



Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopters MEDIA RELEASE

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WESTPAC LIFESAVER HELICOPTER CELEBRATES FIVE YEARS ON THE SOUTH COAST

THE WESTPAC LIFE SAVER Rescue Helicopter celebrates its 5th birthday today on the NSW south coast.

The service commenced operations from a council leased hangar at Moruya Airport on 1st December 2010.

In its first year of operation, it only operated for the three months of summer. This was after Westpac announced additional funding for the Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter Service to introduce a dedicated rescue helicopter service for the region.

Following ongoing support from Westpac and the introduction of funding from the NSW State Government, the Service commenced full-time operations on 1st October 2011.

Since it started flying on the south coast, the helicopter (callsigned *Lifesaver 23*) has undertaken 698 flights.

“These flights are a wide range of rescue missions and cover a huge area of NSW,” said Westpac Life Saver Helicopter CEO, Stephen Leahy.

“Over the last five years, not only has the helicopter supported the local community of the NSW south coast but it has been sent to many other parts of the state when there have been natural disasters.”

“We’ve been as far south as Mallacoota in Victoria, across to Wagga Wagga several times, and up to Grafton and Lismore. The teams are equally as skilled working on the coast as they are in remote areas of western NSW.”

The helicopter is regularly called upon to assist emergency services in the search and rescue of people missing in the bush and snowfields, fisherman who have been swept off rocks or fallen overboard their boat and assisting people who are trapped in floodwaters.

“Many people see the distinctive red and yellow helicopter flying along the beaches, undertaking regular coastal surveillance patrols on behalf of Surf Life Saving NSW,” said Mr Leahy.

These flights look for people swimming in remote locations, well away from patrolled beaches, fisherman in potentially dangerous places and boats that might be crossing bars or fishing near known blackspots. Crews also keep a look-out for sharks or anything that

might attract sharks such as large schools of fish.

“The Westpac Life Saver Helicopter is the community’s rescue helicopter. As the NSW South Coast continues to grow and tourism increases, we recognise the need to support the community with aerial surveillance and rapid aerial rescue capabilities, especially in remote locations,” Mr Leahy said.

“It’s important to recognise the strong partnership we have with Westpac as well as the NSW state government to make sure we can continue to save lives. Without their support and the generosity of the local community, we would not be able to provide this service.

The Moruya based Westpac Life Saver Helicopter is on duty every day of the year.

Note:

Lifesaver 23 and its crew feature in the first episode of the new series of Air Rescue, screening this Thursday night at 8.00pm on Channel 7. Rescue Crew Officer Samantha Law completes her first rescue mission when a lady falls ill on the Barque *Endeavour* 40 kilometres off Jervis Bay.

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For more information, contact:

STEPHEN LEAHY
Chief Executive Officer
Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopters
Mob: 0406 353 266
Ph: (02) 9694 3100

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@lifesaverhelo

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