

Kokoda crash pay-outs capped by PNG law

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RELATIVES of the nine Australians killed in an air crash near Kokoda would only get paltry legal compensation capped at about \$12,500 for their loss under the country's legislation.

Several groups of relatives are due to visit Kokoda and the crash site about 85km north of the capital Port Moresby this week, to hold a memorial service on the one year anniversary of the accident, which killed the Australians, three Papua New Guineans and one Japanese when their aircraft hit a mountain.

The relatives could face hostility from some land owners at the crash site who have yet to receive any reparations for damage to their property.

Earlier this year, landowners in a village near the site complained their water supply had been contaminated and a swathe of forest had been chopped down to allow rescue and salvage helicopters to access the crash site, on a steep ridge about six hours walk from the nearest road.

The landowners alleged medicines carried by the plane had leached into a local creek and polluted the water supply.

A local ex-pat who asked not to be named told *The Australian* that landowners had conducted an animated discussion about compensation with Australian High Commission officials who visited the crash site.

Yesterday a spokesman for the Australian Foreign Affairs Department reported villagers said they had written to Airlines PNG about the issues.

Airlines PNG, which operated the crash plane, said last month that compensation was "being discussed with the state".

PNG's Community Development Minister Lady Carol Kidu who is accompanying one group of relatives to the crash site this week, confirmed compensation had been an issue but said she would be with the group and would help explain the situation to locals.

Compensation payouts from the airline's insurers to the Australian relatives could be as little as \$12,500 according to experienced international aviation lawyer Patrick Nunan.

Mr Nunan says the families of the Kokoda victims would only be entitled to a capped payment of a maximum of 30,000 kina or about \$12,500 under the local legislation.

