

GOUVERNEMENT DE LA REPUBLIQUE DU VANUATU  
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GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU  
Utilities Regulatory Authority

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## **Reliability of the Electricity Network in Vanuatu**

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The performance and reliability of Vanuatu's electricity networks have until recently been regulated in accordance with provisions set out in relevant concession contracts. Following a review of the requirements, the Utilities Regulatory Authority (URA) identified some shortfalls in the contracts with respect to reliability, quality of supply and customer service obligations imposed on the utilities.

Following consultation with stakeholders the Authority published its Electricity Reliability Standards in May 2010 which complemented existing obligations and responsibilities of the utilities under relevant concession agreements.

A reliable electricity service is defined by the availability and quality of the service.

"Power outages" or "blackouts" are more common terms associated with the availability of electricity.

An unplanned outage means that the electricity is disconnected unexpectedly and is the result of faults on the network: by a tree falling on a power line during a storm, for example.

Some interruptions – or outages – are inevitable, and customers cannot be guaranteed continuous supply.

Planned outages occur when a utility needs to disconnect supply to perform maintenance or construction works.

The URA's Reliability Standards requires that utilities give customers a minimum of 3 days' written notice of a planned outage.

Unplanned outages typically have greater effect on customers than planned outages, because customers have no warning to take the necessary actions to manage the impact of supply interruption.

Consequences of an unplanned outage may be a delay in an electronic business transaction or damaged goods in a freezer. Such consequences have a great effect on the daily activities and budgets of consumers.

In addition to the availability of supply, the Authority is concerned with supply quality – namely, the technical characteristics of electrical energy as delivered. Customers should receive their electricity at the nominal voltage of 220/380 volts and at a single fundamental frequency of 50 hertz. The key elements for assessing quality of supply are voltage variations and harmonic distortion.

Sometimes people observe their lights going slightly brighter or dimmer than normal. This usually goes unnoticed though as it only lasts for a few seconds at a time. This phenomenon is a result of voltage variations which, if not resolved by the utility, may result in damage to consumer appliances in the long run.

The Authority monitors the quality of electricity supply in Vanuatu through two sources: specifically the level of customer complaints as reported by the utilities; and the results of independent regulatory audits of utilities.

The URA's Reliability Standards addresses the availability and quality of supply, as explained above, but also the quality of customer services provided by a utility. How long utility takes to respond to customers' questions and complaints is one of the criteria that define customer service quality.

The Authority is empowered by the *Utilities Regulatory Authority Act No. 11 of 2007* to impose penalties on utilities that may not comply with the Electricity Reliability Standards or provisions of certain concession contracts. An example is the ongoing issuance of penalties by the URA to utilities for unjustified electricity outages.

The Electricity Reliability Standards is available on our website [www.ura.gov.vu](http://www.ura.gov.vu) or a copy may be obtained by visiting our office on the ground floor of the VNPF Building, Port Vila.

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#### **About the Utilities Regulatory Authority**

The Authority was established under the *Utilities Regulatory Authority Act No. 11 of 2007*. The Authority acts independently of the Government and its primary purpose is to increase access and ensure safe, reliable and affordable electricity and water services, and to protect the long-term interests of consumers throughout Vanuatu. In the electricity sector, the Authority 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 manages consumer disputes and advises the Government on matters related to electricity and water. It also reviews tariffs under the rules of the Concessions Agreements and relevant legislation.

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