Media statement

5 December 2016

Basslink fault cause investigation completed

The exact cause of the subsea cable fault that led to the December 2015 outage of the Basslink interconnector has been described as a 'cause unknown' by international cable experts charged with investigating the fault.

The independent investigation was recently completed by Cable Consulting International (CCI), a UK-based firm regarded as one of the world's leading submarine power cable experts. The investigation, which spanned more than six months, encompassed forensic examinations and laboratory analysis in Italy and the UK. As part of the investigation, CCI also consulted with Materials Technology Ltd, a leading UK materials engineering consultancy to undertake some specific materials testing.

The length of time taken for the investigation reflected both the meticulous investigation approach undertaken by CCI as well as the efforts taken to attempt to derive further visibility on the fault cause, which unfortunately still concluded as cause unknown.

CCI determined that the fault had occurred within the cable; the fault was not at a location of a joint, or a lead sheath to armour bond. There was no evidence of any pre-existing mechanical damage to the cable. The point of initiation within the fault path and the direction of propagation of the electrical failure could not be determined due to the severity of the fault damage.

The operating conditions at, and preceding, the time of failure were no different to those of the year of 2015 and the cable was within its thermal rating. The insulation adjacent to the failure site was sound and showed no evidence of thermal ageing. A sample of cable remote from the fault site was in sound condition.

"We have provided the report in its entirety to Hydro Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government and trust it will provide them with sufficient expert evidence to accept that the fault was a force majeure event. Given this, we would like Hydro Tasmania to recommence meeting its contractual obligations to Basslink immediately," said Basslink Chief Executive Malcolm Eccles.

"Despite best efforts, the CCI investigation has concluded that it is not possible to determine the cause of the fault. It is not uncommon that the cause of the fault remains unknown based on other past incidences of submarine cable outages," he said.

"The silver lining in this whole exercise is that CCI found the other section of the cable it sampled to be in sound condition. This gives us confidence in the long-term outlook of the asset," said Mr Eccles.

Basslink has consistently maintained its position that the cable fault was a force majeure event. The CCI investigations support Basslink's view and represents the final step in this investigative process.

Basslink has accepted the findings of CCI and will not be undertaking any further testing. Basslink has full confidence in the quality and reliability of the asset, which is operating as designed.

Representatives of Hydro Tasmania and Basslink's insurer observed the forensic examinations in Italy and the UK.

- Ends -

For further media enquiries on Basslink, please contact:
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About Basslink www.basslink.com.au

The Basslink Interconnector enhances security of supply on both sides of Bass Strait; protecting Tasmania against the risk of drought-constrained energy shortages while providing Victoria and southern states with secure renewable energy during times of peak demand. The Basslink Interconnector is the world's second longest undersea electricity cable. Owned by Keppel Infrastructure Trust, Basslink delivers excellence in the areas of safety, reliability and performance.

Basslink has a number of fibre optic assets which carry high speed telecommunication traffic. Basslink Telecoms offers a range of wholesale transmission services between Tasmania and Victoria.

About CCI

Cable Consulting international Ltd (CCI) is an independent engineering consultancy that provides expertise on supertension land and submarine cable system technology. CCI has conducted numerous failure investigations on cables and cable accessories in the voltage range 11kV to 400kV. CCI's engineers have previous experience working for a major cable manufacturer designing, developing, manufacturing and installing supertension land and submarine cable systems, as well as working for a power transmission utility.