



Media Release

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Remote airstrip upgrades will help Flying Doctor save lives

Landing between rows of kerosene lamps or flaming diesel-soaked toilet rolls on Outback airstrips will soon be a thing of the past thanks to a kick-start contribution from a very generous donor, and the Federal Government's Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program.

These upgrades will predominately; address; animal proof fencing, airstrip lighting, surfaces and navigation aids. This will improve access and safety by day and night for the RFDS and all aviation users in Australia.

"Having a larger network of designated night landing strips will mean shorter journeys for injured or unwell people in remote locations, which we believe will save lives," explained Sarah Little, Community Development Coordinator at the Royal Flying Doctor Service, South Eastern Section (RFDS SE), following a recent visit to inspect upgrades and deliver lighting flares.

"Navigation aids and reliable lighting will enable us to work with confidence and increased safety in time-sensitive emergency situations, in darkness and in most weather conditions."

The program will upgrade 50 locations in NSW nominated by the RFDS SE. These include communities already being serviced by the RFDS, including; Coolah, Goodooga, Ivanhoe, Louth, Packsaddle, Tilpa, White Cliffs and Yunta.

"We gave priority to those locations where we have landed the most emergency flights or clinic services during the past year," said Sarah.

"These are necessary upgrades as aviation regulations are getting ever tighter and both the RFDS SE and our patients rightly have high expectations around safety and quality of healthcare.

"We also fly very expensive, sophisticated aircraft with "mini-intensive care" units in the back, assets we are keen to preserve."

These upgrades will make a real difference to the remote communities like the South Australian township of Innamincka, which sits just inside South Australia and straddles the NSW and Queensland borders. Both the township and the nearby Innamincka station, which hosts a monthly RFDS SE clinic, have just received upgrades.

“We do feel a little exposed out here, 600kms from the nearest full-time doctor. Knowing that the Flying Doctor can now land here or in the township at night, gives us much greater peace of mind,” said Jodie Keogh whose husband manages Innamincka station.

“We’ve had eflares for about four years that allowed the RFDS to land here, but we’ve now been properly upgraded.”

“A survey identified and removed potential obstructions around the airstrip and permanent metal stakes installed along its edges to hold the battery-operated flares.”

“Innamincka is now the night time evacuation point for stations and communities within a 100km radius.”

These emergencies will be facilitated on the ground by the staff of the station, the hotel and the shop. They will put out flares or do a ‘brumby run’ ahead of a RFDS landing.

“Overall, the works are progressing well and in the coming months many more communities will be able to enjoy the peace of mind that Innamincka now has,” said Sarah.

“Our founder, John Flynn, spoke of casting a “mantle of safety” over the Outback and although the tyranny of distance still exists almost 90 years later, these improvements are moving the Flying Doctor ever closer to his vision.”

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For more information or photographs, contact:

Ryan Young, Digital Marketing Communication Coordinator, RFDS (South Eastern Section) on 0427 392 475 or ryan.young@rfdsse.org.au

Nick Bleszynski, Media Consultant, RFDS (South Eastern Section) on 0403 931 291 or nick.bleszynski@rfdsse.org.au

ABOUT THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

The Royal Flying Doctor Service has been taking the finest care to the furthest corners of Australia since 1928. The not-for-profit service provides 24 hour emergency cover to 90% of the Australian continent, via a modern fleet of specially equipped aircraft and road vehicles. In the past year, the South Eastern Section facilitated almost 4,600 clinics, took over 5,500 telehealth calls, had around 51,000 patient contacts and transported over 8,300 patients.

