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## Aussie fishos and ADI help fight malaria in PNG

06 May 2009

Last year fishing mates, Stephen Campbell and Stephen George, returned from their annual fishing expedition to PNG determined to help the village locals they'd seen suffering from malaria. In April 2009, in partnership with Australian Doctors International (ADI) and Kimberly-Clark Healthcare, they provided 602 various sized insecticide impregnated bed nets to almost 1,300 people in nine villages situated along the remote Bensbach River lowlands in South Fly, Western Province, PNG.

Six hundred cases of malaria were reported at the beginning of the 2008 wet season. And yet we saw only two bed nets in the entire village," said Stephen Campbell, General Manager for Kimberly-Clark's Healthcare Division in Sydney.

He and close friend Stephen George, from Melbourne, enjoy fishing trips to Bensbach every year. This wet savannah is renowned for its bountiful barramundi, along with other exotic wildlife such as cassowaries, crocodiles and pygmy geese.



**Stephen George from Melbourne, who financed the charter flight needed to fly the 602 bed nets from Port Moresby to Morehead.**

The two fishing mates proposed the project to ADI, a not-for-profit development aid organisation who has delivered nearly 55,000 nets to North and Middle Fly in Western Province, PNG, since 2003. Kimberly-Clark had supported one of ADI's previous bed net projects and with urging from Campbell was keen to help again. This was ADI's first venture in South Fly, whose borders are just five kilometres away from Australian territory.

"Having worked in the healthcare industry most of my life it was immediately apparent that many of the local villagers were in need of medical program that addressed some of the more serious health risks," said Campbell, who convinced his company to pay for the nets.

"The opportunity that Kimberly-Clark had with ADI to deliver a sustainable and significant benefit to the villages that I visit each year was obvious and achievable."

"It's such a simple, but life-saving intervention," emphasised George, who paid for the charter flight needed to transport the bed nets from Port Moresby. "My first trip to Bensbach was in 1995. So when I return year after year only to find that more and more beautiful people have passed away from preventable illnesses such as malaria and TB, it just breaks my heart. Whatever I can do, I will do."

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It took from June 2008 to April 2009 to complete the project, due to the complicated logistics and high costs associated with operating in such an isolated region. In this floodplain terrain, there are no paved roads and most villages lack access to basic services such as electricity, telephone and post. The project was coordinated from ADI's offices in Sydney and North Fly.

"Over those ten months I learnt just how challenging it is to make things happen in PNG," said Campbell. "The remoteness and cost to transport aid was a significant challenge."



**Insecticide impregnated bed nets, such as the one shown here, were delivered to nine villages in the Bensbach region.**

George applauds the great synergy between all parties involved: "One of the crucial components of this project was ADI training local community health workers to conduct a census among households to assess the number and size of nets needed by each family. This also ensures that no one misses out or doubles up. We all wanted to make sure that the nets got to the people who needed them."

Based on the results of the census, 602 insecticide impregnated bed nets were purchased from Rotarians Against Malaria in Port Moresby and flown to Morehead via an Air New Guinea charter flight. Local community health workers then hand delivered the nets to the villagers and showed them how to use and take care of them. For example, it is highly recommended to keep the nets away from open fires and not use them for fishing in the nearby rivers!

George is now counting down the 40 days left until his next trip to Bensbach, his tenth to the region. He's looking forward to hooking some fat barramundi, as well as seeing firsthand the outcomes of the ADI bed net project that he helped make possible.

"It's frustrating to see all the sickness these poor kids suffer when much of it can be prevented by something as simple as bed nets, or penicillin, or even a cake of soap," he said. "I just want to make sure that local people we know are still there and not gone from something like malaria."

#### reader comments

I fished the Morehead for eight weeks some time ago, and can think of no better people to assist than the folks of the Morehead, between Bula and Morehead proper. The M'bini people have to rate as some of the most gentle, well spoken and friendly people I have ever encountered, and , as a 'M'bini Markai ,(if I've got the grammar and spelling correct), I applaud all and any efforts to assist these wonderful people. MF P.S. big shout out to the Tonda Wildlife fund, Tonda Village and "constable Constable", all of whom made our stay safe, enjoyable and informative P.P.S Hi Mike and "Nads" ... you guys rock ... first metery from above the "cut" and that horse from Bensback Creek did it for me aye.

**Mike F** on 07-May-09 06:06 PM

Congratulations to the two Stephens who put in a great effort with Australian Doctors International to bring lasting benefits to the people of Bensbach.

**Anne Lanham** on 06-May-09 08:29 PM

Well done to both the Stephens, ADI and KC. As President of ADI, I've watched this partnership evolve and flourish with great satisfaction. By the way, it is estimated that for every 20 nets delivered, it can potentially save one life; start doing the maths! Also, it's mainly kids under five who die from malaria

**Peter Macdonald** on 06-May-09 05:19 PM

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