

CANE TOADS

Grievance

MRS C.A. MARTIN (Kimberley) [9.34 am]: I rise to grieve about a pesky little creature called *Bufo marinus* that has been around for 70 years. It started off in Queensland and is now beginning to invade -

Mr R.C. Kucera: Just like John Howard!

Several members interjected.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I am not allowed to say that!

Cane toads have been slowly making their way over to Western Australia and are now at the upper reaches of the Ord River tributaries, causing people quite a few problems. Cane toads are mean little critters which cannot be eaten by any other species of animal -

Several members interjected.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: I am not talking about John Howard!

Crows flip them over on their back and go for the gut, which is fine, but the Kimberley does not have a lot of crows, and of course the cane toads are not heading down to South Australia! Cane toads are a real issue. Cane toads have no use: every now and then a taxidermist might stuff one; I would like to see all cane toads stuffed, but it would be quite expensive. In Queensland they are used as souvenirs.

These pesky little critters have been around for about 70 years. They have no practical use. They were introduced to Australia at a time when people could do virtually whatever they wanted and introduced all sorts of feral species. Cane toads have got one up on the rabbits - they are actually better than rattlesnakes, as a matter of fact. It is hard to believe how rapidly they are breeding, and they are moving closer and closer to the Kimberley region.

In Kununurra there is a group called Kimberley Toadbusters, led by Lee Scott-Virtue. She is a wonderful woman who, like hundreds of people in Kununurra and thereabouts, does not want to sit on her hands and watch this horrible invasion of creepy crawlies. The Kimberley Toadbusters have been out toadbusting every weekend. The group started off with a handful of people four years ago, and now there are hundreds involved. One of the Community Development and Employment Program organisations runs a program for people to go out for the whole weekend and catch toads. These disgusting little creatures are euthanased in a freezer and then buried.

A couple of real issues have surfaced. I have a message here from Lee Scott-Virtue, which reads -

We are most grateful to have your support -

This is a message to Hon David Templeman -

and the support of the Premier and the Hon D Templeman in supporting the recent grants to the KTBs.
The acknowledgement of their work . . .

The Hon Kim Chance has also been most supportive in assisting us with quarantine issues.

We would like to extend an invitation to any parliamentary member . . .

I asked them just to say on the government side, but they said any, so that is okay -

. . . to come on a KTB toadbust, any weekend . . .

The toadbust is a family activity, and they all go around killing toads. Do not bother bringing baseball bats or any of that, it is not allowed; the toads have to be euthanased.

I have also been asked by the Kimberley Toadbusters to deliver to Parliament this document, which is a chronology of what has happened in the past four years. This document is really interesting, because only the state government has helped this group -

Dr S.C. Thomas: Tell the truth! You have to be honest!

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: That is what it says. If the member wants to read it, he can; there is also one for the Minister for the Environment and Conversation. It is a good document.

One major problem in the fight against cane toads is cross-border issues. The last time I checked, cross-border issues were actually the responsibility of the federal government.

Several members interjected.

If members want to have a yarn, they should get on their feet. I have only got seven minutes, so get over it!

The most important issue I want to raise in this house is cross-border responsibility, which is not that of Western Australia or of the Northern Territory; it is the federal government's responsibility. What has the federal government done to assist WA to deal with this disgusting little critter? Members should see it; it reminds me of a couple of members I have noted on the opposition side! I am trying to be nice and to deliver my grievance nicely!

Organisations like the KTB must be provided with more funds. Can members imagine just sitting there, waiting to be invaded and doing nothing? These people go out every weekend; they commit their own time and resources simply because they feel helpless. The state government has assisted them - the minister is a legend; what can I say? - but the federal government, which has the real responsibility for cross-border issues, does nought. I mean nought, because the only things the federal government funds are in the capital city. It funds nothing up in the Kimberley. All we see is the people involved sitting there feeling helpless, wanting to stop the cane toad movement. People from Queensland who now live in Kununurra said, "Oh, you'll get used to it." No; we do not want to get used to it. For 70 years cane toads have been making their way over to Western Australia. When they are in our backyards in Perth, I will be really upset because we have enough creepy crawlies around without these disgusting little critters. What do they do? They spit in dog bowls and make dogs sick. People in the Kimberley love their dogs. Without their dogs they are not whole. These disgusting little critters spit in dog bowls and make dogs sick and then what do they do? They get into chook pens. Where would we be without eggs?

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: No; not the toilet. What happens? They bugger up the chooks! Cane toads are coming; they are eating all our insects and bugs. What about the native species, and when a snake eats a cane toad? Can members imagine life without snake or goanna on the menu? Come on! Once cane toads are here, they will destroy all the native species that I and people like me enjoy. I have to say to the minister that we hope he can actually put some pressure on where it is needed; namely, on the federal government to get it moving, because we need help.

The SPEAKER: Order! The document can lay on the table of the house for the balance of this day's sitting.

[The paper was tabled for the information of members.]

The SPEAKER: I remind members that the convention of this place is that grievances be heard without interjection. It appears that everyone in the place has forgotten that, including very senior members of this chamber who should know better. I warn people that from now on I will instruct the Acting Speakers who usually take grievances that that will be the rule.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah - Minister for the Environment) [9.41 am]: I thank the member for Kimberley for her grievance and for her ongoing passion and advocacy for her community, particularly regarding this menace, the cane toad. We have had a laugh, and when cane toad issues are raised it causes some mirth. Nonetheless, I think we all understand the seriousness of this threat to the biodiversity of our state, particularly in the Kimberley, which is the front-line threat area. I suppose also we face some very real threats if the cane toad is successful in entering the very important part the state that is the Kimberley - a unique part of our state and the world - which is very rich in biodiversity and in natural conservation values. This is a serious issue; it is an issue on which we need bipartisan support and certainly cross-government support.

I acknowledge also the work the member for Kimberley has done as the local member. She has supported the Kimberley Toad Busters group for a long period and Lee Scott-Virtue and others who have joined the ongoing on-the-ground fight by locals and people whom they have, if we like, recruited as part of this fight. It is a very serious fight. As the member has already highlighted, the sorties they undertake every weekend across the border into the Northern Territory are very well coordinated and strongly focused on protecting the Kimberley. As the member has already said, they deserve our sincere gratitude for their efforts. However, they need to be sure that those who live in the south west and outside the Kimberley understand just how critical this fight is and that they will get the support they deserve from governments at all levels, including from the department for which I am responsible. It must, of course, be a coordinated response.

I am pleased we were able to announce recently funding of \$240 000, for which the member was very pleased to present a cheque towards the ongoing fight. The decision by this Carpenter government to ensure that we allocate another designated officer to work with and help the coordination of the effort on the ground is an important milestone. I acknowledge also the volunteers involved in the recent Great Toad Muster held by the Stop the Toad Foundation. The local community has responded brilliantly. We need to support the Kimberley Toad Busters, and this state government will continue to support their efforts in that area.

As the member said quite rightly, we need an understanding from the federal government that this is a cross-border issue, and one that the federal government needs to not only show leadership in, but also support the

efforts of the local community and the state government. That is why I have been pressuring the current federal government to understand that we need to develop a toad strategy aimed at militating and working against the threat of cane toads to Western Australia. It also needs to continue the research to find a biological or genetic solution to this issue. That is why the Carpenter government, through the Premier, also announced recently, as part of our ongoing fight against the cane toad, that it would also provide \$500 000 towards the ongoing genetic fight, if we like, to find a solution to this problem. That money will go to assist the efforts of the Australian cane toad genome program led by Professor Grant Morahan. We need to contribute research dollars to ensure the result is multilayered and that we attack this insidious creature in a variety of ways. Let there be no doubt that the toad will get into the state at some stage in the future, and that will be a tragedy. However, we must do everything possible on the ground to prevent it and do the necessary research.

I want to highlight some other things. Since 2003-04 this government has invested more than \$11.8 million in the fight against the cane toad. We have put our dollars up-front for the community, for research and for coordinating a multilayered approach. Now we are saying to the federal government that it must come to the party because this threat is not a Western Australian threat. Research is showing that the cane toad is adapting to climate and that it is a threat to places like Sydney and places further south. It will be to the detriment of the current federal government if it allows the cane toad to march further south without a genuine federal government approach and without understanding the threat of this insidious creature. That is why I am pleased that Peter Garrett, the federal opposition spokesperson on environment and climate change, understands that. He has announced that if a Rudd government is elected, it will invest \$2 million in an overall across-government and across-state approach and take leadership on this issue. It is a very important forward-thinking initiative by the opposition spokesperson on the environment. Come 24 November when the Rudd government is elected, we will have a federal environment minister who understands the importance of this issue and will act and work in cooperation with the state government, local governments and the magnificent volunteers the member for Kimberley mentioned. We look forward to that change. I am certain that the only way in which we could get the current federal environment minister to react would be if cane toads were marching into the seat of Wentworth. I thank the member for her grievance and I can assure her that we will continue the fight against this insidious creature.