

Public health programs in the top western Torres Strait

Tanaio Anau, Bob Modee, Conwell Tabuai, Mildred Lowatta and Crossfield Manuel, Torres Strait Island Regional Council

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, host committee and special delegates. First and foremost, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge our God for His wisdom, knowledge and guidance. And, secondly, I would like to acknowledge and pay my respect to Elders both past and present on whose land I speak today. My name is Tanaio Anau; I'm from Boigu Island community, which is in the top western cluster of the Torres Strait region. I've been working as a full time environmental health worker (EHW) since 2014, and today I will be presenting along with four of my work colleagues.

The following topics that were chosen are based on the work that we do on ground, and these are some of the potential issues and challenges that can and have impacted on our service delivery.

Our region

The Torres Strait Islands are scattered between the tip of Queensland, Cape York Peninsula and Papua New Guinea. We are one of the two local councils found in the Torres Strait region. Our Council is made up of a Mayor and 15 Councillors who are elected to represent our 15 outer island communities. In 2008 as part of the state government's amalgamation policy, 15 island councils were amalgamated to form what is now the Torres Strait Island Regional Council. Since then, it has been our leaders' vision to empower our people, in our decisions, in our culture, for our future.

Our Environment and Health Section is made up of the following team. At the top, we have our Executive Manager for Community Services, Mr David Abednego, who is with us during this conference; our Manager for Environment and Health, Mr Ewan Gunn; our Admin support, Ms Kerrie Stanley, based in the Cairns office; Miss Philomena David, the Co-ordinator/mentor EHW based on Iama community; and we have 12 full-time EHW's based on each island division along with three part-time EHWs on Dauan and Warraber Island communities.

I will now hand over to Bob to share about the Mentoring Programs and awareness.

Mentoring Program

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. My name is Bob Modee. I'm from Ugar Island community. I started working as a full-time EHW in 2014. I have just recently been appointed as a Senior EHW. I look after 4 Communities in the Torres Strait - Dauan, Kubin, Saibai and St Pauls - delivering Mentoring Programs to each community, and also dealing with health issues on the ground.

The Mentoring Program gives me the opportunity to assist the EHWs that I look after in:

- Identifying and providing the appropriate response to environmental health issues in each of the communities I work with;
- Creating awareness of environmental Health matters with Community residents;
- Encouraging of community participation in addressing and promoting environmental health;
- Monitoring and enforcing of the Council's Local Law as Authorised Persons;
- Developing of a cooperative working relationship with the

Divisional Managers, Divisional Engineering Officers and other stakeholders, including community residents, rangers and police, and

- Liaising regularly with Queensland Health Staff within the community.

Part of my role is to do community awareness.

Spraying was done by Rob Malone from Queensland Health; he sprays areas that we treated with ProLink pellets, also spraying inside old tanks, tyres, black plastic and dark areas where the dengue mosquito (*Aedes Albopictus*) loves to hide.

Rob also did perimeter or boundary spraying around each house in the community. The boundary spraying targets mosquitos that harbour in the bush or shrub, stopping them flying into yards to feed on its blood meal.

Spraying into the bushes and shrubs from bottom to top, allows the insecticide to sit under the foliage of the leaves (not on top), where the mosquito comes to rest or sit.

Community awareness

While doing the yard inspections, I also carry with me dengue information factsheets, pamphlets, flyers etc.. They have facts about minimising breeding sites for mosquitoes and how to prevent the disease from spreading by wearing light-coloured loose-fitting clothing, applying repellent every 4 hours and burning mosquito coil around the house etc.

We also do presentations at school three times a year, educating kids and community members, doing awareness programs on the environment and health issues that we face on ground: the three main issues are:

- Animal Care - Looking after your pet.
- Hygiene - making sure wash your hands after using toilets etc.
- Vector Control - prevention of mosquitoes breeding.

These three issues are very important to our health and well-being and how we deal with these issues on a day-to-day basis.

I will now hand over to Mildred, to talk about the potential issues that they face on Boigu, Saibai and Dauan.

Environmental health issues - top Western Cluster

Thank you Bob. Hello everyone, my name is Mildred Lowatta from Dauan Island community. I have been working as an EHW for 4 years.

The top western cluster represents Boigu, Saibai and Dauan Island Communities. Each community lies approximately 5-6 kilometres away from the shoreline of Papua New Guinea coastal villages. The combined population of these islands is approximately 811 people, with 87% of the population being of Indigenous descent. There are also other government agencies such as Primary Health Clinics, Australian Border Force, Biosecurity, local primary schools and My Pathway job network that work in partnership with the local council.

Movement between the top western islands and the coastal villages of Papua New Guinea is closely monitored and inspected by the Australian Border Force Officers. Under the border treaty agreement that was signed between the Australian and Papua New Guinean governments, traditional visitors now use a Traditional Pass system instead of the passport system. Upon arrival, the

Traditional Pass is signed by the Australian Border Force Officer in charge. They are taken through an inspection and induction process which then allows the traditional visitors to do barter and trade within a limited time frame before they head back to their villages on the PNG coastline.

Some of the cross-border medical health issues that are common are tuberculosis, maternal and child health and emergency medical evacuations. Access to public toilets is limited in the township area for the visitors to use. It is the responsibility of the host tenant in the community for the usage of social housing toilets.

I will now hand it back over to Tanaio to talk about food safety.

Food safety

Food safety awareness is very important to help protect both the customers and ourselves from potential food borne illness. Food sales and fundraiser activities are very popular in our communities. Therefore, as an Authorised Person for the Council, our role is to liaise and speak with all food handlers and other community stakeholders prior to any sales. Council requires that all food sales must be recorded and signed on the food register sheet for each month.

Food safety awareness is then conducted on the following:

- Food handling and hygiene
- Home preparation (cooking, storage, transport and preparation)
- Personal hygiene
- Temperature control
- Food protection
- Purchasing (use-by date and best-before date)

I will now hand it over to Conwell to share about animal management.

Animal management

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, my name is Conwell Tabuai. I'm from Saibai Island community and I've been working as an EHW since 2014. Animal management is important for the health of our communities. A dog relies on us for its health and well-being; if neglected, it can impact our own health, especially children at a young age. Part of my role as an Animal Worker on the ground is to control and monitor the animal numbers, making sure that each pet owner is compliant with the local law requirements.

Council requires:

- All animals to be registered at the council
- All animals must be desexed before the age of 3 months and when the vet visits
- They must wear a collar and be on a leash.

Council provides free vet visits twice a year for the 15 island divisions. I do awareness by putting up notices and speaking directly to pet owners and getting all the consent forms signed before the vet comes. In my community, the total number of animals is 45. From the total, there are 37 dogs, of which 29 are male and 8 are female. Five female dogs are desexed and three intact. For male dogs, we have 24 desexed and five intact. Total number for cats is eight, of which four female cats are desexed, three males are desexed and one male intact.

I will now hand over to my colleague Crossfield to talk about local law and L.O.R.E.

In the performance of our duties as EHW/Animal Management Worker/Authorised Person we are always mindful of the two laws that govern how, when and why we do things. The local law {Local Government Act 2009} gives us processes bound by legislation. However our Traditional Lore which stipulates protocols and practices pertaining to cultural social roles and structures. For example, the dog is a totem to some families on various islands and not on others. EHWs working on these islands with the dog as totems need to be mindful and sensitive to their approach when dealing with animal management issues.

Figure 1 shows the two genders as they climb. The climbing is the teaching of the meaning of respect by the Elders. The core represents the respect and the teaching of lores at different stages by Elders. They use age old-life situations that have occurred through time.



Fig.1.

The teaching of the meaning of respect is done by both male and female Elders with the male Elder having to make the final decision. These Elders are found at each stage of the teaching and they are specific to their roles only. An Elder that teaches an Initiate cannot teach a child or infant. There is another Elder who performs that role.

In summarising our presentation, what makes us successful EHWs is the ability to sometimes not only speak our languages but also understanding the connections between the cultural lores and the local laws of the community that we grew up in. The English language in some communities is our 3rd or 4th language. As a result of intermarriages, part of our cultural inheritance allows us to grow into excellent multilingual speaking people with exceptional mediation skills by showing respect for all languages and cultural ties.

For more information

Tanaio Anau
Environmental Health Worker
Torres Strait Island Regional Council
66 Chamber Street
Boigu Island, QLD 4875
Email: tanaio.anau@tsirc.qld.gov.au

Glossary

EHW environmental health worker
PNG Papua New Guinea