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Establishing a Meteorological Society

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1. Introduction

This document outlines the advantages of a National Meteorological Society¹, and a suggested formal process for establishing it.

Frequently such societies grow out of a recognised need for a forum that allows members of different occupationally based institutions such as National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs), academia and private sector organisations to interact, exchange ideas and cooperate on a wide range of research and operational activities. Additionally, once a Society is established, the occupational institutions can draw many advantages from its activities e.g. through the promotion of meteorology and its related professions, and the capacity for the Society to tap into the broader community that can be affected frequently and in multitude ways by the vicissitudes of weather and climate.

By necessity, this paper can only provide information of a rather generalised nature. To support the development of nascent National Meteorological Societies, the International Forum of Meteorological Societies (IFMS) can provide a wealth of knowledge and experience by drawing from its member societies – both developing and developed. Hence it is recommended that one of the first steps in establishing a National Meteorological Society is to seek formal recognition of the intent from the IFMS. The fee for membership of IFMS is a nominal 1% of a Society's membership fees, so there is no initial cost in seeking this start-up advice and assistance.

Subsequent papers in this series of Best Practices will address some of the ongoing activities that the new Society may take on once it has established as well as several ongoing operational issues important for its efficient operation.

2. Case for a National Meteorological Society

In providing a forum for meteorological and related professionals to interact, several benefits arise; some quite quickly and easily, with others evolving over time as the Society grows and matures.

2.1 Enhancement of cooperative networks:

Networking is critical for the nurturing and ongoing advancement of ideas. For most professionals, creating and developing cross institutional relationships are integral components of their personal development and the effectiveness of the institutions to which they belong.

One of the most effective mechanisms employed by professional societies for promoting cross-institutional collaboration is through the staging of annual conferences, which typically cover a broad range of topics, and the sponsoring of symposiums on specific topics of broad interest. These events provide both professional and social settings for researchers and practitioners to interact and build networks on themes of common interest. In addition, they can assist individuals seeking job opportunities to meet with potential employers, and the latter in identifying suitable recruits.

2.2 Broadening of Knowledge

2.2.1 Professional development:

Many established National Meteorological Societies, in addition to the staging of conferences and symposiums, offer professional development opportunities through short courses, workshops, Webinars and publications on research results and operational activities. Publications may be in the form of hard-copy or on-line learned journals.

¹ The term National Meteorological Society is used here in a generic sense and may be interpreted as embracing several additional and related disciplines such as hydrology and oceanography.

2.2.2 Community outreach

As a National Meteorological Society develops, it can begin to offer courses, seminars and/or lectures to the broader community on research findings and on the latest industry innovations and trends. The development of “Authoritative Statements” by a National Meteorological Society on matters of general public interest can be a valuable contribution to discourse on topics of national concern, e.g. severe weather, climate variability, and climate change.

Many organisations have embraced Social Media as a means of communicating more informally, especially to people beyond their primary constituency. It needs to be stressed from the outset that to be effective the adoption of Social Media and indeed of any on-line system as a means of communication requires careful planning, ongoing management skills and adequate resources.

2.2.3 Mentoring:

Mentoring is a cornerstone activity of many professional societies; it involves the pairing of a younger member with limited experience to someone much more experienced. Mentoring is a two-way process and can provide great rewards to both sides of the relationship.

Participating in forums, chat groups or discussion boards sponsored by an association is also a great way to grow a network. These mechanisms allow one to use peers as sounding boards and can lead to fruitful long-term collaboration.

For the youngest of a Society’s members (high school and college), the availability of a scholarship may be the primary avenue for entering a profession. Hence, if resources are available, they can be an effective way for a National Meteorological Society of assist those interested in entering a meteorological or related career. The establishment of awards for individual achievement in selected areas can also provide incentives for furthering one’s professional development.

2.2.4 Career Advancement

National Meteorological Societies can help their members find employment through the provision of job listings that affiliated member organisations may be offering. Many organisations have career resources and advice on preparing a résumé or interviewing techniques. Belonging to a professional society is a sign to a current or future employer of one’s dedication and connectedness to a chosen profession. Younger members can also be encouraged to serve the Society and hence develop closer relationship with more senior members with the potential to assist with career development.

2.3 Professional Accreditation / Certification:

Some National Meteorological Societies conduct Professional Accreditation / Certification Programs, which are very useful for ensuring the quality of professionals operating within a country. Accreditation or Certification provides assurance and confidence to an employer that a current or prospective employee has attained the necessary knowledge, skills and competence to carry out certain tasks. However, establishing such programs can be a lengthy process and their ongoing management and operations quite onerous. Larger societies such as the American Meteorological Society and the UK Royal Meteorological Society have developed and maintain such Certification Programs. For smaller societies, Regional Societies might be able to provide such a service to their regional Members.

3. First Steps

There is significant diversity amongst the meteorological societies and other related organizations comprising IFMS membership. Consequently, there is much in the way of guidance and examples available to assist in the establishment of a new society. Here we propose some best practices to follow in the establishment of a national meteorological society.

3.1 Founding committee

All new institutions initiated from the ground-up, start small. There will need to be a few key people with the passion (and hopefully the endurance) to see the new entity emerge and become a fully recognised society with the potential to serve both its membership and the wider community. Identifying these people and establishing an initial management structure, which will likely go on to form the founding committee, is clearly a key step.

3.2 Scope of the new society's interests

Meteorology involves several basic scientific disciplines, notably mathematics along with several branches of physics such as fluid dynamics, thermal radiation, and thermodynamics. Furthermore, meteorology is allied to several other disciplines that also draw on a similar range of basic sciences, such as oceanography and hydrology. Meteorology in turn is often included in other broader disciplines such as geography and environmental sciences.

Traditionally, climatology has been considered to be a branch of meteorology although in recent years this interpretation has been less strictly observed.

In establishing a new society, it will be helpful to reflect in its name the scope of the society's intended interests. For example, in addition to "Meteorological Societies", which may in fact be broader than strictly meteorological in scope, the IFMS has the following amongst its membership:

- Australian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society (AMOS)
- Canadian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society (CMOS)
- Geophysical Society of Finland
- Portuguese Association of Meteorology and Geophysics
- Society of Hydrologists and Meteorologists - Nepal
- South African Society for Atmospheric Sciences

3.3 Membership

Typically, professionally qualified members of the new society will have working affiliations with in-country organizations having direct or indirect interests in meteorology and its related disciplines. An inventory of such organizations will be an important first step in gauging the future scope of the society's membership. The organizations may be based within government, academia, or the private sector. Indeed, much of the value of a Meteorological Society will lie in its capacity to draw on all three sectors and act as an effective mechanism for cooperation across a wide range of matters of national interest relating to weather, water and climate. It will be critically important to obtain the backing of these organizations in establishing the society. Such support could include some seed funding, the realisation of which may require the submission of a formal proposal.

In order to broaden the membership of the Society, consideration could be given to a category of membership that does not require a professional qualification in meteorology or related discipline. Having both, however, may lead to the need for managing two activity streams that target the needs and interests of the different membership categories.

4. Incorporated or Unincorporated²

While there will be differences in governing regulations from country to country, an incorporated association is generally regarded as a registered legal entity, usually established for professional, recreational, cultural or charitable purposes, and not as a profit-making enterprise. It will have a minimum number of members and all surpluses (income minus expenditure) will be used to provide further support for the association's future activities. Such a structure offers many benefits to suitable organisations. Incorporation makes an association a legal entity that is independent of its individual members, thus making it easier for the organisation to enter into contracts.

Incorporation will allow an association to:

- continue regardless of changes to membership
- accept gifts, bequests and grants
- buy and sell property
- enter into enforceable contracts
- sue or be sued
- invest and borrow money.

An incorporated association can be established for any legal purpose. Registration is usually inexpensive and it's relatively easy to establish and operate – the association's budget surpluses will generally not be subject to tax.

However, surpluses cannot be distributed to members – they must be applied to the objectives of the association. There's will typically be an annual financial reporting requirement to both the members and to the relevant local authority which may attract a fee. Incorporating an association may not be compulsory in a jurisdiction. However, if you do incorporate, there will be rules to follow.

Becoming an incorporated association is generally not suitable for organisations that are formed to, or operate mostly to, make a profit for their members.

The following table will help decide whether incorporating is the right option for your association.

Things to Consider	If you incorporate	If you do not incorporate
Membership	Your organisation must have a minimum number of members (e.g. five).	Your organisation can have any number of members.
Not-for-profit status	Your organisation may trade, but not in order to distribute surpluses (profit) to its members.	Your organisation is not restricted from trading or doing business for personal profit.
Legal status	Your organisation becomes a 'legal person' (that is, a legal entity that stays the same even if its members change). It can do the following things in its own name: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accept gifts or bequests • buy and sell property • invest and borrow money 	Your organisation may not be able to do any of the things described under 'if you incorporate', at left. These would have to be done by an individual member on behalf of the unincorporated association's members. A member of an unincorporated association is usually personally liable for

² This information is based on advice provided by *Consumer Affairs, Victoria, Australia*. Before proceeding with incorporation, it will be important to gather this sort of information specific to the jurisdiction in which the association will be incorporated. Another useful reference is the article [Ten simple rules for forming a professional scientific society](#)

Things to Consider	If you incorporate	If you do not incorporate
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open a bank account • sue and be sued • take out public liability insurance with greater ease. 	contracts they enter into and decisions they make.
Legal protection for members	Members and office bearers are protected against personal liability for the organisation's debts.	Members could be personally liable if the organisation incurs debts or has legal problems.
Statutory obligations	Your organisation and its office bearers must comply with requirements in any locally legislated acts governing incorporated associations, including accounting, auditing and annual reporting requirements.	Your organisation is not bound by such acts. However, your organisation will normally still be bound by other laws, such as tax laws.
Costs	Your organisation will normally pay fees for incorporating and lodging some administrative forms. There may also be costs involved in meeting ongoing statutory obligations, such as financial reporting on a regular basis.	Your organisation will not have the expense of meeting statutory obligations of incorporation.
Disputes	Your organisation must either have its own procedure for resolving internal disputes or use a procedure set down in a set of model rules for incorporated associations.	Your organisation is not required to have or use a dispute resolution procedure.
Contracts and agreements	Your organisation can enter into contracts and agreements in its own name. This offers more certainty to potential contracting parties such as lenders, lessors, employees and suppliers of goods and services.	Your organisation cannot enter into contracts or agreements in its own name.
Grants	Your organisation may be eligible to apply for a larger range of government and non-government grants.	Your organisation may not be able to apply for grants that require applicants to be incorporated.

4.1 Key factors to consider

Consider the following if you decide to register your society as an incorporated association:

4.1.1 Membership

Incorporated associations require an approved constitution with rules covering matters such as qualifications for membership, quorums for meetings and provisions for elections. Incorporation provides benefits for members and officers, including:

- protection against personal responsibility for any debts or liabilities incurred by the association
- limiting of personal liability to outstanding fees.

The rules and code of conduct of the Australian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society are available at the following link:

<https://www.amos.org.au/about/rules-and-regulations/>

while the constitution and rules of the Ethiopian Meteorological Society are at:

<http://www.ethiomet.gov.et/app/webroot/etms/constitution.php>

The former is in a developed country and the latter in a developing country; however, their constructs are somewhat similar. The relevant national authority for registering an incorporated association may also have suitable examples of model constitutions or rules, which can be modified to suit the establishment of a meteorological society.

4.1.2 Non-profit

As noted above, incorporated associations are non-profit organisations. Any surpluses at the end of a reporting period (generally the country's financial year) should be put back into the association and not provided as personal gain for its members.

4.1.3 Liability

Incorporated associations can own and fully control property. If the organisation is sued, the liability of club members for debts or damage is limited. Members or office-bearers of unincorporated associations on the other hand may be sued or held personally liable for the debts of the organisation. Hence it is important that office bearers (president, secretary, treasurer etc.) in particular, are aware of their responsibilities and exposure in this regard.

4.1.4 Bequests, gifts and funding

An incorporated association can invest a bequest, or gift, given through a will. It can also borrow money and operate one or more bank accounts in its own name. It's sometimes easier for an incorporated association to obtain government funding due to the association's stable structure.

4.1.5 Legislation

Incorporated associations are typically subject to some form of Associations Incorporation Act legislated in the local jurisdiction.

4.1.6 Steps in registering as an incorporated association

- I. Hold a meeting with members to vote on whether your organisation wants to incorporate. A majority of votes in favour of incorporation must be obtained to proceed with incorporation.

- II. The meeting should then authorise a person or persons, who are of legal age (e.g. 18 years old) and are resident in the jurisdiction, to take responsibility for proceeding with the processes of incorporating the association.
- III. Draft the association's constitutional document or set of rules as required by relevant national regulations, noting also the guidance provided by the examples referred to above.
- IV. Hold a meeting to approve the draft constitution.
- V. Submit the constitution to the relevant authority for ratification.

Once approved, the newly formed Association's activities will be guided by its constitution.

A First General Meeting of the Association should be held as soon as possible in order to formally elect the officers of the association along with any ordinary committee members.

It may be necessary to undertake a separate process to have the Association registered as a charitable entity, which would enable it to solicit and accept tax-exempt donations.

5. Financing the Society

5.1 Seed funding

The establishment of any organisation from scratch will require some seed funding to support the work required to bring the structure into existence. The potential sources of seed funds will vary from country to country but could include direct donations from government, academic or corporate entities that can see benefit in supporting the society's establishment. Such donations could be monetary or in-kind, with the latter including use of office space, staff time, meeting room access, and use of equipment, e.g. computing and communication facilities. The securing of seed funds may require the development of a formal or informal proposal.

5.2 Drawing up a budget

All organisations require funding structures to support their operations and activities. Typically, the primary source of funds is the annual fee levied on all members. Membership fees may be graded according membership categories; for example, categories could include Professional, Associate and Corporate. Ideally membership fees should be struck at levels that ensure the Society's basic operational needs are met. In developing the financial documents for the Society, it is recommended that professional advice be sought to ensure that all local requirements for a not-for-profit organisation are adhered to.