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Guest Editors' Introduction

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Guest Editors' Introduction

Abstract
We are very pleased to present the *International Indigenous Policy Journal's* special edition on *Water and Indigenous Peoples.* The idea behind the special edition was to address the complications and nuances of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and water. While not exhaustive of all the issues regarding Indigenous peoples and water, we have been mindful to include in this edition papers that address many of the key indicators of unsafe drinking water on Indigenous reserve communities.

We feel that this edition successfully interrogates why many reserves are still out of reach of safe drinking water, and we hope that the insights offered open up further dialogue and possibilities for meaningful and useful policy in the future.

Keywords
water, Indigenous communities, reserve, legislation, policy, Canada

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We are very pleased to present the *International Indigenous Policy Journal's* special edition on *Water and Indigenous Peoples*. The idea behind the special edition was to address the complications and nuances of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and water. While not exhaustive of all the issues regarding Indigenous peoples and water, we have been mindful to include in this edition papers that address many of the key indicators of unsafe drinking water on Indigenous reserve communities.

Access to safe drinking water is a basic human need; we know that we need water to survive. As many in Canada do not even have to think of, or worry about, accessing safe drinking water, why is it that Indigenous communities experience such disproportionate water safety issues? If the majority of Canada's population enjoys safe drinking water, why is it that access to this basic human need is not extended to those on reserve? As well, why is it that Canada is not unique in Indigenous communities having limited access to safe drinking water?

While these questions on the surface seem very simple, the process of addressing them, as this special issue demonstrates, is highly complex. Further, while there are common threads of water inequality across many Indigenous communities, each has its own unique challenges and barriers to safe drinking water. As well, each community holds their own connection to the nearby waters.

To begin to address and scratch away at this seemingly larger than life issue, the papers that we have included in this special edition highlight and work through various themes relevant to the lack of access to safe drinking water by Indigenous peoples, both across Canada, as well as worldwide. Some of the themes within, as well as between, papers that begin to unravel the above questions posed include: how biological factors impact drinking supplies, the role of traditional knowledge in safe drinking water, how governance limits access to water, and how competing legislations impede safe access?

Looking to policy implications, the commonalities across Canada, the United States, Australia, Timor-Leste, and in Andean countries are insightful and offer opportunities for interventions. The strength of this edition is that while water issues differ contextually, there is utility in the shared experiences across borders of colonized Indigenous peoples.

What makes an edition like this so important is that this issue, lack of access to safe sustainable drinking water on reserve, seems to be highly misunderstood by key players who have the capacity and ability to ensure that safe drinking water is available on reserve. It seems like each camp understands their own small piece of the puzzle, but is unable to access a more holistic understanding of the issue. Part of the challenge in Canada lies in the narrow manner in which the rights of First Nations have been interpreted by the courts, and federal and provincial governments. These decisions have been made in the context of the longstanding and ongoing arguments made by First Nations in Canada that they have had rights to land, water, and other natural resources 'from time immemorial,' even in the context of signed treaties. These political and legal problems continue to exist despite the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution in 1982 and the creation of the *Canada Act*, which recognized the existence of Aboriginal and treaty rights.

In addition to the above, there has been little if any recognition and application of Indigenous knowledge in water management plans within First Nations communities in Canada and very limited consultation has taken place in developing these plans. For instance, the federal government has long been wrestling with Bill S-11, a bill created to legislate safe drinking water on reserve. In February of this year, the federal government announced that water standards on reserve needed to be improved, and with Bill S-8 (Bill S-11's successor), reserves were now to be under provincial standards and laws but without articulating how the capacity to create the upgrades and capital required by downloading provincial water standards onto reserves. While it is true that many of the conditions surrounding safe drinking water on reserve do need to be improved, the larger picture of how and why communities are currently unable to do so has to be examined. With the abundance of drinking water and sewage treatment available in Canada and throughout the world, the

problem of achieving sustainable water management in First Nations communities is clearly not a 'technical problem.'

We feel that this edition successfully interrogates why many reserves are still out of reach of safe drinking water, and we hope that the insights offered open up further dialogue and possibilities for meaningful and useful policy in the future.

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