

Tuesday 14th January, 2020

AusNet Services Update on the Impact of the Victorian Bushfires on Electricity Supply

Summary:

- **Damage to our network in the Gippsland and Upper Murray regions has been extensive. 7,500 customers were initially without power as a result of bushfire damage. 1,167 customers remain affected.**
- **AusNet Services will restore electricity supply to our customers and their communities as soon as possible. We have mobilised our full workforce as we undertake this and have drawn on additional resources as we have needed them.**
- **As we do this the safety of our workforce and the community is our main priority. Our crews will only access areas to conduct inspections and make repairs when it is safe to do so.**
- **Where possible we have used large scale generators to provide some power supply to towns (e.g. Mallacoota, Omeo, Corryong and Walwa.).**
- **Before this weekend we did not have access to many of the impacted areas to carry out inspection, repair and reconstruction work. Since then we have had some limited access and this has allowed us to confirm that we will need to reconstruct around 100km of powerline and replace a significant number of poles.**
- **Based on the outcome of this assessment we estimate that, unfortunately, it could be up to three weeks before we are able to safely restore mains supply to the majority of impacted customers and communities.**
- **In a very small number of cases it may take longer and for these customers we will consider options to provide particular support.**
- **We are working with the Victorian Government and local Incident Control Centres as we set priorities to reconnect communities. Meeting this timetable, however, is subject to safe and uninterrupted access to affected areas and no further adverse developments in fires, weather or other conditions. In some areas there are still active fires burning which are preventing access.**
- **We are providing daily updates on the status and indicative predictions of the power reconnection work to each impacted community in the bushfire zone.**

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AusNet Services owns and operates the electricity distribution network in the Gippsland and Upper Murray where the bushfires have impacted.

Commenting on the bushfires AusNet Services Managing Director Tony Narvaez said:

“On behalf of all of us at AusNet Services I want to extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives fighting these fires and all of the communities that have experienced their devastating impact.

I would like to say clearly to all these communities that we are working tirelessly to assess and inspect the damage to our network and restore their power as soon as is safely possible.

In doing this our absolute priority is the safety of these communities and of our crews.”

Damage to critical electricity infrastructure by bushfires in these local areas has been extensive. The initial impact of the bushfires at the end of December took approximately 7,500 customers off supply. By the middle of last week this had reduced to approximately 2,500 customers off. As of today we now have fewer than 1,200 customers who do not have electricity supply as a result of damage caused by bushfires.

We work closely with the CFA and other emergency services who determine whether it is safe or not for crews to enter impacted areas. Prior to this weekend we had been unable to access the vast majority of this area in order to conduct these assessments.

More favourable conditions over the weekend have now meant we have been able to access some further impacted areas to conduct an assessment of the damage. In some cases this has meant the Australian Defence Force actively transporting our crews in armoured vehicles to conduct inspection and repair work.

The results of these inspections have confirmed the extent of the damage to our network as a result of these bushfires. Some key summary points of our assessment of the damage are as follows:

- In total approximately 1000km of powerlines was off supply due to the bushfires. Key powerlines impacted include:
 - 66kV line between Bairnsdale, Newmerella and Cann River.
 - 22kV line from Wodonga Terminal Station to Corryong.
 - 22kV line between Cann River and Mallacoota.
- Based on our inspections to date we believe that 100km of powerline including poles will need to be fully reconstructed.
- We have 1518 wood poles in the burnt area. We anticipate that a significant proportion of these will need to be replaced.

During the period when we were unable to access, inspect or repair/reconstruct powerlines we did take steps to try and restore power for as many customers as possible. This included using large scale generators to provide emergency power to Mallacoota, Omeo, Corryong and Walwa.

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Further work to reconnect customers to mains supply has had to wait, however, until we have secured full access to impacted sites. This is dependent on these sites being declared safe from falling trees and other hazards.

Access has improved since Saturday 11th January and we have taken this opportunity to move quickly with asset inspection and reconstruction work including the following:

- The 22kV line into Corryong has been inspected, rebuilt and mains supply has been restored.
- Construction is underway in Omeo to repair the main 22kV line serving this community with approximately 40 poles being rebuilt.
- Work has commenced on the Tintaldra to Cudgewa line today with the aim of reconstructing 30 damaged poles over the next three days.
- Essential Energy has repaired the damage on the line to Walwa, restoring power to 49 customers. Further work is underway to assess damage and restore power to the outskirts of town.
- Reconstruction of the Wairewa line is underway.

Based on the assessment of the damage that we have now been able to make, however, we do believe the extent of the damage to our network will mean that it is likely to be three weeks before we are able to have the vast majority of our customers back on supply in the impacted areas once we have access. For a small minority of these customers restoration may take even longer than this and for these customers we will consider options to provide particular support.

Meeting this timescale will rely on favourable weather and fire conditions to allow our crews to continue the work they have started. It will also rely on our securing safe access to impacted sites. As an example the Princes Highway between Orbost and Mallacoota remains closed. We will require access through this road in order to inspect and repair the main electricity line that feeds Mallacoota.

Our reconnection process prioritises relief centres, hospitals, airports and communication services as well as other essential services. We work closely with the Victorian Government and local Incident Control Centres as we set these priorities.

Needless to say we are absolutely committed to undertaking this work and restoring electricity supply to our customers and their communities as soon as possible. We do apologise to all customers off supply. We understand the impact this has, particularly as local communities start the rebuilding process after the bushfires.

In addition to committing to getting customers back on supply as soon as possible we will also keep communities informed on the timing of restoration. We will shortly commence daily updates on the status of the power reconnection work to each impacted community in the bushfire zone. The indicative predictions for each community in these updates will of course be subject to safe and

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uninterrupted access to affected areas and no further adverse developments in fires, weather or other conditions.

We have also set up a dedicated contact phone line for those customers impacted (1300 561 171 Mon though Sun between 8am and 8pm). This line will be able to provide specific local information on likely restoration times as we have this information. Information will also be available on our Outage Tracker website (www.outagetracker.com.au) and on our Facebook page. We have been providing detailed information to local and State wide media outlets and will continue to do so.

We have asked all customers off supply who are on life support or otherwise vulnerable to ensure they have contacted either ourselves or the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services. We are working with multiple agencies within the Victorian Government to ensure these customers receive specific support.

AusNet Services staff are attending local community meetings and providing information to assist impacted customers. We are also developing measures to help customers reconnect quickly and ease the burden of those who have lost supply in this major emergency. We will announce further details in the coming days.