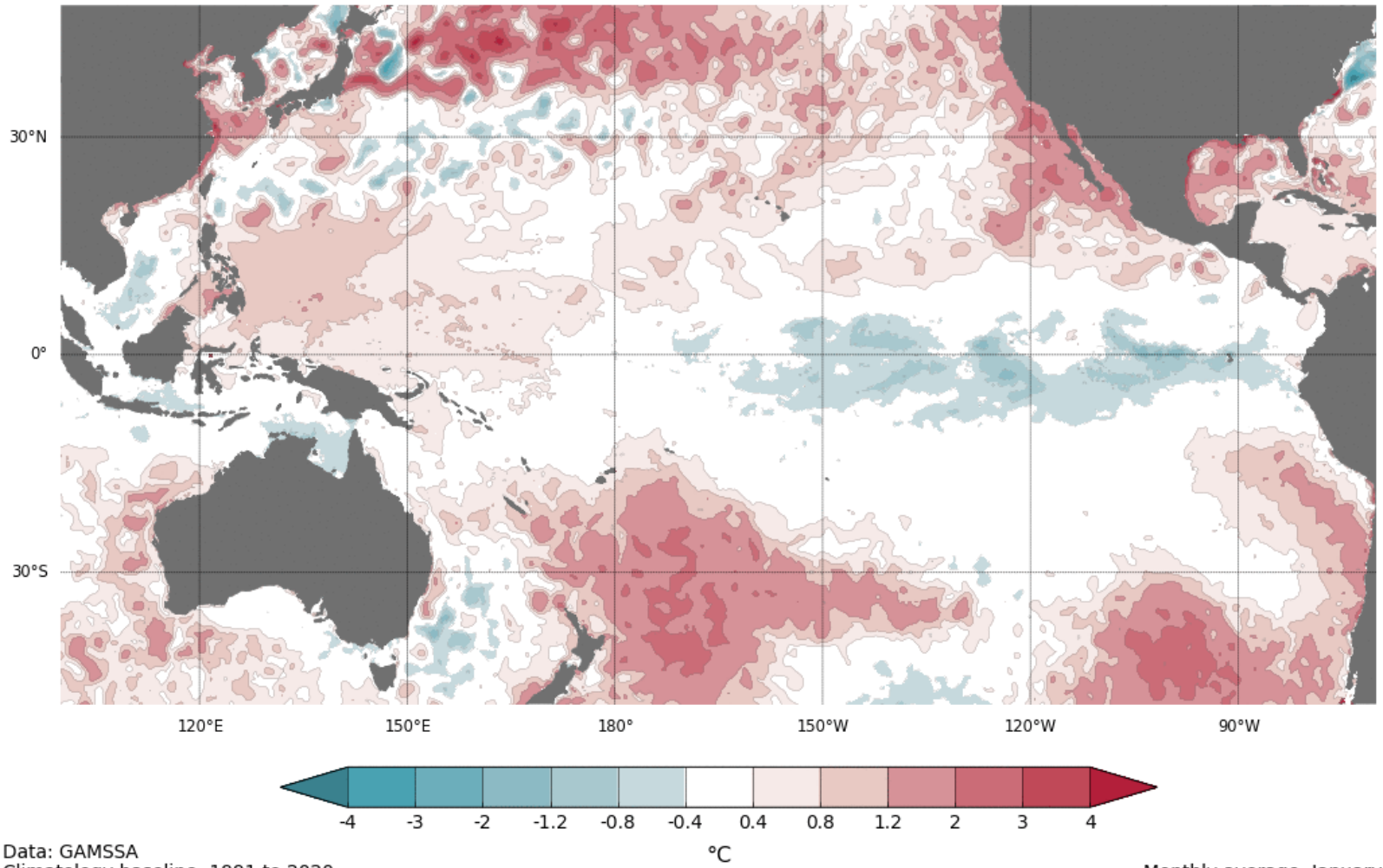
ENSO Update – OCOF 221

18 February 2026

ENSO Update

- The 2025–26 La Niña continues to weaken. Sea surface temperatures in the central tropical Pacific have been fluctuating around the La Niña threshold (−0.80 °C) since late January.
- Atmospheric indicators, such as trade winds, pressure and cloud patterns in the tropical Pacific, are consistent with borderline La Niña conditions. Recent warming in the sub-surface suggests that the event is likely to decline further in the coming weeks.
- These recent changes in the tropical Pacific are consistent with model forecasts, indicating a general easing of La Niña during the latter part of the 2025–26 summer.
- All models indicate a return to neutral ENSO conditions later this month or in early autumn. Continued warming in the tropical Pacific is forecast, with a neutral ENSO state favoured through to at least late autumn.
- Some models suggest the possibility of El Niño development from June. It should be noted that this is a very long lead time for this prediction, and forecasts beyond autumn are highly uncertain.
- The Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) index is +0.53 °C, above the positive IOD threshold. IOD events typically do not occur from December to April. These positive values are not expected to form an event. Model forecasts expect the IOD to remain neutral until at least the end of autumn 2026.
- The MJO is weak in the Indian Ocean during Phase 2. Preliminary forecast has the Western Pacific returning to Phase 6 in early March.

January 2026 SSTs

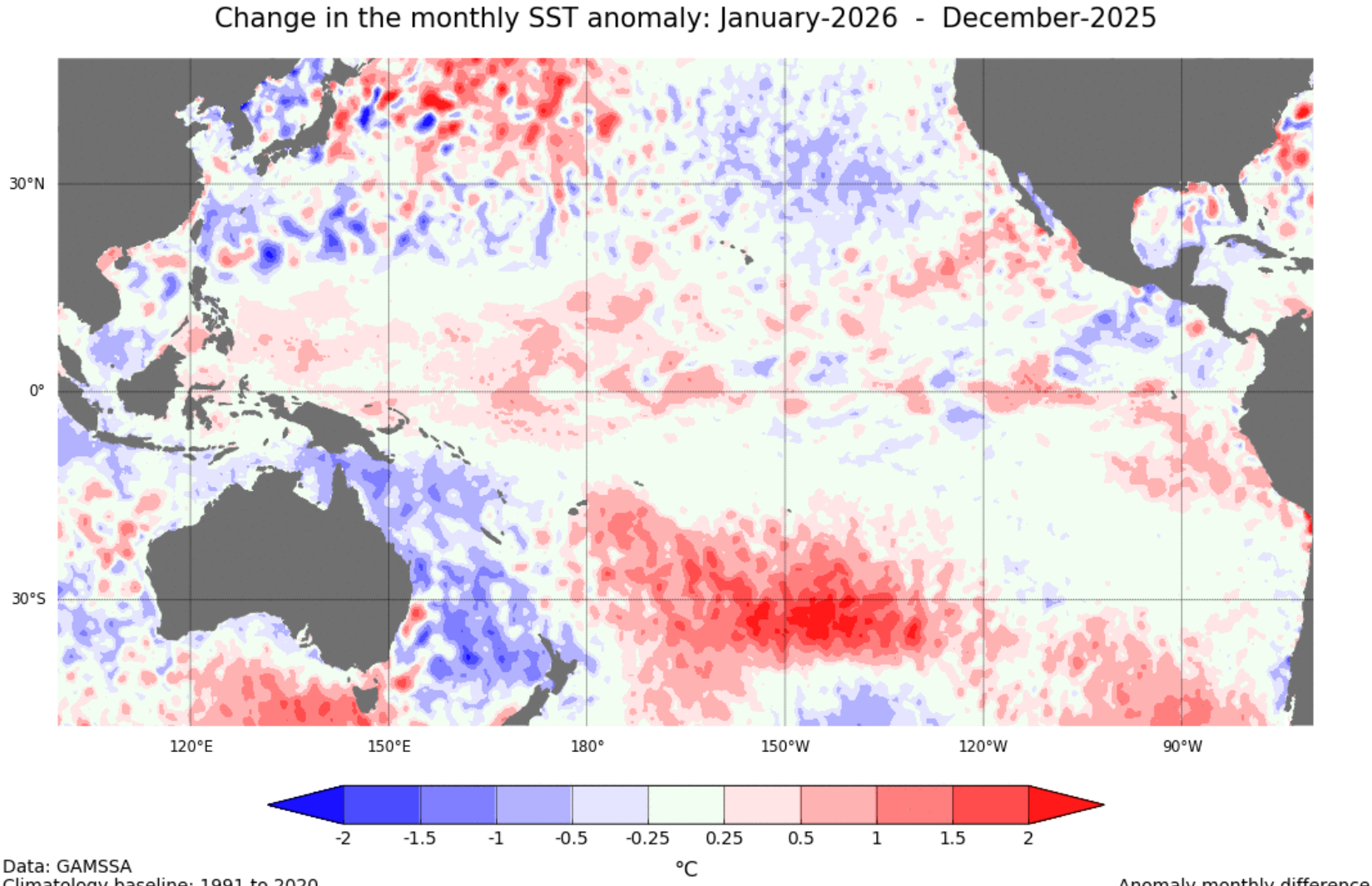


Data: GAMSSA
Climatology baseline: 1991 to 2020

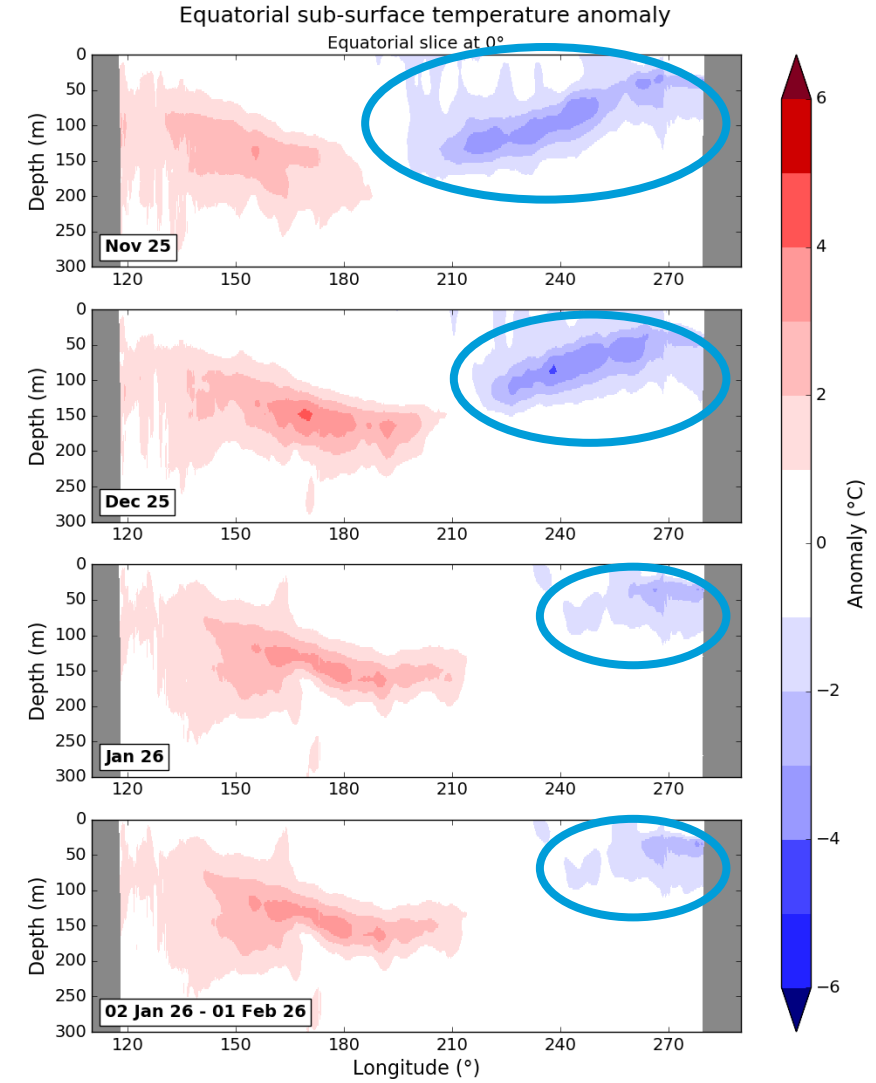
http://www.bom.gov.au/climate

Monthly average: January 2026
Created: 03/02/2026

January – December SSTs



Equatorial Pacific Sub-surface Profile



Created: 06/02/2026

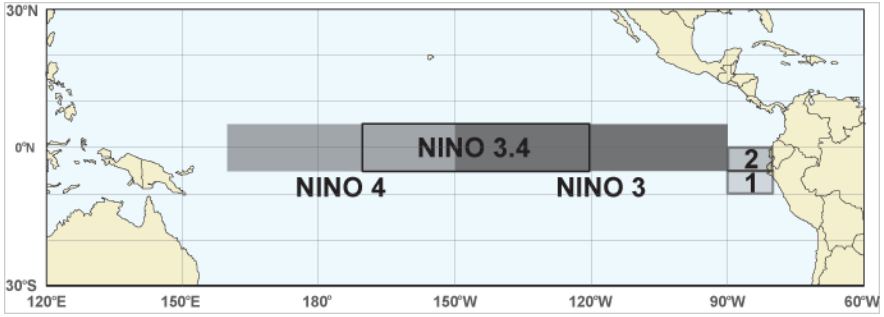
Data: ACCESS-S2 ocean reanalysis
Climatology baseline: 1981 to 2018

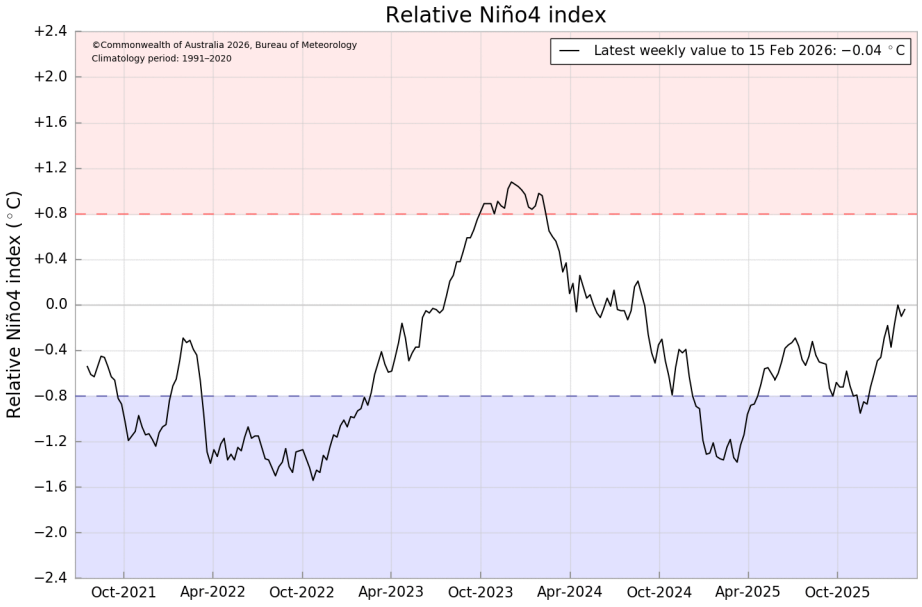
Cooler water in the eastern Pacific continues to recede as we transition into ENSO neutral.

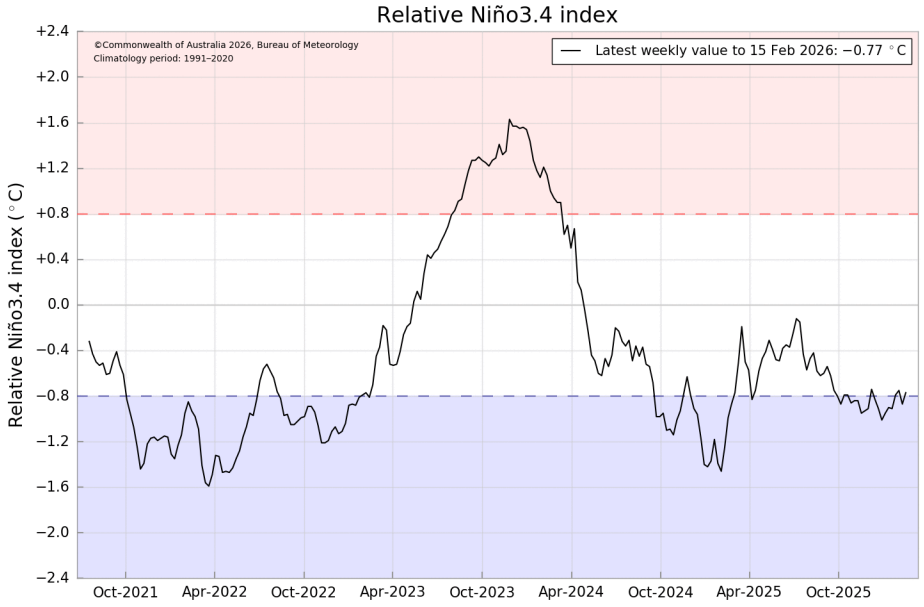
Cooler than average waters beneath the surface of the eastern tropical Pacific can be a sign of La Niña development.

Warmer than average waters beneath the surface of the eastern Pacific can be a sign of El Niño development.

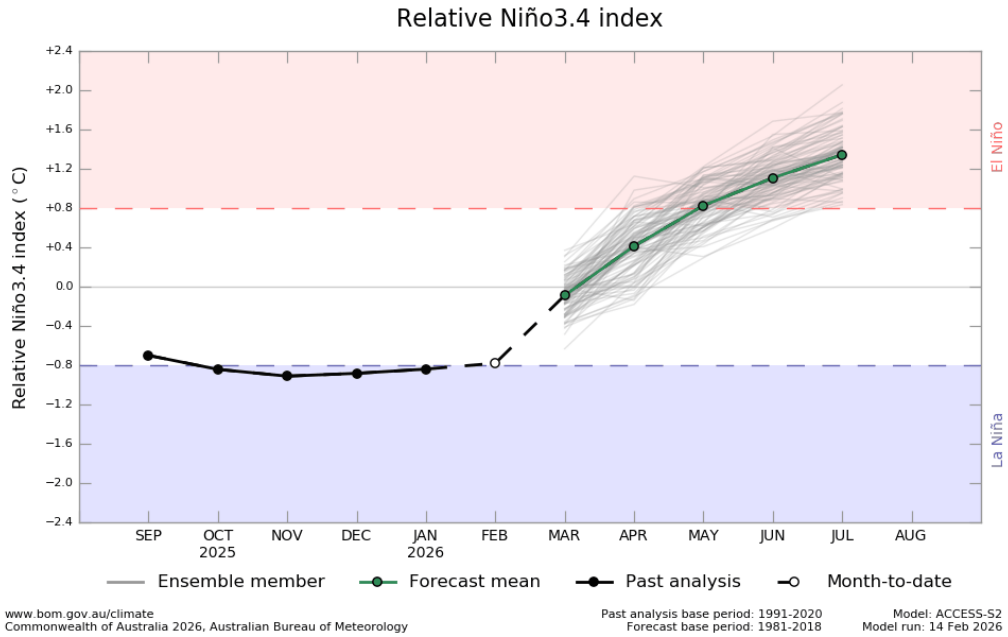
Observed Relative NINO Indices

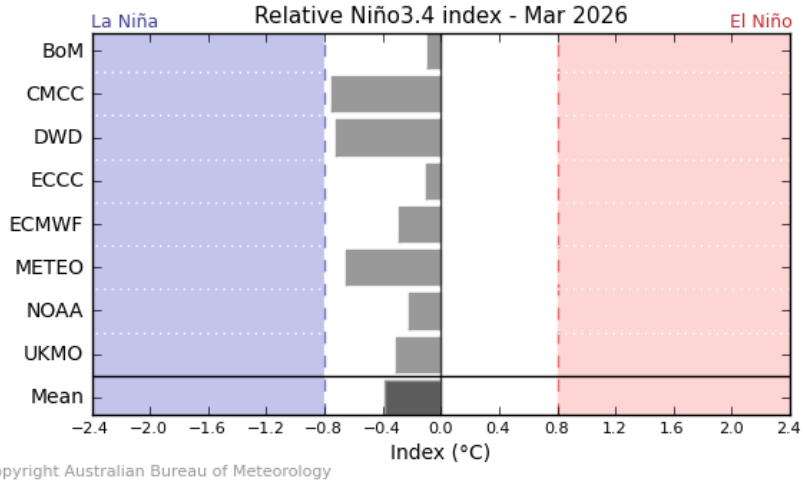






Relative ENSO Outlook



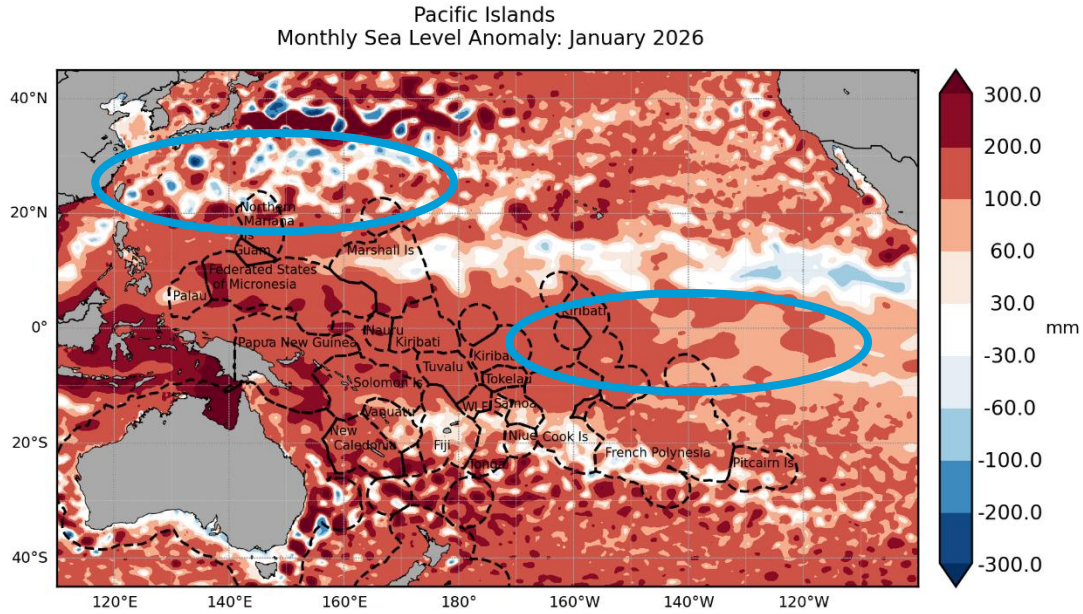


La Niña is still present in the tropical Pacific and slowly transitioning back to ENSO Neutral.

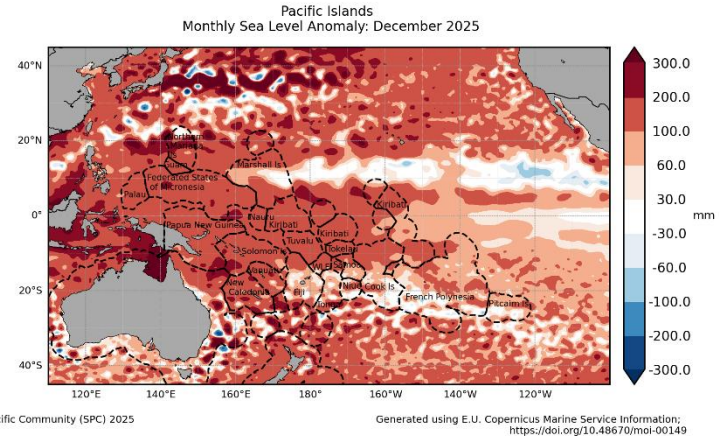
La Niña is associated with **increased rainfall** across the far western Pacific.

La Niña is associated with **decreased rainfall** across the Eastern and Central Pacific.

January 2026 Sea Level Anomaly



Generated using E.U. Copernicus Marine Service Information;
https://doi.org/10.48670/moi-00149



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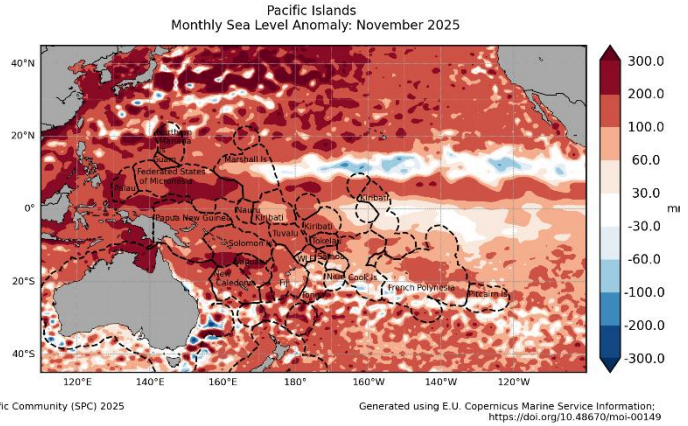
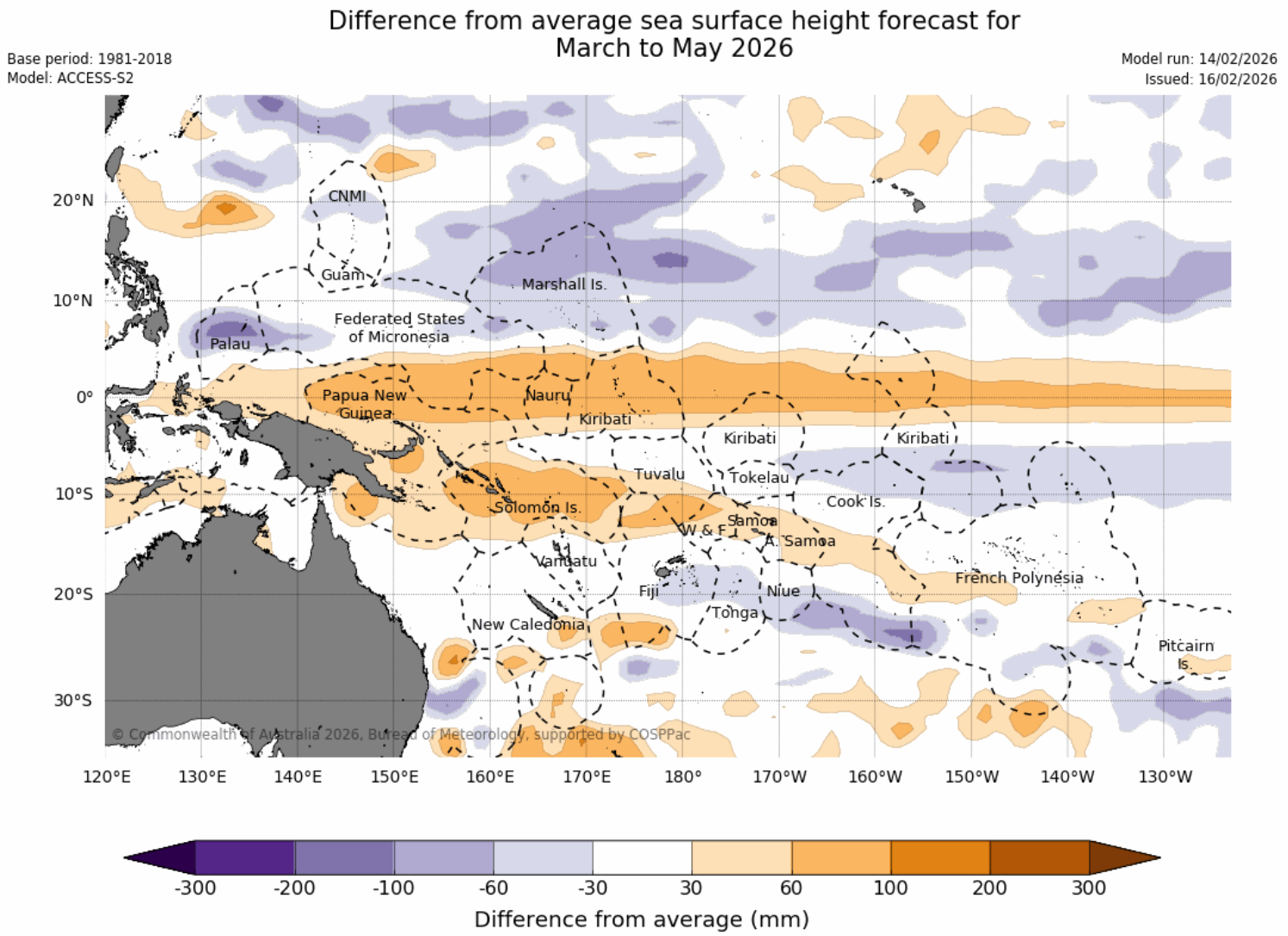


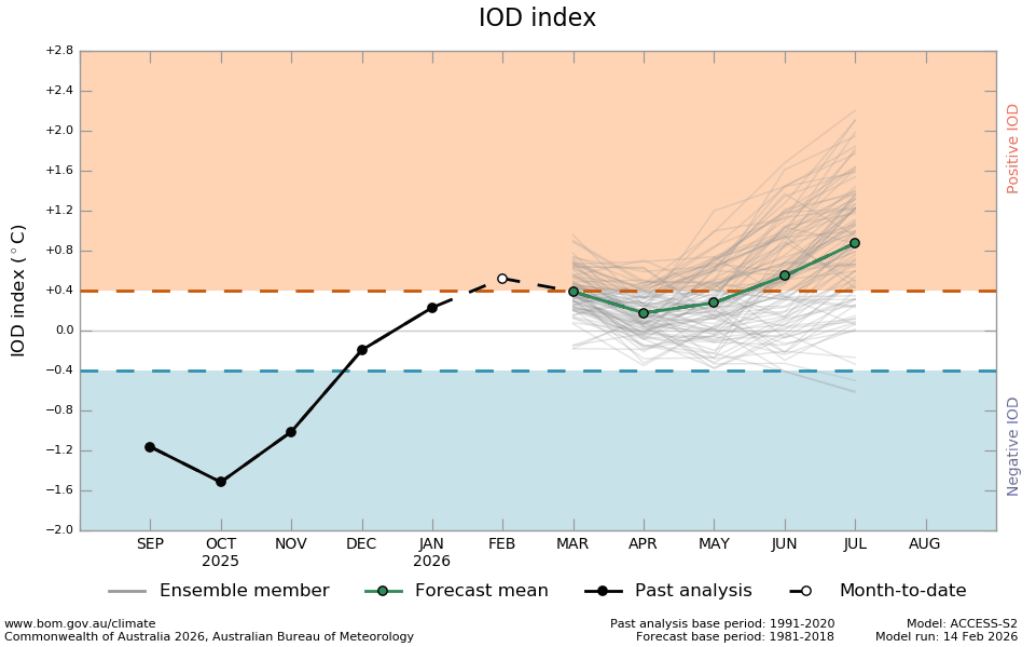
Generated using E.U. Copernicus Marine Service Information;
https://doi.org/10.48670/moi-00149

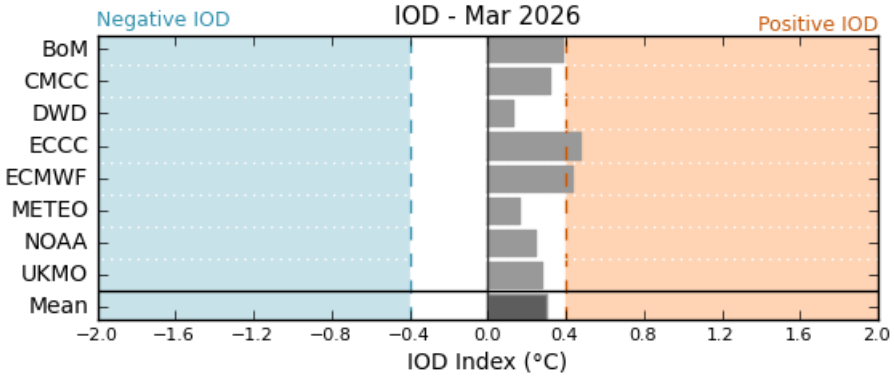
Seasonal Outlook: Sea Surface Height Anomaly



-- -- -- EEZ border V11 (Flanders Marine Institute, 2019).

Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)





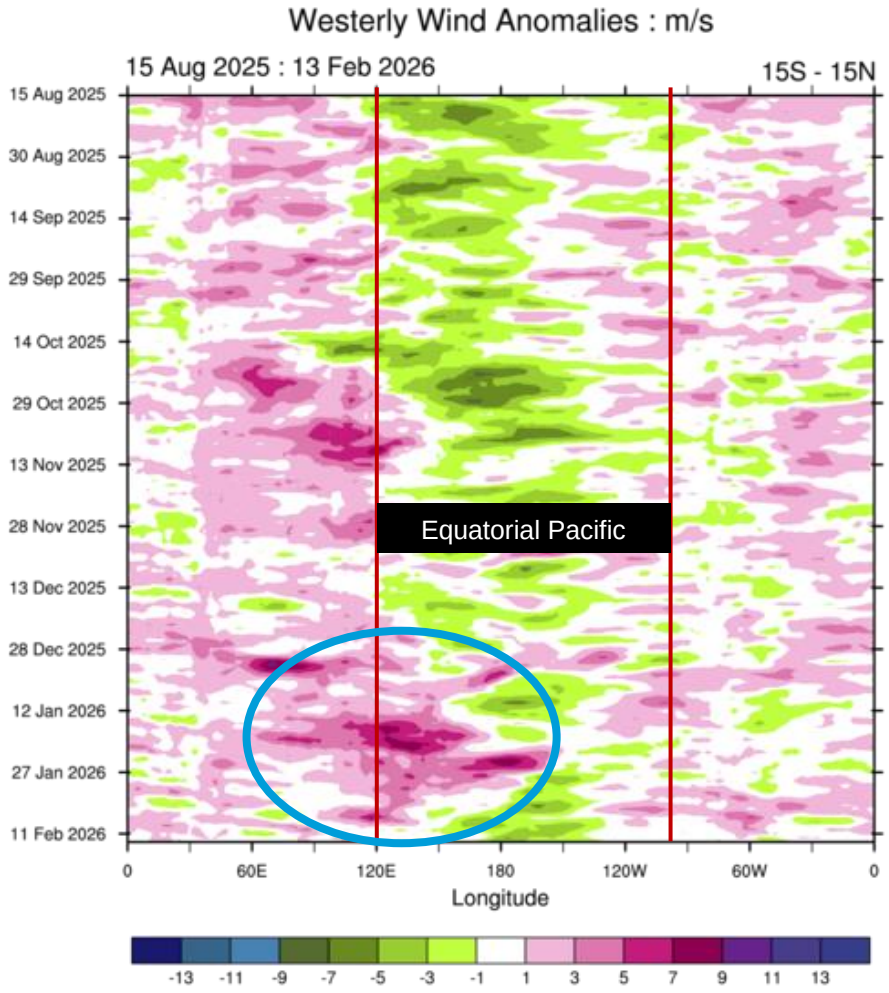
The IOD is +0.53 °C, above the positive IOD threshold. IOD events do not typically form during December to April. No event is expected and the models suggest a return to neutral soon.

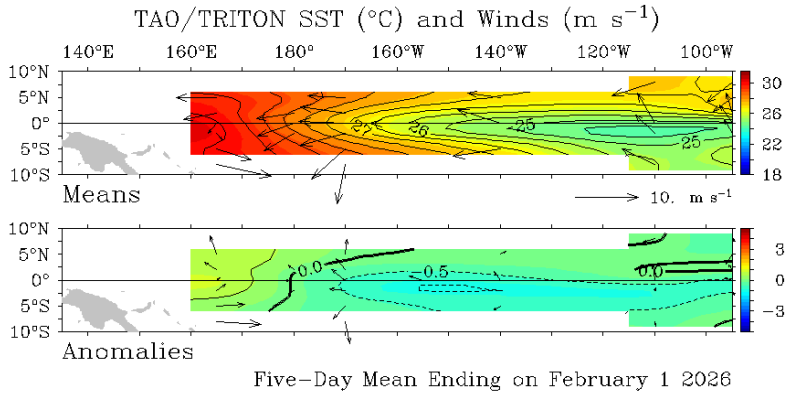
IOD negative is associated with **increased rainfall** across the far western Pacific.

IOD positive is associated with **decreased rainfall** across the far western Pacific.

Atmosphere Outlook

Wind Anomalies





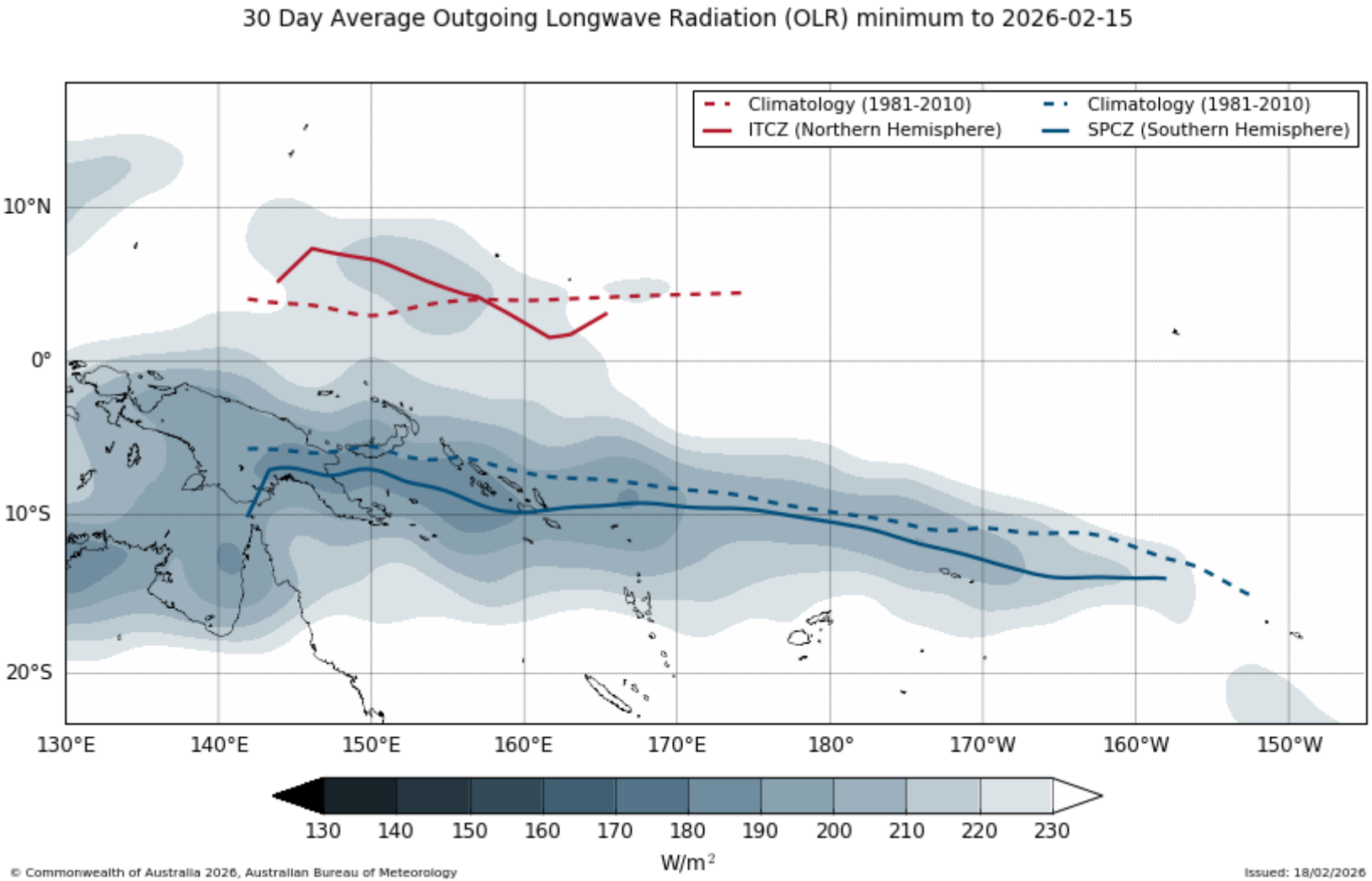
Weaker trade winds (pink) allow for the development of more clouds and potential for rain.

Stronger trade winds (green) hinders cloud development and the potential for rain.

Easterly (stronger trade)

Westerly (weaker trade)

ITCZ and SPCZ



More clouds

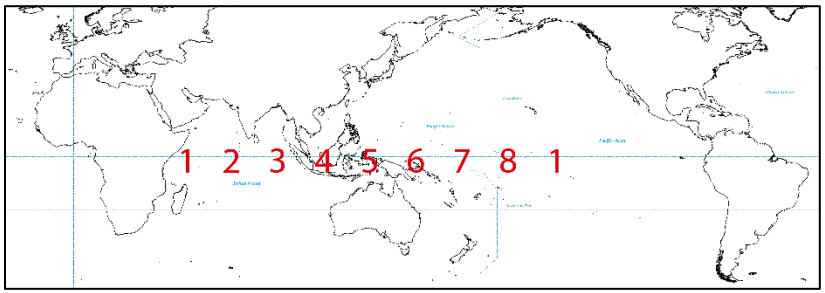
Less clouds

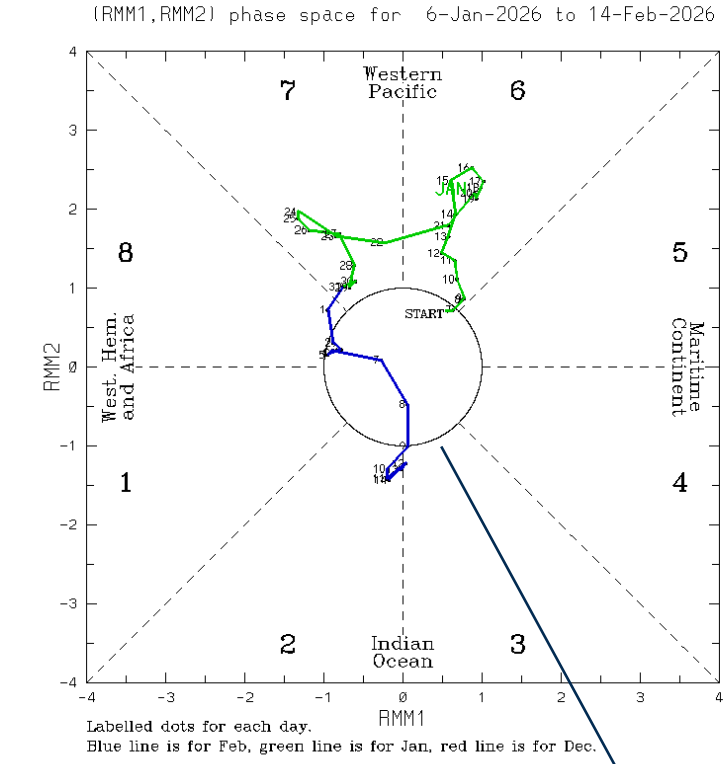
Madden – Julian Oscillation

The **MJO** is weak in **Phase 2** Indian Ocean. Preliminary forecast has return to **Phase 6** Western Pacific in early March.

Phases **6, 7 and 8** are typically associated with **increased rainfall** across the Pacific.

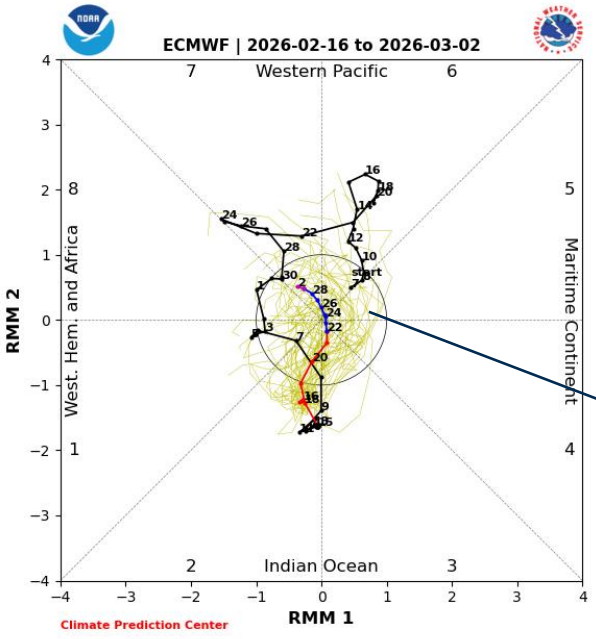
Phases **2, 3 and 4** are typically associated with **decreased rainfall** across the Pacific.



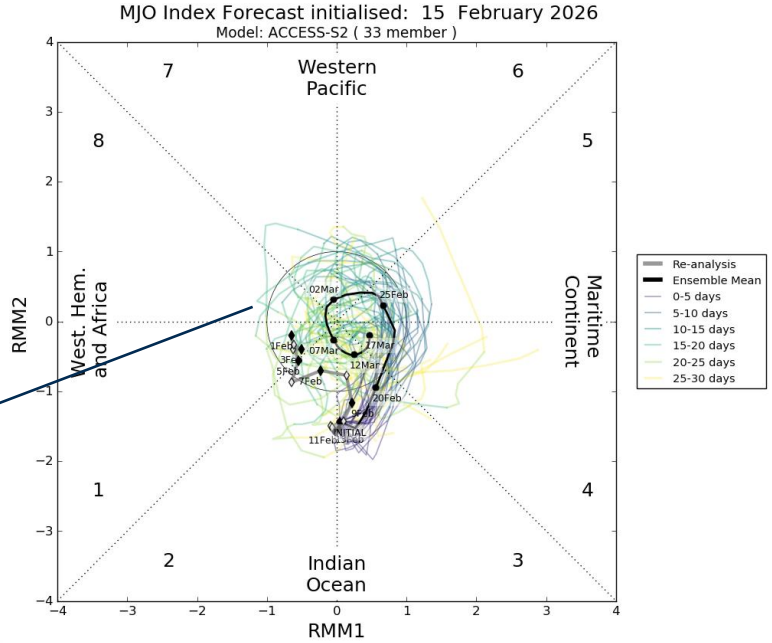


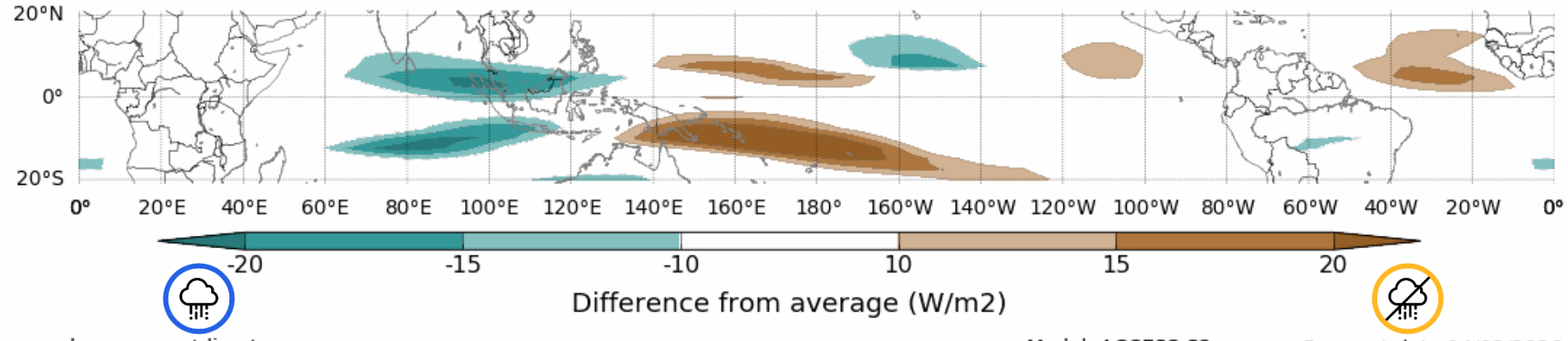
Unit circle:
If inside the unit circle the MJO signal is weak

Madden – Julian Oscillation



Unit circle:
If inside the unit circle the MJO signal is weak





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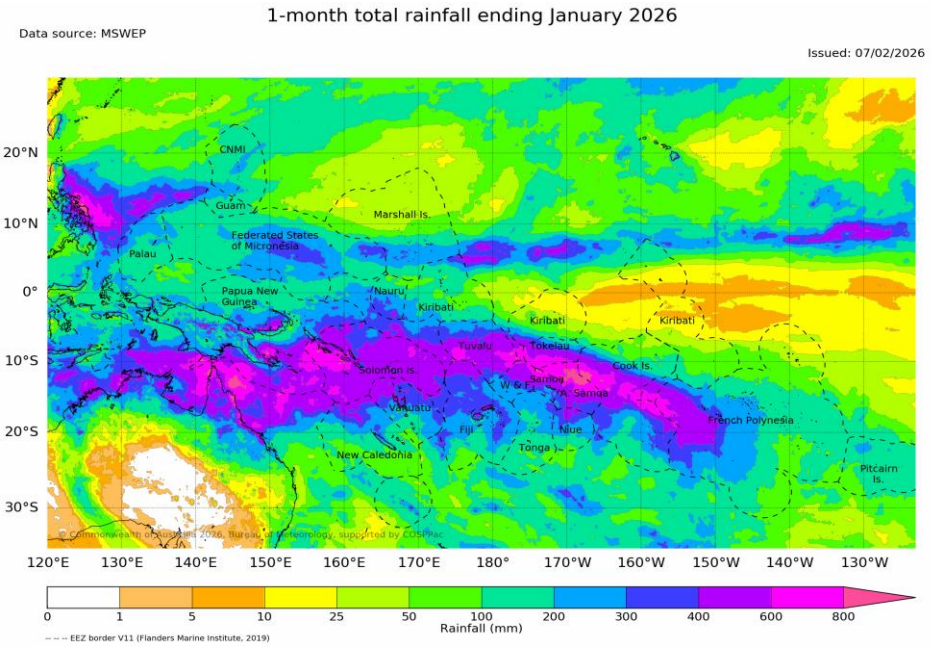
Model: ACCESS-S2
Base period: 1981-2018

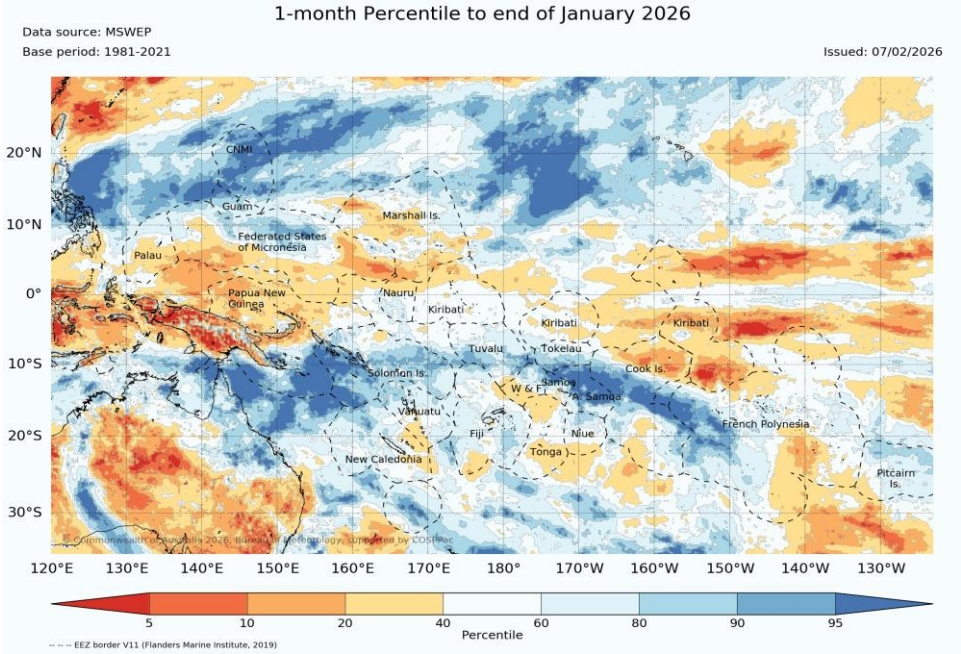
Forecast date:14/02/2026
Model run date: 13/02/2026

Observed Rainfall – January 2026

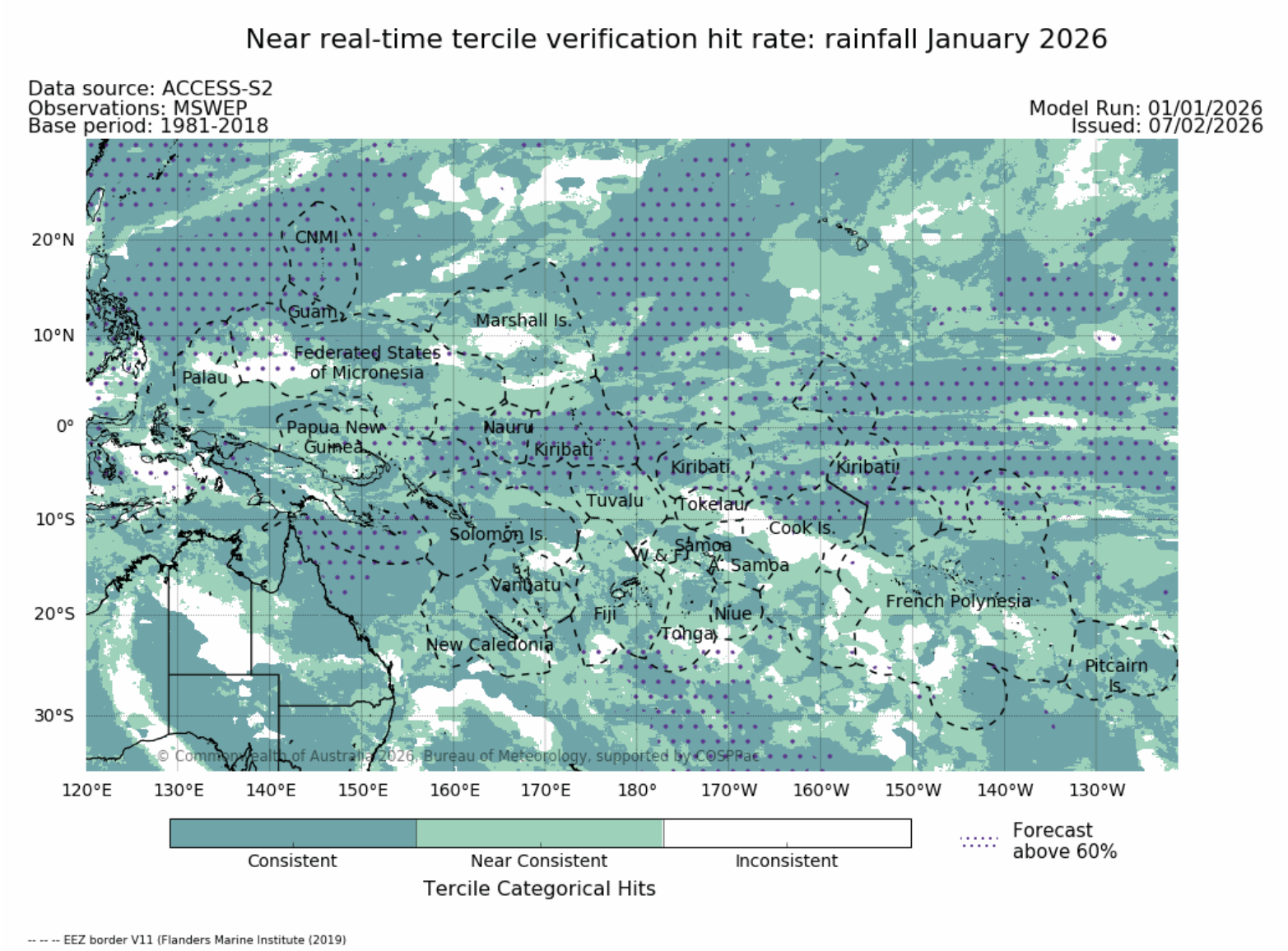
Observed



Percentile

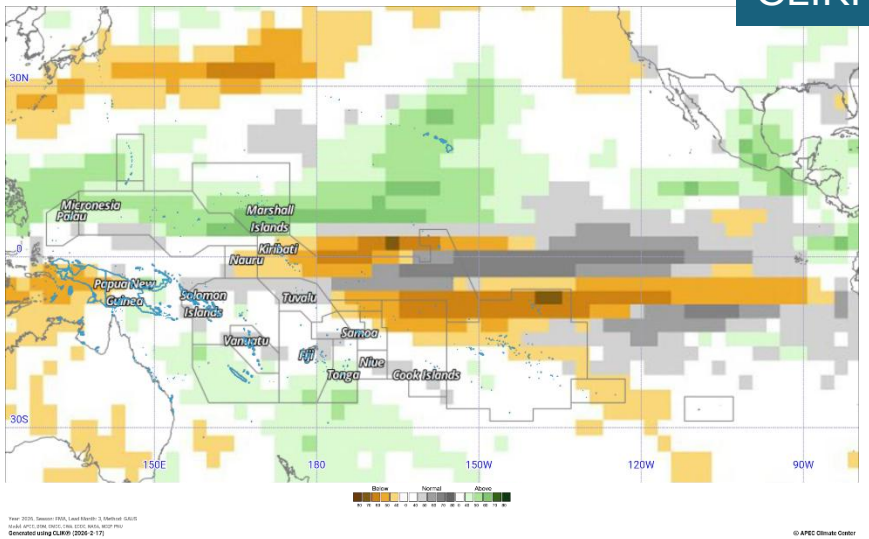


Forecast Verification – January

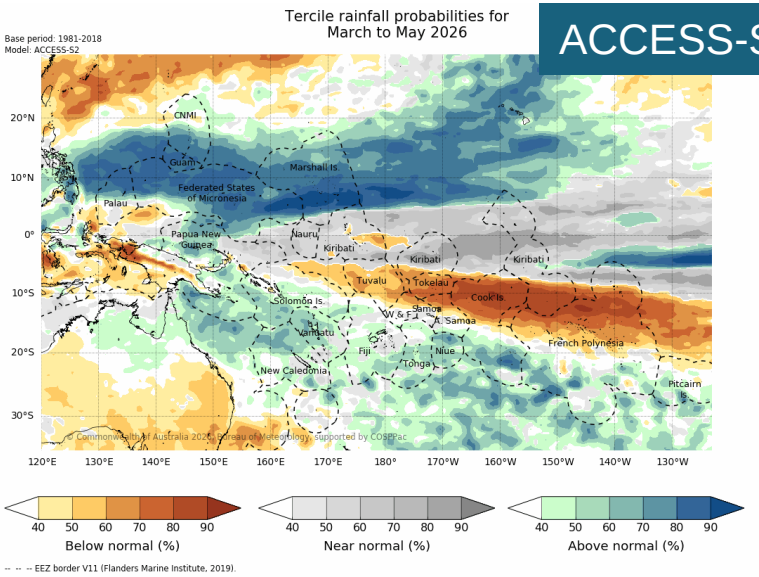


Model Rainfall Predictions (Feb - May)

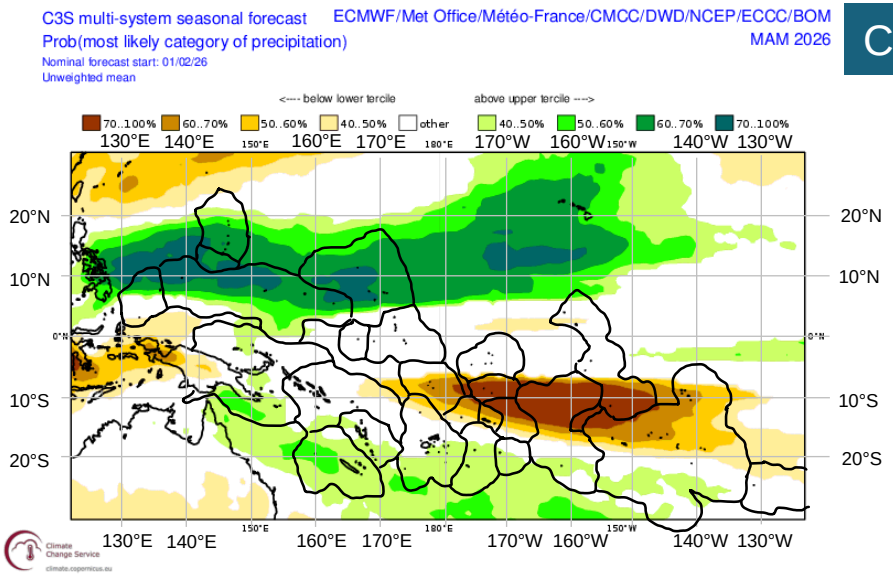
CLIKP



ACCESS-S2

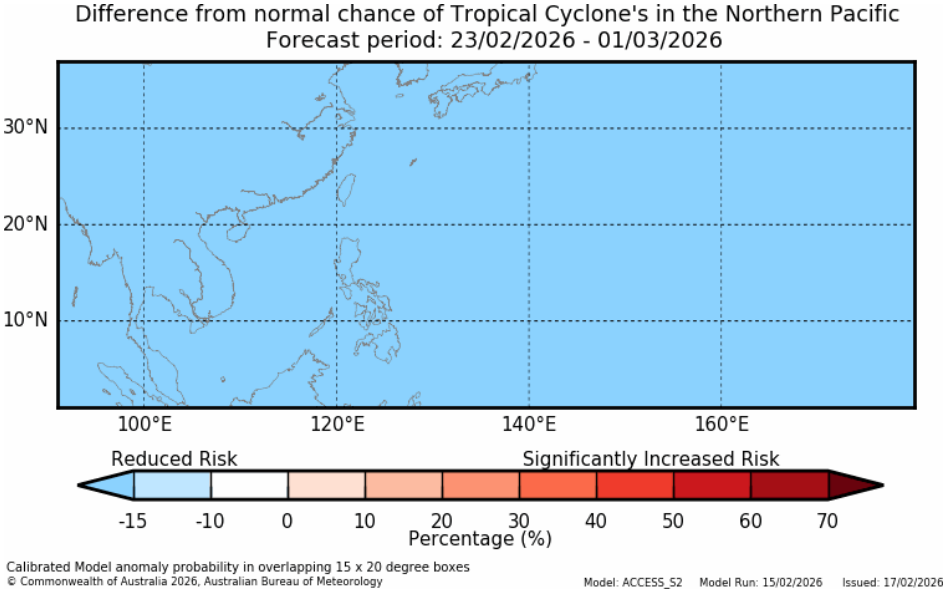


C3S

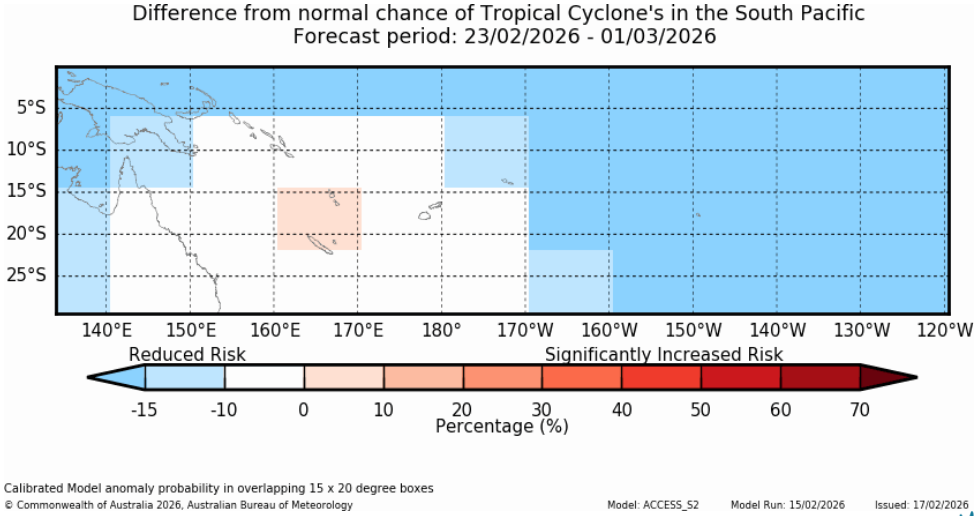


TC Outlooks – Two Weeks

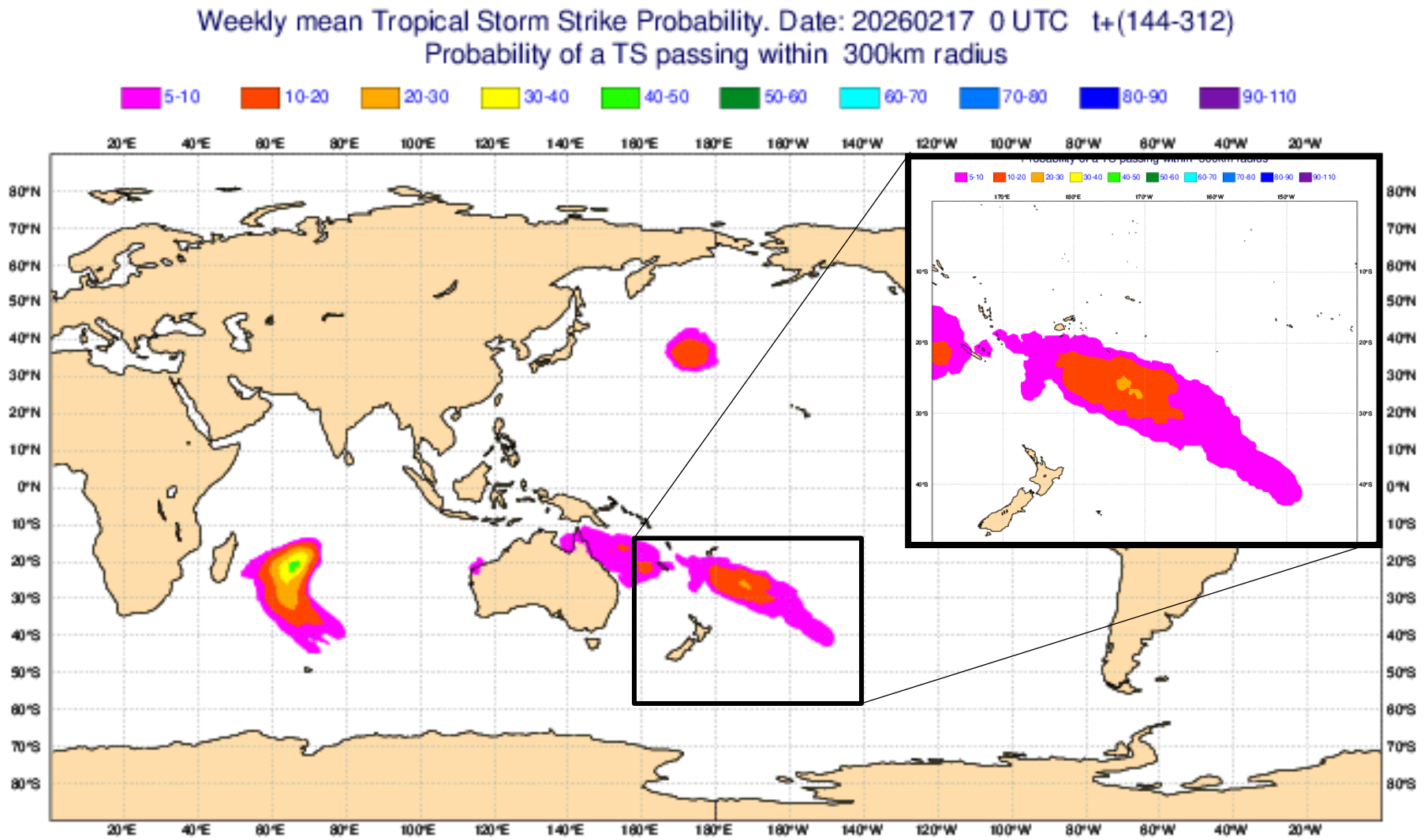
North Pacific



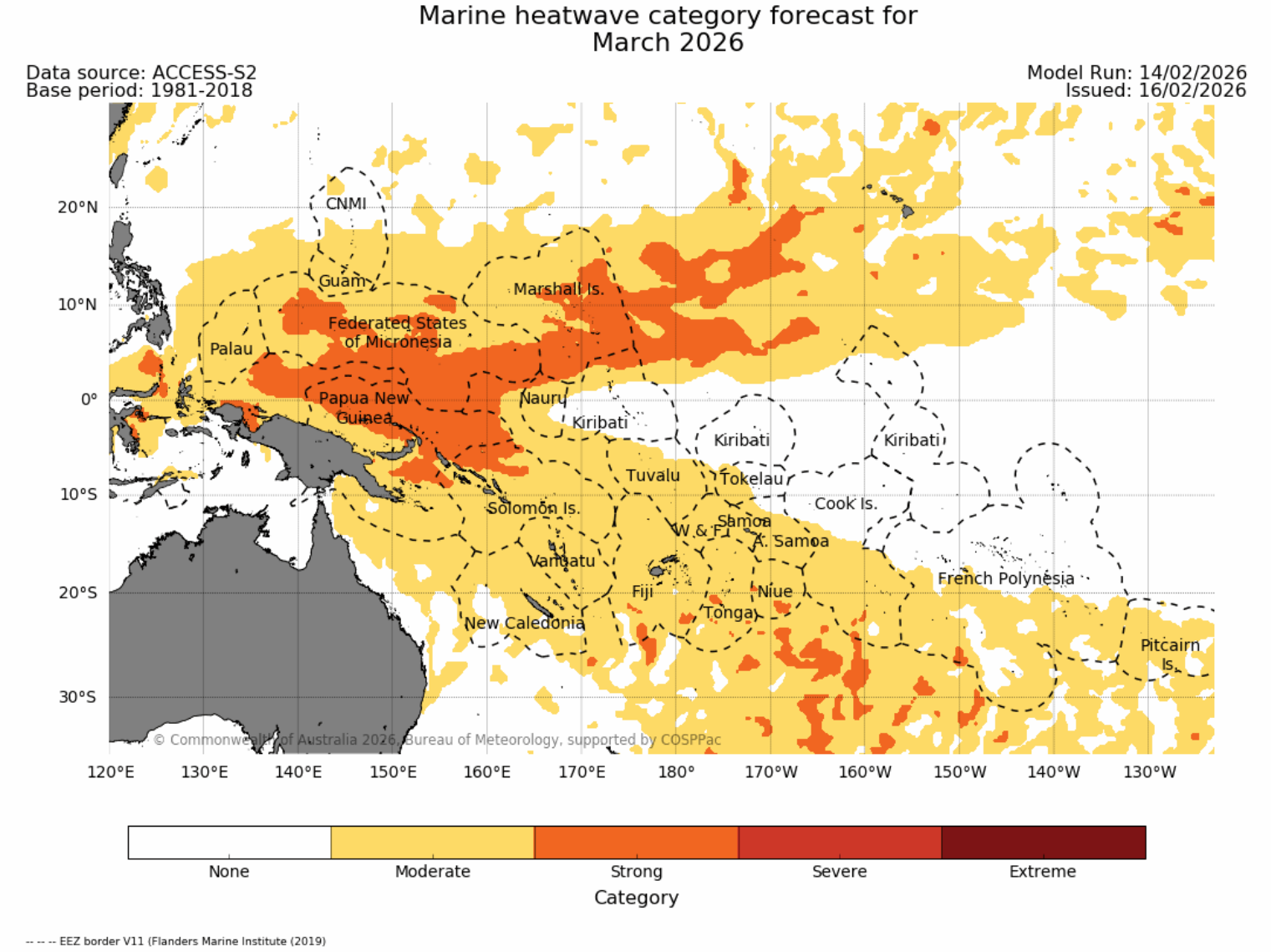
South Pacific



Weekly ECMWF TC Forecast

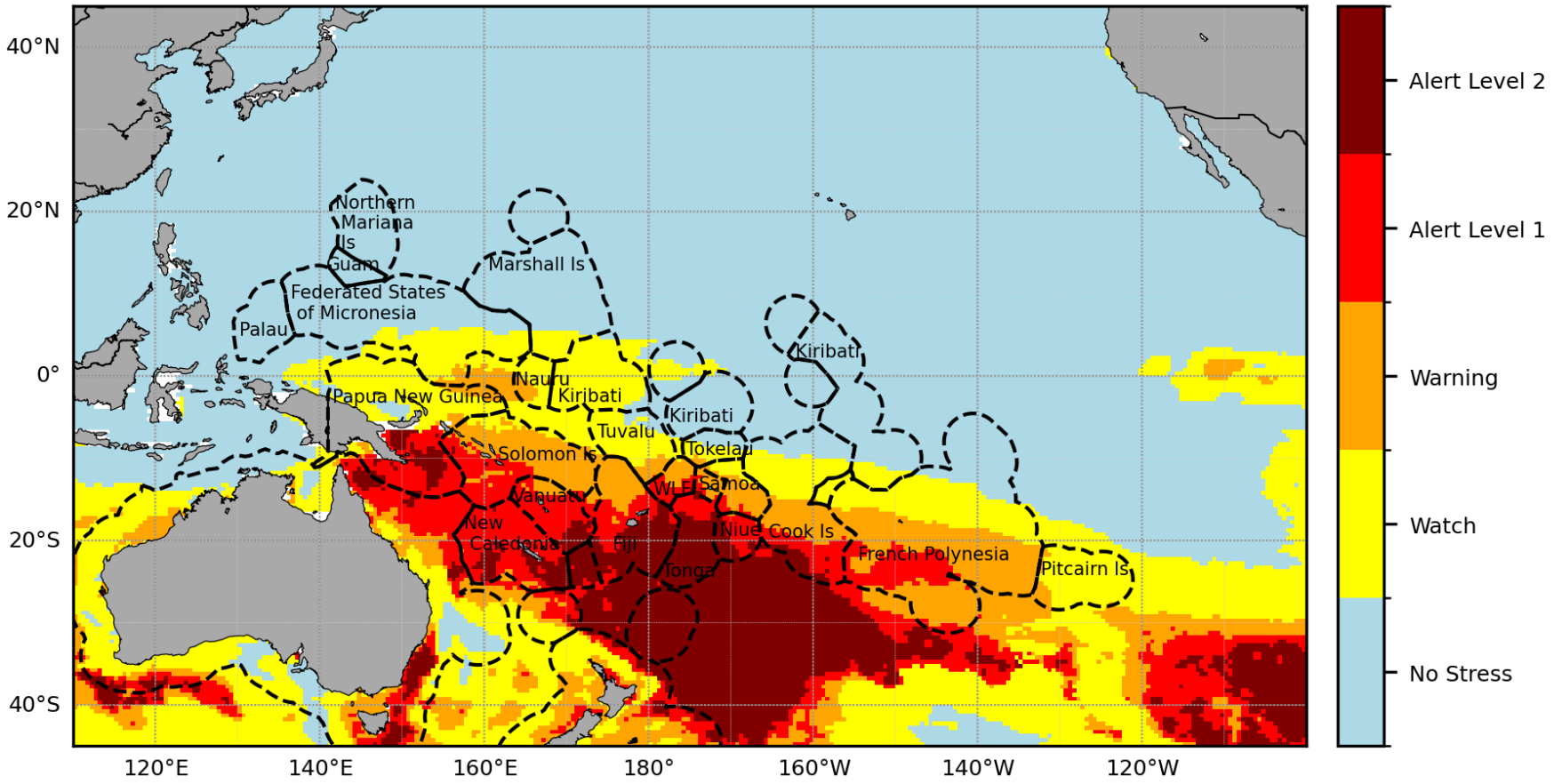


Marine Heatwaves



Coral Bleaching

Pacific Islands
4 Week Coral Bleaching Outlook: 2 March 2026



NOAA

Thank you

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