

In conversation with... Carlo Buontempo

Written by The Parliament Magazine on 21 November 2019 in Interviews
Interviews

“Accurate, quality assured and freely available environmental data from ECMWF’s Copernicus Services supports policymakers and businesses throughout the European Union with the information, evidence and tools to make climate smart decisions,” explains Carlo Buontempo, recently appointed Director of the Copernicus Climate Change Service.



We met Florence Rabier, Director General of the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), in September and she gave us a great introduction to the organisation’s work implementing two Copernicus Services for the European Union - the Climate Change and Atmosphere Monitoring Services (C3S and CAMS)

Given that the global climate talks will take place in just a few weeks, could you tell us a bit more about how these services are supporting the EU’s vision for a greener future?

As you’ve alluded to, the incoming European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, has a vision for Europe to become the first carbon neutral continent and pledged to introduce a ‘European Green Deal’ of carbon-cutting and climate change-mitigating initiatives.

So, now more than ever, there is a political will in Europe to act on climate change. The two groundbreaking services that we operate on behalf of the EU offer vital information to help monitor and understand environmental change and enable others to make informed decisions.

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This information comes from us in the form of quality assured data, tools, sector-specific projects and case studies that are available to everyone free of charge and include the quality of the air we breathe to the impact of climate on economic sectors and society.

These services support the EU's vision for the Green Deal by increasing the level of knowledge on the state of our planet and directly contribute to green economic growth in the EU as a result of the innovation and opportunities this level of big data and service provides.

To put this in monetary terms, all Copernicus services combined, according to a PWC market report published this year, will generate economic benefits between €16.2 and €21.3 billion until 2020.

So, we very much see ourselves as an enabler for realising the EU's green and economic vision.

Taking your answer further, how in your opinion do the services help policy and decision makers in their approach to climate mitigation and adaptation?

ECMWF has been providing data and services to countries across Europe and beyond for over 40 years. It has renowned scientists and powerful supercomputers, and the information we provide goes through rigorous evaluation and quality control.

Therefore, we are a trusted organisation providing something unique that is already having an impact. Our services help policymakers make informed choices relating to climate change mitigation and adaptation both on a European and global level.

Even though our environmental data are openly available to anyone at any time, the services work best when used by intergovernmental and national agencies and institutions to advise governments and elected officials as part of their ongoing function in policy planning and response.

This is our contribution to helping countries with their implementation of the Paris Agreement.

"Now more than ever, there is a political will in Europe to act on climate change"

And beyond policy, how does the data provided by Copernicus support economic sectors to adapt to future changes and threats? How does it work?

The Copernicus Climate Change Service has over 24,000 users of its climate data store from across many sectors and processes 45 terabytes of data everyday as a result.

However, the value of service is more than to simply be a source of data and information, it also enables, and nothing demonstrates this more than when our data is used by players in sectors such as energy, agriculture or tourism to adapt to or mitigate changing climate impacts.

For example, food security is an increasing concern in many parts of the world. One of our agriculture-sector projects provides essential climate data that is fed into crop models for effective harvest planning.

In another, we helped olive tree farmers in Tuscany plan up to 30 years ahead against the olive fruit fly, as long-term projections by C3S show that pest infestation will increase over time because of climate change.

In addition, working with the Copernicus Emergency Management Service (CEMS) operated by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC), we provide fire and flood danger reanalysis data and make it available through our climate data store.

These datasets provide historical records of global fire danger condition spanning several decades - which can be relevant to those working in sectors like tourism - and important information on river discharge, which is very useful to sectors that are water reliant such as agriculture and energy.

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ECMWF's collaboration with the European union also relates to the quality of our atmosphere and the air we breathe. How is Copernicus contributing to this?

The air that surrounds us is a mixture of gases which form the Earth's atmosphere and affects us in numerous ways - our health for example - so it is vital to be able to monitor its quality.

There are several air quality apps that already use data from CAMS forecasts, which is provided up to five days in advance, including Windy, airText and Plume Labs. Euronews gives daily forecasts of the air quality in European cities across their TV network, also based on our data.

And we help hay fever sufferers plan by providing forecasts for apps like Météo Pollen and PASYFO that include personal allergy symptoms which are often triggered by specific particles in the air.

In the coming decade, a top priority is to estimate the anthropogenic CO₂ emissions with the help of satellite observations and to provide support to the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

This will help countries achieve their objective of reducing the level of manmade greenhouse gases and play a key role in making Europe climate neutral.

The Copernicus Climate Change and Atmosphere Monitoring services are contributing to the efforts to meet the climate crisis and to achieve the internationally-agreed goals set out in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the New Urban Agenda of Habitat III, just to name a few.

ECMWF and Copernicus are part of a collective effort to pave the way to what we hope will be a better

future and life for everyone.

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