Connections with water and health in Indigenous communities

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Overview of talk

Background

Research snapshot

Reflections from the research

- Connections to water, land and health
- “Leave no-one behind”…including the small “cities”!
Ecosystem health

Environmental health

Public health

Physical

Spiritual

Social

Emotional

Mental
- Seasonally scarce water supplies (not 24/7 water)
- Very high water-energy demand (diesel-fed bores, desal plants etc.)
- Although only small communities – punch well above their weight with costs to supply safely managed water and power
Approach – mixed methods

Community and stakeholder workshops
Gathered qualitative and quantitative data
Involved and engaged community in water saving behaviours
“everything about water goes back to culture and wellbeing”

“the value of it goes back to the land”

“without we would all perish”

“can provide for families through the land”

“future generations, animals and plants”

“climate change is reducing rain, shows in flora and fauna”

“if Mother Nature collapses on us, it dries up”

“is cleansing, spiritual in cultural aspect”
Health and well being uses of water

- Cooling buildings (esp. when no air con)
- Dust control (reduce airborne dust)
- Social & cultural gatherings
- Heat relief (cooling earth)
- Cleaning food /fishing / hunting equipment
- Watering gardens & establishing ground cover
What has this eel got to do with anything?!
Reponses from 48 households from 2 Islands

“Rank these in order of importance to community well-being”

Health care

Rain (untreated) water

What is your main drinking water source?

- 57% Town (treated) water
- 26% Rainwater
- 13% Bottled water
- 4% Rainwater and bottled water

Reponses from 48 households from 2 Islands
Back to the eel...
“Leaving no-one behind”…we have a responsibility to think bigger than cities – think communities

Opportunities to draw on the skills and knowledge in the urban space to improve those connections to water and health in Indigenous communities

Role of environmental health in moving toward truly water transformational cities is critical

“Water out here is precious, eh.. Yep, more precious than silver and gold”

(25 y.o local man from western Cape York)
Project partners

- Ergon Energy
- PowerWater
- The University of Queensland
- Australian Government
- Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA)
- Torres Strait Island Regional Council
- Queensland Government
- Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy
- Water Corporation
- Centre for Appropriate Technology
From little coconuts, big coconuts grow!