



Friday, 1 February 2019

Standing Committee on Environment and Energy
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

RE: Inquiry Into Controlling The Spread Of Cane Toads

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information concerning the spread of cane toads in the Torres Strait Region. Unfortunately cane toads have become established on two of the inner islands (Thursday and Horn) and have been detected on two more inner islands (Prince of Wales and Hammond). Torres Strait Communities are consequently concerned about the strong possibility of cane toads becoming established on more islands.

The 296 islands of the Torres Strait present a unique biodiversity refuge with species (mostly fauna) that would be considered significant at the state and national level. This includes species with restricted distribution (i.e. only found in Torres Strait), species that share distribution with PNG and species that visit the Torres Strait as part of a migration passage (internationally significant). There have been several incidents on three outer islands (Badu, Moa and Saibai). Cane toads have been captured before they escaped off barges or found dead inside shipping containers. Consequently, there are currently no recorded cane toad populations on the other islands of the Torres Strait.

The TSRA's Land and Sea Management Unit (LSMU) has worked hard to forge strong partnerships with Local Councils, schools, shipping companies, Federal and State Government Departments to mitigate these threats. Highlights of activities undertaken to mitigate the threat of cane toads spreading to further inhabited islands include:

- The successful development of advanced eDNA survey technologies for cane toads with James Cook University. This technology is expected to have widespread application across Australia.
- TSRA rangers conducting regular physical surveys for cane toads on the inhabited outer islands
- Partnering with local schools, Community Development Program (CDP) provider to build cane toad fences on the Horn Island and Cairns Depots, providing training to shipping staff and installing state of the art cane toad traps.
- The production of culturally appropriate brochures and posters increasing community awareness of the issue and management actions.
- Community education projects in collaboration with all schools across the Torres Strait to deliver cane toad awareness, using novel games.
- The production of signs at major transport hubs encouraging people to check their loads for toads.
- Providing training to TSRA Rangers and Council officers across the region to tackle the increasing biosecurity threats in partnership with the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR).
- Development of a novel cane toad eradication program for Thursday Island with the support of the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy.

Prevention is the only management option for the outer islands of Torres Strait, due to size and the availability of multiple water bodies. Better biosecurity measures to prevent the spread of cane toads are most cost effective and viable alternative. The eradication of cane toads is only theoretically possible on very small islands with containable water bodies, such as Thursday Island. This is still a very daunting task.

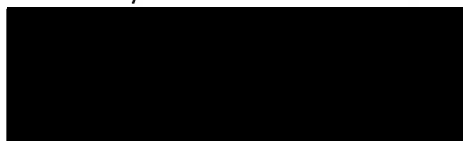
Further mitigation activities are urgently required to ensure the remaining Torres Strait islands remain free of toads. Moreover, we have an international obligation to prevent the spread of invasive species to neighbouring countries, including Papua New Guinea, located 1.5km north of the Torres Strait Island of Saibai (Torres Strait Treaty, 1985).

TSRA is committed to reduce the chances of cane toads further spreading to other Torres Strait islands. However, we do not have the capacity or authority to mitigate the threat from shipping activities across the region. TSRA is therefore requesting that the Committee support Federal and State Governments efforts to deliver effective quarantine, early response and increased surveillance by supporting the following initiatives, in order of urgency:

- Engagement with major transport providers to outline their General Biosecurity Obligations under the Biosecurity Act 2014.
- Development of a monitoring strategy to prevent biosecurity risks to the region
- An assessment of priority pests and their entry pathways.
- Development of quarantine procedures, particularly for freight, throughout the region.
- Development and implementation of a biosecurity plan to mitigate the threat of cane toads in the region.

Your consideration and support in helping us to increase efforts, to reduce the spread of cane toads to our pristine Torres Strait Islands, would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Mr. Napau Pedro Stephen.

Mr Napau Pedro Stephen
Chairperson, Torres Strait Regional Authority