



Hon Colin de Grussa MLC
Member for the Agricultural Region

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

via email: env@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Chair,

Petition no. 155 – Midwest based Rescue Helicopter Service

Thank you for the opportunity to make a tabling Member submission to the Standing Committee in relation to the Petition on a Midwest based Rescue Helicopter Service.

In Australia, there are only two regions with populations exceeding 55,000 which do not have access to a dedicated Emergency Rescue Helicopter Service. These regions are the Goldfields and Midwest regions in Western Australia.

The use of rescue helicopters in regional WA is critical to decreasing the response time to traumatic injury. Responding to incidents within the “golden hour” can improve patient outcomes and reduce mortality rates in regional WA. Research from Edith Cowan University compared the survival rates of 1374 major trauma victims with access to a rescue helicopter within 250km of Perth over a 10-year period. The results found 15.3 per cent of patients who were taken by road to a country hospital died compared to just 10.2 per cent of patients who were retrieved directly from the incident scene by helicopter. The mortality rate was 16.3 per cent for the patients taken by road to a country hospital and later transported to Perth compared to a mortality rate of 8.8 per cent for those retrieved directly by helicopter and taken to a trauma centre.

To put this into perspective, between 2008 and 2017 around 1,000 people were killed or injured on Midwest roads. A rescue helicopter service could have changed the outcome for one in three of those crash victims – equating to approximately 300 people. When considered in human terms, that number and the effect on families and the community is astounding.

In addition to this, outside the Perth region, the Midwest - Gascoyne region had the highest number of regional boating and watercraft fatal drownings for the 10 year period between 2006 and 2015. There have also been 4 deaths in the last 10 years at Kalbarri National Park as well as countless other rescues. There were 12 rescues made in the park in 2017. Whilst there is no specific research available on how the mortality outcomes may have changed had an EHRS been available, the crash trauma research is a clear indicator that lives would have been saved.



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The Midwest is supported by an expanding tourism sector, with most visitors to the region travelling by road. Following the creation of the Houtman Abrolhos Islands National Park and recent upgrades to Kalbarri National Park, as well as the State Government's recently announced Wander out Yonder tourism initiative in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is expected that visitor numbers on the regions roads and to national parks will increase significantly. Visitors to these areas will be safer and have faster access to emergency services with a locally based rescue helicopter in the region.

There is also planned expansion of the mining sector in the Midwest region, with 20 projects worth a combined \$6 billion in the pipeline for development (Source: Midwest Major Projects Summary April 2019). With the expected additional workforce estimated at over 4000 jobs, it is imperative that there is quick response capability in the event of high trauma industrial accidents or road crashes.

A dedicated Midwest Rescue Helicopter service will better support existing emergency service organisations in the Midwest, enhancing the region's search and rescue capacity and providing increased training opportunities for local emergency service volunteers.

There has been comprehensive consultation with key stakeholders and the broader community conducted over the course of the past 10 years, with overwhelming support for the EHRS, as evidenced by the petition submitted to the Legislative Council. Organisations that have strongly supported the proposal include the Geraldton Volunteer Marine Rescue Service; the City of Greater Geraldton and Shires of Carnamah and Chapman Valley; Geraldton Fishers Co-operative; Geraldton Professional Fishing Association and Batavia Local Emergency Management Committee.

In closing, having a rescue helicopter stationed in Geraldton would provide a life-saving service within a 240km radius along the Batavia Coast, inland through the Midwest and offshore to the Abrolhos Islands. It would greatly enhance emergency response coverage for 16 local government areas and greatly assist first responders and support our volunteers in emergency situations, carry out search and rescue missions, primary care retrievals and aeromedical transfers. Reducing response times to traumatic injury is vital to saving lives –an EHRS is instrumental to providing definitive medical treatment within the critical golden hour following an incident.

Yours Sincerely,

Hon Colin de Grussa MLC
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