

# The NWMO

## 360° Evaluation of Reconciliation Policy

2025



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CONSULTING™



*“Status quo hasn’t served Indigenous people and won’t serve them well in the future.”*

~ Bob Watts, from #VoicesofReconciliation video #8



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# Executive Summary:

## *The NWMO's Reconciliation Journey*

The Nuclear Waste Management Organization's (NWMO) Reconciliation journey represents a transformative story of both progress and learning. Since adopting its Reconciliation Policy in 2019, the NWMO has worked to reshape its relationship with Indigenous communities, integrating Indigenous and western approaches to nuclear waste management. Significant achievements have been made in training programs, community partnerships (\$70.9M in Indigenous community investments), and the integration of Indigenous Knowledge systems.

A key learning through this implementation has been the importance of tracking progress centrally. In 2023, the NWMO developed and implemented a centralized tracking matrix to document Reconciliation-related initiatives across departments, reinforcing accountability and supporting future planning.

As this 360° evaluation reveals, the NWMO has made notable progress but recognizes that Reconciliation is an ongoing journey. Opportunities remain to continue strengthening leadership accountability, deepen cross-departmental ownership of Reconciliation, and advance economic Reconciliation initiatives.

*"Through some of the healing ceremonies that we have participated in through the NWMO, it's awakened or helped rekindle a fire in my heart to continue to fight the good fight for our environment."*

*—External NWMO consultant*

### **Tracking Our Progress Toward Reconciliation**

In 2023, the NWMO developed and implemented a centralized tracking matrix to document Reconciliation-related initiatives across departments. This tool has revealed the breadth of efforts underway. For example, Engineering Design has begun integrating Indigenous Knowledge into technical safety cases, while Real Estate Management is collaborating on a Reconciliation-informed Centre of Expertise Framework. The matrix not only helps to capture this work, but also highlights emerging gaps, reinforces cross-departmental accountability, and supports future planning.



## Key Findings

The evaluation identified several key findings across understanding, policy implementation, organizational culture, and community engagement:

- Significant increase in staff understanding of Reconciliation and Indigenous history
- Innovative decision-making processes incorporating Indigenous perspectives
- Strengthened partnerships with Indigenous communities
- Continued opportunities to build deeper Reconciliation ownership across technical teams and departments

## Progress Highlights

Highlights of the NWMO's progress since 2019 include:

- Implementation of the groundbreaking Water Statement, reflecting Indigenous worldviews
- Development and utilization of the Reconciliation Assessment Tool
- Increased Indigenous representation in leadership roles
- Expanded Reconciliation training programs for staff and contractors

While the NWMO's Reconciliation efforts continue to evolve, this work is situated within a broader industry and national context. Across Canada, organizations are increasingly embedding the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action into their operations. The NWMO's initiatives, such as the integration of Indigenous Knowledge into technical work and the use of a centralized tracking matrix, reflect practices seen among leaders in the nuclear and infrastructure sectors. Continued attention to best practices and peer comparisons will help ensure the NWMO maintains a thoughtful and forward-looking approach.

Training on Reconciliation has been an important entry point for many staff. In parallel, teams like Communications and HR have partnered with internal networks to develop tailored learning materials, such as allyship training modules and cultural awareness campaigns. In addition to internal progress, the NWMO has also begun exploring external benchmarking by learning from peer organizations and sector leaders in Reconciliation and Equity, and identifying models that may inform future organizational practices.



*“The Water Statement is not just a document; it’s a bridge between worlds, acknowledging the sacred connection between Indigenous wisdom and scientific understanding.” - NWMO Indigenous Relations team member*

## Recommendations

Building on these findings and insights, the evaluation identified the following recommendations to strengthen the NWMO’s Reconciliation journey moving forward:

1. Embed Reconciliation into leadership accountability frameworks, including integration into professional performance reviews. This will be reported in more detail next year as implementation progresses
2. Enhance support for Indigenous staff and address workload concerns
3. Improve integration of Reconciliation principles across all departments
4. Develop more robust accountability measures for Reconciliation goals
5. Broaden community engagement and continue addressing historic and present-day challenges through reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities

While the NWMO has made substantial strides in its Reconciliation journey (see Table 1), there remain opportunities for growth and improvement as the organization moves into the next phase of its ten-year plan. The path ahead is challenging but filled with promise, as the NWMO continues to redefine industry standards for Indigenous engagement and Reconciliation.

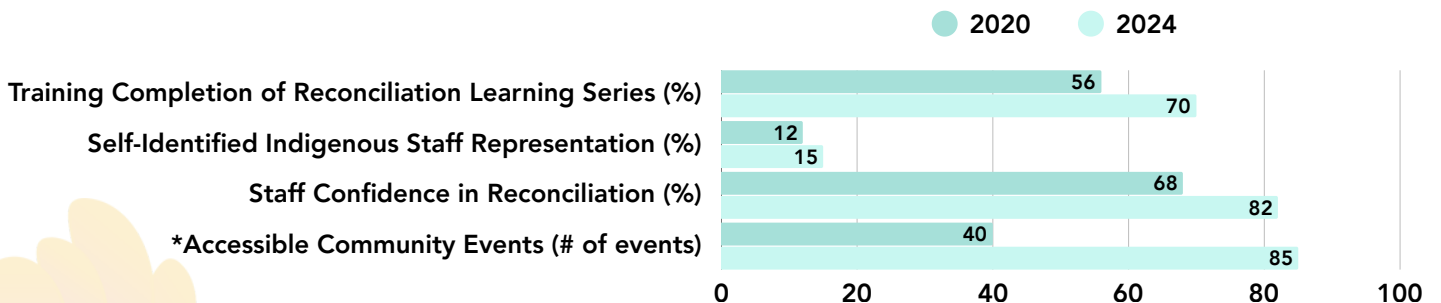


Table 1: Progress Highlights (2020 vs 2024)

\*Accessible community events are those designed to accommodate diverse needs, including transportation, childcare, dietary considerations, physical accessibility, and inclusive communication methods, ensuring equitable participation for all community members.

# Introduction

In the vast landscape of Canada’s energy sector, the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) stands at the forefront of a monumental task: leading Canada’s plan for the long-term management of used nuclear fuel. Beyond this technical challenge lies an equally important mission—one of healing, understanding, and Reconciliation with Indigenous communities.

In October 2019, the NWMO took a bold step by adopting a Reconciliation Policy, responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #92. This policy wasn’t just a document; it was a commitment to meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities and a recognition of past wrongs.

*“The Reconciliation Policy is our compass, guiding us towards a future where Indigenous wisdom and western science walk hand in hand.”*

- NWMO executive staff member

This report presents the findings of the five-year 360° evaluation of the NWMO’s Reconciliation Policy implementation. It’s a story of progress, challenges, and the ongoing journey towards true partnership with Indigenous communities in the management of Canada’s used nuclear fuel.

## The Water Statement: A Watershed Moment

A pivotal development in the NWMO’s Reconciliation journey was the creation of the Water Statement. This groundbreaking document recognizes water’s life-sustaining properties and its deep, sacred connections with Indigenous spirituality. It emphasizes the transformative nature of water and its movement through time and space, particularly in relation to the long-term protection of water resources and the deep geological repository for nuclear waste.

*“The Water Statement is not just about protecting a resource; it’s about honouring a relative. It’s a recognition that water is life, and in protecting it, we protect ourselves and future generations.”*

—Indigenous Elder, Council of Elders and Youth

The Water Statement represents a paradigm shift in how industry approaches environmental stewardship, integrating Indigenous Knowledge with western science in a way that respects and upholds both worldviews (See Figure 1, page 8).

## Key Events

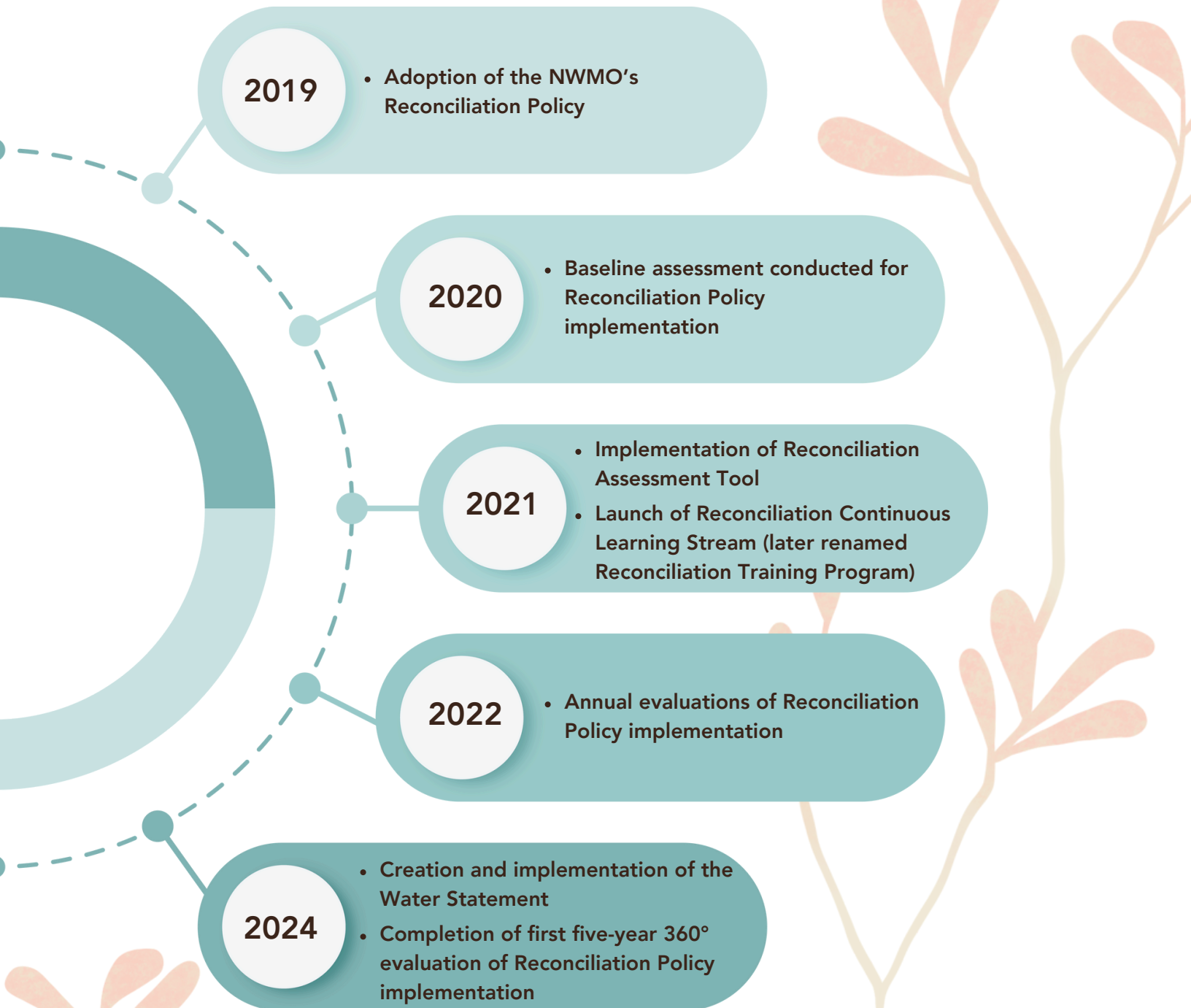


Figure 1: Timeline of key events in the NWMO's Reconciliation journey: 2019-2024



# Methodology

This evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, weaving together quantitative data with rich qualitative insights to paint a comprehensive picture of the NWMO's Reconciliation journey. The methodology was designed not just to measure progress, but to capture the nuanced experiences and perspectives of all those involved in this transformative process.

## Data Collection Methods:

- Surveys of the NWMO staff and Council of Elders and Youth (COEY) members
- In-depth interviews with executive staff, external consultants, and community leaders
- Focus groups with key NWMO departments (see Figures 2 and 3 for the NWMO staff participant demographics, page 10)
- Analysis of organizational documents and previous evaluation data

*"The methodology of this evaluation reflects the spirit of Reconciliation itself—bringing together different ways of knowing and understanding to create a fuller, more nuanced picture." —Evaluation team member*

## Participant Recruitment and Engagement:

The evaluation team worked closely with the NWMO's Indigenous Relations team to ensure broad and meaningful participation. Multiple reminders were sent to encourage a substantial sample size, and special efforts were made to engage COEY youth members in the process.

## Data Analysis:

Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis, with careful attention paid to disaggregating data according to self-identification of ancestry. Quantitative data was examined using descriptive statistics to identify trends and patterns.

## Limitations:

It's important to note that some participants engaged in multiple data collection methods, providing both breadth and depth to the findings but also potentially introducing some overlap in perspectives.

## Participant Demographics:

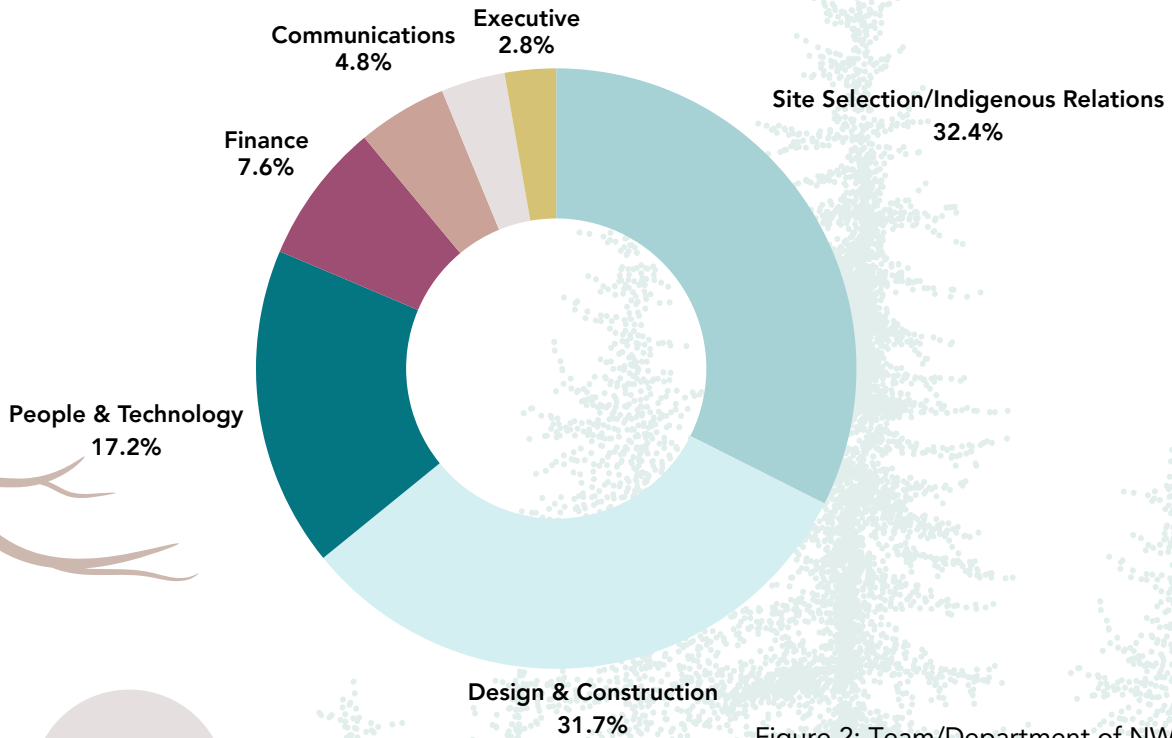


Figure 2: Team/Department of NWMO Staff Participating in Survey

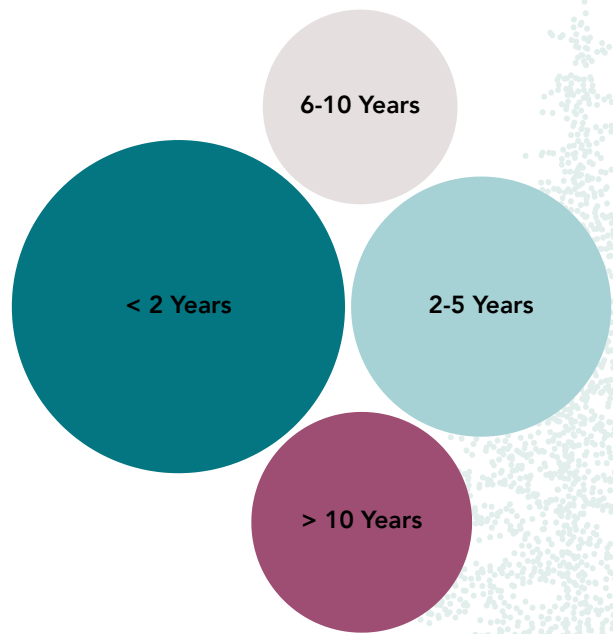


Figure 3: Years Worked at the NWMO

While the charts above reflect who contributed to the evaluation, participant feedback also emphasized the growing presence of Reconciliation efforts throughout the organization.

For example, monthly engagement with Indigenous NGOs like the Assembly of First Nations is helping to shape shared priorities and foster collaborative approaches.



# Key Findings

## 3.1 Reconciliation Understanding

The journey of Reconciliation begins with understanding, and the NWMO has made significant strides in this area. Staff knowledge of Reconciliation and Indigenous history has increased dramatically since 2020, with 92% of staff reporting a substantial improvement in their understanding, compared to 45% in 2020 (see Table 2).

*“The most significant change in my Reconciliation journey is a greater recognition of the impact that the colonization of Canada by western people had on First Nations people. This recognition includes a greater awareness that the impact was an intentional outcome of policies enacted by the governments of the time, and that many of the policies enacted lasted until very recently.” —NWMO staff member*

This increased understanding is not just academic; it’s transforming how NWMO staff approach their work and interact with Indigenous communities. The Water Statement, in particular, has played a crucial role in deepening this understanding.

*“The Water Statement opened my eyes to a whole new way of seeing our work. It’s not just about managing waste; it’s about being stewards of the land and water for generations to come.”  
—NWMO technical team member*

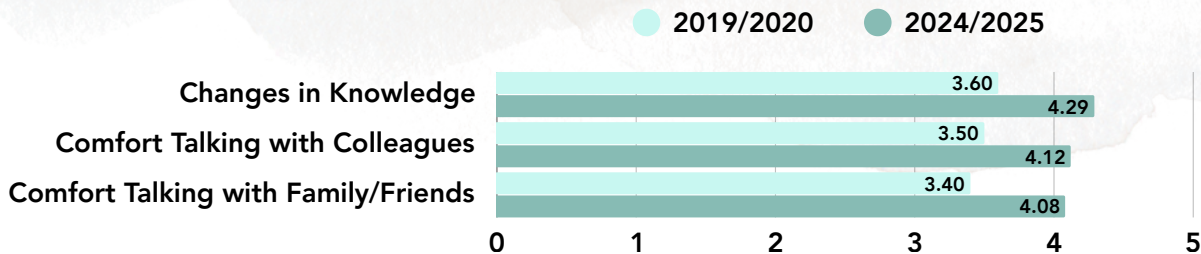


Table 2: Staff Reconciliation Shifts (2019 vs. 2024)  
Average staff rating of change (1 = no change, 5 = major change)

## 3.2 Policy Implementation

The Reconciliation Policy has catalyzed tangible changes in the NWMO's operations:

- Development of the Reconciliation Assessment Tool (2021)
- Implementation of the Water Statement
- Expansion of the Reconciliation Training Program

*"The Reconciliation Assessment Tool has been a game-changer. It's not just a checkbox; it's a way of thinking that's becoming ingrained in how we approach every project." —NWMO project manager*

The Water Statement, in particular, has had a profound impact on the NWMO's approach to environmental stewardship and community engagement. It represents a fusion of Indigenous wisdom and western science, setting a new standard for how industry can engage with Indigenous Knowledge systems.

*"The Water Statement is more than words on paper. It's a living document that guides our actions and decisions every day. It reminds us of our responsibility to protect not just a resource, but a relative." —NWMO environmental specialist*

While progress has been significant, challenges remain in fully integrating Reconciliation principles across all departments. Technical teams, in particular, reported difficulties in applying Reconciliation concepts to their daily work.

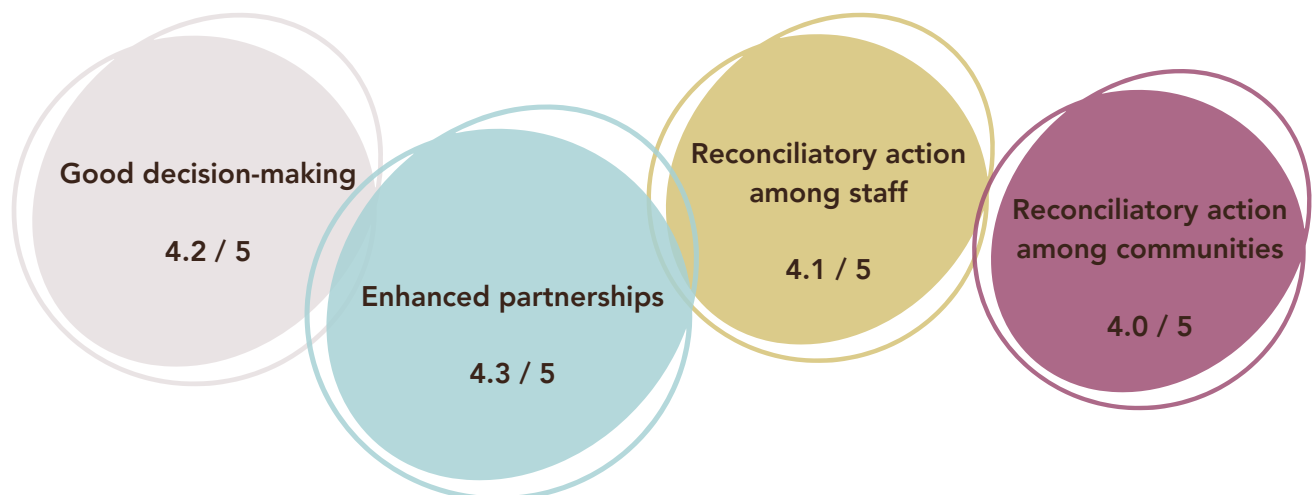


Figure 4: Average Rating (out of 5) of Impacts of Reconciliation Policy



### 3.3 Organizational Culture

The evaluation revealed a significant shift in organizational culture since 2020:

- Increased staff ownership of Reconciliation with the average rating of 4.2/5 in 2024, up from 3.1/5 in 2020 (see Table 3)
- Greater alignment with Indigenous Knowledge systems across the organization
- Improved confidence in implementing Reconciliation principles (3.6/5 in 2024, up from 2.8/5 in 2020)

*“I’ve seen a real shift in how we approach our work. It’s not just about technical solutions anymore. We’re asking ourselves, ‘How does this align with Indigenous values? How can we incorporate traditional knowledge?’”*  
—NWMO engineer

The Water Statement has played a crucial role in this cultural shift, providing a tangible example of how Indigenous worldviews can be integrated into the NWMO’s core operations.

*“The Water Statement isn’t just a policy; it’s become part of our DNA. It’s changing how we think about our relationship with the environment and the communities we work with.”* —NWMO executive staff member

While the majority of staff reported feeling supported by leadership in their Reconciliation efforts, approximately 20% expressed a need for stronger leadership engagement. This feedback highlights an important opportunity to deepen leadership visibility, allyship, and accountability in future Reconciliation work.

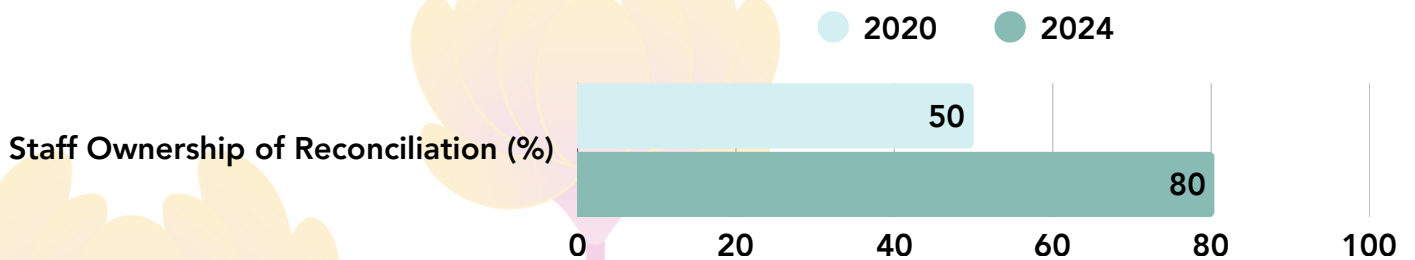


Table 3: Staff Ownership of Reconciliation (2020 vs 2024)

### 3.4 Community Engagement

The NWMO has made significant strides in improving relationships with Indigenous communities since 2020:

- Enhanced consultation processes
- Increased Indigenous representation in decision-making
- Greater incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge in project planning

*“The NWMO’s approach has improved, but there’s still work to be done in rebuilding trust after decades of being ignored.”*

*—Indigenous community leader*

The Water Statement has been a pivotal tool in enhancing community engagement, providing a shared language and framework for discussing environmental stewardship.

*“The Water Statement shows that the NWMO is listening. It’s a step towards understanding our worldview and our deep connection to the land and water.”* —Indigenous Elder

Community members reported appreciation for the NWMO’s efforts but emphasized the need to address historical wrongs and relationship challenges.

The NWMO recognizes that true collaboration must proceed at a pace set by communities themselves, honoring Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.



Figure 5: Water Management, Community Engagement, and the NWMO's Commitments

This diagram emphasizes the NWMO's comprehensive and integrated approach to respectful and collaborative water stewardship. The Water Statement and community engagement practices inform and reinforce each other, while both are supported by the NWMO's overarching commitments. This synergistic approach ensures three key outcomes:

- **Holistic Integration:** Indigenous Knowledge and perspectives are woven throughout the entire process.
- **Rooted Engagement:** Community engagement is deeply anchored in the Water Statement principles and the NWMO's commitments.
- **Continuous Improvement:** The NWMO's dedication to ongoing learning, transparency, and regular evaluation creates a dynamic feedback loop.

## Progress Since 2020

The journey from 2020 to 2025 has been one of significant growth and learning for the NWMO:

1. **Understanding:** Staff knowledge of Indigenous history and Reconciliation concepts has more than doubled.
2. **Policy Implementation:** Development of new tools (e.g., Reconciliation Assessment Tool) and policies (e.g., Water Statement) that incorporate Indigenous perspectives.
3. **Training:** Expansion of Reconciliation training programs, with 95% of staff completing core modules in 2024 compared to 30% in 2020.
4. **Indigenous Representation:** Increase in Indigenous staff from 5% in 2020 to 12% in 2024, including in leadership roles.
5. **Community Partnerships:** Enhanced collaboration with Indigenous communities, with 80% of community leaders reporting improved relationships in 2024 compared to 40% in 2020.
6. **Vendor Relations:** Implementation of Reconciliation requirements for contractors, with 100% of major vendors receiving training by 2024.

The Water Statement, implemented during this period, has been a catalyst for many of these changes, providing a concrete example of how Indigenous wisdom can be integrated into the NWMO's core operations.

## Opportunities for Deeper Reconciliation

1. **Leadership Commitment:** Embed Reconciliation into leadership accountability frameworks by integrating it into professional performance reviews. This process has begun and will be reported on in greater detail in next year's Reconciliation report.
2. **Departmental Integration:** Technical teams continue to struggle with applying Reconciliation principles in their daily work.
3. **Workload Balance:** Indigenous staff across departments have reported feeling obligated to take on responsibilities related to implementing Reconciliation, even when it is not formally part of their role.
4. **Historic and Present-Day Issues:** Acknowledge historic and present-day challenges between Indigenous communities and the nuclear industry and identify actions that support meaningful, transparent dialogue and reciprocal relationship building.
5. **Enhance Use of Tracking Tools:** Leverage the centralized tracking matrix more strategically by creating department-level summaries to support accountability, planning, and cross-team learning.



*“The progress we’ve made since 2020 is encouraging, but it’s also humbling. It shows us how much more there is to learn and do on this Reconciliation journey.” —NWMO CEO*

## Recommendations

### *Moving Forward with Intention*

As the NWMO continues its Reconciliation journey, this next phase calls for deeper cross-organizational ownership, strengthened relationships, and greater accountability to commitments. The following focus areas represent intentional next steps to support continued progress and learning.

#### **Strengthen Leadership Commitment**

- Implement accountability measures for executives regarding Reconciliation goals
- Increase visibility of leadership participation in Reconciliation activities

*“Leadership needs to walk the talk. When our executives actively participate in Reconciliation activities, it sends a powerful message throughout the organization.” —NWMO staff member*

#### **Enhance Support for Indigenous Staff**

- Develop mentorship programs for Indigenous employees
- Address workload concerns and provide additional resources

#### **Improve Cross-Departmental Integration**

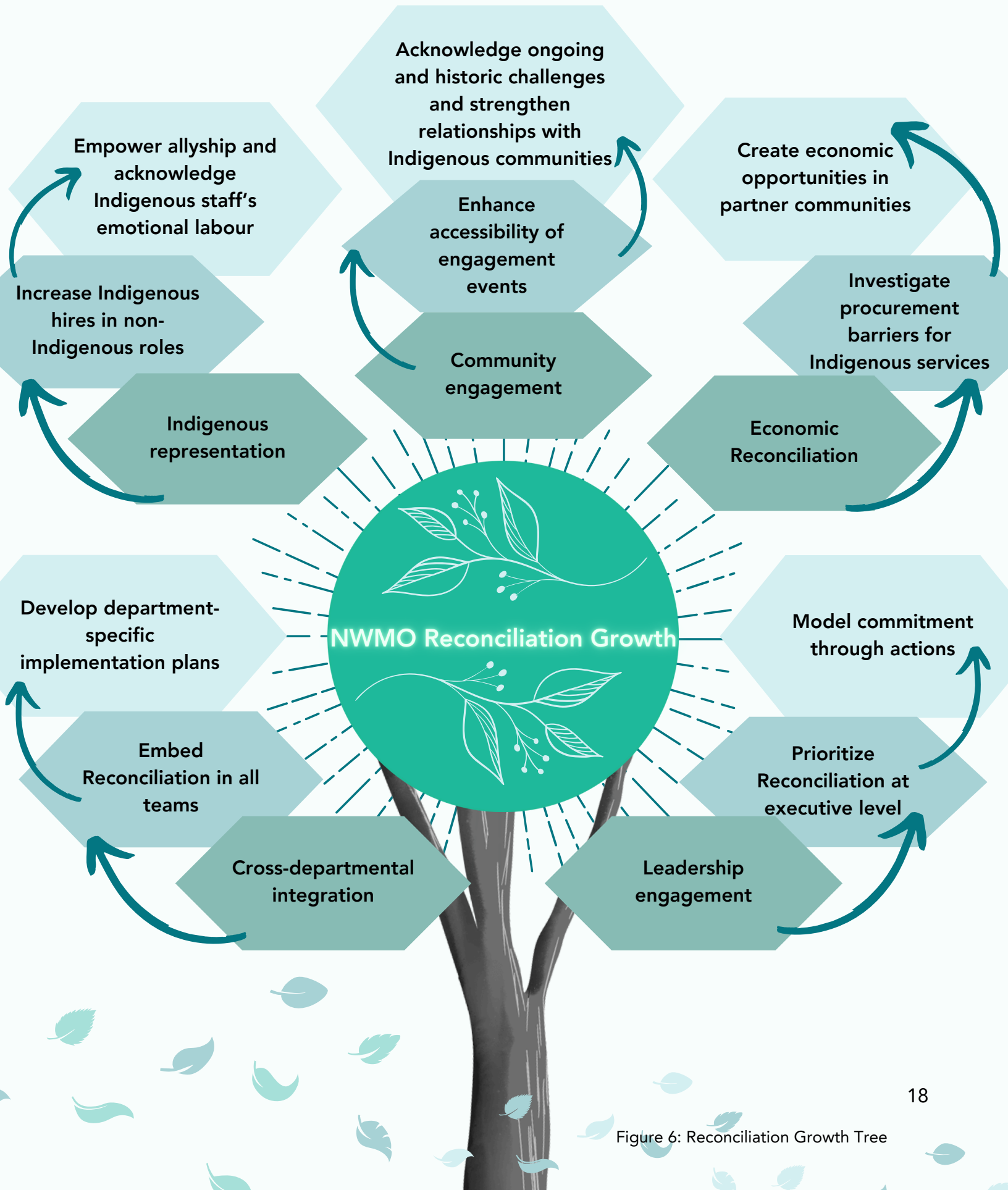
- Create tailored Reconciliation frameworks for technical teams
- Establish cross-functional working groups to share best practices

#### **Expand Community Engagement**

- Develop long-term partnership plans with Indigenous communities
- Increase transparency in decision-making processes



# Reconciliation Growth Tree



NWMO Reconciliation Growth

Acknowledge ongoing and historic challenges and strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities

Empower allyship and acknowledge Indigenous staff's emotional labour

Increase Indigenous hires in non-Indigenous roles

Indigenous representation

Develop department-specific implementation plans

Embed Reconciliation in all teams

Cross-departmental integration

Leadership engagement

Prioritize Reconciliation at executive level

Model commitment through actions

Economic Reconciliation

Investigate procurement barriers for Indigenous services

Create economic opportunities in partner communities

Enhance accessibility of engagement events

Community engagement

Figure 6: Reconciliation Growth Tree



## Conclusion

The NWMO's Reconciliation journey from 2020 to 2025 has been one of significant growth, learning, and transformation. The organization has demonstrated a genuine commitment to learning, growth, and meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities. The implementation of the Water Statement stands as a testament to this commitment, showcasing how Indigenous wisdom and western science can work in harmony.

While challenges remain, particularly in fully integrating Reconciliation principles across all aspects of the organization, the foundation laid over the past five years provides a strong basis for continued progress. The journey ahead will require continued dedication, humility, and a willingness to listen and learn.

*"Reconciliation is not a destination; it's a journey we must commit to every day. The progress we've made is encouraging, but it also reminds us of how far we still have to go." —NWMO Indigenous Relations team member*

As the NWMO moves into the next phase of its ten-year Reconciliation plan, focusing on the recommendations outlined in this report will help address existing gaps and further strengthen the organization's commitment to Reconciliation. By continuing to prioritize Indigenous voices, fostering a culture of continuous learning, and addressing systemic barriers, the NWMO can build on its progress and work towards true partnership with Indigenous communities in the management of Canada's used nuclear fuel.

The Water Statement serves as a beacon for this ongoing journey, reminding us of the power of integrating different ways of knowing and the importance of respecting and protecting the natural world for future generations.

*"The Water Statement is not the end of our journey, but a new beginning. It shows us what's possible when we truly listen to Indigenous wisdom and work together in a spirit of respect and collaboration." —NWMO CEO*