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Crying wolf with the 2023 El Niño: a predicted event that failed to materialize?

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The El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) is a phenomenon that involves the redistribution of heat in the tropical Pacific Ocean, resulting in irregular oscillations in the sea surface temperature (SST) between warm (El Niño) and cold (La Niña) phases, and impacting the global planetary climate. In July 2023 the World Meteorological Organization, formally responsible to declare the onset of El Niño, officially announced its onset to the media, urging governments to prepare for potential high impacts on health, ecosystems and economies. However, the analysis of long-term meteorological and oceanographic data updated to the end of 2023 shows that while the eastern Pacific was warmer than normal in the second half of the year, the overall configuration of the tropical Pacific climate system did not indicate a strong El Niño event. Our findings show that the 2023-24 El Niño event, initially predicted to be at least moderate and possibly strong, turned out to be weak and, *de facto*, the year closed confirming it as a weaker than expected event. Based on historical records, we hypothesize that the state of the Pacific climate system at the end of 2023, following the unusual 2023-24 El Niño, may lead to the development of a strong or very strong El Niño by mid-2024.