

WORKING GROUP FOR COLLABORATION BETWEEN EUROPEAN FORECASTERS (WGCEF)

Minutes of the 2011 Annual Meeting, Bergen, Norway, 7th October

Present:

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

Klaus Baehnke (Germany)
Christian Csekits (Austria)
Evelyn Cusack (Ireland)
Karen-Helen Doublet (Norway)
Alessandro Fucello (Italy)
Andre-Charles Letestu (Switzerland)
Lola Olmeda (Spain)
Janez Markosek (Slovenia)
Jean Nemeghaire (Belgium)
Antti Pelkonen (Finland)
Bernard Roulet (France)
Knud-Jacob Simonsen (Denmark)
Zoran Vakula (Croatia)

Introductions

Karen-Helen opened the meeting and welcomed the group to Bergen. Noting the heavy showers outside, she stressed that she could not guarantee the weather, but also that it was very changeable so at least some fine conditions could be expected, if only briefly.

Frank thanked Karen-Helen on behalf of the group for her hospitality, and for her and her colleague Vibekke Maeland for organising the meeting.

He then extended a warm welcome to new (or long absent) members of the group: Lola, Christian and Alessandro.

The Chairman then recalled his last visit to Bergen, 30 years previously, on board the Dutch weather ship 'Cumulus'. The ship was usually stationed at position 'Mike' at 66N, 02E, Bergen had proved to be a welcome and beautiful sight, and skies had remained blue during his stay.

Frank passed on the apologies from group members unable to attend the meeting: Manfred Kurz, Merike Merlain, Teresa Abrantes, Stefano Micheletti, Tessy Eiffener, Chryssoula Petrou and Panagiotis Giannopoulos.

The agenda was agreed.

Actions from Last Meeting

These actions – to organise the current meeting, to update the website, and to produce the newsletter – had all been completed.

Chairman's Report.

Frank noted that the year since the 2010 meeting in Dublin had seen some very significant weather-related events. In particular the earthquake and tsunami in Japan had been a concern for many European National Met Services (NMSs). There had been much collaboration, particularly in the field of dispersion modelling and forecasting.

The economic situation continues to cause uncertainty within many NMSs. At KNMI in the Netherlands, there is ongoing discussion around further privatisation. Commercial activities at KNMI ceased in 2000. Current civil protection customers remain very happy with the service they receive, but the recession brings increased pressure to cut costs within government organisations.

Newsletter and Website

Frank encouraged all members and their colleagues to contribute to the WGCEF Newsletter. Bernard confirmed that Meteo France were happy to continue to publish the journal, and it was agreed that the group should send a formal message of thanks to Meteo France directors for their support for the group over the years. Alessandro noted the importance of maintaining a 'hard copy' version of the newsletter. It was felt that its appeal to forecasters would be diminished if it were to become 'on-line only' like many other journals.

Andre-Charles presented several options for a revamp of the www.euroforecaster.org. These were well-received, and a preferred option was chosen. The updated site will be based on website formats commonly used for blogging, and the group agreed that this approach would encourage more regular use and interaction between group members. Evelyn and Knud-Jacob volunteered to assist Andre-Charles in further exploring and implementing options for the updated site. Other suggested improvements to be investigated by this WGCEF subgroup would be new logo, and the ability to access the site from smartphones.

ACTION: Andre-Charles, Evelyn and Knud-Jacob to form a WGCEF Website Group and report on progress at the next meeting.

Round Table Discussion on NHMS Developments

Group members were each asked to briefly describe significant changes to their organisations and their roles as forecasters.

Will (UK)

- The Met Office remains a 'government agency', but has transferred from the Ministry of Defence to the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.
- This change will entail a renegotiation of our relationship with military customers.
- There is a current pay and recruitment freeze at the Met Office as a whole, but

despite this we have been able to recruit new forecasters.

- The 24/7 operational and computing facilities at the Met Office have made it a key component of several initiatives to build partnerships between government and scientific organisations. As an example, the Natural Hazards Partnership seeks to combine expertise in many different fields to be able to warn for phenomena as diverse as volcanic ash, floods and enhanced solar activity.

Jean (Belgium)

- New procedures for forecasting thunderstorms have been developed
- INCA is being used experimentally.
- Forecasts for Fukushima were produced using UKMO and Meteo France dispersion models.

Alessandro (Italy)

- No particular change in organisation.
- The Italian Air Force is being reduced in size, so some organisational change is possible due to a review of civil and defence responsibilities.

Evelyn (Ireland)

- 300 people visited Valentia Observatory to celebrate 150 years of observations.
- Staff numbers have reduced to 190.
- The general and aviation forecasting offices have been amalgamated.
- 4 senior forecasters have been lost, so 3 new forecasters have been recruited with a modelling background.
- Government agencies including Met Eireann are joining together to form a National Emergency Centre. A strong forecasting component is required.

Bernard (France)

- A new Vigilance procedure has been introduced for storm surge.
- Aviation forecasting is now centralised in Toulouse.

Andre-Charles (Switzerland)

- Meteo-Suisse's status is changing.
- Regional offices are being reorganised.
- There is a need to exploit commercial potential, so a new product management department has been created.
- 20 jobs are going.
- It has been agreed that data is to be made freely available, though it is still not clear what this means in practice.
- Meteo-Suisse is the 'Single Official Voice' for the most severe ('Level 4 and 5') weather warnings, which it issues on behalf of the government.

Christian (Austria)

- 50% of ZAMG comes from government, but the rest must come from commercial activities.
- 2 forecasters have been lost in the past year, with the number of forecasters in the Vienna office reduced to 12.
- Some scientists have been used for operational forecasting work, though they may not be available for duties at nights and weekends.

Zoran (Croatia)

- No major changes so far this year, though the upcoming election may well result in

less money for the met service.

- Staff continue to be lost through retirement, and they are unable to recruit new staff.
- There is a shortage of scientists and mathematicians available to the service.

Antti (Finland)

- A new radar (doppler + dual-polarisation) has been installed.
- There are new warnings for water level and wave height.
- The Finnish government has required that FMI do all aviation observations.

Janoz (Slovenia)

- Elections are expected soon, so it is uncertain what will happen next year.
- No new meteorologists have been employed.
- A new model is now operational (as described at last year's meeting)
- There is increased use of first-guess model input to products, allowing more time for forecasting.

Klaus (Germany)

- Staff numbers at DWD are now reduced to 2400.
- 3 regional offices are no longer open at night.
- The AUTOWARN system is due to become fully operational in 2015
- There will be more automated observing.

Knud-Jacob (Denmark)

- Danish and Swedish airspace join together from 1st January 2012, so the aviation sectors of the two met services are joining forces.
- DMI has been appointed to provide tsunami warnings to Denmark, the Faroes and Greenland.

Karen-Helen (Norway)

- The yr.no website continues to be a big success, with 4 million users per week. It has become the main channel for forecasts in Norway.
- There is an ongoing process to ensure that the site uses the best data, and makes best use of forecaster intervention where required.

Lola (Spain)

- There is a new organisation of forecasting into forecasting centres.
- New systems, using digital forecasting techniques, are enabling increased automation.

Frank (Netherlands)

- Only one manual observation remains in the Netherlands, at Schipol Airport.
- A decision on further privatisation is due in 2012.
- 17.5% cuts to the KNMI budget are expected over the next 4 years.

Presentations

Members then gave presentations on the following topics:

“Communication from NHMSs towards Media and Civil Protection”

“New Developments on Short-Term High Resolution Model Ensembling and Operational Use of Probabilistic Values in Short-Range Forecasts”

The content of these presentations is available at www.euroforecaster.org

Chairperson Nomination for Next Meeting

Having been Chair/Vice-Chair for the group for four years, Frank announced his intention to step down before the next meeting. Will Lang, current Vice-Chair indicated that he would be glad to serve as Chair from next year – an offer which was agreed by the rest of the group.

The position of Vice-Chair would then become vacant at the next meeting, so members were asked to consider proposing themselves for this role.

Date and Place of Next Meeting

Karen-Helen and Frank stated that Vida Railene (Lithuanian) had confirmed her offer to host next year's meeting, and the group provisionally agreed to meet in Vilnius on 5th October 2012.

Any Other Business

Will thanked the members of the group who had contributed to his work on the WMO PWS Service Delivery Strategy earlier in the year. Members provided examples of service delivery metrics used in their organisations, several of which were quoted in the final version of the strategy.

Close of Meeting

The Chair and Vice-Chair again thanked the members for their participation, wished them well for the coming year, and formally closed the meeting.

Will Lang
18th October 2011