

STOP THE TOAD

KEEP WA CANE TOAD FREE

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The Great Toad Muster

Strategic Plan

2009

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INTRODUCTION

The Stop the Toad Foundation (STTF) cane toad strategy is centered around an annual Muster; a volunteer, community based event which aims to remove as many toads as possible from the frontline through the combined effort of hand collection, trapping and fencing. The Muster is held at the end of the northern dry season, when water is scarce and cane toads are most vulnerable. This usually occurs in September/October and the Muster runs for approximately one month.

In the three years of its field operations, STTF has removed 130,000 cane toads during their annual Muster with the help of over 200 volunteers, contributing to slowing the westward movement of toads into WA. The Muster has also allowed STTF to trial different methods of cane toad control to determine which are more efficient in completely clearing areas of toads. The Foundation has developed exclusion barrier fencing and demonstrated during the 2008 Muster that it is the most efficient method in manual cane toad control available in Australia.

Exclusion fences are a major advance in cane toad control and have significant potential to be used across northern Australia to protect areas of high biodiversity and World Heritage Listed sites, such as Purnululu National Park. They are by far the most efficient way to manually remove toads from an area and are the only recorded, demonstrated model that can completely clear an area of cane toads (<http://www.stopthetoad.org.au/main/publications.php>).

In the light of news that a cane toad has been found on W.A.'s border, STTF is concerned that the resolve of the public, the government and its agencies should not waiver. This is a crucial period in the fight to hold back the tide. STTF believes that the battle to STOP THE TOAD should be maintained, particularly in the light of the success of The Foundation's exclusion fencing methods recently trialed in the Northern Territory.

STTF will be running its fourth annual Great Toad Muster from September 12th until October 12th this year. 2009's operation will be an expanded and ambitious effort. We aim to have 100-200 community volunteers in the field from the W.A. border eastward into the Territory. This is a daunting exercise, but we are heartened by the support already pledged by the Federal Government, volunteers and sponsors.

AIMS

The purpose of this plan is to detail what the Stop the Toad Foundation (STTF) aims to do over the 2009 Dry season to control cane toads moving into Western Australia and how the Foundation's fencing strategy could compliment the work being carried out by The Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and the Kimberley Toad Busters (KTB).

STTF hope to achieve the following outcomes during the 2009 Great Toad Muster;

1. The reduction and complete removal of cane toads from key refuge areas near the frontline of their advance towards Western Australia.
2. The completion of comparative data sets from previous years activities.
3. The success of the new exclusion fencing as a tool for cane toad control. We estimate that we will be able to cover a larger amount of land with a smaller number of people.
4. The acceptance of exclusion fencing by the broader community as a best practice management tool against cane toads in the north end of Australia.
5. A minimal impact on other wildlife. Our fences are made with wildlife friendly gates. All staff and volunteers will be involved in the monitoring of native wildlife impacts.
6. Engagement of community and individuals across northern Australia for a National Eradication Week (NEW). We aim to have numerous communities/groups involved during this event.
7. During the NEW, demonstrate that people power can reduce the numbers of cane toads in Australia, whilst a biological solution is being sought.
8. The attendance and support of large numbers of volunteers. We aim to have between 25-30 persons per night every night of the Muster and the NEW.
9. All strategies are cost effective and we do not go over budget for the Muster.
10. Combined stakeholder monitoring of the sites of the Muster 2009 for cane toad activity for 2 months after the event.

PLANS TO ACHIEVE OBJECTIVES

STTF has been running on-ground toad control operations for three years, giving us the knowledge and skills to run a safe, effective and successful campaign (<http://www.stophthetoad.org.au/main/publications.php>). We also have a large equipment inventory which includes vehicles, generators, tents, fridges, freezers, safety gear and all toad busting equipment.

STTF has a broad knowledge base to draw from through our Committee of Management. Members include scientists Dr Andrew Storey and Dr Helen Robertson, lawyer Robert Edel and Kimberley author Russell Gueho. Also on the Board is Ken Bradley, Public Trustee and STTF Treasurer, who will closely manage Caring for Country funds.

Graeme Sawyer, founder of Frogwatch in the NT, is STTFs Regional Coordinator. Graeme has been working with cane toads since 1991, so has extensive knowledge of their biology and behavior.

STTF has a full time Campaign Manager, who will oversee all toad control activities and be responsible for contract staff such as Camp Managers and Team leaders.

Partnerships formed by STTF with government groups, corporate sponsors, indigenous groups, local community groups, local businesses, scientific and environmental groups will increase our capacity to complete this project. It will also allow for feedback on the location of our work.

STTF relies heavily on volunteers. Our large volunteer database come from all over the world and have a multitude of skills such as setting up bush camps, working in remote areas and nursing, that have been invaluable in the field.

The 2009 Muster is largely funded by the Federal Government's Caring for our Country grants scheme. The ABN Foundation has also pledged their continual support for the Muster strategy for 2009 until 2011.

The following outline demonstrates the steps that will be undertaken to achieve our goals;

1. Involvement and communication with all stakeholders to collect intelligence on the extent and position of the current toad front line.

Specific stakeholders include:

- Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC); Errol Kruger, Corrin Everett and team in Kununurra
- Kimberley Toad Busters (KTB); Ben Scott-Virtue
- Keep River National Park; Cameron Sharp
- Pastoralists; STTF have established relationships with cattle station owners where the Great Toad Muster will take place.
- Northern Land Council; Greg Kimpton

2. Field trips to the control area for the purposes of:

- surveillance
- site evaluation for fencing trials
- trapping and hand-capture operations
- Base-camp sites

3. Volunteer recruitment and training:

- Hold information evenings throughout the State
- Develop promotion material including posters, stickers, brochures
- Organise all food, accommodation and transport from Kununurra for volunteers
- Provide all on-ground training to volunteers
- Arrange volunteer insurance via DEC and ensure their health and safety at all times
- Ensure our team leaders in the field have first aid training

4. Equipment purchase and maintenance:

- The purchase and/or replacement of a range of toad busting and safety equipment, including EPIRBs, UHF radios, handheld GPS units, fencing equipment and first aid equipment.
- Record asset management and maintenance regimes for vehicles, machinery and other equipment.

Estimated Timeline – Great Toad Muster 2009

May-June – reconnaissance and commissioning of base camps for Great Toad Muster, liaison with indigenous groups and pastoralists, community groups and government agencies.

July-August – Begin on-ground field work in the form of ‘mini-musters’.

September–October – Undertake muster activities using adaptive methodologies; fencing, trapping, hand collection, tadpole and metamorph control.

End October – pack up base camp and monitor sites for 3 months to follow.

MUSTER LOCATIONS

STTF will work closely with DEC and KTB to determine the most strategic location for the 2009 Muster operations to occur. This may change in between May and September as toad populations move with water bodies across the northern landscape.

STTF will rely on DEC and KTB to determine which sites STTF’s fencing strategy will be successful. In general, STTF’s fencing strategy is most successful when used close to the water’s edge around man made dams clear of vegetation. Natural water bodies can still be fenced depending on their size and clearance around the edge. STTF suggest that DEC and KTB focus their toad control work on sites that will not be fenced by STTF during this year’s Muster, such as river systems that are unable to be fenced.

1. Newry Cattle station

At this stage (May 2009), the 2009 Muster basecamp will be situated on Newry Station, based 80kms from Kununurra on the Victoria Highway. Basecamp will be able to support 25-30 volunteers a night and will be set up a week before the Muster. Work will be done on Newry for the continuation of the Muster. Basecamp will take 3-4 days to dismantle.

Newry is a 2500 sq km cattle station with numerous man made dams perfect for fencing. STTF are not expecting high numbers on Newry as toads have only been seen there for 1 year.

2. Legune Cattle station

Legune cattle station is situated NE of Kununurra on the border of WA/NT. Legune has one large dam that is used to flood the station up to twice a year. This presents challenges for controlling toads on Legune, but there are numerous dams that are suitable for fencing to occur. Toads have only been found on Legune for the past year, so we do not expect large numbers to be found here either.

A small team of 6 volunteers will carry out 1-2 weeks fencing control work on Legune Cattle station. They will be supported by a camper trailer and small generator.

3. Keep River National Park

Keep River National Park is located east of the WA/NT border, north of the Victoria Highway. The Keep River runs through the middle of this National Park, giving toads a water source all year round. There are, however, strategic sites that can be fenced on Keep River National Park.

A small team of volunteers will assist the Parks and Wildlife Management to fence off strategic water holes in Keep River National Park. This will occur over 1-2 weeks period and volunteers will stay at the Rangers station in the park. Parks and Wildlife Management will then continue their own toad management after the Muster.

4. Bullo River Station

Bullo River cattle station is located 90km east of the WA/NT border and has had toads on the property for two years. Bullo River has two permanent rivers running all year round which presents challenges to controlling cane toad numbers. There are, however, still sites that would be suitable for fencing. If time permits, STTF will send a small team of volunteers to fence off strategic water holes over a 1 week period.

5. Auvergne Station

Auvergne Cattle station is located east of Bullo River station, 170km east of Kununurra on the Victoria Highway. Auvergne station has been the base camp for the past 3 years of the Muster and ideal for the STTF fencing strategy. Auvergne has 13 water holes that have been fenced by STTF for the past three years.

Ideally, STTF would like to carry out some toad control work on Auvergne again to have four years of data from one location and to determine what effect our efforts

during 2008 had on toad numbers. If time permits, STTF will send a small team of volunteers to work on the western side of Auvergne. STTF has a contract with the Northern Land Council in the NT to do some toad control work on the eastern side of Auvergne.

NATIONAL CANE TOAD ERADICATION WEEK

STTF will be running a National Cane Toad Eradication Week (NEW) in conjunction with the last week of the Muster. The NEW aims to show the impacts of people power on toad populations across Australia and will unite the nation for the first time in the fight against cane toads; an approach that is long overdue.

STTF encourage community groups across the country to organise volunteer action against cane toads using the assistance, materials and tools offered by STTF. The Foundation will report via the web and media, the daily number of toads removed from the Australian countryside during the NEW and keep a running tally.

CONCLUSION

STTF strongly encourage all Western Australians and Australians to join us in the fight to protect our beautiful Kimberley. The Great Toad Muster 2009 will be STTF's fourth Muster, and hopefully not its last. With your support, STTF will continue to hold annual Musters and to place pressure on Federal, State and Local governments in an effort to keep holding back the cane toad frontline invading Western Australia.

At the completion of the 2009 Muster, data and statistics will be collated into the 2009 Muster Report and STTF will have 4 consecutive years of data to evaluate. Previous Muster reports can be found on our website at <http://www.stophethoad.org.au/main/publications.php>.