

Vanuatu Project Management Unit  
Port-Vila Mall Building  
Paris Street  
PO Box 192  
Port Vila, Vanuatu  
Tel: (678) 26415/33240  
Fax: (678) 26419  
Email: [vpmu@vanuatu.gov.vu](mailto:vpmu@vanuatu.gov.vu)



Unité de Gestion du Projet de Vanuatu  
Bâtiment Port-Vila Mall  
Rue de Paris  
BP 192  
Port Vila, Vanuatu  
Tel: (678) 26415/33240  
Fax: (678) 26419  
Email: [vpmu@vanuatu.gov.vu](mailto:vpmu@vanuatu.gov.vu)

*Delivering Services through Partnership / Rendre Service a Travers le Partenariat*

## **Media Release**

*For Immediate Release*

# Govt marks start of Brenwe hydro works

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**PORT VILA, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021** – The Government of Vanuatu and partner – the Asian Development Bank (ADB) witnessed what might be the implementation of the first major development project in Vanuatu since the beginning of the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020.

Prime Minister Bob Loughman Weibur officiated the ground-breaking ceremony on 7 May of the Vanuatu Energy Access Project (VEAP). Funded by ADB and the Government of Vanuatu, it is the country's second major hydro power project.

The Prime Minister was joined by the Minister of Climate Change, Bruno Leignkon and Asian Development Bank Unit Head, David Fay, as well as Minister for Justice, Esmon Saimon and community leaders of Northwest Malekula at a ceremony hosted by the people of Unmet and surrounding communities.

VEAP aims to deliver clean, renewable, and affordable energy and create social and economic benefits for the people of Malekula. The project is expected to transform power supply overnight, with the 400kW run of the river scheme providing in excess of 90% of the total generated energy for the Malekula grid through to 2040.

The hydro system is being built by New Zealand-based joint venture company, MAP/Vortex who were awarded the contract about a year ago, but progress and mobilization was seriously hampered by the pandemic, which saw borders closed and international travel restricted since March 2020. It meant that construction had to be delayed until Vanuatu Project Management Unit (VPMU) had navigated all the necessary processes and protocols to ensure the contractors arrived safely in the country without compromising public health and safety.

Prime Minister Loughman spoke passionately at the event and implored local chiefs to ensure VEAP is successfully delivered.

*“Today marks an important milestone which will go down in our history as the beginning of something good for our people of Northwest Malekula. I acknowledge the chiefs who led and rallied their communities to realise this project today.”*

In acknowledging the challenges encountered with the previous hydro project, Prime Minister Weibur said he believed that the timing could not be more appropriate, thanking everyone sincerely who played a part in achieving last Friday's most significant milestone. *“My sincere thanks and gratitude to Asian Development Bank for funding this project; VPMU for managing and facilitating all the processes; Climate Change, Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Lands and everyone who worked hard to ensure Brenwe hydro was commenced amidst challenging circumstances.*

ADB representative David Fay said, *“We are delighted to work alongside the Government of Vanuatu to keep this project moving during the pandemic and help deliver clean, affordable energy to surrounding communities.”*

The project is scheduled to be completed by early 2022.

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*For media enquiries, please contact Vanuatu Project Management Unit (VPMU) Vila Mall Building, Rue de Paris, PO Box 192, Port Vila, Tel: (678) 33240 or Mobile (678) 7753927. Email: [vpmu@vanuatu.gov.vu](mailto:vpmu@vanuatu.gov.vu) or [kmanassah@vanuatu.gov.vu](mailto:kmanassah@vanuatu.gov.vu)*