



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA



**MEDIA STATEMENT**

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**NEW RESEARCH FUNDING AWARDED TO HELP FIND  
CANE TOAD ACHILLES' HEEL**

WA researchers have hailed the Carpenter Government's decision to provide extra funding for a project that could deliver a biological answer to stopping cane toads entering the State.

The Australian Cane Toad Genome Program, being run by Professor Grant Morahan from the Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR) and The University of Western Australia's Professor Dale Roberts, has been awarded a further \$500,000 to help find the toads' Achilles' heel. The WA Government had previously committed \$350,000 to the program, while the Australian Research Council (ARC) has contributed \$260,000 to the fight.

Professor Morahan said The Australian Cane Toad Genome Program will systematically define every toad gene in a bid to aid the development of a biological control strategy for the environmental menace and the latest funding would help fast-track the project.

"We believe molecular genetic technology is the best weapon we've got in trying to tackle the cane toad issue over the long term, so we're delighted the State Government has contributed this additional \$500,000," he said.

"This program is all about finding the toads' Achilles' heel by pinpointing the proteins the toad needs to survive. This knowledge will help other researchers to create a new biological control agent that can neutralize the proteins in the hope of keeping cane toads out of WA forever."

The Program involves developing a library of cane toad DNA that can aid scientists seeking to crack the genetic code of the cane toad. Significantly, this will be Australia's first "home-grown" genome program.

UWA School of Animal Biology Professor Dale Roberts said the genomic approach was a novel way of developing the raw material to tackling cane toad control at broad scales that will complement existing ecological approaches that have some potential for control or eradication at more local scales.

"Because of their skin toxins cane toads have identifiable impacts on many vertebrates but their impact on the unstudied invertebrate fauna is unknown – this is an unstudied iceberg potentially at risk," he said.

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“We already know the Kimberley region has many species, e.g. land snails, with very restricted ranges and this may also apply to many insects, spiders and other invertebrates. Any moves that aim at broad scale control of toads will improve long term survival prospects for these unknown groups as well as protecting more charismatic mammal and reptile species.

“It is great to see a State government supporting fundamental research in genomics with a strong applied focus – a very novel direction in contributing to cane toad control in Australia,” Professor Roberts said.

**MEDIA REFERENCE:**

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