

THE CANE TOAD SYNDROME

Robert Burke

"Innovation without foresight is dangerous. Foresight without innovation is fruitless." Stuart Candy

The 'Cane Toad Syndrome' is what happens when experts come up with ideas to solve a particular problem, but by doing so create a much bigger problem. We need experts in particular fields for many reasons such as intricate health related surgery, flying airplanes, solving human, animal and planet related problems. However, it is important to realize that a person being an expert in one particular discipline does not mean that person is an expert in all things. For example the introduction of cane toads to fight beetle pests in the Australian sugar cane industry in the 1930's did work by controlling the pests. *Expert validation*. But it created a much bigger problem and is one of the foremost examples of an exotic animal release gone wrong, the cane toad is now a well-established pest itself. *Expert myopia*. What the experts failed to see was the spread of the cane toad beyond the cane fields and the disastrous effect on native fauna and the consequent environmental damage.

Other examples of the 'Cane Toad Syndrome' include the decision to create the State of Israel following WW11, which still has tragic consequences today. On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel. U.S. President Harry S. Truman recognized the new nation on the same day. Despite growing conflict between Palestinian Arabs and Palestinian Jews and despite the Department of State's endorsement of a trusteeship, Truman ultimately decided to recognize the state Israel. (<http://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/creation-israel>).

Today we see the 'Cane Toad Syndrome' active in Crimea. Crimea only became part of Ukraine when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev gave the peninsula to his native land in 1954 regardless of the fact that Crimea was historically part of Russia.

The 'Cane Toad Syndrome' occurs when there is 'innovation' without foresight. Not thinking through all the assumptions effectively. It is occurring in the food industry today. For example in the meat and dairy industry where the dairy cows natural grass pastures were largely replaced by hay supplements which the experts claimed would not be a problem if the milk was pasteurized and homogenized. Pasteurization is the process of heating a liquid to a high enough temperature to kill certain bacteria and disable certain enzymes. The homogenization process breaks up an enzyme in milk, which in its smaller state can then enter the bloodstream and react against arterial walls. This causes the body to protect the area with a layer of cholesterol. If this only happened once in a while it wouldn't be of big concern, but if it happens regularly there are long-term risks.

http://www.naturalnews.com/022967_milk_pasteurization_dairy.html#ixzz2xE XjpC6U

Today the Chinese dairy industry is the greatest users of antibiotics in the world. Have the experts considered the animal/human interface of this? With resistance to antibiotics a major human health concern, initially caused by over prescribing of antibiotics by doctors, is now accelerated by the use and abuse of antibiotics in the wider food chain exploitation. The OECD-FAO projections suggest a 25% increase in dairy products will occur in 2010-2020 and *Per capita* meat consumption in high-income countries almost doubled between 1990 and 2002, from approximately 25 to 94 kg person year and the booming Chinese meat consumption is up from 3.8 to 52.4kg person year. There are serious implications of these predictions that the 'Cane Toad Syndrome' has contributed.

Futures thinking and futures work is an effective way of preventing the 'Cane Toad Syndrome' by looking at alternative worldviews and assumptions and putting these into action by effective story telling, strategy, and deeper enquiry to enable less familiar drivers of change to be considered as relevant. Futures thinking and futures work is a necessary attribute of effective leadership. It can be harder work and is usually very challenging to your own worldviews and assumptions of what is "truth", but cannot be overlooked by anyone in a leadership role as the consequence of doing so often lead to tragedy and disaster.