

MEDIA RELEASE

PNG ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION COMMISSION IMPEDED TO CONDUCT INVESTIGATION ON SERIOUS INCIDENT INVOLVING A HELICOPTER DURING EXTERNAL LOAD OPERATION

The Chief Commissioner of the PNG Accident Investigation Commission (AIC), Mr. Hubert Namani today announced that the AIC will not be able to conduct an investigation on a serious incident that occurred on 19 March 2021, where a Bell 407 helicopter registered P2-HNG, operated by Heli Niugini Limited, dropped its external load while conducting a sling airlift operation from Efogi, Central Province, to Port Moresby, NCD.

Mr. Namani explained that *"the purpose of the flight operation was to airlift a Cessna 206 airplane that had been involved in an accident at Efogi on 18 February 2021 and, to do so, the wings and propeller of the airplane were removed at Efogi and the aircraft was suspended by lines attached to the nose and tail section. While flying back to Port Moresby at 4,500 ft, the C206 airplane accidentally detached and dropped into the jungle. The helicopter reportedly returned to and landed safely at Jacksons."*

In accordance with the provisions of Annex 13 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation, *the unintentional or, as an emergency measure, the intentional release of a slung load or any other load carried external to the aircraft is considered a serious incident, becoming an investigable occurrence for the AIC under the Civil Aviation Act 2000 (as amended).*

Mr. Namani added that *"information available to the AIC indicated that Heli Niugini Limited notified the occurrence on the same day via email to CASA PNG. Section 62 of the Civil Aviation Act 2000 (As Amended) requires CASA PNG to notify the AIC as soon as practicable after an accident or incident is brought to their attention. This legal provision ensures that the AIC can respond in a timely manner to take appropriate actions in order to effectively investigate the occurrence with the objective of improving aviation safety mandated as a matter of national importance."*

However, CASA PNG did not notify the AIC about the occurrence.

Mr. Namani explained that *"time is the most relevant factor in an investigation. In this case, the AIC only became aware of the occurrence from other sources on 25 April 2021, more than a month after it happened. Due to the extended delay, the AIC cannot ensure the reliability and accuracy of the information about the serious incident, to effectively investigate."*

"The lack of notification from CASA PNG has impeded AIC's investigation into this serious incident and, more importantly, PNG has lost an invaluable opportunity to obtain safety lessons which would contribute to protect the lives of its citizens in the future."

"As the AIC has an obligation to comply with PNG law and international agreements and to serve our citizens, the AIC will take appropriate steps to ensure that its investigations are not impeded or obstructed by any organisation or person."