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**INVESTIGATION INTO THE MORTALITIES OF LARVAL
MUD CRABS, *Scylla serrata* AND METHODS OF
CONTROL.**

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**In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Science in the Discipline of Microbiology and Immunology, James Cook
University, Townsville, Australia October 2005**

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Laurence Andreas Liessmann

October 2005

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Laurence Andreas Liessmann

October 2005

ABSTRACT

Pathogens and disease throughout the larval stage of the mud crab *Scylla serrata* are said to be responsible for preventing the establishment of a viable mud crab aquaculture industry within Australia.

Vibriosis has been demonstrated as the underlying cause for inconsistent survival of larvae of the mud crab *S. serrata* (Mann *et al.* 1998). Initial investigations of this study were directed at gaining an understanding of virulence factors of vibrios, namely siderophores, haemolysin, chitinases and bacteriophages. Haemolysin, chitinase and siderophore activity were assessed through observation on specifically prepared agars. Detection of a bacteriophage was conducted by mitomycin C induced growth curves. It was visibly evident that the LLD1 strain of *V. harveyi* had the greatest haemolysin production compared to the other strains. The *V. harveyi* strain 12 produced the least haemolytic activity. Colony and halo diameter of the strains were as a group, significantly different ($F=70.78, df=4, 100, P<0.0001$) and ($F=148.31, df=4, 100, P<0.0001$) respectively. When examining chitinase activity, strains 12 and LLB2 were the only isolates that did not produce an evident zone of clearance. Colony and halo diameter of chitinases of the above strains were as a group, significantly different ($F=41.46, df=5, 60, P<0.0001$) and ($F=118.03, df=5, 60, P<0.0001$) respectively. It was visibly evident that the selected probiotic isolate *V. harveyi* LLB1 had the greatest siderophore production compared to the other strains. Colony and halo diameter of siderophores of the strains were as a group significantly different ($F=22.79, df=4, 50, P<0.0001$) and ($F=172.97, df=4, 50, P<0.0001$) respectively. From the four isolates that were concentrated through ultracentrifugation and analysed by TEM, *V. harveyi* 642 was the only isolate to possess a bacteriophage.

The effectiveness of an environmental probiotic, referred to as the *V. alginolyticus* LLB2, was assessed on the survival of larvae of *S. serrata* when challenged with a virulent *V. harveyi* strain. The factors of the experimental trial, the bacterial isolate and concentration of bacteria, were significantly different as a group ($P<0.0001$) indicating that survival of zoea were affected by these factors. It was evident that there was a definite trend between increase in concentrations of bacteria and an increase in mortalities. It was also evident that treatments with *V. alginolyticus* LLB2 led to the

highest survival, which also happened to be at a concentration of 10^5 CFU ml⁻¹. Treatment consisting of *V. harveyi* LLD1 obtained the lowest survival at a concentration of 10^5 CFU ml⁻¹. Treatments that were inoculated at a cell density of 10^5 CFU ml⁻¹ with the virulent *Vibrio harveyi* strains LLD1 and 642 and supplemented with the probiotic *V. alginolyticus* LLB2 had significantly higher survival rate ($P>0.05$) than the treatment inoculated with *V.harveyi* LLD1 and 642 alone. These results suggest that the probiotic *V. alginolyticus* LLB2 demonstrated a protective effect towards the larvae of *S. serrata* when challenged with a virulent *V. harveyi* isolate.

A histological investigation was carried out on the possible diseases associated with the larvae of *S. serrata*, and adult mud crabs. Cells within the hepatopancreas in both the larvae and adults showed nuclear pathology. Amorphous basophilic intranuclear inclusions, which were markedly hypertrophied were observed. These observations were similar to the initial surveys of the intranuclear bacilliform virus *Scylla baculovirus virus* (SBV) in adult *S. serrata* (Anderson and Prior 1992). From 15 batches of larvae that were surveyed only two batches of individuals were found to carry SBV. The prevalences of infected larvae were 32.26% and 52.17 %, respectively, where as 8% of 25 adult crabs from the Townsville region were infected.

Following the detection of an intranuclear bacilliform virus within the larvae of *S. serrata*, presumably SBV, an attempt was made to amplify the nucleotide sequence of this virus. Novel primer sets were designed from the protein-binding gene from WSSV which is said to be homologous to that of the insect baculovirus. Only the primer set BP2, BP2 5' – AAAAATGGTTGCCCGAAGCTC and BP2 5' – TGAGGAACGGCGACGGACAG-3' were successful in producing amplicons. When the relatedness of the amplicon sequences were compared to available databases using Basic Local Alignment Search Tool (BLAST), there were no significant phylogenetic matches.

This has been the first time the intranuclear bacilliform virus SBV has been identified in larvae of *S. serrata*, as well as the first partial sequence from SBV. The investigation of virulence mechanisms possessed by *Vibrio* sp. as well as the use of environmental probiotics in attempt to control vibriosis, will provide a sound basis for future studies in diseases in the mud crab *S. serrata*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xiii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	xiv
CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 General biology of <i>Scylla serrata</i>	6
2.2.1 Taxonomy and Distribution	6
2.2.2 Lifecycle and Reproduction	6
2.3 Major diseases associated with <i>Scylla serrata</i>	8
2.3.1 Intranuclear bacilliform viruses	8
2.3.1.1 Intranuclear bacilliform viruses of crabs	11
2.3.1.1.1 <i>Scylla</i> bacilliform virus (SBV)	11
2.3.1.1.2 Baculo-A	11
2.3.1.1.3 Baculo-PP	12
2.3.1.1.4 White spot syndrome virus (WSSV)	12
2.3.2 <i>Vibrios</i>	13
2.3.3 Fungi	14
2.3.4 <i>Haematodinium</i> sp.	14
2.3.5 Peritrich ciliates	15
2.3.6 Parasitic barnacles	16
2.3.6.1 <i>Loxothylacus ihlei</i>	16
2.3.6.2 <i>Octolasmis cor</i>	17
2.3.7 Nicothoid copepod (<i>Choniosphaera indica</i>)	17
2.4 Probiotics as a possible control method	18
2.4.1 Probiotics in crustacean culture	19
2.4.1.1 <i>Thalassobacter utilis</i>	20
2.4.1.2 <i>Vibrio alginolyticus</i>	22
2.4.1.3 <i>Lactobacillus</i>	23
2.4.1.4 <i>Bacillus</i> S11	24

2.4.1.5 <i>Pseudoalteromonas</i> sp.	24
2.4.1.6 <i>Bifidobacterium thermophilum</i>	26
2.5 Inhibition of virulence	26
2.6 Bacteriophage Therapy	26
2.7 Conclusion	29
CHAPTER 3: GENERAL METHODS AND MATERIALS	
3.1 Source of bacterial strains	31
3.2 Storage and propagation of stock isolates of bacterial strains	31
3.3 Cell density determination of bacterial strains	32
3.4 Bacterial identification	32
3.5 Broodstock	33
3.5.1 Capture Site	33
3.5.2 Maintenance	33
3.5.3 Spawning	33
3.6 Larval rearing conditions	34
3.7 Live feed	34
3.8 Larval pathogenicity assays	35
3.9 Quantification of DNA	35
3.10 PCR Amplification	35
CHAPTER 4: INVESTIGATION OF POSSIBLE VIRULENCE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH <i>Vibrio</i> sp.	
4.1 Introduction	36
4.2 Material and Methods	39
4.2.1 Sources of bacterial isolates	39
4.2.2 Isolation of probiotic and virulent strains	39
4.2.3 Growth curve and selection of probiotic isolate	39
4.2.4 Bacterial identification	40
4.2.5 Extraction and purification of <i>Vibrio harveyi</i> DNA	40
4.2.6 PCR amplification using <i>Vibrio harveyi</i> specific primers	40
4.2.7 Detection of haemolysin activity	41
4.2.8 Detection of chitinase activity	42
4.2.9 Detection of siderophore activity	42
4.2.10 Detection of a phage	42
4.2.11 Bacteriophage extraction and concentration	42
4.2.12 Statistical analysis	43

4.3 Results	44
4.3.1 Comparative bacterial growth curve of environmental isolates	44
4.3.2 Identification of suspect virulent and probiotic isolate	45
4.3.3 PCR confirmation of suspected <i>V. harveyi</i> using <i>V. harveyi</i> specific primers	47
4.3.4 Haemolysin production on blood agar	48
4.3.5 Chitinase production on chitin agar	49
4.3.6 Siderophore production on CAS agar	50
4.3.7 Detection of bacteriophage infection in bacterial strains	52
4.3.8 Bacteriophage extraction and concentration	52
4.4 Discussion	54
 CHAPTER 5: THE EFFICACY OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL PROBIOTIC ON THE LARVAL <i>Scylla serrata</i> WHEN CHALLENGED WITH VIRULENT <i>V. harveyi</i>.	
5.1 Introduction	62
5.2 Material and Methods	64
5.2.1 Challenge of larvae of <i>S. serrata</i> .	64
5.2.2 Screening of vibriostatic activity	65
5.2.3 Statistical analysis	65
5.3 Result	66
5.3.1 The effectiveness of environmental probiotic on larval of <i>S. serrata</i>	66
5.3.2 Screening of vibriostatic activity	68
5.4 Discussion	69
 CHAPTER 6: INVESTIGATION INTO AN INTRANUCLEAR BACILLIFORM VIRUS OBSERVED IN THE LARVAE OF THE MUD CRAB <i>Scylla serrata</i>.	
6.1 Introduction	73
6.2 Material and Methods	75
6.2.1 Sampling procedure	75
6.2.2 Histological procedures	75
6.3 Results	76
6.4 Discussion	79
 CHAPTER 7: THE USE OF POLYMERASE CHAIN REACTION FOR THE DETECTION OF <i>Scylla</i> BACILLIFORM VIRUS IN <i>Scylla serrata</i>	
7.1 Introduction	81

7.2 Material and Methods	83
7.2.1 Viral extraction and DNA purification	83
7.2.2 Testing DNA template integrity using decapod specific primers	83
7.2.3 PCR amplification using primers designed from the White Spot Specific Genome	84
7.2.4 Analysis of products	85
7.2.5 PCR product purification	85
7.2.6 Cloning of PCR products	85
7.2.7 Isolation and confirmation of plasmid DNA	85
7.2.8 DNA sequencing	86
7.2.9 <i>In situ</i> hybridisation of histology slides	86
7.2.9.1 Construction of labelled probes	87
7.2.9.2 Preparation of tissue sections	88
7.2.9.3 Hybridisation	88
7.2.9.4 Detection of probe hybridisation	89
7.3 Results	90
7.3.1 DNA quality from infected <i>S. serrata</i> tissue using decapod specific primers	90
7.3.2 PCR amplication of infected <i>S. serrata</i> tissue using BP1 specific primers	91
7.3.3 PCR amplication of infected <i>S. serrata</i> tissue using BP2 specific primers	92
7.3.4 PCR product purification	93
7.3.5 Cloning of PCR products	93
7.3.6 Isolation and confirmation of plasmid DNA	95
7.3.7 DNA sequencing	96
7.3.8 Hybridisation	98
7.4 Discussion	99
CHAPTER 8: GENERAL DISCUSSION	101
CHAPTER 9: REFERENCES	106
APPENDIX	123
APPENDIX 1: GENERAL BACTERIA CULTURE MEDIA	123
APPENDIX 2: PREPARATION OF CHROME AZUROL S (CAS) AGAR	125
APPENDIX 3: PREPARATION OF CHITIN AGAR	127

APPENDIX 4: PREPARATION OF DUAL LAYER BLOOD PLATES	128
APPENDIX 5: DIFFERENTIAL AND SELECTIVE BACTERIA CULTURE MEDIA	129
APPENDIX 6: BUFFERS AND REAGENTS	131
APPENDIX 7: WALNES MEDIA FOR ALGAE CULTURE	134
APPENDIX 8: FIXATIVE	135

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Morphological comparison of crustacean intranuclear bacilliform viruses.	10
Table 2.2	Environmental probiotics used in the culture of crustaceans.	28
Table 3.1	The strain numbers and the source of isolation of <i>V. harveyi</i> isolates used in this investigation.	31
Table 4.1	Master mix prepared for the PCR used for the confirmation of <i>V. harveyi</i> isolates according to Oakey <i>et al.</i> (2003).	41
Table 4.2	Identification of virulent strain of <i>Vibrio harveyi</i> and a probiotic strain <i>Vibrio alginolyticus</i> using key devised by Alsina and Blanch's (1994a,b) keys and modified by DPI&F.	46
Table 4.3	A comparison of significance differences (P value) of haemolysin halo diameter and colony diameter (shaded area) of <i>V. harveyi</i> strains grown on dual layered blood plates. Haemolysin production at 48 hours was compared using univariant analysis of variance (ANOVA) and comparisons of individual means were performed using LSD multiple comparisons.	49
Table 4.4	A comparison of significance differences (P value) of halo diameter and colony diameter (shaded area) of strains grown on chitin agar. Chitinase production at seven days was compared using univariant analysis of variance (ANOVA) and comparisons of individual means were performed using LSD multiple comparisons.	50
Table 4.5	A comparison of significance differences (P value) of halo diameter and colony diameter (shaded area) of strains grown on CAS agar. Siderophore production at 48 hours was compared using univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) and comparisons of individual means were performed using LSD multiple comparison.	51
Table 5.1	Number of replicates of <i>S. serrata</i> larval pathogenicity assays performed for various bacterial isolates at different concentrations.	65

Table 5.2	Univariate ANOVA results of the experiment of trial (EXP), the bacterial isolate (ISOLATE), and concentration of bacteria (CONC).	67
Table 5.3	The significant values and mean differences from the LSD analysis of survival rates of the larvae between bacterial treatments at a concentration of 10^5 CFU ml ⁻¹ .	68
Table 6.1	Prevalence of SBV in infected batches of <i>S. serrata</i> larvae.	78
Table 6.2	Prevalence of SBV in cells within infected batches of <i>S. serrata</i> larvae.	78
Table 6.3	Number of adult crabs sampled that were infected with SBV.	78
Table 6.4	Intensity of SBV infection within an infected adult crabs.	79
Table 7.1	Master mix prepared for PCR.	83
Table 7.2	Master mix prepared for PCR.	84
Table 7.3	Master mix prepared for PCR.	86
Table 7.4	Master mix prepared for PCR.	87

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	Life cycle of the mud crab <i>Scylla serrata</i> .	7
Figure 4.1	Growth curves of isolated presumptive <i>Vibrios</i> from the first passage as measured by optical density, at a wavelength of 600 nm. Colonies were isolated from different cultures of mud crab larvae.	44
Figure 4.2	Growth curves of isolated presumptive <i>Vibrios</i> from the second passage as measured by optical density, at a wavelength of 600 nm. Colonies were isolated from different cultures of mud crab larvae.	45
Figure 4.3	Amplification of the 16SrDNA sequence coding for <i>Vibrio harveyi</i> by PCR in a presumptive <i>Vibrio harveyi</i> LLD1 isolate.	47
Figure 4.4	Mean colony diameter and haemolysin diameter at 24 and 48 hours of <i>Vibrio</i> strains 642, LLD1, 645, 12 and ISO 7 \pm S.E.	48
Figure 4.5	Mean colony diameter and zone of clearance at seven days resulting from chitinase production of <i>Vibrio</i> strains 642, LLD1, 645, 12, ISO 7 and LLB2 \pm S.E.	50
Figure 4.6	Mean colony diameter and siderophore diameter at 48 hours of <i>Vibrio</i> strains 642, LLD1, 645, 12 and ISO 7 \pm S.E.	51
Figure 4.7	Growth curve of bacterial strains using an absorbance of 600 nm with and without 50 ng of the stressor mitomycin C. In all figures (M) indicates that sample has been stressed with mitomycin C.	53
Figure 4.8	Electron microscopy of concentrated bacteriophage particles of <i>V. harveyi</i> 642.	54
Figure 5.1	Mean survival of 25 larvae of <i>S. serrata</i> at different concentrations of bacterial treatments \pm S.E.	67

Figure 6.1	Light micrograph of amorphous, basophilic intranuclear inclusions in adult <i>S. serrata</i> hepatopancreatic tubule epithelial cells (a, b). Infected nuclei (arrows) are markedly hypertrophic and have thin marginal band of basophilic chromatin. Light micrograph of uninfected larvae of <i>S. serrata</i> (c). Light micrograph of basophilic intranuclear inclusions in larvae of <i>S. serrata</i> (d,e,f). Infected nuclei are markedly hypertrophic. Advanced (large arrow) and early (small arrow) nuclear changes are present. All H&E stain.	77
Figure 7.1	Electrophoretic gel of a PCR using decapod specific primers.	90
Figure 7.2	PCR amplification of infected <i>S. serrata</i> tissue using WSSV - specific primer BP1.	91
Figure 7.3	PCR amplification of infected <i>S. serrata</i> tissue using WSSV – specific primer BP2.	92
Figure 7.4	Electrophoretic gel of a PCR product using M13 primers.	94
Figure 7.5	Electrophoretic gel of a PCR product using M13 primers.	95
Figure 7.6	Sequence of <i>S. serrata</i> 150 bp into a plasmid of <i>E. coli</i> DNA insert of 131 bp. Shaded areas represent primer sites.	96
Figure 7.7	Sequence of <i>S. serrata</i> 350 bp <i>E. coli</i> plasmid DNA insert of 354 bp. Shaded areas represent primer sites.	96
Figure 7.8	The DNA nucleotide sequence of the SBV product 131 bp in comparison to its approximate phylogenetic affiliations with other intranuclear bacilliform viruses obtained using BLAST alignment. Sequence data was aligned using GeneDoc software. Shading indicates identical nucleotides. Dashes indicate simulated spaces introduced to achieve maximal alignment.	97
Figure 7.9	(a). Light micrograph of hepatopancreas of larvae of <i>S. serrata</i> infected with SBV. SBV inclusions are visible (arrows) within infected cells. The following section was a negative control where the probe ₁₅₀	

was not applied. Dark precipitate was present within a number of the infected cells. (b,c). Light micrograph of hepatopancreas of larvae of *S. serrata* infected with SBV. SBV inclusions are visible (arrows) within infected cells. The probe₁₅₀ and anti-dig was applied to both sections. SBV inclusions are visible (arrows) within infected cells. Dark precipitate was also present within a number of infected cells. 98

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACMM	Australian collection of marine microorganism
BP	Base pair
BLAST	Basic Local Alignment Search Tool
CCEAD	Consultative Committee on Emergency Animal Diseases
CFU	Colony forming units
DAB	Diaminobenzidine Tetrahydrochloride
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DPI&F	Department of Primary industries and Fisheries.
ECP	Extracellular products
EDTA	Ethyl diaminetetraacetic acid
IBV	Intranuclear bacilliform virus
LA	Luminous agar
LBB	Luria bertani broth
LB	Luminous broth
 LSD	Least significant difference
MARFU	Marine and Aquaculture Research Facility
OD	Optical density
PCR	Polymerase chain reaction
PYSS	Peptone yeast and sea salt
SBV	<i>Scylla</i> baculovirus
TEM	Transmission electron microscopy
UV	Ultra-violet
VHML	<i>Vibrio Harveyi</i> Myovirus Like
TBE	Tris Borate - EDTA
TE	Tris, EDTA buffer
TES	Tris, EDTA, NaCl buffer
TCBS	Thiosulphate-citrate-bile salts-sucrose
WSSV	White spot syndrome virus

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks foremost to my supervisor Leigh Owens for first of all giving me this opportunity. This journey has been a much pleasurable one thanks to his endless support, enthusiasm and encouragement. A thanks must also go out to my cosupervisor Chaoshu Zheng, for his extensive knowledge and advice in the culture of mud crab larvae.

I wish to thank Laurie Reily for his patience while instructing and guiding me through numerous histological techniques.

Many thanks to Ray, Jane and Brad for their knowledge and advice, who gave up significant time to teach me the finer points of PCR and other molecular biology stuff.

My room mates James and Kerry thanks for being great listeners and for your on going support, I will certainly miss those procrastinating conversations.

I would like to thank the technical staff at the Department of Microbiology and Immunology, Helen, Karen, Kerry and Juli. I'm sure if there were no students getting them to run back and forth from the stores they would actually have to do some exercise.

Fiona yes I have finished, hopefully now life can become somewhat normal again. I can honestly say that my life would have been immeasurably poorer if I had never met you.

Finally thank you to my family especially mum and dad for their financial and moral support throughout the years, which without any of this would have been possible