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Media Statement

RESEARCH FUNDING AWARDED TO HELP FIND CANE TOAD ACHILLES' HEEL

The search for biological controls to help keep cane toads out of WA has been given a boost, with local researchers given funding to help them find the toads' Achilles' heel.

The Australian Research Council (ARC) has awarded \$260,000 to fund the Australian Cane Toad Genome Program, which will systematically define every toad gene.

Professor Grant Morahan from the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) thanked the ARC for its support, saying that it was now recognized that the only effective way to limit the cane toads' progress across northern Australia and into WA was to develop a biological control strategy.

"The cane toad is one of Australia's worst environmental menaces, and because of the sheer size of our northern border, the best long-term solution to this problem will come from using the latest molecular genetic technology," said Professor Morahan.

"What we're focusing on is identifying the toads' Achilles' heel. This involves identifying the proteins the toad needs to survive. By targeting these proteins with a new biological control agent designed to neutralize the proteins we hope to stop the toad in its tracks."

Professor Morahan said the funding would go towards creating a library of cane toad DNA.

"Part of this project will see us bring a world expert to WA who will not only make the toad library, but can also make libraries for Australian researchers in other areas," he said.

"This initiative is critical to helping scientists across the world crack the genetic code of the cane toad, which should help create new opportunities to keep them out of WA, as well as control them in the rest of Australia."

The funding comes on top of a \$350,000 commitment from the WA Government, however Professor Morahan said further funds were required.

"These are very generous contributions that will help kick-start this project. We do still need another \$1 million to make this project work and so we will continue to seek out further funding to get this important work done," he said.

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