Weather to blame for wardrobe blowout

There's going to be a serious blip in the Tucker wardrobe budget this year, and it's purely down to the gods responsible for weather.

It's well known, and possibly scientifically proven, that second-hand clothing outlets like those run by Hospice Taranaki never have to trouble themselves with a department for discarded men's underwear: bloke underpants and singlets are made with some kind of self-destructing chemical embedded in them and they simply vanish over time.

Jerry Seinfeld made a gag about it in one of his classic TV shows. Men never throw underwear away, he said, it's simply worn till it disappears.

The afore-mentioned singlets are going to create mayhem in most Taranaki households after what summer has done to us.

I thought I was alone with this problem, since it's never been the done thing to admit to another male that you wear a singlet. It was a sure sign of absent moral fibre and manliness in my younger days, so was never mentioned.

But the other day an old acquaintance casually came out with it – the summer had been so damned cold he'd been wearing a singlet right through January and February.

My resolve weakened (it's pretty shredded these days, anyway) and I agreed with him. Singlets had been de rigeur during the holidays. Unheard of. What sort of summer have we had, we lamented. Et cetera.

So, you know what that means: our singlets – garments that should have lasted several winters before they melted right off our frames – have had their lifetimes curtailed. The few "good" ones in my underwear drawer have shrunk in number, and now I'm going to have to go to the Farmers and buy more. Unbudgeted.

Who are these weather gods and what have they been up to? By my count, summer was about a fortnight long. That's judged on the number of days we needed to run multiple fans and keep windows wide open at night - two days in December and 10 in late February-early March.

We swam at Fitzroy Beach for a whole week and a bit during the magic 10. The water temperature hit 20 one Sunday and away we went. Then two Sundays later, the weather was crap again. Summer is over, it seems.

I can back this up with actual facts. According to Met Office figures, New Plymouth's average top temperature in January was 15 percent lower than the historical norm – 22 degrees as opposed to 26. It was down a couple of degrees in December, as well. February was average, saved by some fine days at the end. Rainfall in January was up nearly 10 percent on normal.

What's going on then? Easier asked than answered, it turns out. I've been ploughing through National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) and Met Office analysis and I'm still not sure I understand what's caused it.

To be fair to NIWA, New Zealand's elongated, mountainous and sea-connected landscape has many micro-climates, so weather systems as they move across from the west inevitably have a wide range of impacts.

Taranaki doesn't feature much in the literature. Other regions have much sexier things happen – droughts on the East Coast, summer snow in Otago, constant rain (or none) in Northland.

There is the 2014 edition of a NIWA report called 'The Climate and Weather of Taranaki', but while it does an admirable job of describing our average weather and has lots of lovely pictures and graphs, it doesn't really go into why things can change so dramatically year to year.

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We've most of us heard of El Nino and La Nina, the ocean current effects that can vary New Zealand weather from time to time, but the problem this summer, apparently, is it's been neither one nor t'other. We're in what's called "normal".

To quote NIWA: "When neither El Niño nor La Niña are present, (usually referred to as "neutral" or normal conditions), trade winds blow westward across the Pacific, piling up warm surface water so that Indonesian sea levels are about 50cm higher than those in Ecuador. Cool, nutrient-rich sea water 'wells up' off the South American coast, supporting marine ecosystems and fisheries. Relatively cold sea temperatures also extend along the equator from South America towards the central Pacific. High rainfall occurs in the rising air over the warmest water to the west, whereas the colder east Pacific is relatively dry."

There you are. Clear as. Whatever it means, I'm not taking any chances. I'm getting more singlets.