

### EDITORIAL July 2017 CST on access to clean water

Water – it’s our life blood. It’s well known that a person can live for several weeks without food (Mahatma Ghandi survived for 21 days without food) but only three or four days without water, less in hot climates. And it’s everywhere – clean and sparkling – not! Jeff McMullen’s report for *New Matilda* of the findings of a decade-long study in Western Australia is an indictment on the country’s management of its water. Mining companies have been allowed to discharge nitrates in poisonous quantities into the water supply that bush communities are drinking and dying from.

*“This is a really important public health and human rights issue, particularly for the Aboriginal populations of the eastern Goldfields. The neglect that we have shown these populations over the years is being added to by our reluctance to clean up the water supply,” says one of Australia’s most respected epidemiologists, Professor Fiona Stanley.*

Pope Francis is particularly outspoken on the issue of the world’s social debt to the poor in terms of government efforts to ensure clean water is available to those who lack access, “because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity” (Laudato Si’ 30).

*He suggests the waste of water in both the developed world and in developing countries which possess it in abundance is “partly an educational and cultural issue, since there is little awareness of the seriousness of such behavior within a context of great inequality” (30).*

What can we in our communities do to right these wrongs towards the Aboriginal communities who are losing their lives by drinking contaminated water? Education is surely a major factor – how much influence do local authorities have over the rights of mining companies to discharge waste into the water system? On the other hand, how can we change our attitudes towards the country’s first peoples – those who, archaeologists tell us, may have occupied this land for centuries earlier than European settlement? We could start by educating ourselves about Aboriginal life – there is a significant body of literature in public libraries and the Mabo case drew many accounts from Aboriginal plaintiffs of daily injustices. Jesuit priest, lawyer and CEO of Catholic

Social Services, Frank Brennan, writes [here](#) honouring the last of the Mabo plaintiffs, David Passi. Read also the comment from John Frawley.

Catholic social teaching exhorts us to reflect on what we learn through study and observation to see what action we could take as a group. Assess the strengths of your group and discuss how best you might address these issues. Perhaps you could write letters to the management of the mining companies expressing your wish that they change their practices. Point out the extent to which their company’s discharge of poisons into the water supply is harming local communities. Be specific. Send copies to the local authorities in the region. Ask the local councils what they are doing to clean up the water supply. Discuss and reflect again and see what other actions you could take. History shows that the most effective campaigns start small so don’t be overwhelmed and deterred. Do what you can. Then celebrate. Pope Francis stresses the importance of finding joy in what we do and some of that joy might come from acting together.

### Indigenous Australia

#### Poisoned chalice: global water contamination

If a baby is fed unsafe water contaminated with chemical nitrates, the child turns blue. When deep-well bore water arrived in Australian bush communities people thought the big thirst was over. Jeff McMullen reports in *New Matilda* that a decade long study shows unsafe water is now cutting lives short.

[Read more](#)

#### NAIDOC from its beginnings

As we celebrate another annual NAIDOC Week, let’s take a moment to look at the steps taken to get us where we are today.

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#### Growing up under the intervention

Last week marked the 10th anniversary of the controversial Northern Territory Emergency Response, better known as the intervention. Kylie Sambo, a 24-year-old Warlmanpa and

Warumungu woman from Tennant Creek, was only 14 when the intervention was introduced and the military turned up in the Northern Territory. Today she is an activist, a hip hop artist, and a full-time carer for her nephew.

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## Environment

### American cities punish banks for supporting Dakota pipeline

Conservatives have long had a monopoly on the love of states' rights and local government, but in Trump's America, it's the left that has seized the opportunities of what Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis called "laboratories of democracy." Even as the Dakota Access Pipeline inches toward completion, multiple cities including Seattle, San Francisco, Albuquerque, Raleigh, and Philadelphia have spoken with their wallets, severing ties with the oil pipeline-funding banks—in particular, Wells Fargo.

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### Mining company spares rare zebra rock

The world's only operating zebra rock mine has decided to stop production at its biggest deposit, opting to protect the site for future generations.

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### NZ's love affair with plastic – why?

Nearly half our mayors have signed a letter calling for a compulsory charge on plastic bags, and surveys show strong public support for the idea. Still the government remains staunchly opposed. If other countries can do it, why can't we, wonders Kristin Hall for *The Spinoff*.

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### Brazilian president foils bid to lower Amazon protection

Brazil's president Michel Temer has vetoed a bill that would have lowered protections on 1.4 million acres of land – much of it in the Amazon rainforest; but a new bill seeks to open Amazon forests to farming and mining, writes Karl Mathiesen for *Climate Home*.

[Read more](#)

## The Political Community

### The five men who own almost as much wealth as half the world's population

Last year it was eight men, then it fell to six, and now it's almost five. While Americans fixate on [US president Donald] Trump, the super-rich are

absconding with our wealth, and the plague of inequality continues to grow, writes Paul Buchheit for *Alternet*.

[Read more](#)

### Fairtrade mark threatened in UK supermarket move

When four Sainsbury's executives met farmers from some of Africa's biggest tea-growing cooperatives in a hotel in Nairobi last month it should have been a mutual celebration of Fairtrade, the gold standard of ethical trading and the world's most trusted and best-known food certification scheme.

Instead, the world's largest retailer of Fairtrade products precipitated the greatest crisis in the scheme's 25-year history by announcing that it intended to drop the globally known Fairtrade mark for their produce, and replace it with the phrase "fairly traded".

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## Poverty

### Child abuse reports double since intervention

The Federal Government's controversial intervention in the Northern Territory has been exposed as a multimillion-dollar failure that only worsened the abuse of Indigenous children. About half of Indigenous children in the NT now come to the attention of the child protection system by the age of 10, the Royal Commission has heard.

[Read more](#)

## Refugees and asylum seekers

### Plan to restrict pension for older migrants unprecedented

Ethnic and welfare groups have warned a government plan to restrict pension access for elderly migrants is harsh, deeply unfair and takes the "unprecedented" step of punishing individuals for receiving welfare earlier in life.

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## Use It

**The Edmund Rice Centre** turns 21 this year. There's a gala dinner to celebrate on September 8.

[More details here.](#)

Cecily McNeill

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