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Deadly threat bangs at Queensland's door

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Aedes albopictus female mosquito. Credit: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Scientists at The University of Queensland have identified a deadly threat lurking just 30 kilometres north of Queensland.

Researcher Dr Nigel Beebe said established populations of the dangerous Asian tiger mosquito had been found on the Torres Strait islands of Waiben (Thursday) and Ngurupia Horn), in the southern Torres Strait, just off Cape York Peninsula.

"This exotic mosquito is banging on our northern door demanding

entrance and is most likely, despite our increasing efforts, to gain access."

He said there was no clearly marked frontier between Papua New Guinea and northern Australia, and it was difficult to ensure that people and boats were not accompanied by mosquitos carrying deadly viruses such as dengue and chikungunya.

"Once on the mainland, the Asian tiger mosquito is highly capable of travelling with humans and establishing as far south as Tasmania," Dr Beebe said.

"It is capable of transmitting both dengue and chikungunya throughout northern and southern urban landscapes in the summer months," he said.

"We need to be completely on the front foot here, aggressively developing technologies to shut down the risk of an Asian tiger mosquito expansion into Australia, while establishing contingency plans for its arrival."

Dr Beebe led a team of UQ researchers which quantified the population genetics of the tiger mosquito and found it did not come from PNG, as first thought, but from the Indonesian region, and most likely through illegal fishing in the region.

The study, published in the journal *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, found that there were already regular appearances of the Asian tiger mosquito at Australia's northern mainland ports, with boat travel between the islands being the most likely cause.

"With climate change, and the potential invasion of the tiger mosquito into our urban landscapes, the risk of dengue and chikungunya virus transmission is likely to increase in Australia, due to changing

temperatures as well as the increased use of rain water tanks and other water storage facilities," Dr Beebe said.

More information: www.plosntds.org/article/info: … journal.pntd.0002361

Provided by University of Queensland

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