Dear Dr. van der Meer,

Thank you for your kind feedback and additional explanations. After clarification, we have made an addition to the main text to include mention of the deep-sea sponge loop:

"Indeed, Maier et al. 2023 suggest that the biodiversity and productivity of CWC reefs in the deep sea are supported by a number of processes such as CWC's ability to consume a range of dietary components in addition to zooplankton (DOM, bacterioplankton, inorganic resources such and inorganic C and ammonium), efficient resource recycling, and their ability to align their feeding strategies and growth with fluctuations in food availability. For example, it has been suggested that sponges, some of which are known to have high $\delta^{15}N$ due to efficient internal recycling, generate dissolved and particulate organic nitrogen that is then transferred to other associated deep-sea organisms such as brittle stars (Hanz et al. 2022; Kahn et al. 2018). At the moment, however, we do not have any evidence that this deep-sea "sponge loop" directly influences the N isotope composition of CWCs."

Additionally, we have made technical edits to our references section.

We appreciate you handling this manuscript!

Best,
Anne Gothmann (on behalf of Mottram et al.)