



PRESS STATEMENT

IMR09/13

12 November 2013

Bat surveillance vital in PNG

A bat surveillance exercise was recently conducted in Madang to identify potential diseases in bats that might be of threat to humans.

It was a joint effort between four government agencies including PNG Institute of Medical Research (IMR), National Agriculture and Quarantine Inspection Authority (NAQIA), Department of Agriculture and Livestock and Madang Police.

“This is the first of more similar surveillance exercises to be conducted in other bat populations around the country over the next few years,” said Dr Yazid Abdad, Head of Zoonoses and Neglected Diseases section at IMR.

This section was recently formed to investigate diseases that are passed to Papua New Guineans from animals and the environment.

“The aim of the surveillance work is to understand better the bat ecology in PNG and also identify any potential zoonoses so that we may become better prepared in case of an outbreak,” Dr Abdad said.

It has been well documented that bats are carriers of various diseases that have recently caused epidemics worldwide such as coronaviruses (SARS and MERS), influenza viruses and rabies.

“Bats and flying foxes are common in the coastal areas of PNG and so it is vital to understand the role they play and the effects they have on human health,” said Sinafa Robby, staff from Zoonoses and Neglected Disease section.

Apart from bats, other surveillance exercises are also being conducted to investigate other animal populations that have close ties to human.

Information gathered from this surveillance will be used to introduce and formulate health policies with the National Department of Health to further improve the health of Papua New Guineans.

Zoonoses are diseases that humans can contract from wild or domestic animals. Neglected diseases are diseases that are overlooked due to focus on other more serious diseases. Some examples of zoonoses and neglected diseases include hookworm infection, lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis), dengue and leptospirosis (Weil’s syndrome).