



Horizontal evaluation of the Trans Mountain Expansion Project – Terrestrial Cumulative Effects Initiative

Evaluation at a glance

July 2025





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Program Overview

The Terrestrial Cumulative Effects Initiative (TCEI) was one of eight targeted Trans Mountain Expansion Project (TMX) [accommodation measures](#) developed by the Government of Canada in 2019 in response to concerns raised by Indigenous Groups. Throughout the consultation process for the TMX, Indigenous Groups identified a need for increased understanding of potential cumulative effects in their traditional territories and a desire for increased involvement in broader efforts to better understand and manage these potential effects.

Delivered by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), the TCEI was a time-limited funding program that supported Indigenous capacity building and implementation of projects related to cumulative effects in mainland terrestrial and freshwater environments.

Originally available to 104 terrestrial groups on the TMX Crown List, the TCEI was extended to 15 additional groups in response to cumulative effects concerns raised during consultations. The resulting 119 groups became the TCEI-eligible Indigenous Groups. Among eligible Indigenous Groups, there is considerable diversity in capacity and past experience related to cumulative effects monitoring and analysis.

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Scope and Methodology

Scope

The Terrestrial Cumulative Effects Initiative evaluation covers the 5-year period between 2019-20 to 2023-2024. The evaluation focusses on the following themes:



Methodology

A variety of sources were used, including :

Document review

Documents provided by the 3 delivery partners were examined, including but not limited to, internal TCEI documents and federal and departmental policy documents.

Administrative data review

The data review included grants and contributions administrative data, performance measurement information, and financial information.

Key informant Interviews

21 interviews were conducted with 28 individuals including, 12 interviews with 18 representatives from ECCC, NRCan and DFO, and 9 interviews with 10 Indigenous Group representatives.

Survey of Indigenous Groups

A bilingual, web-based survey was disseminated to all 119 Indigenous Groups (200+ unique email addresses).

Case studies

3 in-depth case studies were conducted. 1 on the TCEI's State of Knowledge activities, and 2 on the activities and experiences of 2 Indigenous Groups that received funding.

Design & Delivery

Overall, the design and delivery of the TCEI was appropriate for achieving the program objectives. However, concerns were expressed that the program's administrative requirements were challenging for Indigenous Groups with less capacity and experience.

Efficiency

There is no standardized approach to financial reporting across the TCEI delivery departments, and it was not possible, within the timeframe of the evaluation, to produce an accurate overall picture of TCEI spending. That said, as of September 30, 2024, it was projected that 82% of available funding would be disbursed to Indigenous Groups by the end of the TCEI in March 2025. Steps were taken to address inefficiencies in program delivery arising from factors such as staffing challenges within ECCC and interdepartmental differences in policies and processes.

Governance

A formalized approach to TCEI horizontal governance and delivery exists. This is considered effective by program representatives who note well-defined roles and responsibilities, a high level of senior management engagement, and various interdepartmental committees and working groups to support coordination and implementation.

Performance Measurement

There is currently no overarching logic model or common set of outcomes and indicators for the TCEI. It is therefore unclear to what extent the delivery departments are using performance information to support decision-making or sharing performance information with Indigenous Groups. Some program representatives suggested that, in the future, performance indicators should be developed in collaboration with Indigenous Groups to enhance their meaningfulness and usefulness to Indigenous Groups.

Effectiveness

Overall, the TCEI met its objectives. It was successful in strengthening community capacity for advancing cumulative effects work; supporting Indigenous Groups' understanding of cumulative effects of human activities on mainland terrestrial and freshwater environments; and improving information and knowledge sharing to support Indigenous Groups in decision-making and future analysis around major projects.

Ongoing Relevance

The TCEI was successful in supporting Indigenous Groups to build capacity for and initiate cumulative effects monitoring and analysis. However, participants in the evaluation, including Indigenous Groups and program representatives, agreed that the extent to which this work will continue will be limited without additional and/or sustained funding, particularly given the ongoing needs of Indigenous Groups related to cumulative effects. A flexible funding model, ongoing communication and engagement between the Government of Canada and Indigenous Groups, and Indigenous leadership of knowledge development and sharing activities were identified as important elements for consideration for future programming.



Key Strengths

Co-development

The co-development approach used in the TCEI has been recognized as a significant strength, facilitating substantial collaboration with Indigenous groups to tailor the initiative effectively. Through proactive outreach that included workshops and consultations, the program has developed funding mechanisms and proposal processes that are flexible and accessible, supporting the diverse capacities of Indigenous Groups. However, challenges such as uneven awareness among groups about engagement opportunities and limited resources for participation have occasionally hindered the depth of engagement and equitable distribution of benefits.

Flexibility

The TCEI showcased its adaptability by responding effectively to community-specific challenges (i.e. wildfires, COVID-19, discovery of mass graves, and capacity to engage or participate). This responsiveness was demonstrated through several actionable measures:

- Enhanced outreach and communications efforts with Indigenous Groups to ensure they were informed and supported throughout project disruptions.
- Increased flexibility in funding arrangements, including the extension of TCEI project timelines by an additional year and the establishment of multi-year agreements, which facilitated sustained access to necessary funds for Indigenous groups.
- Provision of comprehensive technical, administrative, and scientific support to assist in both the development of proposals and the implementation of projects, ensuring that community needs were met even under challenging circumstances.

Lessons Learned (1 of 3)

1

Recognizing that the co-development approach was a key strength of TCEI implementation, future Indigenous programming (including cumulative effects programming) should reflect the additional flexibility, time, and program resources that co-development requires, specifically for program design and delivery, establishing governance as well as outcomes and co-developed performance measures relevant to Indigenous groups.

The co-development approach used to design the TCEI allowed the department and its departments to build programming that is based on innovative and culturally sensitive governance structures, to create forums and working groups to share cumulative effects knowledge, information, to build relationship among the cumulative effects communities, and to allow for the creation of tools to support recipients.

Participants in the co-development process recognized that the TCEI was carried out in a meaningful way and mentioned having been able to speak freely in engagement sessions to voice their concerns, needs, and priorities. This is a testament to the use of co-development as a tool to foster meaningful relationships between Indigenous groups and nations and Government of Canada's entities.

Lessons Learned (2 of 3)

2

The TCEI is one of four TMX accommodation measures that provided funding for cumulative effects activities. Although the four programs were designed and delivered separately, there was strong consensus that there were similarities between some of the initiatives and a high degree of overlap among the Indigenous Groups that were likely to seek funding through them.

Program representatives agreed that cumulative effects work is an important element of reconciliation and that the design and delivery of future funding programs for cumulative effects could be enhanced to improve accessibility. There was consensus that a single window front end could be implemented, with multiple departments coordinating on the back end to establish joint delivery mechanisms such as shared Terms and Conditions and tracking tools, could be implemented. Program representatives emphasized the importance of spending time upfront to ensure that program design is optimal and of building co-management commitments into program goals and objectives.

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Lessons Learned (3 of 3)

2

With the objectives of gaining efficiencies and supporting the creation of strong relationships with participants, delivery partner departments should consider taking the necessary steps to ensure that the delivery of the program will be optimal and tailored to the end user needs in future horizontal Indigenous programs. This could include:

- A single window (i.e.: single department) to dispense all cumulative effect proposal, funding and reporting measures for Indigenous groups in a more client focused and effective manner to reduce administrative workload and complexity.
- Development of centralized and standardized processes for financial reporting, contribution agreement policies and approvals, and reporting on results should be considered in the design of Indigenous funding programs, coordinated by a single department, to improve efficiency.
- Implementation of a multi-departmental advisory and governance structure to interface with and support Indigenous group's participation, understanding of cumulative effect and available data, avoid implementation delays, and reduce complexity for the eligible Indigenous groups.

Recommendation

1

Recognizing the practices that the Terrestrial Cumulative Effects Initiative (TCEI) has put in place to generate meaningful Indigenous engagement with the program and the results it yielded, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection Branch, in collaboration with the Assistant Deputy Minister of Programs, Operations and Regional Affairs Branch should develop an approach to widely disseminate the story of the TCEI and the above lessons learned across the department to support awareness and to contribute to the ongoing optimization of the Indigenous engagement, capacity building and cumulative effects funding across ECCC.



Management Action Plan

Action 1 : Develop, finalize, and make a presentation at a series of virtual information sessions within ECCC about the TCEI Lessons Learned and the story of TCEI.

| Deliverable | Timeline | Responsible |
|---|---------------|--|
| Presentations to existing governance and committees (e.g., Environmental Assessment Division, Environmental Assessment Learning Series, EPB Community of Practice and Reconciliation and Indigenous Engagement, ECCC Science Café, Centre of Excellence for Grants and Contributions or Financial Management Authorities and Indigenous Science Division) | June 30, 2025 | DG, Environmental Protection Operations Directorate, Environmental Protection Branch (EPB) |

Action 2 : Develop, finalize, and publish an article for the ECCC News Bulletin about the TCEI Lessons Learned and the TCEI Toolkit.

| Deliverable | Timeline | Responsible |
|---------------------------------|---------------|--|
| Publish ECCC Bulletin blog post | June 30, 2025 | DG, Environmental Protection Operations Directorate, EPB |

Action 3 : Develop, finalize and distribute a placemat (e.g., a summary, one-page document with images/numbers/words) about the TCEI Lessons Learned and the TCEI Toolkit.

| Deliverable | Timeline | Responsible |
|---|---------------|--|
| TCEI Placemat that will be distributed broadly across ECCC using a curated distribution list of relevant recipients | June 30, 2026 | Regional Director General, West and North Region, Program Operations and Regional Affairs Branch |