

**ECONOMICS AND INDUSTRY  
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO 2011 KIMBERLEY ULTRAMARATHON EVENT**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT KUNUNURRA  
MONDAY, 23 APRIL 2012**

**SESSION FIVE**

**Members**

**Dr M.D. Nahan (Chairman)**  
**Mr W.J. Johnston (Deputy Chairman)**  
**Mr M.P. Murray**  
**Ms A.R. Mitchell**  
**Mr I.C. Blayney**  
**Mrs M.H. Roberts (Co-opted Member)**

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<018> Q/K

**Hearing commenced at 3.43 pm**

**CRIPPS, MR PAUL**

**Operations Manager/Pilot, Heliwork WA, examined:**

**WATSON, MR BRYN**

**Pilot/Paramedic, Heliwork WA, examined:**

**The CHAIRMAN:** Before we commence, could I ask those around the room to refrain from using audio-recording devices that might interfere with Hansard? Please turn your mobile phones off to not record or to ring.

Thanks for your appearance before the committee today and thanks for your trip up to the scene yesterday. It was really interesting. This committee hearing is a proceeding of Parliament and warrants the same respect that proceedings in the house itself demand. Even though you are not required to give evidence on oath, any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament. Before we commence, there is a number of procedural questions I need you to answer. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Did you receive and read the “Information for Witnesses” briefing sheet regarding giving evidence before parliamentary committees?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Do you have any questions relating to giving evidence in front of parliamentary committees?

**The Witnesses:** No.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It is not hard. The committee has received your submission. Thanks for your contribution. Do you want to make any amendments to your submission?

**The Witnesses:** No.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Before we get into questions, do you have any statements that you would like to make?

**Mr Cripps:** Not at this point, no.

**The CHAIRMAN:** On what date was the chopper hire from Beyond Action confirmed?

**Mr Cripps:** The initial helicopter that was chartered for filming work?

**The CHAIRMAN:** For filming work, yes.

**Mr Cripps:** I actually do not have that confirmation date on hand at the moment.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Okay. Was it 15 August?

**Mr Cripps:** That sounds correct.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So, in that vicinity. Were there any specific terms of this hire agreement that enabled the chopper to be used as first responder in the event of emergency?

**Mr Cripps:** I received a phone call from the organiser the day before the event inquiring about helicopters available for medical extraction.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Let us get that clear. It was the day before the event?

**Mr Cripps:** The day before the event, yes. Now, just to clarify, it was not actually RacingThePlanet that booked the helicopter for the filming work. It was organised, from my understanding—I recall it was booked through Tourism WA.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Beyond Action, or was it Tourism WA?

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** No, Tourism. I think he is right.

**Mr Cripps:** It may have been Beyond Action, but it certainly was not the RacingThePlanet organisers.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Could you check who actually booked it?

**Mr Cripps:** I think Beyond Action. Now that you say it, I do believe that it was Beyond Action, but I will confirm that. So, when I was contacted by the organiser the day before, I obviously advised her that we obviously did have a helicopter that was going to be on scene doing filming work and that could certainly be used for a first responder-type activity. Obviously, an emergency medical situation is going to override any filming work. So, that aircraft could certainly be utilised for that. In addition to that, we had a Bell LongRanger that was available from Kununurra, but that would not be available to them unless they wanted to pay a standby rate, where that aircraft could be available in Kununurra for the duration of the event. I made it quite clear that if there was an additional charter that came in, if that aircraft was not put on standby, that aircraft could be used for another charter and would not be available. She said to me, “That’s fine, we’ll leave it at that”, and did not place the aircraft on standby.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Would that have made a difference in the outcome of services provided to the injured people?

**Mr Cripps:** I do not believe so, mainly because on the day, the biggest issue we had was lack of communication. So, the only call that Heliwork ever received in regards to the situation down there—actually there were several phone calls. The first phone call was from FESA and they said that they had received a phone call from someone saying that there was fire, there were people trapped somewhere in the East Kimberley. It was very, very vague.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That was from FESA?

**Mr Cripps:** That was from FESA. I think it was Tony Stevenson who called me, from memory, and there was not enough information to go on to do anything. I asked him, “What do you want us to do? Do you want us to go and have a look around the area?” He asked me whether I was aware of the event taking place and I said I was. I did not have full detailed maps of where the event was being held or anything else. We got very little information prior to the event. So I said I knew the event was happening; I knew the approximate area, but not exactly where it was. He said, “Well, we don’t have enough to go on, so we’ll leave it at that.” He did apparently receive a phone number that he had tried to call and could not get in touch with them on that number, so we left it at that and there was nothing further.

[3.50 pm]

**The CHAIRMAN:** Where were you at the time?

**Mr Cripps:** I was in the office at Slingair Heliwork and it was not until approximately 10 to four in the afternoon I received a phone call from Nathan Summers, who was the helicopter pilot flying the media chopper, so to speak. He explained the situation and said that he needed help out there ASAP. We then had to get the aircraft ready because the aircraft was not ready to go. That took some time, trying to mobilise that aircraft. We also contacted St John requesting a stretcher, because

we did not know the exact details of the incident. We knew it was going to be a difficult spot to actually access and we knew there were several casualties but did not know a definite number. I had been contacted by Nathan Summers by sat phone and it cut out a couple of times, so it was several calls over a few short minutes to get as much information as we could.

Bryn was over at the hangar. I asked him to give me a hand to get the aircraft ready. I believe Bryn was the one that actually made the phone call to St John to try and get a stretcher over there. We waited for a period of time. No-one turned up with a stretcher. We decided to make a call and just go without that. We were hoping to get a paramedic or some St John volunteers to come with us, because we did not know what medical aid was down there already. When that did not arrive, we just decided to go anyway. We would have departed Kununurra—I am sure it is in my statement, but I believe it was around 25 past four, somewhere around that. We departed Kununurra and headed straight for Tier Range. When we arrived on scene, it was fairly easy to locate where the injured people were. We considered actually landing down the bottom and then realised that we really did not have enough time to spend landing down the bottom and walking up and trying to assess the situation, so we —

**The CHAIRMAN:** Why not?

**Mr Cripps:** We only had a limited amount of daylight left to return back to Kununurra and because of the call later in the day, we were limited by that. The helicopters that we do have are not suitable to fly at night and we are not rated to fly at night either. So, we basically did a couple of orbits around the area just to get an idea of how we could land there. By this stage, we could see Nathan Summers on the ground there and he was giving us some direction where to land.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Had he taken the filming helicopter to the scene?

**Mr Cripps:** He had. He arrived on scene there and actually tried to land in the area where we later were successful. He could not get in there because of several reasons. There was a lot of camera gear on the front and that restricted how close he could get into the rock cliff face. There were also some shrubs in the way that made access fairly difficult and on the rock sort of sloping ledge, there was a lot of loose rock and that sort of thing, so that made it virtually impossible to land there. It was just too much of a danger for him to land. So they did land and shutdown down the bottom and he and the film crew then climbed up the hill to try and clear an area there. Without that, there is no way that we would have gone into that area.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So they went up there and got rid of some of the trees?

**Mr Cripps:** They got rid of the shrubs that were in the way and got rid of the loose rocks on the rock ledge as well.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Did they do it or did the medical and other people do it?

**Mr Cripps:** No, I believe it was Nathan and I think the other guy's name was Nathan as well, from the film crew.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Was that Nathan Dyer who was with the —

**Mr Cripps:** Yes. No, sorry, not Nathan Dyer. It was someone from Beyond Action. I think his name was Nathan as well, but I cannot recall.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That was the person who was either from Beyond Action or RacingThePlanet who was directing Mr Summers regarding requiring the media chopper?

**Mr Cripps:** Yes.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** You had trouble earlier talking to the other helicopter because you were doing it on a sat phone, but when you were up in the air close by, were you able to talk on your radios to them?

**Mr Cripps:** No. Because the actual helicopter was on the ground, we did not have any communication with the crew at all because they did not have any handheld radios at all.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** So how did you know that they were going up to clear a space for you?

**Mr Cripps:** Only from the satellite phone call that we had. They had already landed and were actually on the scene and had started clearing an area there. It was not really until later that I realised how much work they had done to clear that area. We sort of arrived on scene and it was as is.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Were you the guys that directed the police and the ambulance where to go or was that the other helicopter?

**Mr Cripps:** That would have been the other helicopter. I think there was also John Storey, I believe, had a big part in directing them in his gyrocopter or ultralight or whatever it is that he has got.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So you got to the scene, it had been cleared a bit, and you then decided to hover and touch and they jumped on board.

**Mr Cripps:** We did not really know how close we were going to be able to get. Obviously, Bryn was a big help in guiding me in, because it is quite difficult to hover in an area like that close to a lot of obstacles. We really needed to put one skid firmly on the ground before anyone was able to board the aircraft. So, that took a little bit of time to be able to do that. Because of the helicopter limitations with power, we could only have a couple of people on board at a time. So, there was one of the casualties who ended up coming on board —

**Mr Watson:** Kate was the first one, I believe.

**Mr Cripps:** Kate.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Sarel said it was Kate as well.

**Mr Watson:** Yes, Kate and the race doctor were the first.

**Mr Cripps:** Was the race doctor the first one to get in or was —

**Mr Watson:** Yes.

**Mr Cripps:** So the doctor got in and then obviously assisted Kate getting in. Then, as I say, because of the limitations of the helicopter we did not have enough power to have another two people get on the aircraft. So, unfortunately, we had to leave it at that. We went down to lower ground where we landed. Kate and the doctor actually had to get out of the helicopter. Obviously, that would have been a fairly difficult thing to do with such horrific injuries. We left them there, flew back to the same site.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Where did you put them?

**Mr Cripps:** It was just in a cleared area on lower ground, some unburnt area there.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Close to the accident site?

**Mr Cripps:** It was fairly close, yes.

**Mr Watson:** A mile and a half, two miles.

**Mr Cripps:** Yes. From there we went back to the site where Turia and Sarel boarded the aircraft, then went to where we dropped off the doctor and Kate, picked them all up and then flew directly back to town. When we flew into town, we actually made several phone calls to the hospital and I believe Bryn has got some times.

<019> R/K 3:58:19 PM

**Mr Watson:** I made the first call to the hospital to let them know we were heading out to the scene to get some burns patients. Pre-notification is important so that they can get either bloods or fluids

ready and also pre-notify burns centres and also to plan for further transfer of patients early. That call was made at 1643 hours on the way out to the scene. En route back to Kununurra, I contacted Kununurra Hospital again and I was quite sure to ask for the emergency department, because initially you get transferred to a switch director first off. I spoke to who I was under the understanding was the triage nurse, provided her with a detailed situation report on the patients' conditions. It was obviously a 36-year-old female who was fully conscious, which is what we call a GCS 15. She had 70 per cent burns and had to IV access—I am not sure if that was the doctor on scene or Sarel gained that—and IV fluids running. She was haemodynamically stable. Also a 24-year-old female, GCS 15, which is again fully conscious, with 60 per cent burns, including the face. She had nil current airway compromise, but with those types of injuries the airway tends to deteriorate very, very quickly and unexpectedly, so it is quite a high-risk category burns. She did not have any IV access and was haemodynamically stable at that stage. I provided the hospital with a rough ETA. I took into account the transfer from the airport to the hospital via ambulance. I guesstimated roughly 1745 hours. I also let them know that there were three more burns patients to follow that were on the way from the scene as well. I did confirm that with her that she understood the information. I even prompted that we may need to pre-notify the burns centres due to the patients' serious condition.

[4.00 pm]

**The CHAIRMAN:** Do have a medical background?

**Mr Watson:** Yes; I have been a paramedic in Queensland for the last seven years, and I have also worked for the fire service for three years in Queensland.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So it was a bit of serendipity that you were there.

**Mr Watson:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What time was the call?

**Mr Watson:** That call was 1717 hours exactly.

**The CHAIRMAN:** And then you were going to go to the airport.

**Mr Watson:** I also contacted, as Paul said, the ambulance communication centre. That was at 1715 hours, shortly before I contacted Kununurra Hospital, just to let them know there were two patients suffering critical burns and they required transfer from the airport to the hospital. I gave the rough ETA and underestimated this somewhat deliberately at 1721 hours, our arrival at the hospital, so I was hoping they would get there a bit earlier. That is where we proceeded on to the airport.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Can I just clarify? The ambulance communication centre that you contacted, is that based in Perth?

**Mr Watson:** I do not know the ambulance service here well. I am assuming it is Perth, but I dodge whether everyone followed the routine, the system that goes in place.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are you based here?

**Mr Watson:** As a paramedic?

**The CHAIRMAN:** No, as a helicopter pilot.

**Mr Watson:** During the busy season, the tourist season, I am. I go back to Queensland during the wet season.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So you were on your way to the airport. What happened then?

**Mr Cripps:** There are a couple of different locations that St John can sometimes meet us. The correct location would be at the St John facility there at the airport. However, prior to that building being constructed, often we would bring casualties direct to the Heliwork hangar. There is road access out to the air side, down beside the Heliwork hangar. We flew close by the hangar to just

have a look to see whether the ambulance was at that location. There was no sign of an ambulance, so we decided to continue down to the other end of the airport where the St John facility is. There was no ambulance there. By this stage, the doctor basically said, “We need to get to hospital now”, so we then overflew the Kununurra township and around the hospital, looking for an appropriate area to land as close to the hospital as we could. We ended up landing just on the grass beside Argyle House there out the front of the hospital. That was really the closest area that we could find to the hospital.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Was it a tight fit?

**Mr Watson:** Not particularly, compared to what we had just done; it was relatively easy.

**The CHAIRMAN:** But you were on a run, so you just went for it.

**Mr Cripps:** That is right. I think with a landing like that, the biggest thing is who else is around. It is not a controlled environment. The last thing we really want to be doing is landing somewhere where vehicles and that sort of thing are. That is why we chose the grassed area, because it was actually off the road. The biggest concern was whether anybody was going to come out of Argyle House there. Obviously, most people have the commonsense to stay out of the way, but occasionally people do not. At this point the ambulance had heard us coming in, saw us coming in, and they then repositioned their ambulance, because they were obviously on the way, or about to be on their way, to the airport. They repositioned the ambulance, blocking off the street to stop anyone from driving by, and then they assisted in getting the two casualties out.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Did you ring the hospital to tell them that you were on your way from the airport as close as you could to the hospital?

**Mr Cripps:** No.

**Mr Watson:** It is only two minutes flight time away from that place, so there was not enough time.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Who pays for your services?

**Mr Cripps:** That is the tricky thing. In this case we just went because it was a serious sort of incident, but essentially we generally do not go anywhere unless somebody is paying the bill. In this case RacingThePlanet did fit the bill for it, which you would expect they would. But there was certainly no communication with RacingThePlanet on that particular day at all, any time through the day; it was only later on. It was within the next two days. I do not recall whether it was the Saturday or the Sunday they came in and paid the bill.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** Haemodynamically stable—that is steady blood pressure, is it?

**Mr Watson:** Yes, the body relies on a couple of things; it is your heart rate, your blood pressure and what they call “peripheral resistance”. It is kind of a broad term to state that the patient is compensating for an illness or is reasonably well. So, if they are haemodynamically stable, they have compensated. When they are not, it becomes where either their heart rate is dropping off or their blood pressure is dropping off. They were obviously in shock and quite sick, but in terms of immediately compensating for the insult to the body, they were doing okay.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** I also refer to the earlier remarks you made and a couple of things to clarify. You said that you were contacted by RTP. You advised them that you could have a helicopter on standby for medical evacuation, but there would be a cost associated with that, and if they failed to have a helicopter on standby, there would be no guarantee of that helicopter being there. I was interested in knowing how much it would have cost RacingThePlanet to put that in place.

The other thing I was interested in is you said you advised them that the helicopter that they had booked could provide some first response if there was an emergency, but it does not appear that they have communicated with you anything further about that. What I suppose I am asking is: was

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that arrangement put in place or agreed or was it just left at that, that they were just going to wait and see what happened on the day and call you if they wanted you or something?

**Mr Cripps:** That is pretty much how it was left, yes. They did not put the aircraft on standby. We generally have a minimum of—it depends on the time of year—two hours at this particular time of year. It would have been two hours for the day. Essentially, the customer is going to pay for two hours of flying, which would have been \$1 775 per hour, and it would have been a minimum of two hours to have that aircraft on standby. That is available for the whole day at that cost, and then obviously if you do any more flying than two hours, there would be additional charges on that, but you do actually get two hours' worth of flying for that charge.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Can I also then ask: would it have been more or less difficult for that long-range helicopter to attend than it was for the helicopter that you used? Would there have been any advantage in that? I gather it has got a greater capacity.

**Mr Cripps:** The only difference there—they were exactly the same type of aircraft that we utilised on the day. However, the aircraft that was fitted out with the cameras had limitations because it has got this big camera that sticks out the front, and inside the cabin there is other gear on board as well. If we are actually going to carry someone on a stretcher, then we would really need to utilise the other aircraft. As it turned out, we did not have a stretcher available anyway, but if we had had the aircraft on standby, we would have sourced one of those. There would have been no reason why the other aircraft could not have airlifted people back the same way that we did, if it had been on level ground or something like that and they were just transporting them back to town. But just in the difficult access that we had on the day, it was very difficult for that aircraft.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Just to be clear, the chopper that you used was the best to get into that type of position.

**Mr Cripps:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It was a bit smaller.

**Mr Cripps:** It was the same size, but because it did not have all the camera gear hanging off the front, then it was much easier to manoeuvre. I mean, you have a camera worth thousands of dollars sitting on the front, so you do not really want to —

**The CHAIRMAN:** It might get caught on something, too.

**Mr Cripps:** Yes. At the end of the day, if it was a minor medical emergency, one casualty or something like that, that helicopter certainly could have been used, if it was able to land in a suitable location, to bring someone back to town. I think the biggest issue that I saw from talking to Nathan and our own experience on the day, was the lack of communication at each of the checkpoints, to be able to talk to the other checkpoint, and communication between our helicopter and checkpoints. We had aviation radios in the helicopters as well as UHF radios. The organisers could have contacted us on UHF channels. That is possibly something that we could have made clear to them, that we did have those. We really did not go into any detail, because that was not what it was about; the helicopter was chartered for the filming, and that was that. But in the case of actually having a helicopter on standby for medical purposes, then we go into more detail about what we have on board to communicate with them and whatever else.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** So if they had put a helicopter on standby, for example, you would have provided them with more information about how to communicate quickly.

**Mr Cripps:** That is right.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** You were actually contracted by Beyond Action not RacingThePlanet.

**Mr Cripps:** That is right.

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**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Did you have a communications plan, because they would have been wanting to tell you “Go here, go there. We want this footage”, so you had some arrangement with them for control of your helicopter?

**Mr Cripps:** Not so much. The helicopter was just chartered for the day. It was really only, I guess, the Beyond Action employees were the ones communicating with the helicopter pilot.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** That is what I am saying. Beyond Action would have been some way of telling the pilot, “We want you to go here and film this. We want you to come back here.”

**Mr Cripps:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** One guy was in the chopper and he communicated with people on the ground?

**Mr Cripps:** I am not too sure actually. There were two employees from Beyond Action. I am assuming one of them was on the ground, because I believe only one of them was in the helicopter actually out on site there.

<020> D/N

[4.15 pm]

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** And, indeed, were they experienced at flying in helicopters and filming things?

**Mr Cripps:** Yes. They had extensive experience, yes. And they were a big help on the day sort of clearing the area and assisting with getting us into the site as well.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Because they would have known the dynamics of the helicopter.

**Mr Cripps:** That’s right, yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are Heliwork services used by organisers of other events held in the Kimberley?

**Mr Cripps:** Yes. In the time that I have worked for Heliwork, I do not recall an organiser actually putting us on stand-by for medivac-type purposes. Most of the medivacs that we have done over the last five years would be just ad hoc charter work contracted by RFDS or an individual themselves or one of the charter vessels or something like that on the Kimberley coast, but not that I can recall for an actual event.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are Heliwork services used as part of the local emergency service response planning?

**Mr Cripps:** Not that I am aware of. I do not really know the formal sort of response plan. We are obviously contacted by RFDS, and also St John Ambulance do contact us, but I do not know the formal sort of arrangement there.

**The CHAIRMAN:** And, Bryn, are they in Queensland?

**Mr Watson:** In Queensland, the helicopters are in a big network, so some of them are provided by the Queensland government and others are funded by the community. Occasionally, private providers will get contracted to work for Emergency Management Queensland, and they are contracted by the Department of Emergency Services themselves, but there is always a plan in place in terms of response. It is all coordinated by a central coordination centre. It is called the Queensland emergency medical services, or Queensland Coordination Centre based in Brisbane, so all aeromedical activities are coordinated by that centre so they know exactly what is going on throughout the state. As I said, the arrangements are already in place. The contractors they will generally use they already have contact with, because the aircraft need to meet certain requirements for certain jobs, particularly for the fire services, so they are already on the books and it is just a matter of a phone call, and the details are given across the job taking place.

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**The CHAIRMAN:** Can you discuss the difficulties you had with obtaining equipment from the hospital for the rescue and then securing an ambulance on your return? You have already discussed the ambulance. The equipment was a stretcher, I take it.

**Mr Cripps:** Yes. So after Bryn made the initial phone call, I think there may have been a follow-up phone call regarding that equipment as well. They just never arrived. I am under the belief that that was because, obviously, it is mainly volunteers that are used here in Kununurra for the ambulance service, and I do not know that there were actually volunteers available at that time, and I do not know whether there was some communication between the ambulance coord and the ambulance up here.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** I think they told us that they had three ambulances, and two of them were out on the course, so, presumably, their stretchers were out there.

**Mr Watson:** Yes. I made the phone call at 16.21 to the ambulance communications centre trying to ask if they had a stretcher and/or a paramedic and were they aware of the incident out there, because it is good to get all the information you can. The person I spoke to did not know anything about the incident. She said she would try and find out whether she could get a stretcher for us or a paramedic available. That is when we made the decision to wait 10 minutes to leave us enough time to get back before last light and leave, whether they turned up. I do not believe I made a follow-up phone call to that because we were quite busy getting the aircraft ready. We did not need to waste time.

**The CHAIRMAN:** When you flew in, did you have communications with a paramedic on the ground?

**Mr Watson:** No.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You had no communication with other people on the ground except Nathan?

**Mr Cripps:** We did not really have communication with him either on site because he did not have any hand-held communication, apart from the satellite phone, and we would have had great difficulty communicating by satellite phone.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So you had to make judgements in the air as to what to do.

**Mr Cripps:** Yes.

**Mr Watson:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Because the paramedic really saw you flying around, and he was not sure exactly what you were going to do.

**Mr Cripps:** Yes; absolutely.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** It sounds like you were not sure exactly what you were going to do.

**Mr Cripps:** No, that is right. When we first arrived on scene, I knew from the phone call from Nathan that it was going to be very, very difficult. He made that clear. It was going to be very difficult to get in there, so it was just a matter of assessing the location when we got there and making a judgement.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Did somebody give you a beer afterwards?

**Mr Cripps:** We had a few beers afterwards, yes!

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** On a scale of one to 10 in terms of the difficulty of the landing to put the one skid on the ground to get people in, how do you rate it?

**Mr Cripps:** It would be 10, yes.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Have you done other high-risk things like that before?

**Mr Cripps:** Nothing like that before, no. It is not really something that you would practise. I mean, even helicopter pilots that would be doing a rescue-type operation would not really be performing

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something like that. You would have a helicopter that had a winch on the side and you would be at great height, well away from any danger, and winching people up that way. The risk involved—obviously, it is a managed risk. We had two people on the ground who were fairly competent, and I had Bryn there in the helicopter as well, so that is why I felt confident. If I was on my own, there is no way I would have gone in there. There is too much risk involved. But one of the major risks—not only is it a risk of actually hitting either terrain or timber, or something like that, and trees, but also somebody walking into the rotor blades, because it is fairly steep terrain there, and if you walked straight down the hill towards the helicopter, you would be walking straight into the rotor blades. So, yes, that was probably one of my biggest concerns, that people approach the aircraft downhill, which is sort of to the back right of the helicopter, which is also normally an area that you do not want anyone to go, because we have got the tail rudder there; but that was reasonably safe because that was on the opposite side of the aircraft and over a cliff, basically, so no-one would really be able to get to that danger area. But, yes, the main rotor blades were definitely ones that we were aware of.

**The CHAIRMAN:** How long did you have to hover—as short as possible, I suppose?

**Mr Cripps:** It would have been a fairly short period of time. It felt like forever, but it would have been fairly quick. Obviously, both Kate and Turia were not moving real quickly, as you would expect, but they got down with the assistance of the other guys as quickly as possible, basically, and into the aircraft.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** The first patient on was Kate. You have some first-aid medical training. Were you shocked by the extent of the injuries or was that what you were expecting?

**Mr Watson:** I was shocked because of the extent of the injuries, and particularly because she walked onto the aircraft, and the terrain that we get around here, you generally expect people not to get caught in fire that bad. I have seen burns from bushfires before, but people are generally not that bad, so I was kind of not expecting that. So I was quite shocked to see how bad it was and the fact that she was still able to move around a little bit and the fact that she had been on that hillside for most of the afternoon with those serious burns and was still alive.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Then you dropped Kate off and came back and got Turia.

**Mr Watson:** Yes.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Was it the same or were you sort of by then more expecting it?

**Mr Watson:** Again, I was expecting that. The doctor told me that Turia, or the second patient, was in a worse condition, so we were expecting much the same condition, yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Any other issues?

**Mr Watson:** I guess I was a little bit—coming from Queensland, the ambulance service seems to be a lot better resourced. I was quite surprised to find out that Kununurra only has one ambulance, or paramedic, I should say, and the rest are volunteers. For example, I have worked in Hughenden, which is in the Shire of Flinders in Queensland, and that has got a population of around about 2 000 to 2 500, and we have got two paramedics there—one on duty at all times and one volunteer. So I was a little shocked to find there was only one paramedic based in the whole of the Kimberley, considering we get, I believe it is, about 250 000 visitors through the Kimberley a year.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** St John advises us that they had two, one in Kununurra and one in Wyndham, so basically they have got Sarel at Kununurra, and they said they have got another paramedic officer the same as Sarel at Wyndham.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Then they have a number of volunteers. What about this winch on the helicopter—the physical type?

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**Mr Cripps:** Yes. You can basically fit a winch to most types of helicopters or most turbine-engine aircraft. If the aircraft is going to be regularly used for emergency medical services, generally it is required to have two engines, so then we are looking at an aircraft that is worth a substantial amount more than the average single-engine helicopter. I do not really know the rules and regs here in Western Australia in particular. In New South Wales it is the health service that demands that. They had for many, many years used single-engine helicopters, but when there were a couple of incidents where there were engine failures and that sort of thing, then they decided they wanted two engines. But for smaller communities and remote areas like Kununurra and through the Kimberley, I personally think that they should reassess that because we are never going to get a helicopter that is twin engine and has all the bells and whistles. So, at the end of the day, we have really substandard services because of that.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** So you are really saying something is better than nothing.

**Mr Cripps:** Absolutely, yes. At the moment we use, not frequently—I am not saying this from a company point of view; I am saying for the general public and the people that are travelling through this area, there really needs to be a better standard of emergency medical services available. So, if there was a helicopter from whatever provider that was on stand-by, even for the dry season when we have the greater number of people travelling through the Kimberley, then at least we have something available, and a helicopter available all the time. It may not be able to be utilised, or it would not be able to be utilised of a night, but at least through the day there would be something available.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Could you jerry-rig a winch onto one of your helicopters?

**Mr Cripps:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What would you do—put it on the undercarriage or —

**Mr Cripps:** No. It would go on the side just above the door frame. You would put it on there.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You have a kilogram lift limit on that.

**Mr Cripps:** Yes, that is right. You would probably be looking at a different type of helicopter to what we have, because you would need a helicopter that is a little more stable than what we have, because if you had people out on a skid, they are not particularly a stable helicopter. But we are not talking about a helicopter that is worth, you know, \$6 million or something like that; it would be a relatively economical helicopter in helicopter terms.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Could you take the winch on and off according to the season?

**Mr Cripps:** It can be taken on and off, yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So you do not want it if you are not going to use it.

**Mr Cripps:** That is right.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** So you are looking at, what, \$2 million or something?

**Mr Cripps:** Yes. For \$2 million you would certainly get a helicopter appropriate to that. Probably for \$2 million to \$3 million you would get an older twin-engine machine that would tick all the boxes, but then the running costs from a charter rate point of view would be around \$4 000 an hour, and there would have to be a minimum charge to be on stand-by, so it is probably not a realistic sort of figure, whereas a helicopter that is a single engine will be more around, say, \$2 000 per hour, so you are looking at half the running cost and sort of half the stand-by charge as well.

**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** Would you need pilots to be separately rated to deal with the winch?

**Mr Cripps:** Yes, it is a separate approval, I think they call it, for endorsement.

**Mr Watson:** Yes, 29:11—approve both the pilot and winch operators, and also a down-the-wire crewman. It is quite intensive training that is required, because it is still quite a risky exercise.

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**Mr W.J. JOHNSTON:** So you would need three trained people in the helicopter and the gear.

**Mr Cripps:** Yes.

**Mr Watson:** Yes—or a paramedic as the down-the-wire person and two crew in the helicopter.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Do they require you guys to be a maximum weight?

**Mr Cripps:** Not that I am aware of. Maximum weights, minimum weights —

**Mr Watson:** For winches?

**The CHAIRMAN:** No, I am just joking! Any other issues?

**Mr Cripps:** I think, personally, my main concern was the communication on the day. That was the big thing, yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I think on behalf of everybody I just congratulate you on the work you did.

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** Yes, well done.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I think everybody involved and you were assisting and otherwise it was pretty lucky both of you were there on the day and took the risks that you did, and your ability. So, congratulations.

Thanks for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Please make these corrections and return the transcript within 10 working days of the date of the covering letter. If the transcript is not returned within that period, it is deemed to be correct. New material cannot be introduced via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on a particular point, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript. Again, thanks a lot.

**Hearing concluded at 4.27 pm**

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