

Interactive comment on “Direct observations of diel biological CO₂ fixation in the oceans” by H. Thomas et al.

Anonymous Referee #1

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This paper focuses on the analysis of the diurnal variability of oceanic CO₂ partial pressure (pCO₂) measured by a CARIOCA sensor on the Scotian Shelf. It is based on a long time series of pCO₂ already published by Shadwick et al. 2011. Given the very few time series of pCO₂ sampling the diurnal cycle, only a few studies appeared recently about pCO₂ diurnal cycle. Hence the description of the pCO₂ diurnal cycle in this particular region is original. However, its interpretation is misleading and the paper does not focus on this particular region. The paper refers only to biological processes whereas it is expected that the diurnal variation of the stratification in the mixed layer plays also a role. The contributions of the biological activity plus diurnal stratification on pCO₂ diurnal variation as observed by surface CARIOCA sensors has been first described in Boutin and Merlivat (GRL 2009) and more recently (including O₂ measurements) in Lefèvre and Merlivat, GBC, 2012. None of these papers is

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referred in the manuscript. Because of the daily stratification and the nighttime mixing, the increase of DIC during nighttime cannot be simply interpreted as the result of the respiration process (p2159) : it is also due to surface depletion of DIC by biological activity during the day at the particular depth where the CARIOCA sensor is and to nighttime mixing of surface waters with deeper waters less depleted in DIC. This leads Boutin and Merlivat 2009 to propose to estimate NCP from the day-to-day decrease of DIC at the end of the night when the DIC in the mixed layer is homogenized. With respect to previous studies already cited, the SeaHorse vertical profiles, could probably help monitoring the development of diurnal T and S stratification. Conclusions about grazing and transitional metabolic rates are premature given the unknown effect of vertical mixing not taken into account in this study.

Detailed comments:

Title: 'in the oceans' is too vague; as already mentioned, other studies in the Southern Ocean and in the tropical Atlantic have already studied the diurnal cycle of pCO₂

Section 2: recall the depth of CARIOCA sensor and the depths sampled by the SeaHorse

Section 3: -p2158: It would be better to define pCO_{2,obs}, pCO_{2,temp}, pCO_{2,bio} using equations. They should appear in section 2. Fig 3: what is the meaning of 'they are independent'? -p2159: the way NCP and GPP are computed should be described in section 2 but again the way they are derived is too simplistic

Figures: the Figures are difficult to read (too small). Figure 2: why plotting the temporal evolution of the coherence as a function of SST? Wouldn't be better as a function of time?

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