

## WORKSHOP ON PUBLIC WEATHER SERVICES WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON STORM SURGES

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A Workshop on Public Weather Services with Particular Focus on Storm Surges in the South West Pacific was organized as part of the sixth session of the RAV Tropical Cyclone Committee, in Honolulu from 14 to 16 October 1996. The Workshop focused on disaster reduction to reflect the concern of WMO with, and the importance it attaches to, the activities to implement the objectives of the IDNDR. The Workshop was opened by Maj. General Edward V. Richardson, Director, Hawaii State Civil Defense and its work started with an overview of the PWS Programme and its objectives by Ms Haleh Kootval, Chief of the Public Weather and Operational Information Unit of WMO. She stated that the guidelines contained in the Programme were not prescriptive; rather they were supposed to provide NMSs with sufficient information and guidance on how to develop their own public weather services.

Mr Stephen Ready, Chairman of the RAV-TCC gave a presentation entitled 'Exchange and Coordination of Hazardous Weather Information' which focused on the preparedness, warnings and response elements in the South Pacific region. In a second presentation by Ms Kootval, the role of public weather services in support of disaster preparedness was elaborated on. In the discussions that followed the presentations, several important issues including the necessity of identifying only one national authority responsible for issuing warnings, the impact of international television broadcasts on NMSs, the need for better coordination between disaster managements and NMSs, communication difficulties due to the variety of languages spoken in the region, use and interpretation of terminology, and the need for better representation of NMSs in the planning and implementation stages of disaster preparedness plans were identified by the participants.

A full day of the workshop was dedicated to storm surges and related topics. Excellent papers were presented by numerical modellers, operational forecasters, and disaster managers from across the region. The presence of representatives from the disaster management community provided a unique opportunity for discussions and exchange of views with meteorologists on the impact of storm surges on islands and coastal areas in the Pacific, emergency planning for storm surges, and coordination with public safety and civil defense agencies.

Presentations were also made on efforts in raising public awareness in dealing with disasters and a number of success stories were reported by the participants. In all cases, the importance of educating the public and working closely with national disaster management authorities and other organizations were common themes.

The workshop was rounded up with a review of its work and formulation of a number of recommendations including a regional attempt to agree on clear and concise terminology of warnings for the public and media, an undertaking

of risk assessment for storm surges, forging closer links and coordination among the entire disaster preparedness community, holding regular training sessions and meetings between NMSs and emergency preparedness personnel to foster good relationships, and conducting surveys on the needs of customers including the weather sensitive industries and agencies for meteorological information.

The workshop was judged a success by the participants and the meeting recommended that follow-up workshops be held in conjunction with the future sessions of the RA V Tropical Cyclone Committee.