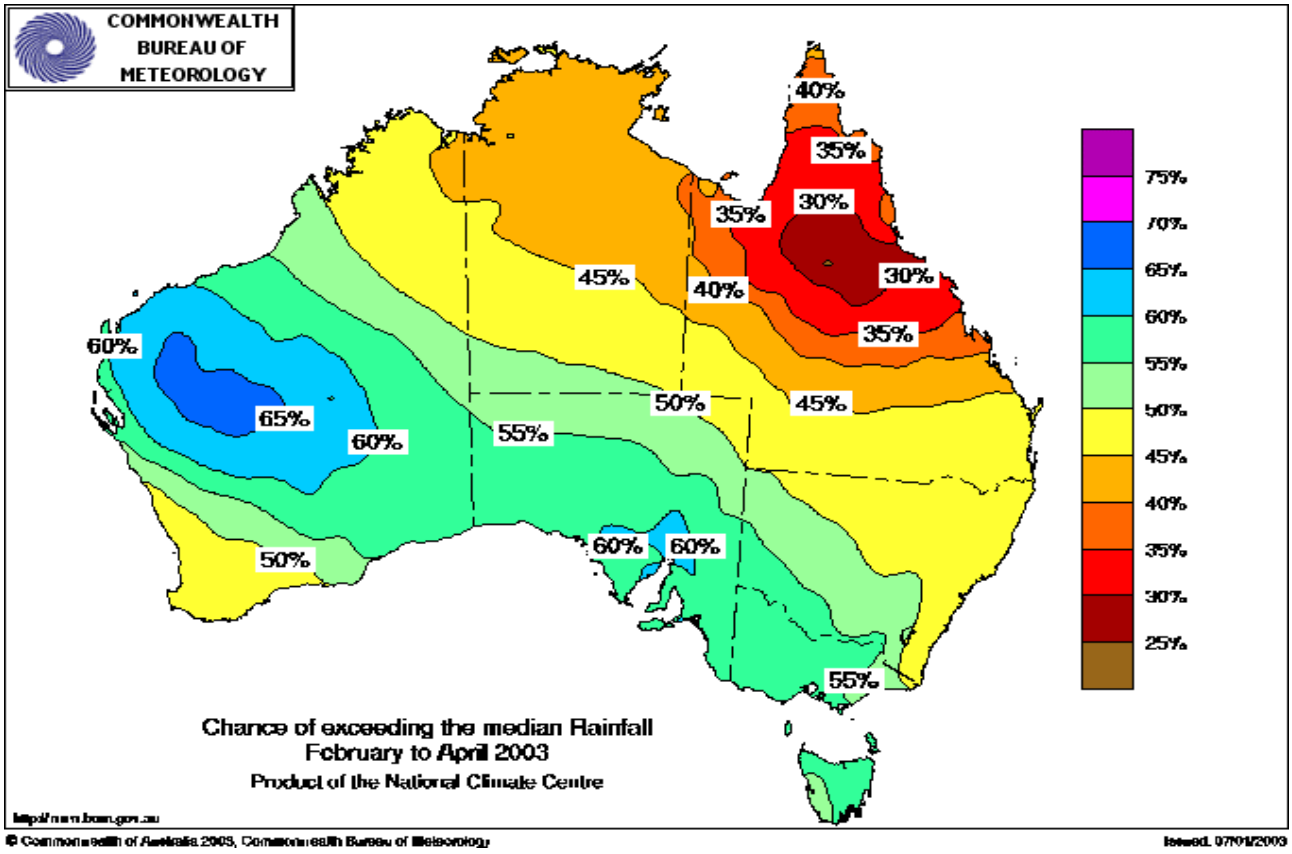
THREE-MONTH SEASONAL CLIMATE OUTLOOK SUMMARY

Rainfall probabilities for February to April 2003, issued 15th January 2003

Below average falls more likely in north Queensland

The latest seasonal rainfall odds show moderate to large swings towards drier than average conditions through parts of north Queensland, according to the Bureau's National Climate Centre.

The chances of above median rainfall for the February to April period are 25 to 40% over much of northern Queensland, meaning that BELOW median falls have a 60 to 75% chance of occurring.



Whilst it's possible for a single tropical cyclone to produce above average seasonal rain, cyclone activity in Queensland tends to be reduced in El Nino years.

So with climate patterns like the current, about 7 seasons out of 10 are expected to be drier than average in north Queensland, whilst about 3 out of 10 are wetter. The statistical outlook scheme is moderately reliable in this part of the country for this period.

Over parts of central WA and southern SA, the chances of ABOVE median falls are mainly between 60 and 65%, although the outlook scheme has mostly low reliability in these areas.

The overall pattern of probabilities has mainly resulted from the current El Niño pattern of above average Pacific Ocean temperatures.

January to March is the period when the impact from El Niño on Australian rainfall most commonly breaks down with a return to average to above average totals. There are four points to note regarding this:

(a) there are no guarantees - it may be after March or before January;

(b) this is not a prediction of when the drought will break, as that may take several months of sustained above average falls in some areas;

(c) in all likelihood the breakdown will not occur uniformly across all drought affected areas;

(d) the main El Niño indicators (SOI, sea-surface temperatures, trade winds) may return to neutral values a few months after the change in Australian rainfall patterns. Regular updates of the progress of the El Niño are available at www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso

Background Information:

- The Outlook probabilities are based on recent Indian and Pacific Ocean temperatures. The Pacific Ocean remained warm in December and the Indian Ocean warmed.

- The Australian impacts of 23 El Niño events since 1900 are summarized on the Bureau's web site at http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/enso/australia_detail.shtml

December's value of the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) was -11, a drop of 5 points from the -6 in November. The approximate SOI for the 30 days ending 12th January was -5.

- This outlook represents a summary, more detail is available from the contact people or web sites listed below.
- Important: Probability outlooks should not be used as if they were categorical forecasts. More on probabilities is contained in the booklet "The Seasonal Climate Outlook - What it is and how to use it", available from the National Climate Centre.

The national text, and a colour map, are on the WEB at http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/ahead/rain_ahead.shtml

An online Seasonal Climate Outlook subscription service is available at http://www.bom.gov.au/silo

Supplementary Information concerning the breakdown of El Niño-related droughts

---

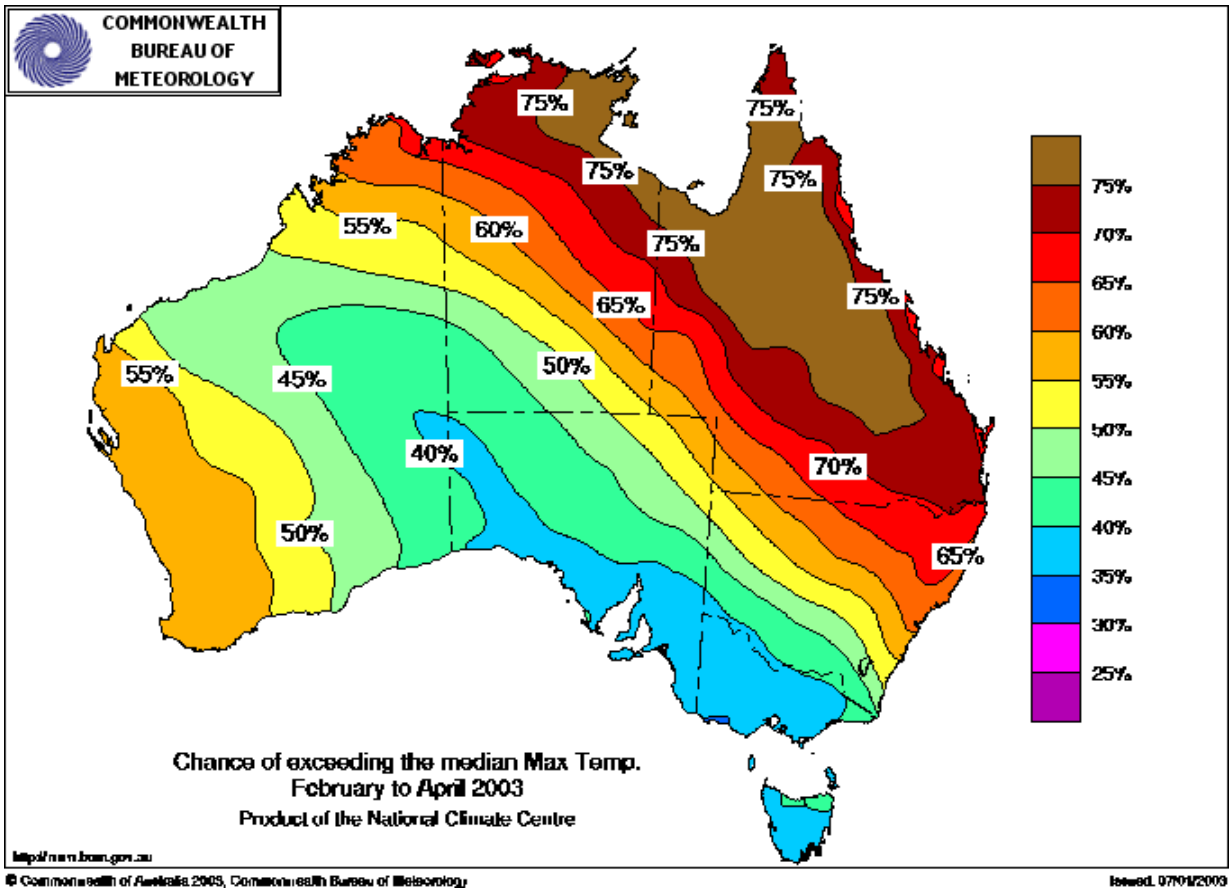
THREE-MONTH SEASONAL CLIMATE OUTLOOK SUMMARY:

Temperature probabilities for February to April 2003, issued 15th January 2003

Warmer in the north, cooler in the south

Seasonal temperature odds have changed little since last month's issue with moderate to large swings towards warmer than average daytime temperatures still apparent in the north of the country. Over southern regions a cooler than average season is the more likely outcome, according to the National Climate Centre.

For the February to April period the chances of above average seasonal maximum temperatures increase northwards from near 60% along a line joining Derby (WA) and Newcastle (NSW) to near 80% around the Gulf of Carpentaria and in central and northern Queensland (see max.gif attached).

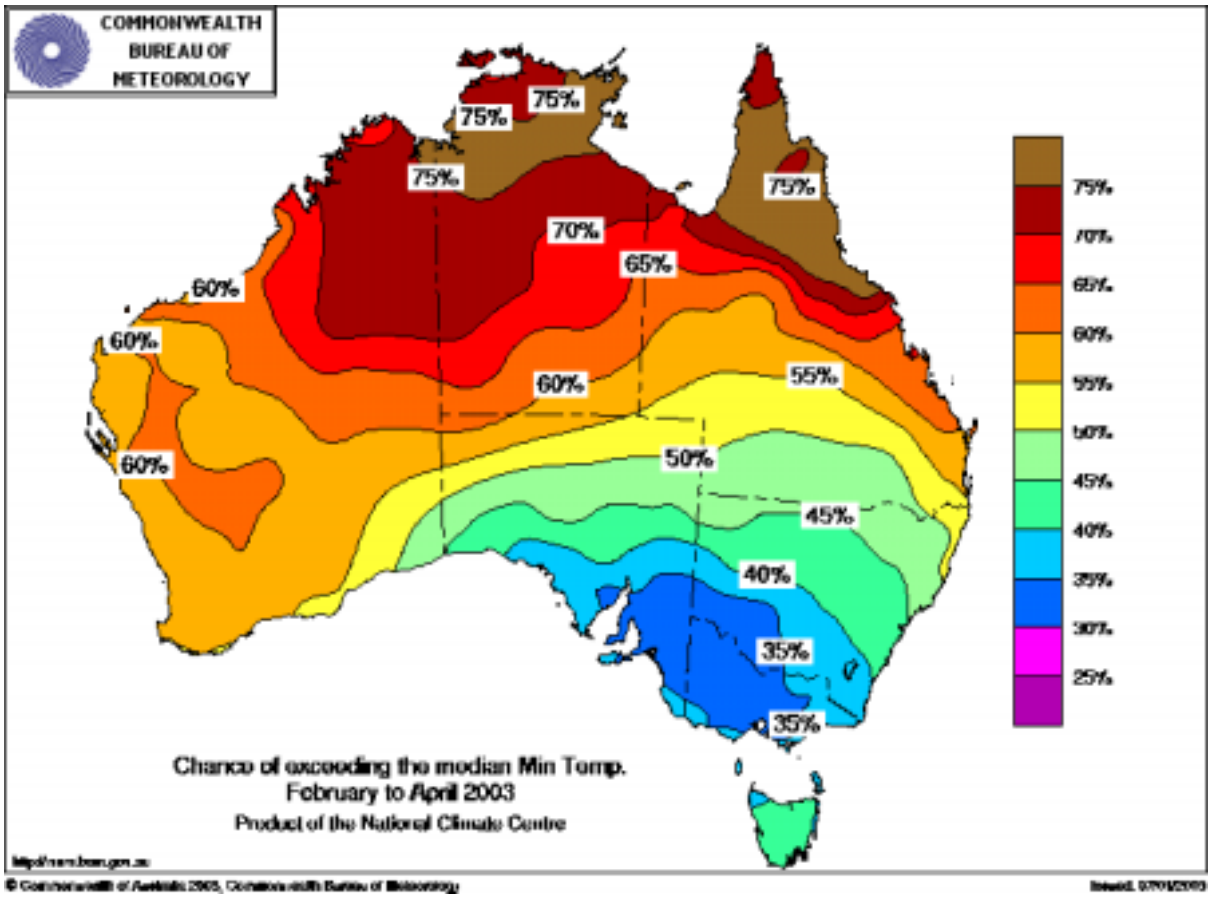


These probabilities have resulted from higher than average sea temperatures across the tropical Pacific Ocean.

So with climate patterns like the current, about 7 seasons out of every 10 are warmer than average across these parts of northern and eastern Australia, with about 3 out of 10 being cooler. Furthermore, the statistical outlook model has moderate to high reliability over much of Queensland and the north of the NT for the February to April period.

In contrast, the chances of BELOW median seasonal maximum temperatures are between 60 and 65% across Victoria, Tasmania and southern and western SA, although the outlook model has low levels of skill in these regions.

The chances of above average seasonal minimum temperatures are between 60 and 80% across much of the northern half of Australia and central WA (see min.gif attached), and minimum temperature outlooks for this period have moderate to high reliability over these same areas. Below average overnight temperatures are favoured in the southeast of the mainland.



Background Information:

- These outlooks are for the average maximum and minimum temperatures for the entire outlook period. Information about individual days or weeks, which may be unusually hot or cold, is unavailable.
- This outlook uses data from both the Pacific and Indian Oceans, with the outlook probabilities for both maximum and minimum temperatures being almost entirely as a result of the El Niño pattern of warm Pacific temperatures.
- This outlook represents a summary: more detail is available from the contact people or web site listed below.
- Important: Probability outlooks should not be used as if they were categorical forecasts. More on probabilities is contained in the booklet "The Seasonal Climate Outlook - What it is and how to use it", available from the National Climate Centre.

The national text, with colour maps, is also on the WEB at
http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/ahead/temps_ahead.shtml

More information on this outlook is available during normal office hours from 9:00am to 5:30pm (EDT) Monday to Friday by contacting the following climate meteorologists in the National Climate Centre:

Grant Beard - (03) 9669 4529

Blair Trewin - (03) 9669 4603

David Jones - (03) 9669 4085

Neil Plummer - (03) 9669 4086 (Mobile: 0419 117 865)