

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

## Background

The Australia-Mekong Water Facility (AMWF) was established through a grant agreement between DFAT and eWater Group to strengthen Australia's engagement with Mekong countries in the water sector. The AMWF was implemented by the Australian Water Partnership (AWP) and funded by DFAT's Mekong-Australia Partnership over 2019-2024.

## Review and response

In 2024, AWP commissioned a review to assess the contribution of partnerships to the AMWF's development and diplomacy outcomes. The review's lessons, recommendations, and DFAT responses are listed in the table below. The review was one of a number of inputs that informed AWP Phase 3 (2024-2026).

Table 1: Review lessons, recommendations, and response

### Facilitate effective partnerships

Key Lesson Learnt	Recommendation	DFAT response to recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Trust and respect take time, as does effective ways of working.</li><li>Long-standing relationships underpin many partnerships.</li><li>Local consultants/people on the ground (including expats who have worked locally for many years) are critical to implementation.</li><li>Having objective Australian technical support at country and regional level helps collaboration, and has helped build local capacity effectively.</li></ul>	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- create a shared vision, governance and management of the partnership, and collaborative ways of working.	Agreed. AWP Phase 3's co-design process provides time for partnership development.

Key Lesson Learnt	Recommendation	DFAT response to recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing clear expectations and an agreed approach to the scope and outcome of activities at the outset of the project is important.</li> </ul>		

### Facilitate diplomatic outcomes and/or support diplomatic efforts

Key Lesson Learnt	Recommendation	DFAT response to recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects have delivered an impressive range of outcomes, as a result of Australian expertise partner Governments might not have been able to access.</li> <li>Study visits/field trips to Australia have played a critical role in showcasing potential solutions to Mekong government partners.</li> <li>AWP working through Post – the Mekong Working Group is an effective means for ensuring links between Australia’s development and diplomatic objectives in the region.</li> </ul>	<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>Agreed. AWP Phase 3 design involves close coordination with DFAT, including via a Southeast Asia Working Group.</p>

### Ensure outcomes are achieved

Key Lesson Learnt	Recommendation	DFAT response to recommendation
<p>Design of AMWF supported activities do not always include a clear M&amp;E plan/framework for the activities.</p>	<p>At activity level 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</p>	<p>Agreed. AWP Phase 3 MERLA Plan incorporates the tiered approach to activities, with Tier A requiring less complex reporting.</p>

Key Lesson Learnt	Recommendation	DFAT response to recommendation
	assessment of risk, especially when working with new Australian partners.	
Partners find reporting onerous.	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.	Agreed. AWP Phase 3 MERLA Plan requires different types of information to be collected from partners.

### Sustainability of outcomes

Key Lesson Learnt	Recommendation	DFAT response to recommendation
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.	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.	Noted. Not incorporated into standard AWP Phase 3 activity cycle.

### GEDSI

Key Lesson Learnt	Recommendation	DFAT response to recommendation
Despite AWP efforts to support systematic integration of GEDSI throughout the AMWF activity cycle, however, results appear to be somewhat disappointing overall	Terms of Reference for AMWF activities must specify more clearly the expectations in relation to gender.	Agreed. Addressed in AWP Phase 3 GEDSI plan.
Some Australian partners continue to focus on gender only, without considering other GEDSI aspects.	Some activities (e.g. Individuals providing specific technical expertise) may not need to specifically focus on GEDSI issues. Some may be contributing	Agreed. All AWP Phase 3 activities are expected to include some GEDSI analysis to ensure they are

Key Lesson Learnt	Recommendation	DFAT response to recommendation
	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.	GEDSI responsive and avoid unintended consequences.  AWP's GEDSI Adviser will be available to partners to determine the suitable approach to GEDSI across each activity and develop guidance and case studies to assist partners in implementation.
The availability of GEDSI expertise to the Australian partner throughout implementation appeared to be the main factor contributing to progress on GEDSI	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.	Agreed. AWP Phase 3 considers this approach for specific partners where suitable.

### Knowledge, Partnerships, Events, and Communication (KPEC)

Key Lesson Learnt	Recommendation	DFAT response to recommendation
Many Mekong Government ministries are willing to generate publicity (new stories, social media) around respective projects.	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).	Agreed. Approach adopted in AWP Phase 3
Many Mekong Government ministries are willing to generate publicity (new stories, social media) around respective projects.	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.	Agreed.

Key Lesson Learnt	Recommendation	DFAT response to recommendation
<p>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.</p>	<p>Wherever possible, AWP should continue to learn from prior activities and experience, including the development of knowledge products (such as the BasinGuide) to help inform the design and implementation of new projects.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p>