

Introduction

Dear Colleagues,

I have great pleasure in introducing the 19th edition of 'The European Forecaster'. Once more we present a range of articles which are both topical and interesting, particularly to operational meteorologists. Alongside case studies of recent severe weather and forecasting techniques, we also look at some of the fundamental issues in forecasting, confirming our view that we are privileged to work in a profession which demands a unique combination of skills: both physical and social sciences along with communication techniques and understanding of the latest technology.

The winter of 2013-2014 was an unusually stormy one across northern Europe. Here in the UK, for example, we were battered by a rapid succession of windstorms and flood events between November and February. I am pleased to report that WGCEF members looked beyond their own nations, and took the opportunity to share data and opinions on the storms with colleagues in other NMSs. We also witnessed an increasing trend in some circles, especially the media, to 'name' each storm, as one might a tropical cyclone. This approach has some advantages, potentially increasing the reach and understanding of our warnings. But many NMSs subsequently felt that the lack of consistency and control over naming across Europe might instead lead to confusion. WGCEF members, at the behest of our parent organisation EUMETNET, are leading on an investigation into whether some consensus and common methodology might be found to name storms. This might initially seem a rather trivial matter, but it highlights the importance of communication in modern weather forecasting; we are nothing if our messages are not understood.

During the winter, it seemed as if weather records were being broken and headlines being made on a daily basis across Europe. Part of this perception is undoubtedly a consequence to our increased awareness of, and sensitivity to, the weather these days. But I suspect there is a sense in which 'extreme' weather is becoming more frequent, and this of course is one of the main predictions of climate change forecasts, as highlighted by the latest IPCC reports. Following severe weather, forecasters are often asked 'Is this Global Warming?' This naturally pushes us out of our comfort zone of conventional short-range meteorology into less familiar territory. But we owe it to ourselves and our users to be able to understand and communicate the key issues of longer range forecasting and the science of climate change. These arguments must become part of the standard repertoire of knowledge for forecasters everywhere, and as natural communicators, we are better placed than most to present them to our customers, governments and the public.

As ever, we are indebted to Meteo-France for their continued support in publishing 'The European Forecaster'. I hope this edition makes it way into forecasting offices across Europe, and stimulates some interesting discussions. We continue to look to draw membership from all European NMSs. If your organisation is not currently represented, please get in touch. We'd be delighted to welcome you to the WGCEF.

Will Lang
WGCEF Chair
May 2014