

# 1 Stronger carbon uptake by the ocean in eddy-resolving 2 simulations of global warming

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## 9 **Keypoints**

- 10 1. We conduct idealized simulations of global warming using increasingly finer horizontal resolutions, with  
11 an ocean-biogeochemical model.
- 12 2. Oceanic carbon-concentration and carbon-climate feedbacks are highly influenced by resolution.
- 13 3. It primarily stems from how the overturning circulation's mean state depends on resolution, as well as  
14 how it responds to global warming.

## 15 **Abstract**

16 Today, the ocean absorbs ~25 % of the human-induced carbon emissions. Earth System Models (ESMs) indicate  
17 that the absorption increases by  $0.79 \pm 0.07$  PgC per ppm of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> increase (carbon-concentration  
18 feedback), but diminishes by  $-17.3 \pm 5.5$  PgC per degree of warming (carbon-climate feedback). Due to lim-  
19 ited computational capacity, ESMs parameterize flows at scales smaller than their horizontal grid resolution,  
20 typically  $\sim 1^\circ$ . We conduct simulations of global warming using increasingly finer horizontal resolutions (from  
21  $1^\circ$  to  $1/27^\circ$ ), with an ocean-biogeochemical model, in an idealized mid-latitude double-gyre circulation. Our  
22 findings demonstrate that these ocean carbon cycle feedbacks are highly influenced by resolution. This sen-  
23 sitivity primarily stems from how the overturning circulation's mean state depends on resolution, as well as  
24 how it responds to global warming. Although being a fraction of the intricate response to climate change, it  
25 emphasizes the significance of an accurate representation of small-scale ocean processes to better constrain the  
26 future ocean carbon uptake.

## 27 **Plain language summary**

28 Today, the ocean absorbs ~25 % of the carbon emissions caused by human activities. This carbon sink is  
29 primarily driven by the increase of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, but it is also influenced by physical changes in  
30 the ocean's properties. Earth System Models (ESMs) are used to project the future of the ocean carbon sink.  
31 Due to limited computational capacity, ESMs need to parameterize flows occurring at scales smaller than their  
32 horizontal grid resolution, typically  $\sim 1^\circ$ . To address these computational limitations, we employ an ocean  
33 biogeochemical model in an idealized setup representing a mid-latitude double-gyre circulation. We conduct  
34 simulations of global warming using increasingly finer horizontal resolutions (from  $1^\circ$  to  $1/27^\circ$ ). Our findings

35 demonstrate that the ocean carbon uptake is highly influenced by resolution. This sensitivity primarily stems  
36 from how the overturning circulation's mean state depends on resolution, as well as how it responds to global  
37 warming. Although our results capture only a fraction of the intricate oceanic response to climate change, they  
38 emphasize the significance of accurately representing the role of small-scale ocean processes to better constrain  
39 the future evolution of ocean carbon uptake.

## 40 1 Introduction

41 By absorbing 25 % of anthropogenic carbon emissions (Friedlingstein et al., 2022), the ocean plays a crucial  
42 role in determining the rate at which CO<sub>2</sub> increases in the atmosphere, thus influencing the pace of climate  
43 change. This carbon uptake is primarily attributed to the rise in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> and its impact on the partial  
44 pressure equilibrium of CO<sub>2</sub> at the air-sea interface. However, this absorption is modulated by changes in  
45 oceanic physics, particularly the warming of surface waters and increased ocean stratification, both of which  
46 tend to decrease this flux (Sarmiento et al., 1998; Sarmiento and Le Quéré, 1996; Maier-Reimer et al., 1996).  
47 Through enhancing or reducing the ocean carbon sink, changes in the ocean carbon cycle act as a negative or  
48 positive feedback on the Earth's climate, respectively. Understanding the ocean's capacity to mitigate or amplify  
49 human-induced climate change is essential for projecting the future climate trajectory.

50 Two metrics have been established to measure the ocean carbon sink response to increasing atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>  
51 and climate change: the carbon-concentration and carbon-climate feedback parameters (Katavouta and Williams,  
52 2021; Arora et al., 2020; Schwinger et al., 2014; Boer and Arora, 2013; Roy et al., 2011; Friedlingstein et al.,  
53 2006). The former quantifies the ocean carbon cycle's response to the rise in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels, while  
54 the latter measures its response to changes in the physical climate. These metrics are typically evaluated using  
55 Earth System Models (ESMs) and idealized climate change scenarios in which atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> increases at  
56 1 % per year (Eyring et al., 2016). Arora et al. (2020) utilized 11 ESMs from the Coupled Model Intercompar-  
57 ison Project Phase 6 (CMIP6) to assess the carbon-concentration feedback at  $0.79 \pm 0.07 \text{ PgC ppm}^{-1}$  and the  
58 carbon-climate feedback at  $-17.3 \pm 5.5 \text{ PgC } ^\circ\text{C}^{-1}$ .

59 One significant limitation of ESMs arises from computational constraints and the use of coarse grid resolu-  
60 tion, which lead to an inadequate representation of transient eddies and flows of scales below 100 km (Gent  
61 and McWilliams, 1990). To overcome these limitations, coarse-resolution ESMs (1 ° or coarser) use sub-grid  
62 parameterizations, which enables capturing certain key aspects of the ocean carbon cycle. These models repro-  
63 duce reasonably well the global net carbon uptake over the historical period (Hauck et al., 2020; Séférian et al.,  
64 2020; Bronselaer et al., 2017) and replicate large-scale carbon uptake/outgassing patterns, as well as key carbon  
65 cycle drivers like primary production (Séférian et al., 2020), mixed layer depth (Fu et al., 2022; Séférian et al.,  
66 2019), and carbon subduction/obduction (Davila et al., 2022; Lévy et al., 2013; Sallée et al., 2012). Nonethe-  
67 less, these processes and their response to climate change are sensitive to sub-grid process representation (Brett  
68 et al., 2023; Couespel et al., 2021; Bahl et al., 2020; Resplandy et al., 2019; Harrison et al., 2018; Balwada et al.,  
69 2018; Mahadevan et al., 2011), potentially introducing biases into current estimates of carbon uptake and the  
70 carbon-concentration and carbon-climate feedbacks. In this study, we examine how eddy resolution influences  
71 the ocean's carbon sink response to future global warming.

72 Explicitly resolving eddies in ocean models is known to impact the positioning of western boundary currents  
73 (Chassignet and Xu, 2017; Lévy et al., 2010; Chassignet and Marshall, 2008), alter the Meridional Overturning  
74 Circulation's strength (MOC, Hirschi et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2020), and increase stratification (du Plessis

et al., 2017; Karleskind et al., 2011; Lévy et al., 2010; Chanut et al., 2008). These changes affect the transport of heat and tracers, including carbon (Swierczek et al., 2021; Uchida et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2019; Uchiyama et al., 2017; Lévy et al., 2012). Furthermore, eddy activity may evolve with global warming (Beech et al., 2022; Martínez-Moreno et al., 2021; Oliver et al., 2015), further influencing ocean circulation and carbon transport. Investigating these effects resulting from resolved eddies has recently started within global warming scenarios (Hewitt et al., 2022; Rackow et al., 2022; van Westen and Dijkstra, 2021; Chang et al., 2020), generally using resolutions not finer than  $1/10^\circ$ , and to the best of our knowledge, not in terms of their implications for ocean carbon cycle feedbacks.

This study assesses the impact of explicitly representing eddies and horizontal flows with scales ranging from 10 km to 100 km on the response of the oceanic carbon uptake to increasing  $\text{CO}_2$  and global warming. The subsequent section outlines the idealized setup employed in this study, followed by the presentation of results and concluding with a discussion regarding the implications for climate projections using ESMs.

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Models and configurations

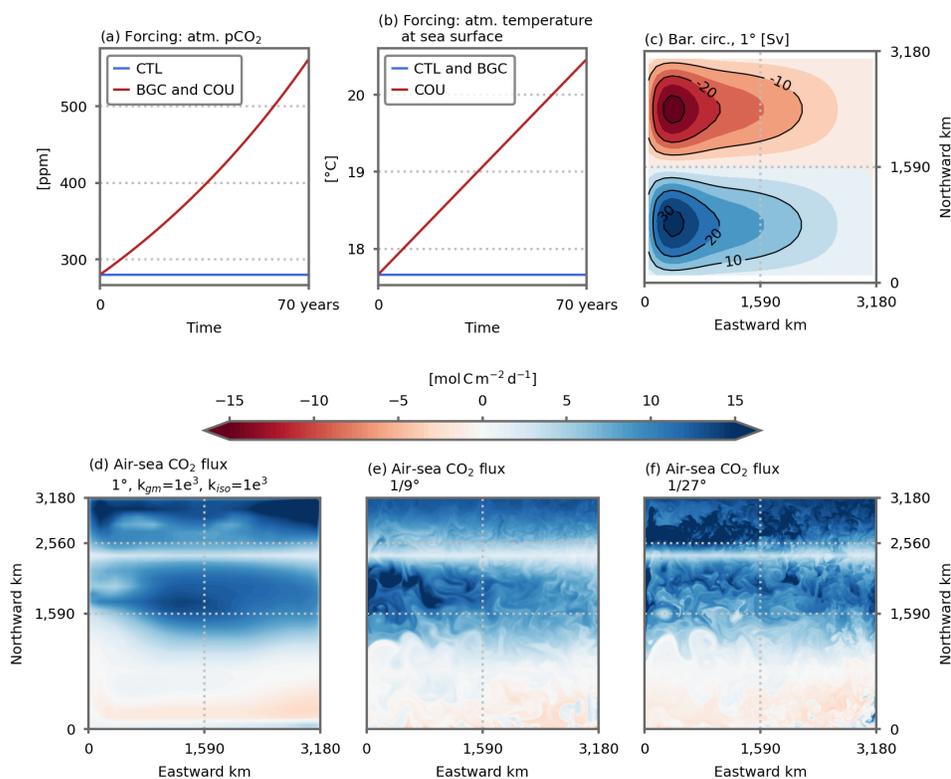
Ocean physics are simulated with the primitive-equation ocean model NEMO (Madec et al., 2017) coupled to the biogeochemical model LOBSTER (Lévy et al., 2012, 2005), in which the carbon cycle has been activated (Sec. S1 and Tab. S2). The domain is a closed square basin on a mid-latitude  $\beta$ -plane. It is 3180 km wide and long and 4 km deep, bounded by vertical walls and by a flat bottom with free slip boundary conditions. A double-gyre circulation is set up by analytical zonal forcings (wind stress, net heat flux and freshwater flux) which vary seasonally between winter and summer extrema. The net heat flux comprises a restoration toward a zonal atmospheric temperature profile and a solar radiation allowed to penetrate within the water column.  $\text{CO}_2$  is exchanged with the atmosphere following Wanninkhof (1992, Eq. 8) and forced with a prescribed atmospheric partial pressure of  $\text{CO}_2$  ( $p\text{CO}_2$ ).

We use three horizontal resolutions: 106 km ( $1^\circ$ ), 12 km ( $1/9^\circ$ ) and 4 km ( $1/27^\circ$ ). For each resolution, time steps, numerical schemes and isopycnal/horizontal diffusion are adapted (Tab. S1). For the  $1^\circ$  resolution configurations, we used the Gent and McWilliams (1990, GM hereafter) eddy parameterization. This parameterization relies on two coefficients, an isopycnal diffusion coefficient ( $k_{iso}$ ) and a GM coefficient ( $k_{gm}$ ). For testing the sensitivity to the GM parameterization, we used five combinations of the isopycnal diffusion and GM coefficients: (1)  $500 \text{ m}^2\text{s}^{-1}$ , (2)  $1000 \text{ m}^2\text{s}^{-1}$  and (3)  $2000 \text{ m}^2\text{s}^{-1}$  for both parameters and (4)  $500 \text{ m}^2\text{s}^{-1}$  and (5)  $2000 \text{ m}^2\text{s}^{-1}$  for the isopycnal diffusion parameter but keeping the GM coefficient at  $1000 \text{ m}^2\text{s}^{-1}$ . We thus end up with seven different configurations: five eddy-parameterized at a coarse resolution ( $1^\circ$ ) and two eddy-resolving at fine resolutions ( $1/9^\circ$  and  $1/27^\circ$ ). In the following, results from the eddy-parameterized coarse resolution configurations are synthesized by showing the average  $\pm 1$  standard deviation across the five different configurations. For the higher resolution configurations, there is no momentum nor tracer diffusion but a minimal bi-Laplacian tracer diffusion at  $1/27^\circ$ . Contrary to the  $1/27^\circ$  configuration, the qualifier "eddy-permitting" is probably more appropriate for the  $1/9^\circ$  configuration. Nevertheless, to simplify and as the emphasis is put on the differences between the  $1^\circ$  resolution and the finer ones, we use the term eddy-resolving for both.

The model and configurations are similar to the one described in Couespel et al. (2021) and were derived from prior studies (Resplandy et al., 2019; Lévy et al., 2012; Krémeur et al., 2009). The key elements have been outlined above. For further details, we refer to the aforementioned papers.

## 115 2.2 The different simulations and experimental design

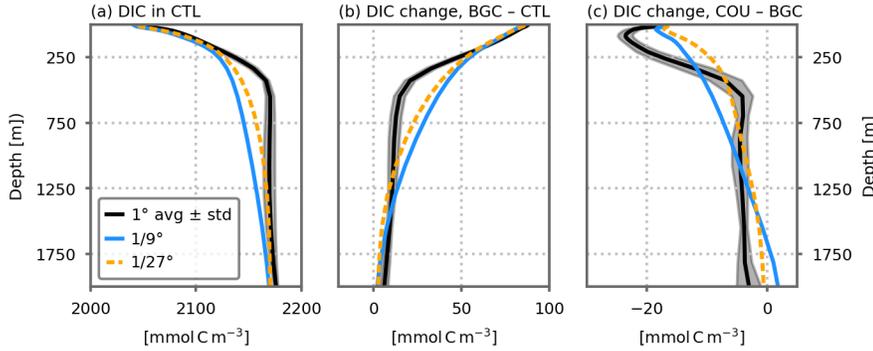
116 After a 100 years spin up at each resolution initialized with the same physical and biogeochemical state (from  
 117 a 2000 year spin-up at coarse resolution), 4 different experiments are conducted. They are forced by different  
 118 combinations of atmospheric temperature and atmospheric pCO<sub>2</sub> (see Fig. 1a,b). (1) The control simulation  
 119 (CTL) is the continuation of the spin-up, with temperature keeping a seasonal cycle and atmospheric pCO<sub>2</sub>  
 120 staying constant. (2) In the biogeochemical simulation (BGC), atmospheric pCO<sub>2</sub> increases by 1% every year,  
 121 but atmospheric temperature stays constant (with a seasonal cycle). (3) In the radiative simulation (RAD),  
 122 atmospheric temperature increases by 0.04 °C every year (with a seasonal cycle), while atmospheric pCO<sub>2</sub>  
 123 is kept constant. (4) In the coupled simulation (COU), both atmospheric pCO<sub>2</sub> and atmospheric temperature  
 124 increase by 1 % and 0.04 °C every year, respectively. The term coupled (COU) is to be coherent with the naming  
 125 used with ESMs. However, here, atmospheric temperature and atmospheric pCO<sub>2</sub> are not radiatively coupled.  
 126 Besides, despite the use of the term "atmospheric", there is no atmospheric model.



**Figure 1.** Overview of the configurations and simulations. (a) Time series of the analytical atmospheric pCO<sub>2</sub> [ppm] forcing for the CTL simulation (blue line) and for the BGC and COU simulations (red line). (b) Time series of the mean analytical atmospheric temperature [°C] forcing for the CTL and BGC simulations (blue line) and for the COU simulation (red line). Shown is the atmospheric temperature average yearly and on the domain. (c) Barotropic circulation [Sv] over the model domain (average of the five 1° resolution CTL simulations). Air-sea carbon flux [mol C m<sup>-2</sup> d<sup>-1</sup>] on March, 3<sup>rd</sup> in (d) the 1° ( $k_{gm}=1e^3$  and  $k_{iso}=1e^3$ ), (e) the 1/9° and (f) the 1/27° CTL simulations.

127 The main features of the model's solution comprise a western boundary current separating a subtropical gyre  
 128 outgassing carbon in the south of the domain from a subpolar gyre uptaking carbon in the north (Fig. 1). A  
 129 rather classic MOC is simulated with northward transport in the upper ocean (above  $\approx 250$  meters), down-  
 130 welling in the north and then southward transport at depth. In the northernmost part of the domain (2,560-3,180  
 131 northward km), deep convection occurs in winter with mixed layer depth reaching 1,000 meters and more. As  
 132 resolution increases, mesoscale eddies and filamentary structures emerge in the air-sea carbon flux (Fig. 1d-f).  
 133 Dissolved Inorganic Carbon (DIC) concentration increases with depth (Fig. 2a). With increasing resolution,  
 134 vertical profiles are more homogeneous. The vertical gradients are weaker and DIC concentration are lower at

135 250-1,250 metres. The equilibrium states have been further described in Couespel et al. (2021).



**Figure 2.** Dissolved inorganic carbon concentration (DIC, [mmol C m<sup>-3</sup>]) vertical profiles spatially averaged for the three resolutions. **(a)** DIC profiles in the CTL simulation. Change in DIC between **(b)** the BGC and CTL simulations and **(c)** the COU and BGC simulations. All profiles are averaged on the 10 last years of the simulations. The 1° resolution profiles shows the average of the five 1° configurations. Shading indicates ±1 inter-model standard deviation.

136 **2.3 Feedback metrics and carbon budget**

137 The responses of the ocean carbon cycle to 1) the increase in atmospheric pCO<sub>2</sub> and 2) the change in ocean  
 138 physical properties are respectively quantified by the carbon-concentration and carbon-climate feedbacks. Fol-  
 139 lowing the traditional BGC-COU approach (Arora et al., 2020), they are defined as:

140 carbon-concentration feedback:  $\beta = \frac{\Delta C_{BGC}}{\Delta C_{atm}}$  **Equation 1.**

141 carbon-climate feedback:  $\gamma = \frac{\Delta C_{COU} - \Delta C_{BGC}}{\Delta T_{atm}}$  **Equation 2.**

142  $\Delta C_{COU}$  and  $\Delta C_{BGC}$  are the cumulative changes in carbon uptake in the COU and BGC simulations relative to the  
 143 CTL simulation,  $\Delta C_{atm}$  is the accumulation of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere and  $\Delta T_{atm}$  is the change in atmospheric  
 144 temperature.

145 The feedback metrics are related to CO<sub>2</sub> uptake, its response to warming and the distribution of DIC in the  
 146 ocean interior. Locally, the DIC budget is :  $-\vec{\nabla} \cdot (\vec{u} \cdot DIC) + L(DIC) + \partial_z(k \cdot \partial_z DIC) + B(DIC) + fCO_2 = \partial_t DIC$ .  
 147  $\vec{\nabla} \cdot (\vec{u} \cdot DIC)$  is the divergence of the advective fluxes,  $\partial_z(k \cdot \partial_z DIC)$  is the vertical diffusion term,  $L(DIC)$  is the  
 148 isopycnal diffusion,  $B(DIC)$  represents the biological sources and sinks of DIC and  $fCO_2$  the air-sea CO<sub>2</sub>  
 149 flux when at the surface.  $u$  is the total velocity and includes the bolus velocity of the GM parametrization at  
 150 coarse resolution. Integrated on the upper ocean (surface to 250 metres depth) and along the 70 years of the  
 151 simulations, the local DIC budget becomes:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{CO}_2 \text{ uptake : } \int_0^{70} \langle fCO_2 \rangle dt &= \int_0^{70} \oint \vec{u} \cdot DIC ds dt && \text{Advection} \\
 &- \int_0^{70} \langle k \cdot \partial_z DIC|_{250m} \rangle dt - \int_0^{70 \text{years}} \langle L(DIC) \rangle dt && \text{Diffusion} \\
 &+ \int_0^{70} \langle B(DIC) \rangle dt && \text{Biological sources and sinks} \\
 &+ \Delta \langle DIC \rangle && \text{Change in DIC stock}
 \end{aligned}$$

Equation 3.

152 The bracket stands for the volume integral on the upper ocean or the horizontal integral at the surface for the  
 153 CO<sub>2</sub> uptake and at 250 metres depth for the vertical diffusion term. The first term on the right side is the integral  
 154 of the advective fluxes entering/exiting the upper ocean, i.e. the vertical DIC advective flux at 250 metres depth,  
 155 here. A similar budget is computed for the lower ocean (250 metres depth to bottom). In that case, the CO<sub>2</sub>  
 156 uptake by the ocean term is null. These budgets have been computed at each time step of all the simulations.  
 157 Furthermore, particularly for relating the advective transport with the MOC, the budget is also computed with  
 158 the upper and lower ocean being divided latitudinally in 3 regions representing the subtropical gyre, the subpolar  
 159 gyre and the convection zone (respectively 0-1,590, 1,590-2,560 and 2,560-3,180 northward km, see Sec. S2)

160 The differences in the DIC distribution and budget between the BGC and CTL simulations give some insights  
 161 about the drivers of the carbon-concentration feedback, while the differences between the COU and BGC sim-  
 162 ulations tell us about the carbon-climate feedback. The extra carbon added to the system in response to the  
 163 increasing atmospheric pCO<sub>2</sub> is the anthropogenic carbon. The change between the BGC and CTL simulation  
 164 thus show the anthropogenic DIC distribution and budget. The difference between the COU and BGC simu-  
 165 lation include the response of the anthropogenic DIC to warming as well as the response of the natural DIC.  
 166 To disentangle one from another, we use the RAD simulation. The differences between the RAD and CTL  
 167 simulations reveal the response of natural DIC to warming (Fig. S2a), while the remainder reveal the response  
 168 of anthropogenic DIC to warming (Fig. S2b).

## 169 3 Results

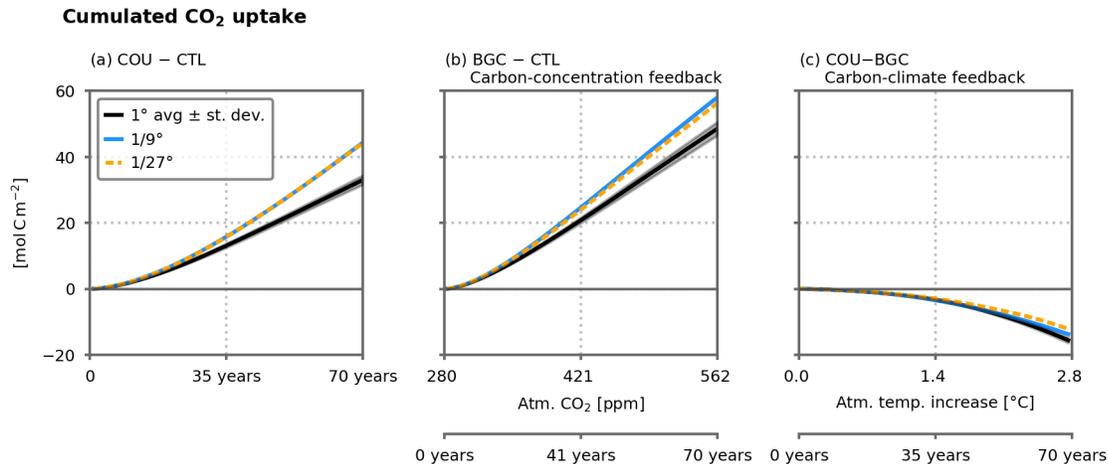
### 170 3.1 Sensitivity of ocean carbon uptake to resolution

171 All along the 70 years of the COU simulation, carbon accumulates in the ocean (Fig. 3a). This accumula-  
 172 tion is driven by the rise in atmospheric pCO<sub>2</sub>, slightly offset by the response to warming-induced changes in  
 173 ocean circulation and biogeochemistry (Fig. 3b, c). At coarse resolution, the carbon-concentration feedback is  
 174  $0.18 \pm 0.01 \text{ mol C m}^{-2} \text{ ppm}^{-1}$  while the carbon-climate feedback is  $-5.42 \pm 0.28 \text{ mol C m}^{-2} \text{ }^\circ\text{C}^{-1}$ . As a conse-  
 175 quence, DIC concentration increases in the BGC simulation as compared with the CTL simulation (Fig. 2b),  
 176 and decreases in the COU simulation as compared with the BGC simulation (Fig. 2c). The strongest changes  
 177 take place in the first 500 meters.

178 With finer resolution, the ocean uptakes about 30 % more carbon (Fig. 3a). 87 % (1/9 °) and 78 % (1/27 °) of  
 179 this extra uptake is caused by a stronger response to atmospheric pCO<sub>2</sub> increase (Fig. 3b). The remainder is  
 180 explained by a weaker decline in uptake because of warming (Fig. 3c). The carbon-concentration feedback  
 181 is stronger ( $0.22$  and  $0.21 \text{ mol C m}^{-2} \text{ ppm}^{-1}$  for the 1/9 ° and 1/27 ° resolution, respectively) while the carbon-  
 182 climate feedback is weaker ( $-4.93$  and  $-4.23 \text{ mol C m}^{-2} \text{ }^\circ\text{C}^{-1}$  for the 1/9 ° and 1/27 ° resolution, respectively).  
 183 As a consequence, there is a stronger DIC concentration increase in the BGC simulation (as compared with the  
 184 CTL simulation, Fig. 2b), notably between at the subsurface (250-1250 meters).

### 185 3.2 Resolution-induced changes in the carbon-concentration feedback

186 The carbon-concentration feedback depends on the ability of the ocean to transport anthropogenic carbon to the  
 187 deep ocean, so that the uptake at the surface is maintained (Figs. 2b and 4a). Once in the ocean, anthropogenic  
 188 carbon is advected northward by the upper limb of the MOC. It is then transferred downwards (through mixing  
 189 and advection) in the high latitude part of the domain (mainly the convection zone) before being advected back  
 190 southward. A small fraction is then advected upward back to the surface (Fig. S1). Diffusive flux participate  
 191 in this downward flux of carbon by counteracting against the gradients (Fig. 2b). About 90 % of the diffusion  
 192 occurs in the convection zone.



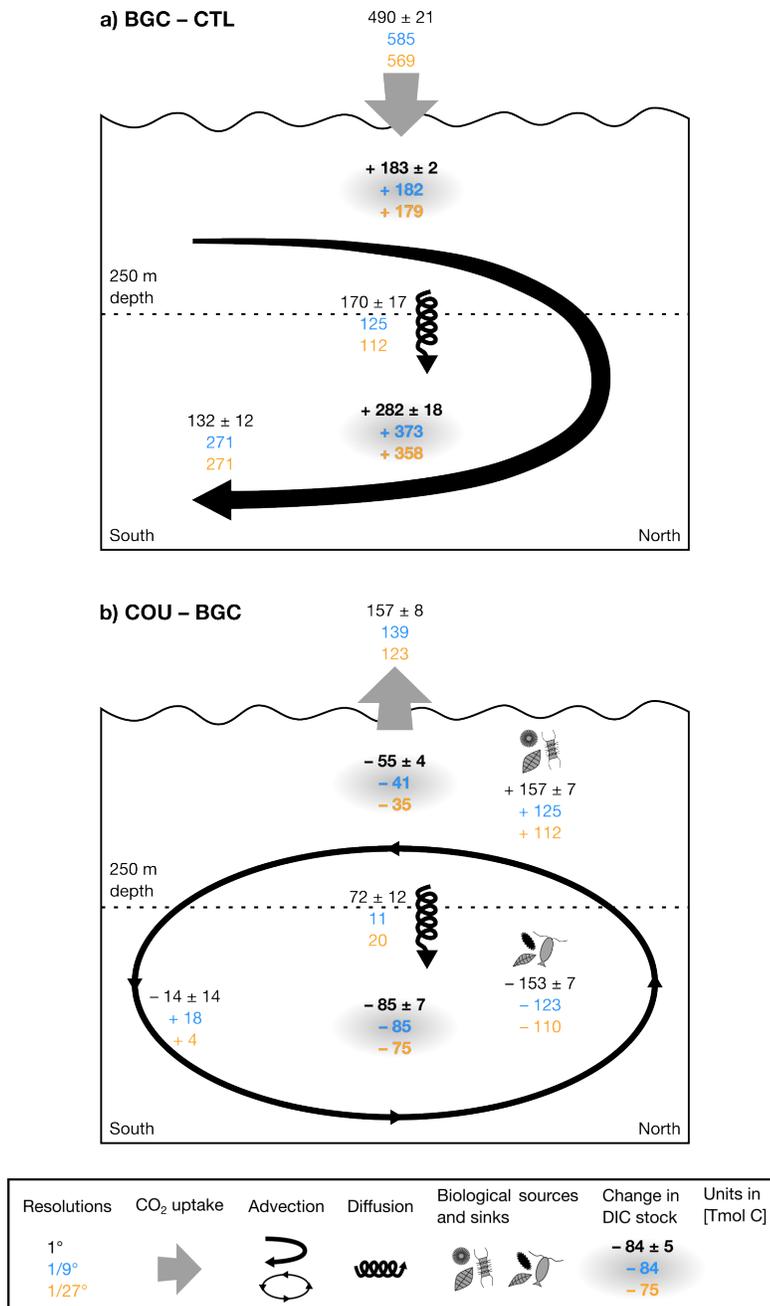
**Figure 3.** (a) Time series of the change in cumulated carbon uptake [ $\text{molCm}^{-2}$ ] COU simulations for the three resolutions. (b) Change in cumulated carbon uptake [ $\text{molCm}^{-2}$ ] in the BGC simulations vs. atmospheric  $\text{pCO}_2$  [ppm] for the three resolution. (c) Change in cumulated carbon uptake [ $\text{molCm}^{-2}$ ] in the COU simulations relative to the BGC simulations vs. change in atmospheric temperature [ $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ] in the COU simulation. The  $1^{\circ}$  resolution lines shows the average of the five  $1^{\circ}$  configurations. Shading indicates  $\pm 1$  inter-model standard deviation.

193 With finer resolution, more anthropogenic carbon is transported and stored at depth (Figs. 2b and 4a)). Below  
 194 250 metres, there is about 90 extra TmolC stored in the finer resolution (Fig. 4a), mostly in the subtropical gyre  
 195 (Fig. S1). 97-79 extra TmolC are absorbed at the air-sea interface. This extra carbon is advected northward  
 196 at the surface, downward in the convection zone and then southward to ultimately being accumulated in the  
 197 sub-surface of the subtropical gyre. Advection transports more anthropogenic carbon to the sub-surface at finer  
 198 resolution. This more vigorous advection is related to the stronger MOC (Couespel et al. (2021, Fig. A8),  
 199 MOC increasing from 1.75 Sv at  $1^{\circ}$  to 3.14 Sv at  $1/9^{\circ}$  and 2.94 Sv at  $1/27^{\circ}$ ). The stronger advection is partially  
 200 balanced by a weaker mixing at finer resolution, resulting in less anthropogenic carbon transported to the sub-  
 201 surface at finer resolution. This is likely related to the weaker gradient at finer resolution (Fig. 2b).

### 202 3.3 Resolution-induced changes in the climate-carbon feedback

203 The climate change induced decrease in carbon uptake is a consequence of decreasing  $\text{CO}_2$  solubility (induced  
 204 by warming) and of the balance between changes in DIC transport, leaving more DIC at depth, and the decline in  
 205 DIC consumption by primary production at the surface (Fig. 4b). The major change is the decline in biological  
 206 consumption of DIC at the surface, mirrored by a decline in organic matter remineralization at depth, resulting  
 207 in less carbon exported to the deep ocean. It mostly happens in the subpolar gyre and the convection zone,  
 208 which are also the areas with the stronger decline in primary production (Fig. S1 and Couespel et al., 2021) The  
 209 second largest change is the increase in downward diffusive fluxes transporting more carbon from the surface  
 210 to the deep ocean, mostly in the convection zone (Fig. S1). It is likely related to the shallowing of the mixed  
 211 layer depth (Couespel et al., 2021, Fig. A9). Changes in advection have minor impact in terms of transport  
 212 between the surface and deep oceans. However, this comes from a compensation between a strong decrease in  
 213 upward and downward advective fluxes (Fig. S1) driven by the MOC decline (Couespel et al., 2021, Fig. A8).  
 214 Changes in the DIC transport results from a compensation between a decline in the upward transport of natural  
 215 DIC and the downward transport of anthropogenic DIC (Fig. S2). The decrease in upward transport of natural  
 216 DIC, paired with the decrease in upward transport of nutrients, is the counterpart to the decrease in biological  
 217 consumption. The two almost offset each other, although more carbon is left in the deep ocean.

218 The climate change induced responses of DIC transport and biological source and sink of DIC are weaker at finer  
 219 resolution (Fig. 4b). A weaker decrease in primary production leads to a weaker decline in DIC consumption



**Figure 4.** Differences in dissolved inorganic carbon (DIC) budgets (integrated over space and time) in the upper and lower ocean (resp. above and below 250 meters depth) for the three resolutions (see Eq. 3). a) Differences between the BGC and CTL simulations. b) Differences between the COU and BGC simulations. Bold numbers stand for changes in DIC stocks. Thin number for differences in CO<sub>2</sub> uptake, physical transport (advection, diffusion) and the biological sources and sinks. The CO<sub>2</sub> uptake arrow indicate the direction of the flux (uptake or outgas). For advection and diffusion terms, positive values stand for a DIC transport from upper to lower ocean. The arrow indicate the direction of the difference of the fluxes. For advection, it is a synthetic view of figure S1. The 1° resolution numbers are the average of the five 1° configurations ± 1 inter-model standard deviation.

220 at the surface, as well as a weaker decline in remineralization at depth. The weaker increase in the downward  
 221 diffusive flux may be related to a weaker shallowing of the mixed layer depth (Couespel et al., 2021, Fig. A9).  
 222 However, it should be noted that the finer resolution simulations do not include isopycnal mixing that is present  
 223 in the coarse resolution simulations and added to the diffusive flux. Finally, advection changes result in more  
 224 (and not less) carbon left in the deep ocean in the 1/9° and 1/27° resolution simulations. This also stems

225 from a compensation between decreases in the upward and downward advective fluxes, although the decrease is  
 226 weaker at finer resolution (Fig. S1). This is likely related to the weaker decline in the MOC at finer resolution  
 227 (Couespel et al., 2021, Fig. A8). As for the coarse resolution, changes in DIC transport arise from the decline  
 228 in the upward transport of natural DIC (compensating the decline in DIC consumption) and the decline in the  
 229 downward transport of anthropogenic DIC (Fig. S2).

## 230 4 Discussion and conclusions

231 Using a wind and buoyancy driven double-gyre model to run idealized biogeochemically coupled simulations  
 232 of global warming, we show that ocean carbon uptake is sensitive to horizontal grid resolution. It is about 35 %  
 233 larger at eddy resolution. Ocean carbon uptake results from the combination of direct uptake of human emitted  
 234 CO<sub>2</sub> (carbon-concentration feedback) as well the negative feedback induced by the carbon-cycle response to  
 235 global warming (carbon-climate feedback). About 78–87 % of the larger carbon uptake at high resolution  
 236 results from a stronger direct uptake of anthropogenic carbon induced by a stronger transport at depth through  
 237 the MOC. The remainder comes from a weaker negative carbon-climate feedback, likely related to a weaker  
 238 decline in the MOC and primary production in response to warming (Fig. 4 and Couespel et al., 2021).

239 The carbon-concentration and carbon-climate feedbacks evaluated at coarse resolution in this study are in the  
 240 range of previous estimates from ESMs. In the North Atlantic, the region most similar to our idealized setting,  
 241 they are respectively estimated to be about 1 to 10 gC m<sup>-2</sup> ppm<sup>-1</sup> and –50 to –300 gC m<sup>-2</sup> °C<sup>-1</sup> in simulations  
 242 run with ESMs (Katavouta and Williams, 2021, Fig. 2 and Roy et al., 2011, Fig. 10a and Fig. 11a). In this study,  
 243 at coarse resolution, the feedbacks are respectively  $2.16 \pm 0.12$  gC m<sup>-2</sup> ppm<sup>-1</sup> and  $65.04 \pm 3.36$  gC m<sup>-2</sup> °C<sup>-1</sup>.  
 244 In ESMs, the global ocean carbon-concentration and carbon-climate feedbacks vary respectively from 0.8 to  
 245 1.1 PgC ppm<sup>-1</sup> and from –4.4 to –12.4 PgC °C<sup>-1</sup> (Arora et al., 2020). In this study, the coarse resolution  
 246 feedbacks, are respectively  $0.78 \pm 0.04$  PgC ppm<sup>-1</sup> and  $-23.48 \pm 1.21$  PgC °C<sup>-1</sup>, when multiplied by the  
 247 global ocean area.

248 In line with prior studies (Brown et al., 2021; Katavouta and Williams, 2021; Ridge and McKinley, 2020;  
 249 Iudicone et al., 2016; Nakano et al., 2015), our results highlight the importance of having a reliable MOC  
 250 for projecting future anthropogenic carbon uptake by the ocean. Indeed, we found that in the fine resolution  
 251 simulation, the stronger MOC implies a stronger transport of anthropogenic carbon at depth and thus a stronger  
 252 carbon-concentration climate feedback while a weaker MOC decline was associated with a weaker carbon-  
 253 climate feedback. Such positive correlations between the pre-industrial MOC and the carbon-concentration  
 254 feedback as well as between the MOC decline and the carbon-climate feedback have been identified in the  
 255 latest ESMs (Katavouta and Williams, 2021), although not in previous generations (Roy et al., 2011). Our  
 256 model behaviour is unusual: the finer resolution simulations have a stronger carbon-concentration feedback and  
 257 a weaker carbon-climate feedback, while the opposite is found in ESMs projections (Arora et al., 2020). This  
 258 is likely related to the unusual behaviour of the MOC in our simulations: the stronger MOC at finer resolution  
 259 experiences a weaker decline, while ESMs with a stronger MOC usually project a stronger decline (Roberts  
 260 et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2020; Winton et al., 2014; Gregory et al., 2005).

261 There are two areas for improvement in the MOC: its mean state and its response to global warming. Our  
 262 results suggest that addressing the effect of sub-grid processes on the mean state only could largely correct for  
 263 the resolution-related uncertainty in carbon uptake and induced climate feedbacks. The improved representation  
 264 of the MOC can be achieved by several solutions that are currently being explored: finer resolution simulations  
 265 (Yeager et al., 2021; van Westen and Dijkstra, 2021; Chang et al., 2020; Gutjahr et al., 2019; Haarsma et al.,  
 266 2016), the implementation of improved parametrization schemes Bachman (2019); Jansen et al. (2019); Mak  
 267 et al. (2018), or the use of statistical approaches (Barthélémy et al., 2022; Sonnewald et al., 2021; Zanna and

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268 Bolton, 2020; Bolton and Zanna, 2019).

269 In this work, we identified resolution related uncertainties in the projection of future ocean carbon uptake in  
270 an idealized regional setting. Many other features may contribute to the sensitivity of ocean carbon uptake to  
271 resolution. Changes in the MOC may also be driven by freshwater input (Bras et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2020),  
272 driven by changes in wind stress pattern (Yang et al., 2020), or related to changes in adjacent regions and involv-  
273 ing the formation of different water masses (Lique and Thomas, 2018; Bronselaer et al., 2016; Delworth and  
274 Zeng, 2008). Carbon uptake is also dependent on the biological carbon pump and the vast number of intercon-  
275 nected processes involved (Henson et al., 2022), whose representation varies among the models (Séférian et al.,  
276 2020; Laufkötter et al., 2015). The North Atlantic is the oceanic regime closest to our configurations, but other  
277 regions have significant contributions to the global ocean carbon cycle feedbacks (Katavouta and Williams,  
278 2021). For example, the Southern Ocean alone accounts for 40% of the total anthropogenic carbon uptake  
279 (DeVries, 2014). The more realistic configurations and the more complex global warming scenario developed  
280 in the CMIP6 (and subsequent MIPs) framework would enable these different elements to be explored. The  
281 uncertainties linked to the resolution in climate models just start to be explored. The sensitivity of ocean carbon  
282 uptake projections to resolution raises concerns about the sensitivity of related climate change issues such as  
283 heat uptake and transport (Bronselaer and Zanna, 2020; Chen et al., 2019) or ocean acidification (Kwiatkowski  
284 et al., 2020).

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289 ing to adapt model configuration.

## 290 Code availability

291 Python scripts used for analysing the model’s outputs and for producing the figures are available online at  
292 <https://github.com/damiencouespel/article-gyre-carbon-diagnostics>

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