

# WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION

## EXPERT TEAM ON COMMUNICATION ASPECTS OF PUBLIC WEATHER SERVICES (ET/COM)

Dubrovnik, Croatia

28 May – 2 June 2006



FINAL REPORT



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A meeting of the Expert Team on the Communication Aspects of PWS (ET/COM) was held in Dubrovnik, Croatia from 28 May to 2 June 2006 and was chaired by Mr Jon Gill (Australia). Under its terms of reference the Expert Team covered a broad range of issues including developing countries' needs to improve communication, partnerships with media organizations, user education, use of the Internet in the dissemination of early warnings, matters related to SWIC and WWIS, concepts of uncertainty and confidence in forecasts, media attributions, and communication with stakeholders concerning natural disasters.

The key conclusions from the main areas of the terms of reference of the Expert Team are summarized below.

### TOR (a)

- The Team reviewed progress on initiatives of ET/COM since the last meeting. The team noted the publication of Guidelines on Weather Broadcasting and the Use of Radio for the Delivery of Weather Information. Building on work undertaken at the last meeting, and in recognition of the growing importance of forecast uncertainty and confidence information in public weather products, the Team commenced work on a comprehensive set of Guidelines to assist NMHSs in the challenging task of effectively communicating this information. Previous initiatives of the team have included advisory material on how to achieve effective presentation of weather and climate information. To enhance this information, the Team commenced the preparation of a set of best-practice examples that illustrate effective presentation in a variety of situations, covering short and long-term weather events, routine and high-impact events, and using different media, including television, radio, print, internet and new mobile communications technologies.

### TOR (b)

- The Team continues to pursue and support WMO cross-cutting activities and initiatives with a focus on communication aspects of PWS. The Team continues to look for opportunities to collaborate with WMO Space Programme in the area of PWS product and service improvements. The Team has established a firm link with **THORPEX (The Observing-system Research and Predictability Experiment)** through the PWS Implementation Coordination Team (ICT). A major component of THORPEX focuses on the use of ensemble prediction systems to generate forecast confidence and uncertainty information - the development by the Team of a set of Guidelines on communicating this information will be of valuable assistance in this respect.

### TOR (c)

- The Team recognized the importance of identifying ways to meet the needs of developing countries in their efforts to improve the communication of PWS products and services. The set of 'best-practice' examples of effective weather presentation will emphasize examples from developing countries and will demonstrate that effective weather presentations do not necessarily require complex or expensive tools. Extra emphasis will be given to seasonal scale forecasts because of their particular importance to developing countries in the tropics.

#### **TOR (d)**

- The Expert Team recognized the importance of positive relationships with the media and that NMHSs and the media are partners in the communication of public weather services information. For the partnership to be effective, the information provided by NMHSs must be useful and appropriate to the needs of the media. The set of 'best-practice' examples that the Team is preparing will be very instructive in assisting NMHSs and media to recognize the qualities of effective information communication and how it can strengthen their relationships.

#### **TOR (e)**

- The Team continues to monitor the role of the Internet and other new technologies in the delivery of public weather services. Although these technologies offer many opportunities for effective communication, the message can sometimes be lost if it is presented too elaborately or with insufficient attention to user understanding. The set of best-practice examples will include PWS products and services that make exemplary use of the Internet and will help provide ideas for NMHSs on how they can most effectively use this medium.

#### **TOR (f)**

- The Team recognized that user understanding of weather information is essential if PWS services and products are to be properly utilized. The Team has established a firm link with the WMO Expert Group on Public Education and Outreach through the Chair of the ICT who is a member of the Expert Group. In addition, the best practice examples will include cases where NMHSs have provided good weather services explanatory information.

#### **TOR (g)**

- The Team discussed the importance of the provision of high quality weather services by skilled and knowledgeable presenters as being an essential element in enhancing the visibility and reputation of NMHSs. The best practice examples will give NMHSs good guidance on how to visually and verbally present weather information with a high degree of clarity. The importance of clear attribution of the NMHS (addressed under TOR (j)) will ensure that such services will enhance the 'brand' of the NMHS.

#### **TOR (h)**

- The WWIS and SWIC websites continue to play an important role in communicating authoritative forecast and warning information to the community and the team reviewed information about the usage of these sites. The Team will collaborate with the ET/SPI in the development of a simple brochure that promotes the websites and their role as sources of authoritative information and also examine ways to determine the usage by the media of these sites.

#### **TOR (i)**

- The Expert Team recognizes the growing importance and challenging nature of communicating uncertainty and confidence in PWS products and services. User understanding of forecast uncertainty information, including the terminology of probabilities, is an area that can benefit from some clear guidelines. Accordingly, the Team has commenced a comprehensive set of Guidelines on effective means of communicating forecast uncertainty and confidence.

**TOR (j)**

- The Team recognized the importance of NMHS attribution. The best-practice examples will include cases of effective NMHS attribution, including the use of NMHS logos on graphical products and services, and the verbal attribution of NMHS services as part of TV and radio weather presentations.

**TOR (k)**

- The Team recognized the importance of close partnerships between NMHSs and Emergency Managers or Civil Protection and the need to communicate crucial information on high impact weather in an understandable and timely way. The set of best practices will include examples of effective presentation of information to emergency managers and will be of benefit to NMHSs in maintaining this important partnership.

**TOR (l)**

- The Team noted the importance of coordinating its work with other relevant activities within WMO, including activities within Regional Associations. A survey has been prepared by the PWS OPAG that seeks information from other CBS OPAGs on their awareness and willingness to collaborate with the PWS Programme.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 A meeting of the Expert Team on the Communication Aspects of PWS (ET/COM) was held in Dubrovnik, Croatia from 28 May to 2 June 2006. The agenda of the meeting is attached as Annex II. The participants were welcomed by Mr Ivan Cacic, the Permanent Representative of Croatia with WMO and a member of the Expert Team. The meeting was chaired by Mr Jon Gill (Australia). The list of participants is given in Annex I. Ms Haleh Kootval (WMO Secretariat) welcomed the participants on behalf of the Secretary-General and provided background information on the work programme of the Team including the Terms of Reference and the associated deliverables as agreed by CBS-XIII. The Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Team are as follows:

- (a) Monitor and report on progress of earlier initiatives of ET-COM and make recommendations as appropriate to OPAG/PWS;**
- (b) Monitor and report on communications aspects of PWS that relate to support of major WMO cross-cutting activities such as Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, the WMO Space Programme and THORPEX;**
- (c) Identify ways to meet the needs of developing countries in their efforts to improve the communication of PWS products and services;**
- (d) Examine, report and recommend on ways of continuing to develop positive partnerships with national and international media organisations, and of assisting NMHSs to improve relations with the media;**
- (e) Examine, report and recommend on broader use of the Internet for early warnings and other public weather services products and the application of other new technologies that might enhance public weather services;**
- (f) Report and advise on ways of assisting NMHSs to enhance the education of users with a view to ensuring more effective use of PWS and enhancing the usefulness of new products and services;**
- (g) Promote awareness of the importance of the impact of high quality, well communicated and delivered public weather services on the image and visibility of the NMHS;**
- (h) Assess the use of the information compiled for the WWIS and SWIC websites by the media, and develop strategies for the improved exploitation of authorised and official weather information through the use of new and emerging technologies;**
- (i) Study and report on how to effectively communicate to end users the concepts of uncertainty and confidence that are increasingly available from the output of Ensemble Prediction Systems and other probabilistic forecasting systems;**
- (j) Noting the ongoing difficulty in media attribution of the role of NMHSs in providing basic services and infrastructure to support weather presentation to the public, review how this matter might be more effectively addressed and to develop advisory material;**
- (k) Noting the major media attention given to the increasing number of weather-related disasters and with a strong connection to the role of NMHSs in the affected countries, report on and develop preliminary guidance material on**

**how NMHSs might more effectively communicate with emergency managers, the media, and the public on meteorological aspects of disasters;**

**(I) Report and advise on collaborative activities with other CBS OPAGs and Technical Commissions.**

1.2 Each TOR was led by an expert who introduced and reported on the TOR.

**2. BACKGROUND**

2.1 The meeting was informed by Ms Kootval that the Thirteenth Session of the Commission for Basic Systems (CBS) (St Petersburg, February 2005) had approved the Terms of Reference of the Open Programme Area Group (OPAG) on PWS, which had been proposed by the Implementation Coordination Team on PWS. The work of the PWS Programme continues to be coordinated through three expert teams and an implementation and coordination team. These are the Expert Team on Services and Products Improvement (ET/SPI); the Expert Team on the Communication Aspects of PWS (ET/COM); the Expert Team on PWS in Support of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (ET/DPM); and the Implementation/Coordination (IC) Team on PWS. The terms of reference of all the teams had been modified by CBS-XIII to reflect the areas of work still outstanding or those which needed emphasis in each team. The subsequent changes in the membership of each team were based on the areas of expertise required accordingly.

2.2 The results of work under the various TORs of the Expert Team are summarized below.

**3. EXPERT TEAM WORK PROGRAMME**

**3.1 Report on progress of earlier initiatives of ET/COM**

3.1.1 The Chair of ET/COM provided the Team with a review of progress on initiatives of ET/COM since the last meeting.

3.1.2 The issue of improving the reach of NMHS products and services remains a strategic area of interest. Following the last meeting of ET/COM in Moscow, Russian Federation, in October 2003, a set of Guidelines entitled 'Weather Broadcasting and the Use of Radio for the Delivery of Weather Information' has been prepared.

3.1.3 The Expert Team recognizes the growing importance of communicating uncertainty and confidence in PWS products and services and prepared a report on this subject as part of the meeting in 2003. Since then, the importance of this issue has continued to grow and the PWS Programme has looked for further opportunities in this area. For example, a proposal has been submitted to the GEO Secretariat with a request for support in the design and preparation of training modules for the media to communicate risk to the public.

3.1.4 The SWIC/WWIS websites continue to play an important role in communicating authoritative forecast and warning information to the community, including the media. Flowing from outcomes of the ET/COM meeting in 2003, WMO members have been requested to add links to the SWIC and WWIS sites on their own websites. Following the 2003 meeting, an e-mail survey measuring media awareness of the WWIS and SWIC sites was recommended. This is intended to occur this year in time for the November meeting of CBS.

3.1.5 The first World Conference on Broadcast Meteorology was held in Barcelona in June 2004. Some members of ET/COM attended the Conference and made specific contributions to some of the key themes of the conference, including the communication of uncertainty, the importance of a single official voice for severe weather warnings and the role of weather broadcasters. The second World Conference on Broadcast Meteorology is currently being organized for November 2007 in Monterrey, Mexico.

### **3.2 Report on cross-cutting activities**

3.2.1 The Team noted that the WMO Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Programme has recently issued a comprehensive survey to WMO Members to determine disaster prevention and mitigation support activities and related programme services currently provided by NMHSs. When completed, the results from the survey will be used by the Team to focus future activities related to PWS communications.

3.2.2 The PWS programme has established a link to **THORPEX (The Observing-system Research and Predictability Experiment)**. THORPEX is a 10-year international research and development programme with a goal to accelerate improvements in the accuracy of one day to two-week high-impact weather forecasts for the benefit of society, the economy and the environment. One of the benefits of THORPEX will be the increased usage of ensemble prediction systems and probabilistic forecasts. The transition from deterministic to probabilistic forecasting will provide important opportunities for NMHSs to communicate forecast uncertainty and confidence information. The development by the Team of a set of Guidelines on communicating this information will be of valuable assistance in this respect (see paragraph 3.8).

3.2.3 A major subprogramme of THORPEX is Societal and Economic Research Applications which has important connections to the effective communication of public weather services and the role of NMHSs. THORPEX will develop a set of demonstration projects, particularly for developing countries where the visibility of NMHSs can often be poor. In recognition of THORPEX's important connection to public weather services, the OPAG PWS Chairman is a member of the THORPEX Societal and Economic Research Applications Working Group. To ensure continued collaboration between PWS and THORPEX, PWS will participate in THORPEX meetings and workshops as possible.

3.2.4 The Team noted the importance of coordinating its work with other relevant activities within WMO, including activities within Regional Associations. The Team recognized the need to keep abreast of the work of Regional Associations and actively look for opportunities to be involved. A survey has been prepared that seeks information from other CBS OPAGs on their awareness and willingness to collaborate with the PWS Programme. This will be helpful in strengthening linkages. **Each Team member will, as a first step, contact the Regional Rapporteurs in their Regional Association to coordinate relevant activities, as well as network with Sub-Regional groupings.**

3.2.5 The focus of ET/COM on communications aspects of PWS feeds into many other areas of the PWS OPAG, with collaborations in the following areas being a current emphasis:

- with ICT - contribute to a definitive template for weather broadcast training in the context of PWS; assist ICT in developing advice to CBS on accreditation schemes for weather broadcasters;

- with ET/SPI - assist with development of communication activities for WWIS/SWIC; collaborate in a survey to identify the emerging needs for new and improved PWS products and services with the emergency management community and media partners; contribute to ET/SPI involvement in THORPEX and the application of probabilistic forecast products and services;
- with ET/DPM - assist with communications activities in DPM, including booklets for school children, and other 'promotional' material.

### **3.3 Best-practice examples of effective communication of PWS Products and Services**

- 3.3.1 The Team has in the past produced a wide range of information and guidance on how to effectively communicate PWS products and services, including through television, radio, print and the Internet. Past reports of the Team have included extensive discussions on the principles of effective weather presentation and separate guidelines on these aspects have also been produced.
- 3.3.2 An effective method of instruction is to 'show by example'. Accordingly, the Team has commenced work on the development of a set of 'best-practice' examples of effective presentation and communication of PWS products and services. These examples are drawn from NMHSs around the world which demonstrate good communication methods. All media will be included, including television, radio, print and the Internet. A wide range of scenarios will be addressed, including routine daily weather presentations, severe weather events such as tropical cyclones, and high-impact long-term events such as drought.
- 3.3.3 A focus of the examples will be on effective language, the use of colour and other graphics elements and how to ensure effective, but unobtrusive attribution of the NMHS. New technologies, such as mobile telecommunications and 'pod-casting' will also be explored.
- 3.3.4 This activity cuts across a number of the Team's Terms of Reference and is seen as an effective way of addressing many of the issues in a single and useful manner.

### **3.4 Meeting the needs of developing countries**

- 3.4.1 The Team made particular emphasis in its discussions on the needs of developing countries in the communication of PWS services and products. Whilst some aspects of communications are becoming increasingly sophisticated from a technological point of view, many of the most effective methods are quite simple and cost-effective.
- 3.4.2 Many developing countries are located in the tropics where seasonal scale weather and climate can be more important than the day-to-day weather. The Team discussed the importance of developing ideas on how to communicate weather information in the tropics that is more closely tied to user needs. Working with relevant agencies in areas such as agriculture and health was also recognized as being an effective way of ensuring the relevance of NMHSs in this area.
- 3.4.3 In developing the examples of best practice in weather presentation (see para. 3.3), a focus will be placed on examples from developing countries and will demonstrate that effective weather presentations do not require complex or expensive tools, e.g. RANET. Extra emphasis will be given to seasonal scale forecasts because of their particular importance to developing countries in the tropics.

3.4.4 The Team noted the program sponsored by the UKMO to provide computer hardware, software and training to developing countries to support effective television weather presentations. The Team strongly supports this work.

### **3.5 Developing positive partnerships with the media**

3.5.1 The Expert Team recognized the importance of positive relationships with the media and that NMHSs and the media are partners in the communication of public weather services information.

3.5.2 For the partnership to be effective, the information provided by NMHSs must be useful and appropriate to the needs of the media. The set of 'best-practice' examples that the Team is preparing will be very instructive in assisting NMHSs to recognize the qualities of effective information communication and how it can strengthen media relationships.

3.5.3 The best-practice examples include cases in which the NMHSs have used clear, non-technical language that is consistent with the understanding of the media's audience. Often there is a different audience for different media, and even within the same media. For example, a routine radio broadcast aimed at farming groups has different requirements to a radio interview that is conducted during a severe weather event. The use of graphics is also addressed in the set of examples, with illustrations of good practice based on clear presentation, effective use of colour and simplicity of style.

3.5.4 The issue of NMHS attribution was discussed by the Team. When building and maintaining effective relationships with the media, it is important that the role of the NMHS is clearly communicated and promoted. This provides benefits to the media who are seen as communicators of authoritative information and also benefits the visibility of the NMHS. The best-practice examples will include cases of effective NMHS attribution, including the use of NMHS logos on graphical products and services, and the verbal attribution of NMHS services as part of TV and radio weather presentations.

3.5.5 The elements of best practice in media relationships were discussed. The use of the media to reach target audiences was seen as one major strength, e.g. radio broadcasts to farmers. The question of interruption of broadcasts to get across an important weather warning was discussed. A balance needs to be struck between giving the audience valuable information and not annoying them, or advertisers who may not want their audience distracted. The warnings need to be credible and important. Crawlers are a good way for messages on TV to be broadcast without overwriting the existing programme. Careful protocols need to be developed between the NMHS and broadcaster so that the system is effective.

### **3.6 Training on aspects of PWS communication**

3.6.1 The Team discussed a number of issues associated with the training of NMHS staff on weather presentation. When conducting training on weather presentation, it is important to have attendees who are actual practitioners who conduct (or are intending to conduct) weather presentations, as part of their duties. The Team agreed to develop some criteria that could be used to help identify appropriate trainers and trainees for such courses; these criteria will assist organizers of relevant courses in identifying who should attend.

- 3.6.2 The Team also recognizes that when conducting training on weather presentation, there can be significant benefits in involving communications specialists and appropriate media representatives as resource people.
- 3.6.3 There are some good examples of simple presentation technologies and associated training being provided to developing countries to help with their weather presentation requirements (see paragraph 3.4).
- 3.6.4 There now exist many opportunities to use web-based and other digital technologies for training. These can be in the form of prepared videos available for download or on DVD, as well as live, interactive 'classrooms' or 'virtual laboratory' conducted over the Internet. The tools for these methods are becoming increasingly cost-effective and easy to use.
- 3.6.5 The Team recognized that with the increasing use of the Internet to provide PWS products and services, there is a growing need of training on the best way to present information via this medium.

### **3.7 WWIS and SWIC websites**

- 3.7.1 The importance of these sites as sources of official information was reiterated by the Team. Progress with including forecast verification information is helpful in promoting these sites because it demonstrates the commitment to high quality and accountable services. Accordingly, the Team strongly endorses this work and the contribution it will make to promoting the authority of NMHS services.
- 3.7.2 The Team noted the intention of the ET/SPI to develop a simple brochure that promotes the websites and their role as sources of authoritative information. The Team will collaborate with ET/SPI on this very useful promotional initiative and work with NMHSs to ensure the brochure is circulated widely to media.

### **3.8 Communicating forecast uncertainty and confidence**

- 3.8.1 The Expert Team recognizes the growing importance of communicating uncertainty and confidence in PWS products and services and prepared a report on this subject as part of the meeting in 2003. Since then, the importance of this issue has continued to grow and the PWS Programme has looked for further opportunities in this area.
- 3.8.2 The development of ensemble prediction systems is one of the key advances in NWP in recent years and is being increasingly used to develop guidance information on forecast uncertainty and confidence. A major subprogramme of THORPEX specifically addresses this area.
- 3.8.3 The effective communication of forecast uncertainty and confidence information is a challenging area that can sometimes be overlooked. User understanding of forecast uncertainty information, including the terminology of probabilities, is an area that can benefit from some clear guidelines. Accordingly, the Team has commenced a comprehensive set of Guidelines on effective means of communicating forecast uncertainty and confidence.
- 3.8.4 The Team discussed the overall framework and layout of the Guidelines and made some preliminary observations about the most important aspects on which to focus. This included user understanding of probability information, how to visually represent this sort of information and how it is interpreted by users. Understanding of user

behaviours and psychology will also be addressed, including aspects such as the perceived significance of the probability of an event being influenced by the impact of that event.

#### **4. ACTION ITEMS**

4.1 The key conclusions arising from the meeting of ET/COM are given in the Executive Summary of this report. In addition, the Team agreed on a number of specific actions and commenced the preparation of advisory material and guidelines for distribution to NMHSs according to its Terms of Reference.

4.2 The Team agreed that each of its members would contact the Regional Rapporteurs in their Regional Association, as well as representatives of Sub-Regional groupings, to coordinate inter-related activities. Each team member will make initial contact with appropriate representatives by 15 August 2006. Ongoing liaison will then be maintained to ensure continuing coordination.

**Action: All team members, 15 August 2006**

4.3 The Team agreed to develop criteria to be used to help identify appropriate trainers and trainees for courses on PWS presentation. An initial draft of the guidelines will be prepared by Messrs Jon Gill and Sam Muchemi and Ms Claire Martin by 31 August 2006 and circulated to team members for comment.

**Action: Jon Gill, Sam Muchemi, Claire M. Morehen, 31 August 2006. Final version should be completed by: 31 October 2006**

4.4 The Team agreed to collaborate with ET/SPI on the production of a promotional brochure about the WWIS/SWIC websites. This brochure is currently being drafted by ET/SPI and Mr Jon Gill, Chair of ET/COM, has already supplied some feedback.

**Action: Jon Gill to provide feedback - done**

4.5 The Team agreed to, and commenced development of, a set of 'best-practice' examples of effective weather presentation in all media for distribution to NMHSs. Under the leadership of Ms Claire Martin, and with contributions from Messrs Sam Muchemi, Ivan Cacic and Jose Rubiera, an initial draft will be completed by 31 July 2006 and circulated to team members for comment. The final version should be completed by October 2006.

**Action: Claire Morehen, Sam Muchemi, Ivan Cacic, Jose Rubiera – draft by 31 July 2006. Final completion: October 2006**

4.6 The team agreed to the preparation of Guidelines entitled 'Communicating Forecast Uncertainty and Confidence'. Mr Jon Gill will lead the development of these Guidelines. An initial draft will be prepared by 31 December 2006 and circulated to team members, and more widely to other PWS Expert Teams and relevant WMO groups for comment. The final version should be completed by 30 June 2007.

**Action: Jon Gill, draft by 31 Dec 2006. Final completion: 30 June 2007**

PARTICIPANTS AT THE MEETING OF THE  
EXPERT TEAM ON COMMUNICATION ASPECTS OF PWS (ET/COM)

Dubrovnik, Croatia, 28 May – 2 June 2006

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## EXPERT TEAM ON COMMUNICATION ASPECTS OF PWS (ET/COM)

(Croatia, 28 May -2 June 2006)

### PROGRAMME

	Sunday, 28 May	Monday, 29 May	Tuesday, 30 May	Wednesday, 31 June	Thursday, 1 June
AM 0900	<b>1. Opening</b>  <b>2. Background Information and Objectives (Secretariat)</b>  <b>3. ET/COM work programme</b>  TORs (a, b, i, l): Discussions of key issues led by <b>Jon Gill</b>	TORs (e, h): Discussions of key issues led by <b>Roman Vilfand</b>  TOR (f,j): Discussions of key issues led by <b>Claire Martin</b>	Start individual group work under each TOR leading to related deliverables  All participants: prepare input for reports on each subject and for the report of the meeting  TORs (c, d, g): Best practice examples (deliverable3)	Presentation by sub-groups to the ET/COM  General discussion  Arrangements for follow-up actions under TORs  Prepare inputs for the Executive Summary of the meeting	Preparation of report of the Expert Team (continue)
1200					
	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>
PM 1330	TOR (c): Discussions of key issues led by <b>Sam Muchemi</b>  TORs (d,g): Discussions of key issues led by <b>Ivan Cacic</b>	TOR (k): Discussions of key issues led by <b>Jose Rubiera with the participation of all</b>  General discussion on ET/COM work	TOR (j): Advisory material (deliverable 2)  TORs (e, h): Promotional information (deliverables 5 and 6)  TOR (k): Guidelines (deliverable4)	<b>4. Preparation of report of the Expert Team</b>	Review and adoption of the report    <b>5. Closure</b>
1700					