Population-specific responses in physiological rates of *Emiliania huxleyi* to a broad CO$_2$ range

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Abstract

Although coccolithophore physiological responses to CO$_2$-induced changes in seawater carbonate chemistry have been widely studied in the past, there is limited knowledge on the variability of physiological responses between populations from different areas. In the present study, we investigated the specific responses of growth, particulate organic (POC) and inorganic carbon (PIC) production rates of 3 populations of the coccolithophore *Emiliania huxleyi* from three regions in the North Atlantic Ocean (Azores: 6 strains, Canary Islands: 5 strains, and Norwegian coast near Bergen: 6 strains) to a CO$_2$ partial pressure ($p$CO$_2$) range from 120 µatm to 2630 µatm. Physiological rates of each population and individual strain increased with rising $p$CO$_2$ levels, reached maximum and declined thereafter. Optimal $p$CO$_2$ for growth and POC production rates and tolerance to low pH (i.e. high proton concentration) was significantly higher in an *E. huxleyi* population isolated from the Norwegian coast than in those isolated near the Azores and Canary Islands. This may be due to the large environmental variability including large $p$CO$_2$ and pH fluctuations in coastal waters off Bergen compared to the rather stable oceanic conditions at the other two sites. Maximum growth and POC production rates of the Azores and Bergen populations were similar and significantly higher than that of the Canary Islands population. This pattern could be driven by temperature-CO$_2$-interactions where the chosen incubation temperature (16 °C) was slightly below what strains isolated near the Canary Islands normally experience. Our results indicate adaptation of *E. huxleyi* to their local environmental conditions and the existence of
distinct *E. huxleyi* populations. Within each population, different growth, POC and PIC production rates at different $pCO_2$ levels indicated strain-specific phenotypic plasticity. The existence of distinct responses to changes in carbonate chemistry between and within populations will likely benefit *E. huxleyi* to acclimate and adapt to rising CO$_2$ levels in the oceans.
1 Introduction

Coccolithophores form a layer of calcium carbonate (CaCO$_3$) platelets (coccoliths) around their cells. Coccoliths are of biogeochemical importance due to ballasting of organic matter with CaCO$_3$, a phenomenon which is thought to promote the transport of organic carbon to the deep ocean (Klaas and Archer, 2002; Rost and Riebesell, 2004). The coccolithophore *Emiliania huxleyi* forms extensive blooms under favourable light intensity, temperature and nutrient conditions, with different morphotypes in certain regions (Cook et al., 2011; Henderiks et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2012; Balch et al., 2014; Krumhardt et al., 2017).

Variable responses of growth, photosynthetic carbon fixation and calcification rates of different *E. huxleyi* strains to rising CO$_2$ levels have been reported (Langer et al., 2009; Hoppe et al., 2011; Müller et al., 2015; Hattich et al, 2017) and are likely a result of intra-specific variability of genotypes (Langer et al., 2009). Several recent studies observed optimum curve responses in physiological rates of a single *E. huxleyi* strain to a broad $p$CO$_2$ range from about 20 µatm to 5000 µatm, and linked them to inorganic carbon substrate limitation at low $p$CO$_2$ and inhibiting H$^+$ concentrations at high $p$CO$_2$ (Bach et al., 2011; 2015; Kottmeier et al., 2016). Until now, studies on the physiological responses of *E. huxleyi* to rising CO$_2$ are mostly based on a few genotypes and little is known about the potential variability in CO$_2$ and H$^+$ sensitivity between and within populations. Recently, several studies found substantial variations in CO$_2$ responses for N$_2$ fixation rates between *Trichodesmium* strains, as well as for
growth rates between strains of *Gephyrocapsa oceanica*, *Ostreococcus tauri* and *Fragilariopsis cylindrus* (Hutchins et al., 2013; Schaum et al., 2013; Pancic et al., 2015; Hattich et al., 2017). Hence, multiple strains, ideally from geographically distinct regions should be considered for investigating phytoplankton responses to climate change (Zhang et al., 2014; Blanco-Ameijeiras et al., 2016; Krumhardt et al., 2017).

Oceanographic boundaries formed by both ocean currents and environmental factors such as temperature, can limit dispersal of marine phytoplankton, reduce gene flow between geographic populations, and give rise to differentiated populations (Palumbi, 1994). Different populations were found to show different growth rates for *E. huxleyi*, *G. oceanica*, and *Skeletonema marinoi* at the same temperatures, and for *Ditylum brightwellii* at the same light intensities (Brand, 1982; Rynearson and Armbrust, 2004; Kremp et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2014). Phenotypic plasticity describes the ability of a strain to change its morphology or physiology in response to changing environmental conditions (Bradshaw, 1965). Plasticity can be assessed by analyzing the reaction norm of one trait and a plastic response may allow a strain to acclimate across an environmental gradient and widen its bio-geographical distribution (Reusch, 2014; Levis and Pfennig, 2016).

In order to better understand how local adaptation affects the physiological response of *E. huxleyi* to rising CO$_2$ conditions, we isolated 17 strains from three regions in the Atlantic Ocean, and assessed growth, carbon fixation and calcification responses of the population over a $p$CO$_2$ range from 120 $\mu$atm to 2630 $\mu$atm.
2 Materials and methods

2.1 Cell isolation sites and experimental setup

*Emiliania huxleyi* strains EHGKL B95, B63, B62, B51, B41 and B17 originated from Raunefjord (Norway 60°18’N, 05°15’E) and were isolated by K. T. Lohbeck in May, 2009 (Lohbeck et al., 2012) at ~ 10 °C in-situ water temperature. *E. huxleyi* strains EHGLE A23, A22, A21, A19, A13 and A10 originated from coastal waters near the Azores (38°34’N, 28°42’W) and were isolated by S. L. Eggers in May or June, 2010 at ~ 17 °C in-situ water temperature. *E. huxleyi* strains EHGKL C98, C91, C90, C41 and C35 originated from coastal waters near Gran Canaria (27°58’N, 15°36’W) and were isolated by K. T. Lohbeck in February, 2014 at ~ 18 °C in-situ water temperature.

Seasonal CO$_2$ concentration in the surface seawater ranges from 240 µatm to 400 µatm near Bergen, from 320 µatm to 400 µatm around the Azores and from 320 µatm to 400 µatm around the Canary Islands (Table 1). Monthly surface seawater temperature ranges from 6.0 to 16.0 °C near Bergen, 15.6 to 22.3 °C around the Azores and from 18.0 to 23.5 °C around the Canary Islands (Table S1). All 17 strains belong to morphotype A (determined by scanning electron microscopy) and have been deposited in the Roscoff culture collection (RCC) under the official names as shown above. Genetically different isolates, here called strains, were identified by 5 microsatellite markers (P02E09, P02B12, P02F11, EHMS37, EHMS15) (Table S2). For a description of primer testing, deoxyribonucleic acid
(DNA) extraction, DNA concentration measurements, and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) protocols see Zhang et al. (2014). The Azores and Bergen strains had been used earlier by Zhang et al. (2014).

The six or five (in case of Canary Islands) strains of each region were used to test the physiological response to varying CO$_2$ concentrations at constant total alkalinity (TA). The experiment was performed in six consecutive incubations, with one strain from each population (Azores, Bergen, Canary Islands) being cultured at a time (Fig. S1). Monoclonal populations were always grown in sterile-filtered (0.2 μm diameter, Sartobran® P 300, Sartorius) artificial seawater medium (ASW) as dilute batch cultures at 200 μmol photons m$^{-2}$ s$^{-1}$ light intensity under a 16/8 h light/dark cycle (light period: 5:00 a.m to 9:00 p.m.) at 16 °C which we consider to be a compromise for the three different origins of the strains. Nutrients were added in excess (with nitrate and phosphate concentrations of 64 μmol kg$^{-1}$ and 4 μmol kg$^{-1}$, respectively).

For the preparation of ASW and nutrient additions see Zhang et al. (2014). Calculated volumes of Na$_2$CO$_3$ and hydrochloric acid were added to the ASW to achieve target CO$_2$ levels at an average total alkalinity (TA) of 2319 ± 23 μmol kg$^{-1}$ (Pierrot et al., 2006; Bach et al., 2011). Each strain was grown under 11 CO$_2$ levels ranging from 115 μatm to 3070 μatm without replicate. Mean response variables of all strains with a population were calculated and mean CO$_2$ levels of all strains within a population ranged from 120 μatm to 2630 μatm. Cells grew in the experimental conditions for at least 7 generations, which corresponded to 4–7 days depending on cell division rates. Cells were cultured for 4 days in 120–925 μatm CO$_2$, for 5 days in 1080–1380 μatm
CO₂, and for 6 or 7 days in 1550–2630 μatm CO₂. Initial cell concentration was 200 cells ml⁻¹ (estimated from measured pre-culture concentrations and known dilution) and final cell concentration was lower than 100,000 cells ml⁻¹. Dissolved inorganic carbon (DIC) concentrations and \( p\text{CO}_2 \) levels changed less than 7% and 11%, respectively, during the experimental growth phase.

### 2.2 pH\(_T\) and total alkalinity measurements

At 10:00 a.m. on the last day of incubations (at day 4–7 depending on CO₂ concentration), pH\(_T\) and TA samples were filtered (0.2 μm diameter, Filtropur S 0.2, Sarstedt) by gentle pressure and stored at 4°C for a maximum of 14 days. The entire sampling lasted less than 2 h. The pH\(_T\) sample bottles were filled with considerable overflow and closed tightly with no space. pH\(_T\) was measured spectrophotometrically (Cary 100, Agilent) using the indicator dye \( m\)-cresol purple (Sigma-Aldrich) similar to Carter et al. (2013) with constants of acid dissociation for the protonated and unprotonated forms reported in Clayton and Byrne (1993). TA was measured by open-cell potentiometric titration (862 Compact Titrosampler, Metrohm) according to Dickson et al. (2003). The carbonate system was calculated from measured TA, pH\(_T\), (assuming 4 μmol kg⁻¹ of phosphate and 0 μmol kg⁻¹ of silicate) using the CO2 System Calculations in MS Excel software (Pierrot et al., 2006) with carbonic acid constants \( K_1 \) and \( K_2 \) as determined by Roy et al. (1993).

### 2.3 Growth rate measurements
At 1:00 p.m. on the last day of incubation, 25 ml samples were used to measure cell concentration. Cell concentration was determined within two hours using a Z2 Coulter Particle Counter (Beckman). Growth rate ($\mu$) was calculated according to:

$$\mu = \frac{\ln N_1 - \ln N_0}{d}$$

(1)

where $N_1$ is cell concentration on the last day of incubation, $N_0$ is 200 cells mL$^{-1}$, and $d$ is the time period for growth of algae in days.

2.4 Particulate organic (POC) and inorganic (PIC) carbon measurements

At 3:00 p.m. on the last day of incubation, cells for total particulate (TPC) and total organic (TOC) carbon were filtered onto GF/F filters which were pre-combusted at 500 °C for 8 h. Samples of background particulate carbon (BPC) were determined in a similar way but using filtered ASW without algae, which was previously adjusted to target $p$CO$_2$ levels, and allowed to age for about 7 days under incubation conditions (see above). All samples were placed at −20°C. BPC filters were used as blanks to correct for organic carbon in the medium. TOC and BPC filters were acid fumed. Afterwards, all filters were dried for 8 h at 60 °C. TPC, TOC and BPC were measured using an Elemental Analyzer (EuroEA, Hekatech GmbH). The percentages of BPC in TPC were about 20% at cell densities < 10,000 cells ml$^{-1}$ and about 10% at cell densities > 40,000 cells ml$^{-1}$. POC was calculated as the difference between TOC and BPC. PIC was calculated as the difference between TPC and TOC. POC and PIC production rates were calculated as:

$$\text{POC production rate} = \mu (d^{-1}) \times (\text{TOC} - \text{BPC}) \, (\text{pg C cell}^{-1})$$  

(2)
PIC production rate = \( \mu \left( d^{-1}\right) \times (\text{TPC} - \text{TOC}) \ (\text{pg C cell}^{-1}) \)  \( (3) \)

2.5 Data analysis

In a broad pCO\(_2\) range, physiological rates are expected to initially increase quickly until reaching an optimum and then decline towards further increasing CO\(_2\) levels (e.g. Krug et al. 2011). Hence we used the following modified Michaelis-Menten equation (Bach et al. 2011) which was fitted to measured cellular growth, POC and PIC production rates and yield theoretical optimum pCO\(_2\) and maximum values for each of the three populations (combining the data of five or six strains) (Bach et al., 2011).

\[
y = \frac{X \times pCO_2}{Y + pCO_2} - s \times pCO_2 \quad (4)
\]

where \( X \) and \( Y \) are fitted parameters, and \( s \), the sensitivity constant, depicts the slope of the decline after optimum CO\(_2\) levels in response to rising H\(^+\). Based on the fitted \( X \), \( Y \) and \( s \), we calculated pCO\(_2\) optima (\( K_m \)) (equation 5) and maximum growth, POC and PIC production rates following Bach et al., (2011).

\[
K_m = \sqrt{\frac{X \times Y}{s}} - Y \quad (5)
\]

The relative values for growth, POC and PIC production rates were calculated as ratios of growth, POC and PIC production rates at each pCO\(_2\) level to the maximum (highest) rates. We obtained the relative sensitivity constant by fitting function (4) based on relative growth, POC and PIC production rates.

A one-way ANOVA was then used to test for statistically significant differences in theoretical optimum pCO\(_2\), maximum value and relative sensitivity constant between populations. A Tukey HSD test was conducted to determine the differences between
strains from different populations. A Shapiro–Wilk’s analysis was tested to analyze residual normality. Statistical calculations were carried out using R and significance was shown by $p < 0.05$.

3 Results

3.1 Carbonate chemistry parameters

Carbonate system parameters are shown in Table 2. Average $pCO_2$ levels of the ASW ranged from 125 $\mu$atm to 2490 $\mu$atm for the Azores population, from 120 $\mu$atm to 2280 $\mu$atm for the Bergen population, and from 130 $\mu$atm to 2630 $\mu$atm for the Canary Islands population. Corresponding pH$_T$ values of the ASW ranged from 8.46 to 7.33 for the Azores population, from 8.47 to 7.37 for the Bergen population, and from 8.45 to 7.31 for the Canary Islands population.

3.2 Measured growth, POC and PIC production rates of each population

Growth rates, POC and PIC production rates of the three E. huxleyi populations increased with rising $pCO_2$, reached a maximum, and then declined with further $pCO_2$ increase (Fig. 1). Growth rates of the Azores and Bergen populations were larger than those of the Canary Islands population at all investigated $pCO_2$ levels (Fig. 1a). With rising $pCO_2$ levels beyond the $pCO_2$ optimum, decline in growth rates was more pronounced in the Azores and Canary Islands populations than in the Bergen population (Fig. 1b).
Measured POC production rates of the Azores and Bergen populations were larger than those of the Canary Islands population at all $p$CO$_2$ levels (Fig. 1c) and decline in POC production rates with increasing $p$CO$_2$ levels beyond the $p$CO$_2$ optimum was larger in the Azores and Canary Islands populations than in the Bergen population (Fig. 1d).

Measured PIC production rates at investigated $p$CO$_2$ levels did not show significant differences among the Azores, Bergen and Canary Islands populations (Fig. 1e). Exceptions were that at 365–695 μatm, PIC production rates of the Azores population were larger than those of the Canary Islands population (all $p < 0.05$).

### 3.3 Physiological responses of populations to $p$CO$_2$

Calculated optimum $p$CO$_2$ for growth, POC and PIC production rates of the Bergen population were significantly larger than those of the Azores and Canary Islands populations (all $p < 0.05$) (Fig. 2a–c). Optimum $p$CO$_2$ for these physiological rates between the Azores and Canary Islands population were not different (all $p > 0.1$).

Calculated maximum growth rates, POC and PIC production rates were not significantly different between the Azores and the Bergen populations (all $p > 0.1$) (Fig. 2d–f). Maximum growth rate and POC production rate of the Canary Islands population were significantly lower than those of the Azores and Bergen populations (both $p < 0.01$) (Fig. 2d,e). Maximum PIC production rates of the Canary Islands population were significantly lower than that of the Azores population ($p < 0.05$), while there was no difference to the Bergen population ($p > 0.1$) (Fig. 2f).
Fitted relative sensitivity constants for growth and POC production rates of the Bergen population were significantly lower than those of the Azores and Canary Islands populations ($p < 0.01$) (Fig. 2g, h). Fitted relative sensitivity constants for growth and POC production rates between the Azores and Canary Islands populations were not significantly different ($p > 0.1$). Fitted relative sensitivity constants for PIC production rates did not show difference among three populations ($p = 0.13$) (Fig. 2i).

### 3.4 Physiological responses of individual strains to $p\text{CO}_2$

Measured growth rates, POC and PIC production rates of 17 *E. huxleyi* strains showed optimum curve response patterns to the broad $p\text{CO}_2$ gradient (Fig. 3). Variations in calculated $p\text{CO}_2$ optima, maximum values and relative sensitivity constants of physiological rates were found between the strains (Table 3).

For all strains within each population, optimum $p\text{CO}_2$ of POC production rates were larger than optimum $p\text{CO}_2$ of growth rates or PIC production rates with the exception of optimum $p\text{CO}_2$ of POC and PIC production rates of *E. huxleyi* strain EHGLE A22 (Table 3). Compared to the Azores and Bergen populations, strains isolated near the Canary Islands showed larger variation in optimum $p\text{CO}_2$ of PIC production rates. Within the Azores population, variations in maximum values ($V_{\text{max}}$) and relative sensitivity constants ($rs$) of growth, POC and PIC production rates of all strains were larger than those within the Bergen and Canary Islands populations (Fig. 3).
4 Discussion

We investigated growth, POC and PIC production rates of 17 *E. huxleyi* strains from three populations to a broad $pCO_2$ range (120–2630 µatm). The three populations differed significantly in growth and POC production rates at the investigated $pCO_2$ levels. The reaction norms of the individual strains and populations equaled an optimum curve for all physiological rates (Figs. 1 and 3). However, we detected distinct $pCO_2$ optima for growth, POC and PIC production rates, and different $H^+$ sensitivities for growth and POC production rates among them (Fig. 2). These results indicate the existence of distinct populations in the cosmopolitan coccolithophore *E. huxleyi*.

In comparison to the Azores and Canary Islands populations, variability in growth rates between strains of the Bergen population was smaller even though they had higher growth rates at all $pCO_2$ levels (Fig. 3). Furthermore, the Bergen population showed significantly higher $pCO_2$ optima and lower $H^+$ sensitivity for growth and POC production rates (Fig. 2). These findings indicate that the Bergen population may be more tolerant to changing carbonate chemistry in terms of its growth and photosynthetic carbon fixation rates. The Bergen strains were isolated from coastal waters, while the Azores and Canary Islands strains were isolated from a more oceanic environment. Seawater carbonate chemistry of coastal waters is usually more dynamic than in the open ocean (Cai, 2011). In fact, previous studies have reported that $CO_2$ and pH variability of the seawater off Bergen was larger than off the Azores.
and Canary Islands (Table 1). In addition, due to riverine input, seawater upwelling and metabolic activity of plankton communities, environmental variability in coastal waters are larger than in open-ocean ecosystems (Duarte and Cerbrian, 1996). Doblin and van Sebille (2016) suggested that phytoplankton populations should be constantly under selection when experiencing changing environmental conditions. In this case, the Bergen population, exposed to larger CO$_2$ or pH fluctuations, may have acquired a higher capacity to acclimate to changing carbonate chemistry resulting in a higher tolerance (or lower sensitivity) to rising CO$_2$ levels. In contrast, the Azores and Canary Islands populations experience similar, less variable seawater carbonate chemistry conditions in their natural environment, which could explain why they also show similar $p$CO$_2$ optima and H$^+$ sensitivity for physiological rates (Fig. 2).

In an earlier study (Zhang et al., 2014), growth rates of the same Azores and Bergen strains as used here were measured at 8–28 °C. While at 26–28 °C the Bergen strains grew slower than the Azores strains, at 8 °C the Azores strains grew slower than the Bergen strains. This illustrates nicely that local temperature adaptation can significantly affect growth of *E. huxleyi* strains in laboratory experiments. Considering these findings and the temperature ranges of the three isolation locations (Table S1), the incubation temperature of 16 °C used in the present study was lower than the minimum sea surface temperature (SST) commonly recorded at the Canary Islands. In contrast, SSTs of 16 °C and lower have been reported for Azores and Bergen waters (Table S1). When exposed to 16 °C, growth rate of the Canary Islands population might have been already below their optimum and hence significantly
reduced in comparison to the other populations (Fig. 2d).

Furthermore, compared to the Canary Islands population, the Azores population had higher maximum growth and POC production rates, and similar optimum CO₂ for these physiological rates. Again, this might be related to sub-optimal incubation conditions as temperature has been found to significantly modulate CO₂ responses in coccolithophores in terms of maximum rates, CO₂ optima and half-saturation, and H⁺ sensitivity (De Bodt et al., 2010; Sett et al., 2014; Gafar et al., 2018; Gafar and Schulz, 2018). In a similar fashion light can also modulate CO₂ responses, hence different requirements by strains adapted to different light availabilities could also explain our observations (Zhang et al., 2015; Gafar et al., 2018; Gafar and Schulz, 2018). Thus, with rising CO₂, growth, photosynthetic carbon fixation and calcification rates of the Canary Islands population cannot increase as much as in the Azores and Bergen populations. In addition, the Canary Islands population showed smallest variability in optimum pCO₂ and maximum values for growth and POC production rates (Fig. 2). The reason may be that low incubation temperature predominantly limited growth and POC production rates of the Canary Islands population, and decreased the sensitivities of these physiological rates to rising pCO₂.

Before we started this experiment, strains isolated from the Azores, Bergen and Canary Islands grew as stock cultures at 15 °C and 400 µatm for 4 years, 5 years and 3 months, respectively. Schaum et al. (2015) provide evidence that long-term laboratory incubation affects responses of phytoplankton to different pCO₂ levels. Thus, it is conceivable that the same selection history in the laboratory incubation
may contribute to a more similar response of growth, POC and PIC production rates between the Azores and Bergen populations at low pCO$_2$ levels (Fig. 1).

Our results indicate that *E. huxleyi* populations are adapted to the specific environmental conditions of their origin, resulting in different responses to increasing $p$CO$_2$ levels. The ability to adapt to diverse environmental conditions is supposed to be one reason for the global distribution of *E. huxleyi* (Paasche, 2002), spanning a temperature range of about 30 °C. The optimum temperature for growth of the Bergen population was about 22 °C and was 5 °C higher than the maximum SST in Bergen waters (Zhang et al. 2014). Furthermore, in comparison to the Azores and Canary Islands populations, larger optimum $p$CO$_2$ of growth rate indicates that the Bergen population may benefit more from the rising CO$_2$ levels at increasing temperatures.

PIC : POC ratios of the Azores and Bergen populations declined with rising $p$CO$_2$, whereas PIC : POC ratios of the Canary Islands population were rather constant (Fig. S6). As changes in PIC : POC ratios of coccolithophore blooms may impact on the biological carbon pump, different regions might see different changes in the future ocean. In natural seawater, due to ocean currents and gene flow, populations at any given location may get replaced by immigrant genotypes transported there from other locations (Doblin and van Sebille, 2016). In addition, *E. huxleyi* is thought to utilize HCO$_3^-$ for calcification which generates protons, and increase in proton concentration may mitigate the potential of the ocean to absorb atmospheric CO$_2$ (Paasche, 2002).

Within a population, individual strains showed different growth, POC and PIC production rates at different $p$CO$_2$ levels, indicating phenotypic plasticity of
individual strains (Reusch, 2014). Phenotypic plasticity constitutes an advantage for individual strains to acclimate and adapt to elevated $p$CO$_2$ by changing fitness-relevant traits and potentially to attenuate the short-term effects of changing environments on fitness-relevant traits (Schaum et al., 2013).

The strain-specific CO$_2$-response curves revealed considerable physiological diversity in co-occurring strains (Fig. 3). Physiological variability makes a population more resilient, increases its ability to persist in variable environments and potentially forms the basis for selection (Gsell et al., 2012; Hattich et al., 2017). It is clear that other environmental factors such as light intensity, temperature and nutrient concentration affect the responses of physiological rates of individual *E. huxleyi* strains to changing carbonate chemistry, and thus change the physiological variability within populations (Zhang et al., 2015; Feng et al., 2017). However, different sensitivities and requirements of each strain to the variable environments can allow strains to co-exist within a population in the natural environment (Hutchinson, 1961; Reed et al., 2010; Krueger-Hadfield et al., 2014). In a changing ocean, strain succession is likely to occur and shift the population composition (Blanco-Ameijeiras et al., 2016; Hattich et al., 2017). Strains with higher growth rates or other competitive abilities may outcompete others (Schaum et al., 2013). Further, a significant positive correlation between growth and POC production rate or POC quota (Fig. S5) indicates that the dominating strains will also take up or fix dissolved inorganic carbon faster. When extrapolated to the ocean, *E. huxleyi* blooms may increase the potential of the oceans to absorb CO$_2$ from the atmosphere and its carbon
storage capacity (Blanco-Ameijeiras et al., 2016), which has the potential to mitigate rising CO$_2$ levels in the atmosphere.

5 Conclusions

In the present study, we found population-specific responses in physiological rates of *E. huxleyi* to a broad $p$CO$_2$ range, which may have arisen from local adaptation to environmental conditions at their origins. The existence of distinct *E. huxleyi* populations and phenotypic plasticity of individual strains may both be important for *E. huxleyi* when adapting to natural environmental variability and to ongoing climate changes. Our results suggest that when assessing phytoplankton responses to changing environments on a global scale, variability in population and strain responses need to be considered, and CO$_2$ response was modulated by other environmental factors such as temperature and light intensity.
Author contributions. YZ, LTB, UR designed the experiment. YZ, LL, RK performed the experiment. YZ prepare the manuscript and all authors analysed the data, reviewed and improved the manuscript.

Competing interests. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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References


Zhang, Y., Bach, L. T., Schulz, K. G., and Riebesell, U.: The modulating effect of
Figure Legends

**Figure 1.** Optimum curve responses of measured and relative growth, particulate organic (POC) and inorganic carbon (PIC) production rates of three *Emiliania huxleyi* populations to a $pCO_2$ range from 120 µatm to 2630 µatm. Responses of measured (a) and relative (b) growth rates to $pCO_2$. Responses of measured (c) and relative (d) POC production rates to $pCO_2$. Responses of measured (e) and relative (f) PIC production rates to $pCO_2$. Using the nonlinear regression model derived by Bach et al. (2011), the curves were fitted based on average growth, POC and PIC production rates of six strains from the Azores and Bergen, and of five strains from the Canary Islands. Vertical error bars represent standard deviations of six growth, POC and PIC production rates for the Azores and Bergen populations, and five growth, POC and PIC production rates for the Canary Islands population. Horizontal error bars represent standard deviations of six $pCO_2$ levels for the Azores and Bergen populations and five $pCO_2$ levels for the Canary Islands populations. At the population levels, 120 µatm and 2630 µatm was the lowest and highest $pCO_2$ level, respectively.

**Figure 2.** Calculated optimum $pCO_2$, calculated maximum value and fitted relative sensitivity constant of growth, POC and PIC production rates of each population. (a) optimum $pCO_2$ of growth rate; (b) optimum $pCO_2$ of POC production rates; (c) optimum $pCO_2$ of PIC production rates; (d) maximum growth rate, (e) maximum POC production rate, (f) maximum PIC production rate; (g) relative sensitivity
constant of growth rate; (h) relative sensitivity constant of POC production rate; (i) relative sensitivity constant of PIC production rate. The line in the middle of each box indicates the mean of 6 or 5 optimum $p$CO$_2$, 6 or 5 maximum values, and 6 or 5 relative sensitivity constants for growth, POC and PIC production rates in each population. Bars indicate the 99% confidence interval. The maximum or minimum data is shown as the small line on the top or bottom of the bar, respectively. Letters in each panel represent statistically significant differences (Tukey HSD, $p < 0.05$).

**Figure 3.** Optimum curve responses of growth, POC and PIC production rates of individual *E. huxleyi* strains in the Azores (left), Bergen (medium) and Canary Islands (right) populations to a CO$_2$ range from 115 μatm to 3070 μatm. Growth rates of each strain as a function of $p$CO$_2$ within the Azores (a), Bergen (b) and Canary Islands (c) populations. POC production rates of each strain as a function of $p$CO$_2$ within the Azores (d), Bergen (e) and Canary Islands (f) populations. PIC production rates of each strain as a function of $p$CO$_2$ within the Azores (g), Bergen (h) and Canary Islands (i) populations. At the strain levels, 115 μatm and 3070 μatm was the lowest and highest $p$CO$_2$ level, respectively.
Table 1. Surface seawater CO\textsubscript{2} levels and pH at the Azores, Bergen and Canary Islands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Mean seasonal CO\textsubscript{2} (µatm)</th>
<th>Mean seasonal pH (total scale)</th>
<th>CO\textsubscript{2} variability (µatm)</th>
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Data and TA samples were collected and measured before and at the end of incubation (for the incubations) of the artificial seawater for each *Emiliania huxleyi* population. pH and TA samples were collected and measured before and at the end of incubation.

Data are expressed as mean values of six strains in the Azores and Bergen population, and five strains in the Canary Islands population.

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<th>pCO$_2$ (μatm)</th>
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<th>DIC (μmol kg$^{-1}$)</th>
<th>HCO$_3^-$ (μmol kg$^{-1}$)</th>
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Table 3. Calculated optimum $p$CO$_2$, calculated maximum value ($V_{\text{max}}$) and fitted relative sensitivity constant ($rs$, ‰) of growth, POC and PIC production rates of each *E. huxleyi* strain.

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<th>PIC production rate</th>
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Figure 1
calculated optimum $p_{\text{CO}_2}$

calculated maximum value

fitted relative sensitivity

Figure 2
Figure 3