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## Are you ready

Tuesday, January 05, 2010

THE Fiji Meteorological Service's prediction - that the first tropical cyclone for the region would occur before the end of 2009 - has been and gone with Cyclone Mick.

But it's what else was on the South Pacific Tropical Cyclone Season Outlook that we now need to take heed of.

Released a week before the official start of the 2009/10 season, the prediction was that "at least two to three tropical cyclones may reach Category 3 and one Category 4 with mean winds of at least 64 knots or 118km/h".

Cyclone Mick, which caused damage to homes, roads, electrical infrastructure, trees, and caused major flooding in whole swaths of two river deltas, was a Category 2.

"Tropical Cyclone Mick formed northwest of Fiji around midday and passed over the Mamanuca and Yasawa Group and Viti Levu on December 13. Damage to weak structures, tree and root crops have been reported. Torrential rainfall associated with the cyclone caused flooding in low lying areas and major rivers of Nadi, Ba and Rewa.

Tropical Cyclone Mick gained intensity as it approached land areas and attained category two status with estimated average winds of 60 knots (110km/hr) and momentary gusts of 90 knots (165km/hr)," according to Fiji Meteorological Service director Rajendra Prasad.

He says that in weather lingo, cyclones are categorized from 1 to 5 - with 1 being the weakest and 5 being the strongest.

That means that if the prediction of "at least two to three" cyclones reaching Category 3 or 4 comes true, there is significantly more damage that we could sustain before this season is over.

The issue of preparedness becomes even more significant given that the New Year also signaled that start of what is considered the "peak season" for cyclones here - January, February and March.

The 2009/2010 Outlook said that on average two to three cyclones passed through Fiji waters a season, with one directly affecting land areas.

In the Southwest Pacific area around us, the average number of cyclones that occur in a season is around nine. The majority of these have occurred within the Nadi weather office's area of responsibility (0°-25° S and 160° E-120° W).

The seasonal forecast is a "near average number of tropical cyclones are predicted for countries west of the Dateline including for Fiji while a slightly higher risk of tropical cyclone activity is predicted for countries just east of the Dateline".

The problem for Fiji is that it sits on the Dateline in question. This means, either way, our people need to pick up the pieces from Cyclone Mick quickly and be ready for another one at any time.

The best advice Prasad can dish out is to use the downtime to prepare.

For now though, the three-day cyclone outlook for the area from the equator to 25S between 160E and 120W shows no significant tropical depression, with low potential for a new cyclone to develop in the area up to tomorrow (Wednesday).

What happens after that we cannot determine. But how ready we are to meet that challenge is something we can determine - every single one of us.