

# FINAL NOTES FROM THE 27<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS ADVISORY BOARD

## Summary of Discussion

Guelph, Ontario, Canada, N1G

Wednesday, October 09, 2024

<b>Canadian Member Participants</b>	<b>U.S. Member Participants</b>
Tom Edge (Co-Chair)	Joan Rose ( Co-Chair)
Marc Habash	Ellen Dailey
Theresa Rupaso Subang	
<b>Canadian Member Regrets</b>	<b>U.S. Member Regrets</b>
Ian Young	Matt Dellinger
<b>Canadian Member Online</b>	<b>U.S. Member Online</b>
	Kristen Lowitt
	Tisha-King Heyden
	Shannon Seneca
<b>Invited Guests</b>	
Martha Dowsley	Online
Ellin Gwyn and Jenn Richards (OMAFRA)	In-person
<b>IJC Staff</b>	
Raj Bejankiwar	In-Person
Breanna Green	In-Person
Oliver Dumville	In-Person
Rachel Wyatt	In-Person
Allison Vogelsong Zejnati	Online

## Welcome, and Introductions

The Co-Chairs welcomed everyone to the 27th meeting of the board, and new members Ellen Dailey and Theresa Rupaso-Subang were welcomed to their first meeting. Breanna Green (IJC US Section Office) was welcomed to her first meeting of the HPAB, as the new US WQB Liaison, replacing Jo Werba.

Raj provided a brief background on the HPAB's Mandate/Roles and Responsibilities. The new members are advised to visit IJC's website to learn about HPAB's history, previous project reports, and ongoing projects.

## Co-Chairs Update *(Tom Edge and Joan Rose)*

The co-chairs provided brief updates to members regarding HPAB-related activities since the Spring semi-annual meeting in April 2024.

Presentation: Manomin/Wild Rice - An Ecological and Cultural Keystone Species

Dr Martha Dowsley (Departments of Anthropology and Geography and the Environment, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, ON) gave a presentation on the Wild Rice/Manomin. Martha Dowsley discussed working on development goals surrounding environmental resilience and climate change. A specific partnership with the Nubian community in Egypt was highlighted, focusing on restoring agricultural lands lost due to displacement by the Aswan Dam in the 1960s. Similar work is being done with the Laxual First Nation in Ontario to restore wild rice harvesting, which is culturally significant and has the potential for commercial harvest. The following is a summary of her presentation.

Wild rice was traditionally harvested by indigenous groups in the Great Lakes region. It holds significant cultural, nutritional, and ecological importance and has been affected by dam construction and other environmental changes. Key challenges include flooding, stable water levels, pollution, and invasive species. Restoration projects are undertaken with First Nations and tribal groups to bring back wild rice habitats. Discuss the Wild Rice Harvesting Act in Ontario and contrasting policies in the US. Consideration of wild rice as either a natural resource or a treaty right with implications for governance and indigenous management. Nutritional benefits of wild rice as a healthy grain. Its role in ecosystem services, such as improving water quality and providing habitat for wildlife. It is important to consider health broadly, including physical, cultural, and ecological health.

### **Future Projects and Prioritization:**

Tom and Joan provided brief updates on the recent memo from the Commission board regarding project prioritization due to budget constraints. They stressed the importance of completing specific projects to inform the 2026 triennial assessment of progress. Ensuring that projects like wild rice restoration and knowledge translation have sufficient resources and are completed in time to contribute to the broader assessments and reports. The further discussion on this issue underscored the critical intersection of cultural practices, environmental resilience, health benefits, and interdisciplinary collaboration in work being undertaken by the board, emphasizing the importance of timely completion and thorough documentation to inform future policy and progress assessments.

**Triennial Assessment of Progress (TAP) Report**—In reply to a member's question about the TAP report, the Co-chairs requested Allison provide a brief background and updates. Following are the key points from Allison's response:

- The TAP report assesses the progress of the US and Canadian governments towards the objectives of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.
- The report is based on the advisory boards' work and includes policy and practice recommendations.
- Engagement with the public and other stakeholders is critical for disseminating findings and advocating for changes.

### **Updates on the ongoing projects:**

1. **Great Lakes Microbial Water Quality Study:** The project aims to integrate new technologies into standard practices for better infrastructure management and environmental protection. A significant theme was the necessity of modernizing water quality assessment tools. The next phase of this project centered around using advanced tools like PCR and metagenomics to improve water quality monitoring and decision-making. The Working Group established a Technical Working (TWG), which met for the first time virtually on Tuesday, October 15. New members were asked to join the working group if they were interested. While the importance of securing funding for the inter-lab validation study, the pilot study, and the GL basin-wide study

was acknowledged, also stressed was the importance of continuing the IJC convening opportunities for discussing, advancing and harmonizing use of modern methods around the basin. Various government agencies and their potential roles in implementing new technologies were considered. Future steps on this project include the establishment of a steering committee to guide the study and implementation of advanced water quality assessment tools. The project aims to continue efforts to secure funding and support from both governments for large-scale environmental projects.

2. **Climate Change and Human Health Indicators Project:** This project aims to develop indicators that could track climate change-driven water quality changes affecting human health under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Allison highlighted several critical issues focused on improving the board report, addressing discrepancies in case studies, and tweaking conceptual models of climate change impacts on water quality and human health. The dynamic conceptual model examines the cascaded impacts of climate change on environmental changes, hazard exposures, and human health outcomes. Allison refined the case study recommendations to better align with board expectations. Allison and Raj outlined several steps, including finalizing the revised report with Seth's help and preparing communication activities to promote it. The communications plan involves engaging key audiences, such as Annex 10 subcommittee members, via story maps and focus groups. AI and big data applications in public health, climate change impacts on water quality, flooding events, and environmental health indicators were also discussed. The final draft report and the communication plan will be shared with the HPAB during the first week of November for a brief review and approval.
3. **Fish Consumption Advisory Study:** Raj Bejankiwar provided additional updates, including a progress report on the fish consumption advisory study and its synthesis report, which is expected in mid-November. Discussions included ensuring community engagement in the report's communication aspects and strategies to disseminate the finalized report effectively. The final synthesis report and the communication plan is expected to be finalized in April 2023
4. **Knowledge Translation (KT) Study:** Allison is a staff lead on this project. Ian Young and Kristen Lowitt are the co-chairs of the working group. Although the WG did not secure a contract due to budget issues, Ian's summer student, Billal, completed a rapid protocol umbrella literature review. It reviewed reviews looking at novel communication methods as applied in the public health literature field. It came up with some general takeaways about different social media and communication platforms. This was the first set of tasks and objectives for this knowledge translation project. The second set includes conducting focus groups with potential users, using HPAB's projects that have been nearly done as case studies. The idea is not to talk about public communication only or public health communication abstractly but to engage audiences for two specific projects, namely the human health and climate change indicators study and the fish consumption advisory study. Allison provided a slide showing how the two proposed projects (Wild Rice and KT) align with the TAP 2026 timeline. It is noted that the findings from Fish Consumption and Climate Indicators will be ready to incorporate in the TPA 2026 at an early stage, while the findings from the KT will be adopted later.
5. Allison concluded that the knowledge translation is not prioritized for funding for contracting in the near term, which would mean the funding for it would get pushed, and whether that would be for a spring or further date that would just implicate its ability to incorporate relevant findings for the climate indicators and fish consumption projects. And if the timeline gets pushed significantly, we may need to reevaluate which of the HPAB's projects use as a case study. The

knowledge translation project focus groups, happening in Spring 2025, can help us in the scoping, but the WG potentially needs to have a phase two work plan for that comms piece built out.

Further discussion on this topic emphasized strengthening communication plans, leveraging community input, and integrating modern follow-ups and updates would be needed to finalize the reports and communicate scientific methods to improve water and health outcomes in the Great Lakes region. The importance of effectively translating technical findings for policy and public engagement was a recurring theme. It was decided that further effectively to relevant stakeholders."

#### **New Topics/Ideas/Emerging Issues - Round Table**

- a. Use of artificial intelligence (AI) in validating toxicological models/ chemical exposure studies
- b. Extension of the climate change human health indicators study – pick a few select indicators and conduct a pilot study
- c. Water quality -human health risks in rural communities

#### **Engagement with Indigenous Communities:**

6. The IJC is prioritizing enhanced engagement with Indigenous communities.
7. Establishing an Indigenous advisory circle is a significant step towards inclusive and comprehensive environmental management.
8. Future Steps:

#### **Next in-person meeting and monthly meeting**

- HPAB will meet in person in Washington DC in conjunction with the IJC's 2025 Spring Semi-annual meeting
- HPAB's monthly virtual meetings are scheduled for the second Thursday of each month.