

Mesoscale eddies enhance the air-sea CO₂ sink in the South Atlantic Ocean

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Key Points

- Satellite and *in situ* observations with Lagrangian tracking were used to estimate the cumulative CO₂ flux of long lived mesoscale eddies
- Both anticyclonic and cyclonic eddies enhance the CO₂ sink into the South Atlantic Ocean.

22 **Abstract**

23 Mesoscale eddies are abundant in the global oceans and known to affect marine
24 biogeochemistry. Understanding their cumulative impact on the air-sea carbon dioxide (CO₂)
25 flux is likely important for quantifying the ocean carbon sink. Here, observations and Lagrangian
26 tracking are used to estimate the air-sea CO₂ flux of 67 long lived (i.e. > 1 year) mesoscale
27 eddies in the South Atlantic Ocean over a 16 year period. We find that anticyclonic eddies
28 originating from the Agulhas retroflection and cyclonic eddies originating from the Benguela
29 upwelling act as net CO₂ sinks over their lifetimes. In combination, the eddies significantly
30 enhanced the CO₂ sink into the South Atlantic Ocean by $0.08 \pm 0.01\%$. Although this
31 modification appears small, long lived eddies account for just ~0.4% of global ocean eddies and
32 eddy activity is increasing; therefore, explicitly resolving eddy processes within all models used
33 to assess the ocean carbon sink would appear critical.

34 **Plain Language Summary**

35 Ocean mesoscale eddies are formed when part of a main current becomes separated to
36 form circular rotating currents that propagate across the oceans. These eddies last from weeks to
37 years and can modify the ocean properties of the water captured within them, which in turn
38 affects the net exchange of carbon between this water and the atmosphere. Little is known about
39 how these eddies modify the absorption of carbon across the global ocean, collectively referred
40 to as the ocean carbon sink, despite them being ubiquitous features of the global oceans. Using
41 satellite-based observations and *in situ* observations, we show that eddies in the South Atlantic
42 Ocean enhance the absorption of carbon from the atmosphere, thus modifying the ocean to be a
43 stronger net sink of carbon. These results are important as they quantify how much eddies
44 contribute to the absorption of carbon from the atmosphere to the ocean. Our results highlight the
45 need to include the impact on carbon uptake by eddies in models used to assess ocean carbon
46 budgets.

47 **1. Introduction**

48 Mesoscale eddies, characterised by radii on the order of 100 km and lifetimes of weeks to
49 years, are ubiquitous in the global oceans (Chelton et al., 2011; Pegliasco et al., 2022). Eddies

50 modify the physical (Laxenaire et al., 2019; Nencioli et al., 2018), biological (Carvalho et al.,
51 2019; Dufois et al., 2016; Lehahn et al., 2011; Roughan et al., 2017), and chemical (Arhan et al.,
52 2011; Chen et al., 2007; Orselli, Goyet, et al., 2019; Orselli, Kerr, et al., 2019) characteristics of
53 the ocean compared to the surrounding waters and can be advected far away from their origin.
54 Alteration of the ocean surface conditions can modulate the air-sea exchange of CO₂ through
55 changes in the partial pressure of CO₂ ($p\text{CO}_2(\text{sw})$) (Chen et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2017; Orselli,
56 Kerr, et al., 2019; Song et al., 2016), solubility of CO₂, and the overlying atmospheric conditions
57 (Frenger et al., 2013; Pezzi et al., 2021; Souza et al., 2021). Despite their abundance however,
58 few studies have investigated the role of eddies in the air-sea exchange of CO₂ (Chen et al.,
59 2007; Jones et al., 2017; Pezzi et al., 2021) and estimated their cumulative impact on the oceanic
60 CO₂ sink (Orselli, Kerr, et al., 2019).

61 Anticyclonic eddies generally display high-pressure centres, displace isopycnals downwards, and
62 have higher sea surface temperatures (SST) than the surrounding environment (McGillicuddy,
63 2016). The solubility of CO₂ in seawater decreases with increasing temperature (Weiss, 1974),
64 and biological activity would hypothetically decrease due to lower nutrient inputs into the
65 surface layer (Gaube et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2018). Therefore, these anticyclonic features are
66 commonly thought to increase $p\text{CO}_2(\text{sw})$ and considered as weak CO₂ sink or even source of CO₂
67 to the atmosphere. Cyclonic eddies are expected to follow the opposite convention with low-
68 pressure centres, lower SST, elevated isopycnals, enhanced biological activity and therefore
69 decreased $p\text{CO}_2(\text{sw})$, potentially enhancing the CO₂ sink.

70 Mesoscale eddies are, however, intricate structures, and the way they modify the air-sea CO₂
71 fluxes is likely to be more complex. Jones et al. (2017) identified that both anticyclonic and
72 cyclonic eddies were hotspots for CO₂ drawdown in the Southern Ocean. Orselli, Kerr et al.
73 (2019) showed that anticyclonic (Agulhas) eddies are a stronger CO₂ sink than the surrounding
74 water in the South Atlantic. By contrast, Pezzi et al. (2021) identified an anticyclonic eddy as a
75 CO₂ source and Chen et al. (2007) reported that a single cyclonic eddy in the North Pacific
76 weakened the CO₂ sink by ~17%. Song et al. (2016) showed that the way in which eddies
77 modify the air-sea CO₂ flux can change seasonally in the Southern Ocean: anticyclonic eddies
78 were stronger CO₂ sources in winter and stronger CO₂ sinks in summer, and the opposite was
79 found for cyclonic eddies. The ability of mesoscale eddies to modify the CO₂ flux as they age
80 (Orselli, Kerr, et al., 2019), may also have a seasonal variability.

81 The South Atlantic Ocean has some of the largest long-lived (>1 year) anticyclonic eddies
82 globally, originating from the Agulhas retroflection (Lutjeharms, 2006), and can propagate to the
83 Brazilian Coast (Guerra et al., 2018). In conjunction, cyclonic eddies forming from the Benguela
84 upwelling system also propagate across the basin (Chelton et al., 2011; Pegliasco et al., 2022;
85 Rubio et al., 2009). The effect of eddies on the air-sea CO₂ flux, differences between
86 anticyclonic and cyclonic, and their role in the global ocean CO₂ sink requires further
87 investigation, especially since eddy kinetic energy has been increasing globally (Martínez-
88 Moreno et al., 2021).

89 The objective of this study is to estimate the air-sea CO₂ flux of long-lived mesoscale eddies in
90 the South Atlantic Ocean using satellite and *in situ* observations. A total of 67 eddies, 36
91 Agulhas anticyclonic and 31 Benguela cyclonic, were tracked using satellite observations (2002 -
92 2018) and Lagrangian cumulative air-sea CO₂ fluxes were estimated in order to assess their role
93 in the South Atlantic CO₂ sink. To help understand which processes are controlling any detected
94 change in flux over the lifetime of each eddy, the $p\text{CO}_2$ (sw) timeseries for each eddy was
95 decomposed into the thermal and non-thermal drivers.

96 **2. Data and Methods**

97 **2.1. Sea surface temperature, salinity, biological and wind speed data**

98 Daily 4 km resolution chlorophyll *a* (chl *a*) composites were calculated from Moderate
99 Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer on Aqua (MODIS-A) Level 1 granules, downloaded from
100 the National Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA) Ocean Colour website
101 (<https://oceancolor.gsfc.nasa.gov/>; accessed 10/12/2020), using SeaDAS v7.5, and applying the
102 standard OC3-CI algorithm for chl *a* (https://oceancolor.gsfc.nasa.gov/atbd/chlor_a/; accessed
103 [15/12/2020](https://oceancolor.gsfc.nasa.gov/atbd/chlor_a/)). Coincident daily composites of SST (NASA OBPG, 2015) and photosynthetically
104 active radiation (PAR) (NASA OBPG, 2017b) were also downloaded from the NASA ocean
105 colour website (<https://oceancolor.gsfc.nasa.gov/>; accessed 10/12/2020). SST, PAR and chl *a*
106 were used to estimate net primary production (NPP) using the Wavelength Resolving Model
107 (Morel, 1991) with the look up table described in Smyth et al. (2005). Daily net community
108 production (NCP) composites were generated using NPP and SST data with the algorithm NCP-
109 D described in Tilstone et al. (2015). The chl *a*, NPP, NCP and SST satellite algorithms were

110 shown to perform best in the South Atlantic with respect to *in situ* data in an algorithm
111 intercomparison which accounted for *in situ*, satellite and algorithm uncertainties (Ford et al.,
112 2021). Daily 8 km sea surface salinity (SSS) composites were retrieved from the Copernicus
113 Marine Service (CMEMS) physics reanalysis product (GLORYS12) (CMEMS, 2021). Daily
114 0.25 ° resolution wind speed at 10 m were downloaded from Remote Sensing Systems Cross-
115 Calibrated Multi-Platform (CCMP) product (Wentz et al., 2015). All data were retrieved for the
116 period July 2002 to December 2018.

117 **2.2. AVISO+ Mesoscale Eddy Tracking Product and Lagrangian Tracking**

118 The AVISO+ Mesoscale Eddy Product META3.1exp (Mason et al., 2014; Pegliasco et
119 al., 2021, 2022) which is based on satellite altimetry was used to identify the trajectories of
120 mesoscale eddies within the South Atlantic Ocean, and provides daily estimates of the eddy
121 location and radius. Anticyclonic (Agulhas) eddies were analysed if: (1) the eddy trajectory
122 started in the Agulhas retroflection region (30 °S – 40 °S; 5 °E – 25 °E; Fig. 1a); (2) the eddy
123 trajectory was longer than 1 year; and (3) the trajectory crossed 0 °E into the South Atlantic gyre
124 region. These criteria identified 36 anticyclonic eddies for analysis between July 2002 and
125 December 2018, that entered the South Atlantic as a single trajectory from formation to
126 dissipation, with limited interactions with other eddies. The selection procedure was repeated for
127 cyclonic eddies originating from the Benguela upwelling system (15 °S – 40 °S; 5 °E – 25 °E;
128 Fig. 1a), which identified 31 cyclonic eddies for further analysis.

129 For each eddy, a daily timeseries of SST, SSS, NCP and wind speed was constructed using the
130 eddy location and radius estimates from the AVISO+ product. For each parameter, the available
131 data were extracted assuming a circular eddy and the median value taken when at least 30% of
132 the data within the eddy were available. An example of the timeseries extraction is presented in
133 Fig. S1. To quantify the effect of eddies with respect to the surrounding conditions, daily
134 timeseries of the environmental conditions were also extracted from a circular region three times
135 the radius of eddy (radii from two to five were tested; Fig. S5), where data inside the eddy radius
136 were excluded. Median calendar month SST, SSS, NCP and wind speeds were calculated from
137 daily timeseries, both for the eddy and the surrounding environment.

138 **2.3. Sea surface $p\text{CO}_2$ estimates**

139 The sea surface $p\text{CO}_2$ ($p\text{CO}_{2(\text{sw})}$) was determined for each calendar month of the eddy
 140 trajectories using the South Atlantic Feed Forward Neural Network approach (SA-FNN_{NCP}; Ford
 141 et al. (2022)). The SA-FNN_{NCP} estimates $p\text{CO}_{2(\text{sw})}$ at the base of the mass boundary layer (sub
 142 skin $p\text{CO}_{2(\text{sw})}$) (Woolf et al., 2016) using non-linear relationships between $p\text{CO}_{2(\text{sw})}$ and three
 143 environmental drivers; $p\text{CO}_{2(\text{atm})}$, SST and NCP, which were constructed for eight static
 144 provinces in the South Atlantic Ocean. The SA-FNN_{NCP} was supplied with the calendar month
 145 median SST and NCP, and the $p\text{CO}_{2(\text{atm})}$ for the mean location of the eddy within the month
 146 which was estimated using the dry mixing ratio of CO_2 from the NOAA-ESRL marine boundary
 147 layer reference, skin SST and sea level pressure following Dickson et al. (2007). The $p\text{CO}_{2(\text{sw})}$
 148 uncertainty was estimated by propagating the $p\text{CO}_{2(\text{atm})}$ ($1 \mu\text{atm}$), satellite SST ($0.441 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$) and
 149 NCP ($45 \text{ mmol O}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$) (Ford et al., 2021) uncertainties through the SA-FNN_{NCP}, and
 150 combined in quadrature with the SA-FNN_{NCP} uncertainty ($21.48 \mu\text{atm}$) (Ford et al., 2022) using
 151 standard uncertainty propagation methods (Taylor, 1997).

152 **2.4. Estimation of the cumulative bulk air-sea CO_2 flux**

153 The air-sea CO_2 flux (F) was calculated for each calendar month of the eddy trajectory
 154 using a bulk parameterisation as:

$$155 \quad F = k (\alpha_w p\text{CO}_{2(\text{sw})} - \alpha_s p\text{CO}_{2(\text{atm})}) \quad (1)$$

156 Where k is the gas transfer velocity estimated from median wind speeds following the
 157 parameterisation of Nightingale et al. (2000). α_w and α_s are the solubility of CO_2 at the base and
 158 top of the mass boundary layer at the sea surface (Woolf et al., 2016). α_w was calculated as a
 159 function of the skin SST and SSS (Weiss, 1974), applying a cool skin bias of $+0.17\text{K}$ to convert
 160 the skin SST to sub skin SST (Donlon et al., 1999; Woolf et al., 2016). α_s was calculated as a
 161 function of the eddy skin SST and the SSS with a salinity gradient of $+0.1$ salinity units between
 162 the base and top of the mass boundary layer (Woolf et al., 2016). The CO_2 flux calculations were
 163 carried out with the open source FluxEngine toolbox (Holding et al., 2019; Shutler et al., 2016)
 164 using the ‘rapid transport’ approximation (described in Woolf et al., 2016) at monthly time steps.
 165 The monthly average daily flux of CO_2 ($\text{mmol C m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$) was multiplied by the number of days
 166 and the area of the eddy, assuming a circular eddy with the mean eddy radius, in the respective

167 month. The fluxes (Tg C mon^{-1}) were then added cumulatively to retrieve the net cumulative
 168 CO_2 flux for each eddy. The uncertainties in $p\text{CO}_2$ (sw) (temporally varying), $p\text{CO}_2$ (atm) ($1 \mu\text{atm}$),
 169 SST ($0.441 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$) (Ford et al., 2021) and the gas transfer velocity (assumed to be $\pm 10\%$; (Woolf et
 170 al., 2019) were propagated through the cumulative flux calculations using a Monte Carlo
 171 uncertainty propagation ($N = 1000$), and the 95% confidence interval (2 standard deviations)
 172 extracted as the uncertainty on the cumulative net CO_2 flux. These cumulative CO_2 flux
 173 calculations were repeated for the surrounding environment conditions, assuming the same area
 174 as the eddy to estimate the cumulative CO_2 flux as if the eddy were not present. The percentage
 175 difference between the eddy and surrounding environment CO_2 flux was computed.

176 2.5. Thermal and non-thermal decomposition of $p\text{CO}_2$ (sw) timeseries

177 The eddy $p\text{CO}_2$ (sw) timeseries was separated into its thermal and non-thermal components
 178 as described in Takahashi et al. (2002). The thermal component ($p\text{CO}_2$ (therm)) was calculated as:

$$179 \quad p\text{CO}_2(\text{therm}) = p\text{CO}_2(\text{sw}) \times e^{(0.0423 \times (\overline{\text{SST}} - \text{SST}))} \quad (2)$$

180 $\overline{\text{SST}}$ and SST are the mean subskin SST across the eddy timeseries and the monthly subskin SST
 181 respectively. The non-thermal component ($p\text{CO}_2$ (bio)) was calculated as:

$$182 \quad p\text{CO}_2(\text{bio}) = \overline{p\text{CO}_2(\text{sw})} \times e^{(0.0423 \times (\text{SST} - \overline{\text{SST}}))} \quad (3)$$

183 $\overline{p\text{CO}_2(\text{sw})}$ was the mean $p\text{CO}_2$ (sw) for the eddy timeseries. The contributions of the two
 184 competing components to the $p\text{CO}_2$ (sw) timeseries can be determined from the seasonal
 185 amplitude of the $p\text{CO}_2$ (therm) and $p\text{CO}_2$ (bio);

$$186 \quad \Delta p\text{CO}_2(\text{therm}) = [p\text{CO}_2(\text{therm})]_{\text{max}} - [p\text{CO}_2(\text{therm})]_{\text{min}} \quad (4)$$

$$187 \quad \Delta p\text{CO}_2(\text{bio}) = [p\text{CO}_2(\text{bio})]_{\text{max}} - [p\text{CO}_2(\text{bio})]_{\text{min}} \quad (5)$$

188 The seasonal amplitudes were calculated using a 12-month moving window for the lifetime of
 189 the eddy, and the ratio between the thermal and non-thermal component (R) was determined as:

$$190 \quad R = \frac{\Delta p\text{CO}_2(\text{therm})}{\Delta p\text{CO}_2(\text{bio})} \quad (6)$$

191 In cases where R is greater (less) than 1, the thermal (non-thermal) contribution was the
 192 dominant driver. The anomaly in R was determined by subtracting the mean R across the eddy's
 193 lifetime.

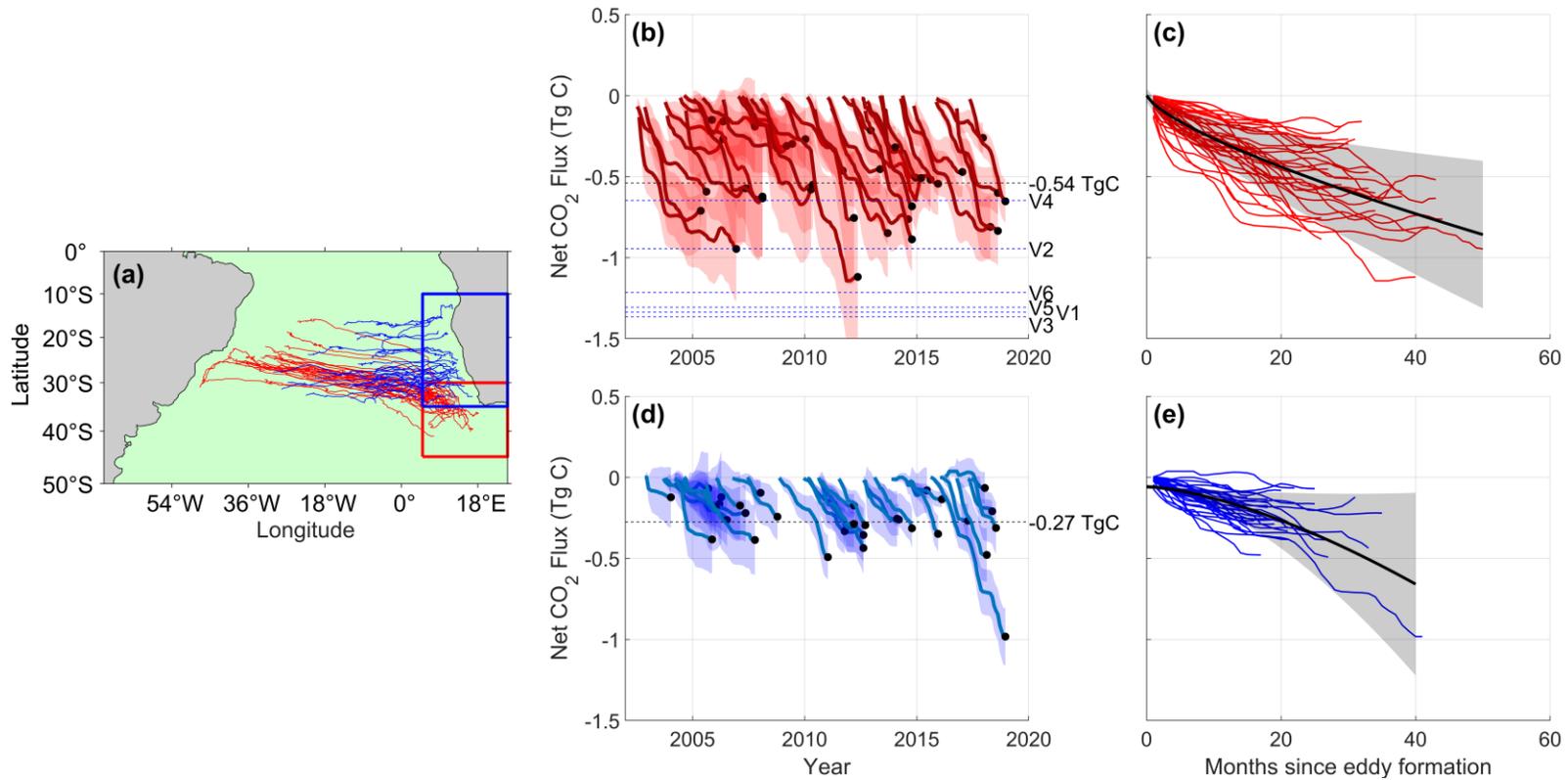
194 **3. Results**

195 A comparison between the SA-FNN_{NCP} estimated $p\text{CO}_2(\text{sw})$ and *in situ* $p\text{CO}_2(\text{sw})$ within
196 both anticyclonic ($n = 6$) and cyclonic eddies ($n = 2$; Fig. S2) identified that the SA-FNN_{NCP} was
197 accurate and precise within anticyclonic eddies (root mean square deviation = $10 \mu\text{atm}$; bias = 0
198 μatm ; $n = 6$) but larger differences were apparent in $p\text{CO}_2(\text{sw})$ for the cyclonic eddies, albeit from
199 just two crossovers (root mean square deviation = $21 \mu\text{atm}$; bias $11 \mu\text{atm}$; $n = 2$).

200 Both anticyclonic (Agulhas; median = -0.54 Tg C per eddy, minimum = -0.09 Tg C , maximum =
201 -1.01 Tg C) and cyclonic (Benguela; median = -0.27 Tg C per eddy, minimum = -0.02 Tg C ,
202 maximum = -0.96 Tg C) eddies acted as cumulative net CO_2 sinks over their lifetime (Fig 1b, d).
203 Anticyclonic eddies displayed an exponential decay in the increase of the net cumulative CO_2
204 sink, compared to a more linear increase in cyclonic eddies when fit with the same functional
205 equation (Fig. 1c, e). The anomaly in the thermal to non-thermal contribution to $p\text{CO}_2(\text{sw})$
206 variability in anticyclonic eddies changed over their lifetimes (Fig. 2a), where a positive anomaly
207 indicates an increasing dominance of temperature on controlling $p\text{CO}_2(\text{sw})$. For cyclonic eddies
208 the anomaly in the thermal to non-thermal component ratio, R , did not change significantly over
209 time (Fig. 2b).

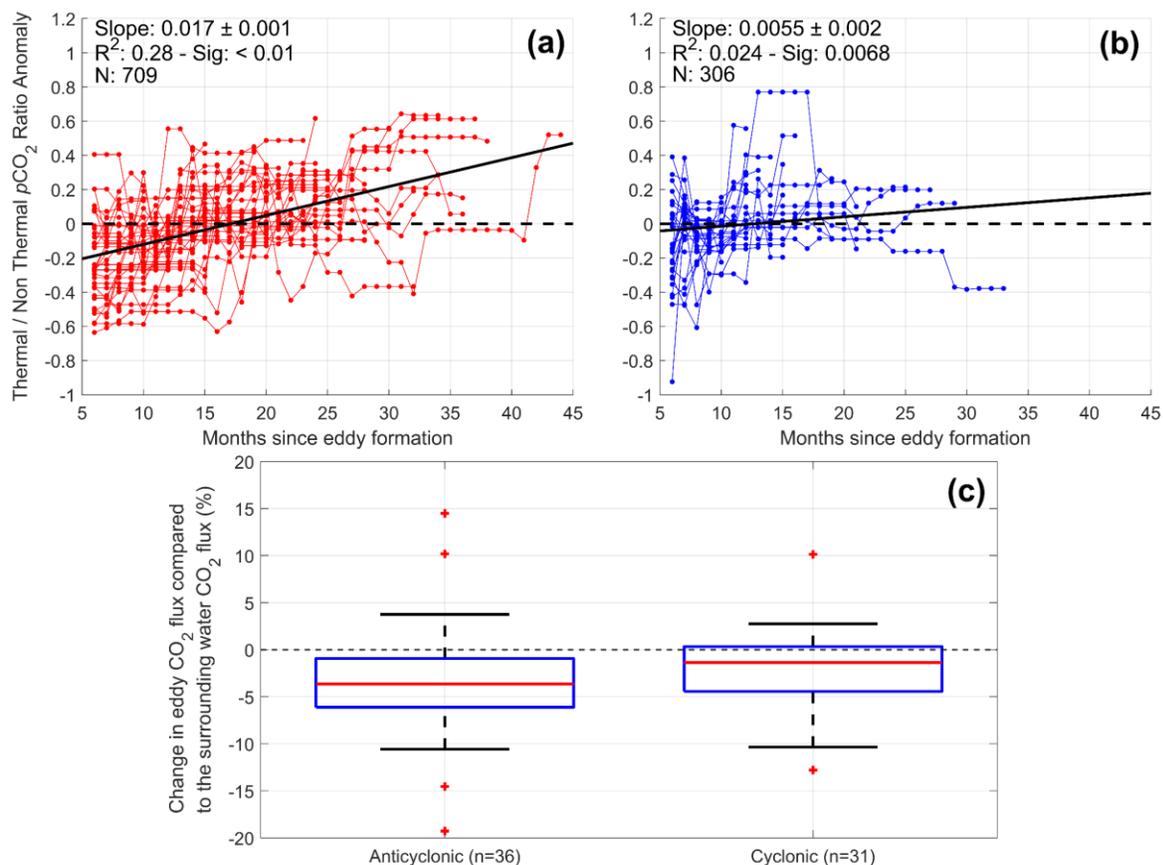
210 The anticyclonic (-3.7% , Mann-Whitney U-Test, $p < 0.001$, $n = 36$) and cyclonic (-1.4% , Mann-
211 Whitney U-Test, $p = 0.007$, $n = 31$) eddies significantly enhanced the cumulative CO_2 sink
212 compared to the water surrounding each eddy (Fig. 2c). No significant differences in this
213 enhancement were observed between anticyclonic and cyclonic eddies (Fig. 2c; Mann-Whitney
214 U-Test, $p = 0.16$), although the anticyclonic modification (-3.7%) was double that of the cyclonic
215 eddies (-1.4% ; Fig. 2c).

216



217

218 **Figure 1:** (a) Trajectories of the 36 anticyclonic (red lines) and 31 cyclonic (blue lines) eddies. Red and blue boxes indicate the formation region for the anticyclonic and
 219 cyclonic eddies respectively. (b) Red lines indicate the cumulative net CO₂ flux for the 36 anticyclonic eddies, where shading is the propagated uncertainty. Black dots
 220 indicate the cumulative net CO₂ flux at eddy dissipation. Black dashed line indicates the mean cumulative net CO₂ flux at eddy dissipation (i.e. mean of black dots). Blue
 221 dashed lines indicate the estimates for 6 anticyclonic eddies presented in Orselli, Kerr et al. (2019). (c) Cumulative net CO₂ flux for the 36 anticyclonic eddies plotted since
 222 eddy formation. Black line indicates a power law fit ($y = a \cdot x^b + c$) for the temporal evolution of the net CO₂ flux of the 36 anticyclonic eddies, where shading indicates the
 223 95% confidence limits. (d) the same as (b), and (e) the same as (c) but for the 31 cyclonic eddies.



224

225 **Figure 2: (a) Anomaly in the 12-month running thermal to the non-thermal ratio of $p\text{CO}_2$ ($p\text{CO}_2$ ($_{sw}$)) for the 36 anticyclonic eddies.**
 226 **Black solid line indicates the linear fit since the formation of the eddy. Black dashed line indicates an anomaly of 0. Statistics**
 227 **within the plot are: Slope is the slope of the linear fit, R^2 is the coefficient of determination, Sig is the significance of the**
 228 **linear fit and N is number of samples. (b) Same as (a) but for the 31 cyclonic eddies. (c) Box plots indicating the percent**
 229 **change in the cumulative net CO_2 flux at eddy dissipation with respect to the waters surrounding the eddy. Red line indicates**
 230 **the median, blue box indicates the 25th and 75th percentile and whiskers show the minimum and maximum non-outlier**
 231 **values. Red crosses indicate outliers that are more than 1.5 times the interquartile range from the 25th and 75th percentiles.**
 232 **Negative percentages indicate a stronger flux, where positive percentages indicate a weaker flux.**

233 4. Discussion

234 This is the first study to provide an observation-based assessment of the cumulative net
 235 CO_2 flux of a large number (67) of long-lived mesoscale eddies. We followed the trajectory of
 236 36 anticyclonic eddies over their lifetime and found that they were a net cumulative CO_2 sink
 237 (median = 0.54 Tg C per eddy). By comparison anticyclonic (Agulhas) eddies have previously
 238 been identified as a net sink for CO_2 varying from ~ 0.6 Tg C to ~ 1.4 Tg C (median = 1.26 Tg C
 239 per eddy; Fig. 1b; Orselli, Kerr et al. (2019)). The Orselli, Kerr et al. (2019) results were based
 240 on extrapolation of a snapshot of the eddies CO_2 uptake potential from ship observations that

241 crossed the paths of six eddies. Two of these eddies were tracked in our study (V1, V3; Fig. 1b)
242 and identified as CO₂ sinks of 0.64 and 0.40 Tg C compared to 1.34 and 1.36 Tg C by Orselli,
243 Kerr et al. (2019). Orselli, Kerr et al. (2019) sampled eddies in austral winter where they acted as
244 a strong CO₂ sink. In our study, the seasonal variability in the CO₂ flux is captured, where eddies
245 were stronger sinks in winter and weaker sinks for CO₂ in summer, which likely explains the
246 lower cumulative CO₂ flux.

247 Both the anticyclonic and cyclonic eddies showed an increasing cumulative CO₂ sink over their
248 lifetime (Fig. 1c, e). For the former, the rate of CO₂ uptake decreased exponentially over this
249 period (Fig. 1c). This result is consistent with the geographical propagation of the eddies in the
250 oligotrophic South Atlantic gyre (Fig. 1a), and eddy stirring of the environment (McGillicuddy,
251 2016). The significant increase in the anomalies of the seasonal thermal to non-thermal $p\text{CO}_{2(\text{sw})}$
252 ratio (becoming more influenced by temperature; Fig. 2a) was found to be mainly driven by a
253 relative reduction in the non-thermal contribution (not shown) and highlights the changing role
254 of biological activity and/or circulation over time as the eddies propagated into the gyre.

255 Carvalho et al. (2019) showed that the phytoplankton community structure changed as the eddies
256 aged, where younger anticyclonic (Agulhas) eddies were dominated by haptophytes (small
257 flagellates) followed by prokaryotes. Sarkar et al. (2021) highlighted that haptophytes are crucial
258 for the biological CO₂ drawdown in the Agulhas retroflection, reinforcing a weaker biological
259 pump as the eddies evolve. In contrast, the cyclonic eddies displayed a linear increase in the
260 cumulative CO₂ sink (Fig. 1e). This signature may be because the cyclonic eddies do not
261 propagate as far as anticyclonic eddies into the South Atlantic gyre (Fig. 1a), which is also
262 illustrated by no significant change in the thermal to non-thermal $p\text{CO}_{2(\text{sw})}$ ratio anomaly (Fig.
263 2b).

264 Both the anticyclonic and cyclonic eddies were shown to significantly increase the CO₂
265 drawdown in the South Atlantic Ocean (Fig. 2c), with respect to the surrounding environment.
266 Jones et al. (2017) showed that both anticyclonic and cyclonic eddies were hotspots for CO₂
267 drawdown of similar magnitude in the Antarctic Circumpolar Current. Dufois et al. (2016)
268 examined chl *a* variability in anticyclonic eddies and showed that the first two modes of spatial
269 variability were consistent with eddy stirring, and the third mode highlighted the mesoscale
270 modification. In our study, by comparing the cumulative CO₂ fluxes of the eddies to a theoretical
271 eddy consisting of surface waters surrounding the eddy, the mesoscale modulation of the air-sea

272 CO₂ flux was quantified. We showed this modulation to increase the CO₂ sink into anticyclonic
273 and cyclonic eddies by 3.7% and 1.4% respectively (Fig. 2c).

274 The cyclonic eddies generally showed lower SST, and higher NCP (Fig. S3; Fig. S4) compared
275 to the surrounding waters, suggesting both biological and physical processes are amplifying the
276 CO₂ sink. Chen et al. (2007) showed $p\text{CO}_2$ (sw) to be elevated at the core of a cyclonic eddy in the
277 North Pacific, due to the upwelling of CO₂ rich waters into the surface layer and the eddy acting
278 as a weaker CO₂ sink compared to the surrounding. By comparison, Lovecchio et al. (2022)
279 identified that cyclonic eddies around the Canary upwelling system entrain nearshore nutrient
280 rich waters into the eddy core at formation. Mesoscale upwelling of nutrients was a small
281 component of the total nutrients sustaining the biological production. This suggests that the
282 biological CO₂ drawdown throughout the eddy lifetime is largely supported by the initial nutrient
283 input which ultimately enhances the CO₂ sink through both the physical and biological
284 signatures.

285 The anticyclonic eddies were associated with elevated SST at formation, which rapidly changed
286 to depressed SST for the remainder of their lifetimes (Fig. S3) compared to the surrounding
287 waters. NCP remained lower than the surroundings (Fig. S4). These characteristics suggest
288 opposing physical and biological forces that modify the air-sea CO₂ flux. Similarly, Laxenaire et
289 al. (2019) showed that the SST anomaly associated with surface water of an anticyclonic
290 (Agulhas) eddy switched from positive to negative over its lifetime, also implying a change from
291 a CO₂ source to sink as it propagated over the South Atlantic basin. This indicates that the
292 physical component exerts the greatest control on amplifying the air-sea CO₂ sink into these
293 anticyclonic eddies.

294 The work presented here has identified that the ability for eddies to modify the air-sea CO₂ flux
295 (Fig. 2c) is driven by intrinsic differences between individual eddies (Fig. S3, S4). Lehahn et al.
296 (2011) observed an isolated patch of elevated chl *a* associated with an anticyclonic eddy that was
297 transported into the South Atlantic gyre, perhaps suggesting enhanced biological drawdown of
298 CO₂, but it was not possible to identify if this is a common feature of all anticyclonic eddies.
299 Entrainment of nutrient rich nearshore waters into the cyclonic eddies (Lovecchio et al., 2022) is
300 likely to be highly variable depending on the location and interaction with other water bodies and
301 the time of year, which will in turn lead to a different biological response and therefore air-sea
302 CO₂ flux. Many mesoscale eddy studies (e.g. Jones et al., 2017; Laxenaire et al., 2019; Orselli,

303 Kerr, et al., 2019) are limited by the availability of *in situ* data. The expanding use of
304 Biogeochemical-Argo profilers, especially those with pH sensors (Roemmich et al., 2019), is
305 improving the potential to assess the air-sea CO₂ flux both globally and regionally (Gray et al.,
306 2018). However, a synergy of *in situ* and satellite observations will be required to study
307 mesoscale eddies and the processes that modify the air-sea CO₂ flux.

308 Based on a recent assessment by Ford et al. (2022) of the South Atlantic Ocean (20 °S to 44 °S),
309 which estimated the region to be a CO₂ sink of 76 Tg C yr⁻¹, the long-lived anticyclonic
310 (Agulhas) eddies assuming six eddies are released per year (Lutjeharms, 2006) would contribute
311 1.3 Tg C yr⁻¹ (1.7 %; Table 1). Orselli, Kerr et al. (2019) identified that six anticyclonic
312 (Agulhas) eddies contributed 2.5 Tg C yr⁻¹ (3.3 %) to the CO₂ sink. Our contribution is likely
313 lower because seasonal variability in the CO₂ flux was captured.

314 In combination, the work presented here finds that anticyclonic and cyclonic eddies enhance the
315 oceanic CO₂ sink into the South Atlantic Ocean (20 °S to 44 °S) by 0.08% (Table 1). Globally,
316 long lived mesoscale eddies, such as those studied here, make up 0.4% of the eddy trajectories in
317 the AVISO+ dataset (Pegliasco et al., 2022). This suggests that the effect of all eddies on the
318 CO₂ flux and net oceanic sink, identified here using observations, is likely to be globally
319 significant as previously indicated by modelling studies. Harrison et al. (2018) for example,
320 showed that mesoscale resolving models may have a modest effect on the global balance of
321 carbon export (<2%), but regionally the effect can be large (±50%). Jersild et al. (2021)
322 highlighted that an Earth System Model (ESM) that explicitly resolved mesoscale eddies was
323 able to produce the observed seasonal biological productivity and *p*CO₂(_{sw}) cycles in the
324 Southern Ocean, but when the eddies were not included, the seasonal cycle was not well
325 reproduced. The results from our study have significant implications on the air-sea CO₂ flux in
326 current global ESMs, in which eddies are not explicitly resolved (Hewitt et al., 2017, 2020).
327 Eddy kinetic energy, as a proxy for mesoscale eddy occurrence, has been increasing at a rate
328 between 2 and 5% per decade (Martínez-Moreno et al., 2021), indicating that the role of
329 mesoscale eddies on the oceanic CO₂ sink may be becoming more significant. In the context of
330 climate change and increasing global temperatures, further work is required to quantify the
331 influence of these changes on the ocean CO₂ sink.

332

333 **Table 1: The calculation of the modification to the South Atlantic Ocean CO₂ sink that mesoscale eddies may contribute.**
 334 **The median percentage change in the eddy flux compared to the surrounding environment is converted to a median Tg C**
 335 **yr⁻¹ equivalent and compared to two estimates of the South Atlantic CO₂ sink in the region the eddies propagate.**

	Anticyclonic	Cyclonic	
Median cumulative CO ₂ flux (Fig. 1b, d; Tg C per eddy)	-0.54	-0.27	
Median percentage change in CO ₂ flux compared to surrounding environment (Fig. 2c; %)	-3.7	-1.4	
Additional flux into eddy (Tg C per eddy)	-0.020	-0.004	
Mean eddy lifetime (yr)	2.5	1.7	
Additional flux into eddy per year (Tg C yr ⁻¹)	-0.008	-0.002	
Spawn Rate (yr)	6 (Guerra et al., 2018)	4 (Chaigneau et al., 2009)	
Additional flux into eddies (Tg C yr ⁻¹)	-0.05	-0.01	
			Total
South Atlantic Ocean CO ₂ sink estimate of Ford et al. (2022) (-76 ± 8 Tg C yr ⁻¹) 20 °S to 44 °S	-0.06%	-0.02%	-0.08%
South Atlantic Ocean CO ₂ sink estimate of Woolf et al. (Holding et al., 2019; 2019) (-261 ± 28 Tg C yr ⁻¹) 20 °S to 44 °S	-0.020%	-0.005%	-0.030%

336 **5. Conclusions**

337 Our analysis presents a novel approach to assess the impact of long-lived mesoscale
338 eddies on the air-sea CO₂ flux in the South Atlantic Ocean. Using satellite observations, *in situ*
339 data and Lagrangian tracking we show that anticyclonic and cyclonic eddies are cumulative net
340 CO₂ sinks of 0.54 Tg C and 0.27 Tg C per eddy (median values), respectively. Anticyclonic
341 eddies exhibited an exponential decay in the rate of CO₂ uptake, and significant changes in the
342 thermal to non-thermal drivers of the $p\text{CO}_2$ (sw) ratio anomaly. This shows the thermal and
343 biological contributions to the CO₂ sink variability change as the eddies age and propagate over
344 different geographic trajectories in the South Atlantic gyre. The cyclonic eddies showed a more
345 linear rate of change of CO₂ uptake, and there was no significant change in the drivers of the
346 seasonal $p\text{CO}_2$ (sw) ratio anomaly.

347 Both anticyclonic and cyclonic eddies amplified the CO₂ sink compared to the surrounding
348 environment by 3.7% and 1.4%, respectively. For the anticyclonic eddies, physical drivers
349 increased the CO₂ sink, whereas the biological component reduced the uptake. In cyclonic eddies
350 both physical and biological components worked synergistically to increase the CO₂ sink.
351 Accounting for their typical frequencies, long-lived mesoscale eddies significantly amplify the
352 CO₂ sink into the South Atlantic Ocean (20 °S to 44 °S) by $0.08 \pm 0.01\%$. Although this
353 modification appears small, long-lived eddies make up only 0.4% of eddies in the global oceans,
354 and therefore the amplification of the global CO₂ sink from all eddies is likely to be much larger
355 than previously estimated. The inclusion of these mesoscale features within models used to
356 estimate the global ocean carbon sink would improve estimates of the role of the global ocean in
357 the uptake and absorption of anthropogenic CO₂.

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381 the META3.1exp DT allsat version and 10.24400/527896/a01-2021.002 for the META3.1exp
382 DT twosat version)

383

384 **Open Research**

385 Daily Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer on Aqua (MODIS-A) estimates
386 of chlorophyll-a (NASA OBPG, 2017a), photosynthetically active radiation (NASA OBPG,
387 2017b) and sea surface temperature (NASA OBPG, 2015) are available from the National
388 Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA) ocean colour website
389 (<https://oceancolor.gsfc.nasa.gov/>). Modelled sea surface salinity from the Copernicus Marine
390 Environment Modelling Service (CMEMS) global ocean physics reanalysis product
391 (GLORYS12V1) are available from CMEMS (CMEMS, 2021). The CCMP daily wind speed
392 products are available from Remote Sensing Systems
393 (www.remss.com/measurements/ccmp); (Wentz et al., 2015). *In situ* GO-SHIP DIC and TA

394 samples can be downloaded from the NOAA/NODC data centre
 395 (<https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/ocean-carbon-data-system/oceans/RepeatSections/>). FORSA
 396 *in situ* $p\text{CO}_2$ (sw) data can be requested from IBMO. Optimum Interpolated SST (OISST) v2
 397 (Reynolds et al., 2002) data used in the reanalysis of $p\text{CO}_2$ (sw) can be downloaded from
 398 <https://psl.noaa.gov/data/gridded/data.noaa.oisst.v2.html>. The AVISO+ Mesoscale Eddy Product
 399 META3.1exp can be downloaded from <https://doi.org/10.24400/527896/a01-2021.001>
 400 (Pegliasco et al., 2021).

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