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31 January 2011

Mr Tom Nightingale
Email: request-57601-9bc1ab49@whatdotheyknow.com
(by email only)

Dear Mr Nightingale

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

Thank you for your email of 12 January 2011 in which you made the following request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000:

> Please would you send me full details of instructions and requests - written and verbal - made by the Cabinet Office to the Met Office in respect of:
> the handling, dissemination, reporting or restriction of use of the "private" seasonal weather forecast supplied to the Cabinet Office by the Met Office for the winter of 2010-11.

.

I can inform you that while the Cabinet Office does hold some information relevant to your request, no instructions were made by the Cabinet Office to the Met Office regarding the handling, dissemination, reporting or restriction of use of the three monthly forecast, a copy of which is attached (Annex A).

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request or wish to request an internal review, you should write to:

Sue Gray
Director
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

email: foiteam@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

You should note that the Cabinet Office will not normally accept an application for internal review if it is received more than two months after the date that the reply was issued.

If you are not content with the outcome of your internal review, you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the complaints procedure provided by Cabinet Office. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

Steve Barnes
Civil Contingencies Secretariat
22 Whitehall
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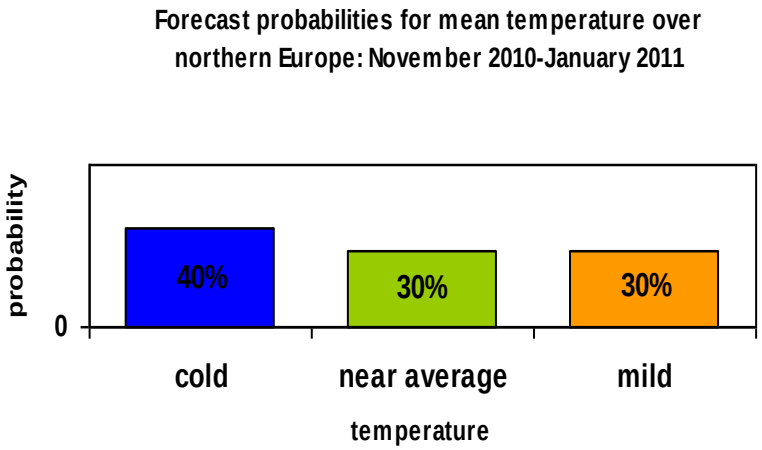
Annex A

Met Office Seasonal Outlook for UK Government Northern Europe: November 2010 – January 2011

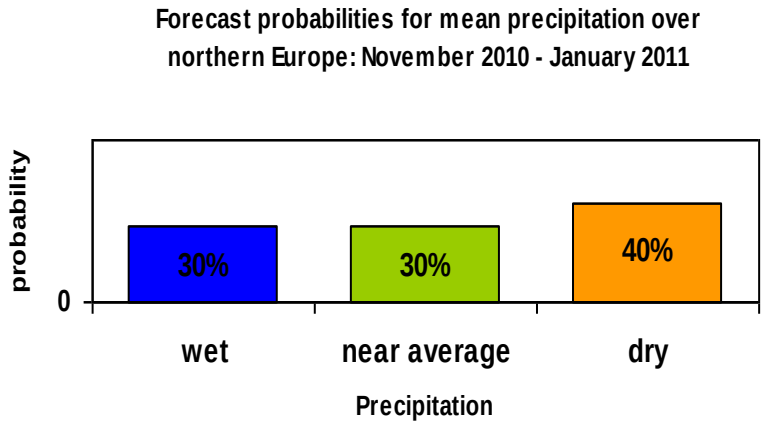
Issued 25 October 2010

Outlook for November 2010 – January 2011

For the period November 2010-January 2011, there is a 30% chance of mild conditions, a 30% chance of near-average and a 40% chance of cold conditions over northern Europe.



For precipitation, there is a 30% chance of wet conditions, a 30% chance of near-average and a 40% chance of dry conditions over northern Europe.



UK and historical context

The outlook gives the likelihood of temperature and precipitation categories for the broad Northern European region.

The tables and figures below put these categories into a UK context. They show the typical range of temperatures and rainfall experienced in the UK for each Northern European category, based on what happened in past years. Occasional years regarded as atypical are omitted in deriving the ranges shown in the tables. This analysis is not a means of 'converting' the Northern European outlook into a UK forecast, but can be used as an approximate guide to the range of UK conditions expected if a particular Northern European category is realised.

(a) Temperature

Observed Northern Europe Temperature Category	Typical lower limit of average UK temperature	Typical upper limit of average UK temperature	UK average temperatures for selected years
Mild (■)	4.4˚C (-0.1˚C)	5.8˚C (+1.3˚C)	2006 6.2˚C (+1.7˚C) 2009 3.4˚C (-1.1˚C)
Near-Average	4.0˚C (-0.5˚C)	5.1˚C (+0.6˚C)	
Cold (■)	3.0˚C (-1.5˚C)	4.9˚C (+0.4˚C)	

Table 1. November-January UK temperature ranges. Typical lower and upper limits for UK temperatures in each Northern European category are shown in the left and central columns. Temperatures in a selection of years are shown in the right-hand column for reference. Figures in parentheses represent the difference in temperature from the long-term average value.

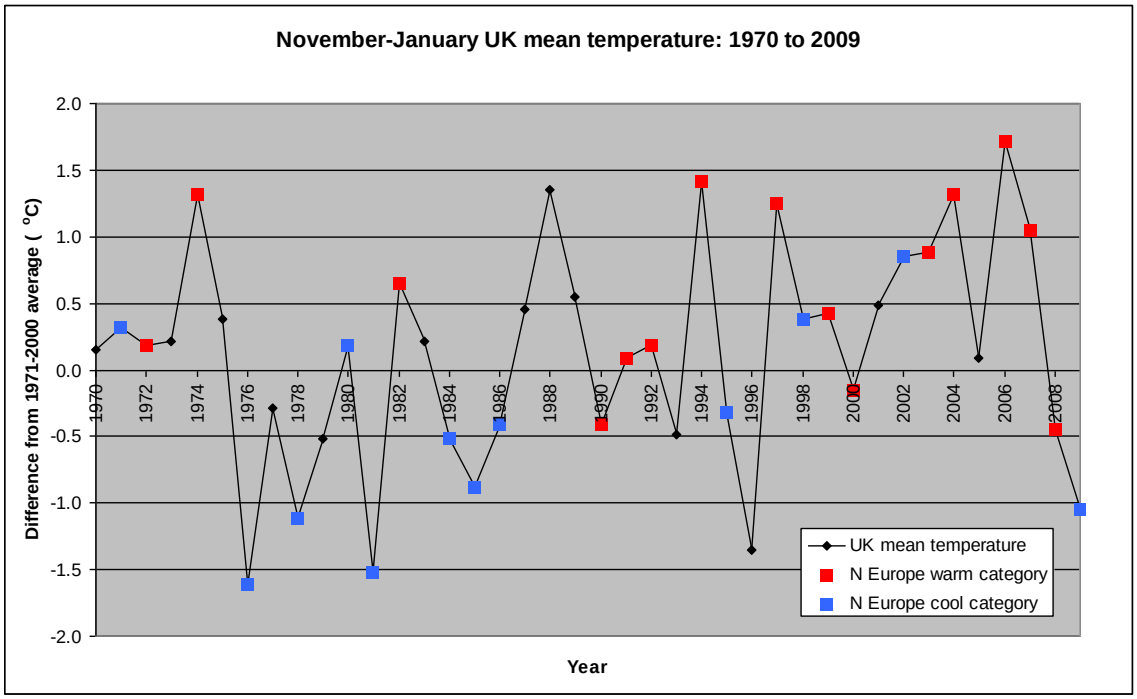


Figure 1. November-January UK average temperatures as the difference from long-term average values. Blue squares indicate years for which the observed Northern European temperature is in the 'cool' category. Red squares indicate years for which the observed Northern European temperature is in the 'warm' category.

(b) Rainfall

Observed Northern Europe Rainfall Category	Typical lower limit of average UK rainfall	Typical upper limit of average UK rainfall	UK average rainfall for selected years
Dry (■)	239 mm (68%)	387mm (110%)	2006 482 mm (137%) 2009 393 mm (112%)
Near-Average	299 mm (85%)	384 mm (109%)	
Wet (■)	398 mm (113%)	450mm (128%)	

Table 2. November-January UK average rainfall ranges. Typical lower and upper UK rainfall limits (millimetres) in each Northern European category are shown in the left and central columns. Rainfall in a selection of years is shown in the right-hand column for reference. Figures in parentheses express the rainfall as a percentage of its normal value.

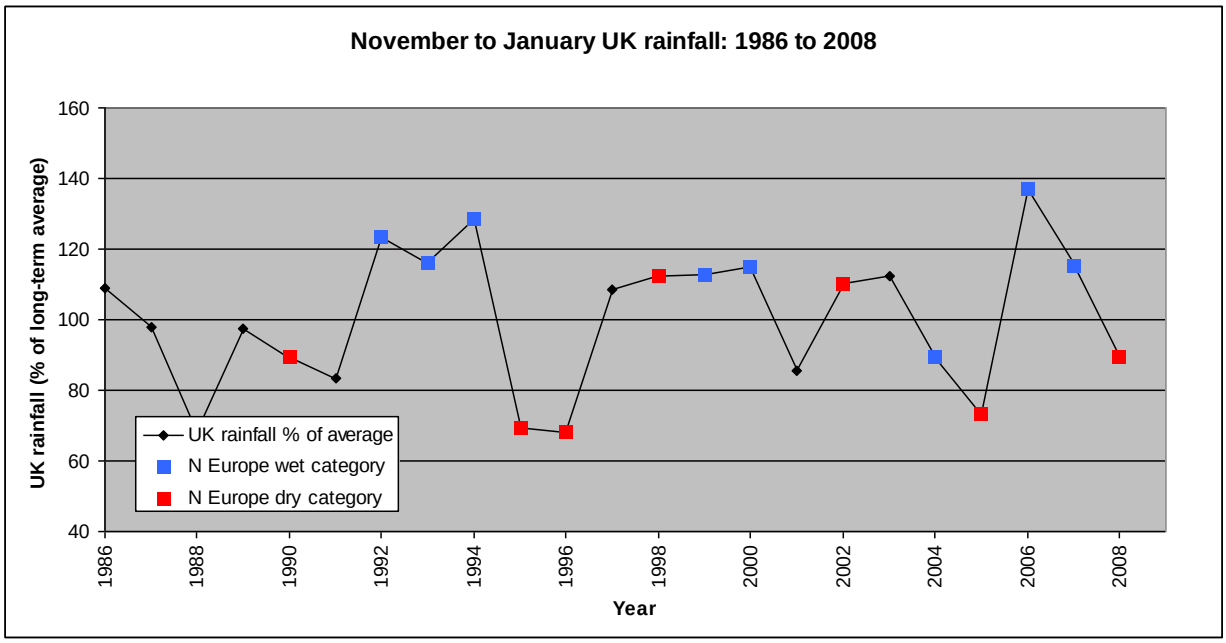


Figure 2. November-January UK average rainfall as a percentage of the long-term average. Red squares indicate years for which the observed Northern European rainfall is in the 'dry' category. Blue squares indicate years for which the observed Northern European rainfall is in the 'wet' category.

Follow up email from the Met Office 25/10/11

As discussed a paragraph on our initial thoughts for winter, please ring if it is not what you were after.

See our Chief Executive reflect on his first year at the Met Office and consider what the future has in store at http://uploads.metofficeab.co.uk/video/MetOffice_Annual_Rep_Final.wmv

Met Office Initial Assessment of Risk for Winter 2010/11

This covers the start of winter: November, December and January 2010/11. This will be updated monthly through the winter and so probabilities will change.

Temperature

3 in 10 chance of mild conditions

3 in 10 chance of average conditions

4 in 10 chance of cold condition

Precipitation

3 in 10 chance of wet conditions

3 in 10 chance of average conditions

4 in 10 chance of dry conditions

Summary: There is an increased risk for a cold and wintry start to the winter season.

Looking further ahead beyond this assessment there are some indications of an increased risk of a mild end to the winter season.

Annex B email exchanges with the Met Office

Email sent 01/11/2010

Further to our discussion this morning DECC, whilst recognising the need to keep the document high level and in lay terms, are also concerned about the difference between the forecasting used by National Grid supplied by Met Office and the statement below based upon more recent indications to CCS.

Short of caveating the differential forecasts as I have provisionally done in para 2 below, can you think of a better way to represent the fact that National Grid calculations were made on older weather forecasts?

Best,

The Weather Outlook

1. In 2009/10 we experienced 1 in 30 winter conditions not experienced since 1981. [to provide alternative definition for last winter]. According to the Met Office prediction for the coming months (November and December), the UK has a probability of 55% that temperatures will be average or lower than average, and a 75% probability of temperatures which are average or higher than average. This means that as we go in to winter, there is a slightly better chance of temperatures being average or higher, but it is important to note that the possibility of an average or colder than average is still high and departments may wish to plan for this possibility. The coldest month of winter has historically been February, so further updates on the 3-monthly output will be produced by the Met Office each month. However, the most recent Met Office of indications are for a colder than average December followed by a relatively mild remainder of the winter. There is no clear indication at present as to the amount of precipitation this winter.

2. It should be noted that National Grid supply and demand forecasting is based upon Met Office forecasting at a fixed point in the year (September/October) whilst this assessment has access to more recent and therefore potentially more accurate weather forecasts. This should not impact the overall accuracy of the broad assessment process contained in this paper.

3. Despite the overall chance of average to above average temperatures, significant localised or wide spread prolonged cold-snaps cannot be ruled out. Therefore, in order to consider the potential consequences of winter conditions over the winter months (December, January and February), three scenarios are considered. The degree of

impact of each of the scenarios will be determined, in part, by their geographical footprint.

4. Scenario 1 – A typical UK winter. Generally following the trend of warmer winters, with rain and normal/above normal temperatures. However, short (up to two weeks), sharp winter conditions of frost and snow will still occur.

5. Scenario 2 – As above, but with occasional severe winter conditions of several days of freezing temperatures day and night and significant snowfalls affecting specific parts of the country. (e.g. the SE and London, or Yorkshire etc.)

6. Scenario 3 – As winter 2009/10 (or worse). Persistent winter conditions over most areas (regions) of Great Britain with one or more spells of several days at below freezing with significant and repeated snow fall.

Email sent 01/11/2010

Below is the forecast used by DECC/Nat Grid.

As discussed the text in the 2010/11 Winter Outlook Report published jointly by National Grid and Ofgem on 6 October states the following regarding the Winter Weather Outlook.

"Met Office Weather Forecast

25. The Met Office have now ceased publication of their long term winter weather forecast however their website[1] continues to provide long term analyses. For the period of December through to February the data presented suggests:

- a 60 – 80% probability of above normal temperatures
- a 20 – 40% probability of near normal temperatures
- a 0 – 20% probability of below normal temperatures

26. In terms of UK precipitation their forecasts are weighted towards above average. For Europe average temps are typically 0.5-1.5°C above average. For North America average temps are up to 2° above average except for a cooler west coast."

The website which the Winter Outlook report cites is http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/science/specialist/seasonal/probability/glob_seas_prob.html and the information currently on this still appears to jibe with the forecast in paras 25 and 26 of the Grid publication.

It would be helpful to have some sort of articulation of how the various forecasts relate to each other to minimise any confusion or scope for ministers to misunderstand the situation.

Many thanks,

> CCS, DECC and DfT are currently pulling together a paper for the DHSC which serves to assess the risk of domestic disruption over the coming winter. Together with DH on health impacts, we have a number of references to last winter that vary from 1 in 5 through 1in20 to 1 in 30 year events.
>
> Departments may define winter weather differently depending upon what it is they are managing. However, this makes a multi-sectoral paper very difficult to draft. For example, for DECC commenting now, last winter was:
>
> " not 1 in 30 cold! – The winter overall from October to March was average with unseasonably periods sandwiching a cold period from the end of Dec to Feb . The Dec to Feb period was still only 1in 5 cold".
>
> Can I use this statement?
> Other sources refer to last year as a 1 in 30. Is there a different statement I should use for different risk factors i.e. 1 in 5 for cold but 1 in 30 for snow?
>
> Thanks in advance,