

Pistol's return adds to inside job fears



The Cairns Post yesterday.

SUSPICIONS a missing Lotus Glen Prison pistol was stolen by a staffer have intensified after the gun was returned yesterday to the room from where it went missing.

The semi-automatic handgun was reported missing from the Tableland prison's locked armoury last Friday and was mysteriously returned about 12.30pm.

The gun, which was not loaded, was found in an Australian Post padded package in an area not accessible to prisoners, who were in lockdown at the time of its return.

The incident has exposed gaping holes in the State Government's security procedures and placed serious questions over

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those guarding convicted killers and rapists.

The prison-issue Glock pistol was last seen in a gun safe kept under lock and key inside the high-security prison, 25km west of Mareeba, on November 28 during a weapons audit.

An Australian Federal Police probe, led by Chief Inspector of Prisons Andrew Brown, is expected to lead to an operations review and overhaul of security procedures at the prison.

Acting Corrective Services Minister Andrew Fraser yesterday moved to assure taxpayers the state's security

systems were up to standard. "This situation is unacceptable, but Queenslanders have every reason to feel confident in the security of the state's correctional centres," he said.

"To have a firearm from a prison armoury unaccounted for is a very rare occurrence, which is why the chief inspector has commenced an investigation.

"Armouries at all other correctional centres in the state were audited over the weekend with no discrepancies found."

Mr Fraser said it would be premature to call for tighter employee tests for future prison guards without the outcome of Mr Brown's investigations.

Prisoner visits were resumed after Friday's lockdown.

Fears ambos may walk over long-running wage dispute

Pay fight in critical condition

AN 18-month dispute with the Government over wages has sparked fears ambulance officers will leave the Far North for better pay.

The Queensland Ambulance Service has been locked in a bitter battle with the Government over a wage increase since October 2008.

The union, which represents 242 Far Northern ambulance officers, asked for an 18 per cent pay rise over three years during enterprise bargaining talks in 2008.

Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union spokesman Bob Lackey said all offers from the Government, including a 12.5 per cent increase, had been rejected, sending the payrise showdown to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission.

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"There was some indication a decision could be handed down in March," Mr Lackey said.

"But we're still waiting."

Paramedics now need a degree to enter the professionals.

Ambulance officers received an interim pay rise of 4 per cent in November 2008 from the Government while the commission also gave the QAS a 4 per cent pay rise in December 2009 while the issue remained in the courts.

"Officers will move to states that will offer better wages and entitlements," a high ranking ambulance staffer, who asked not to be

named, told *The Cairns Post*. "I have some officers from the region actively looking for employment elsewhere."

Intensive care paramedics in the Australian Capital Territory won a 21 per cent pay rise last month.

"We've got a story about ACT paramedics receiving a landmark pay rise in the (Cairns QAS) office building," another disgruntled staffer, who didn't want to be named, told *The Cairns Post*.

The issue has also delivered fears other states could poach paramedics from the region.

The Victorian Government is reportedly recruiting 200 more paramedics after the death of a five-year-old boy who waited more than

an hour for specialist paramedics last month.

"The Victorian Government will need paramedics to fill those new roles and if guys here aren't happy, they could get courted," a QAS source said.

Emergency Services Minister Neil Roberts hoped the issue would not lead to an exodus of Queensland paramedics.

"The Government would like to see this matter resolved as quickly as possible, just like the union," he said.

A union member said paramedics in the region received about \$25 to \$28 an hour, depending on their professional status.

A spokesman for the union in Victoria said paramedics receive about \$26 to \$30 an hour as a base rate.

QR accused of double standards Man with weed keeps job

QUEENSLAND Rail has come under fire for keeping a man with a drug conviction on the payroll while trying to force two long-serving track workers out of a job because of literacy problems.

Graham Parsons, Far North Queensland train driver-in-charge, was fined \$2500 in the Cairns Supreme Court on April 14 for possessing 500g of cannabis.

His conviction came a

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day after QR track workers Mangal Singh and Richard Matthews were asked to resign from the Innisfail infrastructure depot after failing to complete workplace health and safety paperwork.

The pair were given the option of resigning with six months' pay or fighting the issue in a costly and time con-

suming court battle.

However, the Government has told the men they will be offered their jobs back after union pressure and public backlash.

QR is facing further controversy after *The Weekend Post* found it kept Mr Parsons on



Graham Parsons

the payroll without sanction.

"It's a bloody disgrace that two hard-working men would be asked to leave because they have literacy problems but a man found with weed stays on," a QR worker, who asked not to be named, said.

"They are protecting senior staff and shunning blue-collar workers."

Mr Singh, who was been working for QR for 27 years and has a wife and two sons,

will accept the employment offer. Mr Matthews, who has been with the company for 28 years, will take six months' salary and retire.

Rail, Tram and Bus Union spokesman Richie Bates said justice had prevailed in the case of Mr Singh and Mr Matthews.

A spokeswoman for QR said Mr Parsons had undergone a series of drug tests since his conviction.

I lost a fair bit from the accident ... we need to find out who's at fault

— Jamie Jackway



Active: Thursday Island-based paramedic Jamie Jackway was a keen sportsman, pictured here playing rugby union.

Paramedic prepares action over accident

A PARAMEDIC who may never walk again after a helicopter winch line snapped during a Torres Strait rescue is launching legal action over the accident.

Thursday Island-based paramedic Jamie Jackway has no feeling from the chest down and breathes through a tube inserted in to his throat after the November 9 horror fall.

The father-of-three plunged 16m on to a ship during a cardiac patient rescue about 180km west of Horn Island while another air crewman also suffered injuries.

The 2m "gentle giant" once represented the national indigenous basketball team and played rugby league and union.

He now struggles to speak.

The aircraft, operated by Australian Helicopters, was contracted to Emergency Management Queensland.

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An investigation into the accident is ongoing with an EMQ spokeswoman saying the upkeep of helicopter equipment lies with the operator.

Speaking from the spinal unit at Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane yesterday, Mr Jackway said his legal team was preparing a case.

"I lost a fair bit from the accident ... we need to find out who's at fault," the 32-year-old said while in the company of his wife Melinee.

Mr Jackway's family had to move to Brisbane after the accident with his kids Noelani, 11, Kabakore, 9 and T'Challa, 6, taking up schooling in the area.

For Melinee, the days of a supporting wife start at 11am where

she reads to her husband for four hours before picking up the kids, showering and feeding them, and taking them back to Jamie for two hours before bed.

Jamie has been told he will be unable to walk, but Melinee hasn't given up hope.

"Doctors say he won't walk again, we don't think like that," she said.

Mr Jackway's legal team yesterday said it was too early to comment on the case but confirmed they were pursuing compensation.

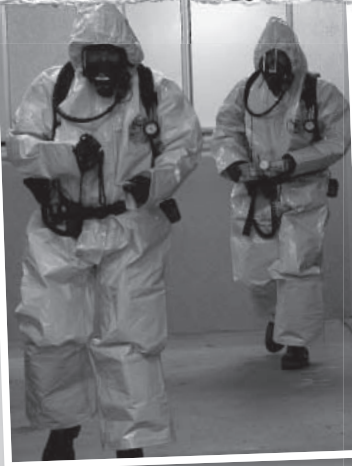
An Australian Helicopters spokesperson said the investigation was still under way and it would be inappropriate and premature to draw any conclusion.

It is understood the company's directors are currently in America.



On duty: Jamie Jackway is still in hospital after a helicopter winch line snapped.

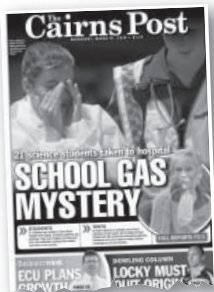
AIR TESTS FIND NO REASON FOR STUDENTS' ILLNESS



Search for answers: Firefighters were back at Redlynch State College yesterday testing the air to find the reason for Tuesday's emergency. Principal Richard Ruddell (above, right) wants to know why 21 students from his school were taken to hospital with symptoms including itching, dizziness and breathing difficulties.

Pictures: MARC McCORMACK

Chemical or gas leak ruled out



Yesterday's *The Cairns Post*.

A CHEMICAL or gas leak has been ruled out as the cause of an illness that left 21 students in hospital as authorities reveal two paramedics also caught the mystery ailment.

Yesterday afternoon a specialist air tester from Brisbane Anthony Warwick said no dangerous air particles played a role in the emergency at Redlynch State College's science lab.

About 9.45am on Tuesday, 14 year 7 science students from the class of 25 were experiencing itchy skin, dizziness and breathing problems.

By 2pm, 21 students were being treated at Cairns Base Hospital with all teenagers discharged by 7.30pm that night.

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Most of the students have since returned to school with Mr Warwick only finding traces of floral odours, fabric softeners and sanitisers in his tests.

Mr Warwick, who is doing the air tests for Education Queensland, said dust from exposure to plants or pests may have triggered the illness, but did not think these theories were likely.

It comes amid new revelations two paramedics who did not go into the lab but had contact with affected children also became ill.

"Two paramedics were affected for about an hour from their exposure to students and they didn't enter the building," Smithfield Fire Station officer Greg Strettlles said.

The mystery took another turn with Trish Holland, who was teaching the science theory class, revealing the illness struck students in a domino effect.

"It seemed to start from the back and work along and then come to the next row and work along," Ms Holland said of the pattern of symptoms.

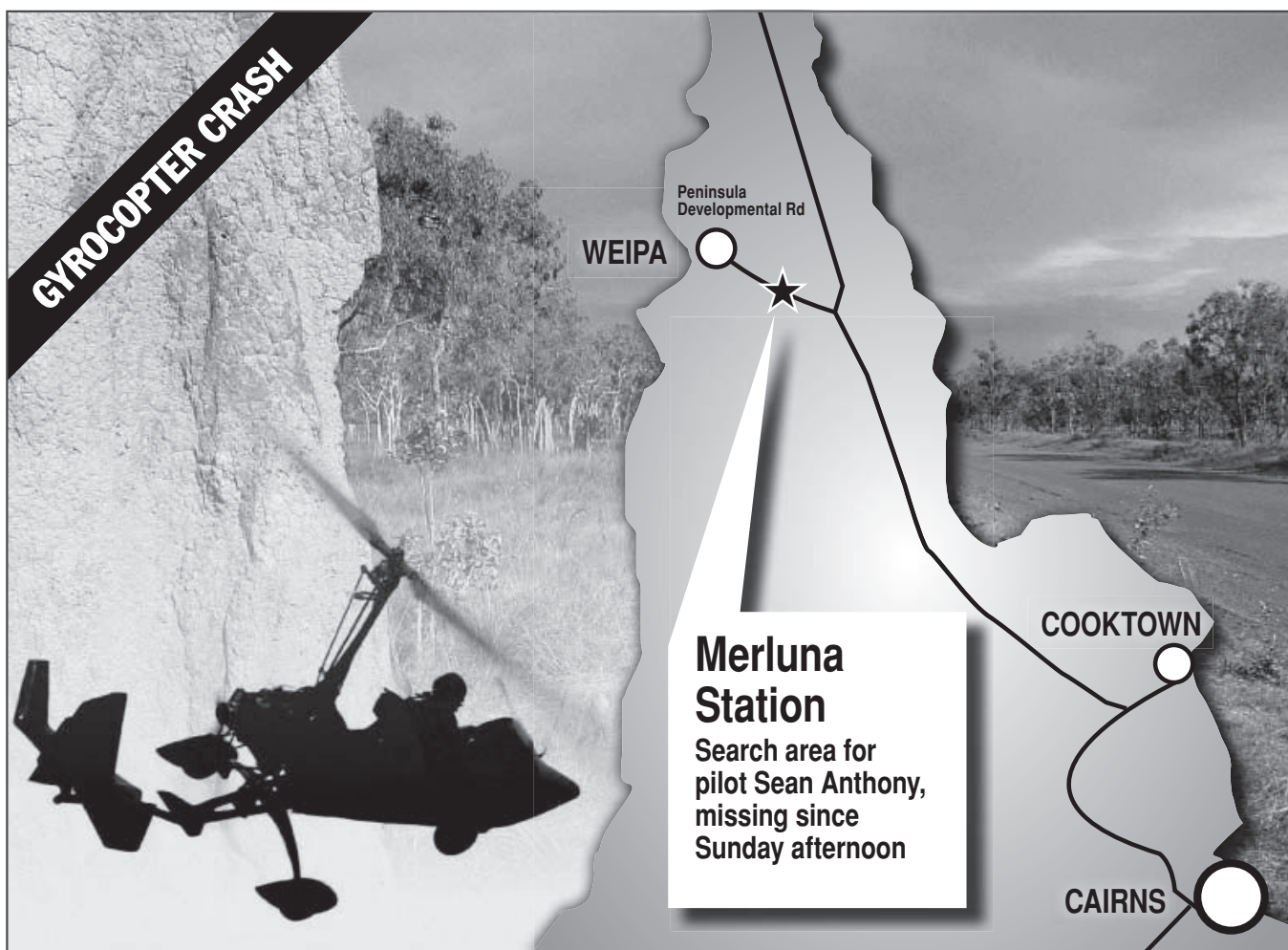
The science lab, which is a part of a creative technologies block, has not been painted or altered since it was opened three years ago.

The event at Redlynch is similar to a 2005 mysterious illness that caused breathing problems, dizziness, nausea, headache and vomiting in 57 people at Melbourne's domestic airport.

A gas leak was blamed for the incident but investigations found no dangerous air particles.

Sociologist Robert Bartholomew, who wrote a report on the Melbourne airport incident, which was published in *The Medical Journal of Australia*, said a mass anxiety attack could be behind the Redlynch event.

The science lab is expected to reopen after the Easter holidays.



No trace of pilot after call for help

AIR and land searches for a pilot were continuing in rugged bush near Weipa last night after the father-of-two crashed his gyrocopter on a test flight.

Sean Anthony, 42, crashed late on Sunday afternoon and spent the night in the bush before making contact with police yesterday about 11.45am and giving them co-ordinates of his location using a GPS and mobile phone.

Authorities believe he is about 50km south of Weipa on a large cattle farm, but heavy scrub has so far hindered the search.

While it is believed Mr Anthony is not seriously hurt, they fear he has walked from his original post after calling for help.

Mr Anthony was last seen leaving Weipa airport about 2pm on Sunday and his wife raised the alarm yesterday morning.

"I'm very worried, he doesn't nor-

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mally not contact me when he goes flying," his wife Leanne told *The Cairns Post*.

"I haven't been able to eat or sleep since he disappeared.

"Two nights out there would be tough.

"The last word I had is they found footsteps in the dirt on the track."

Mrs Anthony described the aircraft as small, blue and yellow with a single blade on top and propelled by a motor blade at the rear.

She said her husband, who operates a crane truck at Weipa, had been flying for seven years.

There was confusion yesterday afternoon when police emailed media outlets saying Mr Anthony had been found, but this was later retracted when the pilot remained missing.

"He made contact with police

The last word I had is they found footsteps in the dirt on the track

— Pilot's wife Leanne Anthony

around 11.45am today and advised them he was safe and would be walking out of bush land," the statement read.

"Police travelled to the scene to collect the man however he was not in the location he advised to police."

Weipa police officer-in-charge Sgt Brett Jenkins said authorities would work through the night until Mr Anthony was found.

"We're just hoping he hasn't

walked away from the spot (where) he said he was," he said.

Three police aircraft were scouring bushland from Weipa to Merluna Station, a 166,400ha cattle station about 120km southeast of Weipa yesterday before centring the search further north after Mr Anthony's SOS call.

A worker at Merluna Station, a camping and cabin accommodation provider, said the company knew Mr Anthony and co-operated with police.

Cairns police regional duty officer Dave Dini said the man's wife told police he often used the Peninsula Developmental Rd to navigate his way from the airport to Merluna Station Stay.

Gyrocopters are a smaller, slower model of the helicopter which can only hold one or two people and travel no faster than 100km/h.