

Minutes of the WGCEF 2012 Annual Meeting

Lithuanian Hydrometeorological Service, Vilnius, Lithuania

5th October 2012



Present:

Frank Kroonenberg (Netherlands, Chair -2012), Will Lang (UK, Vice-Chair, Chair 2012-)

Klaus Baenke (Germany), Brice Briere (Luxembourg), Imre Bonta (Hungary), Evelyn Cusack (Ireland), Christian Csekits (Austria), Karen-Helen Doublet (Norway), Alessandro Fuccello (Italy), Andre-Charles Letestu (Switzerland), Jean Nemeghaire (Belgium), Lola Olmeda (Spain), Taimi Paljak (Estonia), Antti Pelkonen (Finland), Vida Raliene (Lithuania), Bernard Roulet (France), Zoran Vakula (Croatia), Andris Viksna (Latvia)

Introductions

Vida Augliene (Director, LHMS) welcomed the group to Vilnius, noting its location at the 'geographical centre of Europe'. She explained that the LHMS sits within the Ministry of Environment. It has 296 staff, including 100 in Vilnius. Half of this total have a university education. The total includes 110 meteorological and hydrological observers. Unusually (and perhaps uniquely!) for a European NMS, most (73%) of its staff are female.

LHMS has a strong involvement in weather activities across Europe and within the global meteorological community, for example through WMO, Eumetnet,

Eumetcal and the HIRLAM consortium. They place a high priority on these collaborative activities, particularly as a means of developing staff.

The LHMS website meteo.lt has grown in popularity, having 6 million visits in 2008 and 24 million in 2011. They are currently undertaking a 1.2m Euro project to enhance their internet capability further, due to be completed in 2014.

Vida Raliene then gave an overview of LMHS's forecasting operations, explaining their responsibilities in the public, marine, aviation and civil protection sectors. They have 11 operational forecasters, in addition to a Chief and a Head.

Chairperson's Introduction

Frank welcomed the new members to the group (Brice, Taimi and Andres). The agenda was agreed, and minutes from the Bergen 2011 meeting were judged to have been completed.

Frank noted that an impressive 17 countries were represented at the current meeting, and thanked Vida and her team for hosting the meeting and providing the evening meal.

The main theme of Frank's opening address was the perception of our forecasts by the general public (and by other users). In the Netherlands, and perhaps elsewhere, the public can sometimes be unsatisfied by the negative aspects of forecasts, and their (understandable) emphasis on poor weather. He cited the case of owners of 'beach clubs' in the Netherlands who had complained that weather forecasts which stressed negative aspects of the weather were affecting their businesses. He explained that Dutch commercial weather providers have agreed to be more positive in the wording of their forecasts when possible, and asked whether European NMSs might consider a similar approach.

Frank then announced his intention to step down as Chair of the group and to hand over to Will, as agreed at the Bergen meeting. He invited members of the group to nominate a new Vice-Chair to replace Will. Zoran nominated Evelyn Cusack, and this nomination was supported by the rest of the group. Evelyn then agreed to become the new Vice-Chair of the WGCEF. Will took over as Chair for the rest of the meeting.

Newsletter

All group members present expressed their satisfaction with the 17th edition of the WGCEF newsletter. Bernard confirmed that the Director of Meteo France was 'flattered' by the letter of gratitude he had received from the Chair last year, and that Meteo France would continue to publish the newsletter on behalf of the group. This offer of continued support was warmly accepted.

Website

Andre-Charles led a discussion on the 'new look' WGCEF website. It was agreed that the new site was a major improvement, and offered new opportunities for networking and collaboration between

members. It was suggested that the site (and indeed the group in general) would benefit from a new logo. Brice volunteered to source this. Alessandro suggested that the site could become a forum for 'real-time' case studies, and the group agreed to try using the site for this purpose. It was also agreed that the links to other sites could be re-ordered to give more emphasis to Meteoalarm.

Andre-Charles was thanked for his efforts in maintaining the website, as were the other members of the group who had contributed to the redesign.

Eumetnet Proposals

Frank and Will explained the background to the proposal for the group to officially become a Eumetnet Working Group. After discussions around the mutual benefits of links between WGCEF and Eumetnet, the group unanimously agreed the following response to the proposal:

1. We are eager to link with the Forecasting Programme of Eumetnet for a trial period of two years.
2. We will look to arranging a connection with Eumetnet that does not entail a significant drain in resources or additional workload for WGCEF member and chairpersons.
3. Will Lang will take up an action to inform the members of the group not present at this meeting of our decision.
4. Will Lang (also on behalf of Frank Kroonenberg) will inform Steve Noyes (Eumetnet Director) of our positive decision.

Group Membership

After the Eumetnet discussions, a brief discussion followed about WGCEF membership. It was agreed that membership should be as representative of the European forecasting community as possible, and therefore that we should try to ensure each nation had the opportunity to have an active representative within the group.

Will agreed to coordinate an effort to address these issues. As an example, possibilities of identifying group members from Russia and from Iceland were mentioned.

Round Table Update

As has become usual at our meetings, members of the group were then invited to briefly summarise any key developments at their organisation during the last year.

Andre-Charles (Switzerland)

- Meteo Suisse had been looking at the possibility of privatisation, but this option has now been rejected.
- The organisation is in the process of moving buildings.
- TAF production will be centralised.

Brice (Luxembourg)

- Historically, the service in Luxembourg has concentrated on aviation forecasting, with just a small amount of public work. But recently, with the permission of the government, there has been a reprioritisation to recognise the importance of general forecasting work for the public.
- Currently the service has 12 forecasters, plus a number of consultants.
- They are implementing the German FeWis system in Luxembourg.

Klaus (Germany)

- AutoWARN is now scheduled to become operational by 2015.
- The COSMO-DE ensembles are now operational.
- Renewable energy is an increasingly important field of attention for DWD.
- DWD has become active on Facebook.

Christian (Austria)

- ZAMG has a new homepage, with much greater access to forecasts.
- There remains considerable competition with private weather providers.
- Videoconferencing tools are being used to aid collaboration between the regional offices, mainly for internal use and for training.
- Research staff are now obliged to spend 25% of their time in operations.

Zoran (Croatia)

- There is still a lack of forecasters within the service.
- More free information is being given via the web, including new heat warnings.

Taimi (Estonia)

- The Estonian met office has moved; hydrologists have left the institute and their tasks are now per-

formed by meteorologists (who have learned about hydrology, and other issues such as sea ice).

- There are currently 11 forecasters in the service, plus a Head.
- A new website is under construction.

Frank (Netherlands)

- KNMI is implementing an open data policy next year.
- It is likely to remain a full government agency.
- Discussion is ongoing on the future of KNMI's aeronautical services, but they are likely to keep them for at least 4-5 years.

Andris (Latvia)

- They have started to use FMI's TAF editing software, in addition to the Finnish HIRLAM model.
- There is a new website, a popular Twitter account, and services for smartphones.
- There is a focus on the emerging energy market, and also services for road maintenance.

Will (UK)

- The Met Office's social media services have expanded greatly in the last year, with over 80,000 followers of its Twitter account.
- Despite the difficult economic environment and an ongoing pay freeze, the Met Office continues to recruit and train forecasters, focussing their efforts on advice-giving roles embedded within customers' organisations.

Antti (Finland)

- FMI has also implemented an open data policy.
- There has been considerable work undertaken on forecaster competencies.

Imre (Hungary)

- Summer 2012 was Hungary's 2nd hottest on record.
- Staffing at the met service has reduced from 224 to 194 people.
- The largest commercial customers are in the aviation and energy sectors, and the media.
- There is a new website.

Jean (Belgium)

- RMI has officially rejoined with the Oostende marine met service.
- New radar has been installed at Jabeke
- There is increasing emphasis on nowcasting, particularly within text for warnings.

- Warning exchange with forecasters in neighbouring countries has become routine, with an exchange of information and ideas in the lead up to a weather event.

France (Bernard)

- Meteo-France has closed 7 local centres in the last year.
- They have implemented a new visualisation system for forecasters.

Spain (Lola)

- There has been a reorganisation at AEMET due to financial constraints and political change, to deliver greater flexibility and efficiency.
- The flooding in September 2012 was well forecast.
- There has been much work on establishing the socio-economic benefits of weather forecasts.
- There has also been work on building a database of severe weather events.
- The summer of 2012 was the 4th driest and hottest on record.

Ireland (Evelyn)

- Met Eireann staffing levels have reduced from around 350 to 170 in recent years, with a reduction in the number of divisions from 8 to 4.
- Ireland's first woman senior meteorologist was recently appointed.
- A 'Development Meteorologist' has been appointed: a day-working position looking at improving forecasting processes and services.
- New climate averages for Ireland for the period 1981 to 2010 have recently been published [Evelyn circulated copies to members].

Italy (Alessandro)

- No major changes have taken place this year.
- No new staff have been recruited, partly because of the shrinking size and budget of the Italian military.
- A new website has been launched.

Norway (Karen-Helen)

- The 'Yr' website remains very popular, including abroad, with around 5 million unique visits to the site every week.
- A 'virtual office' approach, including use of video-conferencing, has been adopted to deliver efficiencies.

Presentations

Members of the group then gave presentations based on the following topics:

"Case Studies of Severe Weather Situations"

"Examples of Improving Forecast Quality Despite Resource Limitations and Staffing Reductions"

Content of these presentations is now available via the WGCEF website.

Date and Place of Next Meeting

Brice Briere stated that Luxembourg might be willing to host the 2013 meeting, and the group welcomed this offer. Subsequent discussion has confirmed this invitation, with a date to be confirmed in October 2013.

Topics for Next Meeting

Due to running behind schedule, the group agreed to conduct the discussion of possible topics for 2013 via email and the website.

Close of the Meeting

The new Chair and Vice-Chair once more thanked the group members for their participation at the meeting, and for their active involvement in the group over the past year. They then wished all present good luck in the coming year, and brought the 2012 meeting to a close.

Will Lang
November 2012.