Disparities between in situ and optically-derived carbon biomass and growth rates of the prymnesiophyte *Phaeocystis globosa*

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Abstract

The oceans play a pivotal role in the global carbon cycle. It is not practical to measure the global daily production of organic carbon, the product of phytoplankton standing stock and growth rate by discrete oceanographic methods. Instead, optical proxies from Earth-orbiting satellites must be used. To test the accuracy of optically-derived proxies of phytoplankton physiology and growth rate, hyperspectral reflectance data from the wax and wane of a *Phaeocystis* bloom in laboratory mesocosms were compared with standard ex situ data. Chlorophyll biomass could be estimated accurately from reflectance using specific chlorophyll absorption algorithms. However, the conversion of chlorophyll (Chl) to carbon (C) was obscured by the non-linear increase in C:Chl under nutrient-limited growth. Although C:Chl was inversely correlated (r^2=0.88) with the in situ fluorometric growth rate indicator Fv/Fm (Photosystem II quantum efficiency), none of them was linearly correlated to growth

rate, constraining the accurate calculation of *Phaeocystis* growth or production rates. Unfortunately, the optical proxy φ_{ph} (quantum efficiency of fluorescence: the ratio of the number of fluoresced photons to the number of photons absorbed by the phytoplankton) did not show any correlation with *Phaeocystis* growth rate and, therefore, it is concluded that φ_{ph} cannot be applied in the remote-sensed measurement of this species' carbon production rate.

1 Introduction

Approximately half of the global photosynthetic CO_2 to organic carbon conversion takes place in marine waters (Field et al., 1998). Unfortunately, global daily CO_2 fixation, the product of phytoplankton standing stock and growth rates cannot be measured directly for the world oceans. Phytoplankton biomass and growth rates can be assessed directly and accurately by standard oceanographic techniques, but these miss the spatial coverage of the optical instruments on board Earth-orbiting satellites. On the other hand, optically-derived estimates of phytoplankton biomass and growth rates are less accurate than ship-board data (Abbott and Letelier, 1999;Carder et al., 2003;Behrenfeld et al., 2005;Huot et al., 2005;Astoreca et al., 2009;Martinez-Vicente et al., 2013). Here we report, to our knowledge for the first time ever, on the simultaneous evaluation of standard oceanographic and state-of-the-art optical techniques for gauging both phytoplankton biomass and carbon growth rates.

In "standard" oceanographic measurements, carbon concentration, carbon fixation, chlorophyll and other photopigment concentrations are analysed in discrete water samples (ex situ), as is the quantum efficiency of Photosystem II (Fv/Fm) that can be considered an indicator for phytoplankton growth rate (Kromkamp and Foster, 2003;Ly et al., 2014).

Optical estimates of the oceanic carbon concentration for growth rate estimations can be made from the particulate backscatter coefficient bbp (Behrenfeld et al., 2005), but this coefficient is non-specific for phytoplankton or valid only for low chlorophyll-a concentrations (Martinez-Vicente et al., 2013). Alternatively, the phytoplankton-specific chlorophyll concentration can be estimated from water-leaving radiance as absorbance (Carder et al., 2003). However, the carbon to chlorophyll ratio (C : Chl) that is then needed to convert chlorophyll into carbon is not a constant (Sathyendranath et al., 2009).

A second optical growth rate proxy is the phytoplankton-specific red chlorophyll fluorescence relative to absorbance (φ_{ph}). By definition this "quantum efficiency of fluorescence" is the ratio of the number of fluoresced photons to the number of photons absorbed by the phytoplankton, i.e. by all cellular photo-pigments (Abbott and Letelier, 1999;Huot et al., 2005). According to Falkowski and Kolber (Falkowski and Kolber, 1995) the quantum efficiency of photosynthesis varies inversely to the quantum efficiency of fluorescence. If under nutrient limitation the production of chlorophyll stops, it is expected that C: Chl, fluorescence and φ_{ph} will increase (Kiefer, 1973;Falkowski et al., 1992;Behrenfeld et al., 2009).

Besides the lack of specificity, an inherent problem in the optical approach of organic carbon production is that estimates of carbon and chlorophyll are used in both biomass and growth rate proxies. Moreover, doubt has been raised if the variability in remote-sensed phytoplankton physiology (φ_{ph}) is due to physiological changes in the phytoplankton, or due to environmentally driven biases in algorithms needed to estimate φ_{ph} (Huot et al., 2005).

In order to study the variability in phytoplankton biomass, growth rate, absorbance and fluorescence under variable, but fully-controlled conditions, a mesocosm experiment was conducted where detailed "standard" oceanographic measurements were combined with close-sensing hyperspectral measurements. Phytoplankton dynamics in the mesocosms were experimentally manipulated under semi-natural conditions of temperature, irradiance and turbulence (Peperzak et al., 2011). The prymnesiophyte *Phaeocystis globosa*, a key species in marine primary production was used as test organism (Wassmann et al., 1990;Smith et al., 1991;DiTullio et al., 2000;Vogt et al., 2012). Our ambition was to use the optical signature of *Phaeocystis globosa*, that can now be detected by the MERIS and MODIS satellites (Kurekin, 2014), to better understand the wax and wane of its blooms. This optical signature includes light absorption, light emission and the quantum efficiency of the phytoplankton. In

particular we like to know how optical proxies compare to standard oceanographic techniques for estimating primary production because this is still one of the key question in ocean color research (Cullen and Lewis, 1995;Saba and al., 2010;Huot et al., 2013;Behrenfeld et al., 2009;Huot et al., 2005).

2 Methods

2.1 Experimental

The flagellate, not-colony-forming, strain Pg6-I of *Phaeocystis globosa* ("*Phaeocystis*") was inoculated in two duplicate 140 L mesocosms filled with 0.2 µm filtered Atlantic Ocean water poor in organic and inorganic nutrients that had been diluted with Milli-Q^{TM} to a salinity of 34 g kg^{-1}. A detailed description of the mesocosms is given in (Peperzak et al., 2011). Temperature during *Phaeocystis* growth was kept at 15°C. Irradiance was provided in a semi-sinusoidal light dark (16:8 h) cycle with a maximum surface PAR of 41 W m^{-2} in mesocosm 1 and 45 W m^{-2} in mesocosm 2. Turbulence of the water was provided by pumping surface water to the bottom of the mesocosm at a turn-over rate of 1 h^{-1}. The water was enriched with macronutrients to: 30 µM NO_3^-, 6.3 µM PO_4^{3-}, and trace metals and vitamin B1 (Peperzak et al., 2011). On day 8 of the experiment, when cells were in stationary growth phase, mesocosm 1 received enrichment with the initial nutrient concentrations to examine the effect of alleviation of nitrogen limitation on the physiological and optical properties of *Phaeocystis*.

2.2 Sampling

Water samples were taken in the middle of the light period (13:00 h, CET) to measure salinity, pH, cell abundance, dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DIN), soluble reactive phosphorus

(SRP), HPLC pigments including chlorophyll-a (Chl-a), chlorophyll-c2 and -c3 (summed as Chl-c) and carotenoids, particulate organic carbon (POC) and nitrogen (PON) and PAM (Walz, Water PAM^{TM}) derived Photosystem II quantum efficiency (Fv/Fm) on dark (>20 minutes) adapted samples. A detailed description of the analyses is provided elsewhere (Peperzak et al., 2011). See Table 1 for a list of measured and derived variables.

Surface irradiance (W m^{-2} nm^{-1}), used to convert radiance (W m^{-2} nm^{-1} sr^{-1}) to reflectance (R, sr^{-1}), was measured prior to and after the experiment. In addition, phytoplankton absorption was measured daily at 13:00 h using a 0.55 L integrating cavity absorption meter or ICAM (a-sphere^{TM}, HobiLabs, Tucson, AZ, USA). ICAM-absorption data (a_{ph}, m^{-1}) were blank-corrected daily by subtracting the absorption of filtered seawater, then divided by chlorophyll-a or –c concentrations to obtain the chlorophyll-specific absorption coefficients (a^*_{Chl}, m^2 (mg chlorophyll)$^{-1}$) in both the exponential and the stationary *Phaeocystis* growth phase. *Phaeocystis* spectra of a^*_{Chl}, together with reflectance data, were used to determine the appropriate wavelengths in algorithms for the estimation of chlorophyll-a (-c) absorption from reflectance spectra. Details of the ICAM-absorption, irradiance and radiance measurements are provided elsewhere (Peperzak et al., 2011).

2.3 Mesocosms, absorption and fluorescence algorithms

The mesocosm description and analysis of the spectra and is based on the methodological paper of Peperzak et al. (2011) that contains an extensive description of the experiment, measurements and validation of the analysis of the absorption and fluorescence signals. The mesocosm tank, height 0.75 m, diameter 0.5 m and water volume 0.14 m^3 was made of black high density polyethylene and mounted in a black metal frame made of 30 mm square aluminum painted black (Fig. 1). To avoid light reflection from the walls the interior of the

tank was sand-blasted. The contents was mixed by pumping water at a turn-over rate of 1 h^{-1} from 0.05 m below the water surface (-0.05 m) to 0.10 m above the bottom (-0.65 m). A total of 25 Solux™ MR16 halogen 4700K "daylight" lamps of 50 W with a 24° beam spread were used in a 5 x 5 matrix in a black-painted box that was mounted in a frame at 0.70 m above the water surface. A variable light:dark cycle with a semi-sinusoidal illumination was made possible by timers controlling all lamps.

Prior and after the experiments of two weeks, surface irradiance (E_0) was measured every 15 minutes for at least 24 h from 320-950 nm in 190 channels (W m^{-2} nm^{-1}) with a TriOS™ RAMSES-ACC-VIS hyperspectral cosine irradiance sensor (TriOS, GmbH, Oldenburg, Germany) that was placed in the center of the mesocosm at the position of the water surface. During experiments the irradiance at the bottom (E_b) of the mesocosm (Fig. 1) was measured every 15 minutes with a similar TriOS™ hyperspectral cosine irradiance sensor. Water leaving radiance (L_w) was measured every 15 minutes with a TriOS™ RAMSES-ACC-VIS hyperspectral radiance sensor (radiometer, 320-950 nm in 190 channels, W m^{-2} nm^{-1} sr^{-1}) at an angle of 50° nadir at 0.08 m above the water surface (Fig. 1). An integrating cavity absorption meter or ICAM (a-sphere spectrophotometer, HOBI Labs™, Tucson, AZ, USA) was used as an independent method to measure sample absorption (m^{-1}). This type of instrument is very accurate, also at low concentrations, without interference by particle scattering.

Based on the averaged spectra from the middle of the light period (13:00-14:00 h), four optical properties were derived: 1-the total number of photons absorbed by phytoplankton, 2-the total number of photons emitted by fluorescence, 3,4- the Chlorophyll-c and Chlorophyll-a concentration, respectively. The fifth quantity, the phytoplankton quantum efficiency ($\varphi_{ph)}$ is defined as the ratio of mol photons emitted as fluorescence divided by the mol photons absorbed by the pigments and is therefore the ratio of property 2 over 1.

1- From a comparison of the irradiance sensor at the bottom of each mesocosm with the known irradiance at the water surface, the wavelength-dependent attenuation in the mesocosm was derived. This attenuation was corrected for the (small) effects of pure water and scattering effects at the mesocosm wall and the total number of absorbed photons was calculated as the absorption times the illumination at each wavelength and integrated over the interval 400-672 nm. The stricter upper limit of 672 nm to the Potential Fluorescence Radiation (PFR), is based on a central fluorescence emission at 682 nm and a Stokes shift of 10 nm that determined the minimum extra energy needed for the excitation of a chlorophyll molecule. The typical available PFR just below the water surface is 138 μmol photons m^{-2} s^{-1} (mesocosm 1).

2- The classic Fluorescence Line Height (FLH) algorithm (Abbott and Letelier, 1999) was applied on the remote sensing reflectance spectra (R), calculated as the ratio of the radiance spectra collected above water (Sr Fig. 1) divided by the illumination irradiance.

$$F = R_{Fmax} - R_{base} \quad (sr^{-1}) \qquad (1a)$$

with $$R_{base} = R_{b1} + (\lambda_{Fmax} - \lambda_{b1})*((R_{b1} - R_{b2})/(\lambda_{b1} - \lambda_{b2})) \quad (sr^{-1}) \qquad (1b)$$

Fmax is at the fluorescence peak (λ = 682 nm) in the mesocosm reflectance spectra, R_{base} is the baseline reflectance value at F_{max}, calculated linearly from the reflectance between R_{b1} and R_{b2} with b_1=650 nm and b_2=710 nm. In order to derive the number of emitted photons in the mesocosm, the Fluorescence Line Height was first multiplied by the irradiance spectrum to obtain a baseline corrected radiance above water at 682 nm. Subsequently, the signal was corrected for the water-air transition, absorption by water, self-absorption by the phytoplankton and converted to photons. Finally, the signal was integrated over 4π (assuming isotropic emission) and over the spectral range (650-710 nm), assuming a Gaussian

distribution with a FWHM of 25 nm. See (Peperzak et al., 2011) for a more extensive validation of this conversion.

3- The Chlorophyll-c concentration was calculated from reflectance (R) by a 4-wavelength (at λ = 450, 466, 480 and 700 nm) absorption algorithm (ARP-4$\lambda_{Chl\text{-}c}$) that was developed and positively applied by (Astoreca et al., 2009) to detect *Phaeocystis* in the North Sea:

$$a_{Chl\text{-}c} = a_{w,700} \times R_{700} \times (1/R_{466} - (1/R_{450})^{(1-w)} \times (1/R_{480})^{w}) \ (m^{-1}) \qquad (2a)$$

With the absorption by pure water:

$$a_{w,700} = 0.572\ m^{-1}\ (15°C) \qquad \text{(Buiteveld et al., 1994)} \qquad (2b)$$

and the weight (w) is determined by the position of the Chl-c absorption maximum (466 nm) relative to the two reference (baseline) wavelengths (450 and 480 nm):

$$w = (\lambda_{466,\,Chlc} - \lambda_{450}) / (\lambda_{480} - \lambda_{450}) = 0.53 \qquad (2c)$$

4- A comparable absorption algorithm (ARP-4λ_{Chla}) for Chlorophyll-a was derived after choosing the appropriate wavelengths, including the Chl-a absorption maximum (438 nm):

$$a_{Chl\text{-}a} = a_{w,700} \times R_{700} \times (1/R_{438} - (1/_{R425})^{(1-w)} \times (1/R_{450})^{w}) \ (m^{-1}) \qquad (3a)$$

With water absorption given by eq. (1b) and the weight (w) by:

$$w = (\lambda_{438,\,Chla} - \lambda_{425}) / (\lambda_{450} - \lambda_{425}) = 0.52 \qquad (3b)$$

2.4 Statistics

To test the null hypothesis that there is no difference between means of variables measured in the two mesocosms, two-sample t-tests were performed in SYSTAT™ version 12. Linear regression equations were calculated in SYSTAT™ or Excel™ 2003. 95% confidence intervals (± 95% c.i.) around a variable mean m were calculated from a t-distribution using n observations (days), n-1 degrees of freedom and the standard deviation of the mean sd as: m ± 95% c.i. = m ± t (0.05; n-1) x sd / √n. The standard error (= sd / √n) provided in linear regression by SYSTAT™ was used to calculate 95% confidence intervals of regression slopes.

3. Results

3.1 Phytoplankton dynamics (ex situ observations)

Inoculation of the mesocosms was followed by a three day exponential increase in *Phaeocystis* cell abundance, Chl-a, Chl-c, POC and PON concentrations (Figs. 2A, C-F). Compared to mesocosm 1, the higher surface irradiance in mesocosm 2 led to 17% more cells on day 5, when the stationary growth phase was reached in both mesocosms due to nitrogen limitation (Fig. 2B). In both mesocosms, cell abundances in stationary growth phase decreased with an average rate of -0.07 d^{-1}. The 30 µM nitrate in the nutrient-spike added to mesocosm 1 on day 8, was already depleted by *Phaeocystis* on day 9 (Fig. 2B) and incorporated as PON (Fig. 2F). In addition, *Phaeocystis* cells, Chl-a and Chl-c concentrations increased after the nutrient-spike (Figs. 2A, C-D). In a separate experiment (no data shown), in which a mesocosm 2 water sample on day 10 was spiked with only nitrate, the resumption of cell growth and an increase in Fv/Fm confirmed that nitrogen was the limiting element.

3.2 Physiology and pigment composition (ex situ observations)

After the depletion of DIN on day 4, Fv/Fm declined in both mesocosms (Fig. 3A), while the C:Chl ratios increased (Fig. 3C). The nutrient-spike on day 8 in mesocosm 1 caused a temporary increase in Fv/Fm (Fig. 3A) and led to significantly lower C:N ($t = -25.2$, $df = 5$, $p < 0.001$) and C:Chl ratios ($t = -8.5$, $df = 5$, $p < 0.001$) in mesocosm 1 relative to mesocosm 2 (Figs. 3B, C). The difference in Carotenoids: Chl between mesocosm 1 and 2 (Fig. 3D) from day 9 onwards was also significant ($t = -6.8$, $df = 5$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, the nutrient-spike on day 8 caused a shift in Fv/Fm, C:N, C:Chl and Carotenoids: Chl (Figs. 3A, B - D).

3.3 Absorption and fluorescence (optical observations)

3.3.1 ICAM absorption

The ICAM absorption spectra of mesocosm water samples contained three major peaks: at 438 nm (Chl-a), 466 nm (Chl-c) and 674 nm (Chl-a). In the exponential growth phase, a^*_{Chl} was lower than in the stationary growth phase, due to the increase in Carotenoids after nitrogen was depleted (Fig. 3D). These differences in a^*_{Chl} between exponential and stationary growth phase were significant at 438 and 466 nm, but not at 674 nm (Table 2).

3.3.2 Reflectance absorption

The specific chlorophyll-a and -c absorption ($a_{Chl\text{-}a}$ and $a_{Chl\text{-}c}$) computed from reflectance spectra (Figs. 4A-B) closely resembled the development of *Phaeocystis* cell abundance and Chl-a and -c concentrations (Figs. 2A, C-D). In both mesocosms, total Chl absorption, $a_{Chl\text{-}a\,(\text{-}c)}$ correlated well with HPLC-measured Chl-a and Chl-c concentrations (Figs. 4C-D) and the regression slopes of the two variables in the mesocosms were not significantly different (Table 3). When the data of both mesocosms were split by growth phase, the exponential

phase (day 1 to 4) regression equations accurately (both $r^2 = 0.98$) estimated both Chl-a and Chl-c (Figs. 4E-F). The stationary phase (day 5 to 14) regression intercepts between $a_{Chl\text{-}a\ (-c)}$ and Chl-a and Chl-c concentrations were lower than in exponential growth phase (Figs. 4E-F), although not significantly (Table 3). This means that application of the regression equations combining both growth phases (Table 3), will lead to small underestimations of Chl-a and Chl-c concentrations in the exponential growth phase, and small overestimations of Chl-a and Chl-c concentrations in the stationary phase (Figs. 4 E-F).

3.3.3 Fluorescence

Fluorescence emission estimated from the water leaving radiance (Fig. 5A) resembled *Phaeocystis* cell dynamics (Fig. 2A) and was well correlated with Chl-a (Fig. 5B; overall $r^2 = 0.81$, Table 4). When the data of both mesocosms was split by growth phase, the stationary phase (day 5 to 14) regression slope and intercept were significantly different from those in exponential phase (day 1 to 4) (Fig. 5C, Table 4). This means that according to expectation, nutrient-stressed cells in stationary growth phase have higher fluorescence intensity per unit chlorophyll.

3.4 Fluorescence quantum efficiency (optical observations)

The fluorescence efficiency (φ_{ph}) calculated as mol photons emitted as fluorescence divided by the mol photons absorbed by the phytoplankton pigments increased during exponential growth, stabilized from day 5 to 8 and then decreased (Fig. 6). No apparent change in φ_{ph} was observed in response to the nutrient-spike on day 8 to mesocosm 1.

3.5 Carbon growth rate and proxy comparison

In order to relate dynamics in light absorption and fluorescence to *Phaeocystis* physiology in the different growth phases, the dynamics of carbon growth rate (μ_{POC}) was compared to

Fv/Fm, C:Chl and φ_{ph} (Figs. 7A-C). Because the cellular Chl-c content of *Phaeocystis* is about the same as the cellular Chl-a content (Figs. 4C,D) and total chlorophyll (Chl) was linearly correlated to Chl-a (Chl = 2.28 x Chl-a, $r^2 = 0.99$), C:Chl was used rather than C:Chl-a and C:Chl-c separately.

The proxy comparison showed hyperbolic relations of μ_{POC} with C: Chl and Fv/Fm with highly variable values at $\mu_{POC} \sim 0.0\ d^{-1}$ (Figs. 7A-B). As could be expected from Figs. 7A and B, Fv/Fm was inversely linearly correlated to C:Chl ($r^2 = 0.88$). The good correlation implies that under the present experimental conditions Fv/Fm and C:Chl, as measured either in water samples or derived from water-leaving radiance are directly comparable physiological proxies.

Fluorescence quantum efficiency did not show any correlation with growth rate (Fig. 7C). It appears that in both mesocosms φ_{ph} is a poor proxy for *Phaeocystis* carbon production in both mesocosms.

4. Discussion

The aim of the mesocosm experiments was to investigate a relation between optical remote sensing and "standard" oceanographic measurements of phytoplankton physiology during different growth phases (here: nitrogen-controlled growth) of *Phaeocystis* and to infer possible implications for estimates of primary productivity. The standard physiological and reflectance measurements, in combination with the effect of a nutrient-spike to one mesocosm, proved that growth of *Phaeocystis* was indeed nitrogen-limited during the experiments. By measuring the in situ fluorescence (F) increase due to nitrogen limitation, and the phytoplankton pigment absorption (a_{ph}), an optical estimate of the quantum efficiency of fluorescence φ_{ph} ($=F/a_{ph}$) could be made. It is shown that of the physiological diagnostics

neither φ_{ph}, nor Photosystem II quantum efficiency (Fv/Fm) nor C:Chl are reliable estimators of *Phaeocystis* growth rates. This may have consequences for global carbon fixation estimates using remote sensing data assessing phytoplankton physiology.

4.1 Phytoplankton dynamics

Temperature, salinity, irradiance and pH were at or near values for optimum *Phaeocystis* growth (Peperzak, 2002). Exponential phase growth rate ($\mu = 0.7\ d^{-1}$) and stationary phase mortality rate ($d = -0.07\ d^{-1}$) were equal to the rates obtained in cultures of *P. globosa* strain Ph91 (Peperzak et al., 2000a;Peperzak et al., 2000b). The carbon and photopigment contents of *Phaeocystis* in the mesocosms were comparable to published values, although cellular Chl-a and Chl-c content were relatively low (Table 5). On the other hand, the fucoxanthin to Chl-a ratio was high which is probably caused by 1) an adaptation to the low irradiance environment where this flagellate can thrive (Peperzak, 1993;Seoane et al., 2009) and/or 2) the effect of nitrogen-limited growth on the Carotenoids: Chl ratio (Fig. 3D). In mesocosm 2 *Phaeocystis* in stationary phase reached a C:N of 20, which is equal to the subsistence quota of 0.05 mol N mol C^{-1} in diatoms (Edwards et al., 2003). The rapid depletion of nitrate during the initial days of the experiment and the constant increase in C:N, combined with the decrease in C:N, resumption of cell growth and increase in Fv/Fm after the nutrient-spike, convincingly showed that *Phaeocystis* was nitrogen-limited in the stationary phase.

The physiological indicator Fv/Fm declined when nitrogen had been depleted on day 4. In addition, C:Chl increased. Both indicators responded directly following the nutrient-spike to the nitrogen-depleted *Phaeocystis* on day 8. C:Chl was inversely linearly correlated with Fv/Fm, but carbon growth rate was not. This can be explained by the fact that both Fv/Fm and C:Chl declined continuously after nitrogen depletion while cell division immediately halted on day 5. As a consequence, Fv/Fm and C:Chl not only signal physiological change, they are

also indicative of the persistence of nitrogen depletion in *Phaeocystis*. A comparable conclusion was reached for the decline of Fv/Fm and the duration of nitrogen depletion in the diatom *Thalassiosira pseudonana* (Parkhill et al., 2001). On the other hand, under balanced growth conditions, i.e. steady-state nitrogen-limited growth, the value of Fv/Fm in *T. pseudonana* was high and comparable to the value in nutrient-replete cultures (Parkhill et al., 2001). In other words, the steady 10 day change after an abrupt nitrogen depletion make that Fv/Fm and C:Chl are not good indicators of short-term nutrient-limited phytoplankton growth rates.

In the early stationary phase (day 4-8), the 10% lower surface irradiance in mesocosm 1 led to a slightly lower (94 ± 21) but not significantly different C:Chl than in mesocosm 2 (106 ± 28). Comparable minor effects on cellular chlorophyll contents have been measured in *Phaeocystis* cultured at 10 and 100 µmol photons m^{-2} s^{-1} (Astoreca et al., 2009). The reduction of water column irradiance due to self-shading by increased chlorophyll concentrations during exponential growth would, therefore, have little effect on C:Chl. Far more important than the (relatively weak) effect of irradiance on C:Chl was the factor 10 variability in C:Chl when *Phaeocystis* went from the exponential (C:Chl = 30) to the late stationary growth phase (C:Chl = 200, Fig. 3C and Table 5). This variability confirms that chlorophyll concentration is not a reliable indicator of phytoplankton biomass (Behrenfeld et al., 2009;Kruskopf and Flynn, 2006), which has implications for the correct conversion of chlorophyll to carbon in chlorophyll-based primary production models (Cloern et al., 1995;Sathyendranath et al., 2009).

4.2 Pigments and absorption

Nitrogen depletion led to increases in Carotenoids concentrations relative to chlorophyll. Comparable increases in light absorption under nitrogen limitation, due to increased

Carotenoid: Chl-a ratios, have been observed in other phytoplankton species (Heath et al., 1990;Staehr et al., 2002). The increase of Carotenoids to Chl ratio had a direct effect on the estimation of light absorption from the reflection spectra and ICAM measurements. The excellent correlations (Table 3) between $a_{Chl\text{-}a}$ and $a_{Chl\text{-}c}$ and respectively Chl-a and Chl-c concentrations in exponential phase (both $r^2 = 0.98$) were lower in stationary phase ($0.59 < r^2 < 0.82$). Besides more variability in stationary phase, a_{Chl} was lower than in exponential phase due to interference by Carotenoids in the reflection spectrum. This interference was more pronounced for $a_{Chl\text{-}c}$ than for the $a_{Chl\text{-}a}$ (Table 3), because the $a_{Chl\text{-}c}$ algorithm employs wavelengths from 450 to 480 nm where Carotenoids absorption is more pronounced (Fujiki and Taguchi, 2002;Lubac et al., 2008).

The interference of Carotenoids in stationary phase will increase when total pigment absorption (a_{ph}) will be measured instead of specific chlorophyll absorption. It is not surprising, therefore, that by using the ICAM data (400 to 672 nm) the correlation of absorption with Chl was lower ($r^2 = 0.74$) than when using the Chl-a and Chl-c specific algorithms. Carotenoids interference in stationary phase also explains the limited apparent linearity of chlorophyll detection by ICAM absorption to a maximum of approximately 50 µg L^{-1} (Peperzak et al., 2011). At a high nitrogen-limited *Phaeocystis* biomass, the use of total absorption including the Carotenoids, leads to an overestimation of the chlorophyll concentration.

4.3 Fluorescence quantum efficiency

The optically measured fluorescence signal correlated well with the *ex situ* measured Chl-a concentrations and, as expected, showed a relative fluorescence increase in stationary phase. φ_{ph} in mesocosm 2 ranged by more than 100%, from ≈ 0.8 to ≈ 1.7% (Fig. 6). Satellite estimates of φ_{ph} have a corresponding range, 0 – 3% (Huot et al., 2005;Behrenfeld et al.,

2009). However, there was no correlation with μ (cell growth rate) or μ_{POC} (carbon growth rate, Fig. 7C), due to the effect of changing Carotenoids: Chl ratio as a result of nitrogen limitation. This suggests that in order to relate growth conditions and fluorescence signal strength, new optical proxies should be developed for the photon absorption and emission by individual pigments (Fawley, 1989).

Even though φ_{ph} can be estimated using appropriate fluorescence and absorbance algorithms, its value will not be a reliable indicator of actual nitrogen-controlled *Phaeocystis* growth rate. φ_{ph} is also a diagnostic for the duration of nitrogen depletion in *Phaeocystis*, which adds to the discussion on the physiological significance of Fv/Fm and C:Chl. For instance, under steady-state nitrogen-limited growth, the value of Fv/Fm in *T. pseudonana* is as high as the value in nutrient-replete cultures (Parkhill et al., 2001). As the present investigation was deemed to be exemplary of the phytoplankton dynamics during the wax and wane of a short-term bloom, i.e. a fast reduction from a high concentration of the limiting nutrient towards depletion, a real-world estimate of φ_{ph} might behave similar as φ_{ph} in the mesocosms.

On the other hand, in oceanic waters the supply of the limiting nutrient may be low but relatively more constant, such as by aeolian deposition of iron or by continuous heterotrophic remineralization of organic material in the water column. For iron-limited phytoplankton growth, φ_{ph} derived from satellite data was elevated (Behrenfeld et al., 2009), so in 82% of the oceanic regions with a low iron deposition rate, φ_{ph} appears to be a reliable remote sensing physiology proxy. This applicability of φ_{ph} corresponds with that of Fv/Fm as a good physiological proxy in iron-limitation studies (Timmermans et al., 2001;Timmermans et al., 2008). Maybe Fe-limitation has a more pronounced effect on φ_{ph} than limitation of the major nutrients (N, P).

The present *Phaeocystis* study is an example of how experiments can contribute to validate assumptions on optical data that are being made in the estimation of global carbon production. More experimental data is needed from phytoplankton species that differ in their pigment composition and in the effects of short- and long-term nutrient (N, P, Fe) limitation so that new optical proxies for phytoplankton physiology can be examined. Until these issues have been resolved we should be aware of the obscured view of phytoplankton physiology, hence marine primary production estimates using remote sensing.

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1 Table 1. List of used variables, measurements and computations.

Symbol	Description	Measurement or Computation	Units
a_{ph}	Phytoplankton (total pigment) absorption coefficient	Integrating cavity absorption meter, from 400 to 672 nm	m^{-1}
$a_{Chl\text{-}a\ (-c)}$	Chlorophyll-a or –c absorption coefficient	ARP (-4λ)(-Chl-a/c) 4-wavelength algorithm from reflectance spectrum (eq. 2)	m^{-1}
a_{Chl}	Total chlorophyll absorption coefficient	$a_{Chl\text{-}a} + a_{Chl\text{-}c}$	m^{-1}
$a^{*}_{Chl\text{-}a\ (-c)}$	Chlorophyll-a or c-specific absorption coefficient	a_{ph} / Chl-a (at 428 or 674 nm) or a_{ph} / Chl-c (at 466 nm) (Table 2)	m^{-2} (mg Chl)$^{-1}$
C : Chl (-a)	Carbon to Chlorophyll (-a) ratio	POC / Chl or POC / Chl-a	g g^{-1}
C:N	Carbon to Nitrogen ratio	POC / PON	mol mol^{-1}
Carotenoids	Sum of fucoxanthin, diatoxanthin, diadinoxanthin, β,ε- and β,β-carotene	HPLC	μg L^{-1}
C : cell	Carbon content per cell	POC / N_t	pg $cell^{-1}$
Carots : Chl	Carotenoids to chlorophyll ratio	Carots / Chl	Unitless
Chl-a	Chlorophyll-a	HPLC	μg L^{-1}
Chl-c	Chlorophyll-c	HPLC	μg L^{-1}
Chl	Sum of Chl-a and Chl-c	HPLC	μg L^{-1}
Chl-a(-c) : cell	Chl-a (-c) content per cell	Chl-a (-c) / N_t	pg $cell^{-1}$
DIN	Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen	Continuous flow chemistry	μmol L^{-1}

F	Chlorophyll-a fluorescence	Fluorescence Line Height algorithm (eq. 2).	sr^{-1}
F_0	Dark-adapted chlorophyll fluorescence	Pulse Amplitude Modulation fluorometer	Unitless
F_v/F_m	Photosystem II quantum efficiency	Pulse Amplitude Modulation fluorometer	Unitless
$N_{t\,(t+1)}$	Cell concentration on day t (t+1)	Flow cytometer	cells μL^{-1}
N : cell	Nitrogen content per cell	PON / N_t	pg cell-1
POC	Particulate Organic Carbon	Mass spectrometer	µg L-1
PON	Particulate Organic Nitrogen	Mass spectrometer	µg L^{-1}
R	Reflectance	Water-leaving radiance / Surface irradiance	sr^{-1}
SRP	Soluble Reactive Phosphate	Continuous flow chemistry	µmol L^{-1}
φ_{ph}	Quantum efficiency of fluorescence using phytoplankton absorption	$(F / a_{ph}) \times 100\%$	%
μ	Cell specific growth rate between day_t and day_{t+1}	$\ln (N_{t+1} / N_t) /$ $(day_{t+1} - day_t)$	day^{-1}
μ_{POC}	Carbon specific growth rate between day_t and day_{t+1}	$\ln (POC_{t+1} / POC_t) /$ $(day_{t+1} - day_t)$	day^{-1}

1

Table 2. *Phaeocystis* chlorophyll-specific absorption coefficients peaks in m^2 $(mg\ Chl)^{-1}$ during exponential and stationary growth. Listed are averages ± 95% confidence intervals.

Mesocosm number	N	Day	Growth phase	$a^*_{Chl\text{-}a}$ (438 nm)	$a^*_{Chl\text{-}c}$ (466 nm)	$a^*_{Chl\text{-}a}$ (674 nm)
1+2	6	2-4	Exponential	0.053±0.005	0.044±0.005	0.026±0.003
1	4	10-13	Stationary	0.081±0.012	0.059±0.003	0.033±0.004
2	4	10-13	Stationary	0.091±0.015	0.058±0.004	0.036±0.005

Table 3. Linear regression equations of *Phaeocystis* absorption on HPLC-measured chlorophyll-a and -c concentrations. Absorption was calculated with the ARP-4λ-Chla and ARP-4λ-Chlc algorithms (eq. 1). Regressions were made for the mesocosms separately, for exponential (day 0-4) and stationary (day 5-14) growth phases. Indicated are slope and intercepts ± 95% confidence interval.

		N	Slope (x 10^{-3})	Intercept (x 10^{-3})	R^2
Chl-a	Mesocosm 1	15	1.2 ± 0.1	-0.6 ± 2.8	0.94
Chl-a	Mesocosm 2	15	1.4 ± 0.2	-3.1 ± 3.5	0.91
Chl-a	Exponential	10	1.4 ± 0.1	-1.3 ± 1.8	0.98
Chl-a	Stationary	20	1.4 ± 0.3	-4.4 ± 5.0	0.82
Chl-a	Stationary*	19	1.4 ± 0.3	-4.6 ± 5.4	0.80
Chl-a	Combined	30	1.3 ± 0.1	-1.8 ± 2.0	0.92
Chl-c	Mesocosm 1	15	1.5 ± 0.2	2.0 ± 6.2	0.88
Chl-c	Mesocosm 2	15	1.7 ± 0.4	-1.0 ± 8.6	0.80
Chl-c	Exponential	10	1.8 ± 0.2	1.3 ± 2.9	0.98
Chl-c	Stationary	20	1.8 ± 0.6	-6.7 ± 14.7	0.59
Chl-c	Stationary*	19	1.6 ± 0.6	-4.0 ± 14.6	0.56
Chl-c	Combined	30	1.6 ± 0.2	0.6 ± 4.9	0.84

*day 9 of mesocosm 1 excluded (1 day after nutrient-spike)

Table 4. Linear regression equations of *Phaeocystis* fluorescence on HPLC- measured chlorophyll-a concentrations. Fluorescence was calculated with the FLH-H algorithm (eq. 2). Regressions were made for the mesocosms separately, for exponential (day 0-4) and stationary (day 5-14) growth phases. Indicated are slopes and intercepts ± 95% confidence intervals.

		N	Slope ($x10^{-2}$)	R^2
Chl-a	Mesocosm 1	15	2.6 ± 0.4	0.93
Chl-a	Mesocosm 2	15	3.4 ± 0.8	0.88
Chl-a	Exponential	10	3.1 ± 0.8	0.88
Chl-a	Stationary	20	1.4 ± 1.1	0.27
Chl-a	Combined	30	2.9 ± 0.5	0.81

Table 5. Biochemical characteristics of *Phaeocystis* in the mesocosm compared to published data from cultures, unless otherwise indicated. Chl is the sum of chlorophyll-a and –c; Fuco = fucoxanthin.

Variable	Unit	Mesocosm	Published/Field	reference
Carbon content	pg cell^{-1}	10-40	11	(Rousseau et al., 1990)
Chlorophyll-a	pg cell^{-1}	0.1-0.2	0.1-0.3[a]	(Buma et al., 1991)
			1.8[a]	
Chlorophyll-c	pg cell^{-1}	0.1-0.2	0.3[a]	(Buma et al., 1991)
			0.8[a]	(Astoreca et al., 2009)
C: Chl-a	g:g	60-500	16-400[b]	(Falkowski et al., 1985)
			65-111[c]	(Sathyendranath et al., 2009)
C: Chl	g:g	30-200	-	-
Chl-c: Chl-a	g:g	1.1-1.9	0.1-0.8[e]	(Buma et al., 1991)
			0.4	(Astoreca et al., 2009)
			0.4	(Seoane et al., 2009)
Fuco: Chl-a	g:g	1.2-2.2	0.2-0.3[d]	(Astoreca et al., 2009)
			0.3-0.8[e]	(Buma et al., 1991)
			0.3-1.0[d]	(Seoane et al., 2009)

[a]for larger non-flagellated *Phaeocystis* cells

[b]range of 3 species cultured at different irradiances

[c]C : Chl-a for prymnesiophytes in field samples determined by regression analysis

[d]high value at low irradiance

[e]in Marsdiep during *Phaeocystis* blooms (Wadden Sea tidal inlet)

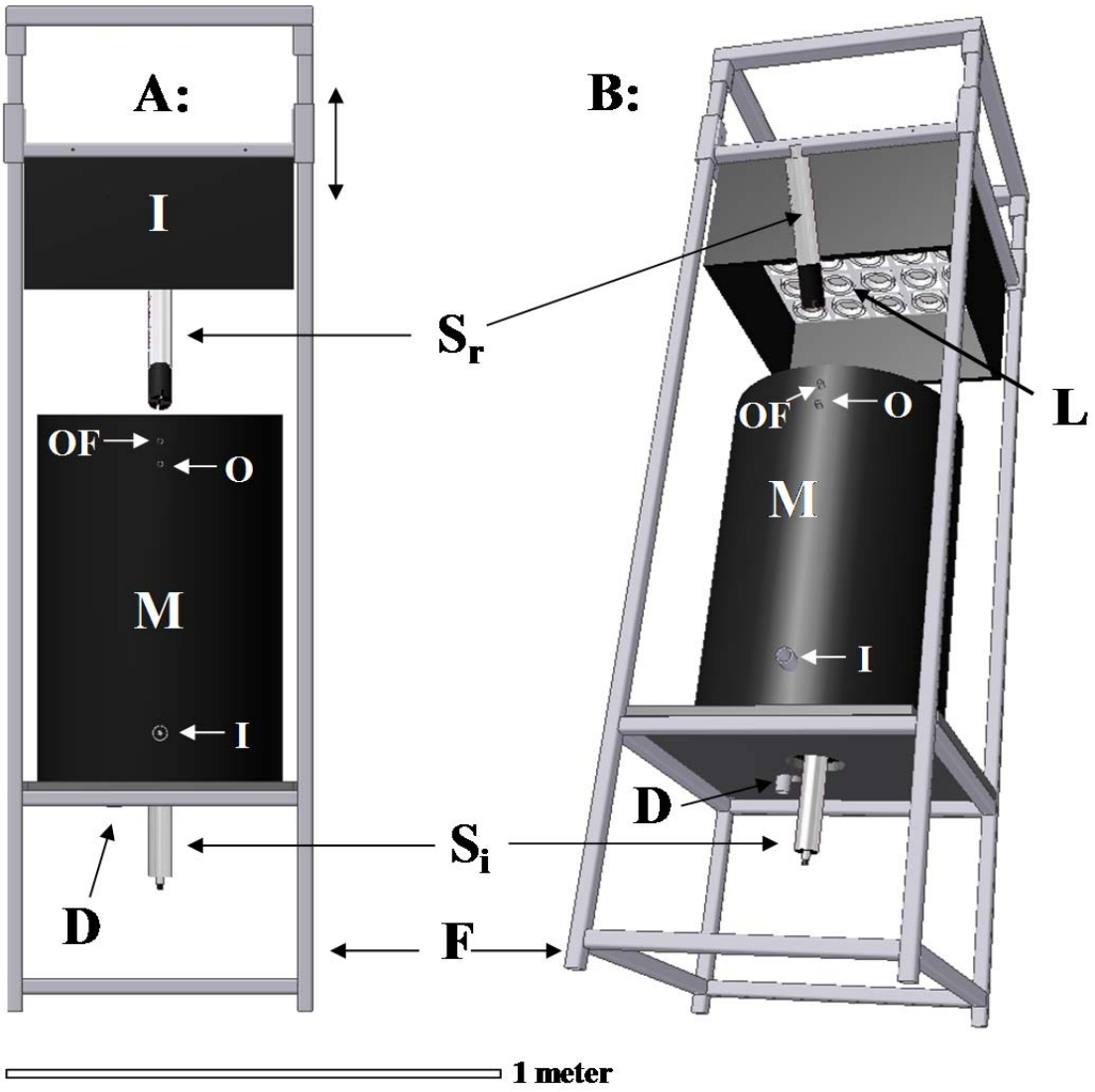


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the mesocosm system. A. side view, B. view from below. The mesocosm vessel (M, height 0.75 m, diameter 0.50 m) is placed inside a metal frame (F) that also holds the illumination-box (I). The illumination-box contains 25 SoluxTM lamps (L) and is height-adjustable. Two hyperspectral sensors were installed: one for bottom irradiance (Si) and one for water-leaving radiance (Sr). Water was pumped round through an outlet at -0.10 m (O) and an inlet (I) at +0.10 m from the bottom. An overflow (OF) at -0.05 m was used to keep the water level constant. The mesocosm is emptied with a drain (D) in the bottom. For clarity, the construction holding the radiance sensor (Sr), electrical wiring, tubing, valves and pump are not shown.

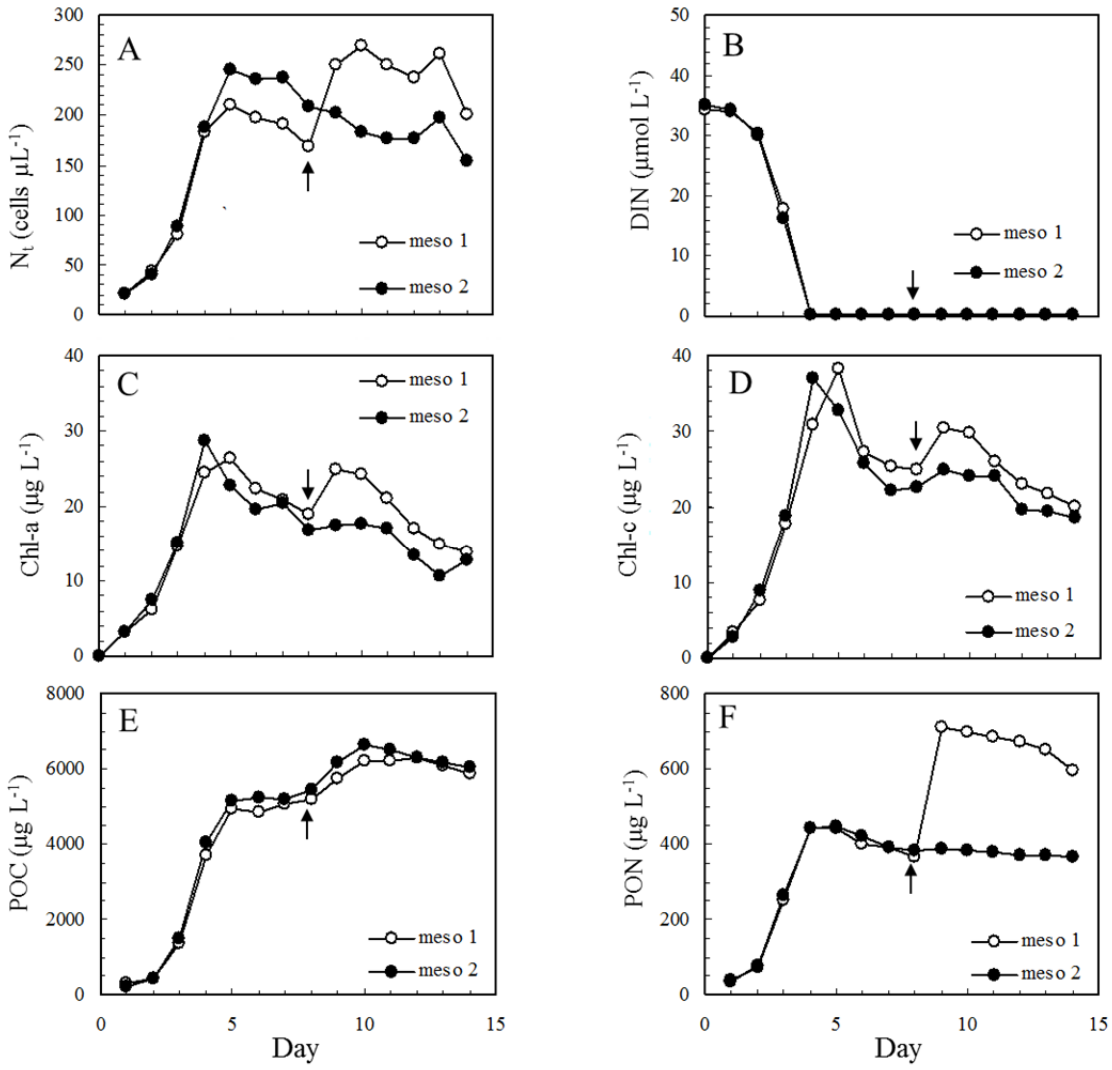


Figure 2. A-F. *Phaeocystis*, nutrient and carbon dynamics in two mesocosms (meso 1, meso 2) in time. A. Cell abundances (cells µL^{-1}), B. Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen (DIN, µmol L^{-1}), C. Chlorophyll-a (Chl-a, µg L^{-1}), D. Chlorophyll-c (Chl-c, µg L^{-1}), E. Particulate Organic Carbon (POC, µg L^{-1}), F. Particulate Organic Nitrogen (PON, µg L^{-1}). The arrow indicates the nutrient addition to mesocosm 1 after sampling on day 8.

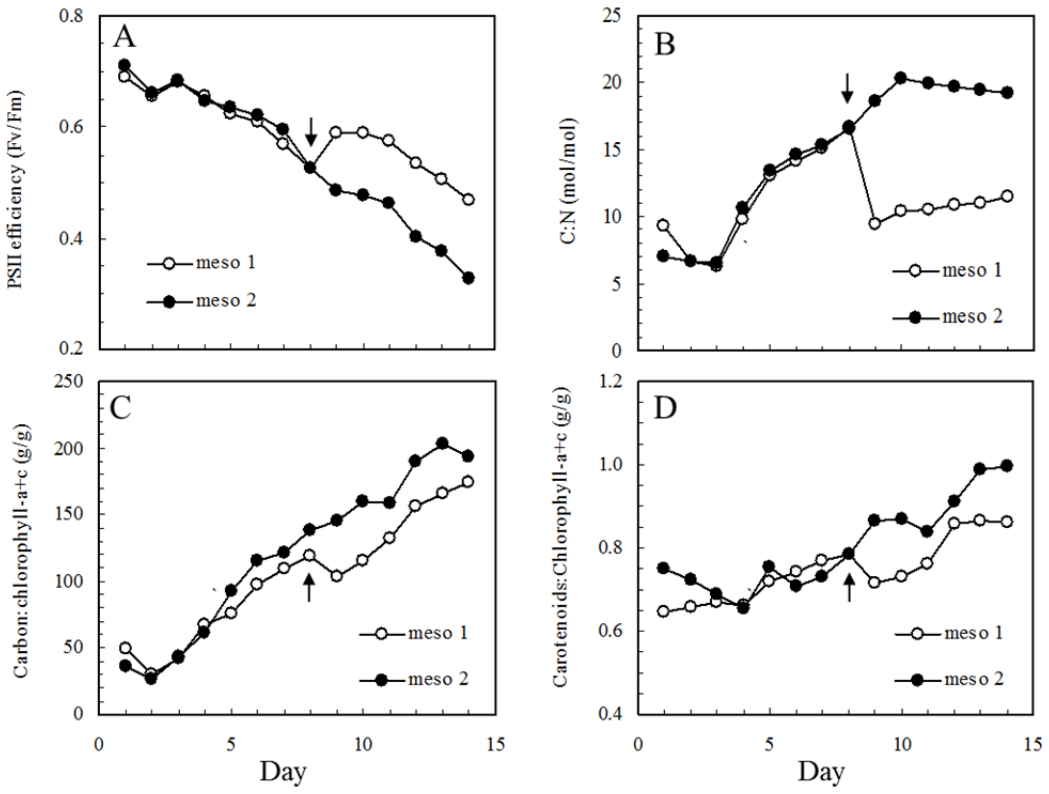


Figure 3 A-D. *Phaeocystis* physiology and pigment ratios in two mesocosms in time. A. Photosystem II efficiency (Fv/Fm), B. Carbon to Nitrogen ratio (C : N, mol mol^{-1}), C. Carbon to Chlorophyll a + c ratio (C : Chl-a+c, $g.g^{-1}$) , D. Carotenoids to Chlorophyll a + c ratio ($g.g^{-1}$). The arrow indicates the nutrient addition to mesocosm 1 after sampling on day 8.

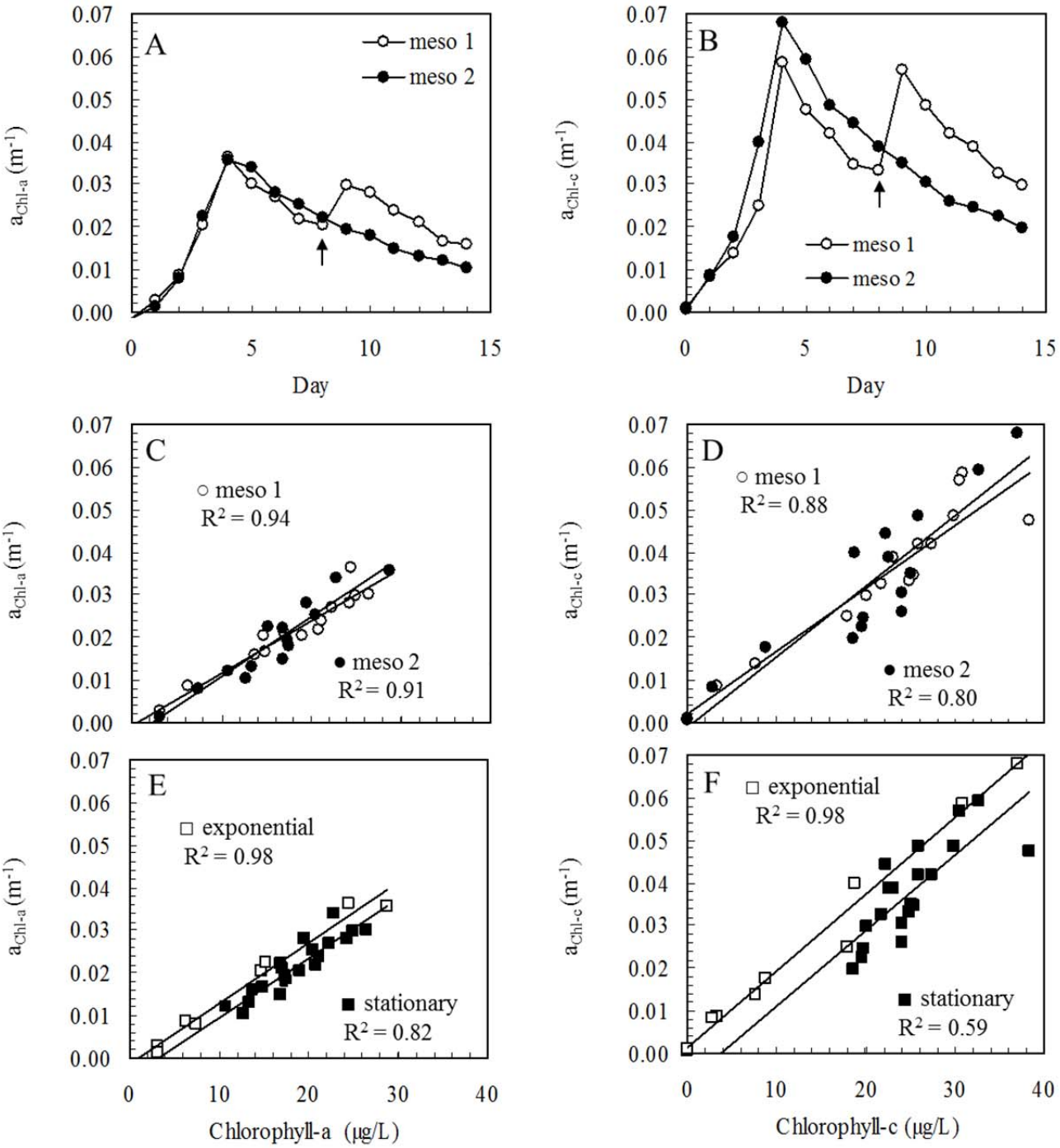
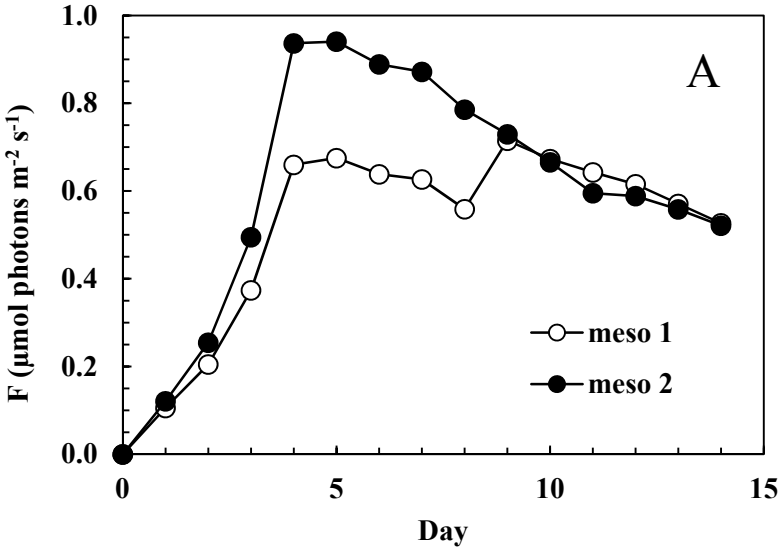
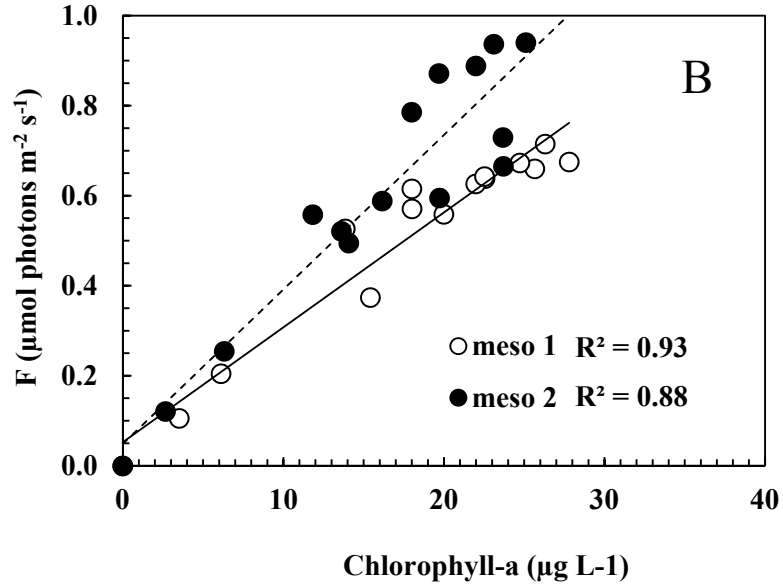


Figure 4 A-F. Absorption characteristics in *Phaeocystis*. A-B: Temporal development (days) of absorption by chlorophyll-a (A: a_{Chl-a}, m^{-1}) and -c (B: $_{aChl-c}$, m^{-1}) calculated from reflectance spectra in both mesocosms. C-F: linear regression of absorption on chlorophyll-a and –c (m^{-1}) against Chl-a and Chl-c concentrations (µg L^{-1}) was performed separately for both mesocosms (C, D) and for exponential and stationary growth phases (E, F).





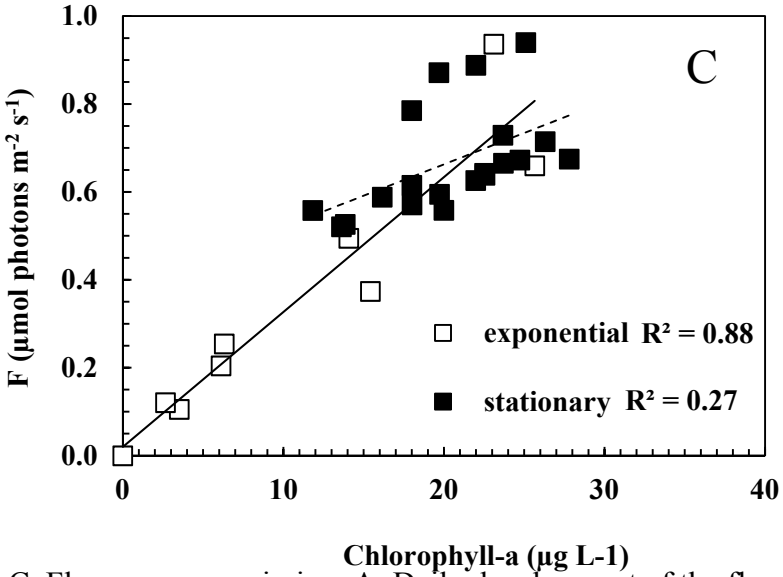


Figure 5 A-C. Fluorescence emission. A: Daily development of the fluorescence emission near 682 nm (F, µmol photons m^{-2} s^{-1}) calculated from reflectance spectra, B: linear

1 regression of fluorescence (F, μmol photons m^{-2} s^{-1}) on chlorophyll-a (μg L^{-1}) for both

2 mesocosms separately and C: for both exponential and stationary growth phases.

3

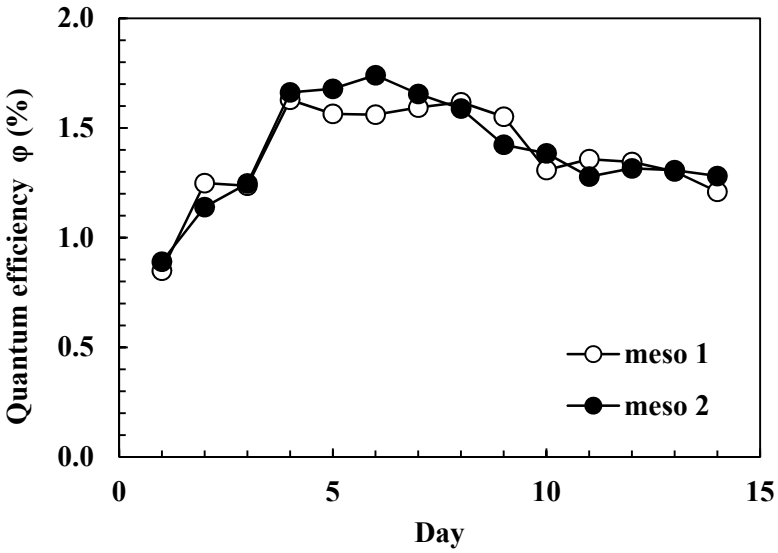


Figure 6. Development in time (days) of quantum efficiency φ_{ph} derived from total phytoplankton absorption and fluorescence in two mesocosms.

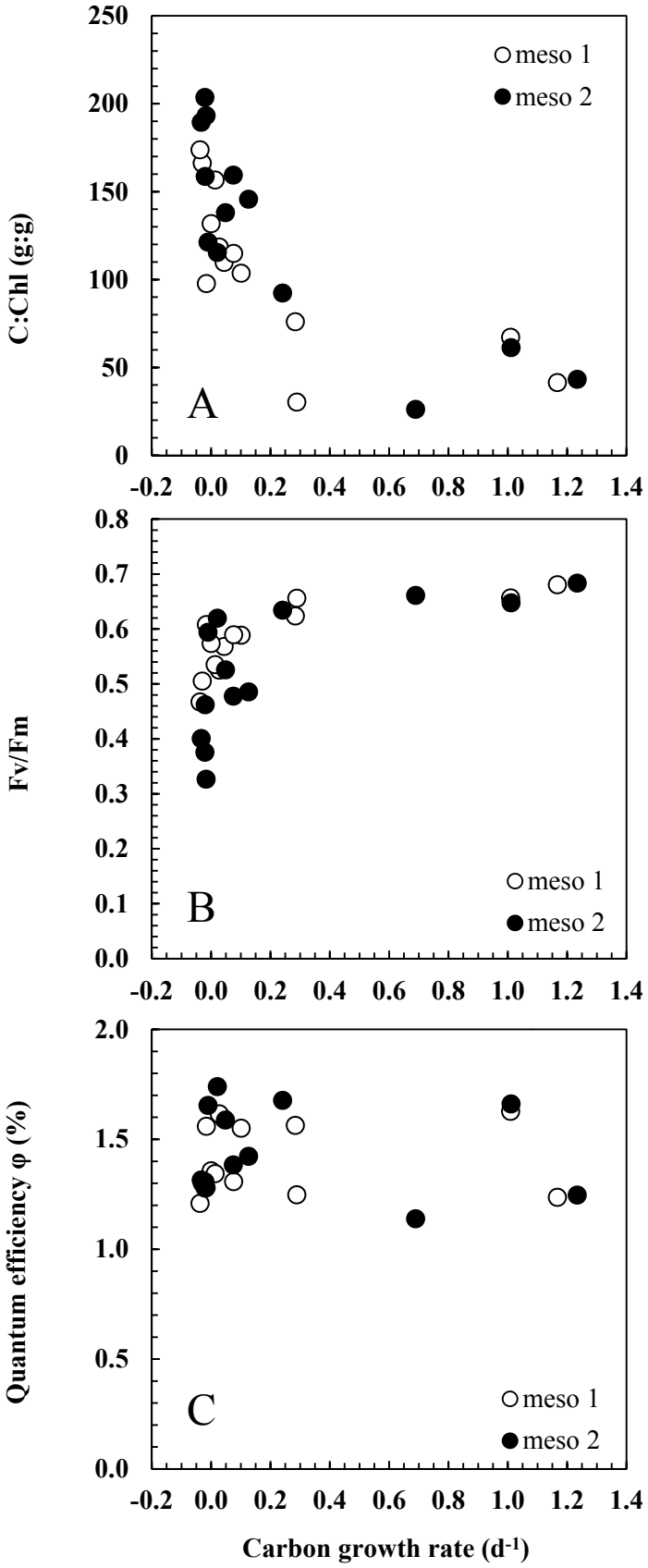

C:Chl (g:g)
250
200
150
100
50
0
meso 1
meso 2
A
-0.2 0.0 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 1.0 1.2 1.4
Fv/Fm
0.8
0.7
0.6
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0.0
meso 1
meso 2
B
-0.2 0.0 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 1.0 1.2 1.4
Quantum efficiency φ (%)
2.0
1.5
1.0
0.5
0.0
meso 1
meso 2
C
-0.2 0.0 0.2 0.4 0.6 0.8 1.0 1.2 1.4
Carbon growth rate (d-1)

Figure 7. Three proxies for growth rate as function of measured carbon growth rate (μ_{POC}, d^{-1}): A: Carbon to Chlorophyll a+c ratio (C : Chla+c, g g^{-1}), B: Photosystem II efficiency (Fv/Fm) and C: Quantum efficiency (φ_{ph}, %). Data combined from both mesocosms.