



Weather Why's with Dr Karl

El Nino

There is an intricate weather phenomenon at work that today has Australia's farmers at its mercy. This phenomenon is a warm ocean current that flows along the Northern tropical coastline of South America, some ten thousands kilometres away from Australia. It is called El Nino, and this is how affects the weather in Australia.

- Water vapour rises from warm waters, just like it does from a pot of water on a stove.

- In the South Pacific, the usual winds run from East to West, pushing the warm surface waters of the ocean towards Australia.

- Warm air rises & condenses to form clouds. Clouds bring rain.

- On the Western side of the South Pacific, you get cold water welling up from the bottom. This results in no clouds and no rain. Sometimes this leads to the creation of deserts in otherwise lush areas.

- Occasionally, the winds stop pushing warm waters towards Australia. So there is no rising water vapour, no clouds, no rain. And yet another drought rolls around. This is called an El Nino event.

- During such an event, the opposite happens on the Eastern side of the South Pacific, because the warm waters arrive. This brings plenty of clouds and rain, but because the cold waters stop rising, the fish also stop biting.

- This usually happens around Christmas time, which is how they came to get the name El Nino – after the Christ Child.

- An "El Nino event" occurs every two to seven years and can last between three or four years.

