

Oceans break high-temperature record in warmest February marked globally

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New York, March 8 (RHC)-- Ocean temperatures hit a record high last month, which was also the warmest February on record globally, scientists in the European Union have said. The average global sea surface temperature stood at 21.06 degrees Celsius (69.91 degrees Fahrenheit) in February, surpassing the previous record of 20.98C (69.77F) set in August 2023, in a dataset that goes back to 1979, the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the average air temperature in February was 13.54C (56.4F), 1.77C (3.18F) warmer than the pre-industrial average for the month. It marked the ninth consecutive month that was the warmest on record for the respective month of the year.

Earlier, January had also been recorded as the warmest first month of the year, surpassing the previous warmest January in 2020, as per C3S's records going back to 1950.

Last month, after scientists warned of the hottest January on record as the world continued a run of exceptional heat fuelled by climate change, C3S Deputy Director Samantha Burgess said, "Rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are the only way to stop global temperatures increasing."

The C3S scientists said while the El Nino climate pattern continued to weaken in the equatorial Pacific in February, marine air temperatures remained at an unusually high level. Marine scientists warned this week that a fourth global mass coral bleaching event is likely unfolding in the Southern Hemisphere, driven by warming waters and possibly the worst in the planet's history.

Corals bleach under heat stress, expelling the colourful, helpful algae that live in their tissues, leaving behind a pale skeleton. This makes them vulnerable to starvation and disease, and many die. This can lead to the collapse of fragile reef ecosystems, with coastlines left unprotected from erosion and storms and fisheries falling short.

El Nino, borne out of warmer than usual surface waters in the Eastern Pacific, alongside human-caused climate change, is fuelling the extra heat. "What is more surprising is that sea surface temperatures are at record levels over regions far away from the centre of the El Nino action, such as the tropical Atlantic and Indian Ocean," said climate scientist Richard Allan of the University of Reading.

This, he said, pointed to the strong influence of rising greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere. While the global average sea surface temperature record excludes the polar oceans, things are in bad shape there, too.

Antarctic sea ice reached its annual minimum extent in February, registering its third-lowest extent on record at 28 percent below average.

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