



Minister for Emergency Services; Corrective Services

Our Ref: 65-14932
Your Ref: Petition No. 155

Hon Matthew Swinbourn MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Legislative Council Committee Office
Parliament House
4 Harvest Terrace
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Dear Hon Swinbourn

Thank you for your correspondence dated 13 August 2020 regarding Petition No. 155 – Midwest region-based Rescue Helicopter Service.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide the Committee with a greater level of understanding of emergency services delivery, which is an extremely complex area.

The State Government is committed to enhancing emergency services capability. However, it is imperative that any investment and resource allocation in emergency services is considered in the context of delivering the best possible service to the whole State. Any expansion of the Emergency Rescue Helicopter Service (ERHS) will be considered as a part of this Government's commitment to long-term planning in emergency services.

By way of background, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) is responsible for managing the ERHS. This service is the State's only dedicated 24-hour Search and Rescue (SAR) service operating from Jandakot and Bunbury Airports. The ERHS provides advanced paramedical critical care directly to an incident and if required, transports the patient to a definitive care hospital. Refer to Appendix 1 – State Emergency Rescue Helicopter Service (RAC Rescue) Facts Sheet 2019 which provides details of the ERHS capability, mission types, and operational range.

The current ERHS responds to major trauma incidents operating within 250km from their respective base. The current ERHS covers approximately 90 percent of the State's population, providing a highly responsive service to critically injured, and sometimes otherwise inaccessible patients within WA. The current ERHS aircraft can fly a straight-line distance of approximately 450km directly to an incident scene, but would require refuelling prior to returning the patient to one of Perth's trauma centres.

DFES manages the ERHS contractual service agreements for the provision of helicopters, crews and critical care paramedic services which are scheduled to expire in June 2021. The next generation of helicopters is currently being considered in the context of building capacity and providing a responsive emergency service to the community. The review of the next generation of the ERHS beyond 2021 is underway in consultation with key stakeholders, including the Department of Health, WA Police, and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority. DFES are looking to align the next generation fleet of rescue helicopters to the national standard currently used across Australia.

There are many factors, including resource to risk modelling that are considered when determining the most appropriate ERHS locations to deliver an optimal service to the whole community.

These include:

- population density and growth centres;
- number of regional ambulatory Priority 1 and search and rescue incidents that meet ERHS tasking criteria;
- aerodromes with established jet-aviation infrastructure, as the ERHS helicopters require jet fuel;
- availability to aircraft maintenance facilities at aerodromes;
- aerodrome proximity to regional receiving hospitals for patients that do not require a tertiary, trauma centre; and
- requirement for overlapping flight coverage of current ERHS helicopters to provide redundancy and dual helicopter response.

In 2017 and 2019, DFES undertook service reviews of the ERHS. This assessed operational data, including regional response; identification of suitable aerodromes around regional response hot-spots; and data from St John Ambulance and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority for incidents meeting ERHS tasking requirements within a 350km flight range of the identified aerodromes. This review included national rescue helicopter network coverage.

The information gathered from the service reviews were evaluated to determine the need for future ERHS aircraft fleet and bases, while considering the strengths and opportunities that exist in and around regional communities. This information is informing the current procurement process.

I am aware of an election promise of \$30 million from Royalties for Regions funding to establish a Midwest ERHS based at Geraldton. It is premised on delivering:

- the rescue helicopter service with flight crew and critical care paramedics;
- new infrastructure of a Geraldton Rescue Helicopter Base at the Airport – to be approved by the City of Geraldton as the airport's managing authority;
- new helicopter landing site at Geraldton Hospital – to be approved by Geraldton Hospital / WA Country Health Service; and
- fund a feasibility study into extending the rescue helicopter network into other regions.

This only addresses short term capital funding and does not address recurrent operational funding for the service into the out years.

While the Royal Flying Doctor Service of WA (RFDS) aircraft does not directly respond to incident scenes as referenced in the petition. The RFDS does provide transport of hospital patients from regional medical facilities to Perth-based tertiary hospitals (trauma centres) upon landing at Jandakot Airport with the use of road ambulance transfers.

The McGowan Government is investing \$73.3 million for the redevelopment of the Geraldton Health Campus. I also understand that the Department of Health, WA Country Health Service would be responsible for hospital infrastructure including the development of a helicopter landing site (HLS). As the primary users, DFES has provided consultation for a new HLS being built at Jurien Bay, Narrogin, and Royal Perth Hospitals.

While I acknowledge the petition and appreciate that there is a genuine desire for a Midwest based ERHS, resource allocation in emergency services must be considered in the context of delivering the best possible emergency service to the whole State. The next generation of helicopters is currently under review with the most appropriate experts, including the Department of Health and the Department of Fire and Emergency Services.

As demonstrated by the 2017 and 2019 service reviews of the ERHS, I submit that DFES and other relevant stakeholders have the appropriate expertise to consider the ERHS operational needs and service delivery model for the whole State. This expertise has been incorporated in the procurement process for the next generation of the ERHS. It is vital that any investment in emergency services is properly considered in the context of long-term service delivery. Any departure from proper process could deliver suboptimal outcomes to the community.

Thank you again for bringing the petition to my attention. I trust my feedback will enable you to evaluate the petition with further clarity.

Yours sincerely



HON FRANCIS LOGAN MLA
MINISTER FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES; CORRECTIVE SERVICES

17 September 2020

State Emergency Rescue Helicopter Service (RAC Rescue) Facts Sheet 2019



BACKGROUND

Western Australia's only 24 hour, 7 days a week emergency rescue helicopter service, consisting of appropriately crewed and equipped helicopters to allow specialist Critical Care Paramedical services, to be rapidly deployed to incidents or otherwise inaccessible patients. Helicopters accelerate delivery of patients directly to definitive care (most appropriate hospital for the patient's condition) which achieves higher patient survivability rates, reduced hospitalisation/rehabilitation times, and better patient and community outcomes.

HISTORY

Western Australia's Emergency Rescue Helicopter Service (ERHS) commenced operations from Jandakot Airport (RESCUE 651) in August 2003 known in the public domain as RAC RESCUE. On 1 February 2016, the second base opened at Bunbury Airport (RESCUE 652), expanding the area of coverage to include all of the South West and part of the Great Southern. Aircraft, crew, equipment and operating procedures are identical and interchangeable. The helicopters operate as a network, providing redundancy for each other.

MISSION TYPES The ERHS conducts four types of missions:

1. Primary Care Retrievals;
2. Search & Rescue (SAR);
3. Secondary Care Inter-Hospital Patient Transport;
4. Other approved tasks.

Advanced paramedical intervention to incidents / Primary Care Retrievals are a response to ambulance Priority 1 incidents and patients that require Critical Care Paramedic capabilities on scene, or when aeromedical evacuation is required from otherwise remote or inaccessible locations – These tasks have priority over the other ERHS operations and are conducted in accordance with the Department of Health Ambulance Distribution Model (Health Operational Directive OD0608/15 of 23 February 2015).

Search & Rescue (SAR) is conducted on behalf of other Hazard Management Agencies such as the Australian Maritime Safety Authority in Canberra or the Western Australian Police. It includes, sea and land searches for missing persons and if necessary vertical retrieval plus advanced medical treatment – SAR is conducted in accordance with agreements between DFES and the other agencies, and is the most heavily used rotary wing SAR asset in the State.

Secondary Care Inter-Hospital Patient Transport (IHPT) are time-critical adult and child patient transfers from regional medical facilities to tertiary hospitals with specialist medical capabilities on behalf of the Department of Health and the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). IHPT are conducted in accordance with the Department of Health Contract with RFDS for provision of aeromedical IHPT services and Department of Health Information Circular IC0014/07 of 7 June 2007. Separate policies and procedures cover Neo-Natal IHPT.

Other approved tasks include training for the above operations and those tasks necessary to enable the delivery of the Contracts between DFES and the ERHS Service Providers: CHC Helicopters Australia and St John Ambulance.

Note: Per current contract parameters, ERHS does not conduct firebombing or intelligence surveillance/reconnaissance tasks (eg. Law enforcement, searches for deceased persons, shark patrol, marine oil pollution, fire detection or mapping).

CAPABILITY

Aircraft Information

Operator:	Lloyd Helicopters trading as CHC Helicopters (Australia)	Jandakot	Bunbury	Back-Up
Type:	Bell 412EP Twin Huey	RESCUE SIX-FIVE-ONE	RESCUE SIX-FIVE-TWO	RESCUE SIX-FIVE-THREE
Engines:	2 x Pratt & Whitney PT6T-30F turbine engines	VH-EWA	VH-EPK	VH-VAA

Performance

Cruise Speed	122 knots – 226 km/hr – 3.77 km/minute
Operational Radius (flight to incident, one tank of fuel, weather-dependent)	Approx. 240 km (out & back)
Deployment Range (without refuelling)	Maximum - 530 km



Crew & Patients

Standard Crew:
CHC Pilot, CHC Air Crewman, St John Ambulance Critical Care Paramedic / Rescue Crewman (CCP)
Aeromedical critical care; Provide emergency land/sea search and rescue; Conduct helicopter winch operations and retrievals; Adult and paediatric anaesthetics, advance life support, and resuscitation; Administer blood and S8 medication; Graduate Diploma in Paramedical Science.

Optional Crew:
Royal Flying Doctor Service Clinician, Department of Health Specialist/s, other supplementary crew.

Patients:
Maximum 2 unless SAR mercy mission

Equipment

- Single Pilot – Instrument Flight Rules
- Night Vision Goggles
- Image-Intensifying Night Vision Imaging System (NVIS)
- Forward Looking InfraRed (FLIR) Systems StarSfire 380HDC
- Thermal Imaging Sensor
- HD TV & video management systems
- Churchill ARS ("augmented reality") mapping system
- Multi-agency radio
- Two-person (272kg) rescue winch
- Critical care medical equipment
- St John Ambulance AmbicAD
- CCTV camera system
- Air-deployable 6-10 man life rafts with associate survival equipment
- Air deployable Self-Locating Datum Marker Buoy
- Hand-held grapple hook and ring
- Aviation EPIRB direction finder
- Strobes, flares & sea dye marker

READINESS

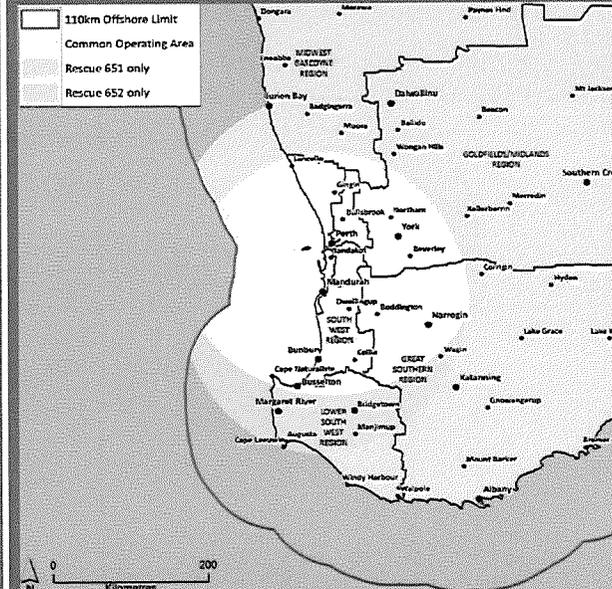
Type of Mission	Readiness (minutes from task order)	Helicopter Planning Ranges
Primary Care Retrievals	15 minutes	400 km total distance from base to incident then to definitive care destination hospital.
SAR	15 minutes	Land SAR: Variable ranges Sea Rescue: Up to 110 km off shore.
Secondary Care Aeromedical IHPT	60 minutes	Variable ranges, depending on time-criticality

TYPICAL MISSION SCENARIO AREA OF COVERAGE

Rescue or Retrieval; Return to Metropolitan Definitive Care (No Refuel)

Purpose

- Nominal operating range of each ERHS aircraft 365 days a year; 24x7 – returning patients to Perth metro trauma centre hospitals.
- Shapes represent aircraft flying range to depart base and return patient to Perth (RPH, FSH, or QE2/PCH) then back to Jandakot base on one tank of fuel (full). Max total distance 400km. Note, this 400km total is slightly short of the Bell412EP capability. The pilot retains a 30 minute fuel reserve to allow for variables such as weather, time spent searching, hovering, etc.



Assumptions

- ERHS operates with Bell 412EP aircraft
- Depart from Jandakot or Bunbury Base
- Max distances (onshore and offshore)
- Maximum round trip from base = 400km
- Max offshore = 110km

