

This Year May Be Warmest Ever

2007 Could Break Record Set in 1998

By RAPHAEL G. SATTER, AP



Australia is already suffering through its longest dry spell on record, because of El Niño, a cyclical warming trend now under way in the Pacific Ocean.

A resurgent El Niño and persistently high levels of greenhouse gases are likely to make 2007 the world's hottest year ever recorded, British climate scientists said Thursday.

Britain's Meteorological Office said there was a 60 percent probability that 2007 would break the record set by 1998, which was 1.20 degrees over the long-term average

"This new information represents another warning that climate change is happening around the world," the office said.

The reason for the forecast is mostly due to El Niño, a cyclical warming trend now under way in the Pacific Ocean. The event occurs irregularly – the last one happened in 2002 – and typically leads to increased temperatures worldwide.

While this year's El Niño is not as strong as it was in 1997 and 1998, its combination with the steady increase of temperatures due to global warming from human activity may be enough to break the Earth's temperature record, said Phil Jones, the director of the Climatic Research unit at

the University of East Anglia.

"Because of the warming due to greenhouse gases, even a moderate warming event is enough to push the global temperatures over the top," he said

"El Niño is an independent variable," he said. "But the underlying trends in the warming of the Earth is almost certainly due to the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere."

El Niño can sometimes lead to milder weather, such as in the in the north-eastern United States or the Atlantic Ocean, which is likely to see fewer hurricanes this year. However, it can also increase the severity of weather-related disasters, such as typhoons in the Philippines or drought in southern Africa and Australia, a country that is already suffering through its longest dry spell on record.

Environmental groups said the report added weight to the movement to control greenhouse gases.

"The evidence that we're doing something very dangerous with the climate is now amassing," said Campaign against Climate Change coordinator Philip Thornhill.

"We need to put the en-

ergy and priority (into climate change) that is being put into a war effort. It's a political struggle to get action done - and these reports help," Thornhill said.

