CASISAC

Changes in the Agulhas System and its Impact on Southern African Coasts

***A. Biastoch, K. Matthes, F. U. Schwarzkopf, I. Ivanciu**, GEOMAR Helmholtz-Zentrum für Ozeanforschung Kiel*

In Short

- The Agulhas System is a key element of the global overturning circulation
- The coastal distribution of sea level is strongly determined by regional processes
- Explicitly simulated atmospheric CO_2 and ozone allow to decipher the impact of changes in the westerlies on ocean circulation

The Agulhas current system is an important player in the global overturning circulation. On its way along the southern African coast, the Agulhas current transports waters south towards the tip of the continent, where it turns back into the Indian Ocean, shedding eddies that enter the Atlantic Ocean, carrying warm and salty waters from the Indian Ocean.

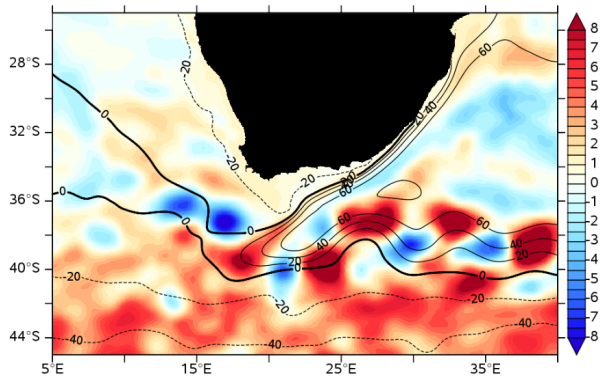

***Figure 1:** Long-term mean (1960-2009) Sea Surface Height (contours and linear trend (shading) from a hindcast simulation in INALT20.L46. Mean SSH contours depict the way of the Agulhas Current, its retroflection and the corridor in which Agulhas rings enter the Atlantic Ocean. The trend pattern shows sea level rise along southern African coasts and emphasizes the high spatial variability.*

This transport is highly variable on temporal and spatial scales and is subject to climatic changes [1]. The main focus in CASISAC is set on different influencing factors acting on the Agulhas system, particularly the impact of global warming on Southern Hemisphere wind systems. The observed and prognosed changes in the Agulhas system lead to a warming of surface waters and thus have a direct influence on the regional climate along the Atlantic rim, specifically in southern Africa. In particular changes in the distribution and amounts of rain are important for the supply of drinking water and agriculture, but also their threat through extreme events. We will simulate the impact of a changing Agulhas system on the regional climate in southern Africa. Ocean currents are also closely related to the distribution of the sea level, potentially expanding or compensating the global sea level rise. Changes in the distribution and height of surface wind waves come in addition. The already diagnosed and for the future prognosed regional distribution of the sea level along the southern African coastlines will be assessed 1. The combination of all effects, changing rain amounts and resulting river outflow, sea level rise and wind waves, are key quantities for the regional impact on southern African coasts. In CASISAC we aim at evaluating their vulnerability under global warming.

To assess the aforementioned processes, resolving ocean eddies is mandatory. We employ a series of nested model configurations with resolutions of 1/20° and 1/10° in the South Atlantic and western Indian Ocean embedded in global grids at 0.25° and 0.5° horizontal resolution, respectively. Hindcast experiments under prescribed atmospheric forcing over the past 6 decades will enable us to analyse multi-decadal variability and already ongoing changes in the Agulhas system and their regional and global scale effect. Coupled ocean-atmosphere experiments with interactive chemistry provide insights on the impact of increasing CO_2 and a potential recovery of the Antarctic ozone hole on the Southern Hemisphere westerlies and thereby the Agulhas System.

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https://www.geomar.de/~abiastoch

More Information

[1] Biastoch, A. et al., *Nature Communications* **6**, 10082 (2015). doi:10.1038/ncomms10082

Project Partners

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