

## CANE TOADS

### *Statement by Minister for the Environment*

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for the Environment)** [9.57 am]: I inform the house that last weekend I had the pleasure of visiting the Kimberley to see first-hand the on-the-ground actions the community and the Department of Environment and Conservation are undertaking to combat the westward spread of cane toads. Members will be aware that since December 2004 the state government has committed more than \$12 million to the state cane toad initiative. A significant proportion of this money has gone to scientific research into biological control and a biological survey of Kimberley islands, but there has also been a considerable commitment to two community-based groups, Kimberley Toad Busters, and Stop the Toad Foundation.

While in Kununurra I was pleased to meet Lee Scott-Virtue and other representatives of Kimberley Toad Busters and travel with them to the cane toad control zone at Saddle Creek, about 80 kilometres east of the Western Australia-Northern Territory border. I had the opportunity to meet Kimberley Toad Busters in the field and join them for several hours of toad busting. On the Saturday I was provided with a demonstration of the cane toad sniffer dog program that DEC has implemented. I also met with Kimberley Toad Busters' volunteers at an induction session and was pleased to see that new equipment, including a four-wheel-drive trayback ute, trailer and quad-bike purchased with state government funding, had been delivered to the group. Ms Scott-Virtue accompanied me on a flight over the key target area in which the volunteers and DEC staff have been toad busting. This flight highlighted the enormity of the challenge we face. The area is immense—bigger than Tasmania—and most of it is inaccessible, particularly during the wet season. It is expected that cane toads will arrive in the Kimberley within the next 12 months as toads have been detected at Fish Creek, just 40 kilometres inside the territory border. However, depending on how the rest of the wet season goes, it is possible the toads could be in Western Australia by midyear. The level of community engagement in the Kimberley is remarkable, and the commitment, passion and dedication of the community members, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, is inspirational.

Although a state government-commissioned report found there was no evidence that the physical removal of cane toads has slowed the westward invasion, the volunteer groups have shown that with dedication and persistence localised control of cane toad populations is achievable. Therefore, the Carpenter government believes community-based programs can play a role in controlling this most destructive introduced species in targeted areas. Although research into biological control agents and identifying biodiversity assets in the Kimberley that are at risk are critical elements in developing strategies to deal with cane toads, the government will continue to support community action.

The Rudd federal Labor government has announced additional funding of more than \$2 million for a national approach to cane toads. I have already written to the federal Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, Peter Garrett, expressing the Carpenter government's willingness to work collaboratively with the commonwealth and the community on this matter. I will be reinforcing this when I meet with Mr Garrett next month.

I place on record my thanks to Lee Scott-Virtue and her intrepid colleagues in Kimberley Toad Busters, and the Kimberley community in general, for their dedication, enthusiasm and commitment to working with the government and acting now for the future to combat this environmental scourge.