

# Delineating environmental control of phytoplankton biomass and phenology in the Southern Ocean

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26	Main point #1: Phytoplankton phenology and biomass are mostly organized in the
27	Southern Ocean at a large latitudinal scale and a regional scale.
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29	Main point #2: The timing of bloom occurrence appears tightly linked to the seasonal
30	cycle in irradiance, with some exceptions in specific light-limited regimes.
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32	Main point #3: Zonal asymmetries in regional-scale phytoplankton biomass are mainly
33	driven by local advective and iron supply processes.
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#### 46 Abstract

47 The Southern Ocean (SO), an area highly sensitive to climate change, is currently experiencing 48 rapid warming and freshening. Such drastic physical changes might significantly alter the SO's 49 biological pump. For more accurate predictions of the possible evolution of this pump, a better 50 understanding of the environmental factors controlling SO phytoplankton dynamics is needed. 51 Here we present a satellite-based study deciphering the complex environmental control of 52 phytoplankton biomass (PB) and phenology (PH; timing and magnitude of phytoplankton 53 blooms) in the SO. We reveal that PH and PB are mostly organized in SO at two scales: a large 54 latitudinal scale, and a regional scale. Latitudinally, a clear gradient in the timing of bloom 55 occurrence appears tightly linked to the seasonal cycle in irradiance, with some exceptions in 56 specific light-limited regimes (i.e. well-mixed areas). Superimposed on this latitudinal scale, 57 zonal asymmetries, up to three orders of magnitude, in regional-scale PB are mainly driven by 58 local advective and iron supply processes. These findings provide a global understanding of PB 59 and PH in SO, which is of fundamental interest for identifying and explaining ongoing changes 60 as well as predicting future changes in the SO biological pump.

61

#### 62 **1. Introduction**

The Southern Ocean (SO) plays a key role in the global carbon cycle, absorbing 40% of the total oceanic inventory of anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> [*Khatiwala et al.*, 2009]. However, current and predicted changes in ocean circulation and hydrology associated with climate variability might impact the efficiency of the SO carbon sink, although the extent of such changes and their specific impact on the biological pump are still vigorously debated [*Landschützer et al.*, 2015; *Le Quéré et al.*, 2010; *Munro et al.*, 2015]. Such debate cannot advance without a better understanding of the factors that shape the complex biogeography of the SO, and what controlstheir time-scale of variability (i.e. daily, seasonal to decadal).

71 Delimiting marine bio-regions has proven highly valuable for disentangling multiple 72 limiting growth factors affecting the efficiency of the biological pump [Longhurst, 2007] 73 mediated by both PB and PH, and for ultimately underlining effects of climate change such as 74 areal changes in trophic regime [Polovina et al., 2008] or in fisheries stock and species 75 [Fossheim et al., 2015]. Changes in PB profoundly alter the efficiency of the biological pump, 76 thereby modulating energy transfer to upper trophic levels and carbon export to deep water 77 [Legendre and Rassoulzadegan, 1995]. Changes in PH may also have important consequences 78 for the marine food web, due to potential mismatch between primary and secondary producers 79 and apex predators [Ardyna et al., 2014; Edwards and Richardson, 2004], and for the carbon 80 cycle through export of unexploited carbon aggregates to the deep ocean [Dall'Olmo et al., 81 2016].

82 The efficiency of the SO's biological pump is strongly associated with phytoplankton 83 biomass (PB) and its phenology (PH), which themselves are mediated by nutrient availability 84 (e.g. mainly iron, and/or possibly nitrate and silicic acid), light, temperature and mortality factors [Behrenfeld and Boss, 2014; Boyd, 2002]. These factors are essentially controlled by vertical 85 86 mixing, advection, seasonal fluctuations in solar irradiance, and the extent and typology of sea-87 ice cover. As a result, a variety of patterns of net primary production (NPP) are found in the SO 88 [Arrigo et al., 2008], with their own associated phytoplankton species succession, stock, and 89 distribution [*Quéguiner*, 2013]. Delineating the interplay of environmental forcing on PB and PH 90 remains challenging and requires novel approaches, which are available through satellite-derived 91 observations. Using these integrative and multidisciplinary approaches (i.e. satellite-derived

92 ocean color and altimetry, Argo floats, lagrangian modeling and biogeographic-derived
93 analysis), we provide here a global understanding of the phytoplankton biomass and phenology
94 in a potentially changing SO.

95 2. Material and methods

# 96

# 2.1 Satellite-derived, climatological and modeling products

Satellite-derived Level-3 data sets of chlorophyll-a concentration (chl a; mg m<sup>-3</sup>) and 97 photosynthetically available radiation (PAR;  $E m^{-2} d^{-1}$ ) were obtained from the European Space 98 99 Agency's GlobColour project (http://www.globcolour.info). Eight-day composite chl a 100 concentrations using standard Case 1 water algorithms were used (i.e. OC4v5 for SeaWIFS, 101 OC4Me for MERIS and OC3v5 for MODIS/VIIRS sensors; see O'Reilly et al. [2000] and 102 Maritorena et al. [2010] for details). The climatological annual net primary production (NPP) 103 was derived from the adapted-SO NPP model of Arrigo et al. [2008]. A detailed description of 104 the NPP model can be found in the supporting information [Dobson and Smith, 1988; Gregg and 105 Carder, 1990; Markus, 1999]. The climatologies of mixed layer depth and bathymetry were 106 extracted respectively from Pellichero et al. [2016] and the GEBCO, version 2014 (General 107 Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans; http://www.gebco.net). The climatology of the length of the 108 sea-ice cover was derived from the Special Sensor Microwave Imager (SSMI; 1998-2002) and 109 the Advanced Microwave Scanning Radiometer - Earth Observing System (AMSR-E; 2002-110 2014) sensors, and made available by National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC; 111 https://nsidc.org). The locations of the major fronts (i.e. the Subantarctic Front SAF, the 112 Antarctic Polar Front APF, the Southern Antarctic Circumpolar Current (ACC) Front SACCF 113 and the Southern Boundary of the ACC SBdy, following Swart et al. [2010]) were determined 114 based on the Maps of Absolute Dynamic Topography (MADT) product from CLS/AVISO. The

Lagrangian model of horizontal dispersion of iron fluxes used also altimeter products produced
by CLS/AVISO, with support from the CNES (Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales;
http://www.aviso.altimetry.fr/duacs/).

#### 118 <u>2.2. Clustering K-means method</u>

119 The bio-regions were defined here using a cluster K-means analysis (see the SI for more 120 details), previously applied successfully in the Mediterranean Sea [D'Ortenzio and Ribera 121 d'Alcalà, 2009; Mayot et al., 2016], in the North Atlantic [Lacour et al., 2015] and at the global 122 scale [D'Ortenzio et al., 2012]. The analysis was performed on climatological and normalized 123 annual chl a cycle, in order to statistically organize the GLOBcolour time series (1998–2014) 124 and to create clusters representing regions of similarity (i.e. annual chl a cycles). To maintain 125 consistency in the seasonal data availability throughout the study area, the period study covers 126 the period from September to March (as referred here to "annual"). This technique regroups 127 pixels with seasonal cycles shapes - i.e. similar phenologies. A single characteristic seasonal 128 cycle, that is statistically representative of the group as a whole, is then determined by 129 calculating the center (average cycle) within each group or cluster. Each group representative of 130 a characteristic seasonal cycle constitutes a phenological characteristic regime. A more detailed 131 discussion of the cluster K-means analysis can be found in the supporting information [Devred et 132 al., 2007; Hartigan and Wong, 1979; IOCCG, 2009; Lund and Li, 2009; Milligan and Cooper, 133 1985]

A one-way analysis of variance by ranks (Kruskal–Wallis H test; *Zar* [2010]) was performed to test whether eco-regions differed in their biological characteristics (i.e. annual mean chlorophyll *a* concentration, seasonality and timing of bloom). A significant result of the Kruskal–Wallis H test implies that at least one eco-region differs from all others. 138

#### 2.3 Lagrangian modeling of horizontal iron fluxes

139 In order to estimate iron delivery due to horizontal stirring, we use an advection scheme 140 based on altimetry, extending to the Southern Ocean a Lagrangian model used for predicting the 141 development of the Kerguelen phytoplanktonic plume [d'Ovidio et al., 2015]. The model has 142 been extensively calibrated and validated in the Crozet and Kerguelen regions by integrating 143 satellite data (altimetry and ocean color), lithogenic isotopes, iron measurements, and drifters 144 [d'Ovidio et al., 2015; Sanial et al., 2014; Sanial et al., 2015]. The main characteristics of the 145 model were resumed here and we refer to d'Ovidio et al. [2015] for the full description of the 146 model. The model seeds each open ocean location with a particle and finds the particle's most 147 recent contact with a shallow bathymetry by a back-trajectory issued from altimetry data. It 148 provides the time and the position at which the contact took place. An exponential scavenging 149 relation (with a time constant based on in situ iron data from the KEOPS2 cruise) is used to 150 estimate the decreasing of bio-available iron along the trajectory from the time of the contact 151 with the potential iron source to the current position. Here, the model was applied to the entire Southern Ocean using a grid of 0.25°, a time window of 2004-2015 (one map every 4 days), 152 153 potential sources of iron in the bathymetric band shallower than 500m, and a diffusion term of  $40 \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$ . 154

155

## 156 **3. Results and discussion**

Based on satellite-derived observations, a large range of both annual mean chlorophyll *a* (chl *a*) concentration and net primary production (NPP) (>0.1 mg chl *a* m<sup>-3</sup>/20 g C m<sup>-2</sup> y<sup>-1</sup> to more than 2 mg chl *a* m<sup>-3</sup>/400 g C m<sup>-2</sup> y<sup>-1</sup>, respectively) were observed across the SO. It occurs at a variety of scales, including the latitudinal and the regional (i.e. Indian, Pacific and Atlantic; Fig. 1a) scales in the SO. The annual mean chl *a* concentration is associated with the amplitude of its seasonal cycle (Fig. 1a&c). In contrast, the timing of blooms (i.e. the maximum of the annual chlorophyll cycles, Fig. 1d) appears entirely decoupled from both large-scale patterns in annual chl *a* concentration and its seasonality (Fig. 1c), hence revealing a complex organization of phenological patterns of the chl *a* annual cycle.

166 Here, we disentangle the spatial complexity of chl a seasonal cycle using a K-mean 167 clustering method [D'Ortenzio et al., 2012] with the goal of defining distinct bio-regions with 168 similar large-scale patterns in PH (Fig. 2). In brief, this technique statistically gathers regions 169 that exhibit similarly shaped seasonal chl a cycles (see the section 2.2 for more details). The 170 seven distinct bio-regions so identified are distributed along a latitudinal gradient (Fig. 3a). At 171 temperate latitudes, two bio-regions (i.e. 1 and 2) exhibit an early bloom in October. Moving 172 south to 45-63°S, two other bio-regions (i.e. 4 and 5) display an annual chl a cycle with a 173 delayed bloom in November/December. Finally, near the Antarctic continental shelf (< 63°S), 174 the dominant bio-regions 6 & 7 were characterized by a late bloom in January/February. 175 Interestingly, one bio-region (i.e. 3) differs drastically from the general phenological trend of a 176 delayed bloom moving from subtropical to polar latitudes, having a late bloom at a moderate 177 latitude ( $\approx$  43°S, Fig. 2 & 3d). Furthermore, the co-existence of bio-regions at a same latitude 178 indicates variations in the seasonality of the annual chl a cycle (e.g., 1 & 2, 4 & 5 and 6 & 7) 179 which are related to distinct levels of PB (Figs 3b-c).

From temperate to high latitudes, the latitudinal gradient in bloom timing clearly follows changes in light regime (expressed as the annual mean photosynthetically available radiation in the double boxplot; Fig. 4a). The unique bio-region (i.e., 3), characterized by a paradoxically late bloom with respect to the timing of light availability, is mainly located in the vicinity of the Antarctic Circumpolar Current. Interestingly, this region corresponds to the highest Southern Ocean wind stress and depth of the mixed layer (see SI, Fig. S1). Deep mixed-layers likely impose severe light limitation to phytoplankton growth in spring, hence delaying the bloom later in season. Close to the Antarctic shelf, as shown locally in the western Antarctic Peninsula [*Venables et al.*, 2013], the timing of the bloom (Fig. 2) was not related to winter sea-ice extent but more to the seasonal cycle of irradiance.

190 To address the potential causes of regional-scale variability in PB (Fig. 1a), we hypothesize 191 that iron availability represents its first order driver [Hutchins and Boyd, 2016]. Using integrative 192 and multidisciplinary approaches, we disentangle the impact of four important iron supply 193 mechanisms on PB. These surface-layer iron-sources are shallow plateaus (<500 m) which both 194 (i) locally recharge the surface-layer in iron [Arrigo et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2015] and (ii) 195 remotely recharge the surface layer by lateral advection of non-consumed iron [d'Ovidio et al., 196 2015; Graham et al., 2015]; (iii) sea-ice, which recharges the surface as ice melts [Arrigo et al., 197 2015; Lannuzel et al., 2016]; and (iv) vertical mixing through deep convection, which can 198 entrain iron from deep water [Tagliabue et al., 2014b]. Below, the potential impact of these four 199 likely iron-sources on the intensity of PB is investigated. Note that the Aeolian iron deposition 200 was not considered here as a major iron supply mechanism due to its intermittency and its 201 unclear role in regulating PB [Boyd et al., 2012; Cassar et al., 2007; Tagliabue et al., 2009; 202 Tagliabue et al., 2017].

Clearly, the highest PB (> 1.2 mg m<sup>-3</sup>) are detected in shallow areas (< 500 m), on continental and island shelves where iron fluxes are expected to be significant [*Boyd et al.*, 2012; *Tagliabue et al.*, 2014a]. Furthermore, we use a Lagrangian model based on altimetry in order to track which water parcels have been recently in contact with a shallow area – and when – to

207 assess the probable locations of some of the iron plumes downstream of these iron sources and to 208 estimate their loss of bio-available iron during advection by scavenging [d'Ovidio et al., 2015]. We find a well-defined decline in PB (from 0.8 to 0.3 mg  $m^{-3}$ ) with distance and time from the 209 210 most recent contact of the water parcel with a shallow area (Fig. 4b): the further away a water-211 parcel is from the initial shallow area iron source, or the longer after a water-parcel has been 212 iron-enriched in shallow areas, the weaker is the PB signal. We note however that seamounts and 213 submerged plateaus do not enhance local or downstream PB, as already observed north of 214 Kerguelen plateau [Graham et al., 2015] (Figs. 1a&4c), suggesting that not all shallow areas are 215 active and/or bioavailable iron sources. Close to the Antarctic shelf and coastal polynyas, the 216 potential role of the seasonal melting of sea-ice [Arrigo et al., 2015; Lannuzel et al., 2016] as iron source is revealed with enhanced PB ( $\approx 0.4 \text{ mg m}^{-3}$ ). 217

218 Moving away from potential iron delivery from shallow areas (either locally or 219 downstream) and from sea-ice, we investigated the possible role of mixed-layer depth on 220 regulating PB. If deepening of the mixed layer in winter can recharge the surface layer in 221 nutrients (iron, but also nitrate and silicic acid in the temperate regimes) by deep convection, it 222 can also limit PB by reducing light availability for phytoplankton growth during the growing 223 season. Indeed, region of deep winter mixing in the Southern Ocean are mostly located directly 224 north of the ACC, where strong winds and isopycnal tilts, are associated with an season-wide 225 weak stratification, leading to deep winter mixed layer but also to relatively deep, compared to 226 their surrounding, spring and summer mixed-layers.

Our findings clearly translate this complex interplay between availability of nutrient and light related to the winter mixed-layer depth. An increase in PB is observed with the deepening of the winter mixed-layer until a maximum winter depth of about 150 m. When the winter mixed 230 layer becomes deeper, a decrease in PB is observed, likely resulting from a stronger light 231 limitation of phytoplankton growth during the growth season (Sep-Mar; on average, winter 232 mixed layer deeper than 150 m are associated to Sep-Mar mixed layer deeper than 110 m or so; 233 Fig 4b). We thus depict here a tipping winter MLD at  $\sim 150$ m, which likely represents a shift 234 between an iron-limited to a light-limited environment. Such threshold in the MLD is certainly 235 dependent on the local structure of the iron profile [Tagliabue et al., 2014b]. Despite the HNLC 236 (High Nutrient Low Chlorophyll) nature of the Southern Ocean, an intermediate mixing mode 237 (i.e., with a winter MLD maximum from 120 to 200 meters) appears to enhance PB by supplying 238 an optimal combination of both light and nutrient requirements for phytoplankton growth. This 239 apparently modest effect of optimal mixing on PB may nevertheless have major implications due 240 to the large areal extension of those zones relying on the vertical mixing to support phytoplankton iron requirements (Fig. 4c). 241

242 Deciphering the complexity of the SO's phytoplankton phenology and biomass is 243 particularly critical to assess how climate variability and change might regionally impact the 244 biological pump. Our results reveal two main scales of organization for both PB and PH, i.e. a 245 large latitudinal and a regional scale. Alterations of stratification that are expected with global 246 warming may modify light-mixing regimes, and thus potentially modulate the bloom timing. 247 However, since the phenology appears here to be strongly linked to the circumpolar seasonal 248 cycle in irradiance, we suppose that only drastic changes in stratification could significantly alter 249 bloom timing, and therefore the impact on the biological pump might be expected to be relatively 250 minor.

Concerning the fate of phytoplankton biomass in the changing SO, no particular changes at
 local scale are expected in shallow bathymetry (i.e. where iron recharge from shallow plateaus

(<500 m) are not prone to be affected). Potential changes also likely to remain minor in downstream transport from ACC, depending on whether the ACC has shifted locally in some regions over the past decades according to climate model [*Kim and Orsi*, 2014; *Sallée et al.*, 2008] but not others [*Gille*, 2014; *Shao et al.*, 2015]. Even if ACC changes remain unclear under next century climate change scenarios [*Meijers et al.*, 2012], past studies indicate that if there is a change, the expected position change should be small compared to the size of the bathymetry structure it interacts with to give rise to ocean surface iron plumes.

260 The main uncertainties regarding the fate of PB thus remains linked to the role of the 261 mixed-layer depth and the sea-ice, which have a more direct response to climate variability and 262 change. Climate modes have direct regional impact on both sea-ice and mixed-layer depth 263 [Sallée et al., 2010; Simpkins et al., 2012]. In response to SAM and ENSO, sea-ice extends in 264 some regions and is reduced in others, which, according to our results, would have regional 265 impact on iron delivery and PB intensity. Similarly, SAM tends to deepen mixed-layer depth 266 regionally but shallows it in other regions. Under next century climate change, the response is 267 more regionally consistent, with an overall shallowing of the mixed-layer associated with 268 increased stratification (freshwater input from glacier and sea-ice, and increased heat forcing 269 from the atmosphere), and an overall reduction of sea-ice cover.

However, according to our findings, a shallowing (or deepening) of the mixed-layer is not expected to translate to the same PB response everywhere (see SI, Fig. S2). Indeed, the response would be state-dependent: a shallowing of a deep mixed-layer (typically deeper than 200 m) would result in an increase in PB, while a shallowing of an already relatively shallow mixedlayer (typically less than 120 m), would reduce PB. At the SO scale, a global shallowing of the mixed-layer depth appears to have negative consequences on PB (loss of  $\approx 0.3 \%$  m<sup>-1</sup>; see SI),

276 mainly due to the areal increase of depleted-iron regions with less efficient vertical iron recharge. Conversely, a positive response of PB (increase of  $\approx 0.15 \text{ }\% \text{ m}^{-1}$ ; see SI) would be observed with 277 278 a global deepening of the mixed-layer until a critical threshold (+40 m compared to the actual 279 mixed-layer depth climatology), from which severe light limitation damps phytoplankton growth 280 and biomass. Given the more direct response of the MLD to climate variability and change in the 281 SO, these results highlight the crucial role of the local vertical mixing and the associated subtle 282 balance between light/nutrient availability on regulating PB in the majority of the HNLC areas of 283 the SO.

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#### **Figure captions**

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Figure 1: Phytoplankton biomass, net primary production and phenology in the Southern Ocean. Map showing the climatological (a) annual mean chlorophyll *a* concentration (mg m<sup>-3</sup>), (b) annual net primary production (g C m<sup>-2</sup> d<sup>-1</sup>), (c) the chlorophyll *a* seasonality (mg m<sup>-3</sup>), (d) the timing of the bloom (week) maximum based on the GLOBcolour time series (1998–2014). The climatological annual net primary production (b; mg C m<sup>-2</sup> d<sup>-1</sup>) was derived from the adapted-SO NPP model of Arrigo et al. (2008). Frontal positions calculated from MADT contours are shown for the STF (white), the SAF (red), the PF (yellow) and the SACCF (black).

436

437 <u>Figure 2:</u> Biogeography of the Southern Ocean. Spatial distribution (a) of the 7 bio-regions 438 (i.e. bio-regions 1 to 7) of the Southern Ocean obtained from the k-means analysis. The 439 normalized annual chlorophyll cycles (continuous lines) of the centers of the clusters (b - h)440 obtained from the k-means analysis are presented, as well as their respective standard deviation. 441 The absolute annual chlorophyll cycles (dashed lines) corresponding to the centers of the clusters 442 (b - h) are also indicated.

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444 <u>Figure 3:</u> Latitudinal repartition of the bio-regions and their respective biological 445 characteristics. Latitudinal proportion (a) of the different bio-regions. Box plots of the bio-446 regions (1 to 7; x axis) against (b) annual mean chlorophyll *a* concentration (mg m<sup>-3</sup>), (c) the 447 chlorophyll a seasonality (mg m<sup>-3</sup>), (d) the timing of the bloom maximum (month; y axis). The 448 line in the middle of each box represents the region median. The top and bottom limits of each 449 box are the 25th and 75th percentiles, respectively. The lines extending above and below each box, i.e., whiskers, represent the full range of non-outlier observations for each variable beyond the quartile range. The results of the Kruskal–Wallis H test are shown in figures (b) through (d), and depict regions with statistically significant differences between the climatological input variables at the 95 % level (p < 0.05). The codes of the test significance are as follow .: p < 0.05, \*: p < 0.01, \*\*: p < 0.001 and \*\*\*: p < 0.0001.

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456 Figure 4: Environmental control of phytoplankton biomass and phenology in the Southern 457 Ocean. Double boxplot (a) of the maximum bloom timing (weeks) versus the annual mean PAR (E m y<sup>-1</sup>) of the different bio-regions. The top/right and bottom/left limits of each box are the 458 459 25th and 75th percentiles, respectively. The numbers in each box are located at the median of 460 both maximum bloom timing and annual mean PAR. Barplot (b) of the mean annual 461 chlorophyll a concentration according (1) the shallow areas (< 500 m; red), (2) areas where iron 462 delivery downstream take place (%; percent of iron remaining in a water parcel after scavenging 463 in respect to its initial concentration acquired in shallow areas; red to blue), (3) areas 464 characterized by a seasonal sea-ice cover (grey) and (4) areas where variations in the annual 465 maximum MLD are analyzed (white). See the map (c) delineating the distinct areas listed just 466 above.

467

Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

