

Media Release

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Far North power consumers escape major outage

Far North power consumers narrowly escaped joining the tens of thousands of Auckland and Northland households which were without power for many hours yesterday, following a major Transpower outage.

At around 3:00pm Monday, a shelter belt on private Waikato land caught fire when heavily loaded 110 kV transmission lines sagged into trees. As a result, two Transpower circuits running north into Auckland were tripped. The impact of this outage was further compounded because Auckland's only large power station, Otahuhu-B, was co-incidentally shut down for routine maintenance during the lower-demand summer period.

In responding to the outage, Transpower requested Auckland line network company Vector and Whangarei-based Northpower to shed load. This meant tens of thousands of households and some businesses had their supply switched off, while repairs were made.

Far North power consumers were spared power cuts, but were not entirely immune from the outage fallout, as Top Energy was forced to control power to hot water cylinders. According to CEO, Russell Shaw, Top Energy was also asked by Transpower to shed load. "We responded by turning off ripple-controlled hot water cylinders on our network and were on standby to cut supply, if required. Fortunately, we were also able to maximise generation output at our Ngawha Power Station, which meant less load for the National Grid. Although we did not have to cut supply in the end, it was a close run thing", he said.

Shaw also pointed out the Transpower outage was caused by the sagging lines igniting trees. "This demonstrates why our own vegetation control programme is so critical. Trees and power lines just don't mix well", he said. The company is investing \$9 million in an aggressive vegetation control programme for its Far North network, over the next 3 years.

In Auckland power was restored around 8:30 pm last night but ripple-controlled hot water outages would likely continue, into today.

Transpower Chief Executive, Patrick Strange said that a number of other factors, in addition to the fire, had resulted in Transpower asking lines companies to shed load. "There is currently not enough generation to feed the Auckland region. In addition to initial issue of the fire which has resulted in two of our main transmission lines being out of service, the Otahuhu power station is also out for maintenance, one of our other transmission lines is out for maintenance and there are also some reports of lightning in the area."

According to Shaw, the Top Energy Group's investments in generation at Ngawha and current and future network reliability and capacity investments will prove hugely beneficial for Far North power consumers, especially until Transpower catch up with investments in the vulnerable National Grid. "With the new generation station at Ngawha we can ride through faults and outages like the one we had last night. But with others, like the outage last October where a fork hoist carrying a shipping container brought down transmission lines, there is little we can do. Following that event the supply was completely cut and the lights went out for all power consumers north of Auckland. But what all these outages illustrate is the security of supply vulnerability. This is what Top Energy is focussing on for the Far North network over the next 10 years - where we will be doubling the number of zone substations and 33kV overhead feeder lines", Shaw said. END.

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