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Australian Cyclone Season in 2004/5 Forecast to be Most Active in 4 Years

Five tropical storms anticipated to strike Australian shores

London, 13th April 2004—Inhabitants of Australia and nearby islands can expect the 2004/5 tropical cyclone season to be the most active since 2000/1, leading weather experts say.

Tropical Storm Risk (TSR), the consortium of experts on insurance, risk management and seasonal climate forecasting led by the Benfield Hazard Research Centre at University College London, today issued its first extended range forecast for Australian-region tropical storm activity in 2004/5. The Australian tropical cyclone season lasts from 1 November to 30 April.

TSR anticipates five tropical storm strikes on Australia in 2004/5. For the Australian region as a whole (100°E to 170°E) TSR anticipates 11 tropical storms, with five of these developing into severe tropical cyclones. TSR estimates with 85% probability that basin and landfalling tropical storm numbers in 2004/5 will be either above-average or average and assigns only a 15% chance they will be below-average. The last three years have each seen below-average tropical storm activity around Australia.

“The main climate factor behind our forecast for Australian-region tropical storm activity in 2004/5 being close to or slightly above average is the anticipated neutral effect of early Austral summer ENSO (El Nino Southern Oscillation) sea surface temperatures in the region 150°W-160°E, 5°S-5°N” said Dr. Mark Saunders, TSR’s lead scientist. Water temperatures in this region influence atmospheric vertical wind shear over the Australian region which in turn affects tropical cyclone activity. The last three Austral summers have seen warmer-than-normal ENSO sea temperatures in this region leading to enhanced vertical wind shear and low tropical cyclone activity.

TSR has an impressive forecast track record. Recent long-range forecast successes include those for the 2001/2, 2002/3 and 2003/4 Australian-region tropical cyclone seasons. For the 2004/5 Australian season TSR will be issuing monthly updated seasonal forecasts through to early December 2004. TSR forecasts may be accessed through the website www.tropicalstormrisk.com.

Tropical storms are a costly disaster for northern Australia and adjacent southwest Pacific islands. The average storm damage bill per year 1990/1-2000/1 for this region is US \$58 million. By providing a lead time, seasonal storm forecasts help businesses and government plan ahead, thereby reducing risk and uncertainty.

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Notes to Editors:

About Tropical Storm Risk (TSR):

Founded in 2000, Tropical Storm Risk (TSR) offers a leading resource for forecasting the risk from tropical storms worldwide. The venture provides innovative forecast products to increase risk awareness and to help decision making within the (re)insurance industry, other business sectors, government and society. The TSR consortium is co-sponsored by Benfield, the leading independent reinsurance intermediary, Royal & Sun Alliance, the global insurance group, and Crawford & Company, a global claims management solutions company. The TSR scientific grouping brings together climate physicists, meteorologists and statisticians based at the UCL (University College London) Benfield Hazard Research Centre. www.tropicalstormrisk.com.

About Benfield Hazard Research Centre:

Benfield Hazard Research Centre is sponsored by Benfield, the leading independent reinsurance intermediary and risk advisory business. Benfield's customers include many of the world's major insurance and reinsurance companies as well as Government entities and global corporations. Benfield employs over 1,700 people based in over 30 locations worldwide. www.benfieldgroup.com

With over forty researchers and practitioners, the Benfield Hazard Research Centre is Europe's leading multidisciplinary academic hazard research centre and comprises three groups: Geological Hazards, Meteorological Hazards and Seasonal Forecasting, and Disaster Studies and Management. The Centre is based at University College London, which along with Oxford and Cambridge, is one of the UK's top three multi-faculty teaching and research institutions. www.benfieldhrc.org