

NICK DAMETTO

Member for Hinchinbrook



MEDIA RELEASE

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Ingham left in dark over heli debacle

A DANGEROUS situation where an emergency helicopter appeared to be delayed in retrieving a patient from Ingham Hospital on Wednesday night due to bats has been sidestepped by Queensland Health.

Chief Health Officer Dr Jeannette Young refused to answer detailed questions from the office of Hinchinbrook MP Nick Dametto about the incident after he was inundated with Facebook messages from concerned locals.

Mr Dametto was one of several people who witnessed the Queensland Government Air (QGAir) helicopter appear to be circling the hospital and trying to land, but was impeded by a swarm of flying foxes.

“Later that evening, I was also notified by a number of rightly concerned residents about the apparent situation,” he said.

“On Thursday morning, I directed my staff to make some inquiries with Queensland Health about the incident, including whether the helicopter’s landing and take-off were hindered by bats last night, if there were previously similar incidents and if there was a specific procedure in place for the helicopter to disperse bats prior to landing.”

In a lacklustre response that failed to provide any real answers, Queensland Chief Health Officer Dr Jeanette Young said Queensland Health could “not provide the clinical details or outcomes for the patient due to patient confidentiality”.

Dr Young would only confirm that a helicopter was tasked by Retrieval Services Queensland that afternoon to “retrieve a high priority patient from Ingham Hospital for transfer to Townsville Hospital”.

“We cannot provide the clinical details or outcomes for the patient due to patient confidentiality,” she said.

“The aeromedical crew ensures that patients in their care are transferred in a timely matter with safety taking a high priority.”

Mr Dametto said the response from Dr Young was “extremely disappointing”.

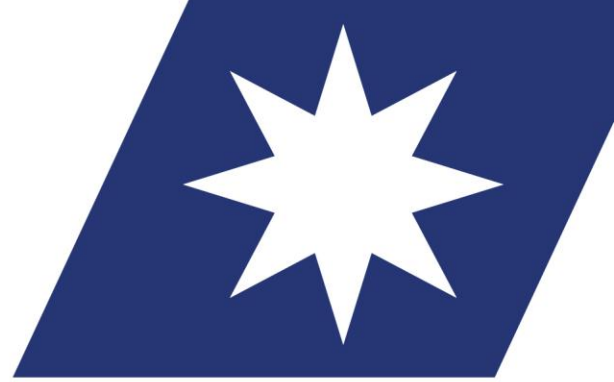
“We simply wanted to find out what was going on and I believe we gave Queensland Health adequate time to answer some fairly basic questions, most of which were avoided,” he said.

“I don’t think Dr Young’s response meets community expectations. I will be writing to Health Minister Steven Miles and Environment Minister Leeanne Enoch asking for a proper explanation and will demand action to ensure bats cannot continue to impede the emergency helicopter when human lives are on the line.”

Mr Dametto said bats roosting in Ingham not only posed a health risk to locals but also to helicopter aircrew, who could be delayed in retrieving patients to take to Townsville for critical treatment.

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“We know that every second counts in this sort of business and the minutes that it could take for a pilot to circle Ingham Hospital as they wait for bats to disperse is unacceptable,” he said.

Mr Dametto said he understood the State Government had indicated there was a review underway of the existing flying fox code of practice and encouraged the Department of Environment and Science to work on pinpointing methods that will effectively disperse flying foxes.

“The current methods permitted under the Code are not cost effective for local councils in being able to move bats on. The Department has the money and resources to find a more effective solution to this problem and I urge them to work with all local stakeholders involved in this issue,” he said.

“I stand with the community in saying the State Government needs to fix this issue once and for all.”

—ENDS—

Media Enquiries

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