

CANE TOADS

Statement by Minister for the Environment

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Minister for the Environment) [9.36 am]: As part of the state cane toad initiative, a program coordinator position has now been established in Kununurra to promote cooperation and a coordinated approach among the various stakeholders involved in cane toad control operations. This is an important position that will ensure that we deliver the best value for the state's \$12 million investment in stemming the westward march of the toads. The role will also provide executive support to a stakeholder working group, as well as a liaison point for Department of Environment and Conservation staff and external groups on cane toad management issues. The stakeholder working group will provide a forum for interested stakeholders to contribute to the development of management strategies for cane toads in the Kimberley, and to provide advice to government on cane toad management initiatives. Specifically, the group will promote a coordinated approach to cane toad management across the region, as well as developing and reviewing strategies for mitigating the impact of cane toads on the region.

Members are aware that since December 2004 the state government has committed more than \$12 million to the state cane toad initiative. This amount includes \$900 000 a year for a government control program, and more than \$1.2 million for community action. The Kununurra volunteers, under the banner of "Kimberley Toadbusters", as well as "Stop the Toad Foundation" and others, along with the state's own cane toad team, have worked very hard over the past four years to stop toads getting to Western Australia. Despite these efforts, toads are reportedly within 15 to 30 kilometres from our border. Actions that have taken place in the past 12 months include control operations at major breeding sites in the Northern Territory, developing strategies to identify sites at high risk from the introduction of these noxious animals, and the identification of sites of significant ecological and environmental importance. The Kimberley island's biological survey has also begun and will identify fauna sanctuary sites to protect priority wildlife from cane toads.

Efforts against cane toads in the Northern Territory continue, and a key focus now will be identifying dry season refuges and eliminating as many toads as possible from these areas. We hope to keep the toads out of Western Australia at least for another year.

I applaud the Kimberley community, led by Kimberley Toadbusters, for their contribution to the cane toad battle. Their efforts have demonstrated fantastic resolve, and we hope that their efforts will be successful. Biological control remains our best hope for the long-term control of cane toads on a regional level. This is why the state government is investing in scientific research to map the cane toads' genome. This is the first genome project in Australia. It will put the search for the cane toads' Achilles heel on to a systematic basis, thereby maximising the prospects for success. The government also remains committed to working collaboratively with the Northern Territory, other states and territories, and the commonwealth, to develop a nationally coordinated approach to cane toad control and management.