

**Reviewer #1:**

Citation: <https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-2024-1865-RC1>

**General:**

The submitted article “Modulating surface heat flux through sea ice leads improves Arctic sea ice simulations in the coupled EC-Earth3” by T. Tian, R. Davy, L. Ponsoni, S. Yang, provides interesting results on the effect of surface heat flux through leads on Arctic climate representation in one global climate model. It highlights the importance of representing the effect of small-scale processes.

The study is in most parts well written. The figures are nice and easy to understand. However, some of the conclusions from this study should be better supported by additional analysis or better explanation.

I thus recommend to accept this submission after revision that considers a few major and a somewhat larger number of minor comments.

Thank you for your thorough review and insightful comments on our manuscript titled "Modulating surface heat flux through sea ice leads improves Arctic sea ice simulations in the coupled EC-Earth3." We appreciate the opportunity to clarify our findings and address your concerns.

**Main comments**

1. The authors highlight that the modulation is not only affecting Arctic sea ice but also improving the sea ice representation in EC-Earth3. They set up three improvement goals in the introduction (reduced sea ice, better trend, and Arctic ice minimum in September instead of August). These goals are only partly met. Sea ice is slightly less extended and slightly thinner in the improved model version when averaging over 1980-2014. However, August is still the month with lowest sea ice extent and the trend is not improved. The heat flux modulations seem further to have little impact in a present day climate but is more pronounced in a colder climate, and would likely have rather little impact in a warming climate.

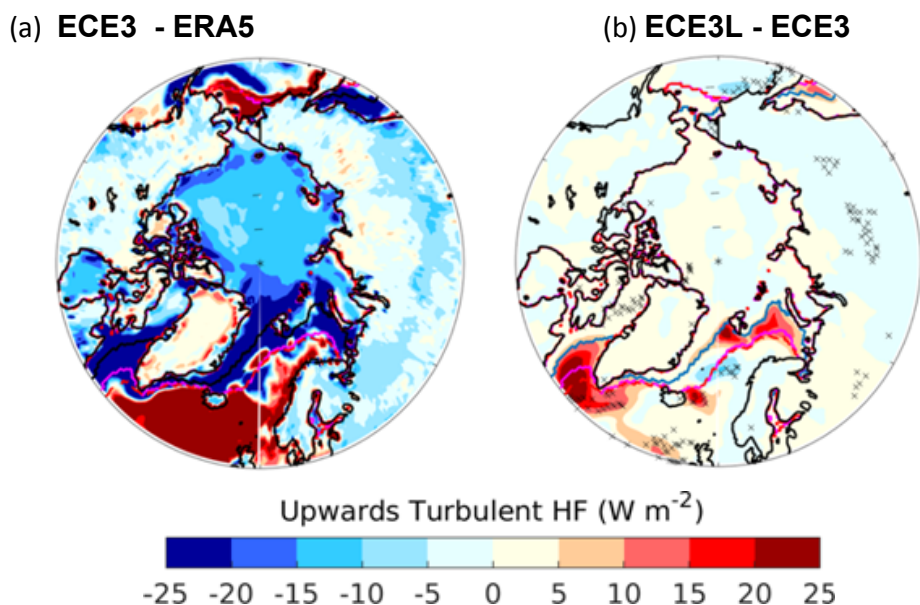
Further, the authors do not show that the modulation of the heat flux is improving the heat flux in high-ice covered areas or atmospheric stratification in EC-Earth. This should be done to the extent possible. Otherwise, any potential improvement of the sea ice could be due to a compensation of errors. We should have in mind that many other processes including large scale ocean and atmospheric circulation are strongly affecting sea ice.

As long as it is not well shown that the modulation of heat fluxes is really improving the related local processes, this study, which provides interesting and relevant results, should be seen as a sensitivity study to understand the impact of modulating the heat flux over leads, and not try to sell it as an improvement that solves long-standing biases in global models.

We appreciate the careful evaluation of our results. Regarding the Arctic warming trend over 1980–2014, we applied cumulative distribution functions (CDFs) to both visually and statistically assess differences between the two ensembles for the Arctic and key sub-regions in Fig.S10. These analyses suggest that ECE3L offers an improved representation of Arctic warming trends, particularly by reducing variability and showing better alignment with observed data. This is addressed in response to minor comment 6. We also showed improvement in representing the declining rate of sea ice volume in March in response to minor comment 8.

We acknowledge the lack of observational data on how sensible and latent heat fluxes respond to variations in lead width in Arctic regions. Given this limitation, we avoided making assumptions about these responses. Instead, we quantified the sensitivity of the sensible heat flux based on the LES simulations conducted by Esau (2007). We revised the title accordingly *“Impact of modulating surface heat flux through sea ice leads on Arctic sea ice in EC-Earth3 in different climates”*. In the revised version, we will clarify that this is a sensitivity study throughout the text, focusing on the potential contribution of sea ice lead parameterization to mitigate long-standing biases.

Additionally, we compared the winter mean turbulent heat flux between the ensemble means and ERA5 in Figure 1. The ECE3 ensemble significantly underestimates the upwards heat flux at the sea ice margins, whereas the ECE3L ensemble slightly enhances the heat flux, aligning with the area with sea ice reduction in March, as shown in Fig. S6b.



**Figure 1.** The mean difference in upwards turbulent heat flux (the sum of surface sensible heat flux and surface latent heat flux) during winter (January to March) between (a) the ECE3 historical ensemble and ERA5, and (b) between ECE3L and ECE3, over the period 1980-2014. The ECE3 ensemble consists of 19 members, with missing realizations from r6, r9, r11, r13, r15, and r20. Stippling indicates areas that are not statistically significant. The blue line and pink line indicate the mean sea ice concentration above 70% and below 15%, respectively.

2. The cold and warm climate simulations are very short (section 2.2). Although Figures S2 / S3 indicate that the 30-year period chosen for analysis seem to be rather stable for sea ice area, volume and global air temperature, a 20-year spin-up is very short. I would expect, and earlier studies showed this, that climate warms (depending on the model by maybe around 0.2 - 0.6 degree C) after initializing from a transient run and repeating the forcing from that year before stabilizing. EC-Earth3 seems not to show such a warming after initialization from the transient run, or the warming is very small and short in time, or it is not visible due to internal variability and the shortness of the simulations. It should be checked which of these alternatives is true.

A 30-year period is also short for comparison between the cold and warm climate, particularly given that EC-Earth3 shows huge internal variability on centennial scales. Maybe, the somewhat surprisingly much larger effect of the modulating heat flux in ECE3L in the cold climate compared to the transient run can partly be explained by internal variability. I suggest to make the cold and warm simulations in total at least 100-year long to get more robust results.

We acknowledge the possibility of large internal variability in the global mean temperature (GMT) by around 0.2 to 0.6°C (Doescher et al., 2022), therefore, it is important to analyze the development of GMT over time.

To address the concern whether our experiment design shows a warming after initialization from the transient run, or can overcome the model internal variability, we modified Figure S3, by comparing the yearly mean GMT between the ECE3, ECE3L, and the transient simulation (r5, which provides the initial conditions for the 1985 and 2015 forcing experiments). We have now combined the original Figs. S2 and S3 into a single figure (referred to as Fig. S2, see below)

Specifically, we calculated the difference of GMT between the last 30-year mean (shown in original Fig.S3) and the first 30-year mean for each simulation, respectively. As shown in the new Fig. S2c, the

- For the 1985-forcing run, the difference is 0.06°C for ECE3 (0.11°C for ECE3L) and the 50-year trend is 0.03 °C/decade for ECE3 (0.05 °C/decade for ECE3L).
- For the 2015-forcing run, the difference is -0.03°C for ECE3 (-0.03°C for ECE3L) and the 50-years trend is -0.00°C/decade for ECE3 (-0.01 °C/decade for ECE3L).

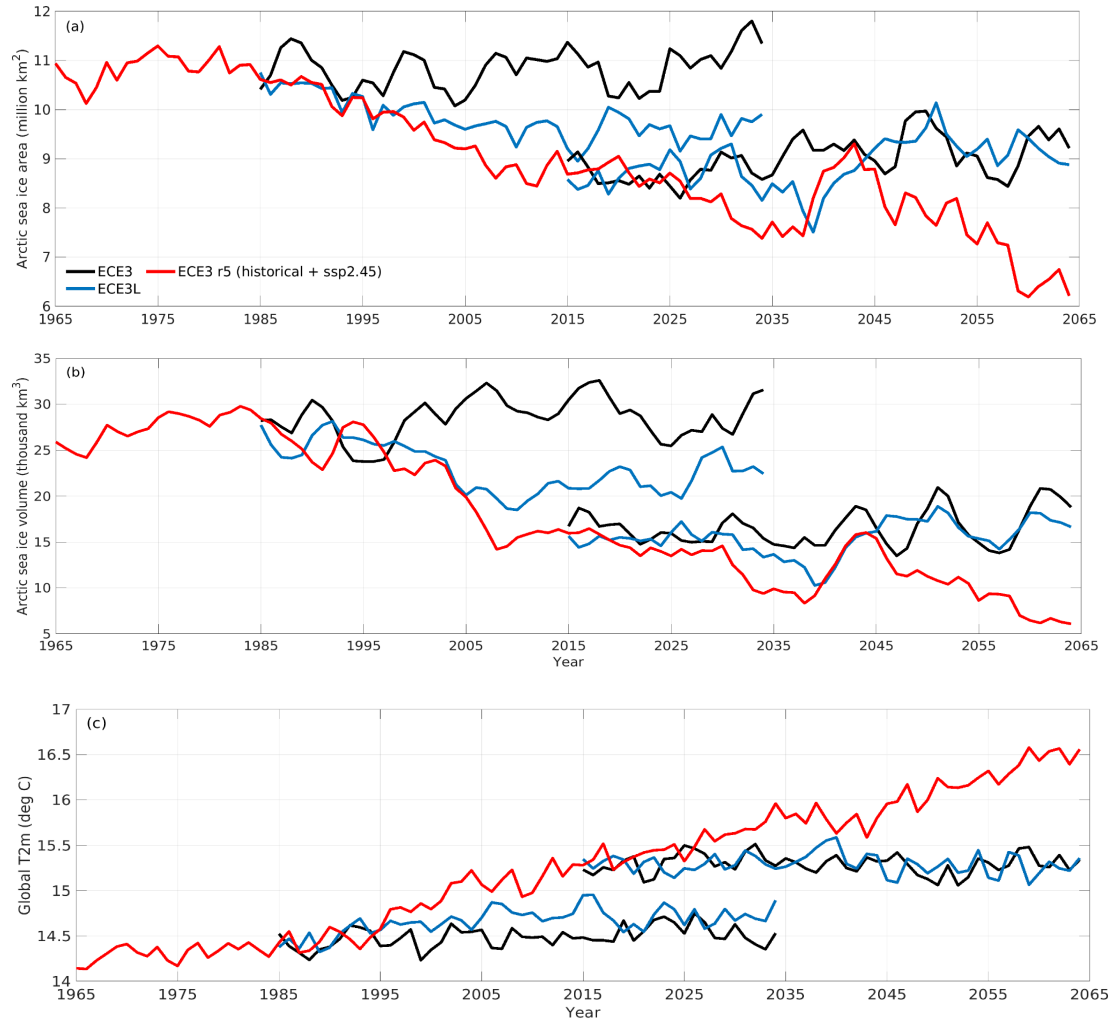
Based on this analysis, it seems unlikely that the climate would warm by 0.2-0.6°C within the next 50 years due to initialization effects. The paired simulations are stable over the 50 year period in both forcing experiments, with no significant warming trends attributable to initialization artifacts. This stability is reflected in the absence of noticeable temperature drift in both forcing periods. In contrast, the transient simulation (r5), driven by historical and SSP2-4.5 external forcings, shows a clear warming trend over time. The fluctuations in ECE3 and ECE3L are consistent with internal variability, indicating that the model does not exhibit any pronounced initialization-induced warming.

Regarding internal variability, we observed the following over the 30-year and 50-year periods:

- 1985-forcing: the standard deviation is 0.1°C for ECE3 (0.1°C for ECE3L) over 30 years, and 0.1°C for ECE3 (0.1°C for ECE3L) over 50 years.

- 2015-forcing: the standard deviation is 0.1°C for ECE3 (0.1°C for ECE3L) over 30 years, and 0.1°C for ECE3 (0.1°C for ECE3L) over 50 years.
- Transient run: the standard deviation is 0.2°C for 1985 (25 members) and 0.2°C for 2015 (24 members) in ECE3.

As internal variability in ECE3 and ECE3L is of a similar magnitude in their respective cold/warm climate scenarios and remains lower than that in the transient climate in the corresponding years, there is no evidence of amplified internal variability in ECE3L due to the modulated heat flux. Therefore, the larger effect of sea ice reduction in the cold climate, compared to the transient run, is unlikely due to internal variability.



**Figure S2:** Yearly mean Arctic sea ice area **(a)**, Arctic sea ice volume **(b)** and global 2-meter air temperature **(c)** from 1965 to 2065, comparing the ECE3 (black), ECE3L (blue), and transient (r5) simulation (historical + SSP2-4.5, red) experiments. Results from the 1985-forcing experiments are shown for the period 1985–2035, while results from the 2015-forcing experiments cover the period 2015–2065.

While we acknowledge that a longer simulation period (e.g., 100 years) would provide more robust results, it is unfortunately not feasible to extend the original simulations, as the supercomputer used for this study has been decommissioned. However, as suggested, we now present the full

50-year time series of sea ice area and volume in Figure S2, to ensure a more comprehensive view of the model behavior over time.

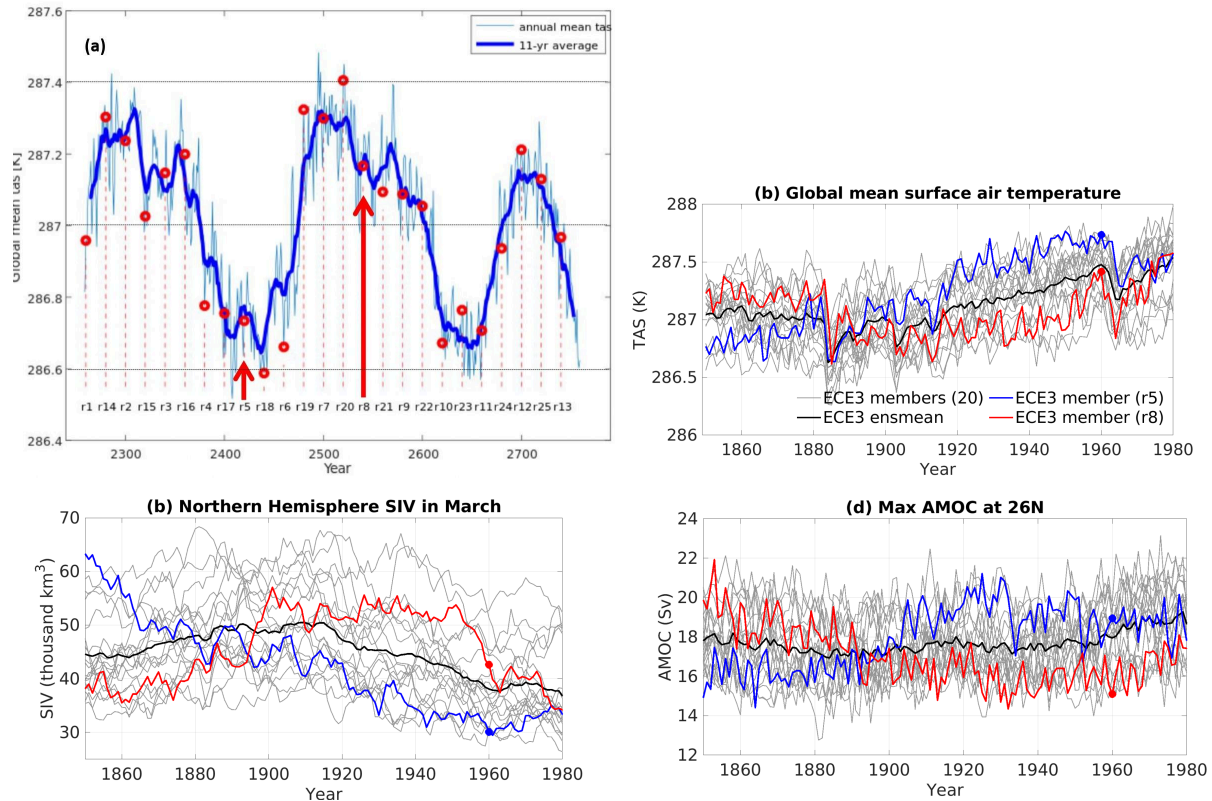
As response to Reviewer #2 comment 13: we will revise figure captions to highlight the purpose of supporting materials in Fig. S2 as follows:

*“The changes in sea ice area and volume from ECE3 to ECE3L shows notable differences between the ExpCold and ExpWarm setups, revealing the sensitivity of sea ice evolution to initial sea ice conditions and external forcing, with relatively more sea ice reduction in ExpCold. The paired simulations are stable over the 50 year period in both forcing experiments, with no significant warming trends attributable to initialization artifacts. This stability is reflected in the absence of noticeable temperature drift in both forcing periods. In contrast, the transient simulation (r5), driven by historical and SSP2-4.5 external forcings, shows a clear warming trend over time. The small fluctuations in ECE3 and ECE3L are consistent with internal variability, indicating that the model does not exhibit any pronounced initialization-induced warming.”*

3. While it is very nice that the ensemble of historical simulations is large with 20 members, the method to initialize the ensemble of historical simulations from only two historical members of EC-Earth3 in 1960 might lead to an underestimation of the spread in the ECE3L ensembles compared to the original ECE3 ensemble. The large spread across CMIP6 ECE3 members due to long-term large internal variability (AMOC) might not sufficiently be captured by this method based on 2 members only. It would be good to see where these 2 members that are used to create the ECE3L ensemble are placed in the cloud of the original 25 ECE3-members (e.g. AMOC, global mean temperature, Arctic ice volume).

Thank you for your insightful comment. We acknowledge that internal variability in a coupled climate system can indeed arise from multiple components, including the atmosphere and the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC).

In our study, the two members were initialized from states reflecting moderate deviations from the ensemble mean of 25 members — r5 from a slightly colder state and r8 from a slightly warmer state (Fig.2a, pointed by red arrows). This initial difference between r5 and r8 is reflected in the AMOC behavior, TAS and SIV evolution during the historical period from 1850 to 1980 (Fig.2b-d). For the year 1960 the differences between r5 and r8 (with solid dots) are 3.8 Sv, 0.3K and -12.8 thousand km<sup>3</sup>, respectively. We include the original 20 ECE3-members (data publicly accessible) in Fig.2b,c,d for the TAS, SIV, and AMOC time series, respectively. The AMOC strength, as well as other parameters in the historical simulations, exhibits considerable inter-annual variability. Specifically, for AMOC, the magnitude of internal variability in both r5 and r8 is similar to that of other ensemble members.



**Figure 2.** (a) Adapted from Figure 3 in Doescher et al. (2022). Time series of the global mean of annual near-surface temperature (TAS) over a 500-year-long EC-Earth3 piControl experiment. The thick blue line represents an 11-year running average of the annual mean. The time axis is arbitrary due to the constant forcing applied throughout the experiment. Red circles mark the initial states from which the members of the historical experiment are initialized. The realization IDs of the historical ensemble members (r1-r25) are displayed at the bottom, and r5,r8 are highlighted by red arrows. (b,c,d) Annual global mean TAS, Northern Hemisphere sea ice volume (SIV) in March and annual Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) in the historical ECE3 simulations (thin lines, 20 members available) at 26°N. The r5 (blue) and r8 (red) members are indicated by thick lines, and the values in 1960 are marked by circles, respectively.

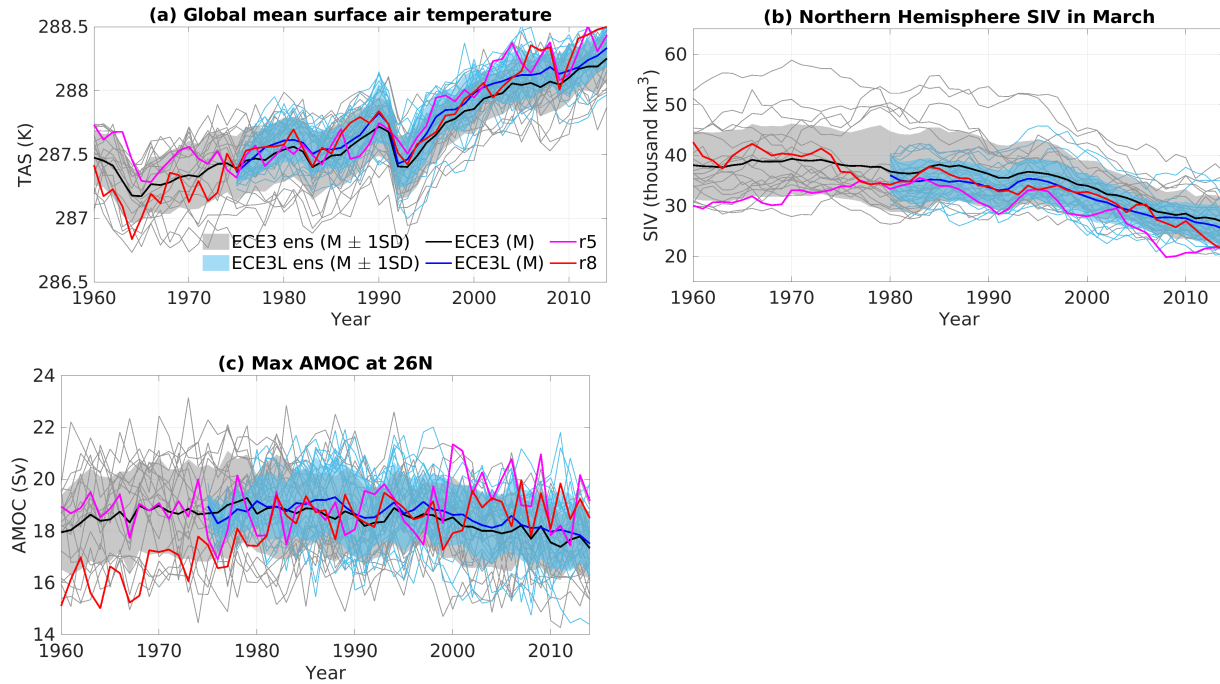
For the generation of the ECE3L ensemble, we introduced small random perturbations (on the order of  $10^{-5}$  K) in the 3D temperature field. Although these perturbations are minor, they are adequate to induce divergence among ensemble members after only a few days.

We compared the ensemble mean and the model spread for TAS (a), SIV in March (b) and AMOC (c) between ECE3L and the original ECE3 ensemble in Figure 3 and Table 1. We applied paired *t*-test to assess statistical differences. In Fig. 3c, although the difference in AMOC between r5 and r8 has converged since 1980, the ECE3L simulations maintain a similar magnitude of model spread (std=1.4 Sv) as ECE3 (std=1.5 Sv) averaged over the period from 1980 to 2014 (Table 1). The ensemble means of AMOC from 1980-2014 show significant differences between ECE3 and ECE3L ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that our method captures the internal variability of AMOC adequately.



For GMT and SIV, their ensemble means are also significantly different with  $p < 0.05$ , while the detrended time series are not significantly different with  $p > 0.05$ , indicating the dominant role of external forcing.

In light of your comment, we will add clarification regarding the representation of AMOC internal variability in ECE3L in L232, maybe add Fig. 3c to supplement (also in response to comment 14).



**Figure 3.** (a-c) as in Figure 1. b-d, but for the ECE3 and ECE3L members (thin lines) over time, with ensemble means (thick line) and model spread (shaded area) represented as one standard deviation from the ensemble mean across 20 members. Note r5 and r8 are indicated by pink and red lines.

**Table 1.** Ensemble mean difference (ECE3-ECE3L) and ensemble spreads averaged over time (from 1980-2014) for ECE3 and ECE3L.

Parameters	Mean difference (ECE3-ECE3L)	Mean model spread (ECE3)	Mean model spread (ECE3L)
GMT (K)	-0.1	0.2	0.2
SIV ( $10^3 \text{ km}^3$ )	1.8	6.0	3.9
AMOC (Sv)	-0.3	1.5	1.4

**Minor comments:**

1. Title: Since the improvement (reduction of sea ice) seems to be limited to the earlier part of the historical period that is analysed here, and there is little evidence that modulating the heat flux

improves present day sea ice, I suggest to change the title. Maybe something like: "Impact of modulating surface heat flux through sea ice leads on Arctic sea ice in EC-Earth3."

Please delete the "coupled" before EC-Earth3. Either write the "global coupled climate model EC-Earth3" or only "EC-Earth3". To my understanding EC-Earth3 is as default coupled.

We revised the title accordingly. The new title of the manuscript is "*Impact of modulating surface heat flux through sea ice leads on Arctic sea ice in EC-Earth3 in different climates*".

2. Line 4: without reading the entire article it is impossible to know, what "cold" and "warm" climate refers to. "cold" sounds like PI or even colder and "warm" like some time in the future. I recommend to say something like: ...one pair using 1985-forcing (cold climate) and the other 2015-forcing (warm climate).

Thank you for your valuable feedback and we will revise it accordingly.

3. L7: "two CMIP6 historical ensembles". Sounds like an ensemble of historical simulations from different CMIP6-models. Make clear that you performed an historical ensemble with ECE3L and compare it to an ECE3 ensemble.

Yes, we will rephrased it accordingly.

4. L8: It is unclear why ECE3L is in () . I guess what you mean is that both the ECE3 and ECE3L ensemble means closely resemble the mean states in the respective cold-ensemble.

We realize that our original phrasing may have been unclear, and we will rephrase the sentence in the abstract to improve clarity. Here is the revised sentence:

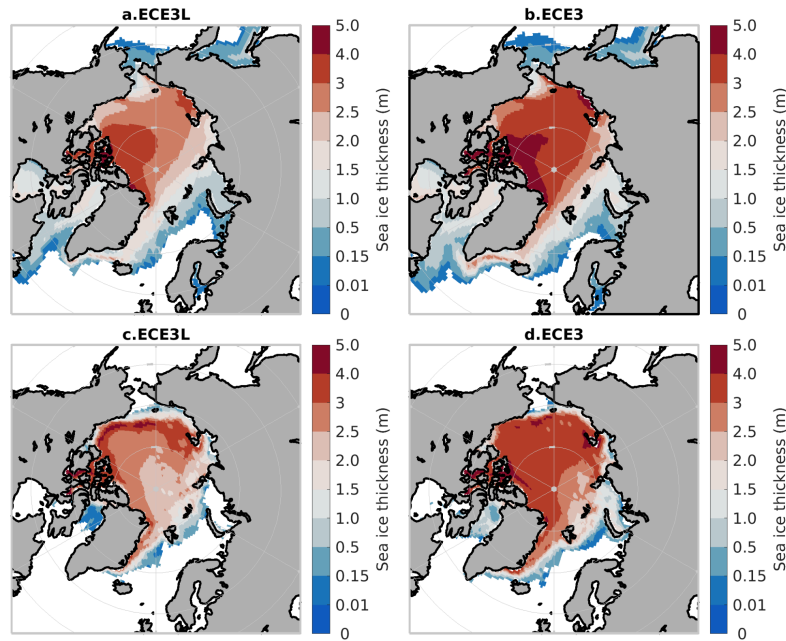
*"We found that the spatial changes in mean sea ice states between the ECE3 and ECE3L ensemble means in the transient climate closely resembled those observed in the 1985-forcing (cold-climate) experiment. However, the magnitude of reduction in the total sea ice area and volume achieved by ECE3L relative to ECE3 was nearly four times greater in the cold-climate than in the transient-climate experiment, suggesting the diminishing role of sea ice leads in a changing climate with decreasing occurrences of stable stratification in winter."*

5. L10/11: It does not seem very logical that the mean climate states are similar in the cold climate and the transient run, but the effect of the modulated heat flux so much smaller in the transient run. If the mean sea ice state of the transient run is similar to the cold climate, the argument that diminishing ice leads to a smaller impact of modulating the fluxes in the transient run does not make sense. In fact, your figures seem to show that sea ice is even a bit thicker in the transient run than in the "cold" climate.

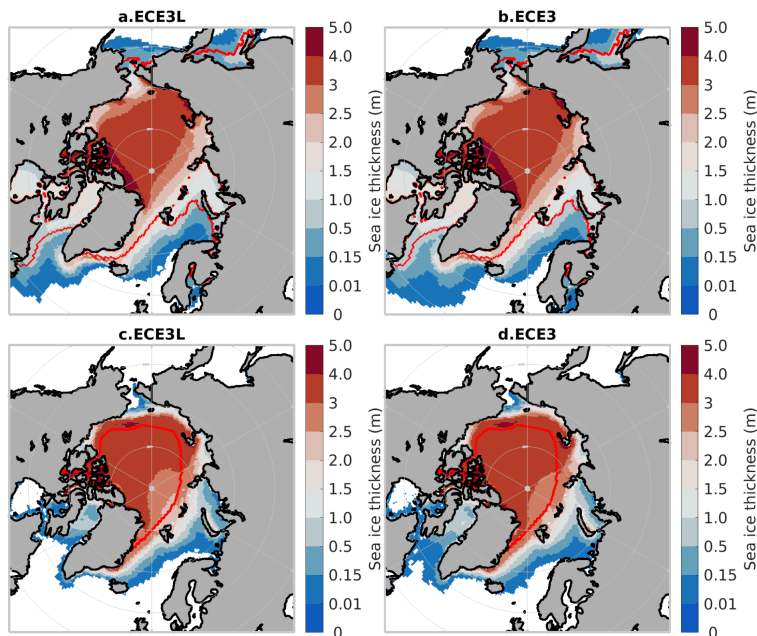
We acknowledge the reviewer's point. As shown in Figs. 3a,b and 10a,b in the manuscript, the mean sea ice thickness (SIT) in March for ECE3L and the difference against ECE3 are provided for both the 1985-forcing and transient runs. The smaller reduction in sea ice during the transient run leads to thicker ice remaining in ECE3L (Fig.10a) compared to the cold climate (Fig.3a), as seen here in Figs. 5a (transient run) versus Figs. 4a (cold climate). For reference, ECE3's mean SIT is shown on the right panels in Figs. 4 and 5. The SIT in March is slightly greater in the central Arctic for the cold climate



(Fig. 4b) than the transient run (Fig. 5b), with little difference in summer (Figs. 4d and 5d). More thinner ice (<0.5m) observed in the ice margin in the transient run in both seasons likely results from interannual variability.



**Figure 4.** 30-year mean sea ice thickness in March (a,b) and September (c,d) in the cold-climate experiments.

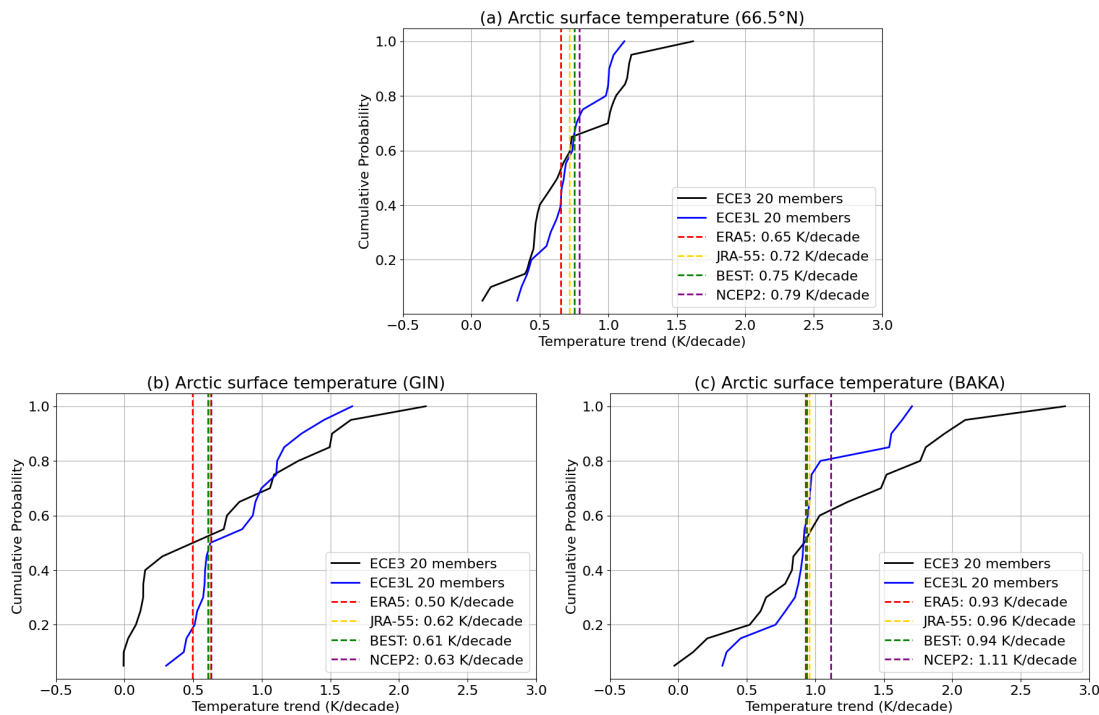


**Figure 5.** As Fig.4, but for 35-year mean in the transient-climate experiments.

6. L11/12: I disagree to the statement that the local amplification rate in ECE3L is significantly improved compared to ECE3. Maybe in parts of the Greenland and Labrador Seas but in contrast

ECE3 is clearly better in the Barents Sea. Please explain clearer (in section 5.1) why you would judge that this is a significant improvement or delete this sentence.

We acknowledge the reviewer's point. To address your concerns, we applied CDF to analyze the time series from the original Fig. S10a. This approach enabled us to visually and statistically assess the differences in variability and central tendency between the ECE3 and ECE3L ensembles for the Arctic region (north of 66.5°N). As noted that the Greenland-Iceland- Norwegian Seas (GIN: 40°W-15°E, 66.5°N-82°N) and the Barents and Kara Seas (BAKA: 15°E-100°E, 70°N-82°N) exhibit relatively remarkable changes in temperature trends and amplification ratio compared to the rest of the Arctic domain Fig. 13, we applied CDF to these two key sub-regions.



**Figure S10.** Cumulative distribution function (CDF) plots for TAS trend from ECE3 and ECE3L ensembles: (a) in the Arctic region (north of 66.5°N), (b) the Greenland-Iceland- Norwegian Seas (GIN: 40°W-15°E, 66.5°N-82°N), and (c) the Barents and Kara Seas (BAKA: 15°E-100°E, 70°N-82°N). Observations are from ERA5 (Hersbach et al., 2020), Berkeley Earth (BEST, Rohde and Hausfather, 2020), JRA-55 (Kobayashi et al., 2015) and NCEP2 (Kanamitsu et al., 2002).

In the Arctic (Fig.S10a), ECE3L aligns more closely with observed trends, particularly by reducing variability and providing a more accurate central tendency compared to ECE3. In the GIN and BAKA seas, the CDF analysis highlights regional differences in ensemble performance, with ECE3L again showing better alignment with observations (Fig. S10b,c). While the ensemble mean of ECE3 performs slightly better than ECE3L for temperature trends and amplification ratios in the Barent Sea (Fig.13c, f), the variability within individual members makes ECE3L more reliable regionally in Fig.S10c. (Please refer to our response to Reviewer #2, comment 10, for further details.)

7. L27: “most climate CMIP6 models struggle to reproduce the rapid decline since the mid-2000s” – this suggests that most CMIP6 models underestimate the observed trend but is this really true? The CMIP6-model mean (e.g. Notz and Community) slightly underestimates the trend between 2000 and 2014 but if we would consider the observed ice area until 2023 and compare versus e.g. hist+ssp2-45, the CMIP6 model ensemble mean is well representing the trend. Differences among models are large (Keen et al. 2021) but is Keen et al. 2021 really stating that CMIP6 models generally are underestimating the trend since mid-2000s?

Further, observations show a rapid decline until 2012 but no further decline thereafter, thus it “rapid decline since the mid-2000s” is not entirely correct from today's (year 2024) view.

We appreciate the reviewer's feedback and have clarified the following points in response:

- Rapid decline period: The rapid decline primarily occurred between the early 2000s and 2012, with the rate of decline slowing afterward (Lee et al., 2023; Sumata et al., 2023).
- Model performance: While the CMIP6 multi-model mean captures the overall trend, individual models vary in their ability to reproduce the decline. Differences in model performance are mainly attributed to biases in sea ice volume and growth processes (Keen et al., 2021).
- Feedback mechanisms: Key feedback processes, such as the sea ice-albedo effect, are often underrepresented due to biases in sea ice modeling, which introduces uncertainties in future projections (Wunderling et al., 2020).

Please modify this statement.

*“In addition, CMIP6 models exhibit significant inter-model variability in simulating Arctic sea ice decline, particularly during the accelerated loss that began around the early 2000s. This includes the nonlinear shift from thicker, deformed ice to a thinner, more uniform regime after 2007 (Sumata et al., 2023). While the multi-model mean captures the observed sea ice trend until 2012, discrepancies arise in models' ability to simulate the timing and magnitude of the decline, with some underestimating or overestimating trends due to biases in sea ice volume and growth processes (Keen et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2023). These discrepancies challenge the reliability of future climate projections, particularly regarding sea ice loss (Wunderling et al., 2020). Consequently, critical feedback mechanisms, such as the ice-albedo effect that amplifies Arctic warming, cascade uncertainty, limiting models' ability to project reliable future sea ice evolution and its broader impact on global climate systems.”*

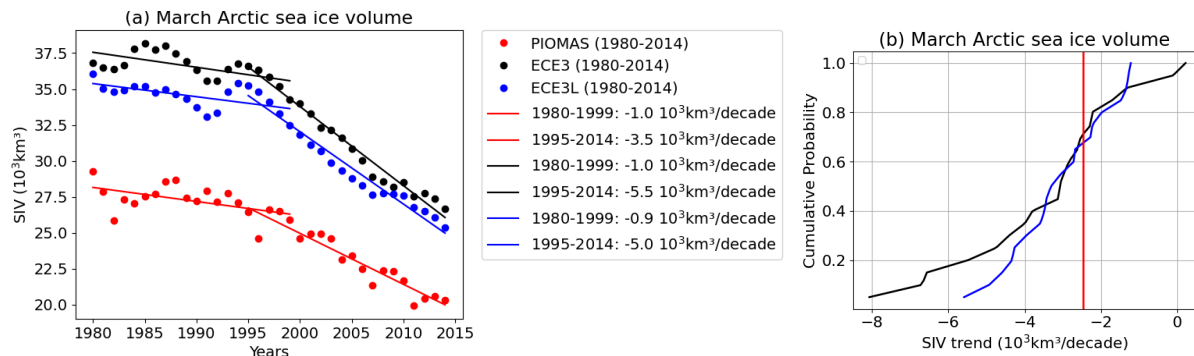
8. L 52/53: This is an important question that is phrased here but I do not find any answer to it in conclusion or abstract of this article. To me it seems that your conclusion would be “no”. The cold climate shows less ice/ is warmer with heat flux modulation but the warm climate shows only little change, thus the delta sea ice between warm and cold states is actually smaller in the ECE3L than the ECE3 runs. Surprisingly, this is not really reflected in the amplification rate or the trends.

Please take up the question again later, e.g. in the conclusions.

Thank you for your valuable feedback.

We have raised two questions: Q1. Whether the amplified heat flux through sea ice leads during winter can accelerate the transition from a colder state with thicker ice to a warmer state with thinner ice. Q2. Whether this amplified heat flux becomes less effective in a warming Arctic.

We hypothesized that higher SIV acts as a buffer, delaying the response to warming. This is because additional energy is required to thin thicker ice. By removing the buffer, we expected the model to better represent the thinning rate in the warming Arctic. To explore the transition from a cold-thick state to warm-thin state, we calculated the declining rate in SIV for two periods, 1980-1999 and 1995-2014 (Fig.6a). We also applied CDF to analyze the trends from 1980 to 2014 (Fig.6b)



**Figure 6. (a)** Time series of March SIV ( $10^3 \text{ km}^3$ ) for PIOMAS (red), ECE3 (black), and ECE3L (blue) from 1980 to 2014. Linear trends are indicated for two periods: 1980-1999 and 1995-2014. The respective trends (in  $10^3 \text{ km}^3/\text{decade}$ ) are:

- PIOMAS: -1.0 for 1980-1999 and -3.5 for 1995-2014;
- ECE3: -1.0 for 1980-1999 and -5.5 for 1995-2014;
- ECE3L: -0.9 for 1980-1999 and -5.0 for 1995-2014.

This panel shows that both ECE3 and ECE3L simulate stronger SIV reductions compared to PIOMAS during the latter period.

**(b)** CDF of the March SIV trend ( $10^3 \text{ km}^3/\text{decade}$ ) for the ECE3 (black) and ECE3L (blue) ensembles from 1980 to 2014. The red vertical line represents the observed trend from PIOMAS. The CDF shows over 60% of the members in both ECE3 and ECE3L overestimate the SIV decline (left of the reference line), with trends in ECE3L generally closer to the observed trend and exhibiting reduced variability.

In summary, the amplified heat flux through sea ice leads in ECE3L does not accelerate the decline in SIV, but rather mitigates the overestimated decline rate observed in ECE3, which is driven by a more pronounced positive bias in SIV in colder states. ECE3L ensemble exhibits reduced variability and shows potential for improving the model's sensitivity to Arctic amplification in certain regions. However, long-term trends in SIV (Fig. 6b) and TAS (Fig. S10) in the Arctic remain primarily driven by external forcing (as discussed in the response to major comment 3). The role of sea ice leads will diminish under future warming scenarios but remains crucial in colder climates, where ice loss and surface warming are more pronounced.

We will incorporate this explanation in the conclusion.

9. L87: “does not supply additional heat to warm the atmosphere”. Please explain:

We apologize for any confusion caused by our statement. Our intent was to clarify that the heat extracted from the ocean per square meter, under the same air-sea temperature difference, remains consistent according to the bulk formula, regardless of whether it's in an open ocean grid cell or a grid cell with a small fraction of open water surrounded by sea ice. This implies that the ocean is not more prone to freezing, as the same amount of heat is transferred to the atmosphere. The introduced modulating factor, *Alead*, primarily affects the efficiency of heat transfer received by the atmosphere through the "amplified/damped" surface sensible heat flux (SSHF) over leads surrounded by sea ice. Consequently, this sub-grid process is non-conservative. (As reply to Reviewer #2, major comment 1)

Do you mean the amplification of heat flux in winter is compensated by below-1-values in summer, and in the annual mean there is no additional heat flux to the atmosphere? And why should not the heat flux into the atmosphere be increased in a coupled model if it would be more realistic?

Not exactly, it is that there is usually above-1 values in winter when you more often find stable stratification than there is in summer, but there is nothing prescribing that the net effect on heat fluxes in the annual mean should be 0; this depends upon the climatology of the atmospheric stratification in the model.

10. L 110-115: “These simulations were a subset of a 25-member ensemble.” How many EC-Earth3 members are you using: 25 or 20 or what do you mean with “subset”?

We used 20 members, which are a subset of the original 25-member ensemble. As explained to major comment #3.

11. L118: How do you perturb the atmospheric initial conditions?

The 3D temperature field was perturbed with random differences (to the order of  $10^{-5}$  K), which are much smaller than observations yet sufficient to generate enough differences in the different members after a few days.

12. L177: “..in EXPWarm during the 50-year cycle (as revealed in the full time series in Fig S2)” . Figure S2 does not show the full 50-year time series but only year 21-50, please correct. As stated before, 100-year runs would provide more robust results, and please show really the entire time series as it would be very interesting to see how quickly the sea ice changes evolve in ECE3L.

We now present the full 50-year time series of sea ice area, volume and GMT in Figure S2. Please refer to our response to major comment 2, for further details.

13. L194/195: Do you want to indicate that ocean heat transport from the south into the Arctic increases in ECE3L, and that the increased heat is decreasing more sea ice? In case this is the hypothesis, please show ocean heat transports into the Arctic. However, I believe that it is more likely that sea ice is generally getting thinner. At the ice margins, ice is getting so thin, that it drastically drops while in the Central Arctic sea ice concentration will still be close to 100% in winter even if ice thickness is reduced by 1 m or more.

Your latter interpretation is correct. Combining our response to Reviewer #2, comment 4, we will revise this section:

*“The findings suggest that during Arctic winters, the overall thinning of sea ice, particularly at the ice margins, is a key driver of sea ice concentration reduction. In these marginal zones, where the ice is already very thin, even small reductions in thickness can lead to significant decreases in ice extent. In contrast, in the Central Arctic, sea ice concentration can remain close to 100% during winter, despite thickness reductions of one meter or more. This thinning at the margins coincides with a significant rise in surface air temperature by approximately 2 degree (Fig. 5), indicating a warmer atmospheric boundary layer extending southwards.”*

14. L 230: Model spread is smaller in ECE3L than ECE3 - this might be an artifact of the initialization methodology; see main comment 3.

As reply to major comment 3, we showed the ensemble mean and the spread of TAS and AMOC in ECE3L are comparable to those in the original ECE3 ensemble (Fig.3 and Table 1). We will add clarification that the reduced model spread is due to the reduced positive bias in the colder conditions, unlike an artifact of the initialization methods, as well as Fig. 3c to supplement.

15. L235: “can refine estimates of the declining sea ice trend”. Yes, but it would reduce the trend since the effect of heat flux modulation is larger in a colder climate. Is not that in contrast to one of your goals to make the trend in CMIP6-models or specifically in EC-Earth3 more realistic (= larger) ? (Although as stated before I disagree that CMIP6 models generally underestimate the observed sea ice trends).

As reply to minor comment 8, it reduces (rather than accelerates) the overestimated trend for ECE3. We’ve also clarified the CMIP6 models’s performance in representing the declining rate, as response to minor comment 7.

16. L239-245: Linked to minor comment 5: Do you have any explanation why the impact of modulating heat flux in the transient period is so much smaller than in the cold climate, although the cold climate has even slightly thinner ice than the transient run?

We addressed this to minor comment 5.

17. L270: “has significantly improved its accuracy ...”. But the improvement seems to be time-dependent and mainly for a (past) colder climate. If I follow your argumentation, then you would not expect large impact in a warmer future climate as well or would you? Any improvement of models is good but how relevant is this improvement to “improve predictions of future Arctic conditions” (Line 275) then?

We acknowledge the reviewer’s point and agree that while the improvement is significant, the parameterization has limitations in warmer states, which may limit its impact on improving predictions of future Arctic conditions. As a result, we will remove the phrase “to improve predictions of future Arctic conditions” from Line 275.



18. L291: “The temperature trend maps demonstrate that ECE3L outperforms ECE3”: Linked to comment 6, I disagree: both ECE3L and ECE3 show trend patterns that are quite different from the reference data sets. There are maybe a few small areas where ECE3L fits a little bit better but there are other areas where it is worse. And if we look at the local amplification maps, it is even more difficult to see a clear improvement. We need also have in mind that we compare ensemble means to one realization of the reality.

Thank you for your feedback. We understand your concerns and have addressed similar points in our response to comment 6, as well as to Reviewer #2, comment 10.

To provide a clearer comparison, we have added a CDF plot, which offers a more detailed assessment of the differences between the ensemble members and the reference datasets.

19. L365/ 366: “In a warmer climate, the modulating factor can either increase or decrease sea ice states ...” Would it not be most probable that the effect would be small in a future warmer Arctic if we would follow your argumentation from the section before? We know from future climate simulations in the Arctic that ice thickness will further decrease and atmospheric stability decrease. What would you expect, given this knowledge, how the modulating factor would affect sea ice states in a warmer climate, increase, decrease or little effect?

We will revise the text to better reflect this expectation:

*“In a warmer climate, the modulating factor can either increase or decrease sea ice states depending on prevailing atmospheric stability and the mean sea ice thickness, making the overall effects minimal and uncertain.”*

20. L370: Please explain (or modify or delete this statement) how a parameterization in a model can “inform effective strategies for mitigating the impacts of climate change”?

We will delete this statement. Our goal is to improve the climate models and reduce the uncertainties in climate simulations by applying new parameterization that enables us to represent sub-grid processes or quantify its relative importance. However, we acknowledge that there is still a long way to go in improving sea ice dynamics in our global model before drawing such conclusions.

21. L375: in code and data availability: what about code and data of ECE3L?

We will add the information.

#### **Technical corrections:**

L71: delete “particularly”

Done.

L74/75: write “sea ice in the Central Arctic” or just “it in the Central Arctic” instead of only “Central Arctic”.

Done. We changed it to “it in the Central Arctic”.

Caption Figure 1: “Seasonal air temperature”: I think you show “monthly air temperature” or maybe the “annual cycle”.

Done. We changed it to “Annual cycle of”.

Caption Fig S4 and S5: “under a constant”: “climate” missing? ; “as in Fig. ??”: replace “??”

We have addressed the issues by correcting the caption to read “under a constant forcing” and replacing 'as in Fig. ??' with 'as in Fig. 2.' Thank you for bringing these to our attention."

L395: It seems to be strange to write into the reference that “The Blue Action project receives ...”. Consider deleting.

We deleted it accordingly.

**Reference:**

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Keen et al.: An inter-comparison of the mass budget of the Arctic sea ice in CMIP6 models, *The Cryosphere*, 15, 951–982 (2021).

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