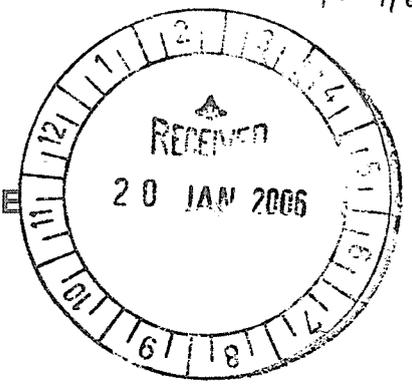




GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT; SCIENCE



Ref: 3716

Ms Mia Betjeman
Clerk Assistant
Legislative Council
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Ms Betjeman

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS IN RELATION TO CANE TOADS

Thank you for your letter of 15 September 2005 requesting a response to recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs in relation to petitions on preventing the entry and establishment of cane toads in Western Australia that were tabled in the Legislative Council between May and August 2005.

Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends that the State continue to explore all means of preventing the entry and establishment of the cane toad in Western Australia.

While considerable Government and community attention has focused on the issue of cane toads over the past year, cane toads have been spreading across Australia, both southwards and westwards, from Queensland for 70 years. No strategy or technique has been developed and successfully implemented to date to prevent that spread, despite intensive searching for bio-control agents and other methodologies.

The State Government is adopting an active adaptive management approach, that is, where a new technique or technology is demonstrated to be effective, it will be rapidly deployed in the fight against cane toads. Department of Conservation and Land Management staff are also maintaining close contact with officials from government agencies in other States and the Northern Territory as well as cane toad researchers throughout Australia to monitor the latest developments, and the Department has a representative on the National Cane Toad Taskforce. However, it needs to be noted that, with current technologies, there is only a very slight chance that the toads can be permanently prevented from reaching WA.

Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends that the Government ensure the adequate resourcing of government and non-government programs associated with managing the environmental, social, cultural and economic impact of the entry and establishment of the cane toad in Western Australia.

The State Government allocated \$600,000 for the control of cane toads in December 2004, and \$900,000 for the 2005/06 financial year. A further \$1 million was allocated in July 2005, comprising \$500,000 for a public awareness campaign and a further \$500,000 for a community-based control program through the 'Stop the Toad' Foundation. The Commonwealth pledged a matching allocation of \$600,000 in August 2005. Ongoing State funding post 30 June 2006 is being considered in the 2006/07 budget process.

Recommendation 3: The Committee recommends that the State Government, as a matter of priority, ensure that key biodiversity assets are identified and protected from the devastating effects of the establishment of the cane toad in Western Australia.

Following a community and scientific forum held in Kununurra in March 2005, a number of recommendations were made. One of these, Recommendation 7, was that "A biodiversity study of the Kimberley region should be funded in the medium term, but this **must not** detract from funding for the control of cane toads entering Western Australia." Clearly, the community priority was to invest most resources in attempts to prevent the entry and establishment of cane toads in WA.

Nevertheless, biodiversity asset identification and protection is one of the key platforms of the State Cane Toad Strategy. Key elements of this include:

- Developing and implementing a biological survey of the Kimberley region to identify species at risk, key areas requiring protection and investigating the role that islands might play in the conservation of species at risk.
- Identifying areas on the mainland that are unlikely to be colonised by cane toads because of natural geographical features, which could be used for translocating species at risk.
- Evaluating the feasibility of protecting critical habitat for geographically-restricted or threatened species with fencing and toad trapping programs.
- Assessing the risk of cane toads invading offshore islands and devising mitigation strategies for particular islands.

Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that the State Government ensure the adequate resourcing of research into mechanisms for the biological control of the cane toad.

The CSIRO has been researching methods for the biological control of cane toads since 1991 and the Commonwealth Government has allocated \$10 million to bio-control research since 1996. The Commonwealth Government announced a \$3 million funding boost to this research in August of this year (Attachment 1). Additionally, the Queensland Government allocated \$1 million for the development of a cane toad specific toxin in March of this year (Attachment 2). The Western Australian Government is considering its budgetary position and how best it can support these ongoing research programs into the biological control of cane toads, but our primary focus is on direct control against the toads moving towards our borders and border security, whereas the Commonwealth Government is investing primarily in biological control research.

Recommendation 5: The Committee recommends that the State Government continue to call on the Federal Government to provide matched funding for cane toad initiatives in Western Australia.

To date, the Commonwealth has matched the initial State allocation of \$600,000 only and I can assure the Committee that the Minister for the Environment has actively pursued the matter of full matching funding with the Federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator the Hon Ian Campbell. Unfortunately, in his response of 19 September 2005 (Attachment 3), Senator Campbell indicated that the additional State allocation in 2005 would not be matched by the Commonwealth. In his letter, Senator Campbell stated that the Commonwealth had committed over \$10 million to cane toad control measures since 1996.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on the Committee's recommendations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Bowler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

JOHN BOWLER MLA
ACTING MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT; SCIENCE

16 JAN 2006



Australian Government

Senator the Hon. Ian Campbell

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Joint Media Release

Australian Minister for the Environment and Heritage

Senator the Hon. Ian Campbell

&

Australian Minister for Education Science and Training

Dr Brendan Nelson MP

5 August 2005

C219/05

\$3.6 million to fight the cane toad

The Australian Government has stepped up the fight against the cane toad with a new \$3.6 million national package to combat the environmental menace.

The Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell, and the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, today announced a \$3 million funding injection for the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) to massively boost vital biological control research, with another \$600,000 for the joint Australian Government and Western Australian Government cane toad task force.

Senator Campbell said the Australian Government had already contributed almost \$7 million since 1996 on biological control studies and cane toad-trapping trials to combat the pest. The new funding would be made available through the Natural Heritage Trust and the CSIRO.

"The cane toad is a blight on our landscape, having already caused major damage to populations of Northern Territory species like the Northern Quoll," Senator Campbell said.

"Female cane toads lay 8000 to 35,000 eggs at a time and breed at least twice a year. Their large numbers in some States have had a devastating effect on our wildlife - they compete for food with other native animals and are likely to carry disease that can be transmitted to and reduce numbers of our frogs and fish species.

"So while short-term measures like traps are important to slow the toads down, their capacity to breed means we will not stop them for good unless we find a biological solution."

Dr Nelson said the \$3 million funding would boost the CSIRO's research effort into biological control of the invasive pest.

"Though there are a range of activities we can carry out to slow the progression of the cane toad, a key step towards the eradication of this pest will be found through scientific research," Dr Nelson said.

"The aim of this research is to identify a gene critical to toad development and then manipulate the gene to prevent the transition from tadpole to adult toad. The project will then look at ways in which to 'deliver' this gene through the toad population. This type of research could be the long term answer to the detrimental impact cane toads are having on our unique environment.

"The ongoing CSIRO research can now be extended and fast tracked thanks to the Government's additional funding."

For more information on cane toads visit <http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/publications/cane-toad/index.html>

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**Premier & Trade
The Hon. Peter Beattie MP****27 March 2005****SMART \$1M TO STOP CANE TOAD'S TOXIC HOP**

Premier Peter Beattie has announced the Queensland Government will commit \$1 million towards biotechnology research aimed at halting the cane toad in its tracks.

The announcement is the first from a clutch of initiatives that Mr Beattie will release next month, as part of a broad-ranging Smart State strategy.

The funds will be committed over two years, beginning in the 2005-06 budget to be unveiled by Treasurer Terry Mackenroth in June.

"The government will make \$1 million available for work to finally develop an effective cane toad control," Mr Beattie said.

"The funding will go to the Australasian Invasive Animal Cooperative Research Centre and the Institute for Molecular Bioscience at the Queensland Bioscience Precinct at the University of Queensland.

"The work will be based at the Queensland Bioscience Precinct at St Lucia.

"Initially the task will be to assess the prospects of developing a cane toad-specific bait derived through biotechnology.

"We may not find a weapon of mass destruction against cane toads, but some of the best brains in Queensland biotech will be focussed on the task of controlling the spread of this amphibious vandal.

"Queensland gave Australia the cane toad - it's only right that we do our best to stop its rampage across northern Australia," Mr Beattie said.

The biotech research will focus on developing a toxic bait that is specific to cane toads.

The research will use biotechnology to identify, develop and test a potential toxin that will only hurt cane toads and not native Australian animals or plants.

"This toxin would be subject to rigorous testing and regulatory approvals to ensure it would not harm

other species," Mr Beattie said.

"If successful, it would be put into baits that would be eaten by and harm only cane toads.

"One potential source of the toxin may be the toxic secretion that the cane toad uses in self defence.

"It may be possible to use biotechnology to modify the poisonous compounds produced by the cane toad and turn this weapon against its own species.

"If this works, it is foreseeable that Queenslanders and other Australians may one day be buying baits off the shelf to help control cane toads in their own backyards - like Ratsak for toads.

"Importantly, a safe toad control could be used to reduce the environmental impact of toads in ecologically sensitive areas such as national parks and world heritage areas.

"Wherever the toad goes it leaves a long list of native Australian casualties - including other species of frogs, quolls, lizards and snakes.

"This research will fill an identified gap and priority in the existing Australian research programs aimed at controlling the cane toad," Mr Beattie said.

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SENATOR THE HON IAN CAMPBELL
 Minister for the Environment and Heritage
 Senator for Western Australia

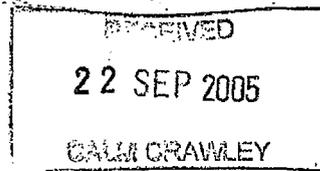
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21 SEP 2005
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*MC
RF
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The Hon Dr Judy Edwards MLA
 Minister for the Environment; Science
 29th Floor Allendale Square
 77 George's Terrace
 PERTH WA 6000



19 SEP 2005

Dear Minister

Thank you for your letter of 4 July 2005 concerning the management of cane toads in Western Australia. I appreciate your letter and regret the time it has taken to reply.

The effects of cane toads on the Australian environment and its wildlife remain a pressing national issue. I am therefore grateful for your advice on the significant progress that has been made in developing and implementing the joint Cane Toad Management Initiative in our state and the Northern Territory. The commitment across the community to this venture is very encouraging.

You will recall I invited your Government in August last year to join the Australian Government to provide matching funding for an initiative to prevent cane toads entering our state. In December 2004 you accepted my offer and committed \$600,000 to the Cane Toad Management Initiative. We also agreed that the experience and involvement of the Northern Territory would increase the effectiveness of the programme and invited their assistance.

I am pleased to confirm that the Natural Heritage Trust Board has now released \$600,000 from the Western Australia Strategic Reserve, in line with my commitment to match funding to the joint initiative.

I welcome the additional \$900,000 the Western Australian Government has committed to this work and note your request for matching Australian Government funds. While the work through the Cane Toad Management Initiative is important in tackling the advance of cane toads towards Western Australia, and I welcome the further commitment of Western Australian funds, I believe our principal goal, and the biggest investment, should be in finding a long-term biological solution. This was the thrust of my recent announcement that the Australian Government would commit \$3 million to extend and speed up CSIRO research into a biological control agent – a solution that, once found, will be of immense benefit to the nation's environment.

Handwritten notes:
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 2. ...
 23/9

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Handwritten: 3 27/9

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FILE

I have also offered \$422,000 to the Northern Territory to match its commitment to a programme of cane toad control. This takes the Australian Government's total expenditure and commitments for cane toad control measures since 1996 to more than \$10 million.

I believe these measures will provide the best opportunity to solving this serious problem.

I look forward to continuing to work with you and with the Northern Territory Government to combat the cane toad menace.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Campbell', with a stylized flourish at the end.

IAN CAMPBELL

Cc The Hon Kim Chance MLC