

Weather Eye Paul Simons



What will next year's weather bring? Over the next three months, at least, the Met Office outlook points to unusually mild conditions, but with more heavy rains and high winds that are bound to lead to more floods. This forecast is quite confident because of powerful events happening across the globe. The pattern of sea surface temperatures across the Atlantic is contributing to the wet and windy weather and, up in the Arctic, winds in the stratosphere are whirling around in an extremely strong vortex, helping to drive a powerful jet stream across the Atlantic.

There is a note of caution, though. The sun's activity goes up and down in a fairly regular 11-year cycle and is coming close to its lowest point. That can weaken the polar vortex

in late winter and raise the prospect of it breaking down and sending bitterly cold easterly winds to freeze the UK and Europe.

Another factor at play this winter is tumultuous events happening across the Indian Ocean. The seas towards east Africa have grown abnormally warm, driving torrential rains across the region. At the same time, the ocean has turned unusually cool towards southeast Asia and Australia, choking off their normal rains and creating chronic drought that is helping to fuel the catastrophic bushfires and searing heat in Australia. This phenomenon, which is rather like El Niño in the Pacific, is called the Indian Ocean Dipole and the present episode is the worst for 60 years. It is disrupting rainfall patterns in the tropics, which in turn is pushing the wet westerly winds across the Atlantic. The dipole is weakening, though, raising hopes that weather patterns could return to normal in east Africa and Australia early next year.

Whatever next year's weather, the relentless drumbeat of climate change continues and the Met Office expects that 2020 will be yet another very warm year as rising levels of greenhouse gases drive up global temperatures.