

REPORT ON THE MEETING OF PWS EXPERT TEAM ON MEDIA ISSUES

Orlando, Florida

20 to 24 June 1999

The PWS Expert Team on Media Issues met in Orlando, Florida from 20 to 24 June 1999 to address issues as defined by the Commission for Basic Systems (CBS) in its Terms of Reference indicated below:

- To establish a mechanism for dealing promptly with issues of consistency between warnings and information disseminated by the international media and the official warnings and information issued by NMHSs.
- To provide guidance to further strengthen links and on establishing a mechanism for ongoing dialogue between NMHSs and both national and international media bodies with a focus on ensuring acknowledgement of the role of NMHSs in providing data and products on which forecasts are based.

The list of participating experts is given in [Appendix A](#).

In addition, the expert team discussed issues related to presentation and dissemination of public weather information to the media and provided input on product development and exchange for the work of relevant PWS expert teams engaged in work on those areas. The agenda of the meeting is contained in [Appendix B](#). The summary of discussions under each broad theme of the meeting and the action required follow below.

International Media

The expert team was briefed by Ms Haleh Kootval, Chief of Public Weather and Operational Information Unit in WMO Secretariat, on the new structure of the CBS and the interaction of the Expert Team on Media Issues with other expert teams within the PWS Programme. She also briefed the team on the discussions concerning the Public Weather Services at the WMO 13th Congress and more precisely on what actions Congress had requested to be taken as far as the media issues were concerned. In addition to the members of the expert team, representatives from the BBC, CNN and the International Association of Broadcast Meteorologists (IABM) were present at this session.

As expected the discussion during an open exchange focused on issues of access by the international broadcasters to official warnings and forecasts issued by NMSs and

hence topics relating to "single official voice" and attribution.

There was general agreement that to overcome much of the difficulties cited by both the NMSs and broadcasters, it was essential to ensure efficient and effective information flow between the two sides. The representatives of international broadcasters present at the meeting re-affirmed their intention and desire to make use of official warnings and information issued by NMSs. A major obstacle to achieve this however, is lack of a single and centralized source of such information. To be useful and used by broadcasters who often operate under severe time constraint, information has to be accessible easily and in a media-friendly format. For their part, the broadcasters agreed that benefits of acknowledging NMSs as sources of data and detailed information on severe weather warnings include increasing the visibility of NMSs and lending credibility to broadcasts. However, in addition to difficulties in accessing information source, other difficulties cited in giving attribution regularly to the NMSs include lack of time on air, technical difficulties in using crawlers (running text at the bottom of the screen), or company policy. Nevertheless, the broadcast representatives assured the meeting that once access to direct information from NMSs becomes a reality, they will make every effort to give attribution to providers of data and information. The members of the expert team raised an important issue concerning the due recognition of the authority of an RSMC in its assigned region of responsibility and requested the international media to make every effort to familiarise themselves with rules of operation of RSMCs in order to avoid broadcasts of warnings which are in conflict with the guidance and advisory issued by the responsible RSMC.

The meeting agreed that to overcome some of these long-standing difficulties it was essential to establish as a priority channels to direct official NMS information to the international broadcasters as follows:

- Short-term solution: communication of severe weather warnings by NMSs to the broadcasters by using fax or e-mail.
- Long-term solution: Use of a centralized web-site.

The meeting agreed that for the purposes of the international media, the warnings placed on a centralized web-site should be limited to those phenomena such as tropical cyclones, major floods or other extreme weather conditions whose scales are sufficiently large as to make them important for coverage by global broadcasters.

The Secretariat representative informed the meeting that the idea of a centralized web-site on the WMO Home page had been discussed at Congress and provided that the Secretariat was not perceived as engaging in operational meteorology, the idea had been welcomed by Members.

As a first step a list of broadcasters with international or regional coverage will be drawn up as potential recipients of information and for further contacts and communication their direct contact numbers and addresses will be communicated to NMSs.

The meeting proposed that a media web-site be located on the WMO Home page with direct links to the relevant information produced by NMSs, should contain the following components:

- Severe weather warnings together with warning summaries, time of issue, validity period .
- Climatic anomalies and weather extremes.
- City forecasts by NMSs.
- Online feedback for verification and interaction through e-mail.
- Reminder to broadcasters to provide attribution.

The feasibility of such a web-site will be investigated in collaboration with other PWS expert teams and within the Secretariat.

The meeting also indicated that it was highly desirable for NMHSs to establish a practice whereby broadcasters could be identified as "meteorologists" or "weathercasters" as the case may be, so as a clear distinction could be made between the two categories of presenters. The meeting encouraged the NMHSs, as appropriate, to set certain scientific standards for broadcasters as a means of ensuring high quality of content as well as presentation of weather broadcasts.

This session was concluded with a strong support for ongoing dialogue between the international broadcasters and the WMO, as addressing concerns of Members in this regard has now progressed to considering practical solutions for those concerns.

Actions proposed

- 1. Draw up a list of international or regional broadcast bodies who need to be informed of the proposals of the expert meeting. Prepare a list of their direct contact numbers (fax or e-mail). Write to them to specifically encourage them to provide attributions for the source of data or severe weather information provided to them by NMSs (Gerald Fleming).**
- 2. Liaise with the PWS Expert Team on Product Development and Verification and Service Evaluation in the design of a media web-site with the elements cited above (Edwin Lai).**
- 3. Design a template for large-scale severe weather warnings on the media web-site for use by NMSs (Samuel Muchemi).**
- 4. Prepare a list of definitions (and thresholds if exist) of severe warnings which require to be included in the template and examine existing arrangements for their (regional or international) exchange (Gerald Fleming).**
- 5. Examine any similar arrangements for accessing severe warnings that may exist within WMO and in particular within the Tropical Cyclone Programme. As procedures concerning issuing of warnings for tropical cyclones are defined within the Tropical Cyclone programme, those same procedures should be followed in the development of the proposed media web-site (Haleh Kootval).**
- 6. Collate input for the template on climatic anomalies and extremes (Lea**

Saukonnen).

7. As an interim measure provide direct contacts (faxes or e-mails) of the international broadcasters to NMSs and RSMCs (tropical cyclones) and request that the broadcasters be contacted immediately of the warnings and advisories issued by NMSs and RSMCs respectively. Similarly draw the attention of the broadcasters to the WMO web-site where Publication No. 5 can be found and used as a resource directory for contacting NMSs directly (Haleh Kootval).

Technical Considerations

The expert team discussed technical considerations related to dissemination and presentation of weather information including use of available technology for better dissemination and challenges and guidelines for better presentation. It agreed that NMSs should be strongly advised to ensure that the hardware and the software used for producing graphics are compatible, and that when purchasing new equipment e.g. satellite receiving stations and radars, the proper interfacing between the hardware and the media outlets is observed.

The meeting encouraged NMHSs to explore and use new technology which, allows reception of radio broadcasts of weather warnings and forecasts in remote areas which are currently poorly served by other communication means.

The meeting agreed that more formal training courses on dissemination and presentation issues should be organized, possibly through regional training centres (RRTC) of WMO. NMSs should be encouraged to explore possibility of obtaining software through bilateral arrangements with those NMSs who are willing to make them available under some cooperation scheme.

Actions proposed

1. Prepare guidelines on essential elements of a good broadcast including the basic parameters (wind, weather, temperature) and additional parameters (e.g. state of the sea, phases of the moon, UV and heat indices, etc) and the presentation tools necessary to support them. (Gerald Fleming).
2. Compile a catalogue of readily available TV weather graphics packages, developed either commercially or by NMSs, indicating the kind of hardware required to operate them and price ranges for the whole system. In addition provide guidelines for simple presentation systems (e.g. power point) suitable for an NMS with no presentation facilities and a second set of guidelines for an NMS with some basic presentation facility. (Ahmed Al-Harthy).
3. Explore the possibility of arranging for training courses on dissemination and presentation to be conducted at RRTCs (Haleh Kootval).

National Media, Improved Communication

As these two topics were closely connected and the discussions flowed from one to the other they are combined for the purpose of this report. The discussions concentrated on how to develop better partnerships with the national media keeping in mind their requirements and constraints and the issue of "single official voice" especially as regards public warnings. The participants described their NMSs' practices and their own experiences in dealing with the media. These

ranged from friendly and mutually cooperative to unsatisfactory. It was interesting to note that in Fiji the NMS-media relationship has improved considerably as a result of PWS training workshops and visits by experts from neighbouring NMSs. Similar improvements took place in Kenya where confidence in the capability of NMS has grown as a result of better television presentations. On the whole, NMSs realize that they depend on a good relationship with the media to help them in informing the public and to improve their own visibility. The meeting agreed that NMSs should be encouraged :

- To establish procedures and mechanisms to deal with the media, particularly in times of severe weather, being mindful of the needs specific to newspapers (e.g. charts, background information), radio (e.g. telephone interviews), television (live coverage).
- To get to know the media's expectations and procedures, and to monitor their feedback.
- To cultivate working relationship with the media during periods of normal weather so that during severe weather the NMS can use the media effectively to inform the public correctly and in a timely manner. This could be achieved by setting up standing committees, organizing media workshops or more informally by inviting media representatives to social gatherings and events organized by the NMS.
- To adopt a "model" appropriate to their own culture and circumstance on how to designate staff to deal with media issues. This could be either a centralized system whereby a person or group are designated to act as "interface" or "buffer", directing the media to the appropriate information source, or a rotating shift of staff who all take turn to deal with the media. Alternatively a hierarchy from the most senior staff to shift forecasters could be designated to handle different media situations. In any case it is important that the staff dealing with the media are given appropriate training and where possible are selected for their natural talent in communication skill.
- To have an official story or "party line" available, and to speak as one single voice, no matter which of the above models they adopt. This is especially important during severe weather.
- TV weather producers should also be included in training activities of NMHSs aimed at weather presenters, in order for them to understand and appreciate issues involved in interaction between the NMSs and the media and thus to facilitate interaction and communication between producers and weather presenters.
- To respond to concerns about different sources of information on the Internet with a potential to confuse the public, the meeting suggested that NMSs may consider placing a disclaimer on their official web-sites indicating that only those sites carry the official meteorological information issued by the NMS.

Actions Proposed

- Prepare a short questionnaire for distribution to Members through the Secretariat to investigate the levels of qualification and experience of weather presenters with a view to encouraging NMSs to set scientific standards for broadcasters. Questions on broadcast facilities and training resources managed by NMSs should also be included (**Jose Rubiera**).
- Collate information on training opportunities in broadcast meteorology offered by institutions and centres other than NMSs (**Gerald Fleming**). The information obtained from both NMSs and other sources will be used by the Secretariat to respond to the requests of NMSs for training. In addition, NMSs with facilities and resources will be encouraged to provide training support to WMO on a regional basis.

Closure

In setting its work plan, the meeting agreed that in order to prepare adequate input to the work of the Expert Team on Product Development and Verification and Service Evaluation which is scheduled to meet in Hong Kong from 23-27 November 1999, most of the tasks should be completed by October, bearing in mind that where surveys are required, this may take longer.

The report of the expert team will be circulated to all members of the Open Programme Area Group (OPAG) on Public Weather Services for comments. A summary of the report and especially the proposed actions will be submitted to the Twelfth session of CBS in the year 2000 through the Chair of OPAG on PWS.

Appendix A

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<p>Sunday, 20 June</p> <p>9.30 am to 5.00 pm</p> <p>Rapporteur: Mr A. Al-Harthy</p>	<p>Theme: International Media</p> <p>Expert Team discussions with representatives of international broadcasters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Background to formulation of the Expert Team: requests from the WMO Constituent bodies. Report on relevant issues from 13th WMO Congress ■ Issues of concern to NMHSs ■ Issues of concern to international broadcasters ■ Formulation of proposals to address concerns ■ Summary conclusions
<p>Monday, 21 June</p> <p>8.30 am to 5.00 pm</p>	<p>Expert Team participation at the AMS 28th Conference on Broadcast Meteorology</p>
<p>Tuesday, 22 June</p> <p>9.00 am to 5.00 pm</p> <p>Rapporteur: Mr S. Muchemi</p>	<p>Theme: Technical Considerations</p> <p>Expert Team Meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dissemination issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ use of available technology for better dissemination ■ demands of users including newspapers, TV and radio ■ Presentation issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ developing guidelines for graphical presentation (design and contents) ■ challenges for better presentation ■ rules for better presentation ■ developing guidelines ■ Summary Conclusions
<p>Wednesday, 23 June</p> <p>8.30 am to 10.-30 am</p> <p>Rapporteur: Mr Alipate Waqicelua</p>	<p>Theme: The National Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Relationship with the national media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ how to develop better partnership ■ what are the needs of the national media (TV, radio, newspapers) ■ issues related to "single official source" as regards public warnings
<p>Followed by NOAA presentation and tour of the Kennedy Space Center</p>	
<p>Thursday, 24 June</p> <p>9.00 am to 5.00 pm</p> <p>Co-Rapporteurs: Mr Edwin Lai Mr Rabindranath</p>	<p>Theme: Improved Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ National media (continued) with summary conclusions ■ Necessity to develop skills to communicate better ■ Setting up a network to identify and access sources of information on hardware/software/presentation skills ■ Summary conclusions ■ Overall recommendations and conclusions of the Expert Team ■ Formulation of work plan

