MEDIA RELEASE

International research project has approval to conduct field trials in Cairns’ suburbs to eliminate dengue fever

‘Eliminate Dengue’ project to initiate field trials in Cairns from January 2011

In a positive step towards controlling dengue fever in far north Queensland, and the world, an Australian led international research team from the University of Queensland, today announced in Cairns that it has received regulatory approval to commence field trials of its unique and natural control method.

Following years of successful laboratory research including trials in the Mosquito Research Facility at James Cook University, Cairns, the project team is now planning for field trials at Yorkeys Knob and Gordonvale prior to subsequent field trials in Vietnam.

Project leader, Professor Scott O’Neill from the University of Queensland who has been working on the control method since the 1990s welcomes the approval from the Federal Government’s Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA).

“We’re delighted with the approval to go to field trials which follows years of comprehensive testing and risk analysis from the CSIRO and the APVMA. This approval is a significant milestone for everyone who has been working on the project and represents an important step in the search for a self sustaining solution to dengue fever,” Professor O’Neill said.

“The ‘Eliminate Dengue’ approach is aiming to control dengue by stopping the mosquito passing the virus onto humans,” O’Neill said.

“Our approach involves introducing strains of a bacterium called Wolbachia into the mosquito population, blocking virus transmission. Wolbachia occurs naturally in up to 70 per cent of all insect species and our studies have satisfied the government’s requirements demonstrating safety to people and the environment.”

The objective of the 2011 field trial is to determine how well the Wolbachia method establishes within the wild mosquito population.

“The project is the first of its kind in the search for a permanent solution to dengue fever and is unique in that the method will be self-sustaining once established” O’Neill said.

Throughout the research program the project team has been actively talking to the Cairns community, particularly residents, business groups and community organisations in Yorkeys Knob and Gordonvale. All residents of these suburbs have been contacted by the project team this week with an invitation to meet the team.
Anyone with any questions should call 1800 811 054 to talk to a project member in Cairns or visit the project website at [www.eliminatendengue.com](http://www.eliminatendengue.com)

**Media contact:** To arrange an interview contact Helen Cook: 0439 878070

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**BACKGROUND**

**About Dengue fever:**
Dengue fever is a mosquito-borne viral disease that occurs in over 100 countries worldwide. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that each year there are 50-100 million cases of dengue fever globally. Over 1,000 cases of dengue fever were confirmed in Far North Queensland in the 2008-09 wet seasons¹ and the potential for dengue to be imported into Australia is likely to rise with the increase of the disease in the Asia Pacific region as a result of urbanisation and growth in international travel.

There are four types of dengue virus - DEN 1,2,3,4 which can cause dengue fever. If a person gets dengue a second time from a different virus there is a greater risk of developing the more severe and life threatening form of the disease, dengue haemorrhagic fever (DHF).

**About the Team and funding:**
The ‘Eliminate Dengue’ project is an international collaboration involving research institutions in Australia, Vietnam, Thailand, USA and Brazil.

The project is funded by the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health as part of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s ‘Grand Challenges in Global Health’ initiative.

The project is also funded by the Queensland and Australian Governments.

**About APVMA:**
The APVMA is an Australian government regulatory authority established in 1993 to centralise the registration of all agricultural and veterinary chemical products into the Australian marketplace².

Applications to the APVMA undergo a rigorous assessment using the expertise of the APVMA’s scientific staff and drawing on the technical knowledge of other relevant scientific organisations, Commonwealth Government departments and state agriculture departments.

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¹ Queensland Health ‘Media Release’