

STOP THE TOAD

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MEDIA RELEASE – 21 June 2012

THE AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY AWARDS CANE TOAD CONTROL AT THEIR ANNUAL GALA AWARDS NIGHT

Campaign Manager for non-for-profit group Stop the Toad Foundation, Kim Hands, has been awarded 'Young Conservationist of the Year' for her work on cane toads at last night's 25th anniversary Australian Geographic Society Gala Awards night.

Kim, who is from Perth, has been running The Stop the Toad Foundation (STTF) since May 2008 and, with the help of hundreds of volunteers, has been responsible for the removal of 135,000 cane toads near the WA/NT border region during the Foundation's annual Great Toad Musters. Kim has also been driving the recently completed cane toad fence project at Emma Gorge, El Questro Wilderness Park in the east Kimberley.

"Believe it or not, my dream was never to work with cane toads! ," said Kim upon receiving her award at the 2012 Australian Geographic Society's Gala Awards night, held at Sydney's Shrangri-la Hotel last night.

"My dream was, however, to try to make a difference and be involved in the conservation of Australia's biodiversity."

"The work that STTF has been doing has given me that opportunity. I am very grateful to The Foundation for my experience".

Kim fell in love with The Kimberley when she was working for The Australian Wildlife Conservancy as a tour guide in 2005. It was this experience which led her to want to do something 'on the ground' towards protecting this unique area. It was about this time that the Stop the Toad Foundation began and set out to do something about slowing down the cane toad invasion heading towards WA.

"STTF has achieved some amazing work over the past 7 years and I am lucky to be involved with most of it. Probably the most exciting is the cane toad fence we have erected at Emma gorge on El Questro. This is the first trial in Australia at trying to keep toads out of a specific area. If it is a success, the technology could be used all over Australia to create sanctuaries for our native animals. To me, this is very exciting, especially as we don't have a biological solution to toads as yet."

Kim said she was surprised at the number of people who told her it wasn't worth trying to stop the toad and that it was a losing battle, instead of encouraging her and the work of the organization.

"I have known from the beginning that it would be an enormous and daunting task (trying to stop the toad) but my attitude has always been to give it a go. I would rather die trying than not to have tried at all".

Her positive attitude and drive to contribute to the conservation sector is what got the attention of The Australian Geographic Society, who has been supporting the work of STTF through their annual scientific expeditions to The Kimberley in 2011 and 2012.

The Australian Geographic Society was founded by Dick Smith in 1987 and its core value is supporting Australians to 'have a go' in the areas of exploration, adventure, research, science and conservation. Each year, The Society holds awards to celebrate winners such as 'Young Adventurer of the year' (which was won by Jessica Watson in 2010 for her sail adventure around Australia) and Young Conservationist of the year (which was won by Kim this year). Awards are given to Australians who inspire others.

When asked what her inspiration was Kim said it was Australia's unique biodiversity and breathtaking landscape. She also said that she drew a lot of inspiration from the volunteers she has met along the way.

"I am continuously blown away by the passion I see in every day people from all walks of life, from all over Australia, that come up to The Kimberley to volunteer with Stop the Toad to do something about the cane toad. I would like to dedicate this award to them because without them, I could not have achieved nearly half as much as I have done."

"I am honoured to be named 'Young Conservationist of the year' by the Australian Geographic Society. I love what the Society represents and am very grateful for their support and acknowledgment. I will continue to fight for the conservation of Australia's biodiversity in the future".

For more information contact STTF's Campaign Manager Kim Hands on kim@stopthetoad.org.au or 0400130397.

Fact file

- Toads were introduced into Australia in 1935 in an effort to control beetles eating the sugar cane.
- Toads produce toxins that are deadly to a range of endangered Australian wildlife including northern quolls, goannas, snakes and freshwater crocodiles. They also compete with native wildlife for habitat and food.
- The western frontline of toads is moving at least 40 km a year and toads are now well and truly into The Kimberley.
- Each female toad can lay 35000 eggs. The first rains indicate to the toads it is time to breed.
- STTF is a non-profit, non-government organization established in 2005. There is one staff member, who divides her time between Perth and Kununurra.
- STTF has held The Great Toad Muster for the past 5 years. A total of 200,000 toads have been removed with the help of hundreds of volunteers around Australia.
- STTF uses temporary and permanent fencing to control toads.
- The Emma gorge fence is the first toad proof fence to be erected in Australia. It is 2km long and took 18 days to build. The total cost was just over \$7K.
- The Emma gorge fence is on El Questro Wilderness Park. El Questro are going to use the fence as an attraction for its tourists by creating a new spotlight tour- to spot native wildlife and remove toads. They hope the fence will raise the awareness of the cane toad issue in The Kimberley.