

# Intensified future heat extremes linked with increasing ecosystem water limitation

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15 **Abstract.** Heat extremes have severe implications for human health, ecosystems and the initiation of wildfires. Whereas they are mostly introduced by atmospheric circulation patterns, the intensity of heat extremes is modulated by ~~vegetation functioning~~terrestrial evaporation associated with soil moisture availability. Thereby, ~~vegetation provides~~ecosystems provide evaporative cooling through plant transpiration and soil evaporation, which can be reduced under water stress. While it has been shown that regional ecosystem water limitation is projected to increase in the future, the respective repercussions on heat  
20 extremes remain unclear.

In this study we use projections from ~~eight~~twelve Earth system models to show that projected changes in heat extremes are amplified by increasing ecosystem water limitation in regions across the globe. We represent ecosystem water limitation with the Ecosystem Limitation Index (ELI) and quantify temperature extremes through the differences between warm-season mean and maximum temperatures. We identify hotspot regions in tropical South America and across Canada and Northern Eurasia  
25 where relatively strong trends towards increased ecosystem water limitation jointly occur with amplifying heat extremes. This correlation is governed by the magnitude of the ELI trends and the present-day ELI which denotes the land-atmosphere coupling strength determining the temperature sensitivity to evaporative cooling. Many regions where ~~vegetation functions~~are ecosystem functioning is predominantly energy-limited or transitional in present climate exhibit strong trends towards increasing water limitation and simultaneously experience the largest increases in heat extremes. Sensitivity of temperature

30 excess trends to ELI trends is highest in water-limited regions, such that in these regions relatively small ELI trends can amount to drastic temperature excess trends. Therefore, considering the ecosystem's water limitation is key for assessing the intensity of future heat extremes and their corresponding impacts.

### Short summary

35 Heat extremes have severe implications for human health and ecosystems. Heat extremes are mostly introduced by large-scale atmospheric circulation but can be modulated by vegetation: Vegetation with access to water uses solar energy to evaporate water into the atmosphere. Under dry conditions, water may not be available, suppressing evaporation and heating the atmosphere. Using climate projections, we show that regionally less water is available for vegetation, intensifying future heat extremes.

## 40 **1 Introduction**

Heat extremes affect ecosystems and society through their implications on human health, crop yields and tree mortality, and the initiation of wildfires (Anderegg et al., 2013; Goulart et al., 2021; McDowell & Allen, 2015; O et al., 2020; Orth et al., 2022; Ruffault et al., 2020; Vogel et al., 2019). In the recent past, temperature extremes have increased in intensity, duration and frequency; these changes are related to climate change (Seneviratne et al., 2021) and they have even accelerated in recent  
45 years in many regions (Seneviratne et al., 2014). In the future, heat extremes are projected to intensify further, alongside the ongoing global warming (Seneviratne et al., 2021).

Hot temperatures can be fueled by dynamic and thermodynamic processes (Harrington et al., 2019; Trenberth et al., 2015). The relevance of atmospheric dynamics for recent heat waves has been highlighted for the case of large-scale blocking patterns  
50 which support heat accumulation across consecutive dry days (Cassou et al., 2005; Jézéquel et al., 2018) as well as the entrainment of warm air aloft (Miralles et al., 2014). Also, large-scale circulation patterns advecting warm air, or air from regions with dry soils, have been suggested to contribute to heat waves (Schumacher et al., 2019). Additionally, thermodynamic processes can amplify heat extremes; the land surface determines the partitioning of incoming radiative energy into sensible heating and latent heat (Seneviratne et al., 2010). Changes in this flux partitioning can be induced through soil  
55 moisture drying as water-stressed vegetation tends to reduce transpiration; this way, a larger fraction of the incoming energy is available for sensible heating which can lead to elevated temperatures (Budyko, 1974; Denissen et al., 2021; Vogel et al., 2017). As a consequence, circulation-induced rainfall deficits are translated by ecosystem water limitation to reduced

evaporative cooling and amplified local temperatures (Miralles et al., 2012; Quesada et al., 2012; Teuling et al., 2010; Ukkola et al., 2018).

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It has been shown that climate change may involve regional long-term trends in soil moisture and land-atmosphere coupling (Berg et al., 2017; Berg & Sheffield, 2018; Denissen et al., 2022; Seneviratne et al., 2021; Sippel et al., 2017) and that these can contribute to amplified heat extremes (~~Lorenz et al., 2016; Seneviratne et al., 2006; Vogel et al., 2017~~)(Lorenz et al., 2016; Seneviratne et al., 2006; Vogel et al., 2017) especially in the case of depletion of soil moisture preceding the warm season

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(Rasmijn et al., 2018; Stegehuis et al., 2021). In this study, we revisit and complement this previous research with novel indices and by analyzing output from the latest generation of Earth System models from the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project Phase 6 (CMIP6<sub>2</sub>) (Eyring et al., 2016)). ~~In particular we use (i) a recently introduced ecosystem water stress index (Ecosystem Limitation Index (ELI), (Denissen et al., 2020)) which directly captures evaporative cooling and hence links more mechanistically with heat waves than general land-atmosphere coupling indices.~~(Denissen et al., 2020)), a correlative index

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that evaluates directly the importance of water versus energy stress for terrestrial evaporation, thereby moving beyond the nonlinear relationship between soil moisture and evaporative cooling alone. Further, as this index directly captures evaporative cooling, it links more mechanistically with heat waves than general aridity or land-atmosphere coupling indices. Thereby other factors affecting water-limitation can be functionally addressed (e.g. groundwater, hydraulic failure as lag effect, CO<sub>2</sub>). Further,

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the ELI can be used to pinpoint regime transitions, as positive values are indicative of water-limited conditions, while negative values denote ecosystem energy limitation. ~~In addition, for analyzing heat extremes, we (ii) focus on the difference between warm-season averagemean and maximum temperatures, hereafter referred to as temperature excess. While temperature excess is known to be affected by land-atmosphere coupling (Dirmeyer et al., 2021; Donat et al., 2017; Lorenz et al., 2016; Schwingshackl et al., 2018; Seneviratne et al., 2006; Sippel et al., 2017; Ukkola et al., 2018; Vogel et al., 2017)(Dirmeyer et al., 2021; Donat et al., 2017; Lorenz et al., 2016; Schwingshackl et al., 2018; Seneviratne et al., 2006; Sippel et al., 2017;~~

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Ukkola et al., 2018; Vogel et al., 2017), the average temperature is largely driven by large-scale circulation (Cassou et al., 2005; Miralles et al., 2014; Schumacher et al., 2019). This way, we assume that by focusing on the difference between mean and maximum temperatures, we can isolate the thermodynamic component from the dynamic component in heat wave development. ~~This way~~As such, we jointly assess trends in ecosystem water limitation and heat extremes in fully coupled CMIP6 simulations from ~~eight~~twelve state-of-the-art Earth system models at the monthly time scale and 2°x2° spatial

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resolution from 1980 – 2100 (Eyring et al., 2016) in order to determine the thermodynamic contribution of the land surface for present and future heat extremes.

## 2 Materials and Methods

### 2.1 Ecosystem Limitation Index

The Ecosystem Limitation Index (ELI), formerly referred to as the correlation-difference metric (Denissen et al., 2020), is adapted as follows:

$$\text{Eq. 1) } \text{ELI} = \text{cor}(\text{SM}', \text{ET}') - \text{cor}(\text{T}_a' \mid \text{SW}_{\text{in}}', \text{ET}')$$

The prime denotes monthly anomalies of root-zone soil moisture (SM), terrestrial evaporation (ET), air temperature ( $T_a$ ) and incoming shortwave radiation ( $\text{SW}_{\text{in}}$ ).  $\text{cor}(\text{SM}', \text{ET}')$  is a proxy for water limitation, whereas  $\text{cor}(\text{T}_a' \mid \text{SW}_{\text{in}}', \text{ET}')$  is a proxy for energy limitation. In this context, the  $\mid$  indicates the use of either  $T_a$  or  $\text{SW}_{\text{in}}$  anomalies in the second term on the right hand side of Eq. 1, as ET in some regions is limited more strongly by lack of incoming shortwave radiation (Nemani et al., 2003) and in other regions more strongly by cold temperatures. Therefore, we test for each grid cell which energy proxy yields the highest correlation with ET ( $\text{cor}(\text{T}_a', \text{ET}')$  vs.  $\text{cor}(\text{SW}_{\text{in}} \mid \text{SW}_{\text{in}}', \text{ET}')$ ), and is hence most relevant in this location, to then use it in the computation of ELI in the respective grid cell (Supplementary Figure 1). Between energy- and water-limited conditions, the ELI expresses different typical sensitivities to energy and water supply: High and positive  $\text{cor}(\text{T}_a' \mid \text{SW}_{\text{in}}, \text{ET}')$  is indicative of energy-limited conditions, whereas high and positive  $\text{cor}(\text{SM}', \text{ET}')$  indicates water-limited conditions. The ELI combines both the relevance of energy and water supply for evaporative cooling by taking the difference between those two correlations, so that positive values denote water-limited conditions and negative values indicate energy-limited conditions. Thereby, the ELI can be used to pin-point transitional areas where regime shifts occur frequently, where ELI is approximately zero. Further, in contrast to other traditional indices, such as the Aridity Index, that rely on climatological means, the ELI can be used to study (parts of) the seasonal cycle. For a more extensive assessment of air temperature or incoming shortwave radiation and soil moisture as the choices for energy and water proxies as well as a detailed elaboration on the interpretation of ELI, please refer to Denissen et al. (~~Denissen et al., 2022~~)(2022).

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## 2.2 CMIP6 data

In this study, we use data from the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP6) (Eyring et al., 2016), of which the most important information on the used data is summarized in Table 1. We only selected models that provide i) historical (1980 - 2015) and “worst-case” SSP5-8.5 (2015 – 2100) (O’Neill et al., 2016) simulations, ii) the necessary variables (Table 1) and iii) sufficient spatial ( $2^\circ \times 2^\circ$  or finer grid cell resolution) and temporal (monthly) resolutions. The maximum daily temperature denotes the maximum daily average temperature per month. By taking the SSP5-8.5 scenario we intend to focus on the climate scenario most influenced by human activity and related emissions of greenhouse gasses.

Table 1. Overview of model details and model output used in this study. The following variables have been downloaded from all the models at the monthly time scale: temperature (tas), ~~root-zone~~ the total water content per soil moisture (mrsolayer (mrsol)), terrestrial evaporation (hfls), leaf area index (lai), maximum daily temperature (tasmax) and in- and outgoing short- and longwave radiation (rsds,rsus,rlds,rhus). Dynamic vegetation reflects whether or not plant functional traits (PFT) can vary

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125 in time, responding to competition for resources. These resources could but do not necessarily include any combination of nitrogen, phosphorus, water and energy. However, the resources considered in this context vary between models. As land use change forcing is identical for all models for the SSP5-8.5 scenario (O'Neill et al., 2016), this column only concerns historical simulations. For historical simulations, land use change forcing comes from the Land Use Harmonization (LUH) 2 v2h product (<https://luh.umd.edu/data.shtml>) (Hurt et al., 2011), except if mentioned otherwise. As land cover types might vary between models, land use change forcing effects might differ as well. \*\*\*: in the CMIP6 members, or variants, differences exist in the forcing index (f). This index number indicates the forcing used for the respective realization and can be used to distinguish

130 between CMIP6-recommended or other forcing data sets. Which forcing dataset f represents is defined per model. \*\*: the first number denotes the version of the historical simulation, whereas the second number indicates the SSP5-8.5 simulation.

Institution	Model	Member*	Version <sup>***</sup>	Dynam ic vegetat ion	Irrigati on	Land use change	Citation
<u>Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)</u>	<u>ACCESS-ESM1-5</u>	<u>r1i1p1f1</u>	<u>v20191115 &amp; v20191115</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>(Ziehn et al., 2019a, 2019b, 2020)</u>
Beijing Climate Center (BCC)	BCC- CSM2-MR	r1i1p1f1	v20181126 & v20190314	no	no	yes, explici tly involv ed in BCC- AVIM 2.0	(Wu et al., 2018, 2019; Xin et al., 2019)
<del>Canadian Centre for Climate Modelling and Analysis (CCCma)</del> <u>Centro Euro-Mediterraneo sui Cambiamenti Climatici (CMCC)</u>	<del>CanESM5</del> <u>MCC-ESM2</u>	r1i1p1f1	<del>v20190429 &amp; v20190429</del> <u>v20200622 &amp; v20200622</u>	<del>no</del> <u>yes</u>	no	<del>yes, for crops.</del> <u>yes, for crops.</u>	<del>(Swart, et al., 2019b, 2019a)</del> <u>(Cherchi et al., 2019; Lovato &amp; Peano, 2020a, 2020b)</u>

Centre National de Recherches Météorologiques (CNRM)	CNRM- <del>ESM2CM6-</del> 1	rlilplf2	<del>v20190410 &amp; v20190410</del> <del>v20181206 &amp; v20191021</del>	no	no	yes	( <del>Seferian, 2018; Séférian et al., 2019; Voldoire, 2019</del> )(Voldoire, 2018, 2019a; Voldoire et al., 2019)
<u>CNRM</u>	<u>CNRM-ESM2-1</u>	<u>rlilplf2</u>	<u>v20181206 &amp; v20191021</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>yes</u>	(Seferian, 2018; Séférian et al., 2019; Voldoire, 2019b)
<u>EC-Earth-Consortium</u>	<u>EC-Earth3-CC</u>	<u>rlilplf1</u>	<u>v20210113 &amp; v20210113</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>Indirectly, through irrigated crop</u>	<u>yes</u>	(Consortium (EC-Earth), 2021a, 2021b; Döscher et al., 2021)
<del>Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) National oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory (GFDL)</del>	<del>FGOALS-g3GFDL-ESM4</del>	<del>r2ilplfrlilplf1</del>	<del>v20190828 &amp; v20191216</del> <del>v20190726 &amp; v20180701</del>	<del>no</del> <u>yes</u>	<del>yes</del> <u>no</u>	<u>yes</u>	( <del>Li, 2019a, 2019b; Li et al., 2020</del> )(Dunne et al., 2020; John et al., 2018; Krasting et al., 2018)



<u>Met Office Hadley Centre (MOHC)</u>	<u>HadGEM3-GC31-LL</u>	<u>r1i1p1f3</u>	<u>v20200114 &amp; v20190624</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>yes</u>	( <u>Good, 2020; Ridley et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2018</u> )
<u>Max Planck Institute for Numerical Mathematics (INM Meteorology (MPI-M))</u>	<u>INM-CM4-8MPI-ESM1-2-HR</u>	<u>r1i1p1f1</u>	<u>v20190530 &amp; v20190603 v20190710 &amp; v20190710</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>noyes</u>	( <u>E. Volodin et al., 2019a, 2019b; E. M. Volodin et al., 2018; Jungc laus et al., 2019; Mauritsen et al., 2019; Müller et al., 2018; Schupfner et al., 2019</u> )
<u>Institut Pierre Simon Laplace (IPSL) MPI-M</u>	<u>IPSL-CM6A MPI-ESM1-2-LR</u>	<u>r2i1p1f1r1i1p1f1</u>	<u>v20180803 &amp; v20191121 v20190710 &amp; v20190710</u>	<u>noyes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>yes</u>	( <u>Boucher et al., 2018, 2019, 2020; Mauri tsen et al., 2019; Wieners, et al., 2019; Wieners, et al., 2019</u> )

Model for Interdisciplinary Meteorological Research on Climate (MIROC Institute MRI)	MIROC-ES2LMRI-ESM2-0	rlilplflr1l1p1f2	v20190823 & v20190823v20190222 & v20191108	no	no	yes	(Hajima et al., 2019; 2020; Tachiiri et al., 2019)(Yukimoto, Kawai, et al., 2019; Yukimoto, Koshiro, et al., 2019a, 2019b)
Met Office Hadley Centre (MOHC)	UKESM1-0-LL	r2ilp1f2r1l1p1f2	v20190627 & v20190726	yes	no	yes, for crops and pasture	(Good et al., 2019; Sellar et al., 2019; Tang et al., 2019)

### 2.3 Pre-processing data

135 All data is regridded to a common 2°x2° grid cell resolution using bilinear interpolation after applying a model-specific land-sea mask. After data acquisition, several steps are taken to assure a meaningful selection of data for the analysis. First, to pinpoint the hottest heat extremes, we focus on the three hottest months a year (warm season), defined as the 3 months-of-year with the highest maximum daily temperature averaged decadal. The advantage of considering only the warm season lies in the comparison of concomitant trends of ELI, evaporative fraction (EF) and temperature excess, as these might be subject to seasonal variability. Second, to additionally assure that we are investigating the active vegetation periods during the warm season, which would elicit vegetation responses to anomalies in energy and water supply affecting the surface flux partitioning, 140 all months with  $T_a < 10^\circ\text{C}$  and Leaf Area Index (LAI)  $< 0.52 \text{ m}^2 \text{ m}^{-2}$  are excluded from the analysis. Thereby, we disregard mainly grid cells in the most sparsely vegetated regions in CentralNorthern Africa, and Western China and Australia and cold regions in the Northern latitudes, but retain major drylands including parts of the Sahel and the Australian interior (Supplementary Figure 2). This selection of data results in what we refer to in this manuscript as the “warm vegetated land

145 area”. Further, root-zone soil moisture is computed as a weighted average of the total water content per soil layer present in  
the top meter of soil. This data is then used to compute the decadal time series of the desired diagnostics, which are ELI, EF  
and temperature excess. EF is computed as the fraction of the net surface radiation (the sum of all radiative components) that  
is used to evaporate water. Temperature excess is computed for each grid cell and decade as the difference between the means  
of (i) the 10 warm-season averagemean temperatures from the individual years and (ii) the 10 temperature maxima in the  
150 individual years. Next to this, we assess ecosystem water limitation with the ELI (Equation 1.2) (Denissen et al., 2020).

#### **2.4 ERA5-Land analysis**

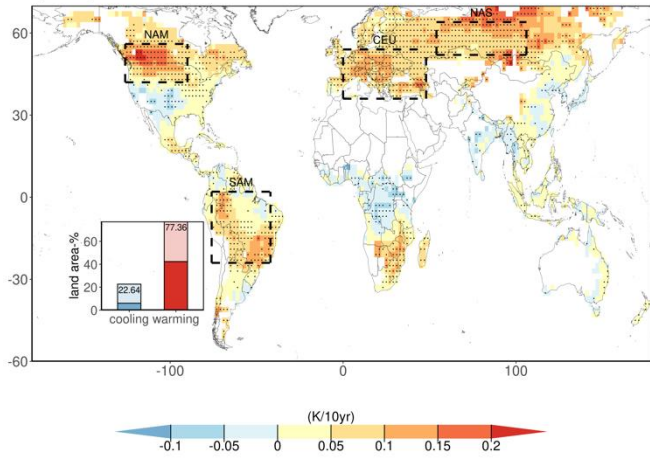
Reanalysis data, including the variables 2m temperature, soil moisture layers 1-3, latent heat flux, LAI for high and low  
vegetation and downward solar radiation, from ERA5-Land from 1950 – 2020 were used to validate the CMIP6-based results  
155 (Muñoz Sabater, 2019; Muñoz-Sabater et al., 2021). All data has been aggregated to the monthly time scale and 2°x2° spatial  
resolution. Maximum daily temperature was computed as the maximum average daily temperature per month. The root-zone  
soil moisture encompasses the soil moisture in top meter of the soil and is computed as a weighted average of soil moisture  
layers 1 (0 – 7cm), 2 (7 – 28cm) and 3 (28 – 100cm). The same methodology as has been applied to the CMIP6 data to compute  
temperature excess and ELI has been applied to the reanalysis data. Vegetated conditions were assumed when the LAI of either  
160 high or low vegetation > 0.2.

#### **2.5 Computing Theil-Sen slopes and slope significance**

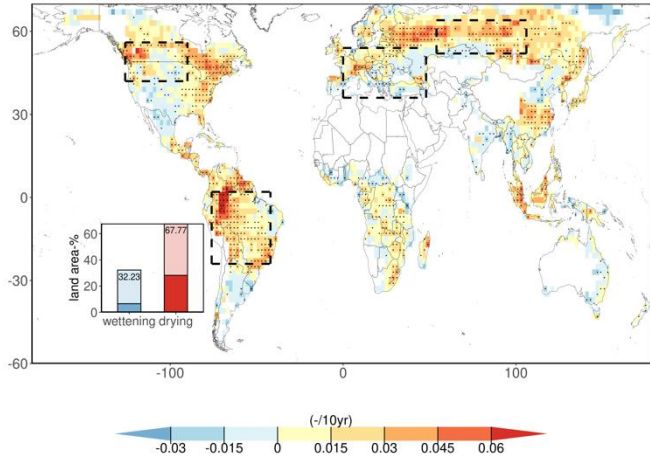
The trends shown in Figure 1.2 and 4.6 and Supplementary figures 3, 4 and 6.5 are based on Theil-Sen slopes (Sen, 1968;  
Theil, 1992). This approach is insensitive to statistical outliers, as the median slope from a range of slopes through all pairs of  
165 points is selected as the best fit. The significance of these slopes is determined based on Kendall’s tau statistic from Mann-  
Kendall tests.

### **3 Results**

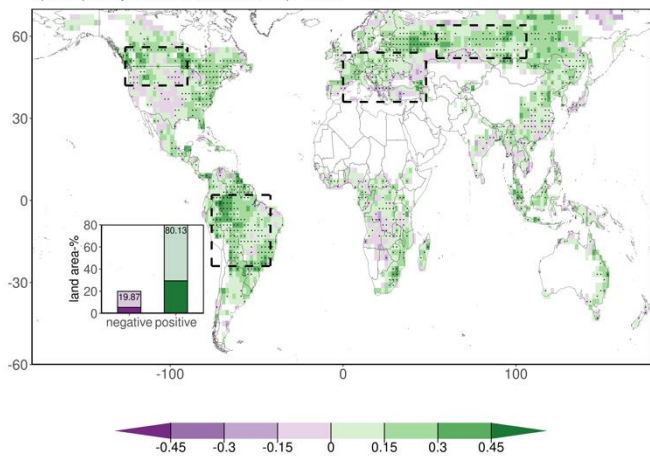
a) Temperature excess trend, 1980 - 2100



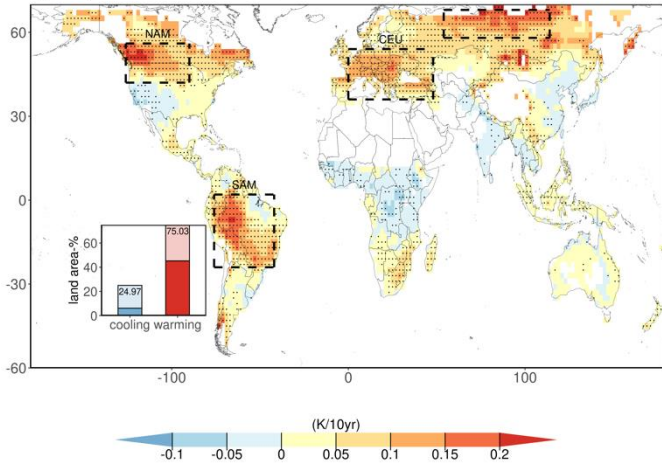
b) Ecosystem Limitation Index trend, 1980 - 2100



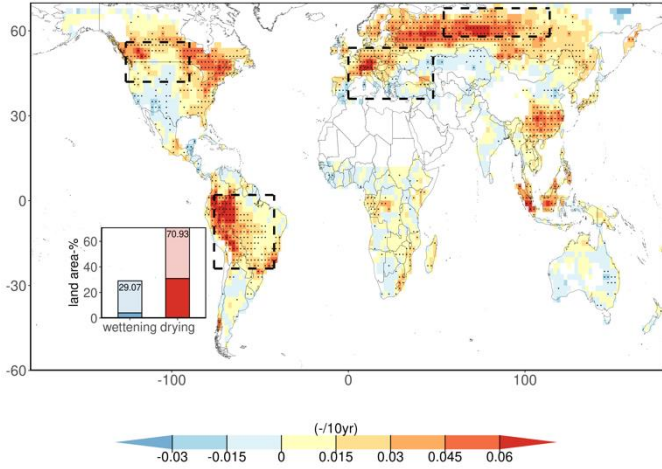
c) cor(Temperature excess, ELI), 1980 - 2100



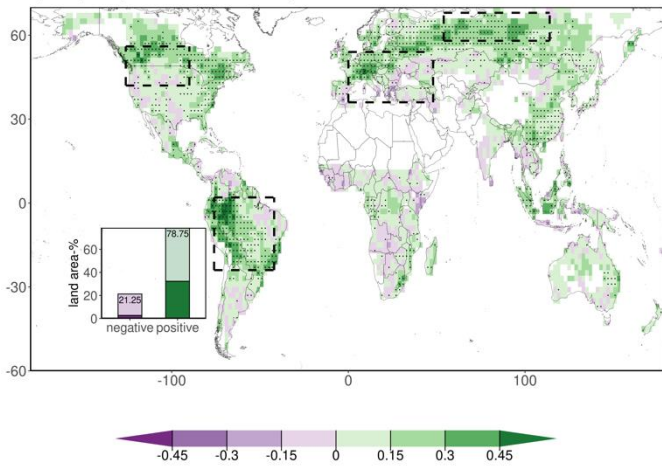
a) Temperature excess trend, 1980 - 2100



b) Ecosystem Limitation Index trend, 1980 - 2100



c) cor(Temperature excess, ELI), 1980 - 2100



**Figure 1.** Similarity of global patterns of change in temperature excess and ecosystem water limitation. Multi-model means of trends based on decadal time series per respective CMIP6 model of a) temperature excess) and b) Ecosystem Limitation Index (ELI). c) Multi-model means of Kendall's rank correlation coefficient between model-specific time series of ELI and temperature excess. The insets display the fraction of the warm land area ~~that~~ with positive or negative trends or correlations, respectively (at least 68 out of 812 models agreeing on the sign of the trend or correlation are hued darker). Stippling indicates that at least 68 out of 812 CMIP6 models agree on the sign of the trend or correlation. All trends and correlations are calculated over the warm season and are only displayed if at least 58 CMIP6 models have full time series available, such that white areas denote regions with no or insufficient data. The dashed boxes indicate regions of interest, which are regions where temperature excess increases are particularly rapid and spatially coherent: North and South America (NAM and SAM), Central Europe (CEU) and Northern Asia (NAS).

We identify increased temperature excess trends across over 77.75% of the warm vegetated land area from 1980 - 2100 (Figure 1a). Model confidence is higher for increasing than for decreasing temperature excess (inset plot Figure 1a), as in ~~more than almost~~ half of the area with increasing temperature excess at least sixeight out of eighttwelve CMIP6 models agree, while this is much less ~~than a third~~ for decreasing temperature excess (see also Supplementary Figure 3). This reveals high confidence in an accelerated increase of heat extremes compared with warm-season averagemean temperatures.

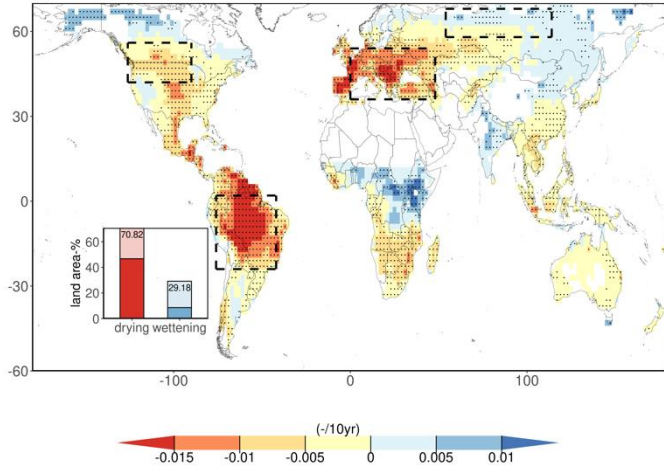
There is a widespread increase in incoming shortwave radiation in about 71% of the warm vegetated land area, with high inter-model agreement (Supplementary Figure 4), which can directly affect near-surface temperature through the surface energy balance. These trends could result from projected decreases in aerosol emissions (Nabat et al., 2014), or from changes in cloud cover. As daily maxima of incoming shortwave radiation roughly co-occur with daily temperature maxima, increased incoming shortwave radiation links more strongly to increased in maximum temperatures rather than mean temperatures (Qian et al., 2011), which are more strongly governed by the longwave radiation budget.

ELI increases in more than 68.71% of the warm vegetated land area (Figure 1b), signaling shifts towards water limitation. Generally, models particularly agree on the sign of the ELI increases (stippling in Figure 1b), whereas more uncertainty exists with respect to the magnitude of ELI trends (Supplementary Figure 45). Further, we note that in the mid- to high latitudes, ELI trends are generally temperature controlled, whereas the tropics are more sensitive to incoming shortwave radiation (Supplementary Figure 1), thereby acknowledging and allowing that energy proxies can vary locally.

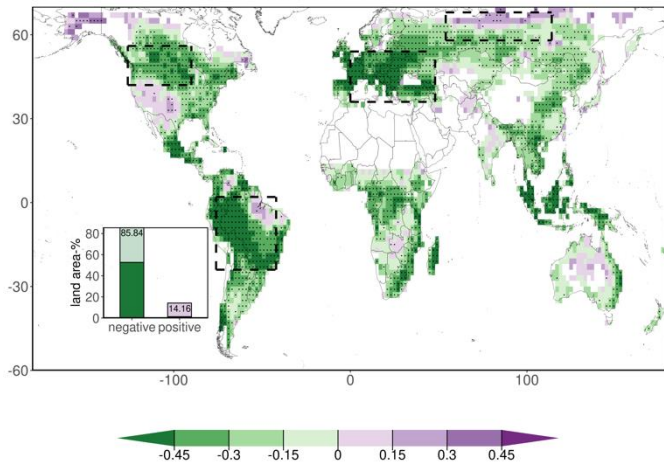
Spatial patterns of multi-model mean trends in temperature excess and ELI are very similar. Areas with the highest temperature excess trends (>0.2 K/10yr) are predominantlyexclusively characterized by ELI increases ~~(found in 92% of these areas)~~. More importantly, also the temporal evolution of decadal time series of temperature excess and ELI is similar in many regions. This is evidenced by significant correlations in many areas (Figure 1c, Supplementary Figure 5), ~~suggesting that increasing ELI~~

205 contributes to hotter temperature extremes. We also find regions with insignificant and even negative correlations such as the  
Sahel, Kazakhstan and parts of North America.6), suggesting that increasing ELI contributes to hotter temperature extremes.  
As correlations cannot distinguish the direction of causality, we stress that hotter temperature extremes can in turn further dry  
out terrestrial vegetation, thereby increasing water limitation. Additionally, heat extremes and related hydraulic failure could  
210 strengthen positive correlations between ELI and temperature excess. We also find regions with insignificant and even negative  
correlations such as parts of the Sahel, Kazakhstan, the Balkan, North America and Southern Africa. As plant transpiration  
scales with LAI, this limits the ability of the scarce vegetation present in such regions to provide sufficient evaporative cooling,  
possibly rendering correlations insignificant. Further deviations from a positive relationship between temperature excess and  
ELI might result from alternative processes such as (changes in) advection of warm air masses through large-scale circulation  
215 patterns- and changes in incoming shortwave radiation (Supplementary Figure 4).

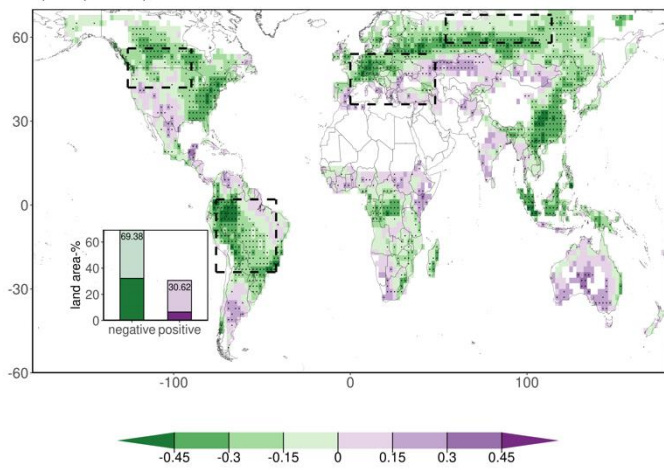
a) EF trend, 1980 - 2100



b) cor(Temperature excess,EF), 1980 - 2100



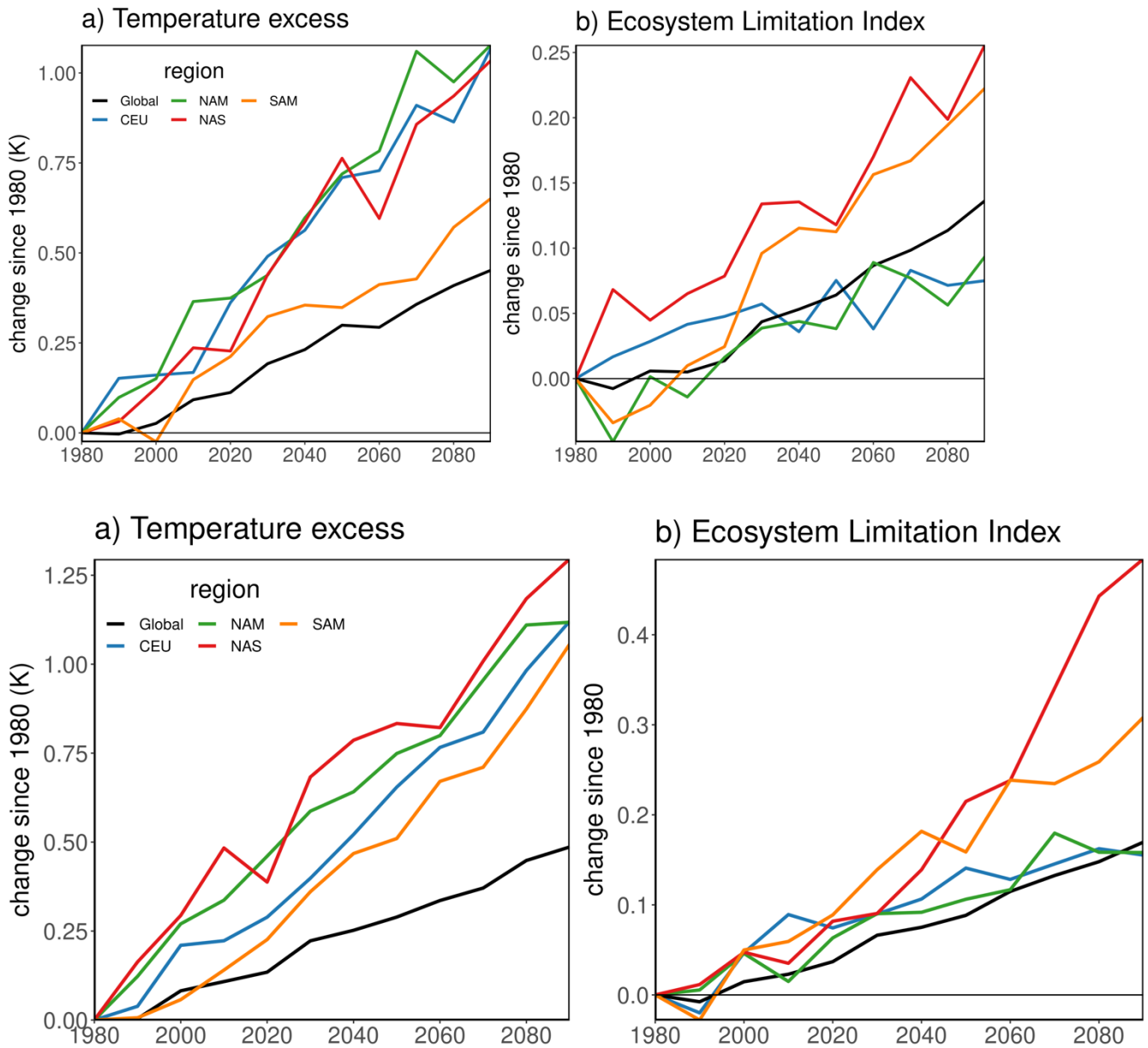
c) cor(EF,ELI), 1980 - 2100





**Figure 2.** Global multi-model mean distribution and trends of Evaporative Fraction (EF). Multi-model mean of trends based on decadal time series per respective CMIP6 model of a) EF and b) Ecosystem Limitation Index (ELI). c) Multi-model mean of Kendall's rank correlation coefficient between model-specific time series of ELI and temperature excess. The insets display the fraction of the warm land area that with positive or negative trends or correlations, respectively (at least 8 out of 12 models agreeing on the sign of the trend or correlation are hued darker). Stippling indicates that at least 8 out of 12 CMIP6 models agree on the sign of the trend or correlation. All trends and correlations are calculated over the three hottest months-of-year, defined as the 3 months-of-year which have the highest average temperature over 1980 - 2100. The dashed boxes indicate regions of interest.

Furthermore, in order to illustrate the physical link between ELI and temperature excess, which presumably is through evaporative cooling, we analyze terrestrial evaporation normalized by net surface radiation. The resulting EF links the surface energy and water balances. The EF is ~~generally~~ decreasing in ~~the four~~ all regions of interest but Northern Eurasia, with high agreement between individual models (~~Supplementary~~ Figure 6a2a). Moreover, EF is generally significantly correlated with both temperature excess and ELI, respectively, ~~establishingsuggesting~~ the physical link between these quantities. This way, in ~~more than 89~~ approximately 86% of the warm vegetated land area, trends in EF fraction are negatively correlated with temperature excess, meaning that a decreasing (increasing) trend in EF, renders more (less) energy available for sensible heating, which elevates (reduces) heat extremes (~~Supplementary~~ Figure 6b2b). In about ~~80~~ 69% of the warm vegetated land area, the correlation between EF and ELI is negative (~~Supplementary~~ Figure 6e2c), verifying that ~~a shift~~ most shifts towards ecosystem water limitation jointly ~~occurs~~ occur with the expected decreases in evaporative cooling. Some regions, such as central US, the Mediterranean and Northern Mongolia, exhibit insignificant or even positive correlations, possibly pointing to other processes such as irrigation and/or land use changes (Table 1).



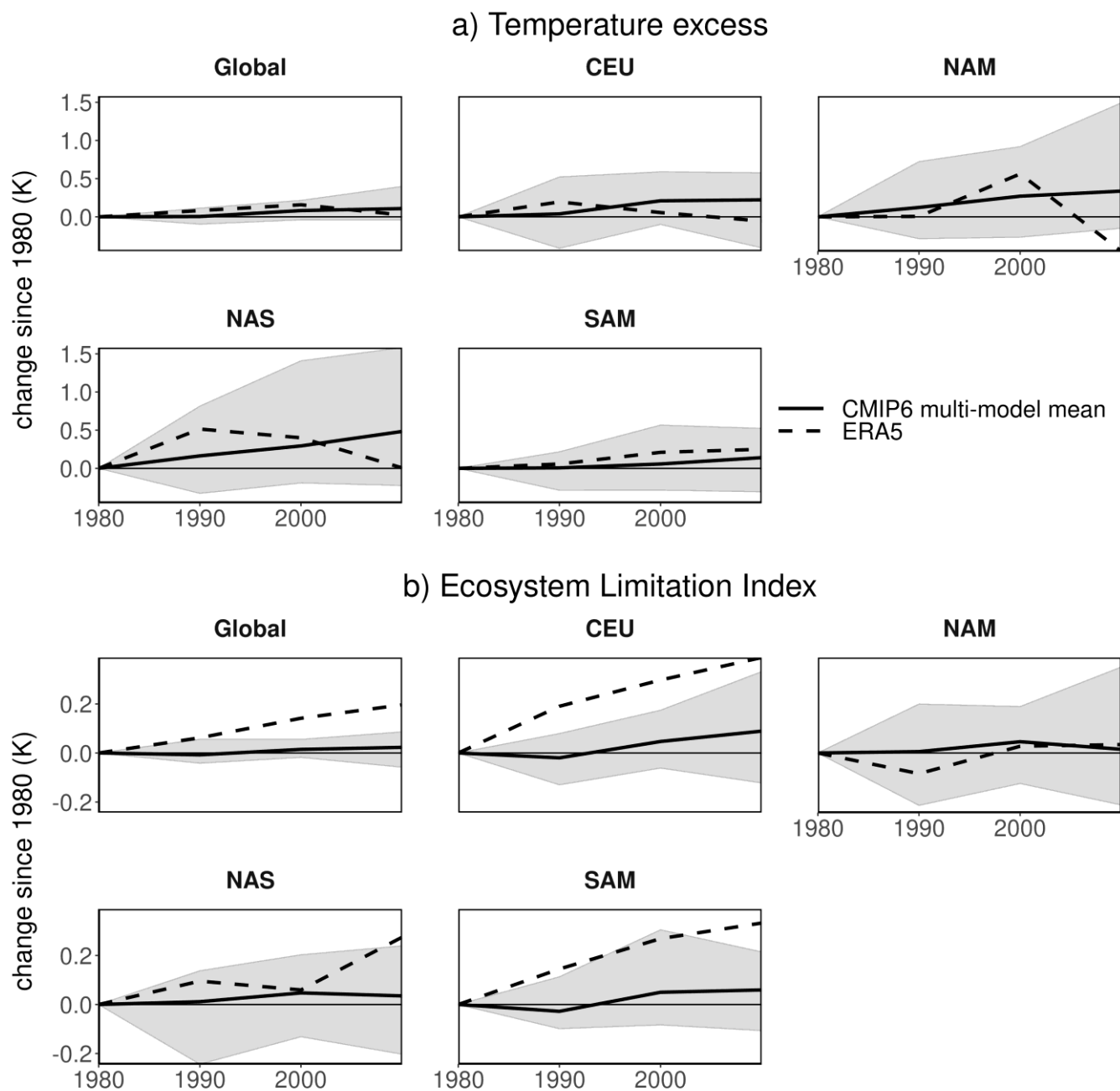
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**Figure 23.** Changes in global and regional temperature excess with increasing ecosystem water limitation. Temporal evolution of a) temperature excess and of b) Ecosystem Limitation Index (ELI) globally and for the regions of interest. Solid lines depict multi-model mean time series. Global and regional averages are calculated over land grid cells that have complete time series for all models and variables and are weighted according to the surface area per grid cell.

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Next, we compare the temporal evolution of temperature excess and ELI averaged across the regions of interest and the entire warm vegetated land area between historical and future time periods. Figure [2a3a](#) shows a steady global increase of temperature excess, with warm-season maximum temperature experiencing an additional 0.5K warming with respect to the average warm-season temperature over 1980 – 2100. In all regions of interest ~~but SAM~~, temperature excess is increasing over twice as fast as the global average. Even though uncertainty in temperature excess exists between individual models (Supplementary Figure [3 and 7a](#)), the majority of models agree both globally and regionally that temperature excess is significantly increasing.

ELI trends differ more strongly in magnitude across the regions of interest than the temperature excess trends (Figure [2b3b](#)). While underlying ELI trends from individual models generally tend to display positive ELI trends, there is a larger spread both in magnitude and in sign (Supplementary Figure 7b). This indicates different contributions of the ELI to the temperature excess trends between models (Supplementary Figure [5c](#)) and regions; while the ELI contribution is particularly strong in NAS and SAM, as can also be seen from the correlations in Figure 1c, it is weaker but still considerable in CEU and NAM where probably other processes play a role such as changes in large-scale circulation patterns or boundary layer dynamics. Further, most significant trends in Supplementary Figure 7b are positive, underlining a higher confidence of the model ensemble to project increasing rather than decreasing ecosystem water limitation.



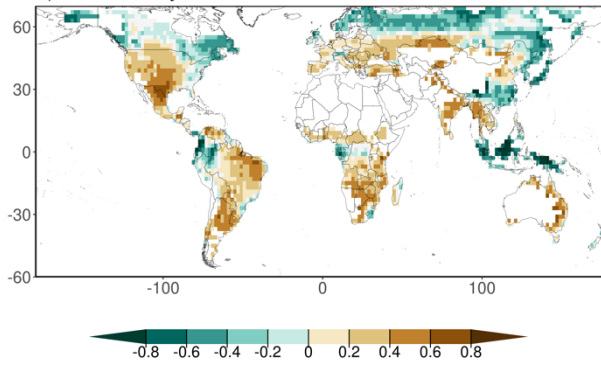
**Figure 4.** Changes in global and regional temperature excess in concert with increasing ecosystem water limitation from CMIP6 models and ERA5-Land. Temporal evolution of a) temperature excess and of b) Ecosystem Limitation Index (ELI) globally and for the regions of interest. The black solid lines depict global and regional time series from the CMIP6 models, while the black dashed line represents ERA5-Land. The grey ribbon displays the envelope which encapsulates all the CMIP6

results. Global averages are calculated over land grid cells that have complete time series for all models and variables and are weighted according to the surface area per grid cell. The same mask is applied for CMIP6 models and ERA5-Land.

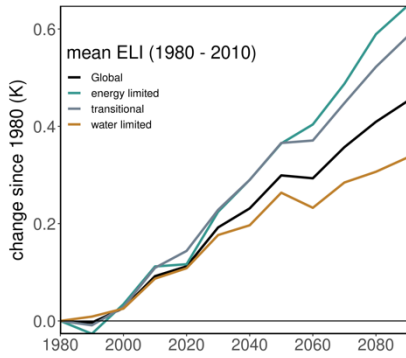
270 During 1980 – 2020, temperature excess computed from ERA5-Land data lies largely within the envelope of the individual  
CMIP6 models (~~Supplementary Figure 8a, “ERA5 Land analysis” in Supplementary material~~-Figure 4a). As such, the  
temperature excess findings from individual CMIP6 models are not implausible. As the ERA5-Land dataset is supported by  
the comprehensive assimilation of available observations, the similarity of the CMIP6 model results in terms of temperature  
excess demonstrates a successful validation of the models considered here. This is further corroborated by surface air  
275 temperature extremes from CMIP5 and CMIP6, that compare well with observation-based data sets, albeit with model-specific  
performance that varies in space and time (Thorarinsdottir et al., 2020). At the same time, the CMIP6-based ELI is only partly  
corroborated by the ERA5-Land reanalysis data from 1980 – 2020 (~~Supplementary Figure 8b4b~~), as globally and in half the  
regions of interest the reanalysis-based ELI exceeds the CMIP6 envelope. Note that ~~the ERA5-Land reanalysis is not only~~  
indirectly supported by data assimilation, as much by assimilated meteorological forcing from ERA5 assimilates observations  
280 in the case of ELI compared to only for 2m temperature, relative humidity and surface soil moisture. Therefore, temperature  
excess, as ELI benefits more directly from data assimilation than ELI, which is based on ET and (root-zone) soil moisture  
which are not readily observed across the globe. This way, ERA5-Land estimates of the global ELI evolution are subject to  
uncertainty, and while it provides an independent reference for comparing the CMIP6 model results it is itself based on the  
land surface model dynamics underlying the ERA5-Land dataset. Next to that, differences could arise due to different land  
285 cover maps underlying respective simulations from ERA5-Land and the CMIP6 models.

The tendency of temperature excess to be elevated in response to increasing ecosystem water limitation becomes even clearer  
when only grid cells where at least six~~eight~~ out of eight~~twelve~~ CMIP6 models agree on the sign of the temperature excess  
trends are included. This is evidenced by a stronger increase of ELI in regions with robust temperature excess trends  
290 (Supplementary Figure 98). ELI trends are even larger for regions with robust and positive temperature excess trends. At the  
same time no clear trends in ELI are found for regions with robust and negative temperature excess trends. This suggests that  
factors other than evaporative cooling, such as changes in circulation, render the temperature excess trends negative in these  
regions.

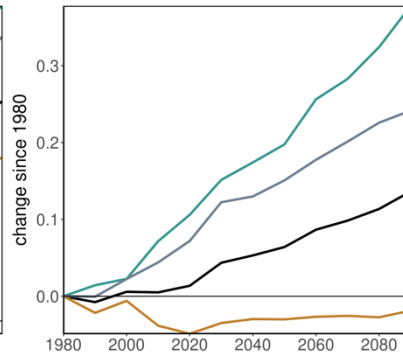
a) mean Ecosystem Limitation Index, 1980 - 2010



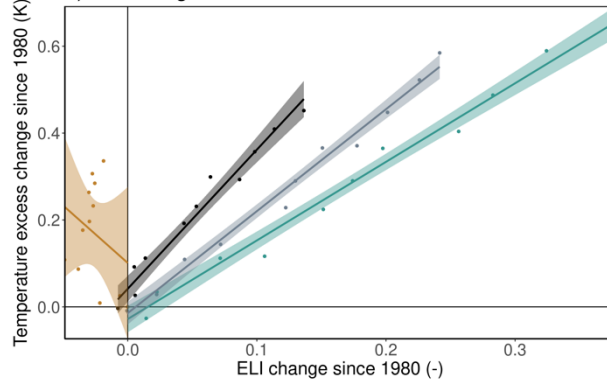
b) Temperature excess



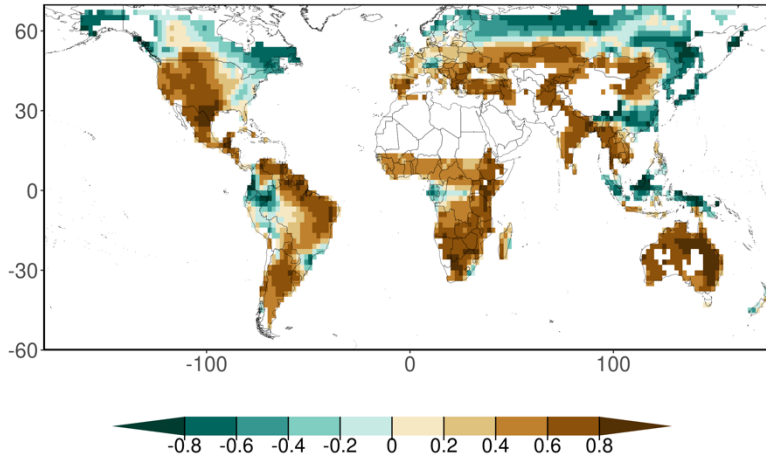
c) Ecosystem Limitation Index



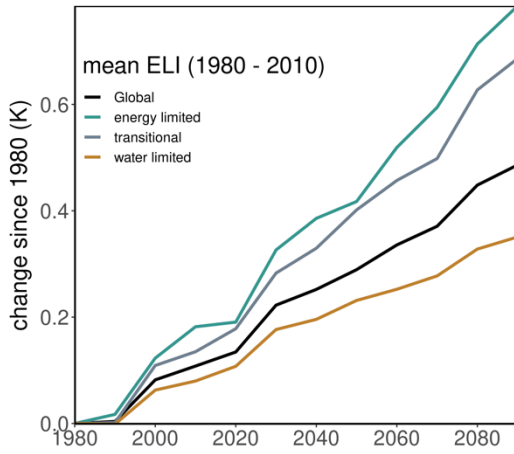
d) Linear regression



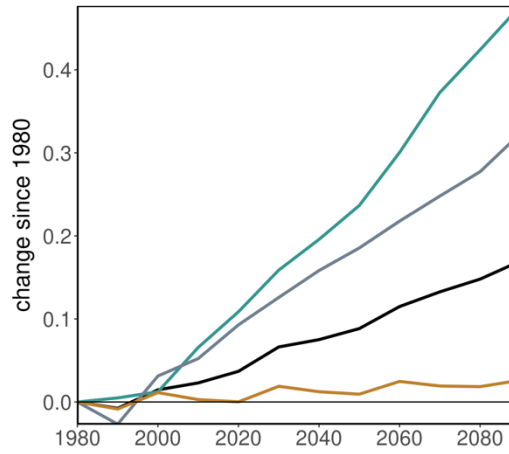
a) mean Ecosystem Limitation Index, 1980 - 2010



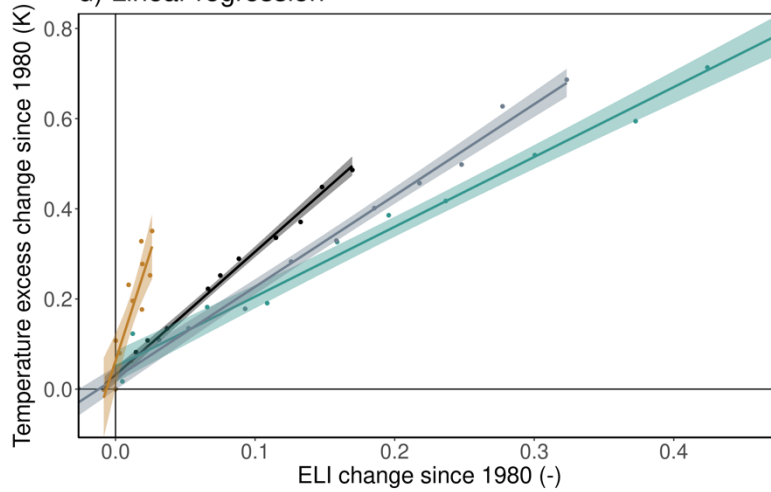
b) Temperature excess



c) Ecosystem Limitation Index



d) Linear regression



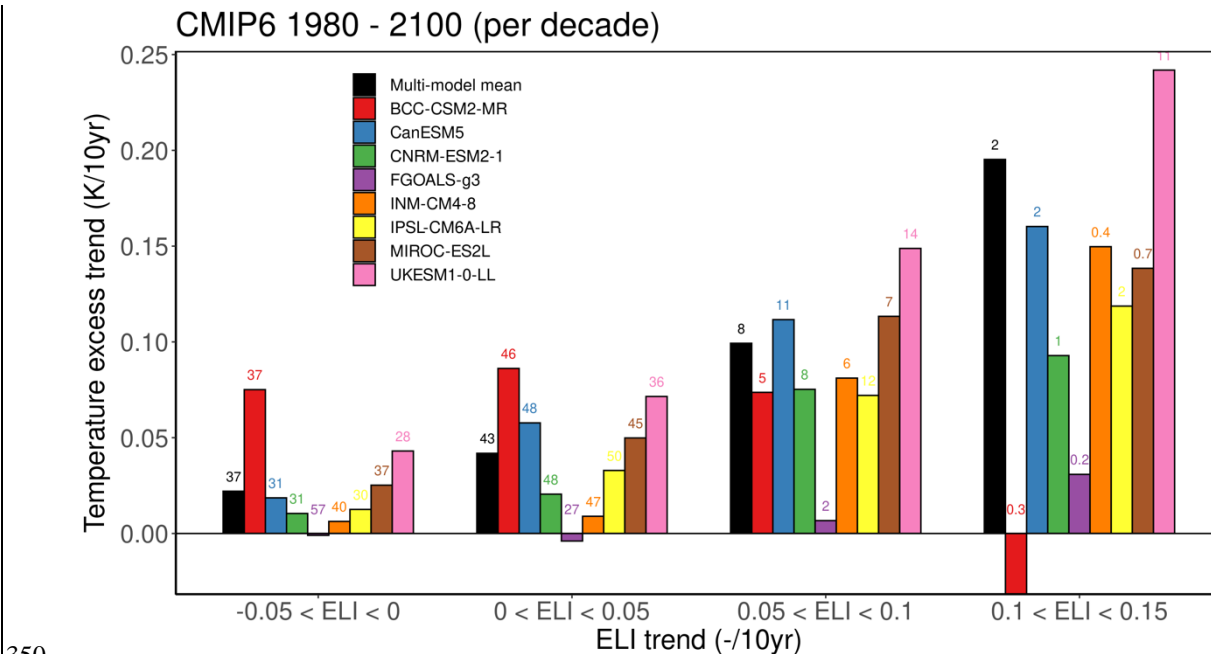
**Figure 35.** Relation between temperature excess and ecosystem water limitation. a) Multi-model mean Ecosystem Limitation Index (1980 - 2010). Solid lines depict the time series of multi-model means inferred from globally (black) and regionally (colored) decadal averaged model simulations for b) temperature excess and c) Ecosystem Limitation Index. The classification is defined based on the model-specific mean ELI over 1980 - 2010 (Supplementary Figure 409): Energy limited (ELI < -0.2), transitional (-0.2 < ELI < 0.2) and water limited (ELI > 0.2). d) Points denote the global (black) and regional (colored) decadal multi-model means of ELI (x-axis) and temperature excess (y-axis), expressed as change since 1980. The lines denote linear regressions, with a shaded colored 95% confidence interval. Land grid cells that do not have complete time series for all models are excluded (white regions, Methods). Global and regional averages are weighted according to the surface area per grid cell.

The sensitivity of temperature excess to ELI trends is expected to depend on the initial regime: ~~and can be explained through the nonlinear relationship between soil moisture and EF (Supplementary Figure 20 in Denissen et al., (Denissen et al., 2022; Seneviratne et al., 2010))~~: In initially energy-limited grid cells, ~~ecosystems can provide ample evaporative cooling. (soil moisture exceeds critical soil moisture), ecosystems can sustain maximum EF, assuming sufficient available energy during the warm season.~~ Hence, in such grid cells shifts towards water limitation, ~~evidenced expressed~~ by positive ELI trends, ~~should or soil drying, do~~ not amount to large changes in surface flux partitioning, nor in temperature excess. ~~We expect the opposite in, resulting in low sensitivity between ELI and temperature excess trends. In~~ initially ~~transitional-water-limited~~ grid cells, ~~where evaporative cooling should be (soil moisture below critical soil moisture), further soil drying, or shifts towards water limitation,~~ ~~can reduce EF. This way, temperature excess trends are highly~~ sensitive to ELI trends. ~~In~~ in water-limited grid cells, ~~Transitional grid cells, which are characterized by a soil moisture regime that transitions periodically from below to above the critical moisture content, effectively switch between energy- and water-limited conditions frequently. As such, evaporative cooling and consequently temperature excess are periodically sensitive to increasing water limitation. In extremely dry and water-limited conditions, where soil moisture values approach the wilting point, hardly any moisture can be extracted from the soil, rendering~~ vegetation activity ~~might be and associated EF~~ too low to provide ample evaporative cooling. ~~As such that,~~ shifts towards ecosystem water limitation ~~cannot should hardly~~ decrease evaporative cooling further. ~~in extremely water-limited grid cells.~~ To test this hypothesis, we classify all grid cells based on their respective mean ELI over 1980 - 2010 (Figure 3a5a) to define energy-limited (ELI < -0.2), transitional (-0.2 < ELI < 0.2) and water-limited (ELI > 0.2) conditions. We analyze temperature excess trends across these three regimes and find that over initially water-limited areas they are below the global average, while trends over initially transitional or energy-limited areas are above the global average (Figure 3b5b). This is against our initial expectation but can be explained by the corresponding ELI trends which are much more pronounced in energy-limited regions (Figure 3e5c), leading to more often occurring water-limited conditions in these areas. ~~However, in~~ in initially water-limited regions, temperature excess increases despite ~~only marginal ELI remaining fairly constant~~ increases over the study period, ~~possibly pointing to other processes affecting a higher sensitivity of~~ temperature excess ~~to ELI increases in such regions.~~ Moving beyond trends we also analyze the sensitivity of decadal temperature excess with respect to ELI for

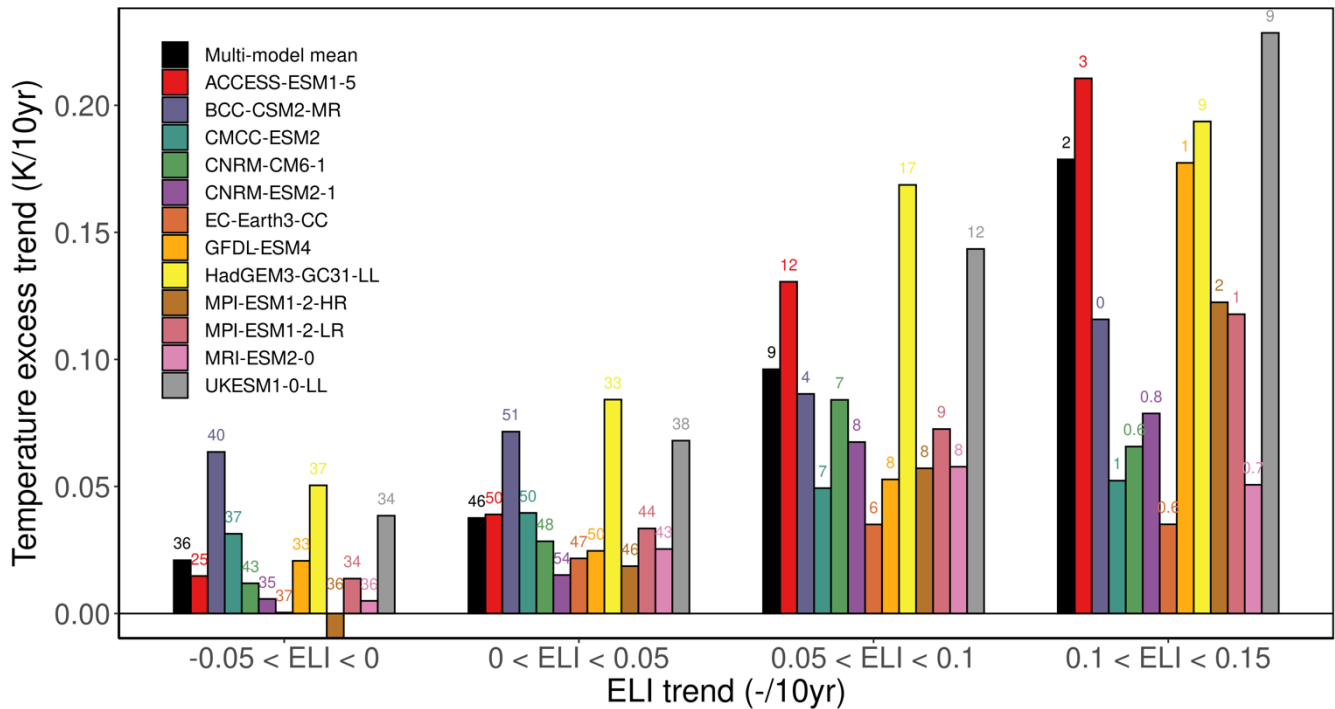


energy-limited vs. transitional vs. water-limited areas and find the strongest relationship in the case of transitional-water-limited areas (Figure 3d5d), as evidenced by the largest increase in temperature excess with ELI. This confirms that changes in transitional-water-limited areas temperature excess trends are most sensitive to ELI trends. This stresses that evaporative cooling in already arid drylands is even further reduced, increasingly limiting their ability to mitigate future heat extremes (Feldman et al., 2023). Despite lower sensitivity in transitional and energy-limited regions, ELI trends and related reductions in evaporative cooling are much larger, amounting to larger temperature excess trends.

To quantify the strength of the relationships displayed in Figure 3d5d we compute correlations for the relationships shown for the three regimes, respectively (crosses in Supplementary Figure 4a10a). This suggests again the stronger a more robust link between ELI and temperature excess, especially in transitional, but also and energy-limited areas resulting from the strong ELI trends moving these areas towards water-limitation. To study the relevance of spatial variability across the grid cells that are initially energy- or water-limited or transitional for the correlation estimates, the grid-specific time series of temperature excess and ELI are bootstrapped and displayed as boxplots in Supplementary Figure 10a, with overall similar results. Whereas sensitivity in water-limited regions in Figure 4d is higher, more uncertainty exists in its relationship, as evidenced a larger spread of bootstrapped correlations. Substantial variability exists across model-specific correlations (Supplementary Figure 4b10b,c). Although the models generally agree on the signs of the correlations, the magnitudes of correlations differ strongly, possibly relating to different representations of land-atmosphere coupling and resulting differences in trends and initial ELI states and trends (Supplementary Figure 5 and 409).



## CMIP6 1980 - 2100 (per decade)



**Figure 46.** Temperature excess trends increase with stronger trends in ecosystem water limitation. The bars denote the multi-model mean and model-specific temperature excess trends (y-axis) binned according to their respective ELI trends (x-axis) for the multi-model mean trends (black) and all individual models (colors). The numbers display the fraction of warm vegetated land area in which respective temperature excess and ELI trends occur ~~and do~~. These area fractions may not add up to 100%, because ~~there are~~ values outside of the defined bins on the x-axis are possible.

In order to further analyze the role of the magnitude of ELI trends for the coinciding temperature excess trends, we group the global grid cells with respect to their ELI trends and show the multi-model mean and model-specific temperature excess trends (Figure 46). Higher temperature excess trends correspond ~~with~~ stronger increasing ELI trends. Such strong increases in ELI indicate more often occurring water-limited conditions, potentially also during heat wave events, such that temperature excess gets more sensitive to ELI. Analyzing results from individual models shows that stronger ELI trends are associated with stronger trends in temperature excess in almost all models, albeit with substantial variability between individual models, owing to different representations and strength of land-atmosphere coupling.

### 4 Discussion

Our findings corroborate earlier research which demonstrated the relevance of soil moisture to (future) heat extremes via its control on surface flux partitioning based on idealized Earth system model experiments in which long-term soil moisture trends

are artificially removed (Fischer et al., 2007; Lorenz et al., 2016; Schwingshackl et al., 2018; Seneviratne et al., 2006; Vogel et al., 2017, 2018). While our correlative analysis cannot establish the causal link nor disentangle the direction of causality between land surface dynamics and heat extremes to the same extent, it benefits from fully coupled simulations without artificial tweaking the water balances, such that it effectively complements the existing body of research. We note that temperature excess is not exclusively driven by land-atmosphere coupling, and the findings presented here merely stress the importance of considering ELI in this context.

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While the correlation between ELI and heat wave temperatures is robust across models, we find substantial differences between individual models in terms of the strength of this link (e.g. Figure 42 and 6 and Supplementary Figures 5-6, 7 and 11-10). This could be related to a different representation of land-atmosphere interactions in general, which could be due to e.g. different soil moisture layers and depths, as well as different underlying soil and vegetation types. Additionally, models might use different vegetation water stress functions, some of which are poorly constrained by theory (De Kauwe et al., 2017; Martínez-de la Torre et al., 2019; Ukkola, Kauwe, et al., 2016). Further, not all models include dynamic vegetation, irrigation and land use change (Table 1). Another reason might be that measurements of soil moisture and terrestrial evaporation are scarce, such that large-scale observational constraints for these key quantities have been lacking and are only recently available following the advent of machine-learning techniques to efficiently interpolate global gridded datasets from the available in-situ measurements (Jung et al., 2019; O & Orth, 2021). Additionally, the vegetation's response to soil moisture drying is difficult to capture due to heterogeneous soil and vegetation characteristics and limited observational constraints for rooting depths and soil moisture dynamics in respective soil layers. Next to those processes, the effects of ELI on temperature excess can be obscured by land use and, circulation change- and trends in incoming shortwave radiation (Supplementary Figure 4). Although disentangling such effects would be insightful, we consider a comprehensible analysis out of scope for this study. At the same time, the findings in this study are based on model-specific assumptions. Therefore, we advocate the need to reproduce the main findings in this study (Figure 1c, for example) with observation-based data to scrutinize the model-based findings in this study. However, despite apparent differences in processes represented in the models, we still find mostly significant positive correlations between temperature excess and ELI in most models (Supplementary Figure 56).

395 Further, despite the apparent difficulty that Earth System Models experience with representing soil moisture trends and related trends in land-atmosphere processes (Albergel et al., 2013; Berg et al., 2017; Berg & Sheffield, 2018; Greve et al., 2019), widespread shifts towards water limitation are robustly projected (Figure 1) (Denissen et al., 2022; Teuling, 2018; Ukkola et al., 2018). Further highlighting the complex nature of land-atmosphere interactions, we note that ecosystem water limitation is not only affected by climate, but also by changes in vegetation physiology (e.g. stomatal regulation) and structure (e.g. LAI in response to increasing CO<sub>2</sub> (CO<sub>2</sub> fertilization) (Donohue et al., 2013; Ukkola, Prentice, et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2016), which has also been shown to modulate heat extremes (Lemordant & Gentine, 2019). This way, changes of both CO<sub>2</sub> and climate jointly affect ELI which in turn influences heat wave magnitudes. Given this situation, future research

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should focus on the link between ELI and heat wave intensities using observation-based datasets, particularly as longer-term interpolations or reconstructions of key variables become available. This can help to corroborate model-based findings, and to  
405 constrain the variable relevance of ELI across models.

Finally, we focus on the intensity of the heat extremes by considering temperature only rather than more impact-relevant indices. Heat stress for humans is dependent not only on temperature, but also on wind speed and humidity (Buzan & Huber, 2020; Matthews, 2018). Through reduced evaporative cooling and increased entrainment of dry air from above the atmospheric  
410 boundary layer, the lethality of heat extremes above dry soils can be reduced (Wouters et al., 2022). In this study, we find an increasing temperature excess alongside increasing EF in 1814% of the warm vegetated land area (~~Supplementary Figure 6b2b~~), which suggests potentially higher heat stress than reflected by temperature alone as terrestrial evaporation can increase humidity and related lethality. On the other hand, combined hot and dry conditions can lead to increased wildfires (O et al., 2020) and can be associated with severe impacts on agriculture and infrastructure. In that perspective, our results on the  
415 correspondence between increased ecosystem water limitation and amplified heat waves confirm findings from Teuling ~~et al.~~ (~~Teuling, 2018~~) indicating that droughts in Europe will become hotter under future warming. (2018) indicating that droughts in Europe will become hotter under future warming. This is in line with future projections, suggesting that concurrent hot and dry extremes will continue to increase in future (Seneviratne et al., 2021; Vogel et al., 2020).

## 420 **5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, we show the ability of the land surface to modulate the intensity of future heat extremes. ~~In this context we~~ We focus on novel indices by focusing on ecosystem water limitation and the temperature excess between warm-season mean and maximum temperatures. In this context, the ELI is used to represent the nonlinear relationship between soil moisture and evaporative cooling, as it considers the effect of hydrometeorological anomalies on ecosystem response. This way, we find a  
425 widespread increase in temperature excess in ~775% of our study area. We identify several regions of interest where temperature excess is increasing more rapidly than the global mean. In large parts of these regions, these temperature excess increases jointly occur with trends towards ecosystem water limitation which lead to reduced evaporative cooling. Thereby, the relevance of trends in ecosystem water limitation for trends in temperature excess depends on (i) the magnitude of the ELI trends, which is largest in initially energy-limited and transitional areas, and (ii) the initial ELI regime as (maximum)  
430 temperatures are more sensitive to evaporative cooling in ~~a transitional regime~~ initially water-limited regions. Finally, identifying regions where ELI trends and related evaporative cooling are important for future heat extremes can inform long-term adaptation strategies. Human activities play a key role here, as we can implement agricultural practices and/or tillage, irrigation and land cover management, afforestation and city greening to mitigate the impact of heat extremes (Schwaab et al., 2021; Sillmann et al., 2017).

435

## Data and code availability

440 The CMIP6 model simulation data is freely available from ~~Google cloud CMIP6 public data: <https://pangeo-data.github.io/pangeo-cmip6-cloud/>~~ the Earth System Grid Federation (ESGF) public data: <https://aims2.llnl.gov/search/?project=CMIP6/>. All the data used in this analysis will be made publicly available in a data repository which can be assessed via Zenodo.

445 The scripts to acquire ~~and aggregate CMIP6 data are publicly available (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5900393>, (Koirala, 2022))~~ CMIP6 data are publicly available (<https://github.com/TaufiqHassan/acccmip6>) (Hassan, 2022). All the code written and used in this analysis will be made available from a code repository on Zenodo.

## Author contributions

R.O., A.J.T. and J.M.C.D. jointly designed the study. J.M.C.D. performed the analyses. All authors contributed to the writing of the paper, the discussion and interpretation of the results.

## 450 Competing Interest Statement

The authors declare no competing interests.

## Acknowledgements

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460 came up. Another special thanks to Ulrich Weber for downloading and aggregating the reanalysis data used in this study.

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