# **First Nations Water Security Forum Video Transcript**

Most Australians would be really shocked to learn how many Indigenous people in remote communities still don't have access to healthy drinking water. In a lucky country like Australia, a rich and self-respecting country. We just can't sit by and accept that level of deprivation. That's why our Government’s investing 150 million dollars to support critical water infrastructure in remote First Nations communities.

Why I'm here, we've done a two days workshop to talk about water and how water is important to us and the problems the communities face out bush about water. The government need to take this seriously. It's a matter of people's lives and health that is at risk right now and if they provide the services that the Bush people need and to get people to healthy living again, and that'll be good to have to safe, clean drinking water, because water is life. No water, there is no life, you know, and what can we do about it? And this is life-giving water and everything depends on water. The plants, the insects, the animals, even us human beings. We all depend on water and that’s the most precious resource in this world today is water.

When I grew up in Mount Allan, when I was a kid back in the 70s, I grew up with the older people that showed me the waterholes around there, and they're drinking, drinking the water at Mount Allan there. They used to drink the dam water from there and the bore water, mixed together, and all of a sudden they stopped, then the Power and Water checked the water at the dam and the water had algae, the green thing, the green stuff, not allowed to drink, that it's salty or something, uranium water. That's why we stop, then the bore water started continuing, then the bore water had uranium too. I need to change this before something happens, but I'm just going to worry about my future for the kids, how they're gonna survive.

Back in early nineties when I was growing up, we didn't know what water quality was safety wise. If it was good or bad water. Our mothers and fathers, our grandfathers, our grandmothers were drinking that water, so we were doing the same thing. But as we start to grow up knowing all kinds of stuff like health problems, where all these health problems are coming from and with education and communicating with other people like we started to know that water is a main issue too. Like it's we need good quality of water, to have good quality of health.

One of our nurses spoke to Power and Water if they could get a copy of samples that they've been doing in the community. That's when they noticed a bit of, there was uranium in the water, in my community. They found the results back in, back, back in 2018 or 19, and early this year, they've installed a filtration system. Our community's really happy. The water quality tastes much better, and it's good for the kids because they're the next generation for our people.

So one of the keys about understanding water quality is having the scientific data and knowledge that is available for people to see, and to understand what it means. So for some of these communities, they're only receiving information about their water quality when something has gone wrong, when the water quality is bad, or when people's health is deteriorating. So what we need to do is to make sure that they're getting information when their water is safe to drink and it's good to drink. Because the implications of not having safe water means that they have to make decisions in their community. Do they drink the water or do they go and spend their money elsewhere, where bottled water is expensive and on occasions it's cheaper to go and buy soft drinks. That has implications for community health, for obesity, for diabetes. So, by improving drinking water within these remote communities, we've got an opportunity to really focus on people, the communities, and improve public health and individual health of these people that are living in these situations.

I've really enjoyed the opportunity to help to facilitate this session and just to bring together all of the different voices, from community, critically important, and from utilities and other service providers, and government agencies. It's a fairly unique opportunity to have had everyone sitting around in tables, nutting out the problems, the challenges, looking at actions and solutions, and all of this information, really important information in helping to improve drinking water in the bush will be taken forward to government to work out what the next possible actions are.

To take our people back to the Country, not only for Warlpiri, but the other language tribes too, that wanting to go back to their Country, to learn about the songs they want to hear and see their kids, to have social impacts on our Country and learning cultural activities. That way we may pass on and the kids on and on to pass onto their future, to carry on our Traditional ways of, you know, living out there. But because of the water here at Yuendumu, you know, it's really bad. But I hope in this conference the government can, you know, listen to us and do some action on it. It's been so long, we've been suffering, so we need action upon it.

We got many, many messages to take back, and we're taking those back in a number of different ways. I really value that coolamon as a symbol that we can go back to the Australian Government and to our department. And I think for people in Government departments back in Canberra, those symbols can be really powerful ways of helping people remember that the things that we do affect real people in their lives, in their health, and in their communities.