The IABM and ECOMET

A position paper prepared by Board of Directors

The world of Meteorology encompasses many different activities; observing, forecasting, research, climatolo
For the great majority of the ordinary people, though, the world of Meteorology means only one thing; the wea
on radio and television. The weather broadcast is the main point of contact between meteorology and the out
How the populace - and those who are the decision-makers in society - view our science will be greatly influe
they see on the small screen and hear on their car radios. It is important for the overall good of meteorology -
reason - that weather broadcasting be conducted to the highest possible standards. Anything less will reflect
chosen field of endeavour.

What makes a good weather broadcast? Opinions, of course, will vary from country to country, from culture t
even from person to person. Weather broadcasting is essentially about the transmission of information - infor
can be detailed and complex at times; information which contributes to the efficient and economic conduct o
information that is needed for the protection of life and property when the elements turn really nasty. Good we
broadcasting, then, is built on two foundations; quality of information and quality of presentation.

Historically, the problems of weather forecasting have revolved around the efficient collection of vast amount
data; the organisation of this data into a coherent synoptic view of the atmosphere; the preparation of maps a
showing the likely evolution of the atmosphere over time, and then the interpretation of this evolution into the
expected weather at a specific location.

The weather broadcaster needs to be able to talk about the weather with authority and credibility. To do this,
need to involve themselves in all the steps of weather forecasting, but they do need an understanding of why
is evolving in a particular direction. They need this both to explain properly the upcoming changes in the weat
cannot explain what one does not understand) and also to correctly interpret the developing weather, as seen
observations and in radar and satellite imagery, in the context of the overall forecast.

Only by having weather broadcasters who are meteorologically trained and who have access to a continuous
weather observational data can the highest levels of weather broadcasting be achieved. Broadcasts which ar
presented, or which are simply out of date, reflect badly upon the meteorological community as a whole.

It is the belief of the IABM that current ECOMET pricing structures militate against good weather broadcastir
against the long-term interests of European meteorology in general and European NMHS's in particular.

Before explaining why we hold this belief, we would like to make a few general points. We do not have a diffic
concept that some income should flow from broadcasting to support the meteorological infrastructure. We ar
aware that developments within broadcasting - specifically the development of digital broadcasting and the pr
television channels - is putting enormous pressure on broadcasters to produce more content for less revenue
broadcast content are being driven relentlessly down.

We would like also to emphasise that we do not see this as being primarily a public versus private sector issu
many NMHS's in Europe which are active in the field of broadcasting. Most, if not all, of them want to retain a
this market, but this will only be possible if they can produce a keenly-priced package for their broadcasters.
pricing structures make this very difficult.

If a broadcaster wishes to produce a weather forecast of high quality, the first thing they will need to do is to
services of a meteorologist or an experienced forecaster. They may employ this person directly, or they may l
secondment arrangement with an NMHS or a private sector weather supplier. This person may go on screen
may work in the background briefing, and preparing material for, a non-met presenter.

The key point here is that there is a substantial cost to the broadcaster in employing someone with this skill a
experience. Contrary to popular belief, presenters chosen purely on the basis of their appearance or presenta
are frequently not well paid. There is a large supply of such persons, and limited demand. They tend to be yo
dependants and therefore willing to work for lower pay than an experienced professional. A broadcaster who e

experienced meteorologist is already making a significant investment in quality.

A meteorologist or forecaster, however experienced, cannot work without information; the broadcaster now m second investment and acquire a stream of weather data with which the meteorologist can work. It is the cos in Europe which is the nub of the problem. The pricing structures of ECOMET put a high value on raw data a (relatively) low value on end products. The broadcaster who wishes to invest resources in quality weather bro penalised by these pricing arrangements. It is simply cheaper for a broadcaster to buy in a forecast product a eye candy to present it. With the pressure on content costs this will soon be the only affordable option for Eu broadcasters. Authoritative weather broadcasting will simply disappear from European television screens.

There is another aspect of this situation that deserves consideration. The free availability of weather data in t spawned a vigorous private sector there dedicated to the provision of weather forecast packages for broadca a mature market, with strong and well-resourced companies. These companies have been handed a competi by ECOMET in that they can supply turn-key packages of graphics and model data to European broadcaster substantial discount to the costs that must be charged by those who base their services on European produc compete, European weather companies are now integrating US data into their packages and services. We m stage where the output from ECMWF, HirLam, Arpége, UKLam, Aladin etc simply disappear from the televisi broadcast, to be replaced by products based on the AVN or the MRF.

We in the IABM are aware that many European NMHS's have, in recent years, been forced to put considerab findings creative ways "around" the ECOMET regulations in order to continue to supply weather information to broadcasters. That this should happen is in itself an indication that there are severe problems in this area. O reasons that NMHS's want to retain broadcast clients is that it provides them with visibility to the public and t makers. Indeed such visibility through broadcasting is strongly encouraged through WMO as a capacity-build for all NMHS's. It is curious, however, that no monetary value is put on this exposure when contracts betwee broadcasters and NMHS's (or private-sector companies) are being worked out. If it is important to NMHS's to visibility, then a value needs to be put on this exposure, and this amount explicitly accounted for in contracts broadcasters.

The IABM understands that ECOMET was established out of the necessity to regulate the European market data and the relationships between European Met Services, and to bring these into line with EU competition l the effects of ECOMET rules and pricing structures on broadcasting have been to create many difficulties be NMHS's and broadcasters in Europe, who are being forced to look to other suppliers for their weather data. T is worsening as broadcasters grapple with the need to produce ever more content with ever more limited reso

The IABM strongly supports the public service role of NMHS's, its members want to work with NMHS's to he forecast and warnings services to the public. ECOMET policies have made this work more difficult, and have pressure on long-established relationships that have existed between NMHS's and the media for many years. needs to re-evaluate its role in, and impact upon, broadcast meteorology. ECOMET needs to examine how it support quality weather broadcasting in Europe, and it needs to do this now.

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