ENSO *QUICK LOOK* June 17 2002 A monthly summary of the status of El Niño, La Niña and the Southern Oscillation , or "ENSO"

During the 4-week period from mid-May to mid-June, sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific warmed from weakly above average to levels that, if continued for several months, are high enough to represent El Niño ocean conditions. The atmosphere also has developed features suggestive of El Niño, such as reduced trade winds and a below normal Southern Oscillation Index. However, a pattern of anomalous convection characteristic of El Niño episodes is still lacking. There continues to be an enhanced likelihood of an El Niño in 2002 relative to an average year. The IRI's assessment is that there is an approximately 75% probability of an El Niño lasting from the middle of 2002 into early 2003. This assessment is based on the collective forecasts of many computer models of various types, as well as on the experience of the several oceanographers and atmospheric scientists familiar with the El Niño phenomenon. Compared with the statement from one month ago, this probability has increased by 20%, since movement toward El Niño conditions has progressed. Compared to one month ago, the range of likely scenarios for tropical Pacific sea surface temperatures has continued to narrow. The most likely outcome is a weak El Niño, and the second most likely is a slightly warm but near-neutral condition during the remainder of 2002. The chances of a moderate El Niño are not high, and chances of a strong one are tiny. If a weak El Niño continues through this northern summer, past events suggest it would continue for at least the remainder of the year and likely through March of 2003.



- El Niño and La Niña events tend to develop during the period Apr-Jun and they:
- Tend to reach their maximum strength during Dec-Feb
- Typically persist for 9-12 months, though occasionally persisting for up to 2 years
- Typically recur every 2 to 7 years

* Probability of an El Niño refers to the likelihood of a sustained (that is, over several seasons) warming across a broad region of the eastern and central tropical Pacific, not just along coastal South America.

** Based on sea surface temperature departures from the long-term average over the "NINO 3.4" region (120-170W, 5S-5N).