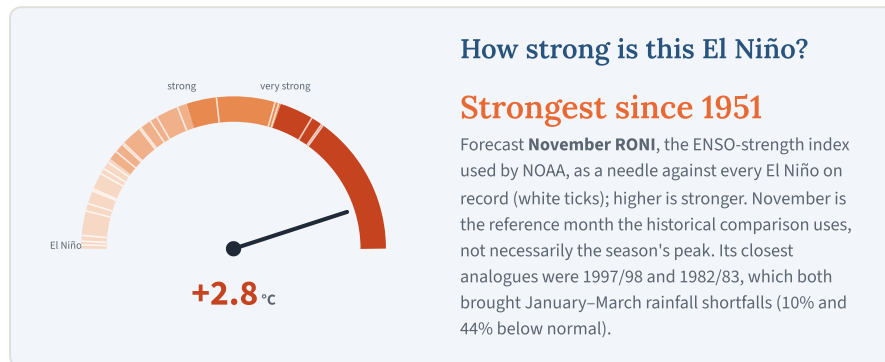


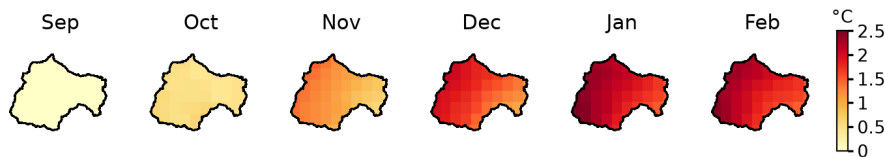
A very strong El Niño points to a hotter season: dams 84% full, a reserve to protect

Heat is a confident signal this season. A drier-than-normal tilt appears later in the outlook but carries low confidence. Reservoir storage was estimated on 17 September 2026 at **84%** of capacity, above the **80%** held a year earlier. That is a sound starting point, not a guarantee: a hotter and possibly drier season will draw on it and could delay refilling. On current forecasts this would be the strongest El Niño since 1951; its closest past analogues were 1997/98 and 1982/83, which both brought January–March rainfall shortfalls (10% and 44% below normal).



TEMPERATURE OUTLOOK

Most months in the outlook lean hotter than normal, strengthening toward the end of the period. Seasonal heat forecasts have a strong track record in this basin (verified skill: RPSS +0.13 vs ERA5).



RAINFALL OUTLOOK

Models lean drier than normal from November, consistent with El Niño climatology, but seasonal rainfall skill in the Limpopo is low (RPSS +0.03). Treat the drier tilt as a **watch, not a warning**, and revisit monthly.

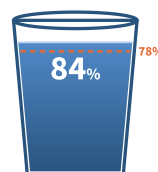
WATER IN STORAGE: THE IRRIGATION RESERVE

The basin's dams are **84% full**, easing to about **78%** by end-November as the dry season draws them down, and further should the rains come late or fall short. That stored water has to last until the rains refill it. Storage is little changed since the July 2026 brief, and above where it stood a year earlier. In the closest analogue seasons (1997/98 and 1982/83) January–March rainfall fell short, so refilling cannot be assumed. This water is the season's supply for **irrigated** farming; rain-fed areas rely on rainfall and soil moisture instead.

Storage is a satellite-derived estimate, not an exact reading.



How each dam's volume was estimated: High = machine-learning model · Medium = geometry / height-informed estimate · Low = capacity-fraction estimate



of capacity · dashed = ~78% by end-Nov

At a glance

- El Niño:** very strong event · very likely
- Hotter season:** likely
- Drier season:** low confidence
- Dams 84% full:** a reserve to protect
- Soil moisture very wet** (Jun–Aug): 97th percentile, modelled estimate
- Crop water demand** ↑ ~11%: crops lose more water when it is hotter

READING THIS BRIEF

- observed, or a forecast with proven skill
- low-confidence signal, worth monitoring

Only low-confidence items should prompt contingency planning, not commitments.

Recommended actions

- Protect the reserve.** High storage now is no guarantee for 2027: agree drawdown limits and contingency triggers with farming communities, municipalities and other water users now, so allocations can be tightened early rather than late if the dry tilt firms up.
- Prepare for heat.** Heat- and drought-tolerant varieties, mulching, and adjusted planting windows help reduce pressure on water and soils.
- Reassess monthly.** Rainfall confidence may not improve; treat heat and stored water as the planning basis. This brief is reissued each month.