

This manuscript has been greatly improved, however there is still some confusion and imprecision about the definition of El Niño events which should be rectified before publication.

Comments

Line 200: Greater description of the ENSO indices used (with webpage references, if this is where the three indices are taken from) would help clarify the subsequent analysis. Line 200-201 is somewhat confusing, is there a lagged correlation between ONI indices and variables, and if so, is it months or one year? Or are the authors determining years to be considered El Niño or La Niña based on some threshold of number of months (and if so, what month is taken as the year start)?

Line 150, 264, 268 and section 3.2: As noted, 1999 and 2017 contain no El Niño periods so cannot be defined as El Niño years, and defining 1997-1999 and 2015-2017 as El Niño events is therefore incorrect, and negates many of this paper's conclusions. 1999 was a strong La Niña year, as noted elsewhere in this manuscript. Please check ENSO dates are precise throughout the manuscript, using e.g.

https://origin.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/analysis_monitoring/ensostuff/ONI_v5.php .

In relation to this, section 3.2 refers in the first paragraph to the strong El Niño events of 1998, 2016 and 2023. The analysis of the first two events is consistent, as they both consist of strong El Niño indices over the preceding wet season, until around March/May of 1998/2016. 2023, however shows the opposite pattern, with strong La Niña indices over the preceding wet season. Given that the strongest El Niño months for 2023 occurred after the date of the satellite imagery from which this analysis has been used, I do not think it is reasonable to make conclusions about the effect of the 2023 El Niño at this point, unless all analysis has been conducted using only a few months of ENSO index leading up to the date of satellite image.

Figures throughout: Please define in the figure captions the meaning of all error bars and shading, and which data were used to construct these.

Minor comments

226: Please use SI units hPa rather than mb

265-267: The statement that there is a steady decline over 3 consecutive years from both 1997-1999 and 2015-2017 contradicts lines 259-260 and figure 3, which show a rebound or partial rebound in the final year.

Line 278 and Table S4: which El Niño years are included here?

Table S5: MEI mislabelled as MVI.