ENSO: Recent Evolution, Current Status and Predictions

Update prepared by:
Climate Prediction Center / NCEP
7 May 2018

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Recent Evolution and Current Conditions

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Summary

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ENSO Alert System Status: La Niña Advisory

La Niña conditions are present.*

Equatorial sea surface temperatures (SSTs) are near-to-below average across the east-central and eastern Pacific Ocean.

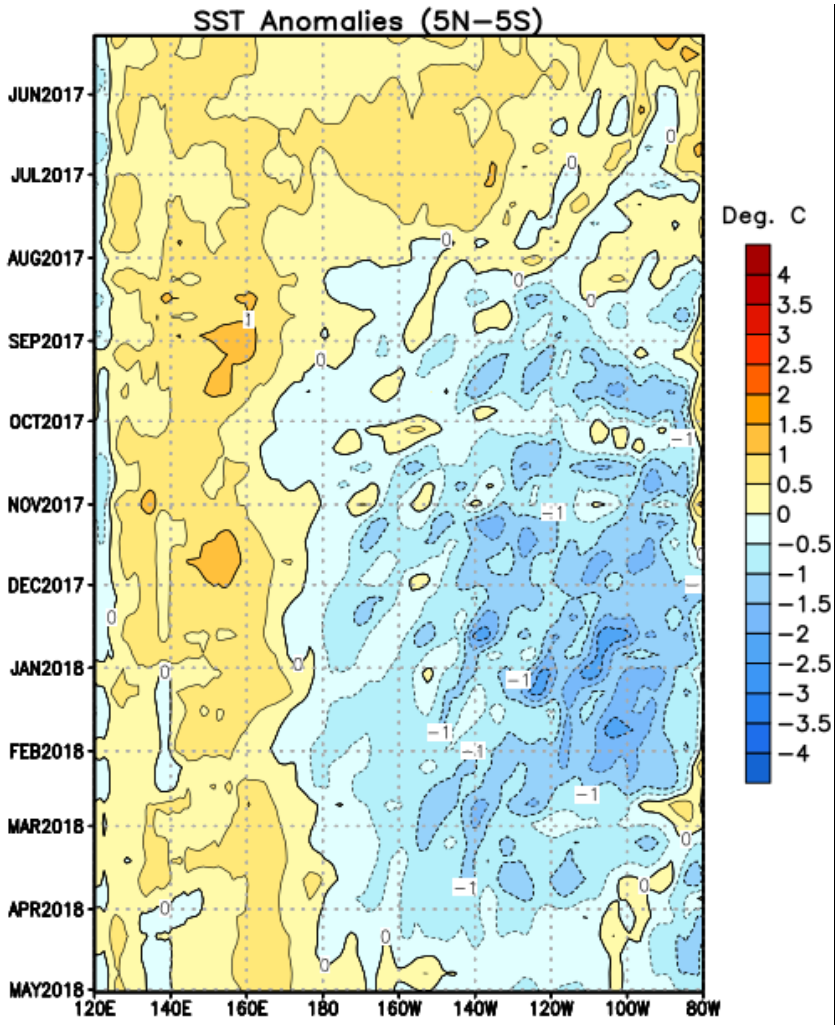
La Niña is expected to transition to ENSO-neutral during April-May, with ENSO-neutral then likely (greater than 50% chance) to continue through the Northern Hemisphere summer 2018.

* Note: These statements are updated once a month (2nd Thursday of each month) in association with the ENSO Diagnostics Discussion, which can be found by clicking here.

Recent Evolution of Equatorial Pacific SST Departures (ºC)

During August 2017, above-average SSTs dissipated east of the Date Line. Below-average SSTs emerged and have generally persisted across the central and eastern Pacific Ocean.

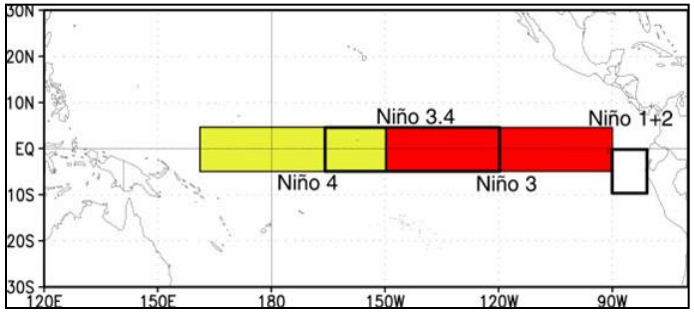
Since early April 2018, negative SST anomalies have dissipated or weakened in the central and east-central equatorial Pacific.

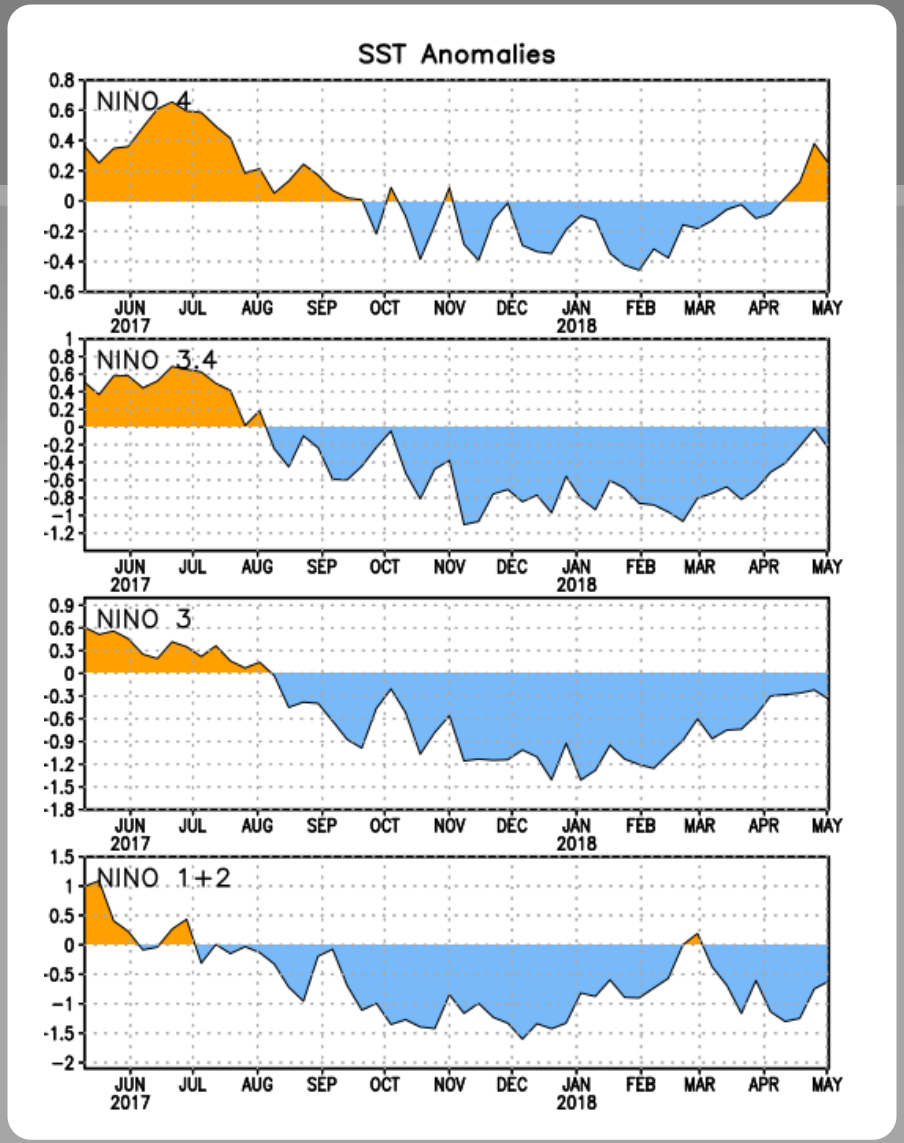


Niño Region SST Departures (ºC) Recent Evolution

The latest weekly SST departures are:

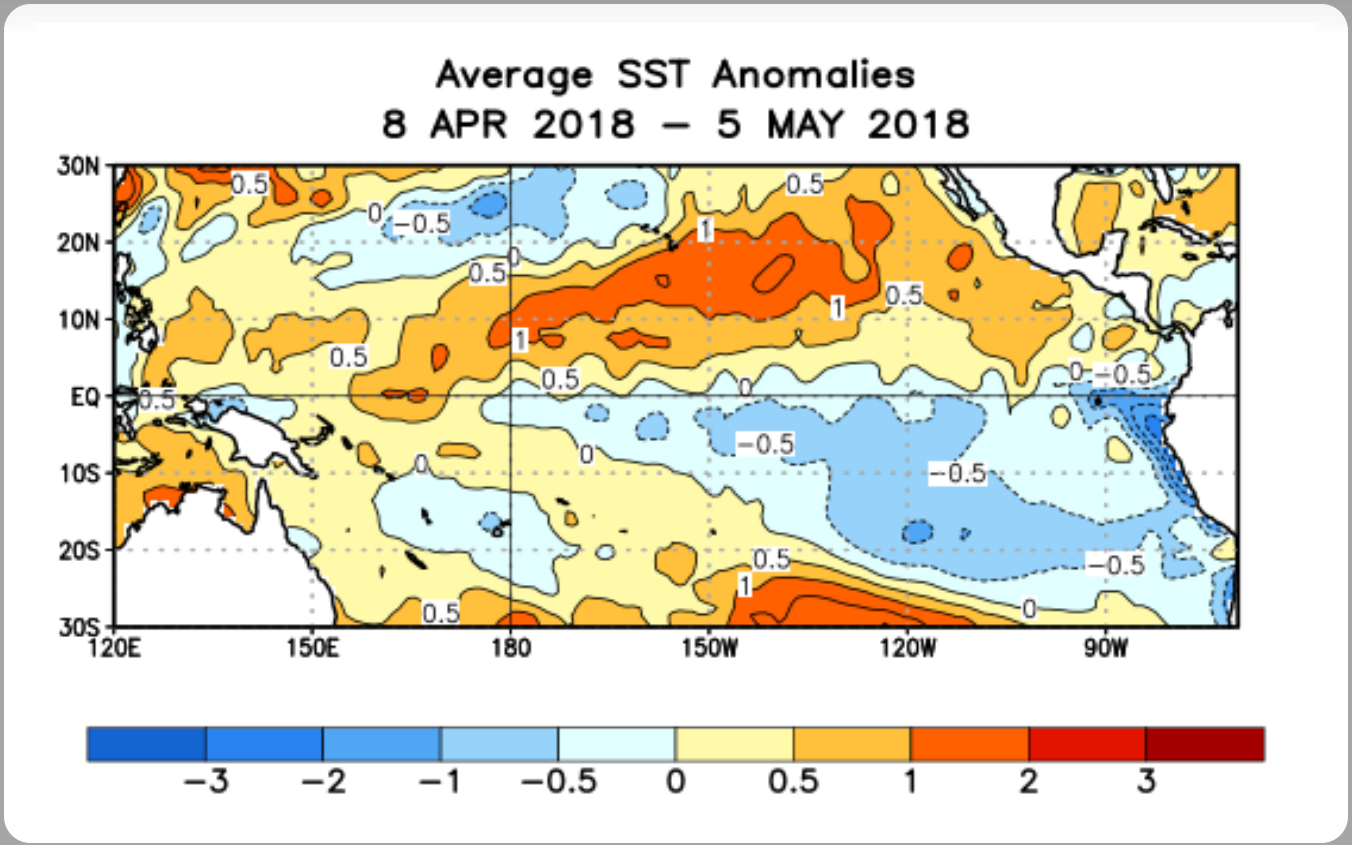
Niño 4	0.2ºC
Niño 3.4	-0.2ºC
Niño 3	-0.3ºC
Niño 1+2	-0.6ºC





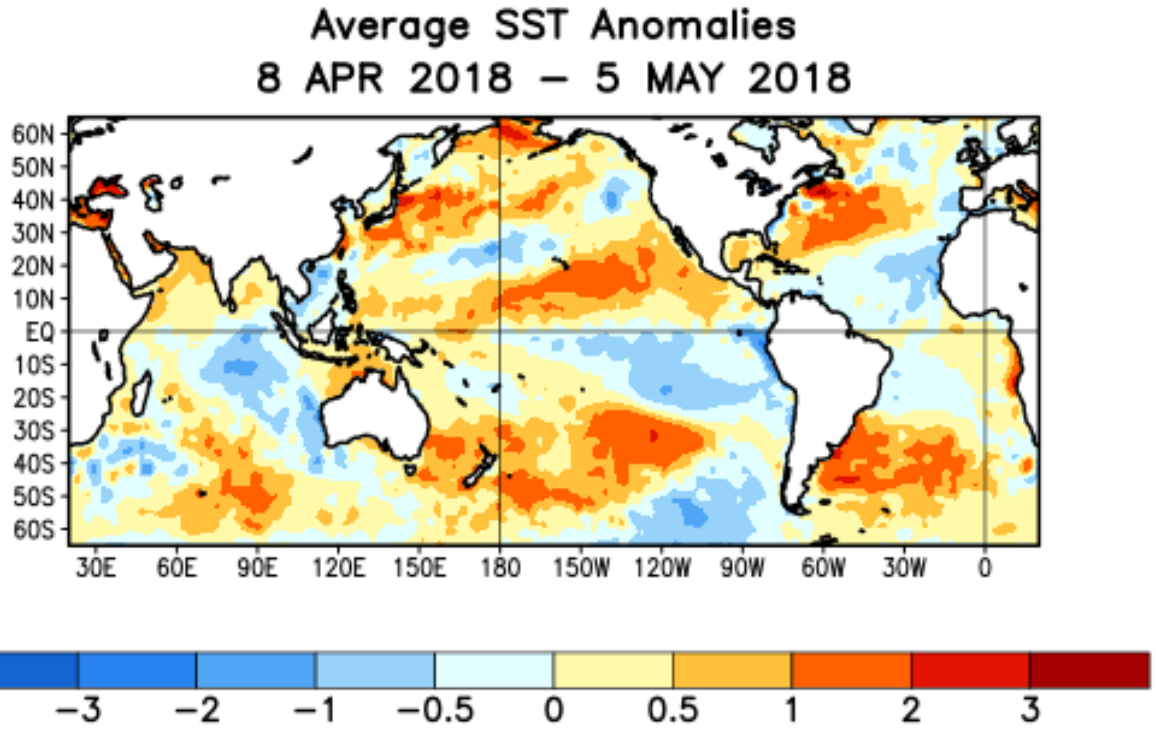
SST Departures (ºC) in the Tropical Pacific During the Last Four Weeks

During the last four weeks, equatorial SSTs were near-to-below average across the east-central Pacific Ocean, below average near South America, and above average in the western Pacific.



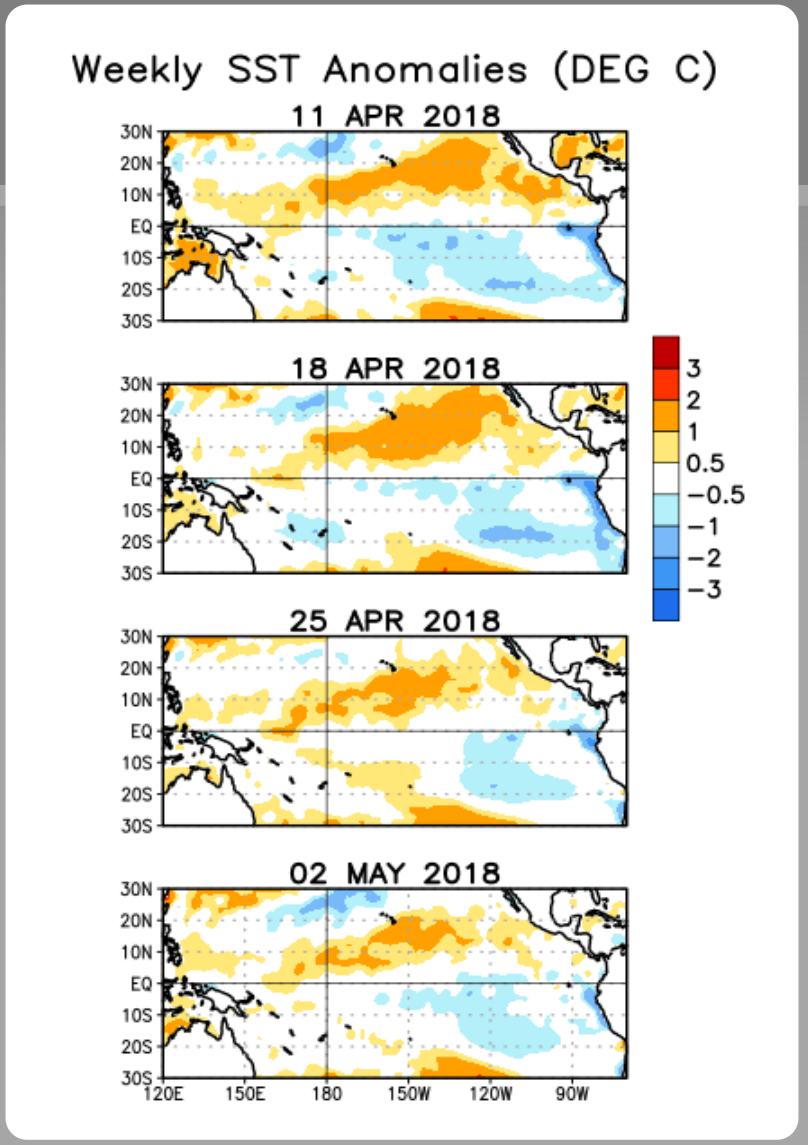
Global SST Departures (°C) During the Last Four Weeks

During the last four weeks, equatorial SSTs were above average in the western Pacific. SSTs were below average in the eastern Indian Ocean and the eastern Pacific.



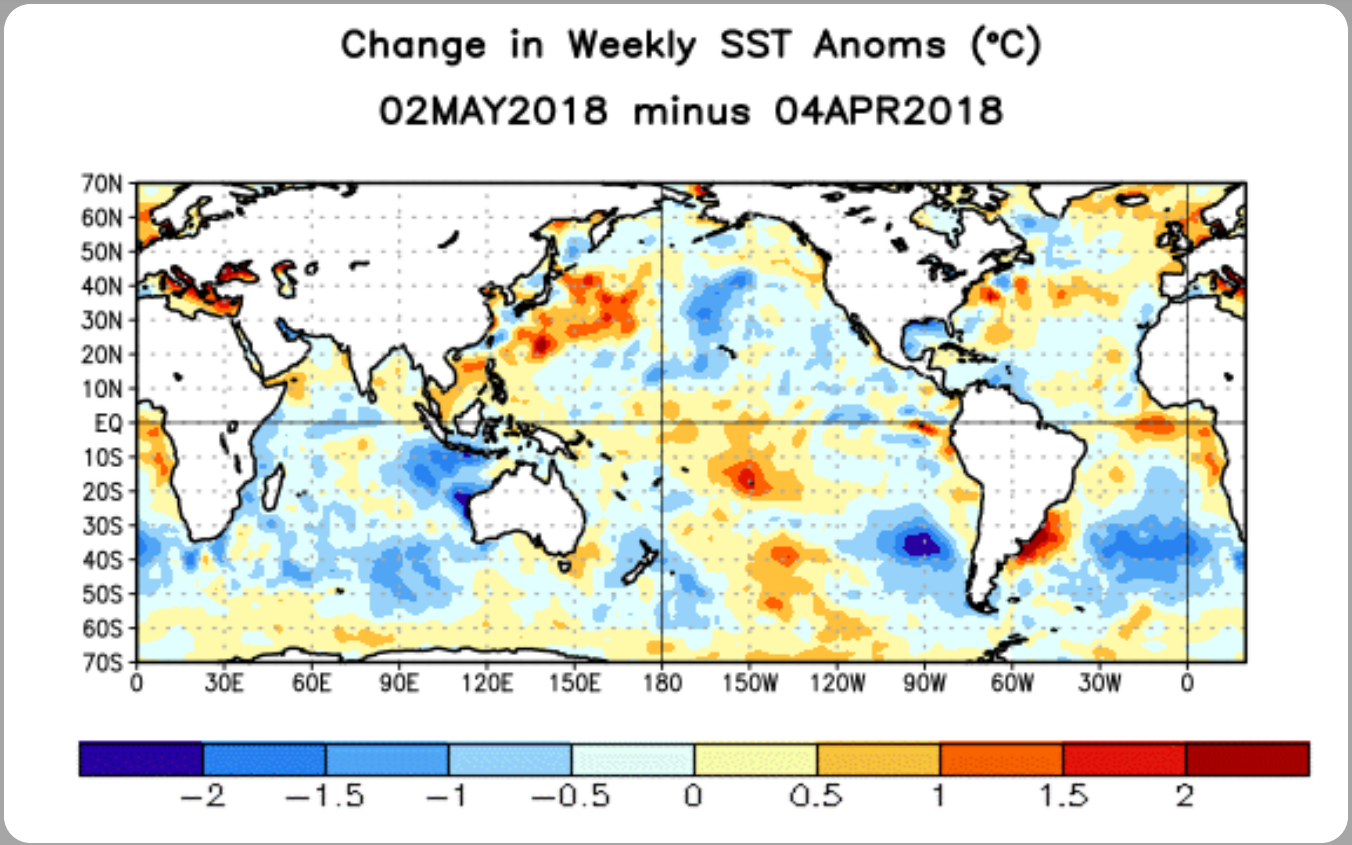
Weekly SST Departures during the Last Four Weeks

During the last four weeks, below-average SSTs have weakened or dissipated across the central and east-central equatorial Pacific Ocean. Negative SST anomalies persisted near the coast of South America.



Change in Weekly SST Departures over the Last Four Weeks

During the last four weeks, mostly positive changes observed across the central and east-central Pacific.



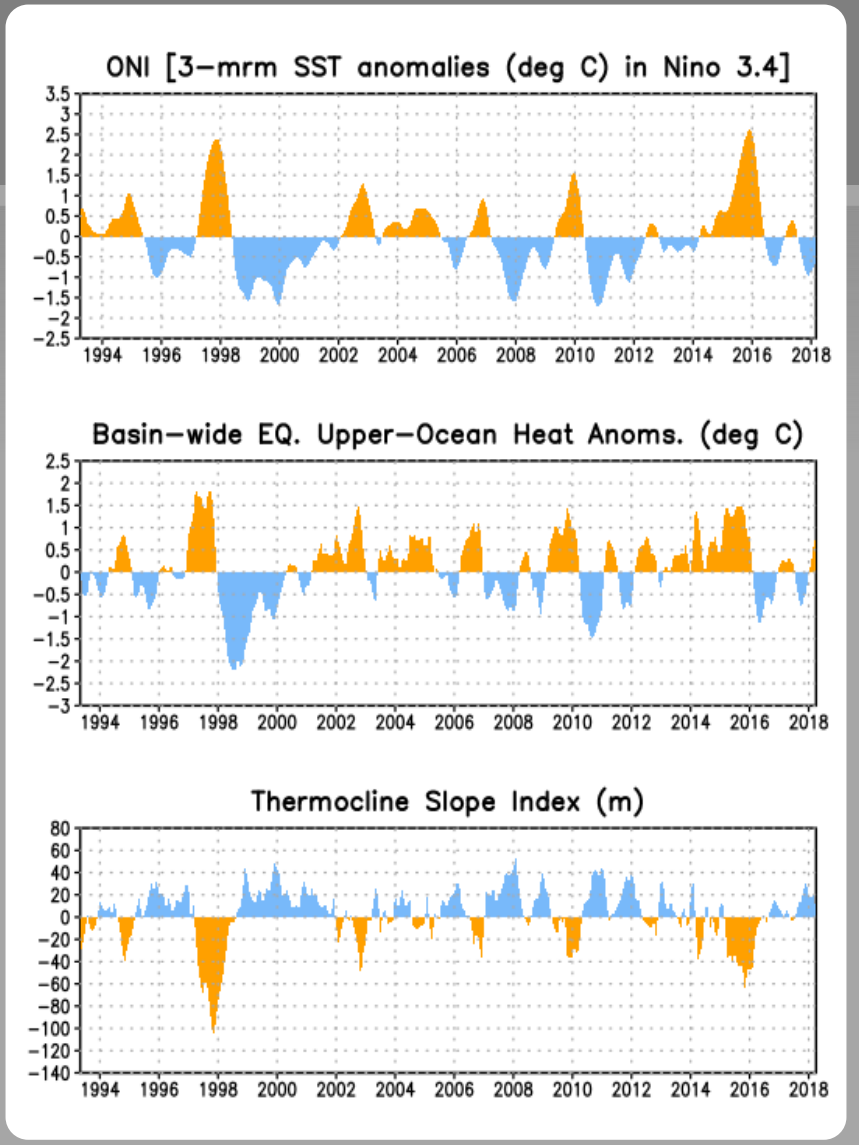
Upper-Ocean Conditions in the Equatorial Pacific

The basin-wide equatorial upper ocean (0-300 m) heat content is greatest prior to and during the early stages of a Pacific warm (El Niño) episode (compare top 2 panels), and least prior to and during the early stages of a cold (La Niña) episode.

The slope of the oceanic thermocline is least (greatest) during warm (cold) episodes.

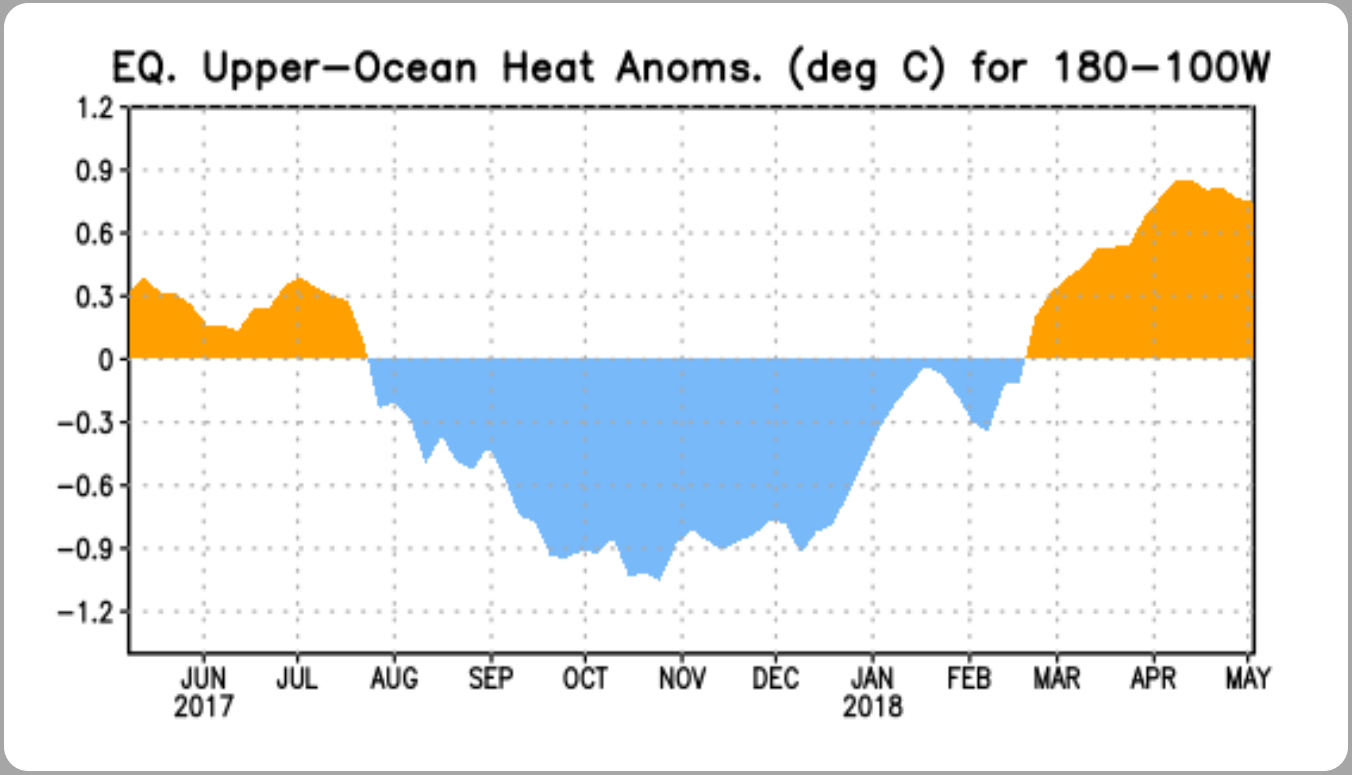
Recent values of the upper-ocean heat anomalies (below average) and thermocline slope index (above average) reflect La Niña conditions.

The monthly thermocline slope index represents the difference in anomalous depth of the 20°C isotherm between the western Pacific (160°E-150°W) and the eastern Pacific (90°-140°W).



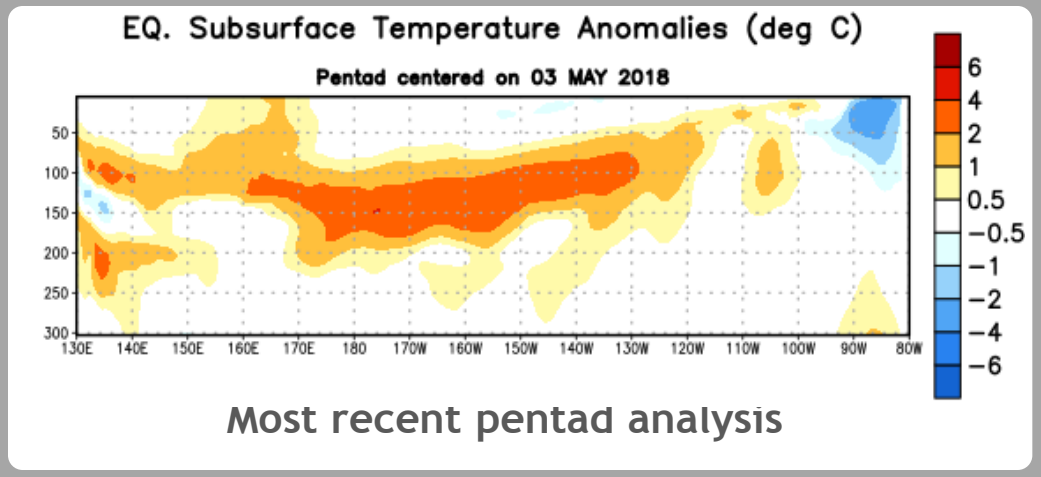
Central and Eastern Pacific Upper-Ocean (0-300 m) Weekly Average Temperature Anomalies

Negative subsurface temperature anomalies lasted from August 2017 to February 2018. Since the end of February, temperature anomalies increased and have remained positive.



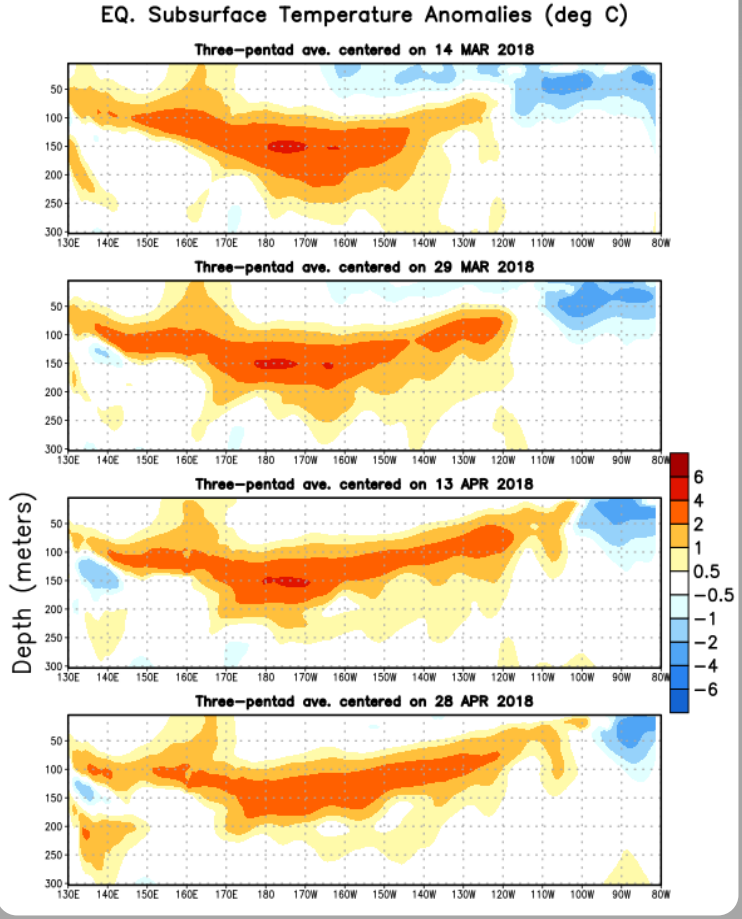
Sub-Surface Temperature Departures in the Equatorial Pacific

In the last two months, positive subsurface temperature anomalies have shifted eastward into the eastern Pacific Ocean.



Most recent pentad analysis

Recently, positive temperature anomalies at depth have shifted eastward to ~100°W. Weak, negative anomalies persist near the surface between ~160°W and ~140°W, with stronger, negative anomalies occurring near the surface east of ~95°W.

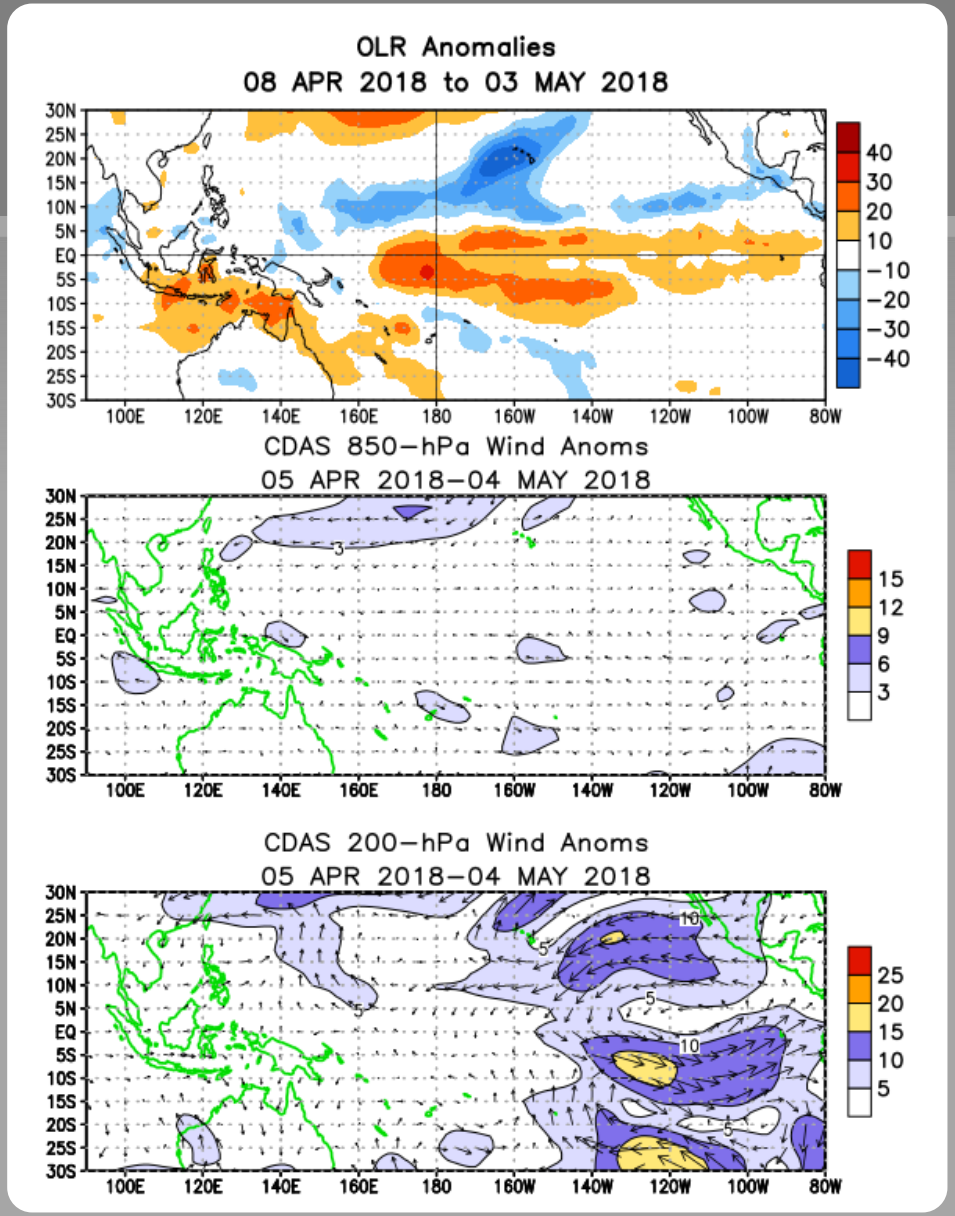


Tropical OLR and Wind Anomalies During the Last 30 Days

Positive OLR anomalies (reduced convection and precipitation) were near the Date Line, east-central Pacific, and parts of Indonesia.

Low-level (850-hPa) winds were near average across most of the tropical Pacific Ocean.

The anomalous upper-level (200-hPa) winds were cross-equatorial over the east-central Pacific and anomalous westerly over the eastern Pacific.



Intraseasonal Variability

Intraseasonal variability in the atmosphere (wind and pressure), which is often related to the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO), can significantly impact surface and subsurface conditions across the Pacific Ocean.

Related to this activity:

Significant weakening of the low-level easterly winds usually initiates an eastward-propagating oceanic Kelvin wave.

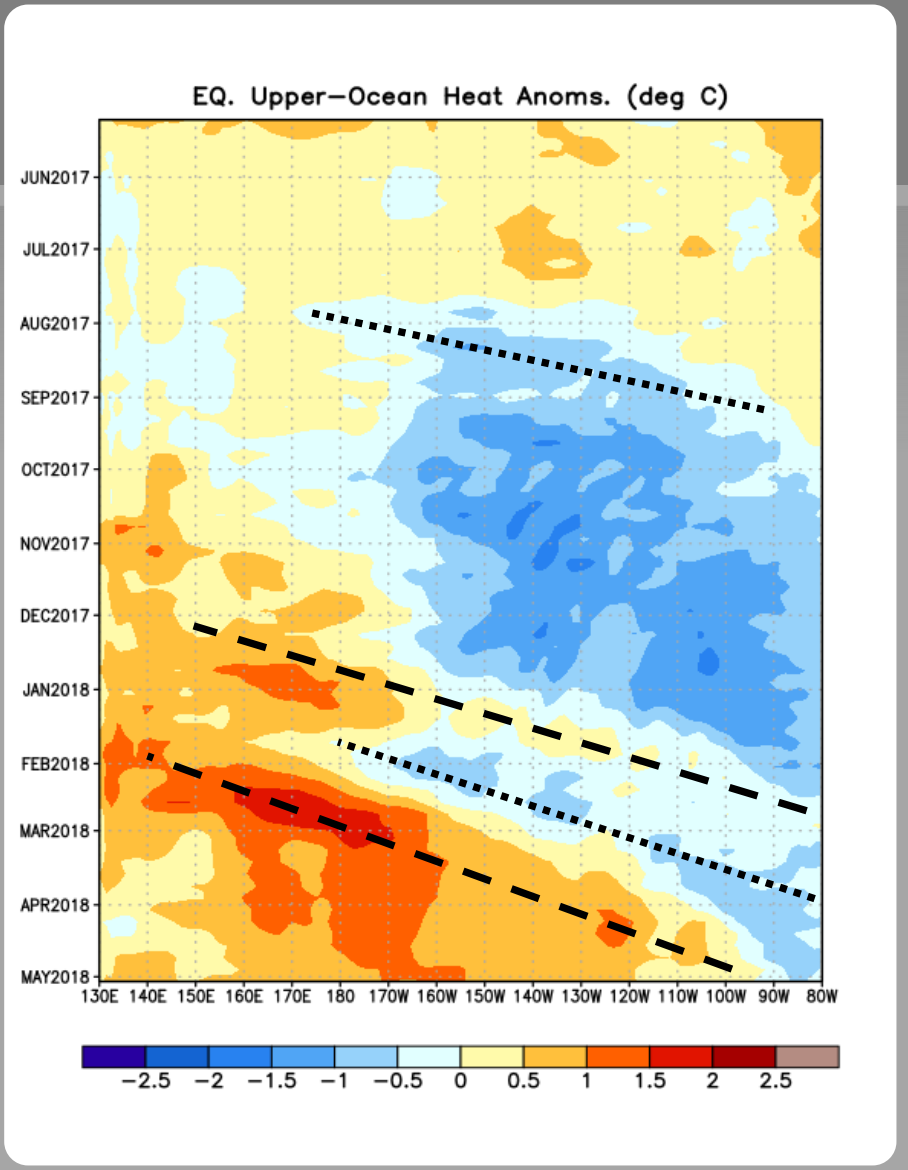
Weekly Heat Content Evolution in the Equatorial Pacific

From August 2017- early January 2018, negative subsurface temperature anomalies persisted in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean.

From December 2017- February 2018, a downwelling Kelvin wave contributed to the eastward shift of above-average subsurface temperatures.

From mid January - March 2018, an upwelling Kelvin wave resulted in below-average subsurface temperatures.

Since early February 2018, another downwelling Kelvin wave has led to positive subsurface anomalies as far east as ~90°W.



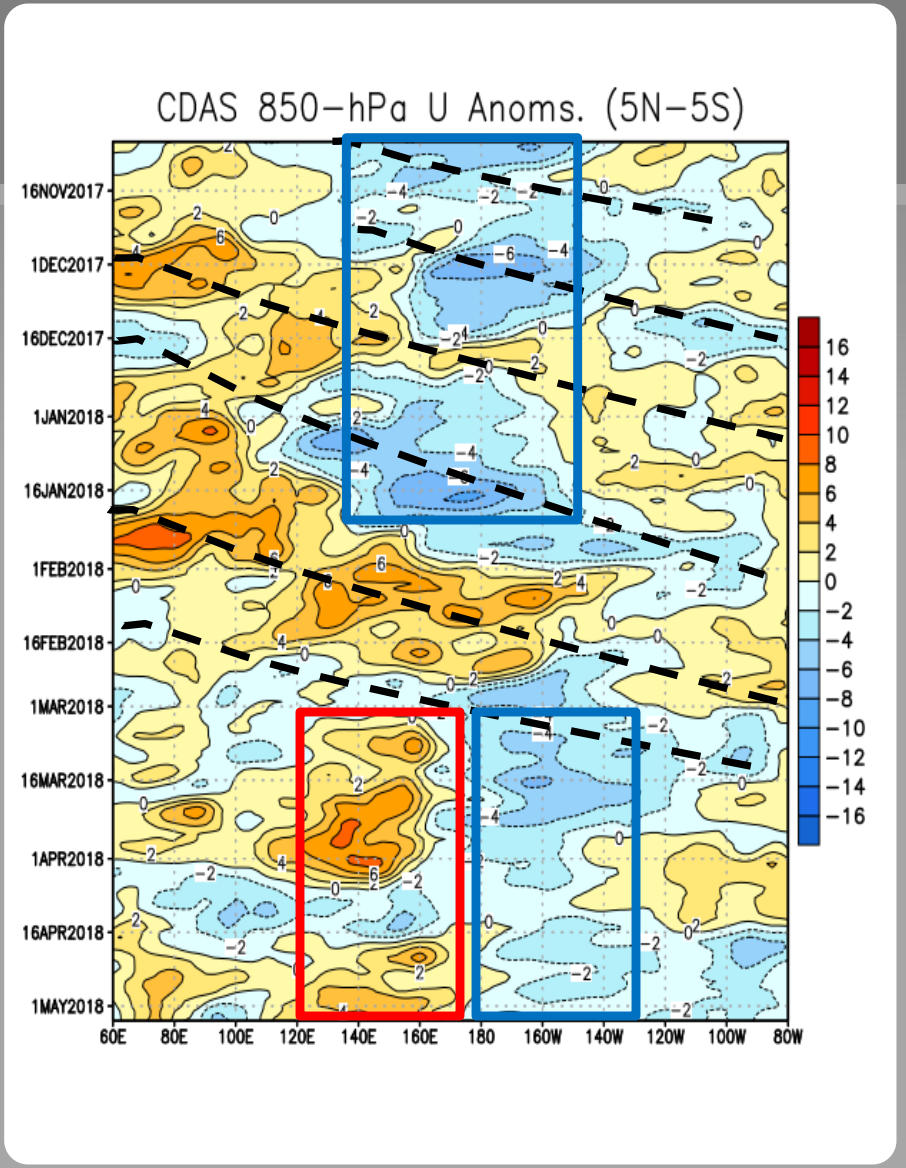
Equatorial oceanic Kelvin waves have alternating warm and cold phases. The warm phase is indicated by dashed lines. Down-welling and warming occur in the leading portion of a Kelvin wave, and up-welling and cooling occur in the trailing portion.

Low-level (850-hPa) Zonal (east-west) Wind Anomalies (m s^{-1})

Through mid-January 2018, easterly wind anomalies prevailed across the central equatorial Pacific.

Up to late February 2018, the Madden Julian Oscillation (MJO) contributed to the eastward propagation of low-level wind anomalies.

Since early March 2018, easterly wind anomalies have persisted over the east-central Pacific Ocean. Westerly wind anomalies have periodically emerged west of the Date Line.

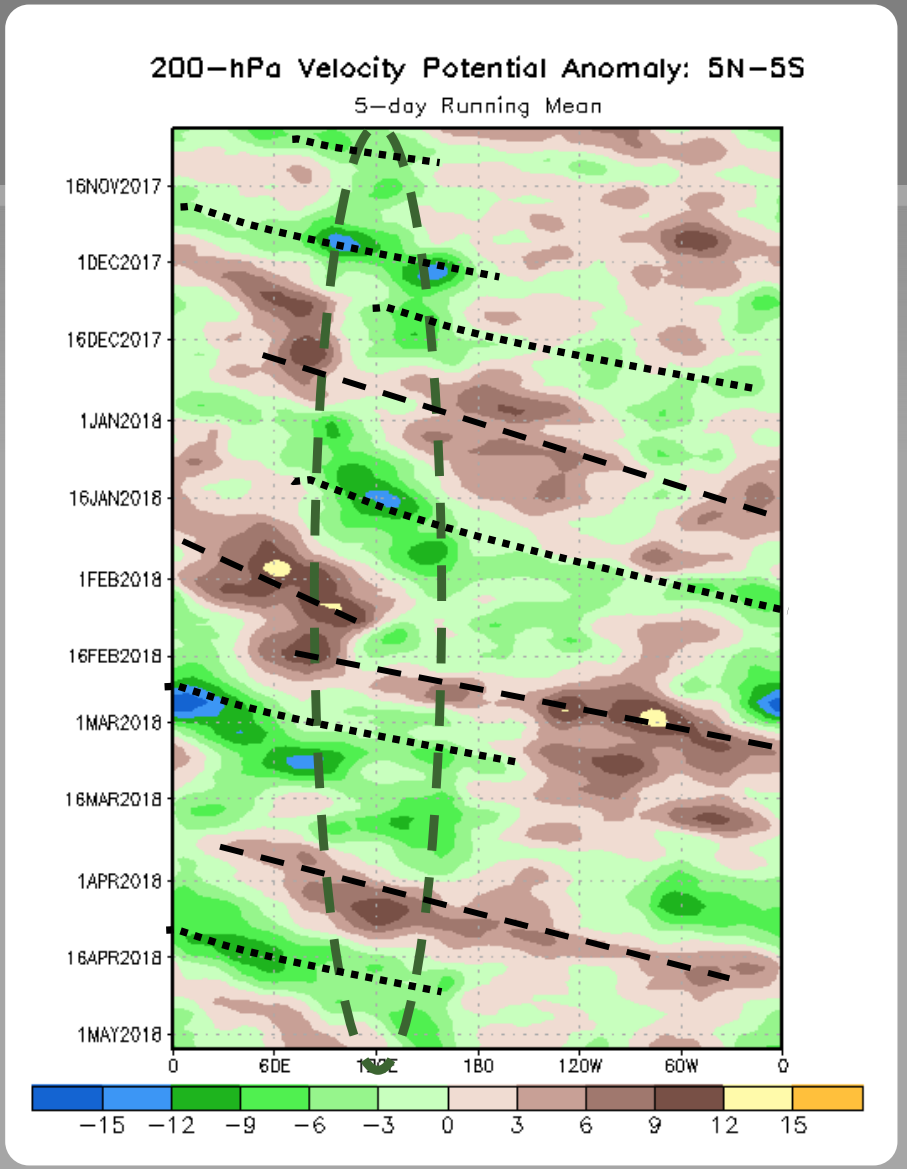


Westerly Wind Anomalies (orange/red shading)
Easterly Wind Anomalies (blue shading)

Upper-level (200-hPa) Velocity Potential Anomalies

Until May 2018, anomalous upper-level divergence (green shading) generally persisted near Indonesia.

During this period, eastward propagation of regions of upper-level divergence (green shading) and convergence (brown shading) have been evident.

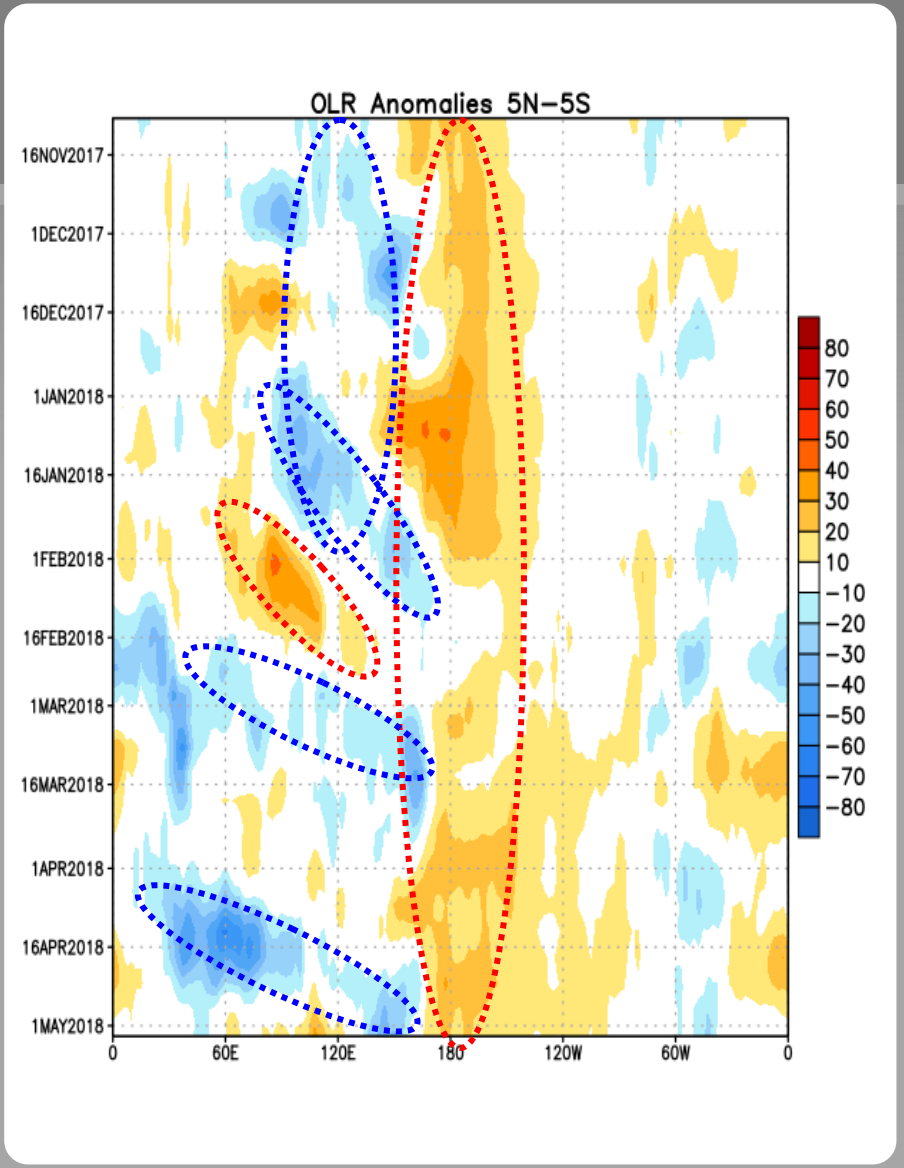


Unfavorable for precipitation (brown shading)
Favorable for precipitation (green shading)

Note: Eastward propagation is not necessarily indicative of the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO).

Outgoing Longwave Radiation (OLR) Anomalies

At least since October 2017, positive OLR anomalies generally persisted over the central Pacific Ocean.



Drier-than-average Conditions (orange/red shading)
Wetter-than-average Conditions (blue shading)

Oceanic Niño Index (ONI)

The ONI is based on SST departures from average in the Niño 3.4 region, and is a principal measure for monitoring, assessing, and predicting ENSO.

Defined as the three-month running-mean SST departures in the Niño 3.4 region. Departures are based on a set of improved homogeneous historical SST analyses (Extended Reconstructed SST – ERSST.v5). The SST reconstruction methodology is described in Huang et al., 2017, J. Climate, vol. 30, 8179-8205.)

It is one index that helps to place current events into a historical perspective

NOAA Operational Definitions for El Niño and La Niña

El Niño: characterized by a positive ONI greater than or equal to +0.5°C.

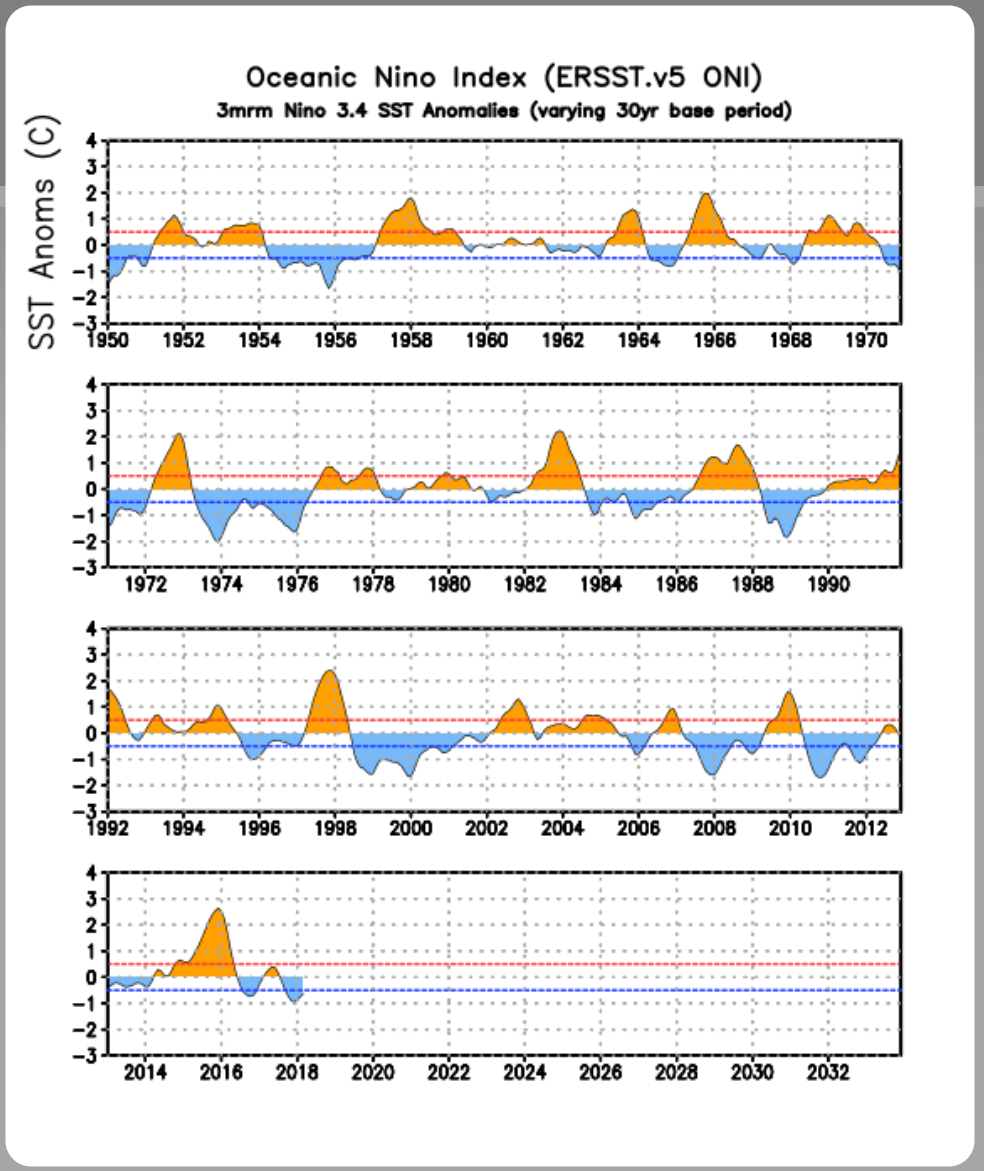
La Niña: characterized by a negative ONI less than or equal to -0.5°C.

By historical standards, to be classified as a full-fledged El Niño or La Niña episode, these thresholds must be exceeded for a period of at least 5 consecutive overlapping 3-month seasons.

CPC considers El Niño or La Niña conditions to occur when the monthly Niño3.4 OISST departures meet or exceed +/- 0.5°C along with consistent atmospheric features. These anomalies must also be forecasted to persist for 3 consecutive months.

ONI (°C): Evolution since 1950

The most recent ONI value (February - April 2018) is -0.6°C.



Historical El Niño and La Niña Episodes Based on the ONI computed using ERSST.v5

Recent Pacific warm (red) and cold (blue) periods based on a threshold of +/- 0.5 °C for the Oceanic Nino Index (ONI) [3 month running mean of ERSST.v5 SST anomalies in the Nino 3.4 region (5N-5S, 120-170W)]. For historical purposes, periods of below and above normal SSTs are colored in blue and red when the threshold is met for a minimum of 5 consecutive over-lapping seasons.

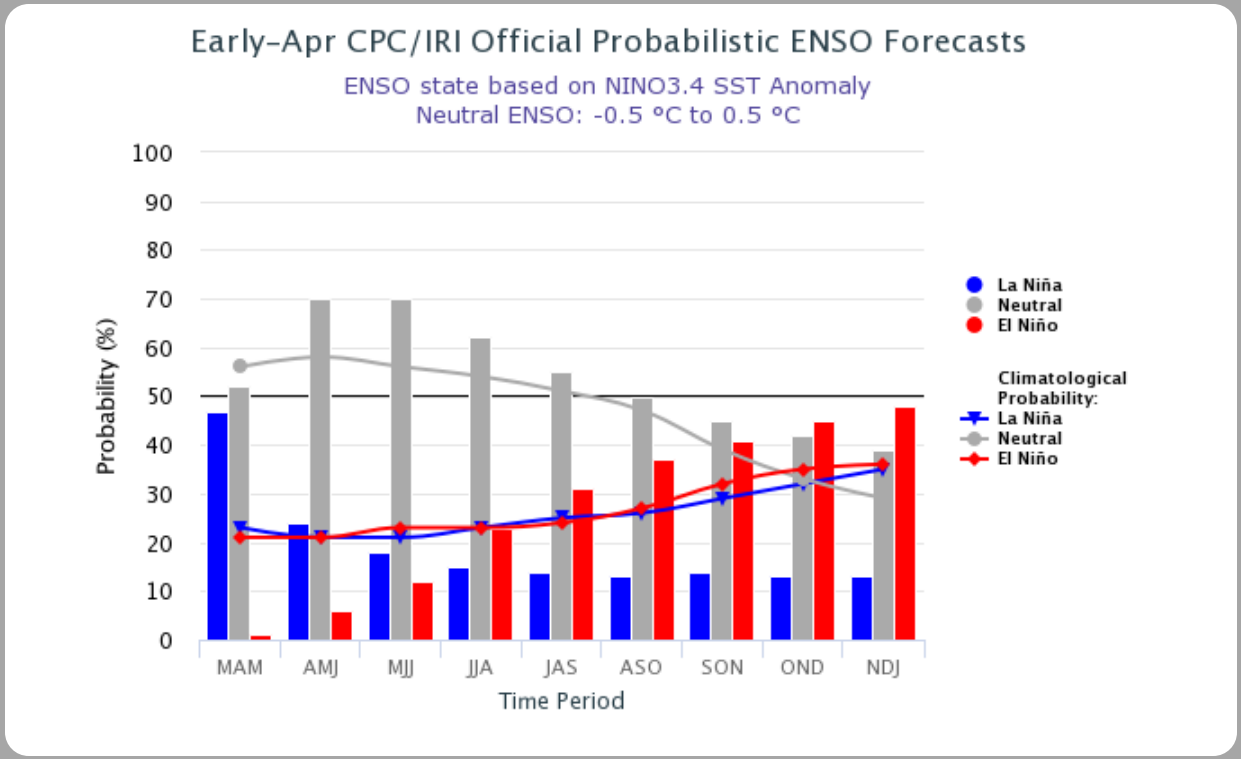
The ONI is one measure of the El Niño-Southern Oscillation, and other indices can confirm whether features consistent with a coupled ocean-atmosphere phenomenon accompanied these periods. The complete table going back to DJF 1950 can be found here.

Year	DJF	JFM	FMA	MAM	AMJ	MJJ	JJA	JAS	ASO	SON	OND	NDJ
2006	-0.8	-0.7	-0.5	-0.3	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.7	0.9	0.9
2007	0.7	0.3	0.0	-0.2	-0.3	-0.4	-0.5	-0.8	-1.1	-1.4	-1.5	-1.6
2008	-1.6	-1.4	-1.2	-0.9	-0.8	-0.5	-0.4	-0.3	-0.3	-0.4	-0.6	-0.7
2009	-0.8	-0.7	-0.5	-0.2	0.1	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.7	1.0	1.3	1.6
2010	1.5	1.3	0.9	0.4	-0.1	-0.6	-1.0	-1.4	-1.6	-1.7	-1.7	-1.6
2011	-1.4	-1.1	-0.8	-0.6	-0.5	-0.4	-0.5	-0.7	-0.9	-1.1	-1.1	-1.0
2012	-0.8	-0.6	-0.5	-0.4	-0.2	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.0	-0.2
2013	-0.4	-0.3	-0.2	-0.2	-0.3	-0.3	-0.4	-0.4	-0.3	-0.2	-0.2	-0.3
2014	-0.4	-0.4	-0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.4	0.6	0.7
2015	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.8	1.0	1.2	1.5	1.8	2.1	2.4	2.5	2.6
2016	2.5	2.2	1.7	1.0	0.5	0.0	-0.3	-0.6	-0.7	-0.7	-0.7	-0.6
2017	-0.3	-0.1	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.2	-0.1	-0.4	-0.7	-0.9	-1.0
2018	-0.9	-0.8	-0.6									

CPC/IRI Probabilistic ENSO Outlook

Updated: 12 April 2018

A transition from La Niña to ENSO-neutral is expected during April-May, with ENSO-neutral favored (greater than 50%) through Northern Hemisphere summer 2018.



IRI/CPC Pacific Niño 3.4 SST Model Outlook

The majority of models predict ENSO-neutral through summer 2018, with an elevated chance of El Niño by fall/winter 2018.

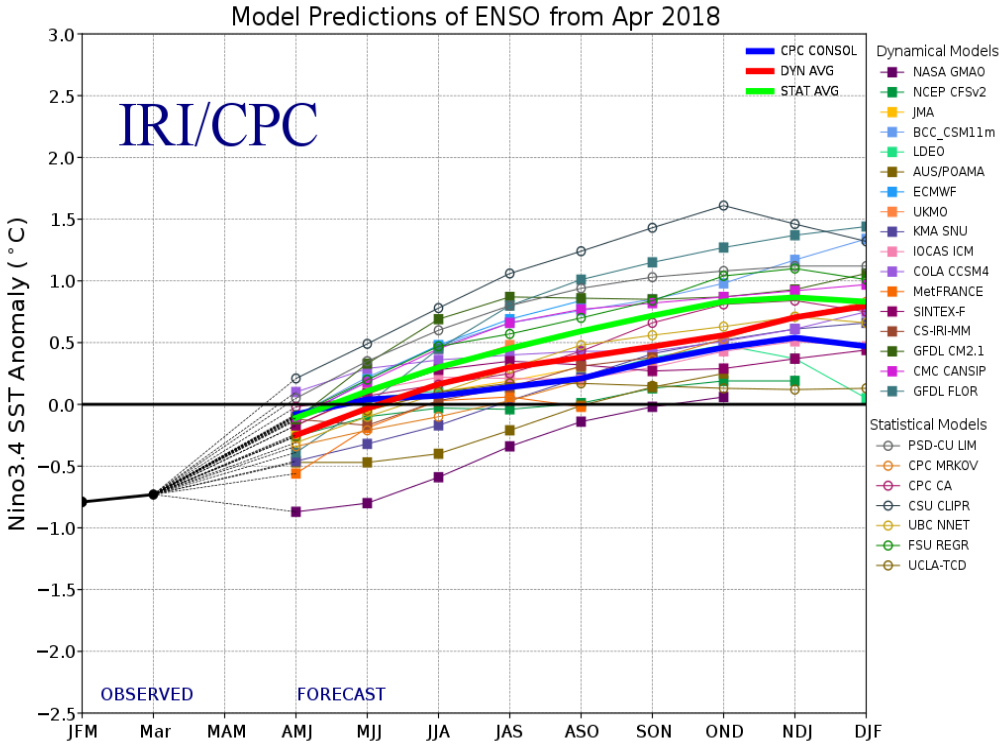
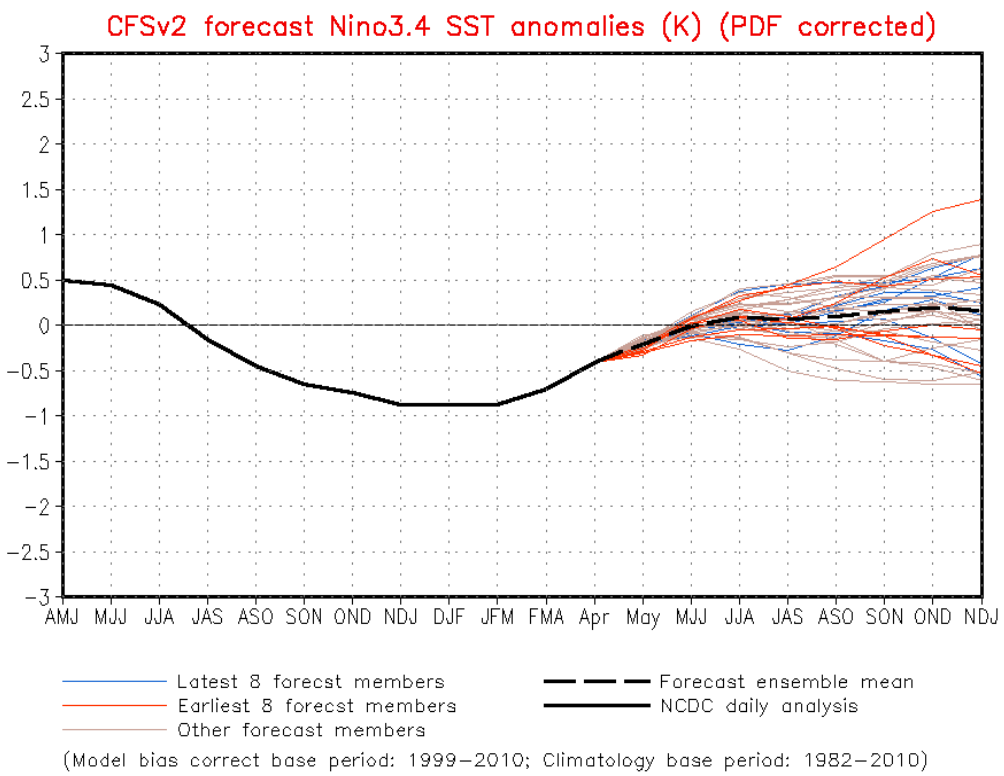


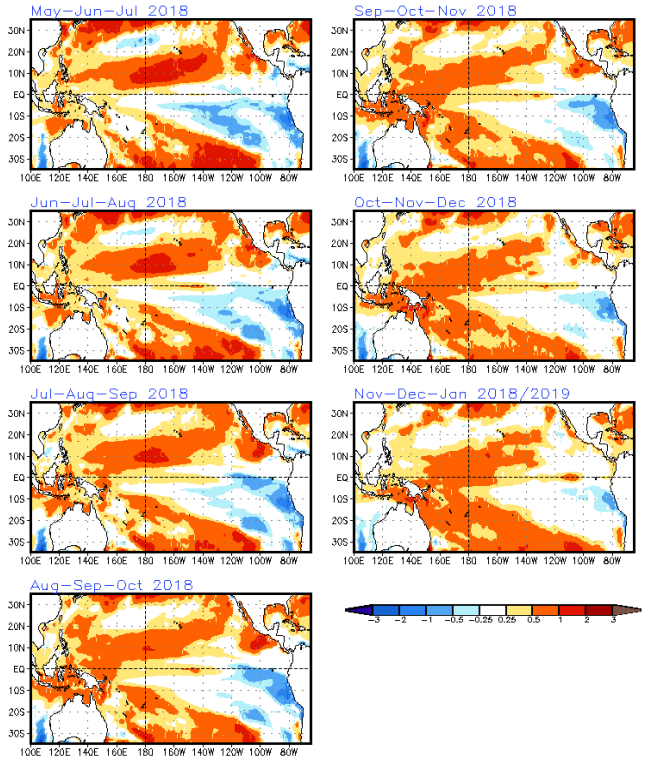
Figure provided by the International Research Institute (IRI) for Climate and Society (updated 19 April 2018).

SST Outlook: NCEP CFS.v2 Forecast (PDF corrected)

Issued: 6 May 2018

The CFS.v2 ensemble mean (black dashed line) favors ENSO-neutral through Northern Hemisphere fall 2018.



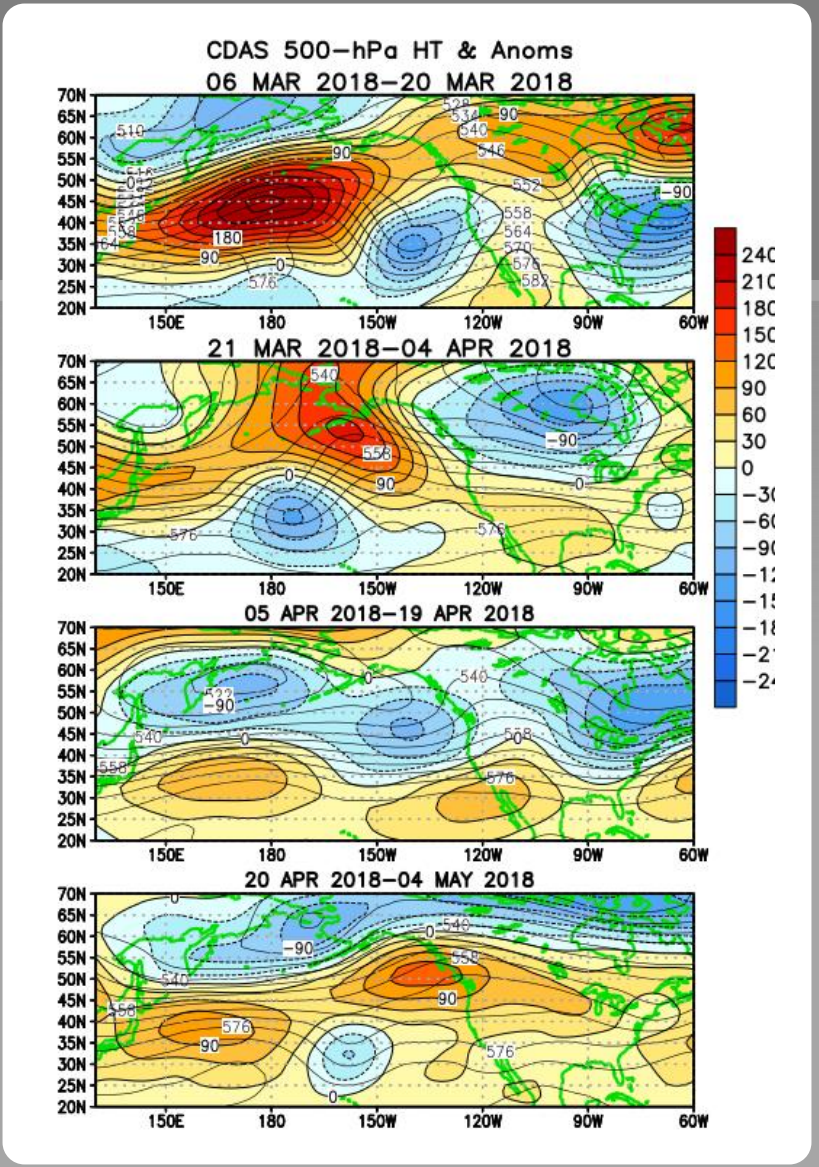


Atmospheric anomalies over the North Pacific and North America During the Last 60 Days

Through March 2018, anomalous ridging over the North Pacific Ocean was accompanied by an anomalous trough (and below-average temperatures) over the western contiguous United States with anomalous ridging over the central US.

During late March through mid April 2018, an anomalous trough and below-average temperatures persisted over parts of central and eastern North America.

Since late April, zonal flow and anomalous ridging has prevailed over the contiguous US.



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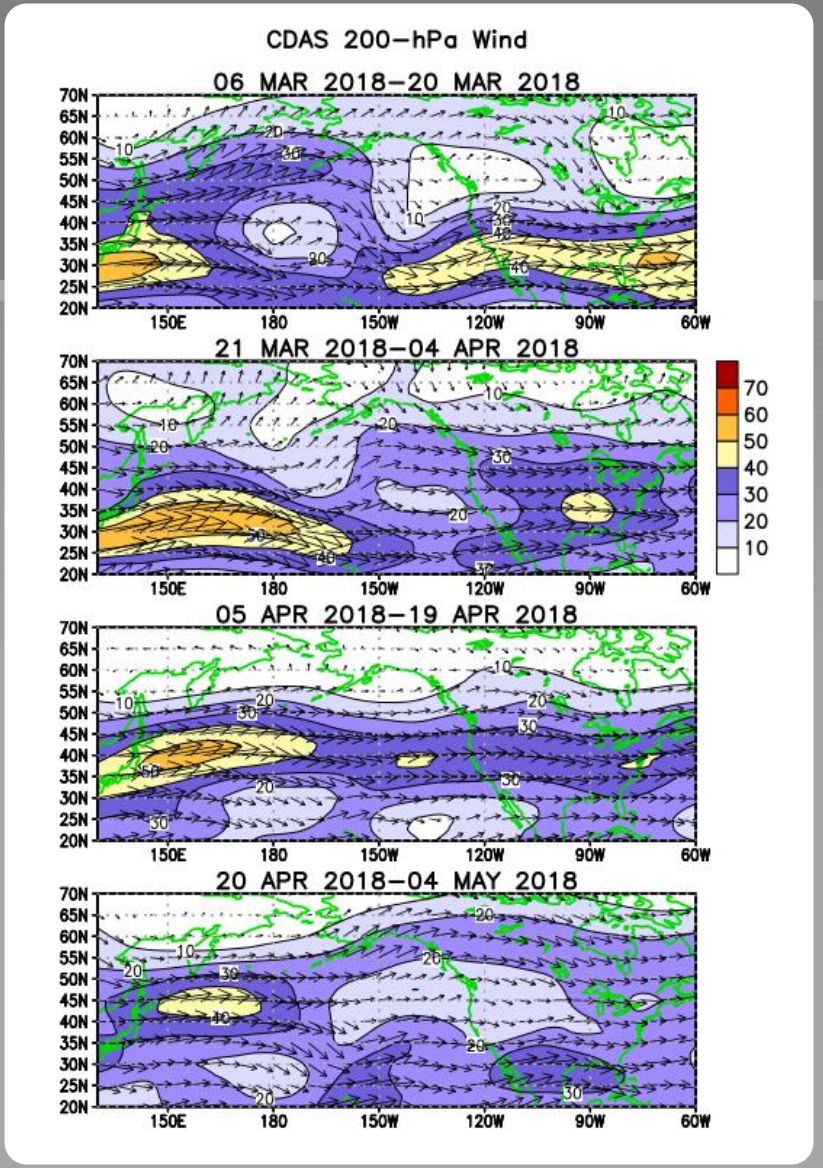

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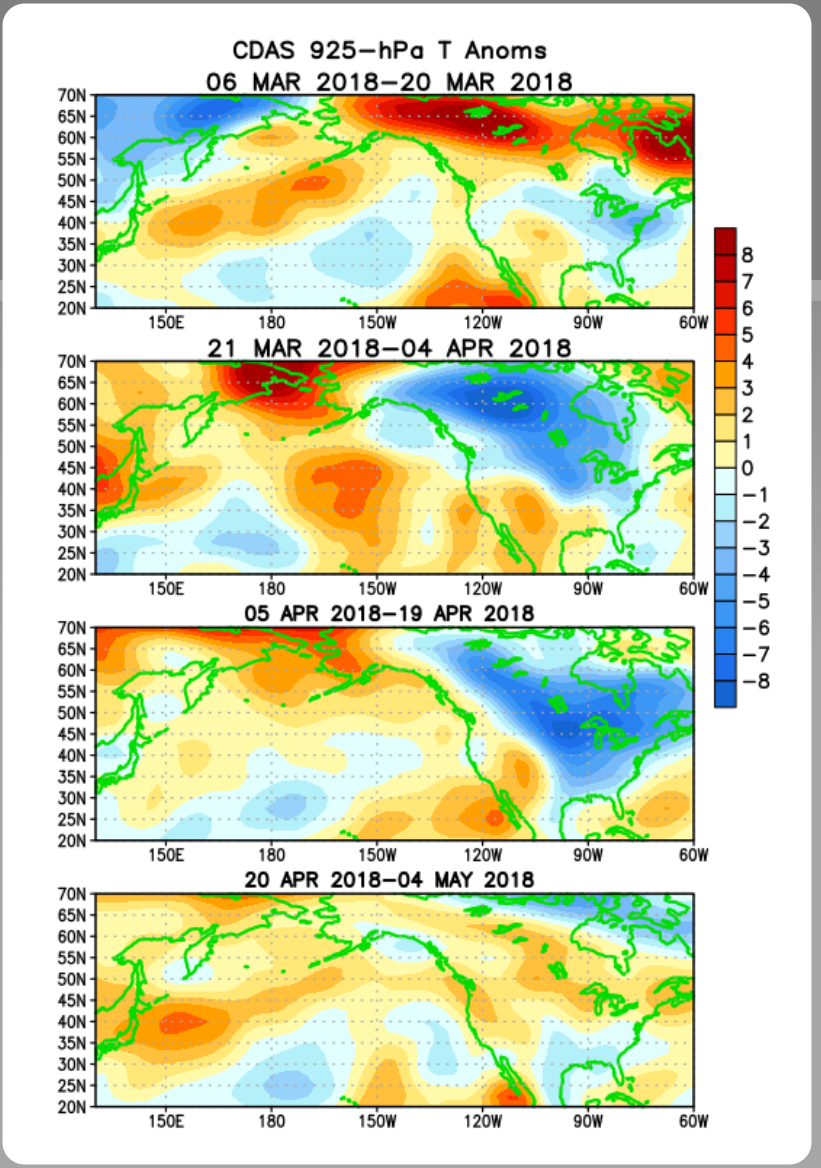
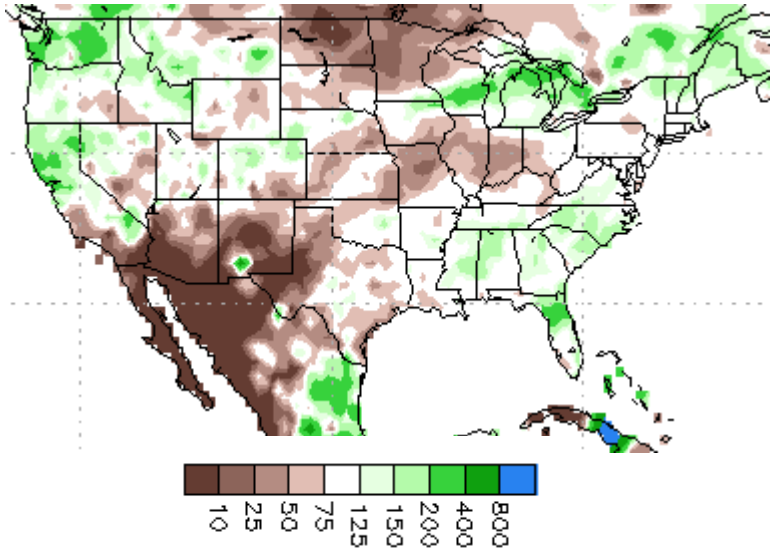


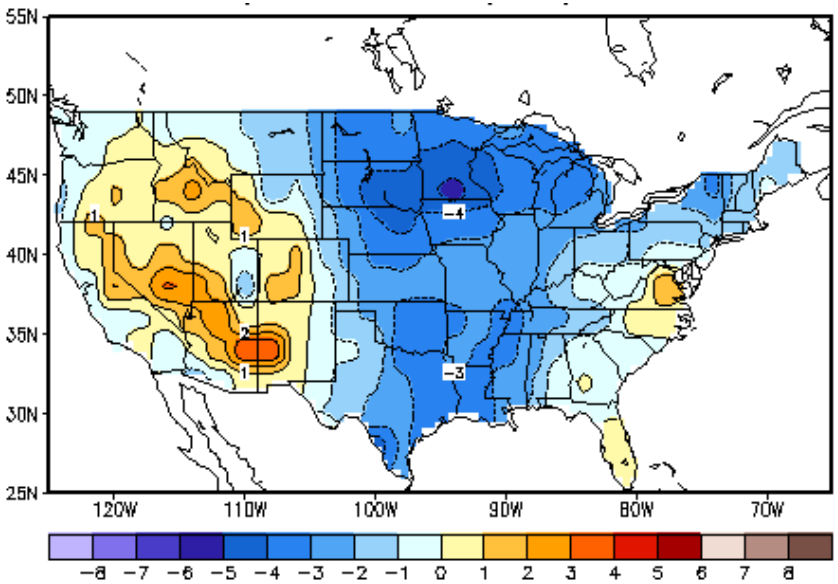
U.S. Temperature and Precipitation Departures During the Last 30 Days

End Date: 5 May 2018

Percent of Average Precipitation



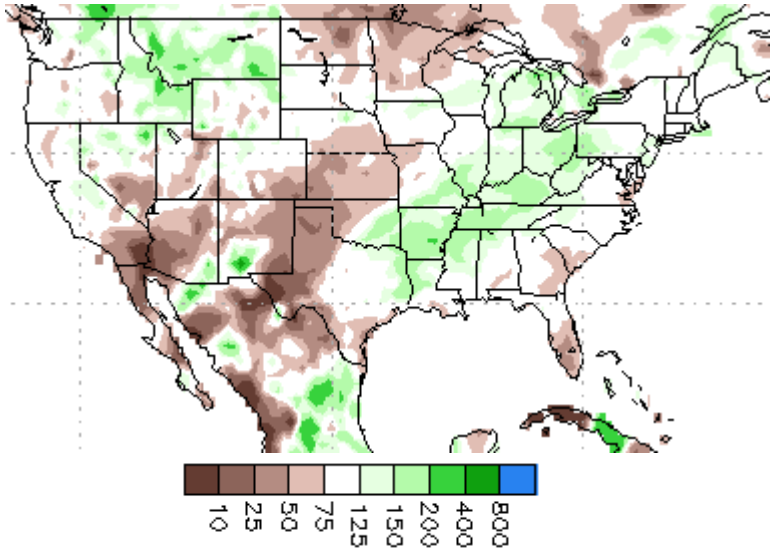
Temperature Departures (degree C)



U.S. Temperature and Precipitation Departures During the Last 90 Days

End Date: 5 May 2018

Percent of Average Precipitation



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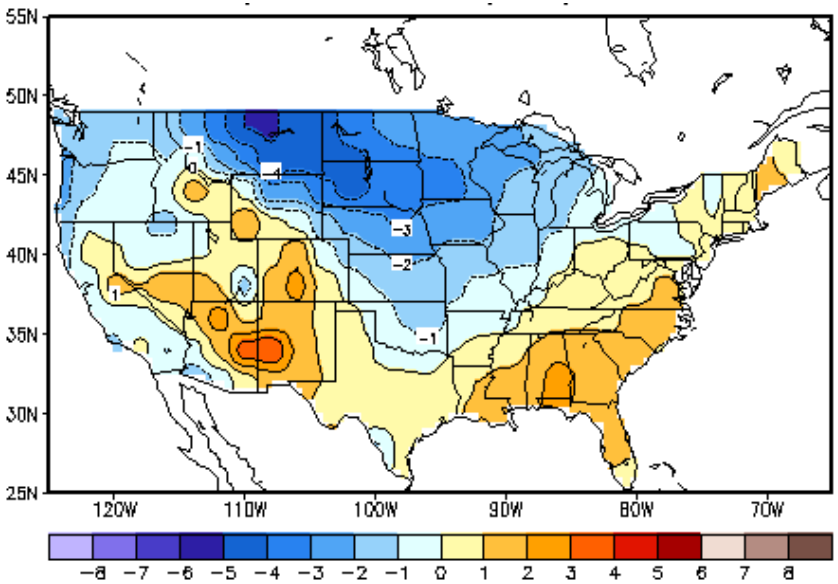
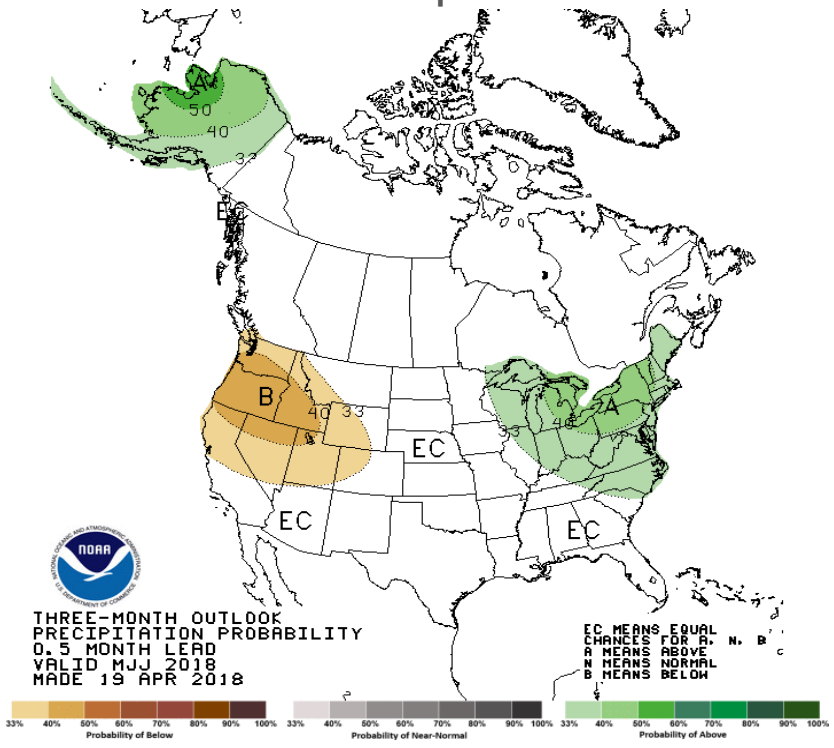


U. S. Seasonal Outlooks

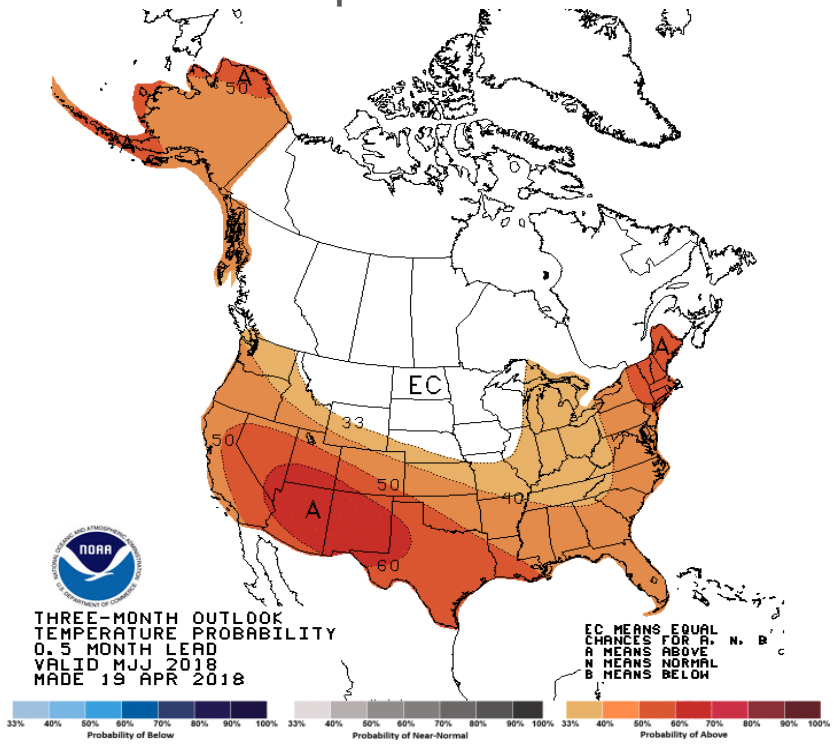
May - July 2018

The seasonal outlooks combine the effects of long-term trends, soil moisture, and, when appropriate, ENSO.

Precipitation



Temperature



Summary

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