

Tonga: Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai Volcano

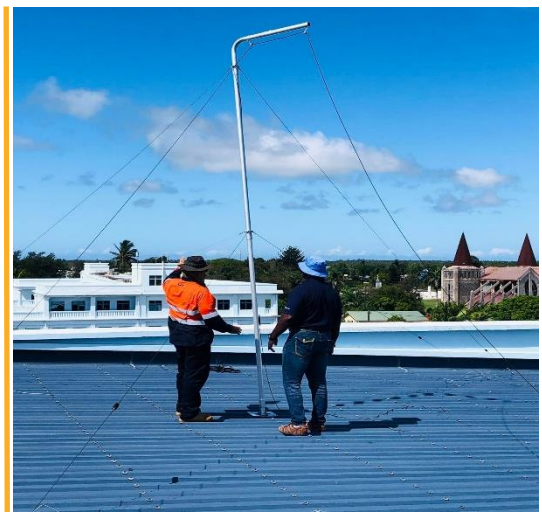
ETC Situation Report #14

Reporting period: 01/11/2022 to 30/11/2022

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 Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) undertook a survey to gather feedback from users of its services in Tonga. 93% of respondents reported satisfaction with the cluster.
- The ETC worked with the Tongan Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change (MEIDECC) to inspect and dispatch High Frequency (HF) radio equipment to five islands where it will be installed.
- The ETC received a donor visit from USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) on 21 November.



The ETC and MEIDECC installs a broadband connectivity mast on the roof of the MEIDECC building in Vava'u. Photo: ETC/WFP November 2022

Situation overview

A 7.9 magnitude earthquake originating near the town of Neiafu, on the island of Vava'u, hit Tonga on 11 November. Following the earthquake, a tsunami alert was declared by the government authorities. The alert was later downgraded, with authorities urging the public to take "special caution".

Internet Service Provider (ISP) data connectivity services in the outer islands of Tonga are still down until the section of the submarine Tonga Domestic Cable Extension (TDCE) damaged in the 15 January volcanic eruption is fully repaired. The estimated date for the domestic fibre cable remediation is April 2023.

Communications in Tonga

Data connectivity services of the local Mobile Network Operator (MNO) shut down daily between 0100 and 0700 on the islands of Vava'u and Ha'apai. MEIDECC and other partners

rely on the emergency.lu VSAT satellite systems for internet connectivity, as well as Starlink terminals.

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.

The ETC conducted a user satisfaction survey in November to assess the performance of ETC services and activities delivered in Tonga in 2022. ETC services included in the survey are telephony (satellite phones) and internet connectivity (portable BGAN and VSAT satellite terminals). ETC activities included coordination, information management (IM) and a capacity building session. The survey took place from 1 to 22 November. Based on the initial survey results, 93 percent of respondents were satisfied with the ETC's performance. A report on the full results of the survey will be published in December.

On 21 November, the ETC received visit from one of its donors, the USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). A meeting to discuss ETC activities, achievements and challenges was held.

Data connectivity

The two emergency.lu VSATs deployed on Vava'u and Ha'apai islands are fully functional, with the exception of a minor interruption of service on 18 November, which was quickly resolved. The VSATs supply internet connectivity services in two MEIDECC Emergency Operations Centres (EOC) on the two islands. Technical maintenance of the units has been assigned to two MEIDECC staff who were trained on the systems in October. The staff now have a direct link for technical assistance to both the ETC Pacific team and the emergency.lu support platform run by the ETC's partners in Luxembourg.

Radio communications

The ETC worked with the Tongan Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change (MEIDECC) to inspect and dispatch High Frequency (HF) radio equipment from Tongatapu to the five islands where it will be deployed, in addition to the mainland. The HF equipment was sent to 'Eua, Ha'apai, Vava'u, Niuatoputapu, and Niuafu'ou on 21 November.

Laptops and other HF radio accessories to be deployed in the five locations have also been received in country. Once all of equipment has reached the islands, the ETC and MEIDECC will begin to schedule the installations.

A training session on HF radio systems for MEIDECC staff from across the country has been scheduled for 23 January 2023.

Preparedness

An ICT Capacity Assessment (ICA) was conducted on behalf by the ETC by its partner NORCAP. The completed assessment and will inform future actions for telecommunications preparedness in Tonga.

Additional Information

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

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 11 January 2023 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

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

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