

# Tonga: Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai Volcano

## ETC Situation Report #13

Reporting period: 01/10/2022 to 31/10/2022

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

- The emergency.lu VSAT connectivity terminals in Ha'apai and Vava'u are now updated and restored to full capacity for use by government responders operating in the Emergency Operations Centres (EOCs) on both islands.
- As part of the mission to restore the VSAT terminals, two government staff were trained in deploying and commissioning satellite connectivity systems to maintain the services on Ha'apai and Vava'u.
- The ICT Capacity Assessment (ICA) has been completed and will inform next steps for telecommunications preparedness in Tonga.



The ETC and MEIDECC restore connectivity provided by the Government of Luxembourg satellite terminal on Vava'u.  
Photo: ETC/WFP

## Situation overview

Tonga has fully re-opened its borders. Pre-departure and arrival COVID-19 testing is no longer required. The state of emergency as it relates to COVID-19 and most restrictions have been lifted.

Domestic air travel in Tonga remains tentative and subject to passenger demand. Daily flights operate to the island groups of Vava'u and Ha'apai. Flights to the Niufo'ou island group are scheduled once a month and flights to the Niuatoputapu island group are scheduled twice a month.

## Communications in Tonga

Data connectivity services of the Mobile Network Operator (MNO) Digicel shut down daily between 0100 and 0700 on the islands of Vava'u and Ha'apai. The Ministry of Meteorology,

Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change, and Communication (MEIDECC) and other partners rely on the emergency.lu VSAT satellite systems for internet connectivity, as well as Starlink terminals.

In October, Digicel announced its plan to upgrade the microwave link on Kao Island for improved data connectivity services on the islands of Ha'apai and Vava'u. Once operational, the microwave data connectivity link may provide an interim connectivity solution before the scheduled repair of the Tonga Domestic Cable Extension (TDCE) submarine cable in April 2023. The TDCE was damaged during the HTHH volcanic eruption on 15 January 2022.

## ETC Activities

### Coordination

The ETC in the Pacific continues to work with MEIDECC and the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) for the emergency telecommunications response in Tonga.

### Data connectivity

The connectivity services of the two emergency.lu VSAT satellite terminals on Vava'u and Ha'apai island groups were restored from 22 to 24 October. The ETC supported a technical team from MEIDECC to install Uninterruptable Power Supply (UPS) systems to stabilise the power supply to the emergency.lu VSATS, which are based in the government Emergency Operations Centres (EOCs) on both islands. Two MEIDECC staff on Vava'u and Ha'apai were trained in deploying and commissioning satellite connectivity systems to maintain the VSATs.

### Radio communications

Planning for site assessments to deploy HF radio and ICT systems are ongoing with the government. The equipment to establish a new HF radio network in a total of five remote island stations has already been received in country.

The HF radio training session to build the capacity of six MEIDECC and NEMO technicians is scheduled for January 2023 in Nuku'alofa. The aim of the training will boost the skills and capacity of MEIDECC and NEMO to participate in the deployment of the HF radio solution and ensure long-term sustainability of the solution.

The remaining VHF radio system equipment is ready to ship to Tonga from New Zealand. Once received, the equipment will be used to enhance the existing coastal VHF radio network across six island locations.

### Preparedness

The ICT Capacity Assessment (ICA) has been completed and will inform next steps for telecommunications preparedness in Tonga.

## Additional Information

See the [ETC Dashboard](#) for an overview of planned and existing service locations.

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is mapping the status of connectivity in Tonga via the [Disaster Connectivity Map \(DCM\)](#). For the first time since the eruption of the HTHH volcano on 15 January 2022, the DCM detected live connectivity data points on 15 October on Vahe Lifuka Island, situated in the Ha'apai island group.

## 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 was extended until October 2022 and is now fully utilized. The CERF funding covered the provision of HF emergency communications infrastructure capacity enhancement as well as the UAS systems and training, the operational cost for the VSAT deployments, the ICT control systems for MEIDECC Department of Communications, and supported ETC coordination and support activities.

A contribution of US\$217,000 was received from the Government of Japan to support the response. This funding is extended to March 2023. The Government of Japan funds are being utilised for the HF training components as well as the VHF capacity enhancement solution procurement, delivery, deployment, and additional operational activities.

## Challenges

Logistical 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

The next Global ETC Joint teleconference on the response in Tonga will take place on **Wednesday 23 November 2022 at 07:00 UTC**.

## Contacts

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

**[www.etcluster.org/emergency/tonga-volcanic-eruptionsunami](http://www.etcluster.org/emergency/tonga-volcanic-eruptionsunami)**

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

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