

## ESRC offshore sailor survey – west coast of NA responses

In Feb. and March of 2026 the ESRC Working group surveyed BCA members who are currently sailing offshore around the Pacific Ocean. The email survey requested responses to 8 questions (see questions below). The objective of the survey was to gather information that would be useful to BCA members preparing to sail offshore or interested in conditions where they have sailed in the past.

The responses are presented in two documents. One for responses from cruisers currently on the west coast of NA – Mexico to Panama. And a second from cruisers who have recently crossed the Pacific.

We greatly appreciate the responses from offshore sailors and believe they provide interesting information.

Responses from:

RM - Rob Murray – Colon, Panama – Atlantic side of the canal

DG – Dennis Giraud – Mexico - see long email on weather forecasting.

SK – Siegfried Kemmier – Mexico

LB – Lori Bernard – Mexico

ST – Stefanie and Torsten – Caribbean

PB – Brent Perry - Mexico

Questions:

1. Did you find weather information and forecasting to be reliable, or did you encounter unexpected wind or wave conditions?  
RM - Much better every year, generally accurate save for extreme or unusual conditions (which model based forecasts always get wrong). The tuantapec or papagayos winds are still underreported in the models when they're active.  
SK - I found Predict Wind forecasts reliable and ALWAYS 5 knots less than actual experienced wind conditions.  
LB - Yes, it's reliable, but yes, we often have more, less or different wind than what was forecast. We find it is getting worse. Generally the ECMWF model is best but in the Sea HRRR (the pirate model) is better. No models handle small land effects. Generally the gust map wind strengths are the actual winds.  
DG – see notes below under additional advice  
ST – Pretty bang on  
B&P- we used two forecasters- one was Met-Bob, a relatively famous kiwi forecaster, and the other was Windy premium, with the subscription you get access to individual forecasting, and once we settled on a person there (Eugene)- we got fantastic forecasts from him. we also used Predict Wind and ORCA as well as NOAA and a few offshore sites for weather predictions. Overall Windy was best, and most relevant to where we were at the time of the forecasts. Does not stop you from getting caught in a storm, but certainly helps to prepare everyone mentally.
2. Were there other unexpected weather-related issues that you experienced? (e.g. waterspouts, lightning strikes)  
RM – No  
SK – No  
LB - We had rain several times this year! Very unexpected for the Baja in November/December.

DG –

- I can attest that there have been significant changes here with the most notable in the last couple of years.
- In the summer it is definitely hotter in Mazatlán where I spend hurricane season. Over the last 2 summers there were several days 55C with 100% humidity.
- This season in Baja California Sur we've seen SIGNIFICANT rain. We recently had a moderate rain event that lasted 10 hours. Unprecedented in my 11 years here but the desert loved it. La Paz not so much with the flooding.
- Hurricane season has been pretty quiet this far north for the last two seasons which were ENSO neutral.

ST – we came across the occasional squalls and we got hit by lightning in Costa Ric in 2024

B&P- Nothing other than normal crappy weather- we did get hit by a bad cyclone about 120nm off the coast of California/Oregon that we had tried to outrace south- we did learn to never ever think you will outrace bad weather.

3. Did you change your routing across the Pacific based on weather forecasts; or information regarding some islands having difficulties (eg. water or food shortages, disease, floods, or sea level rise problems)?

RM – didn't cross

SK - I am in Mexico currently, crossing the Pacific in March 2027.

LB – N/A

ST - Not applicable on our route (PNW-MX-Nicaragua-CR-Panama-Colombia-ABC's-USVI-BVI's-Guadeloupe-Dominica) started in 2022.

We however filed a cruise plan travelling from ABC's to USVI (Geo political situation) identifying ourselves as friendly vessel and had an encounter with US Navy after Venezuela attack.

B&P- We are still in Mexico, but we have learned to only travel on good weather forecasts- there is never any reason to hurry, and forcing a schedule will result in both physical and emotional data- we now respect that our timeline only matters as long as we are all in a good place and enjoying the trip.

4. Did you notice coral bleaching on any of the coral reefs you visited? In areas where coral bleaching was observed, were there any changes in fish or invertebrate abundance from what you expected or what you've experienced in the past?

RM - San Blas islands (our local coral) seems much the same as always.

SK - I have been diving numerous times off of the big island of Hawaii. Yes have seen coral bleaching here but have seen MUCH MORE significant coral bleaching in the Caribbean!

LB - We have seen coral in the both the Baja and west coast. While not as abundant it looks healthy.

ST – We have not encountered coral bleaching.

B&P- Cannot say- marine life seems to be very plentiful in the Sea of Cortez and in Mexico in general- we are in awe.

5. Did you encounter islands suffering from drought, where water was scarce (or unavailable to cruising yachts).

RM - There is no water in the san Blas islands. Never has been. Panamá did have problems with drought last year for operations of the canal (they opened the second crossing and I think it used more water than they thought), but this year has been very wet and they're having to spill water from lake Gatun.

SK – not yet

LB - Water is scarce on the whole Baja, many communities depend on desalination for their drinking water. Not having a water maker would be very challenging.

ST – Guadeloupe (marina) made water available every second day

B&P- Water in general is scarce- either marinas dont have it or it is not potable, or it can be expensive and take a lot of time to fill. Watermaker is essential if you are away from town centers.

6. Did you encounter any marine heat waves or ocean dead zones ("blobs" = areas of the ocean with reduced oxygen levels, greater acidity, and reduced marine life)?

RM – No

SK – No

LB – No

ST – No

BP – Not yet

7. Is there anything you wish you had known about how climate change is impacting the Pacific before you set sail?

RM – N/A

SK – not at this point

LB – No

ST – N/A

BP – Not yet

8. If someone was going to be departing Mexico across the Pacific in 2026 or 27 (during a forecasted El Niño) what advice would you give them?

RM - Enjoy yourselves, it's the trip of a lifetime.

SK - have not crossed yet but I can share we left Sept 22, 2025 which is very late but had perfect weather and favourable winds all the way to San Francisco and then continuing to the Channel Islands. South of San Diego - very light winds.

LB – N/A

ST – N/A

BP – Have lots of spares

Additional Advice:

LB

- You don't have enough solar. Add more.
- Water maker is essential gear.
- Lithium batteries are a game changer.
- PredictWind is worth the cost.
- Cell service in Mexico is insufficient to not have Starlink, particularly the Baja.
- Do not leave without big wheels for your dinghy. Your light dinghy that you can get up on shore without heroic strength. Speaking of dinghies, surf landings and launchings are an acquired skill. We can do a seminar once we are home. ( May to November)
- Paddle boards or sit-on kayaks are much better to get to shore.
- Start studying Spanish yesterday. You'll have more fun. And have an easier time in remote pueblos.

DG

- But before I get going here, I was a professional pilot for 48 years and consider myself a student of meteorology. I've attended many training courses including forecasting courses so I believe what I'm saying here is correct.
- Re forecasting: The important thing to understand once you pass south of the USA into México forecasting is very difficult therefore not reliable or accurate.
- NOAA is a part of the USA government and are suffering severe funding cuts. Their main concern is Mexico the great so concentrate on that.
- In México, Meteomex provides the best forecasts for obvious reasons. As does Canada for Canada. etc.etc.
- The reason for this is little or NO SURFACE DATA. Almost everything is space based but there's very important information a satellite cannot get. The big one being sub surface temperature.
- This is the main reason the hurricane that devastated Acapulco a couple of years ago wasn't predicted to turn into shore. They couldn't see the very warm subsea mass that surfaced off the coast.
- I find most cruisers aren't well trained in meteorology and tend to look at Windy or PredictWind and make plans on their forecasting beyond 2 TWO days
- The locals here call Windy "Windy Lies".
- People forget that these apps MUST put out information and they probably wouldn't be purchased if they only supplied 2 or 3 days of forecasting. It's not about the information accuracy, it's about the PROFIT. \$\$\$\$.
- Look at any aviation forecast. 72 hours max.
- The forecasting these apps spew are all computer generated but based on NO DATA. In other words, it's made up fiction beyond 2 or 3 days. However, they do, sometimes, get it right which, sadly sucks the unwary in.
- The saving grace these days is Starlink which allows cruisers to obtain current forecasting. If Starlink connects which is NOT GUARANTEED. But, again, Oceanic forecasting is based on space-based data.
- For ocean passages this is why a "reputable" weather routing company is a great idea. They have weather experts examining all the available information so are the best source for the best chance of "accurate" weather information.
- Bottom line. Don't rely on forecasts beyond 2 days. Take the third with a healthy grain of salt.
- On a side note: Many cruisers with F.P. in their plans came down to La Cruz in Bandaras Bay to take advantage of the courses put on by Mike Danielson. I attended several and Mike did a fantastic job. However, sadly, Mike passed away to cancer a couple of months ago so that resource is gone.
- You mentioned something about La Niña. We are still neutral however there are signals we MIGHT see a **La Niña develop. (RE comment – El Nino)** MIGHT. No One Knows for sure
- A very good source of information on this is a YouTube channel called Stormsurf. It's very technical but he provides all the information you need to get a grasp of the science in his note sections. The ENSO stuff starts about halfway thru. We'll worth learning about.

