

Chapter 7

Organizational Reformation of Water Resources Management after “the 2011 Thailand Floods”

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Summary: In 2011, Thailand experienced a massive flood. The Thai government reorganized the organizational structure of water resources management after this flood during 2011–12. The Yingluck administration planned both short-term flood mitigation projects and long-term flood prevention measures to be implemented by the new water resources management organization. However, later on, the structural reformation was criticized by the public, and the entire long-term measures planned in 2012 were scrapped by the Prayud administration after the Coup d’etat in May 2014. This study summarizes the incidents and the reformation process in a chronological order from 2011 to 2014.

Keywords: Thailand Floods, Water Resources Management, Organization

Introduction

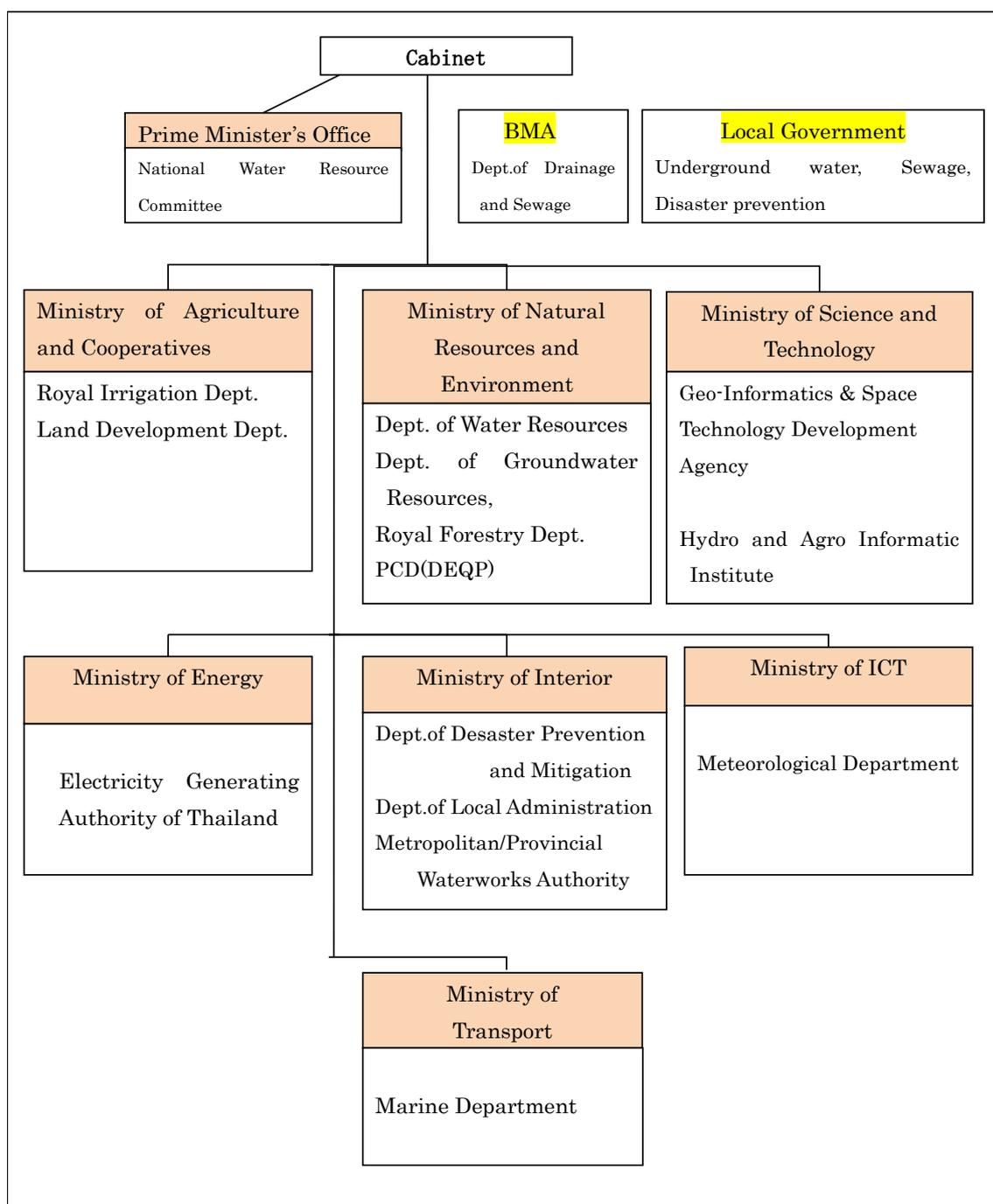
A massive flood struck Thailand during July to November 2011 due to high and long seasonal rainfall in May 2011 (Sucharit [2013]) resulting in tremendous damage. The death toll rose to 815, and seven industrial estates as well as many communities around Bangkok were flooded for several weeks to two months. In fact, many floods have been experienced in Thailand almost every year, especially in the Chao Phraya River watershed. However, the total losses from “the 2011 Thailand Great Floods” are 1.2 trillion baht, and this is the worst economic damage that Thailand had ever experienced.

To develop more effective flood control measures, the Yingluck administration thereafter tried organizational reformation of water resources management until 2013. This study summarizes the incidents and the reformation process until its failure in a chronological order from 2011 to 2014.¹

Overview of the organizational structure before “the 2011 Thailand Great Floods”

The water resources management policies before 2011 in Thailand were mostly managed by the following administrative bodies (Chart 1).

Chart 1 Water Resource Management Organizations in Thailand before 2011



This complex structure in Thailand was assumed to be one of the causes behind conflicting forecasts on floodwaters during 2011, and the different forecasts greatly confused the public during the flood.

Before 2011, the Thaksin administration attempted organizational reformation by submitting a draft bill on the new water resources management in 2005. However, before passage of this draft bill in the parliament, then Prime Minister Thaksin was ousted from his post by the coup in September 2006.

Chronology I - The 2011 Thailand Great Floods

In this chronology, the author summarizes how the conflicting views on the effects of the floods were made public during “the 2011 Thailand Great Floods” The confused information from various departments and public agencies led to the reformation process after the floods by the Yingluck administration.

June 27, 2011 – Ministry of Interior established a center to cope with floods and other disasters according to the 2007 Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Law.

July 3, 2011 – Phua Thai Party led by Yingluck Shinawatra won the general election.

July 6, 2011 – Kriangsak Kowathana (National Disaster Warning Council) commented on flood possibility in Bangkok and the surrounding areas in 2011, if high rainfall pattern continues.

August 10, 2011 – Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives announced that there would be no floods in Bangkok.

August 16, 2011 – Yingluck administration established “the War Room” to manage the floods expanding in the central region.

September 13, 2011 – Yingluck administration applied the 1991 State Administration and Management Rule (Article 11) and strengthened the authority of prime minister and ministers to handle the flood.

September 30, 2011 – GISTADA alarmed the public that the flooding of 13 districts in Bangkok may be unavoidable due to heavy rainfall. However, BMA deprecated this forecast immediately.

October 1, 2011 – Yingluck administration disclosed unusual heavy rainfall and the need for flood preparation in the surrounding areas of Bangkok.

October 4, 2011 – Prime Minister, the Bangkok Governor, and Provincial Governors of Pathumthani, Nonthaburi, and Samud Prakan organized a meeting

on the flood prevention scheme.

----- – Saha Rattana Nakorn Industrial Estate was flooded.

October 7, 2011 – Yingluck administration established the FROC.

October 12, 2011 – Yingluck administration established the FRC. Prime Minister was given an audience by the King to ask for the King's advice.

October 13, 2011 – Floodwaters attacked the Hi-Tech industrial estate.

October 13, 2011 – FROC and the Bangkok Governor Sukhumbhand announced contradictory views to Bangkok residents on the need for evacuation.

October 15, 2011 – Flooding of the Rangsit University.

October 17, 2011 – The Navanakhorn Industrial Estate was flooded.

October 20, 2011 – A barrier protecting the Klong Prapa water supply canal was disrupted by residents. Then the floodwaters entered the canal down to Sam Sen in Bangkok and several areas along the banks.

October 21, 2011 – Yingluck administration ordered BMA to open the sluice gate.

October 24, 2011 – Floods attacked the Don Muang airport, which was closed the next day.

October 31, 2011 – Prime Minister confirmed that the occurrence of floods to the central part of Bangkok would be escaped.

November 12, 2011 – Prime Minister stated that the overall situation in Bangkok was improving.

Chronology II - Organizational Reformation

After the scale of damages caused by “the 2011 Thailand Great Floods” was made clear, Yingluck administration attempted organizational reformation of water resources. The author selected the significant events of this reformation process in Chronology II.

November 10, 2011 – Yingluck administration announced the 2011 Prime Minister Act on Reconstruction and Future Development. The following committees were established to manage flood control and prevention: the Strategic Committee for Reconstruction and Future Development and the Strategic Committee for Water Resources Management (SCWRM).

December 2011 – SCWRM submitted the flood mitigation principle and eight schemes to the government to manage flood control in the future.

January 26, 2012 – The executive decree on strategies for future development and

reconstruction was announced, authorizing the government to borrow 350 billion baht to finance water management and flood rehabilitation projects.

- The executive decree allowing the finance ministry to transfer to the FIDF responsibility for the management of 1.14 trillion baht in debt (incurred from the bailout of financial institutions during the 1997 crisis) was also announced.

February 13, 2012 – Yingluck administration announced the 2012 Prime Minister Act on Water Resources and Flood Control Management Committee, known as “the Single Command Authority” act.

Accordingly, the National Water Policy and Flood Committee (NWPF) and the Office for water and Flood Management Committee (OWFMC) were established. The OWFMC was subscribed as a main promoter of the long-term flood. Mitigation plans to be decided in detail in 2013.

February 2012 – The cabinet approved the budget for “the Action Plan for the Prevention and Mitigation of Flood: Urgent Period” with consent and support by SCWRM.

April 12, 2012 – The cabinet decided to construct a controversial “Mae Wong Dam” within eight years.

June 4, 2012 – The cabinet approved (1) the plan for constructing flood wall barriers alongside six industrial estates and (2) preparation of the retention area of 2.1 million rai in the north (Phitsanulok, Phichit, and Nakhon Sawan) and south (Nakhon Sawan, Chainat, and Singburi) areas.

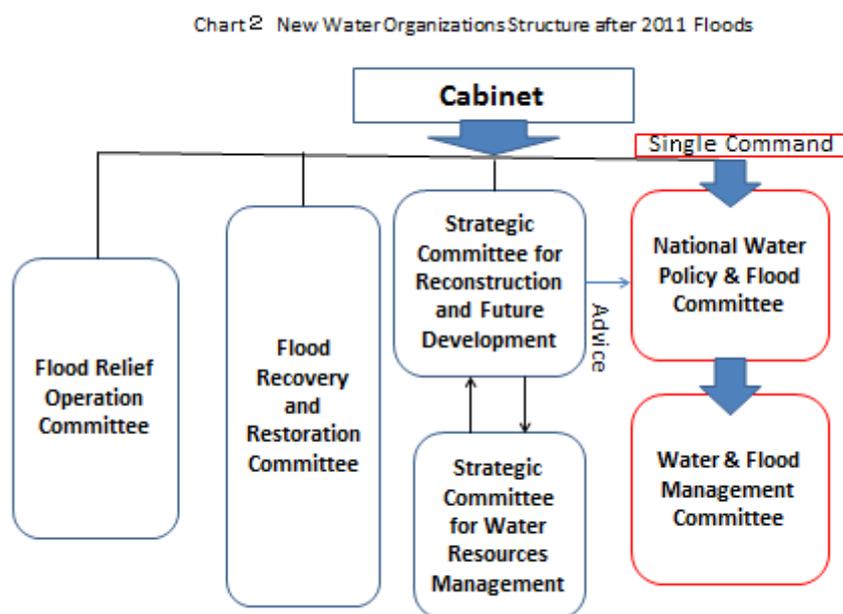
February 22, 2013 – Deputy Prime Minister Proprasob as the chairman of WFMC supervising the implementation of the projects signed a proposal on the long-term flood mitigation plans with 10 modules.

March 19, 2013 – The terms of references for the international competition of the long-term flood mitigation plans were shown to related agencies.

September 2013 – The National Water Operation Center (Thailand) began its operation of the flood simulation system.

Yingluck administration consecutively attempted the organizational reformation of water resources (Chart 2). The reformation process was well recognized by the professionals and related departments until February 2012. However, as the single-command agency (NWPF and OWFMC) began to be driven by politicians,

some controversial projects (such as the large floodway construction project, the Mae Wong Dam project) began to be listed in the flood prevention measures. The professionals as well as public questioned on some of the long-term flood mitigation plans.



Source: From the homepage of SCWRM and NESDB

In the following chapter, the author would show the events that led to the protest of the government's long-term flood mitigation plans until its end was announced after the Coup d'état in May 2014.

Chronology III – Protests against the long-term flood mitigation plans

After the Yingluck administration began using the single-command agency as its main body to establish the long-term flood mitigation plans, the professionals and related agencies (especially the SCWRM members and major water resources organizations) and the public began criticizing its decision-making process.

January 30, 2012 – Democrat Party MPs and 69 senators appealed to the constitutional court to rule whether the two executive decrees (on 350 billion baht to finance

water management and flood rehabilitation projects and on the finance ministry's transfer of 1.14 trillion baht in debt to the Bank of Thailand) were constitutional or not.

February 22, 2012 – The constitutional court excludes that the two decrees were constitutional.

August 17–18, 2012 – Some of the professionals in SCWRM organized a meeting and criticized methods in the long-term flood mitigation plan formulation by NWPFC.

May 1, 2013 – Srisuwan Janya—president of Stop Global Warming Association of Thailand—and 45 people appealed the Central Administrative Court asking it to issue an injunction against the 350 billion baht water management scheme.

May 14–20, 2013 – Deputy Prime Minister Prodrasob and the environmental NGOs had conflicts at the Water Summit in Chiang Mai on the controversial water plans.

May 17, 2013 – National Anti-Corruption Commission warned the government of its technical default on the bidding of the international competition of the long-term flood mitigation plans.

June 27, 2013 – The Central Administrative Court rejected the appeal by Srisuwan Janya, but asked the government to conduct the E/HIA of the projects again.

September 10–23, 2013 – Sasin Chaleomlap and other environmental activists rallied 388 km from Kamphenphed to Bangkok protesting the water projects.

November 2013 to May 2014 – People's Democratic Reform Council led by Suthep Thuagsuban began protest movements to overthrow Prime Minister Yingluck.

May 22, 2014 – National Councils for Peace and Order (NCPO) led by the military group of Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha announced the Coup d'état.

June 8, 2014 – NCPO announced a halt of long-term flood mitigation plans and a review of the entire scheme.

As Chronology III shows, the professionals and related agencies did not support the decision-making process of the water management plans led by the single-command agency and politicians that had lacked transparency. In addition, the feasibility to conduct the listed plans was questioned by the professionals and related department experts. Thus, the SCWRM members began to split by pros and cons toward the

government scheme. After May 2013, the environmental NGOs also began to express distrust to international bidding and some of the long-term flood mitigation plans.

The NCPO who led the Coup d'état in May 2014 announced to review all the projects under the new water management schemes. Currently, new plans and projects are proposed by related departments and the professional assigned by Prime Minister Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha. The plans are expected to be formulated into a new long-term plan, and the plan is to be conducted after next general election, which is expected after September 2015.

¹ The data that is mentioned chronologically in this chapter is based on Funatsu [2013] and Funatsu [2014] and is updated from other sources.

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