A counter attack launched on invasive animals

The Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre (IA CRC) is new frontline venture aiming to develop solutions to combat the scourge of invasive animals in Australia that is inflicting at least $720 million worth of damage to agricultural production annually. It will build on the strong foundation provided by the substantial achievements of the Pest Animal Control CRC, and will involve strong international partnerships.

Alongside the high profile threat posed by weed plants, invasive animals including cane toads, wild dogs, feral pigs, foxes, feral cats, rabbits and pest birds are now the second biggest threat to national biodiversity conservation after habitat destruction. Their impact globally is equally significant.

Australia has the unenviable record of having nearly half the known mammalian extinctions worldwide over the past two hundred years, and invasive animals have been a major factor in this dramatic statistic. Pest animals now threaten fourteen of Australia's fifteen World Heritage Listed areas.

By combining national and international skills in science, management, commerce and industry, the unique partnerships of the new CRC will deliver the means to combat existing high profile invasive animal pests, as well as those that have the potential to cause severe impacts in the future.

A total of 41 organisations are giving their support to the IA CRC, and these comprise 35 Australian government agencies, industry bodies and small-medium enterprises, as well as six international organisations from New Zealand, Britain and the USA.

The IA CRC will examine growing problems such as the recent spread of foxes to Tasmania's vulnerable ecosystems. Glenn Harris

CEO of the new organisation, Dr Tony Peacock, said 'The Invasive Animals CRC will focus on solving invasive animal problems through the development of commercial outputs. It will, for the first time, bring together private and public land managers to integrate approaches to invasive animal management across agencies and jurisdictions.'

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Coastline retreat predictions questioned

University of Sydney academics say they have advanced models which show that the erosion around Australia's coastline predicted in July's Allen Group Report for the National Greenhouse Office could be almost twice that indicated for the same climate-change projections.

The researchers developed the computer models for predicting long-term coastal erosion due to environmental change.

'These models are capable of more sophisticated forecasts than those reported in the Allen Group Report,' said Dr Peter Cowell of the University of Sydney Institute Of Marine Sciences.

According to page 59 of the Report, 'Rising sea levels may also impact on beaches: CSIRO estimated that the coastline could possibly retreat horizontally by 50 to 100 times the vertical sea level rise, which could imply a recession of sandy beaches by 4.5 to 88 metres by 2100 under certain climate change projections.'

A cove near Albany, Western Australia. Over the next 100 years, coastlines are expected to change dramatically. CSIRO Publishing.

The researchers' models on the other hand show recession could be as much as 150 metres by the turn of the century for the Sydney coast due to sand loss from beaches to the offshore seabed. Recession could be even greater along other parts of the Australian coast more susceptible to climate-change impacts on transport of sand along the coast or into estuaries.

However, their models also show that the possible range of impacts on beaches could be much greater than conveyed by the Allen Report. A small possibility even exists that some coasts could advance despite rising sea levels.

Dr Peter Cowell said 'The simulations use advanced computer models that we developed to predict coastal changes that not only include the expected range of increased sea levels. Our models also take into account effects of seawalls, offshore reefs, various types of sediments (e.g. sand and mud), and changes in coastal dynamics, including effects on sand movements along the coast. The models are geared to manage the uncertainty inherent in making these types of predictions.'

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