

Vanuatu – Tropical Cyclone Lola

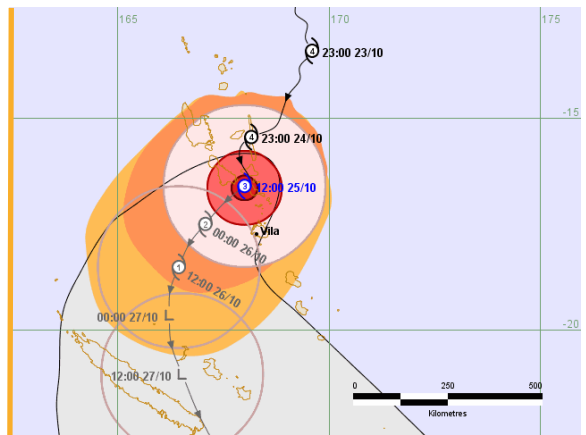
ETC Situation Report #1

Reporting period: 22/10/2023 to 25/10/2023

The 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 currently supporting the emergency response to Tropical Cyclone Lola which hit Vanuatu as a Category 5 storm on 24 October.

Highlights

- On the evening of 25 October, Tropical Cyclone Lola made landfall as a Category 5 storm in the northern provinces. TC Lola is the third cyclone to hit Vanuatu this year. In February and March, the small island nation was hit by two Category 4 cyclones—Judy and Kevin—within days of each other.
- Telecommunications infrastructure and power have been severely impacted. Vodafone in Vanuatu have reported that their network is down in the most areas of Torba, Sanma, Penama, and Malampa provinces.
- The National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) in Vanuatu has been activated. The ETC is engaging with Vanuatu’s National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) for ICT requirements to support the response.



TC Lola Forecast Map. Photo: Vanuatu Meteorology and Geo-Hazards Department. Link [here](#).

Situation Overview

On 22 October 2023, Tropical Cyclone (TC) Lola formed on the northern tip of Vanuatu’s Torba Province. It tracked towards Northern Vanuatu before making landfall on the evening of 24 October as a Category 5 storm. TC Lola is the South Pacific’s earliest Category 5 cyclone outside the official cyclone season.

Four provinces are most impacted—Torba, Sanma, Penama, and Malampa—with an estimated 150,000 people affected. The Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) has placed Penama, Malampa, and Shefa provinces on Red Alert (stay at home/collective shelter).

On 25 October, TC Lola was downgraded to a Category 4 storm, but continues to wreak havoc on Vanuatu.

Initial reports suggest that significant damage has been sustained in some of the island communities, with up to 50 percent of houses destroyed in some areas.

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Telecommunications impact

Telecommunications infrastructure and power have been severely impacted in Vanuatu as result of TC Lola.

As of the morning of 25 October 2023, the Mobile Network Operator (MNO) Vodafone confirmed that their network is down in many areas of Torba, Sanma, Penama, and Malampa provinces. Restoring the network will be a priority as soon as the situation stabilizes and travel becomes possible.

TC Lola has passed Torba and Sanma provinces, and telecommunications are confirmed to be down in these locations.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC is engaging with Vanuatu's NDMO and the Chair of the National ETC team—currently, staff are sheltering in Port Vila as the Red Alert is still active for Shefa province.

The NDMO hosted a joint coordination meeting to brief humanitarian partners on the situation on 25/10/23. At this point, a state of emergency has not been endorsed by the Council of Ministers. Assessment priority areas are Penama, Malampa, Shefa, and Torba. Assessments will be coordinated for these locations with rapid response teams.

The NDMO has requested for support for satellite phones. The ETC in the Pacific will support the rapid assessment teams with four satellite phones and six prepaid SIMs to provide connectivity for the initial damage assessment in the outer islands.

There is currently no movement for response activities as the cyclone is still active. The National ETC members are planning to assess the impact when flights to the affected regions resume.

Connectivity

VSAT connectivity has been confirmed to be active on Pentecoast, Ambae, Maewo, and Sola island groups. A number of VSAT terminals may be in working condition, but are not connected due to a lack of mains power.

Starlink terminals set up and/or supported by the ETC in Provincial Emergency Operations Centres (PEOCs) during Cyclones Judy and Kevin earlier in 2023 are reported to be functional and are providing connectivity. Government responders in the PEOCs are using these devices to communicate with the NDMO on the mainland of Efate. There are five Starlink terminals deployed in PEOCs in Torba, Sanma, Penama, Malampa, and Tafea.

Funding

ETC Pacific funding is allocated from USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) via the WFP Pacific Multi Country Office (MCO) based in Fiji. Funding allocation for the ETC Pacific in the response to Cyclone Lola will be budgeted once assessments have been conducted and the ICT requirements have been identified.

Challenges

Travel is severely restricted in the wake of TC Lola. The Vanuatu Civil Aviation Authority confirmed that domestic and international flights have been rescheduled until 26 October.

With essential services cut off in much of the north, it is difficult to identify what the impact had been on those islands at this early stage.

Meetings

The Vanuatu NDMO is conducting Inter-agency meetings with its partners and the next meeting will be held on Wednesday 25 October.

Contacts

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