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## Assessment of SARAL/AltiKa Wave Height Measurements Relative to Buoy, Jason-2, and Cryosat-2 Data

Hito Sepulveda Hector <sup>1</sup>, Queffeuilou Pierre <sup>2,\*</sup>, Ardhuin Fabrice <sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Univ Concepcion, Dept Geophys, Concepcion, Chile.

<sup>2</sup> IFREMER, Lab Oceanog Spatiale, F-29280 Plouzane, France.

<sup>3</sup> CNRS Ifremer UBO IRD, UMR 6523, Lab Phys Oceans, Brest, France.

\* Corresponding author : Pierre Queffeuilou, email address : [pierre.queffeuilou@ifremer.fr](mailto:pierre.queffeuilou@ifremer.fr)

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### Abstract :

SARAL/AltiKa GDR-T are analyzed to assess the quality of the significant wave height (SWH) measurements. SARAL along-track SWH plots reveal cases of erroneous data, more or less isolated, not detected by the quality flags. The anomalies are often correlated with strong attenuation of the Ka-band backscatter coefficient, sensitive to clouds and rain. A quality test based on the 1Hz standard deviation is proposed to detect such anomalies. From buoy comparison, it is shown that SARAL SWH is more accurate than Jason-2, particularly at low SWH, and globally does not require any correction. Results are better with open ocean than with coastal buoys. The scatter and the number of outliers are much larger for coastal buoys. SARAL is then compared with Jason-2 and Cryosat-2. The altimeter data are extracted from the global altimeter SWH Ifremer data base, including specific corrections to calibrate the various altimeters. The comparison confirms the high quality of SARAL SWH. The 1Hz standard deviation is much less than for Jason-2 and Cryosat-2, particularly at low SWH. Furthermore, results show that the corrections applied to Jason-2 and to Cryosat-2, in the data base, are efficient, improving the global agreement between the three altimeters.

**Keywords :** Radar altimeter, significant wave height, satellite, SARAL, AltiKa, validation

## 1- Introduction

The AltiKa radar altimeter was launched on February 25th, 2013, on the SARAL mission, a cooperative project between the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and the French space agency Centre National d'Etudes Spatiale (CNES). Technical description of the altimeter and of the mission can be found in Verron et al. (this issue). AltiKa is operated at Ka-band (35 GHz, 0.8 cm wavelength) a higher frequency than all previous satellite altimeters, operating at Ku-band (13,6 GHz, 2.2 cm) and using secondary frequency at C-band or S-band to correct for ionospheric attenuation. ~~Using Ka-band frequency enables a low ionospheric attenuation and better altitude and along-track spatial resolutions than at Ku-band (Vincent et al. 2006).~~

Using a higher frequency, jointly with technological innovations, lead to several improvements of Altika performances, relative to conventional Ku-band altimeter, for both sea level and significant wave height (SWH) measurements (Vincent at al. 2006, Raney and Phalippou 2011 ). First, increasing the frequency bandwidth results in a better height resolution (31 cm instead of 45 cm at Ku-band) and a smaller pulse limited footprint. Second, a smaller antenna beam-width reduces the measurement footprint to 8 km in diameter, instead of 21 km. Third, a higher pulse repetition frequency (4 kHz) increases the number of individual waveforms for averaging, with improvement of SWH estimate accuracy. Fourth, the tracking performances are improved, with a resulting better monitoring of changing surface elevations, in particular at coastal transitions. Past altimeter

missions have largely demonstrated the accuracy (Queffeuilou 2004, Zieger et al. 2009, Durant et al. 2009, Ray and Beckley 2012) and the usefulness of satellite altimeter wave height measurements in various research areas like wave observation and climate (Cooper and Forristall 1997, Young et al. 2011), and numerical wave modelling (Rasclé ~~and Ardhuin 2013~~ ~~et al. 2008~~ , Skandrani et al. 2009, Abdalla et al. 2010, Ardhuin et al. 2011).

~~Up to now, coastal altimeter SWH measurements were not considered because of land contamination of the altimeter signal.~~ Up to now, very coastal altimeter SWH measurements were not considered. In coastal waters the altimeter signal is contaminated by land because of the large antenna footprint and sidelobes. Coastal measurement performance depends also on the agility of the tracker to recover the signal, at the transition from the land to the sea. The height scale of the coastal topography has a significant impact on the coastal measurement perturbation. Indeed,

~~c~~Comparisons with coastal buoy measurements indicate dramatic biases and errors in the altimeter measurements, relative to the coastal ones (Shanas et al. 2014), and this is mainly

1 because in such comparisons, in order to be free from land contamination, altimeter data are  
2 necessarily limited to offshore areas (at least 50 km), where sea state conditions can be very  
3 different from the coastal ones. With SARAL one can expect improvements in wave height  
4 measurement at low sea state because of better height resolution, and in coastal areas because  
5 smaller footprint and better tracking.  
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10 Nevertheless the main and serious drawback of Ka-band is a larger signal attenuation by the  
11 atmospheric vapour and liquid water content (clouds and rain). In strong rain events, the signal  
12 attenuation results in distortion of the return waveform (Tournadre et al. 2009), inducing  
13 erroneous wave height estimates.  
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18 First SARAL Intermediate Geophysical Data Records (IGDR) were made available rapidly after  
19 launch, and preliminary wave height validation studies have shown the global good accuracy of  
20 SARAL significant wave height (SWH) measurements, but have also revealed the effects of rain  
21 attenuation on SWH measurement quality (Queffeuou 2013-a). After the commissioning phase a  
22 new reprocessed data set, Geophysical Data Records in version "T" (GDR-T), was made  
23 available ~~(GDR-T)~~ from the beginning of the mission.  
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29 The aim of the present paper is to validate the SARAL GDR-T SWH data, firstly to assess the  
30 quality and particularities of the SARAL AltiKa measurements, and, secondly, with the goal of  
31 implementing the SARAL wave height measurements in the global merged altimeter wave height  
32 data set, developed at Ifremer. For this purpose, SARAL SWH measurements are compared with  
33 buoy data, and with altimeter measurements from Jason-2 and Cryosat-2. Section 2 describes  
34 the various data set used in the study, and the quality test processing, when needed. Section 3  
35 shows the data screening and quality tests performed over SARAL SWH data before comparison  
36 with other sources. Results of comparisons are shown and discussed in section 4, for buoy data,  
37 and in section 5 for Jason-2 and Cryosat-2 ~~comparisons~~.  
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## 48 **2- Data and processing**

### 49 **Altimeters**

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52 SARAL data are the GDR in version T (SARAL/AltiKa Products Handbook 2013), collected on  
53 the AVISO ftp, for cycle number 1 to 12, covering the 14 month time period from March 14th,  
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2 2013 to May 8th, 2014.  
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5 Jason-2 and Cryosat-2 data are from the merged SWH altimeter data base developed at Ifremer  
6 (Queffelec and Croizé-Fillon, 2013) - described here under, and also distributed within the  
7 Globwave project ([www.globwave.org](http://www.globwave.org)). In the data base, Jason-2 data are the GDR-D provided  
8 by AVISO (Picot et al. 2003), and Cryosat-2 data (Francis et al. 2007) are the IGDR processed  
9 and provided by the NOAA Laboratory for Satellite Altimetry  
10 (<ftp://ftp.star.nesdis.noaa.gov/pub/sod/lisa/cs2igdr/>).  
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18 Because altimeter SWH data are issued from various altimeters (more than 10 altimeter missions  
19 were operated since 1991), in various formats, and with various quality flags, it was suitable to  
20 develop a merged, calibrated and homogeneous SWH data base, easily accessible by potential  
21 users. Over the whole altimeter missions, using dedicated quality flags does not always suppress  
22 erroneous SWH data and some time does suppress valid SWH data. Editing criteria found in  
23 user's manuals, as for instance considering only data with SWH less than 11 m, are valid for  
24 mesoscale sea level studies but not for SWH activity. Indeed, SWH values up to 20 m have been  
25 shown to be of good quality and consistent with other observations (Hanafin et al. 2012).  
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35 To set up the merged data base, basic quality flags are tested (land, ice), and specific flags are  
36 also considered for some altimeters. After this step, many erroneous data still remain, due to  
37 land contamination, strong rain attenuation, and sigma0 blooms, for example---.  
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41 Analysis of the data reveals that the standard deviation of SWH values over 1 s is the most  
42 relevant parameter to detect erroneous values of SWH. For most altimeters the most widely  
43 used SWH data is estimated over 1 s along-track measurements (called 1 Hz data) as the mean  
44 value of a number of individual SWH estimated from the analysis of the return waveform. The  
45 number of individual measurements over 1 s depends on the altimeter technology and processing:  
46 20 for Jason-1&2 and 40 for SARAL. Together with the mean value, the 1 Hz standard deviation  
47 (hereinafter called the rms) is available, and is a good indicator of the SWH measurement quality.  
48 The rms level depends also on SWH, due to both instrument and geophysical sea surface height  
49 variability (at the wave height scale). For a given narrow SWH bin range the distribution of the  
50 rms is not Gaussian, but the distribution of the logarithm is generally more Gaussian. This  
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observation property can be used to estimate a maximum threshold value for the logarithm of SWH rms as the sum of the mean value and twice or ~~3 times~~ thrice the standard deviation— this factor is adjusted empirically for each altimeter —~~the standard deviation~~. From that, a maximum threshold is then estimated for the SWH rms itself. This technique was applied for the data base, producing a specific SWH rms threshold for each altimeter.

Applying this threshold, very few isolated spurious data still remain and are eliminated using the following specific filter. For each altimeter measurement, a neighbouring data set is constructed in selecting all the along-track data over 100 km, 50 km each side of the considered point, resulting in a 14 to 17 measurement data set, depending on the satellite. Then the two extreme values of this data set are discarded for computing mean value and standard deviation. Lastly the considered measurement is tested relatively to the range defined by the mean value plus or minus four times (can be adjusted empirically, depending on altimeter) the standard deviation. The measurement is discarded if outside this range.

After this cleaning procedure, biases and trends are analysed for the various satellites. To calibrate the data, buoy comparisons, and cross-altimeter comparisons are generally performed. Numerical wave models are also used for quality assessment (Abdalla et al. 2010). Dedicated studies proposed various altimeter SWH corrections (Zieger et al. 2009, Durant et al. 2009). In the data base, specific SWH corrections (Queffeuilou and Croizé-Fillon 2013) are applied, and updated on a regular basis.

For Jason-2 (GDR-D), the correction is linear, and rather small (a few cm to 20 cm):

$$\text{swh\_cor} = 1.0149 \times \text{swh} + 0.0277$$

Cryosat-2 exhibits a non linear bias at low SWH (+10 to -30 cm for SWH less than 2 m), and a new correction was proposed for this (Queffeuilou 2013-b) :-

$$\text{swh\_cor} = 0.4889 + 0.4712 \times \text{swh} + 0.1546 \times \text{swh}^2 - 0.0145 \times \text{swh}^3 ; \text{ for swh} \leq 2.45 \text{ m}$$

$$\text{swh\_cor} = -0.1057 + 1.0058 \times \text{swh} ; \text{ for swh} > 2.45$$

### Buoys

The buoy data set consists in the raw observations collected by ECMWF between March and December 2013, as part of their ocean wave forecast inter-comparison project (Bidlot et al.

2002, J. Bidlot, personal communication 2013). It includes a combination of buoy records, platform observations, and ship reports from several countries, thus the total number of buoys changes every month.

~~Of 559 buoys, 437 reported SWH data. Of those, 22 were considered as potential moving platforms/ships/buoys due to the large change in their reported positions and were discarded after visual inspection of the reported latitude and longitude. For 40 buoys no collocation with SARAL satellite data was obtained and they were also discarded. For the remaining buoys, those reporting slight changing positions, the average position was considered for collocation purposes. The resulting data set for collocation consists in a maximum of 375 buoys. For the buoy per buoy analysis, buoys with less than 6 collocations pairs were not considered.~~

Out of 559 buoys 375 are used for preparing collocation data sets. Rest of the buoys either has large drifts or does not collocate with SARAL.

It was not possible to control the quality of each buoy record as the provided data were in raw format. Buoy satellite collocated pairs whose difference was outside the range defined by the mean value plus or minus twice standard deviation, were identified as possible outliers. These outliers represent about 4% of the total for both SARAL and Jason-2. This approach is helpful to discard not only data from buoys with possible instrumental errors but also data from buoys whose measurements are not representative of local surrounding wave environment, such as buoys in protected areas of a harbour. In order to understand the impact of this quality control step, the statistical parameters were calculated with and without the excluded data pairs (Table 1). A more refined approach would require to inspect the data set and to select the buoys to be excluded individually.

To check SARAL's measurement quality in coastal waters, the location of each buoy was visually inspected and then buoys were separated into coastal, those within less than 50 km from the coast, and oceanic buoys.

### 3- SARAL SWH data screening and quality control

1 SARAL SWH data were analysed, in some empirical sense, to eliminate the erroneous data  
2 which are not detected by the quality flags given in the product. An example of SWH anomalies,  
3 not detected by quality flags, is given in Figure 1, for SARAL pass number 954, cycle number 2.  
4 This particular pass was selected for illustration (many other cases are available) because Jason-  
5 2 measurements (pass 244, cycle 179) are available at the same time, close to the observed  
6 anomalies. The two altimeter tracks cross in open ocean, near  $0.9^{\circ}$  S  $77^{\circ}$  E, on May 21st,  
7 2013, at 12:59:32 for SARAL, and 7 minutes later for Jason-2. Along-track measurements  
8 between  $2^{\circ}$  S and  $4^{\circ}$  N, covering about 700 km, are shown in Figure 1.  
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18 SARAL SWH (black dot) exhibits three large spikes, in a global almost constant SWH  
19 background about 2 m. A first ~~spike~~ occurs over several consecutive 1 Hz measurements,  
20 with a maximum value of 7 m ~~at~~  $0.7^{\circ}$  S latitude. Two other spikes, more narrow, with  
21 maximum value between 8 m and 9 m, are observed by  $2.6^{\circ}$  N and  $3.4^{\circ}$  N. The Jason-2  
22 collocated SWH measurements (grey dot) does not show such anomalies, though some larger  
23 scatter is present in the first anomaly area. These SWH spikes are strongly correlated with the  
24 atmospheric liquid water content (rain and clouds), as shown by the atmospheric attenuation  
25 correction applied to the SARAL backscatter coefficient (grey plus symbol). This correction,  
26 available in the SARAL data product, is estimated from the liquid water content provided by the  
27 radiometer measurements. The anomalies correspond to attenuation correction about 12 dB,  
28 which is very large comparing to a background about 11 dB for the Ka backscatter coefficient.  
29 Such attenuation modifies the shape of the altimeter return waveform, inducing erroneous SWH  
30 estimates. Among the parameters that could be used to detect effectively such anomalies and to  
31 suppress erroneous data (number of valid data used to estimate the 1 Hz mean SWH, attitude  
32 angle, liquid water content, SWH quality flag ~~etc...~~) the standard deviation of SWH (hereinafter  
33 SWH rms) value appears to be the more relevant variable. The SARAL SWH rms (black circle in  
34 Figure 1) is very sensitive to the anomalies, while the Jason-2 SWH rms (grey circle), at Ku-  
35 band, is less perturbed than ~~at~~ at Ka-band.  
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54 A global analysis of the 1 Hz (SWH , rms) pairs was performed over 5 months (cycle number 4 to  
55 8), representing 4.5 million of 1 Hz ocean data. The following flags and conditions were tested  
56 to select the data: open ocean or semi enclosed sea, number of individual values for 1 Hz SWH  
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1 estimates equal to 40, SWH rms non equal to zero, and absolute value of the attitude angle  
2 waveform less than or equal to 0.01 degree square . The attitude angle waveform is the angle of  
3 the antenna pointing, relative to the vertical, estimated from the analysis of the altimeter return  
4 waveform. In practice, the square of this quantity is estimated, and considered.  
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9 The (SWH,rms) distribution is shown in Figure 2 for 0.01 m x 0.01 m bins. For convenience the  
10 figure has been zoomed, but numerous isolated data points exist up to 9 m in rms. Three  
11 patterns can be distinguished. The main one in the global axis of the distribution, indicates that  
12 the rms increases with SWH. A secondary pattern consists in large, scattered, rms values,  
13 above the red curve, for SWH range about 1–9 m, extending up to 9 m rms well beyond the  
14 upper limit of the figure. Most data of this second pattern correspond to along-track, almost  
15 isolated, erroneous spikes. A third pattern in the bottom left side of the figure, shows a specific  
16 non-linear behaviour of the rms at very low sea state, in the first 1.5 m SWH range. This feature  
17 is also observed in other altimeters (Queffeuilou 2013-a) at different low SWH ranges, and may  
18 be due to the waveform processing.  
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28 The red curve in Figure 2 corresponds to the rms threshold value estimated from the distribution  
29 of the logarithm of the rms, for each 0.1 m SWH bin. Data above the red curve are considered  
30 erroneous. At high SWH the red curve becomes very noisy, mainly because of a relatively low  
31 number of data. In practice, the rms threshold is estimated by the real values given by the red  
32 curve for SWH less than or equal to 2.5 m. Between 2.5 m and 12 m, the red limit is  
33 approximated by a third order polynomial fit. Then the threshold is set to a constant value (1.85  
34 m) for SWH larger than 12 m.  
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43 This threshold filter is applied to the SARAL GDR-T before comparisons with buoy data, in  
44 section 4, and with Jason-2 and Cryosat-2 altimeter data in section 5.  
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#### 48 **4- Buoy comparison**

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52 | SARAL and Jason-2 measurements were collocated with the selected buoys data. For each buoy  
53 observation, altimeter measurements within a 30 minute time window from the buoy  
54 measurement, and 50 km from the buoy location were selected. The collocated data set is  
55 obtained by averaging the altimeter measurements, along-track over 50 km (25 km each side of  
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1 the closest approach). Individual 1 Hz altimeter wave height measurements are obtained every 7  
2 km for SARAL and every 5.8 km for Jason-2, so within this 50 km distance range it is possible to  
3 find up to 7 and 9 individual measurements for SARAL and Jason-2, respectively. ~~Analysis of  
4 the dependence of the bias, of the root mean square error (RMSE) and of the scatter index (SI),  
5 on the minimum number of along-track averaged observations indicates an optimal~~ Plots (not  
6 shown) of the root mean square error (RMSE), scatter index (SI) and number of collocated data  
7 show that these three parameters decrease with the number of along-track averaged  
8 observations. An arbitrary trade-off between scatter and number of collocated data consists in  
9 selecting a -number of at least 5 valid data for SARAL, and 6 for Jason-2.

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21 Figure 3 shows the comparison scatter plots for SARAL (left) and Jason-2 (right). Statistics in  
22 the figure are given when the outliers (in grey) are not taken into account. The RMSE is less for  
23 SARAL (20 cm) than for Jason-2 (24 cm). Scatter indexes are almost identical (0.13) for both  
24 altimeters. The slope of the regression line is very close to the unity, for SARAL. The SARAL  
25 observed mean bias (8 cm) is slightly larger than the Jason-2 one (5 cm). The main impact of the  
26 outliers is, of course, an increase of RMSE and SI, as shown in columns W and W/O in Table 1.  
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34 The dependence of the bias and RMSE on SWH, for both SARAL and Jason-2, is shown in  
35 Figure 4. Bias and RMSE are estimated for buoy SWH bins, 0.1 m wide. Better results are  
36 obtained with SARAL. The bias is lower for SARAL (top), for SWH less than 0.5 m. The SARAL  
37 RMSE is about 20 cm, and also much less than Jason-2 for SWH less than 1 m. The better  
38 quality of SARAL SWH is also clearly shown when the results are normalized by the mean SWH  
39 of the bin (not shown).  
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47 Above statistical results are obtained over the whole buoy data set, with no information on the  
48 quality of measurements of each particular buoy. An idea of the distribution of the quality of the  
49 various buoys can be obtained in calculating the statistical parameters for each buoy. The bias,  
50 RMSE, SI and regression slope were calculated for each buoy having more than 6 collocation  
51 data. The histograms for the four parameters are shown in Figure 5. Only very few buoys lead to  
52 extreme results. The median value of the parameter is reported and plotted in the graphs. The  
53 median value, rather than the mean, can be preferred as it is a robust indicator, not sensitive to  
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1 outliers. The median values are slightly smaller than the mean values reported combining all the  
2 collocated data (Figure 3, Table 1).  
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7 Separating open ocean and coastal buoys provides interesting results. Figure 6 shows the scatter  
8 plots for both SARAL (left) and Jason-2 (right) comparisons with oceanic (top) and coastal  
9 (bottom) buoys. Comparison statistical results are also given in Table 1. First, all results indicate  
10 an increase of the scatter (both RMSE and SI) for coastal buoys. Second, the RMSE is less for  
11 SARAL than for Jason-2, for both open ocean and coastal buoys. Without considering outliers,  
12 the RMSE increases from 18 cm (oceanic) to 22 cm (coastal) for SARAL, and from 21 cm to 26  
13 cm for Jason-2.  
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20 ~~When comparing buoy and satellite data, the different errors should be kept in mind. In~~  
21 ~~particular, short wind-waves sampling error already leads to uncertainties on SWH that are~~  
22 ~~larger than 10 % for 17-minute long record (Donelan and Pierson 1983). Many other factors can~~  
23 ~~be at the origin of the observed outliers. A main one is the individual buoy instrumental quality.~~  
24 ~~An other one, observed in the present data set, is the relative location of satellite track, buoy~~  
25 ~~and coastal line. Some cases were observed (not shown) of along-track sampling on the other~~  
26 ~~side of a small island, relative to the buoy location. The 40 Hz high along-track resolution of~~  
27 ~~SARAL is an opportunity for future investigation of such cases.~~  
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### 37 5- Jason-2 and Cryosat-2 comparison

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41 SARAL SWH measurements are compared to Jason-2 and Cryosat-2 data, at the ground track  
42 crossing points. Three different collocated data set are analysed. The first one consists in the  
43 closest 1 Hz measurement cells at the crossing ground tracks, within a 30 minute time window.  
44 One second measurement cells correspond to along-track distance of the order of 7 km for  
45 SARAL, 5.8 km for Jason-2, and 6.4 km for Cryosat-2. The small size of the 1 Hz “footprint”,  
46 of the order of ten to twenty km, imposes to consider a short time window, to assume stationary  
47 sea state. Half an hour is an usual value, ~~as in buoy wave measurement technology.~~ Twenty to  
48 forty minutes is a usually required buoy measurement record length to estimate sea state  
49 parameters. Yet, over the 12 first SARAL cycles (about 14 months), the resulting collocated  
50 data set consists in 2657 pairs for Jason-2 and 1625 for Cryosat-2, and ~~low and high (over 6 m)~~  
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SWH ranges, over 6 m, -isare poorly sampled. To increase the size of the data set the time window width is increased up to 1 hour, producing the second collocated data set.

Enlarging the time window width also increases the impact of the error induced by the time and space variability of sea state. To compensate for that a third collocated data set is constructed in averaging along-track altimeter measurements over 50 km, i.e. 25 km each side of the crossing point. Furthermore, for better reliability, data are selected when almost all the 50 km 1 Hz measurements are valid i.e. when the number of 1 Hz valid measurements over 50 km, is equal to 6 or 7 for SARAL, to 6, 7 or 8 for Cryosat-2, and to 8 or 9 for Jason-2.

The impact of the time measurement difference is illustrated in Figure 7. ~~showing t~~ The bias, the root mean square error and the scatter index for 50 km along-track averaged, SARAL Jason-2 collocated data, are shown over successive time windows, ~~1 hour width: time measurement differences between 0 and 1 h, 1 h and 2 h, 2 h and 3 h... up to 12 h. Each time window is one hour wide but the range of the absolute value of the difference between time measurements increases, one hour step, from 0-1h to 11h-12h.~~ The contribution of the time variability is a clear increase of the root mean square error (circle) and of the scatter index (square). Relative to the first time window (plus or minus 1h), the RMSE increases by a factor 5 at 6 h, and 8 at 12 h. The bias (dot) is almost constant, the number of data points-number (star), called data number in the following, being uniform (about 5000) over the various time windows. So, for a given space sampling (i.e. 50 km average) a minimum time difference is suitable, in conjunction with a minimum data number, to eliminate errors due to the time sea state variability.

Comparison results are shown in scatter plots of Figures 8 and 9, and in Tables 2 and 3, for Jason-2 and Cryosat-2, respectively.

Figure 8 shows comparison with Jason-2 corrected SWH, for 1 Hz (left), and 50 km average (right) data set. The agreement is very good, over the whole SWH range. Above 8 m-For SWH\_ larger than 8 m, the number of data points is ~~poor~~small and the scatter is larger than at lower SWH. Averaging over 50 km (right) decreases significantly the scatter: the RMSE decreases from about 20 cm to 10 cm, and the scatter index from 7 % to 3 %; the average distance to the regression line decreases from 14 cm to 7 cm.

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2 Table 2 gives the statistical comparison parameters for the 3 collocated data sets (1 Hz and 30  
3 min, 1 Hz and 1 hour, 50 km average and 1 hour). A first remark is that increasing the time  
4 window width from 30 min to 1 h, increases the number of 1 Hz collocated data by a factor two  
5 (two first columns in the Table 2), but has no significant impact on the results: biases, RMSE,  
6 scatter indexes, slopes and intercepts are almost the same for the two data set. This is also  
7 observed in Table 3 for Cryosat-2 comparisons.  
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15 Though the Jason-2 SWH correction is linear and relatively small, it improves the results of the  
16 comparison, for all the statistical parameters in Table 2 (~~for each collocated data set, the second~~  
17 ~~value of the statistical parameters is given for Jason-2 corrected data~~), with the exception of the  
18 intercept, which slightly increases.  
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24 In summary, the SARAL SWH is in very good agreement with Jason-2. The mean bias is less  
25 than 2 cm, the root mean square errors are 21 cm and 10 cm, and scatter index 7 % and 3%, for 1  
26 Hz and 50 km average data, respectively. The slope of the regression line is almost equal to the  
27 unity.  
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33 SARAL Cryosat-2 comparisons are shown in Figure 9. Plots are given for both corrected (right)  
34 and non corrected (left) Cryosat-2 data, because of the non linear correction required for  
35 Cryosat-2 at low SWH, as indicated above. At very low SWH, Cryosat-2 exhibits some negative  
36 values (Figure 9, left). This is feasible because in the waveform processing, SWH is estimated as  
37 the root square of a quantity deduced from the return waveform data fitting analysis. At very low  
38 sea state, this quantity can be negative, due to ~~the~~ noise. In this case SWH is calculated as the  
39 root square of the absolute value, and a negative sign is added to SWH. One of the effects of  
40 the proposed correction is to increase this negative values to positive (compare left and right  
41 graphs at low SWH). Note that when estimating the correction to Cryosat-2 (Queffeuilou 2013-  
42 b) the negative values of SWH were discarded from the data set, so that the proposed correction  
43 could ~~be~~-not be well adapted to the negative occurrences.  
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54 Table 3 shows that, globally, the correction improves the agreement between SARAL and  
55 Cryosat-2, in term of bias, RMSE and scatter index (compare the two values given for each  
56 parameter). Along-track averaging over 50 km decreases the RMSE from 22.6 cm to 13.3 cm  
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1 and the scatter index from 8 % to 5%, relative to the 1 Hz data. These comparison results are a  
2 bit worse than those obtained with Jason-2.  
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7 Variation of the bias and RMSE as a function of SARAL SWH is shown for the various collocated  
8 data set, in Figure 10. Upper left graph shows the 1 Hz SARAL Jason2 comparison. The Jason-  
9 2 SWH correction (black curves) reduces the bias and the RMSE, relative to the non corrected  
10 data (grey curves), over the whole SWH range. Over the 0.5 m – 6.5 m SWH range, the bias is  
11 very low. Above 6.5 m SWH, the bias increases with some scatter, that could be due to the  
12 relatively ~~low data number~~ small number of data points combined with a larger time variability of  
13 SWH at high sea state. The bias variation over the whole SWH range, is much less for the 50  
14 km average data set (black circle curve in top right graph), space averaging compensating  
15 probably for the time variability. This last graph shows a very good agreement between SARAL  
16 and Jason-2 corrected data, with RMSE increasing gently from 10 cm or less, for SWH under 2.5  
17 m, up to 25 cm for 9 m SWH.  
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29 Results are not so good relative to Cryosat-2 (Figure 10, bottom graphs). The correction  
30 reduces the bias for SWH above 1.5 m, resulting bias being less than 10 cm, and the RMSE  
31 being of the same order as with Jason-2. But at low SWH, under 1.5 m, the bias increases (the  
32 correction changes the sign of the bias) and the RMSE is also higher. This probably results from  
33 the inaccuracy of the proposed correction at low negative Cryosat-2 SWH.  
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41 The better height measurement resolution of SARAL improves the 1 Hz SWH accuracy, as  
42 shown by the buoy comparison results in section 4, and must also have some impact on the 1  
43 Hz SWH rms level, which depends on the instrumental noise measurement, and on the  
44 geophysical variability of SWH. Comparing density plots of (SWH,rms) pairs for SARAL (Figure  
45 2) with similar plots obtained with other Ku altimeters (not shown here) indicates that the  
46 SARAL SWH rms level is much ~~less~~ smaller than for the other altimeters. This is confirmed by  
47 the plots of the 1 Hz SWH rms as a function of SWH at the collocated crossing points (Figure  
48 11). Jason-2 and Cryosat-2 exhibit much larger rms than SARAL, ~~and~~ particularly at low SWH,  
49 where a significant increase is observed on Cryosat-2.  
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## 6- Conclusion

The successful launch of the SARAL mission has raised the quality of the available satellite measurements of significant wave height (SWH), once specific flags are applied to the measurements. These flags, essentially based on the standard deviation of SWH estimated from the 40 Hz data, are designed to exclude specific events due to land or rain contamination. As expected from the high frequency in Ka-band, compared to previous satellite missions, the AltiKa instrument performs better, and particularly for lower sea states, thanks to its narrower range gates.

The buoy comparison shows that SARAL is more accurate than Jason-2 at low SWH. The root mean square error relative to buoys is about 20 cm for SWH up to 4 m, with no increase at low wave heights, contrary to Jason-2. Global regression analysis also shows that SARAL SWH does not require any correction. Considering uncertainty factors such as the buoy data quality, the relative poor sampling at high and low SWH, or impact of the outliers, present results can be considered as very good. Results from open ocean and coastal buoy comparisons show that SARAL SWH is of better quality than Jason-2, for both situations. ~~The high 40 Hz along-track resolution of SARAL represents a real opportunity for future investigation of sea state in coastal areas.~~

The comparison with other altimeters confirms the high quality of the SARAL SWH. The standard deviation of the 1 Hz measurement is much less than for other altimeters, and particularly at low SWH. It also demonstrates that the corrections applied to Jason-2 and to Cryosat-2 are efficient, improving the comparison results, with the exception of Cryosat-2 at very low SWH. The Cryosat-2 behaviour at low sea state has to be investigated.

Considering above good results, SARAL GDR-T SWH data are now included in the Ifremer merged altimeter wave height data base, with no correction, but using the specific SWH flag.

The high 40 Hz along-track resolution of SARAL and the improved accuracy at low SWH represent a real opportunity for future investigation of sea state in coastal areas. The high along-track sampling enables to get measurements closer to the coast, using a running average window over less than one second of data. Nevertheless, the random nature of the specular reflection on the sea surface and the statistical definition of SWH imply that the altimeter SWH measurement is typically noisy, and 40 Hz SWH are very noisy. SARAL data will be useful for

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2 various coastal application, such as the validation of numerical wave models in coastal waters,  
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4 and data assimilation in the models. An other field of application is the study of the fetch impact  
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6 on the wind wave growth.  
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4 Figure captions  
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7 Figure 1: measurements along SARAL (pass 954, cycle 2) and Jason-2 (pass 244, cycle 179)  
8 collocated tracks, between 2° S and 4° N: 1 Hz SWH, SWH rms, and SARAL atmospheric  
9 backscatter coefficient correction (shifted by 3 dB).  
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15 Figure 2: density plot (log10) of the distribution of SARAL 1 Hz SWH, SWH rms data, for 0.01  
16 m x 0.01 m bins, over cycle number 4 to 8. Solid red line is the estimated maximum SWH rms  
17 threshold.  
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22 Figure 3: SARAL (left) and Jason-2 (right) SWH comparison with buoy data. Discarded outliers  
23 in grey. Orthogonal regression line in grey, and perfect line in dashed grey.  
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28 Figure 4: SARAL and Jason-2 buoy comparison. Bias and RMSE as a function of SWH.  
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32 Figure 5: SARAL individual buoy comparisons. Histograms of statistical parameters: bias, root  
33 mean square error, scatter index and slope coefficient, estimated from individual buoy  
34 comparisons. Median value reported (grey) in the graph for each parameter.  
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39 Figure 6: SARAL (left) and Jason-2 (right) SWH comparison with buoy data, for open ocean  
40 buoys (top) and coastal buoys (bottom). Discarded outliers in grey. Orthogonal regression line in  
41 grey, and perfect line in dashed grey.  
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47 Figure 7: statistical parameters for SARAL Jason-2 50 km along-track averaged collocated data  
48 over successive time windows, 1 hour width, ranging from 0-1h to 11h-12.  
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52 Figure 8 : SARAL Jason-2 SWH comparison: 1 Hz (left) and 50 km along-track average (right)  
53 collocated data within 1 hour time window.  
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58 Figure 9: SARAL Cryosat-2 SWH comparison: 1 Hz (top) and 50 km along-track average  
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2 (bottom) collocated data within 1 hour time window, for Cryosat-2 (left) and Cryosat-2  
3 corrected SWH (right).  
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7 Figure 10: statistical parameters as a function of SARAL SWH (0.5 m bins) for 1 Hz (left) and 50  
8 km average (right) collocated data, for Jason-2 (top) and Cryosat-2 (bottom) comparisons. Bias  
9 (circles), root mean square error (squares), and number of data points (dots). Jason-2 or  
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11 Cryosat-2 corrected data in black , non corrected data in grey.  
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17 Figure 11: comparison of 1 Hz SWH rms as a function of SWH, for collocated data set: SARAL  
18 Jason-2 (top), SARAL Cryosat-2 (bottom). Mean value of rms per SWH 0.1 m bins, in grey.  
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Table 1: statistical parameters for SARAL and Jason-2 SWH measurements, versus buoy observations. Data number, bias (cm), RMSE (cm) and scatter index, for a) all pairs of data, b) for data pairs from coastal buoys, c) for data pairs from oceanic buoys. In each case, results are given with outliers (column W) and without outliers (column W/O).

	SARAL						JASON 2					
	All		Coastal		Oceanic		All		Coastal		Oceanic	
	W	W/O	W	W/O	W	W/O	W	W/O	W	W/O	W	W/O
n	6718	6390	3425	3197	3194	3106	7843	7504	3727	3271	4272	4096
bias	8	8	10	8	6	7	3	5	11	7	2	3
rmse	30	20	34	22	23	18	38	24	44	26	28	21
si	0.18	0.13	0.23	0.16	0.13	0.10	0.19	0.13	0.25	0.16	0.13	0.10

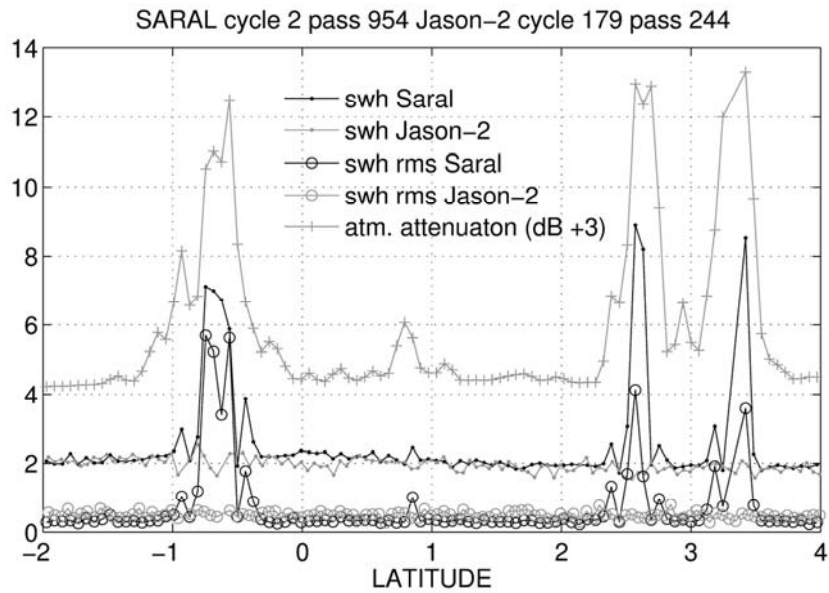
Table 2: ~~Saral Jason-2 SWH comparison for 3 collocated data set: 1 Hz measurement cells within 30 min or 1 hour time window, and 50 km along-track averages within 1 hour time window. Data number, SWH bias, root mean square error, scatter index, orthogonal regression slope and intercept. For each parameter the second value is obtained when the Jason-2 SWH is corrected.~~  
Comparison of Saral and Jason-2 SWH for 3 collocated data sets: 1 Hz measurement cells at crossover within 30 min or 1 hour time window, and 50 km along-track averages within 1 hour time window. Number of data points, SWH bias, root mean square error, scatter index, orthogonal regression slope and intercept, are given for Jason-2 non corrected (NC) and corrected (C) data.

	Crossover 30 min		Crossover 1 hour		50 km average 1 hour	
n	2657		5272		4849	
	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C
bias (cm)	5.5	-1.7	5.4	-1.8	5.7	-1.7
rmse (cm)	20.7	19.8	21.6	20.9	11.8	10.1
si	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.04	0.03
slope	0.9710	0.9855	0.9739	0.9884	0.9789	0.9935
intercept (cm)	3.25	6.07	2.51	5.32	0.90	3.68



Table 3: as Table 2, for Saral Cryosat-2 collocated data.  
Comparison of Saral and Cryosat-2 SWH for 3 collocated data sets: 1 Hz measurement cells at crossover within 30 min or 1 hour time window, and 50 km along-track averages within 1 hour time window. Number of data points, SWH bias, root mean square error, scatter index, orthogonal regression slope and intercept, are given for Cryosat-2 non corrected (NC) and corrected (C) data.

	Crossover 30 min		Crossover 1 hour		50 km average 1 hour	
n	1625		3206		2841	
	NC	C	NC	C	NC	C
bias (cm)	-8.9	-5.9	-8.5	-5.5	-9.03	-4.95
rmse (cm)	24.7	21.4	25.6	22.6	16.2	13.3
si	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.08	0.06	0.05
slope	1.0250	0.9861	1.0175	0.9815	1.0063	0.9782
intercept (cm)	2.19	9.65	3.79	10.52	7.27	11.12



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Figure 1: measurements along SARAL (pass 954, cycle 2) and Jason-2 (pass 244, cycle 179) collocated tracks, between 2° S and 4° N: 1 Hz SWH, SWH rms, and SARAL atmospheric backscatter coefficient correction (shifted by 3 dB).  
118x70mm (300 x 300 DPI)

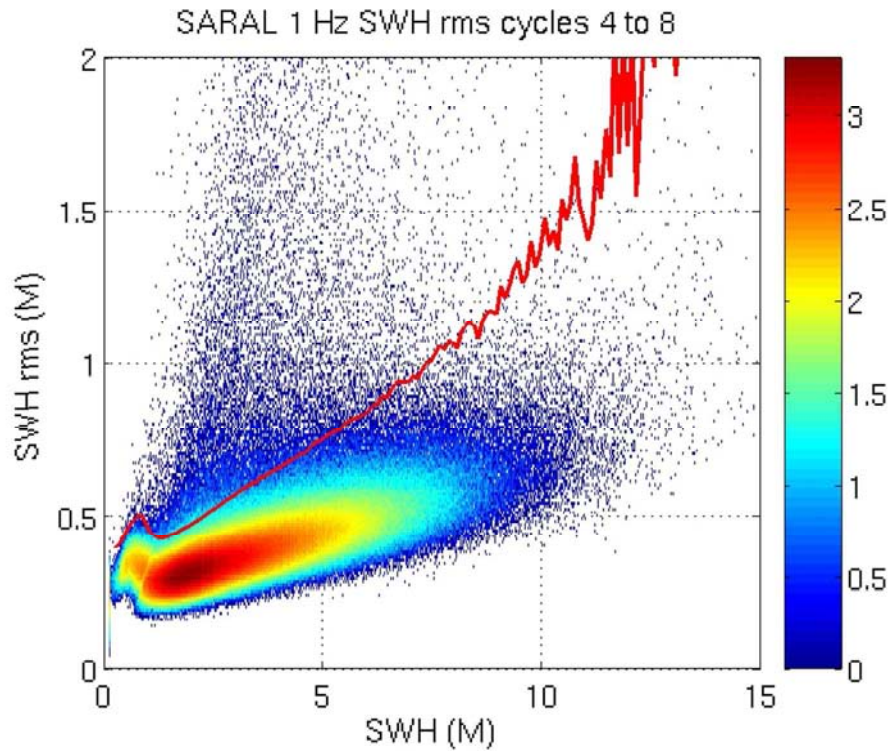


Figure 2: density plot (log10) of the distribution of SARAL 1 Hz SWH, SWH rms data, for 0.01 m x 0.01 m bins, over cycle number 4 to 8. Solid red line is the estimated maximum SWH rms threshold.  
118x88mm (300 x 300 DPI)

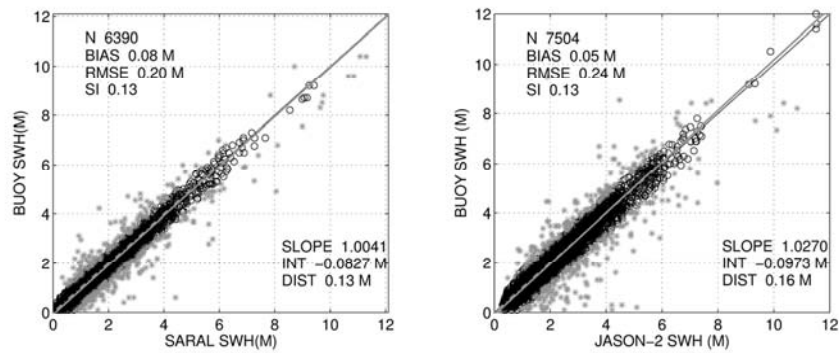


Figure 3: SARAL (left) and Jason-2 (right) SWH comparison with buoy data. Discarded outliers in grey. Orthogonal regression line in grey, and perfect line in dashed grey.

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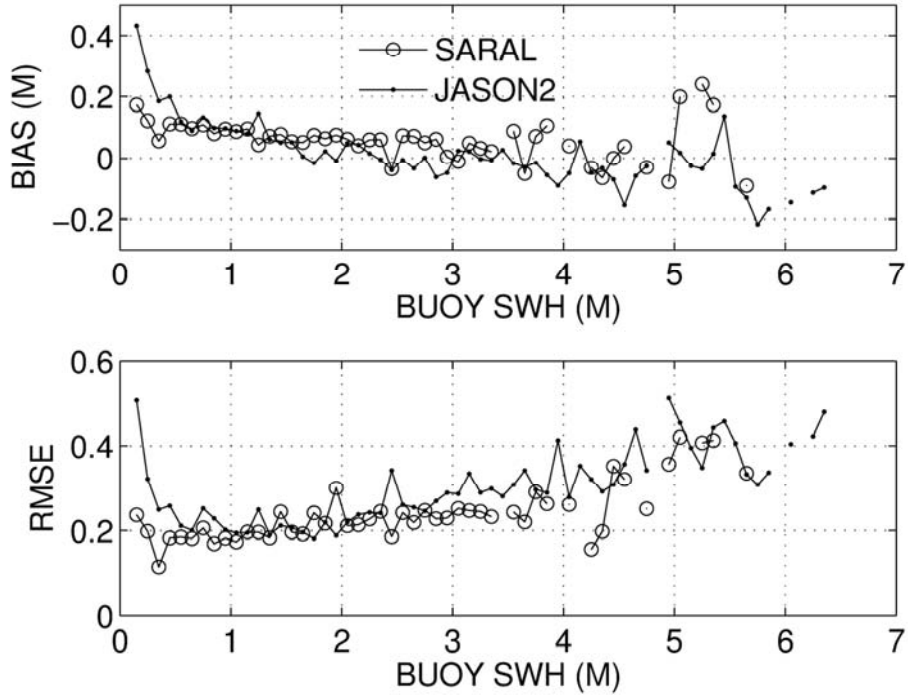
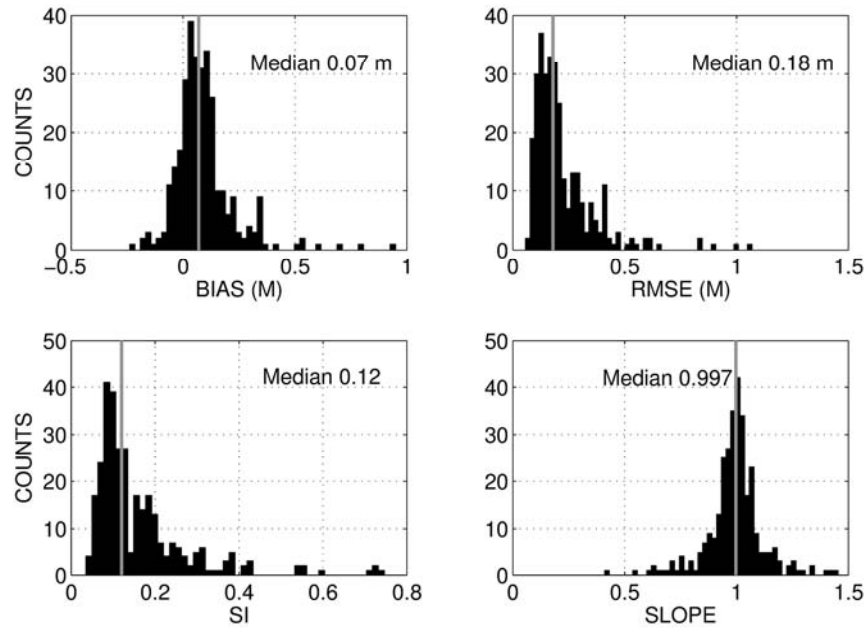


Figure 4: SARAL and Jason-2 buoy comparison. Bias and rmse as a function of SWH.  
118x88mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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SARAL individual buoy comparisons. Histograms of statistical parameters: bias, root mean square error, scatter index and slope coefficient, estimated from individual buoy comparisons. Median value reported (grey) in the graph for each parameter.  
158x109mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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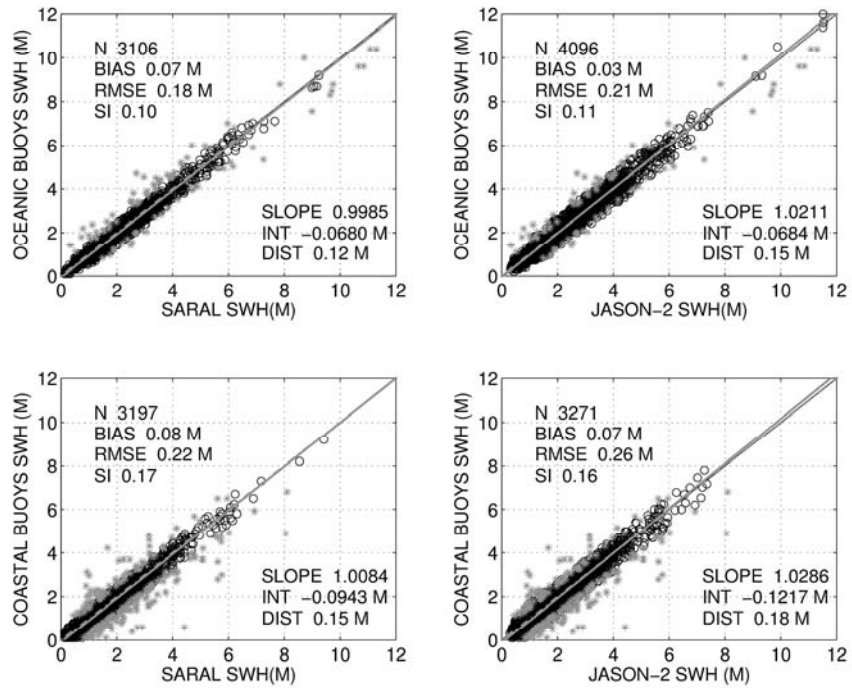


Figure 6: SARAL (left) and Jason-2 (right) SWH comparison with buoy data, for open ocean buoys (top) and coastal buoys (bottom).  
208x160mm (300 x 300 DPI)

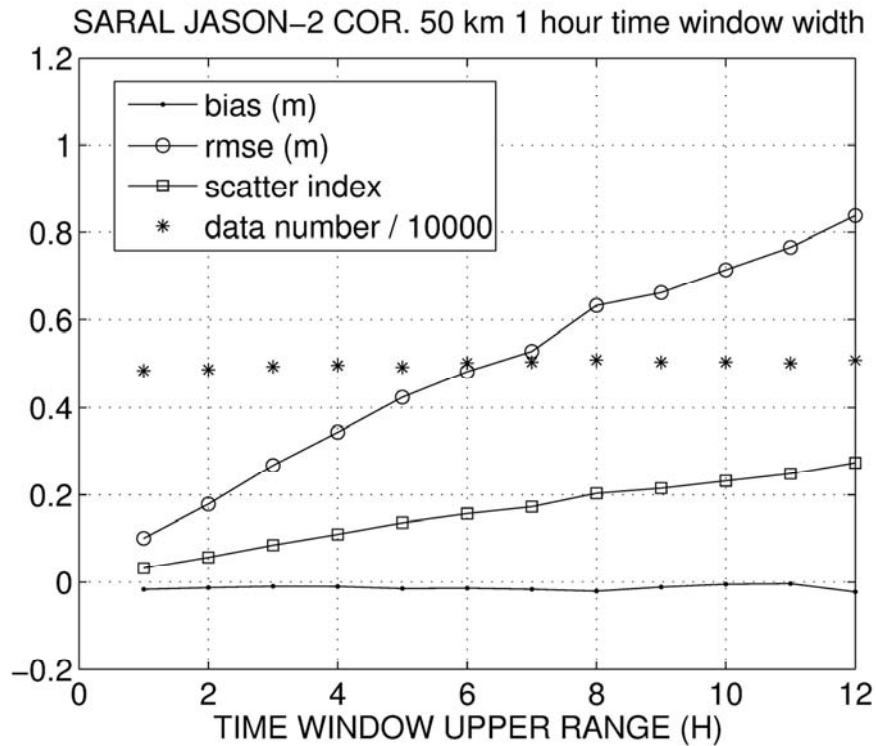


Figure 7: statistical parameters for SARAL Jason-2 50 km along-track averaged collocated data over successive time windows, 1 hour width, ranging from 0-1h to 11h-12.  
118x89mm (300 x 300 DPI)



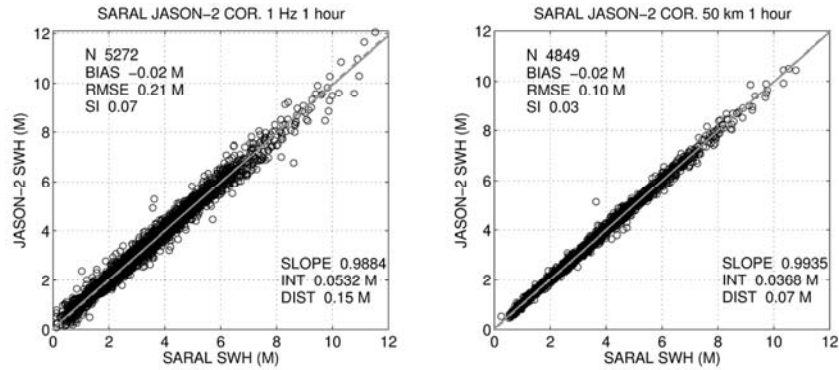


Figure 8 : SARAL Jason-2 SWH comparison: 1 Hz (left) and 50 km along-track average (right) collocated data within 1 hour time window.  
119x43mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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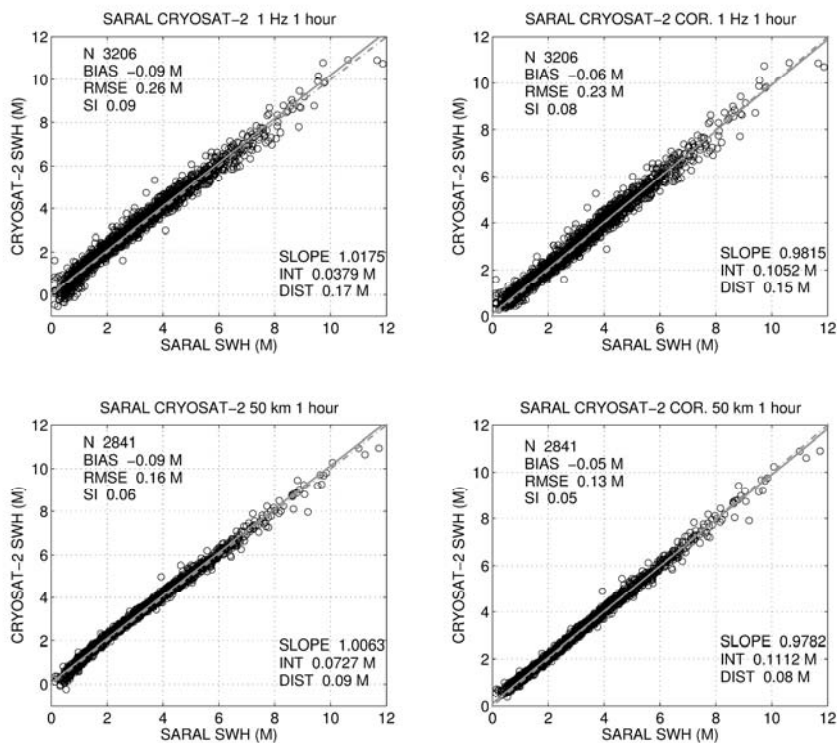
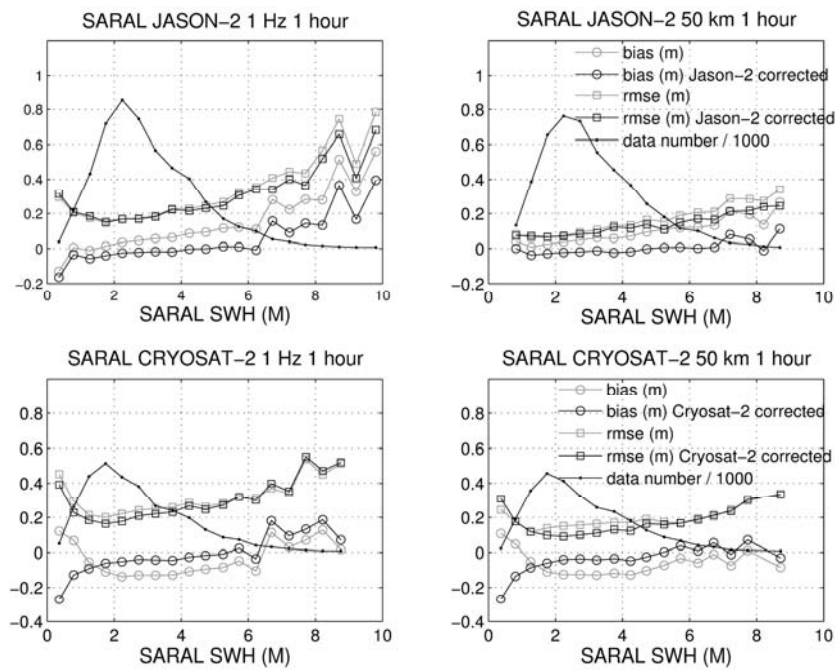


Figure 9: SARAL Cryosat-2 SWH comparison: 1 Hz (top) and 50 km along-track average (bottom) collocated data within 1 hour time window, for Cryosat-2 (left) and Cryosat-2 corrected SWH (right). 266x219mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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statistical parameters as a function of SARAL SWH (0.5 m bins) for 1 Hz (left) and 50 km average (right) collocated data, for Jason-2 (top) and Cryosat-2 (bottom) comparisons. Bias (circles), root mean square error (squares), and number of data points (dots). Jason-2 or Cryosat-2 corrected data in black , non corrected data in grey.  
179x128mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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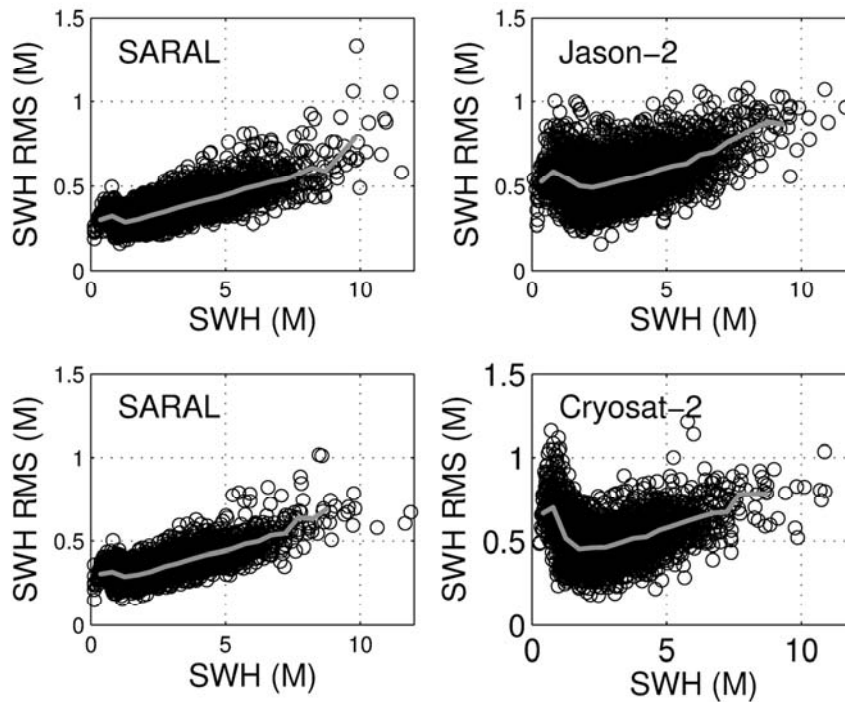


Figure 11: comparison of 1 Hz SWH rms as a function of SWH, for collocated data set: SARAL Jason-2 (top), SARAL Cryosat-2 (bottom). Mean value of rms per SWH 0.1 m bins, in grey.  
118x88mm (300 x 300 DPI)