

Australian Government Statement

At

23rd Greater Mekong Subregion Ministerial Conference

18 November 2019

- Distinguished guests, Ministers, senior officials, ladies and gentlemen.
- I would like to thank the chairs: the Government of Cambodia and the Asian Development Bank.
- On behalf of the Australian Government, thank you for the opportunity to make a statement.

Australia and the Mekong

- Australia is a long-standing partner of each Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) member state: Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- We value these bilateral relationships and we recognise the importance of the Mekong subregion, including for the broader Indo-Pacific region.
- Indeed all of us gathered here today share an overriding interest in the stability, prosperity and resilience of Mekong states.

- Australia’s vision for the Indo-Pacific, which includes the Mekong, is for a region that is open, inclusive and prosperous.
- A region where trade, capital and ideas flow freely, and where the rights of all states are respected.
- Where states are stable, prosperous and sovereign – resistant to coercion, but open to engagement on the basis of shared interests.
- At a time of rapid and profound change, Australia is committed to an ambitious, proactive agenda to shape such a region. And we want to work with all regional partners in this endeavour.
- As Australia’s Prime Minister recently said, ‘we all have responsibilities to deepen patterns of cooperation’ and ‘Australia is ready to play its part’ [*Asialink Bloomberg address 26 June*].
- We also believe that we are more likely to success in securing an open, stable and prosperous region if we work together.
- That is why Australia welcomes opportunities to partner with Mekong forums such as the GMS.
- We value the GMS as an established piece of Mekong architecture that:
 - brings together all Mekong countries

- is based on principles of transparency, quality standards and cooperation with other Mekong forums
- provides clarity and solidarity among the Mekong states around your own self-identified priorities and needs
- and in the process, charts a coordinated response to the changes taking place in our region, and enhances your collective ability to deliver resilience and prosperity for the people of the Mekong.

GMS-specific support

- We appreciate our longstanding partnership with the GMS, particularly in the areas of connectivity and infrastructure.
- As you would be aware, Australia has provided technical assistance for the GMS Trade and Transport Facilitation Program for the past eight years.
- As part of that program, we were delighted to see the landmark Cross Border Transport Facilitation Agreement, the CBTA, come into operation last year.
- The implementation of the CBTA marks an important moment in regional cooperation and a major step forward in

making the movement of commercial goods and passengers faster, cheaper and easier.

Connectivity and Infrastructure

- Australia is a long-term, trusted partner on efforts to enhance connectivity in Southeast Asia and in the Mekong, including through:
 - soft infrastructure to support implementation of the GMS' CBTA
 - hard infrastructure investments such as our support [*\$160m, 2011-18*] to design and construct the Cao Lanh bridge in Vietnam to help link people and markets in the Mekong Delta to the rest of Southeast Asia and beyond
 - and support to ASEAN for the formulation and implementation of the ambitious Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025.
- Earlier this month, Australia's Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment joined ASEAN partners in Bangkok to launch ASEAN's Priority Pipeline of Infrastructure Projects
 - which has been developed through assistance from the ASEAN-Australia Development Cooperation Program

- and will support quality, bankable projects to enhance connectivity in the region – with 14 of the total 19 projects in this initial pipeline being in GMS states.
- More broadly, Australia is stepping up our efforts to help Indo-Pacific countries meet their substantial infrastructure needs in a sustainable way that delivers lasting benefits to their people.
- Infrastructure development, when done well – such as through the CBTA – will drive regional prosperity.
- This is why Australia is working with Indo-Pacific countries to help ensure they have access to a range of infrastructure financing sources and can make well-informed investment choices, including those that avoid unsustainable debt.
- Over the last year, we have announced a suite of new infrastructure initiatives, many of which will include activities in the Mekong once operational.
- These initiatives include our \$15 million per year Southeast Asia Economic Governance and Infrastructure Facility. This will be launched in July 2020, and will support government-to-government partnerships and other Australian institutional linkages aimed at improving infrastructure decision-making, including in the Mekong.

- This facility will complement existing bilateral programs and Australia's investments in a range of multilateral initiatives that are also contributing to infrastructure development and enhanced connectivity throughout the GMS sub-region.

Water/energy points

- As Australia's Prime Minister announced at the 2018 ASEAN-Australia Summit in Singapore, Australia will continue to support more equitable, transparent and effective water resources management, recognising the essential role these resources play in the development of the subregion.
- The next phase of our longstanding Greater Mekong Water Resources Program will continue to make available to the region Australia's internationally recognised expertise on water and renewable energy issues
- We will actively support cooperation between relevant regional architecture, including the GMS and the Mekong River Commission.

Cambodia bilateral points

- Here in Cambodia, we are working with the Royal Government of Cambodia to develop the infrastructure required to support robust, sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

- Our Investing in Infrastructure program (3i) is supporting the expansion of piped water networks, which will provide one million Cambodians with access to clean water.
- We are funding the development of a long-term energy masterplan to 2030, and assessments of the contribution renewables can make to Cambodia's energy mix.
- Our new bilateral economic governance and infrastructure program will invest AU\$75 million over five years to help strengthen Cambodia's competitiveness and improve its connectivity with neighbours.

Closing remarks

- Ministers, on behalf of the Australian Government, I thank GMS members, especially our Conference host, Cambodia, for the opportunity to make this statement.
- We look forward to continuing to working with you on our shared regional investment, connectivity and infrastructure goals.