# Let's Talk about Talking – a Risk Communication Workshop

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**Introduction**

Operational meteorologists are not infrequently required to convey information to clients that essentially says "you may die". Such a message can trigger sub-optimal responses within the audience that are so instinctive they're imperceptible, and so even clear risk communication can be rendered ineffective by psychological factors. The audience isn't always rational, and indeed it is arguably *negligent* to assume it could be when being asked to face mortality.

Almost every operational meteorologist conveys life threatening risks to clients many times through their careers, however their training has hitherto been of an overwhelmingly technical nature; conducted largely by technicians. Through university specialization in science and mathematics, technical training, mentoring from other meteorologists and a small amount of media training forecasters gradually learn the art of conveying technical information to those unfamiliar with the science. Nonetheless with meteorology steadily becoming less about forecasting and more about decision support, the need for authentic and empathetic connection with clients will only increase.

A Risk Communication Workshop for operational meteorologists was held in Melbourne over two days in August of this year to connect forecasters with key clients, media professionals, risk communication specialists from academia and experienced practitioners. Lessons from recent events were discussed, along with audience needs, psychological factors, best practice and forecaster concerns.

The workshop was the first in an ongoing annual effort to build a culture of reflecting upon reaching others and working within more effective teams. Future iterations of the series will consider how forecasters in other industries with comparable backgrounds and pressures (e.g. pilots and financial traders) benefit from employing behavioural economics principles to humanize their largely technical training and mitigate interference in judgement and communication from sub-optimal instinctive responses.