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Persistent ocean warmth and expanding marine heatwaves mark the first half of 2026

Record global sea surface temperatures of 21.0°C made June 2026 the warmest June ever observed

Press Release, Toulouse, France, 30 June 2026 – The first six months of 2026 were characterized by persistently elevated sea-surface temperatures and widespread marine heatwaves across much of the global ocean, according to the latest Copernicus Marine mid-year bulletin.

Covering January through June 2026, the assessment examines sea-surface temperature (SST) and marine heatwave conditions across the global ocean between 60°S and 60°N, with particular focus on the Mediterranean Sea, the North Atlantic and the tropical Pacific. The analysis draws on Copernicus Marine's GLO12 global ocean monitoring systems, combining observations, modelling and reanalysis to provide a comprehensive picture of evolving ocean conditions.

Published alongside the joint Copernicus Climate Change Service and Copernicus Marine Service announcement confirming record daily global sea-surface temperatures for this time of year in June 2026, the bulletin provides the broader oceanographic context behind that milestone.

“The first half of 2026 was marked by sustained and exceptional ocean warmth. Our mid-year bulletin shows that global sea surface temperatures averaged 20.94°C between January and June, making it the second-warmest opening six months on record. Marine heatwaves expanded steadily throughout the period, ultimately affecting around 82% of the global ocean. The Mediterranean, the central North Atlantic and the equatorial Pacific all emerged as hotspots, and these regional signals paint a consistent picture of an ocean under sustained thermal stress, underscoring the need for continuous, high-resolution ocean monitoring to understand how the

situation is evolving” says Simon Van Gennip, Lead Oceanographer for the Copernicus Marine Service, Mercator Ocean International.

Global Ocean (60° S – 60°N)

Globally, the first half of 2026 was the second warmest on record, with an average sea-surface temperature of approximately 20.94°C, slightly below the record set in 2024 (at around 21.04°C).

- Marine heatwaves expanded steadily throughout the six-month period. By the end of June, approximately 82% of the global ocean experienced marine heatwave conditions of varying intensity, marking the second-largest extent observed after 2024, when around 83% of the ocean was affected.
- The most persistent hotspots were observed across the tropical and subtropical Pacific, the upwelling regions off the Chilean and Californian coast, the subtropical part of the North Atlantic and the waters west of Europe. These regions experienced prolonged periods of above-average temperatures, with some areas reaching record or near-record conditions.
- June 2026 was warmest on record, with an average sea-surface temperature (SST) of about 21.0 °C, higher than June 2023 and 2024 records (around 20.9 °C)

The widespread nature of these marine heatwaves highlights that exceptionally warm ocean conditions have remained a defining feature of the global climate system throughout the first half of 2026.

Mediterranean Sea

The Mediterranean Sea continued its run of unusually warm conditions.

- Average sea-surface temperature during January-June reached 18.07°C, making the first half of 2026 the third warmest on record, behind only 2024 and 2025.
- Marine heatwaves affected almost the entire basin (98%). Around 80% of the Mediterranean experienced strong, severe or extreme marine heatwave conditions between January and June, with the most persistent events occurring in the western Mediterranean.
- This is the second-largest extent of strong-or-higher marine heatwaves on record, after 2025 (88%) and 2024 (95%).

- In June 2026, global sea surface temperatures reached a record average of 24.3°, making it the warmest June on record and breaking the previous benchmark of 23.94±0.44°C set in 2003 and 23.95 ±0.40°C in 2025.

North Atlantic (0° - 60°N)

The North Atlantic also experienced exceptional conditions throughout the first half of 2026.

- Regionally sea-surface temperatures reached record values in the subtropical part of the North Atlantic, where as many as four months registered record-breaking monthly temperatures. Similar record-high conditions were observed along parts of the European Atlantic coastline.
- A third of the North Atlantic was affected by strong, severe or extreme marine heatwaves.
- The strongest and most persistent events developed across the central basin and the waters west of Europe, continuing the pattern of elevated temperatures observed in recent years.

Tropical Pacific (30°S – 30°N)

The tropical Pacific remained another major hotspot during the first half of 2026.

Mean Sea-surface temperatures from January to June 2026 matched the 2016 record (26,91°C). Large parts of the basin recorded consecutive monthly temperature records, with the strongest and most persistent warming in the western equatorial Pacific and the eastern upwelling regions off Peru and California.

- Marine heatwaves also intensified across the basin. Around 60% of the tropical Pacific experienced strong or more intense marine heatwave conditions, exceeding the spatial extent observed during the same period in 2024.
- June 2026 marked the warmest June ever recorded in the tropical Pacific , with an average sea surface temperature of 27.26°C, surpassing the previous record of 26.90°C set in 2023.

These exceptionally warm conditions are consistent with the development of El Niño conditions, which typically contribute to above-average temperatures across parts of the tropical Pacific while influencing weather and ocean conditions around the world.

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Media Resources: <https://atlas.mercator-ocean.fr/s/LizJtmXzDBCRAkn>

- Press releases (Copernicus Marine & Joint Press Release)
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About the Copernicus Marine Service

The [Copernicus Marine Service](#) is one of the six services of Copernicus, the European Union's Earth Observation Programme. The service operates ocean analysis and forecasting and is funded by the European Union. The Copernicus Marine Service delivers regular and systematic reference information on the Blue (physical), White (sea ice) and Green (biogeochemical and biological) ocean at both global and European scales. Its data and products support key EU and international policies, contributing to efforts in pollution reduction, marine protection, maritime safety and routing, sustainable resource management, marine renewable energy, blue growth, climate monitoring, and weather forecasting. The service also seeks to raise public awareness by providing citizens in Europe and worldwide with accessible information on ocean issues.

About Mercator Ocean International

[Mercator Ocean International](#) is one of the world's leading ocean prediction centres and a key pillar of Europe's digital ocean infrastructure. It is the entrusted entity of the European Commission for the Copernicus Marine Service, delivering free, open-access ocean data and forecasts as a public service to governments, authorities, scientists, and strategic users worldwide. Mercator Ocean also leads the development of the European Digital Twin Ocean, a flagship European initiative developed with partners under the leadership of the European Commission to support scenario-based ocean decision-making. In 2025, Mercator Ocean took a major step toward becoming an international organization, with twelve European countries endorsing the international convention establishing the Mercator International Centre for the Ocean.