The Indian Ocean Dipole - often called the “Indian Niño” because of its similarity to El Niño - is a climate phenomenon similar to El Niño.

The dipole is a climate phenomenon similar to El Niño because of its similarity to sea-surface temperatures in opposite parts of the Indian Ocean.

Both weather events have been linked to higher-than-usual temperatures and bushfires.

Temperatures in the eastern part of the ocean oscillate between warm and cool, depending on the phase of the dipole cycle. The dipole has reached a point where sea temperatures are unusually warm in the west and cool in the east.

The result of this unusually strong positive dipole this year has been higher-than-average temperatures and an increase in bushfires. Meanwhile in Australia, record-breaking spring temperatures have helped spark and fan a series of bushfires across the country.

On the other hand, in the east of the Indian Ocean, islands on the west side of Indonesia are going to see a greater chance of drought and reduced rainfall. Under a neutral phase, there would be sea temperatures close to average across the Indian Ocean.

A neutral phase would mean sea temperatures were close to average across the Indian Ocean. Meanwhile, in the west of the Indian Ocean, the climate will be warmer than normal and that place will get a reduced amount of rainfall. A negative dipole phase would bring about the opposite conditions - warmer than-normal water and greater precipitation in the eastern Indian Ocean, and cooler and drier conditions in the west.

The countries in the west of the Indian Ocean, so on the African coast, are going to see much, much more flooding and heavy rainfall relating to these events, says Dr Turner. Meanwhile in Australia, record-breaking spring temperatures have helped spark and fan a series of bushfires across the country.

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The effects of the dipole could get worse because of climate change. Extreme climate and weather events caused by the dipole are predicted to become more common in the future as greenhouse gas emissions increase.

Andrew Watkins, head of long-range forecasts at the bureau, said the dipole was crucial to understanding the heatwave. Extreme positive dipole events would increase this century from one every 17.3 years to one every 6.3 years.

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