

## **BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY ADVISORY BOARD**

### **Establishment of the Bureau of Meteorology Advisory Board**

Following on from the 2001 report of the Strategic Assessment of the Bureau, and on the recommendation of the Parliamentary Secretary, the Prime Minister formally approved the creation of the Bureau of Meteorology Advisory Board in June 2002 with a view to its commencing operation in the first half of 2002–03. The Board was established initially as a non-statutory body.

### **Role of the Bureau Board**

The function of the Advisory Board is to advise the Parliamentary Secretary and the Director of Meteorology on issues of relevance to the proper discharge of the functions of the Bureau. More specifically, the role is set out in the following terms of reference approved by the Parliamentary Secretary.

### **Terms of Reference**

The major responsibilities of the Board are to:

- a) To keep under review, and advise the Minister and Director of Meteorology on:

- (i) The changing environment affecting national and international demand for the provision of meteorological and related services;
  - (ii) The Bureau's Corporate Strategy and Forward Program;
  - (iii) The optimal balance of resources to be applied to the various public interest priorities of the Bureau including severe weather warning services, provision of public weather, climate, hydrological and oceanographic services, maintenance of the national climate record and the conduct of research and investigation;
  - (iv) The appropriateness of the allocation of current and future products and services provided by the Bureau in the categories of free, cost recoverable or commercial;
  - (v) Stakeholder views of the Bureau's current products and services and emerging needs;
  - (vi) Any other issues of relevance to ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of the Bureau of Meteorology;
- b) To respond to issues and requests addressed to it by the Minister, the Director of Meteorology and members of the stakeholder community; and
  - c) To report, at least annually, to the Minister on its activities and to make recommendations in relation to the performance and future direction of the Bureau.

## Membership

Membership of the Board is by Parliamentary Secretary invitation, after consultation with the Prime Minister. The initial proposed membership of the Advisory Board was agreed in September and the Hon. Dr Sharman Stone MP sent letters of invitation to the prospective members in early October. While the Director and the Portfolio Secretary are included as ex-officio members, the balance of membership is constituted so as to broadly reflect the Bureau's stakeholder community, with individual members selected on the basis of their ability to contribute at the highest level to the development of meteorology in Australia.

Members were selected to represent, as far as possible, the following broad sectors:

- Agriculture;
- Aviation;
- Defence;
- Fire and Emergency Services;
- Environmental Management;
- Marine;
- Media;

and/or, as representatives of the following specialist fields:

- Economics;
- Law;
- Meteorology; and/or
- Scientific research.

Not surprisingly, some members are recognised as contributing expertise and experience in more than one of these areas.

At 30 June 2003, the Bureau Advisory Board comprised the following members:

<i>Member</i>	<i>Position</i>
Professor Vicki Sara (Chair)	Chief Executive Officer Australian Research Council
Mr Ian Castles AO	Visiting Fellow National Centre for Development Studies
Mr Mackenzie Craig	Primary Producer
Mr Barry Grear AO	Chairman of the South Australian State Disaster Committee
Ms Sue Howard	Director of Radio ABC
Mr Russell Miller	Partner Minter Ellison
Professor Peter Schwerdtfeger	Senior Adviser Airborne Research Australia
Professor Gillian Triggs	Chair in Law Faculty of Law University of Melbourne
Mr Roger Beale AM (ex officio)	Secretary Department of the Environment and Heritage
Dr John Zillman AO (ex officio)	Director of Meteorology Bureau of Meteorology



*From top left to bottom right: Vicki Sara, Ian Castles, McKenzie Craig, Barry Gear, Sue Howard, Russell Miller, Peter Schwerdtfeger, Gillian Triggs, Roger Beale and John Zillman.*

Dr Zillman's term as Director of Meteorology coincided with the end of the financial year, and thus the conclusion of his ex-officio role on the Advisory Board. At his last meeting as a Board member, the Board expressed gratitude to Dr Zillman for his accomplishments as Director of Meteorology and in building a world class Bureau of Meteorology for Australia.

The incoming Director of Meteorology, Dr Geoff Love, will join the Board in 2003–04.

## Activities of the Board 2002–03

### Meetings

A minimum of two Advisory Board meetings are to be held each calendar year with an expected maximum of four meetings per year. The location for meetings will general-

ly be the Bureau's Head Office, although from time to time meetings may be held at other locations and/or venues.

For 2002–03, the following meetings of the Advisory Board were held:

#### **3 December (meeting 2002/1)**

Held at Parliament House, Canberra

Attendance: Chair Professor Sara, Members Castles, Craig, Gear, Howard, Miller, Schwerdtfeger, Triggs, Beale and Zillman.

#### **20 March (meeting 2003/1)**

Held at the Bureau's Head Office, Melbourne

Attendance: Chair Professor Sara, Members Castles, Craig, Gear, Howard, Miller, Schwerdtfeger, Triggs, Beale and Zillman.

#### **11 June (meeting 2003/2)**

Held at the Bureau's Head Office, Melbourne

Attendance: Chair Professor Sara, Members Castles, Craig, Howard, Schwerdtfeger, Triggs, Beale and Zillman.

Apologies: Miller and Gear.

The Hon. Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, attended the inaugural meeting of the Board on 3 December, welcoming the Advisory Board's active engagement and expressing her thanks to the Chair and members for accepting their positions on the Board. The Parliamentary Secretary also met with the Board during meeting 2003/2.

## Major Issues examined in 2002–03

At the first meeting of the Board (2002/1), members were provided with an introduction to the Role and Operation of the Bureau along with specific strategic challenges and opportunities facing the Bureau.

In the two subsequent meetings, the Board commenced detailed analysis of strategic issues as follows:

- the Forward Program 2003-08 and its resourcing;
- staffing the Bureau;
- consideration of the Bureau's charging policy;
- feasibility of integration of the National Tidal Facility Australia (NTFA); and
- examination of various options for training.

## Forward Program 2003–08 and its Resourcing

The Bureau's *Forward Program 2003–08* was considered at meeting 2003/1. The Board commended the Bureau on the high quality of its Forward Program document and offered some suggestions for improvement focusing mainly on the need for prioritisation of activities and resources.

At meeting 2002/1, the Board considered a paper on Resourcing which set out a

broad overview of the Bureau's 2002-03 Budget and Forward Estimates situation, trends in Operating Expenses and Running Costs, and a summary of current resource issues. At the request of the Board, further consideration was given to the issue at meeting 2003/1 in light of additional information on parameter settings for the 2003-04 Budget process.

## Staffing

As a specific component of the Bureau's resourcing issue, the Board looked in detail at Bureau staffing matters at meeting 2003/2.

Bureau staffing levels have decreased by 20% since 1990-91, and by 8% compared to 1994-95 benchmark levels with a projected loss of up to a further 100 in Average Staffing Level (ASL) over the next five years. There have been decreases in all major staff categories apart from Information Technology Officers and Meteorologists.

The Bureau has maintained its essential operations and services over the past decade in the face of this overall decline in staff numbers through:

- greatly increased workloads on individual staff;
- higher levels of risk associated with equipment maintenance and system disruption;
- reduced hours of coverage in many offices and 'borrowing' of severe weather forecasting staff from other states during prolonged severe weather events, such as fires and floods;
- failure to meet the growing needs of the community and specialist user groups for high quality data and information in a range of formats;
- failure to keep pace with the advancing international state of the art of meteorological systems and techniques; and
- substantial thinning of professional and technical expertise in many aspects of the Bureau's operation.

The Board expressed its total support for the Bureau in building a strong case for resources but strongly emphasised the need for the Bureau to adopt a forward-looking focus in addressing staffing pressures. It stressed the importance of a targeted communication strategy that better makes the connection between staff reductions and the actual impacts on the Australian public. A number of specific suggestions as to how the Bureau could support its claims were provided.

In reinforcing the need for a compelling case on resource needs, the Board noted that it may be more appropriate to build towards the 2005–06 Budget process and to develop a strong and multi-layered case that works at all levels from Ministerial to the public at large.

## Charging Policy

The Bureau's charging policy is set down in 12 Principles that take into account the primary public interest role of the Bureau, the 'public good' characteristics of many Bureau products and services, and Australia's commitment to various international Conventions and Regulations arising therefrom. The Board examined the Bureau's charging principles and accepted them in general, with suggestions for minor modifications.

The Board also considered the choice the Bureau faces in drawing the line between its basic service and commercial services at the margin. In general, the Board was persuaded that the Bureau's current approach to charging is in line with government policy and that major changes bore significant risk to the balance of commercial and public interest activities.

Board members also discussed the status and operation of the Bureau's Special Services Unit (SSU). The Board considered whether there would be benefits in having the SSU more or less integrated than it is presently, but on balance felt that the current model is about right. The Board noted

an intention to focus on the SSU mission statement at a future meeting.

## National Tidal Facility Australia (NTFA)

As a current issue before the Bureau, the advice of the Board was sought on the proposed transfer of the functions of the NTFA to the Bureau, noting the resource issues associated with the transfer and the proposed strategy for addressing future funding arrangements.

The Board supported the concept of absorbing the National Tidal Facility of Australia (NTFA) within the Bureau, but expressed strong concerns about the possible impact of this on other Bureau operations. It noted the need to address more comprehensively:

- the funding basis for NTFA services, particularly in terms of the split between public good and commercial services;
- the state of the NTFA's assets, including ownership and depreciation funding;
- the effective provision of the tsunami warning service; and
- the proposed model of incorporating the facility within the Bureau.

The Board strongly supported the Portfolio Secretary in convening a meeting of key agencies with an interest in the NTFA, including Geoscience Australia and the Department of Finance and Administration (DoFA), to map out full costs and develop an appropriate funding strategy involving major stakeholders.

## Training

High-quality education and training programs for staff are essential to the capacity of National Meteorological Services to deliver the outcomes expected of them by Government and the community and to sustaining high levels of performance over time. The Bureau has conducted in-house training of specialist staff since 1937.

Bureau training activities are periodically reviewed and evaluated, with the most recent evaluation undertaken in 1997. A consistent thrust of review outcomes over the past two decades has been the need to optimise collaboration with the tertiary sector, particularly in the training of professional staff. Most recently, the 2001 Strategic Assessment of the Bureau of Meteorology considered there may be scope for savings to the Bureau through greater use of partnership arrangements with universities.

In order to progress the matter, the Board considered the issues around training professional meteorologists at meeting 2003/2. Discussion focused on a range of options that were put forward in relation to the delivery of the professional training function in partnership with universities, including maintaining the current in-house arrangements.

The Board noted issues relating to the relative cost of the various options and the strategic issues they raise as well as the critical linkage between recruitment and training in the Bureau. Current relationships and involvement with Australian universities were considered, as were the potential impacts on the range of applicants and on training of defence and overseas National Meteorological Service (NMS) personnel.

The Board acknowledged the need to make a fully informed and objective decision on this matter. To this end, they commissioned a study of the feasibility and implications of an alternative option for

the delivery of the initial training of professional meteorologists which involved BMTC becoming a university campus. The Board acknowledged the quality of the current training programs but emphasised the need to explore any additional benefits for the Bureau and its trainees that may be offered by alternative arrangements.

## Inspection of Bureau Facilities

The opportunity to see the Bureau in action has been a significant part of the Advisory Board's introduction to the Bureau and understanding of its services and operations.

In conjunction with scheduled meetings, the Advisory Board have toured the following Bureau facilities:

- the National Meteorological and Oceanographic Operations Centre (NMOC);
- the Bureau of Meteorology Research Centre (BMRC);
- the National Climate Centre (NCC);
- the Victorian Regional Office (VRO); and
- the Bureau's Field Training Annexe.

## Board Representation

Members of the Bureau Advisory Board will, from time to time, be invited to attend Bureau activities to represent the Board and to increase their knowledge of the Bureau, its operations, services, clients and stakeholders.

*Board members undertook the following representation duties during 2002–03.*

<i>Member</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Date</i>
Peter Schwerdtfeger	14th World Meteorological Congress	May 2003 Geneva, Switzerland
Mackenzie Craig	Regional Users Forum	June 2003 Mildura