



ENVIRONMENTAL APPRECIATION PROJECT

THE CANE TOAD

Educational pamphlet and *Cane Toad-a-thon*

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Please note: The Youth Minister's Round Table of Young Territorians is an independent advisory council. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Office of Youth Affairs or the Northern Territory Government.

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Acronyms

NT Northern Territory

NTG Northern Territory Government

NRETA Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts

Executive Summary

The primary objective of the Environmental Appreciation Project is to encourage active participation among young Territorians to support and preserve the Territory's environment. This project is based on the invasive cane toad, which is considered as a severe but localised issue to the Territory's Top End.

From research undertaken it appears that youth specific education on the environmental issues facing the Territory, including our cane toad invasion is lacking. Through the creation and production of an educational pamphlet to show the public how to manage cane toads, together with the holding of the *Cane Toad- a-thon*, it is anticipated that this gap in the provision of public information is addressed.

It has become evident from reviewing major youth surveys distributed nationally, that the environment does not rate highly as a concern of young Australians. For example, the results of the 2006 Mission Australia survey, which rated the views of 14,700 young people aged between 11 and 24 years, showed that environmental issues were valued as a high priority by only 8.9% of respondents (nationally and in the NT).

A highly successful *Carp-a-thon* organised and facilitated by young people in Renmark, South Australia, has shown to be extremely successful in engaging young people in effective environmental appreciation. This in turn has demonstrated the need and benefit of a comparable event to be held in the Territory.

It has become apparent in the Territory that young people have to live, and learn to manage, the cane toad invasion. Young people have the capacity to create change, and this is particularly so in creating awareness through targeted education on how to live with cane toads.

Young people are more than capable of overcoming this issue. The educational model suggested could also be replicated to achieve success with other community issues.

The key recommendations for this project include:

1. Provision of funding and in-kind support to print and distribute a youth specific cane toad educational pamphlet.
2. Provision of funding and in-kind support to implement and run a pilot *Cane Toad-a-thon*.

Introduction

The concept of the Environmental Appreciation Project was created for two reasons.

Firstly, a perception that there was a lack of understanding and awareness among young Territorians of environmental issues and, in particular, our cane toad problem.

Secondly, a lack of awareness of the severity of the cane toad invasion on the Territory environment and its native species.

The project aimed to create a medium combining learning, understanding and enjoyment in a memorable environment. By basing the project around the invasive cane toad – a severe but localised environmental issue – it was considered that a great deal can be achieved within the community.

The cane toad was first introduced to Australia (Queensland) in 1935 by sugar cane farmers wanting to combat the cane beetle. This experiment proved to be extremely unsuccessful for its intended purpose, and the 101 toads introduced were left to roam free, breed and multiply. Seventy-two years later, the cane toads have populated to parts of northern Australia, including the Territory's Top End.

Cane toads pose a particularly severe threat to the Territory and Western Australia, and a dramatic decrease in our biodiversity is now clearly evident. These highly prolific and invasive creatures have the potential to wreak havoc upon our landscape; to our wildlife, domestic animals, tourism industry and exporting industry.

Figure 1: Distribution of the Cane Toad in Australia (2007)



- Current distribution of the Cane Toad
- Predicted spread of the Cane Toad in the coming few years

(Reference: www.stopthetoad.org.au/news/images_news070621)

This project was formed in such a way to support the theory that *knowledge is the first step to change*. Young Territorians need to be sufficiently informed to be able to make relevant, well-informed and proactive decisions towards creating a more fluent and sustainable environmental outlook.

Discussion/Major Findings

Current Research

Many major Australian youth survey results indicate that the environment is not given a high priority among young Australians.

The results of the 2006 Mission Australia Youth Survey, conveying the views of 14,700 young people aged between 11 and 24 years showed that only 8.9% indicated environmental issues to be of concern. Additionally, the percentage of young people in the Territory identifying environmental issues as a concern was also 8.9%. Results from the 2005 and 2004 Mission Australia survey were slightly higher (10.5%) and a great deal lower (3.8%)¹, respectively.

As stated in the United Nations Youth and the Environment's World Youth Report (2003) the youth of today will have to live with the issues created a great deal longer than their elders. Young people also have the capability to improve environmental issues for generations to come². *'Youth have a stronger awareness of the issues and a greater stake in long-term sustainability, the environment is one area in which they ought to take the lead'*³.

The percentages quoted in the Mission Australia youth survey results for the past three years are indeed very low in comparison to other options presented on what young people value. Based on these results it raises the question whether young people are lacking an understanding of environmental issues rather than the level of value they place on this issue.

¹ National Youth Survey 2006, Northern Territory summary, pg 44

² Youth and the environment – World youth report – 2003, pg 134

³ Ibid

Contrary to the United Nations report, young Territorians do not seem to have a stronger awareness on environmental issues, yet they do have a greater stake in the result.

After consulting with a passionate group of young environmental leaders in South Australia, it was clear that the education campaign successfully demonstrated in Denmark could be replicated in the Territory.

Youth River Us Project

This campaign – *Youth River Us* – comprised a group of young females. Their primary task was to undertake an impact study on the environmentally devastating carp in the Murray River. A *Carp-a-thon* that was held in October 2005 demonstrated an extremely effective model of environmental appreciation. The project was successful in removing over 500 carp from the river system, and served to motivate the community into taking action and have fun along the way.

Beginning at 8 am in the morning, the group challenged the local community to fish for carp with competitions for the most carp, the heaviest carp, the largest carp, the smallest carp and the prettiest carp. Showbags were provided to all registered participants and comprised local environmental information supplied by the Murray Darling Basin Commission.

Local bands and acts entertained the crowds and provided an opportunity to showcase their talents and instil a whole of community feel. Sponsorship and grants were sought to make the concept a reality and provide prizes.

Because of the similarities in reducing an introduced pest (i.e. carp in South Australia and cane toads in the Territory's Top End), the whole of community model implemented by South Australia could form the basis of an event in the Top End.

Our current focus

It appears that there is a gap in the Northern Territory Government's focus on combating cane toads. This gap relates to educating young Territorians on the impact of the toads on our environment and how to manage cane toads that are infiltrating suburbia.

Aside from research, \$500,000 is devoted to supporting FrogWatch community awareness campaigns and toad busting activities⁴. Although this attention is considerable, there is no provision for education awareness information that directly targets young people. Current campaigns are designed to appeal to the community in general. In saying this, FrogWatch does an exceptional job at educating the wider population and holding back the cane toad front. Its contribution to the community should be highly valued. This project aims to supplement/integrate FrogWatch's current campaign rather than to replace it.

It is proposed that the *Cane Toad- a-thon* will be held during National Youth Week 2008 (5–13 April). The current round of EnvironmeNT grants, which is specifically aimed at funding and developing environmental activities in the Territory, will not be available because of the proposed timeframe. In such a case, the project would endeavour to be funded in the next round and be held at a later date.

⁴ S.O.S. *Save our suburbs*

Conclusion

The implementation of the Environmental Appreciation Project comprises two parts, namely:

1. The development of a youth friendly educational pamphlet that includes the following (the attachment refers):
 - A brief description of the amphibian, including how it came to be here and how to identify it.
 - Reasons for its immense success in Australia.
 - What we face in terms of losing biodiversity.
 - What young people can do (including all necessary contacts and means of collecting further information).

This resource would be different from what FrogWatch has already produced, including resources prepared by the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (Parks and Wildlife), because it would developed in a 'youth friendly' format. An educational resource specifically for young people allows for greater detail on certain aspects, with less importance placed upon others. In particular, the resource focuses on what a young person can do as an individual to combat the cane toad problem. It is intended to distribute resource to young people via high schools and through youth group networks. Its reach will therefore be different to the FrogWatch campaign.

2. Implementation of a *Cane Toad-a-thon*.

Following the public release of the pamphlet, this event will be developed to enable young people to put into practise the information conveyed in the pamphlet.

A *Cane Toad-a-thon* is a large cane toad 'bust' held after dark.

It is proposed to be hold this event during National Youth Week 2008 (5–13 April), with attractive prizes offered to encourage young Territorians to participate. The scale of the event would depend on the level of funding secured. The *Carp-a-thon*, a similar event held in Renmark South Australia, attracted more than 500 participants. An all day event, it included local bands, foods stalls and entertainment. This community event was successful in removing a large number of carp from the waterways and, importantly, was extremely successful in raising awareness of the importance of the river's health to the community.

The intention of this project is not to highlight yet another issue pressuring the young people of today. Rather, this project is designed to portray the environment in a positive light, and convey to the audience that it does not need to become an issue if careful consideration is given to the situation at the initial stage. This however, does not come without knowledge. Major research studies have shown that environmental issues do not rate highly on the minds of young people. The project does not intend to question the validity of this fact because other youth issues such as mental health, drugs and alcohol abuse, are very real issues these days. This project conveys a sense that the environment needs to also be uppermost on young people's minds because prevention is better than having to fix the problem. Often, this is too late for environmental issues.

By distribution an educational resource to young people that shows both the issue and the solution, the problem can be overcome and the objective achieved – environmental appreciation. The project does not condone what would be regarded as 'inhumane' killing; rather it aims to empower young people by providing practical information.

The *Cane Toad-a-thon* aims to promote the environment as an opportunity to have fun, gain knowledge and instigate change.

The Mission Australia results as illustrated in this report have clearly shown that the environment is not a major concern to 91.1% of the youth population. Therefore, to create change it is necessary to approach the wider audience with appealing, relevant and enjoyable activities and without a great deal of pressure.

When competing against the many prevalent and serious issues facing young people today, it is necessary to influence people's present thinking that the environment is another issue to be concerned with, and persuade them to look upon it as a marvel that needs protecting and nurturing.

Recommendations

Northern Territory Government

1. Educational pamphlet to be endorsed by the Minister for Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage and the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts (NRETA).

The capacity for success and influence of this pamphlet will remain limited while it is developed and distributed internally (i.e. within the Office of Youth Affairs). The base model has the potential to be modified to young people in Queensland and Western Australia.

2. *Cane Toad-a-thon* to receive funding from NRETA to implement the pilot program to ensure the viability of the pilot, and whether the project can be supplemented via one-off successful grant applications. Such an event not only requires a great deal of organisation, but also a significant amount of monetary support from grants. Support is currently sought from FrogWatch for organising assistance.
3. Funding from NRETA to secure the *Cane Toad-a-thon* as an annual event, subject to the success of the first event.

FrogWatch NT

1. The integration of a youth link from the main FrogWatch NT website www.frogwatch.org.au/.
2. Continued government and community support towards facilitating the *Cane Toad-a-thon*.

References

FrogWatch NT www.frogwatch.org.au/

Mission Australia *National Survey of Young Australians 2006, Key and Emerging issues*, 2006.

Stop the Toad, *Cane Toad distribution (image)*, accessed October 8 2007 from www.stophethoad.org.au/news/images_news070621

United Nations *Youth and the Environment World YOUTH Report, 2003*, 2003.