

Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry.

Your Honour, I would like to bring to your attention the role of Media aircraft, in particular helicopters, flying in disaster areas and urge you to take steps to ensure the bizarre events which happened in the recent Queensland floods can never happen again. I refer of course to the events surrounding the tragic death of the late Mr. James Perry. During the day of the reporting of the Lockyer Valley floods the image of the Perry Family's plight was shown time and time again throughout the day. All viewers on the day, including myself, have to be forgiven for believing that the family having been discovered, would have been rescued. It was truly dismaying to learn the truth of what did happen.

I believe the personal on board the helicopter which flew over and around the Perry family for quite some time then flew off, abandoning them to their fate, should be charged with culpable negligence leading to death and serious harm. That the helicopter was in close vicinity of the Perry family for some time is evidenced by the fact that vision of the family in the car was shown as well as of them on the roof of the car. That they flew off before the family was able to be rescued is also in evidence. That they would have time to effect a rescue (instead of doing nothing useful) if they had been "rescue capable" is also obvious.

This bizarre and obscene situation does not reflect at all well on the Media people involved. In life and death situations such as this, it is just not good enough for Media people to hide behind "objectivity" with concepts such as "we don't make the news, just report it." Surely, even in the absence of effective rescue capability, the life and death situation confronting them demanded the least this crew should have done was radio for help, then stay on station till it arrived.

Which leads me to my next point. The idea of Media aircraft flying around in disaster zones, completely impotent of any action other than to take photographs for curious onlookers must surely be at an end. If a media helicopter is first on a life threatening situation where urgent help is of the essence, it must be capable of acting immediately to respond and render positive assistance, leaving aside its photographic and reporting role for as long as is necessary.

To make this possible, all aircraft flying into disaster zones, officially declared or not, including all media aircraft must be made capable of rendering first critical positive response. (To have aircraft flying around not capable of doing so is a waste of resources at very least.) All media aircraft permitted to fly into disaster areas should be made to be rescue capable. In the case of fixed wing aircraft the dropping of life saving equipment and supplies while staying on station till radioed help arrives would be the minimum prerequisite. All media helicopters must be made fully capable of effecting immediate rescue. Whether by only carrying rescue trained media personal and the necessary equipment or by carrying trained rescue persons as well as the media crew is a matter for debate. The effective rescue capability of Media aircraft, particularly helicopters, however it is achieved, is NOT a matter for debate. It is imperative that it happens before the next disaster strikes.

If this rescue capability had already been in place, the outcome for the Perry family would have been very different. They would not have had to endure the unimaginable torment of having been “found”, only to have their hopes dashed on realising it was by a completely useless media helicopter intent only on photographing their plight. Can you imagine their feelings? Especially when the helicopter flew off? I can’t. What happened to them next was totally inexcusable, especially as with the right mechanisms in place it would in all likelihood have been totally avoidable. Instead of a happy and jubilant outcome, the Wife and Son of the late James Perry are left to relive the horror of their experiences while grieving the unnecessary loss of their Husband and Father.

Please make sure that this can never be repeated for someone else in the future. Please insist that all Media aircraft flying into disaster zones are required by law to be fully rescue capable. Secondly All Media crew flying into disaster areas must be required by law to leave their media role aside and engage in rescue as a first priority wherever and whenever the situation confronting them demands it.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr. Louis Anthony Moss.

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