

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2013-14, 5/6 & 7 June 2013

Question: E13-256

OUTCOME: 14 - Biosecurity and Emergency Response

Topic: Risk of Cross Border Infections

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Boyce

Question:

In DOHA's opinion what is the level of risk of cross border infections that affect Australian citizens in Northern Australia? Can the Department please provide supporting information for this opinion?

Answer:

The joint Papua New Guinea (PNG)/Australia Torres Strait Cross Border Health Issues Committee (HIC) which the Department of Health chairs, identifies health concerns that arise in the Torres Strait Treaty Zone and adjacent Treaty villages along the South Fly coast of PNG. HIC member agencies work together to identify appropriate strategies and resources to address these concerns.

An independent study undertaken by the Head of Epidemiology at the Victorian Infectious Diseases Services and commissioned by the Government of PNG, *Evaluation of Risks of Tuberculosis in Western Province PNG*, has concluded that the risk of PNG/Torres Strait cross border Tuberculosis transmission is low if contact is confined to trading, fishing and other outdoor activity.

Queensland Health, which is a member of the HIC, has coordinated a *Torres Strait Risk Assessment* which provides a list of communicable diseases which pose the greatest risk in the Torres Strait region. This assessment found that diseases which pose a risk due to the proximity of Torres Strait to PNG are malaria, TB and Japanese encephalitis.

The HIC has developed a package of measures to address issues of cross border health concern. The Australian elements of the package includes an exotic mosquito detection, control and elimination program to assist in preventing the spread of mosquito-borne diseases in the Torres Strait and to the mainland, and funding for a Torres Strait Communications Officer to ensure effective information and data sharing with PNG regarding communicable diseases in Torres Strait communities which may arise from cross border movements in the Torres Strait Protected Zone.