THE SOUTH PACIFIC SEA LEVEL & CLIMATE MONITORING PROJECT

MONTHLY DATA REPORT

NO. 197

NOVEMBER 2011

Australian Government

Bureau of Meteorology

This project is sponsored by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), and is managed by the Bureau of Meteorology with its National Tidal Centre (NTC) providing key technical support.

Australian Government

Bureau of Meteorology

National Tidal Centre
Bureau of Meteorology
Australia

GPO Box 421
Kent Town SA 5071
Australia

Tel: (+618) 8366 2730
Fax: (+618) 8366 2651
Website: http://www.bom.gov.au/oceanography/

Quality Certification:

I authorise the issue of this South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project Monthly Data Report for November 2011 in accordance with National Tidal Centre Quality Assurance procedures.

William Mitchell
Manager - National Tidal Centre

South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project

Monthly Data Report

November 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This summary, and the overview that follows, are intended to provide a synopsis of the Monthly Data Report and of the trends observed over the life of the project to date.

November 2011

- The SEAFRAME network continued to collect high quality sea level and associated meteorological information for monitoring climate variability and climate change.

- The SEAFRAME station at Solomon Islands was upgraded with a new data logger and an additional radar water level sensor under the Observation Network Upgrade Project. Routine calibration and maintenance servicing was performed at Cook Islands, Samoa and Tonga during November.

- La Niña climate conditions continued to strengthen across the equatorial Pacific during November. Ocean temperatures across the equatorial Pacific were cooler than normal and Trade Winds were stronger than normal.

- Monthly sea levels during November 2011 were 10cm higher than normal at Cook Islands and around 5cm higher than normal at Marshall Islands, FSM, PNG, Solomon Islands and Samoa. Sea levels at Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga were near normal for this time of the year.

- International climate models predict that the current La Niña event is nearing its peak and will not be as strong as the 2010/11 La Niña. La Niña conditions are expected to persist through the southern hemisphere summer.

Short-Term Trends

It is important to stress that as the sea level record becomes longer, the short-term trend estimate becomes more stable and reliable. Observed trends in sea level include natural variability, for example, events such as El Niño and effects due to many other atmospheric, oceanographic and geological processes. Longer-term data sets for all stations are required in order to separate the effects of the different signals. ***Please exercise caution in interpreting the short-term trends in the table below –*** they will almost certainly change over the coming years as the data set increases in length. Figure 13 later in this report provides the "time history" of the short-term trend at all project locations.

Recent short-term sea level trends in the project area based upon SEAFRAME data through November, 2011

Location	Lat / Long	Installation Date	Trend (mm/yr)	Change from previous month
Cook Is	21°12'17.1"S / 159°47'5.2"W	Feb 1993	+5.4	+0.2
Tonga	21°8'12.5"S / 175°10'50.5"W	Jan 1993	+8.5	0.0
Fiji	17°36'17.7"S / 177°26'17.7"E	Oct 1992	+5.2	0.0
Vanuatu	17°45'19.2"S / 168°18'27.7"E	Jan 1993	+5.3	0.0
Samoa	13°49'36.4"S / 171°45'40.7"W	Feb 1993	+6.8	+0.1
Tuvalu	8°30'8.9"S / 179°11'42.6"E	Mar 1993	+4.1	0.0
Kiribati	1°21'54.2"N / 172°55'58.8"E	Dec 1992	+3.0	0.0
Nauru	0°31'45.9"S / 166°54'36.2"E	Jul 1993	+3.7	0.0
Solomon Is.	9°25'44.1"S / 159°57'19.3"E	Jul 1994	+7.5	+0.1
PNG	2°2'31.5"S / 147°22'25.6"E	Sep 1994	+7.9	+0.1
FSM	6°58'49.9"N / 158°12'0.8"E	Dec 2001	+17.5	+0.2
Marshall Is.	7°6'21.7"N / 171°22'22.1"E	May 1993	+5.2	+0.1

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the November 2011 Monthly Data Report for the South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project (SPSLCMP). The report details the month by month operation of the SEAFRAME monitoring stations in the Pacific, including operational problems with the network or with satellite communications, the occurrence of abnormal sea level or climate events, interpretation of sea level fluctuations in the context of El Niño and the emergence of trends in the data.

The SPSLCMP was developed as an Australian response to concerns raised by the member countries of the South Pacific Forum over the potential impacts of global warming on climate and sea levels in the Pacific. Support was provided for the installation of SEAFRAME monitoring stations across the South Pacific Forum region.

SEAFRAME gauges not only measure sea level by two independent means, but also observe a number of "ancillary" variables - air and water temperatures, wind speed,

wind direction and atmospheric pressure. There is an associated programme of levelling to first order, to determine shifts in the vertical of the sea level sensors due to local land movement. Continuous Global Positioning System (CGPS) measurements are now also being made to determine the vertical movement of the land with respect to the International Terrestrial Reference Frame.

The AusAID funded project has, as its principal objective ***'the provision of an accurate long term record of sea level in the South Pacific for partner countries and the international scientific community which enables them to respond to and manage related impacts'***.

The project's monitoring network consists of 12 SEAFRAME stations, providing a wide coverage across the Southwest Pacific basin. All of these stations (see Figure A), with the exception of the Pohnpei (FSM) gauge, which was established in December 2001, have been operational since October 1994.

The monthly data report, one of a range of information products produced by the project, is the primary form of SPSLCMP data dissemination. Its content is designed to provide up-to-date access to the project's data products.

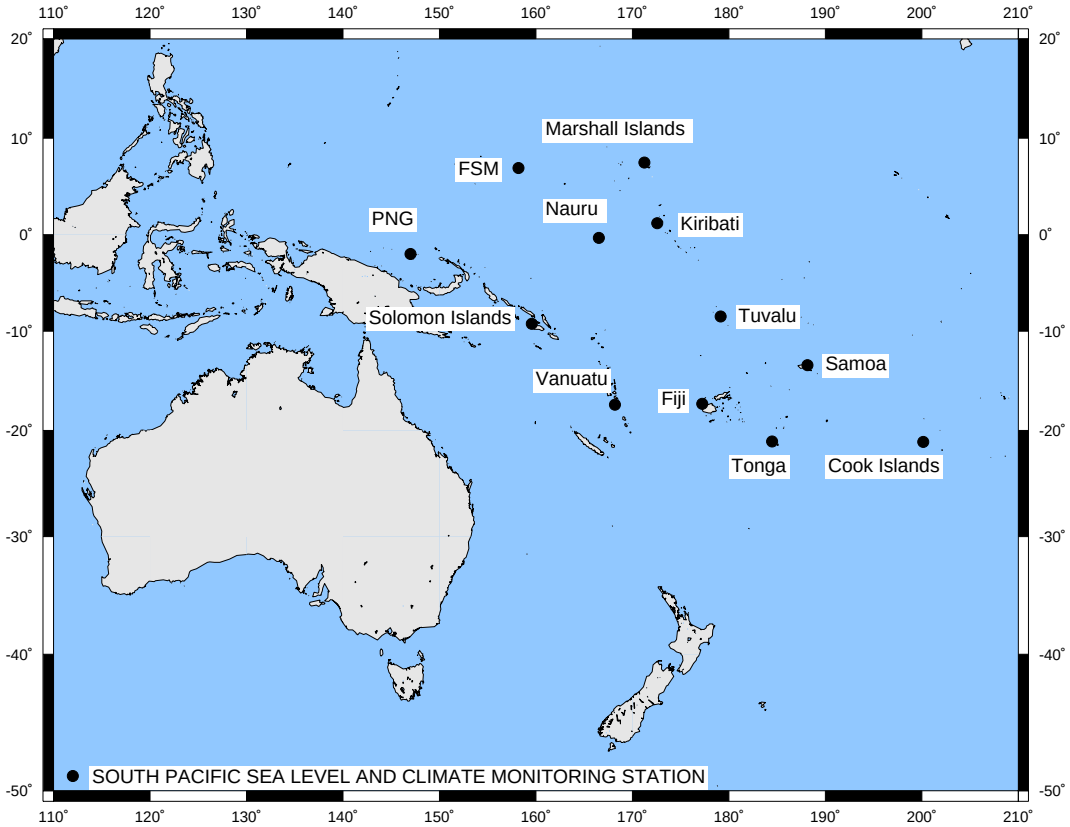

Figure A: *South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Stations*

NOVEMBER CLIMATOLOGY

La Niña climate conditions continued to strengthen across the Pacific during November. Sea surface temperatures across the equatorial Pacific Ocean were cooler and Trade Winds were stronger than is normally observed at this time of the year. International climate models predict the La Niña will peak during the next month and persist through the southern hemisphere summer.

The Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) strengthened during November to a value of +13.8 following the October value of +7.3 (**Figure B**). Sustained positive values of the SOI above +8 are typical of La Niña, while sustained negative values below –8 are typical of El Niño.

Sea surface temperatures cooled across much of the equatorial Pacific during November. The map of sea surface temperature anomalies (**Figure C**) shows surface temperatures across the central and eastern equatorial Pacific were at least 1.0°C cooler than normal during November and the extent of cool surface water grew in comparison with October. A broad band of warmer than normal sea surface temperature continued to be observed across the southwest Pacific.

Subsurface ocean temperatures across the equatorial Pacific remained cooler than normal east of the dateline during November. The overall volume of cooler than normal water contracted toward the east in relation to October, but the volume of water where temperature anomalies were -4.0°C increased during November (**Figure D**). Slightly warmer than normal subsurface temperatures was observed in a small region of the western equatorial Pacific.

During El Niño (warm-episode) conditions there is a sustained weakening of the Trade Winds across much of the equatorial Pacific and an increase in cloudiness in the central equatorial Pacific particularly near the dateline. During La Niña (cold-episode) conditions there is a reversal of this situation, with stronger Trade Winds and a decrease in cloudiness in the central Pacific. Trade Winds were stronger than normal across the western and central equatorial Pacific during November (**Figure E**). Cloudiness near the dateline remained suppressed during November.

The consensus among international computer models surveyed by the Bureau of Meteorology is that the current La Niña is nearing its peak and will not be as strong as the 2010/11 La Niña. La Niña conditions are expected to persist through the southern hemisphere summer before returning to neutral values during autumn.

The preceding description of the climatology of the Pacific region, and Figures B, C and D are based on information sourced from the National Climate Centre of the Australian Bureau of Meteorology at http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/. Figure E was generated from the Tropical Atmosphere Ocean project website courtesy of PMEL, NOAA at http://www.pmel.noaa.gov/tao/.

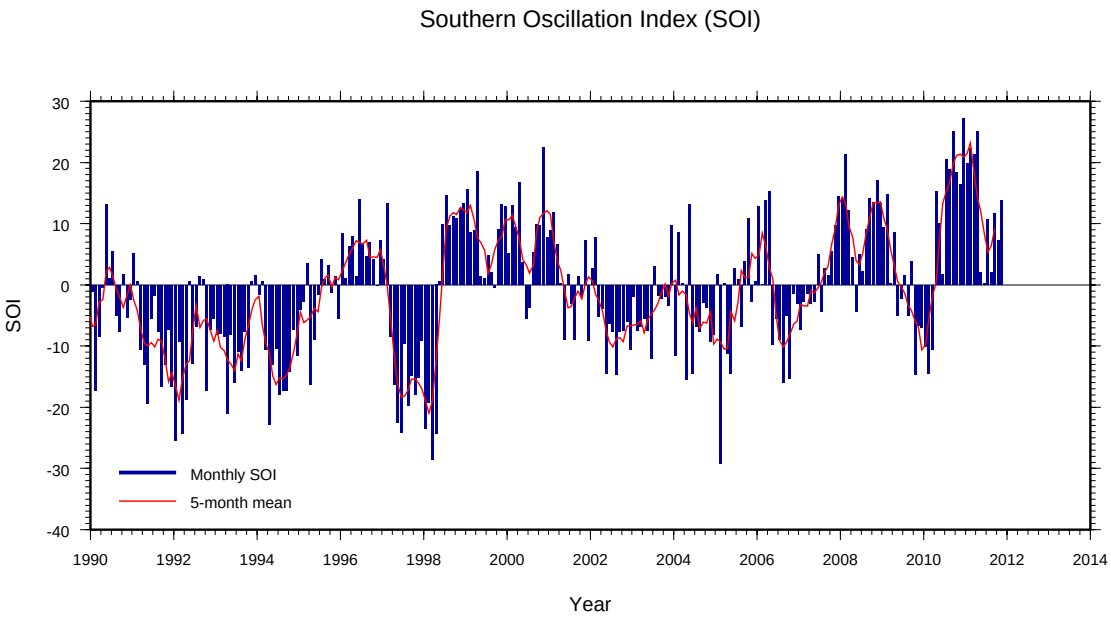

Figure B: *The five-month weighted mean and individual monthly means of the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI). The SOI is ten times the monthly anomaly of the difference in mean sea level pressure between Tahiti and Darwin, divided by the long-term standard deviation of that difference for the relevant month.*

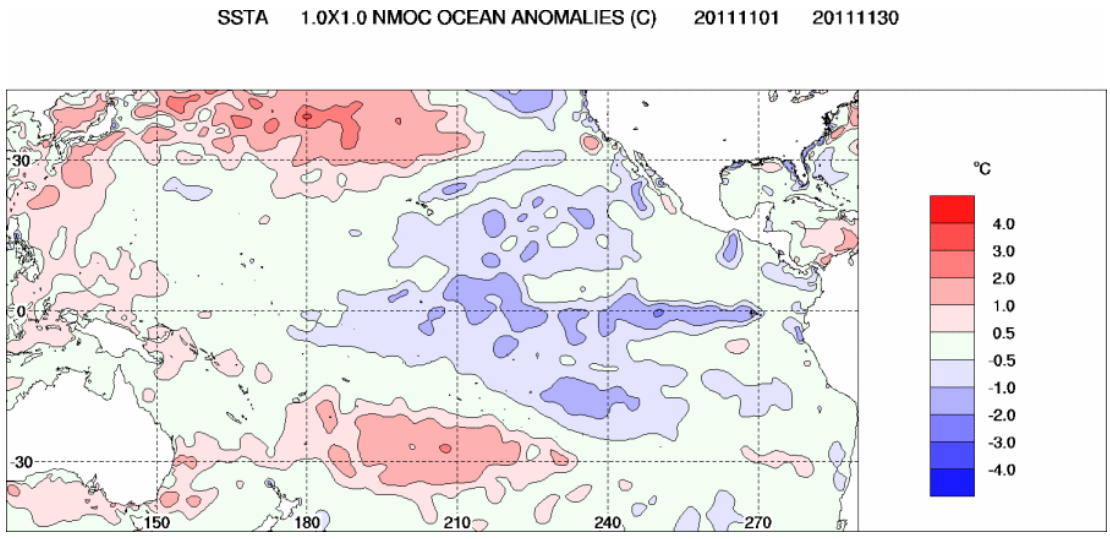

Figure C: *Sea surface temperature anomaly (°C) for November 2011.*

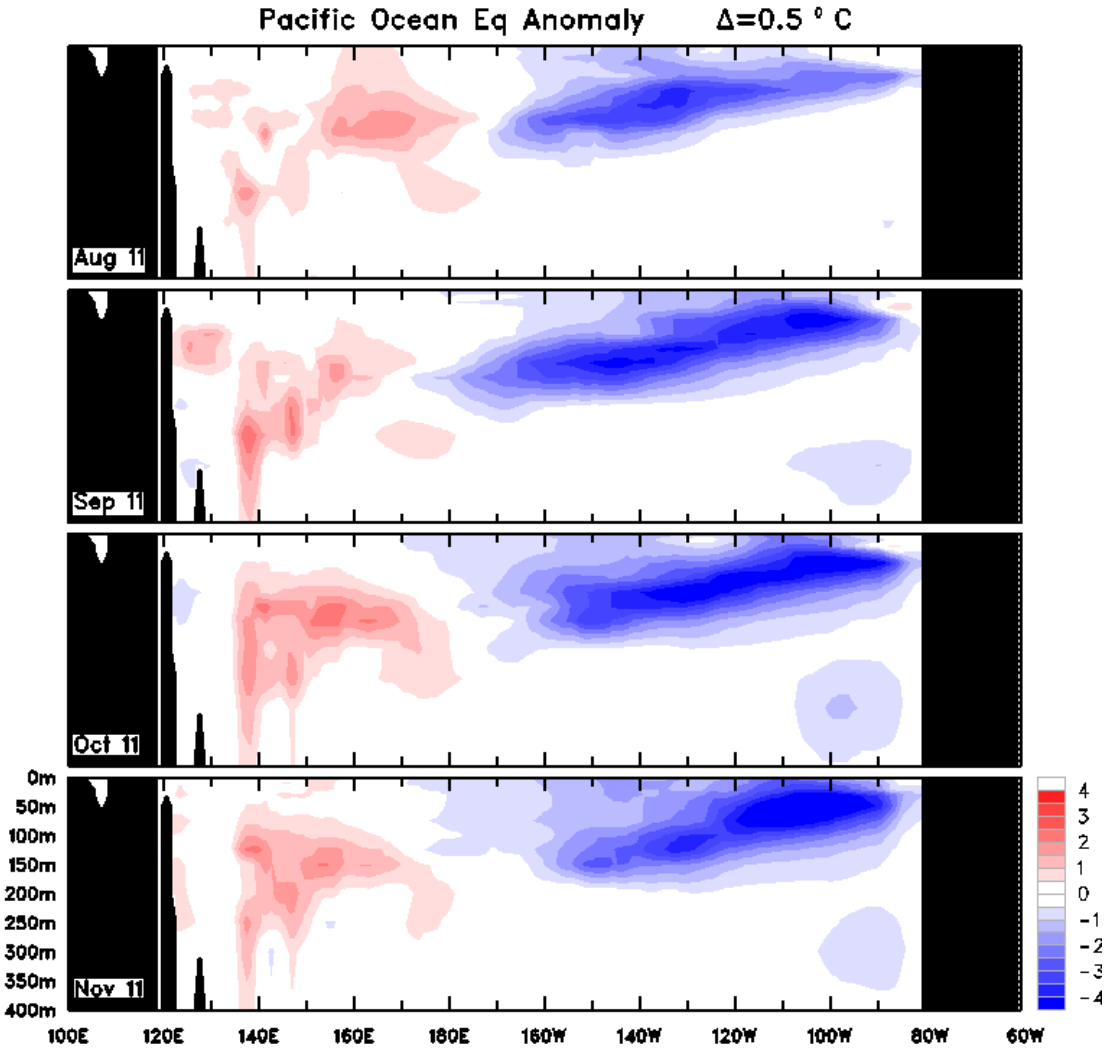

Figure D: *Equatorial depth-longitude section of ocean temperature anomalies for August through to November 2011. Contour interval is 0.5°C.*

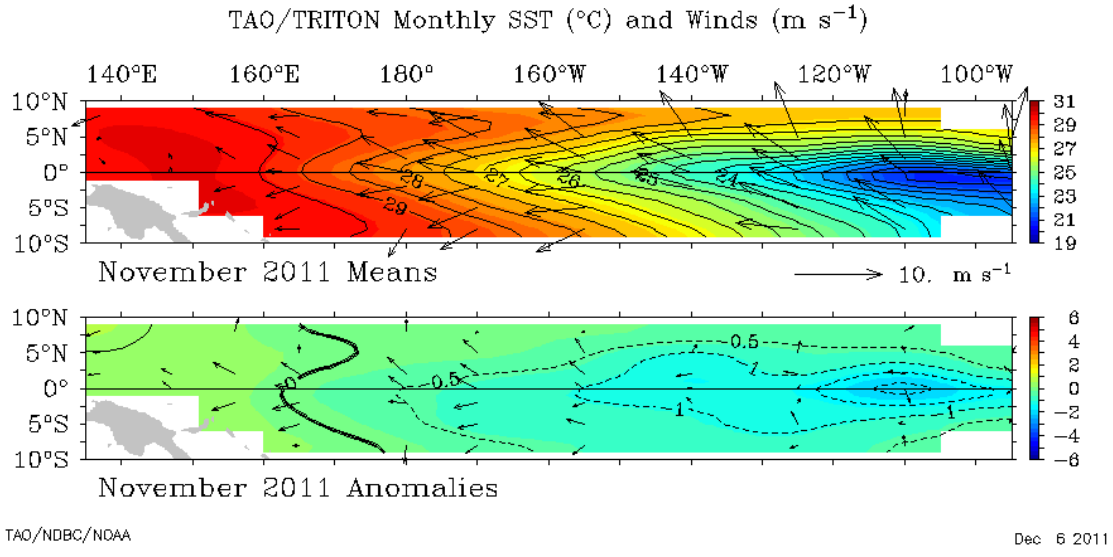

Figure E: *Monthly mean wind vectors (top) and anomalies (bottom) for November 2011. The colour-shaded contours represent the monthly mean sea surface temperatures (top) and anomalies (bottom).*

NOVEMBER SEAFRAME DATA

Monthly Sea Level and Environmental Data (Figures 1-10)

The **observed sea levels (Figure 1)** are dominated by the daily oscillations of the tide. In most cases, the tide rises and falls twice per day (semi-diurnal), but at PNG and the Solomon Islands the tide tends to have a single high and low per day (diurnal). Where the tides follow a semi-diurnal pattern the greatest tidal variations are called spring tides, which tend to occur around the time of the full and new moons. There was a full moon on the 10th of November and a new moon on the 25th of November.

Gaps in the data are the result of instrumental errors or data retrieval problems and are discussed under **Instrument Performance**.

The **residuals (Figure 2)** are the differences between the observed sea levels and the tidal predictions. They highlight non-tidal sea level fluctuations, such as those due to the effects of weather or tsunamis. Tropical cyclones often produce storm surges where the combination of low barometric pressure and strong winds raise sea levels well above the predicted tides for a period of a day or more.

The non-tidal sea level fluctuations can be amplified or sustained by the shape of the harbour in which the gauge is located. Some of the SEAFRAME stations are located in harbours that are favourable to persistent 'sloshing' under certain conditions (a phenomenon referred to as a seiche), such as at PNG when the wind suddenly changes strength or direction, at FSM during periods of reduced tidal range and at Nauru during strong westerly winds.

The residual sea levels were generally unremarkable during November 2011 in terms of any significant storm surge, tsunami or harbour seiche. The residuals at Solomon Islands, Samoa and Cook Islands indicate the sea levels there were consistently higher than predicted tides during November as a result of favourable climate conditions and ocean heat content.

The sea level residuals at all stations, to some degree, exhibit semi-diurnal or diurnal fluctuations, which last a few days or weeks and then disappear. If these peaks were to persist, rather than appear as occasional 'transients', then the tidal analysis would be able to account for them, and the end result would be virtual eradication from the residuals.

The **barometrically corrected residuals (Figure 3)** have had the effect of atmospheric pressure fluctuations removed from the sea level residuals of Figure 2. The rule of thumb for the 'inverse barometer effect' is that a 1-hPa fall in the barometer, if sustained over a day or more, produces a 1-cm rise in the local sea level (within the area beneath the low pressure system).

The **winds**, **temperatures** and **barometric pressures** are plotted in **Figures 4** to **9**. The short lines in **Figure 5** follow the meteorological convention, that is, they point in the direction the wind is coming *from*. For example, the winds at Vanuatu prevailed from the northeast for most of the month.

Air and water temperatures **(Figures 7** and **8)** are plotted using the same vertical scale for the purpose of comparison. The air temperatures are seen to fluctuate over a much

wider range than the water temperatures. At some sites (e.g. FSM) the water temperature shows almost no variation, although the air temperature varies by several degrees between night and day. At Nauru a twice-daily fluctuation in water temperature is related to interactions between tides and terrestrial (land-based) water discharging into the wharf area. The water temperature fluctuations there are usually more pronounced during the larger spring tides.

Barometric pressures **(Figure 9)** tend to fluctuate by around 3 hPa twice-daily at all stations as a result of atmospheric tides, which are largest in the tropical regions and reduce to near zero toward the poles. The longer-term barometric pressure fluctuations that occur over periods of days to weeks are due to passing weather systems. These fluctuations tend to be larger at sites farther away from the equator such as Cook Islands and Tonga.

The **meteorological data** are put into perspective by **Figure 10**. In this figure, if an open circle falls above (below) a solid dot, a new maximum (minimum) for the particular month has been set. *The data sets only include South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project data, which have been collected since October 1992 when the first station was installed (Fiji). The data from FSM has only been collected since December 2001.* A new record November maximum air temperature of 28.9 ºC was observed at Tonga, carrying on from the record set in October. A new November minimum water temperature of 28.6 ºC was observed at FSM.

Mean Sea Level and Anomalies (Figures 11-13)

Figure 11 shows the **monthly mean sea levels**, which are simple arithmetic averages of the sea levels, relative to an arbitrary zero. The figure shows that Tuvalu, for example, normally experiences an annual cycle of about 0.2 metres, reaching a peak around February or March. One effect of the El Niño of 1997/1998 was very low sea levels which disrupted the annual sea level cycle at many of the SEAFRAME stations.

Figure 12 shows the monthly mean **sea level anomalies,** or departures from normal conditions after tides, annual and semi-annual seasonal cycles and the sea level trend have been removed. The annual cycle at Tuvalu (which has the largest consistent annual cycle) is quite notable in **Figure 11** but less apparent in **Figure 12**. By removing the seasonal cycles, the anomalies help to bring out irregular features, such as lower than normal sea levels across the region during the 1997/98 El Niño.

Monthly sea level anomalies during November 2011 were close to +5cm at Marshall Islands, FSM, PNG, Solomon Islands and Samoa and +10cm at Cook Islands, indicating sea levels at these stations were slightly higher than normal for this time of the year. At Kiribati, Nauru, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga sea levels were close to normal for November.

Sea Level Trends

The **short-term sea level trends** at individual stations as at November 2011 are shown in the following table. Sea level trends are updated every month by allowing for a linear trend term in the tidal analysis of all the data available at individual stations. *Please exercise caution in interpreting the trends* – they will continue to change over the coming years as the data sets increase in length. The evolution of the monthly trend values (in mm per year) at each station from one year after installation to present

is depicted in **Figure 13**. This figure illustrates that as the sea level record becomes longer, the relative sea level trend estimates become more stable and reliable. The reason for this is that the trends from short sea level records are affected by the natural sea level variability occurring on inter-annual, El Niño and decadal timescales due to atmospheric, oceanographic and geological processes. Longer-term data sets for all stations are required in order for the underlying trend to emerge from these short-term variations. Further details are available from the *National Tidal Centre (NTC), Australian Bureau of Meteorology*.

Recent short-term sea level trends in the project area based upon SEAFRAME data through November, 2011

Location	Lat / Long	Installation Date	Trend (mm/yr)	Change from previous month
Cook Is	21°12'17.1"S / 159°47'5.2"W	Feb 1993	+5.4	+0.2
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Fiji	17°36'17.7"S / 177°26'17.7"E	Oct 1992	+5.2	0.0
Vanuatu	17°45'19.2"S / 168°18'27.7"E	Jan 1993	+5.3	0.0
Samoa	13°49'36.4"S / 171°45'40.7"W	Feb 1993	+6.8	+0.1
Tuvalu	8°30'8.9"S / 179°11'42.6"E	Mar 1993	+4.1	0.0
Kiribati	1°21'54.2"N / 172°55'58.8"E	Dec 1992	+3.0	0.0
Nauru	0°31'45.9"S / 166°54'36.2"E	Jul 1993	+3.7	0.0
Solomon Is.	9°25'44.1"S / 159°57'19.3"E	Jul 1994	+7.5	+0.1
PNG	2°2'31.5"S / 147°22'25.6"E	Sep 1994	+7.9	+0.1
FSM	6°58'49.9"N / 158°12'0.8"E	Dec 2001	+17.5	+0.2
Marshall Is.	7°6'21.7"N / 171°22'22.1"E	May 1993	+5.2	+0.1

Barometric Pressure, Water Temperature and Air Temperature Anomalies

The anomalies of barometric pressure, water and air temperature (**Figures 14** to **16**) are determined in the same manner as the sea level anomalies (**Figure 12**), except the trend is not calculated.

The **barometric pressure anomalies (Figure 14)** show substantially higher than normal barometric pressures were observed at SEAFRAME stations during the 1997-1998 El Niño. In November 2011 barometric pressures remained close to normal for this time of the year at all stations.

The **water temperature anomalies (Figure 15)** show warmer than usual conditions persisted at Fiji, Tonga and Cook Islands through November 2011, with anomalies of around +0.5ºC being observed. The water temperatures at PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu cooled during November and, like Marshall Islands, FSM, and Samoa, are close to normal for this time of the year. Slightly cooler than normal water temperatures were observed at the equatorial stations of Kiribati and Nauru during November 2011.

The **air temperature anomalies (Figure 16)** remained positive at Tonga and Cook Islands during November 2011, where conditions were around +1.0ºC warmer than usual. Air temperatures at other stations were generally close to normal for this time of the year. Over the duration of the record the air temperature anomalies generally (although not always) follow the water temperature anomalies, which is an indication of the large influence the ocean has upon the climate of the Pacific Islands.

Instrument Performance

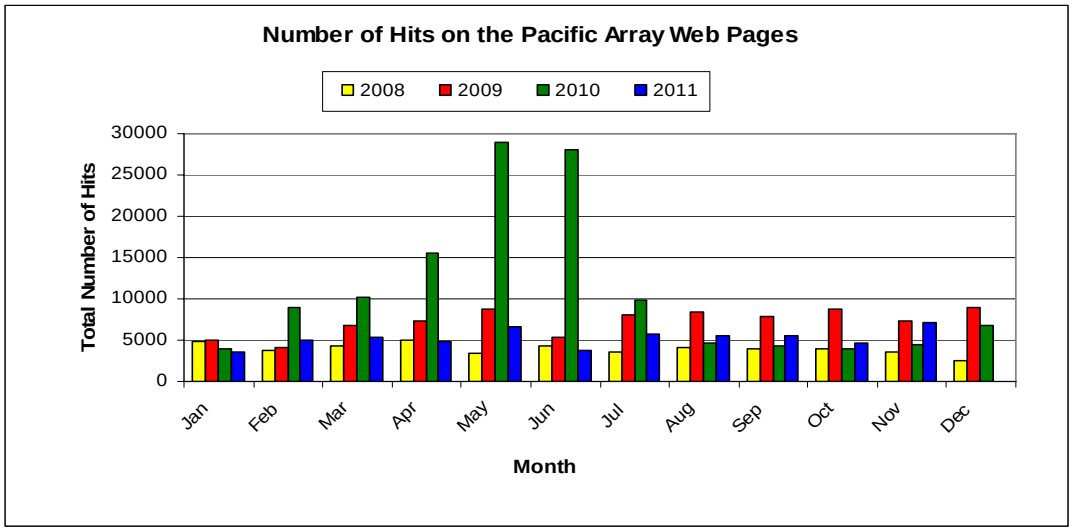
In **Figure 17,** which shows **sea level data return,** colour is used to distinguish five-year project phases. The number of missing days is noted in gaps in the bars.

Sea level data return during November 2011 was very good across the network. The Solomon Islands SEAFRAME station in Honiara was upgraded under the Observation Network Upgrade Project (ONUP) and ceased operation from 29 November 2011 for two days as the changeover of the logger was being completed. The ONUP project has now upgraded 5 of the 12 stations with modern data loggers and additional radar sensors, in addition to infrastructure and safety improvements where required. Small data losses resulting from calibration and maintenance service visits occurred at Cook Islands (on 1 November 2011), Samoa (15 November 2011) and Tonga (21 November 2011). The primary sea level sensor at Vanuatu malfunctioned for several days, most notably from 13-14 November 2011. It returned to normal operation on its own accord but unfortunately a data gap exists in the archived record because the sea level data from the backup sea level sensor was also of poor quality.

Minor satellite and dial-up communications problems resulted in small data loss from Nauru and Marshall Islands. Problems encountered with the ancillary sensors during November included the air temperature sensors at Nauru and Tuvalu, the water temperature sensors at Tuvalu and Tonga and the wind monitors at Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Tonga. The erroneous data received from these problematic sensors were removed from the archived records.

Web Hits

The following chart shows the number of times the Pacific pages on the *NTC* web site have been visited, by month since January 2008.



SEAFRAME STATIONS

SEAFRAME stations employ either a SUTRON or TELMET (for upgraded stations) programmable data logger, water level gauges and other sensors. The data logger and associated electronics are normally housed in fibreglass huts. A sketch of a typical SUTRON station is shown in the following figure.

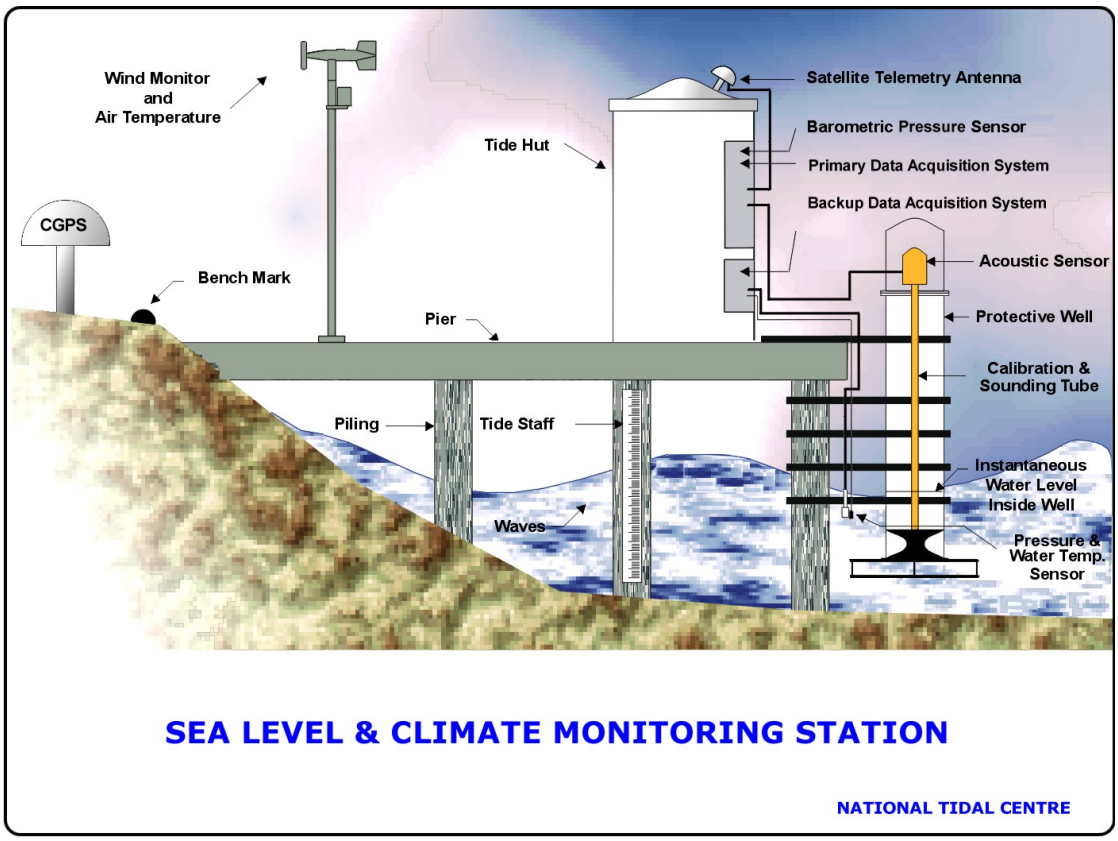
Water level sensors include:

(1) Primary water level using a Bartex 'AQUATRAK' acoustic-in-air sensor,

(2) Secondary water level (or backup) using a Druck pressure transducer mounted close to the seabed, and

(3) Tertiary water level using a Vega-puls radar sensor mounted above the water (at upgraded sites).

For SUTRON stations, the water level samples are averaged over three minutes and logged every six minutes, while meteorological sensors are logged on an hourly basis. With the upgraded TELMET stations, the water level samples are averaged over one minute and, together with meteorological data, logged every minute. Appropriate weighted-average and time-centred data is computed remotely which conforms to the SUTRON algorithm. Both SUTRON and TELMET data loggers have the memory capacity to store approximately one month of data.



The Observation Network Upgrade Project (ONUP) is scheduled to upgrade all Pacific SEAFRAME stations by mid-2013 with modernised TELMET data loggers, real-time satellite communications and additional radar-type water level sensors. The status of the station upgrades is given in the following table.

Status of Station Equipment Upgrades to November, 2011

Location	Lat / Long	SUTRON Installation Date	TELMET Upgrade Date
Cook Is	21°12'17.1"S / 159°47'5.2"W	Feb 1993	To be upgraded
Tonga	21°8'12.5"S / 175°10'50.5"W	Jan 1993	Mar 2011
Fiji	17°36'17.7"S / 177°26'17.7"E	Oct 1992	Jun 2011
Vanuatu	17°45'19.2"S / 168°18'27.7"E	Jan 1993	To be upgraded
Samoa	13°49'36.4"S / 171°45'40.7"W	Feb 1993	Aug 2011
Tuvalu	8°30'8.9"S / 179°11'42.6"E	Mar 1993	To be upgraded
Kiribati	1°21'54.2"N / 172°55'58.8"E	Dec 1992	Oct 2011
Nauru	0°31'45.9"S / 166°54'36.2"E	Jul 1993	To be upgraded
Solomon Is.	9°25'44.1"S / 159°57'19.3"E	Jul 1994	Nov 2011
PNG	2°2'31.5"S / 147°22'25.6"E	Sep 1994	To be upgraded
FSM	6°58'49.9"N / 158°12'0.8"E	Dec 2001	To be upgraded
Marshall Is.	7°6'21.7"N / 171°22'22.1"E	May 1993	To be upgraded

The *Monthly Data Report* is prepared by *NTC* for *AusAID*.

NTC would appreciate feedback from readers on the content and presentation of the *Monthly Data Report*.

Please spare a few moments to let us know your constructive opinion.

Further communication on the *Monthly Data Report* may be made to *NTC*. Anyone interested in a more detailed account of the project should contact:

National Tidal Centre
Bureau of Meteorology
PO Box 421
Kent Town SA 5067
Tel: (+618) (08) 8366 2600
Fax: (+618) (08) 8366 2693
Website: http://www.bom.gov.au/oceanography/tides.shtml

Or visit the project website at http://www.bom.gov.au/pacificsealevel

Please refer to: http://www.bom.gov.au/oceanography/projects/spslcmp/spslcmp.shtml
for details.

Please also note the following:

Figure 1

NOVEMBER 2011
SIX MINUTE WATER LEVEL OBSERVATIONS (m)

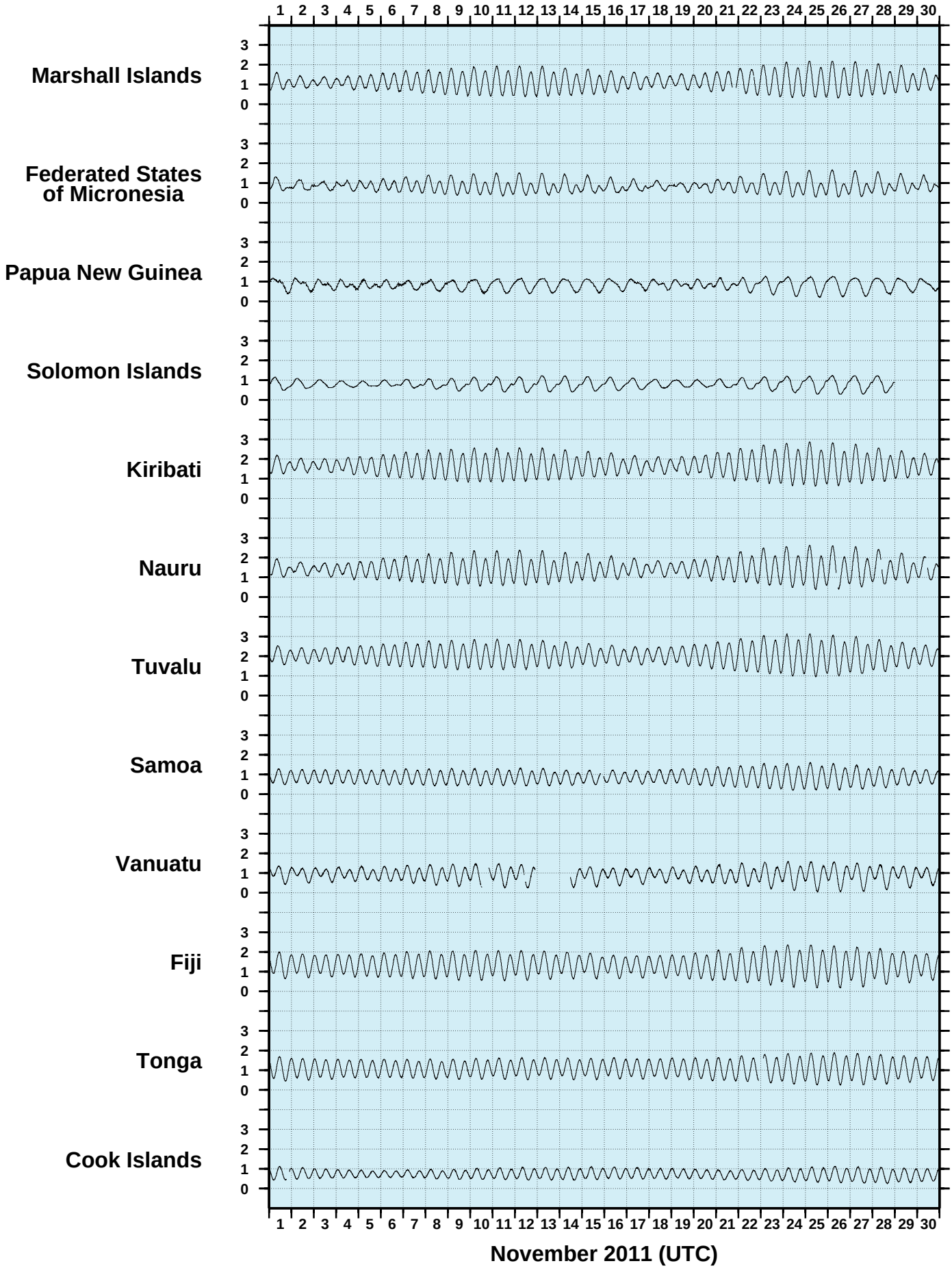


Figure 2

NOVEMBER 2011
SIX MINUTE RESIDUAL WATER LEVELS (m)

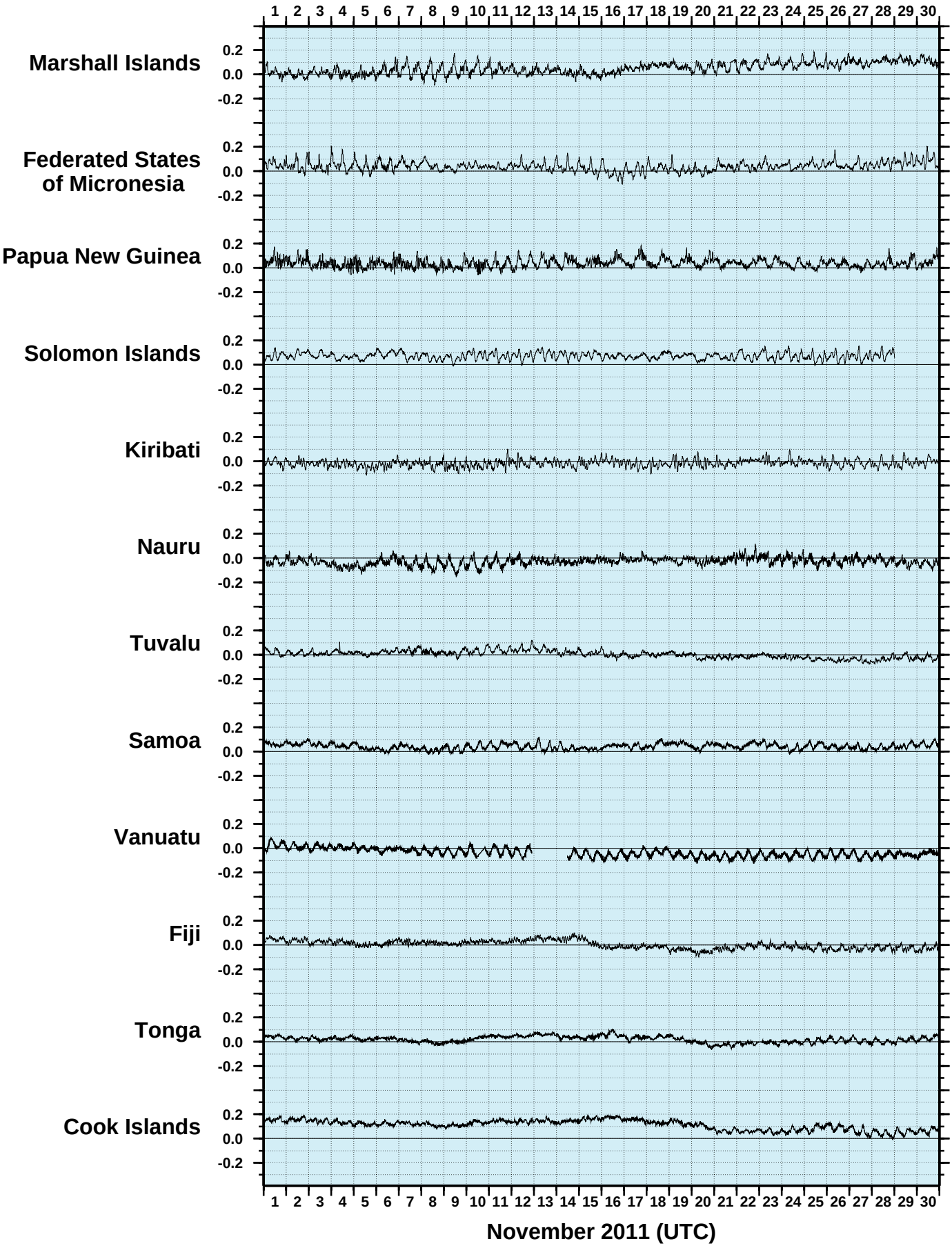


Figure 3

NOVEMBER 2011
SIX MINUTE RESIDUALS
ADJUSTED FOR ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE (m)

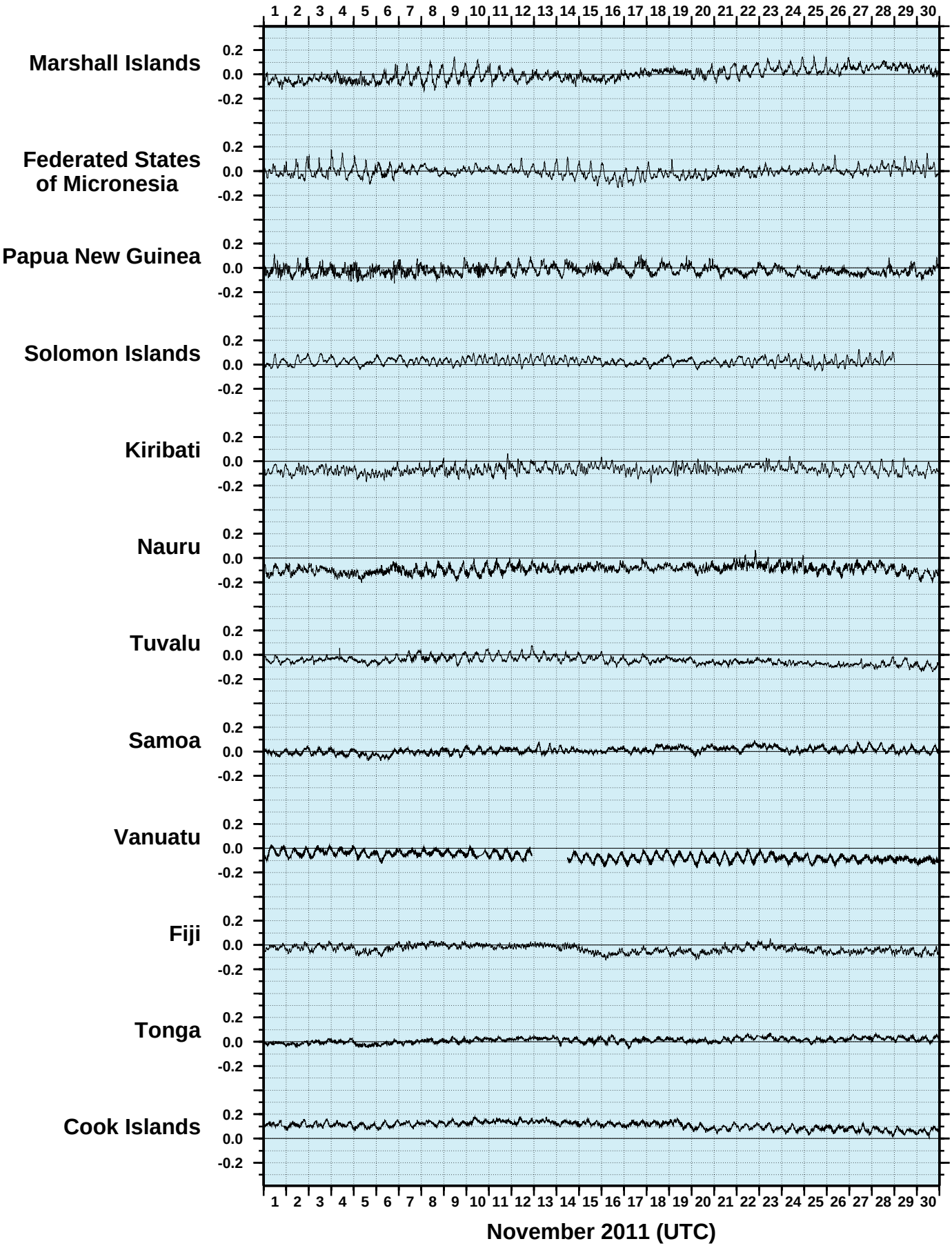


Figure 4

NOVEMBER 2011
HOURLY WIND SPEEDS (m/s)

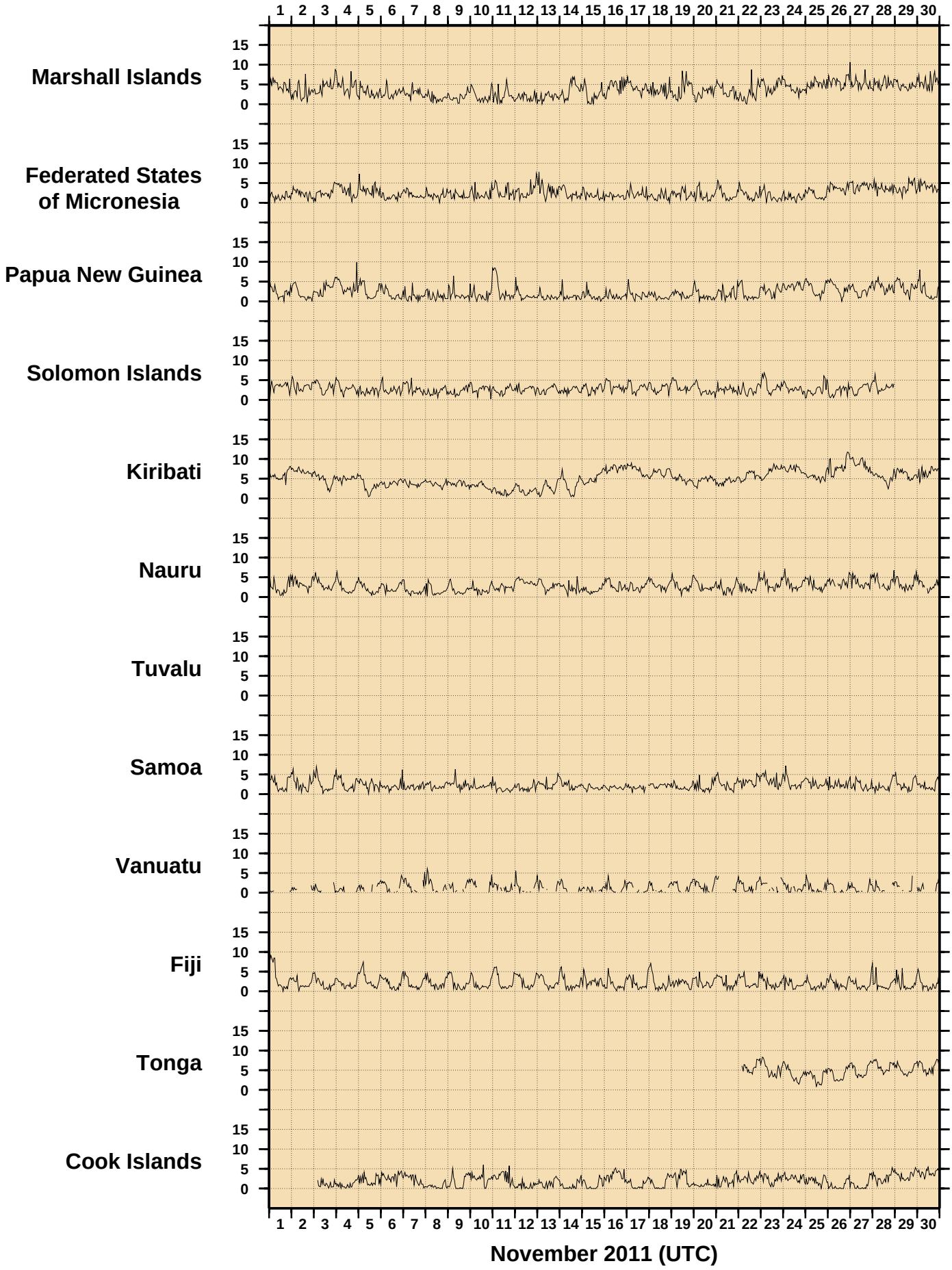


Figure 5

NOVEMBER 2011
HOURLY INCIDENT WINDS (m/s, deg True)

—— 10 m/s

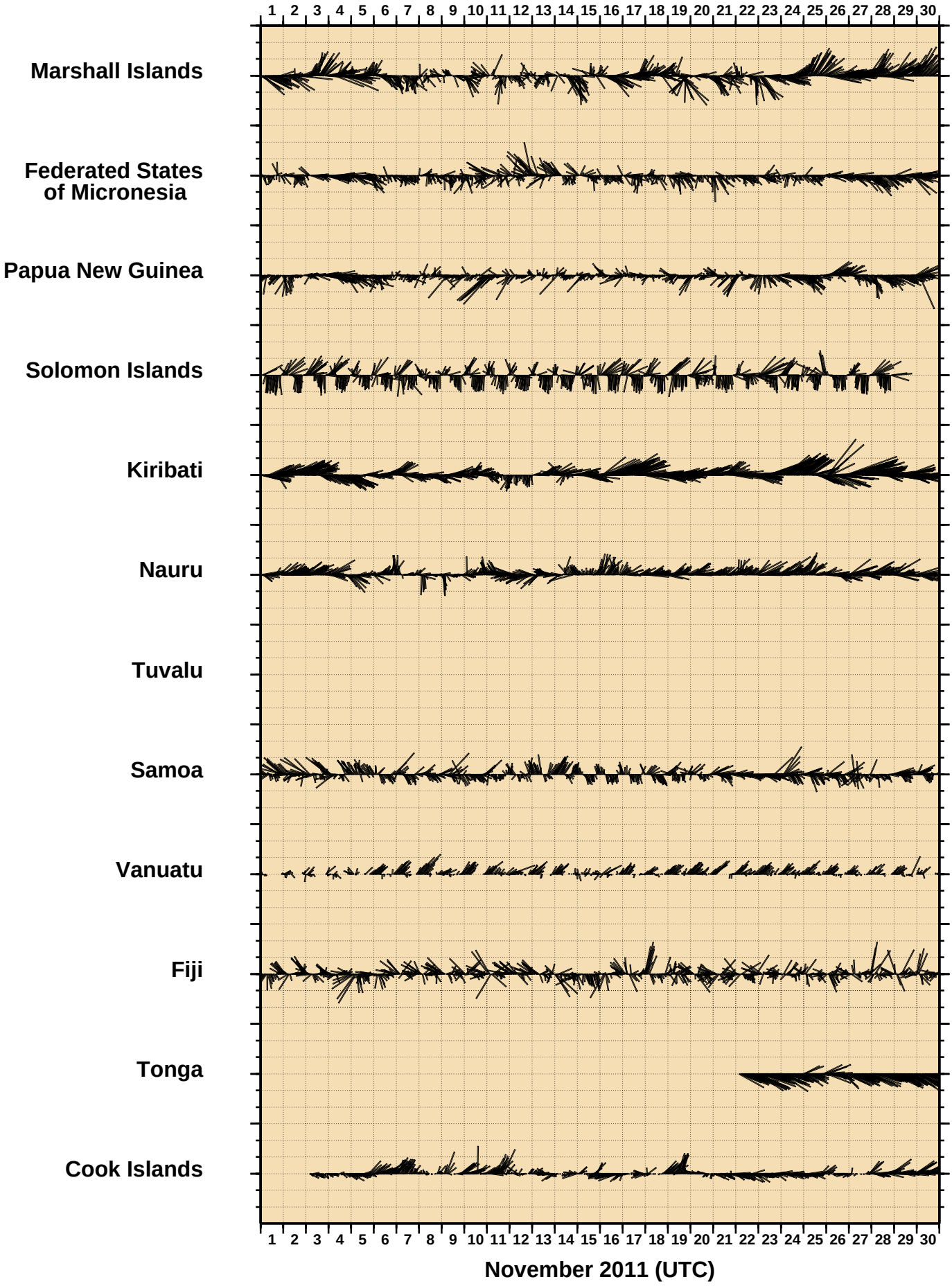


Figure 6

NOVEMBER 2011
HOURLY MAXIMUM WIND GUSTS (m/s)

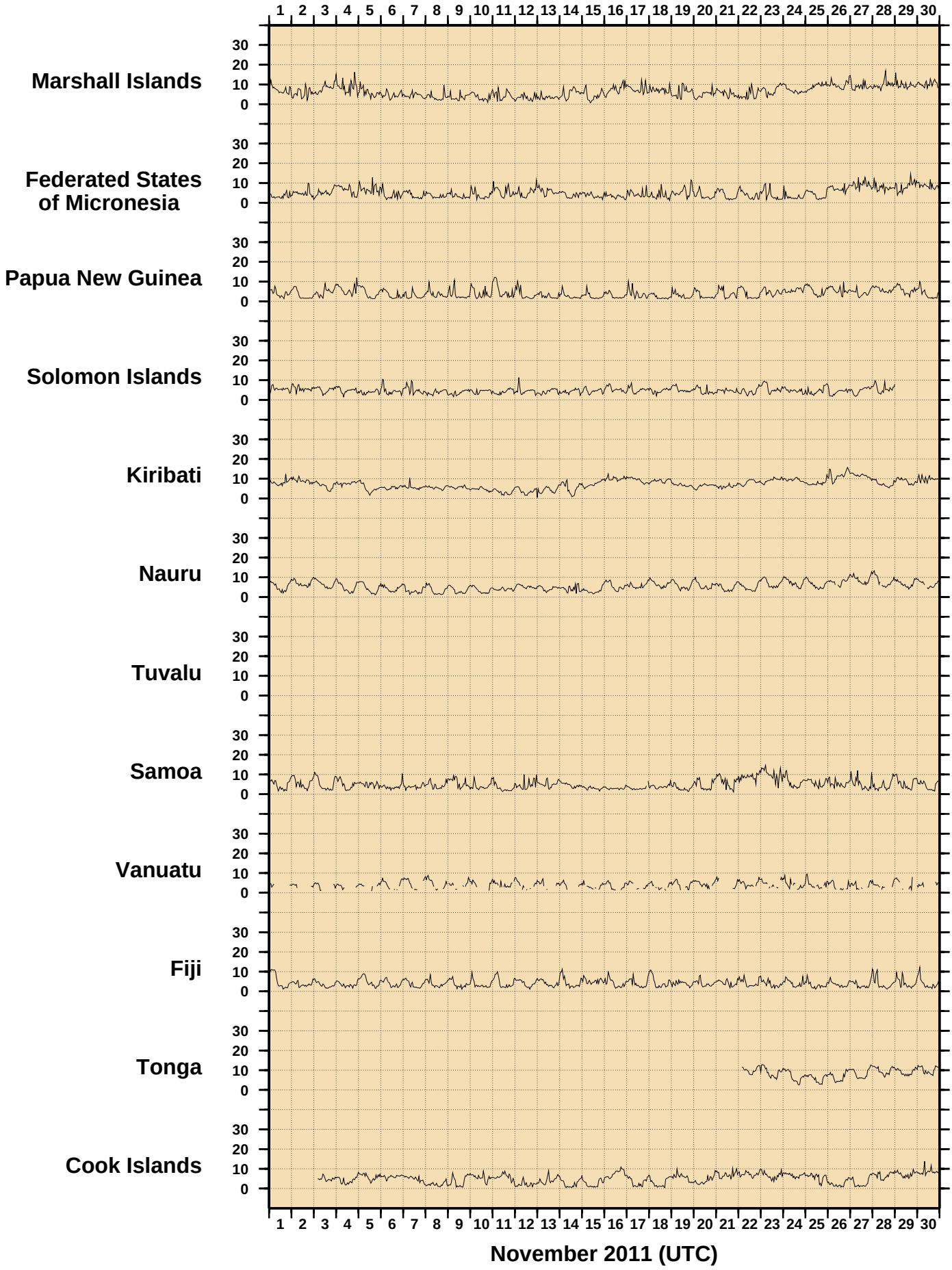


Figure 7

NOVEMBER 2011
HOURLY AIR TEMPERATURES (˚C)

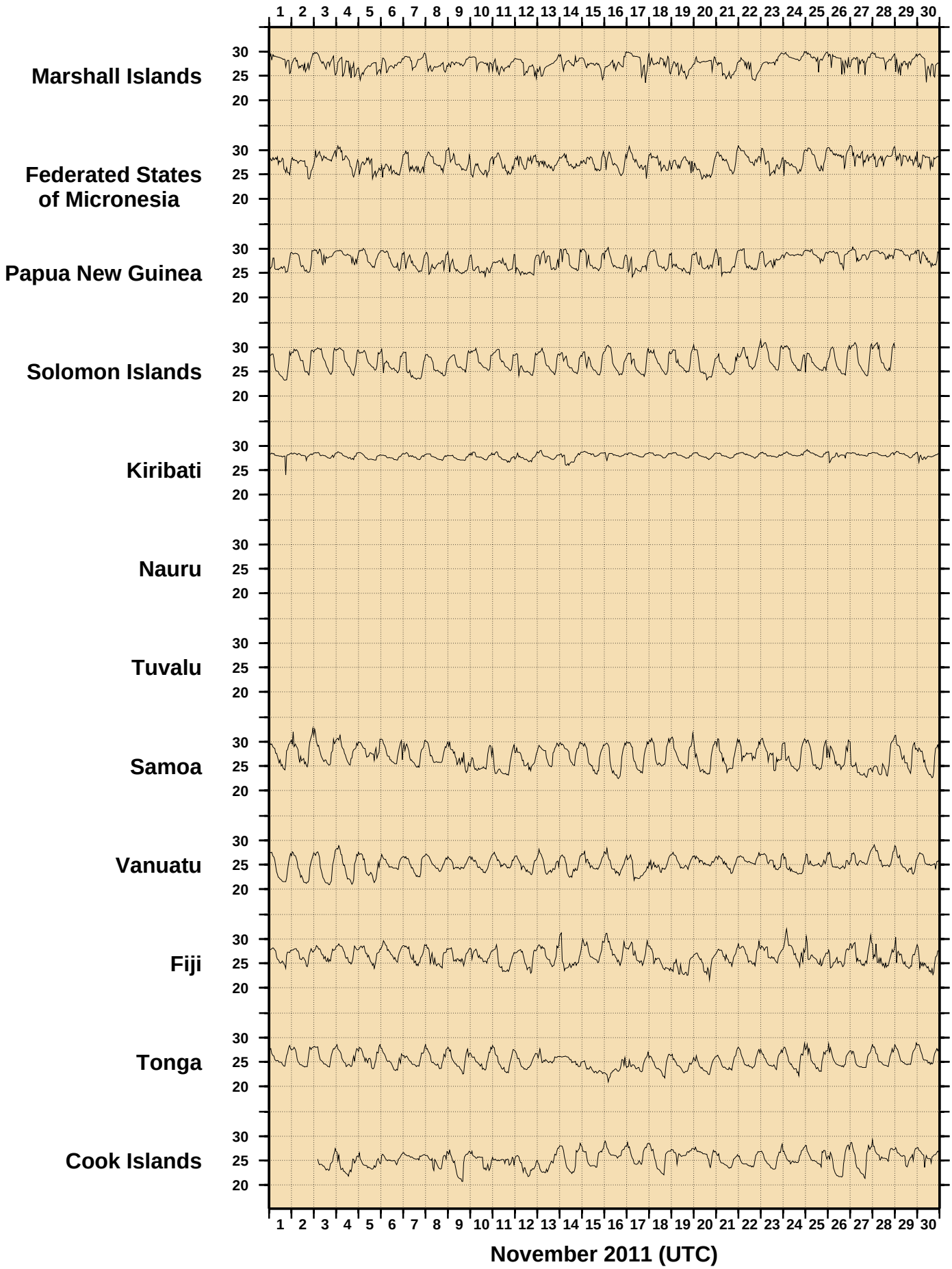


Figure 8

NOVEMBER 2011
HOURLY WATER TEMPERATURES (˚C)

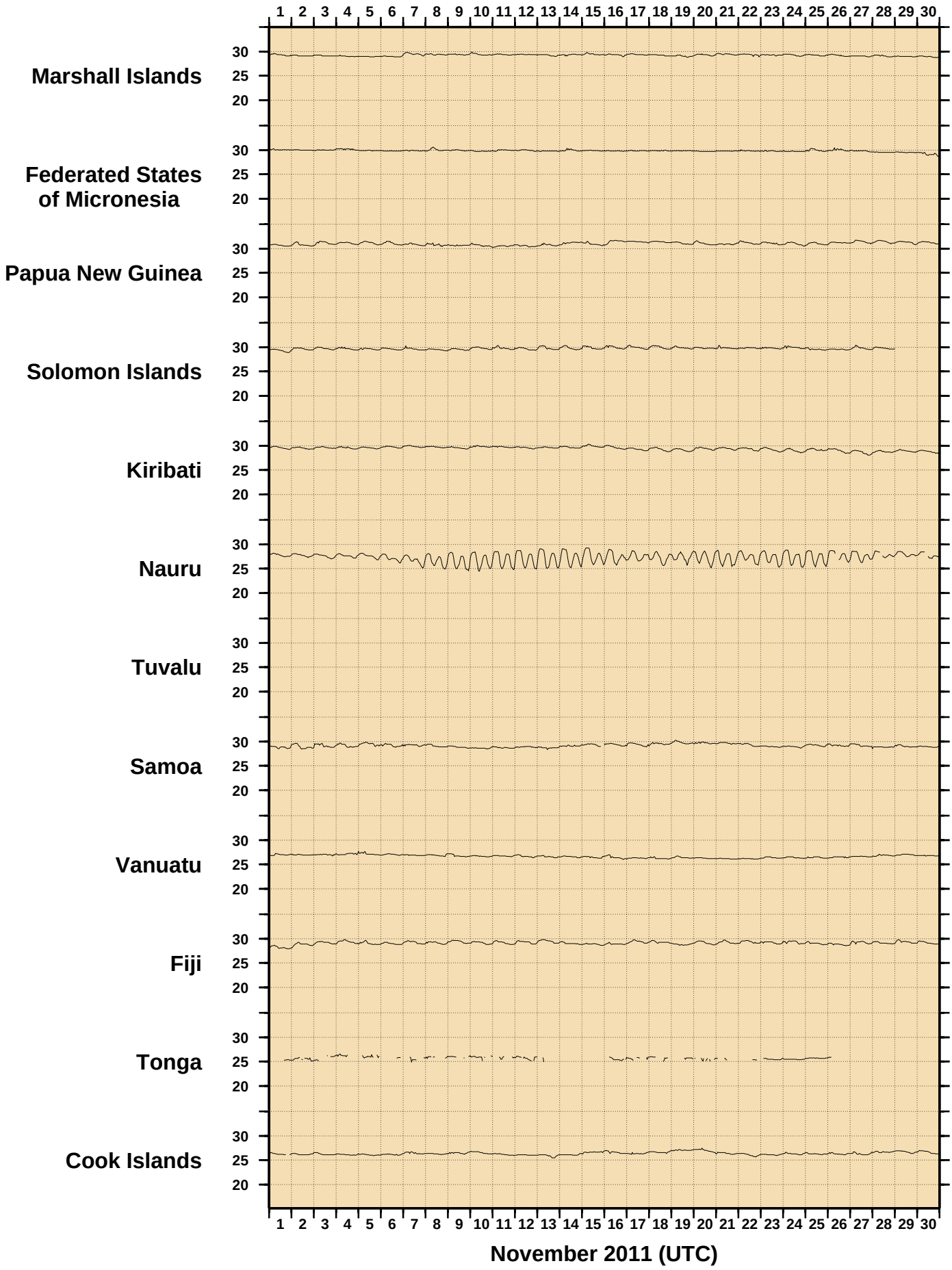


Figure 9

NOVEMBER 2011
HOURLY ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE (hPa)

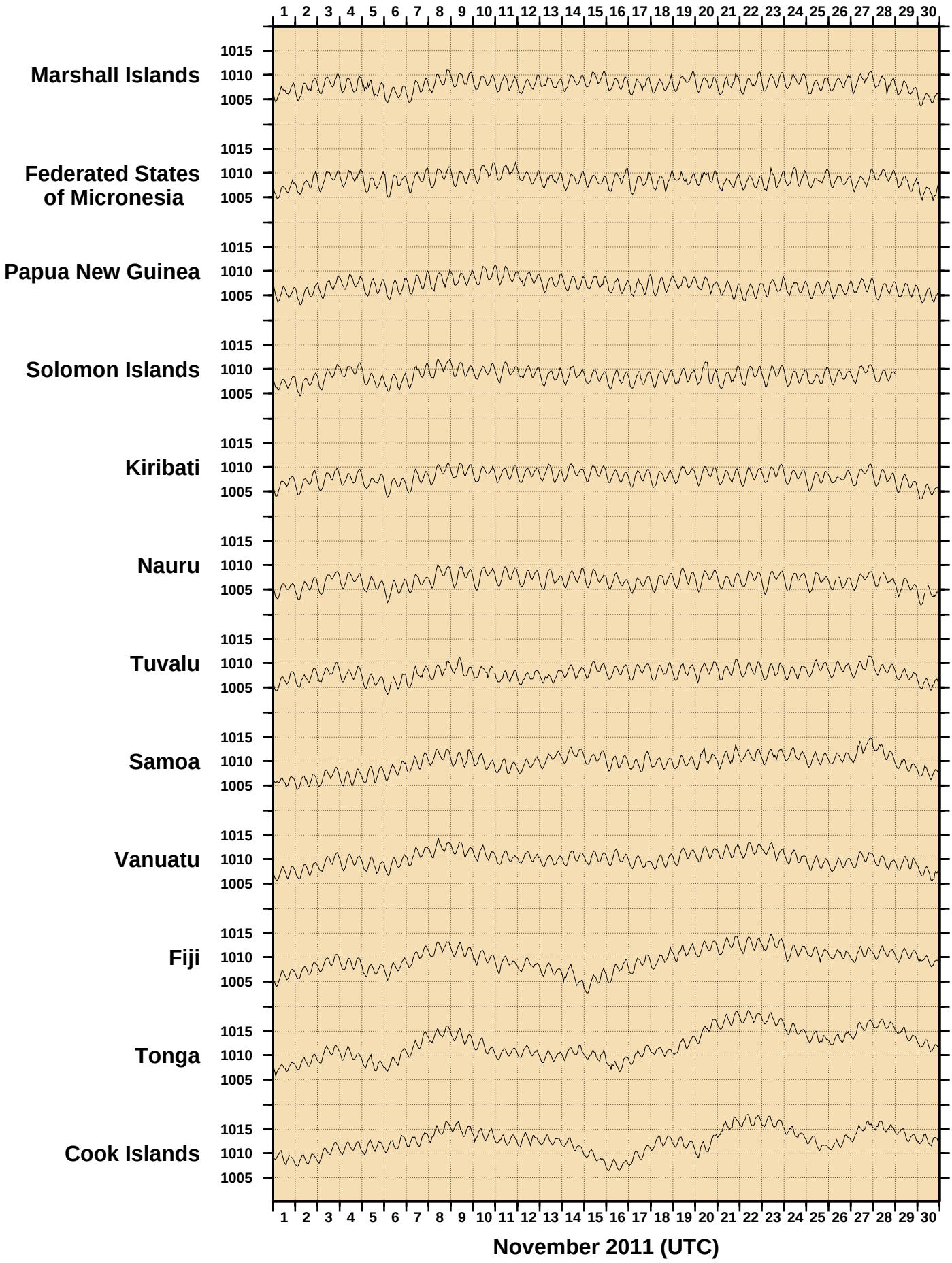
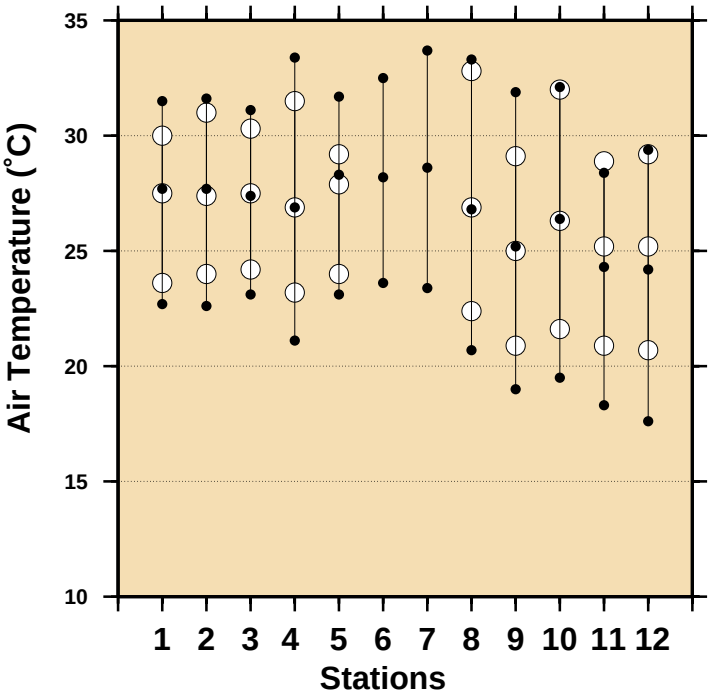
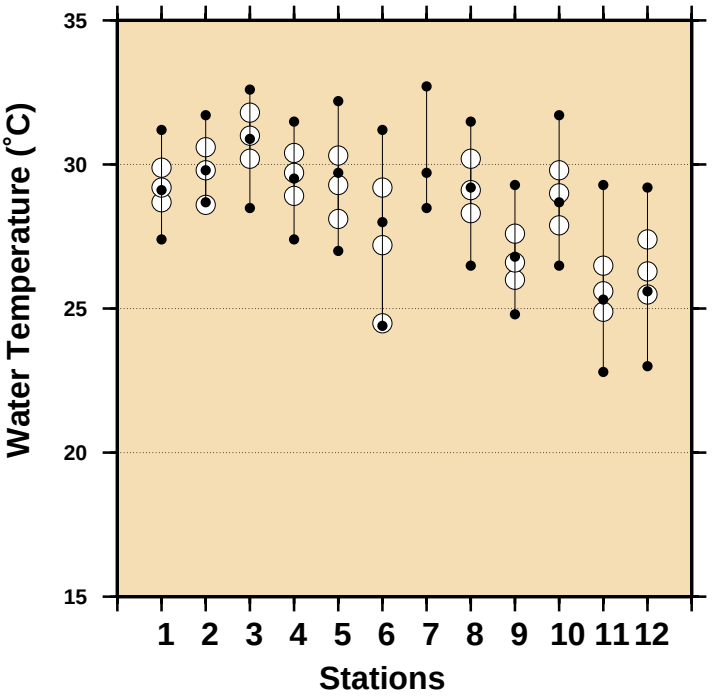
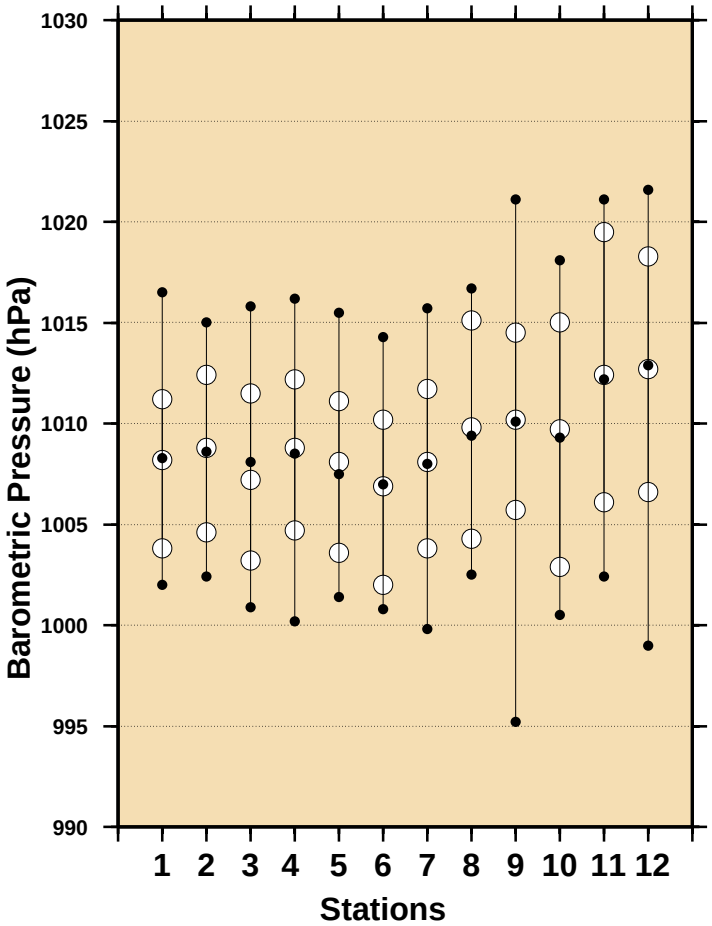


Figure 10

Comparison of November 2011 Max, Min & Mean with Long Term November Values







Stations

1 - Marshall Islands
2 - Federated States of Micronesia
3 - Papua New Guinea
4 - Solomon Islands
5 - Kiribati
6 - Nauru
7 - Tuvalu
8 - Samoa
9 - Vanuatu
10 - Fiji
11 - Tonga
12 - Cook Islands

November 2011 Maximum
November 2011 Mean
November 2011 Minimum

Long Term November Maximum
Long Term November Mean
Long Term November Minimum

Figure 11

MONTHLY MEAN SEA LEVELS TO NOVEMBER 2011 (m)

The zero line represents an arbitrary fixed offset from the zero of the tide gauge.

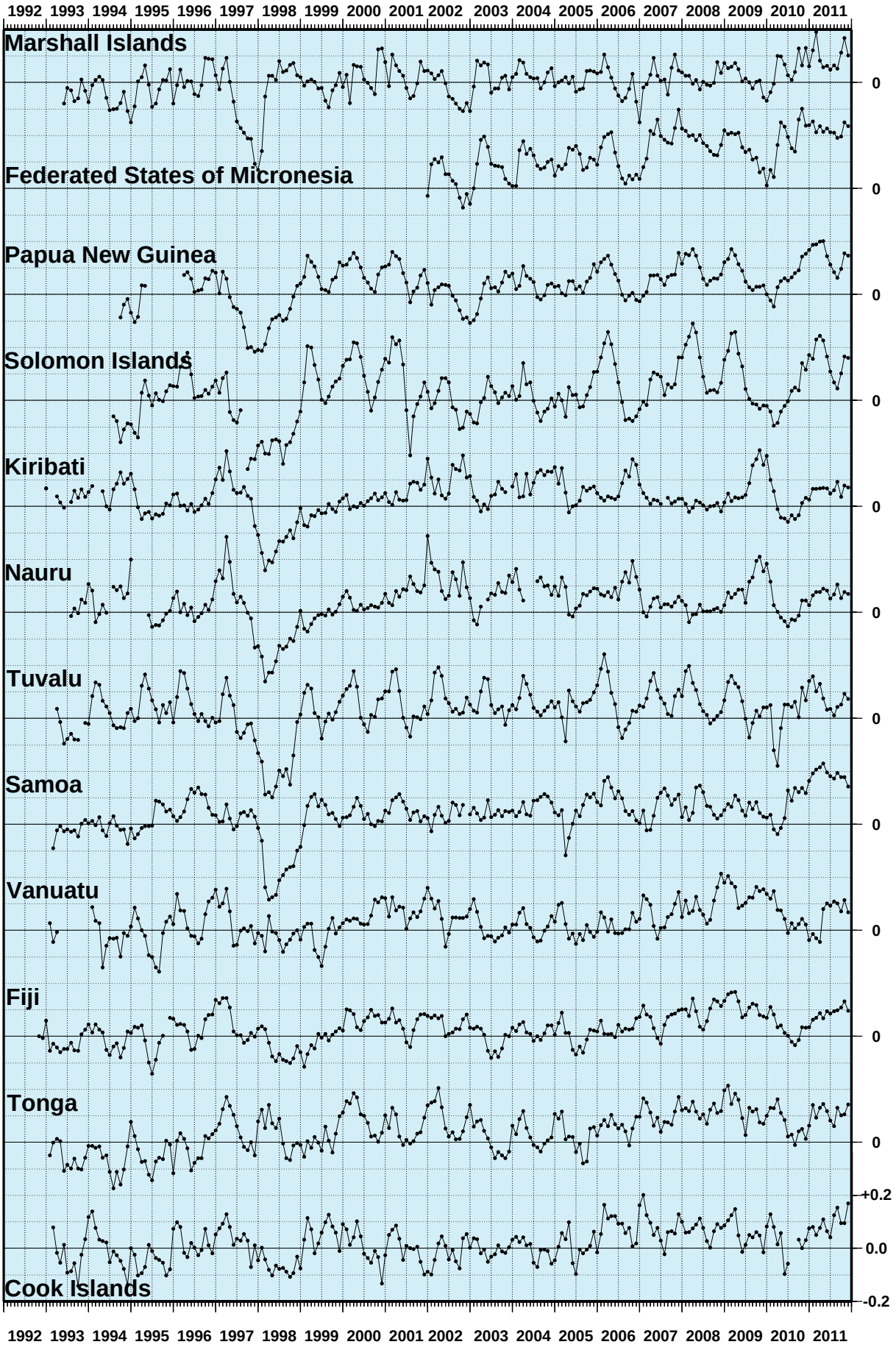


Figure 12

SEA LEVEL ANOMALIES THROUGH NOVEMBER 2011 (m)

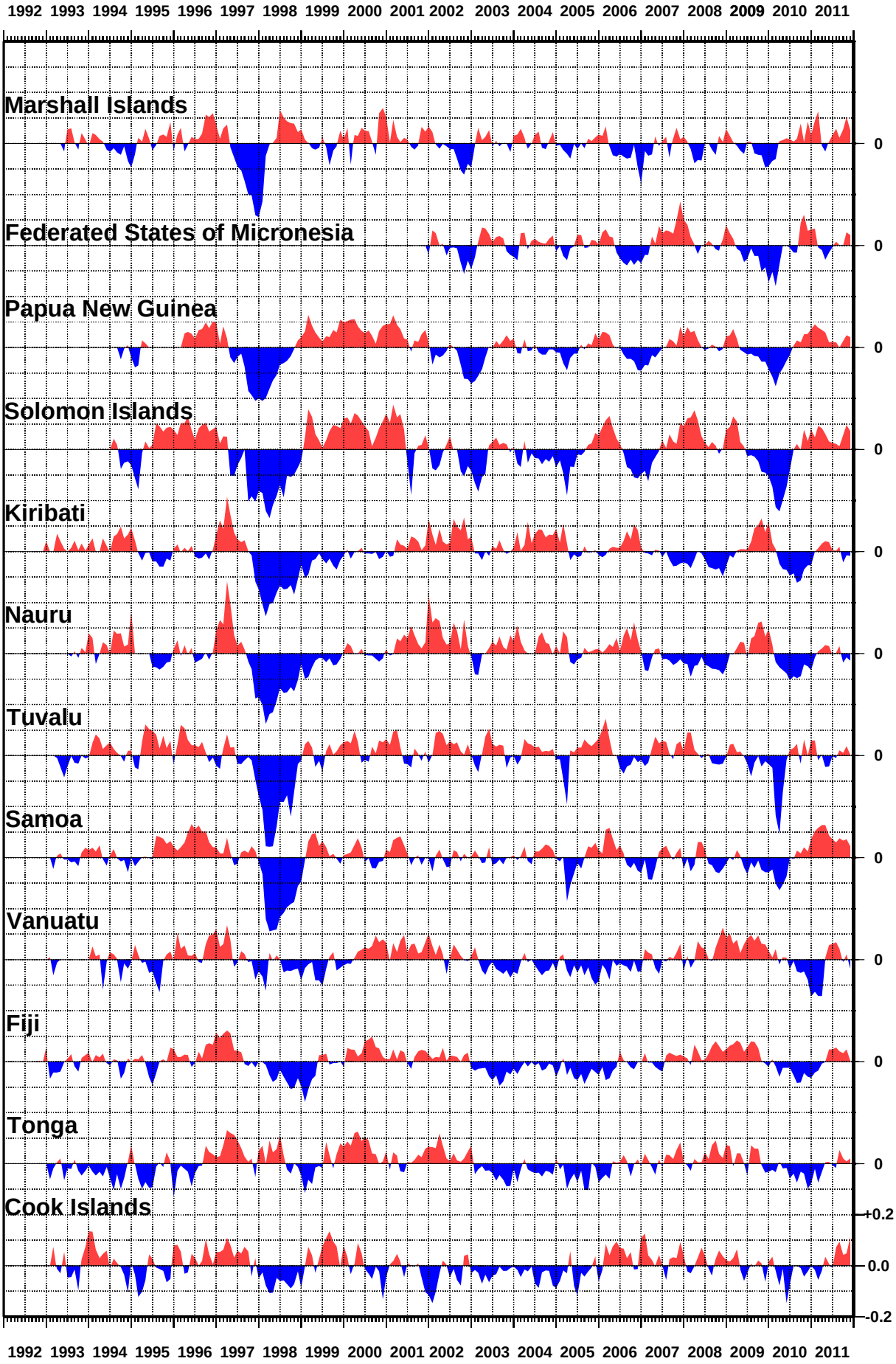


Figure 13

SEA LEVEL TRENDS THROUGH NOVEMBER 2011 (mm/year)

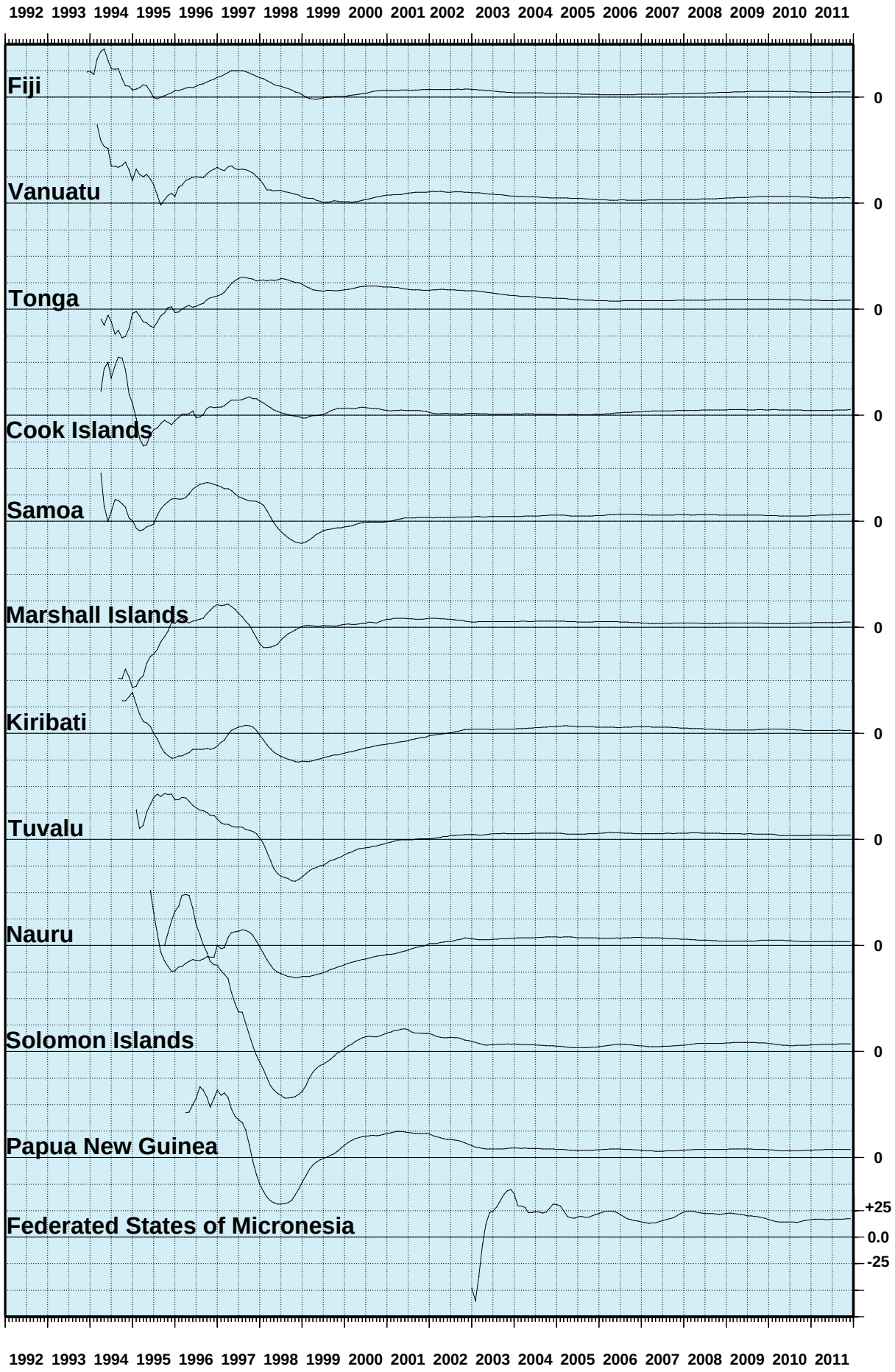


Figure 14

BAROMETRIC PRESSURE ANOMALIES THROUGH NOVEMBER 2011 (hPa)

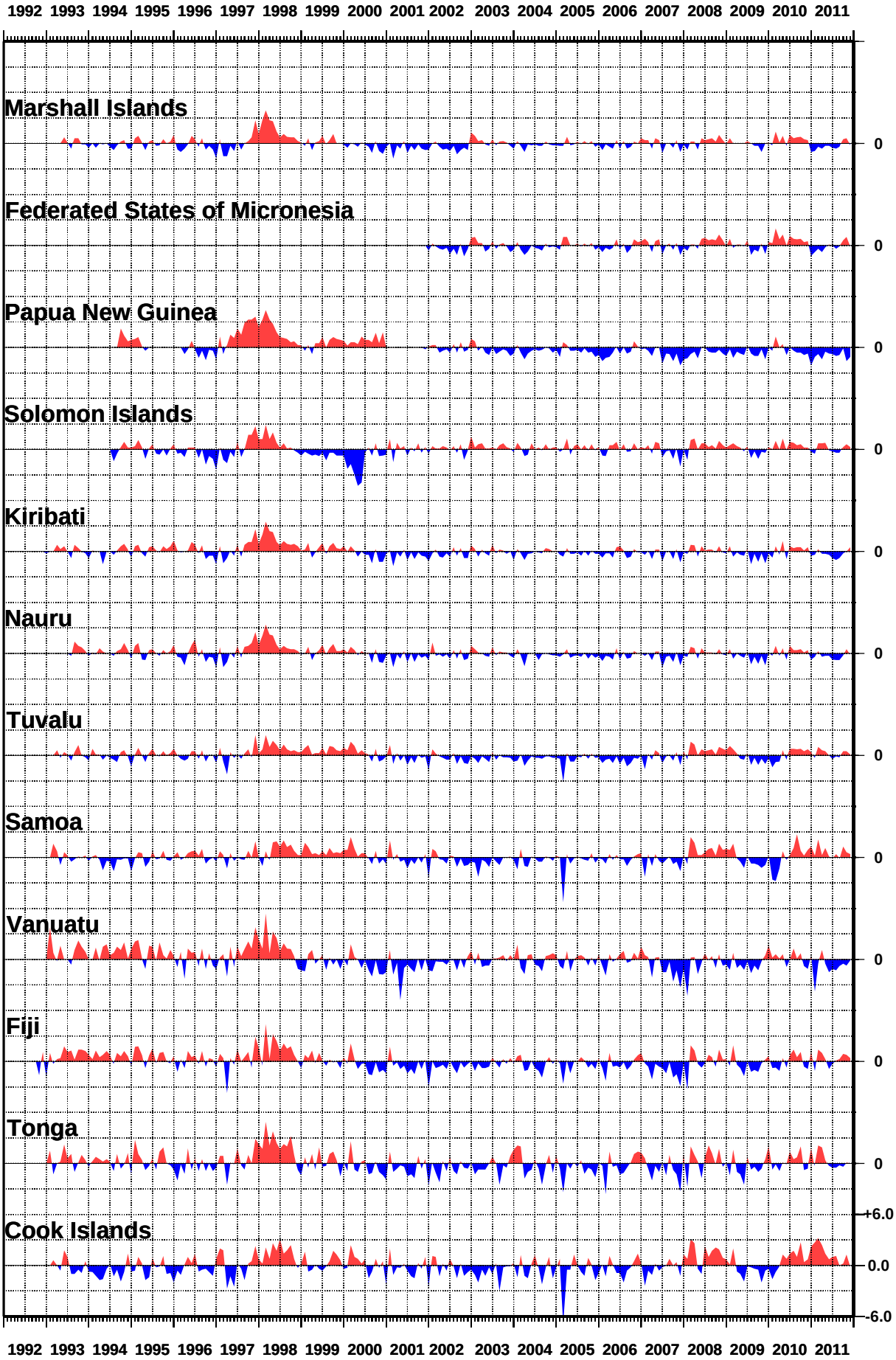


Figure 15

WATER TEMPERATURE ANOMALIES THROUGH NOVEMBER 2011 (˚C)

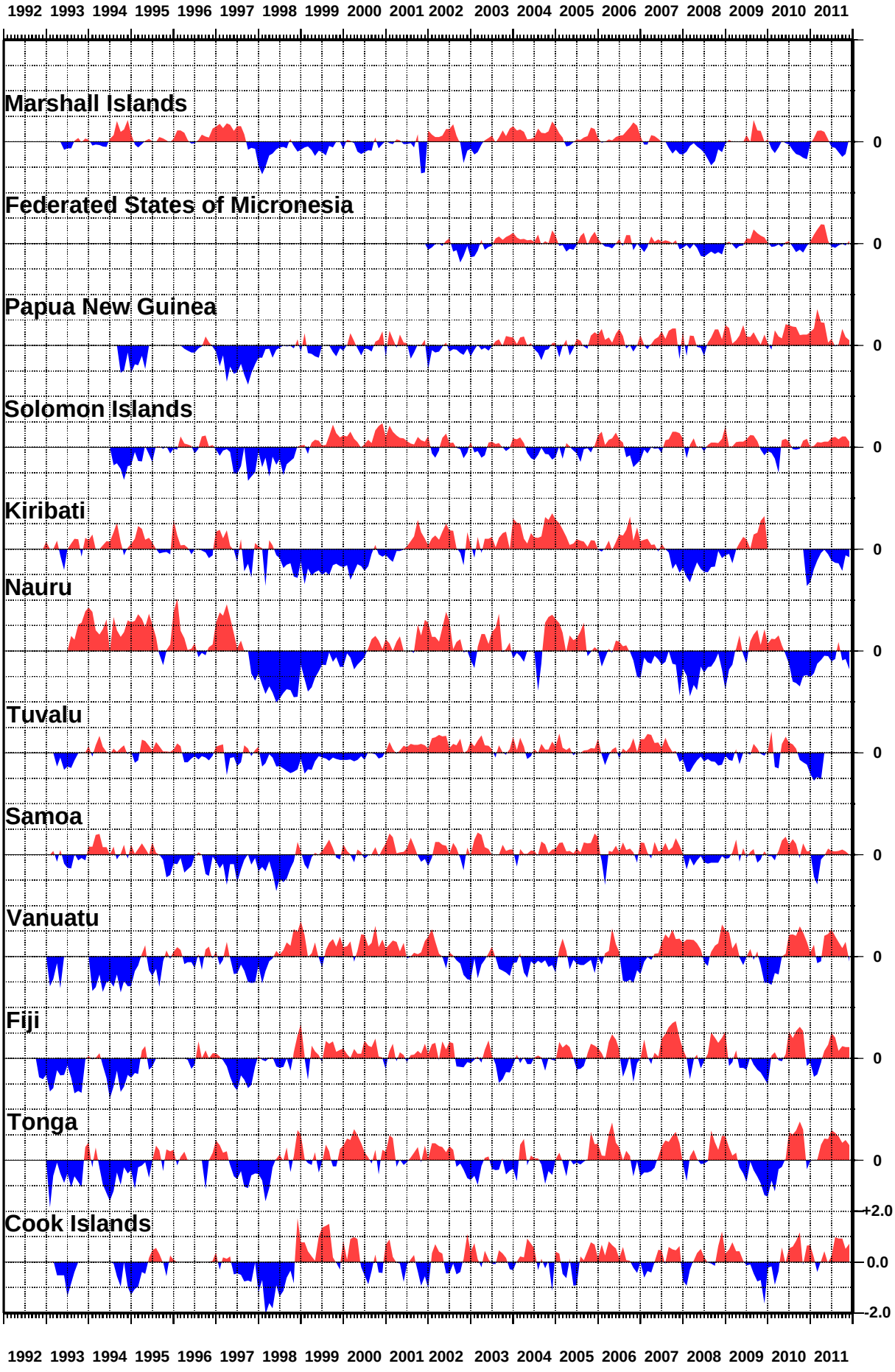


Figure 16

AIR TEMPERATURE ANOMALIES THROUGH NOVEMBER 2011 (˚C)

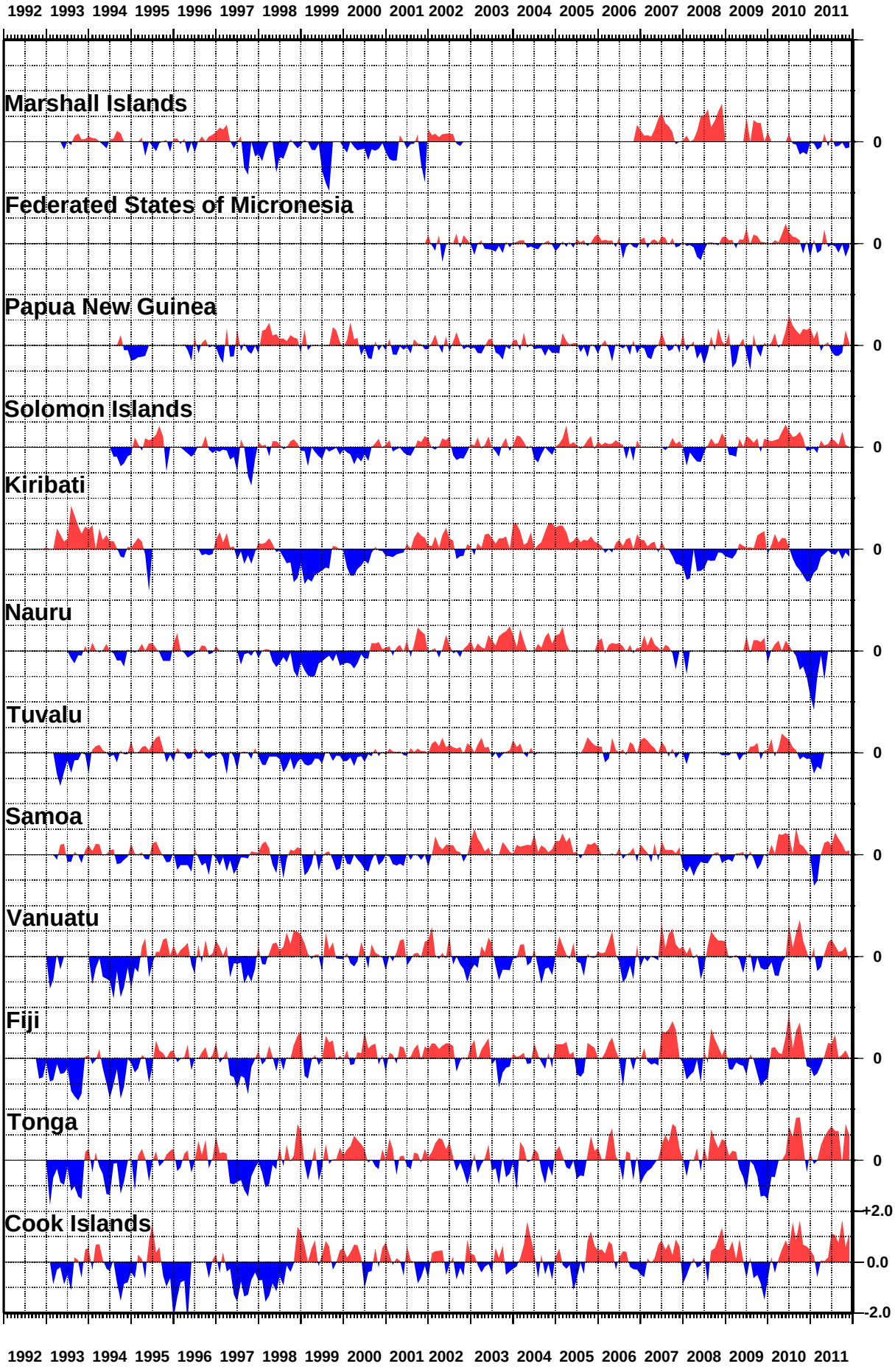


Figure 17

SEA LEVEL DATA RETURN

THE NUMBER OF DAYS OF GAP ARE INDICATED

GAPS INCLUDE TRANSMISSION, POWER AND LOGGER FAILURE

* Patchy record