

## ***Interactive comment on “The role of coccoliths in protecting *Emiliana huxleyi* against stressful light and UV radiation” by Juntian Xu et al.***

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Anonymous Referee #2 Received and published: 2 June 2016 Coccolithophores are an ecologically important group of marine phytoplankton that characteristically produce calcium carbonate plates (liths) internally and then secrete them to the cell surface. Exactly why coccolithophores produce liths has been the subject of considerable debate, with a range of possibilities raised. The manuscript by Xu et al has set out to test the hypothesis that the calcite from which the liths are constructed will absorb enough UV radiation to protect the cells from damage. The approach the authors have used is to compare the UV sensitivity (measured as growth, quantum yield of PSII and relative electron transport characteristics including non-photochemical quenching) in a calcified strain, a non-calcifying strain and the calcifying strain with the liths removed (which could be more clearly termed ‘decalcified’ in the text and figures/tables).

C1

Response: Corrected as “de-calcified”

The experimental approach is sound and the results are presented clearly and discussed thoroughly. I really only have some minor points the authors might like to consider. P 2 line 26: ‘for’ not ‘since’

Response: Corrected.

P 3 line 52: delete ‘by’

Response: deleted.

P 4 lines 72/72: shading effects could include scattering of light which is certainly a feature of coccolithophore blooms

Response: We added this in the text and cited two papers to support it at lines 71-74.

P 4 lines 73/74: a bit pedantic I know, but strictly speaking it is hard to see how liths could stimulate NPQ – presumably liths are affecting the light climate in some way that leads to up-regulation of NPQ

Response: We think it is possible that NPQ is indirectly affected, which coincides with calcification. This sentence was deleted in the text.

P 9 line 180 et seq.: I assume some of this loss of transmittance could be due to scattering by liths rather than absorbance? In Fig 1, the non calcifying strain has a lower transmittance in the UV than does the calcifying strain without liths - could this be because the non-calcifying strain employs another strategy (such as inducing UVscreening compounds) to ameliorate UVB?

Response: We used a double beam UV-VIS-NIR spectrophotometer (PerkinElmer, Lambda950, USA) to obtain the absolute absorbance of liths, so that all the scattered light was recaptured. It might be one of strategies against UV damage for non calcifying strain to synthesize UV screening compounds, and we added this in the discussion at lines 256-259.

C2

P 10 lines 201-203: A significant decrease in rETRmax would, if alpha is unaffected, be expected to show a decrease in Ik (given the relationship  $I_k = rETR_{max}/\alpha$ ) so the lack of an effect on Ik seems odd. In fact there does seem to be a difference but it is statistically non-significant.

Response: Considering the relationship  $I_k = rETR_{max}/\alpha$ , it would be true. In our results, there are differences in Ik between Calcified and De-calcified cells, which is only statistically different at  $P > 0.05$ . Since alpha is lower in De-calcified cells than that in calcified cells, which is not statistically different at  $P < 0.05$ ,  $I_k = rETR_{max}/\alpha$  could not statistically be different.

P 11 discussion lines 233- 234: While I don't disagree with the authors conclusions, you have to be a bit careful in making claims that the liths are causing the differences in growth rate between the naked and calcifying strain based on only one strain of each phenotype (certainly when grown indoors). Would all naked strains grow more slowly than all calcified strains? Remember also that calcification leads to internal generation of CO<sub>2</sub> - although it has been shown elegantly by Bach et al 2013 that there is no obligatory coupling between calcification and photosynthesis. The differential impact of UVB on growth is though compelling!

Response: We have revised the conclusion, now it reads "In conclusion, the coccoliths of calcified *E. huxleyi* play an important role in protecting this species against harmful solar radiation especially UV-A and UV-B. Since our data were only based on only one strain of each phenotype, cautions should be taken when drawing conclusion about the differential responses of calcifying and naked strains. In addition, since calcification leads to internal generation of CO<sub>2</sub>, such an increased availability of CO<sub>2</sub> might aid to enhance growth, though it has been shown that there is no obligatory coupling between calcification and photosynthesis (Bach et al., 2013). Nevertheless, the reported absence of photoinhibition in this alga at high light levels appears to be connected to the coccosphere of *E. huxleyi* or its calcification process. In view of the ecological implications, shoaling of the upper mixed layer (UML) caused by global warming

C3

and progressive ocean acidification that reduces thickness or the number of coccoliths (Gao et al., 2009; De Bodt et al., 2010) could threaten cells of *E. huxleyi* living within the UML due to increased daily exposures to solar radiation. "

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