

# WRIA 12 Discussion Guide

## Development of Consensus Recommendations

The WRIA 12 WREC must decide how to make formal decisions throughout its work. This discussion guide provides background on consensus, offers a few different options for voting, and has questions for the WREC to consider.

### 1. Background

#### ***Definition of Consensus***

Consensus is a group process where the input of everyone is carefully considered and an outcome is crafted that best meets the needs of the group as a whole. The root of consensus is the word consent, which means to give permission to. When members consent to a decision, they are giving permission to the group to go ahead with the decision. Some members may disagree with all or part of the decision, but based on listening to everyone else's input, all members agree to let the decision go forward because the decision is the best one the entire group can achieve at the current time.

Consensus takes time because it involves listening to and addressing minority concerns until all members of a group consent to making a decision and moving forward. Relying solely on consensus can halt all progress if one person refuses to allow a decision. For this reason, some groups choose to rely on consensus only for final decisions and use some form of a majority vote for interim decisions along the way. Other groups allow for a majority vote after substantive discussion does not result in a consensus-based decision.

### 2. Options for WREC Consideration

Here are two options for the committee to consider. The committee may also create their own variation on these options. Each option suggests potential language to the operating procedures.

#### **a. Consensus with majority vote**

- *The Committee will use consensus-based decision-making and will not rely on parliamentary procedure.*
- *The Committee will strive toward consensus. The levels of consensus include:*
  - ✓ *I can say an unqualified "yes"!*
  - ✓ *I can accept the decision.*
  - ✓ *I can live with the decision.*
  - ✓ *I do not fully agree with the decision; however, I will not block it.*
- *If consensus cannot be reached after substantive discussion, the chair may ask for a vote. The vote will carry if two-thirds (66%) of the members present vote in favor.*
- *Minority reports will be allowed for all decisions. In addition, committee meeting summaries and other relevant documents will highlight the pros and cons of the*

*actions discussed by the members.*

In considering this option, the committee could also provide more detail on what is “substantive discussion”. For example, this could be changed to say that “If a decision is needed for the group to move forward and consensus cannot be reached after X number of meetings, the chair may ask for a vote”.

**b. Consensus for all decisions**

- *The Committee will use consensus-based decision-making and will not rely on parliamentary procedure.*
- *The Committee will strive toward consensus. The levels of consensus include:*
  - ✓ *I can say an unqualified "yes"!*
  - ✓ *I can accept the decision.*
  - ✓ *I can live with the decision.*
  - ✓ *I do not fully agree with the decision; however, I will not block it.*
- *If one or more members blocks consensus, the decision may not move forward.*
- *Minority reports will be allowed for all decisions. In addition, committee meeting summaries and other relevant documents will highlight the pros and cons of the actions discussed by the members.*

**3. Questions for Committee Discussion**

- It is not expected that any Committee member will strongly agree with every action taken by the committee throughout the process, or strongly support every recommendation in the final plan. The goal is to develop a final plan that the full committee will consent to approve. Which decision process will be the most useful to reaching this goal?
- The legislation requires that a final plan be created. This will hopefully be done by consensus, but the law provides a process for plan approval if consensus cannot be reached. If the committee prefers consensus for all decisions, Ecology would like clarity on how to proceed if this results in effectively blocking the process along the way—which could deprive Ecology of valuable local input in the planning process. How should the operating principles address this?