical expertise based on Australia’s long history with managing agricultural water scarcity, and for establishing good practice with respect to water scarcity coping strategies.</li> <li>Australia raising awareness of the program in other forums, so WSP see this as an important win.</li> <li>WSP is establishing a forum to address water scarcity management, within which it is expected that Australia will continue to play a prominent role, including continuing to influence the adoption of cooperative water scarcity coping strategies.</li> </ul>	
<b>Thailand-Australia Water Dialogue</b>	Tier A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wide participation in dialogue from across various ministries of Thai govt in JSC – i.e. beyond water resources</li> <li>Opportunity for Australian partners to showcase cooperation and offerings with Thai counterparts in panels</li> </ul>	<p>Provided a paradigm shift on two critical issues in Thailand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the efficiency of the current early warning system towards unpacking the approach to early warning and flood forecasting in Thailand into its component parts to benchmark where they stand against current best practices.</li> <li>Helped in shifting the short-term focus of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The activity supports bilateral relations between Australia and Thailand, strategically offering Australia’s support the establishment of ONWR as it prepares to take on the responsibilities of the apex body in the water sector. This helps position Australia as a key partner in the water sector as new institutions and authorities emerge within the structure of the Thai government.</li> <li>Led to follow up collaboration on Early Warning Systems, and Dispute Resolution and Prevention work with River Basin Committees.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The value of such dialogues can be used as a learning prototype for Australia and other countries in the region</li> </ul>

Activity	Tier	Select Development Outcomes		Select Diplomatic Outcomes	
			<p>capacity building of RBCs to manage dispute resolution towards a longer-term, more strategic vision of harnessing water accounting as a mechanism for 'dispute mitigation'.</p>		
<p><b>Water scarcity regional publication</b></p>	<p>Tier A</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified best practice from lessons learnt from in 10 Asia-Pacific countries to make Mekong governments more aware of how to improve water scarcity management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 5 AWP-funded water scarcity profiles (and the 5 FAO-funded ones) provided the basis for a regional publication to provide a regional perspective on water scarcity.</li> <li>The 5 AWP funded profiles provide guidance on the application of the established methodology for developing water scarcity profiles in five new countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Australia) to guide and advocate for improved water scarcity management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The regional publication showcased Australian experience with water scarcity, highlighting potential Australian based solutions for Mekong governments to consider.</li> <li>Publication provided helpful background to shape the FAOs Asia-Pacific Water Scarcity Program – a multi-year multimillion dollar initiative.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publication enhanced understanding of the Australian experience, and is likely to lead to further opportunities for Australian support to Mekong governments (as is already happening through WSP).</li> </ul>

### c. Annex 3: Select Knowledge Products and Diplomatic Related Events per Activity

Activity	Tier	Select Knowledge Products	Select Diplomatic Events
<b>Lao PDR</b>			
<b>Support to the development of a Lao PDR Groundwater Profile and Sustainable Groundwater Management Plan for Sekong Basin</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distribution of National Groundwater Profile for Laos and the SGMP for the Sekong Province</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AWP Website stories:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Gender and ethnicity in planning sustainable groundwater management in Lao PDR</a></li> <li><a href="#">Lao Department of Water Resources Staff Visit South Australia for Training in Groundwater</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>National media highlighted that Sustainable Groundwater Management Plan for the Sekong was approved in an official meeting in Provincial Administration Office of the Sekong.</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting the development of an Integrated River Basin Management Plan for the Nam Xam Basin, Lao PDR</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distribution of River Basin Management Plan for the Nam Xam Basin in north-eastern Laos</li> <li>River basin planning workshops</li> <li>Seven capacity building seminars were delivered to National, Provincial and District level staff from DWR, MoNRE and PoNRE (online recordings available)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project applied the BasinGuide - another AWP product - to the Lao PDR context demonstrating the applicability of BasinGuide for basins in Asia.</li> <li>Plan was officially received by Vice Minister of MONRE and the Vice Governor of Houaphan Province</li> </ul>
<b>Coordination of Flows in the Mekong (Lao PDR) improving regional and national communication and information sharing</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guidelines for Flow Coordination for Lao PDR river basin</li> <li>Workshops and training were provided for knowledge sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation made by LNMCS and the Australian partner at the 4<sup>th</sup> MRC Summit (<a href="https://waterpartnership.org.au/strengthening-the-coordination-of-flows-in-the-mekong/">https://waterpartnership.org.au/strengthening-the-coordination-of-flows-in-the-mekong/</a>)</li> </ul>

Activity	Tier	Select Knowledge Products	Select Diplomatic Events
<b>Technical Support in developing water legislation in Lao PDR</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three stakeholder consultations in October 2022 covering northern, central and southern Laos. This included in total 178 representatives from all levels of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, including the national, provincial and district level, as well as other related government agencies, private sector representatives, civil society actors, DFAT and village representatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AWP News story: <a href="#">Supporting water agreements in Lao PDR</a></li> </ul>
<b>Thailand</b>			
<b>Technical support to improve reservoir water quality management in Thailand (2 projects)</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>100+ individuals (RID staff) participated in training workshops with regards to reservoir water quality monitoring/management, including field training with water quality monitoring instrumentation and aquatic weed management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Findings presented at December 2023 International Water Association Congress</li> <li>Social Media posts</li> <li>Newsletter article</li> <li>Videos</li> </ul>
<b>Australian support to Thailand RID pilot water ordering project</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshops supported, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>20th meeting of the Australia-Thailand Joint Working Group on Agriculture at the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, where the activities to support Thai adoption of irrigation water “requesting” and sharing practices at the local/district level were highlighted</li> </ul> </li> <li>launch the Thai translation of ‘Irrigation Water Ordering: An Australian Perspective’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support RID Delegates attendance at the ICID conference Adelaide October 2022</li> <li>AWP News story: <a href="#">Australia and Thailand collaborate on irrigation water sharing to manage water scarcity</a></li> </ul>
<b>Thailand-Australia Water Dialogue</b>	Tier A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Dialogue marked the first meeting of the Thailand-Australia Joint Steering Committee, leading to the approval of Australia’s cooperation on areas of work, including the Water Scarcity Program (with FAO), Early Warning Systems and River Basin Committees (RBC)</li> <li>80 high-level officials participated in the dialogue to discuss further cooperation with a range of different Thai government agencies including ONWR, RID, ONEP and MBA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5-day study tour for Thai delegates – exposure to other Australian stakeholders (e.g. Murray Irrigation)</li> <li>Wide participation in dialogue from across various ministries of Thai govt in JSC – i.e. beyond water resources</li> <li>Opportunity for Australian partners to showcase cooperation</li> </ul>



Activity	Tier	Select Knowledge Products	Select Diplomatic Events
<b>Vietnam</b>			
<b>Technical assistance to Vietnam on national water resources planning</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Water Plan approved by Prime Minister (February 2023) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project team provided support to DWRM in preparation of the Plan</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AWP news story: <a href="#">Progressing water reform in Vietnam</a></li> <li>Hanoi Capacity Building Workshops on Water Security Framework (November 2022) held with DWRM</li> </ul>
<b>Development and piloting of an environmental flow assessment and implementation Framework in Vietnam</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Framework for environmental flow assessment and implementation in Vietnam</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Australian Embassy <a href="#">Facebook post</a></li> <li>AWP news story: <a href="#">Innovative environmental flows framework paving the way for Vietnam’s sustainable river management</a></li> </ul>
<b>Technical support to the process of amending Vietnam’s Law on Water Resources</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Law on Water Resources promulgated on 22 December 2023</li> <li>DG, DWRM acknowledges AWP support, stressing the importance of the law in helping Vietnam ‘rethinking, approaching and transforming water resource methodologies in Vietnam ‘ (Letter sent to AWP, 22 December 2023)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17 – 21 April 2023 seven Government of Vietnam officials (DG level and below) travelled to Melbourne and Adelaide for the study visit.</li> </ul>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vietnam visit to Australia promoted on <a href="#">DWRM website and local news</a></li> <li>Social media links to news stories giving recognition and promoting the activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">High-level Government of Vietnam delegation visits Australia in support of reforms to Vietnam’s Law on Water Resources</a></li> <li><a href="#">Australian water experts support development of amendments to Vietnam’s law on water resources</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>Analytics from Aither’s LinkedIn posts found that on average there were 6,546 impressions and a 9.93% engagement rate</li> </ul>

Activity	Tier	Select Knowledge Products	Select Diplomatic Events
<b>Australian support to Vietnam irrigation modernisation projects – WEIDAP (Water Efficiency in Drought Affected Provinces) (3 Projects)</b>	Tier C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies, practices, tools prepared by project team but for internal consumption within WEIDAP</li> <li>• Workshops, technical exchanges and study tours to Australia, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Water Pricing Workshop (November 2022)</li> <li>○ Water Resource Planning and Crop Monitoring Workshops (November 2022) to share summary reports with MONRE and other key stakeholders</li> <li>○ Water Resource Management workshop with MONRE (November 2022)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited social media</li> </ul>
<b>Regional</b>			
<b>Support to the Mekong River Commission Secretariat (2 projects)</b>	Tier C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preliminary Design Guidance been referenced in the technical review of the major Mekong mainstream hydropower projects under the MRCs Procedure for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement (PNPCA)</li> <li>• <a href="#">Preliminary Design Guidance for Proposed Mainstream Dams in the Lower Mekong River Basin</a></li> <li>• Project team notes that as the project is part of a broader JAIP project and therefore not feasible to deliver specific communication products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MRC Facebook page</li> <li>• MRC newsletters</li> </ul>
<b>Technical support to the Mekong River Commission Regional Flood and Drought Management Centre</b>			
<b>Fisheries monitoring in the Mekong Basin to assess impacts of mainstream hydropower projects as part of the Mekong River Joint Environment Monitoring (JEM) Program</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training videos</li> <li>• MRC policy document: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mekong River Commission. (2023). Guidelines for Fish Pass Monitoring in the Lower Mekong River Basin. Part I: Guidelines for fish pass monitoring using PIT tagging technology. Part II: Guidelines for fish pass monitoring using acoustic tagging technology. Vientiane: MRC Secretariat</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Published article <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lee, D.; Eschenroeder, J.C.; Baumgartner, L.J.; Chan, B.; Chandra, S.; Chea, S.; Chea, S.; Chhut, C.; Everest, E.; Hom, R.; et al. <a href="#">World Heritage, Hydropower, and Earth's Largest Freshwater Fish</a>. <i>Water</i> <b>2023</b>, <i>15</i>, 1936.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MRC media releases</li> <li>• AWP news story: <a href="#">Helping fish to migrate and breed in the Lower Mekong Basin</a></li> <li>• Demonstrate activities and make presentations on behalf of AWP to external delegates including the Australian and German ambassadors and the chief executive team from the Mekong River Commission</li> </ul>

Activity	Tier	Select Knowledge Products	Select Diplomatic Events
<b>Valuing the contribution of nature-based solutions to integrated urban flood management in Thailand and Vietnam</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Valuing Nature-based Solutions in Mekong region</a> publication</li> <li>• Integrated Urban Flood Management valuation guide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 Knowledge exchange events and a regional conference</li> <li>• Dedicated website providing access to project information and key outputs</li> <li>• Project flyers, video and communications materials</li> </ul>
<b>Technical support to the FAO Asia Pacific Water Scarcity Programme (WSP) (3 projects)</b>	Tier B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributed a number of tools via National Water Accounting Trainings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ National Water Accounting Roadmaps', and</li> <li>◦ 'Regional Water Accounting Practitioner Guide.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Details on the <a href="#">Regional Water Scarcity Program at FAO website</a> and <a href="#">fact sheet</a></li> <li>• Key program outputs to be presented at Water Scarcity Symposium (November 2024 – In Phase II)</li> </ul>
<b>Water scarcity regional publication</b>	Tier A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publication: <a href="#">Managing Water Scarcity in Asia and the Pacific</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publication improves understanding of the Australian experience and promotes further opportunities for Australian support to Greater Mekong Governments</li> </ul>

## Acronyms

**Table 4. Acronyms**

Acronym	Meaning
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AMWF	Australia-Mekong Water Facility
AWP	Australian Water Partnership
CPO	Central Project Office (MARD, Vietnam)
CSU	Charles Sturt University
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DWRM	Department of Water Resources Management (Vietnam)
ERP	AWP's Expert Review Panel
EQ	Evaluation Questions
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GEDSI	Gender equality, disability and social inclusion
JEM	Joint Environmental Monitoring
KPEC	Knowledge, Partnerships, Events and Communications
LNMCs	Lao National Mekong Committee Secretariat
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAP-WEC	Mekong Australia Partnership Water Energy Climate
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Vietnam)
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (Laos and Vietnam)
MRC	Mekong River Commission
OECD - DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development - Development Assistance Committee

RFDMC	Mekong River Commission's Regional Flood and Drought Management Centre
RID	Royal Irrigation Department (Thailand)
ToC	Theory of Change
WEIDAP	Water Efficiency Improvement in Drought Affected Provinces Project
WQI	Water Quality Index