



Official Release

Rescue Helicopter Welcomes Former Mayor Onboard

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Central Hawke's Bay's former Mayor Alex Walker has wasted no time pivoting her skills and attention to support the region's rescue helicopter service into its next chapter – joining the Board of Trustees.

Since leaving the presiding role of Mayor following a record three terms in office, she's had time to reassess what she values most and where she can make a community-minded impact.

“Leaving the mayoral role has been a really important time for reflection, recharging, and realigning with what matters most for me and my family. At heart, I'm an entrepreneur and a creative, with a deep passion for helping people and communities grow and succeed.

“Over nine years in local government I built a really strong kete of governance and leadership skills, and this next chapter is about taking that experience into new kaupapa that truly excites me.”

Previously sitting on Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust's Trustee Appointments Committee, Ms Walker has also played an integral role in the region's Cyclone Gabrielle recovery coordination.

“Through our Cyclone Gabrielle experiences, I also know the reassurance that comes from having our own helicopter, our own equipment and our own people, right here in our

community, ready to respond when we need them most. The governance skills that underpin strong local government — council, community and iwi partnerships, economic, health and social connections, emergency management, asset planning, risk and audit — are exactly what a Rescue Helicopter Service needs to thrive. That alignment made saying yes feel very natural.

“For many rural Hawke’s Bay families — including my own — the sound of a helicopter overhead can be deeply personal. It often means someone you love is on board. I bring both that personal passion, and the governance experience that can navigate a complex industry while keeping our people at the heart of every decision we make.”

With preparations now in their final stages for the arrival of Hawke’s Bay’s new and upgraded rescue helicopter - the Airbus H-145 D3, Hawke’s Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust Board of Trustees Co-Chair, Blair O’Keeffe is confident Alex will hit the ground running.

“Alex brings significant governance, emergency management and asset planning experience which is an extremely valuable set of skills for the Trust to tap into.

“There’s a lot to do, to keep us operating and set ourselves up for the future, including welcoming the arrival of our new helicopter in the short term - the result of years of planning and fundraising efforts. With much more to do, and ongoing need for community support, it is great to be able to maximise the use of Alex’s skills and experience. It’s an exciting time and such a rewarding and valuable service to be associated with.”

Sentiments shared by Ms Walker.

“This is one of Hawke’s Bay’s most trusted and loved institutions. It delivers what truly matters, in a highly professional way, with the full support of the community behind it.

“What’s impressed me is how the service has continued to evolve — new partnerships, collaboration across the Lower North Island, trusted government support for a new helicopter, and operating models that strengthen scale, efficiency and professionalism. Leadership has been strong, and the Trust’s reputation continues to grow. I feel honoured and extremely proud to be a part of it.”

Hawke’s Bay’s Rescue Helicopter conducts around 400 lifesaving missions every year – made possible through essential Government funding combined with the generous support of local communities who provide grants, sponsorship, bequests and donations to sustain operations and assist in purchasing key equipment.

The H145 replaces Hawke’s Bay’s much-loved but ageing yellow BK117, which has served the Hawke’s Bay region and beyond since 2018. It is one of nine new or near-new aircraft being introduced nationwide, with the purchases jointly funded by Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora and the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC).

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