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Scientists scramble for solution to Rhinoceros Beetle

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Scientists from around the world are meeting in Australia this week to try and find a solution to the invasive coconut rhinoceros beetle which is devastating trees across the Pacific.



The disease-resistant variety of rhinoceros beetle. Photo: Supplied

Guam entomologist Aubrey Moore has been travelling the globe searching for a viral control agent to deal with what's referred to as the CRBG, a particular beetle bio-type that has proven immune to previous viruses that were introduced.

Dr Moore said over half of Guam's coconut tree population was under threat from the CRBG, as were other populations across the region.

"This is a Pacific-wide problem. It's a big problem in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and other places," he said.

"It turns out that all of the new infestations of Rhino Beetle in the Pacific involve this new bio-type, CRBG, and it's totally out of control."

Eradication methods like destroying breeding grounds or spraying had been ruled out and there was urgency to find a viral solution, Dr Moore said.

"This meeting is all about using pathogens for insect control. There will be scientists from all over the world there so we are hoping to learn a lot and also get organised."

A further two meetings had been organised by New Zealand's scientific institute, AgResearch, Dr Moore said.