PUBLIC EDUCATION

Public education activities aim to:

- foster greater public understanding of weather and climate and to help the community use that information in their own and the national interest;
- inform the public and specific groups about the Bureau’s role and the services it offers, and to help those groups use the services most effectively; and
- help improve communications and morale within the Bureau by making known various Bureau activities.

The effectiveness of public education activities was assessed in terms of formal visits and attendances at the Bureau’s exhibition area at Head Office, attendance at external exhibitions and displays, distribution of a wide range of publications, and from public feedback via telephone, e-mail, post, Internet access, media responses and visitor comments.

Giles upper wind flight observed by some of the local indigenous children.
PUBLICATIONS

- World Meteorological Day was held on 23 March. A media release, poster, display panels and a booklet were developed for Head Office and all Regional Offices on the theme, ‘Weather, Climate and Water in the Information Age’. Community awareness was also raised through the distribution of the World Meteorological Day poster, mainly to schools.

- The 2003 Australian Weather Calendar was again well received by the community and about 35,000 copies were distributed and sold. It, too, had the theme ‘Weather, Climate and Water in the Information Age’.

- A range of printed information, images and advice was provided to the mass media (radio, television and print), publishers, government agencies, commercial organisations, the general public and Bureau staff.

- The Bureau’s in-house journal Weather News continued to contribute to internal communication among Bureau staff, including those in the most remote areas, with information on Bureau people and events, services issues and developments across Australia.

- Press clippings from major newspapers, items from the Internet, transcripts and media alerts relevant to the Bureau were collected. About 4,000 pages of press clippings were collated and distributed.

WEB-BASED INFORMATION

- The highlight event for 2003-04 was Wager on the Weather, the Bureau’s major national project for National Science Week. The competition to find Australia’s canniest weather forecaster was devised by the organiser of National Science Week. A special website was developed by the ABC and all weather observations and background information were provided by the Bureau. Organisers rated the competition in August a huge success, with more than 10,000 people vying for the title. The competition provided a chance to explore the science behind the weather and a first-hand experience of how challenging weather forecasting can be.

- Nearly 200 media releases were placed on the Bureau website on issues such as the installation of new weather radars, supercomputers, weather satellite tracking antennas, Field Offices, automatic weather stations and observing systems for weather-balloon flights, forums involving the Bureau such as ABARE’s Outlook conference, and new services and forecasting systems. Regular releases on monthly weather summaries in each State, seasonal climate outlooks, drought statements and annual climate summaries were also placed on the website.

- About 500 images were distributed from the Bureau’s photographic collection to the media, staff, publishers, other government agencies, commercial organisations and the general public. The digital library of images was further developed and catalogued on the publicly accessible National Meteorological Library website.
VISITS, TALKS AND MEDIA PRESENCE

- As in previous years, Bureau staff operated a stand at the Amazing World of Science in Canberra for five days during National Science Week. The display, a part of the Australian Science Festival, focused on different ways to predict the weather and on how to enter ‘Wager on the Weather.’ The feedback provided by visitors was helpful in guiding the development of future exhibits.

- The World Meteorological Day address was given by Mr Mel Ward AO, former managing director of Telecom Australia, on the theme ‘Weather, Climate and Water in the Information Age’.

- The Head Office exhibition area hosted a small number of tours by school and community groups before it was closed in September in preparation for the Bureau’s move to new premises at 700 Collins Street.

- Regional Office staff participated in more than 55 agricultural shows, field days and similar external functions.

- Regional Office staff gave 168 talks to community and special interest groups (mainly schools, boating organisations, and community service clubs).

- Regional Offices hosted visits from more than 100 groups, predominantly schools.

- Direct media inquiries to the Public Affairs Unit at Head Office generally numbered five to 10 a week, and together with the direct media contact with regional offices and field offices resulted in extensive national media coverage of meteorological issues.

- A new service was established to inform staff of media releases of interest to the Bureau. Staff in regional forecasting centres and field offices who speak with the media on a regular basis are emailed a precis of Bureau-related media releases to enable them to explain new services and systems.