

BOM forecasters to be replaced by community information officers on radio programs

ABC Rural / By [Warwick Long](#) and [Luke Radford](#)

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The Bureau of Meteorology says it has a team of science communicators to help broadcast weather information. *(Supplied: Darcy Rayner)*

The Bureau of Meteorology has defended its decision to replace expert forecasters in local radio crosses with "science communicators" in a move lambasted by the National Farmers Federation.

The ABC understands the BOM will soon rollout a legion of spokespeople, known as community information officers, to take over on-air weather reporting currently conducted by meteorologists.

Key points:

- Meteorologists will be phased out from presenting weather forecasts on local radio

BOM meteorologists currently conduct nearly 700 scheduled local radio crosses each week.

The BOM wouldn't confirm when the new officers would take over all on-air responsibilities.

However, in a statement, a spokesperson said the community information officers would draw from the same information currently used to support radio crosses.

"Everyone delivering radio crosses draws on local information and is fully briefed on local weather issues," the spokesperson said.

Gippsland resident Lisa Ross said she was worried about the loss of expert information during events such as natural disasters.

"We were in the 2009 Black Saturday fires and the first thing that went was the power, so if that goes we lose internet," Ms Ross said.

"So the only thing we can listen to is the radio."

She said she wanted information from a professional about what was happening in her area.

"What if it's a life or death situation," she said.

"How am I going to get information out of someone who is just reading notes about the weather?"

Qualified science communicators

The BOM said a team of community information officers was already supporting many of the crosses that went to air.

A spokesperson said the officers were qualified science communicators who were based in the region of the broadcast.

"Everyone delivering radio crosses is appropriately qualified and trained," the spokesperson said.

Ms Ross said that change did little to allay her fears.

"It's actually bringing out a bit of anxiety ... it's making me very apprehensive," she said

- The forecasts will be presented instead by community information officers
- Farming groups are concerned it will leave rural communities with less access to accurate information

"I don't understand what they're doing trying to change things.

"We used to be able to rely on things, but I definitely wouldn't rely on that at all."



Some rural residents fear the decision could put them at risk during natural disasters. *(AAP: Andrew Brownbill)*

Farmers frustrated

The decision has been poorly received in the farming community.

National Farmers Federation vice president David Jochinke said he was baffled by it.

"We already have ... issues getting long-range forecasts and we want to be able to ask questions of those people on the cutting edge," Mr Jochinke said.

"It's also a question of trust.

"Agriculture is driven by the weather and we want to know we're getting the best service possible."



David Jochinke says farmers can't always rely on access to the BOM's app. (*Landline: Tim Lee*)

Mr Jochinke said despite claims to the contrary, not everything could be replaced by a mobile app.

"It's really hard to ask your phone a question," Mr Jochinke said.

"But again it's about trust, the meteorologist doesn't just tell us what's happening, they help us understand why and how things are occurring.

"We're not there for them to tell me a story, they're there to give me the facts about what's going on.

"That's why we tune in, without that being the case, it really throws in the question: why do we even have crosses?"

Farmers and advocates fear the decision will leave rural communities with less access to quality information. (*ABC News: Giulio Saggin*)

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