

To: WEI Meeting Participants

From: Tanya Guenther and Rahul Ray

Date: January 17, 2024

Re: Final Rio Tinto WEI Table Meeting 32.5 Summary

A video conference meeting for the Rio Tinto Water Engagement Initiative (WEI) was held on Wednesday, December 6, 2023, from 1 PM to 3:34 PM.

This document is a summary of the meeting and is not word-for-word “meeting minutes.” The information presented highlights the topics raised, key discussions, and identified action items.

The facilitator was **Rahul Ray** (RR) from EDI. **Tanya Guenther**, from EDI, took notes during the meeting and prepared this summary. **Colin Parkinson**, from EDI, attended to provide support. **Jayson Kurtz** (JK) from Ecofish Research participated as the Technical Working Group (TWG) coordinator. **Katie Healey** and **Kirsten Lyle** from Ecofish were present as process technical support. **Michael Harstone** (MH), from Compass Resource Management, participated as a decision analyst. **Clayton Schroeder** (CS), also from Compass Resource Management, participated as Structured Decision Making (SDM) support.

Andrew Czornohalan (AC), Rio Tinto Operations Director Power and Services, Kitimat and Kemano participated as a WEI Table member.

December 6, 2023 attendance is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. December 6, 2023—WEI Main Table Meeting Participants

Individual	Organization
Aman Pahar	<i>Rio Tinto</i>
Andrew Czornohalan	<i>Rio Tinto</i>
Clayton Schroeder	<i>Compass</i>
Colin Parkinson	<i>EDI</i>
Denis Wood	<i>Public participant</i>
Donna Klingspohn	<i>Public participant</i>
Henry Klassen	<i>Public participant</i>
Jayson Kurtz	<i>Ecofish</i>
June Wood	<i>Public participant</i>
Katie Healey	<i>Ecofish</i>
Kim Menounos	<i>Fraser Basin Council</i>
Kirsten Lyle	<i>Ecofish</i>

Lyla Brophy	<i>Nechako Valley Regional Cattlemen’s Association</i>
Michael Harstone	<i>Compass</i>
Phillip Krauskopf	<i>Ministry of Forests, Water Authorizations</i>
Rachel Chudnow	<i>Ecofish</i>
Rahul Ray	<i>EDI</i>
Ray Klingspohn	<i>Public Participant</i>
Shirley Moon	<i>Area F Representative Regional District of the Bulkley-Nechako</i>
Stephen Dery	<i>UNBC, TWG</i>
Tanya Guenther	<i>EDI, Meeting Support</i>
Tim Plesko	<i>Public participant</i>
Wayne Salewski	<i>Public participant</i>
Luc Turcotte	<i>Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship</i>
Deborah Jones-Middleton	<i>Director Protective Services Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako</i>
Kevin Moutray	<i>Mayor District of Vanderhoof</i>
Steve Gordon	<i>Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship</i>
Duncan McColl	<i>Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship</i>
Clint Lambert	<i>Area E Representative Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako</i>

The following provides a summary of the topics discussed during the videoconference.

WELCOME AND UPDATES

Attendees were welcomed to the meeting. The agenda for December 6 was reviewed. There were no additions or deletions.

DISCUSS/REACH AGREEMENT ON PACKAGE OF PHASE 1 RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO:

Review of alternative selected at Meeting 32

Last meeting general agreement was reached on a flow alternative.

- WEI Participants reached agreement on a Phase 1 flow alternative. Gerd Erasmus did not agree to the scope of Phase 1.
- During this meeting, WEI participants felt there was agreement on Phase 1 within the identified parameters. **WEI participants at the meeting confirmed that Flow Alternative 6A is the selected Phase 1 flow alternative.**

Phase 1 Non-Flow Alternatives

The framework for building the package was reviewed from Meeting 32. Some of the key steps to develop the framework included:

- Project team reviewed a series of potential options and recommendations to be included in Phase 1 (beyond a flow alternative recommendation).
- Project Team was directed to go away and work with the TWG to develop page for the Main Table to review.
- TWG has met to discuss data gaps and the priorities for monitoring research, physical works, and other considerations.
- Project Team suggested a priority list of actions to undertake for each category, as summarized in the pre-reading package (Meeting 32).

Physical Works Projects for Phase 1

Recommendation from TWG:

- Many projects, and the TWG was reluctant to prioritize them
- Considerations include:
 - Relative cost
 - WEI relevance (river management, broader ecological consideration)
 - Related issues
 - Lifetime
 - Maintenance
 - Benefits
 - Implementation timeline
 - Time to benefit
 - Certainty
- Project team prioritization included:
 - If Main table member outlined conditions to accept Flow Alternative 6A to mitigate or offset trade-offs between Alt 6 and the status quo
 - All other projects will be identified as important as they provide value and benefits in the watershed (but may need other partners to take the lead).
 - All physical works priorities are listed in the pre-reading package. The recommendations from the TWG are to prioritize these items to:
 - Improve caribou calving ground access
 - Improve caribou survival
 - Reduce osprey nest flooding
 - Improve mainstem fish habitat
 - Reduce fish stranding

- Improve side channel fish habitat
- Reduce flooding

Comments from WEI Participants included:

- *Concern about wolves*
- *Changing the flood threshold from 550 to 500 feet.*
- *Other groups may be working on similar activities in the watershed. Need to look at what is being done by other groups*
- *Response: TWG recognizes there is other work going on. The review of data gaps will look at what we prioritize, what is being done by others, and what we may need to do.*
- *Sturgeon sustainable recovery and recruitment is a long-term goal, habitat improvement.*

Data Gaps (PMs, baseline ecological studies) for Phase 1

Detailed information is provided in the pre-reading package for Meeting 32.

- Main Table members were asked to review the list of high priority data gaps and identify any missing data gaps. Comments included:
 - Is there data to document the day-to-day temperature of water released from Skins Lake Spillway and that temperature of Cheslatta Falls?
- PM Data Gaps
 - Targeted studies to refine existing PMs and/or develop new PMs.
- Ecological Baseline
 - Research to address uncertainties regarding the current state of ecological components.
- Approach
 - Identify and assess data gaps (review issue/PM list, technical memos, TWG/Main Table comments)
 - Scope studies (high-level design/cost)
 - Prioritize, with prioritization criteria
 - 35 high priority data gaps have been identified with 8 unique to ecological baseline category and a lot of overlap between the data gaps.
 - See the table in the prereading package for the full list.

Comments:

- *How did you decide on what data to accept? Any timeline of items being outdated?*

Time was considered, but no strict rules applied. For example, we have a flow habitat relationship based on work done in the '80s. Sometimes things change and data may or may not be relevant. Reviewed to see if anything has changed since then.

- *In the past there has been an economic question, but today there is also an energy, low-CO2, Clean BC, Paris Accord target consideration as well. Economics are a smaller piece of the puzzle right now. It complicates things completely and becomes a political space of meeting Clean BC 2030 and Paris Climate Accord by 2035.*
- *What about out migration?*
 - *Identified basic ecological work on salmon but have not identified out migration.*

Recommended Effectiveness Monitoring:

- Project Team discussed various options. Factors considered included:
 - Expected change/effect under flow alternative
 - Lessons learned
 - Standard monitoring protocols
 - Monitoring timeframes
 - WEI timeframes
 - PM certainty
- Recommended effectiveness monitoring includes:
 - Reservoir elevation
 - River discharge
 - River elevation
 - River temperature
 - Power output

Comments:

- *How will the information be used? Sometimes difficult and dangerous to draw conclusions, but ultimately it is what leads us to ask more questions. We do not underestimate it. Hard to use in a pure science world.*
- *If our main goal is improving the health of the river, often times health is determined by what other people notice.*
- *Out migration is a monitoring tool.*

Other Operational Consideration for Phase 1

Formal Review: Project Team is recommending that a formal review of the Phase 1 Flow Alternative be carried out five years after implementation.

- Triggers
 - If the White Sturgeon Recovery Team recommends a new base flow regime
 - If it determines that the Phase 1 Flow Alternative is having adverse population-level effects on priority fish species

Comments:

- *Possible effects on Vanderhoof and flooding as a possible trigger, if the flooding is attributable to the flow changes only. Other flooding reasons would not be a trigger.*
- Operational Updates and Engagements
 - Should Operational Updates and engagement continue after the planning phases and into the implementation?

Decision: The Main Table agreed to include a recommendation for annual updates/reporting.

- Phase 1 Studies and Physical Works Project Manager/Co-ordinator
The Project Team recommends a dedicated support to coordinate and manage this work (i.e., phase 1 coordinator/project manager).

Rio Tinto is willing to commit to moving forward and continue building on the work. At end of Phase 1 would like for this group to have a workshop to see what worked well and what could be event better and look at lessons learned.

- Any other recommendations?
 - **Continuing working to strengthen relationships and input from First Nations communities and create opportunities for receiving their input and feedback.**

Conclusion of Phase 1

Congratulations to everyone for their work. Phase 1 planning is now complete! Your contributions and the work you have put in have been greatly appreciated. We found a way to have some hard discussions in a respectful way that allowed for all voices to be heard. When we started, we did not realize how long the road was going to be. We kept going through a pandemic, wildfires, floods, and other challenges along the way. Through it all, we had an opportunity to learn from each other.

Comments:

- *Our wealth is built by friendships and this process has opened up many friendships!*
- *Over the 4-1/2 years we have learned so much. Well done everyone!*

DISCUSS UPCOMING WORKPLAN AND SCHEDULE FOR 2023 AND TRANSITION TO PHASE 2 IN 2024

Questions to consider:

- Do we wait to start phase 2 until data collection for PM updates has been advanced significantly?
- Any scope issues which need to be better defined in relation to phase 1?
E.g.: with DFO in relation to reshaping STMP water budget and shape?
E.g.: with others on other agreements (Province or BCHw/power generation)?

- What is the status of the infrastructure investigations e.g., Kenny Dam spillway?

NEXT STEPS

Action: Project Team to provide Main Table members with Phase 2 scope options.

Comments:

- *This team will come together at a later date to review lessons learned and finalize the report for Phase 1. That will pave the way for Phase 2.*
- *If members have feedback in the meantime they forward it to the Process Team.*

MEETING ADJOURNED

The meeting was adjourned at 3:34 PM.

ACTION ITEMS

- Project Team to provide Main Table members with Phase 2 scope options.