

# Media release

7 January 2020



## Crews from across the State head to south-east NSW to help get the power back on

The devastating bushfires across south-east NSW have caused extensive damage to the Essential Energy electricity network, with the destruction of hundreds of power poles and associated electrical infrastructure.

Parts of the network have been completely destroyed and will need a comprehensive rebuild when crews can gain access, leaving some customers without power into next week at the earliest.

On New Year's Eve, more than 37,000 customers were left without power as fires tore through south-east NSW, including the South Coast. Essential Energy crews were able to restore power to more than 25,000 customers by 4pm, Friday 3 January, however the fire events over the weekend caused further damage, impacting the power supply to more than 35,000 customers down the South Coast and across parts of the Riverina.

Essential Energy has started patrolling lines and making repairs where safe to do so, but with 90 per cent of the network in designated bushfire zones, many locations are still not safe to access.

Luke Jenner, Essential Energy General Manager Customer and Network Services said teams are working closely with the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) to gain access to fire-ravaged areas, with repairs having commenced where possible.

"The extent of the damage from these unprecedented fires is like nothing we have experienced before. The network has sustained extensive damage with some areas being completely destroyed and needing re-building," Mr Jenner said.

"Over the past 24 hours we've reached parts of the network that have been inaccessible until now. This allowed us to restore power to 12,000 customers in the Batemans Bay, Mossy Point and parts of Broulee and Tomakin yesterday, with 11,000 customers currently without power.

"In many cases customers will be without power into next week, some possibly longer. As soon as we are able to gain safe access and assess the damage, we'll be in a position to determine the extent of the damage and provide estimated times for when the power will be restored to customers.

"Our priority is safe, steady power restoration. It's important we take the appropriate time to fully assess conditions, particularly hazard trees, and undertake any necessary work safely to minimise the risk of our people or members or the public being injured.

"Priority is given to critical services in bushfire-affected areas including hospitals, water pumping stations, nursing homes and petrol stations.

Initial indications are that in excess of 500 poles have been destroyed by the fires over the past week. A significant amount of damage has also been caused to the underground power network in urban areas of Batemans Bay, where it is anticipated restoration will be complex and lengthy.

More than 320 personnel have been mobilised from across Essential Energy's footprint to assist local teams with network repairs and power restoration. Additional specialist personnel have also been deployed to minimise the impact of hazardous trees and the active threat they pose on the electricity network.

Depot Hubs have been set up in Moruya, Bega, Albury and Tumut to provide support and logistics, including safety leadership, design and planning, on-the-ground fleet management, and ensuring all crews are appropriately supported.

Mr Jenner said Essential Energy leaders are located in the EOCs (Emergency Operational Centres) partnering with the RFS and other emergency services and authorities to ensure safe access into impacted areas to assess the network damage.

"I am confident we have the resources and capability to safely make repairs and rebuild the network to get the power back on to customers. We will work as quickly as safety will allow."

Customers can stay up to date with power restoration progress through Essential Energy's website, [www.essentialenergy.com.au](http://www.essentialenergy.com.au), Facebook or by calling us on 13 20 80.

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**FACT FILE:**

- Essential Energy builds, operates and maintains one of Australia's largest electricity distribution networks, servicing 855,00 customers across regional, rural and remote NSW
- Our footprint covers 95 per cent of NSW, traversing 737,000 square kilometres of landmass with 183,612 kilometres of powerline, including 163,417 kilometres in designated bushfire zones
- The network services more than 855,000 customers with approximately 4.6 customers to each kilometre of powerline, which is almost one-tenth the customer density compared with our counterparts in NSW
- Essential Energy's footprint also includes 1.38 million power poles, equating to 1.6 power poles per customer.