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Yvo de Boer: "regional relevance and greater frequency, keys for successful climate services"

At the JRC's Annual Lecture entitled: "climate services: fit for purpose?", Yvo de Boer explained the ingredients for their success. Such services have to be put in the context of people's regional relevance - even if this means extrapolating data at regional level - and the dissemination frequency of information has to be much higher. Only then will they be able to provide their crucial role of supporting the policy-making process, bringing business on board and contributing to the creation of a public awareness and understanding.

De Boer is the former head of the United Nation's body responsible for a multi-lateral response to the climate change challenge (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change - UNFCCC) and the new KPMG Special Global Advisor, Climate Change and Sustainability.

Addressing a select audience of about 350 people, including top European Institution officials, science and technology leaders, business executives, NGO leaders and students, de Boer stated that: "...the urge to build climate-resilient nations naturally brings with it a desire for more detailed knowledge of the changes that lie ahead. In response to this demand, the idea of 'climate services' has emerged, whereby detailed climate information will be tailored to the needs of specific end users and delivered on demand". He added that: "Germany and the US have now set up national climate services, and last September the World Meteorological Organisation established a Global Framework for Climate Services, with the aim of providing climate data and information to nations worldwide".

Managing uncertainty

The information most urgently needed by decision-makers and resource managers is how the climate will change in the decades ahead and on regional scales. Much of the new science that will be presented in the next *International Panel on Climate Change Report*, due out in 2013-2014, will be focused on this sort of decision-relevant science. But the scientific community recognises that here, climate science is still very much in its infancy.

Where local and regional stakeholders have very specific information requests, on which multi-million-euro decisions and significant societal impact rest, climate scientists can thus find themselves in the decidedly uncomfortable position of having to communicate science that is highly uncertain.

JRC Director-General Roland Schenkel underscored the importance of the *Annual Lecture* and *High-Level Thematic Workshop* (see information below) as interactive platforms to bring together 'happening' science and the global decision-makers at its core, while engaging in open debate with a wide cross-section of stakeholders.

"We are delighted to have somebody of Yvo de Boer's calibre involved on what is an emerging topic of widespread interest. Global challenges require global responses," said Schenkel, who oversees an extensive set of institutes that comprise the European Commission's primary laboratories for policy support. "Our discussions this week show that there is a real momentum in climate science cooperation. Now we must build on that momentum".

Green shoots of pan-European cooperation

On Monday 25 October, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre and the *Nature Publishing Group* convened 15 science and technology leaders for discussions of how climate science contributes to policy-making in their nations - and how the influence could be sharpened.

In addition to Yvo de Boer, participants included Sir John Beddington, UK Chief Scientific Advisor; Jos Delbeke, Director-General, European Commission Directorate General Climate Action; Roland Schenkel, Director-General, European Commission Directorate General Joint Research Centre; Philip Campbell, Editor-in-Chief, *Nature*; Chester Koblinsky, Director, Climate Program Office, US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); Professor Peter Hoeppe, Head of Munich Re's Geo Risks Research Facility; Julia Slings, UK Met Office Chief Scientist; Annegret Thielen, Deputy Director of the German Climate Service Centre; and Saleemul Huq, International Institute for Environment and Development.

Though a summary report of the dialogue will be completed in the weeks ahead, the group - representing government, business and non-governmental organisations - settled on a series of main themes:

- In its relations with policymakers and the public, climate science must guarantee that it is guided by values of integrity and transparency, with its work underpinned by findings in other disciplines such as the social sciences, continuous peer challenge and evaluation;
- The public plays a critical role in affecting policy, especially by influencing the positions adopted by elected officials and policymakers. Whereas climate science necessarily takes long-term and often global predictions, the here and now of adaptation and mitigation at local levels should be better explained. A key role of science leaders is to inform the public and policymakers and aid in their understanding of policy implications;
- Scientists must seek to provide a complete and accurate assessment of the potential risks in scientific research and policy. While assessments of risk and uncertainty are inherently difficult and complex, science leaders should not create unnecessary angst as a means of motivating public support for particular science policies; and
- Scientists should answer, in an accurate and timely way, policymakers' requests for shorter-term climate science information. At the same time, policymakers should encourage scientists to cooperate inter-regionally and to speak out even when their research or assessment may be unpopular.

The Joint Research Centre

The Joint Research Centre is a directorate general of the European Commission. It provides customer-driven scientific and technical support for the conception, development, implementation, and monitoring of European Union policies. Further, it functions as a reference center of science and technology for the Union. It serves the common interest of the European Union member states, while being independent of private and national special interests. It has seven scientific institutes, located at five different sites in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, with a wide range of laboratories and unique research facilities.