

**THE SOUTH PACIFIC SEA LEVEL & CLIMATE
MONITORING PROJECT**

MONTHLY DATA REPORT

NO. 146

AUGUST 2007



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

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Quality Certification:

I authorise the issue of this South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project Monthly Data Report for August 2007 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

August 2007

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.

August 2007

- The SEAFRAME network continued to collect high quality sea level and associated meteorological information for monitoring climate variability and climate change. Data communications problems were experienced at Kiribati until 9th of August when the problem was resolved.
- Monthly mean sea levels observed from SEAFRAME installations were generally near normal and within 5 cm of what is expected at this time of the year.
- Monthly mean air and water temperatures were warmer than normal at many stations, which is consistent with the warmer than normal sea surface temperatures observed by satellites across the southwest Pacific region.
- The SEAFRAME network assisted in monitoring a tsunami that propagated across the Pacific Ocean following a magnitude Mw7.9 earthquake near the coast of Peru on the 15th of August. Tsunami signals were detected as high as 30cm at Samoa and 27cm at Vanuatu.
- Climate conditions reminiscent of a weak La Niña continued to be observed across the equatorial Pacific during August, including cooler than normal surface and subsurface temperatures across the central and eastern equatorial Pacific and stronger than normal Trade Winds.
- The majority of international climate models predict that cool conditions will persist at La Niña thresholds across the Pacific for the remainder of 2007. Forecast predictions and historical observations suggest a basin-wide La Niña event is unlikely to develop this late in the year.

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 August, 2007				
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	+4.2	+0.1
Tonga	21°8'12.5"S / 175°10'50.5"W	Jan 1993	+8.3	+0.1
Fiji	17°36'17.7"S / 177°26'17.7"E	Oct 1992	+3.1	+0.1
Vanuatu	17°45'19.2"S / 168°18'27.7"E	Jan 1993	+3.3	+0.1
Samoa	13°49'36.4"S / 171°45'40.7"W	Feb 1993	+6.2	+0.1
Tuvalu	8°30'8.9"S / 179°11'42.6"E	Mar 1993	+5.8	0.0
Kiribati	1°21'54.2"N / 172°55'58.8"E	Dec 1992	+5.8	-0.1
Nauru	0°31'45.9"S / 166°54'36.2"E	Jul 1993	+6.7	-0.2
Solomon Is.	9°25'44.1"S / 159°57'19.3"E	Jul 1994	+5.2	+0.2
PNG	2°2'31.5"S / 147°22'25.6"E	Sep 1994	+6.4	+0.1
FSM	6°58'49.9"N / 158°12'0.8"E	Dec 2001	+17.5	+0.9
Marshall Is.	7°6'21.7"N / 171°22'22.1"E	May 1993	+3.9	-0.1

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the August 2007 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 gauges 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. SEAFRAME gauges were installed in the participating Forum Countries.

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, that 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.

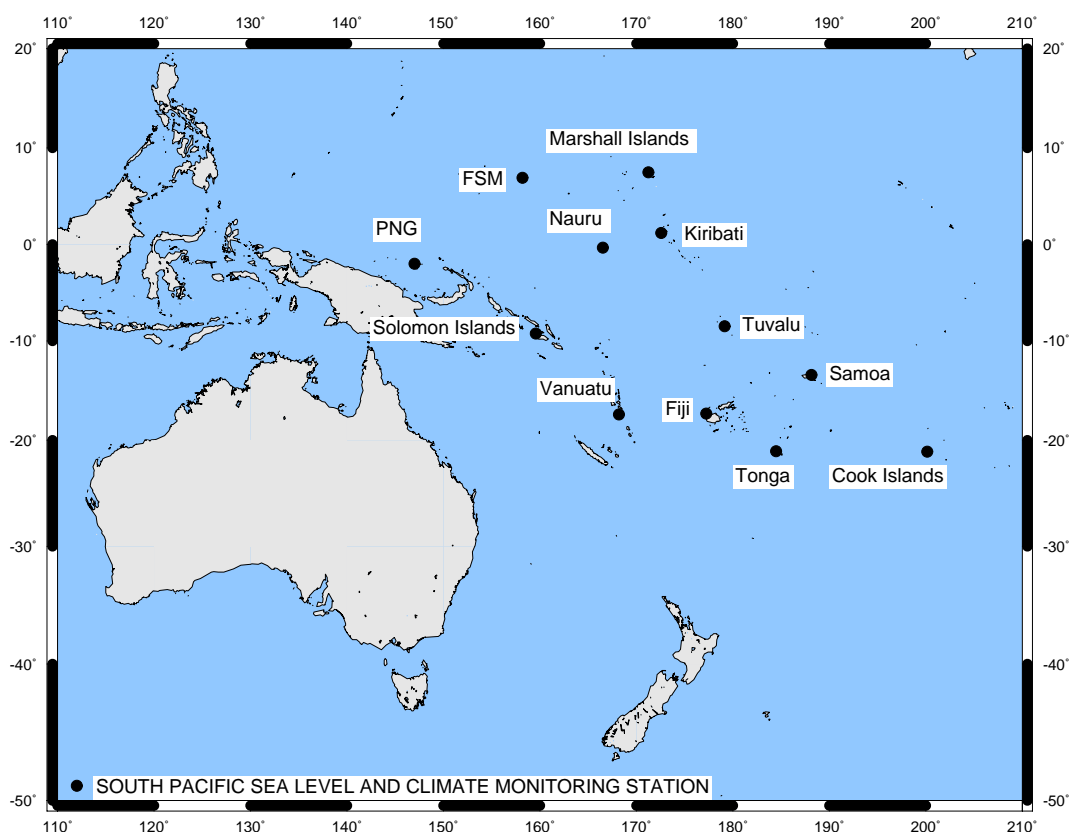


Figure A: *South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Stations*

AUGUST CLIMATOLOGY

A gradual strengthening of La Niña indicators was observed across the Pacific during August. In the eastern equatorial Pacific there was an expansion of cooler than normal sea surface temperatures and further cooling of subsurface waters. Trade Winds remained stronger than normal across most of the equatorial Pacific. The consensus among international climate models is that cool conditions will persist at La Niña thresholds for the remainder of 2007, although the threat of a basin wide La Niña event developing this late in the year remains unlikely.

The Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) experienced a modest rise from -4 in July to +2 in August (**Figure B**). The SOI has been indicative of neutral climate conditions in the Pacific since November 2006. In order for a La Niña event to be recognised this year, the SOI would need to persist at values of +7 or more for several months, which is considered unlikely.

Cooler than normal sea surface temperatures were observed in the eastern equatorial Pacific during August (**Figures C and E**), and have extended further westward in comparison to July. Sea surface temperatures remained slightly warmer than normal in the western equatorial Pacific and near to slightly below average in the central equatorial Pacific. In the southwest Pacific region patches of warmer than normal sea surface temperatures continued to be observed during August (**Figure C**).

Cooler than normal subsurface temperatures continued to be observed along the thermocline across much of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean during August (**Figure D**). This pattern has been maintained by stronger than normal Trade Winds across much of the equatorial Pacific. Warmer than normal subsurface waters were observed in the west-central 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 near the dateline. During La Niña (cold-episode) conditions there is a reversal of this situation, with stronger Trade Winds and decreased cloudiness in the central Pacific. The TAO/TRITON array of moored buoys revealed Trade Winds were slightly stronger than normal across much of the equatorial Pacific during August, although they were slightly weaker than normal in the far western Pacific (**Figure E**). Cloudiness in the equatorial Pacific near the dateline was below average during August.

The results from six international dynamic computer models predict that cool conditions will persist at La Niña thresholds across the Pacific for the remainder of 2007. The outlook is that La Niña conditions will warm gradually to neutral conditions by February 2008.

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/>.

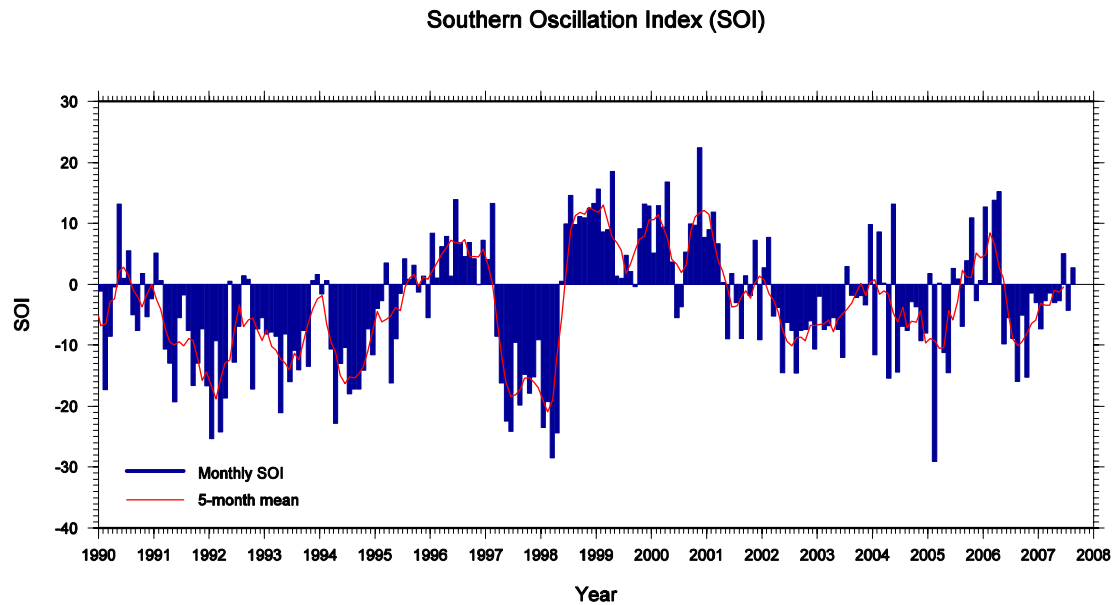


Figure B: The five-month weighted mean and individual monthly means of the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI). The SOI is ten times the monthly anomaly of the difference in mean sea level pressure between Tahiti and Darwin, divided by the standard deviation of that difference for the relevant month, based on the period 1933-92.

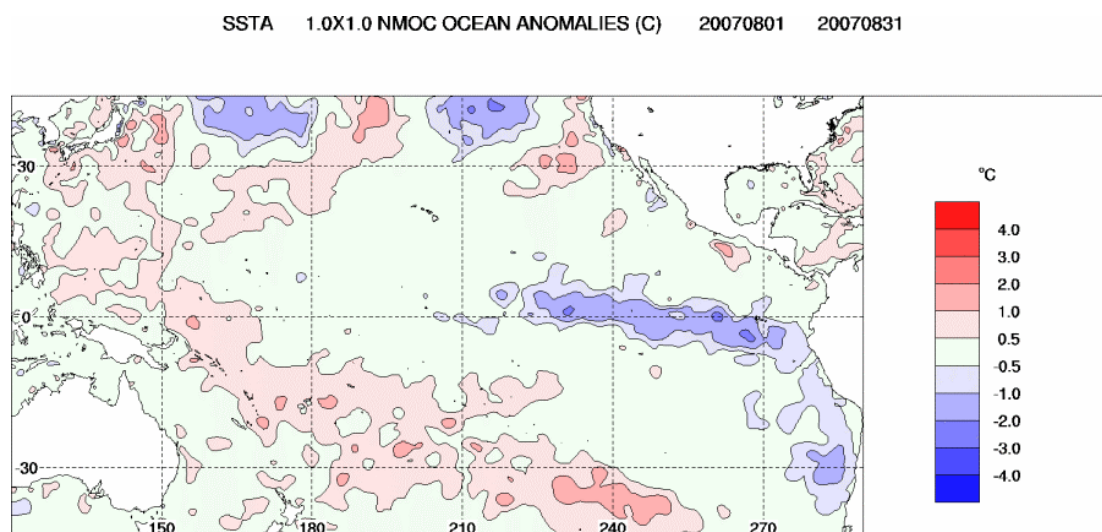


Figure C: Sea surface temperature anomaly ($^{\circ}\text{C}$) for August 2007.

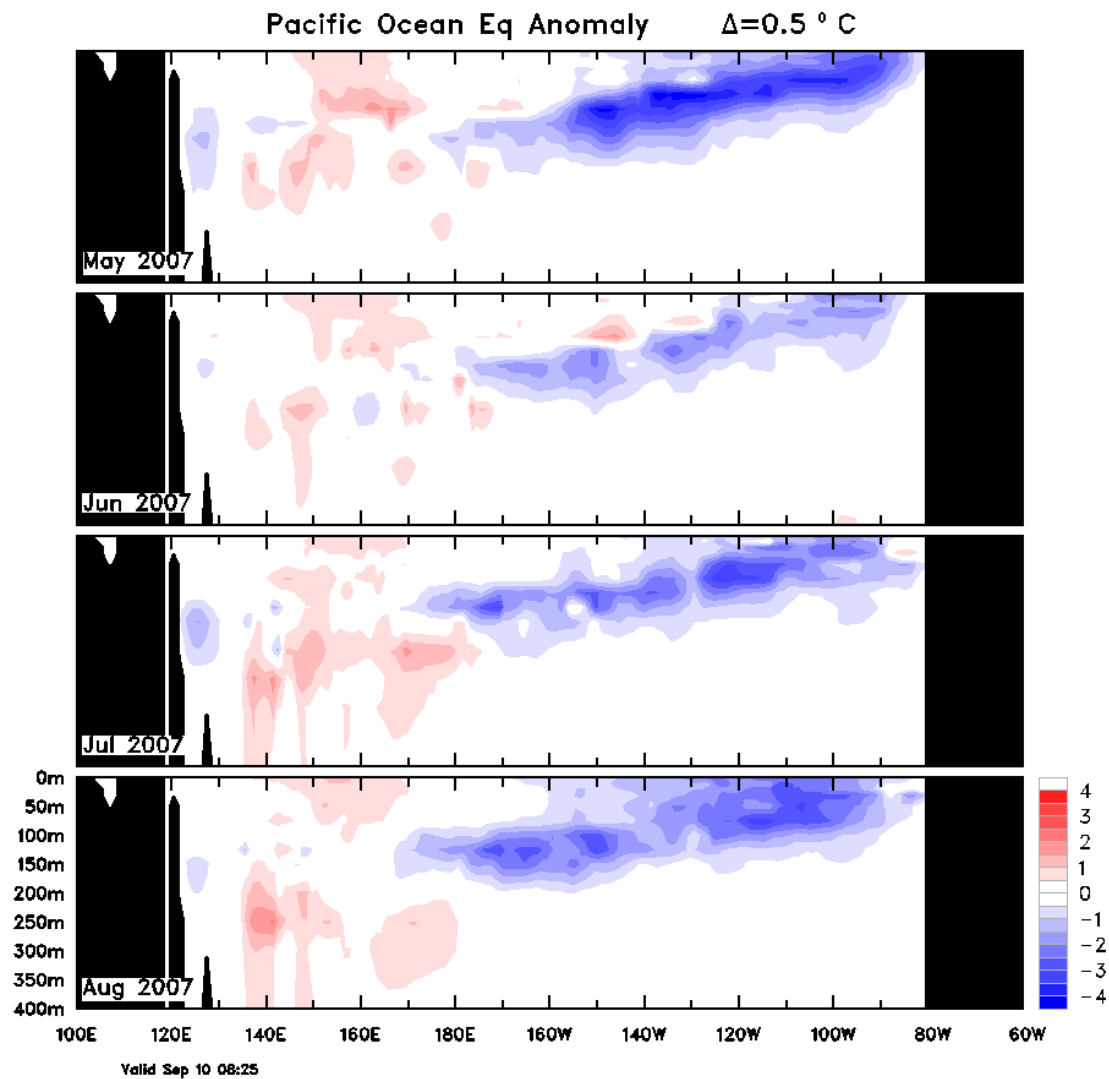
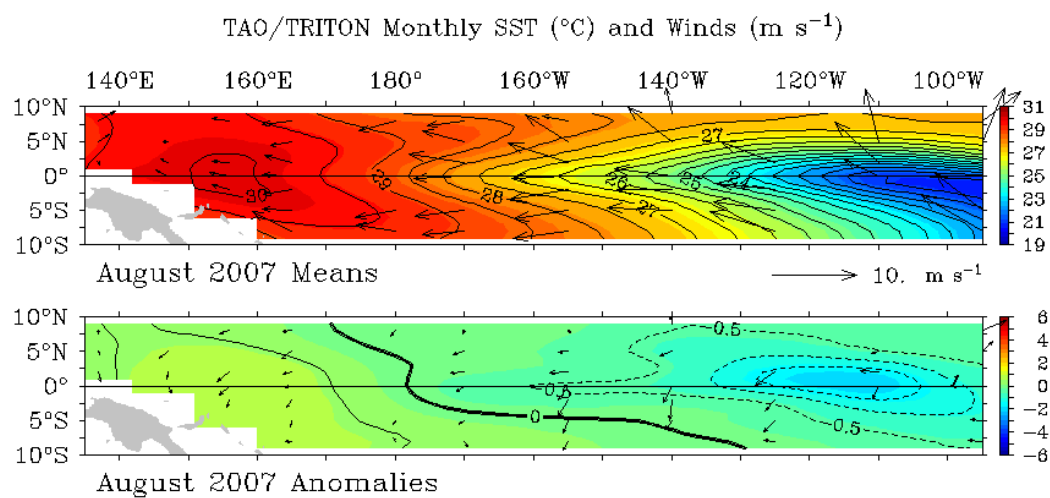


Figure D: Equatorial depth-longitude section of ocean temperature anomalies for May 2007 through to August 2007. Contour interval is 0.5°C .



TAO/NDBC/NOAA

Sep 12 2007

Figure E: Monthly mean wind vectors (top) and anomalies (bottom) for August 2007. The colour-shaded contours represent the monthly mean sea surface temperatures (top) and anomalies (bottom).

AUGUST 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). The greatest variations tend to occur close to the new and full moon. There was a new moon on the 12th of August and a full moon on the 28th of August UTC.

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 are an indication of the non-tidal fluctuations in the sea level record, such as those due to the short-term effects of the weather or tsunamis. The shape of the harbour in which the gauge is located influences residual sea level fluctuations. The gauge at Papua New Guinea (Manus Island), for example, often records residual sea level fluctuations due to a standing wave, or seiche, that arises within Seeadler Harbour when the wind suddenly changes strength or direction.

A tsunami propagated across the Pacific following an undersea earthquake of magnitude Mw7.9 that occurred at 23:41 UTC on 15th August 2007 near the coast of Peru. A tsunami signal is evident in the six-minute residuals (Figure 2) at Samoa, Vanuatu and Tonga. Inspection of one-minute SEAFRAME sea level data has revealed trough-to-peak tsunami signals of 30 cm at Samoa, 27 cm at Vanuatu and 10 cm at Tonga, as well as 5cm at Fiji and 2cm at Cook Islands.

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. The maximum wind gusts observed each hour are shown in **Figure 6** and show the strongest winds were observed at Tonga where they reached 20 m/s (39 knots) on the 1st of August.

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. The SEAFRAME at Nauru records a predominant twice-daily fluctuation in water temperature that is related to the tide, since it is 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 further 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.* Figure 10 reveals that no new August maxima or minima were set. However the minimum air temperature at Samoa, maximum water temperature at PNG and maximum barometric pressure at FSM all equalled previously set August records.

Mean Sea Level and Anomalies (Figures 11-13)

Figure 11 shows the **monthly mean sea levels**, which is a simple arithmetic average 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 to disrupt 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.

Relatively small sea level anomalies were observed at SEAFRAME stations during August 2007. Monthly mean sea levels were mostly within 5 cm of what is expected at this time of the year. Negative anomalies were observed at Nauru, Kiribati and Marshall Islands, but elsewhere monthly-mean sea levels were near to slightly higher than normal.

Sea Level Trends

The **short-term sea level trends** at individual stations as at August 2007 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*.

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Marshall Is.	7°6'21.7"N / 171°22'22.1"E	May 1993	+3.9	-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 August 2007 barometric pressures were mostly near normal across the region.

The **water temperature anomalies** (**Figure 15**) show water temperatures ranged from near normal to warmer than normal during August 2007. This is consistent with patches of warmer than normal sea surface temperatures across the Pacific Forum region as shown in Figure C. The largest water temperature anomalies were observed around Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga.

The **air temperature anomalies** (**Figure 16**) show higher than normal air temperatures were also observed at many of the stations in August 2007, particularly Marshall Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga and Cook Islands. 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.

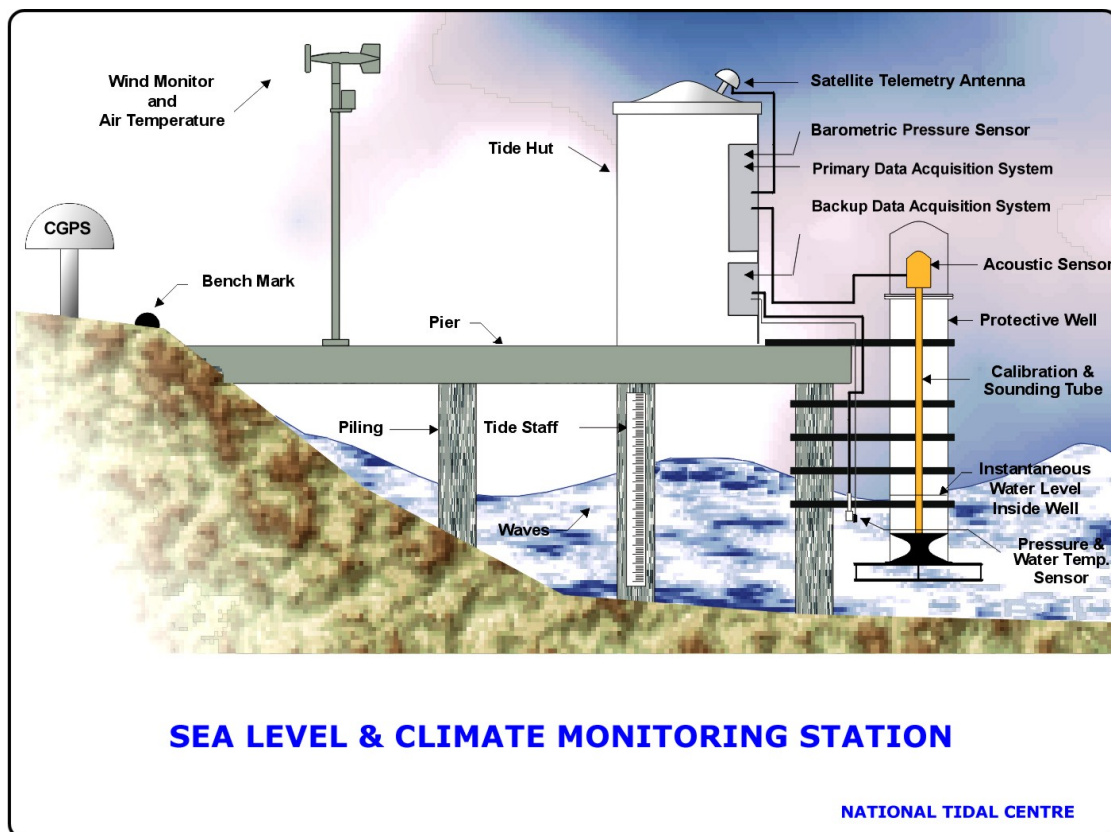
At Kiribati an outage in both satellite and telephone communications prevented data retrieval until 9th August when the problem was resolved. At Solomon Islands erroneous wind directions have been recorded since 30th July and have been removed from the record. Dial-up communications problems were experienced at Kiribati and Solomon Islands and some small data gaps may exist where data were unable to be recovered.

SEAFRAME STATIONS

SEAFRAME stations employ a SUTRON 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 station is shown in the following figure. Water level sensors include:

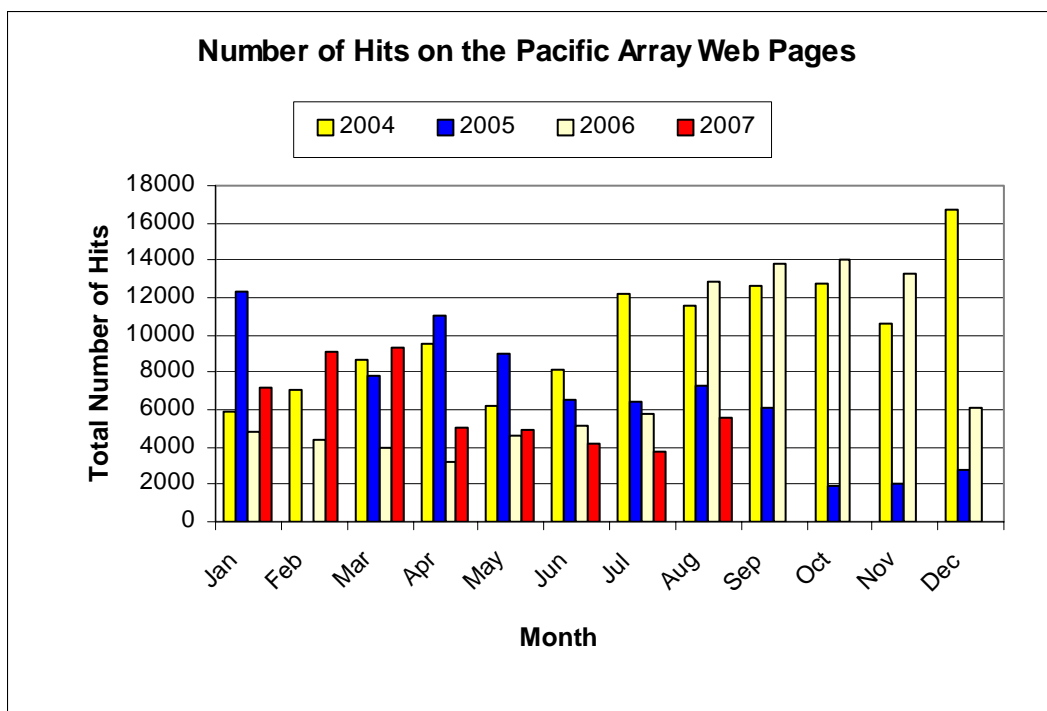
- (1) Primary water level using a Bartex 'AQUATRAK' acoustic-in-air sensor, and
- (2) Secondary water level (or backup) using a Druck pressure transducer mounted close to the seabed.

The primary and backup water level sensors provide water level values, which are averaged over three minutes and are logged every six minutes. The data logger has the memory capacity to store approximately one month of data. The meteorological sensors are logged to the SUTRON data logger on an hourly basis.



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 2004. Note that the web statistics for February 2005 are not available due to technical difficulties.



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:

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Website: <http://www.bom.gov.au/oceanography>

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:

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Individuals and organisations are advised that quality controlled six-minute or hourly data from these stations are available on request from *NTC*. Some handling fees may be charged. For commercial agencies requesting data, some additional costs may be levied.

Figure 1

AUGUST 2007

SIX MINUTE WATER LEVEL OBSERVATIONS (m)

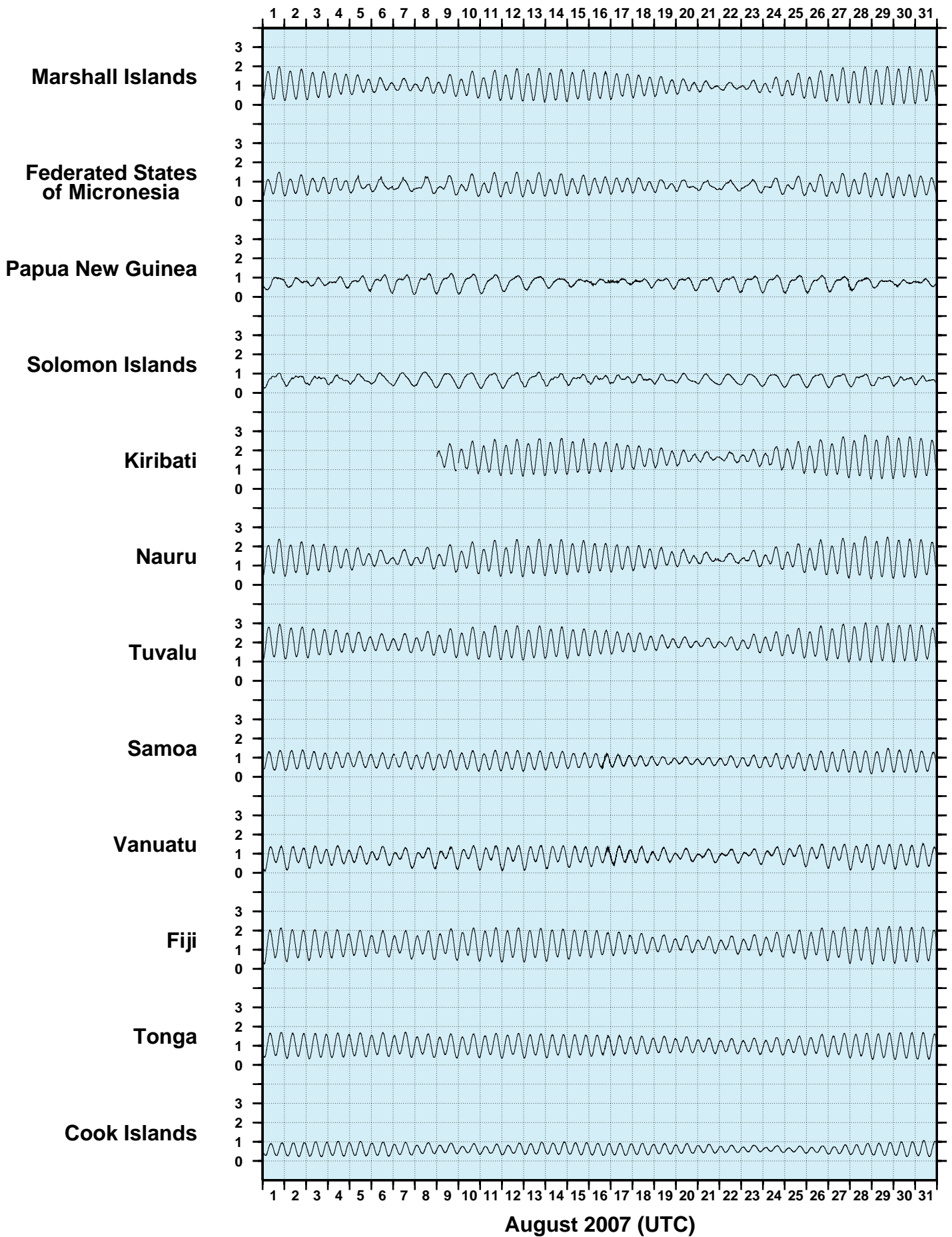


Figure 2

AUGUST 2007
SIX MINUTE RESIDUAL WATER LEVELS (m)

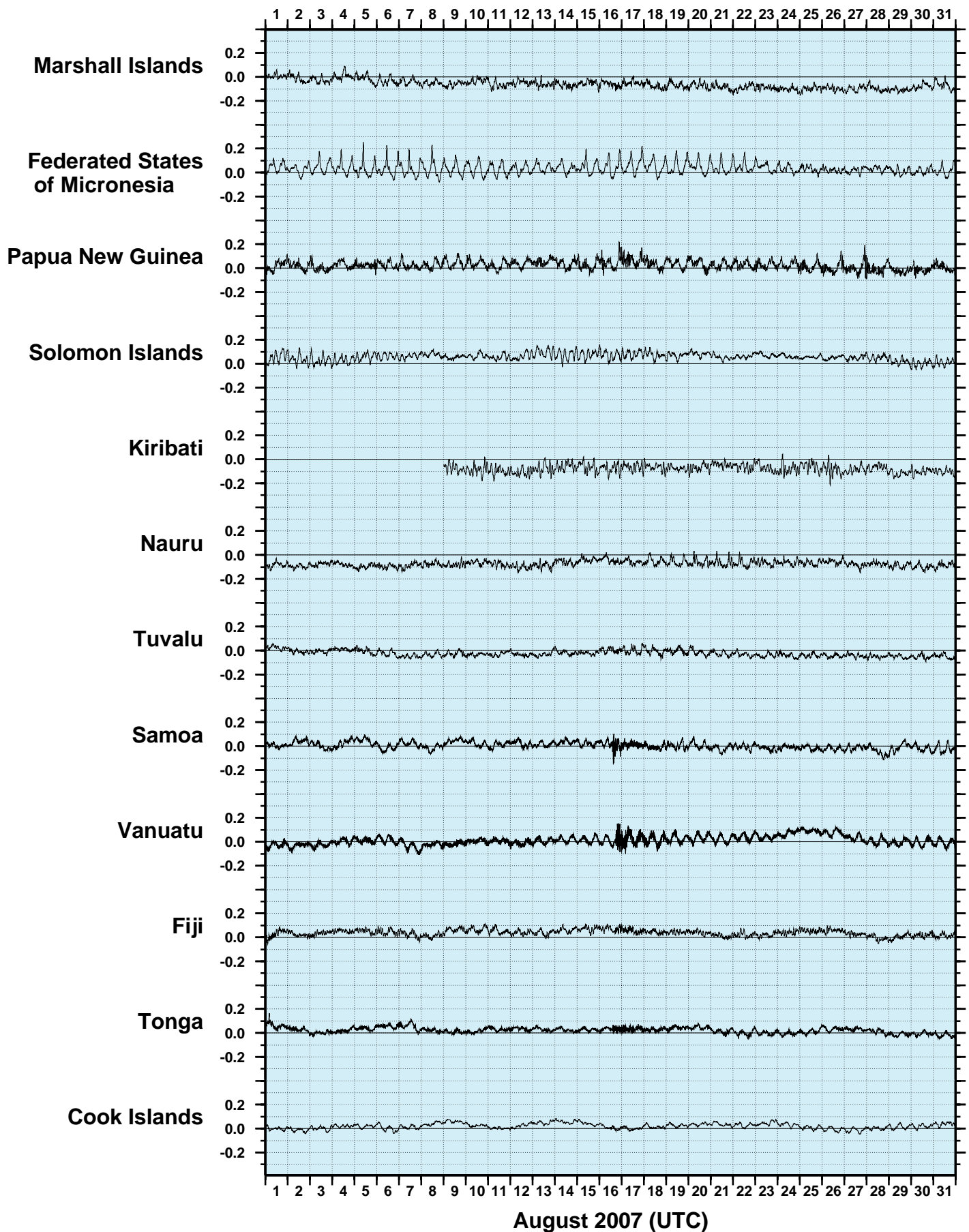


Figure 3

AUGUST 2007

SIX MINUTE RESIDUALS

ADJUSTED FOR ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE (m)

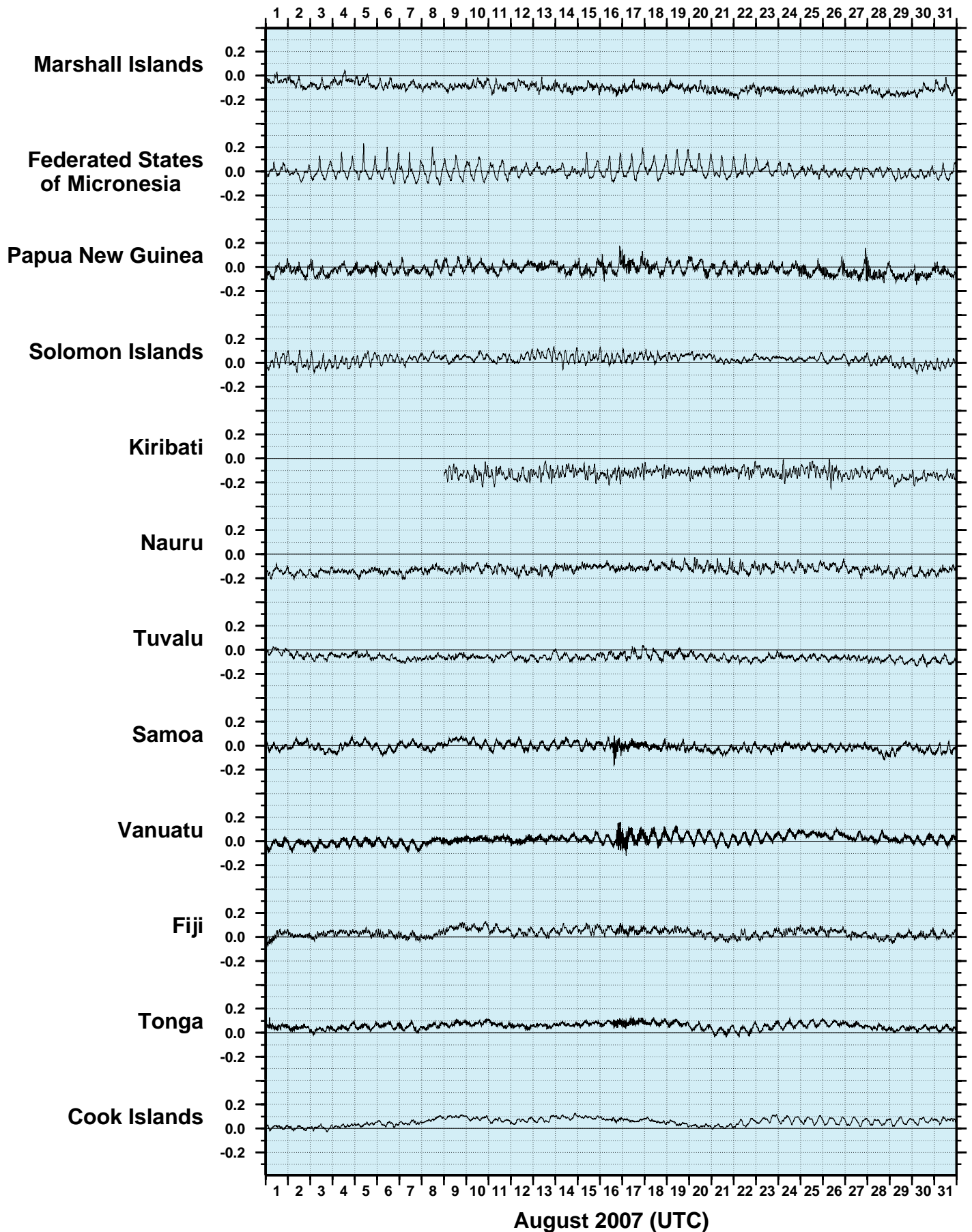


Figure 4

AUGUST 2007
HOURLY WIND SPEEDS (m/s)

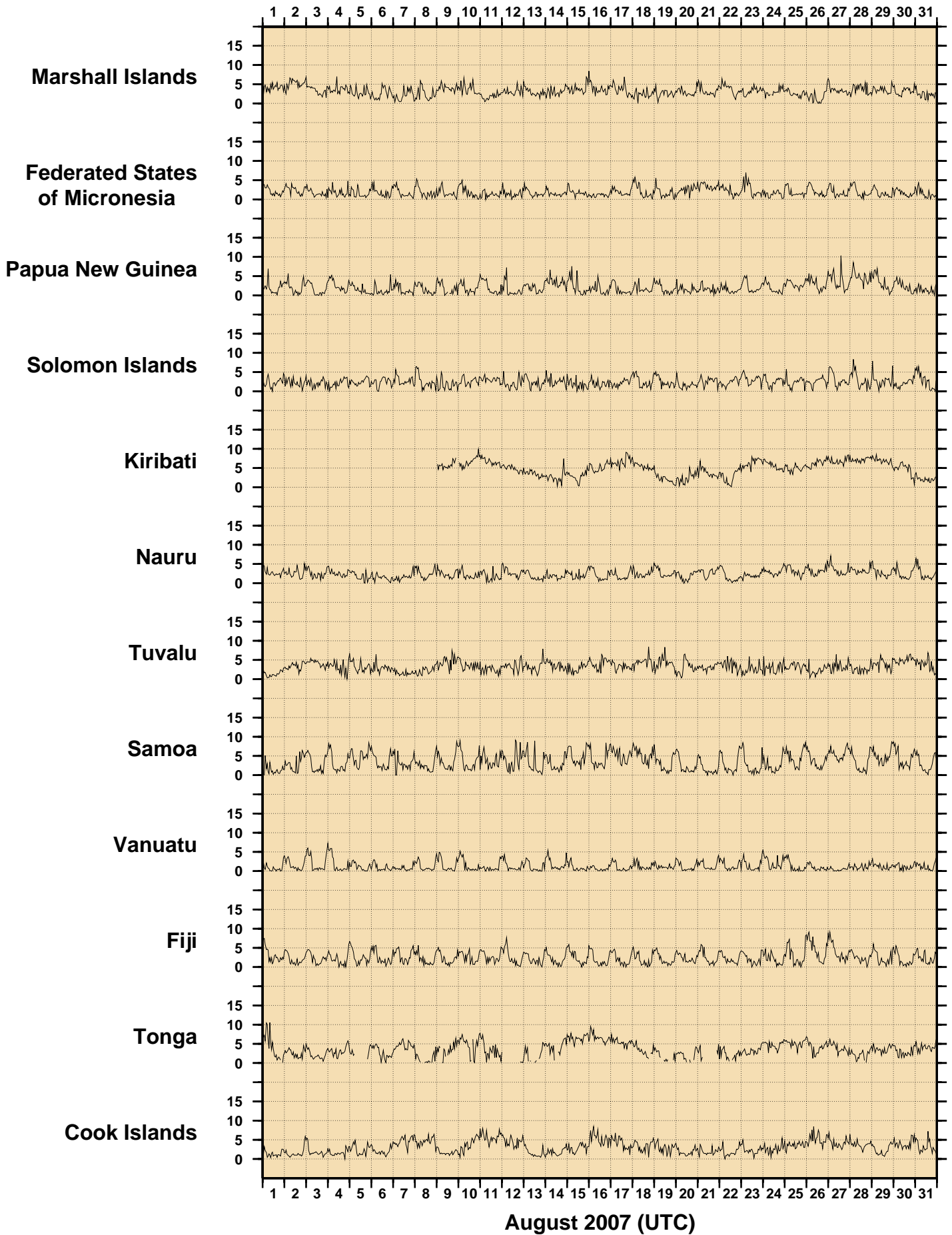


Figure 5
AUGUST 2007
HOURLY INCIDENT WINDS (m/s, deg True)

— 10 m/s

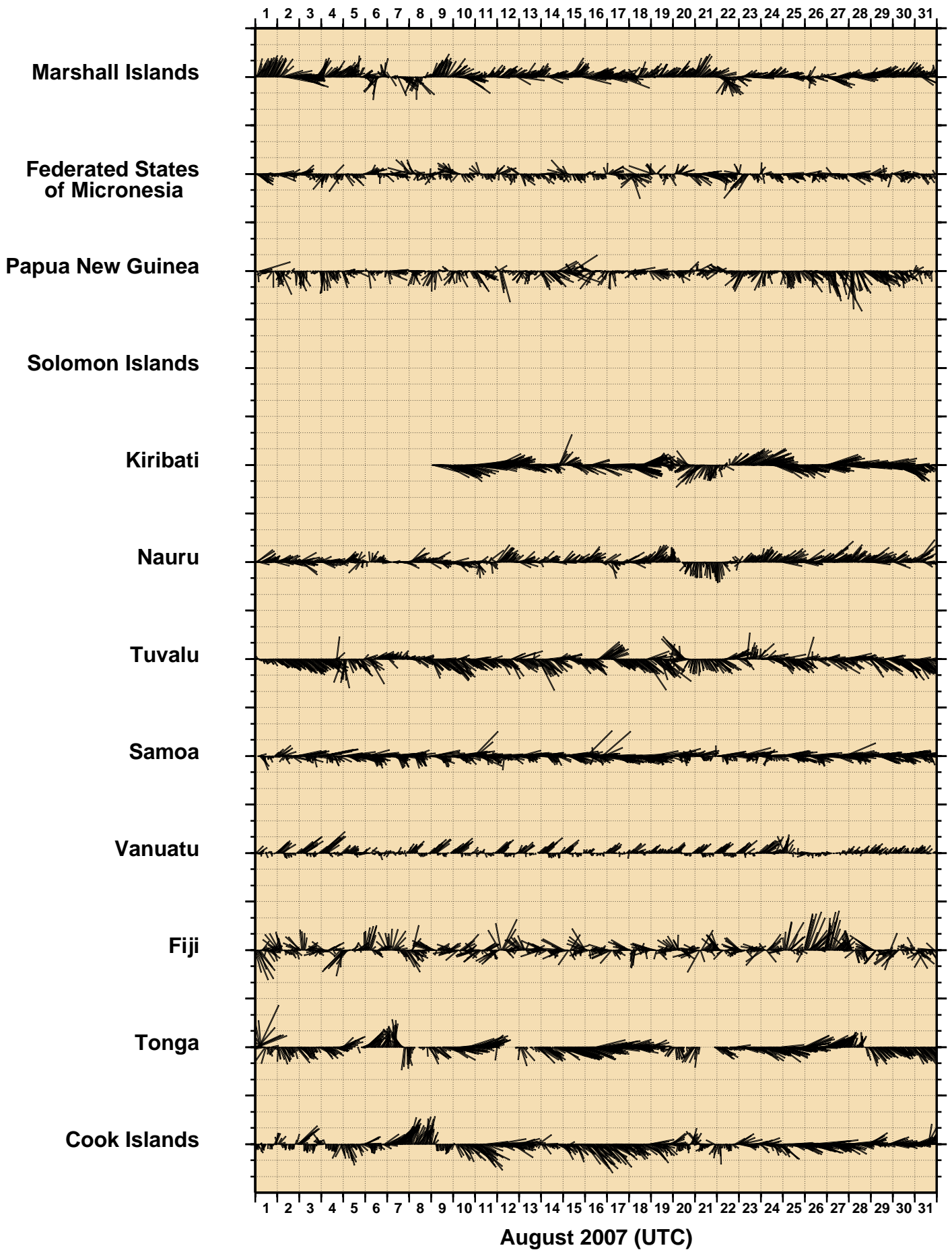


Figure 6
AUGUST 2007
HOURLY MAXIMUM WIND GUSTS (m/s)

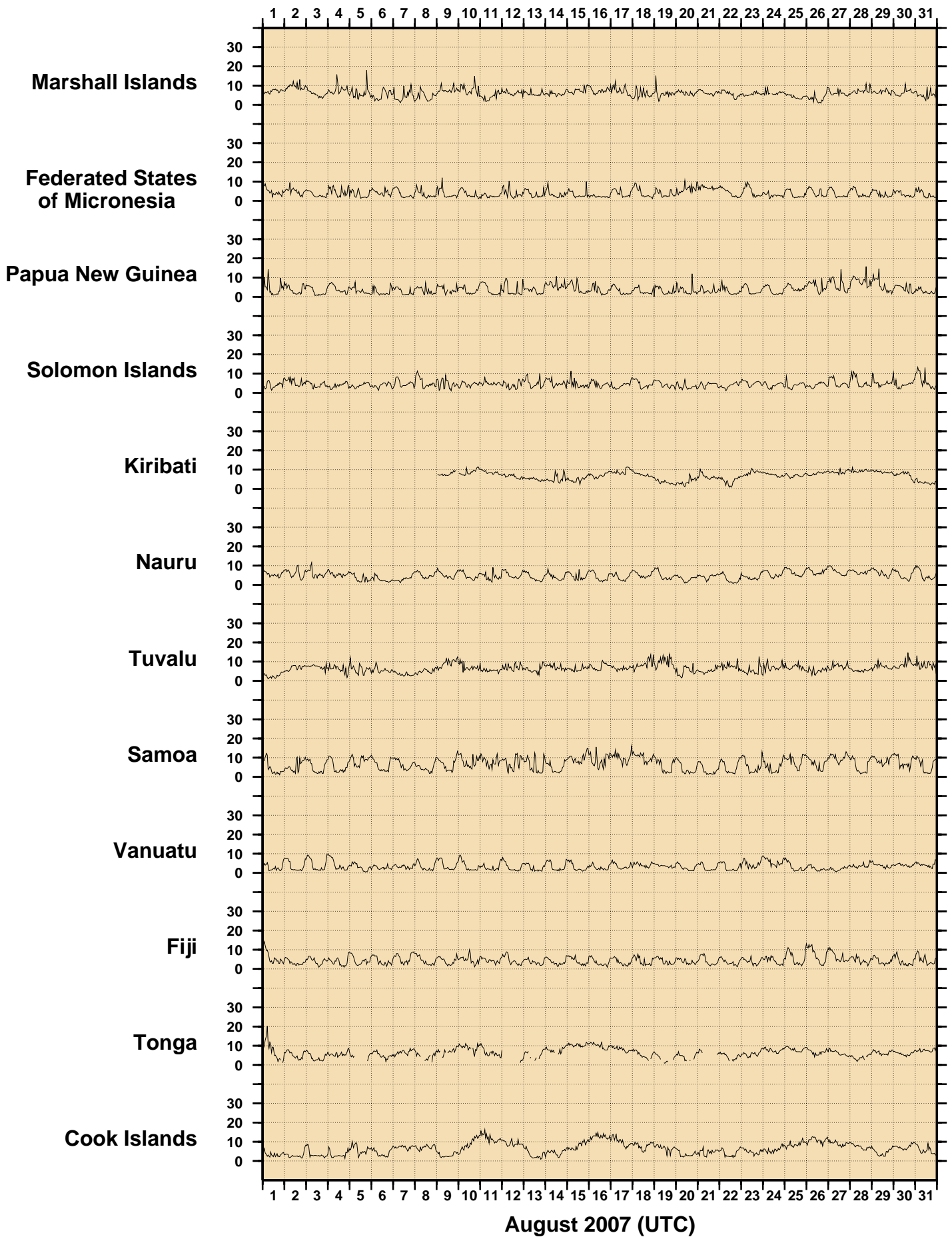


Figure 7

AUGUST 2007
HOURLY AIR TEMPERATURES (°C)

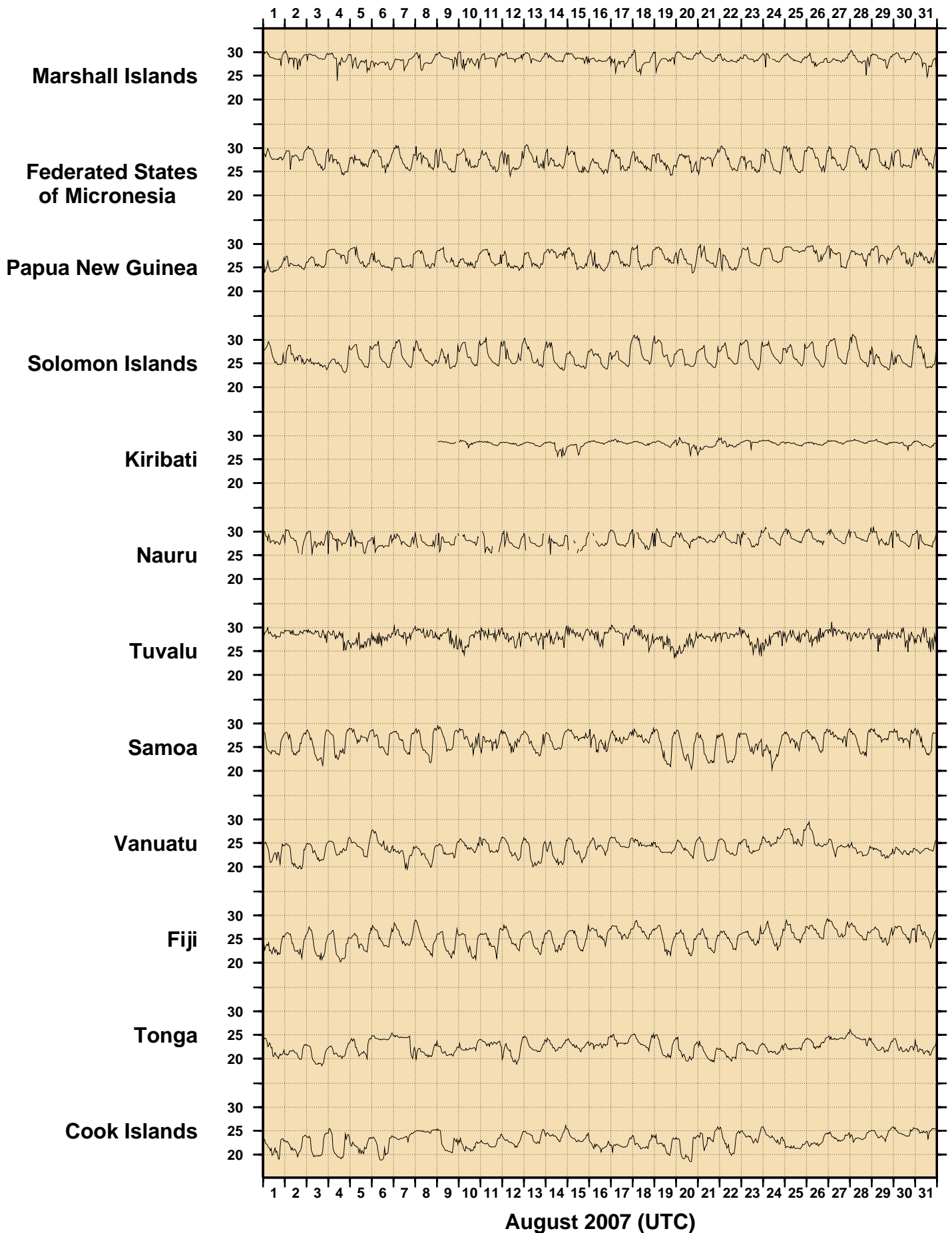


Figure 8

AUGUST 2007
HOURLY WATER TEMPERATURES (°C)

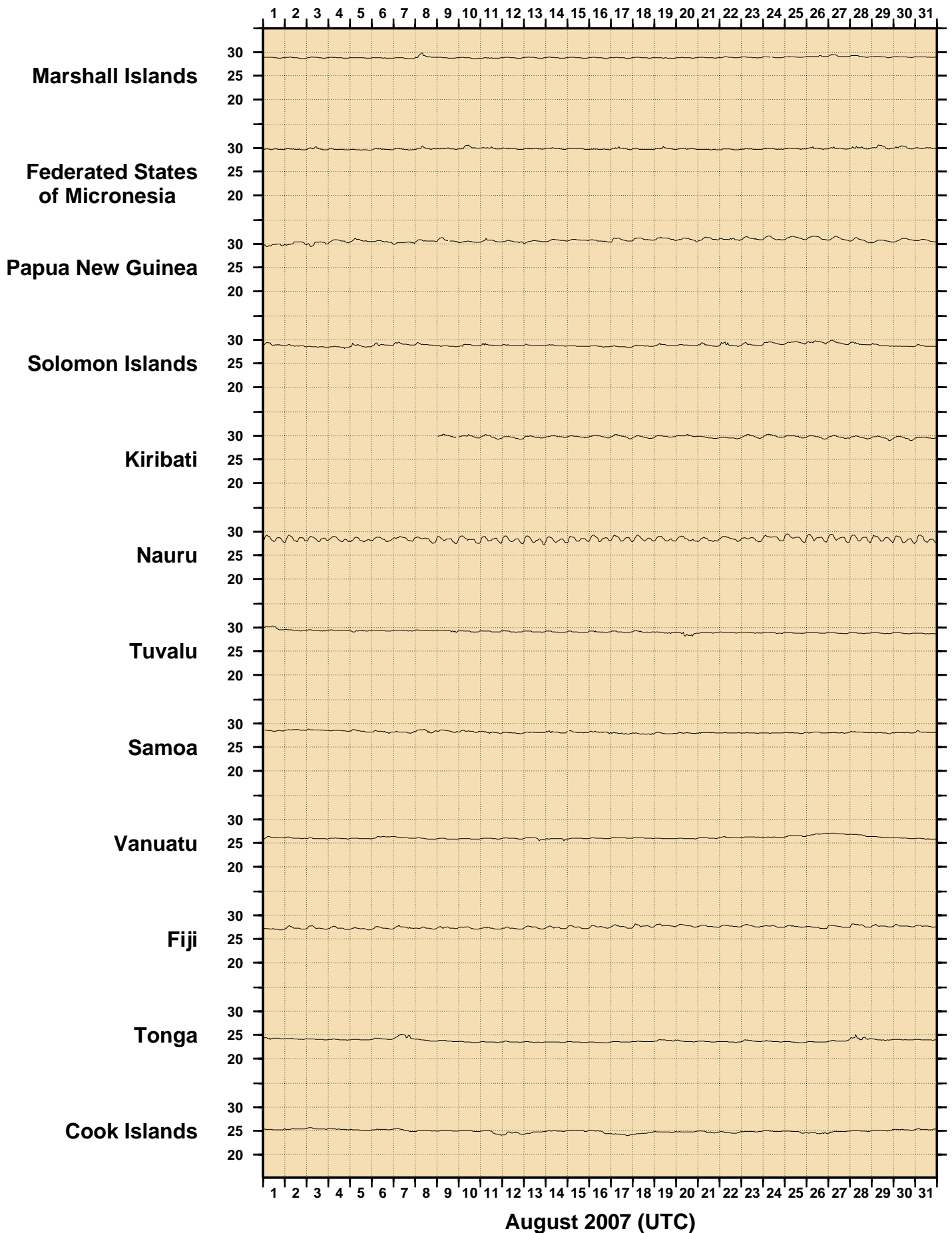


Figure 9
AUGUST 2007
HOURLY ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE (hPa)

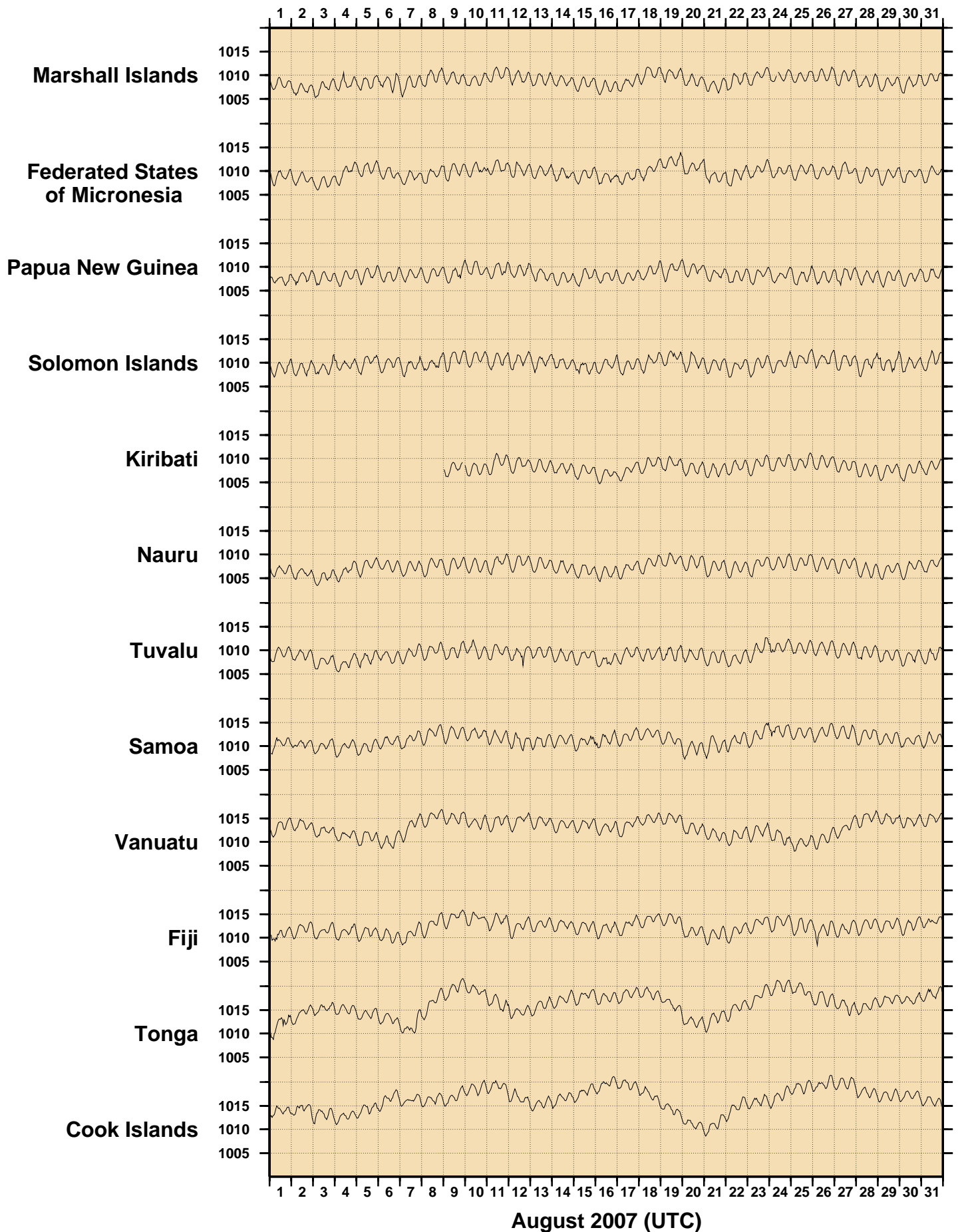
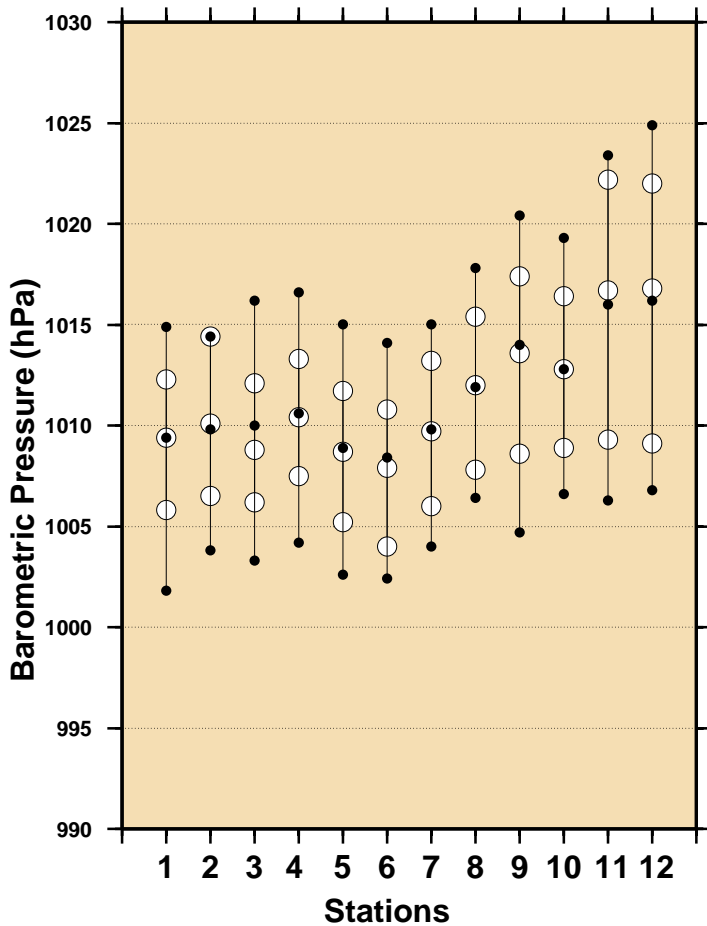
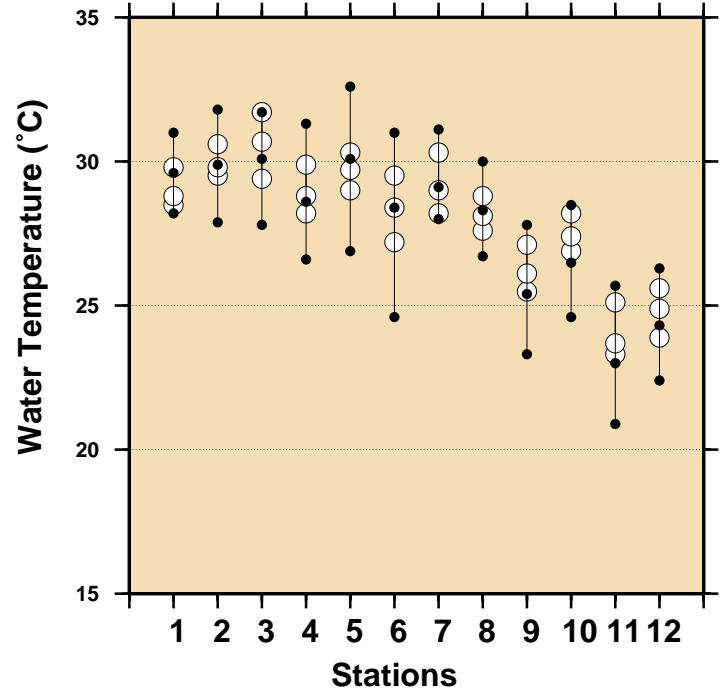
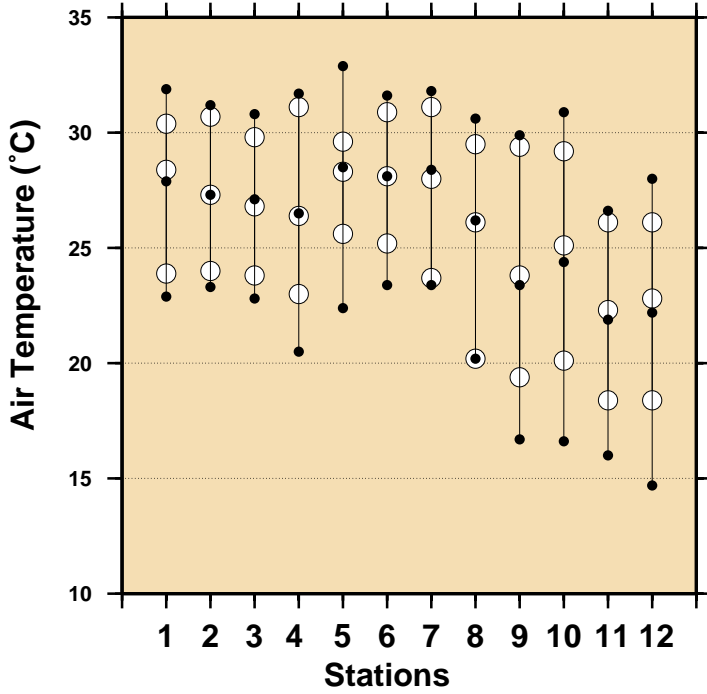


Figure 10

Comparison of August 2007 Max, Min & Mean with Long Term August 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

- August 2007 Maximum
- August 2007 Mean
- August 2007 Minimum

- Long Term August Maximum
- Long Term August Mean
- Long Term August Minimum

Figure 11

MONTHLY MEAN SEA LEVELS TO AUGUST 2007 (m)

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

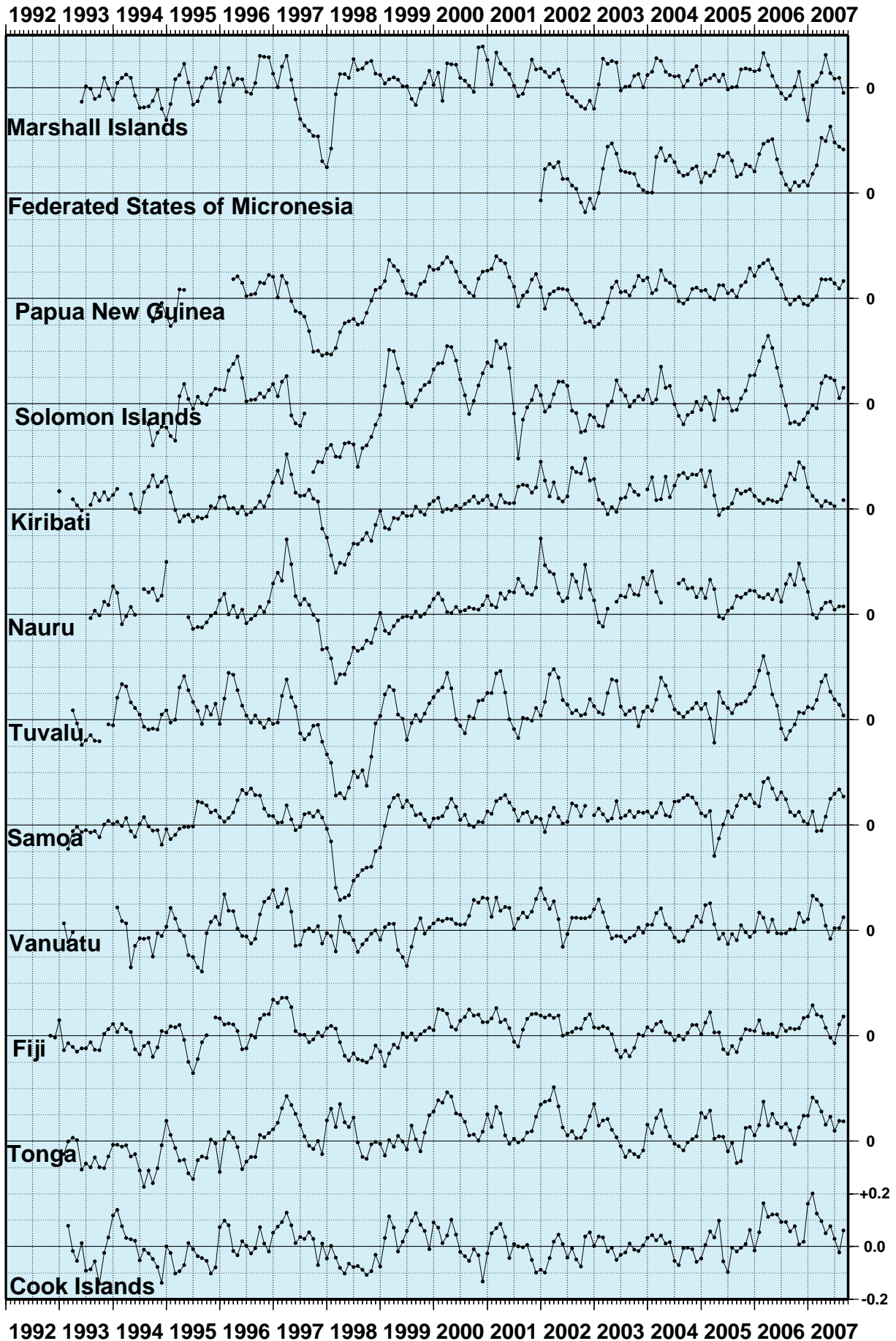


Figure 12

SEA LEVEL ANOMALIES THROUGH AUGUST 2007 (m)

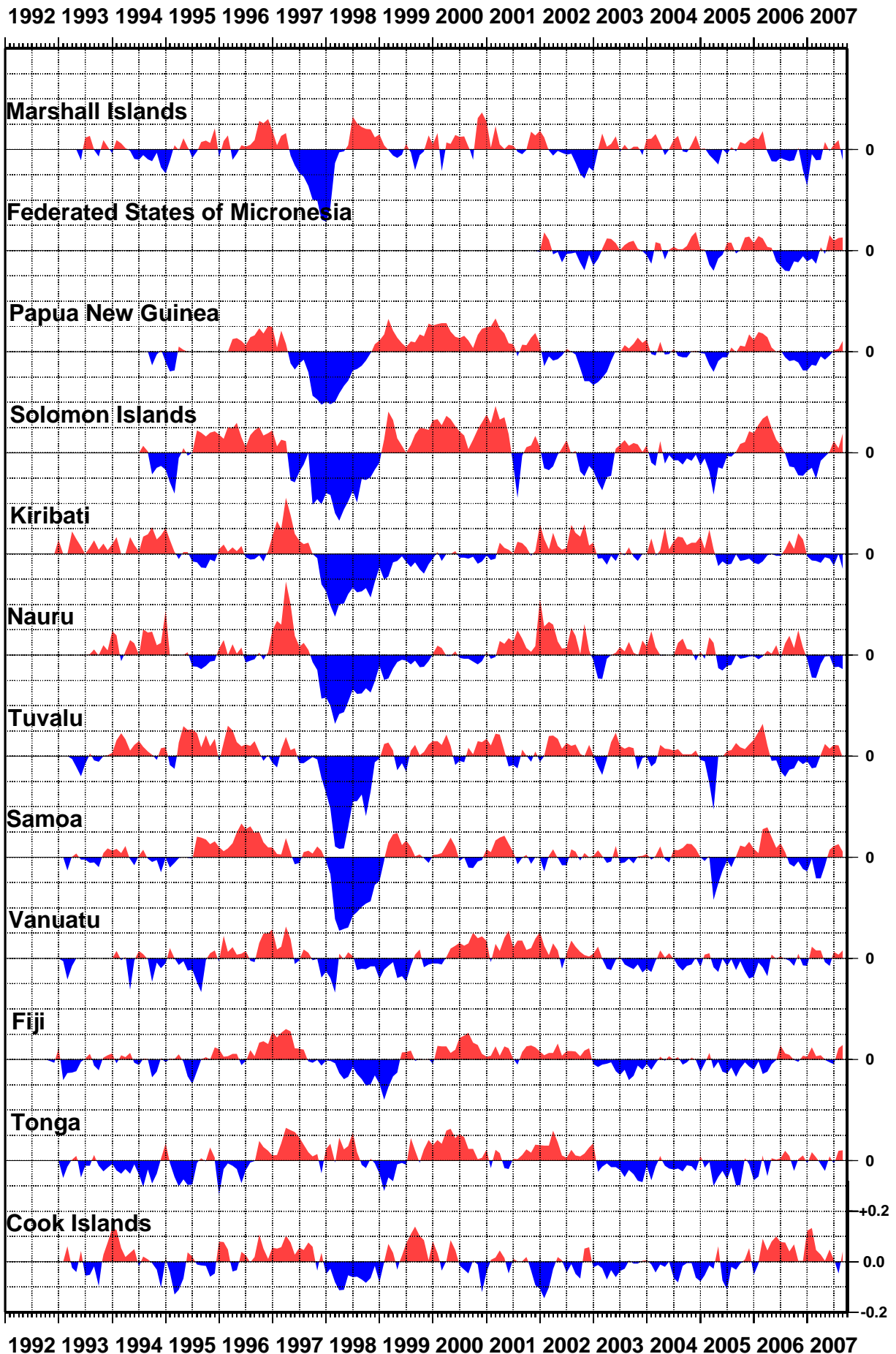


Figure 13

SEA LEVEL TRENDS THROUGH AUGUST 2007 (mm/year)

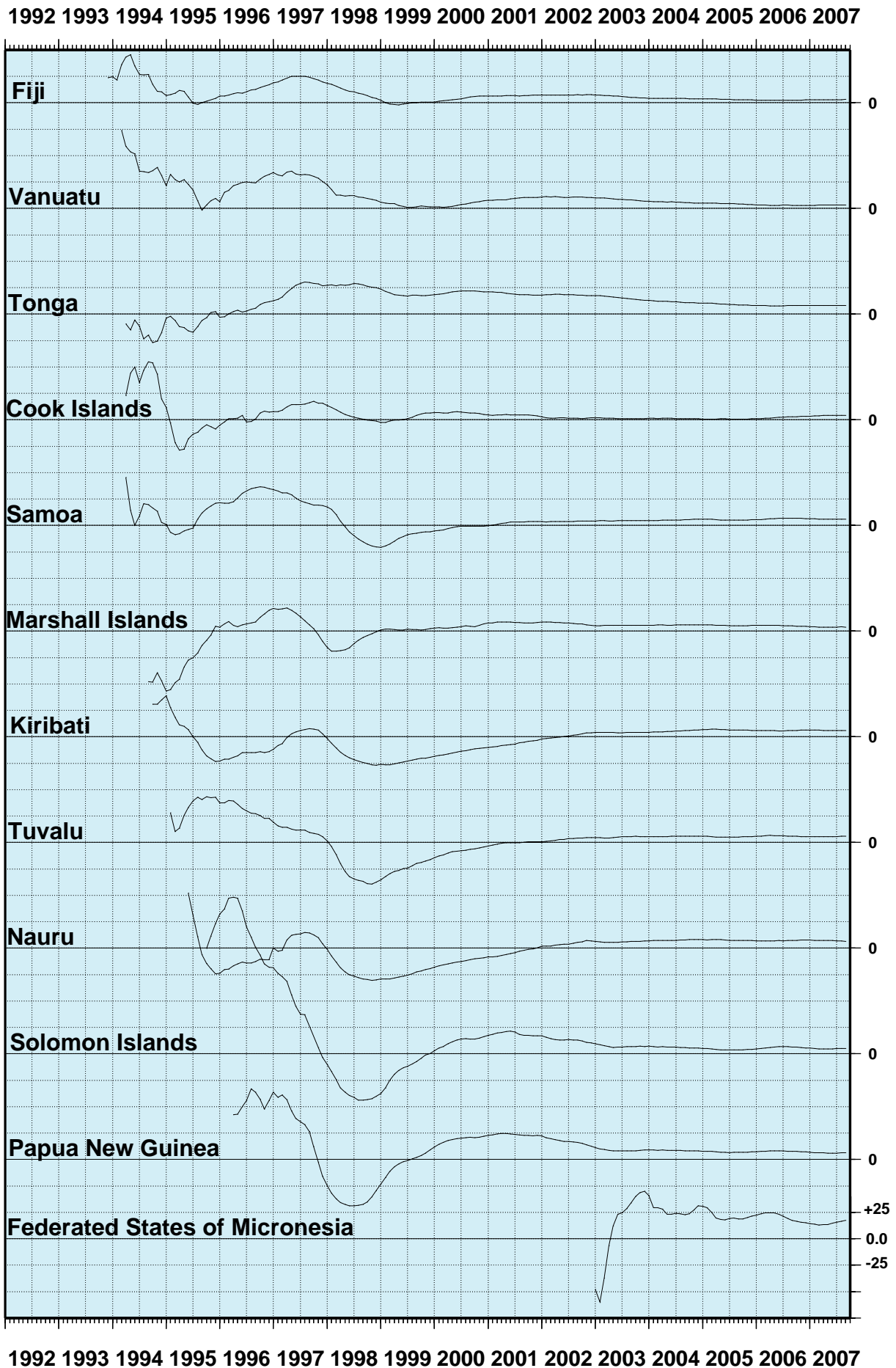


Figure 14

BAROMETRIC PRESSURE ANOMALIES THROUGH AUGUST 2007 (hPa)

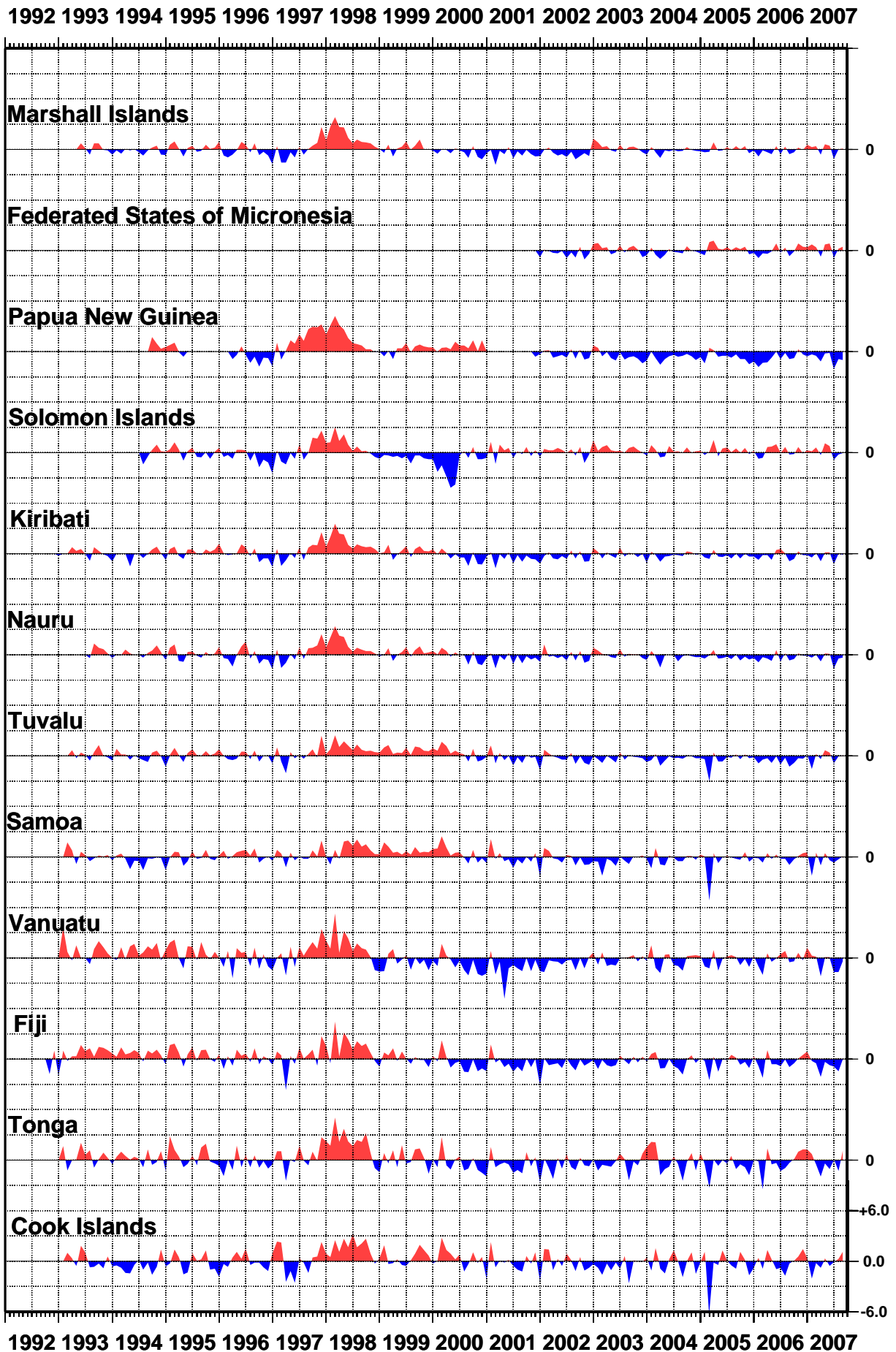


Figure 15

WATER TEMPERATURE ANOMALIES THROUGH AUGUST 2007 (°C)

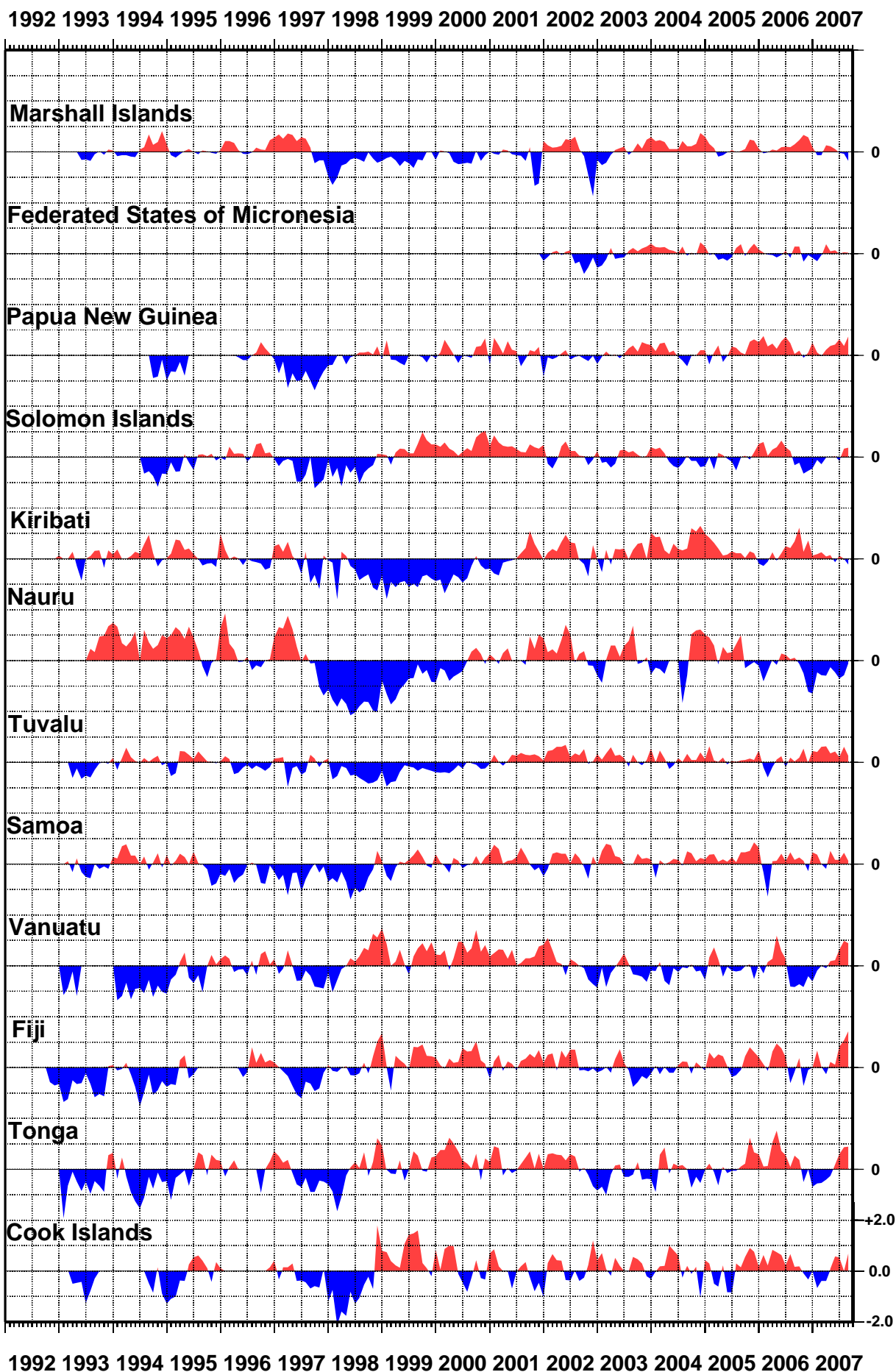
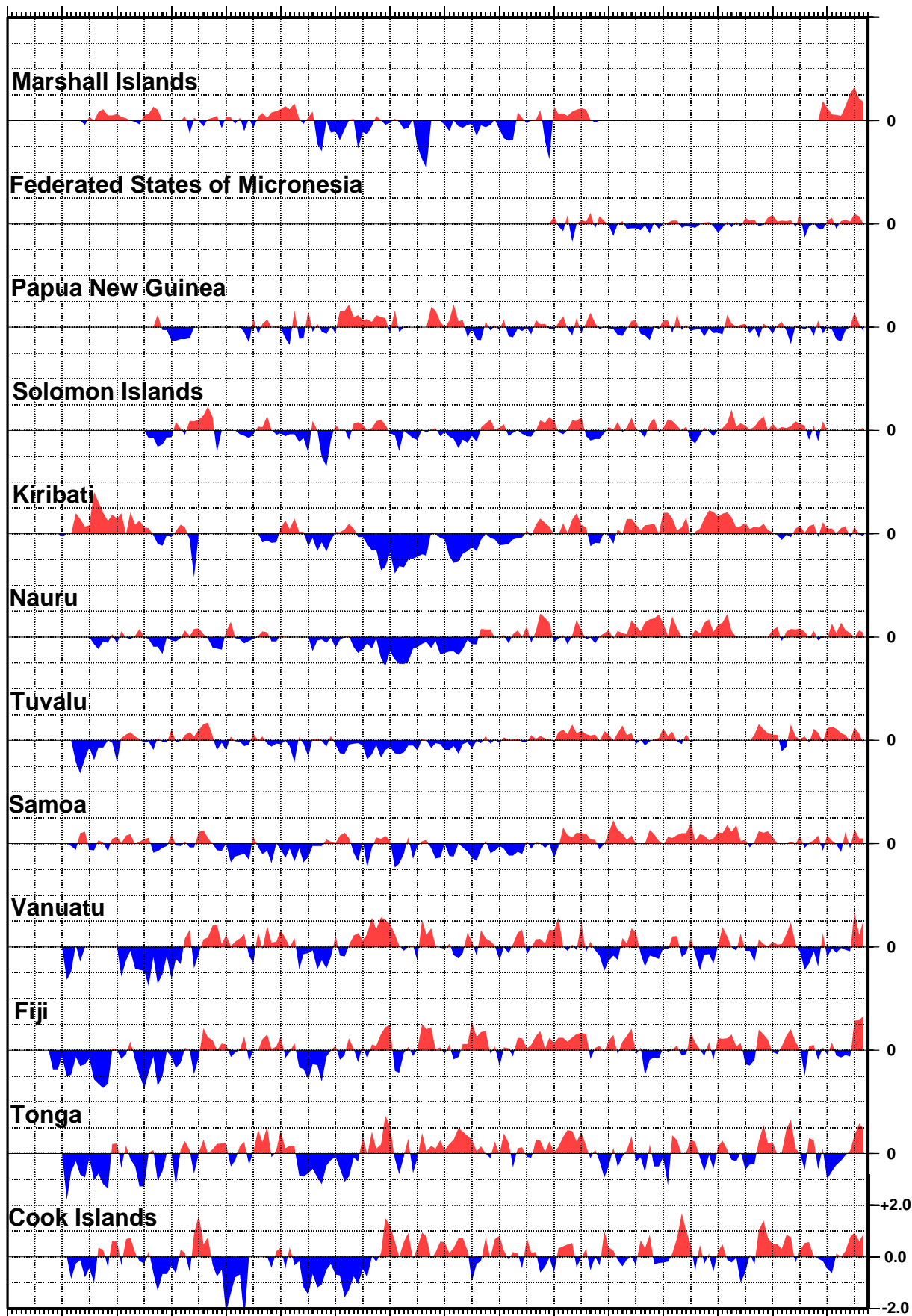


Figure 16

AIR TEMPERATURE ANOMALIES THROUGH AUGUST 2007 (°C)

1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007



1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007

Figure 17

SEA LEVEL DATA RETURN

THE NUMBER OF DAYS OF GAP ARE INDICATED
GAPS INCLUDE TRANSMISSION, POWER AND LOGGER FAILURE

* Patchy record

