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## Darwin Harbour bush tucker gets a health check

**Researchers are helping traditional owners to check the health of a bush tucker staple collected in and around the mangroves of Darwin Harbour.**



Credit: CDU

Concerns among the Larrakia people regarding the safety of shellfish collected near developed areas and sewage outfalls have led to the establishment of the Healthy Marine Harvest project, in which researchers from Charles Darwin University's Research Institute for Environment and Livelihoods will work with local Indigenous people to check the health of the shellfish at popular traditional gathering sites in and around Darwin Harbour.

'Determining whether shellfish and marine invertebrates collected for eating have elevated metal or bacterial levels has significant implications for the health of the people using these animals as a food source,' says Dr Padovan, a microbiologist at CDU.

'This study will analyse metal trace levels and microbial populations in shellfish and other marine invertebrates collected near sewage outfalls and industrial areas compared to samples collected from reference locations.'

'Larrakia families are having to travel further out from the traditional gathering sites in and around Darwin due to concerns about the health of bush tucker in urban areas, particularly in areas around the harbour that have been developed,' says Larrakia representative Ms Lorraine Williams.

'Bush tucker including the shellfish locally known as "longbums" are not only a healthy source of food, the collecting of bush tucker is also an important family tradition passed on through the generations,' says Ms Williams.

According to Ms Williams, the shell middens in and around Darwin are important archaeological features, indicating consistency of the collection of shellfish by generations of Indigenous women.

'What has changed is the range of species. There are not many shellfish species left in the Darwin harbour region, so we hope that this research may also lead us to some answers about the health of the ecosystem in general,' she says.

Ms Williams said that Larrakia trainees would also work alongside CDU staff in the laboratory learning new skills.

'The traditional owners involved in the project will then be able to relay the results to the various groups who are out shellfish collecting,' she says.

'Once we have established the baseline data, it is hoped that this type of research will be ongoing.

The Healthy Marine Harvest project is funded through [Territory Natural Resource Management](#).

Source: Charles Darwin University

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