

NGO's Urge Government to Open Pak Mun Gates

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November 22, 2002

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra

Office of the Prime Minister

Government House, Dusit

Bangkok 10300

Thailand

Dear Prime Minister Thaksin,

We, the undersigned 26 organizations from 15 countries, are writing to urge you to restore the fisheries of the Mun River and people's livelihoods by opening the gates of the Pak Mun Dam year-round, following the recommendations of the government-sponsored study by Ubon Ratchathani University. There remains no doubt that the Pak Mun Dam has been a tragic mistake that has gravely affected the lives of more than 6,000 families near the dam and countless others whose livelihoods and way of life depend on the Mun River. We encourage you to take this unprecedented opportunity to rehabilitate the ecology and livelihoods of communities along the river.

In response to local villagers' demands, your government agreed to consider the findings of studies on the economic, social, and environmental impact of the dam on the Mun River and surrounding communities. This includes the research of Ubon Ratchathani University (directly funded by the government), the villager-led Thai Baan research conducted with the help of the Southeast Asia Rivers Network (SEARIN), and the study conducted by the Institute of Scientific and Technological Research of Thailand. However, before a government review panel had a chance to examine the studies, a government committee headed by former Deputy Prime Minister Pongpol Adireksarn recommended that the gates be closed for eight months a year. Rather than rectify this hasty and ill-considered decision, the Cabinet issued a resolution confirming the decision and ordered the gates closed on November 1.

This decision is alarming for several reasons. First, the decision was taken before the review panel could complete its work. Secondly, it was made without consulting the people most impacted by the dam —villagers who will lose their livelihoods if the gates are closed. Further, this decision disregards the findings from both the Ubon and villager-led research which show that opening the gates year-round is the only viable choice given the severe social and ecological impacts created by the dam. Lastly, the decision to close the gates for eight months per year was not one of the four options presented by the Ubon research team.

We cannot understand why Ubon Ratchathani University was asked to conduct research if its results

would be so lightly considered. Mr. Pongpol's committee called its decision to close the gates a "compromise" between EGAT and local fishermen. But what kind of compromise ignores all options recommended by professional research and excludes the voices of affected villagers from the decision-making process?

Prime Minister Thaksin, last year you ordered the Pak Mun Dam gates to be opened to allow further study. We now appeal to your reason and your commitment to serving the Thai people. We urge you to open the gates of the Pak Mun Dam permanently.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Susanne Wong

International Rivers Network

This letter is also endorsed by the following 25 organizations from 15 countries.

Jorge Cappato, PROTEGER - Amigos de la Tierra, Argentina

John Sinclair, Fraser Island Defenders Organization, Australia

Daniel LeBlanc, Petitcodiac Riverkeeper, Canada

Grainne Ryder, Probe International, Canada

Margaret N. Weitzmann, PROTECT/James Bay Network, Canada

Sébastien Godinot, Amis de la Terre, France

Dr. Manfred Westermayer, Association of Esperanto-Greens (AVE), Germany

Heike Drillisch, WEED - World Economy, Ecology & Development, Germany

Heffa Schuecking, Urgewald, Germany

Kevin Li , Globalisation Monitor, Hong Kong, China SAR

Ashish Fernandes, Sanctuary Asia, India

Antonio Tricarico, Campagna per la riforma della Banca mondiale, Italy

Ikuko Matsumoto, Friends of the Earth, Japan

Ms. Kyoko Ishida, Sustainable Development and Aid Program, Japan Center for a Sustainable Environment and Society (JACSES), Japan

Tonje Folkestad, FIVAS (Association for International Water and Forest Studies), Norway

Naeem Iqbal, Pakistan Network of Rivers Dams and People, Pakistan

Joan Carling, Cordillera People's Alliance, Philippines

Liane Greeff, Environmental Monitoring Group, South Africa

Teresa Perez, World Rainforest Movement, Uruguay

Phat Tran, MekongRiver, USA

Paula Palmer, Global Response, USA

Roger Normand, Center for Economic and Social Rights, USA

Marty Bergoffen, Southern Appalachian Biodiversity Project, USA

Barbara Warner, Marion County Water Watch, USA

Diana Bohn, Jubilee Debt Coalition, USA