



## Official Release

# Stingray Attack Leaves Man Critically Injured

**For release: Tuesday 7th January, 2025**

A 'freak' stingray attack on a keen local fisherman at a southern Hawke's Bay beach has left the man hailing the lifesaving efforts of Hawke's Bay's Rescue Helicopter crew.

Eli Carroll was wading out to sea to drop some crayfish pots with a friend at Owahanga, 40 minutes south of Pongaroa, a few weeks ago when he unwittingly stood on a stingray in knee-deep water provoking a violent attack.

"I knew straight away I'd stood on something as I felt the vibration under my feet. Next thing I knew, this huge tail came whipping out of the water, hitting me hard in my thighs. I knew at that point that I was in big trouble."

The first stroke of the ray's serrated tail pierced a laceration 10 centimetres long in Eli's right upper thigh, before seconds later striking his left leg snapping its barb off and leaving it embedded.

"The first thing I thought was 'I need to get to shore and call the helicopter, fast!' Where we were was quite remote and I felt myself fading, knowing I wasn't going to be awake long enough to speak to the paramedic.

"I remember seeing the water filling up with blood and I buckled over. My friend Paul dragged me out to our nearby buggy and made the phone call to the house. I can't remember the ride back up the hill, I was in complete shock until the helicopter arrived."

Critical Care Flight Paramedic Heath Gillot treated Eli at the scene.

“When we arrived Eli was alert but in immense pain and bleeding from both legs. He had a large gash to the right inner thigh near the groin and the barb from the stingray was protruding from the inner left side of his leg. Both injuries to the legs appeared to have narrowly missed Eli's femoral artery and we were unable to determine the depth of the barb that was lodged in his left leg.

“Without any delay we rapidly gave Eli some pain relief, bandaged up his legs and helped load him onto the stretcher and into the helicopter in order to get him to surgery as fast as possible.”

Eli was airlifted to the nearest facility at Palmerston North Hospital where he underwent emergency surgery to remove the barb.

“Had the delay been more significant I believe that Eli might not have had such a favourable outcome,” says Heath. “In addition, the location of his injuries were mere millimeters from major vessels and organs that could have significantly impacted his survival.”

From being picked up in the Lowe Corporation rescue chopper to 18 minutes later arriving at hospital, Eli knows he was given the best chance of survival.

“The crew that day were amazing, considering where we were located I honestly didn't think they'd get there that fast. If we had been 100 metres further down the beach I could have died as cellphone reception is so patchy.”

It's not the first near miss Eli has had. If things happen in three's then he's hoping he's had his.

“About a year ago my fishing kayak flipped paddling out to Somes Island in the Wellington Harbour. I was metres from the current taking me out to Cook Strait and was rescued by the Coastguard. Then only a few months ago my truck left the road and flipped into a creek upside down. I had to push the window out and swim to safety with a fractured rib. I've bought a few lotto tickets lately, but I'm obviously not lucky enough to win!”

The contract builder says he's now looking for something extra to do, and isn't ruling out volunteering for the rescue helicopter.

“I've signed up to install fire alarms in Dannevirke and become a volunteer firefighter. One day I'd like to give back through volunteering for the helicopter.”

As for fishing and going back in the ocean.

“It was my fault, next time I'll look where I'm standing and won't wade into murky water where I can't see the bottom. It was just a case of 'wrong place wrong time', mixed with a bit of carelessness – it hasn't put me off. I was back in the water a few days later.”

## **About the Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust**

*The Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter is a charitable trust, which provides a dedicated Rescue Helicopter service to the Hawke's Bay region. Each year the Rescue Helicopter crew completes around 400 lifesaving missions, helping those who need urgent medical care and transportation. The service is free of charge and available 24/7 to everyone in our community, however a shortfall of approximately \$1.4 million in funding each year leaves it reliant on sponsorship, grants and donations to remain operational.*

**ENDS.**

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