18th Pacific Islands Climate Outlook Forum Statement

This statement was produced by the WMO RA-V Pacific Regional Climate Centre Network following the 18th Pacific Islands Climate Outlook Forum (PICOF-18) held on 23-24 April 2026, for use by National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) in the Pacific Islands. For more information, please see the background section and/or contact your local meteorological office.

Key messages

- The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) status is currently neutral. Transition to an El Niño event is likely in mid-2026 with the event persisting through at least the end of 2026. There remains some uncertainty regarding the magnitude, though a strong El Niño event is possible.
- Early and active tropical cyclone (TC) conditions in the north tropical Pacific are expected to continue in 2026 under a developing El Niño, with activity shifting eastward toward RMI. Above-normal TC activity is favoured in the western North Pacific, and reduced activity in far-western Micronesia and Palau.
- Across most of Micronesia, northern Kiribati and southern French Polynesia above normal rainfall is favoured for May to July. For the same period in Palau, Melanesia, most of Polynesia and Kiribati Phoenix and southern Line Islands mostly below normal rainfall is favoured. Outlook confidence is highest along the equator and in the western Pacific, with generally good skill elsewhere. The spatial pattern is similar for August to October with a greater chance of below normal rainfall over Palau, PNG, Solomon Is., northern Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa.
- Air temperatures are favoured to be near-normal across southern PNG, New Caledonia, Fiji, Tonga, and Niue for May to July 2026 with above normal temperatures elsewhere. The region of near-normal temperatures extends further east over August to October with below normal air temperatures over northeastern Fiji, northern Tonga, Niue, southern Cook Islands and southern French Polynesia. There is good spatial agreement between the models for both periods with regards to the rainfall and temperature outlooks.
- Above-normal sea surface temperatures (SSTs) are favoured across most of the equatorial Pacific from May to October, with cooler-than-normal waters likely between Tonga, Samoa, and the Southern Cook Islands later in the period; forecast confidence is moderate to high in the equatorial region.
- Sea level is favoured to be above normal around Nauru and Kiribati, and below normal across FSM and the southwestern Pacific during May to July, with high confidence in this forecast across Micronesia and the equatorial region.
- Marine heatwave conditions are predicted across most Pacific Islands from May to July 2026, with strong intensity north of the equator and east of the Date Line, persisting into July across the central and eastern Pacific.
- Coral bleaching alerts begin in Nauru, Kiribati, and Samoa in the 4-week outlook and progressively expand and intensify, spreading into southern RMI, northern Tuvalu, and broader areas of central and eastern Kiribati by the 12-week outlook.
- The Fisheries Convergence Zone is likely to shift eastward and along the equator during May to July 2026 period.

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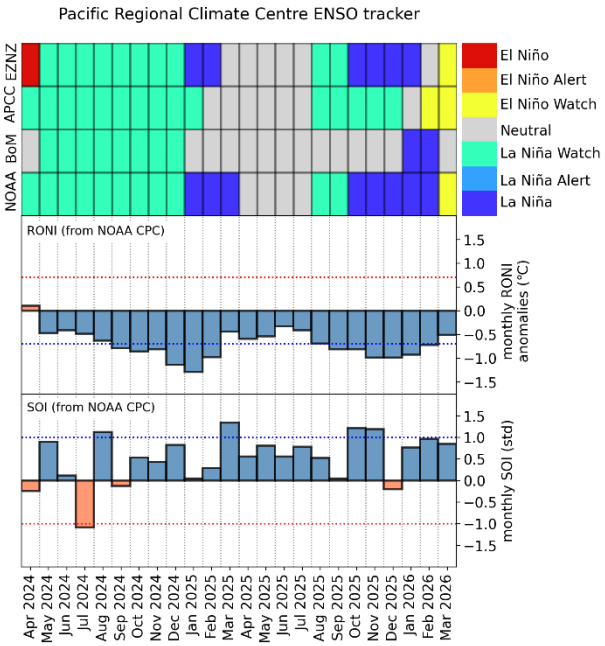
https://www.pacificmet.net/rcc

Climate in review – November 2025 to April 2026

- From November 2025 to April 2026, climate conditions across the Pacific were shaped by a weak and relatively short lived La Niña, consistent with the ENSO outlook issued in October 2025 during PICOF-17.
- As of April 2026, the **Pacific Regional Climate Centre ENSO tracker** (click here) is at El Nino Watch based on status reports from the majority of RCC-N members.



- Warmer than normal SSTs were present across much of the Pacific, apart from a large patch of average SSTs from central to eastern tropics, and a small section of lower-than-normal SSTs in central equatorial Pacific. Much higher-than-normal SSTs were present in far northeastern and southwestern Pacific
- Rainfall, trade wind, and atmospheric pressure patterns over the last 3-6 months were typical of a weak La Niña. Overall, rainfall outlooks from PICOF-17 for November 2025 to April 2026 verified well when compared to observations over the same period, reflecting a typical La Niña "horseshoe" rainfall pattern.
- Air temperatures were also broadly consistent with forecasts, with generally above-normal air temperatures across much of the Pacific and a correctly anticipated seasonal evolution from early- to late-season patterns.
- Higher than normal sea levels were present across the Maritime Continent, expanding eastward across the Western Warm Pool by March 2026. There was a small section of lower-than-normal sea levels in central equatorial Pacific.
- Persistent warm ocean conditions across the western and central tropical Pacific led to widespread Watch–Warning coral bleaching levels and localised Coral Bleaching.
- Marine heatwaves were present in the Western Warm Pool region and in the subtropics north and south of the equator, with regions reaching 'moderate' to 'strong' categories.
- Coral bleaching occurred mainly in the western Pacific (PNG, Western Solomon Is., Palau, FSM, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Guam, RMI)
- Tropical cyclone activity in the southwest Pacific basin over the 2025-2026 period verified well against the PICOF-17 outlook: 5 named TCs have occurred so far, which is at the lower end of the forecast range [5 to 9], with 3 reaching severe (Category 3-5) intensity.
- The general impacts of weather/climate recorded by NMHS for November 2025 to April 2026 impacted the water, agriculture, Fisheries transportation, Infrastructure, Health, Fisheries, Education, and Tourism sectors. Landslides were recorded in PNG resulted in twenty-one deaths, and flooding in Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu with six fatalities. There were also increase in ciguatera cases in Vanuatu. In Fiji, Tonga, and

Vanuatu, there were fish deaths in relation to the Marine Heatwave existed in the Pacific from November 2025 to January 2026. Houses and infrastructure damages were recorded in Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, Solomon Islands, PNG and FSM during the five cyclone events that occurred in the region.

Historical surface and sub-surface temperature, as a background for recent patterns

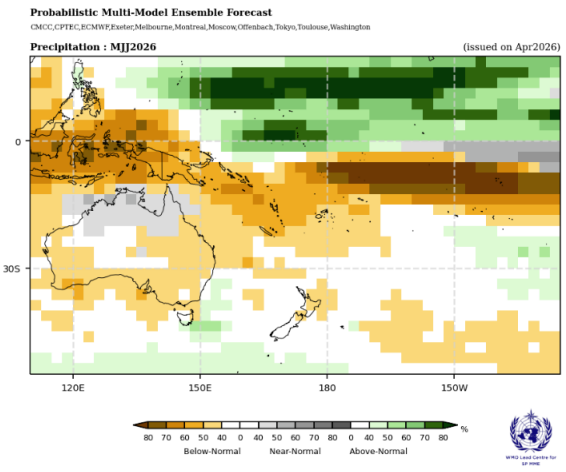
- Positive trends in SSTs have been observed in the northern, southern, and western Pacific, which has led to an increase in the number of marine heatwave events in these regions.
- Marine heatwave duration (number of days) has been increasing over the past four decades across most of the southwest Pacific.
- Sea level rise in the southwest Pacific continues to be higher than the global average of 3.7 mm/year since 1993, with increases of 4 to 6.5 mm/year across most Pacific Island countries, and the highest trends (5+ mm/year) occurring in the western tropical Pacific (Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands).

Climate outlook – May to October 2026

El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO)

- Recently oceanic and atmospheric observations suggest a transition to El Niño in the coming months. However, we are still within the 'spring predictability barrier', a period when ENSO forecasts tend to have lower confidence. Despite this increased uncertainty, Pacific RCC Network Node on Seasonal Prediction members agree on the development of El Niño between June to August 2026.
- There is still uncertainty with regards to event magnitude. A strong El Nino event is a distinct possibility.

Rainfall and Air Temperature

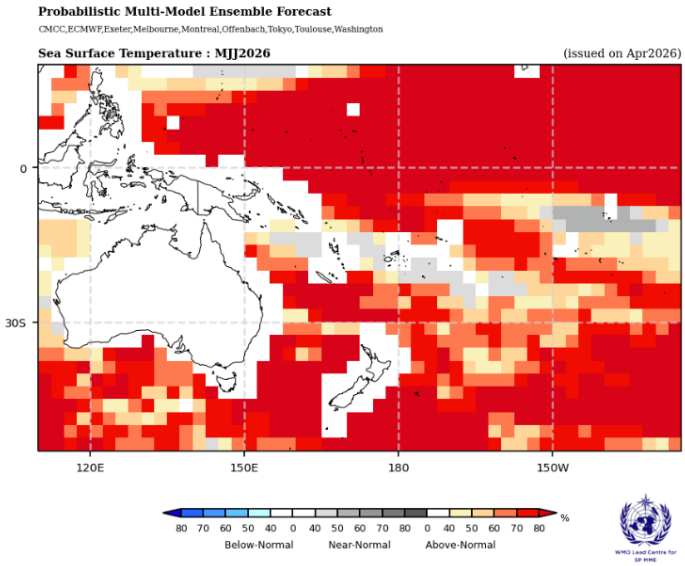


The rainfall outlook for May to July favours above normal rainfall for Guam, CNMI, FSM, RMI, Nauru and the Gilbert and northern Line Islands (Kiribati). Above normal rainfall is also favoured for southern French Polynesia. Below normal rainfall is forecast for Palau, PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu, Kiribati (southern Line Is.), Niue, Wallis and Futuna, Samoa, American Samoa, northern Cook Islands and northern French Polynesia. Confidence in this outlook highest along the equator and in the far

western Pacific. There is also acceptable skill for most of the off-equatorial Pacific region.

- The rainfall outlook becomes more El Niño-like over August to October 2026, albeit with reduced confidence due to the longer lead time of the forecast period. Below normal rainfall is forecast for Palau, CNMI, PNG, Solomon Is., New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, Niue, Wallis and Futuna, Samoa, American Samoa, Kiribati (southern Line Is.), Tokelau, Cook Islands, and northern French Polynesia, with above normal rainfall forecast over eastern FSM, northern and southern RMI, Nauru, Kiribati (Gilbert, and northern Line Is.), and most of Tuvalu.
- Above normal air temperatures are favoured across the Pacific Islands for May to July 2026 for all countries except for eastern PNG mainland, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, and Niue where near normal air temperatures are predicted.
- The air temperature outlook for August to October 2026 is similar to the previous season, with a change to below normal air temperatures over most of Fiji, Tonga, Wallis and Futuna, Samoa, American Samoa, Niue, central Cook Islands, and western French Polynesia.
- There is good agreement between models with regards to the rainfall and air temperature outlooks over the coming three to six months. Good agreement between high quality models is common for extremes phases of ENSO, i.e. El Niño and La Niña.
- Mean sea level pressure and wind seasonal predictions also reflect a gradual transition to El Niño and align well with the rainfall and air temperature outlooks.

Ocean surface temperature, sea level & coral bleaching



Above normal sea surface temperatures (SSTs) are favoured across most of the equatorial Pacific for May to July and August to October. Below normal SSTs are favoured for the western parts of Polynesia between Tonga, Samoa and the Southern Cook Islands over August to October. Skill associated with the equatorial Pacific outlooks is moderate to high.

- Above normal sea level is favoured for Nauru and Kiribati and below normal sea level for FSM and the southwestern Pacific over May, June and July. This outlook is associated with high skill across Micronesia and the off-equatorial region.
- Moderate Marine Heat Wave (MHW) conditions are favoured across most of the Pacific Islands in May with strong MHW conditions north of the equator and east of the Date Line. In June, the Bureau of Meteorology ACCESS-S model favours expansion east of the Date Line and a return to normal conditions for Palau, most of FSM. In July

MHW persists in the central and eastern Pacific with an expansion of the strong category in the north equatorial Pacific.

- Coral bleaching alerts have been issued for Nauru, Kiribati, and Samoa in the 4-week outlook ending 4 May. In the 8-week outlook ending 1 June, these alerts become more intense around Nauru and Kiribati and extend into southern RMI and northern Tuvalu. By the 12-week outlook ending 29 June, the alerts continue and spread further north and south, covering a larger portion of central and eastern Kiribati. This 12-week outlook also indicates coral bleaching alerts in Palau and western FSM.
- An eastward and equatorward shift of the Fisheries Convergence Zone is likely over the forecast period.

Tropical cyclones

- Tropical cyclone activity in the western North Pacific began early with four tropical cyclones developing by 21 April 2026, one of which attained super typhoon status. Each of the first four months of 2026 had a tropical cyclone.
- With a strong El Niño favoured for 2026, overall tropical cyclone activity and genesis region is expected to shift eastward towards RMI.
- Above-normal tropical cyclone activity is anticipated for the western North Pacific through the end of 2026. Below normal tropical cyclone activity is likely for far-western Micronesia and Palau.
- The official NOAA Western North Pacific Tropical Cyclone outlook will be released around 1 June 2026.

Projected Sea Surface temperature, as a background for recent patterns

- Climate change projections depend on future greenhouse gas emissions pathways, which in turn depend on human choices and actions. Under the projected pathways, the long-term ocean outlook for the Pacific points toward warmer sea surface temperatures, more frequent and intense marine heatwaves, increasing ocean acidity, and declining aragonite saturation state, with possible regional changes toward lower salinity.

Background

The seasonal outlooks used in this statement were obtained from the WMO Lead Centre for Long-Range Forecast Multi-Model Ensemble. Where an outlook was not available (e.g., for TCs or coral bleaching), it was obtained from Pacific RCC Network Node on Seasonal Predictions member websites

These outlook statements are for use by National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs). They do not constitute an official outlook for any nation. For more information, please contact your local meteorological office.

The Pacific Islands Climate Services Panel and World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Pacific Regional Climate Centre (RCC) Network Node for Seasonal Prediction have delivered PICOFs since October 2015. PICOF is a platform used to discuss the seasonal outlook (ENSO, TCs, precipitation, temperature, and oceanic conditions) for the upcoming six months, capacity build, and enable knowledge exchange between NMHSs and strengthen relationships between NMHSs and stakeholders.

PICOF is an important mechanism for sharing climate and ocean information, best practices, and lessons learnt on climate and ocean prediction and its likely implications on sectors where productivity is heavily dependent on the state of climate. PICOF is held twice a year: an in-person session in October, focusing on November to April and a virtual session in April, focusing on May to October.

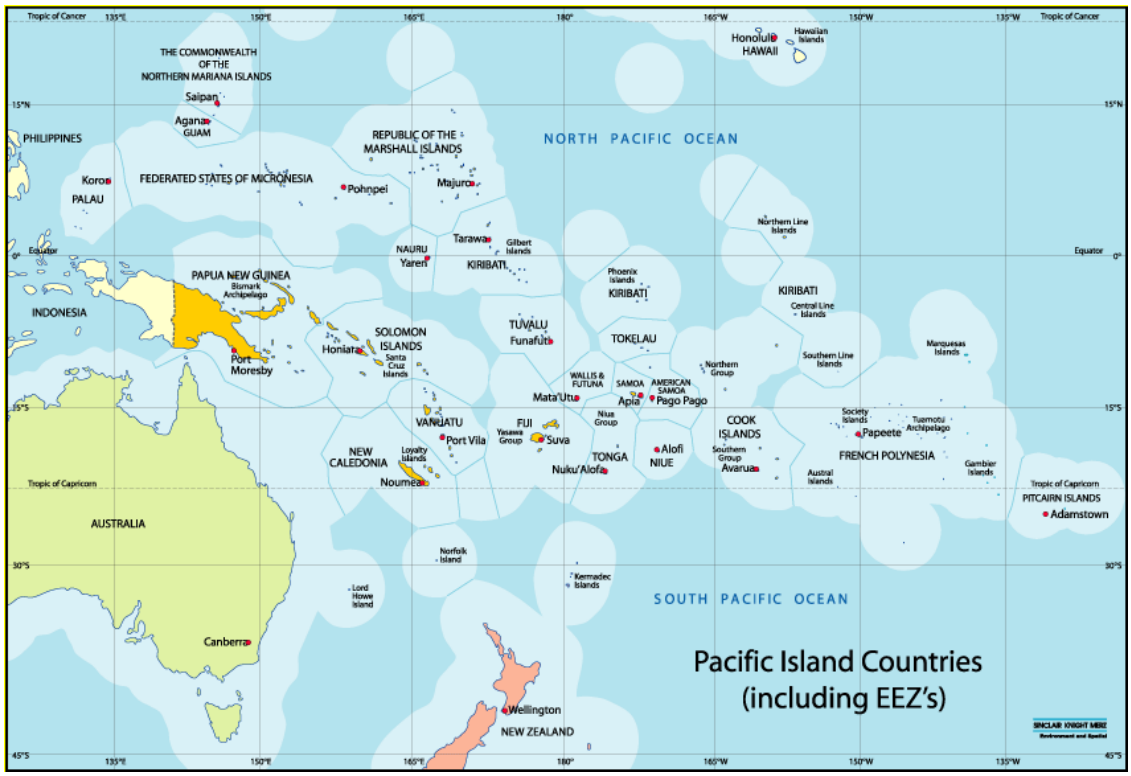
PICOF-18 had attendees from American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Chuuk and Pohnpei), New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States of America, and Vanuatu. Representatives from the following organisations also participated: Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Pacific Community (SPC), Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BoM), United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Météo-France, Earth Sciences New Zealand (ESNZ), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Climate Centre (APCC), Seoul National University (SNU), Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company (PCRIC), and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

Close working relationships between Pacific rim and Pacific Island NMHSs, regional organisations, and WMO are critical to effective warning of climate hazards leading to early preparedness. Further enhancement of these relationships is essential, as well as relationships between NMHSs, their primary stakeholders, and the community. These can be frequent meetings such as one-on-one discussions, cluster group meetings, and national climate outlook forums.

In addition to the production of national seasonal climate outlooks, there is a need for simplified products and messaging especially for rural and remote communities. Sectoral impacts are most often related to prolonged drier or wetter than normal conditions. NMHSs

should continue to develop climate products tailored for national sectors, relevant to their needs, and incorporating where possible traditional knowledge elements.

Figures & supporting information:



Map of the Pacific Islands region, including countries and territories involved in PICOF. Source.

Important links

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