

GLOBAL

Green Death

To the dyslexic, dog is god. To British Aerospace Systems (BAE), a European defence company with more than \$30-billion in annual sales, corporate responsibility is ecofriendly weaponry. Intended to "reduce the collateral damage of warfare," BAE's product line includes lead-free ammunition, bombs that don't contain depleted uranium and a line of "insensitive munitions" that are "significantly less likely to explode in an accident." The company describes its ecofriendly approach under the heading Corporate Responsibility. All of BAE's major manufacturing facilities are ISO 14001 (environment) certified, and the company is committed to managing and minimizing the environmental impacts of its activities, operations, offices and products.

Species Still at Risk

Government inaction has once again prompted organizations to turn to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). A coalition of over 10 Canadian and American environmental groups has filed a formal complaint with the CEC. It alleges that by failing to list at-risk species and protect critical habitat under its *Species at Risk Act*, Canada is putting more species at risk of extinction. American environmental groups are involved because many species at risk in Canada migrate throughout North America. The CEC, a side deal to the North American Free Trade Agreement, promotes the effective enforcement of environmental law.

Asian Waste

A new United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) study found that 90 per cent of Asia's sewage is discharged into the marine environment without treatment. The report's release coincides with a conference in Beijing that reviewed UNEP's Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Sources. The report entitled, *The State of the Marine Environment*, focuses on untreated sewage, increased sedimentation as a result of deforestation, increased fertilizer use and coastal developments as the major threats to Asia's marine environment.

Devils in Distress

BEST KNOWN as Taz from Warner Bros. *Looney Tunes*, the Tasmanian devil (*Sarcophilus harrisii*) is famous for its aggressive eating habits and disturbingly loud screech. Now, sadly, the largest of the world's carnivorous marsupials is gaining notoriety because of declining numbers brought about by a contagious form of cancer called facial tumour disease. Over the past decade, more than half the population has fallen victim.



Courtesy of the author

The Tasmanian devil is one of Australia's most iconic and unique animals. In prehistoric times, these dog-sized marsupials roamed all over mainland Australia. Today, they are exclusively found in Tasmania where they live to fight over food. Snarling and biting, devils often injure each other in the excited struggle. Unfortunately, this innate behaviour is the very practice that spreads the rare disease, which could lead to their extinction.

Symptoms of facial tumour disease became apparent in 1993. Since then, it has spread across more than half of the island and is believed to have claimed the lives of more than 75,000 devils. Aside from a rare canine transmissible cancer, the facial tumour disease in devils is the only other known form of contagious cancer.

"The extent of the disease and its impact on the devil population is very serious," explains Steven Smith, manager of the Devil Facial Tumour Disease Program; "We are in the process of negotiating with mainland institutions to send what we call insurance populations in the event of Tasmanian extinction. We have to consider extinction while the disease continues to spread and we do not have an effective barrier or vaccine to combat it."

The fatal disease is characterized by disfiguring facial tumours that affect feeding and can lead to starvation. Once developed, the tumours spread through the body. Death can occur within six months. Highly populated areas are experiencing mortality rates of up to 100 per cent.

"We are working on a whole range of possibilities, but it is a race with time," warns Smith. "We are working on disease suppression in certain parts of Tasmania and developing a preclinical diagnostic test to determine diseased devils earlier."

The Tasmanian devil is currently listed as "vulnerable" under the *Tasmanian Threatened Species Protection Act*. Weakened by disease, the devils are also challenged by the introduction of foxes, loss of habitat and death on Tasmanian roads.

With fear that the Tasmanian devil could suffer the same fate as the now-extinct Tasmanian tiger, the state government has invested \$1.5-million in a three-year action plan to assist the species. In addition, Warner Bros. is lending a helping hand. The company granted permission for the use of its cartoon character, Taz, in a country-wide television campaign designed to raise funds for research. It also allowed the production of a plush toy, sales of which are expected to raise more than \$130,000, also for research.

With worldwide attention now focusing on the Tasmanian devil, there is hope that the sound of screeching will ring in the ears of local Tasmanians for many decades to come. 🗣️

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To contribute or to find out more about the Tassie Devil Appeal please visit the University of Tasmania Foundation website at www.utas.edu.au/foundation