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CANE TOAD CONTROL PROGRAM CONTINUES TO GATHER MOMENTUM

The Torres Strait Regional Authority's (TSRA) Land and Sea Management Unit and the Torres Shire Council (TSC) are working towards controlling the Cane Toad population on Thursday Island through a number of strategies, including new fencing.

In response to the growing populations on Thursday Island, the TSRA and TSC are conducting sustained Cane Toad Busts and in partnership with My Pathways, participants have commenced installing Cane Toad exclusion fencing around fresh water bodies.

The TSRA Chairperson, Mr Joseph Elu, said Cane Toads will have a devastating impact on the biodiversity of the Torres Strait region, this is something the community want to prevent from happening.

"The spread of Cane Toads across the Northern Territory and into Western Australia is known to have severely impacted Indigenous communities through the loss of culturally significant animals such as goannas, fresh-water crocodiles, and native quolls," Mr Elu said.

"The traditional owners in those areas know these culturally important animals have eaten the Cane Toad. This is decimating animal populations across huge areas of land.

"Water pythons that some Traditional Owners call *The Rainbow Serpent* have not been seen in a long time – we do not want the islands of the Torres Strait to experience the same fate."

Mr Elu said a schedule of Cane Toad busts are being implemented by the TSRA and TSC with the aim to reduce the population over the coming months.

"447 toads were collected from the Council depot area and reservoirs on 27 October during one hour of Cane Toad busting, and a further 450 were collected from the area on 11 November," Mr Elu said.

"Since cane toad busts commenced in late October, more than 4,000 toads have been collected and destroyed. This highlights the number of toads on Thursday Island.

"During the dry conditions experienced in October and November, high concentrations of toads were observed at the main water bodies. Fortunately, this made them easier to collect.

"A key strategy is restricting Cane Toads from accessing freshwater bodies on the island with the installation of exclusion fences. If Cane Toads can be isolated from water they will die as they need to access water every three days."

Mr Elu said working with the TSC is an important approach as jointly we have been able to collaborate and develop a Cane Toad Control strategy for the long-term management of this invasive species.

“The success of this strategy is largely dependent on a whole of government, business and community approach to work together to achieve success,” Mr Elu said.

“We want to control the existing cane toad population, stop it spreading to other islands, and stop re-population of the Torres Strait from the mainland and we can only do this by working together.

“This approach has previously been successful on Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory, and we are confident we can adapt their methods and learn from their success.”

Mr Elu said it is generally known that Cane Toads have been unintentionally brought into the Torres Strait over a long time. The TSRA will not be seeking legal action against any organisation or individual in relation to the Cane Toad infestation on Thursday Island.

“Cane Toads have been reported in various places all over Thursday Island, including Tamwoy Town, Green Hill Fort Dam and Sadies Lookout track,” Mr Elu said.

“It is thought that the recent burning of over 75 per cent of vegetated areas on Thursday Island opened up more country for Cane Toads to move and hunt at night, so they now have access to areas where they have not been seen in the past.

“Of concern are the recent sightings of cane toads on Horn Island where there had not previously been known to have an established toad population. There are no known cane toad populations on the other islands in the Torres Strait.”

Mr Elu said the launch of a *Torres Toad Terminator* campaign is planned for early 2015, and is aimed at getting community involvement in the project.

“The campaign will be important for people to see how they can help with the problem in a safe, fun environment,” Mr Elu said.

“This being said, there are some native frogs on Thursday Island that we do not want people mistaking for Cane Toads.

“These native frogs are some of the important wildlife we want to protect.”

Mr Elu thanked the TSRA’s Land and Sea Management Unit and the TSC for the joint strategic planning of the Cane Toad control program and wished them every success.

ENDS

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Caption: Large female cane toad (Image: Clarence Valley Conservation in Action Landcare)



Caption: Cane toad eggs which are laid in strings at the water's edge and can be pulled out like fishing line within first 12 hours of being deposited. (Image: Kimberley Toad Busters)



Caption: TSRA staff member, Harry Seriat and Pearson Wigness holding some Cane Toads removed from the TSC depot (Image: TSRA).



Caption: Champion Cane Toad busters Randal Ingram, Jacob David, Nikolas Visini-Hall and Buckley Ingram caught 447 Cane Toads in one hour (Image: TSRA).