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*Building Capacity around the world by strengthening National Meteorological Societies & Regional Meteorological Societies and creating Collaborations*

## Establishing a Meteorological Society

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### 1. Introduction

This document outlines the advantages of a National Meteorological Society<sup>1</sup>, 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 exchange ideas and cooperate on a wide range of research and operational activities. Additionally, the occupational institutions can draw many advantages from the activities of such societies e.g. through the promotion of meteorology and its related professions, and the capacity for societies to tap into the broader community affected frequently and in multitude ways by the vicissitudes of weather and climate.

To support the development of nascent National Meteorological Societies, the International Forum of Meteorological Societies can provide a wealth of knowledge and experience by drawing from its member societies

### 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 developing 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 an annual conference, which typically covers a broad range of topics and the sponsoring of symposiums on specific topics of broad interest. These events provide opportunities for both researchers and practitioners in both professional and social settings. In addition, they can assist

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

individuals seeking job opportunities to meet with potential employers and the latter identifying suitable recruits.

## 2.2 Professional Development:

Many National Meteorological Societies, in addition to the staging of conferences and symposiums, offer professional development opportunities through courses, workshops and publications on research results and operational activities as well as general information on weather, climate and water for the broader community. Publications may be the form of hard-copy learned journals, brochures, reports and as is increasingly the case through 'on-line publication' shared through websites that can be open to members only or to the broader public. Many organisations have embraced Social Media as a means of communicating and promoting professional development more informally, both within the Society's bounds and more broadly. It needs to be recognised from the outset that to be effective the use of Social Media and indeed on-line systems in general requires careful planning, ongoing management skills and adequate resources.

### 2.2.1 Broadening of knowledge:

As a National Meteorological Society develops, it can offer courses, seminars and/or lectures to keep its members up to date on the latest industry innovations, research and trends. Through a range of outreach activities, it can also assist in raising the awareness of the wider community in matters relating to weather, water and climate.

### 2.2.2 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 recognition and confidence to an employer that an individual 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.

### 2.2.3 Mentoring:

Mentoring is the cornerstone of many professional societies when it comes to working with its younger members through the pairing of a lesser experienced person with 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 your network. This allows you to use your peers as sounding boards and often make some great friends with the same interests as you.

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 to 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.

## 2.3 Career Advancement

National Meteorological Societies can help their members find employment through the provision of job listings that other members or their organisations may be offering. Many organizations have career resources available such as advice on preparing a resume 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.

## 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 What will be the scope of the new society's interests?

Meteorology in of itself 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, potential members of any 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. Such 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 may include some seed funding, the realization of which may require the submission of a formal proposal.

## 4. Incorporated or Unincorporated<sup>2</sup>

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 given 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.

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<sup>2</sup> 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](#)

<b>Things to Consider</b>	<b>If you incorporate</b>	<b>If you do not incorporate</b>
<b>Membership</b>	Your organisation must have a minimum number of members (e.g. five).	Your organisation can have any number of members.
<b>Not-for-profit status</b>	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.
<b>Legal status</b>	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accept gifts or bequests</li> <li>• buy and sell property</li> <li>• invest and borrow money</li> <li>• open a bank account</li> <li>• sue and be sued</li> <li>• take out public liability insurance with greater ease.</li> </ul>	<p>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.</p> <p>A member of an unincorporated association is usually personally liable for contracts they enter into and decisions they make.</p>
<b>Legal protection for members</b>	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.
<b>Statutory obligations</b>	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.
<b>Costs</b>	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.
<b>Disputes</b>	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.

Things to Consider	If you incorporate	If you do not incorporate
<b>Contracts and agreements</b>	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.
<b>Grants</b>	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.

## 5. Key factors to consider

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

### 5.1 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.

Two examples of constitutions in use by two IFMS member societies are available here [\[add links\]](#). One society is in a developed country and the other in a developing country, their constructs are somewhat similar. The relevant national authority for registering an incorporated association may also have suitable examples of model constitutions, which can be modified to suit the establishment of a meteorological society.

### 5.2 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.

### 5.3 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.

## 5.4 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.

## 5.5 Legislation

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

## 5.6 Steps in registering as an incorporated association

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Hold a meeting to approve the draft constitution.
5. 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.