

# Drone Vaccine Delivery Project Initiation Phase launched

By Anita Roberts

**THE FIRST PHASE OF THE PROJECT** to deliver lifesaving vaccines to vulnerable children in remote areas of Vanuatu using drones have finally been launched yesterday by the Minister of Health (MOH), Jack Norris Kalmet.

In a world first, the Government of Vanuatu has awarded three commercial contracts to the Wingcopter Holding GmbH & Co. KG from Germany and Australia's Swoop Aero Pty Ltd to get vaccines to a dozen areas.

These two drone companies have started conducting trials to test the use of drones in transporting vaccines in Vanuatu.

The use of drones to deliver vaccines in Vanuatu is considered the world's first trial with a potential to be replicated in other countries.

The inability to deliver needed vaccines from town to children at remote locations due to the lack of adequate transportation and poor infrastructure makes the government turn to drones to improve service delivery.



Drone taking off at Takara in North Efate yesterday.

The challenges of reaching children in the remote islands of Vanuatu are immense, nurses often walk several hours to deliver vaccines to health clinics, said the representative for the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

(UNICEF) in the Pacific region, Shelton Yett.

"Every child in the world has the right to lifesaving vaccines and this new technology is a step towards reaching those children most at risk," he said.

Yett said during the

launching yesterday that "UNICEF is proud to support the Government of Vanuatu in exploring new ways to get vaccines safely where they need to go, when they need to go".

UNICEF is implementing the project with the governments

of Vanuatu and Australia, through the Australian High Commission in Port Vila.

The government of Australia has provided Vt50 million for the drone vaccine delivery trial, said the Deputy Australian High Commissioner, Susan Ryle.

Minister Kalmet said the government will continue to explore how it can increase the use of drone to other sectors as climate change and agriculture.

The initiative will help the government achieve the Universal Health Coverage by 2030, he said.

"It is in line with the Sustainable Development Goal and the United Nations Pacific Strategy of 2018 to 2011," he added.

Minister Kalmet thanked the government of Australia and UNICEF for their technical and financial assistance.

The initial drone trials will be conducted over the offshore islands of north Efate from the old Takara airstrip before going to Epi, Sherpherds, Pentecost and Erromango.

Healthcare professionals, government representatives, teachers and children from Takara who attended yesterday's launching witnessed a real life demonstration of how drones are used to get vaccines to remote areas by the Wingcoter, the German drone company.