



# Regulation of inorganic carbon acquisition in a red tide alga (*Skeletonema costatum*): the importance of phosphorus availability

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**Abstract.** *Skeletonema costatum* is a common bloom-forming diatom and encounters eutrophication and severe carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) limitation during red tides. However, little is known regarding the role of phosphorus (P) in modulating inorganic carbon acquisition in *S. costatum*, particularly under CO<sub>2</sub> limitation conditions. We cultured *S. costatum* under five phosphate levels (0.05, 0.25, 1, 4, 10 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>) and then treated it with two CO<sub>2</sub> conditions (2.8 and 12.6 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>) for 2 h. The lower CO<sub>2</sub> reduced net photosynthetic rate at lower phosphate levels (< 4 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>) but did not affect it at higher phosphate levels (4 and 10 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>). In contrast, the lower CO<sub>2</sub> induced a higher dark respiration rate at lower phosphate levels (0.05 and 0.25 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>) and did not affect it at higher phosphate levels (> 1 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>). The lower CO<sub>2</sub> did not change relative electron transport rate (rETR) at lower phosphate levels (0.05 and 0.25 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>) and increased it at higher phosphate levels (> 1 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>). Photosynthetic CO<sub>2</sub> affinity (1/K<sub>0.5</sub>) increased with phosphate levels. The lower CO<sub>2</sub> did not affect photosynthetic CO<sub>2</sub> affinity at 0.05 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> phosphate but enhanced it at the other phosphate levels. Activity of extracellular carbonic anhydrase was dramatically induced by the lower CO<sub>2</sub> in phosphate-replete conditions (> 0.25 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>) and the same pattern also occurred for redox activity of the plasma membrane. Direct bicarbonate (HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>) use was induced when phosphate concentration was more than 1 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>. These findings indicate P enrichment could enhance inorganic carbon acquisition and thus maintain the photosynthesis rate in *S. costatum* grown under CO<sub>2</sub>-limiting conditions via increasing activity of ex-

tracellular carbonic anhydrase and facilitating direct HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup> use. This study sheds light on how bloom-forming algae cope with carbon limitation during the development of red tides.

## 1 Introduction

Diatoms are unicellular photosynthetic microalgae that can be found worldwide in freshwater and oceans. Marine diatoms account for 75 % of the primary productivity for coastal and other nutrient-rich zones and approximately 20 % of global primary production (Field et al., 1998; Falkowski, 2012), hence playing a vital role in the marine biological carbon pump as well as the biogeochemical cycling of important nutrients, such as nitrogen and silicon (Nelson et al., 1995; Moore et al., 2013; Young and Morel, 2015). Diatoms usually dominate the phytoplankton communities and form large-scale blooms in nutrient-rich zones and upwelling regions (Bruland et al., 2001; Anderson et al., 2008; Barton et al., 2016). Nutrient enrichment is considered to be a key factor that triggers algal blooms, albeit the occurrence of diatom blooms may be modulated by other environmental factors, such as temperature, light intensity, and salinity (Smetacek and Zingone, 2013; Jeong et al., 2015). When inorganic nitrogen and phosphorus are replete, diatoms can outcompete chrysophytes, raphidophytes, and dinoflagellates (Berg et al., 1997; Jeong et al., 2015; Barton et al., 2016) and dominate algal blooms due to their quicker nutrient uptake and growth rate.

In normal natural seawater (pH 8.1, salinity 35),  $\text{HCO}_3^-$  is the majority ( $\sim 90\%$ ) of total dissolved inorganic carbon (DIC, 2.0–2.2 mM).  $\text{CO}_2$  (1 %, 10–15  $\mu\text{M}$ ), which is the only direct carbon source that can be assimilated by all photosynthetic organisms, only accounts for 1 % of total DIC. Diatoms' ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase/oxygenase (Rubisco), catalyzing the primary chemical reaction by which  $\text{CO}_2$  is transformed into organic carbon, has a relatively low affinity for  $\text{CO}_2$  and is commonly less than half saturated under current  $\text{CO}_2$  levels in seawater (Hopkinson and Morel, 2011), suggesting that  $\text{CO}_2$  is limiting for marine diatoms' carbon fixation. To cope with the  $\text{CO}_2$  limitation in seawater and maintain a high carbon fixation rate under the low- $\text{CO}_2$  conditions, diatoms have evolved various inorganic carbon acquisition pathways and  $\text{CO}_2$  concentrating mechanisms (CCMs), for instance, active transport of  $\text{HCO}_3^-$ , the passive influx of  $\text{CO}_2$ , multiple carbonic anhydrase (including both common ( $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ , found in all algae) and unusual ( $\delta$ ,  $\zeta$ , found only in diatoms) families that carry out the fast interconversion of  $\text{CO}_2$  and  $\text{HCO}_3^-$ ), and assumed C4-type pathway (using phosphoenolpyruvate to capture more  $\text{CO}_2$  in the periplastidal compartment), to increase the concentration at the location of Rubisco and thus the carbon fixation (Hopkinson and Morel, 2011; Hopkinson et al., 2016). *Skeletonema costatum* is a worldwide diatom species that can be found from equatorial to polar waters. It usually dominates large-scale algal blooms in eutrophic seawaters (Wang, 2002; Li et al., 2011). When blooms occur, seawater pH increases and  $\text{CO}_2$  decreases because the dissolution rate of  $\text{CO}_2$  from the atmosphere cannot catch up with its removal rate caused by intensive photosynthesis of algae. For instance, pH level in the surface waters of the eutrophic Mariager Fjord, Denmark, could be up to 9.75 during algal blooms (Hansen, 2002). Consequently, *S. costatum* experiences very severe  $\text{CO}_2$  limitation when blooms occur. To deal with it, *S. costatum* has developed multiple CCMs (Nimer et al., 1998; Rost et al., 2003). However, contrasting findings were reported. Nimer et al. (1998) documented that extracellular carbonic anhydrase activity in *S. costatum* was only induced when  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration was less than 5  $\mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$  while Rost et al. (2003) reported that activity of extracellular carbonic anhydrase could be detected even when  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration was 27  $\mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ . Chen and Gao (2004) showed that *S. costatum* had little capacity in direct  $\text{HCO}_3^-$  utilization. Conversely, Rost et al. (2003) demonstrated that this species could take up  $\text{CO}_2$  and  $\text{HCO}_3^-$  simultaneously.

Phosphorus (P) is an indispensable element for all living organisms, serving as an integral component of lipids, nucleic acids, adenosine triphosphate (ATP), and a diverse range of other metabolites. Levels of bioavailable phosphorus are very low in many ocean environments and phosphorus enrichment can commonly increase algal growth and marine primary productivity in the worldwide oceans (Davies and Sleep, 1989; Müller and Mitrovic, 2015; Lin et al., 2016). Due to the essential role of phosphorus, extensive studies

have been conducted to investigate the effect of phosphorus on photosynthetic performances (Geider et al., 1998; Liu et al., 2012; Beamud et al., 2016) and growth (Jiang et al., 2016; Reed et al., 2016; Mccall et al., 2017) as well as phosphorus acquisition, utilization, and storage (Lin et al., 2016; Gao et al., 2018a). Some studies show the essential role of phosphorus in regulating inorganic carbon acquisition in green algae (Beardall et al., 2005; Hu and Zhou, 2010). In terms of *S. costatum*, studies regarding the inorganic carbon acquisition in *S. costatum* focus on its response to variation in  $\text{CO}_2$  availability. The role of phosphorus in *S. costatum*'s CCMs remains unknown. Based on the connection between phosphorus and carbon metabolism in diatoms (Brembu et al., 2017), we hypothesize that phosphorus enrichment could enhance inorganic carbon utilization and hence maintain high rates of photosynthesis and growth in *S. costatum* under  $\text{CO}_2$  limitation conditions. In the present study, we aimed to test this hypothesis by investigating the variation in CCMs (including active transport of  $\text{HCO}_3^-$  and carbonic anhydrase activity) and photosynthetic rate under five levels of phosphate and two levels of  $\text{CO}_2$  conditions. We also measured redox activity of the plasma membrane as it is deemed to be critical to activate carbonic anhydrase (Nimer et al., 1998). Our study provides helpful insights into how bloom-forming diatoms overcome  $\text{CO}_2$  limitation to maintain a quick growth rate during red tides.

## 2 Materials and methods

### 2.1 Culture conditions

*Skeletonema costatum* (Grev.) Cleve from Jinan University, China, was cultured in f/2 artificial seawater with five phosphate levels (0.05, 0.25, 1, 4, 10  $\mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ ) by adding different amounts of  $\text{NaH}_2\text{PO}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ . The cultures were carried out semicontinuously at 20 °C for 7 days. The light irradiance was set as 200  $\mu\text{mol photons m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ , with a light and dark period of 12 : 12. The cultures were aerated with ambient air (0.3 L  $\text{min}^{-1}$ ) to maintain the pH at around 8.2. The cells during the exponential phase were collected and rinsed twice with DIC-free seawater that was made according to Xu et al. (2017). Afterwards, cells were resuspended in fresh media with two levels of pH (8.20 and 8.70, respectively corresponding to ambient  $\text{CO}_2$  (12.6  $\mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ ) and low  $\text{CO}_2$  (2.8  $\mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ ) under corresponding phosphate levels for 2 h before the following measurements, with a cell density of  $1.0 \times 10^6 \text{ mL}^{-1}$ . The concentrations of DIC were  $2109 \pm 36$  and  $1802 \pm 38 \mu\text{mol (kg seawater)}^{-1}$ , respectively. Cell density was determined by direct counting with an improved Neubauer hemocytometer (XB-K-25, Qiu Jing, Shanghai, China). This transfer aimed to investigate the effects of phosphate on DIC acquisition under a  $\text{CO}_2$  limitation condition. The pH of 8.70 was chosen considering that it is commonly used as a  $\text{CO}_2$  limitation condition (Nimer et al., 1998; Chen

and Gao, 2004) and also occurs during algal blooms (Hansen, 2002). A total of 2 h should be enough to activate CCMs in *S. costatum* (Nimer et al., 1998). The cell density did not vary during the 2 h of pH treatment. All experiments were conducted in triplicates.

## 2.2 Manipulation of seawater carbonate system

The two levels of pH (8.20 and 8.70) were obtained by aerating the ambient air and pure nitrogen (99.999 %) until the target value and were then maintained with a buffer of 50 mM tris (hydroxymethyl) aminomethane HCl. The cultures were open to the ambient atmosphere and the rise of culture pH was due to algal photosynthesis below 0.02 units (corresponding to the decrease in  $\text{CO}_2$  less than 0.7 and  $0.2 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$  for pH 8.20 and 8.70 treatments, respectively) during the 2 h of pH treatment.  $\text{CO}_2$  level in seawater was calculated via CO2SYS (Pierrot et al., 2006) based on measured pH and total alkalinity (TALK), using the equilibrium constants of  $K_1$  and  $K_2$  for carbonic acid dissociation (Roy et al., 1993) and the  $\text{KSO}_4^-$  dissociation constant from Dickson (1990).

The  $\text{pH}_{\text{NBS}}$  was measured using a pH meter (pH 700, Eutech Instruments, Singapore) that was equipped with an Orion® 8102BN Ross combination electrode (Thermo Electron, USA) and calibrated with standard National Bureau of Standards (NBS) buffers (pH = 4.01, 7.00, and 10.01 at 25.0 °C; Thermo Fisher Scientific Inc., USA). TALK was determined at 25.0 °C using Gran acidimetric titration on a 25 mL sample with a TALK analyzer (AS-ALK1, Apollo SciTech, USA), using the precision pH meter and an Orion® 8102BN Ross electrode for detection. To ensure the accuracy of TALK, the TALK analyzer was regularly calibrated with certified reference materials from Andrew G. Dickson's laboratory (Scripps Institute of Oceanography, USA) at a precision of  $\pm 2 \mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ .

## 2.3 Chlorophyll fluorescence measurement

Chlorophyll fluorescence was measured with a pulse modulation fluorometer (PAM-2100, Walz, Germany) to assess electron transport in photosystem II (the first protein complex in the light-dependent reactions of photosynthesis) and the possible connection between electron transport and redox activity of the plasma membrane. The measured light and actinic light were 0.01 and  $200 \mu\text{mol photons m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ , respectively. The saturating pulse was set to  $4000 \mu\text{mol photons m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$  (0.8 s). Electron transport in photosystem II (electron transport rate, ETR,  $\mu\text{mol e}^- (\text{mg Chl } a)^{-1} \text{s}^{-1}$ ) =  $0.5 \times E \times \Phi_{\text{PSII}} \times \bar{a}^*$  (Dimier et al., 2009; Alderkamp et al., 2012), where  $E$  ( $\mu\text{mol photons m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ ) is the ambient light density,  $\Phi_{\text{PSII}}$  (dimensionless) is the PSII photochemical efficiency and  $\bar{a}^*$  is Chl *a*-specific absorption coefficient ( $\text{m}^{-2} (\text{mg Chl } a)^{-1}$ ). Since  $\bar{a}^*$  is light dependent, we used the value of 0.0138

based on the study of Lefebvre et al. (2007) in which the light density is very close to ours.

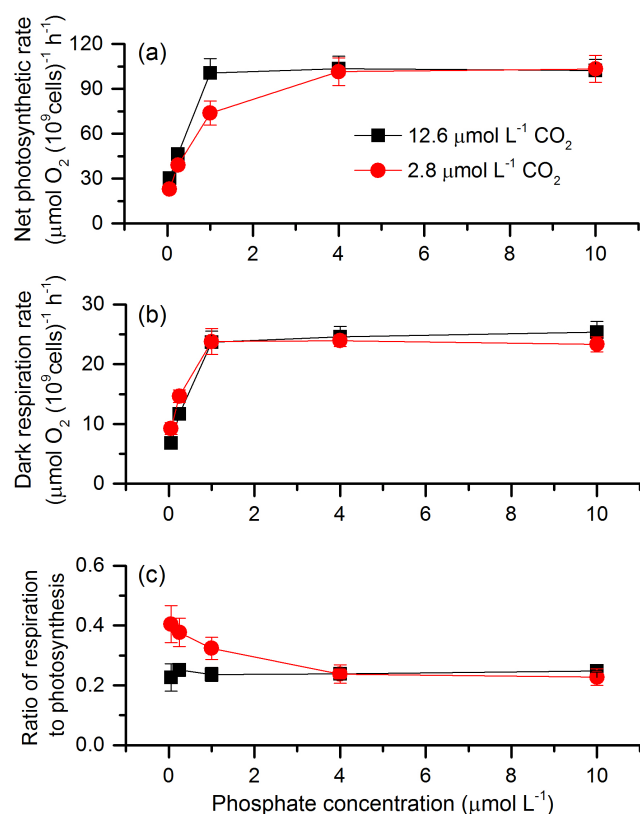
## 2.4 Estimation of photosynthetic oxygen evolution and respiration

The net photosynthetic and respiration rates of *S. costatum* were measured using a Clark-type oxygen electrode (YSI model 5300, USA) that was held in a circulating water bath (cooling circulator; Cole-Parmer, Chicago, IL, USA) to keep the setting temperature (20 °C). A total of 5 mL of samples was transferred to the oxygen electrode cuvette and was stirred during measurement. The light intensity and temperature were maintained the same as that in the growth condition. The illumination was provided by a halogen lamp. The increase in oxygen content in seawater within 5 min was defined as the net photosynthetic rate. To measure dark respiration rate, the samples were placed in darkness and the decrease in oxygen content within 10 min was defined as the dark respiration rate given the slower oxygen variation rate for dark respiration. Net photosynthetic rate and dark respiration rate were presented as  $\mu\text{mol O}_2 (10^9 \text{ cells})^{-1} \text{h}^{-1}$ .

To obtain the curve of net photosynthetic rate versus DIC, seven levels of DIC (0, 0.1, 0.2, 0.5, 1, 2, and 4 mM) were made by adding different amounts of  $\text{NaHCO}_3$  to the Tris buffered DIC-free seawater (pH 8.20). The algal samples were washed twice with DIC-free seawater before transferring to the various DIC solutions. Photosynthetic rates at different DIC levels were measured under a saturating irradiance of  $400 \mu\text{mol photons m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$  and growth temperature. The algal samples were allowed to equilibrate for 2–3 min at each DIC level, during which a linear change in oxygen concentration was obtained and recorded. The parameter, photosynthetic half saturation constant ( $K_{0.5}$ , i.e., the DIC concentration required to obtain half of the DIC-saturated maximum rate of photosynthetic  $\text{O}_2$  evolution), was calculated from the Michaelis–Menten kinetics equation (Caemmerer and Farquhar, 1981):  $V = V_{\text{max}} \times [S] / (K_{0.5} + [S])$ , where  $V$  is the real-time photosynthetic rate,  $V_{\text{max}}$  is the maximum photosynthetic rate, and  $[S]$  is the DIC concentration. The value of  $1/K_{0.5}$  represents photosynthetic DIC affinity.  $K_{0.5}$  for  $\text{CO}_2$  was calculated via CO2SYS (Pierrot et al., 2006) based on pH and TALK, using the equilibrium constants of  $K_1$  and  $K_2$  for carbonic acid dissociation (Roy et al., 1993) and the  $\text{KSO}_4^-$  dissociation constant from Dickson (1990).

## 2.5 Measurement of photosynthetic pigment

To determine the photosynthetic pigment (Chl *a*) content, 50 mL of culture was filtered on a Whatman GF/F filter, extracted in 5 mL of 90 % acetone for 12 h at 4 °C, and centrifuged (3000 g, 5 min). The optical density of the supernatant was scanned from 200 to 700 nm with a UV–VIS spectrophotometer (Shimadzu UV-1800, Kyoto, Japan). The concentration of Chl *a* was calculated based on the opti-



**Figure 1.** Net photosynthetic rate (a), dark respiration rate (b), and ratio of respiration rate to net photosynthetic rate (c) in *S. costatum* grown at various phosphate concentrations after 12.6 and 2.8  $\mu\text{mol CO}_2$  treatments. The error bars indicate the standard deviations ( $n = 3$ ).

cal density at 630 and 664 nm:  $\text{Chl } a = 11.47 \times \text{OD}_{664} - 0.40 \times \text{OD}_{630}$  (Gao et al., 2018b) and was normalized to picograms per cell.

## 2.6 Measurement of extracellular carbonic anhydrase activity

Carbonic anhydrase activity was assessed using the electro-metric method (Gao et al., 2009). Cells were harvested by centrifugation at 4000  $g$  for 5 min at 20  $^{\circ}\text{C}$ , washed once, and resuspended in 8 mL Na barbital buffer (20 mM, pH 8.2). A total of 5 mL of  $\text{CO}_2$ -saturated icy distilled water was injected into the cell suspension, and the time required for a pH decrease from 8.2 to 7.2 at 4  $^{\circ}\text{C}$  was recorded. Extracellular carbonic anhydrase ( $\text{CA}_{\text{ext}}$ ) activity was measured using intact cells. CA activity (E.U.) was calculated using the following formula:  $\text{E.U.} = 10 \times (T_0/T - 1)$ , where  $T_0$  and  $T$  represent the time required for the pH change in the absence or presence of the cells, respectively.

## 2.7 Measurement of redox activity in the plasma membrane

The redox activity of plasma membrane was assayed by monitoring the change in  $\text{K}_3\text{FeCN}_6$  concentration that accompanied reduction of the ferricyanide to ferrocyanide. The ferricyanide  $\text{K}_3\text{FeCN}_6$  cannot penetrate intact cells and has been used as an external electron acceptor (Nimer et al., 1998; Gao et al., 2018b). Stock solutions of  $\text{K}_3\text{FeCN}_6$  were freshly prepared before use. A total of 5 mL of samples was taken after 2 h of incubation with 500  $\mu\text{mol K}_3\text{FeCN}_6$  and centrifuged at 4000  $g$  for 10 min (20  $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). The concentration of  $\text{K}_3\text{FeCN}_6$  in the supernatant was measured spectrophotometrically at 420 nm (Shimadzu UV-1800, Kyoto, Japan). The decrease in  $\text{K}_3\text{FeCN}_6$  during the 2 h of incubation was used to assess the rate of extracellular ferricyanide reduction that was presented as  $\mu\text{mol} (10^6 \text{ cells})^{-1} \text{ h}^{-1}$  (Nimer et al., 1998).

## 2.8 Cell-driving pH drift experiment

To obtain the pH compensation point, the cells were transferred to sealed glass vials containing a fresh medium (pH 8.2) with corresponding phosphate levels. The cell concentration for all treatments was  $5.0 \times 10^5 \text{ mL}^{-1}$ . The pH drift of the suspension was monitored at 20  $^{\circ}\text{C}$  and a 200  $\mu\text{mol photons m}^{-2} \text{ s}^{-1}$  light level. The pH compensation point was obtained when there was no further increase in pH.

## 2.9 Statistical analysis

Results were expressed as means of replicates  $\pm$  standard deviation and data were analyzed using the software SPSS v.21. The data from each treatment conformed to a normal distribution (Shapiro–Wilk,  $P > 0.05$ ) and the variances could be considered equal (Levene's test,  $P > 0.05$ ). Two-way ANOVAs were conducted to assess the effects of  $\text{CO}_2$  and phosphate on net photosynthetic rate, dark respiration rate, ratio of net photosynthetic rate to dark respiration rate, rETR, Chl  $a$ ,  $K_{0.5}$ ,  $\text{CA}_{\text{ext}}$ , reduction rate of ferricyanide, and pH compensation point. Least significant difference (LSD) was conducted for post hoc investigation. Repeated measurements of ANOVA were conducted to analyze the effects of DIC on net photosynthetic rate and the effect of incubation time on media pH in a closed system. Bonferroni was conducted for post hoc investigation as it is the best reliable post hoc test for repeated measurements of ANOVA (Ennos, 2007). The threshold value for determining statistical significance was  $P < 0.05$ .

**Table 1.** Two-way analysis of variance for the effects of CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate on net photosynthetic rate, dark respiration rate, and ratio of respiration to photosynthesis of *S. costatum*. CO<sub>2</sub>\*phosphate means the interactive effect of CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate, *df* means degree of freedom, *F* means the value of the *F* statistic, and Sig. means the *p* value.

| Source                     | Net photosynthetic rate |          |        | Dark respiration rate |          |        | Ratio of respiration to photosynthesis |          |        |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|----------|--------|-----------------------|----------|--------|--|----------|--------|
|                            | <i>df</i>               | <i>F</i> | Sig.   | <i>df</i>             | <i>F</i> | Sig.   | <i>df</i>                              | <i>F</i> | Sig.   |
| CO <sub>2</sub>            | 1                       | 11.286   | 0.003  | 1                     | 1.262    | 0.275  | 1                                      | 32.443   | <0.001 |
| Phosphate                  | 4                       | 157.925  | <0.001 | 4                     | 169.050  | <0.001 | 4                                      | 7.081    | 0.001  |
| CO <sub>2</sub> *phosphate | 4                       | 3.662    | 0.021  | 4                     | 3.226    | 0.034  | 4                                      | 8.299    | <0.001 |
| Error                      | 20                      |          |        | 20                    |          |        | 20                                     |          |        |

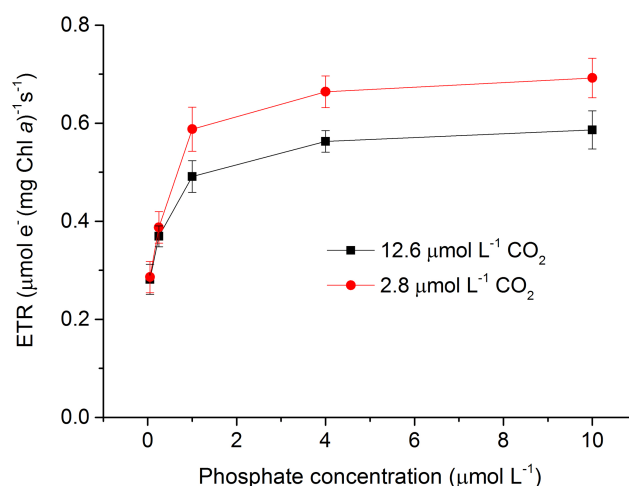
### 3 Results

#### 3.1 Effects of CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate on photosynthetic and respiratory performances

The net photosynthetic rate and dark respiration rate in *S. costatum* grown at various CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate concentrations were first investigated (Fig. 1). CO<sub>2</sub> interacted with phosphate on net photosynthetic rate, with each factor having a main effect (Table 1 and Fig. 1a). Post hoc LSD comparison (*P* = 0.05) showed that 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub> reduced net photosynthetic rate when the phosphate level was below 4 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> but did not affect it at the higher phosphate levels. Under the condition of 12.6 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub>, net photosynthetic rate increased with phosphate level and reached the plateau ( $100.51 \pm 9.59 \mu\text{mol O}_2 (10^9 \text{ cells})^{-1} \text{ h}^{-1}$ ) at 1 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> phosphate. Under the condition of 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub>, net photosynthetic rate also increased with phosphate level but did not hit the peak ( $101.46 \pm 9.19 \mu\text{mol O}_2 (10^9 \text{ cells})^{-1} \text{ h}^{-1}$ ) until 4 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> of phosphate. In terms of dark respiration rate (Fig. 1b), phosphate had a main effect on it and it interacted with CO<sub>2</sub> (Table 1). Specifically, 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub> increased dark respiration rate at 0.05 and 0.25 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> phosphate levels, but did not affect it when the phosphate level was above 1 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> (LSD, *P* < 0.05). Regardless of CO<sub>2</sub> level, respiration rate increased with phosphate availability and stopped at 1 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>.

The ratio of respiration to photosynthesis ranged from 0.23 to 0.40 (Fig. 1c). Both CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate had a main effect, and they interacted on the ratio of respiration to photosynthesis (Table 1). The level of 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub> increased the ratio when phosphate was lower than 4 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> but did not affect it when phosphate levels were 4 or 10 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>.

Both CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate affected ETR and they also showed an interactive effect (Fig. 2 and Table 2). For instance, post hoc LSD comparison showed that 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub> did not affect ETR at lower phosphate levels (0.05 and 0.25 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>) but increased it at higher phosphate levels (1–10 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>). Regardless of CO<sub>2</sub> treatment, ETR increased with phosphate level (0.05–4 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>) but



**Figure 2.** Relative electron transport rate (rETR) in *S. costatum* grown at various phosphate concentrations after 12.6 and 2.8 μmol CO<sub>2</sub> treatments. The error bars indicate the standard deviations (*n* = 3).

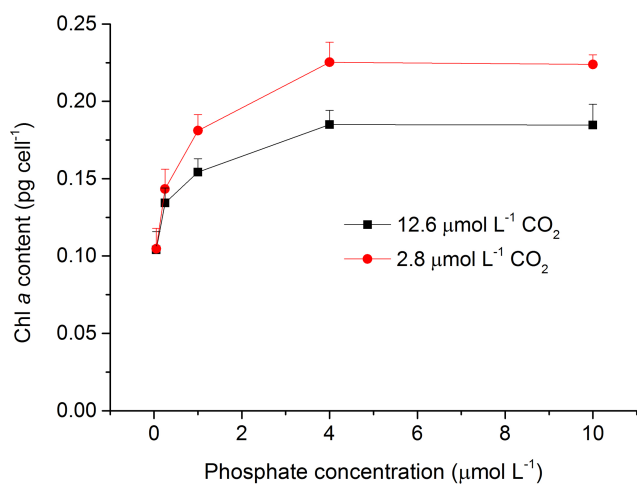
the highest phosphate concentration did not result in a further increase in ETR (LSD, *P* > 0.05).

The content of Chl *a* was measured to investigate the effects of CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate on photosynthetic pigment in *S. costatum* (Fig. 3). Both CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate affected the synthesis of Chl *a* and they had an interactive effect (Table 2). Post hoc LSD comparison (*P* = 0.05) showed that 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub> did not affect Chl *a* at 0.05 or 0.25 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> of phosphate but stimulated Chl *a* synthesis at higher phosphate levels (1–10 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>). Irrespective of CO<sub>2</sub> treatment, Chl *a* content increased with phosphate level and reached the plateau ( $0.19 \pm 0.01 \text{ pg cell}^{-1}$  for 12.6 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub> and  $0.23 \pm 0.01 \text{ pg cell}^{-1}$  for 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub>) at 4 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> of phosphate.

To assess the effects of CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate on photosynthetic CO<sub>2</sub> affinity in *S. costatum*, the net photosynthetic rates of cell exposure to seven levels of DIC were measured (Fig. 4). After curve fitting, the values of *K*<sub>0.5</sub> for CO<sub>2</sub> were calculated (Fig. 5). CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate interplayed on *K*<sub>0.5</sub> and each had a main effect (Table 2). The level

**Table 2.** Two-way analysis of variance for the effects of CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate on relative electron transport rate (rETR), Chl *a*, and CO<sub>2</sub> level required to obtain half of the DIC-saturated maximum rate of photosynthetic O<sub>2</sub> evolution ( $K_{0.5}$ ) of *S. costatum*. CO<sub>2</sub>\*phosphate means the interactive effect of CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate, *df* means degree of freedom, *F* means the value of the *F* statistic, and Sig. means the *p* value.

| Source                     | rETR      |          |        | Chl <i>a</i> |          |        | $K_{0.5}$ |          |        |
|----------------------------|-----------|----------|--------|--------------|----------|--------|-----------|----------|--------|
|                            | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | Sig.   | <i>df</i>    | <i>F</i> | Sig.   | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | Sig.   |
| CO <sub>2</sub>            | 1         | 28.717   | <0.001 | 1            | 32.963   | <0.001 | 1         | 96.182   | <0.001 |
| Phosphate                  | 4         | 127.860  | <0.001 | 4            | 92.045   | <0.001 | 4         | 40.497   | <0.001 |
| CO <sub>2</sub> *phosphate | 4         | 3.296    | 0.031  | 4            | 3.871    | 0.017  | 4         | 3.821    | 0.018  |
| Error                      | 20        |          |        | 20           |          |        | 20        |          |        |

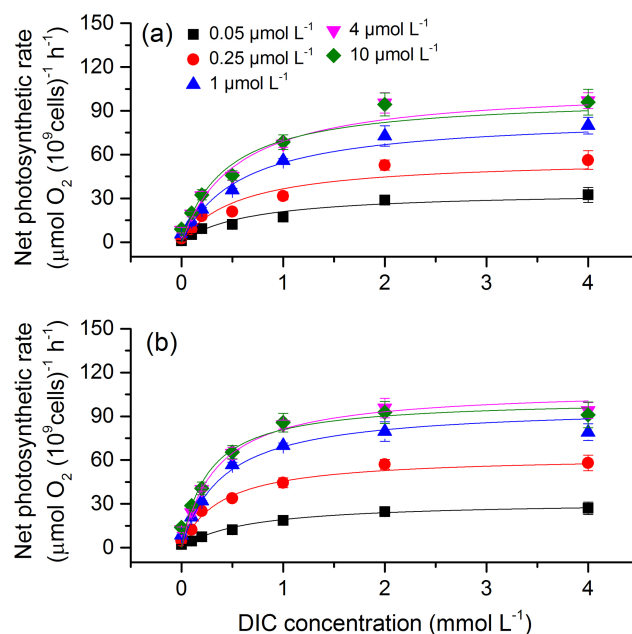


**Figure 3.** Photosynthetic Chl *a* content in *S. costatum* grown at various phosphate concentrations after 12.6 and 2.8 μmol CO<sub>2</sub> treatments. The error bars indicate the standard deviations (*n* = 3).

of 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub> did not affect  $K_{0.5}$  at the lowest phosphate level but reduced it at the other phosphate levels. Under the condition of 12.6 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub>, higher phosphate levels (0.25–4 μmol L<sup>-1</sup>) reduced  $K_{0.5}$  and the highest phosphate level led to a further decrease to  $2.59 \pm 0.29$  μmol kg<sup>-1</sup> of seawater compared to the value of  $4.00 \pm 0.30$  μmol kg<sup>-1</sup> of seawater at 0.05 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> of phosphate. The pattern with phosphate at 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub> was the same as 12.6 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub>.

### 3.2 The effects CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate on inorganic carbon acquisition

To investigate the potential mechanisms that allow cells to overcome CO<sub>2</sub> limitation during algal blooms, the activity of CA<sub>ext</sub>, a CCM-related enzyme, was estimated under various CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate conditions (Fig. 6a). Both CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate had a main effect and they interacted on CA<sub>ext</sub> activity (Table 3). Post hoc LSD comparison (*P* = 0.05) showed that 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub> induced more CA<sub>ext</sub> activity under all phosphate conditions except for 0.05 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> levels, compared to 12.6 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub>. Under the condition of 12.6 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub>, CA<sub>ext</sub> activity increased (0.04–

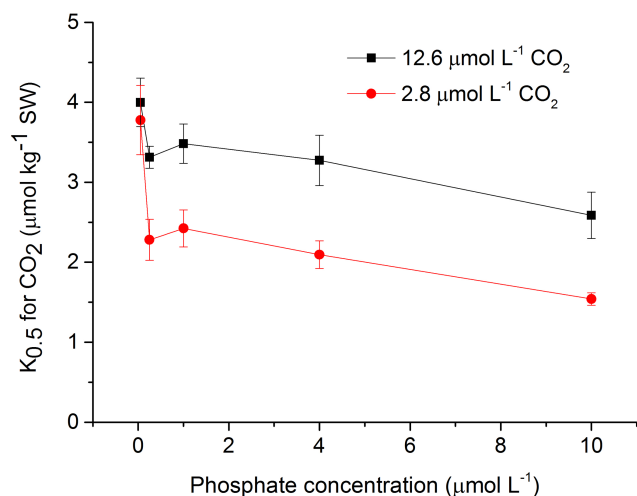


**Figure 4.** Net photosynthetic rate as a function of DIC for *S. costatum* grown at various phosphate concentrations after 12.6 (a) and 2.8 μmol CO<sub>2</sub> (b) treatments. The error bars indicate the standard deviations (*n* = 3).

0.10 EU (10<sup>6</sup> cells)<sup>-1</sup>) with phosphate level and stopped increasing at 1 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> of phosphate. Under the condition of 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub>, CA<sub>ext</sub> activity also increased (0.04–0.35 EU (10<sup>6</sup> cells)<sup>-1</sup>) with phosphate level but reached the peak at 4 μmol L<sup>-1</sup> of phosphate. The redox activity of the plasma membrane was also assessed to investigate the factors that modulate CA<sub>ext</sub> activity (Fig. 6b). The pattern of redox activity of the plasma membrane under various CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate conditions was the same as that of CA<sub>ext</sub> activity. That is, CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate had an interactive effect on redox activity of the plasma membrane, each having a main effect (Table 3).

To test cells' tolerance to high pH and obtain pH compensation points in *S. costatum* grown under various CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate levels, changes of media pH in a closed system were monitored (Fig. 7). The media pH under all phos-





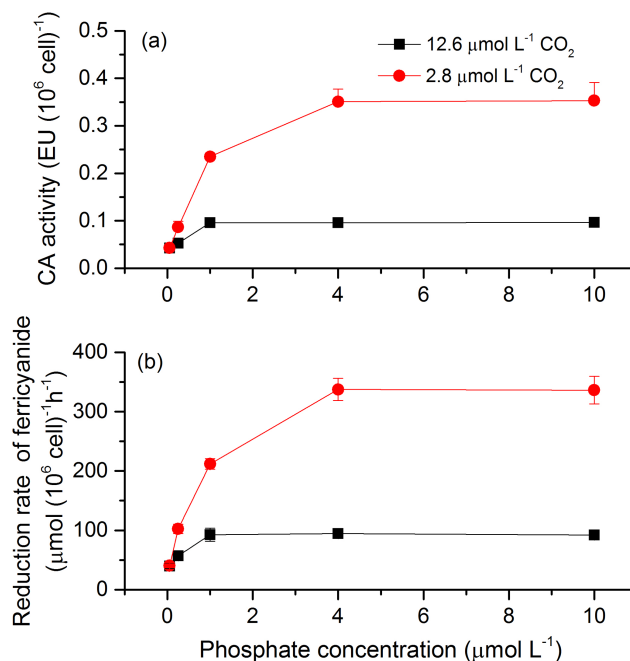
**Figure 5.** Half saturation constant ( $K_{0.5}$ ) for CO<sub>2</sub> in *S. costatum* grown at various phosphate concentrations after 12.6 and 2.8 μmol CO<sub>2</sub> treatments. The error bars indicate the standard deviations ( $n = 3$ ).

phosphate conditions increased with incubation time (Table 4). Specifically speaking, there was a steep increase in pH during the first 3 h; afterwards the increase became slower and it reached a plateau at 6 h (Bonferroni,  $P < 0.05$ ). Phosphate had an interactive effect with incubation time (Table 4). For instance, there was no significant difference in media pH among phosphate levels during the first 2 h of incubation but then divergence occurred and they stopped at different points. Two-way ANOVA showed that CO<sub>2</sub> treatment did not affect pH compensation point but phosphate had a main effect (Table 3). Under each CO<sub>2</sub> treatment, pH compensation point increased with phosphate level, with the lowest of  $9.03 \pm 0.03$  at  $0.05 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$  and highest of  $9.36 \pm 0.04$  at  $10 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$  of phosphate.

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Photosynthetic performances under various CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate conditions

The lower CO<sub>2</sub> availability reduced the net photosynthetic rate of *S. costatum* grown at the lower phosphate levels in the present study. However, Nimer et al. (1998) demonstrated that the increase in pH (8.3–9.5) did not reduce photosynthetic CO<sub>2</sub> fixation of *S. costatum* and Chen and Gao (2004) reported that a higher pH (8.7) even stimulated the photosynthetic rate of *S. costatum* compared to the control (pH 8.2). The divergence between our and the previous studies may be due to different nutrient supply. Both Nimer et al. (1998) and Chen and Gao (2004) used f/2 media to grow algae. The phosphate concentration in f/2 media is  $\sim 36 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ , which is replete for physiological activities in *S. costatum*.



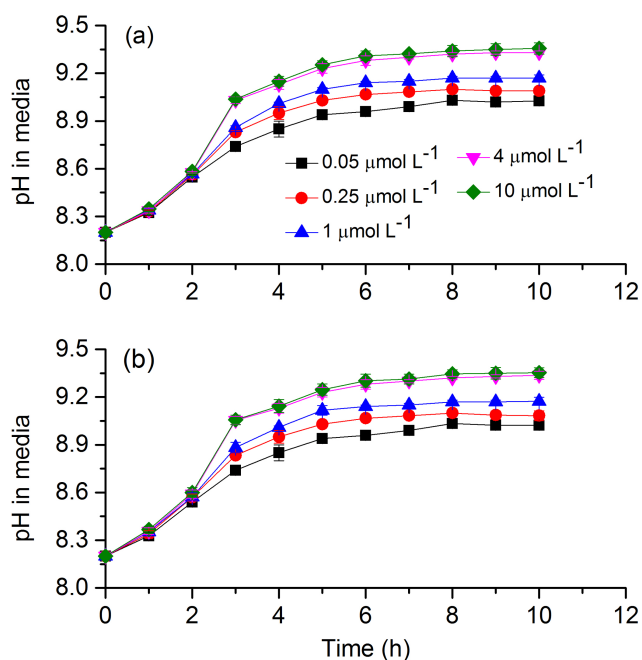
**Figure 6.** CA<sub>ext</sub> activity (a) and reduction rate of ferricyanide (b) in *S. costatum* grown at various phosphate concentrations after 12.6 and 2.8 μmol CO<sub>2</sub> treatments. The error bars indicate the standard deviations ( $n = 3$ ).

*Skeletonema costatum* grown at higher phosphate levels (4 and  $10 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ ) also showed similar photosynthetic rates for the lower and higher CO<sub>2</sub> treatments. Our finding combined with the previous studies indicates phosphorus plays an important role in dealing with low CO<sub>2</sub> availability for photosynthesis in *S. costatum*.

Different from net photosynthetic rate,  $2.8 \mu\text{mol}$  of CO<sub>2</sub> did not affect rETR at lower phosphate levels ( $0.05$  and  $0.25 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ ) and stimulated it at higher phosphate levels ( $1$ – $10 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ ). This interactive effect of CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate may be due to their effects on Chl *a*. The level of  $2.8 \mu\text{mol}$  CO<sub>2</sub> induced more synthesis of Chl *a* at higher phosphate levels ( $1$ – $10 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ ). This induction of lower CO<sub>2</sub> on photosynthetic pigment is also reported in green algae (Gao et al., 2016). More energy is required under lower CO<sub>2</sub> to address the more severe CO<sub>2</sub> limitation and thus more Chl *a* is synthesized to capture more light energy, particularly when phosphate was replete. Although P is not an integral component for chlorophyll, it plays an important role in cell energetics through high-energy phosphate bonds, i.e., ATP, which could support chlorophyll synthesis. The stimulating effect of P enrichment on photosynthetic pigment is also found in the green alga *Dunaliella tertiolecta* (Geider et al., 1998) and the brown alga *Sargassum muticum* (Xu et al., 2017). The increased photosynthetic pigment in *S. costatum* could partially explain the increased rETR and photosynthetic rate under the higher P conditions.

**Table 3.** Two-way analysis of variance for the effects of CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate on CA<sub>ext</sub> activity, redox activity of plasma membrane, and pH compensation point of *S. costatum*. CO<sub>2</sub>\*phosphate means the interactive effect of CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate, df means degree of freedom, *F* means the value of the *F* statistic, and Sig. means the *p* value.

| Source                     | CA <sub>ext</sub> activity |          |        | Redox activity of plasma membrane |          |        | pH compensation point |          |        |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------|--------|-----------------------------------|----------|--------|-----------------------|----------|--------|
|                            | df                         | <i>F</i> | Sig.   | df                                | <i>F</i> | Sig.   | df                    | <i>F</i> | Sig.   |
| CO <sub>2</sub>            | 1                          | 569.585  | <0.001 | 1                                 | 937.963  | <0.001 | 1                     | 0.056    | 0.816  |
| Phosphate                  | 4                          | 176.392  | <0.001 | 4                                 | 276.362  | <0.001 | 4                     | 226.196  | <0.001 |
| CO <sub>2</sub> *phosphate | 4                          | 87.380   | <0.001 | 4                                 | 137.050  | <0.001 | 4                     | 0.040    | 0.997  |
| Error                      | 20                         |          |        | 20                                |          |        | 20                    |          |        |



**Figure 7.** Changes of pH in a closed system caused by photosynthesis of *S. costatum* grown at various phosphate concentrations after 12.6 and 2.8 μmol CO<sub>2</sub> treatments. The error bars indicate the standard deviations (*n* = 3).

#### 4.2 Ratio of respiration to photosynthesis

The ratio of respiration to photosynthesis in algae indicates carbon balance in cells and carbon flux in marine ecosystems as well (Zou and Gao, 2013). The level of 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub> increased this ratio in *S. costatum* grown at the lower P conditions but did not affect it under the higher P conditions, indicating that P enrichment can offset the carbon loss caused by carbon limitation. To cope with CO<sub>2</sub> limitation, cells might have to obtain energy from dark respiration under lower P conditions as it seems infeasible to acquire energy from the low ETR, which led to the increased dark respiration. However, 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub> induced higher ETR under P-replete conditions and energy used for inorganic carbon (CO<sub>2</sub> and

HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup>) acquisition could be from the increased ETR. Therefore, additional dark respiration was not triggered, avoiding carbon loss. Most studies regarding the effect of CO<sub>2</sub> on ratio of respiration to photosynthesis focus on higher plants (Gifford, 1995; Ziska and Bunce, 1998; Cheng et al., 2010; Smith and Dukes, 2013); little is known about phytoplankton. Our study suggests that CO<sub>2</sub> limitation may lead to carbon loss in phytoplankton but P enrichment could alter this trend, regulating carbon balance in phytoplankton and thus their capacity in carbon sequestration.

#### 4.3 Inorganic carbon acquisition under CO<sub>2</sub> limitation and phosphate enrichment

Decreased CO<sub>2</sub> can usually induce higher inorganic carbon affinity in algae (Raven et al., 2012; Wu et al., 2012; Raven et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2017). In the present study, the lower CO<sub>2</sub> did increase inorganic carbon affinity when the P level was higher than 0.25 μmol L<sup>−1</sup> but did not affect it when P was 0.05 μmol L<sup>−1</sup>, indicating the important role of P in regulating cells' CCMs in response to environmental CO<sub>2</sub> changes. The level of 2.8 μmol of CO<sub>2</sub> induced larger CA activity when P was above 0.25 μmol L<sup>−1</sup> but did not increase it at 0.05 μmol L<sup>−1</sup> of P, which could explain the interactive effect of P and CO<sub>2</sub> on inorganic carbon affinity as CA can accelerate the equilibrium between HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup> and CO<sub>2</sub> and increase inorganic carbon affinity. Regardless of CO<sub>2</sub>, P enrichment alone increased CA activity and inorganic carbon affinity. P enrichment may stimulate the synthesis of CA by supplying required ATP. In addition, P enrichment increased the redox activity of the plasma membrane in this study. It has been proposed that redox activity of the plasma membrane could induce extracellular CA activity via protonation extrusion of its active center (Nimer et al., 1998). Our result that the pattern of CA is exactly the same as that of redox activity of the plasma membrane shows a compelling correlation between CA and redox activity of the plasma membrane. The stimulating effect of P on redox activity of plasma membrane may be due to its effect on ETR. The increased ETR could generate excess reducing equivalents, particularly under CO<sub>2</sub>-limiting conditions. These excess reducing equiva-



**Table 4.** Repeated measurements of analysis of variance for the effects of CO<sub>2</sub> and phosphate on pH change during 10 h of incubation. Time\*CO<sub>2</sub> means the interactive effect of incubation time and CO<sub>2</sub>. Time\*phosphate means the interactive effect of incubation time and phosphate. Time\*CO<sub>2</sub>\*phosphate means the interactive effect of incubation time, CO<sub>2</sub>, and phosphate. *df* means degree of freedom, *F* means the value of the *F* statistic, and Sig. means the *p* value.

| Source                          | Type III sum of squares | <i>df</i> | Mean square | <i>F</i> | Sig.   |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|----------|--------|
| Time                            | 40.766                  | 10        | 4.077       | 8737.941 | <0.001 |
| Time*CO <sub>2</sub>            | 0.003                   | 10        | <0.001      | 0.569    | 0.838  |
| Time*phosphate                  | 0.886                   | 40        | 0.022       | 47.496   | <0.001 |
| Time*CO <sub>2</sub> *phosphate | 0.002                   | 40        | <0.001      | 0.112    | 1.000  |
| Error                           | 0.093                   | 200       | <0.001      |          |        |

lents would be transported from the chloroplast into the cytosol (Heber, 1974), supporting the redox chain in the plasma membrane (Rubinstein and Luster, 1993; Nimer et al., 1999) and triggering CA activity.

#### 4.4 Direct HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup> utilization due to phosphate enrichment

A pH compensation point over 9.2 has been considered a sign of direct HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup> use for algae (Axelsson and Uusitalo, 1988) as the CO<sub>2</sub> concentration is nearly zero at a pH above 9.2. This criterion has been justified based on experiments for both micro and macro-algae. For instance, the marine diatom *Phaeodactylum tricornutum*, with a strong capacity for direct HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup> utilization, has a higher pH compensation point of 10.3 (Chen et al., 2006). In contrast, the red macroalgae, *Lomentaria articulata* and *Phycodrys rubens*, that cannot utilize HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup> directly, and whose photosynthesis only depends on CO<sub>2</sub> diffusion, have pH compensation points of less than 9.2 (Maberly, 1990). In terms of *S. costatum*, it has been reported to have a pH compensation point of 9.12, indicating a very weak capacity for direct HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup> utilization (Chen and Gao, 2004). Our study demonstrates that the pH compensation point of *S. costatum* varies with the availability of P. It is lower than 9.2 under P-limiting conditions but higher than 9.2 under P-replete conditions, suggesting that the capacity of direct HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup> utilization is regulated by P availability. Contrary to CO<sub>2</sub> passive diffusion, the direct use of HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup> depends on positive transport that requires energy (Hopkinson and Morel, 2011). P enrichment increased ETR in the present study and the ATP produced during the process of electron transport could be used to support HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup> positive transport. In addition, the increased respiration at higher P levels can also generate ATP to help HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup> positive transport. Our study indicates that P enrichment could trigger HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup> direct utilization and hence increase inorganic acquisition capacity of *S. costatum* to cope with CO<sub>2</sub> limitation.

#### 4.5 CCMs and red tides

In the development of red tides, the pH in seawater can be very high along with extremely low CO<sub>2</sub> availability due to

intensive photosynthesis (Hansen, 2002; Hinga, 2002). For instance, the pH level in the surface waters of the eutrophic Mariager Fjord, Denmark, is often above 9 during dinoflagellate blooms (Hansen, 2002). Diatoms are the causative species for red tides and *S. costatum* could outcompete other bloom algae (dinoflagellates *Prorocentrum minimum* and *Alexandrium tamarense*) under nutrient-replete conditions (Hu et al., 2011). However, the potential mechanisms are poorly understood. Our study demonstrates *S. costatum* has multiple CCMs to cope with CO<sub>2</sub> limitation and the operation of CCMs is regulated by P availability. The CCMs of *S. costatum* are hampered under P-limiting conditions and only function when P is replete. This finding may explain why diatoms could overcome carbon limitation and dominate red tides when P is replete as well as the shift from diatoms to dinoflagellates when P is limiting (Mackey et al., 2012).

## 5 Conclusions

The present study investigated the role of P in regulating inorganic carbon acquisition and CO<sub>2</sub> concentrating mechanisms in diatoms for the first time. The intensive photosynthesis and quick growth during algal blooms usually result in a noticeable increase in pH and decrease in CO<sub>2</sub>. Our study demonstrates that P enrichment could induce activity of extracellular carbonic anhydrase and direct utilization of HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>−</sup> in *S. costatum* to help overcome CO<sub>2</sub> limitation, as well as increasing photosynthetic pigment content and rETR to provide required energy. This study provides important insight into the connection of phosphorus and carbon acquisition in diatoms and the mechanisms that help *S. costatum* dominate algal blooms.

**Data availability.** The underlying research data can be found in the Supplement.

**Supplement.** The supplement related to this article is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.5194/bg-15-4871-2018-supplement>.

**Author contributions.** JX and GG designed the experiments, and GG, JY, JF, and XZ carried them out. GG prepared the paper with contributions from all co-authors.

**Competing interests.** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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