

*MEDIA RELEASE*

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*Reef and Rainforest Research Centre (RRRC), Cairns*

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## RESEARCH ON EARLY WARNING SYSTEM FOR IRUKANDJI

Scientists and managers will be better-equipped to understand and predict swarms of potentially deadly 'irukandji' jellyfish in Far North Queensland waters thanks to government-supported research.

Jellyfish scares have led to a string of beach closures at Cairns, Townsville and elsewhere, with several swimmers suffering the excruciating pain of an irukandji sting.

However a project under the Tropical Water Quality Hub of the Australian Government's National Environmental Science Programme (NESP) has brought together jellyfish experts, surf lifesavers, indigenous rangers and other stakeholders to guide future irukandji research.

The final report of "Project 3.6", to be released this week, contains the framework for investment in future research projects on jellyfish developed after a stakeholder workshop at James Cook University (JCU) Cairns last year.

Future research will look at better understanding irukandji behaviour and morphology, how they are affected by weather patterns such as El Nino and ways for the public to use social media to identify possible irukandji specimens in the wild.

Project lead Dr Mike Kingsford from JCU said bringing together all stakeholders for the workshop opened the door to better investment in jellyfish research.

“The Australian Government has recognised that understanding and managing irukandji requires greater focus and engagement with stakeholders,” Dr Kingsford said.

“With the workshop it was really the first time we had all the relevant stakeholders in the same room - traditional owners, surf lifesavers, GBRMPA, JCU, CSIRO and more - and had a sensible conversation about irukandji research.

“Based on the outcome of the workshop, the government has endorsed further research.

“In terms of how it’s going to help minimise risk, we’re looking at ways of reducing stings by being able to provide better warning to swimmers and also dealing with stings in the best possible way.”

Far North Queensland surf lifesavers are also looking forward to increased knowledge about irukandji, especially given increased beach closures this year.

Surf Lifesaving Queensland Lifeguard supervisor Russell Blanchard said knowing an irukandji swarm was coming before it arrived could help people avoid stings.

“This has been one of our higher-incidence stinger seasons, definitely,” Mr Blanchard said.

“From our point of view one of the biggest benefits of this research is the risk assessment that will help us make a decision on whether it’s safe to swim or not.”

The Tropical Water Quality Hub is managed by the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, a non-profit environmental organisation based in Cairns.

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