



PRELIMINARY REPORT

AIC 26-1003

08/05/2026

OPERATOR	:	Helicopter Support Limited (Solomon Islands)
REGISTRATION	:	H4-HSA
MANUFACTURER	:	Bell Textron
MODEL	:	Bell 222U
CLASS/CATEGORY	:	Engine Failure – Ditching
LOCATION	:	Munda, Western Province (Solomon Islands)
OCCURRENCE DATE	:	17 April 2026



INTRODUCTION

Investigation AIC 26-1003

On 17 April 2026 at 10:03 pm local time (12:03 UTC), the AIC was notified by the Civil Aviation Authority of Solomon Islands (CAASI), about an accident that occurred on the same day at 15:43 local time Solomon Islands (04:33 UTC). The accident involved a Bell 222U helicopter registered H4-HSA, owned and operated by Helicopter Support Limited based in the Honiara.

In accordance with the *Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)* on cooperation in aircraft accident and serious incident investigation between CAASI and the PNG Accident Investigation Commission (AIC), the AIC responded to a request by CAASI, the State of Occurrence, to conduct an on-site investigation.

On 18 April 2026, CAASI delegated the whole of the investigation to the PNG AIC in accordance with *ICAO Annex 13 paragraph 5.1*, which obligates the State accepting the delegation to conduct the investigation, including the issuance of the *Final Report* and the *Accident and Serious Incident Reporting (ADREP)* data.

On 18 April the AIC commenced the investigation pursuant to *Section 247* of the *PNG Civil Aviation Act 2000*, and *ICAO Annex 13 Chapter 5, paragraph 5.1*. A team of investigators was deployed to the occurrence site to conduct on-site investigation activities.

In accordance with *ICAO Annex 13, Chapter 4, paragraph 4.1*, the AIC promptly notified relevant foreign authorities of the State of:

- Helicopter Design: Canada (TSB)
- Engine and Airframe manufacturer: United States (NTSB)
- The International Civil Aviation Organization; the aircraft involved is of a maximum mass of over 2,250 kg.

Participation by the mentioned States and other parties was permitted in accordance with *ICAO Annex 13*.

This *Preliminary Accident Investigation Report*, prepared by the AIC, contains factual information from initial evidence gathered up to the date of this report.

The investigation is continuing and is being carried out pursuant to *PNG Civil Aviation Act 2000*, and in accordance with the *PNG AIC Investigation Policy and Procedures Manual*, and *ICAO Annex 13 Standards and Recommended Practices*.

The analysis, findings, and contributing (causal) factors, and any safety action taken, and safety recommendations issued in the course of this investigation will be included in the *Final Report* which will be published at the completion of the investigation.

The sole objective of AIC investigations and its resulting reports is the improvement of safety.

It is not the role of the AIC to apportion blame or liability.

Factual Information

Occurrence Detail

On 17 April 2026, at 15:28 Solomon Islands local time (04:28 UTC¹), a Bell 222U helicopter, registered H4-HSA, owned and operated by Helicopter Support Limited, was conducting a VFR² humanitarian charter flight from Munda International Airport, Western Province of the Solomon Islands to island communities to the south. Shortly after departure from Munda International Airport, at about 15:33 local time, the helicopter experienced a left engine failure. The pilot turned to track back towards Munda, however, due to degraded aircraft performance, he executed an emergency landing about 2.5 nm south of Munda International Airport. He deployed installed emergency floatation equipment and ditched the helicopter on water.

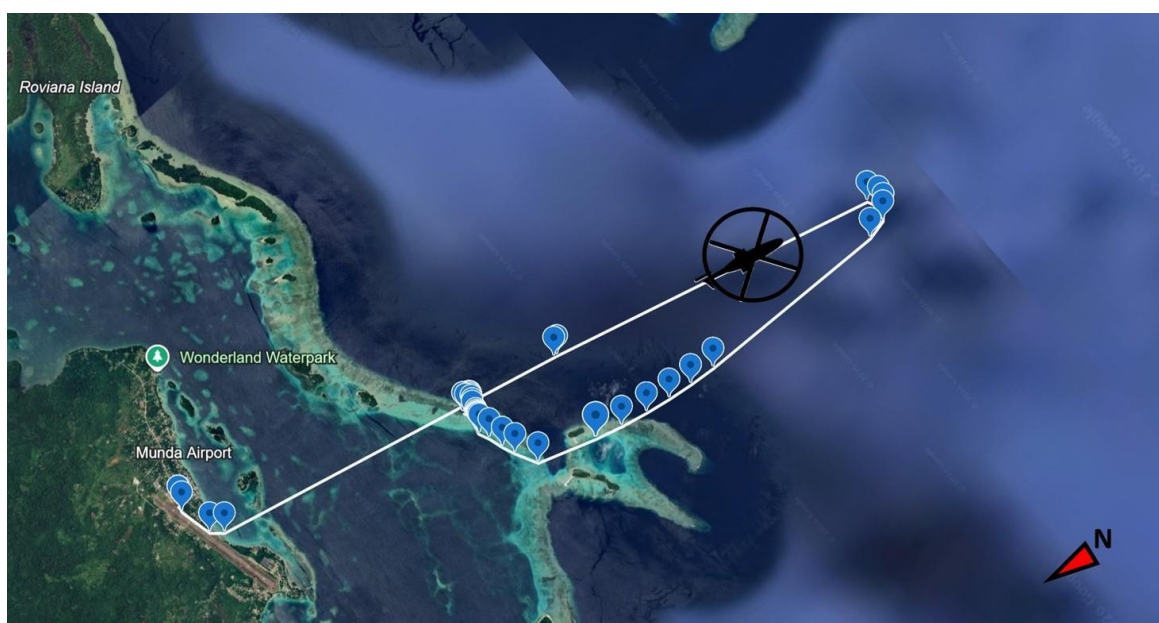


Figure 1: Overview of Flight Track from Munda Airport to the ditching site.

There were two persons on board the helicopter: The pilot and the Loadmaster. There were no reported injuries.

The pilot informed investigators that the helicopter departed normally from Munda International Airport with the planned flight sector for cyclone impacted island communities towards the south of Munda. The Spidertrack³ recorded data showed that the helicopter departed Munda International Airport at approximately 14:28 local time, climbed to 500 ft AGL⁴ and tracked south over the water.

The pilot reported that there were no abnormal indications on departure out of Munda and during the initial climb to the selected cruising height. Once established on the southbound track maintaining height between 500 and 600 ft, and about 10 minutes into the flight, the helicopter's engine gauges indicated what the pilot described as a Run Down in RPM on the left engine.

¹ The 24-hour clock, in Coordinated Universal Time (UTC), is used in this report to describe the local time as specific events occurred. Local area time of the occurrence Solomon Islands Time (Pacific/Munda Time) is UTC +11 hours.

² Visual Flight Rules.

³ A web-based global position tracking company.

⁴ Above Ground Level.

The pilot reported that he immediately transmitted a PAN⁵ call on the Munda Air Traffic Serviced radio frequency, which was acknowledged by air traffic services at Munda International Airport. According to the pilot, he turned the helicopter to track back for Munda. However, he was unable to maintain altitude and the helicopter continued to gradually descend as it tracked back towards Munda International Airport.

At 15:41 local time, after observing persistent degraded helicopter operation, the pilot declared a full emergency by transmitting a MAYDAY⁶ call to Munda Air Traffic Services.

As the helicopter continued to descend, the pilot selected an area near a visible submerged sandbank and prepared to ditch the helicopter over it. The pilot stated that just prior to impacting the water, he deployed the aircraft's floatation equipment. The helicopter impacted the water and came to rest on its skids on a reef adjacent to the sandbank, partially submerged in water (see Figure 3). The pilot shut the operating engine down and both the pilot and Loadmaster evacuated the helicopter.

According to the pilot, shortly after evacuating, they were rescued by locals in dinghies from the nearby islands. The aircraft was partially submerged in water. Apart from the float covers detaching from the aircraft, and airframe exposure to saltwater, there was no further impact related damage to the aircraft.

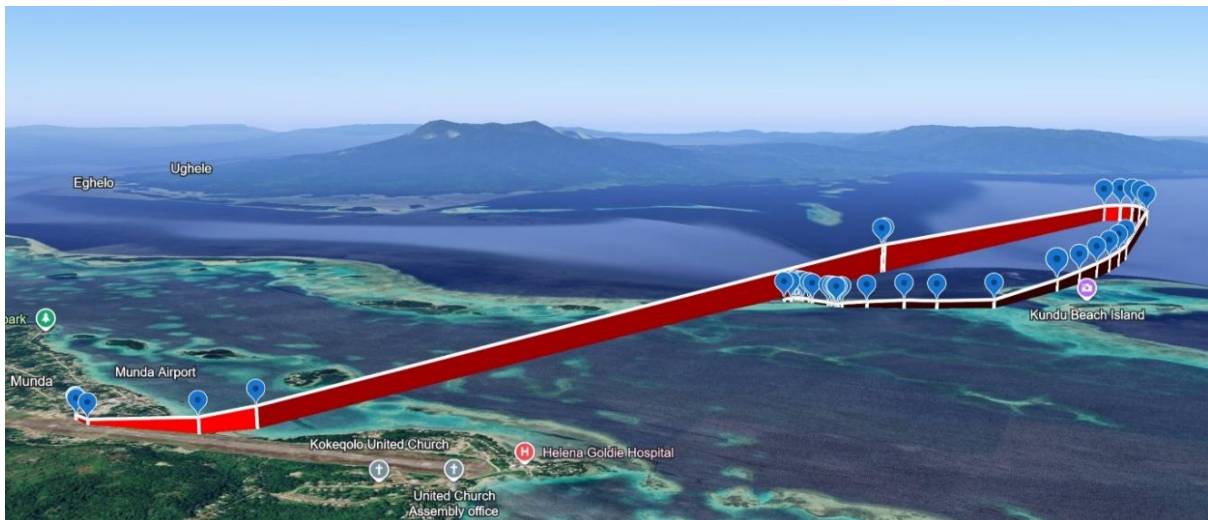


Figure 2: H4-HSA Departure from Munda Airport and track outbound.

⁵ PAN is an international radio distress transmission and denotes urgency but not life-threatening danger.

⁶ MAYDAY is an international radio distress transmission and denotes imminent life-threatening danger.

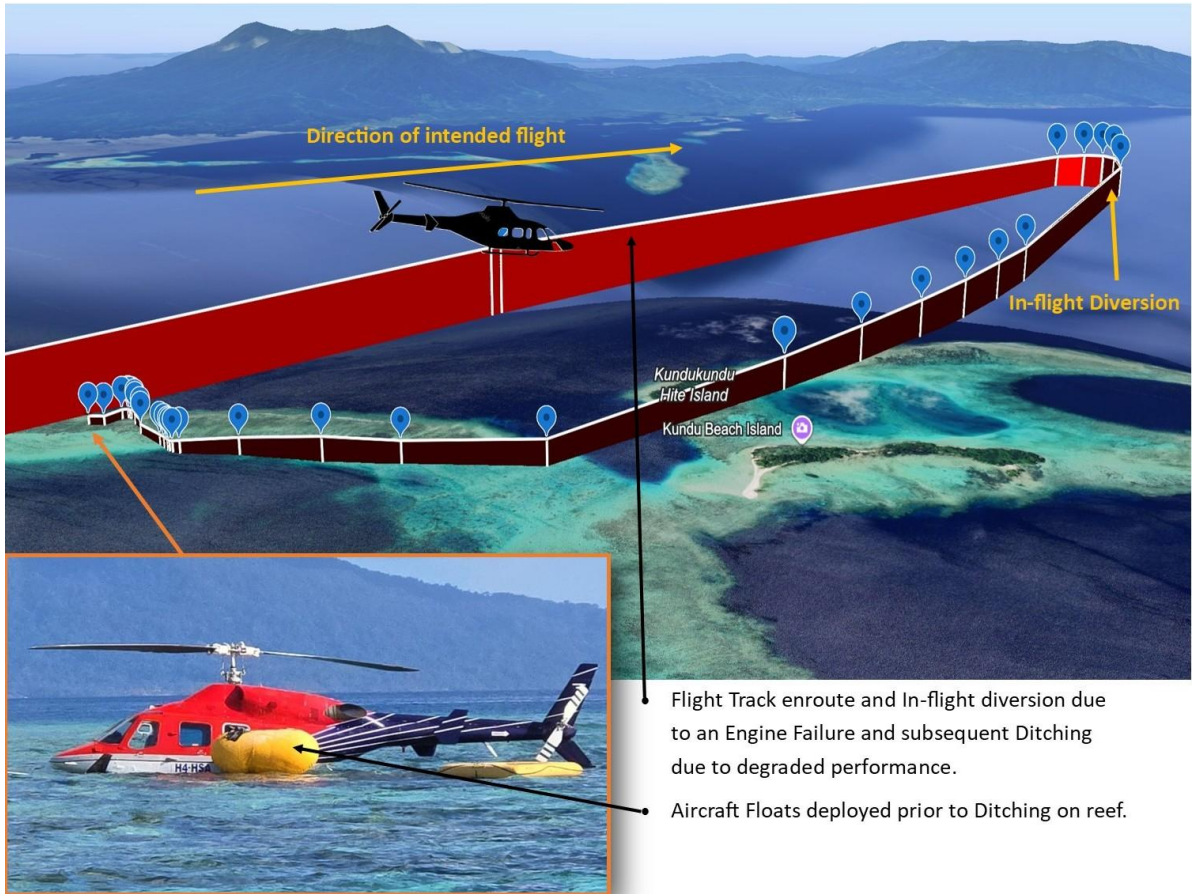


Figure 3: Final Resting position of H4-HSA following the in-flight diversion and track back towards Munda.



Figure 4: Deployment of Floats and their location (H4-HSA).

AIC Comment

The investigation is continuing and will include but not be limited to flight operations, systems, performance, and maintenance aspects. The investigation analysis and findings will be included in the *Final Report*.

Safety Actions

At the time of the issue of this *Preliminary Report*, the AIC had not been informed of any *Safety Action* being taken.

Recommendations

At the time of the issue of this *Preliminary Report*, no safety recommendations have been issued by the AIC.

General details

Date and time:	17 April 2026, 15:33 Local Time (04:33 UTC)	
Occurrence category:	Accident	
Primary occurrence type:	Inflight Engine Failure – Ditching	
Location:	~2.5 Nautical miles south of Munda International Airport.	
	Latitude: 08°21'56"S	Longitude: 157°56'06"E

Type of Operation, Injury, and Damage details

Type of operation	VFR Charter Flight	
Persons on Board	Crew: Pilot	Loadmaster
Injuries	Crew: Nil	Passengers: Nil
Damage	The aircraft was partially submerged in water. Apart from the float covers detaching from the aircraft and airframe exposure to saltwater, there was no further impact related damage to the aircraft.	

Crew details

Pilot In Command	
Nationality	Australian
Gender	Male
Age	65
License type	ATPL-H


Aircraft details

Airframe		
Aircraft manufacturer:	Bell Helicopter Textron	
Model	Bell 222U	
Registration:	H4-HSA	
Serial number:	47548	
Place and Year of Manufacture	Fort Worth Texas USA- 1986	
Engines		
Engine manufacturer	Honeywell	
Engine Model Number	LTS101-750C1	
Engine Serial Numbers	1. LE47144AE	2. LE-47197AE

This Preliminary Report is released by:
Accident Investigation Commission
Ministry of Civil Aviation
Papua New Guinea



08 May 2026



MARYANNE J. WAL
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