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Australian energy networks aid faster, safer Fiji power restoration

Australian energy networks will today send a fleet of donated heavy machinery and vehicles to help accelerate the safe restoration of Fiji's electricity network devastated by Tropical Cyclone Winston in February.

Energy Networks Association CEO, John Bradley, said a team of Australian energy networks had partnered with the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to assess damage and identify much needed resources.

"Cyclone Winston knocked down or damaged over 4,500 power poles with impacts on up to 90% of the Fijian electricity network," Mr Bradley said.

"The donations by 10 Australian energy companies will speed up reconstruction of the electricity network in Fiji by an estimated 25%, completing works months earlier.

"It will make a big difference to the safety and quality of power restoration and will increase the future reliability of the Fiji electricity network during severe weather events."

ENA Chairman and Managing Director of Jemena, Paul Adams, said the energy network industry had moved swiftly to respond to support the Australian Government response.

"We know how much communities depend on safe and reliable power supply, so when we heard about the scale of damage to our near neighbours, Australian energy networks were keen to lend a hand.

"This is what network businesses do best: they work together to get the power back on and keep people safe."

The donation to the Fiji Electricity Authority includes seven heavy vehicles – crane borers, elevated work platforms and a service truck – and \$270,000 of specialised tools and equipment including electrical test equipment, hydraulic cutting tools, drills and pole saws.

The consortium of energy networks contributing to the restoration effort includes ActewAGL, Ausgrid, AusNet Services, Energex, Ergon Energy, Essential Energy, Jemena, SA Power Networks, TasNetworks and Zinfra Group.

ActewAGL CEO, Michael Costello, said:

"Fiji's electricity network suffered tremendous damage from Cyclone Winston with more than 4,500 electricity poles to be replaced across the country. It is an arduous time for the people of Fiji as they recover from this disaster and ActewAGL wanted to do what we could to help rebuild the electricity network."

AusNet Services MD, Nino Ficca, said:

"AusNet Services is pleased to contribute along with our colleagues by donating an elevated work platform to help the Fijian communities recover from Cyclone Winston."

Energex CEO, Terry Effeneay, said:

“These vehicles have been retired from the Energex fleet. They have been very well maintained and are mechanically safe and sound. We hope they will provide a timely boost to the rebuilding effort for the electricity network in Fiji and will enable the vital work to be completed as quickly as possible.”

Ergon Energy Acting Chief Executive, Ros Baker, said:

“Ergon did not hesitate in responding to the request to provide assistance. We are too well aware of the destructive impact of cyclones and this equipment will hasten the restoration of power and get Fiji’s shattered community back on its feet. Getting power back on is critical to the welfare and economy of Fiji, and Ergon is pleased to be able to make a tangible contribution that will hopefully reduce the restoration time.”

SA Power Networks CEO, Rob Stobbe, said:

“It’s important Australia helps its neighbours in times of need and we’re proud to be able to partner with other network businesses to support a key task in Fiji’s disaster recovery. We know ourselves the value of rapid and safe restoration of power supply in major storm events and there aren’t many bigger or more damaging than Cyclone Winston.”

TasNetworks CEO, Lance Balcombe, said:

“TasNetworks is pleased to contribute to this important infrastructure-building initiative to help the Fijian community recover from the devastating impact of Cyclone Winston.”

Zinfra Group Managing Director, Steve MacDonald, said:

“When DFAT asked Zinfra to assist in the Fiji disaster recovery, we jumped at the opportunity to be a part of the response effort. We initially sent our Power Operations Manager to be part of the assessment team to carry out a needs assessment in Fiji. As a result of this exercise, we have provided equipment as recommended in the assessment report, which will assist in expediting the rebuilding of the electrical infrastructure in Fiji. The equipment supplied will also help ensure that all future construction is built to a high quality and improve network resilience to cyclonic conditions.

“Today the energy networks and the Fiji High Commissioner saw the send off of the seven vehicles, with the equipment to follow soon,” Mr Bradley said.

Mr Bradley said the donated vehicles will assist with the reconstruction of the overhead electricity network.

Elevated work platforms (EWPs) will assist Fiji crews to work on overhead assets with improved safety and efficiency.

‘Borer-lifter’ cranes are used to bore holes into the ground several metres deep and lift power poles into place to ensure their maximum stability and strength.

The \$270,000 of small equipment donated will provide Fiji crews with key tools including hand-held drills, earth sticks and voltage detectors.

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The Energy Networks Association is the peak national body representing Australia’s electricity transmission and distribution networks and gas distribution networks on economic, technical, environmental and safety regulation, and national energy policy issues. ENA members provide energy to virtually every household and business in Australia.

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