

WORKSHOP ON PUBLIC WEATHER SERVICES  
FOR PARTICIPANTS FROM RAI AND RAV MEMBERS  
IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

**MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA**

26-30 October 1998

At the kind invitation of the Government of Australia, a workshop on Public Weather Services was organized at the Australian Bureau of Meteorology training Centre (BMTc) in Melbourne from 26 to 30 October 1998. The 13 participants at the workshop were meteorologists mostly from Small Island Developing States in the South Indian and the South Pacific Oceans.

The workshop was opened by Dr J. W. Zillman, Director of Meteorology and the Permanent Representative of Australia with WMO who welcomed the participants and emphasized the importance that the Bureau and he personally attached to the importance of a strong and high quality public weather services programme because these services represent a very visible return on the public and government investments in meteorological infrastructure. He touched upon several important areas of PWS but in particular the importance of building a good partnership with the media.

The workshop programme started by an outline of the objectives and structure of the workshop, followed by an introduction to the WMO PWS Programme in which the scope and objectives, methods to improve national PWS Programmes through a planning framework and a set of guiding principles, and the essential elements for a successful public weather services programme were presented to the participants. Several common causes of concern were identified when the participants described their national PWS Programmes. Disseminating the information and especially warnings to the public was identified as a major difficulty. The issue of (at times difficult) relationships with the media and other government organizations in particular the civil defense authorities was another major concern. As the overall theme of the workshop was "Improving Your Public Weather Services" and a major objective was to get the participants to develop a plan to do so by the end of the workshop, one of the early presentations concentrated on developing a vision and plan for this purpose.

During a visit to the Victoria Regional Office, the participants obtained an insight into how a very busy forecast office operated especially on a day that unseasonable cold weather had attracted much public and media attention to the weather. They also could watch and hear the senior forecaster doing a cross with a local radio station and go on air live.

Developing a user focus and its importance to the success of a national PWS programme was dealt with at the outset and emphasized throughout the workshop. As a very special user group, the emergency management and severe weather received a special focus, followed by users of seasonal and

climate forecasts with special attention to the recent El Niño episode and the following La Niña phase in the region.

Due to the important role of the media in PWS, a whole day was set aside to deal with the role and use of the media, including the development of newspaper graphics, the bases for television and radio weather presentations, developing skills in dealing with difficult media situations, and a visit to the television studios to watch a weather presenter in preparation and presentation of a live broadcast. During presentations by well-known TV and radio personalities the participants received valuable advice on how to establish good relationships with the media as partners to NMSs, how to handle the media with efficiency, how to persuade them to cooperate closely with NMSs in getting accurate information to the public, and the different needs and possibilities offered by different media. Practical work under the supervision of experienced journalists on preparing material for the media included writing press releases and conducting radio interviews. Responding to a changing environment in meteorology both at national and international levels, the importance of evaluating products and services, public education and awareness, and a session on the Internet entitled " Internet: Friend or foe?" preceded a practical session on development of presentation skills which was rated as especially useful by the participants.

As the final part of the workshop and prior to receiving their certificates, the participants completed the draft of their action plans for the improvement of their national PWS programmes, taking into consideration the level of development and infrastructure of their respective Services and presented them to the whole group.