
To: WEI Meeting Participants

From: Rahul Ray and Corrina Ligertwood

Date: May 28, 2024

Re: Final Rio Tinto WEI Main Table Check-in, May 2, 2024: Meeting Summary

A videoconference meeting for the Rio Tinto Water Engagement Initiative (WEI) was held on Thursday, May 2, 2024, from 1 p.m. to 3:55 p.m. PST.

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

The facilitator was **Rahul Ray** (RR) from EDI. **Corrina Ligertwood**, from EDI, took notes during the meeting and prepared this summary. **Colin Parkinson**, from EDI, attended to provide support. **Rachel Chudnow** from Ecofish Research participated as the Technical Working Group (TWG) coordinator. **Kirsten Lyle** from Ecofish was 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.

The attendance for the WEI meeting on May 2, 2024, is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. May 2, 2024 – WEI Main Table Meeting Participants

Individual	Organization
Aman Pahar	Rio Tinto
Andrew Czornohalan	Rio Tinto
Charlie Rensby	Village of Burns Lake
Clayton Schroeder	Compass Resource Management
Colin Parkinson	EDI Environmental Dynamics Inc.
Corrina Ligertwood	EDI Environmental Dynamics Inc., Meeting Support
Daniel Sneep	DFO
Denis Wood	Public participant
Duncan McColl	Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Gerd Erasmus	Public participant
Gina Layte-Listen	Public participant
Henry Klassen	Public participant

Individual	Organization
June Wood	Public participant
Kevin Moutray	District of Vanderhoof
Kim Menounos	Fraser Basin Council
Kirsten Lyle	Ecofish
Michael Harstone	Compass Resource Management
Phillip Krauskopf	Ministry of Forests, Water Authorizations
Rachel Chudnow	Ecofish
Rahul Ray	EDI Environmental Dynamics Inc.
Stephen Dery	University of Northern British Columbia
Steve Gordon	Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Wayne Salewski	Public participant/NEWSS

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

WELCOME AND UPDATES

Attendees were welcomed to the meeting. The agenda for May 2 was reviewed. No additions or deletions were made.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Current Conditions

Andrew Czornohalan from Rio Tinto will be presenting an update at a community meeting in Vanderhoof on May 3.

He noted that the drought is continuing, and that the snowpack survey will show levels possibly the lowest on record. The combination of a low reservoir and a low snowpack will be a significant problem. Rio Tinto is working on opportunities to mitigate risk to the smelter and has suspended energy exports across the winter and likely for the next 12 months. They are also looking at securing market energy to protect the reservoir.

Aman added that the open house the following day starts at 5:30 p.m. and it will be hosted by the Chamber of Commerce. It will focus on the drought. Presenters include Rio Tinto with a hydrological update and identification of risks, and the BC Wildfire Service. A question-and-answer session will also be included, and about 96 people have indicated they will attend.

Andrew also spoke about Phase 1 Recommendations. With the worst drought season on record, Rio Tinto is not in a position to shape flows. Status quo will be implemented.

Please contact Aman if you would like to attend the open house.

Phase 1 Implementation

Rachel Chudnow from Ecofish presented on *Phase 1 Implementation: Priorities Data Gap Studies and Physical Works*.

The Main Table reviewed and identified data gaps at Meeting 32.5, which resulted in 37 high priority studies to reduce uncertainty or develop new performance measures (PMs). The 37 studies will address uncertainties with new Flow Alternative 6A, characterize potential effects (impacts and benefits), and inform future water management decisions to improve the health of the Nechako system. Confidence in the PMs is needed to reach agreement on future flow changes. However, during the prioritization process, several of the proposed 37 studies were found to be redundant, so they were consolidated to 19 studies.

To prioritize next steps, the Technical Working Group (TWG) recommended 9 physical works projects which were brought to the Main Table Meeting 32.5 for comment. Opportunities to share work with other organizations such as TWG members, the BC Ministry of the Environment (MOE), Nechako First Nation (NFN), and the university of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) were also explored.

Andrew noted that a number of studies are currently in progress. Denis W. noted that rearing habitat restoration on the upper Nechako and planting willows for cover is ongoing.

Rachel explained that the initial prioritization process considered factors including: Does the study or physical work: 1. Address key main table concerns (i.e., Pacific Salmon, White Sturgeon, temperature, and Cheslatta Archaeological sites); 2. Require a low water year; and 3. Address multiple Main Table concerns?

Rachel presented that the District of Vanderhoof is advancing dyking/flood mitigation works. After the meeting, Kevin Moutray confirmed that the District of Vanderhoof is not undertaking dyking works. The statement at the meeting was incorrect.

Osprey 3a and 3b work in the reservoir and nest relocation is ongoing. Other physical works are also ongoing with potential for collaboration. Details will be presented in the future.

Discussion:

- Dan asked if side channels will be affected by low flows?
- Andrew said he would take his concern back to the Technical Team.
- Wayne suggested this action will be useable in the future.
- Dan wondered if we could optimize timing to when flows will be available.
- Wayne suggested that drought work can be cost effective given water levels.
- Henry said the goal of opening the side channels is to permit access for fish. He also suggested the need is greater during low flow.
- Dan suggested that opening more channels could lower water levels across the flood plain.
- Rahul noted that technical analysis is needed on the effects of water diversion.

- Colin added that in the past, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) excavated the channels but left them dyked until the water flow was sufficient.
- Rachel added that increasing habitat complexity is still up for consideration.
- Andrew noted that it is ironic that here is too much wood in the reservoir, but not enough downstream.
- Denis has received reports that small fry are using the channel.
- Gerd noted it is difficult to make decisions during such unusual drought conditions. The timing seems logical for improving the side channels, but it would be experimental during drought conditions.

Phase 1 Report

Rahul reported that the team has been working on the WEI report to accurately reflect Phase 1 efforts. It is also being revised to be more approachable. The issue summary sheets will be provided in an Appendix to the main report. The sheets will describe each issue, the sensitivity to flow, the current level of knowledge, and the issue status. The report will also discuss data gaps and monitoring physical works.

Next steps for the report include presenting it to the WEI Main table for review and comment by the end of May.

WEI Phase 1 Survey

Aman Parhar, CSP, BC Works from Rio Tinto provided a summary of the **WEI Phase 1 Survey**. The survey gathered input from as many WEI Participants as possible.

The survey resulted in a wide spectrum of data, including some polar opposite responses. The responses were analyzed for themes and an effort was made to include the broad range of perspectives.

The survey asked questions about Phase 1 and what went well, challenges, opportunities, facilitation, and the sharing of information. Questions to support the design and conduct of Phase 2 focused on the outcomes participants would like to see, and their meeting preferences. The survey also asked for reflections on infrastructure projects.

The overall sentiment, based on interviews, was largely positive, but many said they would like the process to move faster.

Survey questions on facilitation included how EDI's facilitation was rated (more than half responded with a 4 or 5, with 5 being excellent). The other half rated the facilitation as a 1, 2, or 3.

Was the facilitation effective? 57% said yes, with the remainder responding no, maybe, or couldn't say.

For Compass, the decision analyst team, a majority rated them as being effective. The results for Ecofish included a range of responses, with some who found the technical data too simple, while others found it complicated.

Response about what went well included that it was good to get a history and understand water and flow. Most respondents also thought the social connections and relationships were positive. Comments also included that Rio Tinto was well represented and lived up to their partnership expectations.

Responses about the challenges included 90% stating that the process took too long. Some also thought the Table had too many people. It was suggested that the Table should be composed of elected officials. Other comments included the need to spell out all acronyms, provide a clear outline of achievements per phase, a need for more First Nation representatives on the Table, a request for more focus on the reservoir and not on the river, and more room for other topics versus having a tight agenda.

Overall, the survey reflected a large group of people with varied interests.

Feedback on the Handouts included some finding there was too much data and preferring one-page summaries. Others wanted to make sure the data can be questioned without challenging the competency of the presenters. Less wordy and more condensed information was also requested. Smaller group meetings to explain technical terms and processes were also suggested.

Some of the successful outcomes for Phase 2 suggested by survey respondents included having a tighter, more efficient process, completing the studies, consensus on next steps, a water stewardship plan, and everyone coming to the table to have hard conversations without being hard on the people.

Some comments on meeting preferences included a preference for in-person meetings. But some also wanted shorter, more frequent on-line meetings to digest smaller amounts of information before meeting as a larger group every 3 to 6 months for a full day.

The reflection on infrastructure projects asked this question: *The Kenney Dam Release Facility and dredging of the Tahtsa Narrows have come up many times during discussions at the WEI table. If Rio Tinto was to go ahead with these projects, would that change your expectations for Phase 2?* Most respondents indicated that yes, this project would change their Phase 2 expectations.

Discussion:

- Dennis asked Aman if her slides would be available on paper or perhaps attached to the meeting summary.

Action: Rahul to send survey slides with meeting summary

- Andrew asked how can we take this data forward?

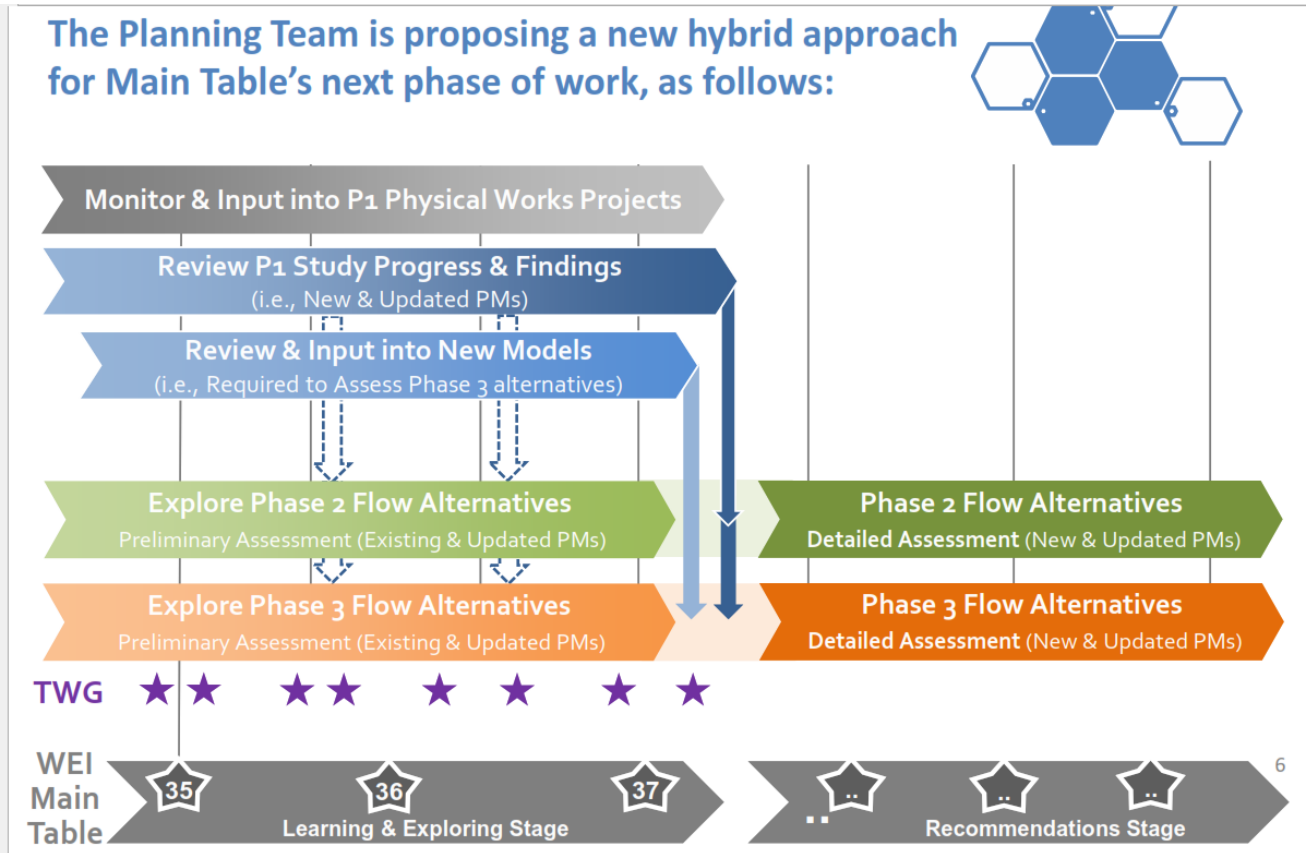
- Wayne asked what would cause us to go to Phase 3?
- Andrew commented that the Phase 1 process built a foundation for a speedier Phase 2 and 3.
- Henry noted that for Phase 1, there's been a decade between previous work. Now we have new people, but the same issues. It's important to build relationships and welcome new people. Four years is a challenge, but we need to focus on what we are here for: to improve the habitat for the fisheries. Sturgeon are now four years closer to extirpation. We need to change flows, consider hard questions, and do what we can do. A water licence can be changed.
- Kevin agrees that we need to speed up. Once positions are stated once, we need to move on.

Framing the Next Phase(s)

Michael Harstone, from Compass Resource Management presented on *Framing the Next Phase(s): a Hybrid Approach to Exploring and Recommending Flow Changes on the Nechako System*.

After reviewing the draft meeting summary, Michael provided some text to provide clarity about what he presented at the meeting regarding next steps.

- As the WEI Main Table moves into the next stages of work, the Project Team took the opportunity to reflect back on Phase 1 to see how we could improve the process and take into account the feedback from the Main Table's survey.
- Some of the past reflections and observations highlighted to the Project Team that many of the Phase 1 performance measures (PMs) were insensitive and associated with too much uncertainty. Moreover, it was noted that in some cases we did not have very good PMs at all (e.g., salmon side channel habitat on the Nechako River). This would present a challenge as the process moved into Phase 2 (and 3), if members did not have confidence or the means to understand the consequences of more significant flow changes. This was also one of the main rationales for the high number of studies that were recommended by the Main Table: therefore, in order to have improved PMs to more accurately estimate consequences and make difficult trade-offs with more confidence.
- Based on this realization, the Project Team developed a hybrid proposal for the next phase of work that was discussed by the Main Table. The hybrid workplan consisted primarily of two parts: information collection to update and improve the PMs (over the next two years) and learning to better understand the consequences of different Phase 2 and Phase 3 Flow Alternatives (initially using the old PMs until they are improved). And once there is a more accurate and comprehensive set of updated PMs, to undertake the more detailed assessment of Phase 2 and 3 Flow Alternatives.
- The Main Table had a number of comments and questions during the following discussion.



The WEI Main Table would be involved in a learning and exploration stage, followed by a recommendation stage. We would continue moving forward on all fronts, but wait for models to better characterize the flow alternatives. The Technical Working Group would be involved in the studies and developing and refining the performance measures.

Discussion:

- Wayne said he can see the value in a hybrid approach. He prefers a big picture solution.
- Wayne asked if Rio Tinto has other power source options. (narrows first, release second).
- Denis spoke about a combination of Phase 2 and 3, and suggested both can be discussed at the same time. BC will be in a power deficit, and we will need to provide an incentive to get the project of the ground.
- Henry noted that the spillway is an important part and will affect downstream flows. He suggested a high priority on studies on infrastructure that will affect the river the most. On dredging of the narrows, he noted that the reservoir is still managed on a 12-month water budget with little room for change, but it [offers] safety for storage to prevent flooding. Henry suggested increased downstream flows based on what the habitat requires, and that we need a study on the cost benefit analysis of power versus water.

- Rahul noted studies and physical works can be advanced, and performance measures can be improved. He then asked “how often would the Main table like to meet for updates on studies and physical works? We could have meetings monthly or every two months.
- Kevin said we should meet as often as it is useful. There is no sense in meeting just for the sake of meeting.
- **Rahul suggested meeting when there are Technical Working Group items to present. There was broad agreement to this idea.**
- Henry suggested the Main Table should prioritize which studies the Technical Working Group should work on and then meet as often as necessary.
- Denis added it is an urgent priority to get the information needed.
- Rachel spoke about Phase 1 work that Ecofish is doing.
- Gerd noted that many studies have been done and are reflected in the Nechako Watershed Council ‘s (NWC’s)work. He suggested this information is available and he would like to see these NWC studies and recommendations made available to the Main Table, and then the Main Table could direct the Technical Working Group.
- Rachel noted that the Technical Memos included comprehensive literature reviews of available information, current relevance, and related to climate change. She doesn’t see a problem with sharing these studies. The two-page summary has a summary of available information, gaps, and what may have changed.
- Gerd would like the Main Table to help decide which studies are relevant. He doesn’t feel informed about past studies or available information.
- Rachel pointed out that the WEI website has links to the Technical Memos and literature reviews. They have tried to focus on main issues since there were about 68 issues with Technical Memos and each is about 30 pages.
- **Kirsten shared the link to the Get Involved Nechako website. [Water Engagement Initiative – Get Involved Nechako](#). Once there, the section: “Technical Memos to Support Issue Scoping and Performance Measure Development” provides an extensive list of background memos. Most of the memos identify the background literature reviewed.**
- Henry stated that we need to identify the projects we want to work on and they will need to be current and updated.
- **Rahul summarized the discussion as follows: When the Technical Working Group has information, we will call a Main Table Meeting.**
- Aman’s survey showed diverse perspectives. He then asked if we need a format for shorter meetings.
- Kevin said it depends on the amount of information. He prefers a one-topic video conference.
- Rahul suggested a 2- to 3-hour meeting could be okay depending on the topic. However, since topics can be complex, would short sessions be useful when needed?

- Gerd suggested we need two kinds of meeting: video conferences to present information to the Main Table, and meeting in person to develop consensus, which requires conversation and input.
- Rahul asked if pre-meeting sessions to go through the information packages would be useful? There was support for this.
- Denis asked if the video conference could be in the evening?
- Discussion ensued about the best meeting times and people's schedules and activities. Some prefer morning or day meetings to absorb information better.
- Rahul asked if the field trip to South Side was helpful, and whether another field trip would be useful?
- Keven replied, yes, but only if it is relevant.
- **Rahul noted that a range of studies and works need to happen. The group wants to be updated as important information is developed. There is support for the hybrid approach outlined with gathering information, refining performance measures, and advancing new infrastructure, including the Kenney Dam release facility.**
- Rahul thanked the group for taking the time to speak with Aman, and noted that these comments will help to shape Phase 2 and 3.
- Gerd questioned the idea of parallel discussions with First Nations and asked who gets the information? Is it the same, and why can't we work together?
- Andrew noted that the technical information is the same.
- Andrew noted that he is guided by the technical work. The river is ambivalent, and an improvement is an improvement.
- Rahul noted that Andrew and Jayson Kurtz are involved in both conversations. We will continue with the technical studies and engaging with this group.
- Kevin commented that his has been the smoothest meeting yet, and that the raised hands works!
- At the conclusion of the discussion, the Main Table supported the Project Team's recommended hybrid workplan and proposed project schedule, which will be focused on information collection (updating key PMs) and learning (preliminary assessment of Phase 2 and 3 Flow Alternatives).

MEETING ADJOURNED

The meeting was adjourned at 3:55 p.m.

ACTION ITEMS

Action: Rahul to send survey slides with meeting summary

Next meeting: to be determined by the information available.