

Training Workshop

on Public Weather and Warning Services

Nadi, Fiji, 1-5 September 1997

At the kind invitation of the Government of Fiji, a Training Workshop on Public weather and Warning Services was organized jointly by WMO and the European Union in Nadi, Fiji, from 1-5 September 1997. The workshop in which thirteen participants from twelve Small Island States in the Southern Pacific took part, was one of the activities planned under the South Pacific Tropical Cyclone Warning Upgrade Project funded by the European Union. It aimed to fulfill the objectives of the Project which were to improve the overall quality and content of information in tropical cyclone warning messages and to ensure that the public and other users of those messages understood the information they received through those warnings, and equally important knew how to react to that information.

Prof. A. Auger (New Zealand Meteorological Services), Mr K. O'Loughlin (Australian Bureau of Meteorology), and Mr R. Gell (TV Channel 9, Melbourne) were the invited resource persons at the workshop.

As the first step the participants made presentations on their respective NMHSs and in particular their public weather services structures and methods of service delivery to the public. As part of the structure of the workshop, the participants had to present plans at the end of the week on how they could translate the knowledge they had gained into ideas to improve their national PWS. To set the scene therefore, lectures and presentations were given to outline the objectives of the PWS Programme, its guiding principles, and what constituted a successful PWS programme.

As the emphasis of the workshop was on the provision of weather and warning services to the public, topics dealing with severe local storms and tropical cyclones, the role of PWS in support of disaster preparedness plans and activities, and public education and understanding were given special attention. The participants were encouraged to take steps to improve relations with disaster managers through improving operational level contacts and setting up joint planning meetings, and gaining formal membership of disaster management committees and councils.

In this connection the importance of a successful partnership with the media was highlighted and the participants spent a session on practical work to prepare suitable material for presentation through the press, radio and telephone. A day trip to Suva and visits to the television and radio studios where weather broadcasts are made, and the South Pacific Forum Secretariat complimented the lectures and the practical session. Round table discussions with the media liaison officer at the Forum Secretariat, and the training officer

at the Regional Media Centre of the South Pacific Commission provided a first hand experience for the participants to better appreciate the requirements of the media for suitably prepared weather information and timeliness.

During the last session the participants presented their individual plans for the improvement of their PWS taking into account needs of the public, disaster managers, presentation and dissemination issues, and the role of PWS in assisting weather-sensitive economic sectors. The list of ideas put forward by participants was quite comprehensive and included some fifty items among which were the need for: establishing closer contact with clients to understand their requirements; working with educational institutions; improving communication in the region; providing more media training to staff, especially on writing for newspapers; inviting disaster managers regularly for briefing session; and surveying user needs and level of their satisfaction with current provision of public weather services.