

Pacific Island Countries – Preparedness

ETC Situation Report #19

Reporting period: October to December, Q4 2023

The ETC in the Pacific is led by the WFP Pacific Multi Country Office (MCO) and was activated in 2016 under the structure of the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) to support telecommunications preparedness in the region. Situation reports are distributed every quarter.

Highlights

- The WFP-led ETC in the Pacific participated in National Disaster Awareness Week (NDAW) in October, hosted by the Fiji National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) in Suva. The ETC exhibited emergency response equipment and participated in simulation exercises to test and strengthen preparedness capabilities.
- Following the impact of Cyclone Lola in Vanuatu on 24 October, the ETC in the Pacific deployed three satellite phones and five prepaid SIM cards to support the NDMO teams with reliable field telecommunications for the initial rapid assessment and field assessment missions.
- The annual ETC User Satisfaction Survey for 2023 was conducted from 04 December to 22 December and resulted in a user satisfaction score of 83%. The aim of the survey was to gather feedback from organizations across the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) who engaged with ETC preparedness and response activities in 2023. A report will be published based on the findings of the survey.



The ETC and WFP were represented at an exhibition during National Disaster Awareness Week in Suva, Fiji, in October. Photo: WFP/ETC

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC in the Pacific is led by the WFP Pacific Multi Country Office (MCO) and was activated in 2016 under the structure of the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) to support telecommunications preparedness in the region. All ETC funding in the Pacific is received under the WFP Multi-Country Strategic Plan (MCSP). All preparedness and emergency response activities carried out by the ETC in the Pacific are under the leadership of WFP.

The recruitment process has been completed for a dedicated ETC Coordinator, who is scheduled to join in January. Simultaneously, efforts are underway to recruit a fourth staff member responsible for coordinating capacity building activities in Pacific Island Countries (PICs).

The annual ETC User Satisfaction Survey for 2023 was launched on 04 December and resulted in a user satisfaction rate of 83% with an 86% participant response rate. The Key Performance Indicator (KPI) is 80% user satisfaction. The aim of the survey was to gather feedback from organizations across the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) who engaged with ETC preparedness and response activities in 2023, to evaluate satisfaction levels and identify areas in which the cluster can improve. A report will be published based on the findings of the survey.

Fiji

The ETC and the WFP-led Logistics Cluster partnered with the Fiji NDMO to take part in National Disaster Awareness Week (NDAW) from 12 to 18 October. The ETC exhibited emergency response equipment including satellite phones and portable BGAN connectivity devices at the booth. Further, the ETC participated in a Tabletop Exercise (TTX), Command Post Exercise (CPX), Field Simulation Exercise, and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Exhibition. As part of the NDAW activities, the team engaged in the Communications Sub Exercise with the Fiji NDMO. The purpose of this sub-exercise was to ensure effective communication and connectivity between the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) and responding agencies. It involved tests such as video conferencing connections, email and phone calls, and radio checks between NDMO and responding agencies. The ETC used this opportunity to observe and identify existing gaps in emergency telecommunications, working collaboratively with NDMO to address and improve them.

The ETC took part in the joint International Telecommunication Union (ITU) – Pacific Islands Telecommunications Association (PITA) Emergency Telecommunications Readiness and ICT Infrastructure Resilience forum held from 16 to 20 October. The focus of the forum was to underscore the significance of testing emergency telecommunications equipment and validating assessment checklists with Pacific stakeholders.

On 31 October, the ETC participated in the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT) training on Disaster Management and Climate Change Monitoring with Efficient Deployment of Radio Spectrum in Pacific Island Nations. During this training, the interim ETC Coordinator conducted a session on the ETC in the Pacific, leading a group discussion on challenges specific to the region and highlighting both unique and common issues faced by ICT development in Pacific countries.

Tropical Cyclone Mal intensified to a category 3 storm before hitting Fiji on 15 November. The ETC supported the NDMO coordination efforts to conduct initial damage assessments—the impact of Cyclone Mal was reported to be minimal.

The ETC in the Pacific initiated an emergency telecommunications group for Fiji made up of relevant stakeholders in country. The group includes representatives from Vodafone Fiji, who met with the ETC on 21 November to establish the partnership. The group is proposed to meet quarterly with more frequent interactions planned during cyclone season.

Tonga

The ETC took part in a regular High Frequency (HF) radio check between Tonga and Fiji as part of preparedness activities in the Pacific.

Vanuatu

Following the impact of Cyclone Lola in Vanuatu on 24 October, the ETC deployed three satellite phones and five prepaid SIMs to support the NDMO teams with reliable field telecommunications for the initial rapid damage assessment. Additionally, the Starlink terminals set up and supported by the ETC in Provincial Emergency Operations Centres (PEOCs) during Cyclones Judy and Kevin earlier in March were reported to be functional and providing connectivity. Government responders in the PEOCs used the devices to communicate with the NDMO. There are five Starlink terminals deployed at each PEOC in Torba, Sanma, Penama, Malampa, and Tafea. See the final SitRep on the ETC response to Cyclone Lola [here](#).

Infographic

See the ETC Pacific preparedness infographic [here](#).

Funding

All ETC funding in the Pacific is received under the WFP Multi-Country Strategic Plan (MCSP). The budget available to the ETC in the Pacific to carry out preparedness and COVID-19 response activities in 2022 until the end of Q1 2023 was US\$510,000. These funds were received from USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA).

An allocation from BHA of US\$571,897 was made available in 2023 in two tranches—April and December—to continue to support ETC Pacific preparedness activities, together with some multilateral funding. More funding will be needed from mid-2024 to sustain and support ETC preparedness activities in the PICs.

Meetings

The ETC is actively re-engaging with ETC focal points across the Pacific to increase collaboration on the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in place and the existing emergency telecommunications infrastructure. The priority is to re-activate the ETC Working Group in the Pacific.

The ETC Information Management Officer (IMO) is engaging with the Pacific IM network and has participated in the third meeting of the Information Management Working Group (IMWG) newly established by UNOCHA in December.

The Global ETC Partners Teleconference for Vanuatu in response to Tropical Cyclone Lola was held on 27 October.

Contacts

NAME	POSITION	LOCATION	CONTACT
Emma Conlan	WFP Pacific Multi Country Office (MCO) Deputy Country Director (DCD)	Suva, Fiji	Emma.Conlan@wfp.org
Namrita Chand	Information Management Officer	Suva, Fiji	Namrita.Chand@wfp.org

All information related to ETC preparedness can be found on the website:

www.etcluster.org/preparedness/preparedness-pacific-islands

For more information or to be added or deleted from the mailing list please contact:

Pacific.ETC@wfp.org