Media Statement

27 October 2026

Release of Independent Review into Safety and Workplace Culture

The Board of the Northern NSW Helicopter Rescue Service today released the findings and recommendations of an Independent Review into safety and workplace culture, announcing it will adopt all recommendations arising from the review.

The Review was commissioned in late 2025 and was conducted by Cilla Robinson, a highly respected employment and industrial relations specialist from Mallesons.

The Review included a comprehensive desktop review of over 220 key documentary materials, a voluntary and anonymous employee survey which received 116 responses, approximately 100 interviews conducted with current and former employees and other stakeholders and site visits to the Service's four bases.

The Review found the Service does not have a pervasive or systemic toxic workplace culture, and that patient safety has not been impacted by workplace cultural issues.

It also found the Service's physical and operational safety record is exemplary, and its aviation safety culture is a genuine organisational strength.

At the same time, the Review identified instances where employees had experienced bullying, harassment, victimisation and other inappropriate workplace behaviour, and highlighted opportunities to strengthen workplace culture, complaints handling, leadership accountability, governance, people processes and employee support.

The Board has accepted the Review's recommendations in full, and implementation is already underway through a dedicated Action Plan, with delivery being treated as a priority.

Separately, the Service notes the completion and outcomes of recent additional reviews into its operations:

- **Independent Aviation Safety Audit -** An audit by an independent Aviation Safety Specialist, commissioned by NSW Ambulance, which resulted in an exceptional outcome, with no non-compliances identified. Additionally, the Audit found that aircraft maintenance was conducted to a very high standard.
- **CASA Audit -** An audit by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), of the Service's aircraft, operations, policies and procedures, resulting in no safety findings and three minor safety observations.
- **ISO Recertification Audit -** An ISO recertification audit of ISO 9001:2015, ISO 14001:2015 and ISO 45001:2018 standards for Quality, Environmental, and Occupational Health & Safety Management Systems, found that a "clearly positive safety culture exists throughout the Service" with no corrective action requests and a small number of observations / opportunities for improvement.

These three reports, together with the Independent Review, describe an organisation that takes safety as its number one priority.

Media Statement

Board Chair John Fenwick said:

“From the outset, I want to apologise to any current or former employee who has experienced bullying, harassment, victimisation or other inappropriate behaviour at the Service.”

“This review has found serious instances in which we have let people down. Those experiences are unacceptable and I am sorry. No one should come to work and experience that kind of treatment.”

"I want to thank the people who participated in the Independent Review and shared their experiences. Their contribution has been essential in helping us understand both the strengths of the organisation and where improvements are needed.”

"The Review examines issues that span several years. In this time there has already been significant renewal across the organisation, including changes in personnel, as well as broader changes to governance and people practices.”

"A number of the recommendations reflect work that is already underway. The Review provides a valuable roadmap for continuing that progress and ensuring the right foundations are in place for the future."

“At its core, the Review has found an organisation that is on a journey. It is not an organisation with a pervasive ‘toxic’ culture.”

“The Review found that the Service has many strengths upon which to build. It recognised the dedication and professionalism of our people, who are a deeply committed workforce who work every day to serve communities across northern New South Wales.”

“Our focus now is on taking action and ensuring that all recommendations are properly embedded across the organisation.”

"Our social licence depends on the trust of our people, volunteers, supporters and the communities we serve. We owe it to them to ensure a workplace that reflects the highest standards of professionalism, respect and accountability.”

“While we focus on implementing the recommendations and findings, the Service will continue to maintain safe delivery of mission-critical helicopter operations and search and rescue services to the communities of northern NSW, serving our community 24 hours a day, every day of the year, while ensuring a workplace where people feel safe, valued and respected.”

The Service will provide regular updates to stakeholders as recommendations from the Independent Review are implemented. A summary of the review and the Service's response are available at https://rescuehelicopter.com.au/media-statement/

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