



The Board's Vision: A healthy and diverse aquatic ecosystem for the benefit of present and future generations.

Mackenzie River Basin Board Secretariat

Mackenzie River Basin Board Meeting No. 81

November 19 and 20, 2024

9:00 am to 4:00 pm Central

Hybrid Meeting – Wanuskewin, Saskatchewan

Attendees (in person unless otherwise noted)

Thon Phommavong	Government Member	Saskatchewan
Vice Chief Joseph Tsannie	Indigenous Member	Saskatchewan
Patrick Cherneski	Government Alternate	Canada Water Agency
Nadine Stiller (day 1; virtual)	Government Member	Canada Water Agency
Heather Jirousek	Government Member	Yukon
Laurie Wein	Government Alternate	Parks Canada
Ted Zimmerman (virtual)	Government Member	British Columbia
Alden Armstrong (virtual)	Indigenous Member	Alberta
Cam Lane	Government Alternate	Alberta
Leon Andrew	Indigenous Member	Northwest Territories
Julian Kanigan	Government Member	Northwest Territories
Nick Mitchell (virtual)	Government Alternate	CIRNAC

Secretariat

Paula Siwik	MRBB Executive Director
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Guests

Bradley Summerfield	ECCC
Sarah Bartnik	ECCC
Corie White	Saskatchewan
Ute Holweger (virtual; day 1)	Canada Water Agency
Remi Gosselin (virtual; day 1)	Canada Water Agency
Ram Yerubandi (virtual; day 1)	ECCC
Kathyn Parlee (virtual; day 1)	ECCC
Nadine Parker (virtual; day 1)	ECCC
Merrell-Ann Phare (day 2; pm)	CIER
Emily Hoppe (day 2; pm)	CIER
Michael Miltenberger (day 2; pm)	CIER
Laren Bill (day 2; pm)	CIER
John Mark Davis (day 2; am)	Saskatchewan

Elder Opening

- Elder Mary Lee opened the meeting by sharing her thoughts on the importance of water, and a prayer to guide discussions during the meeting.

81.1 Welcome Roundtable

This meeting included many guests from the Canada Water Agency (CWA).

81.2 Agenda

Agenda was approved

81.3 Approval of Minutes

Minutes from Meeting 79 and 80 were approved

81.4 Canada Water Agency

- Presentation on the Mackenzie Freshwater Ecosystem Initiative Investment. Investment at this stage is modest so the program will be targeted and strategic.
- The importance of engagement with organizations, communities, and harvesters was noted.
- Presentation on the engagement to review the *Canada Water Act*.
- The Act has not been meaningfully updated in 50+ years. The Minister of ECCC was directed to advance the modernization of the Act to “reflect Canada’s freshwater reality including climate change and Indigenous rights”. The review of the Act will help to enhance government to government relationships.
- CWA are working directly with First Nation governments as well as national and provincial Indigenous representative organizations.
- **Provincial and Territorial Specific Messages:** Most provinces and territories have expressed interest in multilateral engagement/joint discussions with other provinces, territories, and Indigenous partners. Provinces and territories have proposed transboundary water boards and agreements as possible vehicles for seeking joint responses. CWA should be mindful of constraints (i.e. capacity and resources), as provinces and territories work to engage meaningfully across multiple GoC initiatives, and to avoid interference with provincial and territorial jurisdiction.
- **Indigenous Specific Messages:** Most Indigenous partners are appreciative of bilateral meetings and a distinctions-specific approach. Indigenous partners emphasized the need for long-term predictable funding to enable their sustained participation in the review.
- If you have any questions, please feel free to contact: **Canada Water Agency Email** water-eau@ec.gc.ca

81.5 STB update

- i. **Mackenzie Water Quality Framework**
- There is an MoU between CWA and ECCC. The ECCC Science and Technology Branch will:
 - Continue ongoing and enhance water quality monitoring
 - Continue Aquatic ecosystem health parameters (CABIN)
 - Research to assess the impacts of climate change on aquatic processes in Mackenzie River Basin

- Develop multi-scale Mackenzie River Basin model for short and long-term water quality assessment
- Support assessment and reporting on Mackenzie River system indicators of water quality and aquatic ecosystem health
- The multi-scale model is anticipated to be a predictive system and will incorporate water quality monitoring data, CABIN (aquatic invertebrate sampling), and research on climate change impacts on aquatic systems. Anticipated to be able to provide both short term (more immediate future) and long-term climate predictions.
- Several components will be integrated in the proposed model – surface water, groundwater, limnology, river dynamics, and atmospheric conditions. The components will be combined to make predictions. The model is intended to be open source.

ii. National Freshwater Science Agenda

- Renewed/increased federal commitment to freshwater management in Canada. Increased management will be achieved via collaboration. Vision is to address national challenges while responding to regional needs. The agenda to be responsive to Freshwater Action Plan and Canada Water Agency needs. An inclusive agenda that includes coordination between governments and non-governmental organizations and include consideration of Indigenous Knowledge systems. The agenda will be “evergreen” (evolve over time) and have a 10-year roll-out. Evergreen commitment will include increased engagement which will results in updates to the agenda over time.
- Engagement activities to date – 3 rounds of surveys, and smaller discussions at regional levels.
- National freshwater science priorities and associated topics are a) Freshwater and climate, b) Freshwater and Ecosystems, c) Freshwater and land use, d) Supporting Science and Activities.
- Anticipate that the first iteration of the science agenda will be released Spring 2025.

MRBB chair position

- This is the final meeting for the current chair. The role could be filled by any MRBB member, and a co-chair approach could be considered (one Indigenous and one government).
- The MRBB will revisit this discussion once a new member is appointed for the CWA. The CWA alternate will chair in the interim.

81.6 Strategic Plan

- Members reviewed the draft document and highlighted areas where language should be discussed and topics that MRBB members may wish to discuss further. Intended to be a brief document.
- MRBB members felt that the draft captured the important elements discussed at the 2023 Strategic Planning workshop. A series of products such as short summaries and graphics will be developed once the text is finalized.

81.7 Shared Priority Setting Exercise

- The goal of this exercise was to solicit input from MRBB members to support a Mackenzie Freshwater Ecosystem initiative (FEI) call for proposals. The calls are likely to evolve over time.
- MRBB Members were asked to provide thoughts on 4 questions.
 - What are the key pillars/objectives for the Government of Canada to deliver in the basin?
 - How should the MRBB and the federal FEI program partner?
 - What are the key considerations or factors in the design of the Government of Canada program for Mackenzie FEI?
 - What type of organizations or mechanisms are best to deliver the Government of Canada investments to optimize outcomes?
- MRBB members shared input on those questions for Canada Water Agency representatives to consider.

81.8 Parting Comments from the Chair

- MRBB members have accomplished a lot since 2018. A stable Board with low turnover supports accountability. MRBB members have invested time in getting the house in order (Strategic and Operational Review report). The Secretariat is key to the success of this Board. The State of the Aquatic Ecosystem Report was an immense success. The MRBB can advance reconciliation by meaningfully embodying the principles when we come together.

Day 1 Meeting closed

Minutes, Mackenzie River Basin Board Meeting No. 81
Day 2
9:00 am to 4:00 pm Central
Hybrid Meeting – Wanuskewin Visitor Center, Saskatchewan

Note: the order of the agenda was changed due to travel delays. The minutes reflect the order of agenda items as they were addressed on day 2 of the meeting, not the numerical order.

81.11 Committee Updates

- i. Water Quality Task Team (WQTT) Update and Committee Terms of Reference
 - Presentation on the work of the Water Quality Task Team and an updated draft Terms of Reference was tabled.
 - MRBB members did not have comments on the current work and priorities of the task team. There was a discussion around membership and whether the task team has a good connection to the Traditional Knowledge and Strengthening Partnership Committee.
 - MRBB members will provide advice to the Water Quality Task Team on membership in the near future.
- ii Traditional Knowledge and Strengthening Partnerships Committee
 - Presentation on membership, recent meetings including a hybrid meeting in Norman Wells, and committee priorities.
 - TKSP Committee members are also MRBB members, SOAER Committee members and some participate in BMCs. There is a need to secure solid consistent leadership for this committee. TKSP Committee members will meet soon to advise on how to move things forward.
- iii. SOAER Committee Update and SOW Progress/Timing
 - Presentation on level 1 edits to the SOAER website, and the work of the SOAER Committee.
 - Analytics are active on the on the SOAER website and citations have been revised to the Elsevier Harvard citation style. Zotero is now being used as the catalogue to store citations.
 - Key Take Away Website: Maintaining the website is an ongoing resource need and the more that is added, the more maintenance it will require.
 - Key Take Away Content: Proper engagement requires an iterative approach in a basin this size with ongoing additions and improvements to SOAER content.

81.10 Secretariat Update

- MRBB Secretariat had a lot of turn over in 2024-25 which resulted a reduction in the ability to support or advance priorities. The move to the Canada Water Agency has also required time and resources of Secretariat staff.
- The MRBB Secretariat requires additional administrative support, a SOAER Chair, dedicated support for the SOAER update, a chair for the TKSP Committee, and an updated/modernized annual report process.

- MRBB members supported revising the annual report to include budget forecast.
- Capacity of the MRBB Secretariat was discussed. The MRBB Secretariat will work on an assessment of resources.

81.9 Collaborative Leadership Initiative – CIER

- Kick off phase 1 of CLI process for the MRBB.
- CIER shared a “What We Heard” summary. Three themes emerged: Basin Stewardship, Collaboration and Funding & Capacity
- Summary of the CIER analysis to date: a) MRBB has an existing mandate to implement many basin level duties, b) MRBB is a decision making body within the scope of its mandate, c) MRBB is a collaborative governance body within the scope of its mandate, where Indigenous governments nominate Aboriginal members and give them a mandate and associated reporting process, d) MRBB is not limited to a fixed budget.
- Some ideas for tools that and good practices include accessing additional funding, a social network analysis, interactive Zoom tour, and regular caucusing of Indigenous members.
- MRBB members will continue working with CLI. MRBB members to assist CLI in order to focus the conversion on MRBB member priorities, and align priorities identified in CLI’s exercise with MRBB’s larger goals.

81.12 Look Ahead

- Meeting 82 - virtual administrative meeting focused on Agency Reports.
- 2025 Spring Meeting – To be discussed at the January meeting.

81.13 Meeting Close

Goal 1. Evaluate the health of the whole basin

Goal 2. Investigate matters concerning the ecological health of the whole basin

Goal 3. Advocate for the maintenance and improvement of the ecological health of the whole basin

Goal 4. Educate the public, share information, and learn from others about matters concerning the ecological health of the whole basin

Goal 5. Support and facilitate the increased participation of Indigenous Peoples in MRBB activities

Goal 6. Encourage the development and implementation of bilateral water management agreements

Goal 7. Ministers, Indigenous leaders and appropriate staff of jurisdictions are informed of and engaged in MRBB activities

Goal 8. Information, knowledge and research are shared among jurisdictions – written reports

Goal 9. MRBB affairs are administered effectively.