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Restoration of electricity and water supply services after cyclone PAM

The Utilities Regulatory Authority (URA) is pleased to acknowledge the dedication and efforts of the management and staff of UNELCO for their preventive measures and swift response to safely rescue and restore the Port Vila electricity and water systems after the devastation left by cyclone Pam. Although many Vanuatu islands were impacted, Efate and Tanna were very severely devastated by cyclone Pam on 13th March 2015.

The URA notes that the management and staff of UNELCO worked tirelessly during and after the cyclone to ensure public safety, operating around the clock to remove fallen poles, wires and trees to prevent danger to the public and restore the system and services on an emergency basis, prioritizing service restoration to hospitals, fire stations, police, water pumping, etc.

UNELCO called upon local electricity contractors and GDF Suez Group to seek assistance in personnel and material to quickly rebuild and restart the services. As a result of these extraordinary measures restoration of services was remarkably quick. "Although all electricity customers in Tanna and Efate were disconnected as a result of the damage sustained from cyclone Pam, 74% were already reconnected as of 26th March 2015", according to Kimberley Barton, manager responsible for UNELCO Commercial Services. UNELCO has deployed teams in Tanna to start reparations and delivery of heavy equipment. UNELCO confirmed that its electricity network in Malekula did sustain some damage from Cyclone Pam and service was restored at 8h00 Saturday morning to all its Malekula customers

Most of the northern islands of Vanuatu including Santo were relatively less severely affected by the cyclone as they were further away from the cyclone's path. "Santo had some high winds that downed trees onto power lines resulting in loss of electricity to 40% of electricity customers during the storm" according to Peter Allen, General Manager of VUI electricity supplier in Luganville. Due to the preventive measures and post-storm actions by VUI, electricity was restored to all customers within 12 hours of the storm's passing.

For water, supply was restored to most of UNELCO's customers in Port Vila immediately after the cyclone and by the following day, i.e. Saturday, to all customers, in spite of severe damage to pipes and water tank.

URA received periodic detailed reports from UNELCO on the status of restoration efforts which is appreciated.

The URA would also like to commend the Public Works Department for ensuring continuity of water supply in Luganville and Lakatoro during the cyclone

Water supplied by UNELCO and PWD is safe and drinkable. URA has urged water utilities to frequently check water quality to ensure public safety.

URA sincerely appreciates the extraordinary efforts of all Vanuatu utilities to minimize the damage and impact of the Cyclone Pam by preventive and rescue and restoration measures. “Most importantly, utilities were able to prevent any loss of life or injury to public or the technical crew due to its meticulous and swift actions, while working under dangerous and difficult conditions” said URA CEO Dr. Hasso Bhatia, expressing his gratitude to the utilities.

The URA offices reopened after the cyclone and we are available to assist utilities and customers to ensure there is continuity of safe, reliable electricity and water supply in Vanuatu.

About the Utilities Regulatory Authority

The URA was set up under the Utilities Regulatory Authority Act No. 11 of 2007. The URA is an independent body and its primary purpose is to maximise access to safe, reliable and affordable electricity and water services to homes and businesses, and to protect the long-term interests of consumers throughout Vanuatu. In the electricity sector, the URA monitors the concessions operated by UNELCO in Malekula, Port Vila and Tanna; and Vanuatu Utilities and Infrastructure Ltd (VUI) in Luganville. In addition, the Authority assists to resolve consumer disputes and advises the Government on matters related to electricity, water and energy policies.

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