



## Media release

### JOINT STATEMENT

### Premier and Minister for the Olympic and Paralympic Games

The Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk

**Minister for Health and Ambulance Services**

The Honourable Yvette D'Ath

## Health access soaring to new heights in the Torres and Cape

- Palaszczuk Government to invest \$288 million in emergency helicopter services for the Torres Strait and Northern Cape.
- Babcock Australasia won the tender to provide emergency helicopter services for the region.
- Queensland Ambulance Service and Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service will provide 24/7 coverage of a doctor and paramedic dedicated to the aircraft, with Babcock supplying pilots, aircrew and aircraft engineers.

Torres Strait and Northern Cape York Peninsula communities will have greater access to aeromedical emergency healthcare thanks to a \$288 million investment by the Palaszczuk Government.

These communities are among the most remote and difficult to access in Queensland and are highly reliant on the availability and responsiveness of emergency helicopter services.

**Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk today announced the \$288 million investment** would boost the Queensland Ambulance Service's capabilities to provide emergency health care to the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula region with the addition of **two multi-mission Leonardo AW139 helicopters** with increased speed, range and operational capability.

The contract to provide the service has been awarded to Babcock, which already has a 15-year relationship with the Queensland Government.

Two AW139 helicopters will arrive in 2024, with the services expected to be operational by the second half of that year.

The choppers replace two Bell 412 helicopters currently servicing the region.

They will be stationed at Horn Island, where the current base will be upgraded to include staff accommodation and a patient holding facility.

Local artists have been engaged to design the artwork for the new helicopters to ensure they are representative of the local communities they will serve.

**Quotes attributable to Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk:**

“When I took the Cabinet to Thursday Island in September last year, clinical staff made it clear to me that Thursday Island Hospital plays a critical role in providing health care for people living on the Torres Strait,” the Premier said.

“The remote location of many people on the Cape and in the Torres Strait means aeromedical services are vital.

“This investment will improve health care and improve facilities for patients.”

**Quotes attributable to the Minister for Health and Ambulance Services:**

“Queensland is the most decentralised state in the country meaning delivering emergency health services is challenging,” the Minister said.

“The Palaszczuk Government is committed to providing world class healthcare to all Queenslanders, no matter where they live.

“Not only will these helicopters support interfacility transfers of patients and delivery of emergency health care via pre-hospital missions, they will also provide enhanced search and rescue capability, a critical service in the region.

“Having dedicated clinical staff and onsite facilities will improve operational response times, in line with other helicopter bases across the state”.

**Quotes attributed to Member for Cook, Cynthia Lui:**

“Not only does the region get two new emergency helicopters, The Palaszczuk Government will also be upgrading the facilities on Horn Island,” Ms Lui aid.

“We know modern facilities are near the top of the list when it comes to attracting health workers to regional areas, and with the new choppers and base on Horn Island, we tick those boxes.

“This means more jobs and opportunities for local Queenslanders throughout construction and once the base is open next year.

“It will also allow greater support capabilities to nearby health facilities such as Bamaga and Weipa as well as support for 000 responses in the Northern Cape.”

**Quotes attributable to Executive Director of Retrieval Services Queensland, Queensland Ambulance Service, Dr Mark Elcock:**

“This announcement continues to maintain Queensland as the benchmark for aeromedical services in Australasia,” Dr Elcock said.

“Helicopters are the most effective and efficient aeromedical transport option for this unique region. Equity of access to specialist clinical services is fundamental and this new announcement now elevates the helicopter emergency services in the region to the same level as that provided in the major centres.

“Once operational, the addition of these two new helicopters will provide 100% emergency helicopter availability for the region, with a dedicated service and fully kitted out, state of the art airconditioned rescue helicopters.

“The cabin will be modified with the latest aeromedical configuration including roll-on-roll-off power stretchers as currently used by Queensland Ambulance Service for increased ease of access and improved patient care and comfort.

“We also plan to work with Babcock and local communities to design exterior artwork for the aircraft so that the aircraft reflects the local community and traditions.”

**Quotes attributable to Babcock’s Managing Director Aviation & Critical Services, Peter Newington:**

“I am proud of the company’s long-standing partnership with the Queensland Government and the mission-critical services provided across northern Queensland,” Mr Newington said.

“Babcock has operated in the remote Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula region for more than 27 years, ensuring the ongoing access to Emergency Medical Services for some of the hardest-to-reach communities.

“Our experience in the region gives us a unique understanding of the tasks and their interaction with the challenging environment due to the cluster of small islands, and ever-changing weather conditions.

“Under the new agreement, Babcock plans to increase its commitment to the local communities.

“We will be taking a more strategic and targeted approach to deliver opportunities for local business growth, support for the local Indigenous and Torres Strait community with initiatives including traineeships, and positive outcomes for Queensland and its residents.

“The 12-year contract continues a 15-year relationship between The Queensland Government and Babcock in the Torres Strait and will represent a significant uplift in capability to the region.”

**ENDS**

**Media Contact:** Cullen Robinson - 0418 170 474