

Weather Bureau Role During The Recent Extreme Weather Events

My Background: I was with the weather bureau since 1988 and had resigned in 2009 due to some unfortunate events. However I assure you that those circumstances and my resignation has nothing to do with this submission and those events did not cloud my mind and thinking in any way. Some views expressed in this submission were expressed at work as early as mid-90's when some of the co-workers complained about answering the calls from the general public particularly during heavy weather situations. It was true that forecasters can get very busy preparing their forecasts but calls from the public who were under distress are important too. Finally Bureau agreed to call-in an extra person to answer the public calls during such weather events. They however called-in that extra person rarely for what ever reason.

Present situation: Two important changes were made in the last 12 to 18 months in the Regional Forecasting Centre.

1. The forecasters stopped answering calls from the public an hour or two before and also during forecast preparation times.

In this context one has to remember that there will be more number of calls during inclement weather conditions and so undoubtedly difficult to the forecasters to answer. However to answer them is important and some times they may be able to avoid property damage and injury or even death under some circumstances. A forecaster will be in the best position to give right information than even a called-in person who has to come to grips with the overall situation. In the past forecasters were able to answer those calls may be at the expense of sending the forecasts little late. Sending forecasts 10 to 15 minutes late might not have worried most people receiving them as all urgent warnings will be sent by the Supervisors.

It may be worth looking at how the situation was handled by the Bureau during the past heavy weather event. Did the Bureau provided info to the callers promptly? Did they call extra persons to respond the calls from the public? What was the impact of this particular change on the overall management of the flow of information on the developing weather situation during this event?

2. Reduction in the number issues of forecasts.

In the past all forecasts were issued three times a day (4 am, noon and 4 pm)with the exception of Brisbane forecast which was issued four times a day. Now they are issuing all forecasts only twice a day, the first one at 4 am and the second at 4 pm. The forecasters use mostly overseas numerical models because of their reliability but they arrive after the issue time of 4 am forecasts. I do not know if the situation had changed now. In the past noon forecasts were considered more important as they were done after all the important models were received. In the current system both forecasts are *possibly* based on older model outputs. If they are, it may be worth investigating the impact of the new system of issuing forecasts only twice a day.

Flood warnings are being provided with the weather forecasts. In the new system of two issues a day of forecasts, obviously flood warnings also go twice a day. In the recent weather event did the public get timely warnings regarding floods? I do not know if the Hydrology section sent separate warnings when needed.

Concluding remarks.

Compared to the past, now the forecaster is getting better numerical model outputs and guidance, giving him more time for preparation of forecasts. It must be much easier to answer the public calls now than in the past. Further they are issuing forecasts only two times a day. They must be having a lot of extra time in their hands. They can have a better interaction with the public than before.