

Hopes for El Niño evaporating; would have brought a wet winter

By Kurtis Alexander

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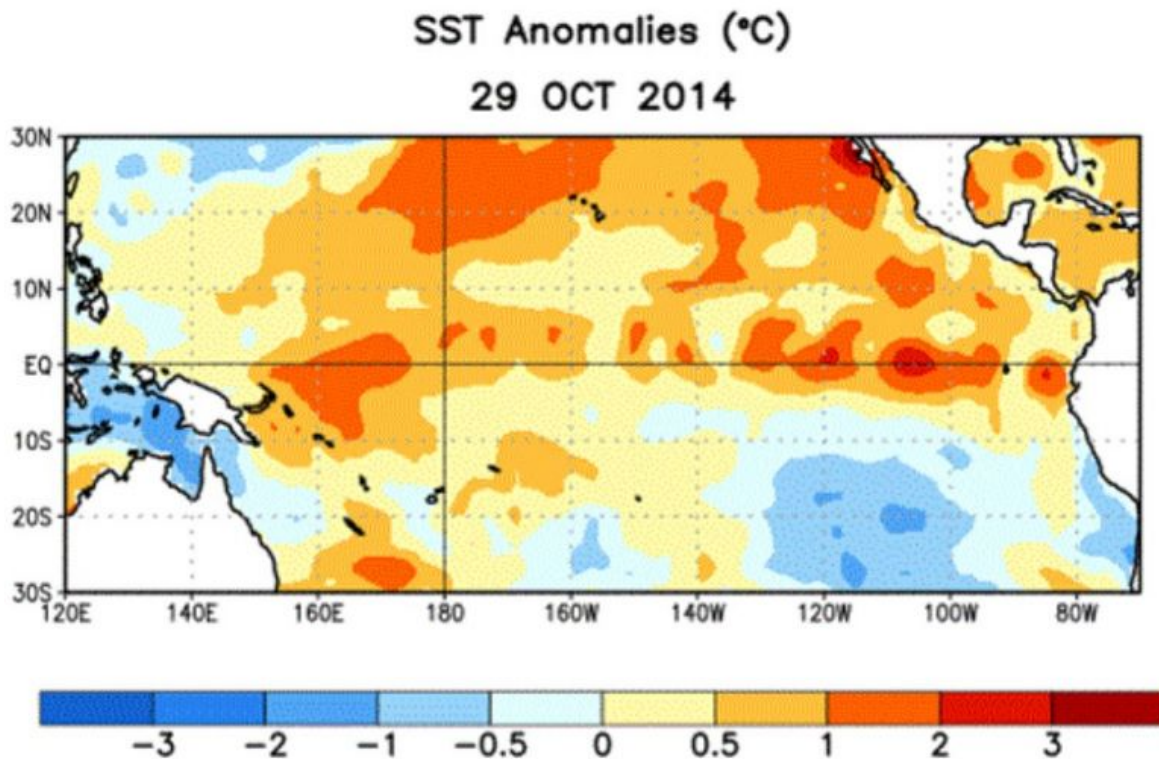


Figure 1. Average sea surface temperature (SST) anomalies (°C) for the week centered on 29 October 2014. Anomalies are computed with respect to the 1981-2010 base period weekly means.

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Photo: Alexander, Kurtis

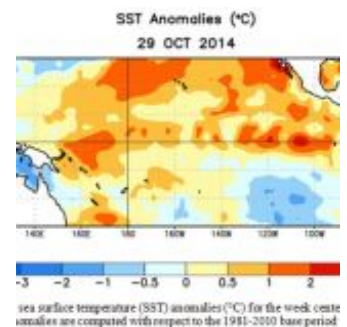
Image 1 of 1

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Federal forecasters on Thursday scaled back the likelihood of an El Niño developing this winter, dampening hopes of



a wet winter washing away the California drought.

Pacific Ocean waters have failed to warm to the levels that scientists projected earlier this year, when the federal [Climate Prediction Center](#) issued an El Niño watch and said the weather pattern was likely to evolve by now — or sometime around the end of the year.

The odds of an El Niño forming this winter are now pegged at 58 percent, according to the Climate Prediction Center, down from 80 percent in the spring.

An El Niño, marked by warming surface waters in the Pacific tropics, is a key signal for forecasters trying to figure out what will happen during the winter months. When the pattern develops, it influences worldwide weather.

Strong El Niños have been associated with rain on the West Coast.

Forecasters have also dropped earlier projections that the weather pattern could be of moderate strength or greater. Consensus now is that it will be weak.

The absence — or weakening — of an El Niño doesn't necessarily mean there will be less rain this winter. It does mean forecasters will have fewer clues about what will happen.

Weather watchers will have to look at harder-to-track patterns, such as the North Pacific Oscillation, which last year helped create the high-pressure ridge over the northern Pacific that diverted many storms from striking the West Coast.

Many of these alternative patterns don't develop as far in advance as an El Niño, making long-term forecasting more difficult.

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