

A newly differentiated species of *Physalia physalis* in Australia

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In October 1991 vast numbers of a large *Physalia* sp. previously unrecognised in Australia, were beached in north Queensland. Some caused severe stings. These animals differed morphologically from the smaller, familiar Australian *Physalia* or "bluebottle" which has a float length of about 3-8cm and usually has only a single, long "main" tentacle - although it can also have several long, thin, tentacles, which may not be obvious.

This "new" *Physalia* sp. (Figure 2) differed in the following respects:

- Float lengths of up to 15cm.
- Up to five thick "main" tentacles usually a dark blue in colour, and up to ten other long, thin, pale-coloured tentacles.

We believe that this is a different species from the common, Australian *Physalia* ("bluebottle"). It is likely that it is *Physalia physalis*, the same as, or a similar species to the lethal western Atlantic species, commonly referred to as the "Portuguese man-o'-war" (Figure 3). The Atlantic jellyfish is larger again with a float length of up to 25 cm, and has multiple long, thick main tentacles, which have been reported to reach a length of 30 metres.

We suggest that the smaller, single tentacled jellyfish commonly known as the "bluebottle" should be referred to by its original name *Physalia utriculus*, despite the suggestion in 1960 by Totton that all *Physalia* species are the same and should all be referred to as *Physalia physalis*. (This question has remained taxonomically unresolved, and Totton's suggestion has since been ignored by some workers in this field.)" 11

Stings by *Physalia utriculus* cause immediate skin pain and whealing which is quickly and efficiently relieved with cold packs or ice." Some pain may be felt in the regional lymph glands and occasionally systemic symptoms including nausea, lethargy and dyspnoea have been reported."

In contrast, victims stung by the newly differentiated Australian *Physalia physalis* experienced severe skin pain, with only slow relief from cold packs. Some of the stings also caused a mild Irukandji-like syndrome," with nausea, vomiting, abdominal colic, limb muscle cramps, anxiety, restlessness and chest pain (the latter is due to myalgia of the intercostal and back muscles resulting in inspiratory pain which cuts off the breath with a grunting" noise).

This pattern of symptoms, lasting about one hour, has also recently been described in victims stung by the Pakistani *Physalia* in Karachi (Junaid Alam et al - unpublished observations, 1991). The morphology of the Pakistani jellyfish is currently under investigation.