

# GMS Working Group on Environment 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting

23 June 2015  
Bangkok, Thailand

## Summary of Proceedings

### Introduction

1. The 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Working Group on Environment (WGE AM21), held on 23 June 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand, was chaired by Dr. Wijarn Simachaya, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE), Thailand (morning, first half), Dr. Prasert Sornsathapornkul, Director, National Park and Protected Area Innovations Institute, Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, MNRE (morning, second half), and Dr. Nawarat Krairapanond, Director, Natural Resources and Environmental Management Coordination Division, Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, MNRE (afternoon); and co-chaired by Mr. Pavit Ramachandran, Senior Environment Specialist, Asian Development Bank (ADB). The meeting was attended by representatives from the environment and other relevant ministries of Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam; the GMS National Secretariats; co-financing and development partners; ADB and GMS Environment Operations Center (EOC) staff. The list of participants is in [Appendix 1](#).

2. The aim of the WGE AM21 was to report on the highlights of the Core Environment Program (CEP) achievements and progress in 2014, present the CEP strategic directions post Midterm Review (MTR), discuss the institutional development of the WGE and EOC, plan CEP engagement in the GMS Regional Investment Framework (RIF), and further explore areas for regional environmental collaboration. The meeting was followed by the Joint Knowledge Event on "*Developing inclusive and sustainable agricultural value chains in the Greater Mekong Subregion*" on 24 June; and the CEP Technical Workshop on 25 June. The program of WGE AM21 is attached as [Appendix 2](#).

### Opening Session

3. In his welcome and opening remarks, Dr. Wijarn Simachaya acknowledged CEP's achievements in accelerating implementation of ongoing activities, commencing new activities, and significantly strengthening of national/provincial support units (NSUs/PSUs) in 2014. He emphasized the importance of learning from CEP's MTR and initiating necessary modifications to improve CEPs effectiveness. He reminded the delegates of their commitment to protect the subregion's natural capital, as mandated in the 4<sup>th</sup> GMS Environment Ministers' Meeting (EMM4) Joint Ministerial Statement. He encouraged delegates to actively discuss how to better engage in the RIF process, mainstream natural capital into the RIF, and to reach out to other sectors, in particular energy and transport.

4. Mr. Yasushi Negishi, Country Director of ADB's Thailand Resident Mission started his opening remarks with reminding the WGE of both the achievements and commitments of EMM4. He resonated Dr. Simachaya's comment on integration of natural capital into the RIF Implementation Plan, and highlighted the importance of working closely with all stakeholders to secure the necessary technical and financial resources. He also recaptured the main messages from the recently concluded 7<sup>th</sup> GMS Economic Corridor Forum (ECF-7), in particular the need for CEP to mainstream environmental and climate change considerations into the RIF subcorridor and investment planning processes. Mr. Negishi reflected on the MTR, pointing out CEP's unique position in the GMS Program and the opportunities this offers to improve sustainability of the subregion's economic development. To achieve that, CEP needs to overcome its insufficiencies which it has begun to address through a restructuring process that should result in a streamlined, efficient, and responsive program structure that is even more aligned with emerging country priorities. He concluded that CEP is at a point where it needs to build a vision and strategy for its future with greater country ownership, and that ADB is fully committed to support this process.

5. Country heads of delegation were asked to deliver their opening remarks. They emphasized the importance and relevance of the CEP to respond to the environmental challenges and related planning needs. They recapped implementation achievements and renewed their commitment to the CEP. All countries highlighted the importance of the MTR and reiterated the challenges that are particularly relevant to them (complex procurement, delayed implementation, too little on-the-ground presence and support). They encouraged WGE to use the meeting as a platform to review the MTR's key observations and discuss the reshaping/reorientation of the CEP. Myanmar also highlighted the commitments made at EMM4 and that CEP is best positioned to deliver on the EMM4 objectives and priorities.

## **Session 1: Highlights of the Core Environment Program Achievements and Progress**

6. All six countries have highlighted their country achievements in 2014, the challenges they have encountered throughout the implementation, and lessons learned as well as their priority areas of work in 2015.

7. Mr. Khieu Borin from Cambodia highlighted their achievements under CEP Phase II including i) the completion of equivalent assessment of existing/new national environmental impact assessment (EIA) requirements and preparation of safeguard capacity development action plan; ii) discussion initiated between Cambodia and Thailand on transboundary biodiversity landscape (TBL); and iii) assessment conducted on gender and social issues to improve CEP implementation in Cambodia. He has listed complex ADB procedures and procurement systems as the biggest challenge, which contributed to delays in activity planning and implementation. He also highlighted the challenge of promoting effective environmental mainstreaming at sectoral level. In 2015, work priorities for Cambodia will include i) formulation of National Environmental Strategy and Action Plan (NESAP); ii) development of protected area profiles; and iii) establishment of TBL between Banteay Smar protected landscape and Tapraya National Park. The presentation is provided in [Appendix 3](#).

8. Mr. Wang Yong from PRC highlighted their recent financial contribution—additional financing of \$500,000 from the PRC Regional Cooperation and Poverty Reduction Fund for CEP to pilot rural waste management activities. He indicated that additional financing will be provided by PRC to initiate studies on biodiversity corridors between PRC and neighboring countries. Some of the country's key achievements are: i) revolving fund utilization assessment was conducted; ii) partnership for CEP activity implementation was established at national and

provincial levels; iii) capacity building and training sessions were organized on priority CEP work areas; iv) impact assessment of CEP Phase I was conducted in Yunnan; v) green village demonstration sites were constructed in Yunnan; vi) habitat restoration was implemented in pilot areas in Guangxi; and vii) ongoing transboundary corridor cooperation (signed memorandum of understanding (MoU) in Guangxi-Cao Bang landscape; discussion in Yunnan-Luang Namtha landscape). Mr. Wang also presented some key lessons, in particular the importance of compiling best practices from CEP Phase I for scaling up and increasing efforts in promoting country cooperation. PRC emphasized the importance of beginning a process to explore options post CEP Phase II in order to ensure CEP sustainability. A copy of his presentation is in [Appendix 4](#).

9. Mr. Sounadeth Soukchaleun of Lao PDR highlighted their country achievements, including i) capacity needs assessment and technical training on pollution monitoring for provincial officials; ii) draft MoU on the joint environmental management of Mekong Headwaters landscape between Yunnan Environmental Protection Bureau and Department of Natural Resources and Environment of Luang Namtha province; iii) climate change risk financing assessment conducted in 8 villages; iv) REDD+ readiness project carried out, including over 140 trained government officials from Champasak, Sekong and Attapeu provinces on REDD+; and v) NSU establishment. He has listed three key challenges Lao PDR has encountered, namely: delays in fund transfer from ADB to NSU, limited in-country technical capacity to implement CEP activities, and limited access to online data and knowledge resources at provincial level to support decision making. Key priorities for 2015 include: disseminating ministerial instruction on pollution control and ministerial instruction on hazardous waste; developing and adopting essential legislation related to pollution prevention and control; strategic environmental assessment (SEA) capacity building in the context of provincial Social Economic Development Plan; and consultation on opportunities for expanding agroforestry value chain. The presentation is attached as [Appendix 5](#).

10. Ms. Khin Thida Tin highlighted Myanmar's achievements, in particular the i) development of country safeguards system with additional \$1 million funding secured from ADB for safeguards strengthening; ii) Myanmar Environmental Information Portal launched, iii) a joint initiative with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) to develop an Ecotourism Management Strategy; iv) recruitment underway for an international advisor to oversee CEP activity implementation in Myanmar; v) a Letter of Agreement on NSU establishment is awaiting government approval. She has highlighted limited experience and lack of familiarity with ADB financial procedures, as well as limited capacity in activity implementation as key challenges for Myanmar. Key priorities in 2015 are: i) NSU establishment; ii) capacity building on strengthening country safeguards systems, EIA implementation and review, SEA in the context of Special Economic Zones; and iii) fast tracking of recruitment of NSU staff members. Her presentation is provided in [Appendix 6](#).

11. Dr. Rungnapar Pattanavibool presented Thailand's achievements in 2014, namely: i) signed Letter of Agreement for Biodiversity Conservation Corridor in Eastern Forest Complex between CEP and Department of National Parks; ii) Green Freight project being initiated and Steering Committee was established. She shared the challenges Thailand has encountered – limited NSU capacity, lack of effective in-country coordination mechanism among ministries, and limited capacity in knowledge generation and dissemination. Key priorities for 2015 include: initiating project on SEA in the context of special economic zone and border towns, establishing TBL corridor with Cambodia, implementing low carbon society master plan, and strengthening cooperation with other sectors in the country. A copy of her presentation is attached as [Appendix 7](#).

12. Ms. Kim Thi Thuy Ngoc representing Viet Nam highlighted the following achievements: i) SEA for Power Development Plan VI approved; ii) multi-sector planning activity to promote environmental mainstreaming initiated; iii) natural capital mainstreaming into RIF opportunity currently being explored; iv) MoU on transboundary biodiversity conservation signed between Cao Bang and Guangxi; v) green freight activity being implemented; vi) climate change risk assessment conducted for biodiversity conservation corridor sites; and vii) national natural capital partnership initiated. She listed several lessons learned in Viet Nam implementation—CEP work should be aligned with national priorities, engaging line ministries is crucial for activity success, and managing the lengthy ADB procurement process. For 2015, Viet Nam’s priorities include: work on multi-sector planning, integrating natural capital consideration in planning and investments, green freight, and continued capacity building. The presentation is attached as [Appendix 8](#).

13. Dr. Michael Green, EOC’s Technical Program Head presented the cross-cutting and regional achievements from CEP work in 2014. These included policy and institutional outcomes, collaboration with GMS sector working groups, further development of a regional knowledge hub on environment, partnerships mobilized, and technical capacities built. He also overviewed progress towards CEP 2014 milestones, financial progress, lessons learned, CEP’s sustainability strategy, critical issues, and upcoming priorities. His presentation is provided in [Appendix 9](#).

## **Statement from Co-financing Partners**

14. Nordic Development Fund representative Ms. Emeli Möller on behalf of co-financing partners delivered the Development Partners Joint Statement (see [Appendix 10](#)). Specific actions requested by development partners include: i) developing a roadmap to respond to recommendations from the MTR (i.e. actions to be taken, timelines and responsibilities); ii) increasing ADB oversight and leadership on the refocusing of the program; iii) developing a clear vision for WGE and EOC; iv) introducing a systematic approach by ADB to embed EOC technical staff in countries for more direct support; v) producing a work plan on actions to influence RIF investment projects; and vi) drafting management response to the requested actions in the statement.

## **Session 2: CEP—The Way Ahead**

15. In his presentation, Mr. Pavit Ramachandran outlined CEP’s strategic directions in terms of refocusing, reprioritizing, and strengthening systems post MTR. He first reviewed the MTR main findings and key messages, and highlighted that the Program needs to adopt a ‘change management’ focus with stronger in-country technical support and align closely with national and regional programs and priorities. CEP priority actions have been identified: i) refocusing and reprioritizing the portfolio with fewer regional learning sites, increase countries’ access to technical support (deployment of EOC staff in-country and strengthening of NSUs), and strengthen information and knowledge services; ii) strengthening and streamlining contractual and in-house EOC financial systems with clear coding of all transactions and contracts, monitoring of cash flow situation on a monthly basis, and ensuring performance benchmarking and effective tracking of contracts, iii) transitioning to a new modality for CEP implementation (through engagement of a firm) with stronger emphasis on program management, to facilitate increased coordination across GMS sectoral programs, in particular the Core Agriculture Support Program; and iv) strategic planning for CEP and institutional development of EOC beyond 2016. The full presentation is in [Appendix 11](#).

## **GMS Country Responses**

16. Delegation of GMS countries provided country response to the co-financing partners' statement and the presentation by Mr. Ramachandran. They welcomed recommendations from the MTR, in particular recommendations in terms of improving its relevance and effectiveness in delivering support to further improve environmental mainstreaming objective and in strengthening the capacities of country stakeholders. Almost all countries have voiced the importance for CEP to work more closely with country line ministries and explore opportunities in joining force with other GMS sector working groups.

17. Cambodia expressed gratitude to development partners for their support and the valuable recommendations in their Joint Statement. Cambodia suggested that WGE's role in leadership and planning should be further strengthened. EOC should play stronger role in technical support and networking with other international organizations, and serve as information and knowledge database to the GMS countries. PRC appreciated the constructive recommendations from MTR to improve CEP implementation in the future, and highlighted the need to improve environmental mainstreaming process with practical tools and implementation capacity. PRC also suggested that immediate efforts should focus on implementation of CEP Phase II, and the discussion for Phase III or future of CEP can be initiated in the next year.

18. Lao PDR found the MTR process very useful; however, each country may have different context and issues. Lao PDR is willing to increase efforts to improve capacity and implementation following the MTR recommendations. Myanmar agreed on proposed improvements suggested by co-financing partners, and highlighted the importance of natural capital and needs of CEP and the GMS Program such as investments (i.e. RIF) to support Myanmar and the subregion. Thailand thanked development partners and believed that concerted efforts of the WGE and EOC are needed for the MTR recommendations to be implemented in a timely manner. Thailand will continuously support and engage in CEP activities with key development sectors such as energy and transport. It commends the CEP for focusing on capacity strengthening of the NSUs and encouraging country ownership, noting that embedding CEP in the country systems and graduating to an environment operations network depends on progress in capacity building. Viet Nam supported the recommendations from the Development Partners Joint Statement, and suggested EOC to take a lead role in developing a road map post-MTR. Viet Nam is willing to work closely with other GMS countries and EOC to identify needs and approaches for future institutional development.

## **Emerging Policy and Strategic Directions**

19. Representatives from GMS countries presented emerging policy and strategic directions from the country perspective. H.E. Mr. Sao Sopheap introduced CEP's support in the preparation of a NESAP in Cambodia, which is required under the Law on Environmental Protection and Natural Resource Management. The NESAP will address three main pillars: environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development. The first NESAP will cover two periods 2015–2018 and 2019–2023 in line with the National Strategic Development Plan and other planning cycles. CEP/EOC will mobilize technical staff and consultant team to support NSU throughout the NESAP formulation, capacity building, and stakeholder consultation processes. The NESAP will serve as a road map for natural resource and environmental planning in Cambodia, and lay out workable mechanisms for mainstreaming environment into other sector development plans. Refer to [Appendix 12](#) for the full presentation.



20. Mr. Wang Yong presented activities on transboundary biodiversity landscapes (TBLs). Progress on transboundary biodiversity conservation between PRC and neighboring GMS countries has been shared: i) an MoU of transboundary biodiversity conservation cooperation between Guangxi (PRC) and Cao Bang (Viet Nam) has been signed; ii) Asiatic Elephant conservation in the PRC-Lao PDR joint conservation areas is under implementation; iii) Yunnan (PRC) and two provinces of Lao PDR have reached preliminary agreement on environmental protection cooperation; and iv) an MoU on environmental cooperation between PRC and Cambodia has been signed. Capacity needs related to TBL initiatives have also been raised, including strengthening biodiversity conservation regulation, development of institutional management mechanisms, and enhancing public education and participation. His presentation is attached as [Appendix 13](#).

21. Mr. Sounadeth Soukchaleun presented sustainable land management in Lao PDR. He first laid out the context and needs of promoting sustainable land use planning (LUP) and land allocation/certification in Lao PDR, given the competing demands and new risks over land use practices and increased complexity in land ownership. Optimal allocation of land also has implications for sustainability in achieving social development and economic growth targets. Capacity needs have been identified: i) technical capacity to work on LUP analytical tools; ii) on-the-job training on scenario building and predictive spatial modeling; and iii) anchoring of tools in guidelines as legal requirements. CEP has supported Lao PDR on capacity building for land use change simulation modelling, tracking and consolidating land use related knowledge (NSU Portal), and review and revision of LUP manual and guidelines, etc. The Department of Land Allocation and Development from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) has LUP mandate, holds three meetings a year to consolidate demand from different stakeholders, and plans to establish a Land Information System Task Force to handle data and modeling work in Lao PDR. It is expected that LUP Manual and Land Titling can be improved and formalized through Prime Minister Decree or endorsed by the Ministers of MONRE. A copy of his presentation is in [Appendix 14](#).

22. Ms. Khin Thida Tin summarized the revised mandate of Myanmar's Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry, which emphasizes sustainable natural resources and environmental quality management, with the latter theme being addressed through a new Environmental Conservation Department (ECD). In this context, CEP's ongoing safeguards strengthening support has already established a solid foundation for future technical assistance to the ECD. Specifically, follow-up CEP safeguard activities could be combined with ADB's capacity development technical assistance to further enhance ECD's procedural and technical capacity and provide comprehensive support for safeguard applications. In addition, CEP support should be coordinated with the expanding contributions of other development partners (e.g. Australia, Canada, Japan, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, and the World Bank) on environmental issues in Myanmar. These partners are combining resources to provide long-term support to the country to strengthen its safeguards system in key development sectors including oil and gas and mining, to support the ECD on pollution prevention and abatement, and hazardous waste management, and to establish an environmental management fund. Her presentation is provided in [Appendix 15](#).

23. Ms. Chutinthorn Mankhong elaborated on CEP's support to Thailand via the GMS Green Freight Initiative. Under the project, Thailand is piloting green technologies and financing, driver training, and reduction of empty backhaul, all of which are key measures which could help improve both the energy efficiency and logistics performance of the freight sector. The initiative is consistent with the strategic objectives of the Thailand's Second Logistics Development Strategy Plan (2013–2017): enhancement of supply chain logistics; enhancement of trade facilitation, and development of mechanism to drive policies and build capacity of entrepreneurs. A copy of the presentation is in [Appendix 16](#).

24. Ms. Kim Thi Thuy Ngoc presented how Viet Nam has developed a comprehensive policy framework to promote investments in natural capital. Relevant policies, programs, and targets with this orientation are: the Socio-Economic Development Strategy (2010-2020) and Plan (2011-2016); the Viet Nam Green Growth Strategy and Action Plan; the National Strategy for Environmental Protection to 2020 with Vision Towards 2030; the Strategy for Sustainable Development in Viet Nam 2011-2020; the National Strategy and Action Plan on Climate Change; the creation of a National Statistics Indicator System; the Viet Nam Statistical Development Strategy 2011-2020; and the Party Resolution 24. In this context, Viet Nam aims to establish a national Natural Capital Partnership (NCP). To support this initiative going forward, CEP can perform the following roles: facilitate the linkages between the NCP and international and regional initiatives and networks; support the Viet Nam NSU to mobilize different partners in the initial stage of the NCP; facilitate exchanges of information in the GMS subregion on natural capital; and support capacity building activities, such as natural capital accounting, mapping and valuation for different partners. Her presentation is attached as [Appendix 17](#).

### **Session 3: Institutional Development of WGE and EOC**

25. The session started with Dr. Michael Green giving WGE a recap of its current institutional role. The terms of reference of the WGE is in [Appendix 18](#).

26. Mr. Peter Thomas, Institutional Development Specialist from EOC, informed the meeting of an ongoing CEP activity on developing a vision for defining and institutionalizing a financially viable future for EOC. A key question in this regard concerns the need for a subregional environment institution in the GMS. It was suggested that shared problems and shared visions in the subregion necessitates that both national and regional responses are crafted (e.g. climate change). It was noted that the CEP has several unique features, having developed as a strong regional program with well-defined geographic coverage, embracing a holistic approach involving both top down and bottom up interventions, and working with several development partners. Despite these positives there is a recognized need to strengthen the linkage between WGE and EOC, in terms of relative power relationships and roles. The meeting observed that several different institutional models already exist in the GMS family involving the energy, rail, and tourism sectors but noted that environment being multi-sector is more challenging. Other models such as those in place in the Coral Triangle Initiative might also be considered. Identified key features of effective regional institutions include country ownership and leadership, shared vision and purpose, and program relevant to countries. He then concluded by proposing the establishment of a task force which he can work with on identifying vision and allow for close country consultation. His full presentation is in [Appendix 19](#).

27. Comments from the Chair and WGE participants followed. Mr. Ramachandran highlighted that the EOC and CEP will have to evolve beyond the current model, which reflects primary development partner and bank financing, to a future model that is self-sustaining and self-financing. He also noted that the institutional development of the program needs to start from a clear understanding of the services/functions that countries deemed to be valuable in terms of CEP support. The resourcing and institutional/governance needs will necessarily follow from this (i.e. "form follows function"). Cambodia agreed on the MTR recommendation that technical and managerial functions of the EOC be clearly separated. PRC commented that the institutional review should consider both the future of the WGE and CEP, and the EOC and observed that the EOC should continue in its central role as secretariat to the WGE but that the EOC needs to improve its capacity in this regard. Lao PDR had no comment while Myanmar responded that they would need to consult with their colleagues in Nay Pyi Taw before

commenting on the proposed environment operations network. Thailand suggested that the review looks at other examples of regional cooperation in the GMS and document positive and negative examples. Viet Nam concurred with PRC that the EOC should focus on its secretariat role and in facilitating regional networking among countries. They also stressed the need to further strengthen NSU capacity to enable better interaction between countries and asked that the review produce a detailed draft institutional proposal on which they can comment. WWF wondered why the current CEP/EOC structure needed to change and recommended that the EOC continue to market its strengths including regional safeguards, knowledge sharing, and impact monitoring. Mr. Thomas responded that while many aspects of the EOC are good, change will need to occur both to address any shortcomings and to reflect future program directions. Dr. Green reinforced this point by noting that change is inevitable given that it has always been anticipated that development partner funding for CEP will eventually be phased out. The Co-Chair concluded that EOC's secretariat function and service provider roles will likely be most relevant in the future.

## **Session 4: CEP in the Context of the GMS Regional Investment Framework**

28. The session's first presentation by Mr. Lothar Linde, Spatial Planning and GIS Specialist, EOC is an introduction to the RIF Implementation Plan (IP) Monitoring System, highlighting the objectives, the processes of preparing the RIF IP status report, including the schedule, responsibilities and core tasks, reporting format and future plans. He emphasized the objectives of the RIF IP monitoring system, as follows: (i) to track status of each RIF IP project throughout preparation and implementation periods; and (ii) to manage changes in the RIF IP in a systematic manner. This will be prepared on a semi-annual basis, starting June 2015 and will involve the following: (i) GMS Secretariat and GMS National Coordinators for oversight, guidance, preparation for dissemination; (ii) ADB sector divisions (focal person) to coordinate with country sector agencies, review, and compile reports; and (iii) country sector agencies (focal person) to report status of projects. The RIF IP monitoring system is initially paper-based but there are plans to transition to online system after the first 2 reporting cycles. The system will be hosted by ADB and linked to the [www.adb.org/gms](http://www.adb.org/gms) website. A copy of the presentation is in [Appendix 20](#).

29. The second presentation by Ms. Sumitra Pooltong, Strategic Planning Expert from the National Economic and Social Development Board, discussed the outcomes of ECF-7 and its implications for the CEP. ECF-7 with the theme "*Fostering pragmatic cooperation towards the future of GMS Economic Corridors*" was held on 11 June 2015 in Kunming, PRC, aimed to: (i) review the implementation of the GMS Economic Corridor Strategies and Action Plans, assess the gaps, and consider measures to address remaining challenges; (ii) consider new approaches for a sharpened focus on economic corridor development including a pilot initiative on corridor section-specific concept plans as bases for preparing more detailed economic corridor development action plans and investment programs; (iii) discuss enhanced approaches to GMS Transport and Trade Facilitation; and (iv) consider emerging areas and platforms for enhanced cross-border cooperation and private sector participation including urban development and development of Special Economic Zones and e-commerce. Furthermore, the presentation included a discussion of the GMS Urban Development Strategic Framework, 2015-2022, a framework for guiding spatial planning in the GMS. Her presentation is provided in [Appendix 21](#).

30. In response, Mr. Linde highlighted CEP engagement in the GMS RIF-CEP provided support to RIF preparation through (i) baseline mapping (corridor roads, railway, hydropower, among others); (ii) spatial prioritization since not all economic corridor roads (or sections) can or



should become full-fledged economic corridors which fed into the development of subcorridor concept planning activity currently underway; and (iii) evaluation of risks, that is, RIF investment suitability/vulnerability. For next steps, CEP will continue to provide support to project preparation by (i) enhancing RIF spatial multi-criteria assessment with natural capital information for project application in Viet Nam and (ii) identifying entry points in response to ECF-7 which involve new approaches for subcorridor concept planning and platforms for cross-border collaboration and knowledge exchange through advisory support to development of spatial plans, data resources, and establishment of GMS knowledge center. See [Appendix 22](#) for the full presentation.

## Closing Session

31. The WGE AM21 Resolution was read and adopted. A copy of the Resolution is attached as [Appendix 23](#).

32. Thailand announced that the 10<sup>th</sup> Semi-Annual Meeting of the WGE will be held in the northern part of Thailand either in October or November 2015; the exact date and venue will be communicated to the WGE after internal consultations have been finalized.

33. Mr. Antti Inkinen gave short remarks on behalf of the Government of Finland. He commented that the meeting is very important as WGE deliberated on the strategic directions for moving forward. The Government of Finland has spent a decade working with different partners, especially ADB to support environment and sustainable development in the GMS. He has recognized and highly appreciated the strong commitment from the GMS countries. CEP's cause is relevant. Although there are some constraints, the Program is committed to contribute to the mainstreaming of environment into regional and national priorities and development plans. However, CEP needs to be more focused to improve efficiency and effectiveness. He then informed the meeting about Finland's plan to consolidate and downscale its operations in the subregion by end of the year, adding that its geographical area for international cooperation will be concentrated in Nepal, Myanmar, and Afghanistan. Finland will definitely remain open to opportunities for future engagement. Mr. Inkinen expressed his sincere thanks to the WGE and other partners for the working relationship and the achievements to-date. He acknowledged the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok for the great collaboration.

34. Dr. Wijarn Simachaya expressed his special thanks to the Governments of Finland, Sweden, the Nordic Development Fund, ADB, and other partners for their support to the Program. He emphasized that the GMS is faced with common environmental issues and encouraged all countries to cooperate in order to address these emerging issues. He also thanked ADB/EOC for the arrangement and for initiating the discussion on the institutional development of CEP and EOC.

35. Mr. Pavit Ramachandran pointed out two key results of the meeting: (i) the strategic directions were identified and agreed to be implemented by all relevant stakeholders; and (ii) the meeting has defined clear roles and functions for the countries to implement the strategic resolution and related activities. He expressed his gratitude to the WGE, the partners, and EOC team for their active participation and the arrangements made for the meeting.

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## Appendices

All appendices are hyperlinked, click to access.

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