



**FINAL REPORT FOR THE RUFFORD FOUNDATION  
MEKONG DOLPHIN CONSERVATION PROJECT**

**CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE IRRAWADDY  
DOLPHIN POPULATION THAT INHABITS THE MEKONG RIVER  
2004**

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## PROJECT UPDATE 2003/2004

The Mekong River Dolphin Conservation Project was initiated in January 2001. The primary aims of the project are to undertake a comprehensive status assessment of the Irrawaddy dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*) population that inhabits the Mekong River, develop and implement effective conservation and management initiatives and build capacity amongst local government officials

Funding obtained by the RUFFORD FOUNDATION and other major donors has contributed to ensuring that MDCP could continue through 2004. The major achievements and outputs have been:

- Dedicated awareness raising of the dolphins and their conservation to local communities.
- Development of dolphin-watching regulations and increased awareness for tourists.
- A trial project to develop a community-based conservation area at Chiteal Pool, on the Lao/Cambodian border.
- Development of a trial 'integrated conservation development project' in three villages near critical dolphin habitats.
- Designation of the Mekong sub-population as 'Critically Endangered' by the World Conservation Union (IUCN)
- Development and publication of the 'Mekong Dolphin Conservation and Management Strategy', which was formally adopted as national policy in January 2005.
- Near completion of a PhD thesis on status and conservation of the Irrawaddy dolphin population inhabiting the Mekong River.

The Mekong River Irrawaddy dolphin population is currently very small (less than 200 individuals), however the potential for effective conservation and subsequent population growth is encouraging. As a result of the restricted nature of the dolphins critical distribution (particularly during the dry season) and local communities cultural affinity for the dolphins, conservation measures have significant potential to be applied successfully and with support from the local communities. In addition, the political will also exists to conserve the dolphins, as the Cambodian government is supportive of conservation measures and initiatives which significantly assist their conservation and management.

Conservation of the remaining Mekong River Irrawaddy dolphin population is of critical importance. It is essential that efforts are conducted immediately to secure the future of this population in the Mekong River, before the population becomes so small that conservation efforts are effectively futile.

### RUFFORD FOUNDATION FUNDING

Funding obtained from the RUFFORD FOUNDATION contributed towards essential core components of the MDCP from March–May 2004, which ensured MDCP was able to continue effectively to implement all aspects of project activities. These costs included:

1. Salary for the Department of Fisheries Counterpart (plus food)
2. Salary for the MDCP Technical Local Counterpart (plus food)
3. Salary for the boat driver
3. Petrol costs (plus one month costs for oil)
4. Office rental and accommodation.
5. Miscellaneous awareness raising costs

The expenses are attached in a separate file.

## AWARENESS AND EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

As part of the RUFFORD FOUNDATION funding, awareness and education activities were undertaken along the Cambodian Mekong River (including Tonle Sap Great Lake and south of Phnom Penh to the Vietnamese border). These activities included; distribution of awareness materials, interviews, village workshops, discussions with villagers, the dolphin distribution calendar program and increased tourist awareness and Kampi viewing site.

### Awareness Materials

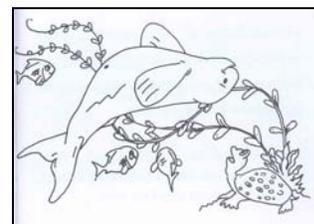
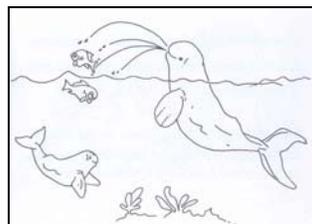
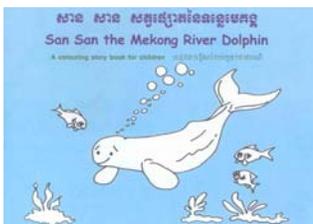
Awareness materials produced from 2002 and reproduced in 2004 were:

- Mekong dolphin folklore poster
- San San coloring book for children
- Mekong dolphin stranding poster
- Mekong dolphin conservation poster
- Two conservation signs at important deep pools

These materials were distributed during all interviews, workshops and discussions with villagers. Many posters were placed permanently on houses, at the request of local villagers.



Mekong dolphin folklore poster



Images from the San San children's coloring Book



Conservation Signs placed at Khasak Makak and Sampan villages

## Interviews

A total of 449 interviews were conducted throughout the Cambodian Mekong River (including Tonle Sap and south of Phnom Penh to the Vietnamese border) from 2003-2004. These interviews assessed present and past day distribution patterns and local perceptions on dolphins, fisheries and their conservation. After all interviews, the folklore poster and San San book were distributed to all interviewees. The results of these interviews will be presented in Ms. Beasley's PhD thesis.



Local villager being interviewed (left) and folklore poster distribution (right)

## Village Workshops

A total of seven village workshops have been conducted along the Kratie to Lao/Cambodian border river section.

Village workshops were conducted at:

- Sombok Village, Kratie Province (27 January 2004)
- Kampi Village, Kratie Province (27 January 2004)
- Chroy Banteay Village (28 January 2004)
- Kbal Chuur Village (28 January 2004)
- Kampi Village (27 January 2004)
- Chiteal Village, Stung Treng Province (05 July 2004)
- Kampi Village (03 August 2004) – in association with the Cambodian Rural Development Team (CRDT)



Village workshops conducted along the upper Cambodian Mekong River

## Dolphin Distribution Calendar Checks

Beginning in April 2003, throughout the Kratie to Lao river section, the MDCP have placed 19 calendars for local villagers to assist with recording daily distribution of dolphins in their area. The responsible individual places a red sticker for the day if they do not see dolphins and a black sticker if they see dolphins. This provides very essential daily distribution data, which would be unobtainable by other realistic means. In addition, this activity provides

monthly contact with villagers to discuss any dolphin carcasses found or discovery of catfish tags (from the Mekong Catfish Conservation Project).



Young boy with MDCP calendar

## **DEVELOPMENT OF DOLPHIN-WATCHING REGULATIONS AND INCREASED AWARENESS FOR TOURISTS**

Increased numbers of both international and foreign tourists are now viewing dolphins at Kampi pool, Kratie Province. It was important that increased information regarding the dolphin's status and biology was available at the Kampi viewing site.

Activities conducted by MDCP include:

- Construction of an information board (in co-operation with Monsoon Tours)
- Design of awareness materials for the information boards (English and Khmer)
- Construction and design of a "no swimming" sign at Kampi
- Establishment of dolphin-watching regulations for boat viewing at Kampi tourist site
- Construction of an information board at Kratie township
- Production of an information leaflet for distribution to tourists (English and Khmer)
- Production of a MDCP information leaflet (English and Khmer)
- Production of information signs to be placed at restaurants, guesthouses and hotels (English and Khmer)



Information board at Kampi viewing site

#### **TRIAL PROJECT TO DESIGNATE A COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION AREA**

Numerous discussions with local villagers were undertaken through 2004, to discuss dolphin and fisheries conservation issues. An example of these discussions, are those with Chiteal Village in order to establish and locally managed conservation area (Appendix 1). These discussions and subsequent activities were directly funded by the RUFFORD FOUNDATION. An independent assessment of these activities were conducted by an independent consultant. (Baird 2004). International trans-boundary conflicts between Cambodia and Laos were a major impediment to the success of this conservation area.



Community members co-operating with MDCP to place buoys around a community based conservation area

## **INTEGRATED CONSERVATION DEVELOPMENT PROJECT 'DOLPHINS FOR DEVELOPMENT'**

In 2004, MDCP began partnering with the Cambodian Rural Development Team (CRDT) to develop and trial an integrated conservation development project (ICDP) named '*dolphins for development*', in order to facilitate conservation of dolphins and fisheries in Kampi Pool, while promoting diversification of local livelihoods and equitable distribution of revenue generated from the dolphin-watching industry. The '*dolphins for development*' ICDP consisted of four main components: (1) rural development and diversification of livelihoods, (2) promoting community benefit from dolphin-watching tourism, (3) awareness raising and education activities conducted through MDCP, and (4) relationship building with government stakeholders (e.g. Department of Fisheries), to ensure co-operation with necessary project components.

This project was not funded through the RUFFORD FOUNDATION, however, project reports are available upon request.



**A well constructed as part of the ICDP to provide freshwater to villagers.**

## **DESIGNATION OF THE MEKONG DOLPHIN SUB-POPULATION AS CRITICALLY ENDANGERED BY THE WORLD CONSERVATION UNION**

Resulting from research by the Mekong Dolphin Conservation Project from 2001-2004, the Mekong River Irrawaddy dolphin sub-population has now been upgraded to a World Conservation Union (IUCN) Red-listing of Critically Endangered:

<http://www.redlist.org/search/details.php?species=44555>

## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEKONG DOLPHIN CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

As a culmination of MDCP activities from 2001-2004, the Mekong Dolphin Conservation Strategy was developed at the end of 2004. This document was formally adopted as national policy in January 2005, acknowledging the funding of the RUFFORD FOUNDATION. This report is attached as a separate file.

## **NEAR COMPLETION OF A PHD THESIS ON STATUS AND CONSERVATION OF THE IRRAWADDY DOLPHIN POPULATION INHABITING THE MEKONG RIVER**

Ms. Beasley is due to complete her PhD thesis in the next few months, as a result of research by MDCP since 2001. Once completed, a copy of the thesis will be forwarded to the RUFFORD FOUNDATION, as well as all associated publications. The thesis chapters are as follows:

- Chapter 1. Introduction (draft completed)
- Chapter 2. Freshwater Irrawaddy dolphins at risk (draft completed)
- Chapter 3. Mekong River and social considerations (draft completed)
- Chapter 4. Historical dolphin distribution (draft completed)
- Chapter 5. Population Size – Photo-identification (draft completed)
- Chapter 6. Population Size – Boat surveys (draft completed)
- Chapter 7. Habitat use and movements (to be completed April 30)
- Chapter 8. Social structure (draft completed)
- Chapter 9. Mortality rates and causes (draft completed)
- Chapter 10. Conservation Potentials (draft completed)
- Chapter 11. Management Recommendations and Summary (to be completed – May 15)

### **APPENDIX**

- 1. Beasley et al. 2002
- 2. Beasley et al. 2005
- 3. Beasley 2004. Mekong Dolphin Conservation and Management Strategy (adopted as national policy)
- 4. Chapter 9. Biological information from carcass recovery program



**Ms. Beasley's PhD thesis investigates biological and social considerations relevant to conservation of Irrawaddy dolphins in the Mekong River. Irrawaddy dolphin from the Mekong River (above) and children from Kampi village (bottom).**

## APPENDIX 1. TRIAL DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION AREA

An example of discussions and activities with villagers at Chiteal village (and villages on the Lao side), to establish a community protected area.

### Activities At Chiteal Pool By MdcP – March – May 2004

- Two newborn calves were sighted in Chiteal Pool on 20 Jan 2004 (from a group that consisted of only 7-9 individuals)
- The newborn calves were re-sighted on 14 Feb 2004
- **February 15**, MDCP held a meeting at Chiteal Village with Chief of Community Fisheries (Mr. Don Ban), Village Chief (Mr. Sing Dam), Police (Mr. Sok Leap, Vice Chief of Commune (MR. Tha Kampoy), and Village Chief of Environment (Mr. Nhem Phon) about the dolphins and conservation (see MDCP Feb. monthly report).
- **March 7**, MDCP held discussions were held with Mr. Tha Kampoy Deputy Preh Romkil Commune, Mr. Don Ban, Chief Community Fishery, Mr. Sok Lang Chief VDC, Mr. Poy Vanna, Community Fishery assistant, MDCP (Mss. Isabel, Mr. Kim Sokha, Mr. Yim Saksang, Mr. Lor Kimsan). Chiteal Village, Cambodia
- **March 7**, MDCP held discussions with Chief and Village Chiefs/Representatives from Hang Khone (Mr. Bun Heng), Hang Sadam (Mr. Nou Teing) and Vern Cam villages (Mr. Sy Lai) (Lao, P.D.R). These discussions were regarding potential conservation strategies for the area (see MDCP March report).
- All village chiefs/representatives were enthusiastic about conserving dolphins in the area and agreed to discuss these issues with people from their village.
- A Cambodian translator (Mr. Ta La, from Police border) was hired to assist with discussions with Deputy of Hang Sdam Village (Mr. Phao), Chief of Hang Kone Village Mr. Bun Heangkaomuny, Chief of Vern Com Village Mr. Sy Lai, is fluent in Lao and translated for MDCP project members
- **March 9**, Isabel Beasley (MDCP Project Co-ordinator) went to Vientiane to discuss dolphin conservation at Chiteal Pool with relevant government agencies, sponsored by the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity and Sustainable Use Project (MWBP).
- **March 10**, Isabel, Alvin Lopez (MWBP Ecologist), Latsamay (IUCN Lao) met with Mr. Soukata and Mr. Somsanouk (Science, Technology and Environment Agency) and Dr. Somphanh Chanphengxay (Department of Livestock and Fisheries) to discuss dolphin conservation.
- All were very supportive and mentioned that if the village chiefs were supportive, it should be fine to place buoys around the pool. However, no written approval was provided.
- **April 8**, MDCP held further discussions with Village Chief/Representative from Hang Sadam, Lao (Mr. Pan Phon), Mr. Ping Sai (Villager at Anlung Chetial Village), Mr. Sea Sopit (Deputy of Community Fishery) at Anlung Chetial Village. It was mentioned that the village needs a bridge. If a bridge can be built, the village will help with conservation.

- **April 9**, a total of 64 buoys were placed by both the Lao and Khmer representatives around Chiteal Pool on the Lao/Cambodian border. These buoys were placed in an effort to conserve dolphin and fish stocks in the pool (see April MDCP report).
- **April 20**, a follow up trip was undertaken to place buoys around the entire pool. The representatives that joined were:

**Khmer representative**

1. Mr. Yim Saksang Project Officer.
2. Mr. Lor Kimsan Boat driver.
3. Mr. Kim Sokha Stung Treng Fishery Office.
4. Dun Pan Chief of Community Fishery Anlung Chetial Village.
5. Mr. Poy Vanna assistant Community Fishery.
6. Mr. Sok Lang Chief VDC.
7. Mr. Tha Kampoy Deputy Preh Romkil Commune.
8. Mr. Sy Sophit deputy Community Fishery.
9. Mr. Sing Dam Chief of Anlung Chetial Village.
10. Mr. Kung Chan soldier border office.
11. Mr. Pon Phon Villager.

**Lao representative**

12. Mr. Nou Teng, Deputy of Hang Sadam Village.
13. Mr. Bun Hangkaomuny, Chief of Hang Kone Village.

- A document written in Khmer and explained to all involved, about the number of nets taken out of the pool was signed by all representatives.
- One person from the Lao side (Mr. Nou Terng Deputy of Hang Sdam Village), and one person from the Cambodian side (Mr. Poy Vanna assistant Community Fishery Anlung Chetial Village) were agreed to be responsible for taking in the buoys at the start of the wet season.

Although a difficult process resulting from numerous trans-boundary issues, lessons learnt were very valuable to members of MDCP. The main lessons learnt for MDCP were:

- Equal benefits from dolphin-watching tourism must be considered and facilitated to encourage community support for conservation.
- Local villagers must be provided with alternative livelihoods (e.g. agriculture, land-based fish culture and livestock) in order to stop fishing in conservation areas.
- When working on trans-boundary issues, it is essential to work with organizations that understand the social and political context of the country (e.g. Lao).
- It is essential to discuss all aspects with relevant village, commune (if applicable) and district authorities.
- Before trans-boundary conservation activities are undertaken (even if villagers appear supportive), it is important to have both village and regional workshops for all to discuss their ideas.
- All documents must be both languages when signed by representatives.