

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

MONTHLY DATA REPORT

NO. 150

DECEMBER 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 December 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

December 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.

December 2007

- The SEAFRAME network continued to collect high quality sea level and associated meteorological information for monitoring climate variability and climate change.
- Higher than normal sea levels were observed at 6 of the 12 stations, although positive sea level anomalies were less pronounced than in November 2007. Sea levels returned to near normal at some stations in association with a return to near normal barometric pressure across the region.
- The equatorial stations at Kiribati and Nauru continued to record lower than normal sea levels and cooler than normal water temperatures in agreement with the regional climate pattern.
- A La Niña event continues to persist in the Pacific, characterised by cooler than normal sea surface temperatures and stronger than normal Trade Winds across much of the equatorial Pacific. The SEAFRAME array observed general decreases in water temperature and air temperature anomalies across the region.
- The majority of international climate models predict that La Niña conditions will persist and a return to neutral conditions will occur around mid-2008.

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 December, 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	+4.8	+0.1
Tonga	21°8'12.5"S / 175°10'50.5"W	Jan 1993	+8.7	0.0
Fiji	17°36'17.7"S / 177°26'17.7"E	Oct 1992	+3.5	+0.1
Vanuatu	17°45'19.2"S / 168°18'27.7"E	Jan 1993	+3.6	-0.1
Samoa	13°49'36.4"S / 171°45'40.7"W	Feb 1993	+6.3	-0.1
Tuvalu	8°30'8.9"S / 179°11'42.6"E	Mar 1993	+6.0	0.0
Kiribati	1°21'54.2"N / 172°55'58.8"E	Dec 1992	+5.1	-0.2
Nauru	0°31'45.9"S / 166°54'36.2"E	Jul 1993	+6.0	-0.2
Solomon Is.	9°25'44.1"S / 159°57'19.3"E	Jul 1994	+6.1	+0.3
PNG	2°2'31.5"S / 147°22'25.6"E	Sep 1994	+7.0	+0.2
FSM	6°58'49.9"N / 158°12'0.8"E	Dec 2001	+23.7	+1.4
Marshall Is.	7°6'21.7"N / 171°22'22.1"E	May 1993	+4.4	+0.1

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the December 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 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, 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.

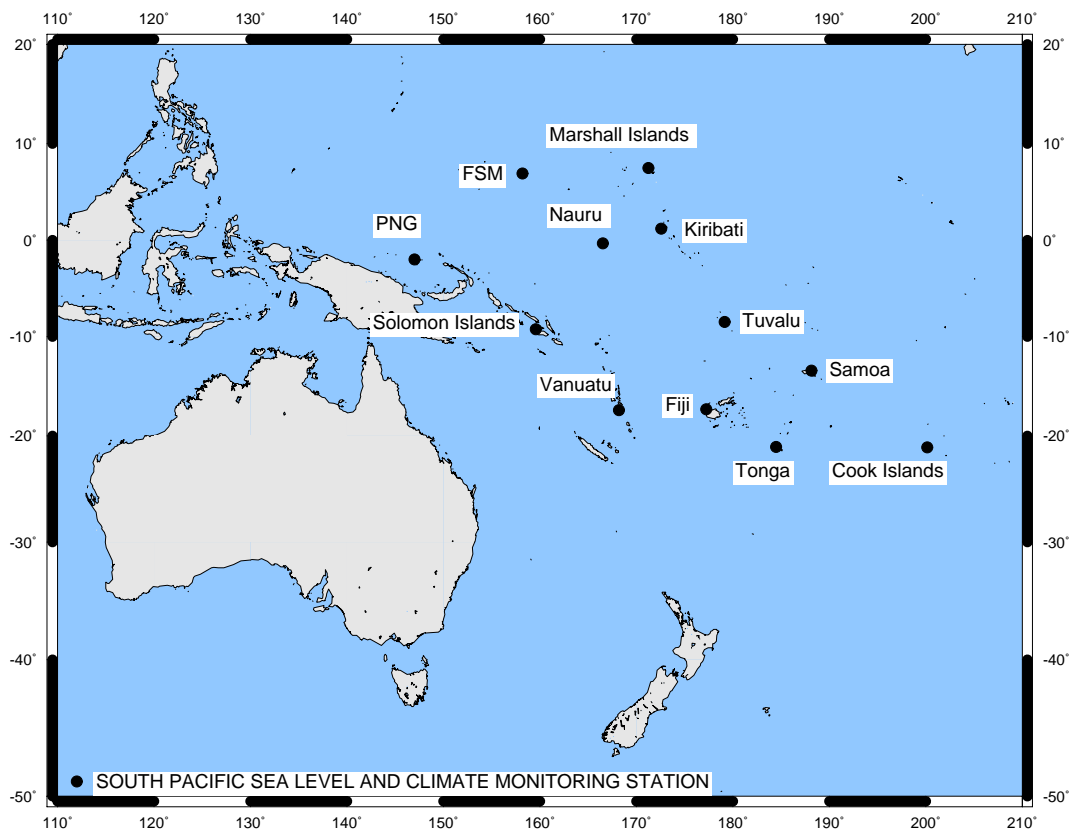


Figure A: *South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Stations*

DECEMBER CLIMATOLOGY

A basin-wide La Niña event is well established in the Pacific and further strengthened during December. Ocean heat content, both at and below the surface is cooler than normal across much of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific due to persistent stronger-than-normal Trade Winds along the equator. Ocean temperatures in the western Pacific are slightly warmer than normal. La Niña conditions are expected to continue until around May 2008.

The 5-month running mean value of the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) has shown a rising trend since mid-2006. The December SOI value was +14, which is indicative of a mature La Niña and the highest value since April 2006. It follows the November SOI value of +10. (**Figure B**).

Sea-surface temperature anomalies below -1°C continue to be observed across much of the equatorial Pacific, extending from the South American coast to the dateline. In the far western Pacific sea surface temperatures remain slightly warmer than normal (**Figure C**, **Figure E**).

Cooler-than-normal sub-surface temperatures continue to be observed in the eastern equatorial Pacific (**Figure D**). This region experienced further cooling during December due to the persistence of stronger than normal Trade Winds in recent months. Sub surface temperatures in the western equatorial Pacific warmed slightly as a result of a westerly wind burst in the region in late November.

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 Pacific particularly 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 stronger than normal overall across much of the equatorial Pacific during December (**Figure E**). Cloudiness in the equatorial Pacific near the dateline was well below average during December.

The results from six international computer models predict that weak cool conditions consistent with a La Niña event will persist into early 2008. The majority of models predict that neutral climatological conditions will return in the Pacific by the middle of 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/>.

Southern Oscillation Index (SOI)

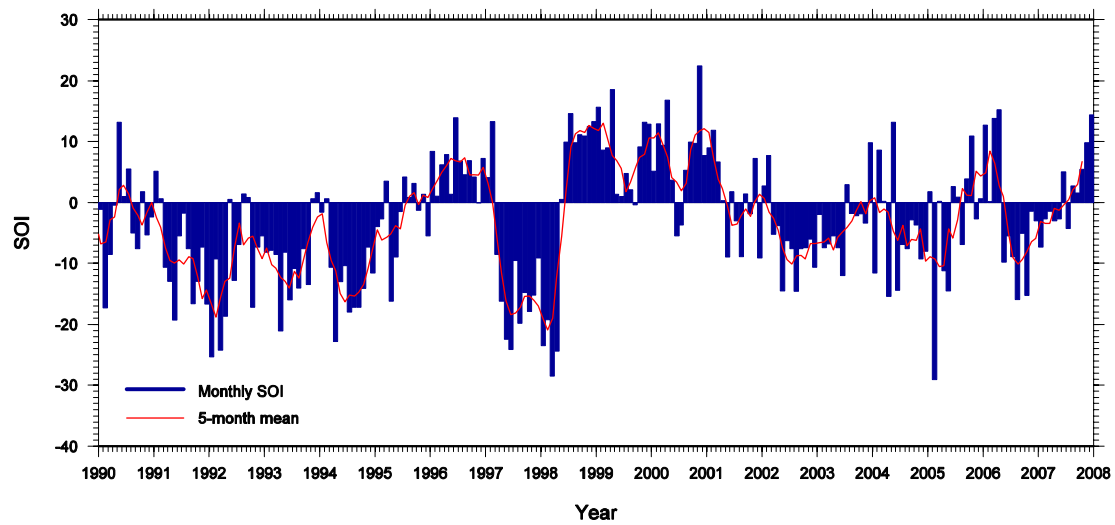


Figure B: The five-month weighted mean and individual monthly means of the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI). The SOI is ten times the monthly anomaly of the difference in mean sea level pressure between Tahiti and Darwin, divided by the standard deviation of that difference for the relevant month, based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

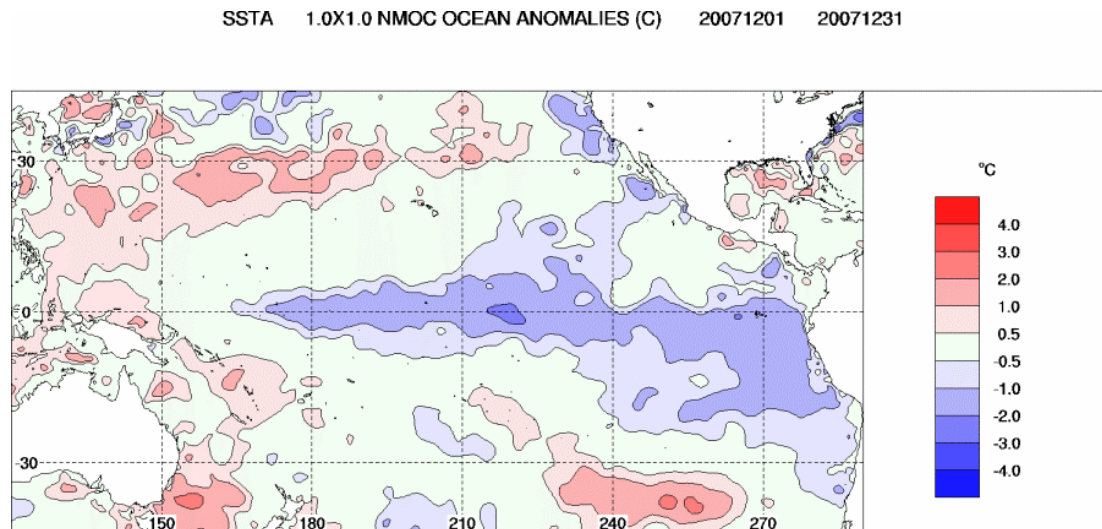


Figure C: Sea surface temperature anomaly (°C) for December 2007.

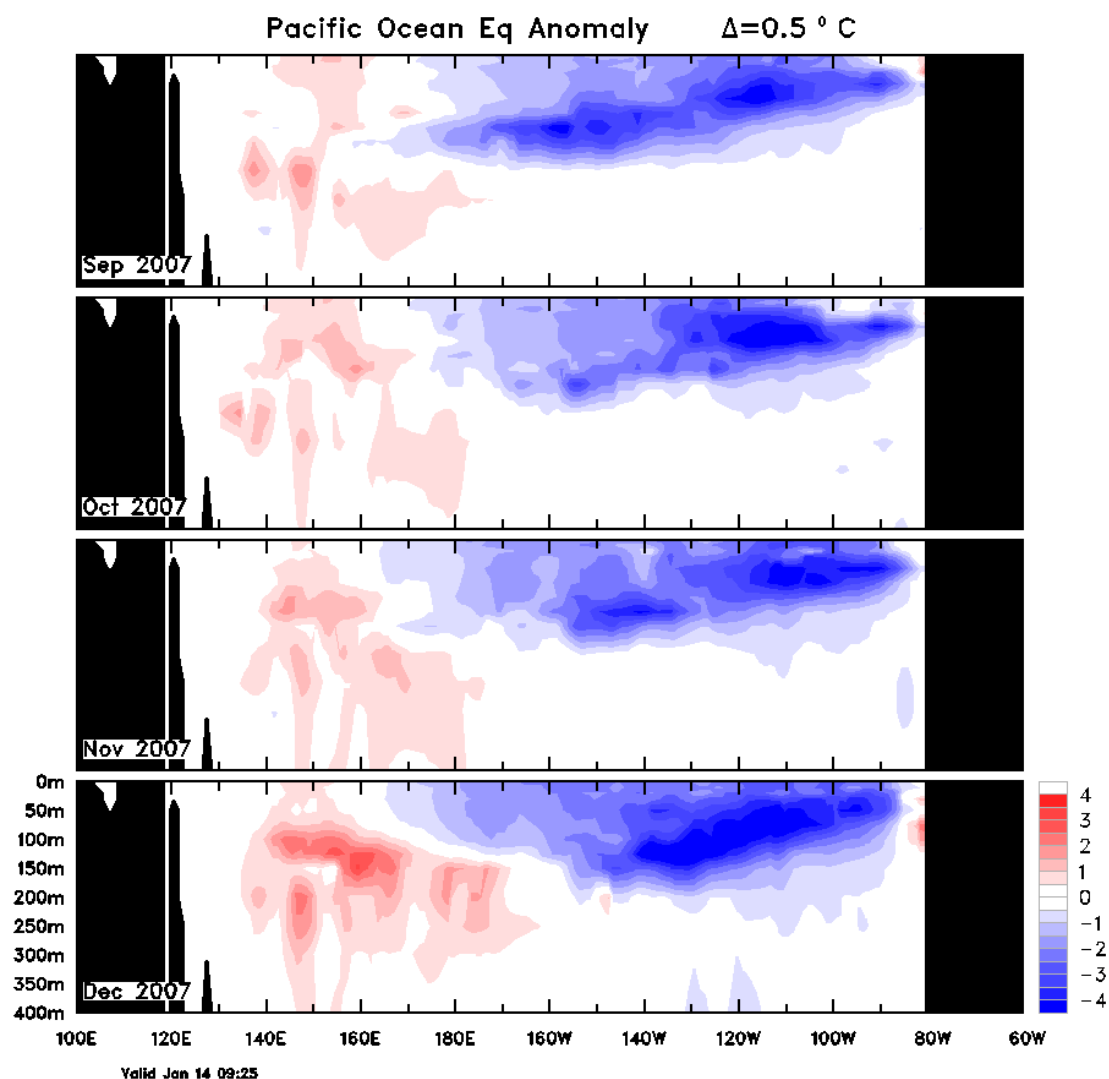
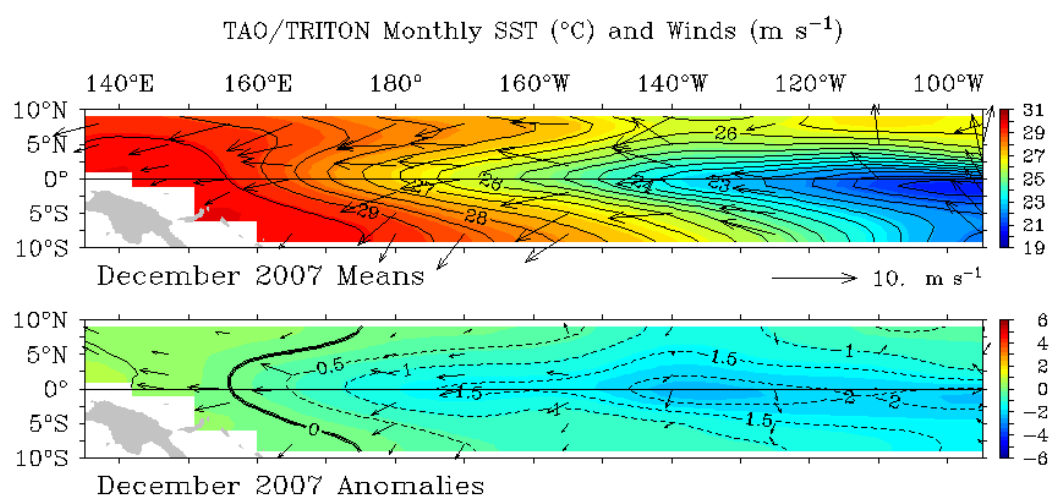


Figure D: Equatorial depth-longitude section of ocean temperature anomalies for September 2007 through to December 2007. Contour interval is 0.5°C .



TAO/NDBC/NOAA

Jan 14 2008

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

DECEMBER 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 9th of December and a full moon on the 24th of December 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 highlight the non-tidal sea level fluctuations such as those due to the short-term effects of weather or tsunamis. The residuals may also respond to the shape of the harbour in which the gauge is located. For example, the gauge at Manus Island, Papua New Guinea often records residual fluctuations of 20 cm or more due to water sloshing (seiche) in Seeadler Harbour that arises when the wind suddenly changes strength or direction. At Cook Islands sea levels reached 30 cm higher than the predicted tide on the 2nd December due to the passage of a low-pressure weather system.

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 barometric pressure correction accounts for a large proportion of the elevated residuals observed at Cook Islands on the 2nd of December.

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 Marshall Islands prevailed from the northeast for most of the month. The maximum wind gust observed by the SEAFRAME network during December was 25 m/s (49 knots) at Marshall Islands on the 8th of December (**Figure 6**). The SEAFRAME stations at Fiji and Tonga also observed strong wind gusts up to 20 m/s during December.

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 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.* A new maximum December air temperature was set at Tuvalu, and a new minimum December air temperature was set at FSM. New maximum December barometric pressures were also set at Tuvalu, Samoa and Cook Islands.

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.

Figure 12 shows sea level anomalies for December 2007 were generally less than those observed in the previous month. Higher than normal monthly mean sea levels remain at 6 of the 12 stations, including Marshall Islands, FSM, PNG, Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Cook Islands. At Solomon Islands and FSM in particular, anomalies of +10 cm were observed. Lower than normal sea levels (anomalies of around –5 cm) were recorded at the equatorial stations of Kiribati and Nauru, while elsewhere sea levels were near normal.

Sea Level Trends

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

Recent short-term sea level trends in the project area based upon SEAFRAME data through December, 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	+4.8	+0.1
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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. Barometric pressures returned to near normal values in December 2007 following the lower than normal pressures that were observed in November 2007.

The **water temperature anomalies (Figure 15)** reveal significant cooling occurred in December 2007. Many of the stations that recorded warmer than normal water temperatures in November are now showing near-normal temperatures, although warm water conditions were still observed at PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji. Cooler than normal water temperatures were recorded at Marshall Islands, Cook Islands and in particular the equatorial stations of Kiribati and Nauru where water temperature anomalies were around -1°C.

The **air temperature anomalies (Figure 16)** also show significant cooling occurred during December 2007. Air temperatures across the region were near normal at most stations, the most notable exceptions being Kiribati and Cook Islands where they are almost 1°C cooler than normal. 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.

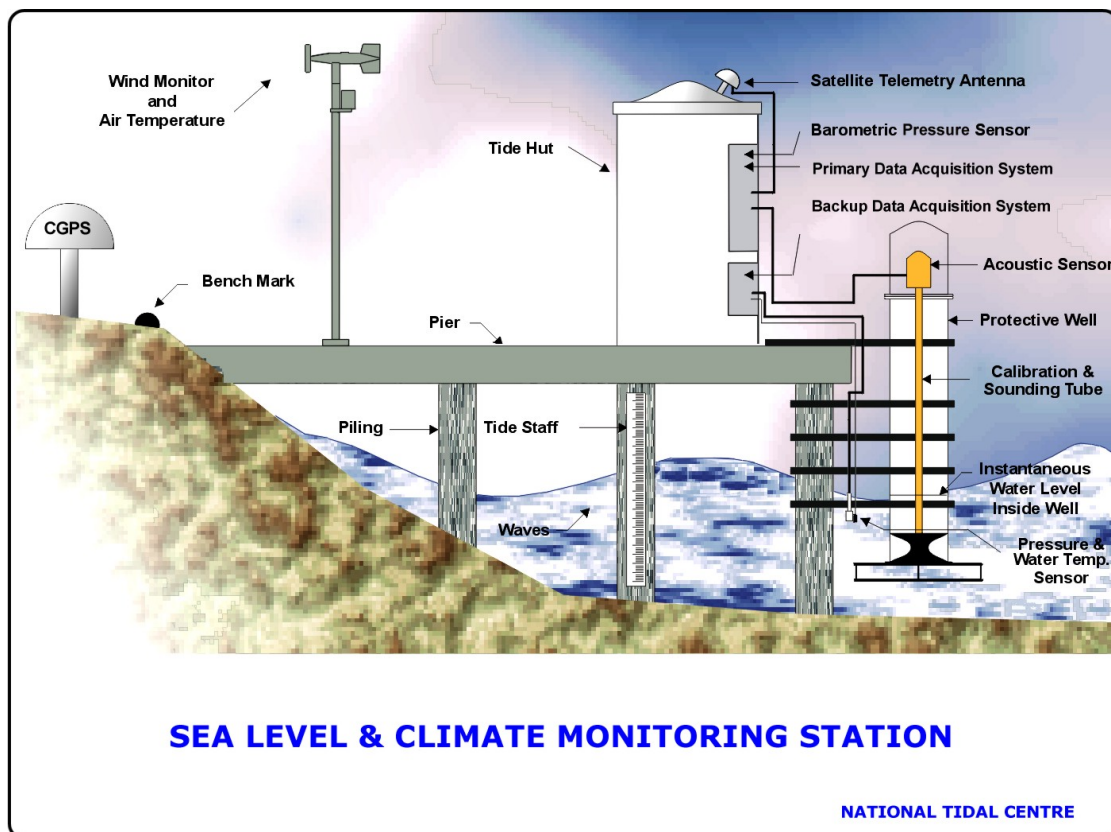
At Solomon Islands erroneous wind directions have been recorded since 30th July and have been removed from the record. At Nauru erroneous readings from the air temperature sensor were removed from the record. At Cook Islands erroneous wind data were received from 18th November onwards and have been removed from the record.

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:

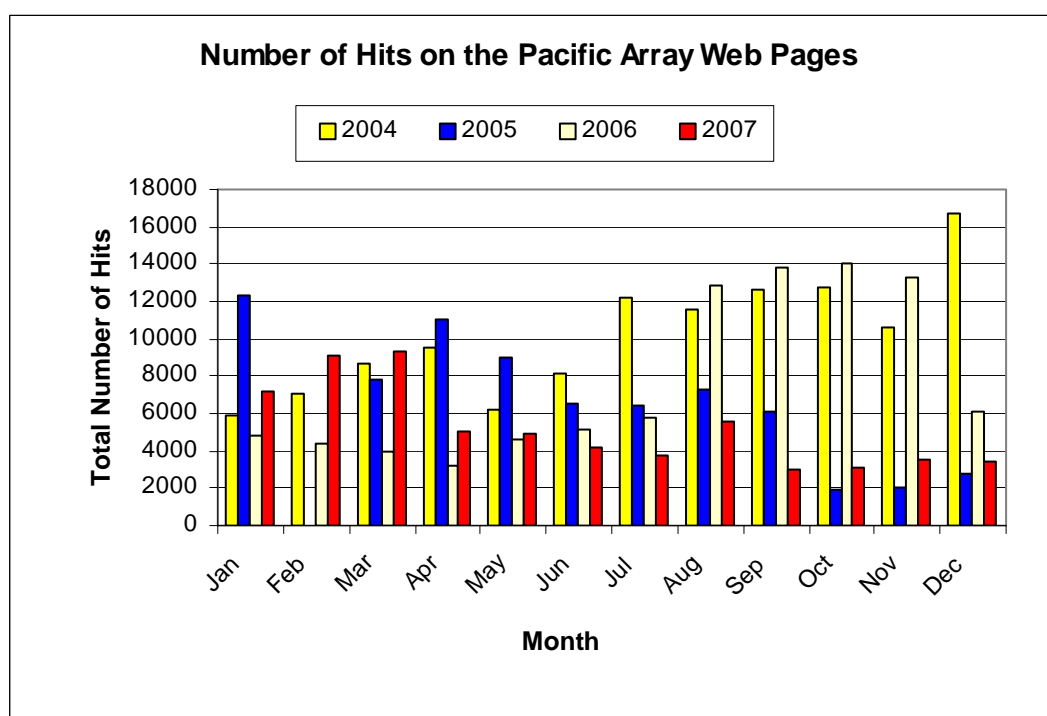
- (1) Primary water level using a Bartex 'AQUATRAK' acoustic-in-air sensor, and
- (2) Secondary water level (or backup) using a Druck pressure transducer mounted close to the seabed.

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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Fax: (+618) (08) 8366 2693
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:

While care has been taken in the collection, analysis, and compilation of the data, it is supplied on the condition that neither the *Commonwealth of Australia* nor *NTC* shall be liable for any loss or injury whatsoever arising from the use of the data. Copyright for material contained in this document is held by the *Commonwealth of Australia*.

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

DECEMBER 2007
SIX MINUTE WATER LEVEL OBSERVATIONS (m)

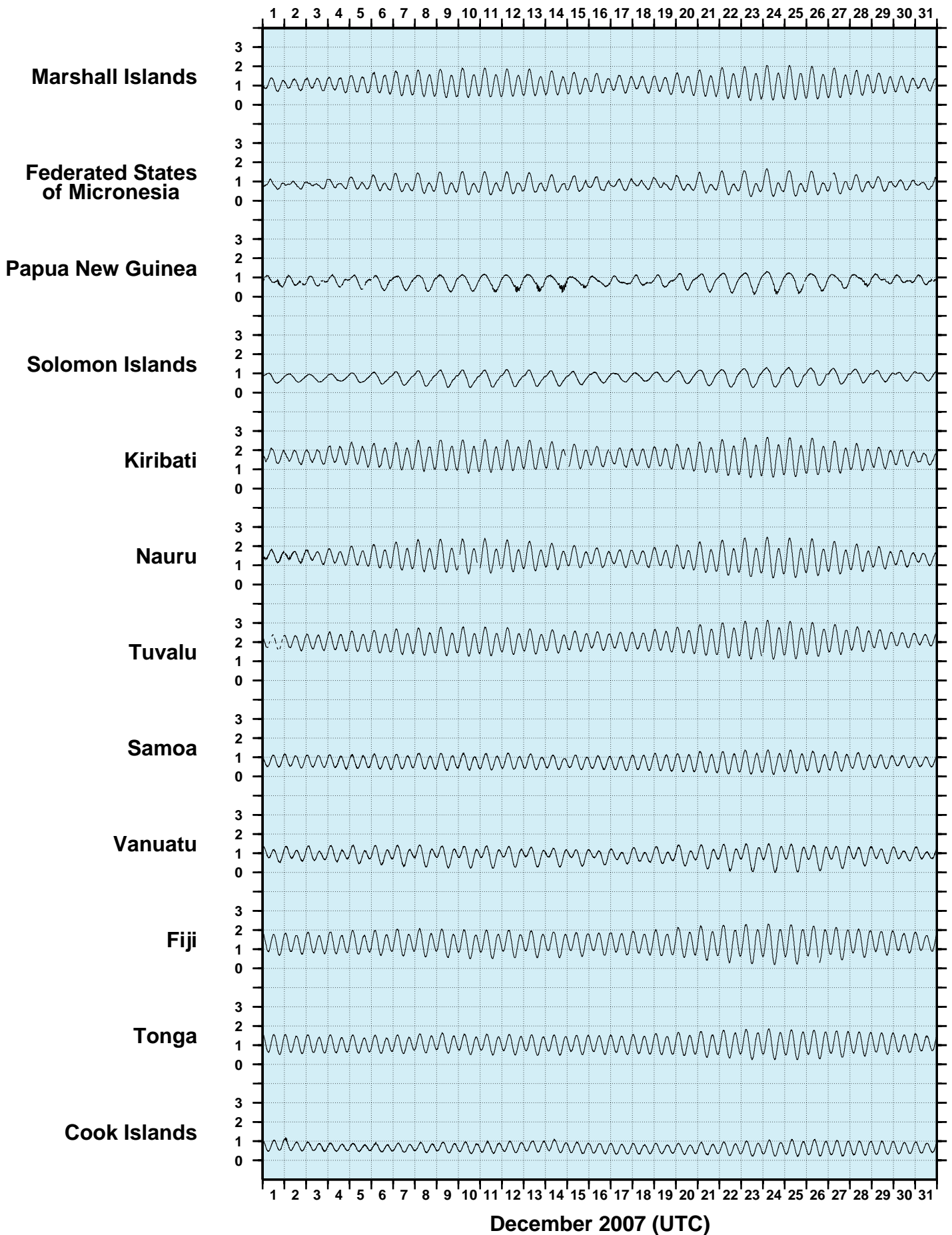


Figure 2

DECEMBER 2007
SIX MINUTE RESIDUAL WATER LEVELS (m)

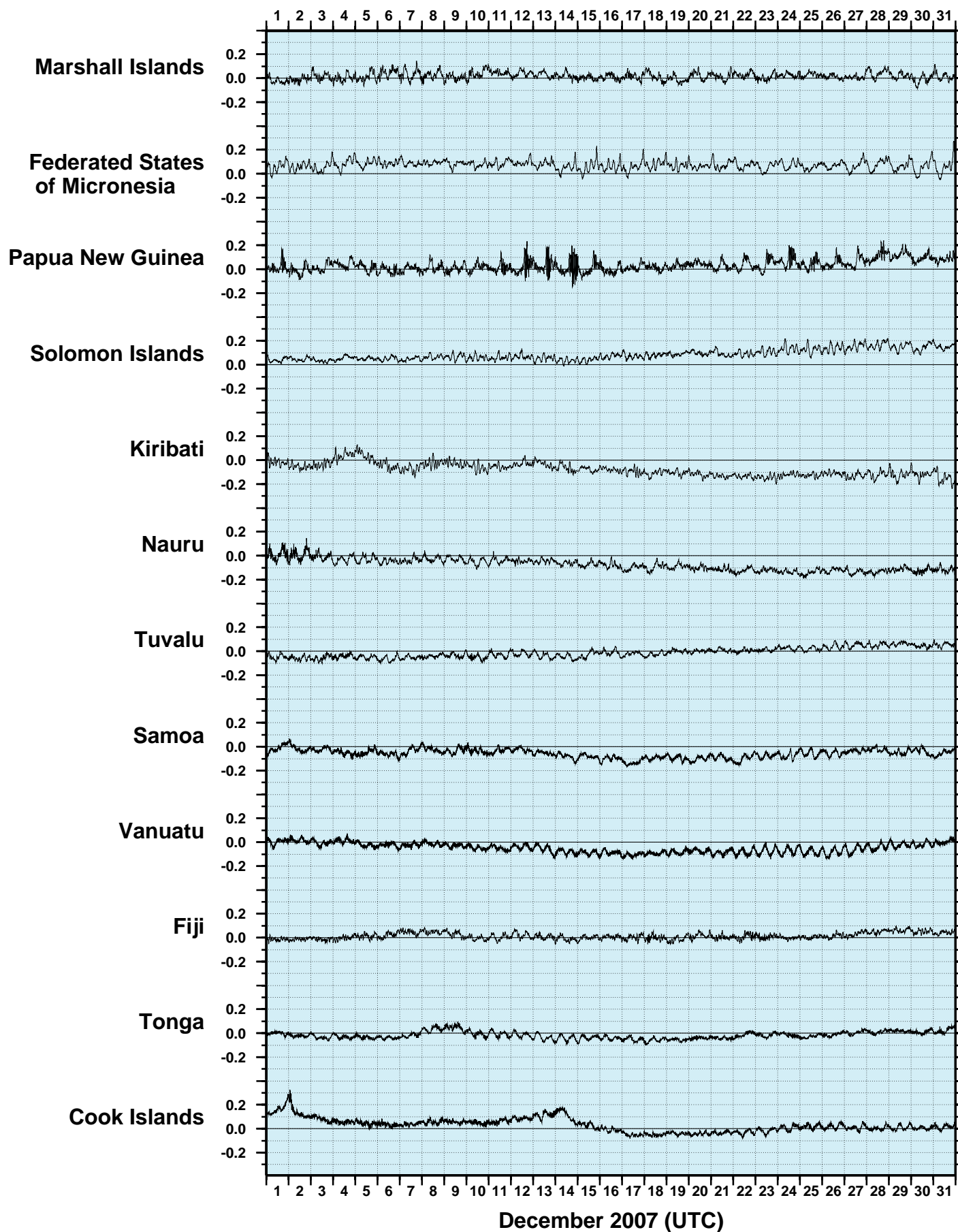


Figure 3

**DECEMBER 2007
SIX MINUTE RESIDUALS
ADJUSTED FOR ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE (m)**

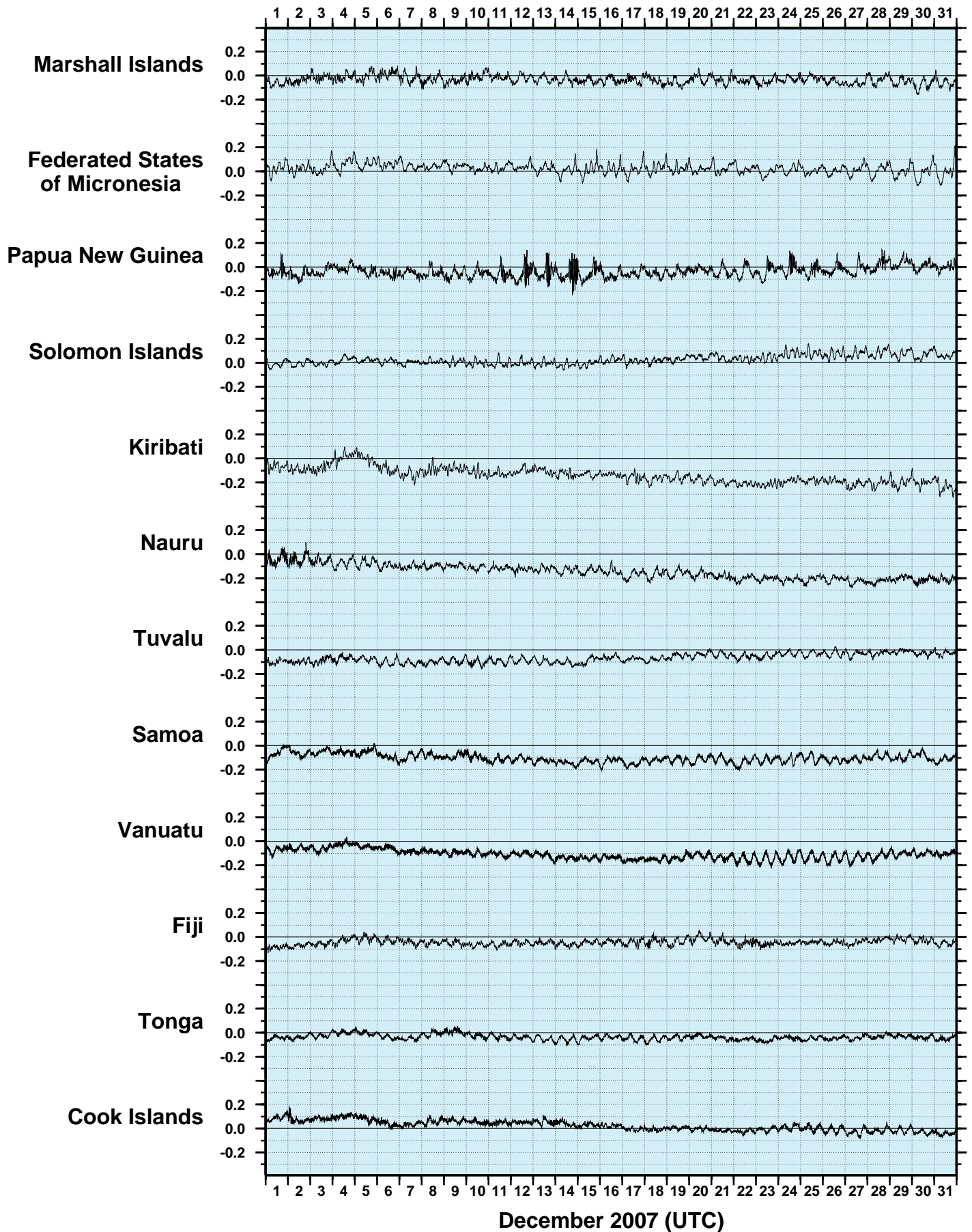


Figure 4

DECEMBER 2007
HOURLY WIND SPEEDS (m/s)

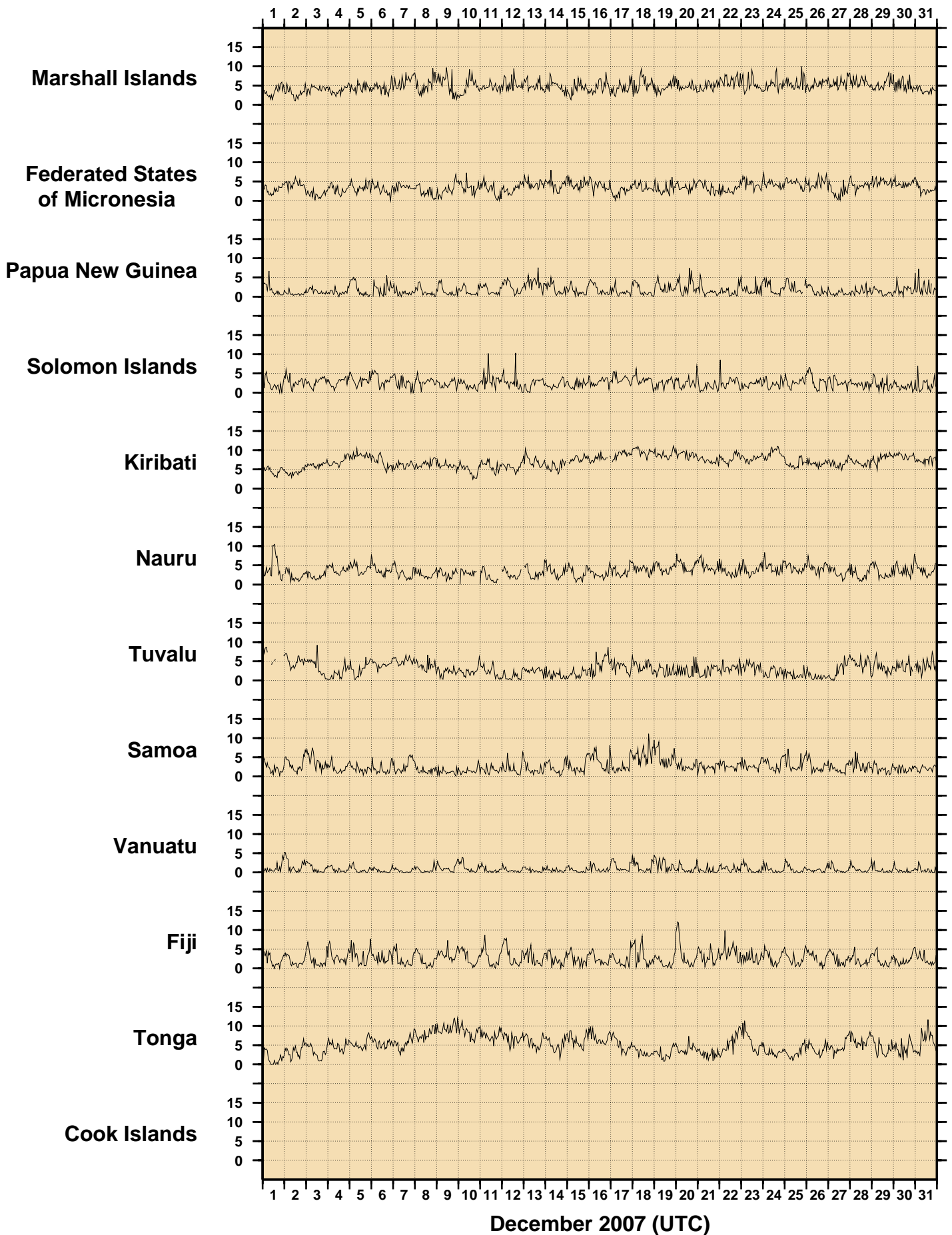


Figure 5
DECEMBER 2007
HOURLY INCIDENT WINDS (m/s, deg True)

— 10 m/s

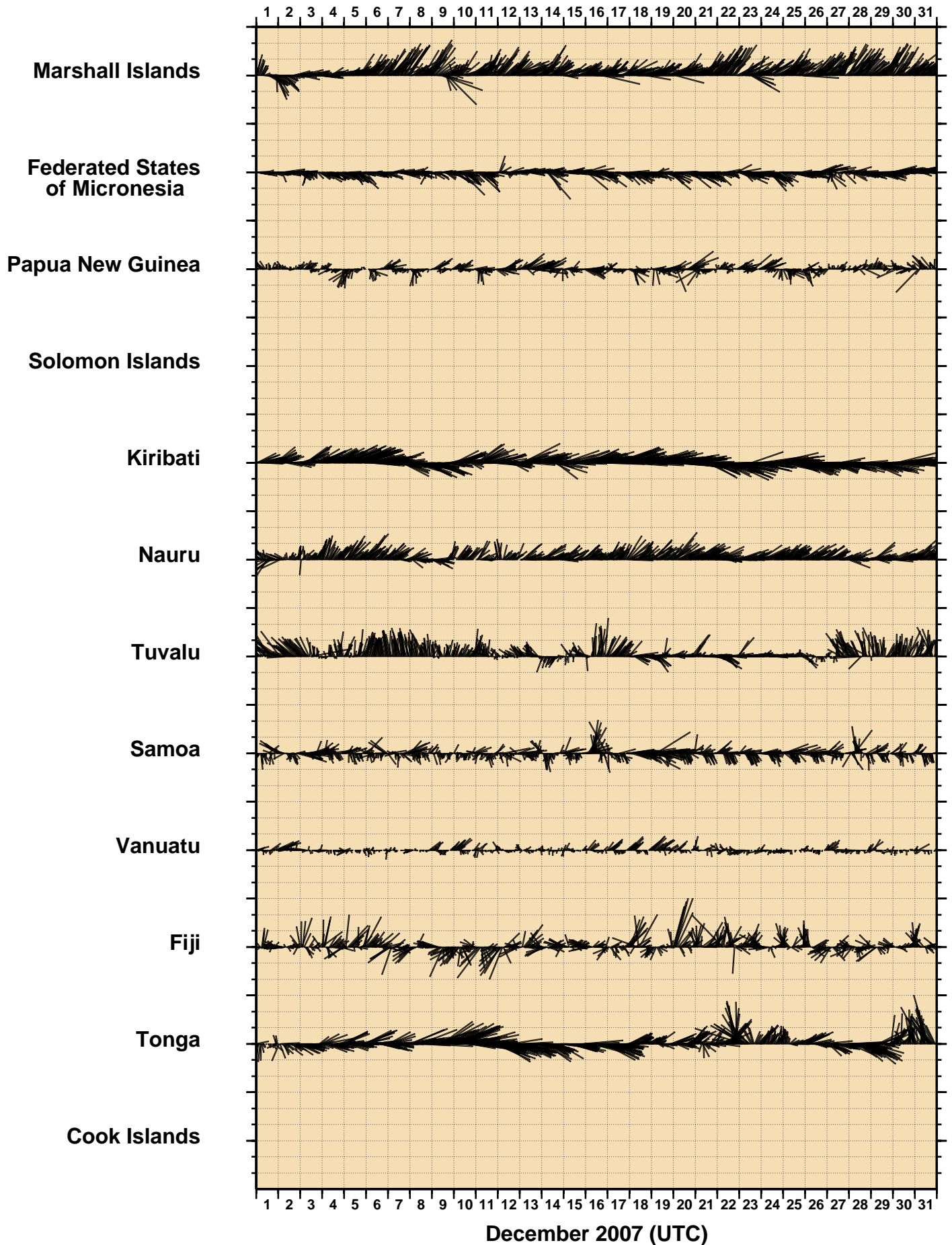
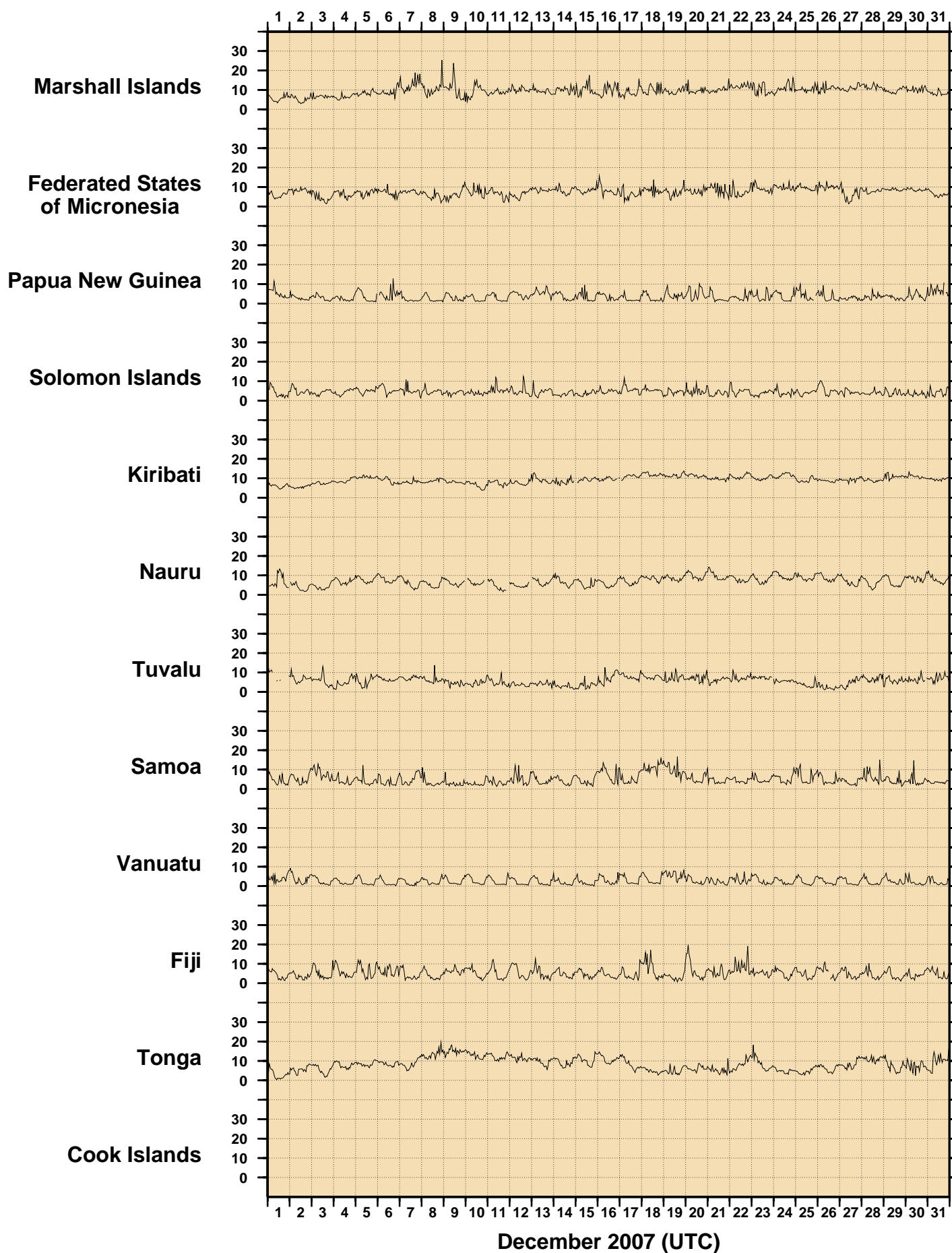


Figure 6
DECEMBER 2007
HOURLY MAXIMUM WIND GUSTS (m/s)



DECEMBER 2007

HOURLY AIR TEMPERATURES (°C)



Figure 8

DECEMBER 2007
HOURLY WATER TEMPERATURES (°C)

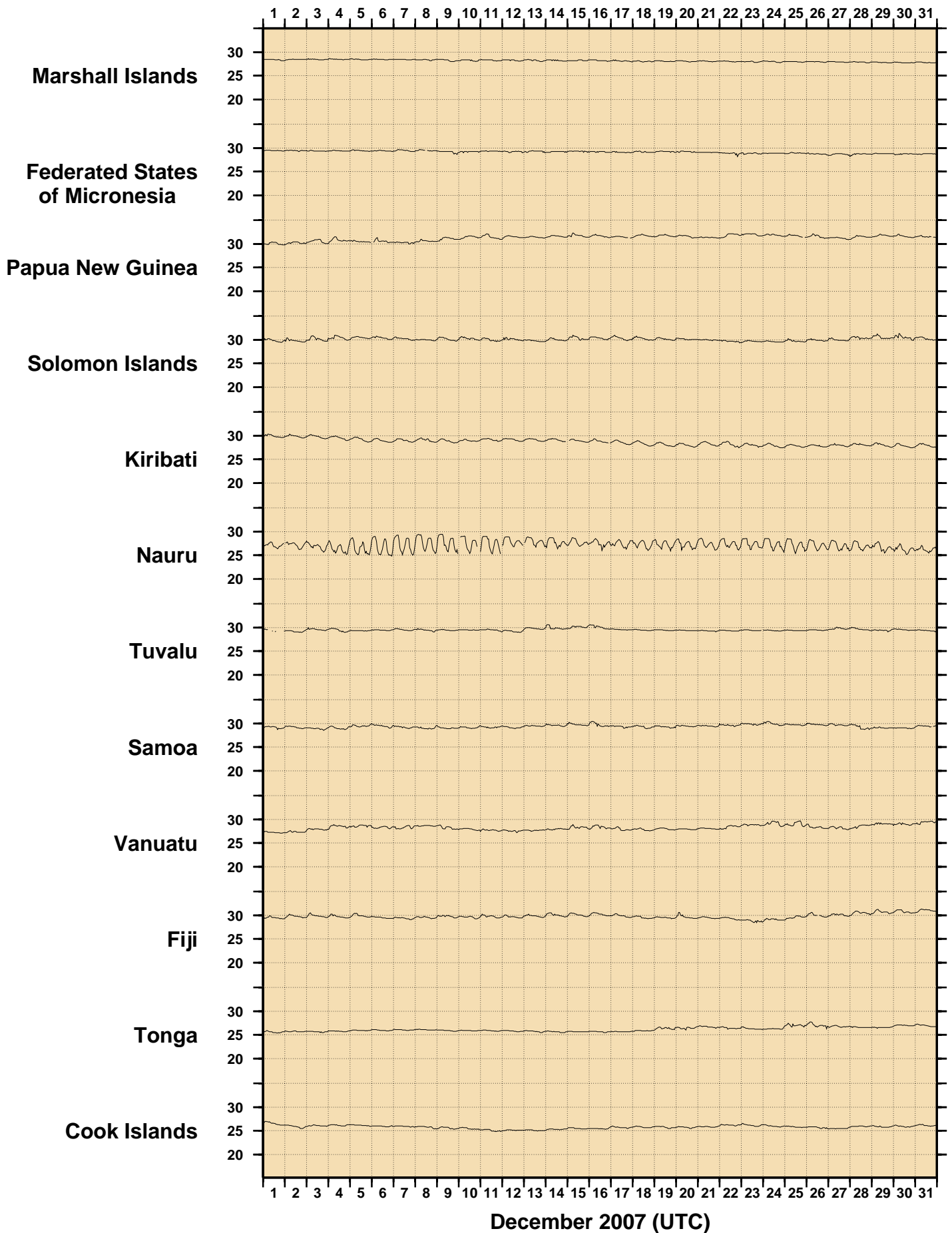


Figure 9
DECEMBER 2007
HOURLY ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE (hPa)

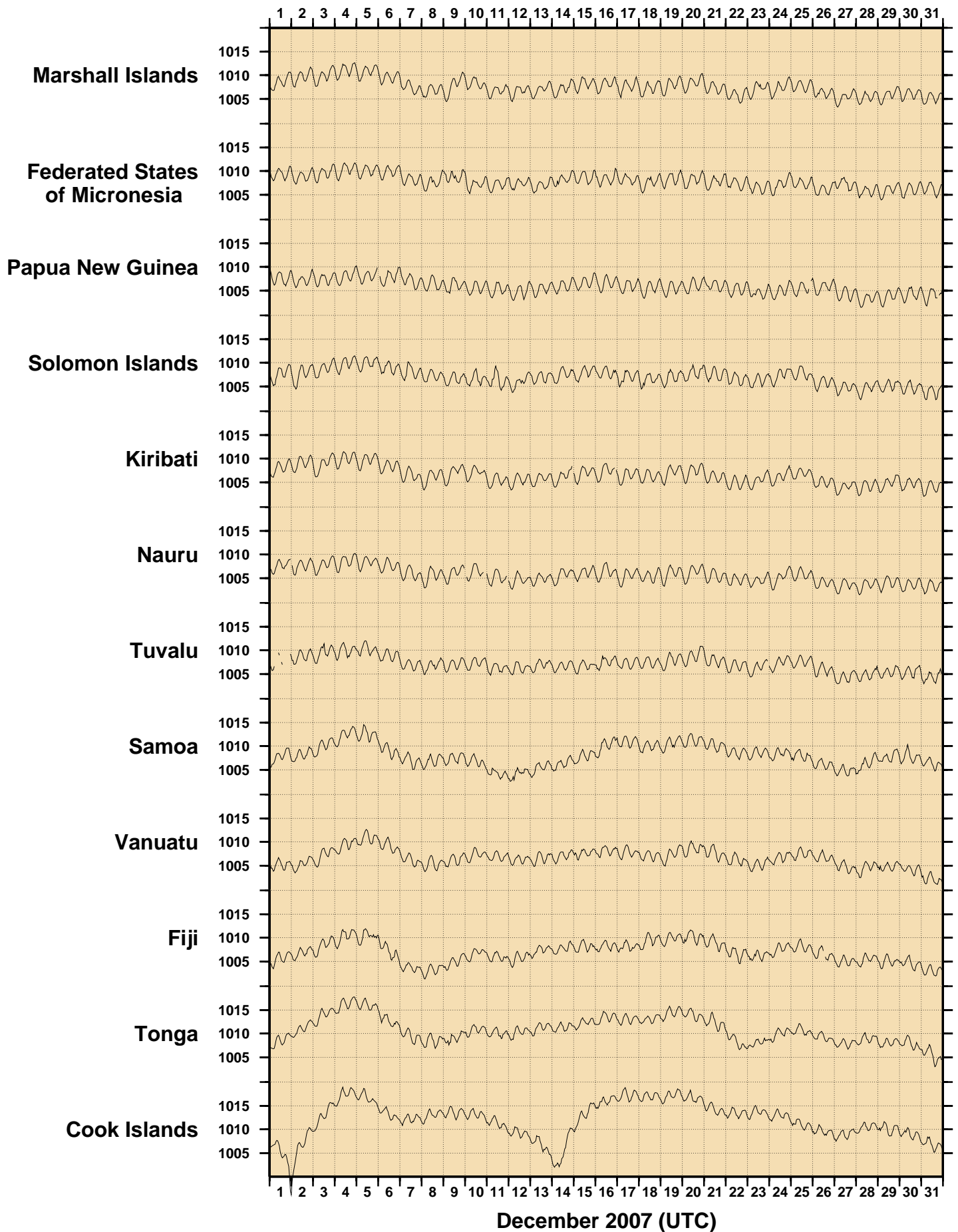
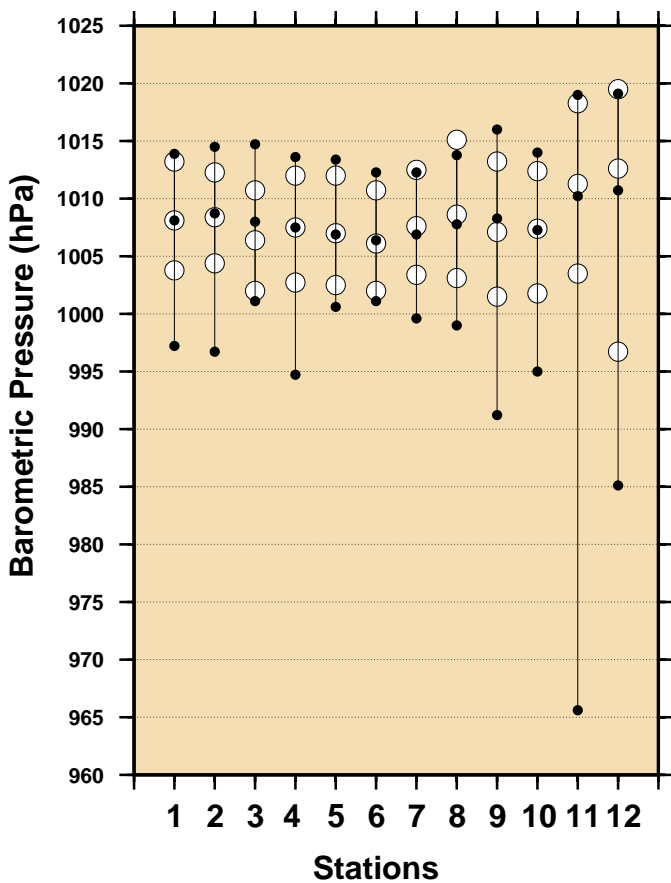
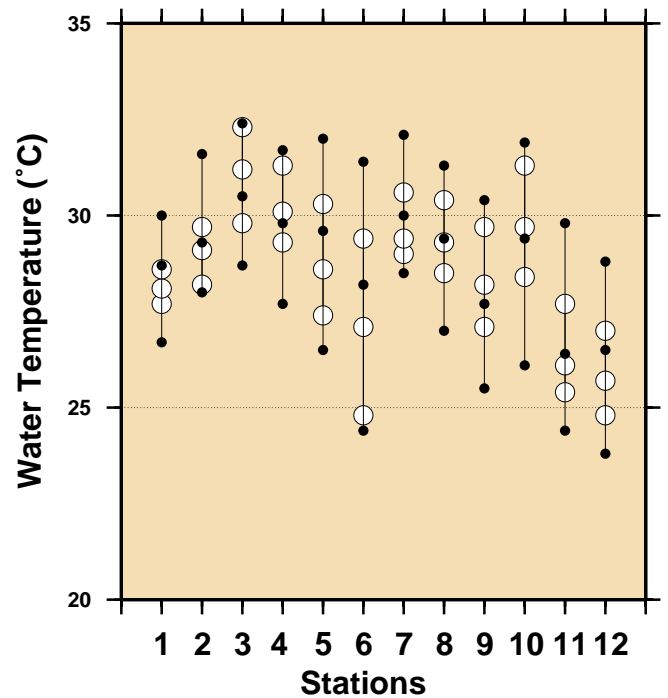
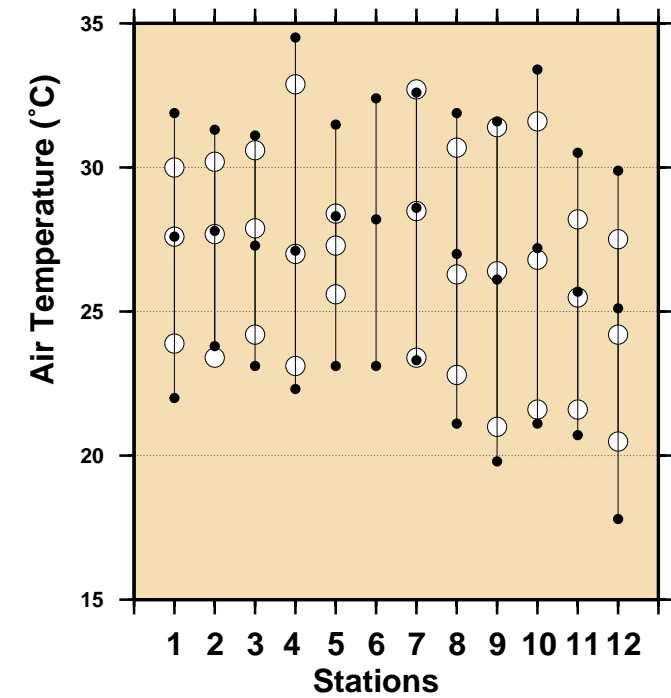


Figure 10

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

○ December 2007 Maximum
 ○ December 2007 Mean
 ○ December 2007 Minimum

● Long Term December Maximum
 ● Long Term December Mean
 ● Long Term December Minimum

Figure 11

MONTHLY MEAN SEA LEVELS TO DECEMBER 2007 (m)

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

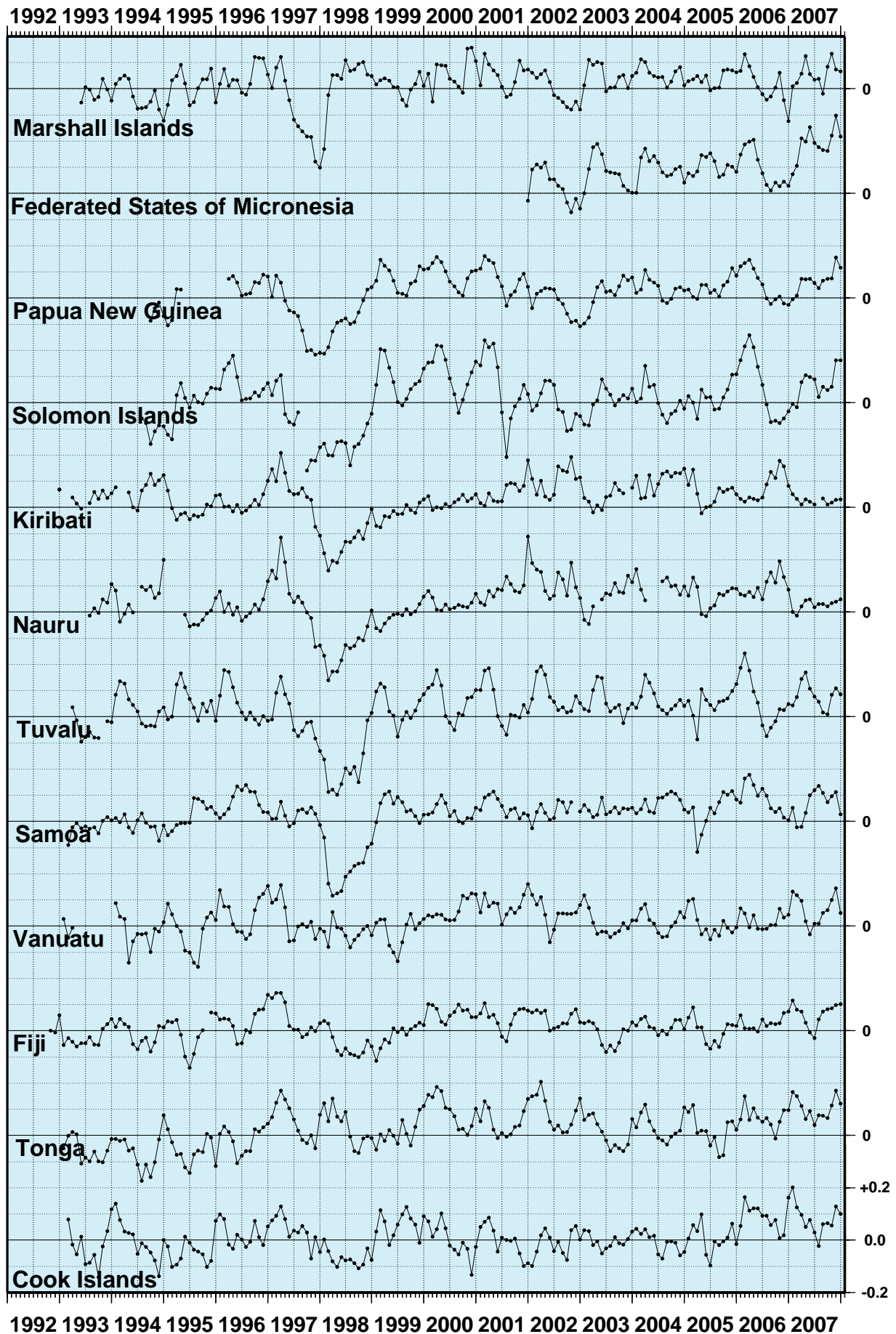


Figure 12

SEA LEVEL ANOMALIES THROUGH DECEMBER 2007 (m)

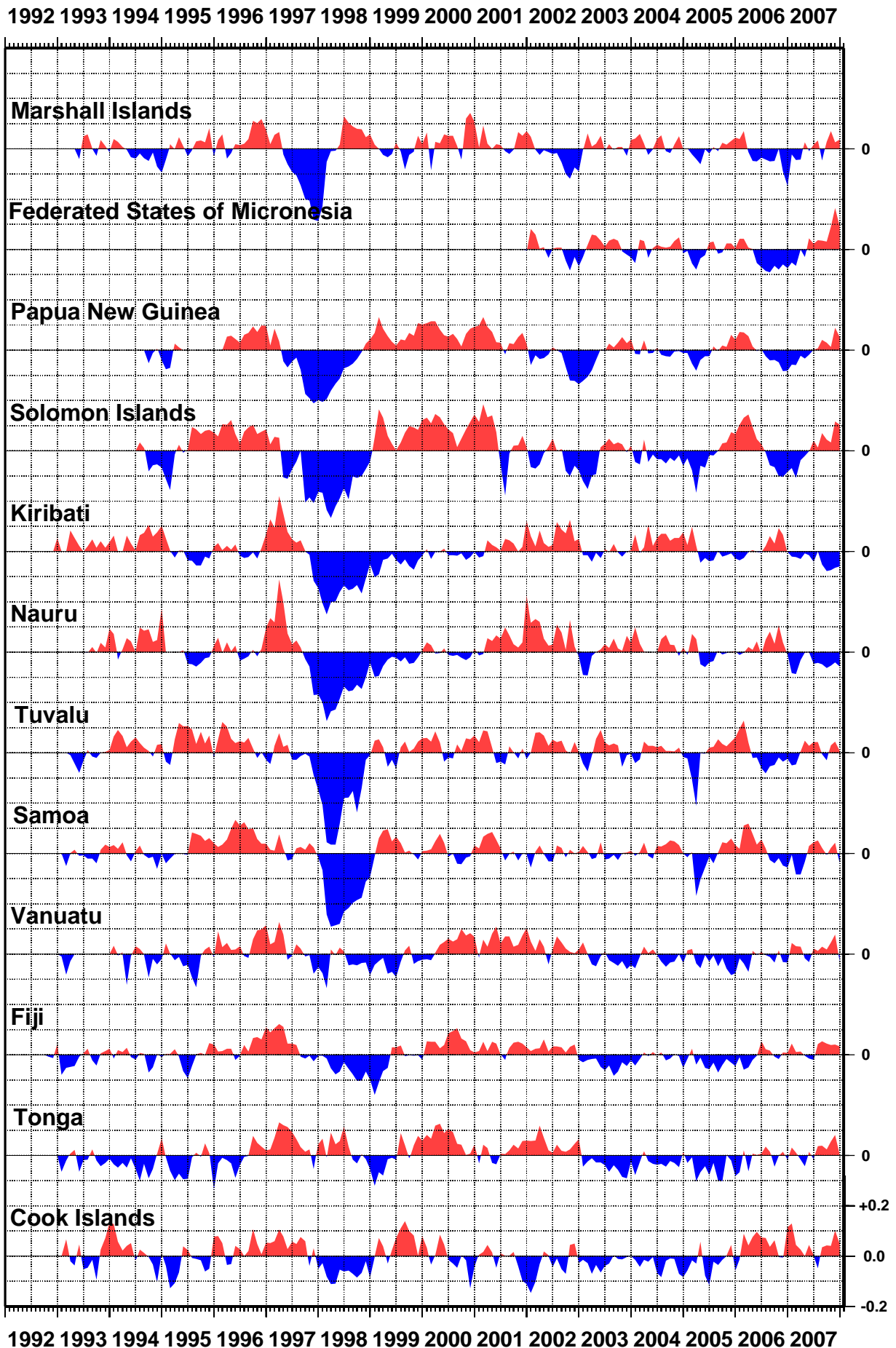


Figure 13

SEA LEVEL TRENDS THROUGH DECEMBER 2007 (mm/year)

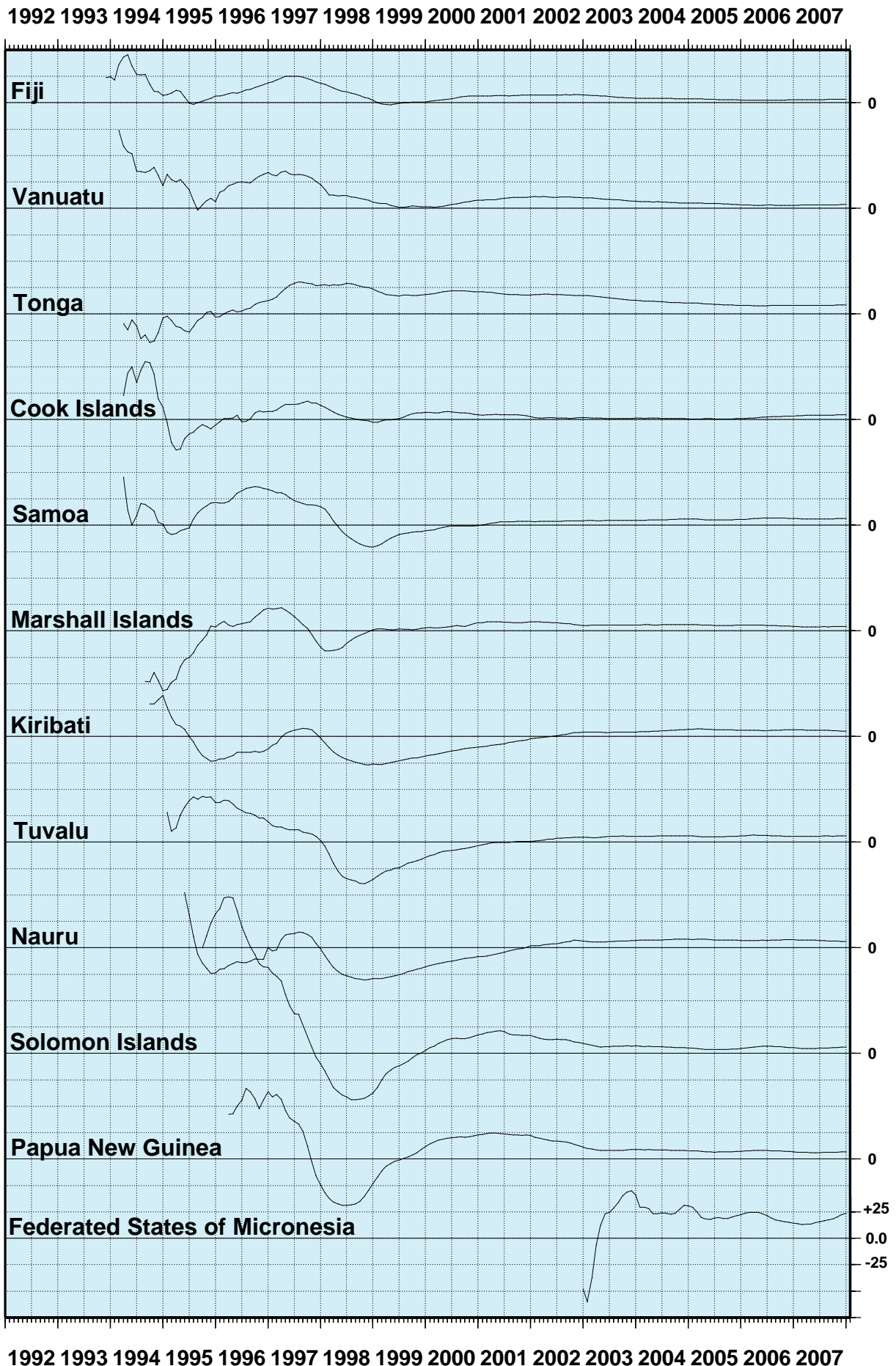
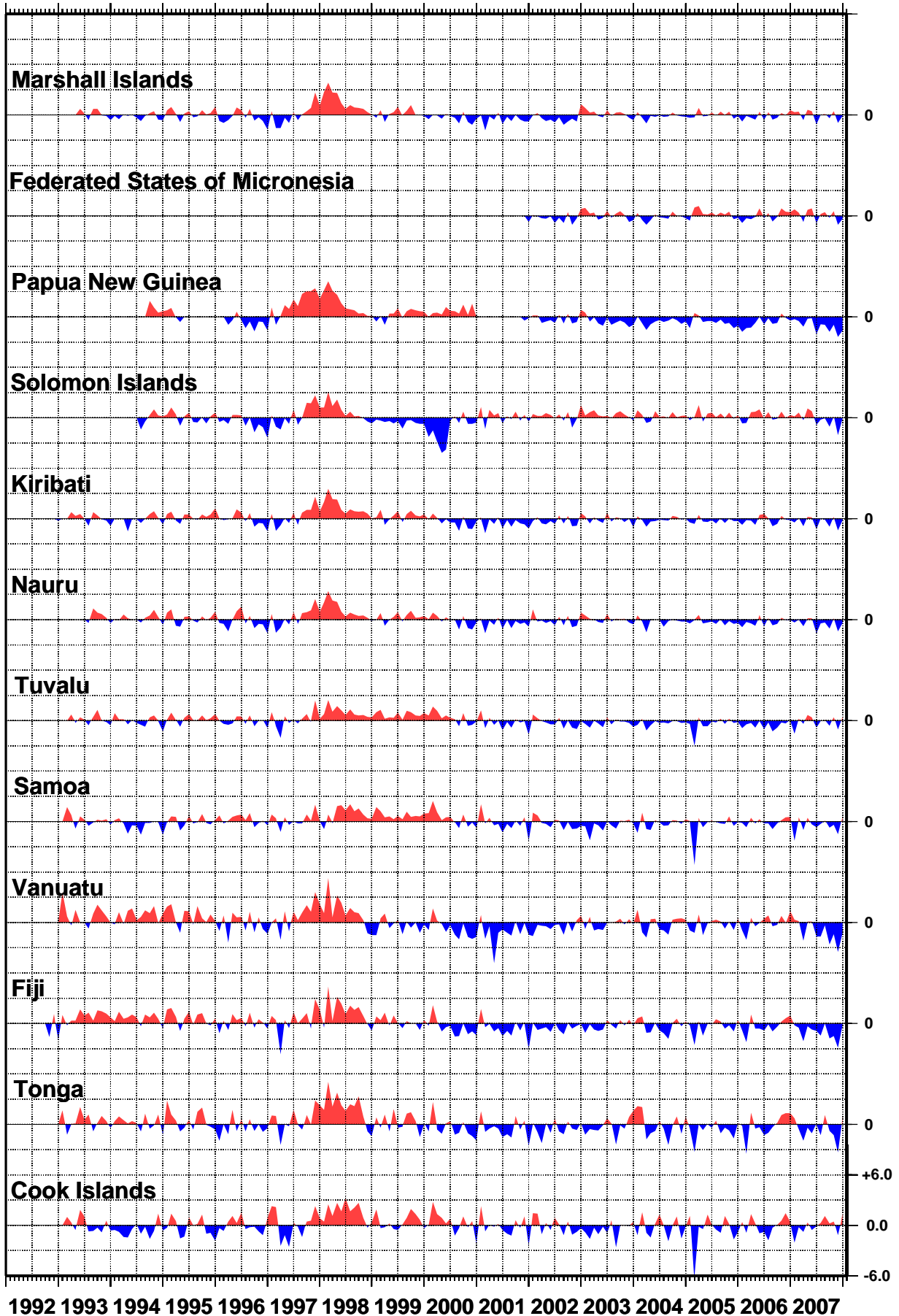


Figure 14

BAROMETRIC PRESSURE ANOMALIES THROUGH DECEMBER 2007 (hPa)

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

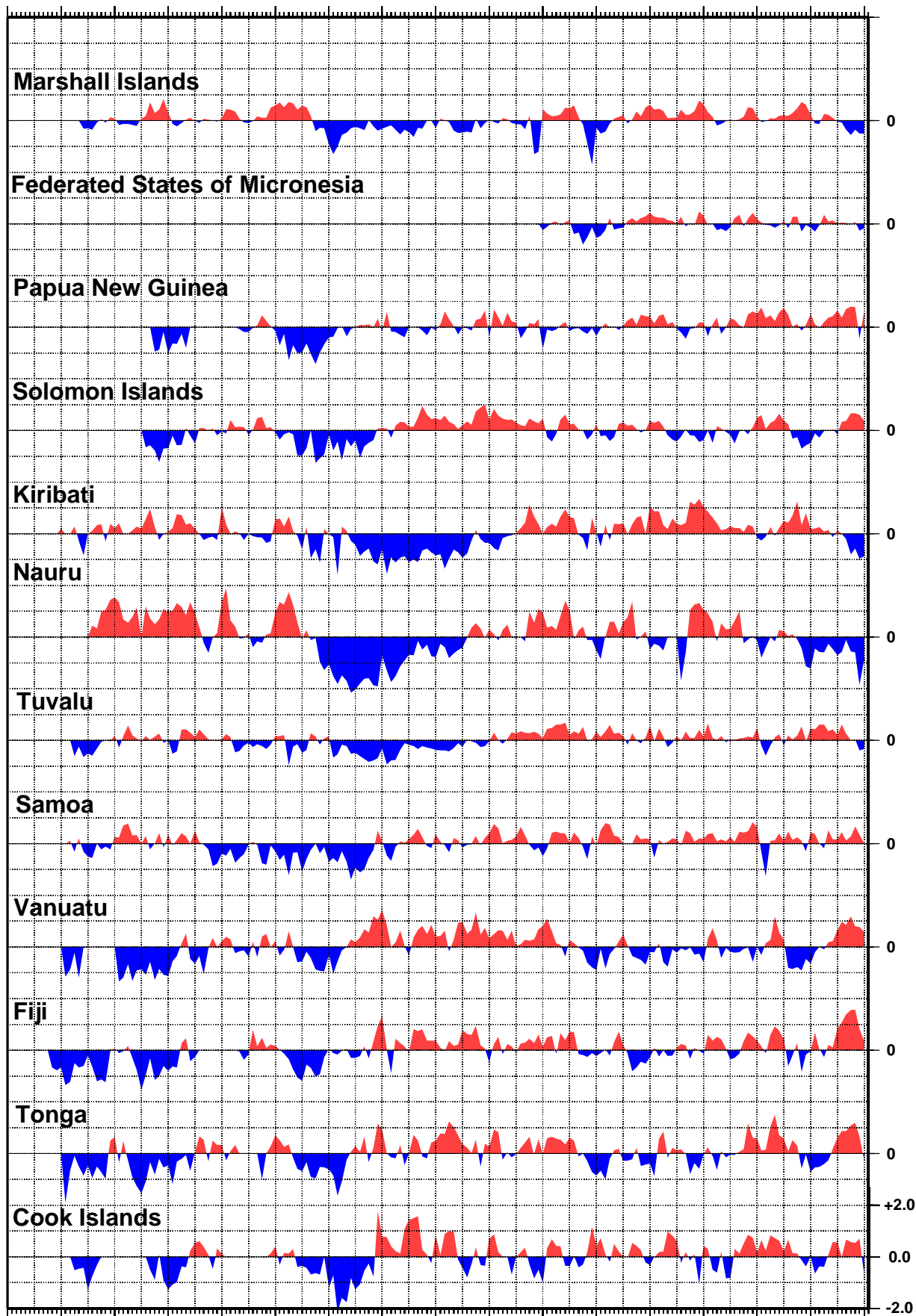


1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007

Figure 15

WATER TEMPERATURE ANOMALIES THROUGH DECEMBER 2007 (°C)

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

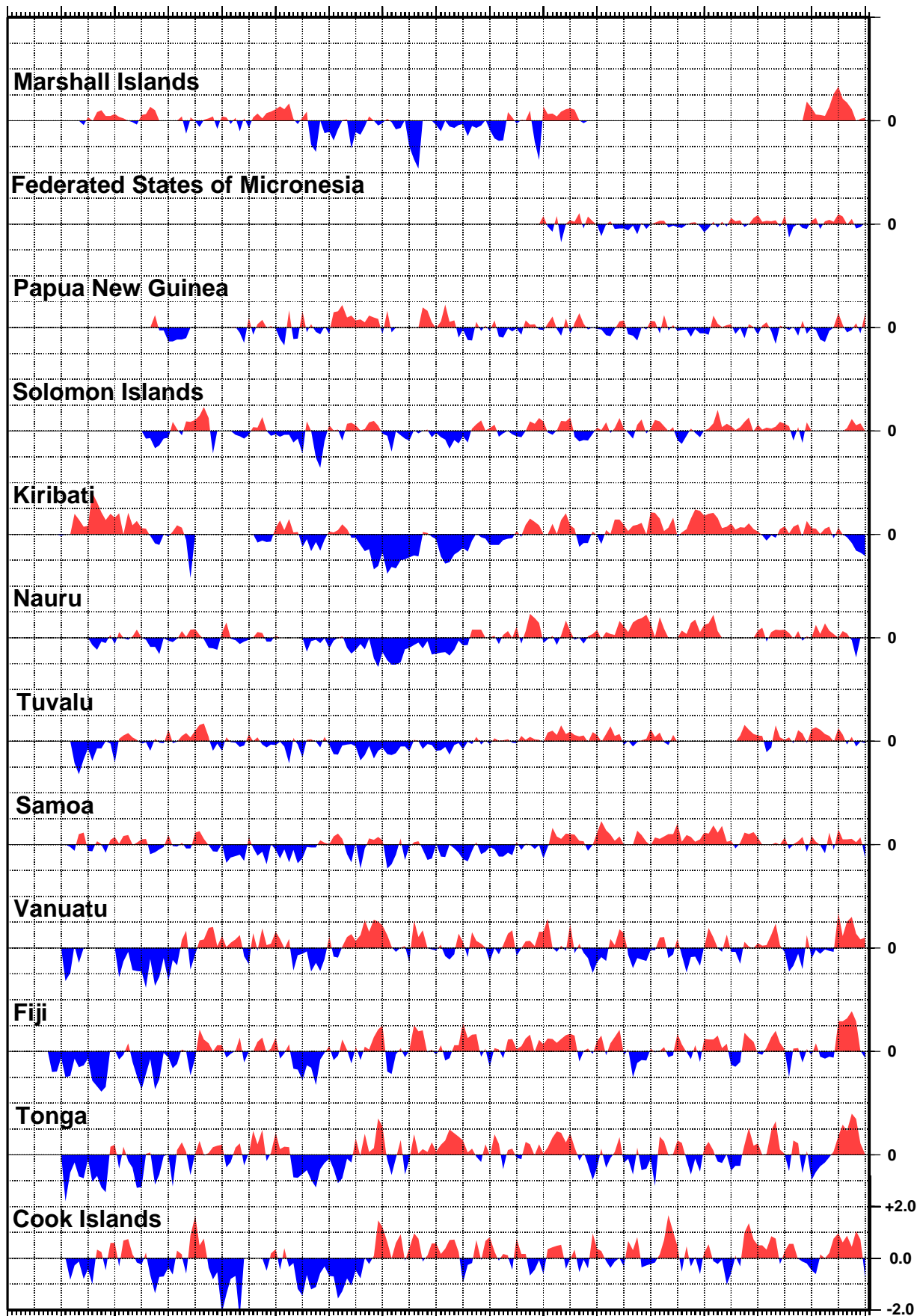


1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007

Figure 16

AIR TEMPERATURE ANOMALIES THROUGH DECEMBER 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

