

**Date** 8 March 2010

**Subject** **New satellite tracking systems reduce rescue time for Westpac Rescue Helicopter**

The Westpac Rescue Helicopter's search and rescue response times have been significantly improved following the installation of a satellite tracking system, funded by nib foundation, on each of the service's three helicopters.

The 'Sky Connect' system allows the service and the NSW Ambulance Medical Response Unit to track the precise location and flight status of each aircraft without any action by the pilot or crew.

Funded by nib foundation as part of its Community Grants program, the \$60,000 tracking systems help ensure the effective deployment of rescue aircraft to the scene of a medical emergency, resulting in reduced response times and improved patient outcomes.

Mr Richard Jones, Westpac Rescue Helicopter General Manager, said the system has already produced excellent results.

"Sky Connect allows the service to track the precise location of our aircraft in real-time on a computer screen in our Operations Centre," Mr Jones said.

"This has removed any room for error in the deployment of our aircraft as we can now accurately pinpoint rescue locations and ensure patients are attended to as quickly as possible, helping save lives."

The ability to track a mission into remote parts of the state proved life saving during the service's longest ever retrieval in January.

"The system was instrumental in locating a 41 year-old woman who was suffering respiratory problems at Weilmoringle, 50km south of the Queensland border," Mr Jones explained.

"High flood waters left roads inaccessible and our crew had to make two stops for re-fuelling before transporting the patient to Brewarrina for treatment.

"Our operations staff and Ambulance NSW were able to follow the mission and provide accurate coordinates throughout the journey."

nib foundation Chairman, Mr Terry Lawler, said the foundation was delighted to help fund the vital work carried out by Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service.

"The Sky Connect system is an innovative addition to rescue service and will dramatically improve the efficiency of this life saving service," Mr Lawler said.

Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service was one of nine successful applicants for Community Grant funding through nib foundation. Each of the recipients offered a diverse range of program services, and fall within the focal areas of support including wellbeing, equity and access, as well as education and training.

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***About nib foundation***

In 2008, nib health funds established nib foundation – a not-for-profit charitable organisation that will support programs aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of all Australians.

The foundation is funded by a \$25 million donation from nib, which was raised through the issue of new shares at the time of listing nib on the Australian Securities Exchange in November 2007.

Since its establishment in October 2008, nib foundation has allocated \$1.8 million in funding of health and wellbeing initiatives.

***About Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service***

Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service was established in 1975 and is a community owned and operated aeromedical search and rescue service. Each year the Helicopter Service undertakes more than 1250 missions free of charge to the communities of the Hunter, Central Coast, Mid North Coast, New England and North West regions of New South Wales. These missions include assisting people who have been in accidents, transporting critically ill patients from rural hospitals to specialist care hospitals and search and rescue missions.

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