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22 January 2021

WEEKEND UPDATE REGARDING SEVERE TROPICAL STORM “ELOISE”

Currently Severe Tropical Storm “Eloise” is located in the central part of the Mozambique Channel (refer to satellite image, Figure 1), moving west south westwards at a moderate speed of approximately 22 km/h. During the past 24 hours it has intensified significantly, given the very warm ocean waters (sea surface temperature (SST) close to 30°C) of the Mozambique Channel, which provide an abundant source of energy to drive the system.

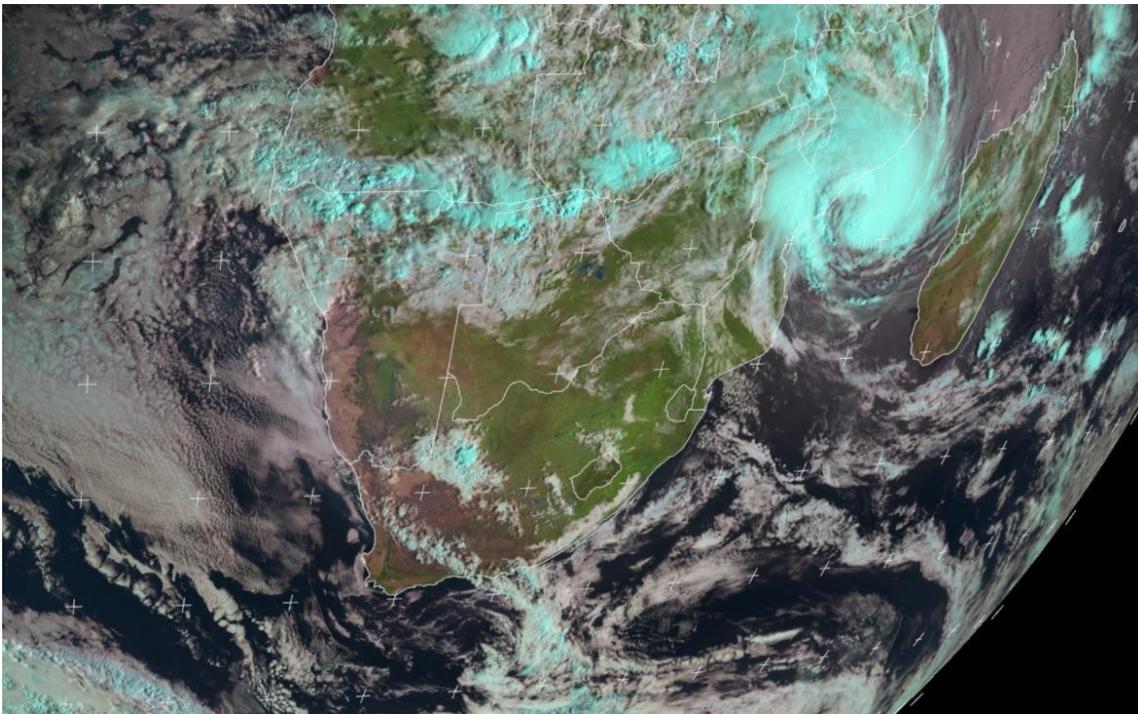


Figure 1: A geostationary satellite image (Meteosat Second Generation) of southern Africa at 08h00 SAST this morning, Friday 22 January 2021. Severe Tropical storm “Eloise” is clearly visible as an impressive swirl of clouds, located in the middle of the Mozambique Channel, lying to the north-east of Beira, Mozambique. RGB false-colour image courtesy EUMETSAT 2021.

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During the next 24 hours, the system is expected to move ever closer to Beira (refer Figure 2), a coastal city in Mozambique. Moreover, “Eloise” is expected to further intensify beyond its current status of “Severe Tropical Storm”, reaching “Tropical Cyclone” status during tomorrow, ahead of landfall near Beira in the latter half of tomorrow (South African time). As a landfalling Tropical Cyclone, one can expect “very destructive” winds, of the order of 118 to 166 km/h (again with reference to Figure 2) to affect the Beira area at landfall (landfall is the term used to describe the moment when a tropical storm system first arrives over the coastline of a landmass). Typically, given the clockwise rotation of surface winds around such a system (in the Southern hemisphere), together with the movement of the system, one can typically expect the strongest destructive winds to be located on the south-western quadrant of the system, i.e. the coastline immediately south of Beira. Significant storm surge, in and around the Beira coastline can also be expected in association with this system.

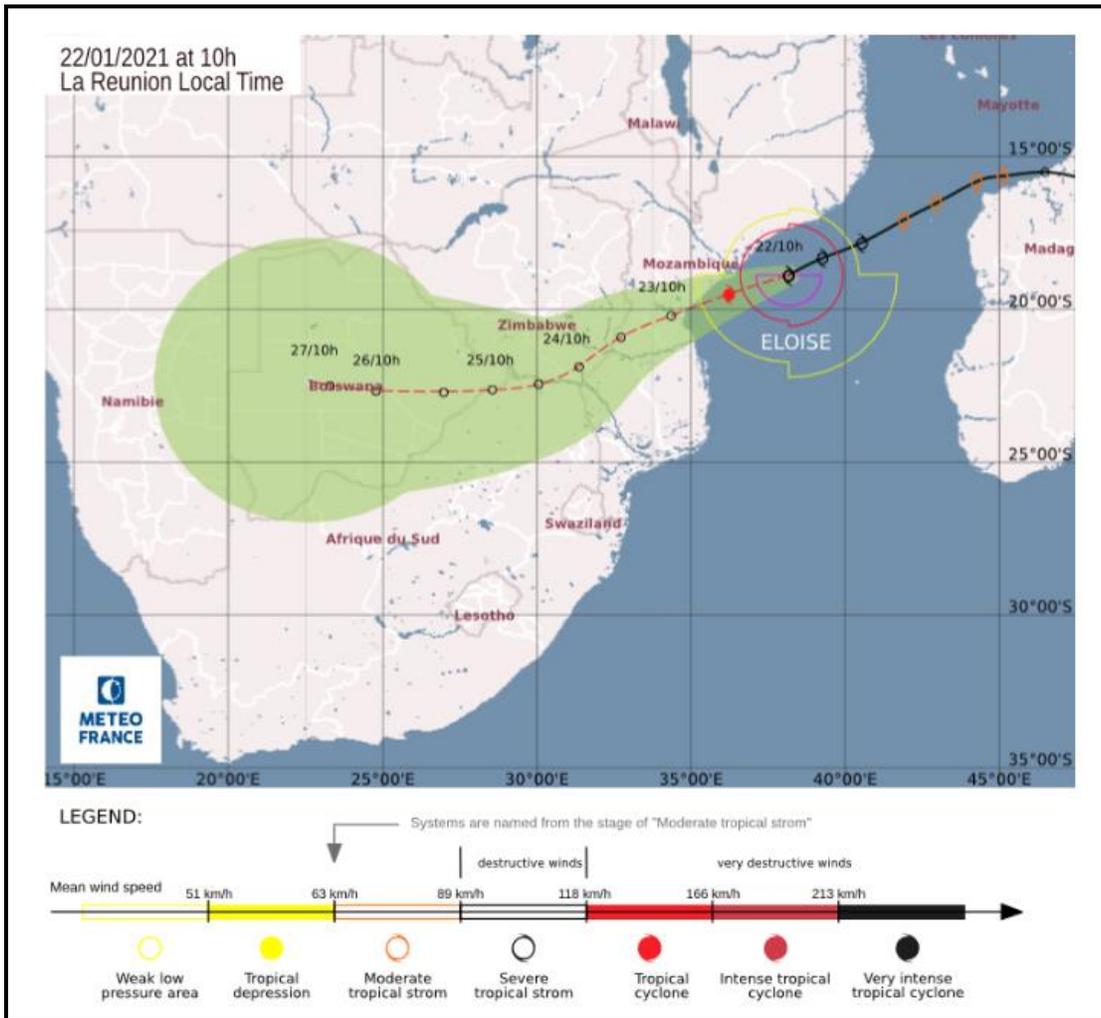


Figure 2: The current position and modelled track for Severe Tropical Storm “Eloise” as issued by Regional Specialised Meteorological Centre (RSMC) LaReunion

Following landfall, we expect “Eloise” to continue along a fairly straight path, taking it overland through southern Mozambique (as the system weakens somewhat) during the course of Sunday, 24 January 2021. It is at this time that the north-eastern parts of South Africa can anticipate the onset of heavy tropical rain, particularly along the escarpment and lowveld areas of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, as well as the northern sector of Limpopo. The northern parts of KwaZulu-Natal can also expect heavy rains during Sunday. These conditions are expected to continue into Monday. In terms of the impacts of heavy rain, SAWS warns that there is a severe risk (ORANGE, level 9) for disruptive rain associated with widespread flooding and flood-related damage of infrastructure including housing, roads and bridges over the aforementioned areas.

Although the heaviest rains are expected during Sunday and Monday, it also needs to be noted that there will still be some rain on Tuesday and Wednesday, albeit much lighter, which can result in further flooding as the ground would already be saturated.

Moreover, it is expected that strong surface winds circulating clockwise around Overland Tropical Depression “Eloise” will result in south-easterly to easterly gale-force winds of the order of 35 to 40 knots (approaching 80 km/h), especially over northern Limpopo during Sunday 24 January 2021. Hence a level 4 (YELLOW) warning of a significant risk of damaging winds has also been issued by SAWS. Note too that these regions rarely experience such winds, consequently it can be expected that numerous trees could be toppled, while informal houses and structures may similarly be damaged.

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