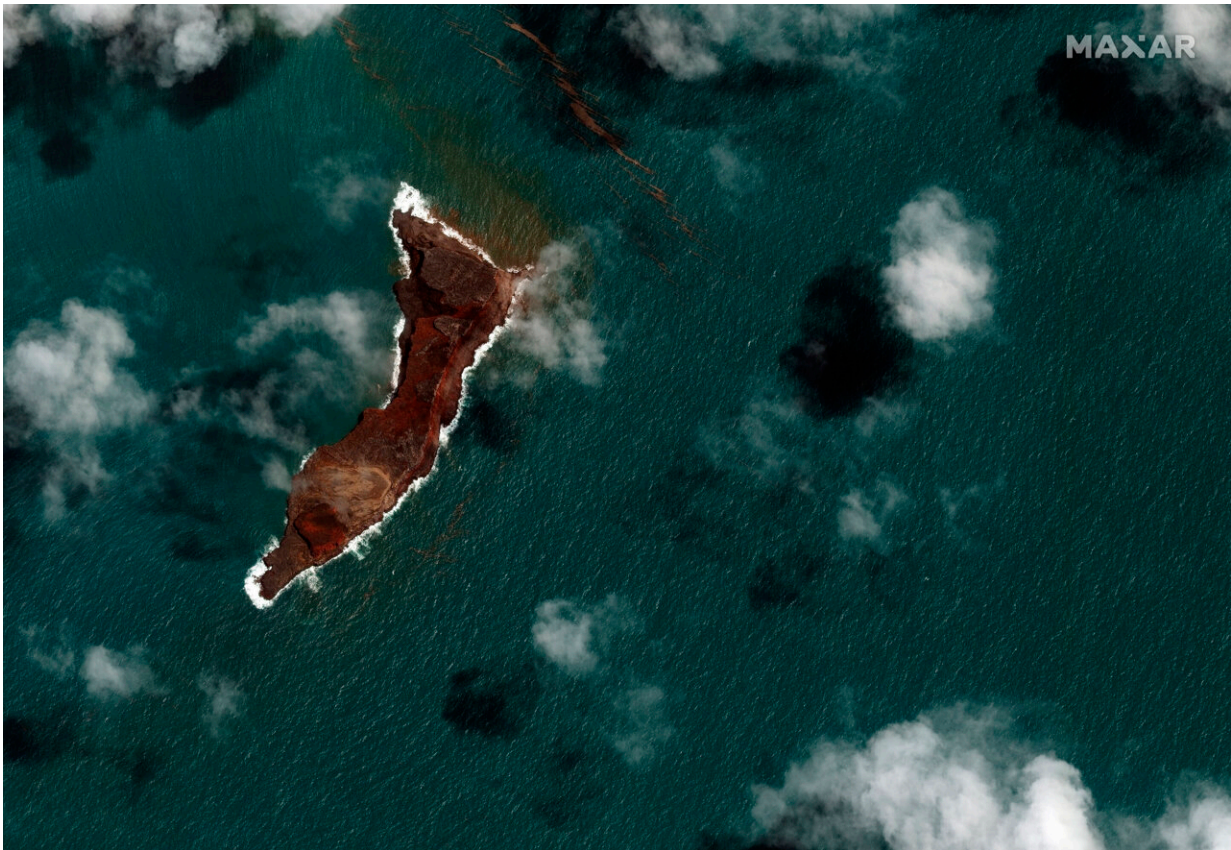


Volcanic ash delays aid to Tonga as scale of damage emerges

January 18 2022, by Nick Perry



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows a view of Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano in Tonga Tuesday, Jan. 18, 2022 after a huge undersea volcanic eruption. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP

Thick ash on an airport runway was delaying aid deliveries to the Pacific island nation of Tonga, where significant damage was being reported days after a huge undersea volcanic eruption and tsunami.

New Zealand's military is sending much-needed drinking water and other supplies, but said the ash on the runway will delay the flight at least a day. A towering ash cloud since Saturday's eruption had prevented earlier flights. New Zealand also sent a [navy ship](#) to Tonga Tuesday with another planned to leave later in the day and pledged an initial 1 million New Zealand dollars (\$680,000) toward recovery efforts.

Australia sent a navy ship from Sydney to Brisbane to prepare for a support mission if needed.

Communications with Tonga have been extremely limited, but New Zealand and Australia sent military surveillance flights to assess the damage on Monday, with aerial photos showing the vibrant Tongan landscape transformed by the ash into a gray moonscape.

U.N. humanitarian officials and Tonga's government "report significant infrastructural damage around Tongatapu," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

"There has been no contact from the Ha'apai Group of [islands](#), and we are particularly concerned about two small low-lying islands—Mango and Fonoi—following surveillance flights confirming substantial property damage," Dujarric said.



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows the main port facilities in Nuku'alofa, Tonga Tuesday, Jan. 18, 2022, after a huge undersea volcanic eruption and tsunami. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP

New Zealand's High Commission in Tonga also reported "significant damage" along the western coast of the main island of Tongatapu, including to resorts and along the waterfront area. The commission said Tonga police had confirmed two deaths from the tsunami, including one who was a British national.

Satellite images captured the spectacular [eruption](#), with a plume of ash, steam and gas rising like a giant mushroom above the South Pacific.

Tsunami waves of about 80 centimeters (2.7 feet) crashed into Tonga's shoreline, and crossed the Pacific, causing minor damage from New Zealand to Santa Cruz, California. The eruption set off a sonic boom that could be heard as far away as Alaska.

Two people drowned in Peru, which also reported an oil spill after waves moved a ship that was transferring oil at a refinery.



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows ash covered homes and buildings in Tonga Tuesday, Jan. 18, 2022 after a huge undersea volcanic eruption. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP

Family said British woman Angela Glover, 50, died after being swept

away by a wave in Tonga.

Nick Eleini said his sister's body had been found and that her husband survived. "I understand that this terrible accident came about as they tried to rescue their dogs," Eleini told Sky News. He said it had been his sister's life dream" to live in the South Pacific and "she loved her life there."

The explosion of the Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano, about 64 kilometers (40 miles) north of Nuku'alofa, was the latest in a series of dramatic eruptions. In late 2014 and early 2015, eruptions created a small new island and disrupted air travel to the Pacific archipelago.

Earth imaging company Planet Labs PBC had watched the island after a new vent began erupting in late December. Satellite images showed how drastically the volcano had shaped the area, creating a growing island off Tonga.



This combination of the satellite images provided by Maxar Technologies shows the main port facilities in Nuku'alofa, Tonga on Dec. 29, 2021, above, and on Jan. 18, 2022. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP

The U.N. World Food Program is exploring how to bring in relief supplies and more staff and has received a request to restore communication lines in Tonga, Dujarric said.

One complicating factor is that Tonga has managed to avoid outbreaks of COVID-19. New Zealand said its military staff were vaccinated and willing to follow Tonga's protocols.

New Zealand's military said it hoped the airfield in Tonga would be opened either Wednesday or Thursday. The military said it had considered an airdrop but that was "not the preference of the Tongan authorities."

Communications with the island nation is limited because the single underwater fiber-optic cable that connects Tonga to the rest of the world was likely severed in the eruption. The company that owns the cable and repairs could take weeks.

Samiuela Fonua, who chairs the board at Tonga Cable Ltd., said the cable appeared to have been severed about 10 to 15 minutes after the eruption. He said the cable lies atop and within coral reef, which can be sharp.



In this photo provided by the New Zealand Defense Force, volcanic ash covers roof tops and vegetation in an area of Tonga, Monday, Jan. 17, 2022. Thick ash on an airport runway was delaying aid deliveries to the Pacific island nation of Tonga, where significant damage was being reported days after a huge undersea volcanic eruption and tsunami. Credit: CPL Vanessa Parker/NZDF via AP



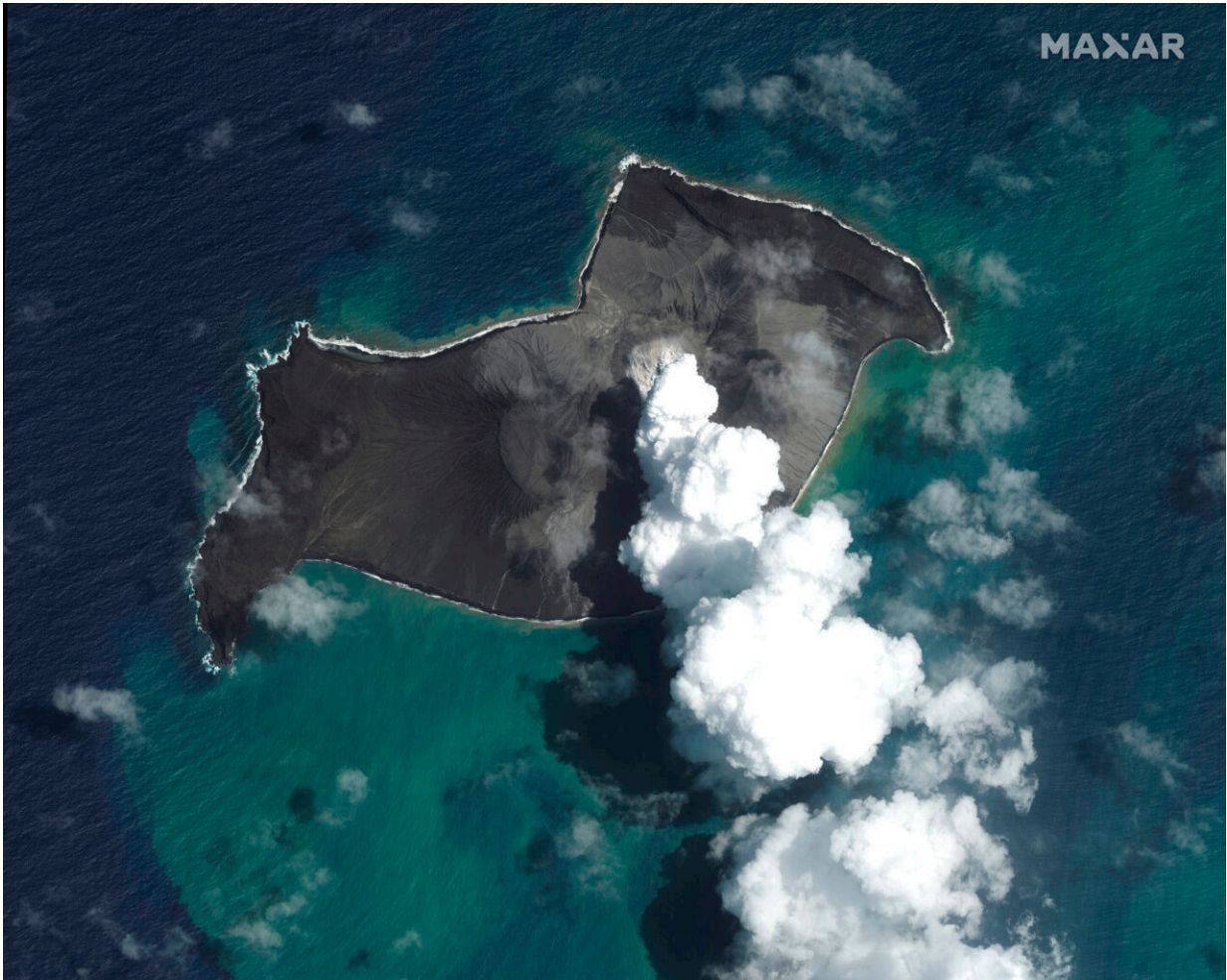
This combination of the satellite images provided by Maxar Technologies shows homes and buildings in Tonga on Dec. 29, 2021, above, and on Jan. 18, 2022. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows a closer view of Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano in Tonga on April 10, 2021. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows the main port facilities in Nuku'alofa, Tonga on Dec. 29, 2021. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows an overview of Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano in Tonga on Jan. 6, 2022, before a huge undersea volcanic eruption. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows an overview of Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano in Tonga on Dec. 24, 2021. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows a closer view of Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano in Tonga on Jan. 6, 2022, before a huge undersea volcanic eruption. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP



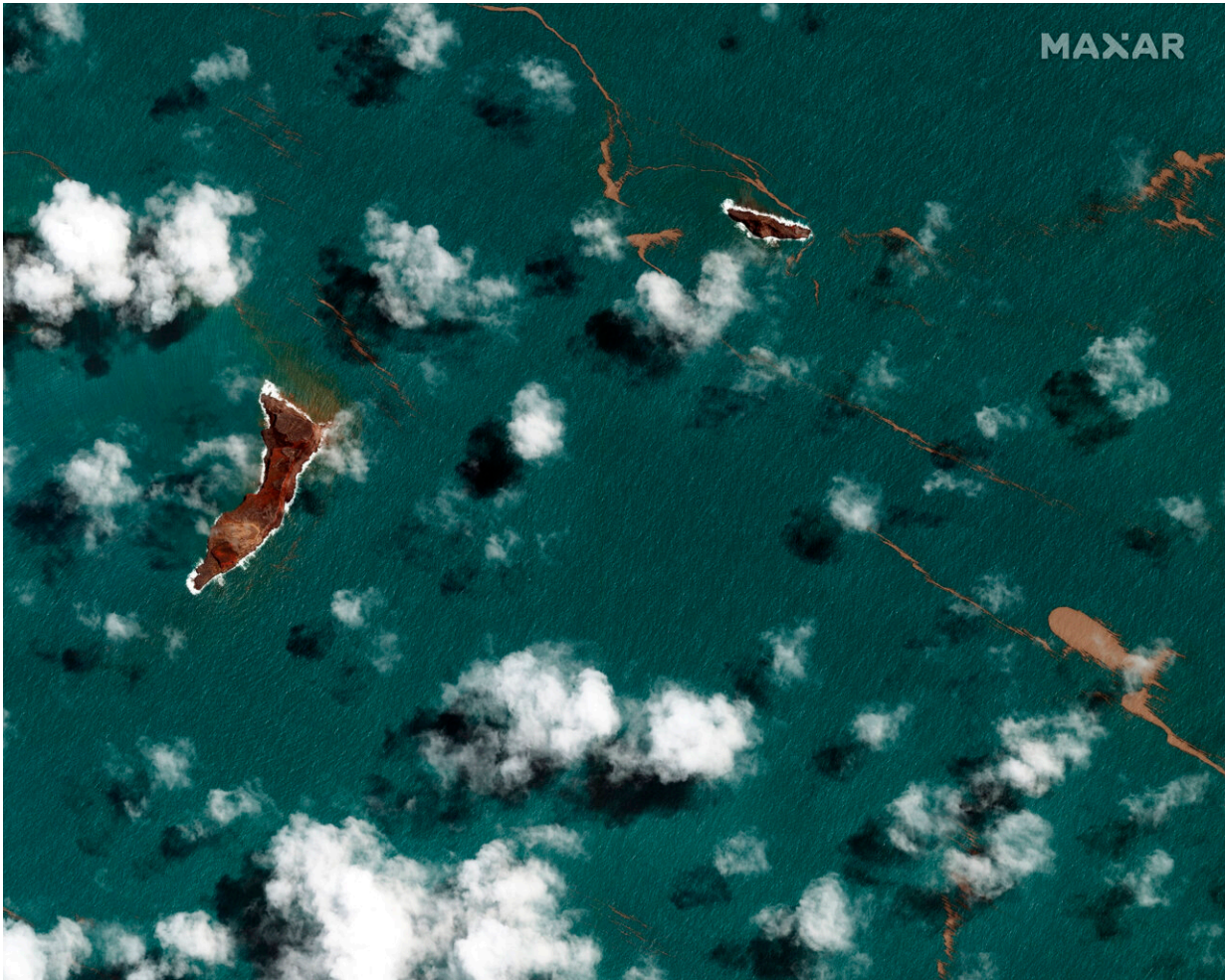
This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows an overview of Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano in Tonga on April 10, 2021. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP



In this photo provided by the New Zealand Defense Force, Air Movements personnel stack and secure pallets of disaster relief supplies at an airbase in Auckland, New Zealand, Monday, Jan. 17, 2022, to be sent to Tonga in the wake of a Tsunami triggered by volcanic eruption. Thick ash on an airport runway was delaying aid deliveries to the Pacific island nation of Tonga, where significant damage was being reported days after a huge undersea volcanic eruption and tsunami. Credit: Dillon Robert Anderson/NZDF via AP



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows homes and buildings in Tonga on Dec. 29, 2021. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows a general view of Hunga Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano in Tonga Tuesday, Jan. 18, 2022 after a huge undersea volcanic eruption. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP



In this photo provided by the Australian Defense Force, HMAS Adelaide prepares to depart Garden Island fleet base in Sydney, Australia, Monday, Jan. 17, 2022, to assist the Tonga government after the eruption of an undersea volcano. Credit: ABIS Susan Mossop/ADF via AP



In this photo provided by the New Zealand Defense Force, Air Movements personnel stack and secure pallets of disaster relief supplies at an airbase in Auckland, New Zealand, Monday, Jan. 17, 2022, to be sent to Tonga in the wake of a Tsunami triggered by volcanic eruption. Thick ash on an airport runway was delaying aid deliveries to the Pacific island nation of Tonga, where significant damage was being reported days after a huge undersea volcanic eruption and tsunami. Credit: Dillon Robert Anderson/NZDF via AP



In this photo provided by the Australian Defense Force, HMAS Adelaide departs from Garden Island fleet base in Sydney, Australia, Monday, Jan. 17, 2022, to assist the Tonga government after the eruption of an undersea volcano. Credit: ABIS Susan Mossop/ADF via AP



In this photo provided by the New Zealand Defense Force, aircrew of a Royal New Zealand Air Force Orion work at their controls as they fly over Tonga, Monday, Jan. 17, 2022. Thick ash on an airport runway was delaying aid deliveries to the Pacific island nation of Tonga, where significant damage was being reported days after a huge undersea volcanic eruption and tsunami. Credit: CPL Vanessa Parker/NZDF via AP



In this photo provided by the New Zealand Defense Force, an Orion plane flies over Tonga where volcanic ash covers roof tops and vegetation, Monday, Jan. 17, 2022. Thick ash on an airport runway was delaying aid deliveries to the Pacific island nation of Tonga, where significant damage was being reported days after a huge undersea volcanic eruption and tsunami. Credit: CPL Vanessa Parker/NZDF via AP

Fonua said a ship would need to pull up the cable to assess the damage and then crews would need to fix it. A single break might take a week to repair, he said, while multiple breaks could take up to three weeks. He added that it was unclear yet when it would be safe for a ship to venture near the undersea volcano to undertake the work.

A second undersea cable that connects the islands within Tonga also appeared to have been severed, Fonua said. However, a local phone network was working, allowing Tongans to call each other. But he said the lingering ash cloud was continuing to make even satellite phone calls abroad difficult.

© 2022 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: Volcanic ash delays aid to Tonga as scale of damage emerges (2022, January 18)
retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-01-volcanic-ash-aid-tonga-scale.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.