

GOUVERNEMENT DE LA  
REPUBLIQUE DU VANUATU

**Autorité de Régulation des Services  
Publics**

Ministère des Finances  
et de la Gestion Economique



GOVERNMENT OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF VANUATU

**Utilities Regulatory  
Authority**

Ministry of Finance  
and Economic Management

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**Local URA team learning how to set water prices**

Maureen Malas is a project manager at the Utilities Regulatory Authority (URA), who is currently running the review of water prices in Luganville. In this article she shares her experience with us:

“When we received the request from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Public Utilities (MIPU) to undertake the water tariff review for Luganville, for me, it was a great learning opportunity to participate in this review process.” Advising Maureen is James Ryan, Chief Economist at the URA. “James ran the electricity tariff review in 2010, and is now back in Vanuatu working with the URA. He makes sure that we follow the right process, and helps us with each step of the review.”

Water prices in Luganville have not changed since 1991; while on the other hand, operating and maintenance costs have risen significantly. This has subsequently led to under-investment in the water network, resulting in a decrease in the quality of water. “We have two immediate objectives for this review; one is to determine a fair price for water customers, and secondly to assist the Government to put in place a plan to improve water services in Luganville”.

The independence of the URA is a key factor in the way it works. “Being an independent regulator means that we have a duty to consider the interests of different stakeholder groups in every decision we take. We do this by actively engaging with all these groups, and ensuring that we publicly explain every step of our decision-making process.”

The process has led to Maureen talking to many different people. “The consultation process means that I need to talk to and listen to the views of a wide range of people: from community chiefs, senior government officials, business leaders, and individuals (including women) who use the water services daily. Having to explain quite complex issues to water customers means that I need to have a deep understanding of the issues involved.” This experience has helped Maureen to improve her communication skills.

Part of the recent consultation in Luganville was a survey of customers. “We walked door-to-door and spoke to people about our work. It really showed me that people are interested in the topic and have interesting things to say about their experiences of being a water customer.”

This process demonstrates the benefits of having an independent utility regulator. “When the Government established the URA in 2008, its aim was for us to work hard to improve electricity and water services for everyone in Vanuatu. This project is one of the many things the URA is doing to try and achieve this aim.”

The results of the tariff review are expected by April. “We will be visiting Luganville again soon to share what we have found so far and get feedback from customers, communities, businesses and the Government.”

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### **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 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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