



**Media Release:**28<sup>th</sup> August 2013

### **URA welcomes amended legislation**

On Monday, parliament voted to approve a bill to amend the Utilities Regulatory Authority Act, in a move to strengthen regulation of the electricity and water industries in Vanuatu. Chairman of the URA, Johnson Naviti, praised MPs for this decision. “This amendment shows that there is political commitment to independent regulation of utilities in Vanuatu. We can now continue to work hard to ensure safe, reliable and affordable electricity and water supply services.”

The amendment contained changes to the URA’s price setting powers, strengthened accountability, improved transparency of certain funds, and made other minor procedural changes. Chairman Naviti continued, “These changes, especially around pricing, create incentives to make our electricity generation more efficient, and ensure that customers will benefit. With the amendment, we also play an important monitoring role in the use of certain electricity and water funds, so that customers know how the government is using their money.”

The URA notes that there is still work to be done to clarify some key issues around electricity. Chief Economist James Ryan commented, “It was interesting to see what points were debated by parliament, and there are some issues where we can improve understanding. For example, it was quoted that electricity is very expensive and that prices haven’t changed. For small households, which make up the majority of customers, prices were approximately halved at the last tariff review in 2010, which makes those prices lower than in Australia, and comparable to those in New Zealand.”

One of the important roles of the URA is providing advice to the public and to government. Chairman Naviti concluded, “We are a small team that is working hard to ensure fairness for electricity and water customers, and we have a lot of information and expertise. If anyone – MPs, government, media, utilities or any member of the public – wants to know more about relevant issues such as safety, pre-payment meters, renewables or geo-thermal energy, then they should feel free to contact the team.”

The URA can be contacted on 23335, [enquiries@ura.gov.vu](mailto:enquiries@ura.gov.vu), or in person at the ground floor of the VNPF building in Port Vila.

**About the Utilities Regulatory Authority**

The URA was set up 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 to 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.

#### Contact Information

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