

Impact of vertical mixing parameterizations on internal gravity wave spectra in regional ocean models

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Key Points:

- Regional ocean simulations are ideal for examining sensitivity of IGW spectra to model mixing parameters
- Turning off the KPP background yields more realistic IGW vertical structure in high-resolution regional models
- IGW spectra are most correctly estimated in models away from tidal generation sites and lateral boundaries

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Abstract

We present improvements in the modeling of the vertical wavenumber spectrum of the internal gravity wave continuum in high-resolution regional ocean simulations. We focus on model sensitivities to mixing parameters and comparisons to McLane moored profiler observations in a Pacific region near the Hawaiian Ridge, which features strong semidiurnal tidal beams. In these simulations, the modeled continuum exhibits high sensitivity to the background mixing components of the K-Profile Parameterization (KPP) vertical mixing scheme. Without the KPP background mixing, stronger vertical gradients in velocity are sustained in the simulations and the modeled kinetic energy and shear spectral slopes are significantly closer to the observations. The improved representation of internal wave dynamics in these simulations makes them suitable for improving ocean mixing estimates and for the interpretation of satellite missions such as the Surface Water and Ocean Topography (SWOT) mission.

Keywords: internal gravity waves, vertical wavenumber spectra, MITgcm, KPP mixing parameterization

Plain Language Summary

Internal waves exist in the ocean interior due to differences in fluid densities. Breaking internal waves cause mixing, which has important effects on ocean temperatures and nutrients. Interactions between internal tides generated by tidal flow over bathymetric features and near-inertial waves generated by wind yield a spectrum of internal waves at many frequencies. Here, we compare the internal wave spectrum in high-resolution numerical simulations of a region in the North Pacific with observations from moored instruments. We study the effects of the “background” mixing components of the widely used K-Profile Parameterization (KPP) vertical mixing scheme on the vertical structure of the internal wave field. The KPP background parameterizes the mixing action of internal waves, which is not resolved in coarser-resolution global ocean models. In our high-resolution simulations, the internal wave field is highly active, and the KPP background components turn out to be mostly redundant in this setting. The modeled internal wave field lies closer to observations when we turn off the KPP background. Improved internal wave representation in ocean models can play an important role in the accurate representation of internal-wave-driven

47 mixing in ocean simulations and interpretation of internal wave signatures from the Surface
48 Water and Ocean Topography mission.

49 **1 Introduction**

50 This paper focuses on the vertical structure of the internal gravity wave (IGW; also
51 simply “internal wave”, or IW) spectrum in regional ocean models. At tidal frequencies,
52 IWs are called internal tides (ITs) and are primarily generated by large-scale barotropic
53 tides moving over topography (e.g., Baines, 1982; Bell, 1975). High-frequency changes in
54 wind forcing generate near-inertial (NI) IWs at the ocean surface, having frequencies close to
55 the Coriolis frequency (reviewed in Alford et al. (2016)). The high-frequency IW continuum
56 is thought to arise from nonlinear interactions of ITs, NI motions, and the IW continuum,
57 and also due to local exchanges between ITs and low-frequency motions (e.g., van Haren,
58 2016; Barkan et al., 2017). The variable distribution of IWs and IW-generated turbulence
59 (Kunze, 2017b) inspire continued interest due to its importance in vertical temperature
60 redistribution (e.g., as in the Arctic; D’Asaro & Morison, 1992) and the global overturning
61 circulation (Munk & Wunsch, 1998; Wunsch & Ferrari, 2004; Kunze, 2017a), their role in
62 the enhancement of primary productivity by redistribution of nutrients (X. Pan et al., 2012),
63 and important feedback to climate (MacKinnon et al., 2017; Whalen et al., 2020).

64 Global high-resolution ocean general circulation models with simultaneous tidal and
65 atmospheric forcing carry a partially-resolved IW continuum (Müller et al., 2015; Rocha,
66 Chereskin, et al., 2016; Arbic et al., 2018). These global models fall short of representing the
67 real ocean due to a lack of resolution and/or insufficient parameterization of unresolved sub-
68 grid scale physical processes such as IW breaking. Regional ocean models have been shown
69 to display improved IW spectra over those in the global models when run at higher horizontal
70 and vertical resolutions, as long as the lateral boundary forcing includes remotely-generated
71 IWs from a global IW model (Mazloff et al., 2020; Nelson et al., 2020). Such remotely-forced
72 regional models run over short periods are relatively affordable computationally and can be
73 used to study the sensitivity of the IW continuum due to changes in model parameters.

74 Here, we study high-resolution regional simulations of the Massachusetts Institute of
75 Technology general circulation model (MITgcm; Marshall et al., 1997) forced at their lateral
76 boundaries by a global MITgcm simulation, named LLC4320, that has been widely studied
77 (e.g., Rocha, Chereskin, et al., 2016; Rocha, Gille, et al., 2016; Savage et al., 2017; Su et

78 al., 2018). Regional simulations forced by LLC4320 have recently been used to study the
79 sensitivity of the IW continuum to model resolution (Nelson et al., 2020) and to under-
80 stand the mechanisms involved in the formation of the continuum (Y. Pan et al., 2020). In
81 this paper, we study the sensitivity of the IW vertical wavenumber spectra to the cumula-
82 tive effect of the background vertical viscosity and diffusivity components of the K-Profile
83 Parameterization (KPP; Large et al., 1994).

84 In our regional simulations, we focus on a region in the Pacific Ocean northward of
85 Hawaii (Fig 1). This region has heightened semi-diurnal (M_2) ITs that propagate northward
86 from the islands (Fig 1 (b)) and undergo parametric subharmonic instability (PSI) at the
87 critical latitude of 28.8° N, where the local inertial frequency is half of the M_2 tidal frequency.
88 In contrast with the shear field at other latitudes in this region, marginally-stable shear layers
89 with elevated NI energy generated via PSI of the IT are observed at 28.8° N (Alford et al.,
90 2007). The northward-propagating ITs also interact with southbound IT beams from the
91 Aleutian Ridge (not in the simulation domain), generating a complex IT field (e.g., Zhao
92 et al. (2010); Alford et al. (2019)). We present improvements in the modeled IW vertical
93 structure in these regional simulations by comparing them to observational data obtained
94 using McLane moored profilers (Doherty et al., 1999; Morrison et al., 2001) (Fig 1 (b)). We
95 find that the vertical wavenumber spectra of KE and shear show appreciable improvement
96 when the KPP background mixing is turned off. We also discuss the characteristics of shear
97 spectra across different frequency bands in simulations with the KPP background turned off.
98 The model captures the vertical structure of the NI band, which is an important component
99 of the total shear, whereas the primary deficiency of the model relative to observations lies in
100 the high-frequency (supertidal) IW continuum. We further study the sensitivity of modeled
101 strain spectra to the KPP background components and quantify spectral improvements with
102 model vertical resolution.

103 **2 Data and methods**

104 **2.1 MITgcm model**

105 Using the MITgcm, we simulate a $6^\circ \times 8^\circ$ region north of the French Frigate Shoals,
106 Hawaii, in the Pacific Ocean as shown in Fig 1. We study a suite of regional ocean simula-
107 tions with 109, 153, and 264 vertical levels and a constant horizontal grid spacing of $1/48^\circ$
108 (~ 2 km in the simulation domain). The vertical level thicknesses of our regional simulations

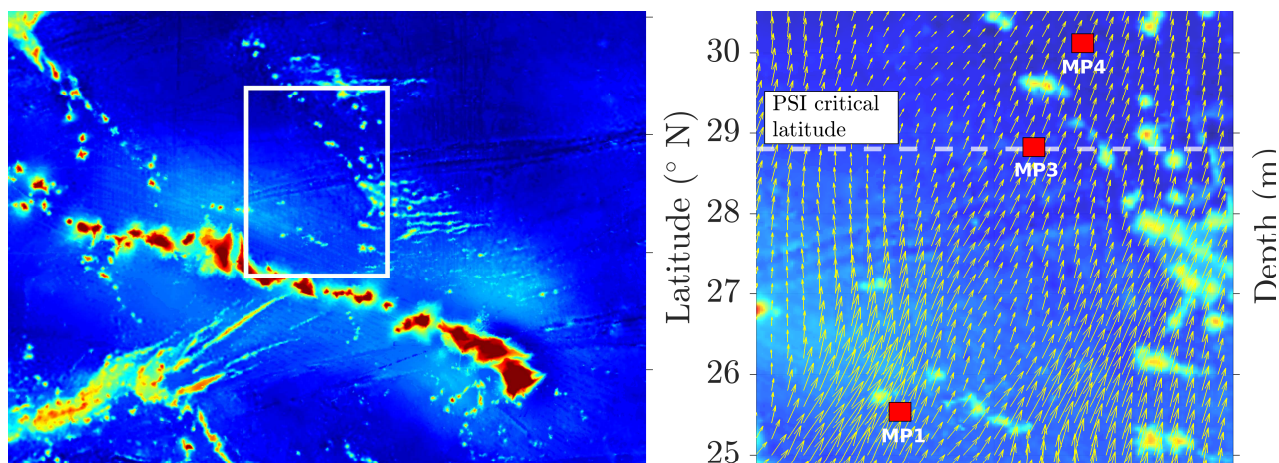


Figure 1. (a) The domain of study north of Hawaii is marked by the white rectangle. (b) An expanded view of the simulation domain. The locations of the McLane moored profilers (MP1, MP3, and MP4) are marked as red solid blocks. Yellow arrows show the energy flux of the mode-1 M_2 internal tide from satellite altimetry (Zhao et al., 2016; Zhao, 2022). The white dashed line at 28.8° N is the critical latitude for parametric subharmonic instability (PSI; e.g., MacKinnon et al., 2013). The model bathymetry from Smith and Sandwell (1997) is shown in color in each subplot.

109 are identical to those of the LLC4320 simulation up to a certain depth but saturate at
 110 thicknesses of $\Delta z=100\text{m}$ below 2250m, $\Delta z=50\text{m}$ below 1110m, and $\Delta z=25\text{m}$ below 300m
 111 for the 109, 153, and 264-level simulations, respectively (see Fig S1). These regional simu-
 112 lations begin on 1 March 2012 and run for 73 days with initial fields taken from the global
 113 LLC4320 simulation, which employs the same grid spacing in the horizontal and 90 z-levels
 114 in the vertical direction (Rocha, Chereskin, et al., 2016; Savage et al., 2017). At the lateral
 115 boundaries, the regional simulations are forced by fields from the global LLC4320 simu-
 116 lation, which also includes remotely-generated IWs. All the simulations are forced with
 117 realistic atmospheric fields and astronomical tidal potential. Velocities, temperature, and
 118 salinity are stored at hourly intervals. (More in the SI.)

119 2.2 Observations

120 McLane moored profilers (MP) are deployed on oceanographic moorings and vertically
 121 profile the water column at $10\text{--}33\text{ cm s}^{-1}$ (Doherty et al., 1999). MPs record velocities,
 122 temperature, conductivity, pressure, and other oceanic variables in hourly intervals. We use
 123 data from three MPs, deployed in the Pacific during the Internal Waves Across the Pacific

124 experiment (Alford et al., 2007) along track 249 of TOPEX-Poseidon. The MP locations are
125 marked as MP1 (194.8° E, 25.5° N), MP3 (196.5° E, 28.8° N), and MP4 (197.1° E, 30.1°
126 N) in Fig 1 (b). The MP data are available in the depth range of 85–1384m with a vertical
127 resolution of ~ 2 m, from 25 April–05 June 2006 at MP1 and MP3, and from 25 April–17
128 May 2006 at MP4.

129 2.3 Spectra calculations

130 Prior to vertical wavenumber spectra calculations with both model output and MP data,
131 the horizontal velocities and the depths are WKBJ-scaled using local buoyancy frequency
132 following Leaman and Sanford (1975) and interpolated to equally-spaced vertical coordinates
133 (see Fig S2 and text in the SI). All vertical wavenumber spectra presented in this paper
134 are averages of individual spectra over the model runtime and MP deployment periods,
135 giving ~ 1700 degrees of freedom (dof) for models and 530–950 dof for MPs assuming the
136 spectra to be mutually independent. Velocities at the top and bottom of the depth range of
137 spectra calculation are smoothly tapered to zero values using a Hanning window, and the
138 lost variance due to this tapering is added back to the total variance. There is no segmenting
139 of data in the vertical direction in our computations of spectra. (More in the SI.)

140 3 Model parameterizations

141 The interior vertical mixing parameterization scheme in the simulations is KPP (Large
142 et al., 1994), and the horizontal mixing is governed by the Leith parameterization for 2D
143 turbulence (Leith, 1968). The Leith scheme is modified with an added damping term for the
144 divergent flow field (Fox-Kemper & Menemenlis, 2008). The effect of this modified Leith
145 scheme on the modeled IW fields in high-resolution regional models is not considered here
146 but will be discussed in future studies.

147 There are three controlling parameters which cumulatively act within the KPP scheme
148 for the ocean interior mixing away from the upper mixed layer: (a) Richardson number-
149 dependent shear-driven mixing, (b) a constant (in both space and time) background mixing
150 to compensate for the breaking of unresolved IWs, set to $5.66 \times 10^{-4} \text{ m}^2\text{s}^{-1}$ as viscosity
151 in the momentum equations and $5.44 \times 10^{-7} \text{ m}^2\text{s}^{-1}$ for temperature and salt diffusivity in
152 LLC4320, and (c) double-diffusive mixing which is not implemented in any of the simulations
153 here. The KPP background has constant damping coefficients for energy dissipation that

154 act at all spatial locations, time steps, and vertical scales of the simulations. Also, if the fluid
155 column becomes convectively unstable, it undergoes immediate mixing in the simulations.

156 With an increase in vertical resolution, models better capture the small-scale density
157 and velocity fluctuations associated with an improved IW field. This raises the question of
158 whether the KPP background, which parameterizes IW-driven mixing in coarser-resolution
159 models that have reduced IW activity, would still be needed with an increase in model
160 resolution. In the following sections, we quantify the effect of KPP background on the
161 modeled spectra primarily using results from the highest-resolution (264-level) simulations
162 (with results from lower-resolution simulations summarized in the SI).

163 4 Spectral estimates and discussion

164 In the high-wavenumber regime, Cairns and Williams (1976)'s revision of the Garrett
165 and Munk (1972, 1975) spectrum—GM76—predicts a universal form of the kinetic energy
166 (KE) spectrum $E(m) \sim m^{-2}$, where m are the (stretched) vertical wavenumbers defined here
167 as the inverse of the stretched depths (also see the SI). The GM76 shear and strain spectra
168 derived from $E(m)$ have spectral slopes of m^0 at high-wavenumbers. However, extensive
169 high-resolution observations have demonstrated that these spectral slopes are variable in
170 different regions of the world's ocean (as reviewed in Polzin and Lvov (2011)). Pollmann
171 (2020) provides a global estimate of these spectral slopes and shows that the slopes deviate
172 significantly from that suggested by the empirical GM76 model. Therefore, in the following
173 discussions, we will consider the observed spectra as the “truth” in our comparison of the
174 modeled and observed spectra and include GM76 spectral slopes as reference.

175 4.1 Kinetic energy spectra

176 In our regional domain (Fig 1 (b)), vertical wavenumber spectra of KE from the ob-
177 servations differ from the GM76 slope of m^{-2} (Fig 2). At wavenumbers higher than 0.02
178 cpm (not shown), observed KE spectral slopes from the MPs are nearer to -2.4 . Combined
179 with the frequency spectral slopes at these sites, this value is closer to the induced-diffusion-
180 dominated solutions predicted by wave turbulence theory (e.g., Lvov et al., 2010; Y. Pan et
181 al., 2020) than to the GM76 slope.

182 We find that the modeled velocities and the KE spectra are sensitive to the KPP back-
183 ground (Fig 2). A comparison of zonal velocities from the 264-level simulations (Fig 2 (a,b))

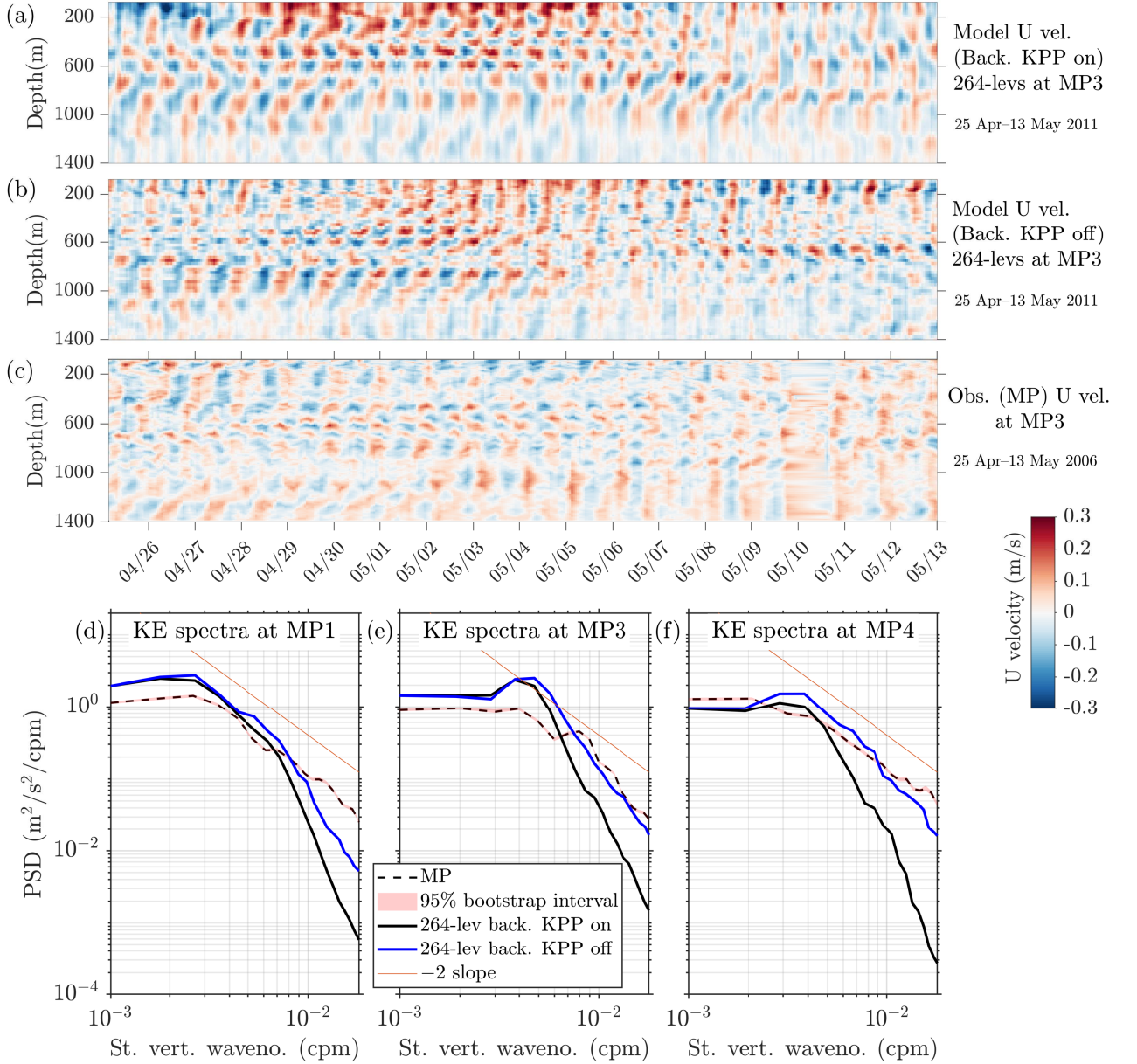


Figure 2. Time-depth plots of zonal (U) velocity from 264-level simulations at the MP3 location and over the depth range of 80–1400 m, with the KPP background (a) on and (b) off, are compared to observed zonal velocity in (c). The model output and the observations are from the same days of the year but different years. In (d–f), KE spectra in the same depth range for 264-level simulations (solid curves) at locations marked in Fig 1 (b) are compared to observed KE spectra (dashed curves) in the depth range of 85–1384m. The solid black curves are the modeled KE spectra with the KPP background on, while the blue curves are the modeled KE spectra with the KPP background components set to zero. 95% bootstrap confidence intervals on the means of the observed KE spectra are drawn in each as light red shading (for simulations, the 95% confidence intervals are smaller than the thickness of the curves). The GM76 spectral slope of -2 is drawn in each for reference. KE spectra are also shown in Figs S3, S4, and S5 in the SI.

184 with that from the observations (Fig 2 (c)) shows that the velocity field has more small-scale
185 features when the KPP background diffusivity and viscosity are both set to zero (Fig 2 (b)).
186 Although a perfect agreement between the velocity field from the simulations and the ob-
187 servations is not expected, energetic events, including those due to tidally-induced periodic
188 flows, have sharper vertical gradients in the simulation without the KPP background (Fig 2
189 (b)) qualitatively similar to that seen in the observations (Fig 2 (c)), whereas these gradients
190 are more diffused in the simulation where the KPP background is kept on and has the same
191 values as that of the KPP background in global LLC4320 simulation (Fig 2 (a)).

192 The effect of turning the KPP background off on the IW field is seen in the comparison
193 of the spectral slopes of the modeled KE spectra to that of the observed KE spectra (Fig 2
194 (d-f)). At low wavenumbers (<0.003 cpm), both observed and modeled KE spectra with and
195 without KPP background roll off to a limiting slope value near zero. The observed and the
196 modeled spectra disagree within a factor of two at wavenumbers <0.003 cpm at all three MP
197 locations. This disagreement may be due to the differences in the overall oceanic mesoscale
198 variability, tidal or near-inertial fields given that the observations and the model simulations
199 are not contemporaneous. The modeled KE spectra with and without the KPP background
200 diverges at wavenumbers higher than 0.004 cpm in both the cases, suggesting a vertical scale
201 where the KPP background starts to become active in the simulations. This vertical scale
202 has a small variability depending on the geographical location within the domain and the
203 vertical resolution of the model (Fig S3) and is also different in different frequency bands
204 (Fig S4). However, the general conclusion is that the high-wavenumber spectral slopes of
205 the modeled KE spectra with the KPP background turned off lie significantly closer to the
206 observed KE spectra from the MPs (Figs 2 (d-f) and S3).

207 The greatest improvement in the modeled KE spectra without the KPP background is
208 seen at the MP4 location which is farthest from the generation site of the M_2 tidal beam. The
209 variance at the highest wavenumber is ~ 40 times higher at MP4 with the KPP background
210 turned off (Fig 2 (f)). The magnitude of increase in spectral variance at MP1 and MP3 at
211 the highest wavenumber without the KPP background are comparable to each other but
212 less than that at MP4. At MP3, which is ~ 500 km from the M_2 IT generation site, the
213 improved modeled IW continuum spectral levels are an order of magnitude higher when the
214 KPP background is turned off (Fig 2 (e)), and the levels display a good agreement with the
215 observed KE spectrum. However, the improved modeled spectrum at MP1 is still relatively
216 deficient in the IW continuum. As all the locations have similar vertical stratification, this

217 difference in the spectral improvement and the disagreement between the modeled and the
 218 observed spectra could most likely be due to the degree of proximity to the IT generation
 219 site. With MP1 being nearer to the IT generation site (Fig 1 (b)), the nonlinear interactions
 220 giving rise to the IW continuum have insufficient time to develop, when compared to MP3
 221 or MP4, giving rise to a weaker overall KE spectrum.

222 Spectral improvement with the KPP background turned off is also observed in the 109-
 223 and 153-level simulations (Fig S3) signifying that in both high (264-level) and moderate
 224 vertical resolution simulations (109- and 153-levels), the KPP background may have to
 225 be turned off to achieve a realistic IW continuum in regional models. We also note that
 226 turning off the KPP background improves the modeled IW continuum at all frequencies
 227 as the high-wavenumber spectral variances are higher in both the highpass (high-frequency
 228 or supertidal) and lowpass frequency bands around a cutoff of 11.5 hr as well as in the
 229 semidiurnal and near-inertial frequency bands (shown for 264-level in Fig S4). The lowpass
 230 band includes semidiurnal and diurnal tides, and near-inertial and subtidal flows, while the
 231 highpass band includes the supertidal IW continuum. We further observe that the high-
 232 wavenumber KE variance in the deeper ocean (1500–4000m) progressively increases with an
 233 increase in the model vertical resolution (Fig S5).

234 4.2 Shear and strain spectra

235 The vertical shear spectrum is defined as $\Phi(m) = (2\pi m)^2 E(m)$ (Gregg et al., 1993).
 236 In what follows, we first describe the shear characteristics of the regional domain using MP
 237 observations and then compare it to the shear spectra from the 264-level simulation with
 238 the KPP background turned off to understand the strengths and deficiencies of the modeled
 239 shear in different frequency bands.

240 The observed shear from MPs is dominated by slowly-varying (lowpass) flows with
 241 periods greater than 11.5 hr at all vertical scales (Fig 3 (a, c, e)). As expected, the NI
 242 band contributes significantly to the total shear. Alford et al. (2017) find that the shear
 243 layers at the PSI latitude (MP3) persist for $\mathcal{O}(25)$ days. In contrast, the shear layers persist
 244 for $\mathcal{O}(7)$ days at other MP locations. This is reflected in the NI shear spectrum at MP3
 245 which has the highest variance among the three locations (Fig 3 (c) compared to (a, e)).
 246 The NI shear spectra have positive slopes up to 0.003 cpm at MP1 and ~ 0.01 cpm at MP3
 247 and MP4, above which they lose variances by an order of magnitude at MP1 and MP3.

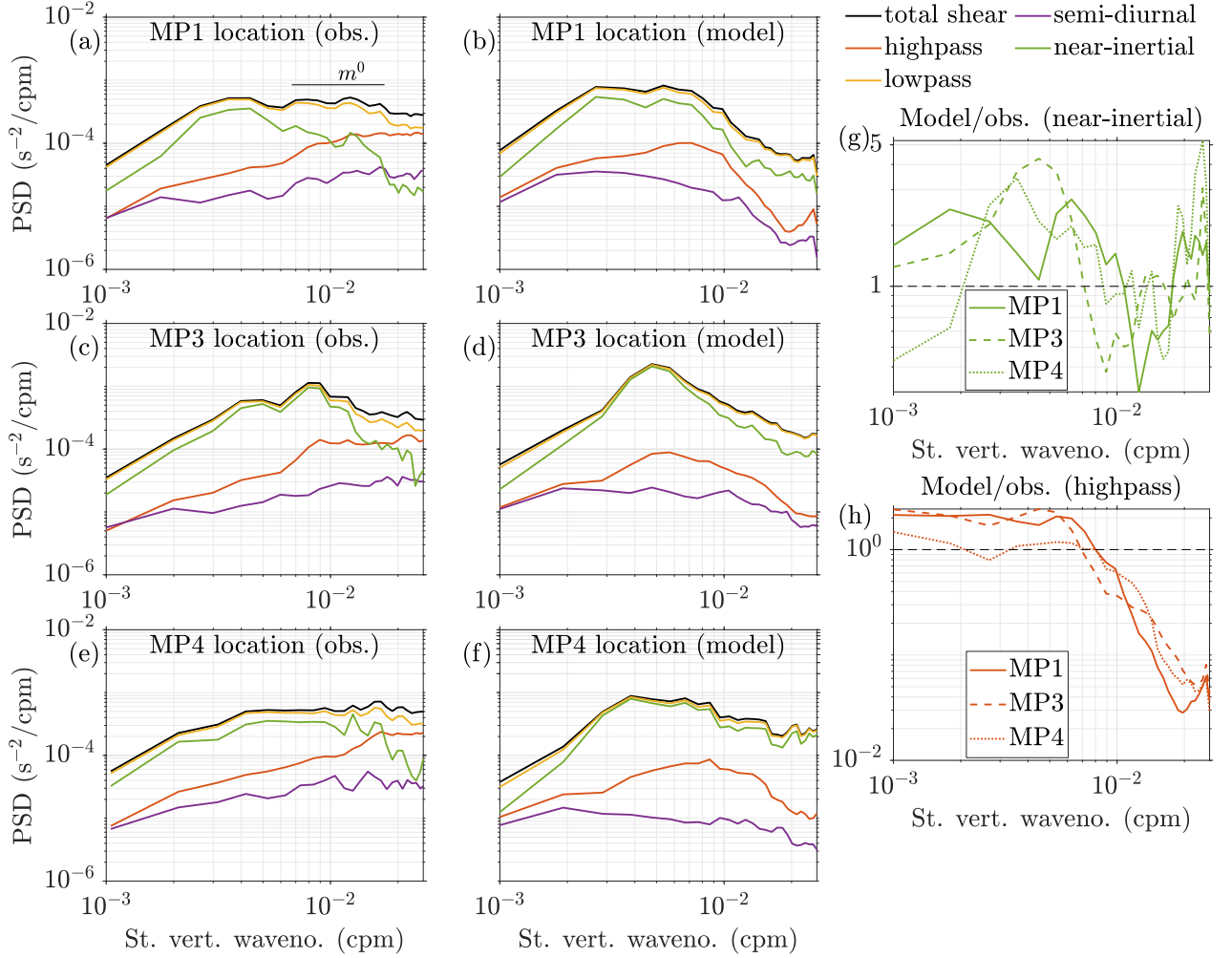


Figure 3. Shear spectra $\Phi(m)$ in different frequency bands from MP observations in (a), (c), and (e) are compared to modeled shear spectra from the 264-level simulation with the KPP background turned off in (b), (d), and (f). In each subplot, black is total shear, red is highpass or supertidal shear (>11.5 hr), yellow is lowpass shear (<11.5 hr), purple is semi-diurnal shear (11.5–13.5 hr), and green is NI shear (90–110% of the local inertial period). The high-wavenumber m^0 slope of the GM76 shear spectrum is denoted in (a). (g–h) The ratio of the modeled shear to observed shear, for the NI and highpass bands, respectively.

248 However, the NI shear at MP4 does not have much vertical variability and also has lower
249 peak shear variance. The NI shear is geographically variable at small vertical scales in that
250 it is a factor of 2–5 lower than the total shear at the highest wavenumber at MP3 and MP4
251 but approximately 20 times lower at MP1. The highpass shear is lower than the NI shear
252 at low wavenumbers but has a higher variance than the NI shear above 0.01 cpm.

253 Similar to the observations, the modeled 264-level shear with the KPP background
254 turned off is dominated by slowly-varying flows (Fig 3 (b, d, f)). The integrated modeled
255 shear at the PSI latitude (MP3; Fig 3 (d)) is 1.2–2.5 times higher than at MP1 and MP4
256 (Fig 3 (b, f)) and attains the highest peak shear among the three locations. Considering
257 the ratio of variance in the NI band (Fig 3 (g)), the modeled and the observed shear show
258 reasonable agreement. In the highpass band, the model does not capture the transition as
259 seen in the observed shear at 0.01 cpm as the modeled highpass shear remains lower than
260 the respective modeled NI shear at all wavenumbers (e.g., comparing Fig 3 (a) and (b)).
261 The ratio of the modeled to observed highpass shear (Fig 3 (h)) shows that in contrast to
262 the other two locations, the modeled highpass shear at MP4 is within a factor of 1.5 of the
263 observed highpass shear for a decade of wavenumbers from 10^{-3} – 10^{-2} cpm. However, unlike
264 the NI shear ratio, the modeled to observed highpass shear ratio decreases after 0.007–0.008
265 cpm and the modeled highpass shear is more than an order of magnitude weaker than the
266 observations at the highest wavenumber (Fig 3 (h)). This reduction in high-wavenumber
267 highpass shear variance could be attributed to the inability of the model to represent the
268 cascade of energy to these vertical scales from low-frequency and NI motions due to a model
269 grid spacing that is too coarse (see section 4 in the SI) or excessive damping by improper
270 model parameterizations.

271 The modeled spectra of strain $(N^2 - \overline{N^2})/\overline{N^2}$, with N being the Brunt–Väisälä frequency
272 and overbar denoting time mean, are lower in variance relative to the observed strain spectra
273 (Fig 4 (a–c)). Except in the small range of 0.003–0.004 cpm at the MP1 location (Fig 4
274 (a)), the model is always lower than the observations in strain variance even in the highest
275 resolution (264-level) simulations. Turning off the KPP background increases the strain
276 variance by less than an order of magnitude at high wavenumbers, but this increase is not
277 sufficient enough to bring the modeled strain variance up to the level of the observations.
278 The largest increase in variance by turning off the KPP background is seen at MP4 (Fig 4
279 (c)), the location farthest from the IT generation site (Fig 1 (b)). Except in the NI band and
280 over a small range of wavenumbers, the modeled strain variance is an order of magnitude

281 too low over the majority of the wavenumbers in all frequency bands (Fig S6). In the deeper
282 ocean (below 1500m), an appreciable increase in the representation of modeled small-scale
283 strain is observed when the vertical resolution of the model is progressively increased (shown
284 for a small depth range of 1800–2200m in Fig 4 (d–f)). This improvement with an increase in
285 the model vertical resolution is reflected in the deep-ocean (1500–4000m) strain spectra (Fig
286 S7) which have the highest variance in the 264-level simulations. Improving the modeled
287 strain may involve refined temporal and spatial resolution as well as understanding the effect
288 of other model parameterizations.

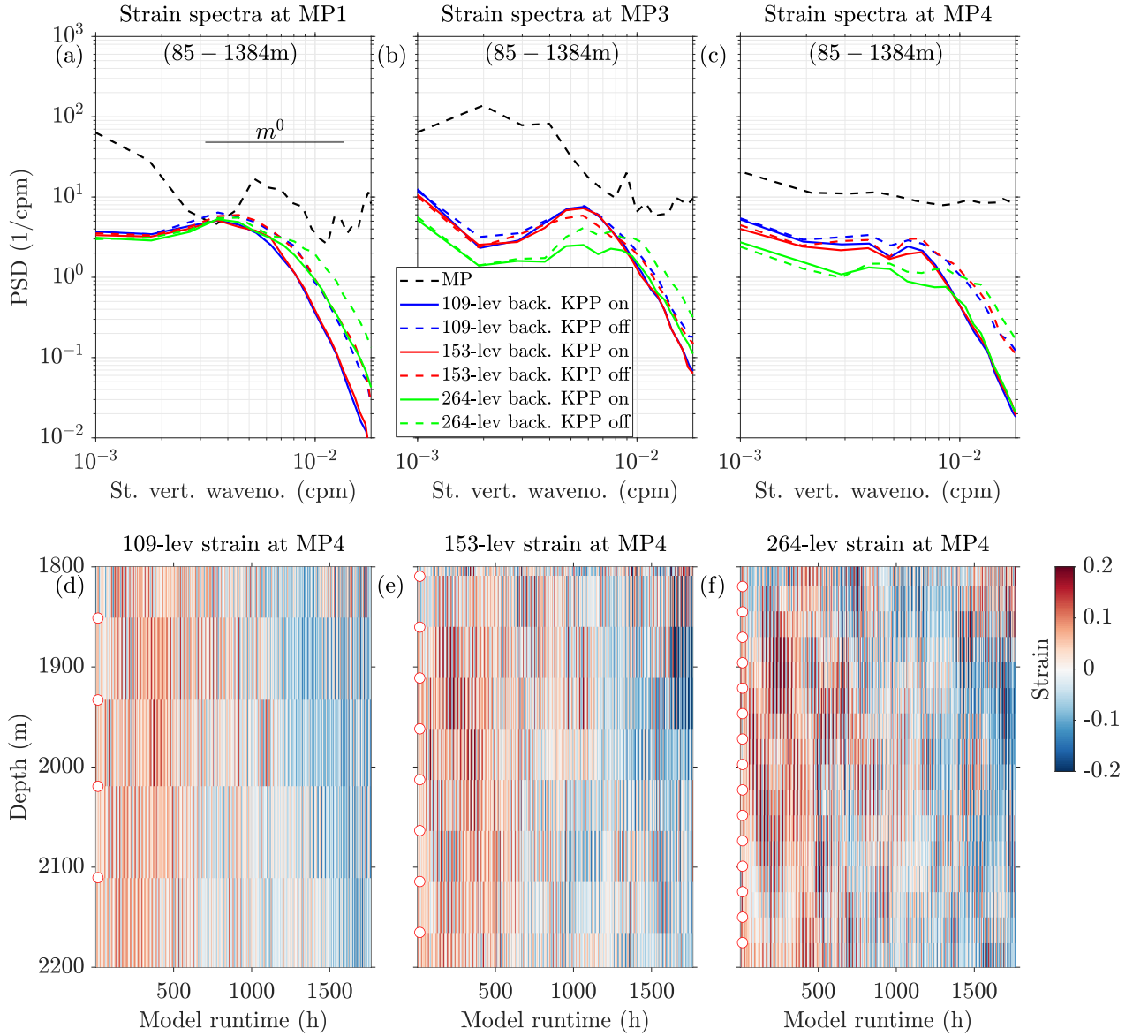


Figure 4. (a–c) Observed strain spectra (black dashed curves) for different locations in the depth range of 85–1384m are compared to modeled strain spectra from 109-, 153-, and 264-level simulations in the depth range of 80–1400m with and without the KPP background components. (d–f) Time-depth plots of the deeper ocean (1800–2200m) modeled strain at MP4 location without the KPP background components for three different vertical resolutions of the model. The filled circles on the y-axis are the locations of the model z-levels. The ratios of the modeled to observed strain in different frequency bands are in Fig S6 and the modeled strain spectra in the deep ocean (1500–4000m) are in Fig S7.

5 Conclusions

Regional simulations with higher vertical and horizontal resolutions can display improved IW spectra over those in the global simulations, as long as they are forced at their lateral boundaries by remotely-generated IWs from global simulations (Mazloff et al., 2020; Nelson et al., 2020). High vertical resolution regional simulations at the same horizontal grid spacing (~ 2 km) as the global LLC4320 are studied in this paper to explore the sensitivities of the modeled IW vertical structure to model parameterizations, in particular, the background mixing components of the K-Profile Parameterization (KPP; Large et al. (1994)). We show that the kinetic energy variance at the high vertical-wavenumber IW continuum increases and lies closer to the observations when the KPP background components are set to zero, with the agreement most notable in locations away from the tidal generation site of the Hawaiian islands. Thus, when high-resolution ocean models start resolving IWs, the KPP background, which compensates for breaking IWs in coarse-grid models that do not represent IW processes at all, should be turned down or even off to maintain the proper spectral level of the IW continuum.

The higher shear at the parametric subharmonic instability critical latitude is captured in the simulations with the KPP background turned off. The ability of the model to represent near-inertial shear, a critical component of the total IW shear, at all vertical wavenumbers is an encouraging start in understanding the space-time variability of IW shear using ocean models. However, the high-frequency or supertidal (>11.5 hr) component of the IW continuum shear is not adequately captured in this model. The simulations with the KPP background turned off are weaker in strain variance relative to the observed strain. The increase in modeled strain variance with the KPP background turned off is not enough to elevate the modeled spectral levels to that of the observations. This work can be developed in a few directions to address these model deficiencies and further improve the modeled IW continuum. We have not studied the sensitivity of the modeled spectra to the frequency of atmospheric forcing updates. We have also not explored the effects of increasing the horizontal resolution and the role of other model mixing parameterizations, most importantly, the Leith damping and the Richardson number-dependent shear-driven mixing component of the KPP and to what extent these govern mixing without the background components. These issues are likely to be important for accurate modeling of high-frequency shear and strain and will be discussed in future papers.

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6 Open Research

The McLane moored profiler observations, regional MITgcm model simulation output, and the analysis codes used in this study are hosted at Harvard Dataverse at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/H0VAP0>. The global LLC4320 simulation output is available at <https://data.nas.nasa.gov/ecco/>.

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