

# Vanuatu – Earthquake

## ETC Situation Report # 01

Reporting period: 17/12/2024 to 18/12/2024

The WFP-led ETC in the Pacific was activated in 2016, under the structure of the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) to support telecommunications preparedness in the region. The ETC in the Pacific is mobilizing support for the emergency response to a magnitude 7.3 Earthquake which hit Vanuatu on 17 December.

## Highlights

- On 17 December, a magnitude—7.3 earthquake struck the island nation of Vanuatu near the capital city—Port Vila— impacting buildings, roads, telecommunications, electricity and water utilities.
- A state of emergency was declared by the President of the Republic of Vanuatu on 17 December for seven days.
- The WFP-led ETC in the Pacific is coordinating with the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT)—the regional inter-agency coordination group— and engaging with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) to prepare for possible support to the government of Vanuatu.
- The ETC Pacific coordinator is ready to deploy from Suva, Fiji to Port Vila, Vanuatu once the airport opens to undertake an initial rapid needs assessment and deliver immediate requested telecommunications equipment.



Multiple buildings collapse in Port Vila, Vanuatu due the impact of a 7.3 magnitude earthquake on 17 December. Photo credit: Getty Images

## Situation Overview

On 17 December, a magnitude—7.3 earthquake struck the island nation of Vanuatu, 31 kilometres (km) west the capital city, Port Vila. The epicentre was reportedly at a depth of 57km—followed by a magnitude 5.5 aftershock near the same location, impacting roads, buildings, telecommunications, electricity supply and water utilities, and causing 14 fatalities as of 18 December. Many large buildings have reportedly collapsed in Port Vila. Electricity is down and water is cut in most of the capital.

Port Vila Bauerfield International Airport has been damaged by the earthquake and commercial flights have been cancelled.

PHT clusters (ETC, Logistics, Shelter) are on standby to deploy and support the response. The National Health Cluster is also ready to deploy to all outlying islands near the earthquake epicentre to undertake rapid assessments.

The Government of Australia has planned to deploy Search and Rescue and Medical Teams, as well as heavy machinery to assist with the clear-up and rescue efforts. France has planned aerial assessments to evaluate building damage in Port Vila and the offshore islands. New Zealand is planning an aerial assessment flight.

## Telecommunications impact

### **As of 17 December**

Initial reports indicate that telecommunications infrastructure, including the fiber network, and power supply were significantly impacted by the earthquake. Both Mobile Network Operators (MNOs)—Digicel and Vodafone were reported down in the direct aftermath of the earthquake. Unverified reports of intermittent service restoration have been received. The full damages to the telecommunications infrastructure are yet to be assessed. Vodafone Fiji have mobilized 10 Starlink data connectivity kits to provide services to Vodafone Vanuatu while their network is undergoing restoration.

As of 17 December, some government departments, agencies and the general public are slowly establishing connectivity via Starlink devices—active in Vanuatu since September this year—following the data connectivity outage of the mobile network operators (MNOs) and local Internet Service Provider (ISP) links.

The NDMO in Port Vila has confirmed using Starlink services for data connectivity and initiated operational meetings at the front of their building. Electrical power supply remains a key challenge.

### **As of 18 December**

Vodafone Vanuatu has activated its disaster recovery satellite uplink, and voice and SMS services are reported as operational (source: Vodafone Vanuatu).

Digicel Vanuatu has confirmed that domestic calls are functional, but international service remains down.

There are reports of community Wi-Fi hotspots established in small business across the capital, including in the following locations:

- Nambawan Café
- Retreat Seaside Sports Bar and Resort
- Ronnie Kava Bar

The NDMO HF network has experienced a service disruption following the earthquake, attributed to a localized power outage affecting the critical infrastructure.

## ETC Activities

### Coordination

The ETC in the Pacific is coordinating under the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT)—the regional inter-agency coordination mechanism—to prepare for possible support to the Government of Vanuatu, and is engaging the NDMO and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) as the national emergency telecommunications cluster lead, to determine any immediate requirements. At this stage, the OGCIO has requested ETC Pacific for Satellite Communications support.

### Connectivity

The ETC in the Pacific has mobilized its regional emergency stock, including one Starlink kit, six satellite phones and two Broadband Global Area Network (BGAN) devices to support emergency telecommunications connectivity in the response. A further five Starlink devices have been requested by the OGCIO, and will be procured regionally.

### Staffing

The ETC coordinator is ready to deploy and support with initial rapid ICT needs assessment and equipment to support immediate gaps in connectivity for the NDMO and other life-saving humanitarian responders. A FITTEST Specialist has been put on standby and will be deployed according to the needs identified.

## Funding

ETC Pacific funding is allocated as part of USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) support to the WFP Pacific Multi Country Office (MCO) based in Fiji. Extended support to the response and recovery would require additional resources to be mobilised.

## Challenges

Air travel of personnel and equipment into Vanuatu is unavailable as of 18 December due to the cancellation of flights.

## Contacts

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All information related to ETC response in Vanuatu can be found on the webpage:

**<https://www.etcluster.org/emergency/vanuatu-earthquake-december-2024>**

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

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