

Impacts of Simulated Coastal Ocean Alkalinity Enhancement on the Seasonal Carbon Cycle in
European Waters under a Low- and a High-Emission Scenario

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Key Points:

- Ocean Alkalinity Enhancement (OAE) aims to increase the ocean's potential to sequester and store atmospheric CO₂
- Due to summer retention, surface OAE reverses the seasonal cycle of alkalinity and it decreases ocean pCO₂, turning the system into a year-round carbon sink
- OAE drives the strongest CO₂ uptake enhancement in winter, while high emissions amplify this signal

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Abstract

One potentially scalable method to remove CO₂ from the air is ocean alkalinity enhancement (OAE), which works to lower its sea surface partial pressure (pCO₂) and accelerate CO₂ sequestration and durable ocean storage. This study explores how OAE might affect the seasonal carbon cycle, which plays a key role in the ocean's annual CO₂ uptake. By analysing earth system model simulations of OAE implemented continuously at the European coastline under low and high emissions, it was found that: a) due to surface alkalinity retention, OAE reduces ocean pCO₂ most strongly in summer, turning the region into a year-round carbon sink; b) the strongest air-sea CO₂ uptake enhancement takes place in winter; c) the ocean's carbon sink is increased more strongly in SSP3-7.0 than in SSP1-2.6 due to a lower buffering capacity.

Short summary

Ocean Alkalinity Enhancement (OAE) is a marine carbon dioxide removal method with large-scale potential. Using an Earth System Model, we explored the effects of continuous coastal OAE application on the seasonal carbon cycle under low and high emissions. We found that stratification retains higher alkalinity over summer, reducing the ocean pCO₂ and turning the region into a year-round carbon sink. Additionally, high emissions lower the ocean's buffering capacity and increase winter CO₂ uptake.

1 Introduction

The ocean constitutes a valuable resource for climate stabilisation, absorbing much of the earth's excess heat and storing vast amounts of carbon in its interior and deep waters (Friedlingstein et al., 2022; Scott-Buechler & Greene, 2019). Thus, research on marine carbon dioxide removal (mCDR) has been expanding, focusing on the use of wetlands, continental shelves and the open ocean to enhance natural CO_2 removal processes. One mCDR method under investigation is ocean alkalinity enhancement (OAE), which aims to accelerate the ocean's CO_2 uptake, as carbon has the potential to be stored in the ocean for a long time. Specifically, OAE would enhance natural weathering, namely the breakdown of rocks and minerals by water-induced chemical reactions that consume atmospheric CO_2 . OAE can be realised by releasing alkaline minerals or solutions at the ocean surface, which would chemically convert aqueous CO_2 ($\text{CO}_2(\text{aq})$) into stable bicarbonate (HCO_3^-) and carbonate (CO_3^{2-}) ions, that together constitute the dissolved inorganic carbon (DIC) pool. This process would lower the ocean CO_2 partial pressure (pCO_2) and allow for additional CO_2 uptake from the atmosphere to restore the altered equilibrium. Additionally, by increasing the ocean's ability to neutralise acidity, OAE would have the additional benefit of temporarily reducing seawater acidification.

CO_2 seasonality is a major contributor to the annual net ocean flux, mainly controlled by sea surface temperature (SST), its thermal component, and DIC, its biophysical component (Fassbender et al., 2022). Variations in SST act on the chemical solubility of gases in seawater, favouring CO_2 dissolution in winter and CO_2 outgassing in summer (Williams & Follows, 2011). Conversely, variations in DIC drive CO_2 loss in winter, when enhanced vertical mixing and organic matter respiration increase carbon content at the top layer, and CO_2 uptake in summer, when organic matter production prevails and reduces surface DIC. As SST and DIC are counteracting drivers (Lerner et al., 2021; Gallego et al., 2018, Takahashi et al., 2002), the one that dominates determines the ocean's role as either a net annual CO_2 source or sink at a given location.

OAE could have several impacts on seasonal carbon dynamics, depending on the selected mode and site of alkalinity addition. For example, the rate at which alkalinity is added could produce different magnitudes and timing of CO_2 uptake within the annual cycle, causing asymmetrical or phase shifts to the air-sea CO_2 flux, or altering seasonal extrema. The location of OAE deployment may be affected by the seasonal driver of the air-sea CO_2 flux as well as by physical properties, like bathymetry or regional ocean circulation. Furthermore, adding alkalinity at the ocean's surface, already supersaturated with respect to calcite and aragonite (Hartmann et al., 2023), may surpass critical thresholds, which could in turn affect the ocean's net annual uptake and potentially affect local ecosystems, as other components of the carbonate system would respond accordingly. Lastly, as the ocean's pCO_2 seasonal cycle is expected to increase due to rising atmospheric CO_2 concentrations (Gallego et al., 2018), studying the influence of background

emissions would help understand the role of different climate mitigation pathways on OAE deployment.

So far, few studies have investigated the impacts of OAE on the seasonal carbon cycle, mostly at present day conditions. Using a global circulation model, Zhou et al. (2025) simulated pulsed alkalinity addition at different locations and in different seasons, finding that it is generally more efficient to inject alkalinity in summer, as winter mixing quickly removes alkalinity from the ocean surface. Similarly, Wang et al. (2023) found that, under continuous OAE deployment simulated using a regional ocean model, alkalinity accumulation is largest in summer due to the lower water transport outside the injection site. Additionally, with a coupled circulation-dissolution model, Wang et al. (2025) studied the detectability and risk exposure of various alkalinity feedstocks, injection locations and seasons of addition, concluding that excess alkalinity is most detectable in summer, when the mean residence time is longest, while the risk potential of negative impacts also increases. However, an analysis that explores the effects of continuous coastal OAE deployment on the seasonal carbonate system under different emission pathways has been missing. Thus, here we focus on seasonal carbon dynamics using output data from an earth system model (ESM) that simulated OAE along the European coastline under a low- and a high-emission Shared Socio-economic Pathway (SSP) (SSP1-2.6 and SSP3-7.0, respectively).

2 Materials and Methods

2.1 Earth System Model

The simulations used in this manuscript were run using the Flexible Ocean and Climate Infrastructure (FOCI) ESM (Matthes et al., 2020). FOCI consists of an atmosphere–ocean–sea ice general circulation model with a surface land component, coupling the Nucleus for European Modelling of the Ocean (NEMO3.6, Madec and The NEMO Team, 2015) for ocean and sea-ice, the Jena Scheme for Biosphere–Atmosphere Coupling in Hamburg (JSBACH; Brovkin et al., 2013) for the land, and ECHAM6.3-HAM2.3-MOZ1.0 (ECHAM6-HAMMOZ; Schultz et al., 2018) for the atmosphere. The ocean is divided into 46 vertical layers with a horizontal resolution of $1/2^\circ$ and the atmosphere is composed of 95 vertical layers with a horizontal resolution of $\sim 1.8^\circ$.

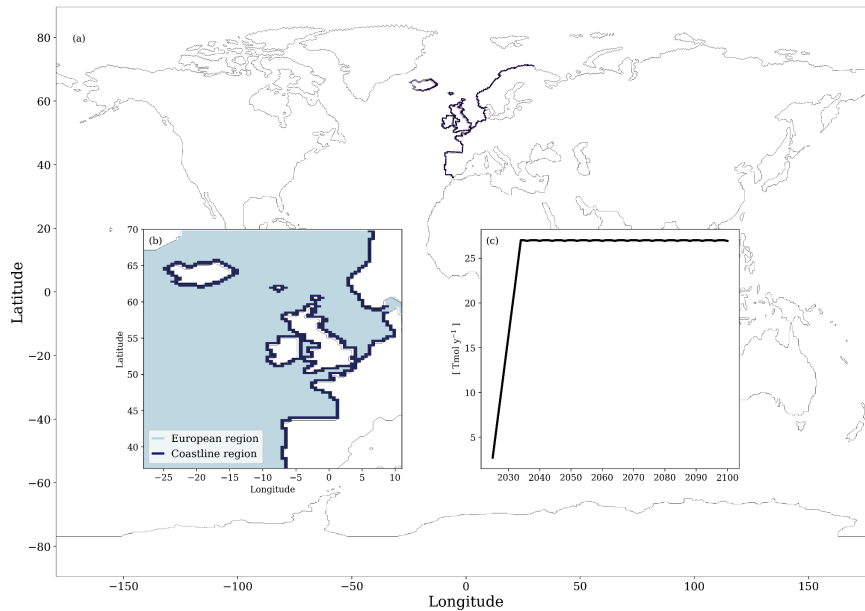
In addition to simulating the land carbon cycle, FOCI incorporates the Model of Oceanic Pelagic Stoichiometry (MOPS) (Kriest & Oschlies, 2015) to enable the representation of marine biogeochemical processes and the ocean carbon cycle. MOPS resolves biological dynamics such as phytoplankton carbon uptake and remineralisation, calcite formation and dissolution (Chien et al., 2022). Alkalinity is a prognostic tracer simulated as a combination of biological sources and sinks, including: nitrate and phosphate supply as sinks, calcium carbonate production and dissolution as sink and source, respectively, and organic matter production and remineralisation as sink and source, respectively (Chien et al., 2022). In FOCI-MOPS, the ocean biogeochemical state, including

DIC and alkalinity, is calculated on the NEMO-MOPS ocean grid, while the coupled air–sea CO₂ flux information is transferred through OASIS3-MCT from the ORCAO5 ocean grid to the coarser atmospheric T63 grid. The CO₂ flux is then calculated in the atmospheric component of FOCI and subsequently remapped conservatively back to the ocean grid, where it is applied as the surface DIC boundary flux (Matthes et al., 2020). Since the CO₂ flux calculation is performed on the less resolved atmospheric grid, sub-atmospheric-grid oceanic gradients are smoothed before the flux is calculated.

2.2 Experimental design

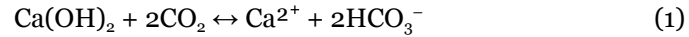
A 1500-year spin-up was carried out with ‘physics-only’ FOCI, followed by a 500-year spin-up including MOPS (Chien et al., 2022). Then, historical simulations were run from 1850 to 2014, when the SSPs begin (Riahi et al., 2017). All spin-ups, control simulations and forcings adhered to the CMIP6 protocol (O’Neill et al., 2016, Eyring et al., 2016). In order to investigate the role of the climate scenario on OAE application, a low- and high-emission SSP have been selected, namely SSP1-2.6 and SSP3-7.0. Simulations were run in emission-driven mode, such that atmospheric carbon is exchanged with the ocean and the terrestrial biosphere.

Figure 1: (a) shows the spatial distribution of alkalinity addition along the European coastline (excluding the Mediterranean and the Baltic seas); (b) zooms into the regional domain, highlighting the ‘European region’ in lightblue and the ‘coastline region’ in darkblue; (c) shows the time series of coastline alkalinity addition in units of Tmol y⁻¹ from 2025 to 2100.



In the OAE runs, alkalinity is introduced continuously and evenly into the surface layer of the coastal grid cells outlined by the coloured line in Fig. 1a, spanning a vertical depth of roughly 3

148 meters. As the model runs with a horizontal resolution of $1/2^\circ$, this corresponds to approximately
 149 55 km in the meridional direction and 45 km zonally in southern Europe, decreasing to about 30
 150 km in northern Europe. OAE is applied from 2025 to 2100, with linear increase over the first
 151 decade of addition (2025-2034), until the equivalent of 1 Gt y⁻¹ of fast-reacting calcium hydroxide
 152 (Ca(OH)₂) is reached. From 2035, this amount, which equals 27 Tmol y⁻¹ of alkalinity (or 44 mol
 153 m⁻² y⁻¹), is held constant until the end of the century (Fig. 1c). Theoretically, Ca(OH)₂ consumes
 154 two moles of atmospheric CO₂, and it produces one mole of calcium (Ca²⁺) and two moles of
 155 bicarbonate, therefore increasing alkalinity by a factor of two (eq. (1)) (Chien et al., 2022):

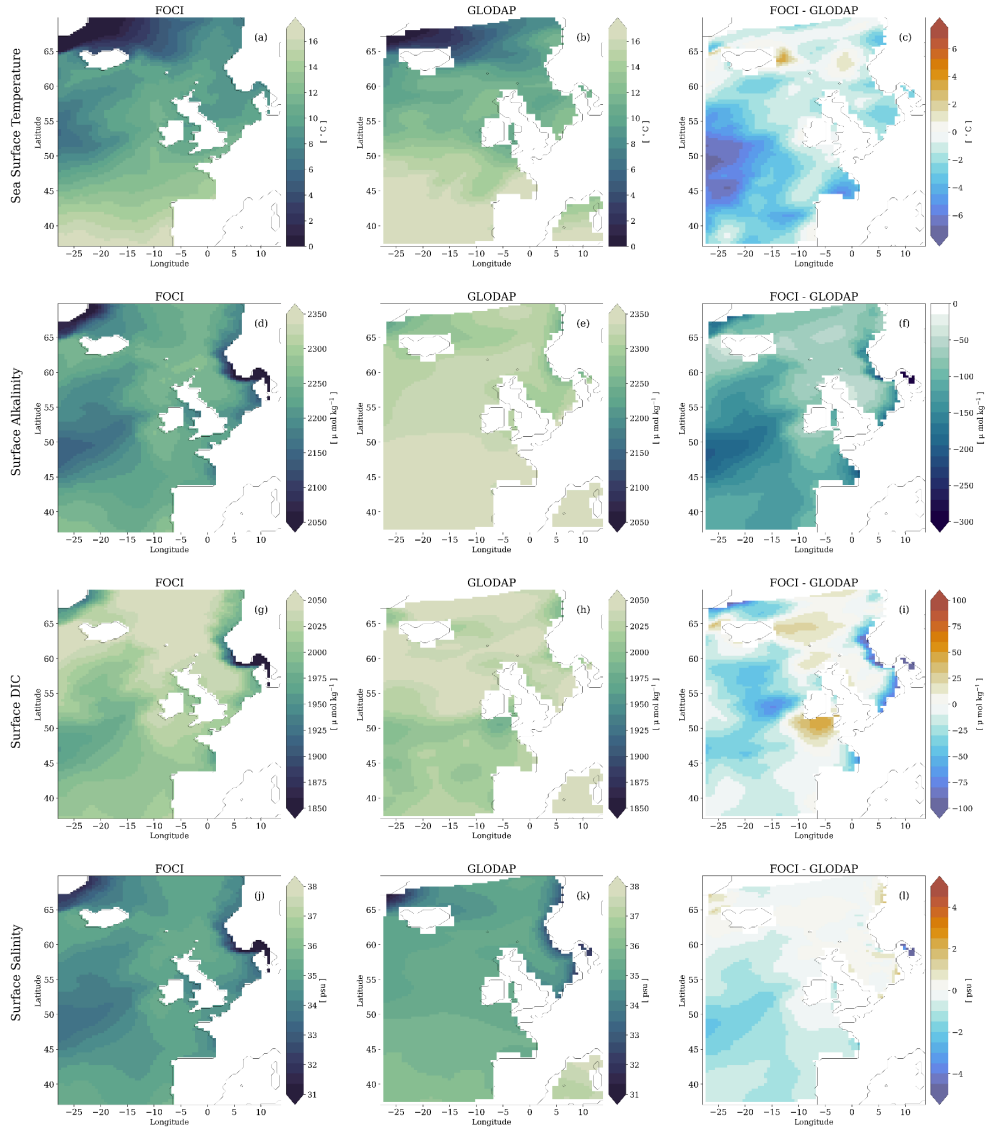


159 2.3 Regional model validation

160 At the global scale, both alkalinity and DIC in FOCI-MOPS agree well with observations, while
 161 still showing a positive bias at the surface and a negative bias below 3000 meters of depth.
 162 However, model fidelity lowers towards the coasts, which are less resolved with a $1/2^\circ$ resolution.
 163 While this is a common bias in global models that has been highlighted in Chien et al. (2022), here
 164 we validate FOCI-MOPS in the region where alkalinity is added using GLODAPv2 observations
 165 (Lauvset et al., 2016, Key et al., 2015) (Fig. 2).

166 For coastal sea surface temperature, FOCI-MOPS agrees well with GLODAPv2, with slightly
 167 lower values near the continental shelf. Towards the North Atlantic, FOCI-MOPS shows a
 168 prominent cold bias (Fig. 2c), which was already observed in previous model validation studies
 169 (Chien et al., 2022, Matthes et al., 2020). Such a feature is likely due to the lack of mesoscale
 170 dynamics, which affects the Gulf Stream path compared to an eddy-resolving ocean model
 171 (Matthes et al., 2020, Ojha et al., 2026, preprint).

172
 173 Figure 2: Comparison of FOCI-MOPS mean fields (1972–2013) and 2021 GLODAPv2 observations,
 174 along with their differences, for sea surface temperature (a, b, c), surface alkalinity (d, e, f), surface
 175 DIC (g, h, i), and surface salinity (j, k, l).



Generally, surface alkalinity has a minor negative bias compared to the GLODAPv2 dataset, which increases off the coasts of Norway and towards the open ocean (Fig. 2f). DIC fields in FOCI-MOPS agree well with observations, while showing a negative bias in the North Atlantic and a positive bias south of the Irish coasts. Importantly, by the Norwegian shelf and in the southern North Sea, the strong negative bias may have an impact on the background carbonate system under OAE application. A bias toward colder, lower-alkalinity conditions also reflects the fresh bias shown in Fig. 2l, which is stronger in the North Atlantic but absent towards the coast.

While FOCI-MOPS shows good agreement with GLODAPv2 observations, we recognise that the use of a lower-resolution model may limit the accuracy of absolute values in our simulations. However, we emphasise that our analysis focuses on differences between simulations (i.e. between an OAE run and a control run, or between SSPs), such that systematic errors are expected to affect experiments similarly and therefore largely cancel.

2.4 Data processing

Our analysis focuses on the comparison between two regions: the ‘coastline region’, which corresponds to the shelf grid cells highlighted by the dark blue line in Fig. 1b, offers details on regime shifts that take place at the epicenter of the domain; the ‘European region’, which corresponds to the coloured ocean region in Fig. 1b, measures how the European system as a whole might respond to OAE. As Palmiéri & Yool (2024) showed that half of the OAE-driven carbon uptake can happen far from the injection region, this approach helps maintain some focus beyond the coastline of alkalinity addition without risking to dilute the OAE signal.

Assuming that the most visible control-to-OAE differences are detected towards the end of the century, the annual cycle averaged over the last simulation decade (2090-2099) is considered here. While ocean $p\text{CO}_2$ and the CO_2 flux are calculated only for the surface, alkalinity is represented over all 46 FOCI ocean layers. Thus, the variable was vertically averaged over a seasonally- and scenario-dependent mixed layer depth (MLD) (also a FOCI output variable defined from potential density), which is the region in direct contact with the atmosphere. The alkalinity that is subducted below the MLD is assumed not to induce CO_2 uptake by the ocean on short timescales (He & Tyka, 2023). Importantly, the CO_2 flux outputs shown in the Results section are taken from the coarser atmospheric grid.

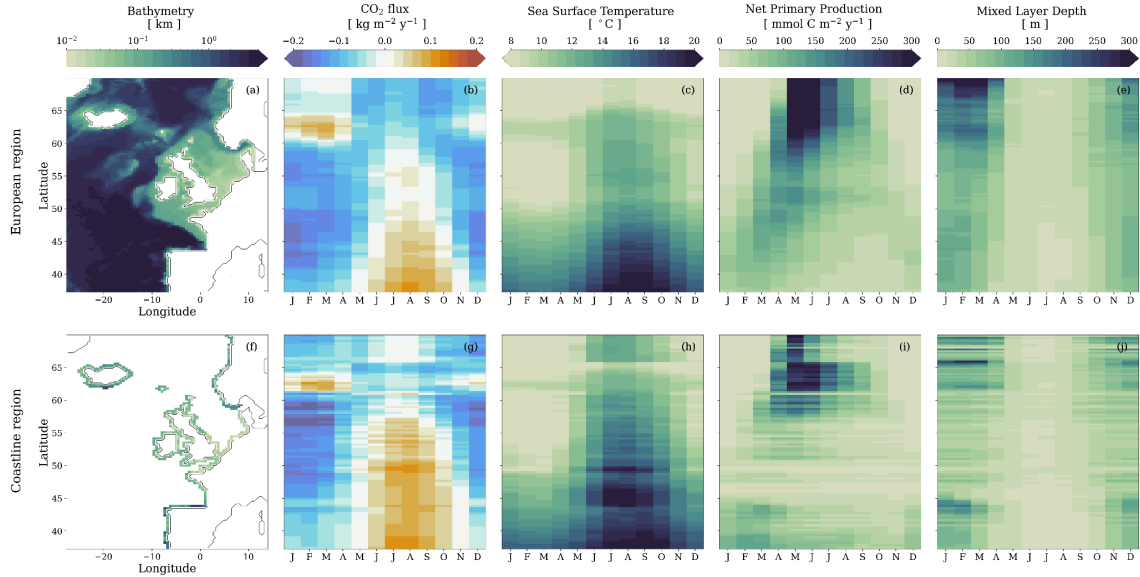
In our analysis, we define the “seasonal amplitude” as the difference between the annual maximum and the annual minimum value in a given simulation, and seasons are defined as follows: winter (December, January, February), spring (March, April, May), summer (June, July, August), and autumn (September, October, November). Additionally, we present results for OAE seasonal carbon sequestration potential, defined as the ratio of the seasonal change in CO_2 flux between a run with OAE and a run without OAE, and the amount of monthly added alkalinity carbon equivalent.

3 Results

3.1 The seasonal state in the control run

As a continental shelf pump, the European region plays an important role in carbon uptake dynamics by transferring atmospheric CO_2 into interior coastal waters and ultimately to the open ocean in the North Atlantic. As outlined above, the CO_2 flux seasonality is mainly driven by SST, which affects its chemical solubility, and biological processes, whereby carbon is used to sustain photosynthesis. Thus, to provide context for interpreting the results of our OAE runs, we analyse the SSP1-2.6 control seasonal state in the European region (Fig. 3a) and in the coastline region (Fig. 3f) for the CO_2 flux (Fig. 3b, g) and for some of its driving variables: SST (Fig. 3c, h), MLD-integrated NPP (Fig. 3d, i), and MLD (Fig. 3e, j).

Figure 3: Hovmöller diagram of the zonally averaged European region (top) and coastline region (bottom) for bathymetry (a, f), the CO₂ flux (b, g), sea surface temperature (c, h), MLD-integrated net primary production (d, i), and the mixed layer depth (e, j) over the 2090-2099 mean. In the CO₂ flux plot, negative values indicate ocean uptake.



For the air-sea CO₂ flux, the European region and the coastline region show two opposing biogeochemical geographies. Up to about 60° N, the seasonal carbon cycle is driven by temperature (Fig. 3c, h), as the largest ocean CO₂ uptake happens in winter, when CO₂ solubility is strongest, while outgassing takes place in summer, when warm temperatures inhibit chemical dissolution. Contrarily, between 60° N and 65° N, seasonality is driven by biological productivity: carbon escapes to the atmosphere over the cold months, when NPP is limited by sunlight and nutrient availability, while, from April to October, increasing productivity consumes CO₂ and ingassing is favoured.

While this pattern is generally homogeneous throughout the two regions, localised divergences emerge. For example, north of 65°, a deeper mixed layer in the European region (Fig. 3e) seems to neutralise CO₂ outgassing, while in the coastline region, where the MLD remains relatively shallower (Fig. 3j) and SST increases relatively more (Fig. 3e), the air-sea CO₂ flux is driven by chemical solubility and the largest CO₂ uptake takes place in winter. This behaviour may be due to the fact that a shallow MLD year-round does not replenish the surface ocean with sub-surface nutrient-rich waters. Additionally, temperature seasonality is stronger in the coastline region than in the European region, especially between 50° N and 60° N, resulting in a relatively more pronounced CO₂ uptake (outgassing) in winter (summer).

3.2 OAE-driven modifications to the seasonal carbon cycle

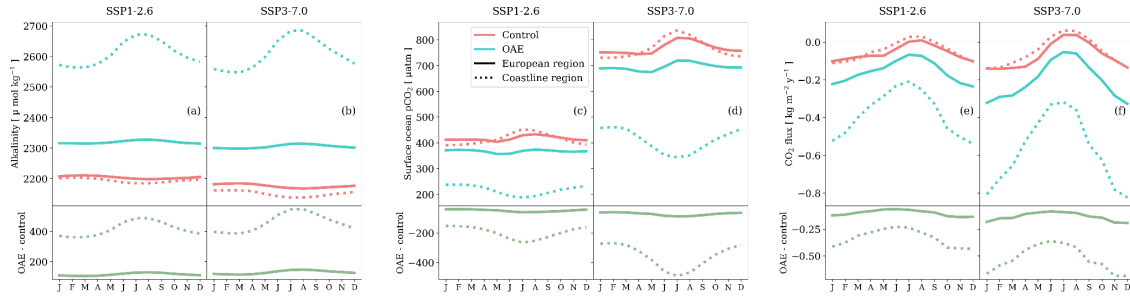
Below, we present results on the OAE-driven seasonal changes in alkalinity, surface ocean $p\text{CO}_2$ and the CO_2 flux, focusing on their temporal evolution over the 2090-2099 decade (Fig. 4) as well as on their spatial differences, both vertically (Fig. 5) and horizontally (Fig. 6). Average values for the main carbonate variables are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Annual minimum and annual maximum values averaged over 2090-2099 for alkalinity, surface ocean $p\text{CO}_2$, the air-sea CO_2 flux, and the mixed layer depth. Results are presented for the European region and the coastline region under both emission scenarios in the control and OAE runs. Note that air-sea CO_2 flux negative values indicate uptake by the ocean.

	European region				Coastline region			
	SSP1-2.6		SSP3-7.0		SSP1-2.6		SSP3-7.0	
	Control	OAE	Control	OAE	Control	OAE	Control	OAE
Alkalinity [$\mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$]	(2198, 2210)	(2315, 2327)	(2167, 2184)	(2298, 2314)	(2184, 2203)	(2563, 2672)	(2138, 2162)	(2547, 2685)
Surface ocean $p\text{CO}_2$ [μatm]	(404, 433)	(357, 374)	(745, 807)	(674, 719)	(391, 452)	(188, 238)	(730, 836)	(344, 461)
Air-sea CO_2 flux [$\text{kg m}^{-2} \text{ y}^{-1}$]	(-0.102, 0.009)	(-0.235, -0.067)	(-0.142, 0.038)	(-0.327, -0.053)	(-0.111, 0.03)	(-0.539, -0.209)	(-0.139, 0.061)	(-0.823, -0.318)
Mixed layer depth [m]	(15, 135)	(15, 141)	(14, 107)	(14, 106)	(15, 76)	(15, 75)	(14, 68)	(14, 66)

In the European region (Fig. 4a, b), surface alkalinity in the control run has lowest values in summer and highest values in winter, with respective extremes of $2198 \mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ and $2210 \mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ in SSP1-2.6, and of $2167 \mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ and $2184 \mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ in SSP3-7.0. Seasonal alkalinity follows MLD seasonality, whereby winter mixing deepens the mixed layer, replenishing the surface with high-alkalinity sub-surface waters. In the OAE runs, alkalinity increases throughout the year: while in SSP1-2.6, control values are higher than in SSP3-7.0, OAE increases surface alkalinity relatively less, especially in summer, where it is increased by $117 \mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ and by $130 \mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ for the low- and high-emission scenario, respectively.

Figure 4: Seasonal cycle averaged over 2090-2099 for surface alkalinity in SSP1-2.6 (a) and in SSP3-7.0 (b), for surface ocean $p\text{CO}_2$ in SSP1-2.6 (c) and in SSP3-7.0 (d), and for the CO_2 flux in SSP1-2.6 (e) and in SSP3-7.0 (f), with the respective difference depicted by the green line. Continuous lines represent the European region and dashed lines represent the coastline region. In the CO_2 flux plots, negative values indicate ocean uptake.

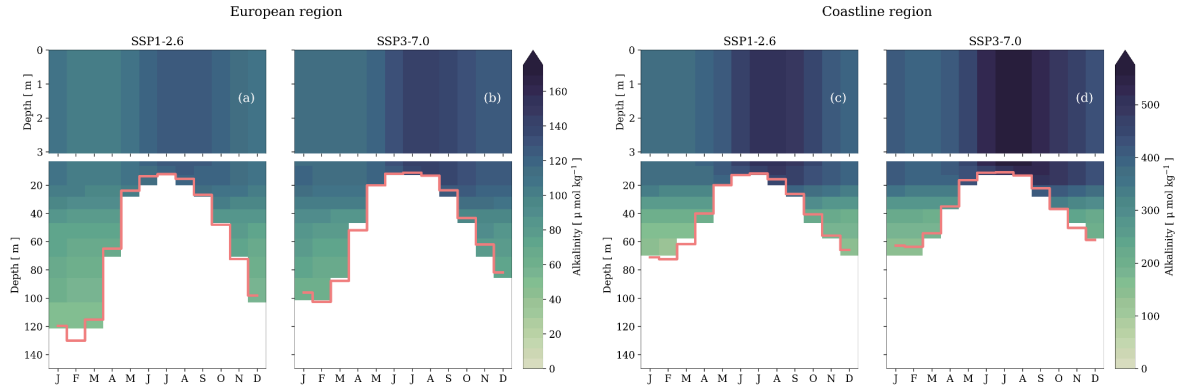


277 In the coastline region (Fig. 4g, h), where control alkalinity is similarly highest in winter and
 278 lowest in summer, OAE increases surface values up to 2672 $\mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ in SSP1-2.6 and to 2685
 279 $\mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ in SSP3-7.0, both in summer. Furthermore, the amplitude of the seasonal cycle increases
 280 greatly compared to the control runs, shifting from about 19 $\mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ to 108 $\mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ and from
 281 24 $\mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ to 138 $\mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$ in the low- and high-emission scenario, respectively. As increasing
 282 emissions enhance surface warming, higher surface alkalinity in SSP3-7.0 is the result of enhanced
 283 vertical stratification, whereby more of the added alkalinity is retained at the top layer.

284 Importantly, under both emission scenarios and in both the European and the coastline
 285 regions, alkalinity addition reverses its surface seasonal cycle, with summer values exceeding
 286 winter values. This reversed pattern is highlighted in Fig. 5, where seasonal alkalinity is shown as a
 287 function of depth: while under natural conditions, alkalinity increases with depth and winter
 288 mixing helps replenish the upper ocean from deeper layers, thus following MLD seasonality, in the
 289 OAE simulations, alkalinity is added at the surface in our simulations, and stronger vertical
 290 stratification in summer leads to greater alkalinity retention.

291 In all OAE runs, while alkalinity mostly accumulates in the first ocean layer (top row), the rest
 292 of the mixed layer (bottom row) also reflects an alkalinity increase, which is higher in summer than
 293 in winter, leading to the seasonal shift that is observed in Fig. 4a, b. Surface alkalinity accumulation
 294 is higher in the coastline region, compared to the European region, due to a much higher alkalinity
 295 input in the region of addition, and in SSP3-7.0, compared to SSP1-2.6.

297 Figure 5: Hovmöller diagram of the zonally averaged alkalinity change (OAE minus control run) as
 298 a function of depth over the first model layer (top) and over the mixed layer (bottom). The left
 299 panels (a, b) represent the European region and the right panels (c, d) represent the coastline
 300 region. The red line corresponds to the mixed layer depth in the control run.



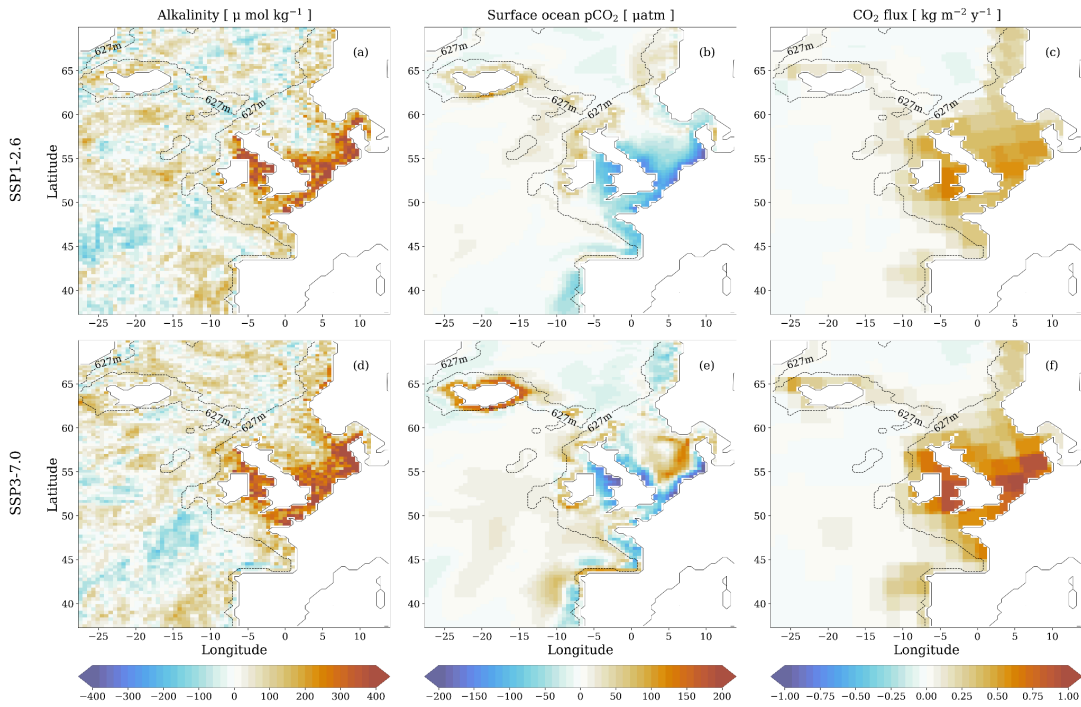
Spatially, under both SSPs in the OAE runs, the seasonal amplitude change of MLD-averaged alkalinity reveals strongest variation in the southern North Sea as well as by the UK coastline, where it increases by about $400 \mu\text{mol kg}^{-1}$. No clear amplitude change is visible in the remaining coastline region like off the coasts of Iceland, Spain and Norway. In SSP3-7.0 (Fig. 6c), the seasonal amplitude signal extends over a slightly wider area than in SSP1-2.6 (Fig. 6a), and the Norwegian and Icelandic coastlines show a slight increase of the alkalinity seasonal amplitude.

With regard to the surface ocean pCO_2 , the European region (Fig. 4c, d) is characterised by lowest and highest values of $404 \mu\text{atm}$ ($745 \mu\text{atm}$) in May and of $433 \mu\text{atm}$ ($807 \mu\text{atm}$) in August under SSP1-2.6 (SSP3-7.0). Minima are registered in spring as a result of phytoplankton bloom and consequent high NPP (Fig. 3d), whereby carbon is consumed in photosynthetic fixation. In the OAE run, surface ocean pCO_2 decreases at all seasons and spring values remain lowest, dropping to $374 \mu\text{atm}$ in SSP1-2.6 and to $674 \mu\text{atm}$ in SSP3-7.0. The seasonal amplitude decreases from $29 \mu\text{atm}$ to $17 \mu\text{atm}$ in SSP1-2.6 and from $64 \mu\text{atm}$ to $45 \mu\text{atm}$ in SSP3-7.0, with minimum values still detected over spring. While in the European region pCO_2 exhibits the same seasonality in both OAE and baseline simulations, in the coastline region, surface ocean pCO_2 is directly influenced by the OAE-driven reversal of the alkalinity seasonal cycle: highest (lowest) summer (winter) values in the control run become lowest (highest) in the OAE run. In SSP1-2.6 (Fig. 4c), the seasonal amplitude of the ocean pCO_2 decreases from $61 \mu\text{atm}$ to $50 \mu\text{atm}$, while in SSP3-7.0 (Fig. 4d) the amplitude is enhanced from $107 \mu\text{atm}$ to $116 \mu\text{atm}$ because OAE drives an even stronger reduction of summer values.

OAE reduces surface ocean pCO_2 in both the European region and in the coastline region, and under both emission scenarios, with the strongest change occurring in summer, when the control runs reach their peak. This behaviour indicates that, in our simulations, alkalinity addition produces the greatest pCO_2 decline during periods of naturally high CO_2 outgassing, resulting in a seasonal pCO_2 amplitude damping that is relatively more pronounced under low emissions: in the European region, the seasonal amplitude is reduced by 42% (28%) in SSP1-2.6 (SSP3-7.0); in the coastline region, the amplitude is reduced (enhanced) by 18% (11%) in SSP1-2.6 (SSP3-7.0).

329

330 Figure 6: Seasonal amplitude change (OAE minus control run) averaged over 2090-2099 for
 331 MLD-averaged alkalinity (a, d), for surface ocean pCO₂ (b, e) and for the air-sea CO₂ flux (c, f). The
 332 top row shows SSP1-2.6 and the bottom row shows SSP3-7.0. CO₂ flux calculations are performed
 333 on the atmospheric component of FOCL, which has a coarser resolution than the ocean component.
 334 The dashed line represents the shelf break set at the 627m isobath.



335

336 In the SSP1-2.6 scenario (Fig. 6b), a distinct spatial pattern of pCO₂ seasonal amplitude change
 337 driven by OAE is identified: at higher latitudes, including off the coasts of Iceland, as well as by the
 338 Norwegian and British North-West coastline, the seasonal amplitude slightly increases compared
 339 to the control; conversely, at lower latitudes, namely near the continental shelf and by the
 340 central-to-southern UK coasts, the seasonal cycle is strongly reduced. In SSP3-7.0 (Fig. 6e), results
 341 are amplified in Iceland, in the Southern North Sea, in the UK and Irish coasts. Exceptions are
 342 found in the central North Sea and Northern Spain, where strong seasonal amplification is
 343 displayed, and off the coasts of Norway, where the ocean pCO₂ seasonal cycle is reduced.

344 Such a strong latitudinal and scenario divergence in the seasonal amplitude of surface ocean
 345 pCO₂ may be due to different factors: north of 60° N, where the air-sea CO₂ flux is driven by its
 346 biological component (Fig. 3d), the seasonal cycle could respond differently from the European
 347 region and the coastline region averages, where the CO₂ flux is controlled by SST; at lower latitudes
 348 in SSP3-7.0, the increasing seasonal cycle of surface ocean pCO₂, which is spatially confined to the

coastal shelves, is probably driven by an even stronger OAE-induced $p\text{CO}_2$ decline over summer, which increases its seasonal amplitude as it is highlighted in Fig. 3d for the coastline region.

Regarding the CO_2 flux, seasonality is overall driven by temperature in our regional domain: the system outgasses (takes up) CO_2 in summer (winter), at lowest (highest) chemical solubility, and the largest CO_2 release happens between July and August. This pattern follows MLD seasonality, whereby summer warming shoals the mixed layer, reducing CO_2 uptake, and winter mixing deepens the mixed layer, enhancing the CO_2 flux. Under SSP1-2.6, the European region ranges from an uptake of $0.102 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ between December and January and an outgassing of $0.009 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ between July and August, while in SSP3-7.0, values are slightly more extreme: $0.142 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ CO_2 in winter and $0.038 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ CO_2 in summer.

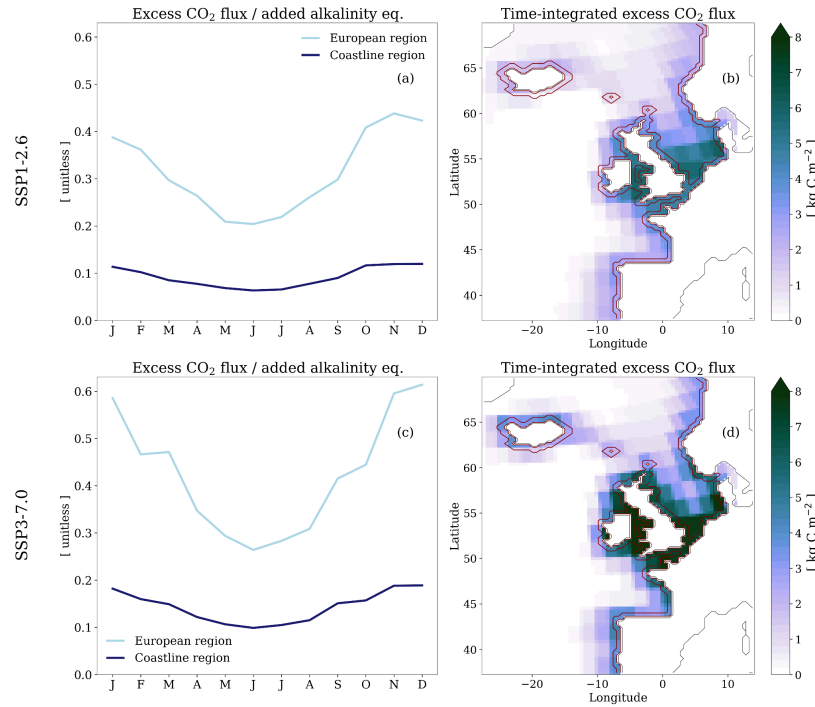
In the European region, with OAE deployment the ocean's CO_2 uptake potential is enhanced at all seasons: it ranges from 0.235 (0.327) $\text{kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ in winter to 0.076 (0.053) $\text{kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ in summer under SSP1-2.6 (SSP3-7.0). As OAE drives largest CO_2 drawdown during winter, it enhances the seasonal CO_2 flux, with a new amplitude of $0.168 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ in SSP1-2.6 and $0.292 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ in SSP3-7.0, compared to their respective controls ($0.111 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$ and $0.18 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$). This results in a seasonal amplitude enhancement of 51% and of 62% in the low- and high-emission scenario, respectively. In the coastline region, the signal is larger than in the European region: the CO_2 flux seasonal amplitude is $0.329 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$, therefore more than doubling the amplitude in the control run, which amounts to $0.114 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$. With an amplitude of $0.505 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$, the OAE seasonal CO_2 flux in SSP3-7.0 is more than 2.5 times larger than the control ($0.199 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ m}^{-2} \text{ yr}^{-1}$).

Importantly, in the OAE runs in both the European region and coastline region, excess surface alkalinity accumulates during summer, prompting a stronger reduction of surface ocean $p\text{CO}_2$ which, due to fast air-sea exchange, turns net summer outgassing into a year-round carbon sink. OAE drives the largest excess CO_2 uptake in winter, as the seasonal air-sea CO_2 flux remains in phase with the MLD cycle, regardless of seasonal variations in alkalinity (Nagwekar et al., 2024). In the coastline region, a shallow bathymetry favours year-round mixing and stronger CO_2 uptake than in the European region. As for the role of the emission scenario, SSP3-7.0 drives an even stronger carbon uptake in winter, while maintaining summer values similar to SSP1-2.6, which further increases the CO_2 flux seasonal amplitude. As it will be described later, this behaviour is due to the lowering buffering capacity of the ocean under higher emissions.

Spatially, in SSP1-2.6, OAE amplifies the CO_2 seasonal amplitude along the European coastline, and the signal remains strong until the connection with the open ocean (Fig. 6c). This boundary is set by the 627m isobath, which separates the region with a strong signal from the open ocean, where changes are almost absent. The only exception is found off the Atlantic coasts of Spain, where the signal persists beyond the selected isobath, which may be resulting from ocean

circulation dynamics that keep alkalinity at the surface and drive strong winter CO₂ uptake. The seasonal cycle is further amplified under high emissions (Fig. 6f), especially by the coasts of the southern North Sea, the UK and North-West Iceland.

Figure 7: The seasonal carbon sequestration potential defined as the ratio between the change in CO₂ flux and the added alkalinity carbon equivalent averaged over 2090-2099 (a, c), and the 2090-2099 time-integrated excess CO₂ flux (OAE minus control run) (b, d). The red contour line represents the region of alkalinity addition.



The effects of OAE on carbonate seasonality are reflected in seasonal carbon sequestration potential. While both in SSP1-2.6 and SSP3-7.0, the seasonal potential grows over the winter months and decreases over the summer months, spatial differences are present: the European region is characterised by larger variability, with values ranging between 0.2 and 0.44 (0.26, 0.61) in SSP1-2.6 (SSP3-7.0), while in the coastline region values are more constant, ranging between 0.06 and 0.12 (0.1 and 0.19) in SSP1-2.6 (SSP3-7.0). Additionally, high emissions drive a larger carbon uptake potential: this is related to the scenario-dependent chemical efficiency of OAE whereby, per unit of added alkalinity, higher atmospheric CO₂ concentrations increase the air-sea disequilibrium and decrease the ocean's buffering capacity (Schwinger et al., 2024, Nagwekar et al., 2024, Nagwekar et al., 2026).

Other than being more variable in the European region than in the coastline region, values are much higher in the former than in the latter, which is explained by the fact that excess carbon

uptake is not confined to the place of alkalinity addition. This aspect is highlighted in panels (b) and (d): while most additional air-sea CO₂ flux takes place near the coastal shelves, with little increase over the open ocean, this excess downward flux extends beyond the region of OAE deployment (Palmiéri & Yool, 2024). Furthermore, compared to SSP1-2.6, high emissions strengthen the ocean carbon sink for the same amount of added alkalinity and within the same spatial extent, due to a lower buffer factor in a high-CO₂ world (Nagwekar et al., 2024).

5 Discussion

This study provides an assessment of OAE-driven impacts on the seasonal carbonate system. OAE was simulated as a continuous surface alkalinity injection to a coastal strip in the European coastline, under a low- and a high-emission scenario. This formulation allowed us to investigate the location- and scenario-dependency of OAE effects, drawing some key findings. First, adding alkalinity at the surface reverses its seasonal cycle, as temperature-induced vertical stratification in summer retains excess alkalinity at the top, while dilution with low alkalinity sub-surface water is favoured in winter. This outcome is especially relevant in the context of monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) protocols, as measuring seasonal shifts could be an opportunity to establish metrics on OAE detectability. At the same time, surface alkalinity in the coastal region increases by more than 500 μmol kg⁻¹ during summer, potentially exceeding critical thresholds for parameters such as pH and aragonite saturation state, thereby adversely affecting local biota. Potential negative side-effects could be partially mitigated by choosing the optimal alkalinity feedstock tailored to the time, rate and place of addition (Wang et al., 2025).

Secondly, continuous OAE deployment induces surface ocean pCO₂ reduction at all seasons, but most strongly when the associated seasonal driver reduces the ocean CO₂ sink potential, which is summer in the temperature-driven European region. In the coastline region, this phase shift of surface alkalinity drives the reversal of ocean pCO₂ seasonality, though the CO₂ uptake, and the OAE-driven uptake increase, remains largest during winter, whereby colder months decrease SST, deepen the MLD and favour CO₂ dissolutions in seawater. This leads to two main conclusions: on the one hand, increasing ocean disequilibrium with the overlying atmosphere turns summer outgassing into net uptake year-round due to fast air-sea exchange; on the other hand, the CO₂ seasonal cycle keeps following MLD seasonality, independent of changes in alkalinity. In the coastline region, the MLD largely corresponds to the depth of the bathymetry for most of the year (Fig. 3), which implies that a shallow, well-mixed compartment may support surface alkalinity retention throughout the year, implying fast air-sea gas exchange. This finding may however be closely tied to the mode of OAE deployment, that allows the surface ocean to be continuously replenished with alkalinity and drive the atmosphere-ocean disequilibrium.

The seasonal carbon sequestration potential of OAE (Fig. 7) reflects the seasonal trend of the CO₂ flux, whereby uptake increases in winter and it decreases in summer in both the European region and the coastline region, and under both emission scenarios. Importantly, the potential is much larger in the European region than in the coastline region, and under higher emissions than under lower emissions, given that excess CO₂ uptake happens further than the region of alkalinity addition and that it is enhanced in SSP3-7.0 (Fig. 7b, d). This finding is relevant for country-level accountability of OAE deployment, as measurements that are limited to national or regional boundaries may not fully reflect the extent of OAE-driven impacts and therefore underestimate the carbon sequestration potential.

In order to highlight the relevance of these findings, we place our results in the context of previous research that investigated OAE-induced seasonal changes under varying background emissions. Starting from the mode of OAE deployment, which has a strong impact on carbonate changes, most studies, including ours, have focused on surface alkalinity addition: at the coastline (Feng et al., 2017, Moustakis et al., 2025), throughout the global ocean (González and Ilyina, 2016, González et al., 2018), or at specific locations to explore regional dynamics (Ilyina et al., 2013, Nagwekar et al., 2024). Similarly, our simulations explored the addition of a fast-reacting material, assuming rapid dissolution at the ocean surface. Importantly, Palmiéri and Yool (2024) simulated the addition of about 29 Tmol -1 alkalinity equivalent to the global shelves at the seafloor, finding that the depth of application has a minor impact on carbon sequestration potential. Furthermore, regarding the rate of alkalinity addition, we apply continuous OAE deployment, which implies a constant replenishment of surface alkalinity to drive air-sea disequilibrium. This approach differs from studies that investigated pulsed addition (He and Tyka, 2023, Zhou et al. 2024), which is likely to become a more realistic strategy in future deployment schemes.

In agreement with previous studies (Wang et al., 2023, Nagwekar et al., 2024, Guo et al., 2025, Wang et al., 2025), surface retention of excess alkalinity is better achieved in summer, as shallow, vertically-stratified waters allow for alkalinity not to be lost due to subduction to deeper layers or advection to the open ocean. Concerning the phase shift of seasonal surface alkalinity, Liu et al. (2025) showed that, by applying OAE to three sites in the southern North Sea, excess MLD-integrated alkalinity seasonality becomes out of phase compared to the whole water column, though the peak is detected during winter. Thus, as seasonal shifts to upper alkalinity can vary based on regional features, side changes to the carbonate system and to the local biota would also be site-specific, urging for comprehensive MRV protocols that synthesise signal detectability and ecological risk prevention.

In agreement with Schwinger (2022), OAE in our simulations amplifies the CO₂ seasonal flux under both SSPs, prompting greatest carbon uptake during winter, as OAE is found to amplify the seasonal cycle when highest CO₂ drawdown occurs naturally. Importantly, our results show that increased summer alkalinity leads to the strongest decrease in ocean pCO₂, causing summer

conditions to shift from net outgassing to net uptake as a result of rapid air–sea re-equilibration. This change effectively turns the European region and the coastline region into year-round CO₂ sinks, while Schwinger (2022) shows that, in their runs, seasonal amplification happens in both directions, therefore increasing outgassing as well as uptake. Additionally, the fact that, in our OAE runs, the CO₂ flux following alkalinity addition remains in phase with MLD seasonality, maintaining largest CO₂ uptake over winter, agrees with Nawgekar et al. (2024), who showed that seasonal shifts of the air-sea CO₂ flux are irrespective of seasonal alkalinity variations.

With regard to the seasonal carbon sequestration potential, as CO₂ uptake is higher in winter than in summer, efficiency follows the same seasonal trajectory, which seems to contradict previous findings (Zhou et al., 2025, Anderson et al., 2025) that found larger efficiency during summer. However, Zhou et al. (2025) performed pulsed alkalinity addition in various seasons, while Anderson et al. (2025) performed 90-day long simulations where alkalinity is continuously added over winter and over summer. However, pulsed addition is expected to have different outcomes from continuously replenishing the ocean’s surface with alkalinity, as is the case of our simulations. In contrast, by simulating continuous OAE over a 10-year simulation in the Bering Strait, Wang et al. (2023) found that warming summer conditions decrease the carbon sequestration potential. These findings imply that results on efficiency are closely tied to simulation-specific features like the time and rate of alkalinity addition, as well as the definition of efficiency itself. For example, if efficiency is defined in relation to changes to DIC, the type, and resolution, of the model deployed is also relevant, as biogeochemical processes that affect DIC sinks and sources would affect pool estimates.

Lastly, we investigate the role of the background scenario on OAE impacts. In our simulations the ocean’s carbon sink is increased more strongly in SSP3-7.0 than in SSP1-2.6, as surface alkalinity reaches similar levels in the two scenarios (Fig. 3a, b) but surface DIC increases more under high emissions (not shown). This finding agrees with Schwinger et al. (2024), who showed that increasing emissions drive an even further ocean uptake of anthropogenic CO₂ compared to a non-transient OAE simulation, due to elevated surface DIC concentrations and a decreasing ocean’s buffering capacity. Similarly, Nagwekar et al. (2026) found that, in SSP3-7.0, a higher air-sea partial pressure difference compared to SSP1-2.6 increases the size of the carbonate system response to alkalinity addition, driving larger additional CO₂ uptake. This same result was previously highlighted by Nagwekar et al. (2024), where OAE efficiency was higher in SSP3-7.0 (compared to SSP1-2.6) due to higher background atmospheric CO₂ and, most importantly, due to a decreasing buffer factor. However, it is important to highlight that, other than enhancing OAE efficiency, higher atmospheric CO₂ would increase surface temperatures, and thus ocean verification stratification, preventing the entrainment of sequestered carbon to deeper layers (Nagwekar et al., 2024), which an essential aspect to long-term OAE efficiency.

6. Limitations

Some limitations and future recommendations can be drawn from this study. With regard to FOCI-MOPS, the ESM represents coastal biogeochemical processes less well compared to the open ocean (Chien et al., 2022), which may affect the accuracy of absolute values in the region of alkalinity addition. While model results are mostly in agreement with GLODAPv2 observations, some of the biases may affect the veridicity of output values. Alkalinity in the Baltic Sea, for example, is poorly resolved by FOCI, which could have an impact on the North Sea boundary conditions. However, since our analysis focuses on relative differences between runs, the main conclusions in this manuscript would be less affected by such structural biases, as these are expected to affect both simulations similarly. Furthermore, while freshwater input from rivers is modelled in FOCI, riverine alkalinity is not accounted for. As river runoff has a strong seasonal cycle, implementing such processes in the model would improve the accuracy of OAE simulations.

Another limitation is that our analysis does not separate the CO₂ flux into its thermal and biological element, therefore missing to discern the influence that each of these elements has in altering the CO₂ seasonal cycle. Given the impacts of temperature and NPP at lower and higher latitude, respectively, in our domain, calculating both terms individually could provide further insight into their seasonal role under OAE deployment. Lastly, this manuscript does not address alkalised water that is subducted before air-sea equilibration is complete, and uncertainty remains on whether that water could resurface to drive CO₂ uptake elsewhere. In Palmiéri & Yool (2024), for example, it was estimated that about 50% of CO₂ uptake favoured by global coastal OAE happened remotely from the alkalinity injection sites, as it is partially displayed in Fig. 7.

7 Conclusions

The present study addressed the changes to the seasonal carbon cycle driven by coastal OAE application under a low- and high-emission scenario. It was found that, when addition takes place at the top layer, excess alkalinity accumulates more strongly in summer, as a shallow mixed layer retains alkalised water at the surface. This has the consequence of reversing, as well as amplifying, the seasonal cycle of surface alkalinity. Additionally, OAE reduces ocean pCO₂ more strongly in summer, when it is naturally highest, which, thanks to fast air-sea re-equilibration, turns summer net CO₂ outgassing into net uptake year-round. However, OAE drives the strongest CO₂ uptake enhancement in winter, when it is naturally strongest, as air-sea CO₂ flux remains in phase with the MLD seasonal cycle.

This study contributes to the understanding of OAE-driven CO₂ intra-annual variability in a continental shelf. While the design of our OAE runs mimics an idealised application, which is unlikely to become a real-world case, coastal OAE implementation is expected to become one of the more feasible approaches, due to proximity with existing coastal infrastructures. Nevertheless, such

interventions could create additional pressures on local communities and ecosystems. Thus, drawing from the results highlighted in this study, other coastal methods like pulsed or point-source experiments should be explored to ensure safe large-scale OAE deployment.

8 Author contribution

Conceptualisation: C. C., D. P. K.; Performing model simulations: T. P. K.; Data curation: C. C., D. P. K.; Formal analysis: C. C.; Investigation: C. C.; Methodology: D. P. K., T. P. K.; Supervision: D. P. K.; Validation: D. P. K.; Visualisation: C. C.; Writing – original draft: C. C. ; Writing – review & editing: C. C., D. P. K., N. M., T. P. K., S. A..

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10 Data availability

The datasets used in this manuscript are available at this Zenodo link (https://zenodo.org/records/13935197?token=eyJhbGciOiJIUzUxMiJ9.eyJpZCI6Ijg2ZWViNjU4LWMyZDYtNGFmZCo4MzIoLWUxMmE5YTNhMzdhdNyIsImRhdGEiOnt9LCJyYW5kb2oiOiIyODIyODFjZmUwZTk2MzJjOTcxNGM2ZWZmZWVhbnNDYwMyJ9.snS8fH7EYBkEYYLP9xUI_P2V4L4HUKBYEi61fFGDd43WwMskAWQBsnCFdpBMYii_TpWstwKQbsFSCF2K_F4oQ).

The code underlying this study is openly available at the following GitHub repository: https://github.com/chiaraciscato/2025_ciscato_oae_seasonality.

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