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Steric Height from JPL Cal/Val and SWOT vs. Coastal High-Frequency Radar Comparison

Dual Investigations in the California Current System

Authors: Luke Kachelein, Jinbo Wang, Audrey Delpech, Matthew Archer, Lee-Leung Fu, Cal/Val Field Campaign Team*
Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology

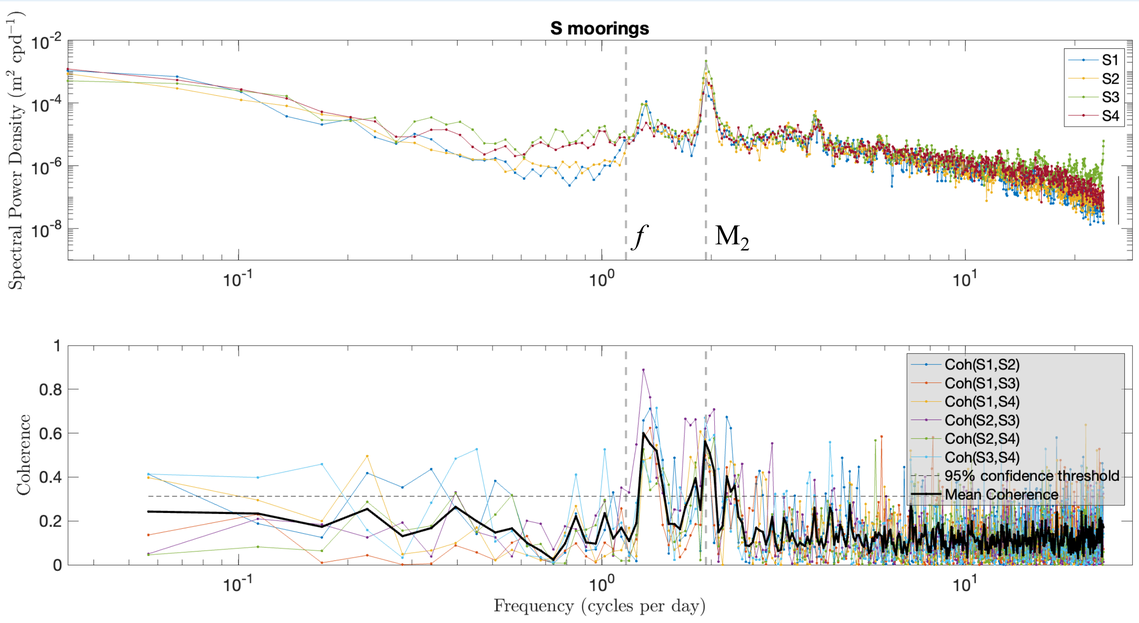
CAL/VAL STERIC HEIGHT

Background Satellite altimetry **sea surface height** (**SSH**) has a major contribution from steric height (i.e. from density fluctuations). SWOT oceanography Cal/Val campaign focused on crossover off the US West Coast, including 11 moorings. Profilers in the upper 500 meters capture ~hourly variability in T and S, thus ρ and hence steric height. See Audrey Delpech's poster for calculating steric height. Spectral and turbulence analysis from Cal/Val period.

Observations Steric height anomaly from SIO and PMEL moorings, profilers and fixed CTDs

Preliminary Results Strong tidal component and low-frequency variability, coherent at inertial and semidiurnal tidal frequencies, structure function (*McCaffrey et al. 2015*) suggests slope of wavenumber spectrum in range of -5/3 to -2, less steep than expected for SSH (e.g. *Xu and Fu, 2012*).

Impact SWOT-scale *in situ* study ascertains spectral properties of steric height, coherence at SWOT scales, and turbulence structure



Structure function

Spectral information from turbulence

$$D_{\theta,n}(d) = \overline{[\theta(x) - \theta(x+d)]^n}$$

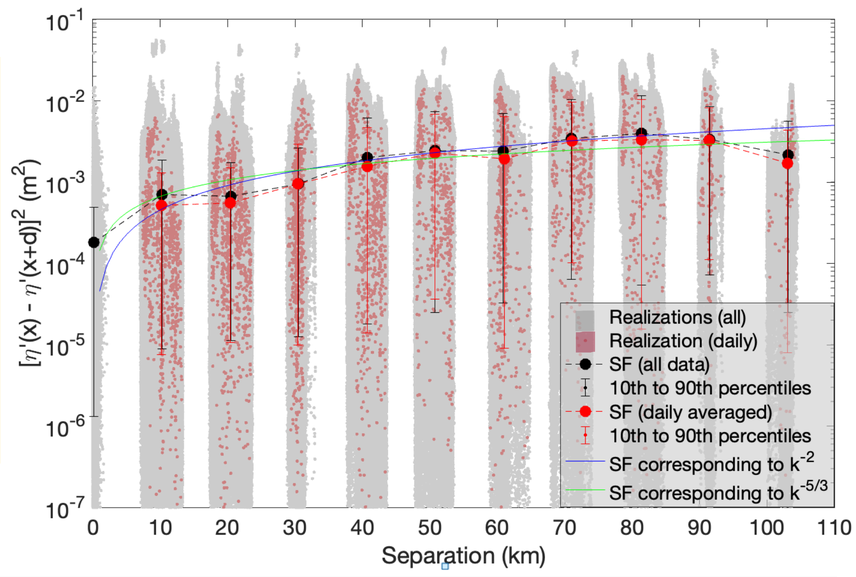
An order γ polynomial approx. of D is related to wavenumber spectrum via

$$S_\theta(k) \propto k^{-\gamma-1}$$

Nonlinear least squares fit to data:

$S_\theta(k) \sim k^{-5/3}$ *Fit to all data*

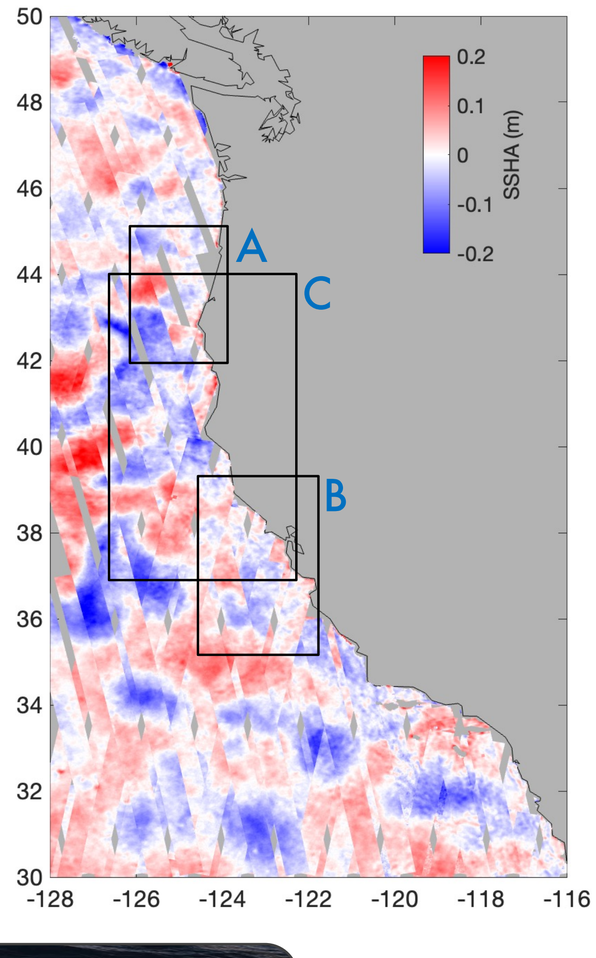
$S_\theta(k) \sim k^{-2}$ *Omitting last point (100 km)*



COASTAL SWOT SSH ANOMALY VS. HF RADAR CURRENTS

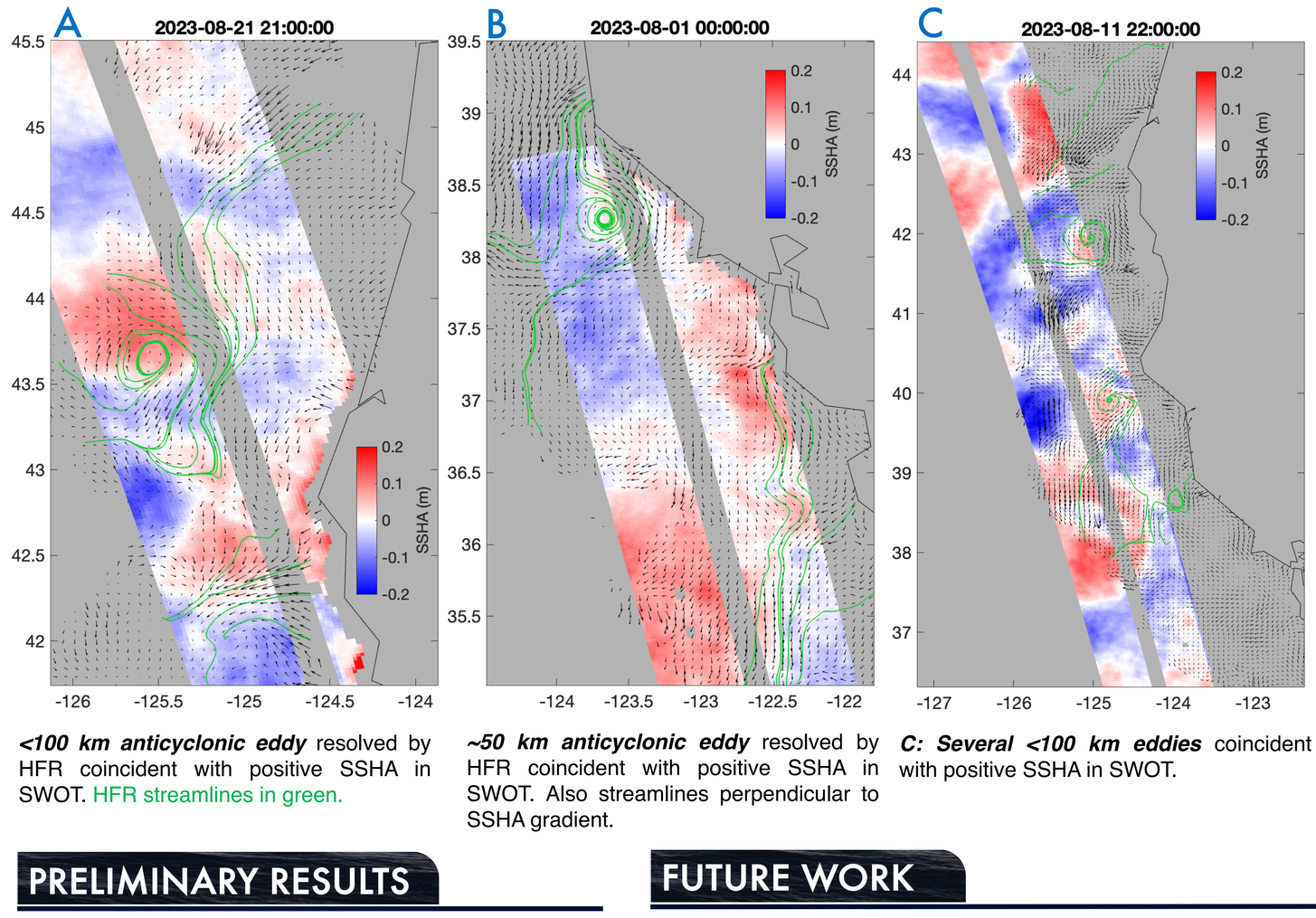
SWOT SSHA – SCIENCE ORBIT

- Third cycle in science orbit in progress
- US West Coast is passed over ~5 minutes
- USWC surface currents **u** well sampled by HF radar (*Terrill et al. 2006*)
- Total surface currents contain multitude of signals: is there discernable geostrophic and/or quasi-geostrophic flow?



Cumulative ground tracks from 27-Jul-2023 to 02-Sep-2023 off the US West Coast. Boxes A-C expanded at right at HFR times within 1 hour of SWOT flyover time.

HF RADAR CURRENTS OVERLAID



<100 km anticyclonic eddy resolved by HFR coincident with positive SSHA in SWOT. HFR streamlines in green.

~50 km anticyclonic eddy resolved by HFR coincident with positive SSHA in SWOT. Also streamlines perpendicular to SSHA gradient.

C: Several <100 km eddies coincident with positive SSHA in SWOT.

DATA

High-Frequency Radar
- Near-real time vector surface currents
- Bragg scattering, radar frequencies of 5-40 MHz
- Radial obs. gridded to 6 km (available at 1km and 2km, unused here)
- Matched to within 1 hour of SWOT flyover time

SWOT SSH Anomaly
- Variable `ssha_karin_2` displayed: `"ssh_karin_2 – mean_sea_surface_cnescls – solid_earth_tide – ocean_tide_fes – internal_tide_hret – pole_tide – dac."`
- Detrended via along-track moving mean, window ~2000 km

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

- Eddies less than ~100 km across are resolved by HFR coincidental with SSH anomalies.
- Flow consistent with geostrophy is observed perpendicular to $\nabla\eta$
- Unbalanced motion (e.g. diurnal currents and tides) likely strong in region and may explain additional structure in **u**.

FUTURE WORK

- What share of total surface currents can SWOT predict? Useful for regions inaccessible to land-based HFR.
- Investigate transition scales from quasi-geostrophy to fully unbalanced motion.
- Remove near-inertial and tidal flow using models.
- Implications for coastal studies: SWOT produces detailed SSH snapshots near coasts compared to past altimeters, while HFR is only possible along coastlines.

*Field campaign participants: Jinbo Wang, Lee-Lueng Fu, Bruce Haines, Matthias Lankhorst, Andrew J. Lucas , J. Thomas Farrar, Uwe Send, Christian Meinig, Oscar Schofield, Richard Ray, Matthew Archer, David Aragon, Sebastien Bigorre, Yi Chao, John Kerfoot, Robert Pinkel, David Sandwell, and Scott Stalin

National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Jet Propulsion Laboratory
California Institute of Technology
Pasadena, California

www.nasa.gov

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Xu, Y., and L. Fu, **2012**: The Effects of Altimeter Instrument Noise on the Estimation of the Wavenumber Spectrum of Sea Surface Height. J. Phys. Oceanogr., **42**, 2229–2233, https://doi.org/10.1175/JPO-D-12-0106.1.
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Terrill, E. et al., "Data Management and Real-time Distribution in the HF-Radar National Network," OCEANS **2006**, Boston, MA, USA, 2006, pp. 1-6, https://doi.org/10.1109/OCEANS.2006.306883.