

Survey work starts on Manatua cable project

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Survey Vessel Geo Resolution. 19051215

Work has commenced on the detailed marine survey for the 3500km route of the Manatua - One Polynesia fibre optic cable. As well as Rarotonga and Aitutaki in the Cook Islands, the new cable will also connect Samoa, Niue, and Tahiti and Bora Bora in French Polynesia. The cable is expected to come into service in 2020.

Survey vessel Geo Resolution is undertaking a detailed study of the cable route using state-of-the-art marine survey technology, including advanced sonar and diving operations, ahead of cable laying which will start later this year. Survey work commenced in Samoa in April and will follow the cable route East, arriving in the Cook Islands in the next few days.

The main vessel will assess the sea bottom, up to 5000m deep in places, and will use smaller vessels and divers in shallower water nearer the shore.

The Cook Islands Ministry of Transport will be issuing a “Notice to Mariners” requiring marine traffic to avoid the survey operations.

Dr Ranulf Scarbrough, ACL CEO and vice-chair of the Manatua Cable Consortium, said: “The Manatua One Polynesia cable is a huge engineering challenge involving laying 3500km of state-of-the-art telecommunications infrastructure. We still have a long way to go but the benefits will be worth it with the opportunity for dramatic improvement in our internet service being within reach in the first half of 2020.”

Cooks Islands Investment Corporation CEO Petero Okotai said: “The Cooks Islands government has worked tirelessly over many years to build a partnership to improve connectivity to the Cooks Islands. As ACL’s parent company, it is very exciting for CIIC to see work beginning on this strategically important project for our nation.”

The Manatua cable will be 3500km long connecting Samoa, Niue, Rarotonga, Aitutaki, Tahiti and Bora Bora. The cable will be capable of operating at up to 10 tera bits per second (= 10,000,000 megabits per second) using state-of-the-art fibre optic technology, enough speed to download 300 high definition movies every single second.

The ground-breaking Manatua cable consortium was formed following the signing of an International Treaty in November 2018 between the governments of the Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and French Polynesia. The purpose of the consortium is to build and operate the Manatua cable. The consortium comprises Avaroa Cable Ltd (for the Cooks Islands), Niue Telecom, the Samoa Submarine Cable Company and Office de Poste et Telecommunications (for French Polynesia). It is the first consortium of its type anywhere in the Pacific.

Avaroa Cable Limited is the state-owned enterprise established by the government of the Cook Islands to manage its involvement in the Manatua Cable project and operate the cable on behalf of the Cooks Islands. Funding has been provided by the Cook Islands government, the New Zealand Government Aid Programme and the Asian Development Bank. ACL is overseen by an independent board chaired by local businesswoman Tatiana Burn.

The Manatua Cable project has also been part funded with US\$15 million of loan funding from the Asian Development Bank.

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