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MEDIA RELEASE

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2009/2010 SOUTH PACIFIC TROPICAL CYCLONE SEASON OUTLOOK

The 2009/10 Tropical Cyclone season will commence in less than a fortnight under *weak* El Niño conditions. These conditions are predicted to continue into early 2010.

Near average number of tropical cyclones (8-11) are likely in the Southwest Pacific as a whole. 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*. Average to below average rainfall is favoured for Fiji's Wet Season.

The South Pacific Tropical Cyclone (TC) season formally begins on November 1 and will end on April 30, 2010. Though a TC can also develop outside this period, such occurrences are rare and usually occur under moderate to strong El Niño conditions. The average number of TCs occurring in the whole Southwest Pacific region in a season is around nine, with a majority of them occurring within the RSMC Nadi-Fiji area of responsibility (0°-25°S and 160°E-120°W).

Southwest Pacific TCs are categorised from 1 to 5, with 1 being the weakest and 5 being the strongest. For the 2009/10 season at least 2-3 TCs may reach Category 3 and one Category 4 with mean winds of at least 64 knots or 118km/h. It is likely that the first TC will occur prior to the end of 2009. The season should reach its peak during January, February and March. On average 2 to 3 TCs pass through Fiji's Waters a season with one directly affecting land areas. There is a slightly higher chance of TCs passing through the northern and eastern parts of Fiji's Waters.

Equatorial Pacific Ocean temperatures are at levels typical of an El Niño event and further warming is expected in the coming weeks. However, the atmosphere in the same region has not displayed El Niño-like conditions as values of the Southern Oscillation Index and tropical cloud patterns remain inconsistent with normal El Niño conditions. Climate models suggest tropical ocean temperatures will remain above these thresholds until at least early 2010.

With the current weak El Niño conditions, rainfall is predicted to be average to below average across most of Fiji. Sea surface and air temperatures are likely to be near average.

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