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 them 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 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. A new exhibition area at Head Office is under development as one of the final stages of the fit-out of 700 Collins St.

A new Corporate Communications Unit was created within the Bureau’s Head Office, drawing together the existing Publications, Public Affairs and Media Liaison functions. The Unit’s purpose is to make information about the Bureau and its broad range of activities more easily available to the community, through better coordination, streamlining and improved focus of public education activities nationally. The Unit will also contribute to improved internal communications.

Publications and Online Education

- 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 Preventing and Mitigating Natural Disasters. The display included panels on refurbishment of an historic 277 weather radar, marking 50 years since the first Australian and Bureau use of radar technology. Community awareness was also raised through the distribution of the World Meteorological Day poster, mainly to schools.
- The 2006 Australian Weather Calendar was again well received by the community and about 45,000 copies were distributed and sold. It, too, had the theme Preventing and Mitigating Natural Disasters.
- A range of printed information and advice was provided to the mass media (radio, television and print), publishers, government agencies, commercial organisations, the general public and Bureau staff, and preparations, including extensive image research, proceeded towards the publication of a history of the Bureau to commemorate its centenary.
- About 400 images from the Bureau’s photographic collection were distributed to the media, staff, publishers, other government agencies, commercial organisations and the general public.
• Another 500 digital images were added to the digital image library on the publicly accessible National Meteorological Library website, for a total of more than 1700 available images. Donations of Weather Calendar entries have been particularly appreciated.

• The popular ‘Touch Screen’ kiosk which for some years has provided meteorological information to the public on an interactive system in Bureau offices round Australia was recast as an online educational project destined for the Bureau’s public website.

• The ‘Learn About Meteorology’ section on the Bureau’s public website continued to be a popular source of information for students, teachers and the general public seeking information about meteorology and related topics, with approximately two million hits recorded to the site during the year.

• Three issues of the Bureau’s in-house journal Weather News were prepared and distributed, contributing 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.

• The contribution of a quarterly Bureau story and photo to the Department of the Environment and Heritage internal online newsletter commenced in 2005-06, with placement of the same story on the home page of the Bureau’s public website, both contributing to wider awareness of the Bureau’s broad range of activities.

• The hard copy media clippings from major newspapers, items from the internet, transcripts and media alerts relevant to the Bureau were complemented by a version on the Bureau’s intranet. Media clippings (on average about 30 pages a day of hard copy) were collated and distributed for every day in 2005-06.

VISITS, TALKS AND MEDIA LIAISON

• More than 250 media releases were placed on the Bureau website on issues such as climate change, new weather radars and weather satellites, major field office upgrades, automatic weather stations and observing systems for weather-balloon flights, forums involving the Bureau, such as the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE) Outlook conference, international meetings held in Australia such as that of the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System, 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.

• Direct media inquiries to the Public Affairs Unit at Head Office generally numbered one to five a week, and together with the daily direct media contact with Regional Offices and Field Offices, and special initiatives such as a two-day interview program for a science writer from a national newspaper, resulted in extensive national media coverage of meteorological issues.

• The World Meteorological Day address was given by Brig. Gen. David Johnson, USAF (retired), Director of the US National Weather Service.
Bureau staff, mainly from Regional Offices, participated in more than 20 agricultural shows, field days and similar external functions.

Regional and Head Office staff gave more than 100 talks to community and special interest groups (mainly schools, boating organisations, and community service clubs).

Regional Offices hosted visits from more than 55 groups, predominantly schools, and Field Offices received several hundred less formal visits (individuals or small groups) from interested locals and tourists.

Public Affairs participated in shared education sessions with the Botanic Gardens and the Melbourne Zoo, and commenced educational presentations at primary schools (in lieu of school visits to the closed public exhibition area) with four schools visited.

Planning commenced for an Open Day at the Bureau’s Training Annexe in Broadmeadows to celebrate National Science Week in August 2006, and for the Bureau’s attendance at the Australian Science Festival in Canberra at the same time.