

EVIDENCE OF CANE TOADS ON MORETON ISLAND CONTINUES

To the detriment of Moreton Island, all recent Cane Toad Campaigns have found cane toads both alive and dead. Ironically most of the Campaigns have coincided with dry weather conditions. One wonders what would be revealed if a Campaign coincided with a good wet?

Dramatically, on the opening day of the Campaign in the presence of Council Officers and crowds of passengers from a cruise ship, a live cane toad was found in gardens adjacent to the beach pathway at Tangalooma Resort.

16-20 December, 2018

Brisbane City Council Cane Toad Detector Dog Campaign

Supported by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Tangalooma Resort and MICAT/Moreton Island Adventures.

Work on the Campaign was undertaken by internationally renowned dog trainer Steve Austin, using specialised Cane Toad Detector Dogs (CTDDs) Becky, Emma and Tommy. Searches were done through the townships, camping grounds, waste transfer stations and Tangalooma. Promotion, involvement and cooperation from the public in maintaining the “Cane Toad Free Status” of Moreton Island is a big part of the Campaign. In addition, water samples from selected sites were taken to be sent for analysis.

Things We Know

1. 100 cane toads were introduced to Queensland in 1935 – now over 200 million are estimated to be spreading across Australia.
2. Female cane toads can lay 8,000-30,000 eggs per season.
3. Cane toads kill anything that eats them – resulting in a massive decline of native wildlife - particularly birds and reptiles.
4. Moreton Island is currently classified as “Cane Toad Free”.
5. With action from stakeholders it is hoped that Moreton Island and the National Park will continue to remain “Cane Toad Free”.

Things We've Learnt

1. With each Campaign we expect to find cane toads.
2. The entry points for cane toads are the MICAT and Tangalooma barges.
3. Cane toads are being carried to Moreton Island by vehicles = in camping gear, firewood, building and landscape materials, plants and mulch.
4. The MICAT terminal at Port of Brisbane has cane toads in the grounds.
(See photo)

MORETON ISLAND CANE TOAD FREE!

Moreton Island is one of Brisbane's major natural assets and one of the few locations in coastal Queensland where cane toads have not established. Any accidental introduction will affect your enjoyment of campsites and waterways and cause serious impacts to local wildlife.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROTECT MORETON ISLAND?

Check for cane toads before travelling and when you unpack. You are likely to find them hiding in firewood, fishing and camping gear, building materials, tyre wells, trailers, and swags.

5. The Campaign has revealed problems of cat and dog control in the townships and evidenced the effect of feral and domestic cats on the islands' wildlife.
6. Without action and planning, cane toads will invade Moreton Island.
7. Assistance and cooperation of support organisations - Brisbane City Council, Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service, Tangalooma Resort and MICAT/Moreton Island Adventures is helping and essential to keeping Moreton Island "Cane Toad Free".



Cane Toads collected at the MICAT Port of Brisbane Terminal

Day 1: Tangalooma Resort and The Wrecks Campground

A scheduled information session and demonstration at the Tangalooma Education Centre was cancelled due to extreme visitor numbers from a cruise ship. A search of the resort grounds and gardens was undertaken with Brisbane City Council Officers, Lachlan Carkeet and Dane Hansen. Drama unfolded amidst masses of resort guests when CTDD Becky located a live cane toad in a garden adjacent to the pathway between the resort shop and the Police Station.

It's believed the cane toad arrived in "aged" garden mulch from the mainland the previous Thursday. The toad was bagged and given to the resort manager, Trevor Hassard.

We continued checking the resort grounds. In the ensuing downpour, CTDD Becky detected the presence of cane toads in water flowing into a bund drainage pit in the lawns in front of the tennis court. Becky's behaviour was frantic at the four pipes where water was draining into the pit. (See photo)

A water sample was obtained.



CTDD Becky's indications of possible cane toad presence at the Tangalooma Bund Drain

In heavy rain we completed the remainder of the resort gardens, the fishing club to the north of the resort and The Wrecks Campground. Where - in previous Campaigns the dogs had detected the presence of cane toads about the toilet block and shower - there was no evidence on this occasion.

It is commendable that Tangalooma Resort, with foresight and grant assistance sourced by MP Luke Howarth, now has a resident CTDD Reggie to assist in keeping the island free of cane toads. (See photo)

Day 2: Koorinal

The forecast of a week of deluge from Cyclone Penny never eventuated. On entry to Koorinal from the ocean beach, we noticed a significant increase in Umbrella Trees and Asparagus Fern since our last visit. ***It would be worthwhile for Parks and Council to act before both these weeds spread out of control.***

Koorinal was quite dry compared to the north of the island. In an entire search of the township, no presence of cane toads was detected. However, the remnants of a dead Curlew in bushland near the Fire Station and a Green Tree Frog in the overgrown lawn of a house at the northern end of Midgin Street, gave evidence of cat kills. ***Does allowing cats on Moreton Island clash with the objectives of a National Park?***

In addition, and to the angst of Steve Austin, one of the CTDDs was attacked and bitten by one of two small resident's dogs in mid Midgin Street.



Resident CTDD Reggie with Steve Austin and Tangalooma Resort Staff

Day 3: Cowan Cowan, Western Beach Campsites, Comboyuro Campground, Bulwer and Blue Lagoon

We received an early morning call from Ranger in Charge, Terry Christensen about a Cowan resident suspecting cane toads. Following the Rangers from the Ranger's Station, we drove to the Cowan site at the corner of Thomas Pamphlett Street. The resident was concerned about a boat, trailer and artificial grass he'd just bought from North Queensland. No evidence of cane toads was found here or throughout any of Cowan Township.

Water samples were taken from creeks near campsites on the Western Beach. Adjacent campsites were checked and campers spoken to about the Campaign.

As in previous Campaigns, rubbish bins at Comboyuro Campground continued to give indications of cane toads. Around these bins is always wet and damp with considerable leaf litter. Toilets and shower blocks gave no indication. ***It would be worthwhile to place and monitor cane toad traps around the Comboyuro bins.***

We headed to the shop - Castaways in Bulwer. Steve Austin couldn't continue work as two resident's dogs were running loose showing aggression towards his dogs. Their owners were located and asked to tie up their dogs for the Campaign to continue. Indications of cane toads detected previously around Castaways and the Bulwer Waste Transfer Station were not apparent on this occasion. ***Council should be more vigilant in enforcement of bylaws in relation to dog control in the Townships and also to protect the National Park.***

We drove to Blue Lagoon Campground and met with Moreton Island Committee (MIPC) President Alan Gennings, informing us that campers at Comboyuro Campground may have heard cane toad calls the previous night. We checked Blue Lagoon and the toilet and shower block, all of which gave no indication.

Water sampling last Campaign was inconclusive about the presence of cane toads in the creek north of Blue Lagoon Campground. Another water sample was taken here and we drove back to Comboyuro Campground to follow up on the camper's report. They weren't present so we left a note with our contact details.

Water samples were taken from creeks near Bulwer, Cowan and Ben Ewa Campground as all water samples had to be sent to the mainland by the end of the day.

Day 4: Ben Ewa and Cowan Point Campgrounds and Tangalooma

The dogs immediately detected the presence of cane toads on a camper's vehicle in Ben Ewa Campground. Discussions with the owner revealed he has cane toads on his property and driveway in the Brisbane suburb of Chandler.

Behind the toilets and showers showed indications of cats or pigs or both. We returned to the campers at Comboyuro Campground who were again not there. On the way back to Tangalooma we searched Cowan Point Campground which was well populated, and spoke to campers. No evidence of cane toads was found.

We felt we should check all the bund drains along the beach at Tangalooma after the previous Sunday. Straight away the dogs indicated on the most northern drain. Surprisingly the drain near the tennis court showed no indication following Sunday's activity in the water. However, extreme odour was indicated in the roots of a Pandanus adjacent to Cabin 315 near the Police Station.

The suspected source of Sunday's find – the "aged" mulch near the jetty - and the adjacent garden's log and Lemandra, sent CTDD Tommy into a frenzy. ***The Pandanus and garden areas in question should be put on high alert with traps placed and monitored.***

Day 5: Cowan and Bulwer Waste Transfer Stations, North Point Campground, Nursery and Sheds, and Spitfire Creek

The day was very hot and sunny. The Waste Transfer Stations gave no indication. Since the April Campaign, it would seem the MICAT is being more particular with the condition of the bins being checked, cleaned and disinfected.

North Point Campground was again well attended by campers. Most were aware of Moreton Island's "Cane Toad Free Status". The MIPC Nursery and QPWS sheds gave no indication of cane toads, but a possible presence of cats. Spitfire Creek also proved negative.



Trainer Steve Austin with CTDD Tommy at the entrance to Cowan Township

Recommendations

- 1.** To increase public awareness, all townships should have a sign relating to keeping Moreton Island "Cane Toad Free". Currently there are signs as you board the MICAT, exit the MICAT at The Wrecks, and at the entrance to Cowan Township. Bulwer and Koorngal have no signs nor do the major camping grounds.
- 2.** Cane toad traps should be used and monitored where detection dogs have indicated the presence of cane toads.
- 3.** Ideally a CTDD should check vehicles waiting to board the MICAT. It would seem essential that ALL shipments of landscape materials, plants and mulch via the MICAT and Tangalooma barges be checked.
- 4.** Begin immediate action at the MICAT terminal to remove all cane toads, install cane toad traps and erect cane toad fencing to prevent them entering the grounds. Continually monitor the effectiveness of these actions.
- 5.** Check townships, Waste Transfer Stations and major campgrounds during summer wet periods using a cane toad caller.
- 6.** Continue the advertising Campaign to Island residents and the public to help keep the "Cane Toad Free Status" of Moreton Island.
- 7.** Liaise with Tangalooma Resort to follow these prevention procedures.

It is believed at the time of writing this report that Brisbane City Council is in consultation with Moreton Island Protection Committee to undertake many of these recommendations. Results of water testing had not yet been received.

Brisbane City Council, Tangalooma Manager Trevor Hassard, QPWS Rangers and Ranger in Charge Terry Christensen, Roz Hawkins and Liz Shaw of Moreton Island Adventures should be commended for their ongoing efforts.

Thanks to Brisbane City Council for the opportunity to participate in such a worthwhile initiative. Moreton Island is a pristine final frontier against the cane toad invasion. Hopefully firm preventative action will maintain Moreton Island's "Cane Toad Free Status" for future generations.

Greg Curtis

Moreton Island Protection Committee