




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA

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ADJOURNMENT

North Queensland Rescue Helicopter

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (12.47 am): I rise to speak about the North Queensland rescue helicopter, which is an issue that I have raised a fair bit in the parliament. I keep getting the same response, which is that we have the fixed-wing service available to us. At the outset I acknowledge that the minister has been engaging on this issue. I had the same attitude when this service first came to Mount Isa. I thought that we already had the fixed-wing aircraft and that we did not need a rescue helicopter. However, the rescue helicopter has some very unique characteristics that value adds to the service we have at Mount Isa. Obviously, we are a very remote location. We do not have the concentration and variety of services that are available on the coast. There are four community rescue helicopters in Queensland. The fourth one is in Mount Isa and it is fully community funded. It would not make up \$100,000 of fee for service to Queensland Health. It does a lot more than that and it costs a lot to keep to keep it operational so that it can save lives.

Members can believe me that it saves lives. I personally know people whose lives it has saved. It can get to a point faster than an ambulance can drive back into town to the airstrip where the flying doctor is. They can triage in the air. The flying doctor can wait at the base hospital in Mount Isa and then take the patient through to Townsville. That can produce considerable cost savings. On 4 April, the last four jobs the helicopter responded to were all urgent cases requiring immediate assistance. The fixed-wing RFDS was attending another job and was not available. It is possible that those four lives were saved by the rescue helicopter service. It is needed. Everyone in our emergency services acknowledges that. There is \$13.46 million in funding for four choppers and we would not make up \$100,000 of that. How can that be fair?

Even 11 per cent of that would keep us viable. In terms of night vision goggles, the other services got \$3.5 million and we got nothing of that. We provided our own night vision goggles. We raised our own money for our night vision goggles. We got nothing and everyone else got \$13.46 million. This needs to be addressed. I plead with the minister to give the service some consideration because it will fail come September. It is a life-giving service.

At first I thought the fixed-wing aircraft was enough and that we did not need this helicopter service, but I have come to the realisation that it has proven to be a vital service. I plead with the minister to give this community what the needs. I personally know of people's lives that have been saved. It will continue to save lives. If we can have a share of the money that is allocated to other helicopter services it would be appreciated. I think that is only fair. Everyone has done a great job of raising money within the community. They have been knocking on doors of mining companies and old ladies. Everyone has been donating. It is time for the government to stand in and keep the service viable.