

## Preparedness in the Pacific

### ETC Situation Report #2

Reporting period Q1 – 1 January to 31 March 2020

These Situation Reports will be distributed every quarter. The next report will be issued on or around 30/06/20.

### Highlights

- The ETC in the Pacific supported the response to Tropical Cyclone Tino in mid-January with technical advisory services to assist affected countries and utilized the updated ETC hazard preparedness checklist as part of the response.
- The ETC Coordinator deployed to three Pacific Island countries from 31 January–5 March to continue the long-standing collaboration between these countries and the ETC. Discussions with key national stakeholders followed on from the ICT Capacity Assessments (ICA) conducted in 2018 and follow-up missions in 2019.
- The ETC Coordinator for the Pacific is part of the World Health Organization (WHO)-led Joint Pacific COVID-19 Incident Management Team (IMT). ETC Pacific is proactive in disseminating information and guidance in up to 21 Pacific countries and territories to inform communications and preparedness efforts during the COVID-19 response.



ETC Coordinator – Hlekiwe Kachali – delivers a preparedness workshop to key stakeholders in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM).

Photo: WFP/ETC

### Response

- From 16–17 January, Tropical Cyclone Tino intensified to Category 3 as it passed over the Pacific, causing alerts to be issued across Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Cyclone Tino brought heavy rain and strong winds to Tonga and Tuvalu. It was the second cyclone to impact the Pacific region within three weeks, following Cyclone Sarai in late December 2019. The ETC in the Pacific provided

technical advisory services to assist affected countries with emergency telecommunications preparedness, including addressing gaps identified during the response to Cyclone Sarai, assessing the vulnerability of above-ground infrastructure, planning for prepositioning of ETC equipment and identifying back-up power solutions. The updated ETC hazard preparedness checklist was utilized to ensure national ETC key stakeholders were ready for potential impact.

- On 24 January, a week after Tropical Cyclone Tino struck, Tuvalu declared a state of emergency. The ETC supported the Tuvalu National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) with technical advisory services. The ETC also provided four tablet devices and one smartphone to assist the NDMO in carrying out assessments and to improve their communication capabilities.
- The ETC Coordinator for the Pacific deployed on a series of visits to the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and Palau from 31 January–5 March. The mission aimed to establish continued collaboration between these countries and the ETC, following the ICT Capacity Assessments (ICAs) in 2018 and follow-up missions in 2019. The ETC Coordinator met with key stakeholders in each country to discuss a list of actions that have taken place since the previous missions and strategies to enhance the efforts of national ETC stakeholders by developing supporting documents such as Terms of References (ToRs), Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and 2020 Action Plans, in line with the national disaster management frameworks and the needs of Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) in each country.
  - **Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI):** The first ever ETC workshop to be held in RMI took place from 6–7 February. The Department of ICT and the NDMO for RMI led the discussions on disaster and emergency telecommunications for the country.
  - **Federated States of Micronesia (FSM):** In FSM, the ETC Coordinator delivered a two-day preparedness workshop for key emergency telecommunications stakeholders in Pohnpei from 19–20 February. The workshop was hosted by FSM’s Department of Transportation, Communications and Infrastructure and included delegates from various national government departments as well as the weather service, NGOs, mobile operators, broadcast radio and state disaster management authorities. Critical outcomes from the workshop were to: 1) Submit a proposal for a fifth working group in FSM’s National Disaster Response Plan, which would assume responsibility for coordination of emergency telecommunications; 2) Create Terms of Reference for the proposed emergency telecommunications working group; 3) Develop an action plan for 2020.
  - **Palau:** The ETC Coordinator is working with the newly formed Bureau of Communications (BoC) in Palau – the ETC Pacific’s operational counterpart in the country – to create an emergency telecommunications roadmap for 2020. The mandate of the BoC has expanded to cover all telecommunications regulations and policy.
- In early March, the ETC Pacific Coordinator met representatives from the Telecommunications and Social Informatics Program (TASI) group from the University of Hawaii-Manoa – based in Honolulu – to create a

strategy for the continued use of Chatty Beetle portable satellite terminals<sup>1</sup> in the Pacific region as the RANET<sup>2</sup> (RAdio and interNET communications) project comes to a close. The Coordinator is also collaborating with the TASI group on the remote delivery of a disaster-emergency preparedness and response training course for ICT and telecommunications professionals based in the Pacific.

- Following the outbreak of the global pandemic COVID-19, the ETC Coordinator for the Pacific has joined the World Health Organization (WHO)-led Joint Pacific COVID-19 Incident Management Team (IMT). Due to a high volume of requests for ETC services from 21 Pacific countries and territories – higher than the usual 12 supported by the ETC – the Coordinator is working almost exclusively on delivering communications services to support COVID-19 response efforts. As part of the joint IMT, the ETC Coordinator is:
  - Collaborating with telecommunications groups and regulators and other national ETC stakeholders and health ministries to set up dedicated public health messaging helplines, helping to ensure the public can observe health guidelines on potential symptoms as well as physical distancing;
  - Advising on communications for Health Emergency Operations Centres (HEOCs) and coordinating national ETC stakeholders to support these initiatives;
  - Planning to support connectivity for training on telehealth services which distribute guidance via information technologies, allowing long-distance contact between patient and clinician;
  - Helped to facilitate training on 30 March for call centre personnel who will staff Fiji’s COVID-19 helpline. The helpline is available for anyone in Fiji who can call using the short code number 158 from mobile or landline telephones.
  - Drafted a proposed operational strategy that countries and territories can adapt to their COVID-19 emergency telecommunications preparedness and response efforts. The operational strategy contains some immediate actions that countries can take; for example, advice on implementing a short code helpline or a call centre to facilitate public interaction with health authorities.
- In Tonga, through the facilitation of the national ETC lead organization – the Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC) – national ETC partners Tonga Communications Corporation and Digicel are distributing relief packages to assist government, businesses and the affected population to support the response against COVID-19. The relief packages include free data to access COVID-19 information website pages and special overseas call rates to government, business community customers, students and individuals.

---

<sup>1</sup> A Chatty Beetle terminal sends and receives short text messages via Iridium Short Burst Data service. Chatty Beetle is a portable Iridium satellite terminal that permits text-based alerts and messaging in remote locations, where communication options are limited.

<sup>2</sup> The RANET (RAdio and interNET communications) project was originally developed to make weather, climate, and other environmental information more accessible to remote and resource-poor communities.



## Challenges

- The ETC Coordinator is unable to deploy due to travel restrictions as a result of COVID-19.
- A lack of funding for the ETC's work in the Pacific is impacting ETC activities in the region and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 outbreak and response.
- Successful disaster and emergency telecommunications preparedness is a shared responsibility and requires the concerted efforts of numerous stakeholders including telecommunications ministries, telecommunications/radio communications/broadcast regulators, local and national disaster management organisations, the private sector and the local community. One challenge is that these multiple stakeholders sometimes have competing priorities which can affect the way in which the ETC focuses its efforts and plans its resources.

## Information

- A dedicated information-sharing space on the Pacific can be found on the ETC website: <https://www.etcluster.org/preparedness/preparedness-pacific-islands>.

## Shared ICT Services

ETC Pacific [Dashboard](#) | ETC Pacific [Infographic](#)

## Contacts

Hlekiwe Kachali, ETC Coordinator for the Pacific

[hlekiwe.kachali@wfp.org](mailto:hlekiwe.kachali@wfp.org)

Phone: +679 331 6139

Ria Sen, ETC Preparedness Officer

[ria.sen@wfp.org](mailto:ria.sen@wfp.org)

Phone: +3906 6513 4105

Elizabeth Millership, ETC Information Management Officer

[Elizabeth.millership@wfp.org](mailto:Elizabeth.millership@wfp.org)

Phone: +971 4581 3903