

Tonga: Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai Volcano

ETC Situation Report #16

Reporting period: 01/02/2023 to 28/02/2023

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 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

- A telecommunications specialist from WFP FITTEST arrived in Tonga on 27 February to support the installation of HF radio networks across five remote islands.
- After troubleshooting issues with the satellite connectivity services provided in the government Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) on Vava'u island, the team is preparing to replace the equipment with components of the VSAT on Ha'apai island. The Ha'apai VSAT will be decommissioned due to low traffic on the network there.
- Tonga Cable Limited has revised the expected restoration date of the domestic undersea communications cable to July 2023, from the previous estimate of April 2023. The outer islands of Tonga remain cut off from Internet Service Provider (ISP) services until the cable is restored.



A technician from ETC standby partner NORCAP tests the communications systems at the MEI DECC Emergency Operations Centre on Vava'u island.

Photo: WFP/ETC

Situation overview

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 2022 volcanic eruption is fully repaired. The restoration of the domestic fibre cable was previously expected to be completed by April 2023, however the timeline provided by Tonga Cable Limited, the organisation responsible for the repair work, has now been extended to July 2023.

The ETC has received reports that mobile networks have been restored on the remote islands of Vava'u and Ha'apai, however the service is not yet stable.

ETC Activities

Coordination and information management

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 emergency telecommunications response and capacity building in Tonga. MEIDECC invited the ETC to participate in a meeting of their national Emergency Telecommunications Cluster group on 16 February, along with stakeholders from the fire department and military.

The ETC is engaging with the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) on the development of an ICT Capacity Assessment (ICA) and a National Emergency Telecommunications Plan (NETP) for Tonga. The ETC is currently gathering information for its ICA, which will provide an overview of the ICT landscape in the country and evaluate Tonga's policies, strategies, and capacities to leverage communications technologies for disaster response. The ICA will be shared with a consultant from ITU who is expected to travel to Tonga to develop the NETP in collaboration with national stakeholders.

Data connectivity

An ETC technician conducted a mission to Vava'u island from 6-7 February to troubleshoot reported issues with the Government of Luxembourg VSAT terminal providing connectivity to the government Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) on the island. The VSAT on Vava'u island is currently out of service, however the second Government of Luxembourg VSAT serving the EOC on Ha'apai island is still functional. Due to significantly decreased use of the Ha'apai EOC, it was decided to decommission the VSAT on Ha'apai island. Components of the decommissioned VSAT will be used to restore the connectivity services to the Vava'u EOC.

HF radio communications

A WFP FITTEST¹ specialist arrived in Tonga on 27 February to support the installation of the HF and VHF radio networks across the islands. Following his arrival, the specialist participated in initial meetings with MEIDECC stakeholders.

In early December, the ETC installed and successfully tested a HF radio control station located in the MEIDECC communications centre in Nuku'alofa on the main island of Tongatapu. The WFP FITTEST telecommunications specialist will support the ETC to deploy HF radio networks in five remote islands —'Eua, Ha'apai, Vava'u, Niuaotoputapu, and Niuafo'ou. The new nationwide HF radio network will connect the remote islands to the HF radio control station on the mainland and serve as a critical tool in keeping responders connected during emergencies.

The first location scheduled for installation is Ha'apai island, where the FITTEST specialist will also support with the decommissioning of the VSAT.

VHF radio communications

The ETC is planning to install a VHF radio solution to augment the existing coastal VHF network in Tongatapu, 'Eua, Ha'apai, and Vava'u. The ETC is following up on the delivery of

¹ Fast IT and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team

the final consignment of VHF radio equipment for this activity and will support the installation of the solution once all the equipment is cleared through customs.

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.

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 **15 March 2023** at **08:00 UTC**.

Contacts

NAME	POSITION	LOCATION	CONTACT
John Dovale	ETC Coordinator	Fiji	john.dovale@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-eruptionsunami

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

Pacific.ETC@wfp.org