



## Official Release

# Rescue Helicopter Reports Positive 2025 Mission Stats

**For urgent media release: Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2026**

Fewer people required critical air medical and rescue services during 2025, according to figures released by Hawke's Bay's Lowe Corporation Rescue Helicopter Service.

During 2025, 352 missions were completed, down from 379 in 2024. The vast majority of the region's missions was to airlift hospitalised patients requiring further specialist treatment (known as Inter Hospital Transfers) totalling 160 as at December 31. This was followed by 100 accident-related missions, 73 medical missions and 19 search and rescues.

The largest mission volume decline by category was for search and rescue, which Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust CEO Andy Quayle believes is notable.

"Whilst we recorded 27 fewer missions overall compared to 2024, we also recorded the lowest number of search and rescue missions since 2019 and just half the number of search and rescues on 2024. That's hugely positive and undoubtedly reflects a combination of people taking more care (along with a bit of luck).

"As a country renowned for its outdoor pursuits and remote terrain, the need for rescue helicopters as an essential service never wavers. If you, or someone you love, ever finds

themselves in a time critical emergency, it's highly likely that the rescue helicopter will be deployed to assist.”

Base Manager and senior Pilot, Bill Hartree says the types of missions have remained broadly consistent over the past twelve months with a steady mix of trauma, medical, and IHT's.

“We reported a consistently high tempo again last year, and the team continues to perform exceptionally well in often unpredictable and challenging conditions. The professionalism, teamwork, and calm under pressure I see every day is a real credit to them. Importantly, we've seen strong patient outcomes overall, which speaks to both the clinical expertise on board and the coordinated response from our partners on the ground.”

With summer nearly ending and a mix of weather conditions oscillating between record temperatures and storms around the Bay, the rescue helicopter anticipates emergency response teams to continue facing an increase in demand. The warmer weather typically leads to a rise in incidents such as boating accidents, fishing mishaps, and other recreational emergencies.

While most New Zealanders were enjoying family and gatherings with friends over Christmas and New Year, the rostered rescue helicopter crew remained on call running 12-hour shifts before changing over. Hartree says this industry standard formula balances adequate time off for staff while maintaining a swift response capability.

Bill Hartree emphasises “it is a privilege to be in a position to assist those in need, and while such operations can be challenging, the satisfaction of making a life-saving difference is unparalleled.”

Looking ahead, 2026 hails the much anticipated arrival of the region's new state-of-the-art Airbus H145 D3. Offering greater efficiency, higher capability, more capacity and speed with less maintenance costs, Andy Quayle says it heralds an exciting step forward for Hawke's Bay's air rescue services.

“To be able to offer an aircraft of this calibre, with its impressive capabilities, to respond to emergency situations anywhere in our region or across New Zealand is an important milestone for aviation services in Hawke's Bay.”

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.

Lowe Corporation Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter's current BK117 has been in operation since 2018 and will be phased out once the H145 arrives mid 2026. As Base Manager, Bill Hartree is eager to ensure the hangar facilities are fit-for-purpose to accommodate the new asset.

“In preparation for our new machine, we've had the opportunity to bring an H145 into the hangar to assess fit and function – and while the trial confirmed we can technically accommodate the H145, it's clear that operating efficiently within the current space will be challenging in the long run. It's a helpful step forward, though, and gives us a clearer picture of what modifications will be required once everything is confirmed and we move toward full integration of the new aircraft.”

**The rescue helicopter is a 24/7 service that remains free to the patient. It currently receives Crown funding with the remaining operational costs funded through generous community grants, sponsorship, bequests and donations.**

**ENDS.**

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