

# Heiltsuk Human Well-being Indicator Report Card

Insights for the Adaptive Management Framework

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Report for:  
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## **Disclaimer**

This report was commissioned by the Ecosystem-Based Management Working Group (EBM WG) to provide information to support full implementation of EBM. The conclusions and recommendations in this report are exclusively the authors', and may not reflect the values and opinions of EBM WG members.

## 1 Introduction

In September 2008, with funding from the Ecosystem-based management working group (EBM WG), the Heiltsuk Nation began creating a community based report card on human well-being (HWB). The intent of the project is three fold:

1. To apply a project based on the principle of adaptive management to the community level with the intent of extracting important lessons for future community-based adaptive management projects;
2. To create a HWB report card process report, which could be used by other Nations to implement similar projects; and
3. To monitor the impacts of EBM on the HWB of members of the Heiltsuk Nation over time.

This report is designed to fulfill goal 1 and inform the Adaptive Management (AM) Framework being created by Stephen Tyler. To this end, members of our project team met with Stephen Tyler on two occasions to better understand how this project could provide useful information for the AM framework. Questions of particular interest to Stephen were integrated into our project. Responses from project participants are summarized in this report. A summary of the Heiltsuk HWB Indicator Report Card project process will be provided in a separate report: *Heiltsuk Human Well-being Indicator Report Card: Process Report*.

## 2 Project Approach

The project team included a project community coordinator who has extensive experience working with each of the participating Heiltsuk departments. In all, 11 departments were approached to participate in the project (Table 1). Departments ranged in size and mandate: the smallest (Heiltsuk Cultural Centre) has 2 staff, while the largest (Bella Bella Community School) has 50-60 staff. On average, 4 meetings took place with each department head to:

- Introduce the HWB report card project;
- Introduce the regional indicators developed by the Sheltair Group and Rubus Ecoscience Alliance;
- Gain more information on each department; and
- Receive feedback on project, indicators and next steps.

The Sheltair Group and Rubus Ecoscience Alliance indicators were introduced to the departments as a starting point for discussion rather than pre-determined indicators to be used in the project.

From an adaptive management viewpoint, Stephen Tyler was particularly interested in whether:

1. Current department visions, goals, objectives & strategies are still relevant to the agency and if so, how they are used to inform decision making. If not, what does guide decision making.

2. The departments feel that a Heiltsuk HWB report card is a useful project and how they see the report card informing decision making.

Both questions were discussed at length with the participants. Findings are summarized below.

**Table 1:** Heiltsuk Departments that have participated in the first phase of the Heiltsuk HWB report card project.

<b>Departments</b>
Heiltsuk Social Development
Heiltsuk Health Centre
R.W. Large Memorial Hospital
Heiltsuk Child and Family Services
Bella Bella Community School
Heiltsuk Community College
Heiltsuk Forestry
Heiltsuk Fisheries
Heiltsuk Justice Department
RCMP
Heiltsuk Cultural Centre

### 3 Findings

#### 3.1 Existence of department mandates, goals and objectives

Of the 11 departments included in the study, two-thirds of the departments could point to a mandate, goals or objectives that guide the work of the department. However, in many cases mandates were not accompanied by measurable departmental goals, objectives or strategies.

The majority (70%) of departments with mandates, goals or objectives used these in evaluation of staff and/or assessment of department effectiveness. However, in all cases the project community coordinator felt that the assessment processes currently in place lacks the ability to demonstrate change in relationship to the department’s goals or objectives.

Participants were asked to review the Sheltair Group and Rubus Ecoscience Alliance indicators produced for the EBM WG in terms of:

1. Relevance to their agency’s mandate/direction and
2. Existence of data to populate the indicators.

Almost half (45%) believed that the indicators were relevant to their agency and would be useful in measuring progress. However, the remaining departments were very resistant to the indicators presented. Most felt that they did not reflect the value of the work their department was doing and many were resistant to an outside agency determining HWB indicators for the Heiltsuk. Interestingly, the departments most likely to feel that the indicators were not relevant were those that have a more direct connection to Heiltsuk

culture and social wellbeing and less direct connection to broader outside agencies.

Because of the resistance to the proposed indicators existence of relevant data has not yet been explored in detail. However, data availability is likely to be an issue with some of the agencies that do not currently keep detailed or electronic records.

## **3.2 Usefulness of HWB report card project**

### **Initial response to project**

Initially there was a high level of resistance to the project. Reasons included:

- Distrust of perceived outside influence, which does not understand community problems;
- Belief that similar work has already taken place in Bella Bella; and
- Hesitancy toward department evaluation for fear that it would be viewed as a personal performance evaluation and have negative consequences.

According to the Heiltsuk project team members, underpinning these issues is a civil service culture in Bella Bella that is resistant to assessment and change. Because unemployment rates are so high, civil service jobs are seen as extremely valuable and they are guarded closely. It is likely that many participants view a project such as the HWB report card as a direct threat to their job.

In those departments that do not have mandates, goals or objectives there was a higher level of resistance to the idea of measuring the progress of the department, suggesting that departments which have already taken internal steps to chart a strategic direction are more receptive to evaluating and assessing their progress.

### **Progress to-date**

Further one-on-one meetings with each department have eased many of the concerns initially expressed and greater support has materialized. Advances have been made by directly addressing individual concerns. Specifically, departments which felt that the indicators provided were not useful or representative were encouraged and assisted in investigating indicators that better reflected the work of their department; those that believed similar work had already been done were encouraged to build on and incorporate past indicator projects; and departments that were reluctant to participate in an evaluation process have been provided with more information on the community level benefits to the project and encouraged to focus on more qualitative and positive indicators.

### **Next steps**

There is still a significant amount of work to do to (1) gain the trust and wilful participation of all departments, and (2) create a multi-year HWB evaluation process. This includes:

- Working with departments that do not have mandates, goals or objectives to create them;
- Placing greater emphasis on educating department staff of the

community value in conducting HWB assessments;

- Listening to departmental concerns and responding to those concerns in a manner that creates a HWB report card that is both effective in monitoring HWB and supported by each department; and
- Working with departments to develop strategic plans for achieving their stated goals and objectives.

Perhaps more significant, and definitely a greater challenge, is creating a culture in Bella Bella that believes in the merits of assessment and evaluation. The project team believes that the Heiltsuk HWB report card is a useful step toward this end; however, the problem cannot be resolved with one project and will likely require significant political will and persistence.

#### 4 Insights and Conclusion

To date, the project has revealed a number of insights that may be useful to the future implementation of adaptive management at the community level:

1. **Take a long-term approach to adaptive management:** Creating a learning culture begins with good governance. This includes transparency, legitimacy, results-based performance and accountability. The absence of these larger issues cannot be solved by implementing a set of annual indicators. Communities must begin at the foundation of their governance institutions to create real change. Coastal First Nations are developing programs to strengthen community governance. This work is integral to the successful implementation of adaptive management at the community level.
2. **Do your homework:** The Heiltsuk have produced a series of reports on performance evaluation and indicators for evaluating program effectiveness. When implementing a new project it is important to have a strong understanding of what has come before it and how past work can support current initiatives. Program and project managers are busy and are not likely to support a project if they believe it is being repeated.
3. **Start from the beginning:** Many of the department representatives were not aware of their mission, or program goals and objectives. Even fewer departments were employing these tools to monitor the effectiveness of their department, and the project team believes none were doing so satisfactorily. To overcome these substantive hurdles it is important that communities create strategic plans, which include measurable objectives and strategies for all departments. To be successful this must be done internally and with buy-in from all departments. For many communities, jumping to the evaluation stage is unlikely to lead to more successful programs and improved HWB.

In some cases sufficient direction may already exist in economic development plans, land use plans, or strategic community plans. If so, this must be better communicated to the departments and these goals and objectives need to be better incorporated into the day-to-day management of their operations.

4. **Work with participants:** Evaluation can be a scary proposition in a community where jobs are a precious commodity and evaluation is not part of the work culture. Project proponents must work with participants to create a project that includes value for all parties. Beginning the process with focus groups or round tables could go a long way in creating ownership of the project, ultimately leading to a greater chance of long-term success. Imposing an evaluation process that participants do not believe in is likely to be met with resistance and in will not create real change.
5. **Support internal structures:** If Bella Bella is any indication, communities are likely to have community members who are passionate about creating positive change and who recognize the role monitoring and evaluation play in this process. Creating a collective approach to improving HWB at the community level will only occur with political will, project champions, and strong communication of the project merits to the broader community. Long-term success of adaptive management will occur if the will to succeed happens from within.
6. **Be adaptive:** Each community comes with a unique set of issues and hurdles that must be overcome to successfully introduce adaptive management. Adaptive management proponents must take the time to understand these constraints and be adaptive to adjusting their strategy in hopes of achieving the project goals.
7. **Create a learning network:** As adaptive management is rolled out at the community level along the coast many project managers will be facing similar issues. Creating a network for them to meet and discuss hurdles and investigate solutions could improve the likelihood of project success in all communities. Such a network is beginning to form through the EBM learning forum workshops. As many community staff are likely to be involved in both processes utilizing this forum may be an option.
8. **Don't stop at evaluation:** Employing a HWB report card, or another adaptive management tool, is only beneficial if managers have the capacity and mandate to create the change identified. This will require political support.

The HWB report card can be a useful tool to implementing adaptive management at the community level; however, the report card will not achieve this end as a stand alone project. It must be accompanied by broader good governance work, creation of (or better communication of existing) measurable program objectives and strategies, and support for department staff to make positive changes in their department. All this must occur while appreciating and supporting the unique cultural undercurrents in each community.