

ECAM plenary session on Ensemble Forecast products – Optimal Use for the Market? Wednesday 14th September 2011

This was a lively roundtable discussion (Chaired by Ewen McCallum from the UK Met Office) on the large topic of ensembles and the use of probabilistic language. The key question being asked was 'what is necessary to stimulate 'the market' (commercial or government) into exploiting this information more fully, as has been done over many years with deterministic output?'

The session was divided into two parts. The first before coffee consisted of short talks from the 5 panellists followed in part 2 by questions from the floor.

Stephan Meulemans (Mecuria Switzerland) opened proceedings with a talk from a customer perspective using renewables as an example of the use of ensembles in demand prediction. He spoke as a knowledgeable user and the importance of getting high profile events right, like the Pakistan floods.

Stephan was followed by Ken Mylne (UK Met office) and he gave a comprehensive and indeed surprisingly 'dynamic' talk covering the whole breadth of the subject from expert to customer. He used numerous examples of how the impact of the event was important and he felt the Press in general just 'don't get it' when it comes to probabilistic language.

Robert Mureau (Meteo Group Netherlands) gave an operational perspective and talked of the forecaster as a user of ensemble information and gave some examples from the media on using such information.

Sebastien Norbert (King's college, London) then took to the stage to speak about social scientific aspects of the subject and emphasised that the person receiving information also has a responsibility about what is being communicated. He emphasised how complex the whole issue was and the obstacles to clear communication.

Dee Cotgrove (UK Met Office) gave an honest insight into the difficulties of communicating the 'BBQ summer' which was a very high profile event in the UK in 2009. She emphasised the difficulties of dealing with the tabloid press in both trying to explain probability or indeed the risk of supplying them with a headline.

After coffee the floor was opened to the audience. A lively and interesting debate took place, covering all aspects of the subject that had been highlighted by the speakers. There was no shortage of 'arms in the air' and the session finished right on time before the evening dinner. It was clear that the debate had not uncovered a 'silver bullet' to answer the key question and that work needed to be done to realise the full potential of probabilistic information.

Ewen McCallum
07/10/11