

Report on the Thirteen Meeting of the Working Group on Cooperation between European Forecasters (WGCEF)

Euroforum, St Lorenzo de El Escorial, Spain, 5th October 2007

Introduction

The thirteenth annual meeting of the WGCEF was held on the afternoon of Friday 5th October 2007 in St Lorenzo de El Escorial, immediately following the end of the ECAM/EMS meeting. The meeting was opened by Nick Grahame (Chairperson, WGCEF) who welcomed everyone and then handed over to Fermin Elizaga who greeted the group on behalf of the INM. Nick Grahame expressed his gratitude to the INM for hosting the meeting and thanked Angel Alcazar and Martina Junge (EMS Secretary, not present) for helping to set up the meeting.

Copies of the agenda were circulated and a final agenda agreed. In total, there were 27 participants representing 18 Meteorological Services across Europe. Adamantia Vlasi was an invited guest whilst apologies and best wishes were read out from those who couldn't attend the meeting (e.g. Manfred Kurz)

Actions from last meeting

- 12.1 Polish Met Service to be contacted to see if they can be represented in WGCEF (Nick Grahame) – email sent but no reply. Will try again.
- 12.2 Liaise with European Meteorological Society (EMS) to see how many other remaining European NMS's are interested in providing a representative for WGCEF (Nick Grahame/Tomas Halenka) – Frank Kroonenberg has approached Serbia.
- 12.3 Develop a password protected operational forecaster database (Nick Grahame/Frank Kroonenberg) – complete
- 12.4 Copy of latest WGCEF newsletter to be sent to a WMO representative (Bernard Roulet) – complete
- 12.5 Provide links to WMO and Meteoalarm from WGCEF website (Andre-Charles Letestu) - complete
- 12.6 Group members to propose extension of PEPS to 48 hours (All/Dirk Heizenreder) - ongoing
- 12.7 Updates to members on progress with EUMETNET proposal for common format of forecasts (Jean Quiby) – to follow after October 2007 meeting
- 12.8 Group members to provide user requirement for above proposal (All) – linked to above and ongoing
- 12.9 Exchange of AutoTAF software (Dirk Heizenreder/Antii Pelkonen) – contact to become close.
- 12.10 Propose topics on 'Probability Forecasting' and 'Forecasting Impacts' at the 2007 meeting (Nick Grahame) – complete.

Report of the chairperson of the WGCEF

The chairperson informed the group of past members who have stood down due to other commitments. These included Ana Casals (Spain), Dirk Heizenreder (Germany), Giuseppe Frustaci (Italy) and Branko Gregorcic (Slovenia). They have been replaced respectively by Angel Alcazar, Klaus Baehnke, Teodoro La Rocca and Janez Marosek. Sverker Hellstrom (Sweden) had also suggested that he might not be able to remain a member of the group but would be naming a successor if that were to be the case. Therefore the number of countries represented within the group remains at 32.

A text message had been received from Liisa Fredrikson saying that things were progressing well. Antti Pelkonen (Finland) added that he had been in contact with Liisa more recently and said that she sent her regards. The group reciprocated.

A major advance took place in Spring 2007 when Meteoalarm was launched officially (more details can be found later in this newsletter). Close liaison with WMO has also led to Meteoalarm being incorporated into the Severe Weather Information Centre (SWIC) on the WMO website. The chairperson also noted that Meteoalarm has been well received within the meteorological community based on comments during the ECAM meeting. Prior to the launch of Meteoalarm, a vicious wind storm affected large areas of northern Europe on 18 January. The Met Office contacted other European NMS's around this time to compare model output.

Jean Quiby (Eumetnet) had been asked to the meeting but had to decline because of an important forthcoming meeting on interoperability. He promised the chairperson to provide an update on this important Eumetnet sponsored activity.

Finally, Nick Grahame announced that the Met Office had appointed a new Chief Executive (John Hirst).

At this point, Aurora Stan-Sion (Romania) requested a short open debate on the importance of the human factor in the forecasting process and management of pressure and stresses. It was agreed by all that the forecaster is under greater pressure than ever before in terms of assimilating and interpretation of increasing amounts of information whilst delivering to higher levels of expectation. Nick Grahame mentioned that there had been a presentation at ECAM by Marco Gaia (Switzerland) that had raised this very issue. Marco's article appears later in this newsletter.

Aurora raised the importance of appropriate levels of training relating to decision-making and stress management in addition to the more traditional elements of meteorological theory. Essentially it is a plea to invest in the human factors involved in the forecasting process. Herbert Gmoser (Austria) suggested that the role of the forecaster should be focussed on 'adding value' in key situations with less involvement in routine tasks. Will Lang (United Kingdom) and Frank Kroonenberg (Netherlands) put forward a proposal to discuss and share experiences of the stresses of shift working. Michael Walsh (Ireland) suggested that the first step should be to see how each NMS deals with severe weather. It was agreed that actions would be put forward (see later). One other factor (raised by Herbert) is that forecaster 'added value' is difficult to assess and this needs to be addressed and acknowledged.

Discussion of Newsletter No.12 and WGCEF website

Nick Grahame mentioned that the articles had been sent in within the timescales requested and that Will Lang had helped in editing and proof-reading them. All contributions were sent to Bernard Roulet (France) by early June 2007 and many thanks once again go to Meteo-France for publishing the newsletter in time for the meeting. The front cover (chosen by Bernard) highlights the importance of the next-generation European satellite program. Copies of the finalised newsletter will be distributed to directors of European National Meteorological Services (NMS's), Eumetnet and the EMS.

Andre-Charles Letestu (Switzerland) continues as webmaster for our site www.euroforecaster.org and Nick Grahame thanked him for his hard work in maintaining up-to-date information.

Meteoalarm update

Frank Kroonenberg described developments since the much published official launch of Meteoalarm in March 2007. Visitor numbers peaked again in July 2007 with the enhanced interest in flooding across parts of the United Kingdom and the intense heatwave across eastern Europe. There are many challenges ahead in order to realise the full potential of Meteoalarm, including greater visibility within NMS websites and further integration with other agencies with environmental responsibilities. Merike Merilain (Estonia) announced that her country was the latest addition to the Meteoalarm consortium in September 2007.

Contributions from WGCEF members

The enthusiastic response to contributions was again noted and highlights the importance of the meeting to provide the opportunity for sharing information. Following action 12.10 (from the last meeting), the contributions were split into two topics

Forecasting Impacts:

Angel Alcazar (Spain) – Warning Statistics at the INM

Fracisco Martin (Spain) – Extratropical Transition of Tropical Storm Delta in the Canary Islands

Andre-Charles Letestu (Switzerland) – Forecasting heavy rain in the Alps (Project MAP-D phase)

Chryssoula Petrou (Greece) – The heat waves in Greece

Janez Markosek (Slovenia) – An extreme rainfall event in Slovenia

A break for coffee allowed the group photo to be taken outside the Euroforum building.

Probability Forecasting:

Carlos Santos (Spain) – Multi Model Short Range Ensemble Forecasting at INM

Benito Elvira (Spain) – Operational Use of EPS for Medium Range Forecasting in Spain

Herbert Gmoser (Austria) – Evaluation of seasonal forecasts at ZAMG

Bernard Roulet (France) – AROME: The new high resolution model of Meteo- France

Details of most of the above presentations can be found on the WGCEF website.

Listed actions from this meeting

- 13.1 Investigate the current issues specific to shift-working forecasters in European NMS's (Aurora Stan-Sion, Frank Kroonenberg, Nick Grahame)
- 13.2 Set up a survey via e-mail or our website on perceived pressures in each European NMS, particularly in severe weather situations (Frank Kroonenberg, Nick Grahame)
- 13.3 Propose topic on 'Verification of warnings and feedback into best practice' at next meeting and send a questionnaire to forecasters (Herbert Gmoser, Aurora Stan-Sion)
- 13.4 Updates to members on progress with Eumetnet proposal for common format of forecasts (Jean Quiby)

Election of new Chairperson and Vice-chairperson

The group elects a new Chairperson and Vice-chairperson every four years. Nick Grahame proposed that Frank Kroonenberg should take on the role of Chairperson and this was passed on a unanimous vote. Frank thanked the outgoing Chairperson for his work in taking the WGCEF forward over the past four years and stated that the group has an important role to play in the future and he was proud to take up the challenge. Herbert Gmoser was proposed as the new Vice-chairperson and this was accepted. Nick Grahame announced that he would be happy to remain as editor of the newsletter (with Will Lang).

Plan of action for 2008

Nick Grahame highlighted the fact that forecasting has never had such a high profile as at present, mainly because of increased public awareness of climate change and extreme weather events. Thus, there is a real challenge for European forecasters to work more closely with researchers, other government organisations and of course, together (e.g. Meteoalarm, Windstorms etc) on timescales from nowcasting to seasonal forecasting. There is also a need for increased flexibility in exchanging forecast information for the common good. Such increased responsibility on the forecaster must however be recognised and the WGCEF should consider the best ways to take the 'human element' forward.

Date and place of next meeting

Nikolaj Weber (Denmark) kindly offered Copenhagen to host the 2008 meeting. This was to put to the vote and accepted. The group agreed that the optimum date would be on the Saturday immediately following eighth EMS meeting scheduled for Amsterdam. This would allow members to attend both meetings with minimal travel. Further details will be put on the website.

AOB (any other business) and closing of meeting

There was no other business so the Chairperson closed the meeting at 1915.

Other related events

A dinner had been arranged on the evening of 5th October by INM at the Meson La Cueva restaurant in the centre of St Lorenzo de El Escorial. The venue had a good deal of charm and the group enjoyed a typical tapas meal that was accompanied by traditional Spanish music. Frank Kroonenberg (Chairperson elect) once again thanked the members of INM for hosting the meeting and treating the group members to a 'taste of Spanish life'.

Nick Grahame
Chairperson WGCEF

Appendix 1

List of participants:

Bernard Roulet (France),
Antti Pelkonen (Finland),
Marta Sallai (Hungary),
Imra Bonte (Hungary),
Michael Walsh (Ireland),
Chryssoula Petrou (Greece),
Adamantia Vlassi (Greece),
Will Lang (United Kingdom),
Frank Kroonenberg (Netherlands),
Nick Grahame (United Kingdom),
Klaus Baehnke (Germany),
Herbert Gmoser (Austria),
Andre-Charles Letestu (Switzerland),

Claude Sales (Luxembourg),
Aurora Stan-Sion (Romania),
Jean Nemeghaire (Belgium),
Ole Kristensen (Denmark),
Nikolaj Weber (Denmark),
Janez Markosek (Slovenia),
Karen-Helen Doublet (Norway),
Merike Merilain (Estonia),
Taimi Paljak (Estonia),
Fermin Elizaga (Spain),
Angel Alcazar (Spain),
Benito Elvira (Spain),
Carlos Santos (Spain),
Francisco Martin (Spain)