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Soares, Ana; Berggren, Martin

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PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00

IMPORTANCE OF CARBON AS LIMITING NUTRIENT FOR BACTERIOPLANKTON IN A BOREAL SUB-ARCTIC COASTAL SYSTEM

Ana Soares & Martin Berggren
Department of Physical Geography and Ecosystem Science, Lund University
ana.soares@nateko.lu.se



- Although nutrient stoichiometry predicted phosphorus (P) limitation, carbon (C) strongly limited bacterioplankton respiration (BR)
- Increases in organic C loading may exacerbate coastal oxygen (O₂) depletion

Results and discussion

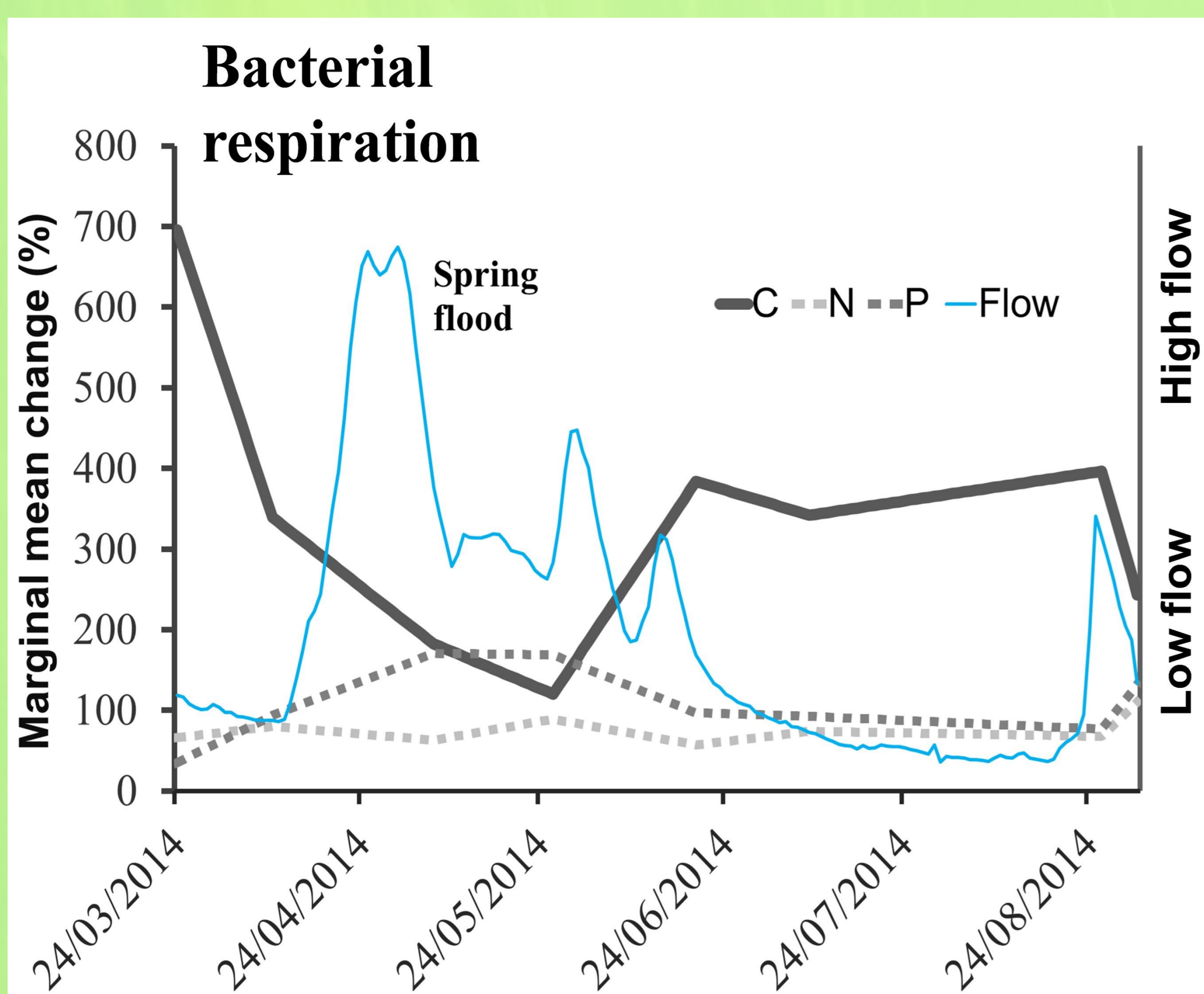


Figure 2. Relative impact (%) of additions of C, N and P, shown as the change in marginal mean (response of bacterial respiration adjusted for all other variables in the model). The nutrient enrichment experiments were performed on a total of 8 dates, and the results were interpolated for the whole period. Flow data was obtained from the Swedish national monitoring programme.

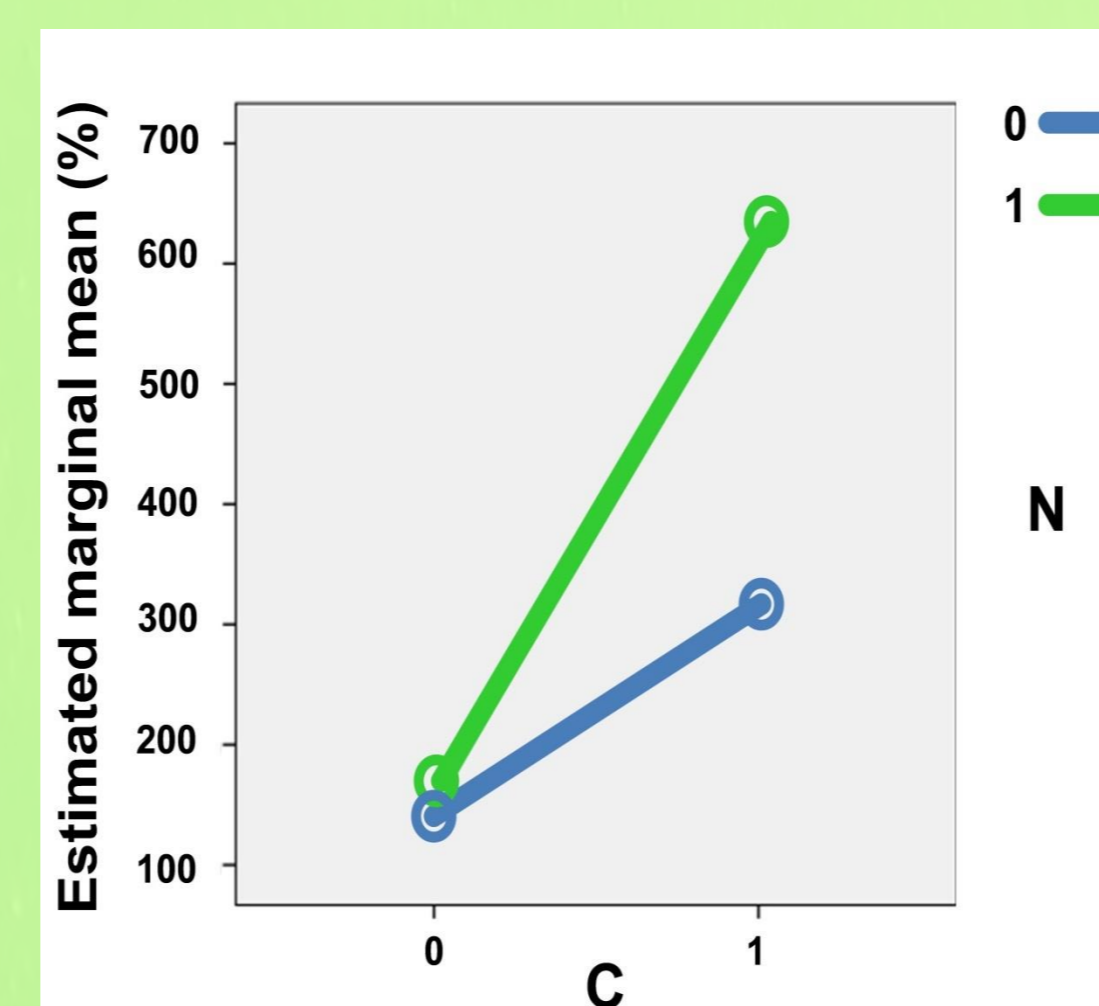


Figure 3. Change in marginal means for C and N factors when added (1 line) and not added (0 line).

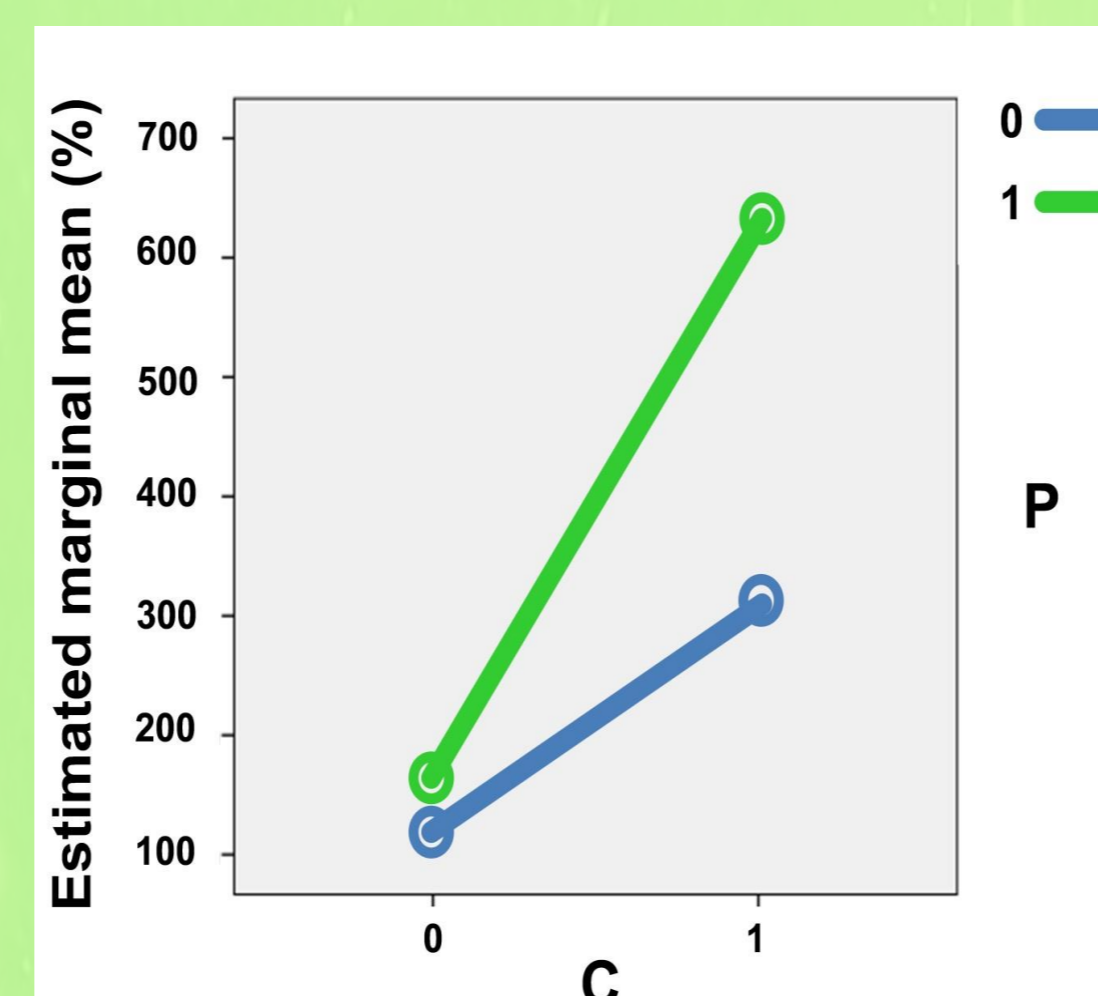


Figure 4. Change in marginal means for C and N factors when added (1 line) and not added (0 line).

All three C, nitrogen (N) and P elements increased BR when added alone (Fig. 2) or combined (Fig. 3 and 4). Among single element additions, C had the strongest effects on BR ranging from a 6 % increase at high flow to a 700% increase at winter low flow. Combined additions of C and P and C and N had similar impacts on BR (~660%).

Table 1. In situ concentrations of dissolved organic carbon (DOC), total nitrogen, total phosphorus (TP).

Date	DOC mgL ⁻¹	TN mgL ⁻¹	TP µgL ⁻¹	C:N:P (molar)
24/03/2014	3.5	0.33	12	753:61:1
09/04/2014	2.9	0.24	6	1249:89:1
06/05/2014	3.1	0.14	6	1335:52:1
26/05/2014	4.1	0.28	15	706:41:1
19/06/2014	3.7	0.29	8	1195:80:1
08/07/2014	3.8	0.57	7	1402:180:1
26/08/2014	3.9	0.31	6	1679:114:1
01/09/2014	3.3	0.21	7	1218:66:1

Nutrient stoichiometry predicted P as main limiting nutrient (Table 1), however BR was mostly C limited.

Our study underscores the role of terrestrial dissolved organic carbon (tDOC) fluxes on coastal oxygen concentrations, which is expected to increase in face of global changes (Wikner and Andersson 2012). Our findings further evidence the shortcomings of nutrient stoichiometry in predicting ecologically available nutrient pools.

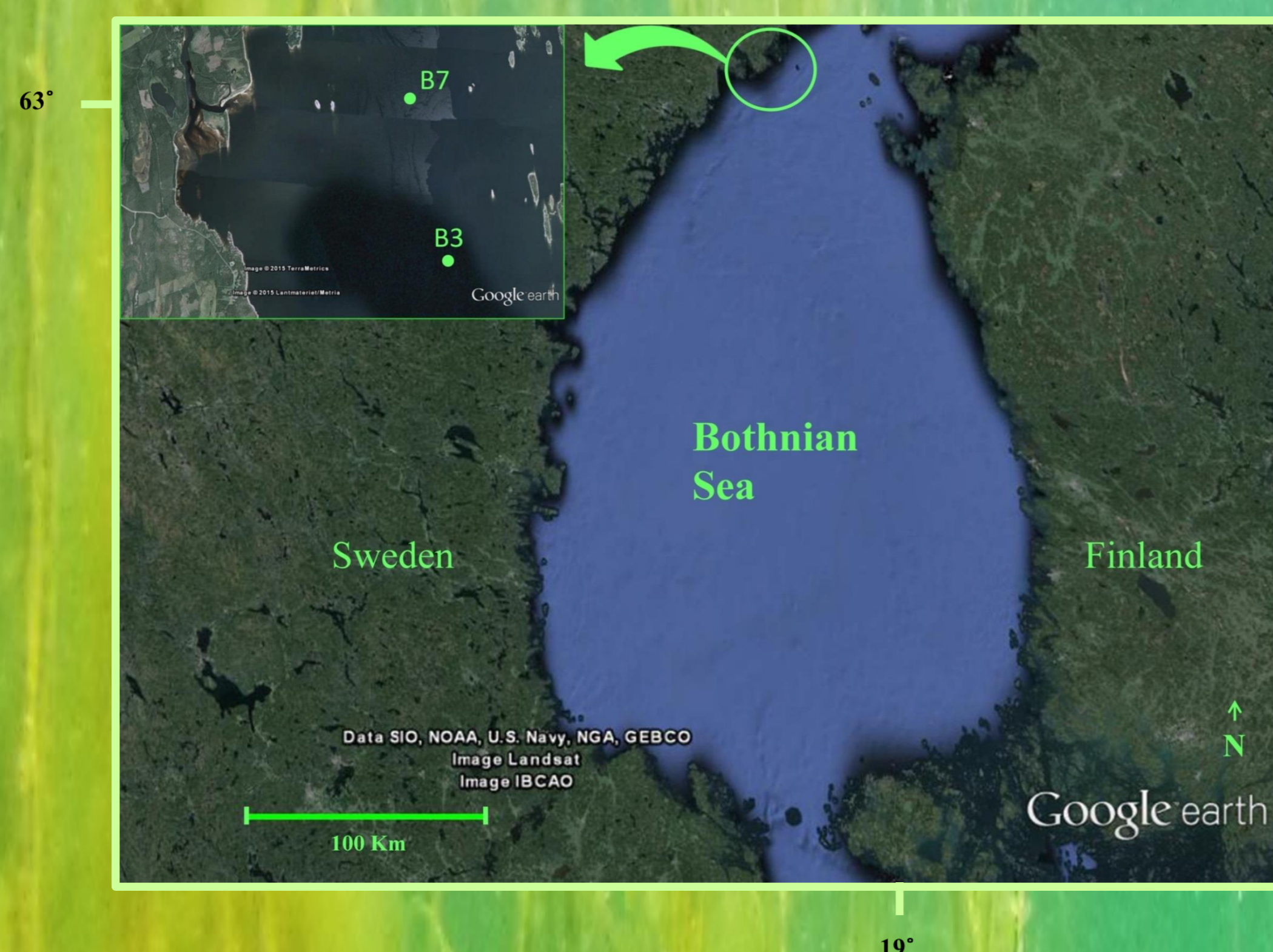


Figure 1 Study area.

Methods

Samples were obtained from the Öre river estuary (Fig.1; 1m depth) on 8 different dates (March-September) alternating between sites B3 (63°29.98N; 19°49.14E) and B7 (63°31.50N; 19°48.49E). We performed multifactorial nutrient bioassays (Fig. 2) in which we added C as C₆H₁₂O₆ (5 mgL⁻¹), N as NH₄NO₃ (0.5 mgL⁻¹), P as Na₂PO₄ (50 µgL⁻¹) and salt as an artificial salt mixture (Kester et al. 1967; 5 psu). Duplicates of BR were measured continuously during 72h at 20°C.

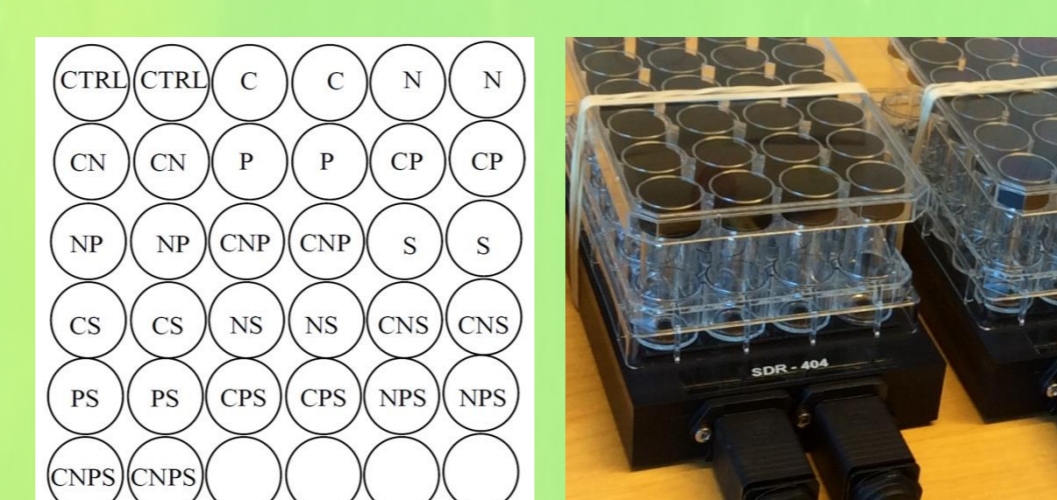


Figure 2. Multifactorial experiments design, bacterial respiration assays.

Background

Dissolved O₂ concentrations in coastal waters are related to the influx of inorganic N and P which promotes primary productivity and BR (Bianchi et al. 2010). Particularly heterotrophic bacterioplankton is affected by fluxes of N and P directly through resource regulation and indirectly through control on primary producers. Additionally, heterotrophic BR may be constrained by inflows of tDOC to coasts (Nydahl et al. 2013). However, consensus on whether BR in aquatic systems is controlled by C or P is missing (Dorado-García et al. 2014). In the northern Baltic Sea, coastal waters are recipients of large shares of tDOC (Gustafsson et al. 2014) and typically show high C:P ratios. In such systems it is hypothesized that BR is limited by P rather than by C.

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