

Suppression of CO₂ outgassing by gas bubbles under a hurricane

Jun-Hong Liang^{1,2,3}, Eric A. D'Asaro⁴, Craig L. McNeil⁴, Yalin Fan⁵, Ramsey R. Harcourt⁴,
Steve R. Emerson⁶, Bo Yang⁷, and Peter P. Sullivan⁸

¹ Department of Oceanography and Coastal Sciences, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

² Center for Computation and Technology, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

³ Coastal Studies Institute, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA

⁴ Applied Physics Laboratory, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA

⁵ Naval Research Laboratory, Stennis Space Center, Mississippi, USA

⁶ School of Oceanography, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA

⁷ Department of Environmental Sciences, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA

⁸ National Center for Atmospheric Research, Boulder, Colorado, USA

Corresponding author: Jun-Hong Liang (jliang@lsu.edu)

Key Points:

- Gas bubbles reduce CO₂ efflux from supersaturated water by a factor of 50 under hurricane winds for the simulated conditions.
- Bubble-induced supersaturation should be included in gas flux parameterization for CO₂ in high wind conditions
- Parameterizations derived using O₂, N₂ and inert gases may not be accurate for CO₂ that has a very different solubility.

Plain Language Summary

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is the primary anthropogenic greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and is the gas most responsible for global warming. The ocean is an important sink of anthropogenic atmospheric CO₂, yet the exchange of CO₂ between the ocean and the atmosphere is not fully understood. This study re-examines the exchange of CO₂ under hurricanes over the low-latitude ocean, using hurricane Frances (2004) as an example. Previous studies show that hurricanes significantly facilitate the outgassing of CO₂ due to the extreme wind. Those studies, however, do not explicitly consider gas bubbles. Gas bubbles, entrained into the ocean when ocean wave breaks, are ubiquitous under hurricanes also due to the extreme wind. While in the ocean, gas bubbles not only move around under the influence of the chaotic wind-driven currents and their own buoyancy, they also exchange gases with the water. Our study, using state-of-the-art computer models that concurrently simulate the chaotic ocean currents, gas bubbles, and dissolved gases, demonstrates that hurricane plays a significantly smaller role in the ocean-atmosphere transfer of CO₂ than previously estimated.

Abstract

The role of gas bubbles on the air-sea CO₂ flux during Hurricane Frances (2004) is studied using a large-eddy simulation model that couples ocean surface boundary layer turbulence, gas bubbles and dissolved gases. In the subtropical surface ocean where gases are slightly supersaturated, gases in bubbles can still dissolve due to hydrostatic pressure and surface tension exerted on bubbles. Under the simulated conditions, the CO₂ efflux with an explicit bubble effect is less than 2% of that calculated using a gas flux formula without explicit inclusion of bubble effect. The use of a gas flux parameterization without bubble-induced supersaturation contributes to uncertainty in the global carbon budget. The results highlight the importance of bubbles under high winds even for soluble gases such as CO₂ and demonstrate that gas flux parameterization derived from gases of certain solubility may not be accurate for gases of very different solubility.

1 Introduction

The transfer of carbon dioxide (CO₂) through the ocean-atmosphere interface modulates the cycling of CO₂ in the earth system and influences the amount of anthropogenic CO₂, an important greenhouse gas, absorbed in the ocean. It has now been qualitatively understood that the ocean takes in CO₂ at the high latitudes where the surface water is cold and is undersaturated

in CO₂, and releases CO₂ at low latitudes where the water is warm and is supersaturated in CO₂. The quantitative estimates of ocean-atmosphere CO₂ flux, however, still contain strong uncertainties [e.g., Wanninkhof *et al.* 2009; Woolf *et al.* 2019], associated with errors in the data used to calculate CO₂ flux including gas concentrations and wind speed, and with the functional form of gas flux parameterization due to insufficient understanding of gas transfer processes particularly when the ocean is rough and gas bubbles entrained during wave breaking play a key role.

Gas bubbles alter air-sea gas exchange in two ways: First, the gas transfer rate is enhanced as gases go in and out of the ocean through bubble surfaces in addition to the sea surface. Secondly, gases still dissolve through bubbles at saturated and supersaturated water as gases in bubbles are squeezed by water pressure and surface tension; as a result, the ocean is supersaturated when the total air-sea gas flux is zero [e.g., Woolf 1997]. Although the enhanced gas transfer rate is already (mostly implicitly) in popular gas flux parameterizations, the bubble-induced supersaturation is thought to be unimportant for highly soluble gases such as CO₂ and is never considered in any realistic CO₂ flux calculations. A recent observational study [Leighton *et al.* 2018], however, concluded that bubble-induced supersaturation is more important than previously thought, implying that existing CO₂ calculations neglecting bubble-induced supersaturation may overestimate (underestimate) efflux (influx). On the other hand, the importance of bubble-induced supersaturation for less soluble gases such as O₂ [e.g., Vagle *et al.* 2010; Bushinsky *et al.* 2016; Wang *et al.* 2019], inert gases [Stanley *et al.* 2009] and their ratios [e.g., Hamme and Emerson 2006] has already been recognized. It was also established in those studies that accurate quantification of the total air-sea gas flux requires the separation of the total gas flux into three components, viz., the gas flux through the ocean surface, that through bubbles that completely dissolved, and that through bubbles that eventually burst at the ocean surface (partially dissolved).

Since gas transfer rate increases with wind speed, it is plausible that gas transfer under hurricanes makes a significant contribution to global CO₂ flux. Based on observational data, Bates *et al.* [1998] concluded that hurricanes contribute up to half of the global CO₂ efflux. Levy *et al.* [2012] noted that the gross effect of hurricanes on CO₂ efflux is much less and is about 10% of the global CO₂ efflux because a considerable portion of the ocean under a hurricane path is undersaturated in CO₂ and vertical mixing is anomalously weak after the passage of hurricanes.

Several other studies [e.g., *Bate 2007; Huang and Imberger 2010*] also discuss the CO₂ efflux under hurricane conditions. While those studies debate the quantitative integral effect of hurricanes on CO₂ efflux, they all agree that strong CO₂ outgassing occurs over surface water supersaturated in CO₂ during hurricane passage due to the enhanced transfer rate associated with strong winds. Gas flux estimates in most studies implicitly include bubble-enhanced transfer rate but not bubble-induced supersaturation [e.g., *Wanninkhof 1992; Fairall et al. 2011*]. While parameterizations are based on gas flux measurements, including CO₂, the data for high wind are collected at high latitudes where the wind is strong but CO₂ is strongly undersaturated [e.g., *Ho et al. 2011; Bell et al. 2017*]. At strongly undersaturated conditions, both the gas flux through the ocean surface and that through bubbles are from the atmosphere to the ocean. It remains unknown if the gas transfer formulas derived from undersaturated water, with CO₂ influx, apply to supersaturated water, with CO₂ efflux.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of gas bubbles on CO₂ outgassing in supersaturated waters under Hurricane Frances (2004). The study is conducted by synthesizing in situ observations including gases and numerical solutions from a process model that simultaneously models turbulent flows, gas bubbles, and dissolved bubbles. Section 2 describes the data and the model; Section 3 presents and discusses the results; and Section 4 is a summary.

2 Data and Model Description

2.1 Data

Hurricane Frances (2004) was a category-4 hurricane in the northwestern Atlantic Ocean causing significant damage to the Bahamas and southeastern states of the U.S. A large campaign was conducted starting August 31st, 2004 to observe both sides of the air-sea interface in the path of the hurricane. Details of the field campaign, instrumentation, and available data are in *Black et al. [2007]*. For this study, the concentrations of dissolved O₂ and N₂ derived from an O₂ sensor and a gas tension device on a Lagrangian float that constantly transited across the upper 40-m or so of the ocean under the maximum hurricane winds are used (Fig. 1a) [*D'Asaro and McNeil 2007*]. Temperature and salinity from a nearby autonomous profiling Electromagnetic Autonomous Profiling Explorer (EM-APEX) float [*Sanford et al. 2011*] are also used.

2.2 Model

2.2.1 Model description

The computer solutions are obtained using the coupled-ocean-bubble-gas model [Liang *et al.* 2017]. Turbulent currents under the hurricane are simulated with the National Center for Atmospheric Research Large Eddy Simulation (NCAR-LES) model [e.g., Sullivan and McWilliams 2010]. The evolution of gas bubbles is tracked as Lagrangian particles and the concentration of dissolved gases are simulated using advection-diffusion equations. Model formulation and implementation are repeated in the supporting information. The next two paragraphs highlight the improvements from Liang *et al.* [2017] that are important for bubble simulations.

Bubbles are entrained into the ocean by breaking waves. In our past studies [e.g., Liang *et al.* 2017], breaking wave number density is an exponential function of breaking wave speed (c) (see equation 3.15 in Sullivan *et al.* 2007). The functional form is based on visual observation by Melville and Matusov [2002]. In this study, we implemented the breaking wave front distribution function ($\Lambda(c)$) from more recent infrared observations [Zappa *et al.* 2012; Sutherland and Melville 2013 and 2015; Romero 2019] that are power-law functions of c (see supporting information for details). There are more large breaking waves and less small breaking waves using the current power-law distribution function than the exponential distribution function in our previous studies (see Figure S1 in supporting information).

In addition to O_2 and N_2 that were simulated in Liang *et al.* [2017], CO_2 is also explicitly simulated in the same way as in Liang *et al.* [2011]. In the model, dissolved inorganic carbon ($[DIC]=[CO_3^{2-}]+[HCO_3^{2-}]+[H_2CO_3]$) and alkalinity are simulated. The partial pressure of CO_2 is diagnosed by assuming equilibrium chemistry [e.g., Sarmiento and Gruber 2006; Emerson and Hedges 2008]. Since the carbonate reaction is assumed instantaneous, our model does not have the chemical enhancement effect of CO_2 exchange that is negligible at normal ocean turbulence conditions [e.g., Wanninkhof and Knox 1996]. The use of equilibrium assumption in LES studies of upper ocean CO_2 is also confirmed by Smith *et al.* [2018], who compared LES simulations resolving carbonate reactions and those assuming carbonate system equilibrium and concluded that explicit consideration of carbonate reaction has minimal effect on CO_2 flux.

2.2.2 Model configuration

The model was configured in a rectangular domain of $400\times400\times200$ m with $256\times256\times192$ grids. The simulation starts on day 245.15 ($\sim 3:36$ AM Sept. 1st GMT) of 2004 when the dissolved gas

data are available and lasts for about 1.16 days within which the wind strengthened to its maximum and weakened to about the pre-storm strength. Wind speeds at 10-m above the ocean surface (U_{10}) and sea level pressure (Fig. 1b) were interpolated from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/Hurricane Research Division (NOAA/HRD) real-time wind analysis (H*WIND) product [Powell *et al.* 1988]. The float is located on the right flank of the hurricane and the largest U_{10} over the float is greater than 52 m/s at day 0.6. Surface heat flux and freshwater flux were interpolated from the hourly NCEP Climate Forecast System Reanalysis (CFSR) product at a spatial resolution of $0.312^\circ \times 0.312^\circ$ [Saha *et al.* 2010]. The strong wind and precipitation also lead to strong cooling flux and freshwater flux to the ocean (Fig. 1c). Wave parameters, including Stokes drift, peak wave period, and wave energy to the ocean, are based on the solutions of wave spectrum computed using the wind-wave model WAVEWATCH III® (WWIII) [Tolman *et al.* 2009]. The WWIII model was also driven by the H*WIND product. Details about the configuration of the WWIII model were described in Fan *et al.* [2009]. The calculation of wave energy flux to the ocean follows Fan and Hwang [2017]. The waves in the front-right quadrant of the hurricane track are higher and longer due to the resonance effect caused by the movement of the storm, while those in the rear-left quadrant are lower and shorter. The atmospheric fraction of gases is constant through the simulation and is 20.9%, 78.1% and 374ppm for O_2 , N_2 and CO_2 , respectively. The value for atmospheric CO_2 concentration was inferred from the updated observation-based global monthly gridded sea surface CO_2 and air-sea CO_2 flux product [Landschützer *et al.* 2017].

Initial profiles of temperature, salinity, dissolved O_2 and dissolved N_2 were set based on the measurements on the floats (Figs. 2a and 2b). The initial mixed layer depth is less than 30 m. Temperature is higher and salinity is lower in the mixed layer than below, as is typical of the region [Sanford *et al.* 2011]. Dissolved N_2 is lowest in the mixed layer and increases with depth below the mixed layer. It is about 1% supersaturated in the mixed layer. Dissolved O_2 is more than 2% supersaturated in the mixed layer. In the studied region with strong surface heating and sunlight, the euphotic zone is deeper than the mixed layer, leading to higher dissolved O_2 in the thermocline than in the mixed layer. Dissolved O_2 is the largest at around 60 m, below which dissolved O_2 decreases with depth due to remineralization. Initial profiles of dissolved inorganic carbon and alkalinity (Fig. 2c) are the same as those used by Huang and Imberger [2010] for the same storm. The profiles are based on measurement by the R/V Knorr cruise at $(22.21^\circ N,$

66.00°W) in 1997, but are increased by 9.59 mmol/kg and 4.27 mmol/kg for DIC and alkalinity, respectively, based on the observed increase in mean DIC and alkalinity in the same region and between 1997 and 2004 by *Bates* [2007].

To understand the effect of gas bubbles, two simulations were carried out, one without gas bubbles (run NB) and the other one with bubbles (run B). In the simulation without gas bubbles, the total gas flux is calculated using the parameterization by *Wanninkhof* [1992] that is commonly used in earth system models. In the parameterization, the enhanced gas transfer rate due to bubbles is implicitly included while the bubble-induced supersaturation is neglected. In the simulation with gas bubbles, gas bubbles are represented by 8 million Lagrangian particles. The total gas flux is the sum of the gas flux through bubbles and the gas flux through the ocean surface. The gas flux through bubbles is explicitly calculated from the bubble fields and the dissolved gas fields, and the gas transfer rate through the ocean surface is calculated using the formula proposed by *Goddijn-Murphy et al.* [2012] for *in situ* wind, i.e., $k_{s,660}=2.6U_{10}^{-5.7}$.

3 Results

During the passage of the hurricane, the ocean surface cools by about two degrees. The cooling is primarily driven by the turbulent entrainment of thermocline water. Only 10% of the total cooling is caused by surface heat flux. Detailed analysis of the cold wake of the hurricane has been carried out by *D'Asaro et al.* [2007]. It plays an important role in the local atmosphere-ocean coupling [e.g., *D'Asaro et al.* 2007], and in the heat exchange between the surface and the interior oceans [*Mei et al.* 2013]. Although there is strong freshwater flux associated with precipitation during the passage of the hurricane, sea surface salinity increases (Fig 3b) due to the dominant effect of entrainment of saltier thermocline water below the mixed layer. The model captures the observed upper ocean response well, particularly during the strongest winds.

Mixed-layer dissolved O₂, dissolved N₂ and DIC all increase after the passage of the hurricane in simulations with and without gas bubbles (red lines in Figs. 3c to 3e). Similar to heat and salt, dissolved gas concentrations are controlled by air-sea surface gas flux and by entrainment of thermocline water which has different dissolved gas concentrations. Throughout the simulated period, all three gases are supersaturated with respect to their atmospheric pressure (see the comparison between the solid lines and the dashed lines in Figs. 3c, 3d and 3f), so that the surface flux is from the ocean to the atmosphere. The supersaturated condition is a combined

consequence of the initial supersaturation condition, the low atmospheric pressure during the storm, the entrainment of the thermocline water immediately below the mixed layer, and the mixing of waters of different temperatures. For the three gases, the effect of entrainment dominates that of surface outgassing, and the mixed layer concentrations of gases increase.

In the simulation with bubbles, the mixed layer concentrations of all three gases increase, and are larger than in the simulation without bubbles throughout the simulated period. Given that the effect of bottom entrainment is the same for both simulations, the difference between the two simulations is from the explicit inclusion of gas bubbles. The difference between the two simulations is much more evident for O_2 and N_2 than for DIC and pCO_2 . This is consistent with the conclusion in *Koch et al.* [2009] that air-sea gas flux has a minimal influence on the change of mixed-layer DIC under a hurricane and the decrease in pCO_2 is due to changes in mixed layer temperature and salinity.

To better understand the role of bubbles in air-sea gas flux, especially for CO_2 flux, the total gas flux between the ocean and the atmosphere, and the respective contribution from the two types of bubbles and the ocean surface are presented in Figs. 4a to 4c. In the simulation without bubbles, the total gas flux (black dashed lines in Figs. 4a to 4c) is from the ocean to the atmosphere for all three gases due to the supersaturation of the gases. In the simulation with bubbles, the total gas flux for both O_2 and N_2 (black solid lines in Figs. 4a and 4b) is from the atmosphere to the ocean, in the opposite direction from the surface flux (red lines) and the total flux without bubbles (black dashed lines). The gas flux through bubbles dominates the surface flux for both O_2 and N_2 . The fractional contribution by completely dissolved bubbles (blue lines) is larger for N_2 than for O_2 because the solubility of N_2 is smaller than that of O_2 .

With bubbles, the total gas flux of CO_2 is from the ocean to the atmosphere aside from a brief period between around day 0.58 to day 0.69 when the winds are strongest (Fig. 4c). Under the simulated conditions, the integrated CO_2 flux during the simulated period is still from the ocean to the atmosphere but is less than 2% of the flux estimated using a parameterization without explicit consideration of bubble-induced supersaturation. Except for the first 0.32 days when CO_2 is more than 8% supersaturated and $U_{10} < 26\text{m/s}$, bubbles contribute to CO_2 dissolution although the gas is at least 3% supersaturated. In traditional gas flux parameterization without bubble-induced supersaturation, bubbles will always contribute to gas efflux in supersaturated

conditions. This implies that previous studies using a traditional gas flux parameterization significantly overestimates CO₂ efflux during the passage of a hurricane. Since CO₂ is the most soluble among the three simulated gases, the relative contribution by bubbles to total gas flux is the smallest. The effect of gas bubbles becomes evident (the black and the red lines deviate) when $U_{10} > 30 \text{ m/s}$. The contribution of completely dissolved bubbles is much smaller than that from partially dissolved bubbles for CO₂ that is highly soluble. This is because the fraction of gas that dissolves through partially dissolved (large) bubbles increases with increasing solubility while the fraction of a gas through completely dissolved bubbles is determined only by the atmospheric fraction of the gas.

While parameterizations for bubble-mediated gas flux including bubble-induced supersaturation have been examined for weakly soluble gases such as inert gases [Stanley *et al.* 2009], oxygen [e.g., Atamanchuk *et al.* 2020] and nitrogen [e.g., Emerson and Bushinsky 2016], they have never been tested with CO₂. That is likely because all CO₂ gas flux studies are conducted at high latitudes where the water is undersaturated. We compare CO₂ flux through bubbles from the LES solutions with that calculated using three parameterizations, including Nicholson *et al.* [2011], Liang *et al.* [2013]; and Nicholson *et al.* [2016] (denoted as N11, L13, and N16 hereafter). The three parameterizations explicitly include the effect of bubble-induced supersaturation that is required to predict an influx or a reduced efflux under supersaturated conditions. The parameterizations also compare well with observed concentrations of a few weakly soluble gases [e.g., Manning *et al.* 2016; Nicholson *et al.* 2016; Liang *et al.* 2017]. The three parameterizations show different prediction skill for total gas fluxes (Figs. 4d to 4f) and the gas fluxes through bubbles when compared with the LES models (Figs. 4g to 4i). Note that the three parameterizations neglect wave condition as an additional parameter. Wave condition regulates the distribution of breaking waves and boundary layer turbulence, thereby modulating both bubble entrainment [Deike *et al.* 2017] and bubble penetration [Liang *et al.* 2012]. It was shown to be important for determining gas flux [e.g., Liang *et al.* 2017] and gas transfer rate [e.g., Brumer *et al.* 2017; Deike *et al.* 2018; Esters *et al.* 2018; Reichl and Deike 2020]. Parameterization L13 predicts a CO₂ efflux until day 0.5 and then switches to CO₂ influx afterward. The change from efflux to influx, also in the LES solutions, is associated with the drastic decrease in pCO₂ due to the entrainment of subsurface water into the mixed layer. In parameterizations N11 and N16, the surface efflux dominates the influx through bubbles

throughout the studied period. The predicted total CO₂ fluxes by the three parameterizations are all much larger in magnitude than the results from the LES model (Fig. 4f). It is likely because the equilibration time is much shorter for CO₂ than for N₂, O₂ and inert gases (see section 4b of *Woolf and Thorpe [1991]*). As a result, in many of the partially dissolved bubbles, equilibration is reached for CO₂, but not for less soluble gases such as O₂ and N₂. When generalized for CO₂, parameterizations derived from weakly soluble gases assume that equilibration is not reached for CO₂, therefore overestimating the flux through bubbles for CO₂ and other highly soluble gases.

4 Summary

This study shows that gas bubbles have a substantial effect on the transport of a soluble gas, CO₂. The outgassing of CO₂ over supersaturated water during the passage of a hurricane is smaller than previous estimates based on traditional gas flux parameterizations. The small efflux is due to gas bubbles that transfer gases into the ocean even under supersaturated conditions. At the right flank of Hurricane Frances (2004) close to the location of maximum winds, CO₂ efflux including the effect of gas bubbles is less than 2% of that calculated using a popular gas flux parameterization without bubble-induced supersaturation under the simulated conditions. These results underscore the significance of previously overlooked bubble-induced supersaturation conditions for CO₂, a highly soluble gas. They also demonstrate that parameterizations derived using weakly soluble gases such as O₂, N₂ and inert gases are not accurate for highly soluble gases such as CO₂, and vice versa.

This study focuses on changes in mixed layer dissolved gas concentration and air-sea gas flux during the passage of a hurricane. Although the CO₂ outgassing flux is substantially smaller than previous estimates, hurricanes likely still have considerable impacts on CO₂ outgassing well after their passage. As shown in Fig. 3, the mixed-layer DIC concentration after the passage of the hurricane is substantially higher than its pre-storm values due to interior mixing. Although pCO₂ is not significantly different right after the passage of the hurricane because of cooling from entrainment of thermocline water, anomalous warming over the cold wake after the hurricane [e.g., *Price et al. 2008*] increases pCO₂, leading to anomalous outgassing in the hurricane wake. On the other hand, it is also possible that the anomalously high DIC is consumed during the enhanced plankton bloom after the passage of hurricanes and is exported to the deep ocean through the sinking of organic particles. Massive ocean phytoplankton blooms after the passage

of a hurricane are commonly observed [Lin *et al.* 2003; Walker *et al.* 2005; Liu *et al.* 2019]. The study of CO₂ flux over a complete hurricane wake would require a regional or a global model together with a parameterization explicitly including bubble-induced supersaturation. Our ongoing efforts are to develop a parameterization including bubble-induced supersaturation for CO₂, with both wind and wave as parameters. Future field campaign could focus on measuring CO₂ flux over supersaturated water, those measurements should include air-side fluxes and concentrations at the two sides of the ocean surface.

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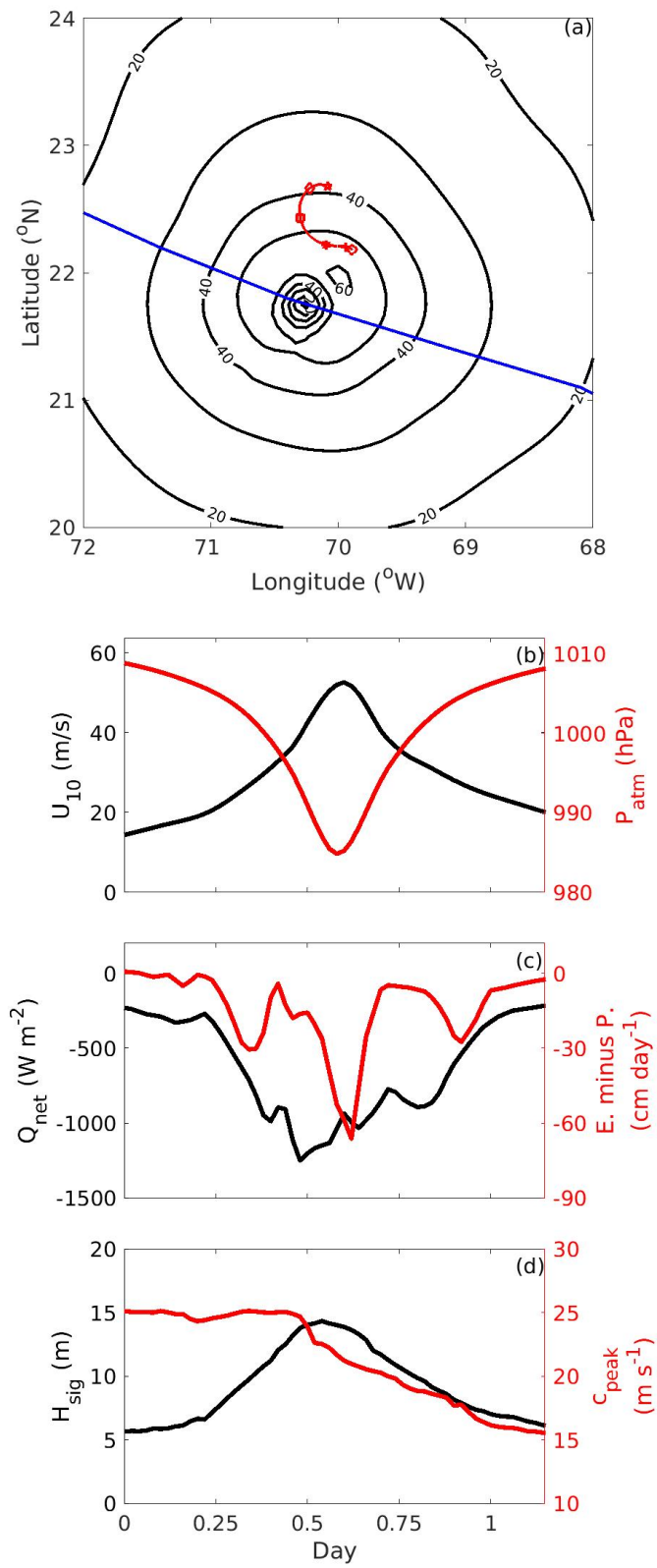


Figure 1. (a) Contours of wind speed [m/s] for Hurricane Frances (2004) at day 245.75. The blue line is the track of the hurricane. The red line is the path of the float where measurement is taken, with symbols indicating a quarter-day increment. At the location of the float, (b) 10-m wind speed (U_{10}) and sea level pressure (P_{atm}). (c) Surface heat flux (Q_{net}) and evaporation minus precipitation (E.minusP.). (d) Significant wave height (H_{sig}) and peak wave speed (c_{peak}). Time 0 corresponds to day 245.15 of year 2004.

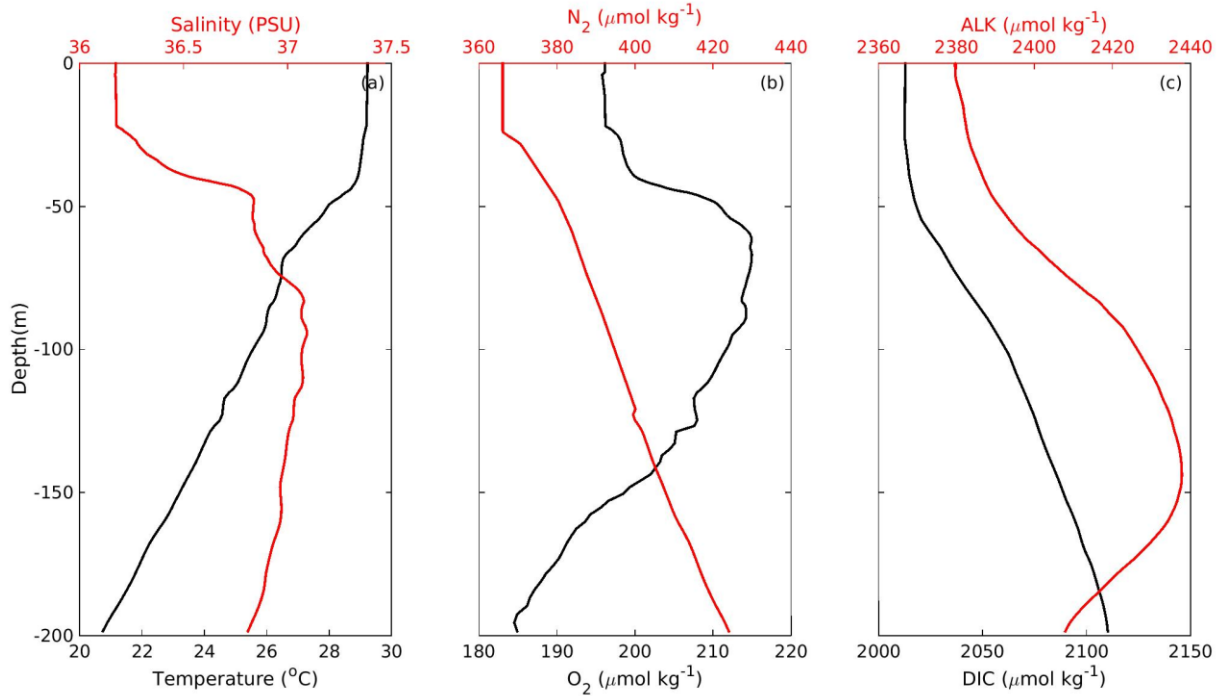


Figure 2. Initial profiles of (a) temperature and salinity; (b) dissolved O_2 and N_2 ; and (c) DIC and alkalinity.

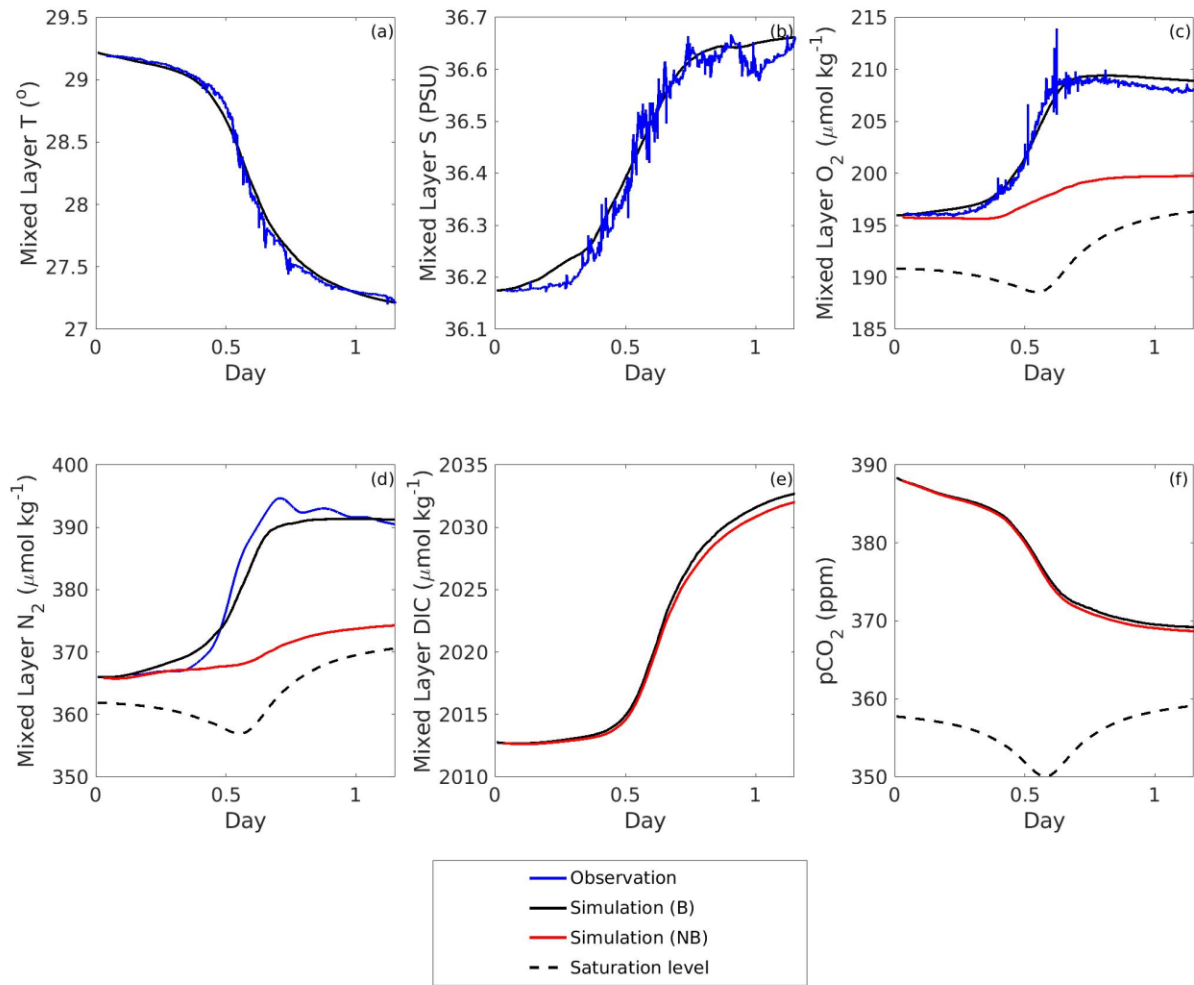


Figure 3. The evolution of simulated and observed mixed-layer (a) temperature; (b) salinity; (c) dissolved O_2 concentration; (d) dissolved N_2 concentration; (e) DIC; and (f) pCO_2 . Blue lines are from observation; black lines are from simulation with bubbles; red lines are from simulation without bubbles; and dashed lines are the saturation levels. The black line and the blue line overlaps in panels (a) and (b).

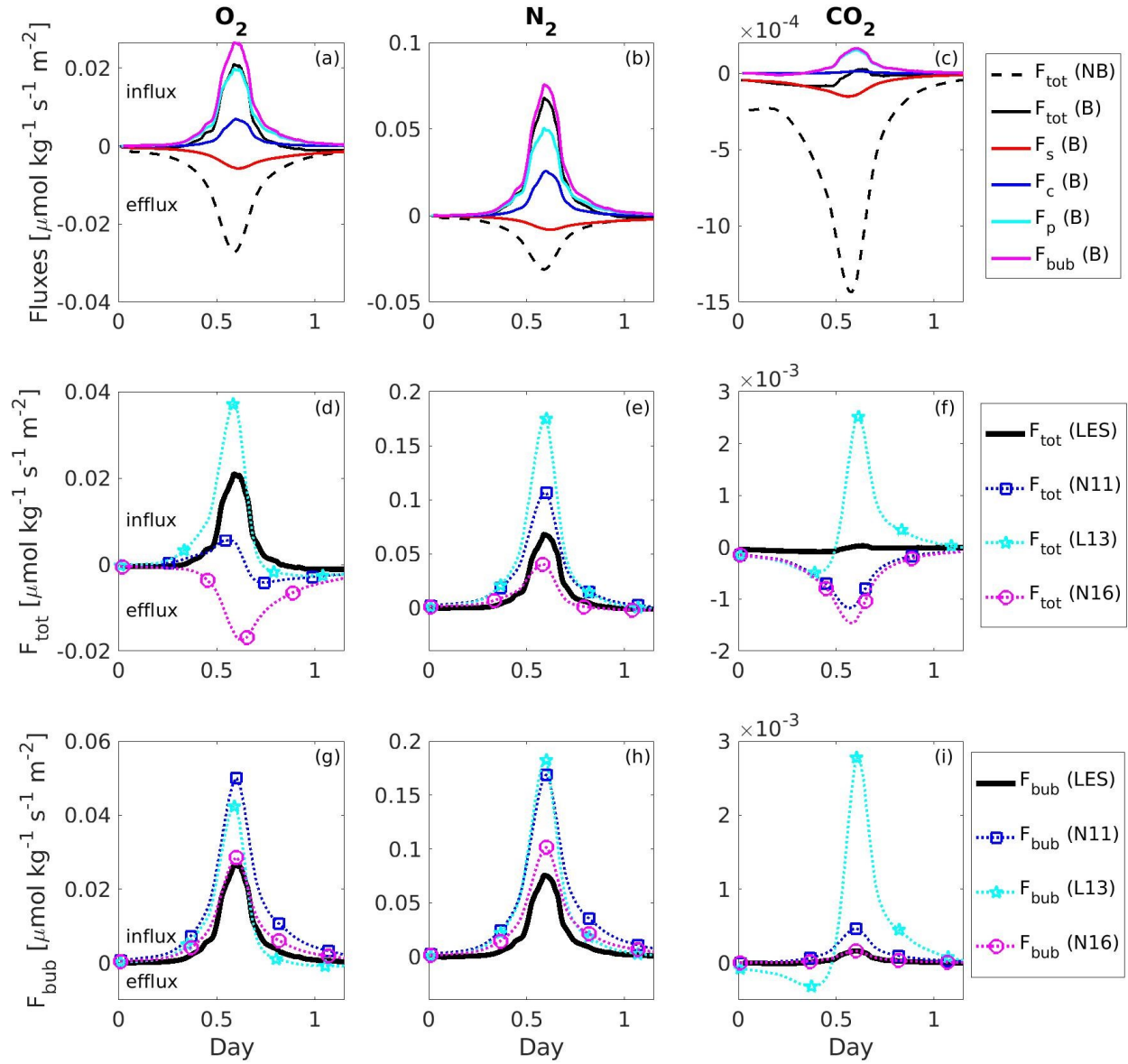


Figure 4. Upper row: The evolution of gas fluxes for total gas flux (F_{tot}), surface gas flux (F_s), gas flux through completely dissolved bubbles (F_c), gas flux through partially dissolved bubbles (F_p), and $F_{\text{bub}}=F_c+F_p$ in simulation without bubbles (Run NB) and with bubbles (Run B). Middle row: The comparison of F_{tot} between three parameterizations (N11: *Nicholson et al.* 2011; L13: *Liang et al.* 2013; N16: *Nicholson et al.* 2016) and LES solutions. Lower row: The comparison of F_{bub} between the three parameterizations and LES solutions. The left, middle and right columns are for O_2 , N_2 , and CO_2 , respectively. Positive means influx and negative indicates efflux.