



WeatherWise

By Mike Griffiin*

In Short: More Strong Winds!

After nearly four weeks, almost all March, of fresh to strong (20-25 knots) south east winds and 2 to 3 metre seas along the Queensland and northern NSW coast; more strong winds are continuing South of Southport to Nowra NSW.

However, the winds should ease from Cairns, to Shoalwater Bay to the 9th April, then to Noosa on the 10-11th April. A dangerous east coast low is brewing in the northern Tasman. Watch for large 2/3 metre swells from Sandy Cape to Newcastle in the second week of April.

This was precursed by the remains of Tropical Cyclone Pancho which caused "fierce destructive winds" with gusts of 91 knots (169 kph) in southern Tasmania. Many boats were damaged as well as roofs and trees strewn about the coast in Victoria and Tasmania.

There were many injuries and 2-3 deaths reported. The Victorian Bureau was warning people to stay indoors.

A large high in the southern Tasman Sea (see Synoptic Chart) is moving towards New Zealand.

A weak front is passing through South Australia. The weak high is having a more inland trajectory, which is a typical autumn phenomenon.

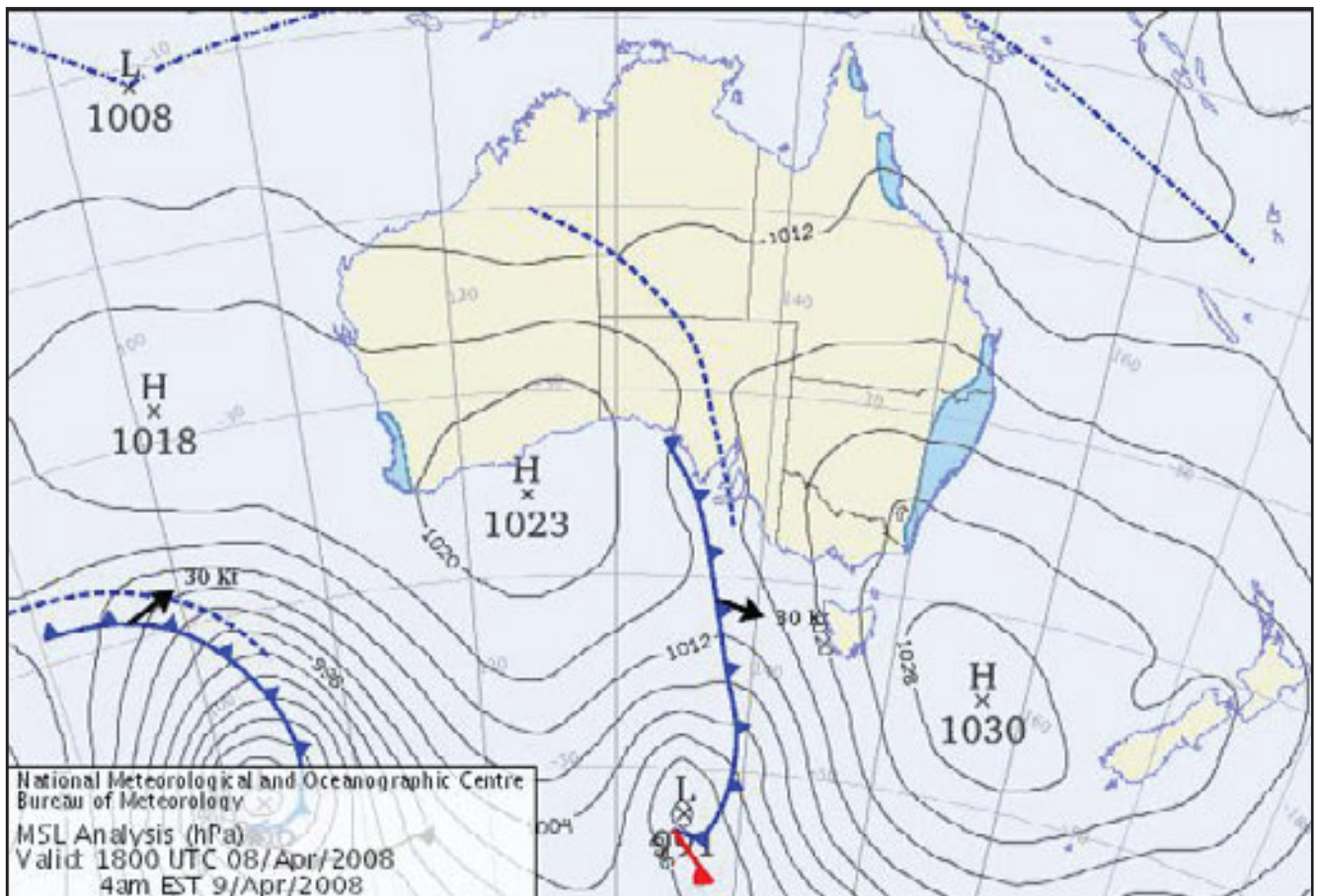
A trough in the Solomon Sea associated with a weak low, an arm of the weak Monsoon Trough, is

combining with the high in the Tasman Sea to cause an increase tightening of the pressure gradient.

This "block" set-up is causing fresh to strong south east winds from Gabo Island, Point Perpendicular, Smokey Cape, Frazer Island to Cooktown.

In contrast light to moderate north to north east winds for Victoria and S.A preceded by early fogs and light winds for the first weekend of April.

Finally too, we can see signs of fronts in the southern ocean moving over southern Australia – not seen since last year. The summer highs have their main position in the Bight and Tasman Sea. Now we will see in coming weeks the highs having their mean position over inland S.A and southern inland W.A. and NSW. This



will allow the fronts to move up from the Indian and Southern Ocean. Watch for a 6-8 day cycle between each front during April.

The fronts – which can form lows - will be heralded by north westerly winds – could be weekends for Victoria and Tasmania - ahead of a fresh to strong south to south westerly winds with a touch of hail and sleet – south of a line Albany – Ceduna – Robe – Gabo Island and snow for the peaks.

These caused watery graves for many sailing ships exposed to these winds and rough weather off the Tasmanian coast in the 1800's and early 1900's.

So better close inshore fishing on the east coastal bays and estuaries if tides permit.

While offshore, beware of rapid wind changes heralded by northerly winds turning north westerly. This is the main trap for the inexperienced autumn fisherman.

Fresh to strong cold southerly winds are likely to follow with seas 2/3 metres - should ease off within 24 hours from St. Helens, Eden, Port Stephens to Frazer Island.

Watch for squally showers/storms where winds can change by 120 -180 degrees for 5-10 minutes and sustained winds to 22 knots and higher gusts then ease back to moderate conditions.

If you are between the Tweed Heads and Agnes Water the 8th and 9th April, storms with hail and squalls are likely, mainly in the afternoon.

In autumn east coast lows could develop. Watch for this about the 10th-12th April east of Frazer Island to Norfolk Island. Heavy rain and confused seas as central pressures approach 1000hpa or less.

If a storm occurs then these conditions will last longer with wind gusts over 35-50 knots and 5-7 metre seas (similar to the Pasha Bulka disaster in Newcastle). This is exceptionally dangerous.

An extra strong anchor and strong stomach could help here and be mindful of the rapid wind shifts and even better don't go! Live to fight again another day.

In Western Australia Tropical Cyclone Pancho reeked havoc causing huge seas and storms with rain during the last 2 days of March. This should be the last tropical influence till next summer.

Now watch for the Indian Ocean fronts Tuesday's to Thursday's which again are heralded by north westerly winds. There could be 2-3 of these for the month.

Funnily enough memorable ones seem to hit on weekends! Most of these fronts only travel just south of Shark Bay and Roebourne, which may be the pick of the month.

The Pilbara to Kimberley coast – from Karratha to Broome seem to be losing their monsoon influence. That is squally storms will be a minimum.

The “dry season” over the Top End is normally not far away this time of year. Usually clear blue skies and early light winds with an afternoon sea breeze. A fishing paradise!

We can see a faint monsoon influence in the Arafura Sea. This may delay the onset of the dry till later in the month as convective squally (winds over 22 knots) showers could persist in areas with high moisture content.

When it rains here it “dumps” and with the squally winds could do some damage. The change to dry will be heralded by some early morning storms later in the month.

Again, watch the gusty northerlies at night which could herald the storm's approach. If you've got a tropical fishing trip organized wait till late April - on the safe side May could be better. Just the same south east winds in the Gulf of Carpentaria can blow 20-25 knots for 4-6 days at a time. Seas over 3 metres are common in these situations.

In the north west Coral Sea the South East Trades are notorious this time of year.

A low in the Solomon Sea is something to watch during the second week of April. Although a weakening gradient could be easing the wind prior to the second weekend in April from Frazer Island to the Whitsunday's.

Watch the Solomon Sea low for if it moves south it could be a major influence on east coast weather.

It is not unusual to have 4-5 days of 20-25 knot winds from Hamilton Island to Hinchinbrook and Cape Flattery.

Before going out be weatherwise!

* Mike Griffin is a veteran of 34 years with the Bureau of Meteorology, serving all over Australia in many places, including Darwin, Perth, Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Rockhampton - where he now lives. Son of a professional fisherman, Mike has enjoyed a life-long affinity with boats, the sea and fishing. Semi-retired now, he still broadcasts with the ABC in Central Qld, and works with the tourism industry, charter and professional fishos.

Mike's Weatherwise TIP OF THE MONTH: The Beaufort Scale

The best guide in understanding wind and the affects on the ocean is the Beaufort Scale. It was devised in 1805 by Admiral Sir Francis Beaufort to help naval captains to judge the conditions and use the correct sail.

This has not changed much except the addition of the estimated wave heights in the middle part of last century. Some of these wave heights are arguable but they remain a good guide.

The main key is any wind over 20-25 knots will cause waves over two metres. This is considered very uncomfortable for most people. Particularly if the wind is a NORTH WESTERLY.

Usually this is accompanied with storms which can cause major wind shifts of 180 degrees and heavy rain with squalls – not to mention the large seas. One seasoned fisherman admitted to me he fell overboard in these conditions, while motoring. Luckily he had a rope in hand. Not to mention a late night will make one feel very woozy.

If you know of anyone who is going out in a strong wind or gale situation don't be afraid to make them think twice, even in larger vessels.

It could look calm inshore but strong to gale force winds can blow up very quickly (mainly in easterly Australia) inside 10 minutes offshore, then move rapidly inshore.

There was one occasion near Ulladulla in 1985 when the boys after a night out decided to go fishing. A gale wind warning was forecast. But the inshore winds were calm. You guessed it off they went. Their boat was found off Newcastle three weeks later. Gale and strong wind warnings are not to

Mike's Weatherwise TIP OF THE MONTH: The Beaufort Scale

Beaufort Scale	Wind Speed (knots)	Description	Sea Condition
0	0	Calm	Sea like a mirror - flat
1	1 - 3	Light Air	Ripples but without foam crests, 5 - 10 cm.
2	4 - 6	Light Breeze	Small wavelets 10 - 15 cm. Crests do not break.
3	7 - 10	Gentle Breeze	Large wavelets. Perhaps scattered white horses. Seas 0.3 - 0.6 metres.
4	11 - 16	Moderate Breeze	Small waves. Fairly frequent white horses. Seas 0.7 - 1.2 metres.
5	17 - 21	Fresh Breeze	Moderate waves, many white horses, seas 1.3 - 2.3 metres
6	22 - 27	Strong Breeze	Large waves begin to form; white foam crests, probably spray, seas 2.4 - 3.9 metres
7	28 - 33	Near Gale	Seas 4 - 5 metres heaps up and white foam blown in streaks along the direction of the wind
8	34 - 40	Gale	Moderately high waves 5 - 6 metres, crests begin to break into spindrift
9	41 - 47	Strong Gale	High waves 6 - 7 metres. Dense foam along the direction of the wind. Crests of waves begin to roll over. Spray may affect visibility
10	48 - 55	Storm	Very high waves 7 - 9.5 metres with long overhanging crests. The surface of the sea takes a white appearance. The tumbling of the sea becomes heavy and shock like. Visibility affected
11	56 - 63	Violent Storm	Exceptionally high waves 10 - 14 metres. The sea is completely covered with long white patches of foam lying in the direction of the wind. Visibility affected
12	64+	Hurricane	The air is filled with foam and spray. Sea 14 + metres completely white with driving spray. Visibility very seriously affected.

be ignored! The secret here is to check the latest wind along the coast and get the latest forecast – use www.bom.gov.au and look for the latest wind observations and marine forecast in your state.

A friend of mine suggests if you want to introduce new people to fishing look for wind strengths under the 10-15 knots. Men! The women will love that. Ideally calm conditions are the best. Usually associated with a large high-pressure system.

F&B

The squally, wind swept Whitsundays is a classic area where accurate forecasting - and the ability to read a weather chart - can make or break a great fishing trip.

