Tonga – Volcanic Eruption/Tsunami

ETC Situation Report #11

Reporting period: 25 July – 25 August 2022

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 response to the eruption of the Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha-apai (HTHH) underwater volcano and the subsequent tsunami which hit Tonga on 15 January 2022.

Highlights

- ETC data connectivity services are now operational on the Vava'u and Ha'apai island groups as of 12 August and 20 August respectively, following the deployment of the emergency.lu VSATs by the ETC and Tongan government disaster response teams. The stable and high-speed connectivity services are supporting the government to coordinate the disaster response.

- Six satellite phones have arrived in Tonga, to be installed as part of the planned new HF radio network across six island locations.

- Two capacity building sessions on HF radio and Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) are planned for delivery in September to support the disaster response in Tonga.

The ETC team installs the first emergency.lu VSAT for connectivity in Vava'u. Photo: MEIDECC/Pomaama Liu

Situation overview

Tonga's government has announced a Recovery and Resilience Building Plan in response to the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai disaster that calls for US$240 million in recovery needs and focuses on four priority sectors: Housing Recovery, Food Security and Livelihoods, Tourism Industry, and Public Infrastructure. The World Bank, the Australian and New Zealand governments, Asian Development Bank, and European Union continue to support the government of Tonga on the implementation of all reforms supported by this project.

Tonga's international borders re-opened on 1 August, to be reviewed in September. Flights remain limited to two per week from New Zealand from 1–28 August, two per week from Fiji and one from Australia in August. This will increase to three flights from New Zealand per week starting 29 August until 31 October. A set of travel restrictions are in place, including the need for a vaccine certificate and a supervised COVID-19 test taken within 24 hours of travel. A face mask and social distancing is required in public areas.

Communications in Tonga

Mobile phone and internet connectivity have been restored in Tongatapu since 22 February when the **international** section of undersea communications fibre cable—severed during the eruption—was repaired. Services of the two national providers in Tonga—Digicel and the Tonga Communications Corporation (TCC)—are available to use at high capacity in Tongatapu.

The **domestic** section of undersea fibre-optic cable was also severed during the volcanic eruption. The repairs are due to be completed by an estimated date in late September. Until the cable is repaired, responders and affected communities on the outer islands—including the Vava'u and Ha'apai groups—will rely on alternative means of communications.

ETC Activities

Coordination

The ETC in the Pacific continues to work with the Tongan Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC) and the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) for the emergency telecommunications response in Tonga.

A standby partner from NORCAP arrived in Tonga on 21 July for a 90-day ETC mission to deploy two emergency.lu VSAT kits prepositioned in Tonga by ETC partner, Government of Luxembourg, as well as to prepare for the installation of a HF and VHF radio network across six islands, facilitate Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) coordination, and strengthen the capacity of national responders on the ground.

Data connectivity

ETC data connectivity services are now operational in Vava'u and Ha'apai as of 12 August and 20 August respectively, following the deployment of the emergency.lu VSATs by the joint ETC, MEIDECC and NEMO team. The connectivity services are located in the MEIDECC-managed Emergency Operations Centres (EOC) on both islands. The new stable and high-speed connectivity services are supporting MEIDECC to coordinate the disaster response. The ETC and partners are now working on the way forward to monitor the VSAT systems.

The two EOCs on Vava'u and Ha'apai were previously supported by connectivity provided by smaller Starlink satellite terminals. These terminals will now be relocated to support the response in other parts of the islands, to be determined by the government of Tonga.

Radio communications & telephony

Site assessments are planned for the deployment of HF and VHF radio communications systems in six island locations – Tongatapu, 'Eua, Ha'apai, Vava'u, Niuatoputapu, and Niuafo'ou. The existing VHF coastal radio network will be augmented while a new and resilient HF radio network will be established.

A HF radio training session is tentatively planned to take place in September. The ETC in the Pacific is working with an Australian-based HF radio supplier to send a trainer to Tonga

along with the required HF equipment to deliver a hands-on training to 6-8 participants from MEIDECC and NEMO. The aim of the training is to boost the skills and capacity of MEIDECC and NEMO so they can participate in the deployment of the HF radio solution and ensure long-term sustainability of the solution.

The six standby satellite phones ordered to complement the installation of the HF radio network across six locations arrived in Tonga in mid-August after being shipped directly from WFP FITTEST in the UAE.

The required VHF equipment continues to be sourced from various international suppliers.

The ETC in the Pacific is in the process of procuring 10 laptops and one tablet device to equip MEIDECC technical and operational teams with the tools to monitor, manage, and maintain the operational status of the HF and VHF radio networks, as well as serve as tools for improved information management in MEIDECC's department of communications.

Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS)

The ETC in the Pacific is planning a UAS training programme in September to certify four MEIDECC operators with Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) licenses, issued by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). These skills will be used to conduct damage assessments during aerial surveys. Two UAS devices are already prepositioned in Tonga, hand-carried from Fiji by the NORCAP mission specialist.

Additional Information

See the ETC Dashboard for an overview of service locations.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is mapping the status of connectivity in Tonga via the Disaster Connectivity Map (DCM).

Funding

The ETC and partners are using existing communications equipment in stock and in-kind contributions from partners to support the response in Tonga.

On 15 February, funding of US$250,000 was confirmed from the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF) to support the ETC in the response to the volcano eruption and subsequent tsunami in Tonga. This funding has been extended to October 2022.

A further contribution of US$217,000 has been received from the Government of Japan to support the response. This funding has been extended to March 2023.

Challenges

Logistics challenges continue to impact the timely shipment of equipment to Tonga, including disruptions in global supply chains, issues with import levies, and the availability of flights for cargo.

Meetings

A Global ETC Joint teleconference will take place on **Wednesday 28 September 2022** at **06:00 UTC**.

Contacts

NAME	POSITION	LOCATION	CONTACT
John Dovale	ETC Coordinator	Fiji	john.dovale@wfp.org
Salma Farouque	ETC coordination support	Australia	salma.farouque@wfp.org
Elizabeth Millership	ETC Information Management	UAE	Elizabeth.millership@wfp.org

All information related to the ETC response in Tonga can be found on the website:

www.etcluster.org/emergency/tonga-volcanic-eruptiontsunami

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

pacific.etc@wfp.org