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MEDIA RELEASE

PNG ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION COMMISSION INVESTIGATING HELICOPTER ACCIDENT IN WATER SOUTH EAST NEW IRELAND

The Chief Commissioner of the PNG Accident Investigation Commission (AIC), Mr. Hubert Namani announced on Saturday 14th September 2019 that the AIC was investigating a helicopter accident that occurred about 4 nm south east of Silur Mission, New Ireland Province.

Mr. Namani said "The helicopter, an Airbus Helicopters BK117-C1 helicopter operated by Tribal Aurora Helicopters, was reported to have departed from Buka Airport, Autonomous Region of Bougainville at 10:15 am on Friday 13th September en-route to Tokua Airport, East New Britain Province.

The last known radio broadcast from the pilot was at 10:45 am when the pilot made a standard 'operations normal' report to Air Traffic Services and stated that he was flying below 5,000 ft and estimating arrival at Tokua at 11:25 am. No further communications were heard from the aircraft.

"By 11:30 am the helicopter had not arrived at Tokua Airport so Air Traffic Services declared an Alert Phase, which was upgraded to a Distress Phase at 11:55 am.

"At 1:30 pm a Manalos Aviation helicopter departed Tokua for the last known position of the missing helicopter and at 2:27 pm the Manalos pilot reported seeing wreckage in the water almost 1 mile from the shore, about 4 nm south east of Silur Mission. He also located the passenger from the helicopter on the beach. The passenger was reported to have been uninjured and swam to shore. The body of the deceased pilot was later found in the water by local residents, about 200 metres from the impact point."

The weather in the area at the time of the accident was reported to be low cloud and rain with significantly reduced visibility.

Mr. Namani said "Only a small amount of wreckage that was found floating on the surface was recovered, and because the helicopter was reported to have sunk in very deep water the AIC commenced an Office investigation on Friday night. The investigation is continuing and includes flight operations, maintenance, weather, and the role and effectiveness search and rescue coordination by PNG Air Services Limited."

In accordance with International Standards, the AIC will issue a Preliminary Report within 30 days.

Hubert Namani, LLB
Chief Commissioner
