

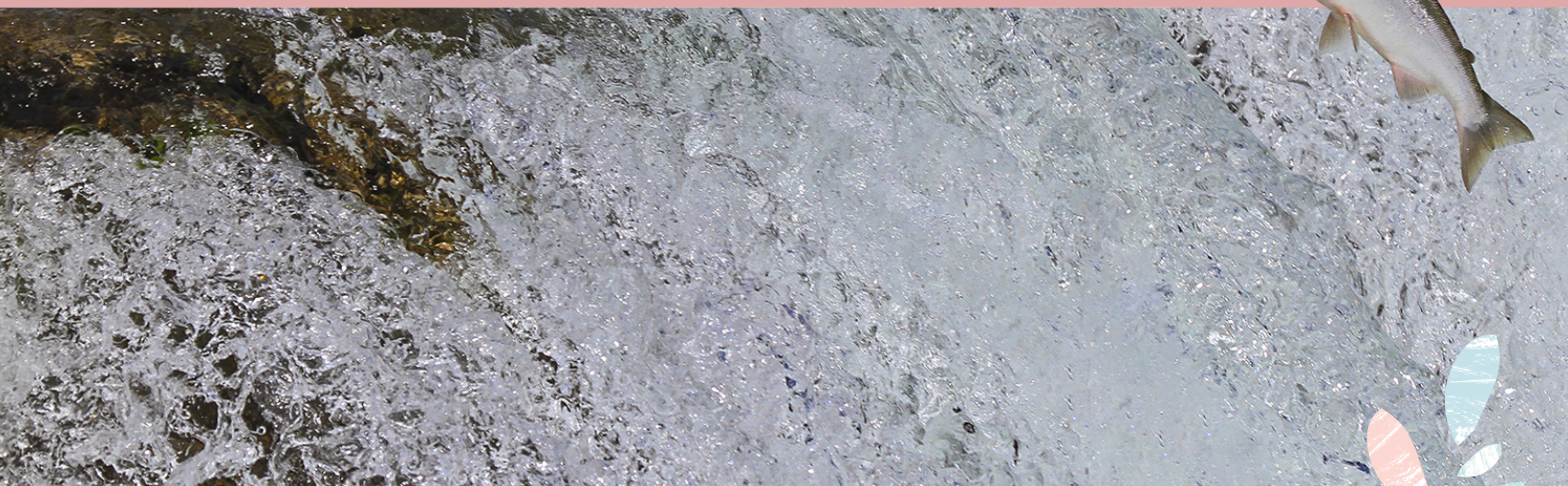
EIPCCP

ENGAGEMENT
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
IN CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

OCTOBER
EDITION

Newsletter

CHANGES / INNOVATIONS / CLEAN TECHNOLOGIES / ADAPTATION AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE



The Water is Speaking to Us

The water is speaking to us

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Water is speaking to us

On page 2

Hundreds of thousands of salmon die on their way to spawn

For centuries, Indigenous communities across Turtle Island have deeply respected salmon. Salmon are perceived as teachers, continually reminding us of the importance of honouring tradition. They are seen as gifts from Creator, having kept humans alive all these years.

Hundreds of thousands of salmon die on their way to spawn

On page 4

Wild rice is severely under threat



Manoomin (Wild rice) has declined roughly by a third over the last century.

Wild rice found in the Great Lake Regions is severely under threat.

On page 8



THE WATER IS SPEAKING TO US

Written by *Hannah Patrie*

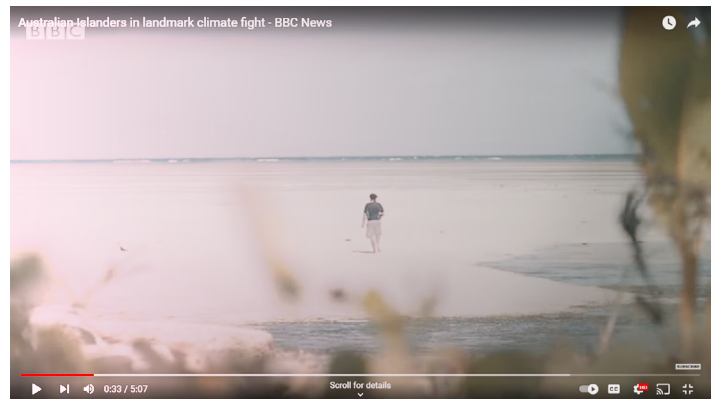
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS WIN HISTORIC CLIMATE CASE AGAINST AUSTRALIA: MONUMENTAL BREAKTHROUGH FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE EVERYWHERE

“OUR FEAR IS GETTING
EVACUATED OFF THIS PLACE,
LEAVING OUR GENEALOGY
BEHIND, OUR LINEAGE
BEHIND, LEAVING OUR
FAMILY REMAINS BEHIND.
HAVING OUR LIFE
BECOME A HISTORY.”

These powerful words were shared by **Yessie Mosby**, a Kulkulgal man and one of many Torres Strait Islanders falling victim to climate change. As sea levels rise, the homelands of these Indigenous communities are quickly being erased. Escalating floods and cyclones are swallowing sacred lands whole, having no mercy for the habitats or artifacts in their path. Coconut trees are washing away, sea birds are no longer in sight, and fish populations are dwindling every year. Families are forced to collect their ancestors' bones like seashells on a beach after rising tides have unearthed countless burial grounds.

Boigu Island, the most northerly inhabited island, has lost 100 yards of land to the ocean - scared land where

ceremonies were once conducted. Other islands of the Torres Strait are similarly plagued: Saibai Island rises only a metre above sea level, while residents of Masig Island now gaze across a coastline once lush with forestry and life, now completely bare and uninhabitable.



Current coastline of Masig Island, once lush with forestry and life, now bare and uninhabitable. – **BBC News**

But these losses carry much more weight than ecological destruction. The people of Zenadh Kes (Torres Strait Islands) have held a deep cultural connection to the land and water for more than 60,000 years. Mosby refers to the island as their mother: it is their source of history, food, medicine, and knowledge. So, climate change is not just threatening their home; it is threatening their way of life.

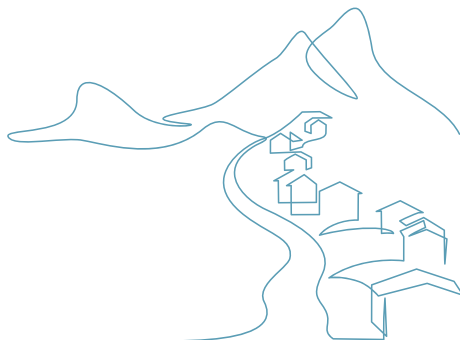


THE WATER IS SPEAKING TO US - CONT



Yessie Mosby and his children stand beside watertight containers which hold their belongings. His family is forced to move to another house, after a cyclone destroyed their home. – New York Times

This is what motivated the formation of the activist group the Torres Strait 8. In 2019, they filed a complaint with the United Nations Human Rights Committee, arguing that the Australian government had failed to address climate change, thereby failing to protect their nations. In September 2022, the group was officially supported by the Committee. It said that by not taking action to curb climate change, the Australian government had violated two of the three human rights set out in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)*, pertaining to culture and family life. Remarkably, the committee has also called on the Australian government to provide the islanders with compensation and remedies.



This win is a monumental breakthrough for Indigenous rights and climate change. Environmental organization ClientEarth states that “[The decision of the United Nations Human Rights Committee] marks the first time an international [court] has found a country has violated human rights law through inadequate climate policy; the first time a nation-state has been found responsible for their greenhouse gas emissions under international human rights law; and the first time that peoples’ right to culture has been found to be at risk from climate impacts.” It also reflects the first time the human rights committee has backed a case by climate-vulnerable people against their own state. And it is a rare but incredible case where Indigenous cultures and knowledge were more significant in the decision-making process than Western science. “*This marks a departure from broad international climate politics where Indigenous laws, cultures, knowledge, and practices are often sidelined or underrepresented,*” says Kristen Lyons, a professor of Environment and Development Sociology at The University of Queensland.



The Torres Strait 8 - Australian Humans Rights Commission



THE WATER IS SPEAKING TO US

This win opens a pathway for Indigenous land and water protectors around the world to come together in a unified fight for ancestral rights. Not only to conserve our incredible cultures but to save our homes, our relatives, and Mother Earth.

The Torres Strait 8 are currently asking the Australian government to transition away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy, to fund Indigenous programs for climate change adaptation, and to support Torres Strait communities as they build their own renewable energy sources. To learn more about this, read the CBC story "[Indigenous Islanders win UN climate case against Australia, opening the door for others.](#)"



"WE DIDN'T CONTRIBUTE NOTHING TOWARDS FOSSIL FUELS, AND BURNINGS, AND THE HUSTLE AND BUSTLE... YET WE ARE AT THE FRONT LINE AND GETTING THE IMPACT OF EVERYTHING. IT'S NOT RIGHT...AS WE ARE WAITING, OUR HOME IS BEING EATEN AWAY. SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE RIGHT NOW. DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE TIME WHEN WE WILL BE MOVED OFF AND BE REFUGEES IN OUR OWN COUNTRY. SAVE IT WHILE WE CAN, NOW!" -Yessie Mosby

HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF SALMON DIE ON THEIR WAY TO SPAWN

For centuries, Indigenous communities across Turtle Island have deeply respected salmon. Salmon are perceived as teachers, continually reminding us of the importance of honouring tradition. They are seen as gifts from Creator, having kept humans alive all these years. And they are esteemed for generating a network of interconnection between other life forms.



Matt Simmons, "Done waiting on B.C., Gitanyow declare new protected area: 'this is our land' [The Narwhal](#), September 26, 2021.



THE WATER IS SPEAKING TO US - CONT

But studies have found a significant decline in salmon populations and diversity across Canada. For example, on average, 52,000 Chinook salmon migrate into Yukon spawning grounds every year, but this summer marked an astonishing low with only **12,000** crossing the border. APTN also notes that in 2018, 1,800 Chinook salmon passed through the Takhini River, but this summer, only 456 passed. According to a [CBC News report](#), studies have also found 70% less diversity among sockeye salmon than in 1913. This means that there is a severely smaller gene pool within the species. The most prominent causes of these trends are human activities and climate change, both of which are degrading salmon habitats and disrupting spawning routes.

Many Indigenous people have recognized these issues and are acting through independent research and conservation tactics. The Kwanlin Dün First Nation community in the Yukon are managing their own [sonar sites](#) and research camps to identify what the salmon need. The First Nations Fisheries Council has been working with 204 nations across B.C. to develop strategies and solutions for salmon populations. Sumas First Nations have launched a five-year [Conservation, Guardianship, and Harvest Plan](#). And multiple communities have decided to stop fishing salmon altogether.



Salmon counters for the Heiltsuk First Nation found piles of dead pink salmon along Neekus Creek in October 2022. This is the result of increased temperatures and record-setting drought conditions leaving many B.C. waterways low or completely dry. – [CBC News](#)

All of this speaks to an even greater issue: humans are failing in their responsibilities to Mother Earth. Reciprocity is a fundamental virtue within Indigenous teachings. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer reflects on a teaching stating: “sustain the ones who sustain you, and the Earth will last forever.” And this is what has bonded humans and salmon for centuries. During dire times, we kept one another alive. These downward trends exemplify humans’ departure from this bond.

“IN OUR ROLE AS SALMON SPEAKERS, OUR GOAL IS TO SPEAK FOR THE SALMON AND TO PROTECT THE SALMON... BECAUSE IF YOU PROTECT THE SALMON, YOU PROTECT THE WATER, AND FOOD AND WATER SECURITY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS”

- HUP-WIL-LAX-A (KIRBY MULDOE)

In the midst of worldly chaos, humankind has vastly forgotten to maintain reciprocity with the non-human world. But these Indigenous water protectors are putting the needs of salmon above their own. That level of commitment is not simply what the salmon require; it is what they have long deserved.



HURRICANE FIONA EXPOSES THE REALITY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE: LIVING THROUGH MULTIDIRECTIONAL HARDSHIPS

A recent [study](#) has found that socially vulnerable groups - such as Indigenous Peoples, women, the elderly, and other visible minorities and economically insecure individuals - are at higher risk of experiencing flooding in Canada. But this does not apply solely to cases of flooding; it is true for any condition related to climate change, including wildfires, droughts, hurricanes, etc. When it comes to climate change, socially vulnerable people experience more drastic impacts. This can be explained by a concept called [intersectionality](#), which is a framework that illustrates how various oppressions overlap, ultimately forming unique experiences.

Indigenous people, specifically those who are women, girls, and gender-diverse, are weighed down every day by an array of oppressions, including racism, sexism, colonial discourse, poverty, food insecurity, intergenerational trauma and more. When you add in the hardship that comes with climate change - those conditions that jeopardize basic needs - the impact is undoubtedly intensified for those with pre-existing oppressions. It is

much harder to rebound after a climate-related disaster when so many forces are working against you.

Hurricane Fiona profoundly exposed this reality. For instance, we are seeing many Indigenous mothers struggling to look after their families because access to clean drinking water is limited, the cost of living is increasing and now, on top of that, Fiona's destructive wrath has uprooted these women's homes, ancestral lands, and communities.

Fortunately, however, we can admire how these affected communities have come together in solidarity. Amid power outages and devastation, various Indigenous communities fed one another, sheltered one another and picked up the pieces of collapsed infrastructure, as highlighted in a [CBC story](#) filed by Oscar Baker III.

Additionally, in immediate response to hurricane Fiona, the Assembly of First Nations hosted the [2nd National Climate Gathering](#) in Fredericton, New Brunswick. About 400 Indigenous Peoples, scientists and researchers gathered to discuss the impacts climate change has had on Indigenous people and to explore Indigenous-led solutions.

"For decades, our Elders and Knowledge Keepers told us that Mother Earth was in crisis. Current approaches to climate change are failing, as emissions and inequalities continue to grow. It is time that the interrelationships between the three 'Cs' - colonialism, capitalism, and carbon - are exposed, and First Nations take their rightful position as leaders and drivers of climate solutions." - The Assembly of First Nations



WHEN YOU RESPECT THE WATER, THE WATER RESPECTS YOU

Water is life:

it gives life, and it has life with
its own spirit and personality.



However, as Hurricane Fiona has demonstrated, water has a dualistic component: as much as water can give life, it can also take it away. This is why traditional knowledge emphasizes the importance of showing water respect.

But for many years, humans have commodified, contaminated, and isolated water on mass scales. And the water is reacting. The floods, hurricanes, and droughts described above are all water's responses to humans' disrespect.

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide a glimpse into the conversations and knowledge around water from an Indigenous worldview. The hope is to remind Indigenous peoples, especially Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit, of their importance during these critical times. As life-givers and caretakers, women have a unique relationship with water. They are the sacred carriers.

**"WOMEN HAVE BEEN
GIVEN THE ROLE AND THE
RESPONSIBILITY TO CLEAN
AND TAKE CARE OF WATER
FOR THE NEXT SEVEN
GENERATIONS THAT ARE
COMING TO US."**

– Elder Roberta Oshkawbewisens

So, to those reading this, we honour the spiritual interconnection you have with water. We wholeheartedly encourage you as you protect the waterways and all life dependent on them. And we stand with you.

To learn more, and to hear from some incredible water protectors, head to watercarriersnwac.ca.





WILD RICE FOUND IN THE GREAT LAKE REGIONS IS SEVERELY UNDER THREAT: SAVE THE WILD RICE, IT SAVED OUR PEOPLE.

To each person, there is some element that signifies home. It could be the sound of busy streets and echoing traffic. It may be the cool, humid breeze felt from the ocean. Or perhaps, something as simple as a scent bringing back nostalgia, providing deep comfort.

For the Anishinaabe people, it is manoomin—also known as wild rice.

Today, the Anishinaabe span across roughly five northern USA states and four southern Canadian provinces surrounding the Great Lakes. And, it is manoomin that got us here. Many centuries ago, our Creator instructed our ancestors to travel to the place where food grows on water. What they found was incredible: Expansive fields of nutrient-rich rice stalks, existing as a complex biodiversity hub for birds, fish, and other wildlife. Manoomin offered life to our ancestors, helping them survive even the harshest winters. It has continued to offer sustenance over time, making manoomin a fundamental part of Anishinaabe culture. It is eaten almost every day and is used in ceremonies.

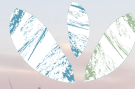
The act of harvesting manoomin is, in itself, a cultural tradition. Ricing offers the perfect setting for language to be transmitted, stories to be told, and for our people to feel connected to Earth, history, and ancestors.

“WHEN YOU GO OUT AND RICE, YOU’RE HAPPY. BECAUSE YOU’RE DOING SOMETHING YOUR GREAT-GREAT-GREATS DID...IN THE SAME LAKE,” SAYS WINONA LADUKE.

For these reasons, manoomin is respected as a gift from our Creator and has been cautiously sustained by Anishinaabe people for centuries.

Manoomin: The sacred rice of Anishinaabe homelands.





WILD RICE FOUND IN THE GREAT LAKE REGIONS IS SEVERELY UNDER THREAT - CONT.

For these reasons, manoomin is respected as a gift from our Creator and has been cautiously sustained by Anishinaabe people for centuries.



Manoomin field in **Minnesota Lake**, estimated to have 64,000 acres of wild rice.

Yet, like many natural marvels of our planet, the great manoomin plant is under threat. Manoomin has declined roughly by a **third** over the last century. Knowledge Keepers from Niisaachewan Anishinaabe Nation estimate their ancestors would have harvest about 500,000 lbs of wild rice every year from the shallow bays of the Winnipeg River. Today, these

manoomin crops produce only about **1 percent** of what they used to. This decline is on account of human activities and industries, drastically changing conditions of waterways, such as **hydroelectric dams**. On top of that, global warming has stalled seed **germination** and is permitting more fungi and other species to invade manoomin habitat. This results in many Anishinaabe communities completely losing their manoomin crops, as well as all the culture and food security that came with them.

Many Anishinaabe have taken action to protect and restore manoomin. Some communities have even established **tribal non-profits to protect manoomin**. A breakthrough response has been a research partnership between Niisaachewan Anishinaabe Nation, near Kenora, Ontario, and the University of Guelph, called: **The Manomin Project**. **This project** combines Anishinaabe Ecological Knowledge and scientific data to study factors limiting the growth of wild rice. The goal is to revitalize fisheries and manoomin as a food source and economic driver, thus building a culturally informed, economically sustainable future for the future generations.



10

WILD RICE FOUND IN THE GREAT LAKE REGIONS IS SEVERELY UNDER THREAT - CONT.

“Rather than researching approaches to add nutrition, divert water sources, or artificially adjust growing conditions for food production, our work looks to work with nature, using the nutrients and water already in the river system to encourage the growth of an Indigenous crop in its native habitat,” says Samantha Mehlretter, project researcher.

The Manomin Project affirms that Indigenous knowledge is significant, informative, and relevant. In this case, like many others, it is the solution to our struggles.

Owing to these Indigenous lead efforts, we are now seeing manomin fields resprouting after years of scarcity. This demonstrates that it is not too late for our water bound relative, and it is certainly not too late for our Indigenous homelands. Much work is yet to be done, but we can remain optimistic.



Anishinaabe using Traditional Harvesting Techniques to collect manomin.



“BELIEVE IN THE SEEDS, THEY REMEMBER WHAT THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO DO,” says Winona LaDuke.

