

Expert Meeting on Public Weather Services

Second Session

(Geneva, 3-6 April 1995)

The Second Session of The Expert Meeting on Public Weather Services was held in Geneva from 3 to 6 April under the chairmanship of Dr Yan Hong (China). The meeting reviewed the actions that had been taken by the WMO Secretariat since the first Expert Meeting, held in March 1994.

The meeting recalled that the Commission for Basic Systems (CBS) had requested that high priority be given to producing a preliminary Guide to Public Weather Services Practices as soon as possible. This priority arose from global concerns regarding the impact of natural disasters and the recognition by governments that meteorological and hydrological services, such as advance warnings of extreme events can assist in mitigating their worst effects. In addition, while the impacts of disasters heighten and focus public support for improvements in meteorological and hydrological warnings and forecasts, the socio-economic value of such programmes is now increasingly recognized.

Accordingly, the participants devoted most of the meeting to detailed review and revision of the draft preliminary Guide that had been prepared by a consultant. Following extended discussions the revised version of the document was finalized for consideration by CBS. It was ensured that the Guide reflected the variations in national practices that exist where public weather services are concerned, particularly in relation to National Meteorological Services (NMSs) policies, private sector involvement, and commercial activities by NMSs. Since it addresses the issue of modernization of public weather services, the Guide, in its final form, is likely to have a wide readership. Consequently, the development of a structure for the document was debated at length and it was agreed that the structure should allow the periodic updating of the Guide with new information on public weather services products and practices to ensure that it does not become outdated.

In addition to preparation of the draft Guide the Secretariat had taken actions in response to the concerns expressed by the Executive Council and the CBS regarding the proliferation of weather forecasts from different sources in the media and, in particular international television broadcasts by satellite communications. The meeting noted that discussions had been initiated with organizations which produce and disseminate these forecasts with a view to agreeing on "a best practice " and a common policy. Initial meetings with representatives of several international broadcast and print media companies have been fruitful and demonstrated willingness of the international media to cooperate with NMSs and WMO.

The meeting was also informed that public weather services presentations had been given at the Training Workshop on TV Presentation Systems and Communication Skills, held in Nairobi, Kenya in November 1994 and at the International Forecasters Festival held in Issy-les- Moulineaux, France in March 1995. More comprehensive presentations were planned for the Training Workshop on Public Weather Services with Particular Emphasis on TV Weather Presentation Systems and Communication Skills in Singapore from 24 April to 5 May 1995. It was also noted that Regional Associations I ,V, and VI had been briefed on the Public Weather Services Programme during their respective eleventh sessions, and that they had been supportive of the actions taken to meet the objectives of the Programme.

The meeting was briefed on the activities to mark the World Meteorological Day 1995 under the theme "Public Weather Services", including preparation of a message from the Secretary-General and a booklet on the theme of Public Weather Services.

The participants presented substantive reports on the following themes:

- Building the public weather services capacity of NMSs;
- Increasing the visibility of NMSs in the area of public weather services;
- Public education component of public weather services;
- Public weather services in the era of information highway;
- Partnerships between NMSs and private sector.

Finally the meeting addressed several issues in respect to its future work. The requirement to improve the public weather services in both developing and developed countries, the need for further development of the Public Weather Services Programme, and the importance of establishing good relations with a broad spectrum of clients such as the media, private sector (both domestic and international) and other WMO Members were among the topics considered.

The meeting closed on the theme of urgency in addressing key tasks , particularly completion of editorial work on the Guide, and design of a survey of public weather services practices of WMO Members.

(H.Kootval)