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NZDF, 2019c

NZDF Helps Transport Election Officials in Solomon Islands

26 March 2019

New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) personnel have been transporting election officials, police and voting material to several remote communities in Solomon Islands as preparations increase for next week's general election.

The NZDF has sent 55 personnel and two Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) NH90 helicopters to provide support for the Solomon Islands election as part of a combined operation with Australia, in response to a request from the Solomon Islands Electoral Commission.

The general election on 3 April is the first since the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands concluded in 2017.

RNZAF Squadron Leader Michael Adair said two NH90 helicopters had been providing back-up transport support as part of a Combined Task Group led by the Australian Defence Force.

Since arriving in Honiara in mid-March, the helicopters had flown election officials to several remote communities, Squadron Leader Adair said. These included Taro Island, which is 500 kilometres northwest of the capital Honiara, Gizo, the second-largest town in Solomon Islands, about 380 kilometres northwest of Honiara, and Munda, a town on the island of Munda which is 320 kilometres northwest of the capital.

"The NH90 is ideally suited to provide logistic support because of their ability to land in remote locations and fly for 2.8 hours without refuelling," he said.

"Together with the Australian Defence Force's MRH90 helicopters, we have been flying to outlying islands to transport election officials, ballot boxes and other election material under the guidance of Solomon Islands authorities.

"By providing this support we are helping Solomon Islands authorities ensure voting material is delivered across the country before election day."

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