

Queensland Health (Horn Island)



Babcock has provided 24/7 Helicopter Emergency Medical Services on behalf of Queensland Health in the Torres Strait since 2007

Program name	Queensland Health (Horn Island)
Customer	State of Queensland (represented by Queensland Health)
Contract start date	2007 (contract extension starting May 2025)
Contract term	2036

Babcock has served the Torres Strait community for more than 27 years, so we understand the often unpredictable and unforgiving conditions residents face in an emergency. And how important it is to have a high performing emergency helicopter service providing fast and quality healthcare.

Operating from Babcock’s purpose-built facility at Horn Island, we provide 24/7 every day of the year aeromedical retrieval and search and rescue services across the Torres Strait and Northern Cape York Peninsula for Queensland Health.

In 2022, Babcock was awarded a new 12-year contract, to commence during 2024/2025, continuing a 15-year relationship with the Queensland Government and representing a significant uplift in capability to the region.

As part of the new contract, Babcock is introducing two multi-mission Leonardo AW139 helicopters to replace the

existing Bell412 helicopters, for increased speed, range and operational capability. The cabin modification is being conducted in Queensland and will incorporate the latest aeromedical configuration including automated, powered, road ambulance stretchers, as used by Queensland Ambulance Service, for increased patient care. Each aircraft will also be fitted with a winch and a Wescam MX-15 Electro Optic/Infra-Red Camera making it a highly capable search and rescue (SAR) platform, notably at night.

Colourful livery – designed by renowned Torres Strait Islander artist Alick Tipoti – makes the helicopters instantly recognisable and includes a distinctive dragonfly motif painted on the underside of both aircraft.

The dragonfly is known in the Torres Strait as ‘Kuyup’ – a term also used by islander peoples to describe a helicopter. Together, the two aircraft will form the Lagaw (Island) Kuyup (Helicopter) Rescue Service.

Alick’s artwork – commissioned by Queensland Health – aims to illustrate the positive impact helicopter services have in supporting the Torres Strait community. The costs of painting the artwork on the helicopters was sponsored by Babcock, Leonardo Helicopters and Lease Corporation International.



“‘Kuyupaw Yabu’ translates to the flight path of the dragonfly, in this case our very own rescue helicopter,” Mr Tipoti said.

To support the delivery of the new aircraft, Babcock has committed to upgrading its hangar facilities on Horn Island. Discussions are currently underway with the Torres Shire Council and airport operators to progress those plans. Upgrades are also being undertaken at some landing sites across the islands to accommodate the wheeled undercarriage of the new aircraft.

As part of its ongoing commitment to the Torres Strait community, Babcock has recently appointed a local Torres Strait resident to complete an apprenticeship in mechanical aeroskills. This four-year apprenticeship will lead to a Licenced Aircraft Maintenance Engineer (LAME) accreditation for the successful applicant. In addition, a qualified sheet metal worker has been hired for the base.

Aerial services form a critical part of medical service delivery across the Torres Strait as there is no road ambulance option between the hundreds of islands within the archipelago. Aeromedical services are the only safe way to transport sick patients to hospital. The new aircraft type and role equipment will give the local community access to improved patient care and enhanced SAR capability, a critical service to the island community.

The service also supports taskings from other government departments including Queensland Fire & Emergency Services and Queensland Police Service.

We have operated in the remote Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula regions for more than 27 years, ensuring the ongoing access to Emergency Medical Services for some of the hardest-to-reach communities. Transport options to medical facilities in the area are limited, and the nearest hospital is located on Thursday Island; the new AW139 aircraft and role equipment will give the local community access to improved patient care and enhanced SAR capability, a critical service to the island community.

Ensuring patients' care before flying

In partnership with Queensland Ambulance Service Paramedics, Babcock provides management of the Horn Island Patient Transfer Facility. The facility is used when patients need to spend any time on the ground at Horn Island while awaiting transfers to and from Babcock's helicopters and the Royal Flying Doctor Service. This ensures patients are held in a safe and comfortable environment and assists with achieving a better overall patient outcome.

At a glance:

- › Provision of pilots, aircrew and engineers to support 24/7/365 operation
- › Night and day all weather operations including Night Vision Goggles (NVG), winching capability, critical patient care
- › Design and install EMS configuration
- › Training support for client crew
- › Road ambulance stretcher interoperability for reduced patient risk

Contract in Numbers:

- › 2024 statistics:
- › 600+ flying hours per annum
- › 400+ missions per annum
- › 99.27% availability
- › 440+ patients per annum
- › 2x Bell412 helicopters will be replaced with 2x AW139s in 2025