ZENADTH KES CLIMATE AWARENESS

GBK
GUR A BARADHARAW KOD

EL NIÑO

IN ZENADTH KES · TORRES STRAIT

A natural Pacific Ocean cycle that often brings drier seasons and calmer seas to our islands, with cooler conditions in Naygay and warmer conditions during Kuki.

RIGHT NOW · OCT 2026

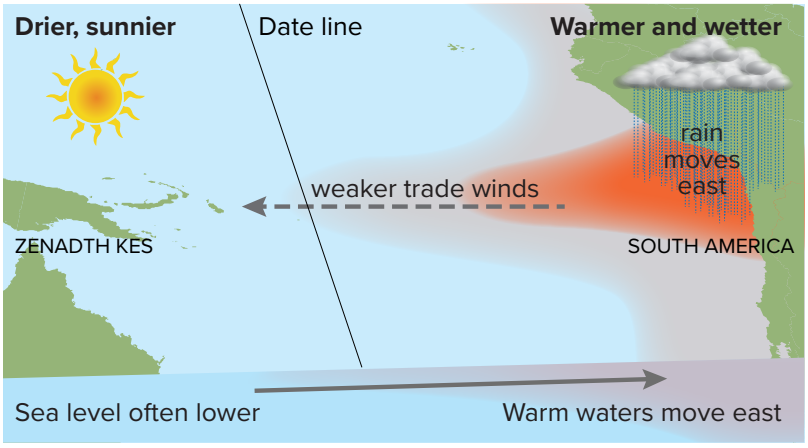
The Bureau of Meteorology says a strong El Niño is underway and likely to peak in late spring or summer.



WHAT IS EL NIÑO?

Trade winds across the Pacific weaken. Warm ocean water, and the clouds and rain that come with it, drift east, away from Zenadth Kes.

- Central and eastern tropical Pacific waters warm at the surface and below
- Trade winds weaken and sometimes reverse
- More clouds near the Date Line, fewer near us



WHAT IT CAN MEAN FOR OUR ISLANDS & MALU

Based on past El Niño events

A late Kuki

The north-west monsoon may arrive later. Sager winds can hang on longer.

Less rain, lower tanks

Rainwater tanks and island water supplies can run low before the wet arrives.

Hotter days and nights during Kuki

More heat stress for Elders, babies, students and outdoor workers.

Coral bleaching

Hot, calm, sunny water before the Kuki rains arrive can stress and bleach our reefs.

Lower sea levels

Reef flats and mangroves sit dry for longer at low tide, adding to heat stress.

Stress on sea life

Warm water and strong sun can harm bêche-de-mer, seagrass and the animals that feed there.

Grass fires

Dry grass on our high islands can catch and spread fire more easily.

Mosquitoes in stored water

Uncovered buckets and drums can breed dengue mosquitoes, even in the dry.

Less likely during El Niño: tropical cyclones and widespread flooding. Fewer is not none, and king tides still come every year.

OUR SEASONS IN AN EL NIÑO YEAR

Usual year

Sager	Naygay	Kuki

El Niño year

Sager	Naygay	Kuki

Illustration only. Season names and timing differ between islands: talk with your Elders.

WHEN DOES IT HAPPEN?

3–5 years

on average **between** events

6–12 months

usual **length**, rarely up to 2 years

Usually forms in autumn or winter and starts to fade in summer.

EVERY EL NIÑO IS DIFFERENT

1997–98

Very strong El Niño. No mass bleaching on Torres Strait reefs.

2015–16

Very strong El Niño. Hot water sat over our reefs: mass bleaching.



GET READY NOW

With climate change, the effects of El Niño can be more severe: hotter days, longer dry spells and stronger marine heatwaves. Planning ahead matters.

Save water early

Check tanks, gutters and taps for leaks.

Cover stored water

Tip out buckets and pot plates every week.

Beat the heat

Shade, water, cooler hours for sport and work. Check on Elders.

Watch Malu

Report bleached coral, dying mangroves or seagrass to rangers or your CRO.

Take care with fire

Dry grass burns fast. Keep burns small and watched.

Stay updated

The BoM long-range forecast is the best guide to the season ahead.

Gur A Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea and Land Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Zenadth Kes and their continuing connection to land, sea and sky.

El Niño is only one of the drivers of our climate. Sources: Bureau of Meteorology (El Niño in Australia; Climate outlook, 1 Oct 2026); AFMA Torres Strait Climate & Ecosystem Status Reports; JCU & UCLouvain research on the 2016 bleaching. Latest outlook: bom.gov.au/climate/ahead