



Official Release

New Rescue Helicopter Winging its Way to Hawke's Bay

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A brand-new state-of-the-art rescue helicopter will soon be winging its way from a German production line to Hawke's Bay, ensuring improved lifesaving mission capability and capacity for patients.

Low Corporation Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter's current BK117 has been in operation since 2018, when it was acquired and upgraded as a second-hand machine. Having flown over 18,500 hours, its days serving our community are becoming limited. Avionic and automation technology is expensive and with a \$20 million price tag, the new Airbus H145D3 heralds a significant advancement for Hawke's Bay. The aircraft has just been ordered and is due to arrive in the region, ready for operation, in September 2026.

With a three-year production line wait for new rescue helicopters and growing global demand, Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust Chair, Blair O'Keeffe was all too aware that time to secure a new one was critical.

"This has been the culmination of several years of planning and focus from Trustees and the team to deliver better health and search and rescue services for our community into the future. There is a great sense of pride in finally reaching this significant milestone, and we're deeply appreciative of the Government funding alongside our generous community support we continue to receive in order to make upgrades like this possible.

“Cyclone Gabrielle reinforced the importance of having modern, fit-for-purpose equipment and infrastructure. The new helicopter will help provide that peace of mind our region needs.”

The purchase of the new Airbus H145D3 initially requires a \$3.7 million deposit, which will be provided by Hawke’s Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust, with the balance expected to be met through a joint funding agreement with central Government.

Trust Chief Executive, Andy Quayle says, “HBRHT is incredibly grateful for the generous and ongoing support from the Hawke’s Bay public, sponsors and grant providers who donate funds each year, and to the Government for its support, without which both the service and this purchase would not be possible.”

Investing in improved aircraft technology, base facilities and staff training is a constant requirement, particularly with the arrival of a new helicopter. The new Airbus will provide crew: enhanced safety features, a greater ability to access and conduct missions that they currently need to decline, enhanced patient and crew comfort, longer mission range through greater fuel capacity, and an increased weight limit enabling transport of multiple patients /whānau if required.

Charlie Beetham, Chief Pilot for both the Lowe Corporation Rescue Helicopter and Search and Rescue Services Limited says the acquisition represents a three-generational leap in performance, safety, and capability.

“The H145, renowned globally for setting the industry standard in Helicopter Emergency Services, brings a host of enhancements from its predecessor the BK-117. From its advanced avionics, superior flight performance and safety features, it is poised to elevate the efficiency and effectiveness of our operation.

“Securing this new machine underscores our unwavering commitment as an organisation to improving the quality of emergency services in Hawke’s Bay so that when people need us, we can get to them as swiftly and as safely as possible.”

The rescue helicopter service, a 24/7 service that’s free to the patient, currently receives Crown funding, with the remaining costs funded through generous community support. Its lifesaving radius extends to Wairoa in the north and Central Hawke’s Bay in the south and everywhere in between.

Central Hawke’s Bay Mayor, Alex Walker (who also chairs the appointments panel for the board of trustees of the Rescue Helicopter Service), fully endorses the purchase.

“This is a fantastic development for our region, supporting ongoing resilience post Cyclone Gabrielle. Well done to all of the team involved in making this happen. The leadership from our Trust has been incredible.”

Wairoa District Council Mayor Craig Little thanked the government for its understanding of the needs of isolated rural areas. “The helicopter service is a vital lifeline and we are grateful to everyone involved for making this happen.”

With progress comes planning and Andy Quayle isn’t one to rest on his laurels.

“Our work is not done – the aircraft is two years away and during this time we remain committed to securing ongoing community support via our very generous sponsors, donors and Grant providers to assist in funding of our day-to-day operations. We are excited by the challenge ahead as we transition from our old aircraft to new. It requires significant ongoing funding to re-establishing our base, crew facilities and obtaining specialist equipment for the new helicopter.

“We continue to reach out to our community to support our fundraising initiatives. I encourage people to help support your local rescue helicopter service to remain free and accessible 24/7 for everyone.”

Hawke’s Bay’s Rescue Helicopter relies on grants, sponsorship and donations to operate.

ENDS.

For more information please contact:

Alisha Neilson

Marketing and Communications Specialist

Hawke’s Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust

021 672 718

alisha@hbhrt.org.nz