

EMWIS

National Focal Points

Quality of Service

Draft Charter

(Version of 2001-10-25)

Table of contents

1 Tasks of a National Focal Point

EMWIS is a specialised information system whose main objective is to identify, structure, analyse and disseminate information on inland water in the Euro-Mediterranean area.

The task of a focal point is two-fold. On the one hand, it should offer the national users easy-to-use and friendly access to information, submitted to an appropriate quality control, and disseminate this information in the widest way possible. On the other hand, it should play the role of an information node of a more global system operating at the Euro-Med level.

Each national focal point is a small team working in an organisation responsible for gathering and disseminating the water related-documentation and information in its country. This organisation (usually providing a public service) is designated by the government.

At the national level, the focal point is responsible for:

- Carrying out an inventory of the available information sources and providing easy-to-use and user-friendly access to these sources (i.e. topical directory)
- Establishing, in co-operation with the information producers, communication processes to provide direct access to the country's information
- Developing, whenever necessary, the tools and interface software needed to provide access to the information
- Disseminating the available information to the country's users
- Strengthening relations with the country's users to meet their expectations in the best way possible and developing new informational services

As an information node of EMWIS, the focal point is also responsible for:

- Participating in the meetings organised by the Co-ordination Committee and in the training seminars
- Implementing a national information system that can be incorporated into a more global system (i.e. it should at least comply with the interoperability recommendations defined by EMWIS Technical Unit)
- Ensuring that the protocols of access to the information are translated and available in the EMWIS working languages (English and French)
- Meeting the information requests from foreign users or from other EMWIS NFPs
- Contributing to the formulation of EMWIS yearly action plan with the Technical Unit

2 The services provided

The information system of a National Focal Point is a specialised information portal, and as such offers added-value services, based on reference information, in addition to the exhaustive gathering of the information generated in the country (in the following areas: institutions, documentation, training, research and development, water-related data administration).

A priori, the services most appreciated by the users are described hereafter:

Specialised news from national periodicals (nation-wide publication or locally published). The articles dealing with water in the country are gathered every day.

In Spain, this basic gathering of information is carried out by a company in charge of collecting the press articles of many Spanish periodicals. This company (Mynewsonline) has signed trade agreements with Spanish periodicals and is under contract with Hispagua for searching articles dealing with the topic concerned.

Periodical information bulletin. This bulletin contains processed information on the most significant water-related events in the country. The process proposed, with at least a monthly publishing, is as follows:

- Selection of the most outstanding national and international articles published during this period
- Events in the water world (courses, congresses, seminars, new legislation, etc.)
- Recommended websites
- Selection of announcements on hydraulic works published in the State Official Journal
- Rainfalls, water reserves and available energy. Source: the National Hydrological Bulletin
- New features on the NFP website

Queries via electronic mail. Thanks to the electronic mail, the users can ask questions, give comments, suggestions, etc. The replies should be given within 48 hours. The information provided is usually in the form of references (i.e. information on the institutions, web pages, libraries, etc. where the users can find the information they require). On some occasions they are put in contact with a specialist in a specific area.

Search engine. The search engine is an essential tool of any portal. The search engine should at least enable queries in full text on any page of the NFP website.

Specialised reports. This concerns reports or web pages on current events interesting the users, such as legionellosis or the effects on health of trihalomethane in water. These reports, drawn up by the NFP team, contain information from the published article (small summary of the articles published on this topic) and then propose basic information on the topic (What is...?), legislation on the topic, when it exists (at the national, regional and international levels) and the information sources (full text document, institutions, bibliographical references, etc.)

Technical watch service. It consists of a system for the selective dissemination of information via electronic mail. The users periodically receive information on their electronic messaging according to the areas of interest they had provided.

Discussion forums for professionals

The mailing lists enable forums in which the users initiate discussions on various topics and share information on recent events. This enables the updating of the website and enhancement of the content as the topics proposed will be discussed with various points of view.

3 Quality of the information provided

Quality control is essential so that the activity developed is reliable and credible. In the information circle (especially on the Internet), this task is critical due to the large volume of existing information. On the web, there is information of great value and good quality but also partly or entirely distorted information due to particular interests. This information does not comply with the

basic criteria on which any kind of information should be based: truthfulness, objectivity, dating and vetting by an author or organisation.

For this reason, it is necessary to:

- Use quality rules for the information produced by the NFP
- Screen the information produced outside the NFP

3.1 Information generated by the NFP

The integrity of the information provided by the NFP on its website should be controlled. Therefore, it is necessary to be able to:

- Contact the NFP (i.e. the person responsible for the information available on the website)
- Identify the information sources when the NFP is not the author (especially regarding digitised data)
- Provide an information update (this date should be included into each web page) and its validity, if need be
- Use ISO standards, when they exist, to codify the information (especially when quantification is concerned)

3.2 Outside information

The main advantage of the web and especially of the websites is to establish hyperlinks to relevant external information sources. Classification per topic and the screening of these sources are essential tasks.

For any website, clarity and user-friendliness in the search for information are as important as the content. This implies a design and structure that can optimise searches and connection times.

In order to do this, the following general criteria are used:

- Relevancy of the information
- Identification of the author
- Date and update
- Writing
- Connection possibilities (external links)
- Graphic design and multimedia (images should not be used too much, lecture should be easy, etc.) (meta-labels, source identification, simple structure, legibility and colour, balance between textual and graphical information)
- Easy management (necessary software), easy search (forward, backward, jump, etc.) organisation (main menu, site map, internal links, etc.), inside search
- Contact (webmaster's e-mail)
- Figures (Number of pages linked to the source concerned)
- Retrieval of information through databases or indexes so that the user can choose the mode he/she wants
- Repository enhancement using documentation analysis technologies (keywords, summaries, contact addresses, etc.)

Some quality indicators are appended for the entire web.

4 The NFPs' commitment to quality

The EMWIS national focal points are committed towards the third parties concerned: users, information providers and EMWIS Technical Unit. In order to establish trust, it is necessary to apply the transparency principle so that everyone can have the bases needed for appreciating and evaluating the quality of the disseminated information.

Towards users, the NFP is committed to:

- Clearly identify the information sources or authors and corresponding publishing dates
- Specify the latest update for each webpage published
- Provide access to its own quality charter and to the quality criteria used
- Offer the opportunity to react to the disseminated information (e.g. comments, box for ideas)
- Periodically analyse expectations to change the offered services accordingly
- Reply to the requests made within a maximum delay of 48 hours
- Respect the users' private life, especially during surveys and when they send a message or a request

Towards providers, the NFP is committed to:

- Inform them when any information which concerns them is published (hyperlink included)
- Enable them to change, at any moment, the information published which concerns them

Towards the Technical Unit, the NFP is committed to:

- Comply, whenever possible, with the recommendations of the Technical Unit, especially when they concern technical compatibility between the national and international levels
- Regularly inform the Technical Unit of the NFP's developments
- Participate in the co-ordination and training activities
- Contribute to the EMWIS Newsletter

APPENDIX - QUALITY INDICATORS FOR THE WEBSITE

Author

Good identification of the author
Apparent reliability of the author
Existence of contact information
Possibility of making additions

Technologies-Access to the information

Website map
Level of friendly navigation
Part summaries (of the sections)
Content hierarchy
Multimedia components
Other indexes (geographical, chronological, etc.)
Reduction level (number of windows to see the entire information)
Existence of semantic navigation
Number of levels (number of clicks to reach the end)
Topical access (topical index)

Ergonomics/Design

Degree of contrast between text and background
Typographical adequacy
Margins and easy reading
Complementarity of the information between images and text
Display layout

Contents

Electronic texts
Topical pages
Inside news
Outside news
Volume of the information related to the topic
Emphasis on the information quality
More or less recent updating
Level of information control and supervision
Clarity (external links)
Are there external links?
Exactness in the selection of links
Link updates
Do the links add value to the information?
Liaison index: number of external links/number of pages

Legibility: Links received by the site

Significant title

Are the first paragraphs explaining the content of the website?

Metalabels

Advanced metalabels (Dublin core)

Quality of the links received (impact factor)

Services

Content customisation

Office customisation

Basic watch via e-mail

Discussion forums

Electronic mail

Page hosting

Connection to the Internet

Software

Electronic trade

On-line courses

Chat

Announcement table/advertising table

FAQ

Access to the information

With an internal search engine

 simple/advanced search

With an outside search engine

 simple/advanced search

 exhaustiveness and accuracy

 Help

Category index

Boolean operators