

Report from the Rapporteur on Public Weather Services

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Introduction

1. Following the Regional Association's consideration and endorsement of the direction and activities being pursued under the Public Weather Services Programme in the Region at its Twelfth Session, the programme has been modified and re-focussed in the light of discussions at Thirteenth Congress (May 1999), and detailed consideration at the Twelfth Session of the Commission for Basic Systems (Geneva, November/December 2000). The most recent Session of the Executive Council has also addressed an aspect of Public Weather Services that will have some impacts on broader WWW planning.
2. The issue of support to Members in the improvement of their Public Weather Services has increased in importance due to the pressure on NMSs to improve their visibility and status through the delivery of effective, high quality weather services to the public and because of the rapid developments in areas such as international television broadcasting and the Internet.
3. Noteworthy activities in the Region since the last RA V Session include the holding of further successful training workshops, the development of some high quality NMS Internet sites, the introduction of a trial Web sites for the international exchange of warnings and cities forecasts, and the success of linking the WMO Public Weather Services Programme to the weather support provided for the Sydney Olympics.

The CBS OPAG on Public Weather Services

4. The work of the Public Weather Services Programme is being undertaken through the Commission for Basic Systems' Open Programme Area Group (OPAG) on Public Weather Services. This OPAG established in late 2000 has three Expert Teams addressing:
 - Product Development and Service Assessment
 - Media Issues; and
 - Warnings and Forecasts Exchange, Understanding and Use.
5. There is also an Implementation and Coordination Team consisting of the chairs of each of the Expert Teams, regional rapporteurs, developing country representatives and the chair and co-chair of the OPAG.
6. The Expert Team on Media Issues met in Minneapolis in June 2001 in conjunction with the American Meteorological Society's 30th Conference on Broadcast Meteorology. This Team is tasked with developing guidelines on improving the use of official information by the media, including attribution, improving media relations and the use of weather on the Internet.

7. The Expert Team on Product Development and Service Assessment is meeting in Honolulu 3-7 December at the same time as the RA V WWW meeting.

8. The Expert Team on Warnings and Forecast exchange, Understanding and Use will meet in 2002 but has already accomplished substantial work on the development of trial Web sites for the placement of Warnings and Cities Forecasts, as discussed below.

Publications and Training Activities

9. The second edition of the Guide to Public Weather services Practices was published in January 2000. The Public Weather Services Programme has produced or has in production a number of more detailed Guidelines dealing with issues including forecast verification and user based evaluation, technical aspects of systems used in public weather service presentation and dissemination, dealing with the media and the Internet, and the effective use of graphical presentation of weather information.

10. A number of Training Workshops on Public Weather Services have been held in the Region since the last RA Session:

- a Workshop on Public Weather Services for RA I and RA V held in Melbourne in October 1998;
- the second Fiji Workshop on Public Weather Services in Nadi in October 1999; and
- a Workshop on Public Weather Services for Small Island Developing States in Melbourne in October 2000.

Regional Issues

11. International television weather broadcasts remain a concern from the point of view of consistency with local warnings and also recognition of the role of NMSs. Discussions international media representatives undertaken by WMO indicated a willingness to cooperate in principle but identified practical problems of the TV networks obtaining access to locally issued warnings. Consideration of a WMO Web site for warnings is part of the response to identification of this problem.

12. The rapid development of the Internet continues to provide challenges and opportunities for NMSs in the Region. On the one hand the availability of a wide range of weather information on the Internet has presented a threat to NMSs in some countries in that the meteorological user community can access this information. On the other hand the users often require some analysis and interpretation of the information and this can enhance the role of the NMS if it has access to the information and can add the interpretation. Most NMSs have had to address the issues of suitable hardware, software and communications capability to take advantage of the Internet. The standard of Internet sites operated by NMSs has risen substantially and there are now numerous excellent examples.

13. The trial of a Web site to act as a collective point for cities forecasts is being coordinated through the Public Weather Services Programme and implemented by Hong Kong China. A proposal for a similar site for the placement of official warnings is also being developed with the assistance of Hong Kong, China.

14. The public weather aspects of the Sydney 2000 Olympics proved popular and a link to the WMO Web site provided access to the sites of all Members who maintain a Web site link to the WMO site. The conduct of a Forecast Demonstration Project on Nowcasting under the World Weather Research Programme has given some interesting indications of the kind of forecast and warning products that NMSs will need to consider for possible operational use in the future. These developments will have implications for both national and WWW information systems.

15. The needs of the Public Weather Services Programme were identified as an issue at the technical conference on a new WMO Information System held in conjunction with the CBS Twelfth Session. It is usually easier and less expensive to build in anticipated system capability

to enable end user needs different types of Public Weather Services, than to add these on to the infrastructure at a later stage.

16. A further issue for consideration by WWW is that raised by the most recent session of Executive Council concerning the need for some standardization of formats for public weather forecasts and warnings to facilitate greater international exchange of these products. At the moment there are few standards or agreed formats even for something as simple as city précis forecasts.

17. Another emerging issue for likely consideration by WWW regionally is the increased interest in and capability to produce air quality forecasts, derived in part from NWP output. While they are mostly experimental several examples now exist of operational services with publicly available information.

18. In the area of Public Weather Services for emergency management, needs are emerging for improved access to and presentation of weather information in actual or potential disaster situations. In particular there is a rising demand for graphical information and for presentation of data and forecast products in formats compatible with geographic information systems.