

Memorandum



To: WEI participants
From: Rahul Ray and Jason Collier
Date: March 22, 2019
EDI Project No: 18P0173
Re: Vanderhoof Information Session (Evening) – March 14, 2019

An information session for Rio Tinto’s Water Engagement Initiative (WEI) was held on March 14, 2019 at Scott’s Grille in Vanderhoof, BC. The session was open to the public and ran from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm.

The organizers and presenters included:

Rio Tinto: Andrew Czornohalan (AC), Justus Benckhuysen (JB), and Danielle De Kay (DD)

EDI facilitators: Rahul Ray (RR) and Jason Collier (JC)

Avison: Trinda Elwert (TE)

Ecofish: Adam Lewis (AL) and Jayson Kurtz (JK)

Thirteen community members were in attendance.

The following provides a summary of the main discussion points.

- A community member said that they would like to see a commitment from Rio Tinto that they are serious about the WEI. It is a trust issue, given the history of Alcan and then Rio Tinto in the watershed. It may take a lot of meetings to get to a place of trust. AC acknowledged the history and believes that making progress with the WEI will help build the foundation to move forward.
- A community member said that the flows in the Nechako are usually good for a period of time, then are shut off completely and the river drops. When the water gets so low, seagulls start eating fish eggs. RR said that the WEI wants to hear about these kinds of interests and issues, as they will help shape the outcomes.
- A community member wanted to know where the main table meetings will be held. RR replied that the main table meetings will rotate through different communities in the watershed.
- Community members commented that a lot of work was done by the Nechako Watershed Council (NWC), which rolled out of the 1997 Agreement. A consensus was reached in 2009 to have the spillway moved to



Kenney Dam, among other recommendations. The NWC thought the recommendations were legally binding, but stated they were never implemented because of political reasons.

- A comment was made that there has been a large amount of work done and information available on the Nechako that needs to be shared. There are many factors that contribute to the management of the Nechako. Sturgeon are the “canaries in the coal mine”, showing the state of the river, which cannot survive on 35% of historical flows. The health of the river depends on flow regime (volume and timing of releases). At it is now, the river does not behave like a natural watercourse should in this geographic area. There has not been political will from the federal or provincial governments to change the situation, as it would cost a lot of money.
- A comment was made that there have been a series of good intentions and efforts to change the situation, but there is nothing to show for it. The WEI process will be difficult to do. However, if we continue down the path we are currently on for another 60 years, the impacts on the system will be devastating, so we need to give it another try and try to trust each other again. It is our obligation.
- Comment that Rio Tinto should have discussions with the BC government to see how to go about fixing the issues and how much they are willing to give.
- AC commented that these comments provide good food for thought. The question is how do we do this? Where will we end up? There are likely some small improvements that can be made now to improve the situations. The intent of the WEI is to “unpack” community interests and see where the opportunities are. We need to look at mitigation related to flooding; look at different flow release schedules; look at the First Nations Major Projects Coalition, perhaps there is a platform there that can be helpful. We need to get everyone on board. It is not going to be easy, but we need to do it together.
- A question was asked if Rio Tinto has a bottom line to what they will give. AC commented that that is a big challenge. Rio Tinto will be at the main table representing their interests and commitments, for example Rio Tinto’s commitment to BC Hydro to supply electricity. Rio Tinto will not be compensated as BC Hydro was for the Water Use Plans for this initiative.
- A question was asked about the quality and validity of the data that Rio Tinto has. For instance, there are questions about how water level is being presented by Rio Tinto. There can be different depths at different locations. There is also a believe that Rio Tinto will dictate what kind of data is collected by other agencies, such as Environment Canada. The data presented seems to be what puts Rio Tinto in a good light. AC said Rio Tinto wants people to know how the data is collected, the reasons why, and the quality control measures that are used, in order to build people’s confidence.
- The District of Vanderhoof said that were present as observers only. They sent a letter signed by two levels of government (municipal and regional) to Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and have not heard or been engaged by them. The District has been working hard on building relationships with First Nations and will not turn their backs on them. The District needs to be engaged by the provincial



government and the DFO if they are going to participate. AC commented that Rio Tinto is trying to engage with all interested First Nations and with the First Nations Major Project Coalition.

- A representative from the Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Resources Operations, and Rural Development (FLNRORD) said the Province cannot run this type of process. The WEI is different from the BC Hydro Water Use Plans, but in both cases, it has been and will be up to the proponent to lead. The Province's role in the WEI will be as a participant, and will also provide technical support, such as supplying data and weighing in on technical information. The representative was present in order to listen, evaluate the resources that may be needed, and report back to the Minister. RR stated that the Province will be a part of the WEI process and will help identify regulatory risks throughout the process.
- The District of Vanderhoof wanted to know if the FLNRORD representative had the authority to make decisions on behalf of the Province. The FLNRORD representative stated that he did. He is present to listen and will bring back the information to help identify the needed resources. The District wanted to confirm that the Province would be able to provide technical data, to which the FLNRORD representative responded that the Province will be a participant and provide technical data. The Provincial representative was hoping to have a letter confirming their participation, but it was not ready ahead of the meeting.
- A comment was made that policy change is needed in order to make the necessary changes for the river. The Provincial and DFO regulatory system needs to change.
- Comment was made regarding cattle ranching and river water levels. There have been instances when water levels rise so quickly that cattle are caught on the other side of the river, which creates numerous problems for cattlemen. It would be good to have communications from Rio Tinto before water levels change, not after the fact. A week's notice would be good. There are also issues with irrigation when the water gets too high if floods irrigation pumps, and when the water gets too low, the pumps need to be relocated to get water. There is also an issue with fences getting washed out when the water levels get too high.
- A comment was made that people in these communities have been lied to before by Alcan and Rio Tinto, and there is a big trust issue. AC understands and was here to speak honestly. We don't know how the WEI will turn out, but it is up to us to determine how it goes. We need to start the conversation and share our understandings and interests.

Action Items

- **RR to follow-up with attendees to see who is wanting to participate.**