

# GETTING A GRIP ON CANE TOADS IN BYRON AND THE NSW FAR NORTH COAST

## overview of the project

Getting a grip on Cane Toads was a program run by Byron Shire Council in Byron Bay and on the NSW Far North Coast to educate the community about effectively and humanely dealing with Cane Toads. Cane Toads are a highly toxic, invasive animal that threaten endangered species and biodiversity. During volunteer events called Musters, community members gathered to learn about how to catch, monitor and humanely euthanise Cane Toads. Over 2700 Cane Toads were collected at 13 locations by more than 300 volunteers, many of whom are continuing Cane Toad control following the completion of the project.



PHOTOGRAPHER: MICHAEL WAINWRIGHT

Bufo Marinus, The Cane Toad

## how the project was carried out

Initially a trailer was constructed to provide an equipment base and a large display area for educational use at the Musters. Educational materials were then developed, including a fact sheet titled "Excluding Cane Toads from water", two posters titled "Frogs of the Byron Shire" and "Most Wanted: Bufo marinus", and stickers titled "I'm a Byron Toad Buster!" These were distributed at events during the project, to Landcare networks, to 20 schools in the area and at Byron Shire Council offices.

Through media coverage on the radio, television and in newspapers, volunteers were encouraged to participate in the program using a volunteer register available online or at the Musters. This register provided contact details and information for insurance purposes and future Musters as well as information on the skills of the volunteers. At each Muster an educational talk was given after which volunteers ventured out and caught Cane Toads. Educational talks were also provided to a variety of community groups and schools.

Some of the Cane Toads collected were provided to assist in research by an environmental science undergraduate from the University of New England studying Cane Toad liver parasites, and a PhD student from the University of Sydney studying predation on threatened species. The remainder were euthanized. The Cane Toads collected were counted and analysed to determine how old they were. This information assists in identifying priority areas for Musters. High proportions of young Cane Toads as well as high numbers caught per hour indicate a breeding ground where Cane Toad control is most effective and where native species are most at risk of being out competed.

A highly visible site at the Mullumbimby Golf Course used signage and was set up to demonstrate how to limit Cane Toad access to waterways through Cane Toad proof fencing. Water at urban lakes, golf courses and farm dams are prime breeding grounds for the Cane Toads, so limiting their access to waterways in this manner prevents breeding and reduces the population.

## outcomes now and in the future

The project has been successful in educating and involving community members in Cane Toad control, with over 1,000 people attending field days, talks or workshops. Significant media coverage through TV, radio and print media assisted to engage many participants. The education campaign and the kits have equipped the community to conduct ongoing Cane Toad control and to identify new areas being invaded.

Removing Cane Toads through Musters directly conserves biodiversity values and protects threatened species by removing the potential for animals to be poisoned by the Cane Toads and by reducing competition for resources such as food and habitat.

Through the project, Byron Shire Council has established a network for controlling Cane Toads. This network allows for improved collaboration between organisations and has assisted in developing uniform monitoring, management and sharing of information.

## benefits, challenges & lessons learned

Monitoring and evaluation methods were changed during the project due to the limited capacity of the community to monitor Cane Toad populations. Cane Toad populations are constantly moving which makes population counts difficult, so in order to more effectively monitor sites in the Shire, monitoring was only conducted where the Cane Toads are breeding as movement is less.

The Cane Toad traps designed were inefficient at capturing Cane Toads. The reasons for this are uncertain, prompting research by the community into improved trapping methods in the future. One suggestion is to play "Cane Toad calls" in the traps.

The Mullumbimby demonstration site has prompted significant interest and enquiries into the site, particularly for information on how to build Cane Toad proof fencing for dams.