Media Release

South African Weather Service

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1 February 2022

The latest regarding Tropical Cyclone "Batsirai"

This morning, Tropical Cyclone "Batsirai" continues to be a highly significant tropical storm system within the Southern Indian Ocean. It is the second named system of the 2021/2022 season for the South-West Indian Ocean domain. Batsirai is classified as a Tropical Cyclone and is currently associated with sustained winds of about 140 km/h and is located at 17.0°S / 061.2°E, moving slowly south-westwards at 18.5 km/h (10 knots).

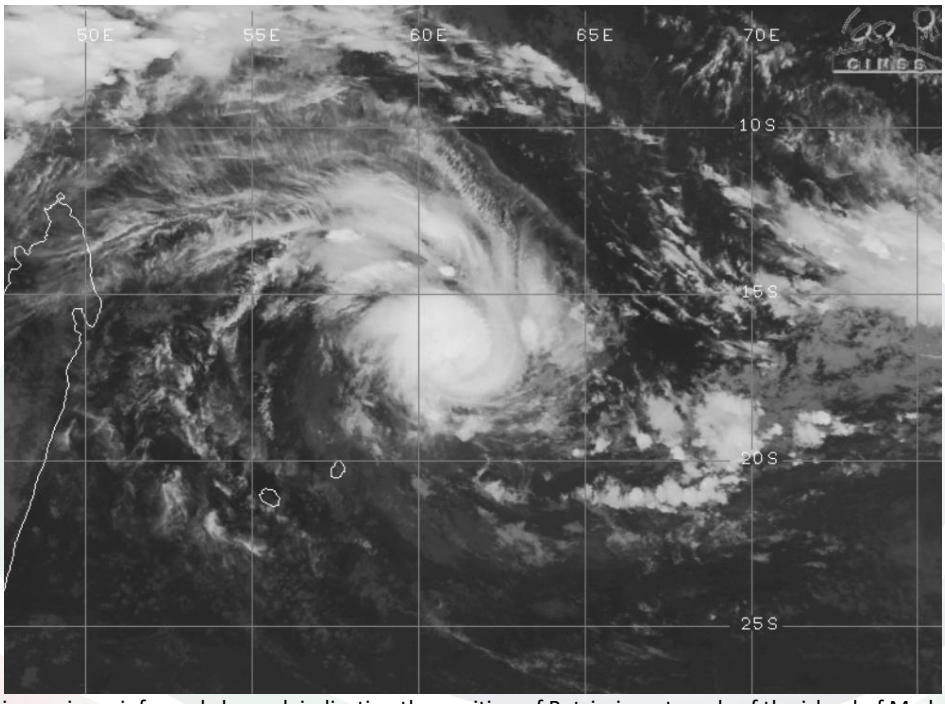

Figure 1: A satellite image in an infra-red channel, indicating the position of Batsirai, eastwards of the island of Madagascar (at extreme left) at 07h00SAST this morning, 1 February 2022. Mauritius and Reunion lie to the south-west of the tropical system. Source: University of Wisconsin, CIMSS.

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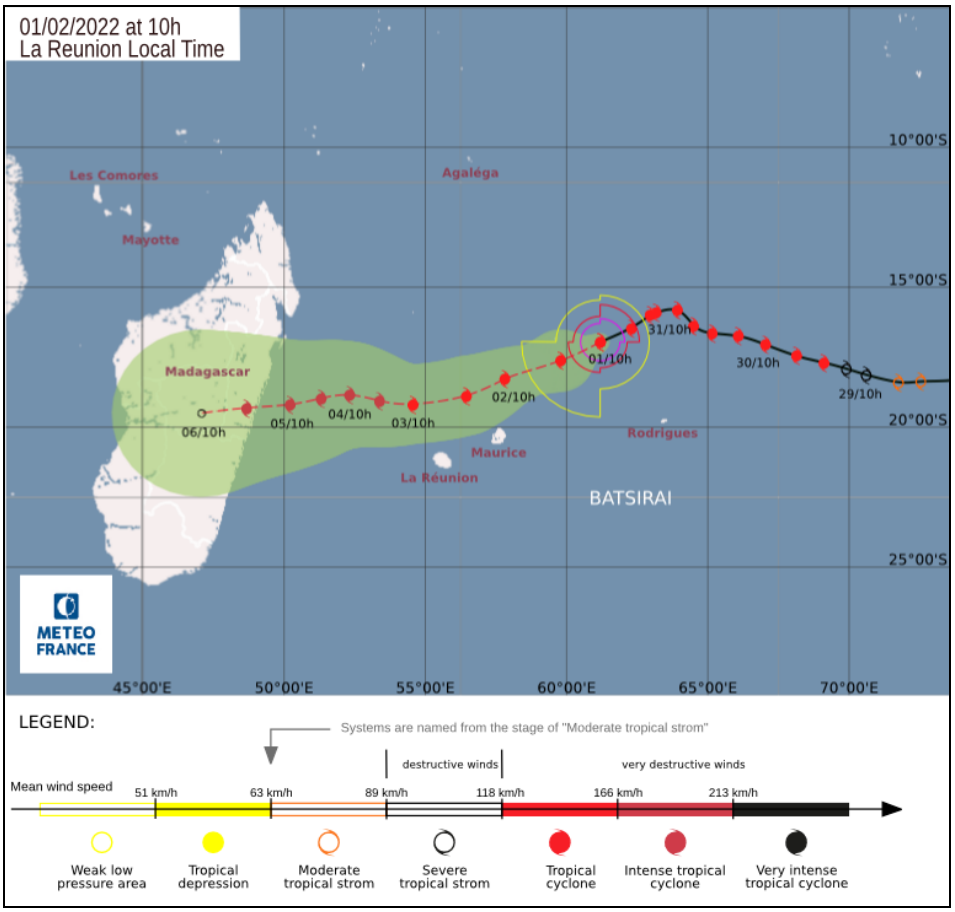

Figure 2: The latest track forecast for Batsirai, as issued by Regional Specialised Meteorology Centre (RSMC) La Reunion at 08h00SAST today 1 February 2022. Source: RSMC Reunion.

In Figure 2 (above), the latest track forecast issued by RSMC La Reunion suggests that over the next few days, Batsirai should pass north of Mauritius and Reunion islands. Rainbands around the periphery of Batsirai however may well affect these islands.

By contrast, it seems highly likely that the eastern coastline of Madagascar (particularly the central part of the coast) will bear the brunt of strong, damaging winds and torrential rainfall, as Batsirai makes landfall at some stage in the latter half of Saturday, 5 February 2022. Very rough seas, combined with storm surge, tend to be more extreme on the southern (poleward) side of tropical storms in this region of the world. Moreover, the steep, rugged topography of the mountains extending along the eastern coastline of Madagascar, will no doubt, exacerbate the risk of orographically-induced rainfall as well as flash-floods and mudslides.

Acknowledging that the movement of tropical cyclones can be extremely erratic, and hence challenging to predict with any accuracy, it is difficult to speculate about future movement of Batsirai in the timescale beyond this weekend. Meteorologists are, however, confident that Batsirai will weaken temporarily once it makes landfall over Madagascar. It is also probable that Batsirai will re-invigorate as it enters the ocean environment of the Mozambique Channel, early next week.

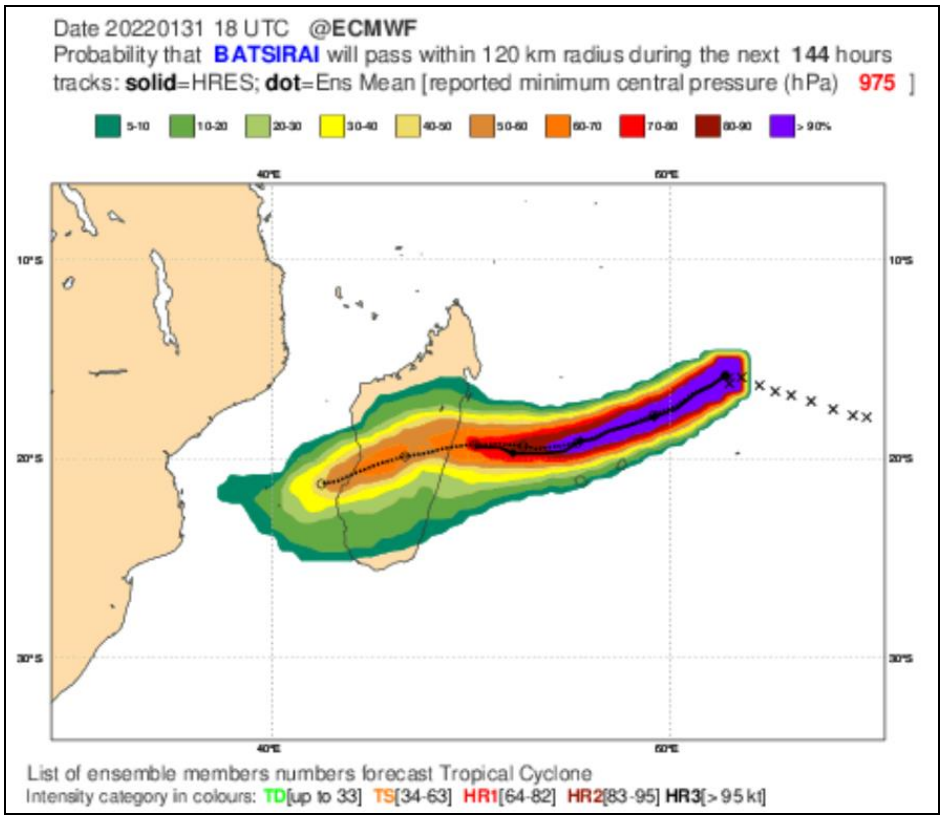

Figure 3: The latest ECMWF "strike plume" ensemble forecast for Batsirai for the next 5 days. Higher confidence tracks are represented as orange, red, blue and purple shades. Lower confidence (outlier) outcomes are represented in varying shades of green. Source: ECMWF.

Despite significant recent advances in Numeric Weather Prediction (NWP) and supercomputing, it is not yet possible to accurately determine whether Batsirai will eventually affect South Africa, either directly or indirectly. However, the latest ensemble forecast from the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) (Figure 3, above) provides a good idea of the most likely path and movement of Batsirai during the coming 5 days. Suffice to say that, at least in the days ahead, there is no immediate weather-related threat for South Africa, in relation to this tropical cyclone.

Be assured that SAWS will continue to closely monitor developments in this regard and will issue updates as and when necessary.

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