



MEKONG-AUSTRALIA PROGRAM ON TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Australia is committed to strengthening engagement with partners in Mekong countries to reinforce our collective response to transnational crime. A lucrative and growing business, transnational crime generates tens of billions of dollars a year for organised crime groups through illicit activities in the region, undermining regional stability and economic development. The COVID-19 pandemic is creating new business opportunities for transnational and organised crime groups and may be driving longer-term changes to the organised crime economy. *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response* (May 2020) commits Australia to support regional stability including through investing in partner country efforts to improve law and justice, aligned with the long-term vision of the 2017 *Foreign Policy White Paper* for a stable, prosperous and resilient region.

MAP-TNC

On 1 August 2019, the Minister for Foreign Affairs announced a new initiative to counter transnational crime and enhance border security in Southeast Asia, focused on the Mekong sub-region. The Mekong-Australia Program on Transnational Crime (MAP-TNC) is expected to be a AUD 30 million investment over eight years that will promote cross-border cooperation between Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, supporting their efforts to tackle serious threats such as drug trafficking, child sexual exploitation and financial crimes.

The program will build on Australia's engagement with Southeast Asia on transnational crime and border security issues over recent years and will complement existing aid investments in the region in law and justice, cybercrime and countering human trafficking.

To build deeper and stronger cooperation between Australia and Mekong Countries to address transnational crime, it is expected that the program will focus on three objectives:

- Better policy analysis, evidence and a stronger information base to assess transnational crime challenges
- Stronger national operational capacities to prevent, detect and address transnational crime
- Enhanced regional coordination (operational, information sharing, border security).

Australia aims to further strengthen relationships between the Mekong countries themselves, and between APS Agencies and Mekong countries, through the provision of timely expert advice and capacity building support. The investment seeks to harness Australia's policy and technical strengths and draw on the expertise on transnational crime and border security in Australia, as well as relevant international expertise.

Implementation approach

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) will be the lead agency and the program will fund Australian law enforcement, security and border protection agencies to work with their regional counterparts to enhance policy development and build technical and operational capabilities. We expect that the initiative will be based on a strategic, adaptive management model. Country-specific engagement plans, informed by detailed country-specific political economy analysis, will be developed and coordinated under a regional annual work plan.

Procurement

We expect that DFAT will manage a tender process for a managing contractor in the second half of 2020, with a view to commence program implementation in early 2021. The managing contractor's role will be to support program management and delivery, engaging closely on activity design, bilateral and regional program implementation, monitoring and evaluation, promoting gender equality and social inclusion, and reporting. The managing contractor will work closely with DFAT supporting its lead role in implementation and will facilitate the annual planning process with DFAT, APS Agencies and Mekong Country representatives. The managing contractor will play a key role in supporting DFAT and other APS Agencies to build a coherent implementation strategy that leads to meaningful outcomes. The program will be based in Bangkok, supported by DFAT staff based at the Australian Embassy in Bangkok working across the Mekong sub-region.