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TWIST OF FATE – TOADS TO RETURN TO CANEFIELDS AS MULCH

In what can only be described as the ultimate irony, one of Australia's greatest pests, the much maligned cane toad, is about to serve a useful purpose as mulch in the sugar cane crops it has traditionally multiplied in.

As part of North Queensland's inaugural Toad Day Out, the Cairns community will be encouraged to collect toads which will be euthanized in a stepped freezing process, and then transported to the SITA Environmental Solutions Advanced Waste Management facility nearby, where they will be processed with other waste to produce agricultural compost.

"In this first year the total weight of the toads collected may add up to a hundred or more kilos and will contribute to the 25,000t of compost that the Cairns plant produces annually and it predominantly goes to the canefields", said Haydn Slattery, SITA plant manager.

"Already many of the growers have jumped at the opportunity to replenish the soil with the compost we supply, avoiding the use of chemicals. I'm sure they will appreciate the fact that the toad they know so well is at last putting something back", quipped Slattery.

SITA's facility is an alternative waste technology that processes and converts 120,000 tonnes of municipal, commercial and industrial waste into green compost and recovers materials for re-use, reducing the volume of waste sent to landfill by around 70%.

Toad Day Out is being staged to raise awareness on humane and safe methods of capturing and disposing of this environmental pest. The event will be in the form of a capture competition with prizes for the heaviest individual toad, heaviest total weight of toads and other classes focusing on reducing the number of toads in North Queensland.

It's a combined project with support from the councils of Townsville, Burdekin, Ingham, Charters Towers and Cairns and is timed to coincide with Earth Hour and April Fools Day, running over the weekend of March 28 and 29.

Each female toad can produce up to 30,000 eggs which means that even if 3000 female toads were collected, the lives of a potential 90 million toads would have been prevented.

"In this inaugural event, the hope is to set the foundations for an annual event which raises community awareness in how to safely handle and dispose of these pests. Emphasis will be given on how to correctly identify cane toads as opposed to native frogs and toads", said Cairns event organizer Lisa Ahrens, Community Development Officer of the Satterley Property Group.

Council staff are encouraging humane methods of capture, handling and disposal that also include safety aspects of making contact with an animal that has potentially toxic poisons if handled carelessly.

The competition rules include conditions that all toads must be alive when presented, measure a minimum of 50mm and physically in good condition. They will not be accepting any toads that have been mutilated in any way.

The likelihood of survival will be enhanced by their rules which encourage capture only within the preceding 24hours with only live undamaged animals to be eligible.

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For further information about the details of Toad Day Out, March 28 and 29, or to register interest or support, please contact Lisa Ahrens, Satterly Property Group

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