Unique mosquitoes in world first

**MOSQUITOES** infected with a bacteria known to block transmission of dengue fever have been approved for release into the wild in Australia’s north, in a world first.

Scientists can soon begin field trials of a unique method for combating the potentially fatal infection, which now afflicts up to 100 million people a year across the tropics.

Yesterday it was announced that the Eliminate Dengue Project, backed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, has received final regulatory and safety approvals.

The first of the mosquitoes to be infected with wobachia — a bacteria otherwise found widely in fruit flies and other insects — will be set free at sites near Cairns next year.

“We’re hoping that in the course of one wet season we should be able to take a study area and see the wobachia invade the whole population of mosquitoes,” project leader Scott O’Neill, from the University of Queensland, said.

“The main effect that it has is to prevent the mosquito from being able to transmit dengue.”

Wobachia bacteria is found naturally in up to 70 per cent of all insect species, though previously not in the mosquito *Aedes aegypti*, which transmits dengue fever.

Scientists had to breed a new strain of wobachia to enable it to live inside the mosquito, where it passes naturally to mozzie offspring and ensures its survival by spoiling the eggs of female mozzies that do not carry it.

The bacteria also monopolises resources needed by the dengue virus, ensuring it can’t take hold on a mozzie which in turn won’t go on to infect humans with dengue fever.