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Observing the Local Emergence of the Southern Ocean Residual-Mean Circulation

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Key Points.

- Horizontal buoyancy advection by mesoscale eddies at a Southern Ocean mooring site balances mean vertical advection on timescale of 100 days.
- The overturning circulation of the Southern Ocean emerges on this timescale as a residual between the eddy-induced and Eulerian-mean flows.
- \circ The eddy-induced flow can be accurately parameterized with a Gent-McWilliams diffusivity of ~2,000 m² s⁻¹.

3 Abstract

⁴ The role of mesoscale turbulence in maintain-

⁵ ing the mean buoyancy structure and overturn-

6 ing circulation of the Southern Ocean is in-

⁷ vestigated through a 2-year-long, single-mooring

⁸ record of measurements in Drake Passage. The

- ⁹ buoyancy budget of the area is successively
- ¹⁰ assessed within the Eulerian and the Temporal-
- ¹¹ Residual-Mean frameworks. We find that a regime
- ¹² change occurs on timescales of 1 day to 100 days,
- ¹³ characteristic of mesoscale dynamics, whereby
- ¹⁴ the eddy-induced turbulent horizontal advec-

tion balances the vertical buoyancy advection 15 by the mean flow. We use these diagnostics 16 to reconstruct the region's overturning circu-17 lation, which is found to entail an equatorward 18 downwelling of Antarctic Intermediate and Bot-19 tom Waters and a poleward upwelling of Cir-20 cumpolar Deep Water. The estimated eddy-21 induced flow can be accurately parameterized 22 via the Gent-McWilliams closure by adopt-23 ing a diffusivity of ${\sim}2{,}000~{\rm m}^2~{\rm s}^{-1}$ with a mid-24 depth increase to 2,500 $\mathrm{m}^2~\mathrm{s}^{-1}$ at 2,100 m, im-25 mediately underneath the maximum interior 26 stratification. 27

1. Introduction

The Southern Ocean plays a pivotal role in the global ocean circulation by connecting 28 the Indian, Pacific, and Atlantic basins [Schmitz, 1996], and the ocean's deep and surface 29 layers [Lumpkin and Speer, 2007]. The regional circulation is shaped by physical processes 30 acting on a wide range of spatio-temporal scales – from large-scale, persistent Ekman flows, 31 directly linked to surface wind forcing, to meso- and small-scale turbulent motions [Speer 32 et al., 2000. Assessing the relative contributions of, and interplay between, this spectrum 33 of flows in determining the Southern Ocean limb of the Meridional Overturning Circulation 34 (MOC) remains an important open question, with implications for e.g., global ocean heat 35 uptake [Liu et al., 2018] and sequestration of carbon dioxide [Landschützer et al., 2015]. 36 However, a complete assessment of these dynamics and their effects is outstanding due to 37 the difficulty of rigorously distinguishing between averaged quantities (produced through 38 inaccurate diagnostic) and mixed quantities (produced through actual mixing). Averaged 39 quantities can be likened to the development of a blurred picture in photography when 40 an overly long exposure time is used to capture a moving object. Hence, unlike mixed 41 quantities, they are the outcome of an inaccurate observation rather than a property 42 of the observed system. The erroneous interpretation of averaged quantities as mixed 43 quantities has been rationalized in the context of the time-mean ocean circulation through 44 the Temporal-Residual-Mean (TRM) framework put forward by *McDougall and McIntosh* 45 [2001].46

Here, we acknowledge this issue, by examining and quantifying the way in which the
mean buoyancy structure and overturning circulation are established at a Southern Ocean

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⁴⁹ site, where a mooring was deployed for 2 years. This also allows us to estimate the eddy-⁵⁰ induced Gent-McWilliams diffusivities. To conclude, a discussion of the impact of our ⁵¹ observational results for our understanding and numerical model representation of the ⁵² Southern Ocean limb of the MOC is provided.

2. Two distinct buoyancy budget regimes

To assess the contributions of motions of different scales to sustaining the extension of 53 the MOC across the Southern Ocean, we used *in situ* observations from a mooring located 54 in the Antarctic Circumpolar Current (ACC) at 56°S, 57°50′W (Fig. 1a), leeward of the 55 Drake Passage [see Fig. 1a and *Brearley et al.*, 2013, for details of the exact location]. 56 These 2-year long measurements were part of a 6-mooring cluster deployed under the aus-57 pices of the Diapycnal and Isopycnal Mixing Experiment in the Southern Ocean [DIMES, 58 Naveira Garabato, 2010; Meredith, 2011]. This study uses co-located horizonal velocity, 59 temperature, salinity and pressure data at 1200-, 1299-, 1853-, 1951-, 2049-, 2152-, 3400-, 60 3600-m depth (see Text S1 for further details). From these observations, vertical velocities 61 can be inferred, and the terms of a time-mean buoyancy budget can be diagnosed. The 62 method to compute vertical velocities from single-mooring measurements is described in 63 Sévellec et al. [2015] and summarized in Text S2; the mean statistical properties of the ob-64 servational record are shown in Figs. 1b-g. Taking advantage of the equivalent-barotropic 65 nature of the ACC flow [Killworth and Hughes, 2002], we defined gradients in the along 66 and across directions of the time- and depth-mean flow (as indicated in Fig. 1a). This 67 enables us to eliminate contributions to the buoyancy budget from the time-mean flow in 68 the across direction (Fig. 1c), except for a small baroclinic component. 69

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Since the measurements were obtained at broadly constant depth levels, it is natural to compute the buoyancy balance in an Eulerian framework with fixed depths. We start from the buoyancy conservation equation:

$$\partial_t b + u \partial_x b + v \partial_y b + w \partial_z b = 0, \tag{1}$$

where t is time; x, y, and z are the along, across, and vertical directions; b is the buoyancy; and u, v, and w are the along, across, and vertical velocities. By applying a Reynolds decomposition, set for a range of averaging periods (from 15 minutes to \sim 2 years), we separate mean quantities from fluctuations. Taking the overall long-time-mean of this decomposition allows us to build a mean buoyancy budget, which intrinsically depends on the averaging/filtering period (as described in Text S3). This can be expressed in terms of mean and turbulent advection as:

$$\operatorname{Mean}_{\operatorname{hor}}(\tau, z) + \operatorname{Mean}_{\operatorname{ver}}(\tau, z) \simeq \operatorname{Turb}_{\operatorname{hor}}(\tau, z) + \operatorname{Turb}_{\operatorname{ver}}(\tau, z), \tag{2}$$

where τ is the averaging period, Mean_{hor} and Mean_{ver} are the mean horizontal and vertical 80 advection of buoyancy, and Turb_{hor} and Turb_{ver} are the turbulent horizontal and vertical 81 advection of buoyancy, respectively. The mean buoyancy budget measures the relative 82 contribution of the turbulent/fluctuation and mean terms in setting the long-time-mean 83 equilibrium. It also shows how these contributions depend on the averaging/filtering 84 period used in the Reynolds decomposition. Note that there is also a trend term in (??) 85 compared to (2); however, it is negligible at all depths and for all averaging timescales by 86 construction of the mean buoyancy budget (Text S3). 87

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The resulting buoyancy advective terms are enhanced in the upper part of the measured 88 water column, between 1,000 m and 2,000 m (Fig. 2), where buoyancy gradients, and 80 notably vertical stratification, attain maximum values (Fig. 1). The turbulent vertical 90 advection (Fig. 2d) is negligible at all depths and for all averaging periods. This indicates 91 that variations in vertical velocity and vertical stratification do not correlate highly enough 92 to sustain a net turbulent advection, despite their substantial magnitudes compared to 93 their mean values (Figs. 1d and 1g). In contrast, the mean vertical advection induces a 94 buoyancy gain between 1,000 m and 2,000 m (Fig. 2b). This is consistent with a mean 95 downwelling of buoyant water: a downward mean vertical velocity through a positive 96 vertical stratification. The mean downwelling is robust to changes in averaging period, 97 confirming the steadiness of this buoyancy flux. 98

The mean horizontal advection induces a buoyancy loss between 1,000 m and 2,000 m 99 for averaging periods shorter than 1 day, but is insignificant for periods longer than 100 ~ 100 days (Fig. 2a). This dependency to averaging timescale suggests that this term 101 is not sustained by a steady horizontal flow. Finally, the turbulent horizontal advection 102 also induces a buoyancy loss between 1,000 m and 2,000 m (Fig. 2c) that emerges for 103 averaging periods longer than ~ 1 day, converging to a steady value for periods longer 104 than 100 days. This indicates that variations in horizontal velocity (Fig. 1b and 1c) and 105 in horizontal buoyancy gradients (Fig. 1e and 1f) are significantly correlated on periods 106 between 1 day and 100 days. 107

¹⁰⁸ The preceding Eulerian buoyancy budget exhibits a remarkable dependence on averag-¹⁰⁹ ing period. Whereas on short timescales the buoyancy balance is between the mean

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horizontal advection and the mean vertical advection (Mean_{hor}+Mean_{ver} $\simeq 0$), on long 110 timescales it is the turbulent horizontal advection that balances the mean vertical advec-111 tion (Mean_{ver} \simeq Turb_{hor}). The change in regime occurs between 1-100 days. This timescale 112 is characteristic of mesoscale dynamics, as may be shown e.g., by considering the 6-day 113 propagation timescale derived from the observed zonal propagation speed of mesoscale 114 eddies $[2 \text{ cm s}^{-1}, Klocker and Marshall, 2014]$ and the baroclinic Rossby deformation 115 radius [10 km, *Chelton et al.*, 1998] characteristic of the ACC. Accordingly, variability 116 within this timescale will be referred to as mesoscale turbulence in the remainder of this 117 study [Klocker and Abernathey, 2014]. 118

The permanent regime is reached for averaging periods of 100 days. This convergence 119 timescale was reported by Sévellec et al. [2015] in a previous investigation of regional 120 dynamics. This period is linked to the cumulative effect of mesoscale eddies propagating 121 over the mooring site, and defines the minimum time over which measurements of eddy 122 variables must be acquired to obtain robust statistics and a convergence of the buoyancy 123 budget. This is symptomatic of the central role of eddies in sustaining the turbulent 124 horizontal advection. On timescales of 100 days, a balance is established between mean 125 vertical advection leading to a buoyancy gain and turbulent horizontal advection inducing 126 a buoyancy loss, in the depth range between 1,000 m and 2,000 m (Fig 2). This is con-127 sistent with the prevalent view of the Southern Ocean limb of the MOC equatorward of 128 the ACC's axis, where the mooring is located (i.e., equatorward of the maximum gradient 129 of dynamic ocean topography, Fig.1a). In this area, buoyant waters are expected to be 130 downwelled by the mean vertical circulation; this effect is balanced by the mesoscale ed-131

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dies inducing a sink of buoyancy at depth [*Toggweiler and Samuels*, 1995, 1998; *Marshall and Radko*, 2003, 2006]. If ergodicity of the ACC flow is assumed (i.e., if time averaging may be considered as equivalent to spatial averaging), our observational diagnostics indicate that mean downwelling at the ACC's northern edge [which represents the equatorward, downwelling branch of the 'Deacon cell', *Döös and Webb*, 1994] is compensated by horizontal mesoscale eddy turbulence.

3. The residual-mean circulation

Having documented the pivotal role of turbulent horizontal advection on timescales 138 longer than 100 days in balancing persistent downwelling, we will test how the former is 139 represented within the TRM framework [McDougall and McIntosh, 1996, 2001]. This will 140 enable us to characterize the physical nature of turbulent horizontal advection. In par-141 ticular, we will assess the extent to which the turbulent buoyancy flux may be accurately 142 parameterized in terms of an adiabatic advection, which has been regularly assumed to 143 prevail over diabatic processes [Gent and McWilliams, 1990]. This parameterisation of-144 ten entails the addition of an eddy-induced velocity proportional to the mean isopycnal 145 slope [Gent and McWilliams, 1990]. In assessing this parameterization approach, we will 146 mainly concentrate on the permanent regime (i.e., the longest time average). 147

We apply the TRM framework and compute the quasi-Stokes velocities, as initially suggested by *McDougall and McIntosh* [1996] and elaborated by *McDougall and McIntosh* [2001], and summarized in Text S4. We obtain the eddy-induced velocities in the along and across directions of the time- and depth-mean flow (respectively referred to as along and across eddy-induced velocities henceforth), and in the vertical direction (Fig. 3a). The

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along eddy-induced velocities are small compared to the mean along velocities (Fig. 3a1), 153 indicating that the residual along transport is mainly determined by the intense mean 154 flow along the path of the ACC. For the across direction, the residual velocities (com-155 puted as the sum of the mean and eddy-induced velocities) are determined primarily by 156 the eddy-induced velocities, and exhibit a substantial baroclinic structure (Fig. 3a2). 157 This suggests that the residual across transport is dominated by the integrated effect of 158 turbulent processes. In turn, vertical eddy-induced velocities are of similar intensity to 159 the vertical mean velocities (Fig. 3a3). This results in a significant compensation of the 160 mean and eddy-induced vertical velocities at all depths, which leads to the occurrence of 161 small residual vertical velocities (Fig. 3a3). Thus, the vertical transport of buoyancy is 162 significantly weaker than suggested by the mean vertical velocities because of the oppos-163 ing contribution of eddy-induced flows. This local result is consistent with the common, 164 general circulation model-based view of the residual-mean circulation in the Southern 165 Ocean, in which the Eulerian-mean vertical flow is almost perfectly balanced by the eddy-166 induced flow [i.e., the vanishing of the Deacon cell in the residual-mean framework, Döös 167 and Webb, 1994; McIntosh and McDougall, 1996]. Overall, along residual velocities are 168 of the order of tens of centimeters per second, across residual velocities are of the order 169 of centimeters per second, and vertical residual velocities are of the order of tenths of 170 millimeters per second. 171

¹⁷² Using these eddy-velocities we can express the buoyancy balance within the TRM frame-¹⁷³ work as: Trnd+Hor+Ver=0, where Trnd is the trend of modified buoyancy ($\hat{b}=\bar{b}+\tilde{b}$, the ¹⁷⁴ three terms denoting the modified buoyancy, mean buoyancy, and the rescaled buoy-

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ancy variance), Hor= $\hat{u}\partial_x\hat{b}+\hat{v}\partial_y\hat{b}$, and Ver= $\hat{w}\partial_z\hat{b}$ (where $\hat{u}=\overline{u}+\tilde{u}, \hat{v}=\overline{v}+\tilde{v}$, and $\hat{w}=\overline{w}+\tilde{w}$ 175 are residual, mean, and eddy-induced along, across, and vertical velocities). Closer ex-176 amination of this buoyancy balance reveals that the trend of modified buoyancy is small 177 compared to the horizontal and vertical advection of modified buoyancy, which tend to 178 mutually compensate (Fig. 3b1). Vertical and horizontal fluxes of buoyancy are de-179 composed into four terms, in accordance with the TRM framework of *McDouqall and* 180 McIntosh [2001] and as summarized in Text S4. These terms correspond to: mean ad-181 vection of mean buoyancy (MAM); turbulent advection of mean buoyancy (TAM); mean 182 advection of re-scaled buoyancy variance (MAV); and turbulent advection of re-scaled 183 buoyancy variance (TAV); such that $MAM_{ver} = \overline{w}\partial_z \overline{b}$, $TAM_{ver} = \tilde{w}\partial_z \overline{b}$, $MAV_{ver} = \overline{w}\partial_z \tilde{b}$, and 184 $\text{TAV}_{\text{ver}} = \tilde{w} \partial_z \tilde{b}$ (and equivalently for the horizontal terms). 185

From this diagnostic, we find that the horizontal buoyancy flux is primarily determined 186 by the mean and turbulent advection of mean buoyancy and by the mean advection of 187 re-scaled buoyancy variance, with a negligible contribution of the turbulent advection 188 of re-scaled buoyancy variance (Fig. 3b2). In contrast, the vertical buoyancy flux is 189 dominated by the contribution of the mean and turbulent advection of mean buoyancy, 190 with negligible influence from the mean and turbulent advection of re-scaled buoyancy 191 variance (Fig. 3b3). Note that the vertical advection terms are one order of magnitude 192 larger than their horizontal advection counterparts (Fig. 3b2 vs Fig. 3b3). To summarize, 193 the TRM framework indicates that the mean vertical advection of mean buoyancy and the 194 turbulent vertical advection of mean buoyancy dominate the overall buoyancy balance, 195 and act to compensate one another. 196

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¹⁹⁷ Now that the eddy-induced velocities and associated buoyancy fluxes have been derived ¹⁹⁸ and described, we can compute the eddy-induced velocity coefficients required in the *Gent* ¹⁹⁹ and *McWilliams* [1990] parameterisation. The mathematical description of this procedure ²⁰⁰ is summarized in Text S4.

We find that the eddy-induced velocity coefficients for the across direction (relative to 201 the time- and depth-mean flow, as above) range from 500 m² s⁻¹ to almost 2,500 m² s⁻¹ 202 These values including the *Gent and* (Fig. 4a), and vary widely in the vertical. 203 *McWilliams* [1990] closure [e.g., 2,000 m² s⁻¹ for NEMO in its $2^{\circ} \times 2^{\circ}$ configuration, *Madec* 204 and Imbard, 1996; Madec, 2008], or those diagnosed in regional eddy-resolving models of 205 e.g., the North Atlantic [500 m² s⁻¹ and 2,000 m² s⁻¹, Eden et al., 2007] or the California 206 Current System [from 300 m² s⁻¹ to 750 m² s⁻¹, Colas et al., 2013]. Following an abrupt 207 increase from 500 m² s⁻¹ at 3,200 m to 1,500 m² s⁻¹ at 3,000 m depth, the across coeffi-208 cient increases linearly up to $2,000 \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$ at 2,300 m. Directly underneath the maximum 209 deep stratification, the coefficient reaches its peak to values up to $2,500 \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$ at 2,100 m210 (Fig. 1g vs Fig. 4a). At shallower levels, the coefficient remains almost constant at 211 $1,800 \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$ all the way to the upper ocean. Notably, we find that the closure converges 212 when the time-averaging period is increased (Fig. 4a). 213

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Our analysis of a mooring in the ACC reveals that a regime shift in the buoyancy balance occurs between 1-100 days, associated with the emergence of mesoscale dynamics. A timescale of 100 days characterises the convergence of flow statistics, and corresponds to the minimum time required for enough mesoscale eddy features to propagate past the

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mooring. On this and longer timescales, an Eulerian buoyancy budget shows that the 218 mean vertical advection of buoyancy is balanced by turbulent horizontal advection. The 219 latter arises from velocities and buoyancy gradients evolving on timescales ranging from 220 1 day to 100 days, characteristic of the mesoscale eddy field. The O(1 day) timescale 221 over which the regime change starts can be used to objectively distinguish between the 222 eddying regime and the non-eddying regime in ocean models. Indeed, using an estimate 223 of the speed of first-baroclinic, non-dispersive internal gravity waves $(NH/\pi=0.55 \text{ m s}^{-1})$, 224 where $N=1.7\times10^{-3}$ s⁻¹ and H=1,000 m following Fig. 1g) and the longest timescale for 225 which the turbulent horizontal advection (i.e., the use of a turbulent closure) is negligible 226 $(1/f \simeq 0.1 \text{ day}, \text{Fig. 2c})$, we obtain $0.55 \times 8640 = 5,000 \text{ m or } \sim 1/13^\circ$ at the mooring latitude, 227 which broadly corresponds to the first-baroclinic Rossby deformation radius. This value is 228 significantly smaller than typical horizontal resolutions adopted by global climate models 229 $(\sim 1/4^{\circ} \text{ at best})$ but is close to those used in recent global ocean models $(\sim 1/12^{\circ} \text{ at best})$ 230 except for a few specific studies). This suggests that to accurately represent the buoyancy 231 balance and residual circulation of the Southern Ocean, models require a horizontal reso-232 lution of a few kilometres or a robust turbulent closure for the effects of mesoscale eddy 233 flows. 234

To validate this type of closure against observations, we quantified the eddy-induced circulation through the quasi-Stokes velocities of the TRM framework [*McDougall and McIntosh*, 2001]. We find that the mean horizontal velocities are only weakly modified by the eddy-induced velocities along the direction of the time- and depth-mean flow, whereas eddy-induced velocities dominate for the across direction. This leads to a signifi-

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cant residual-mean horizontal transport across the direction of the time- and depth-mean 240 flow (of the order of centimeters per second). In contrast, the mean vertical velocities are 241 strongly compensated by the eddy-induced velocities. This leads to a weak residual-mean 242 vertical transport. The TRM view of the buoyancy balance differs from the Eulerian 243 view. In the former (which distinguishes averaged quantities from mixed quantities, un-244 like the Eulerian framework), the buoyancy balance is primarily established between the 245 mean vertical advection of mean buoyancy and the turbulent vertical advection of mean 24F buoyancy. 247

Finally, we considered a parameterization of the eddy-induced circulation as a purely advective process. Following *Gent and McWilliams* [1990], the quasi-Stokes velocity is set proportional to the mean isopycnal slope [computed for the modified buoyancy, *Mc-Dougall and McIntosh*, 2001]. This leads to across eddy-induced velocity coefficients of $\sim 2,000 \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$, but varying by up to a factor 5 over the 2,000-m depth range examined. Our analysis also shows an enhancement of the coefficient up to 2,500 m² s⁻¹ at a depth of 2,100 m immediately below the maximum of deep stratification.

All in all, our analysis suggests the existence of a residual-mean circulation that redistributes buoyancy vertically and in the across direction. Mapping the residual-mean flow onto the temperature-salinity relation measured by the moored instrumentation, we can diagnose the motion of the three major water masses present at the mooring location: Antarctic Intermediate Water (AAIW), upper and lower Circumpolar Deep Water (CDW), and Antarctic Bottom Water (AABW). These three water masses are derived from three distinct water types (temperature-salinity properties at their origin/formation):

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AAIW defined in the range of 3-7°C and 34.3-34.5 psu [Carter et al., 2009], North Atlantic 262 Deep Water defined in the range of $3-4^{\circ}$ C and 34.9-35 psu [Defant, 1961], and AABW 263 defined in the range of $-0.9-1.7^{\circ}$ C and 34.64-34.72 psu by [*Emery and Meincke*, 1986]. 264 Following the density classes set by these three water types, we find that AAIW (light-265 est layer) flows downward and equatorward, CDW (high-salinity layer) flows upward and 266 poleward, and AABW (densest layer) flows downward and equatorward (Fig. 4b). In 267 this way, the classical description of the large-scale overturning circulation of the South-268 ern Ocean [Schmitz, 1996; Speer et al., 2000], derived largely from analyses of basin- or 269 global-scale water mass property distributions and general circulation models, is seen to 270 emerge from local measurements of the buoyancy balance (Fig. 4c). 271

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Figure 3. (a1) Along, (a2) across, and (a3) vertical velocities for the (red dashed line) timemean, (blue dashed line) eddy-induced and (black solid line) residual components for the longest averaging timescale ($\tau = t_2 - t_1 \simeq 2$ years). Eddy-induced velocity is computed through the quasi-Stokes velocity of the Temporal-Residual-Mean framework, and the residual velocity is the sum of the time-mean and eddy-induced velocities. The results are shown on a uniformly spaced 100-meter vertical grid (crosses) and are connected by a cubic spline interpolation (line). (b1-3) Buoyancy budget within the Temporal-Residual-Mean framework as a function of depth for the longest averaging timescale ($\tau = t_2 - t_1 \simeq 2$ years). (b1) Total buoyancy budget between the trend (TRND, black line), horizontal advection (HOR, red line), and vertical advection (VER, blue line). (b2 and b3) Horizontal and vertical buoyancy advection balance between the mean advection of mean buoyancy (MAM, black lines), the turbulent advection of mean buoyancy (TAM, red lines), the mean advection of rescaled buoyancy variance (MAV, blue lines), and the turbulent advection of rescaled buoyancy variance (TAV, purple lines). The results are shown on a uniformly spaced 100-meter vertical grid (crosses) and are connected by a cubic spline interpolation (line).

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