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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Drought Warning in force for Niuafou'ou**

### **Drought Alert in force for Niuatoputapu, Vava'u and Ha'apai**

(19 May 2019, Nuku'alofa) The Tonga Meteorological Services has issued a Drought Warning for Niuafou'ou and Drought Alerts for Niuatoputapu, Vava'u and Ha'apai. The drought warning and alerts for these parts of Tonga are based on the amount of rain that has fell in Niuafou'ou, Niuatoputapu, Ha'apai and Vava'u in the past 3 months and rainfall forecast for the next 3 to 6 months.

Rainfall totals for Feb— Apr 2020 (mm)			
	Feb	Mar	Apr
Niuafou'ou	135.0	87.0	208.5
Niuatoputapu	325.5	61.9	385.1
Vava'u	351.7	135.3	518.6
Ha'apai	189.5	133.1	224.5
Fua'amotu	88.8	339.8	221.5
Nuku'alofa	62.5	539.0	233.0
'Eua	169.0	342.5	227.5
Below average	Average (usual)		Above average

Figure 1: Rainfall totals from February to April 2020 (mm)

### For Niuafou'ou

Rainfall amounts in the past 6 months (November 2019 – April 2020) have been below average and based on the latest climate outlook summary this pattern is forecasted to continue for the next 3 months until at least July. Because Niuafou'ou did not receive the expected rain during the wet season, it is heading into the dry season already with a rainfall deficit which could result in severe water shortages if the rainfall continues to be below average as forecast and if residence do not use water wisely. Residence should ration water now and collect as much rain water as you possibly can during rainfall events.

### For Niuatoputapu, Vava'u and Ha'apai

Rainfall has been somewhat chaotic. Fluctuating between below average and above average in the past 3 months (February – April 2020). But because we are heading into the dry season and with the predictions pointing to drier conditions, Niuatoputapu, Ha'apai and Vava'u Island Groups are placed under drought alerts and water rationing measures should start to be put in place to conserve water. Especially rainwater and especially the outer islands communities.

Forecast		
	May—Jul 2020 (%) chance)	Aug—Oct 2020 (%) chance)
Niuafou'ou	36	36
Niuatoputapu	38	35
Vava'u	40	34
Ha'apai	39	40
Fua'amotu & 'Eua	41	38
Nuku'alofa	44	38

Figure 2: Rainfall forecast for the next 6 months (mm)

## For Tongatapu and Eua

The rainfall in March and April 2020 has been above average for Tongatapu and 'Eua. However, based on the projected forecast and outlook for Tonga's rainfall in the next 6 months, the rainfall is forecasted to be below average across the entire Kingdom of Tonga. So Tongatapu and 'Eua should also be aware that another 2 consecutive months of below average rainfall will put them in a drought alert situation.

Based on these analysis and forecasts, it is important that the people of Tonga, especially Niuafu'ou, Niuatoputapu, Vava'u and Ha'apai are well informed of the Drought warnings and alert that are in-force for each Island Group. It is also important to note that the confidence in the current forecast is low due to fluctuating rainfall patterns. However, Tonga is moving into the dry period anyway and therefore citizens should prepare for drought

### Advise to Rainfall Sensitive Sectors

#### Agriculture

Careful drought planning and actions needs to be implemented now like the following:

- Prepare enough water if it can be spared for irrigating of water dependent crops
- Apply mulching to the soil around crops to keep as much soil moisture in the ground
- Plant drought resistant crops over the next 6 months e.g. cassava and lose yam
- Discuss with your local MAFFF Extension Officer on how to safeguard your crops from drought
- Follow the 10-day rainfall forecast provided by the Met Office daily

## Water

Households are advised to closely monitor and look after your water supply in the 3 to 6months. If your water supply is rainwater only consider rationing and prioritizing your water usage for drinking, cooking and WASH only, preserve water and collect as much rain water as possible by following the latest weather forecasts and reacting to forecasted rainfall events by collecting as much rain water as possible.

## Health

Drought especially prolonged drought always brings with it health risks. Drinking and using contaminated water could result in illnesses such as diarrhea and typhoid. And some skin diseases could be experienced due to lack of water for proper sanitation. Consider, boiling drinking water from water catchments. For those who pump ground water for usage, please consult with the Geology Division of the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources on proper pump and ground water management during drought situations if prolonged dry periods are experienced.

## Disaster Management

Town Officers and NGOs please work closely with your communities' groups to monitor and gauge the water availability and report to NEMO or MIA any water shortages or difficulties that start to arise.

For more information on this media release, please do not hesitate to contact our Meteorological office at 35-355 or visit our Face book page (Tonga Meteorological Services) or by email at [metstaff@met.gov.to](mailto:metstaff@met.gov.to) for more information.

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