

**NWT Water Strategy Development Workshop #2 – Role of Traditional Knowledge  
Hay River March 4-5, 2009  
Summary Notes**

**Workshop Objectives**

- Identify the role of Traditional Knowledge and the roles of TK holders with respect to the development and implementation of the NWT Water Strategy.
- Make recommendations for the role of Traditional Knowledge in the development and implementation of the NWT Water Strategy.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Organization</b>
Aiyana Lajeunesse	Environment and Natural Resources – GNWT
Joel Holder	Environment and Natural Resources – GNWT
Peter Csicsai	Environment and Natural Resources – GNWT
Francois Paulette	Dene Representative
Gerry Cheezie	Treaty 8 Tribal Council
Roy Fabian	Eagle Eye Concepts
Florence Catholique	Lutselk'e Dene Nation/Flo's Consulting
Richard Gordon	Inuvialuit (IRC)
Richard Binder	Inuvialuit (IRC – IGC)
Bea Lepine	ENR – Hay River
Catherine Boucher	DKFN – Fort Resolution
George Lafferty	NWTMN
Patrick Simon	DKFN – Fort Resolution
Howard R. Townsend	Sahtu Secretariat Inc.
Ricki Hurst	Terriplan Consulting
Peter Redvers	ENR/CrossCurrents Association
<b>Regrets</b>	
	INAC
	Tlicho Government
	Gwitchin Tribal Council

## DAY 1

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- Presentation by Beatrice Lepine on ENR's Traditional Knowledge (TK) Implementation Plan:
  - There was concern that the TK Policy does not adequately support the use of TK in governmental operations.
- General Comments:
  - The distinction between lands and water is 'artificial' within the Dene culture and should be regarded holistically.
  - Specific terms utilized in the Water Strategy (WS) such as 'Aboriginal', 'incorporate', 'integrated vs. interdependent', etc should not be utilized in the development of the WS because:
    - they imply that Aboriginal perspectives are secondary and not drivers of this development;
    - Treaties and fiduciary obligations are paramount to policies/acts/strategies etc...
- Presentation on Water Strategy Geodatabase – Ricki Hurst (Terriplan)
  - Presentation focused on technical elements and was not pertinent to the TK Workshop;
  - Interest in the Geo-database was expressed by Florence who commented on the need to provide regional land and water boards as well as communities with appropriate funding and capacity to effectively utilize this tool;
- General Comments:
  - The Dene Nation must adopt a Declaration on Water – this should be seen as a first step in this development;
- Presentation on the NWT Water Strategy Development Process – Aiyana Lajeunesse (ENR)
  - provided the context and history of the development of the WS;
- General Comments:
  - We need to re-think the role of TK in the development of the WS and the relationship between TK and Science.
  - We need to capture the Dene spiritual and cultural value of water in the Water Strategy.
- Afternoon Roundtable Discussion: The following is a summary of a discussion held on the first afternoon (March 4, 2009) of the workshop. It is written from memory; quotes are not verbatim. The roundtable was in response to the general question of *“What do we think should be reflected in a draft NWT Water Management Strategy in terms of traditional knowledge – what is our advice to the managers and drafters of the Water Strategy?”*

- TK is just a minute part of the Dene way of thinking about the land/water/environment
- TK without spirituality doesn't give you very much
- Most of TK is not recorded and doesn't lend itself well to being recorded
- TK that might be recorded and potentially mapped includes knowledge such as:
  - Fish spawning areas
  - Traditional harvesting areas
  - Special spiritual sites
  - Traditional camp sites, gathering spots, burial sites
- Respect for and endorsement of the value of TK should form a prominent part of the Strategy
- Words are extremely important, and as Aboriginal people we have reluctance or even a fear of putting words on paper – the Treaties and the last 100 years have not been a very good track record (e.g. rather than discussing intent and implementation of Treaties and Treaty rights, we spend our time debating words – often in court)
- This may help explain why we have some fear about incorporating TK into the Water Strategy, and certainly a reluctance to provide any definition of TK that may be misinterpreted or misused
- There are over 50 indigenous languages in Canada. We don't have the representatives around this table and we should not expect to come away from this workshop with a definition of TK
- There are four components of the Dene way (including using TK) which are:
  - Values
  - Beliefs
  - Knowledge
  - Skills
- Some knowledge can and is passed down from others, but to truly have the knowledge the person has to experience it
- The traditional Dene way was to receive this knowledge from the spiritual world while fasting – our forefathers who hear our suffering (fasting) and pass our message to God for an answer to us
- The elders tell us (their knowledge) directly and straight up but we often don't really understand it until we are ready to do so – when we are ready to understand and accept it
- In any water strategy TK should be at the forefront and there must be a commitment to endorse and respect TK in any water related decision-making
- This concept of TK is BIG. It can't be captured in a few words or in a geodatabase
- We may be the last generation to have traditional knowledge and our children are moving to more western and economic ways; we can't afford to miss this opportunity of describing TK and placing TK into the Water Strategy
- We have to bring something about TK to the next workshop; we have to tell them something about the importance of TK in a water strategy and what they should and should not do

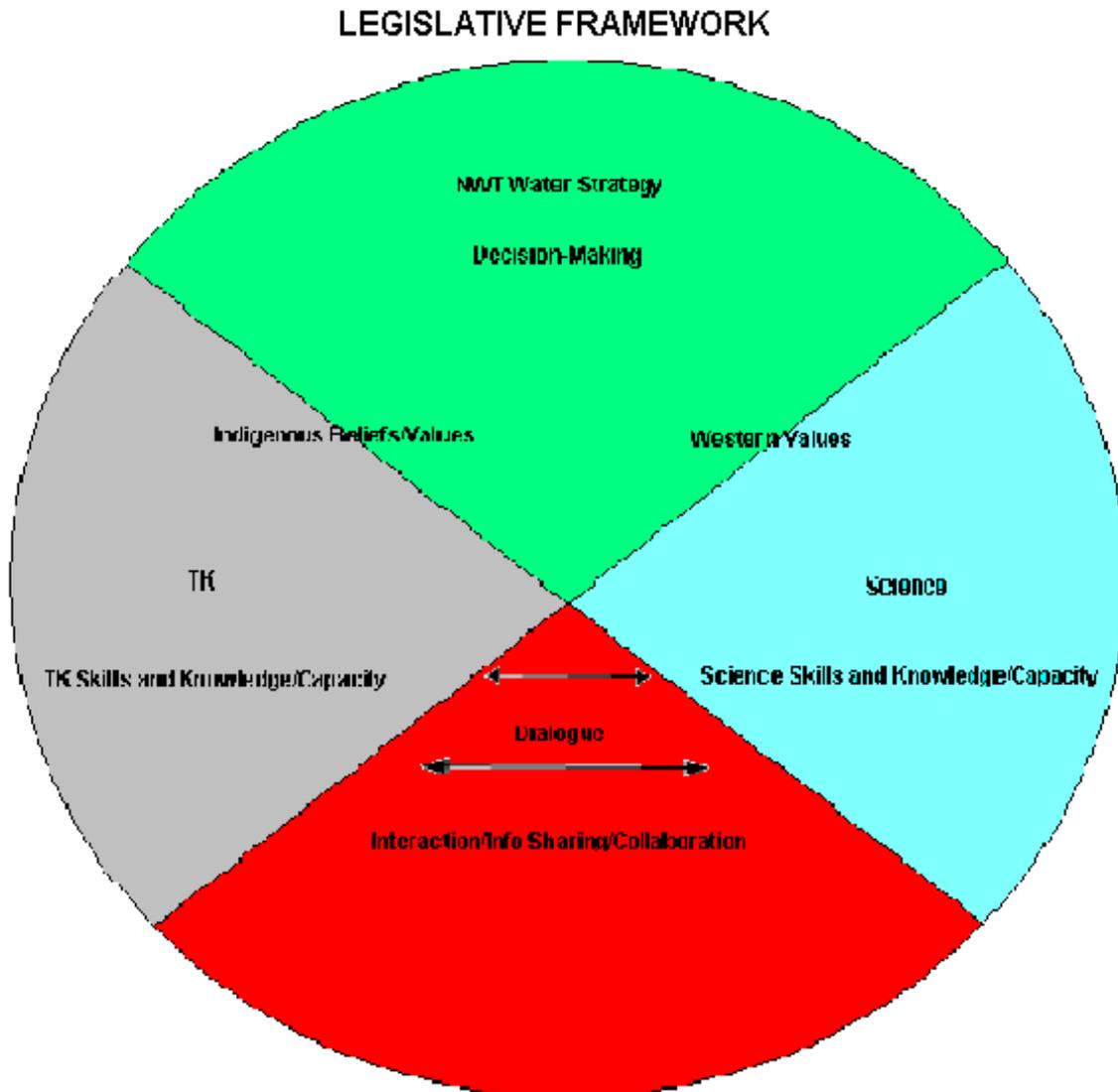
- This is an NWT Strategy and not a GNWT Strategy.
- The Dene way is one of integrity. Decisions must have a sense of integrity and this integrity has been missing in decisions on resource development throughout Canada for a very long time.
- The Dene way is also one of harmony; if what I do will not be in harmony - then I should not do it; and this can be very hard sometimes for a person to follow this path.
- Everything is about relationships: relationships with others, with animals and with the land/water. If we forget fundamental rule then we are in trouble.
- Harmony means all of us being responsible (which is a term I generally prefer to rights).
- There is always an easier and softer way – with integrity in all of our decisions.
- One way that TK can be and is brought forward (in the Mackenzie Delta) is through a round table such as this where elders can bring their knowledge.
- It is important to recognize that there are traditional values with that knowledge and that TK itself has other elements (including values and beliefs)
- There are protocols which have been developed by several communities and regions for accessing TK and these protocols must be respected in any water strategy; the strategy can also support the development of strategies in other communities.
- The water strategy should recognize that TK is different in each area and sometimes in each community, and the source for TK must be appropriate. For example, it does not mean asking any elder to provide TK on polar bears or fish - but the asking the right user and experienced TK gatherer; this advice on who to ask should be sought from the community.
- Traditionally, when we approach big water we use tobacco to express our respect for something that is big and important.
- When I return from any trip, I first go down to the river near my house and I thank the river for all it has done and for being there.
- There has to be integrity in our decisions and recognition of traditional values. For example, I could not put a bear in the lake – a bear is from the land (story of the wind storm that continued until the bear carcass had washed up on the beach).
- We traditionally shun bad medicine, and allowing cancerous material to enter the river (tar sands tailings water) is very bad medicine.
- What's the rush? (i.e. to complete development of a water strategy by June 2009). If it is worth it and if we want to do it well, we can afford to take an extra year. We have to be cautious about providing our support to any strategy.
- There is not a “one off” approach to obtaining traditional knowledge; there must be a process which allows for continued interaction, a continued relationship, a dialogue.

- Summary of DAY 1:
  - In the development of the NWT Water Strategy, from a management perspective we have the ensure that:
    - TK and Dene values are fundamentally driving management decisions;
    - TK holders and Aboriginal representatives are part of the decision-making process;
    - The science that will be utilized in the development of the NWT Water Strategy must be defensible/peer-reviewed and cannot interfere in the decision-making process; must be without bias.
    - We need to utilize existing TK protocols and develop a new overarching TK protocol in the NWT.
    - To adequately reflect the Aboriginal perspective and TK in the development of the Water Strategy, decision-makers must adopt a new set of values, which place primacy on spiritual and cultural aspects of water rather than material and/or economic ones.

## DAY 2

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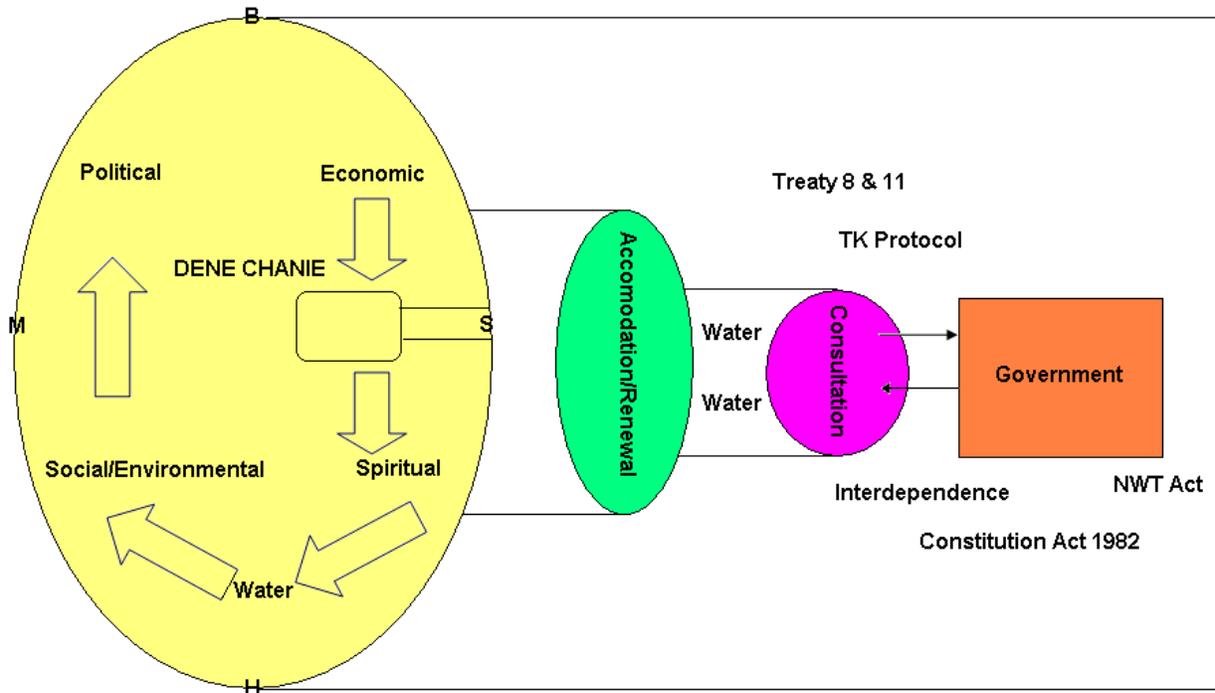
- Presentation by Peter Redvers – Visual Representation of Lessons Learned



Above Diagram By: Peter Redvers, CrossCurrents Consulting

- Questions:
  - How do we use/resource TK in a meaningful way in the development of the Water Strategy? (BALANCE)
  - What is needed for a reasonable and equitable dialogue to occur between science and TK? (DIALOGUE)
  - How do we ensure that TK and Aboriginal values are fully represented at the decision-making and management levels in the development of the Water Strategy? (VALUES)

- How do we ensure that Aboriginal rights and associated government responsibilities are clearly articulated in the WS?  
(RECONCILIATION/POLITICAL)
- The answers to these questions should form the recommendations that will be forwarded to subsequent workshops in the development of the Water Strategy.
- General Comments:
  - The discussion paper that was prepared by Terriplan does not reflect the interests of Aboriginal people – it was recommended that this should be at the forefront of the paper.
  - If we want to meaningfully utilize TK in the development of the Water Strategy, financial resources must be allocated to the communities – resources and capacity at the community level was a general concern expressed throughout the workshop.
  - The process of developing the Water Strategy starting with the discussion paper appears to be working backwards to the Dene world view. In line with this, it was expressed that the government has already “done” something and now is asking the Dene people to express what they “think” of it.
    - Dene Order:
      - Spiritual (Spirit)
      - Social/Environmental (Feeling)
      - Political (Saying/Thinking)
      - Economic (Doing)
  - Presentation provided by Francois (Visual Representation of Lessons Learned): (see next page)



Above Diagram By: Francois Paulette

- Presentation (Continued):
  - There are two separate discussions that should be taking place at the moment:
    - Short-Term: given current water pressures such as those imposed by the Oil Sands Developments in AB, the government (GNWT/Canada) needs to ensure that there are protective measures in place
      - One option for this includes initiating litigation against AB
    - Long-Term: to meaningfully engage the Aboriginal community in developing the Water Strategy, continuous dialogue needs to take place between the Aboriginal community and government where protocols and engagement processes guide the development of this strategy.
  - It was also suggested that we also need to initiate a meeting where all existing legislation, policies, strategies etc relating to water are presented and discussed between Aboriginal governments and organizations and federal and territorial governments and agencies. --> ACTION ITEM
- Comments on Presentation:
  - The essential understanding is that because the Dene Chanie (people formerly known as Chipewyan Dene) knowledge and perspective comes

from a totally different worldview than the understanding and knowledge systems we employ in government; a different approach must be taken before collaboration is even thought about. In order to reach a place of accommodation, reconciliation and renewal and decide on where we are going “to be going” (sic); there is no meeting in the middle. The GNWT/INAC must enter into negotiations with Aboriginal governments to develop a protocol for how TK fits into water management; government to government talks.

- General Comments:
  - There needs to be sufficient allocation of resources to communities/regional land and water boards.
  - There needs to be an understanding that not all Aboriginal groups are the same of organize themselves in the same way.
  - Aboriginal representatives should/must be present at the decision-making level when developing the Water Strategy.
  - Government needs to identify steps that can be taken immediately to prevent further pollution of waters in the NWT from upstream development (i.e. Oils Sands in AB).
  - Government needs to identify how all existing policies, legislation, strategies etc fit together with the Water Strategy:
    - In particular, how do we share info?
    - How does this relate to constitutional/treaty rights?
  - This is an opportunity to advance Aboriginal rights and perspectives; however, lots of work remains to be done.
  - The government needs to develop an inventory of all water systems in the NWT.
  - The government should be monitoring the temperature and the water levels in the NWT.
  - We need to fix the placement of TK within any water strategy document and place it more prominently up front.
  - The NWT Water Strategy was largely initiated and driven by Aboriginal leadership, because of outside sources such as the Alberta tar sands as well as proposed development projects within the NWT. Government recognized the extreme level of concern and began work towards an NWT Water strategy.
  - Too often the assumption is that science is the driver and science then leads on integrating TK into an approach. However, it always leaves out the fundamental aspects of TK – indigenous beliefs and values. Western beliefs and values are then carried forward to decision makers.

- In order for TK to be brought forward effectively, it is important to have some skills/capacity development at the community and regional level that can at least begin to match the skills and resources for western science.
- Guiding principles of a Water Strategy must include the concepts of integrity and harmony, and having these concepts applied to decision making.
- Scientific knowledge is largely talking about the physical science whereas traditional knowledge is primarily talking about spiritual matters, with water as the source of life for all things.
- What are needed are genuine dialogue, information sharing and collaboration that include the importance of relationships and integrity.
- How do we resource the development of the necessary skills and capacity at the community and regional level to bring forward TK?
- There is a need for protocols at the community level (as is the case in a few communities) for the collection and sharing of TK that include considerations of confidentiality, information sharing, proprietary information, intellectual property rights, etc.
- There is very little, if any, TK at the community level that will be shared as information in a geo-database – some because of the reasons above, and some because TK includes a spiritual component that can not be integrated with western science.
- There are at least three main questions for the Water Strategy:
  - Q1:** If some degree of equity and balance is to be achieved, how do we resource communities and regions to develop the skills and capacity to bring TK forward?
  - Q2:** For meaningful dialogue and exchange of information to occur in decision making on water matters, what process do we set up?
  - Q3:** How do we ensure that the fundamental beliefs and values that form part of TK are somehow brought to the decision making level?
- The Water Strategy Discussion Paper treats the issue of Aboriginal people and their fundamental rights beginning on page 12 of the document; these matters must be up front in any strategy in order for it to truly represent the north and the long history of Aboriginal people in the north.
- You could get this type of document (the Discussion Paper) from any University or Western Science institution in the south. It was clearly developed without any involvement of Aboriginal people. Any strategy should say that western science should not over-ride Aboriginal perspectives.
- I don't see that we, as indigenous people, have any part in this document; it reads like it was written by an academic from Toronto (I use Toronto just so that everyone can relate to the fact that it was certainly not written by northerners).
- The Discussion Paper is clearly unbalanced and much too far over to the Western Science or technical side, and some of our message for the

workshop next week is that the strategy must readjust this balance towards traditional beliefs, values and knowledge.

- This is our chance as Aboriginal people to say that TK should be first and we need to do this now before TK declines in the communities.
- Be careful using the term Akaitcho government because we have not made any agreements. Prefer Akaitcho region.
- In writing a TK report or a report with TK in it, it is important to have an Aboriginal face or the communities will be unlikely to accept the result.
- If government really wants TK to be a part of this Water Strategy it will require extra resources – have to put the buck where it is needed.
- The obligations of Treaty 8 and 11 should be acknowledged up front, as should the IFA and other comprehensive land claims.
- The NWT Water Strategy seems to have at least three objectives:
  - To show that we are doing it right (get our own house in order)
  - To help us determine what to bring to the negotiating table
  - To ensure that what is happening in N. Alberta never happens here.
- If the government is going to take real action on water, then it will have to take direct action and that means taking Alberta and industry in Alberta to court; it may also mean taking Canada to court for allowing the “poisoning” of NWT water. No matter how good our strategy is, it will not get the attention of Alberta.
- I understand that we have to accommodate newcomers and I am prepared to work with non Aboriginal people on a water strategy; however, we should be realistic and also consider direct action through a court challenge.
- I have been involved in many, many government programs that try to accommodate and incorporate traditional knowledge and I am getting tired of it. The message is that wherever you go in the north and wherever you want a licence – you have to go to the community and the region and they will tell you who to engage with.
- Any future TK workshops should be held on the land; this is a very artificial environment in which to discuss TK.
- For some reason the threat of compensation seems to have a strong effect on industry and in general on those with money. Therefore, even though we have no interest in having our land destroyed and being compensated with money – the threat of compensation may be another strategic approach.
- Messages for the Information Workshop in Yellowknife on March 12-13
  - No decisions on water use should be made without consultation with the communities and regions affected (as a Section 35 obligation but also as a matter of respect and balance between traditional knowledge and western science;

- (Note: have a look at Alberta Government Land Use Study and their Lands and Resource Management Fund for northern Alberta; Manitoba Trust Fund which was set up to provide intervener funding)
- Special consideration, and perhaps a break-out question at the workshop, of the importance of how do we access information and knowledge in areas that don't have a comprehensive land claim.
- Support the notion (proposed by INAC) of a meeting of Aboriginal leadership to talk solely about water and the NWT Water Strategy.
- We need some sort of direct action through a legal challenge and government should be encouraged to investigate the options and the implications of such a challenge.
- If science is going to be brought to bear, then the quality of that science needs to be impeccable and if it is not – we need to call out that science (reference to carbon sequestering and technologies that are unproven).
- Information and knowledge used in the NWT Water Strategy must be of the highest calibre and we should strive for best available technology in all waters decision making.
- Look at the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People Article 25 – this could form a principle of the Water Strategy.
- Note the amendment to the Navigable Waters Protection Act proposed by the federal conservative government without any consultation. I read this as sinister.
- Focus on the beginnings of any Water Strategy document and acknowledge matters such as treaties, comprehensive land claims, respect, harmony, relationships, etc.
- We have to work together in harmony and we must take advantage of opportunities such as this Water Strategy to develop respectful relationships where decisions are made with a sense of responsibility and integrity. We have to find a way to reach deep down and do things differently.
- See also the messages earlier today and yesterday.
- Some Observations Made by Participants on TK:
  - “Renewal and reconciliation is important when we consider water. Water is a part of that. How we work with this is essential. When we talk about TK, this is just one aspect of the Dene. TK is a minute part of the whole perspective of the Dene. The word interdependence should be used rather than integration or incorporation. When I leave home I go to the water and say that I am going and that I will be thinking of you and I am honoured that you sustain me, And the same when I return.”
  - “Communities and regions need to have the resources to do the work.” This participant was supportive of the GNWT interest in water but would

like to have seen earlier consultation and notice and thinks more resources needs to be placed at the community level for full participation to happen.

- “Need to consider local knowledge and TK. When an elder hasn’t been on the land for several years the current user needs to be consulted too and use their local knowledge combined with TK.
- “Don’t throw this opportunity out to have TK to be part of the Water Strategy”