

Fine structure variability in the equatorial Western Pacific Ocean

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ABSTRACT

CTD and velocity measurements were carried out in the western equatorial Pacific ocean at 165°E in April 1988. Large-scale structures along this meridian are first described. Then, preliminary results of an 8-day long station at the equator are used to locate layers of high variability.

1. Presentation and data

The specific goals and scientific objectives of PROPPAC (PROduction Pélagique dans le PACifique) program are to study relations between physical processes and biological production. Main physical interest is to locate possible areas of vertical mixing. We will then establish how this local mixing interacts with large-scale hydrographic and velocity structures.

In the framework of this program, three cruises have been carried out along 165°E (20°S-6°N). Along the transect, every degree of latitude, a velocity profile is made down to 600 db and, at the same time, a CTD cast is done to 1000 db (Delcroix et al, 1987). Afterward, position for an eight-day long station is chosen in order to study variability of a specific situation.

We present here preliminary results of the cruise undertaken in April 1988:

1. Large-scale structures encountered from 5°S to 5°N along 165°E track (from April 3rd to 7th) are described using temperature, salinity, and velocity sections. Mean and standard deviation profiles are constructed from density data of the 8-day station (April 12th to 19th) in order to locate strong variability layers at the equator.

2. Then, a fine-scale variability study in the upper 400 m is initiated at the equator from the 8-day time series. Väisälä frequency, zonal vertical shear and zonal Richardson number are contour-plotted as functions of depth and time. The 29 profiles of zonal velocity, Väisälä frequency, zonal vertical shear, and zonal Richardson number measured during the 8-day long station have been averaged and are also presented. A mean "activity index" profile is compared to the averaged zonal Richardson number profile.

2. Large scale structures

As potential density section and temperature section look similar, only temperature section is presented here. However, salinity effect on the density field must be taken into account in areas where vertical temperature gradients are weak and vertical salinity gradients are strong (North Subsurface Countercurrent : 2°N-3°N).

A structure evidenced by the three sections shown in Figures 1a to 1c is an unusually strong equatorial upwelling. Delcroix et al (1987) only mentioned weak upwellings detected on temperature and salinity sections of the SURTROPAC cruises of January and August 1984.



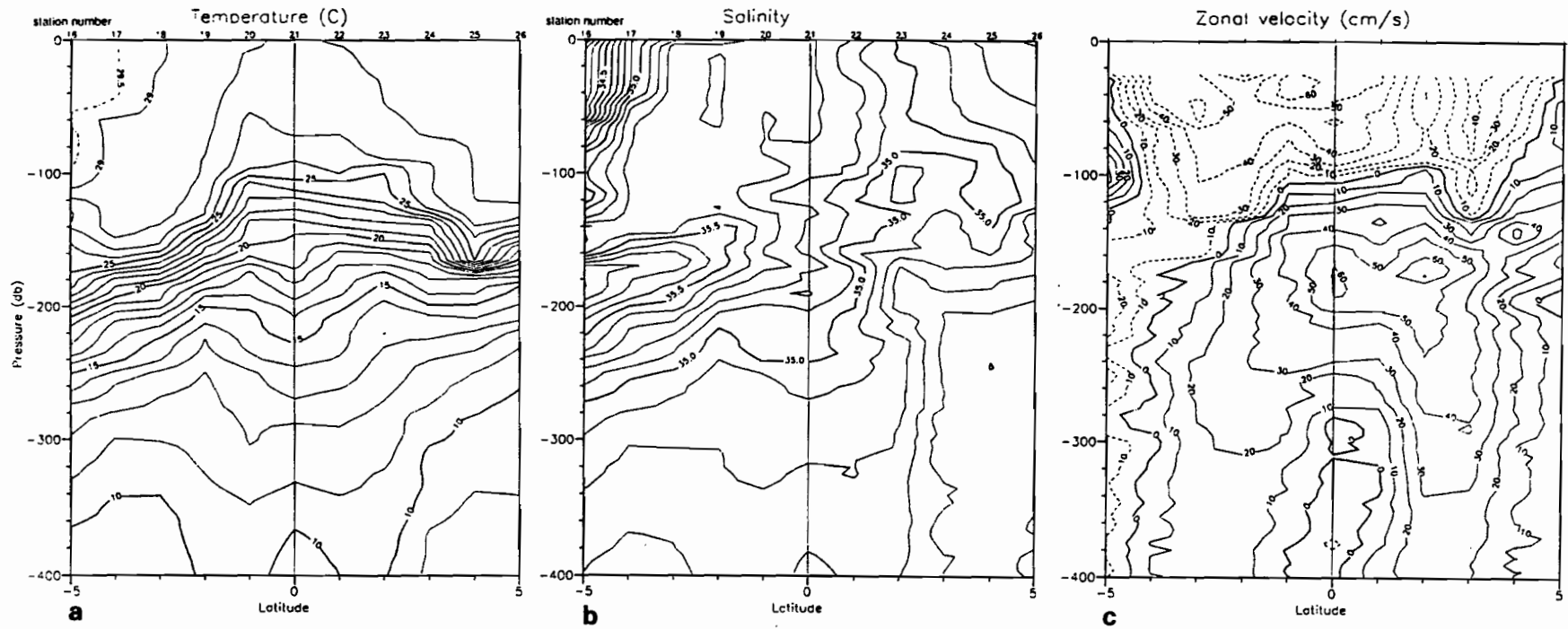


FIG.1. Large-scale structures of (a) temperature, (b) salinity, and (c) measured zonal current (ref. 600db) along 165°E.

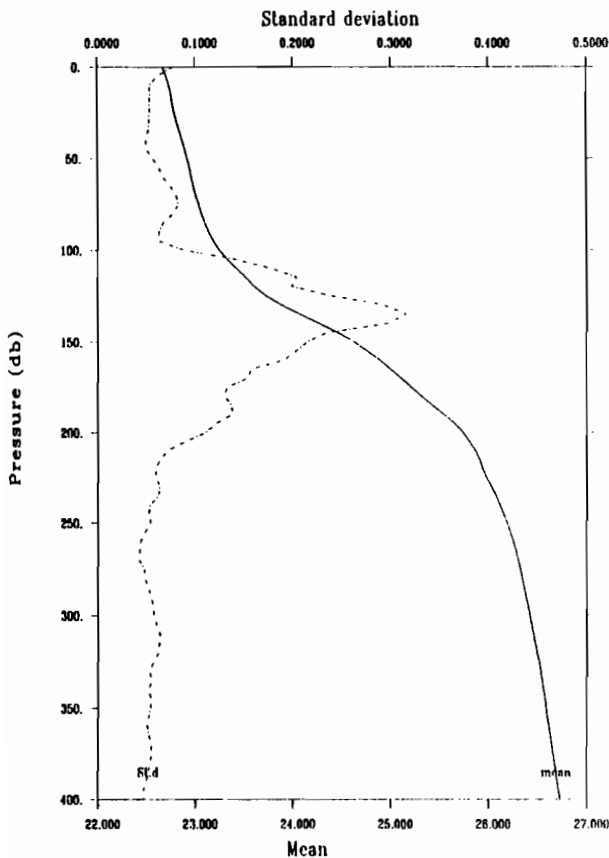
In April 1988, we observe:

- a decrease in sea surface temperature (SST) from 28.6°C at 2°N and 2°N to 27.7°C at the equator;
- a strong meridional salinity gradient from the surface down to 100 m limiting the southern boundary of the upwelling at 4°S: | 0.5 (ppt) per degree of latitude;
- a strong South Equatorial Current (SEC) ($U_{max} > 50 \text{ cm.s}^{-1}$) from 5°S to 5°N and down to 100 m. This strong westward flow has also been observed during the SURTROPAC cruise in January 1988 (Eldin, 1989) but it was not associated with an equatorial upwelling. SST between January and April cruises is measured by equatorial mooring (McPhaden and Freitag, 1988). It indicates a sharp fall in March 1988 and SST reaches value as low as 1°C below climatology at the end of the month.

Other main features have been observed during most cruises:

- isotherm spreading associated with Equatorial Undercurrent (EUC);
- vertical temperature gradient weakens under 300 m depth;
- EUC core is located in the area of maximum meridional salinity gradient (| 0.4 per degree of latitude at 170 m) situated at the northern edge of the high salinity tongue;
- under 300 m, westward Equatorial Intermediate Current (EIC) is hardly detected because of weak zonal velocity ($5 \text{ to } 10 \text{ cm.s}^{-1}$) and narrow meridional extension.

Layers of strong variations (in a statistical sense) are deduced from standard deviation profile of potential density (Fig. 2).



- The mixed layer down to 100 m is associated with small variations except a low maximum at 70 m.

- Strong variations are observed in the thermocline.

- Under the thermocline, there are small variations in the weakly stratified layer but a slight peak around 300 m.

This variability is not caused only by vertical displacements or shear instabilities.

Lateral advection of nearby water masses (which is not studied here) should be taken into account too.

FIG.2. Mean and standard deviation profiles of potential density.

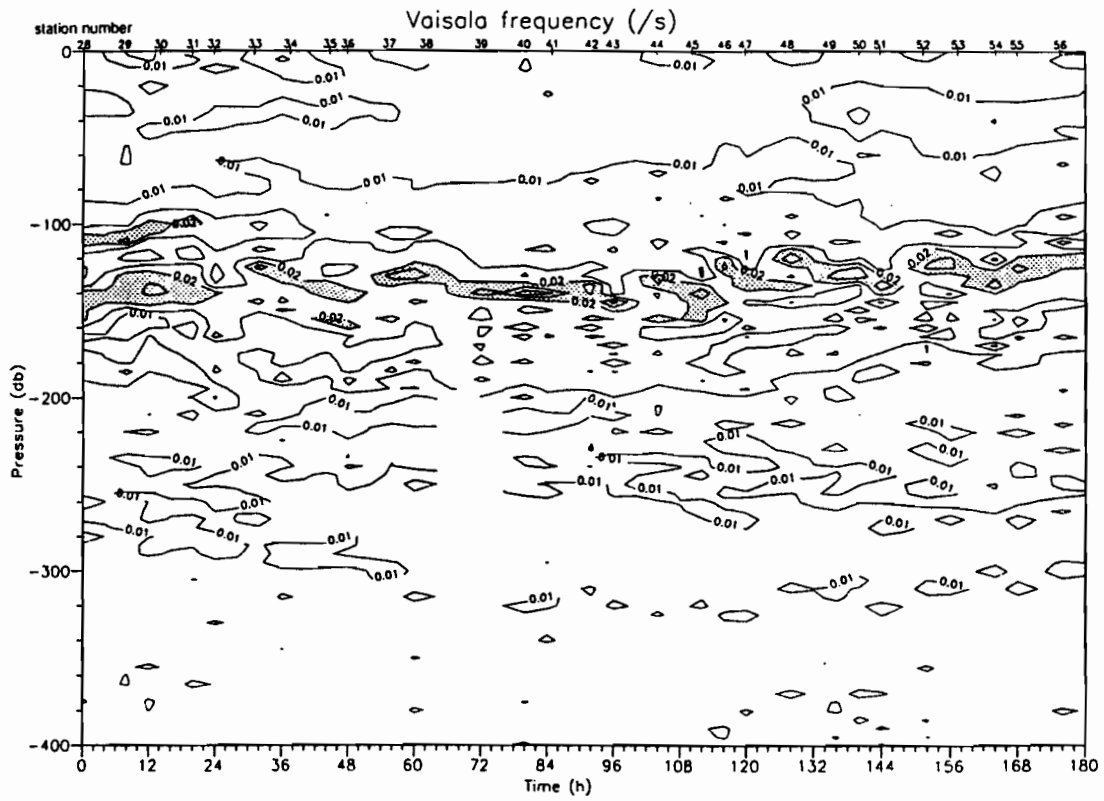


FIG.3a. Evolution of Väisälä frequency during the equatorial 8-day station.

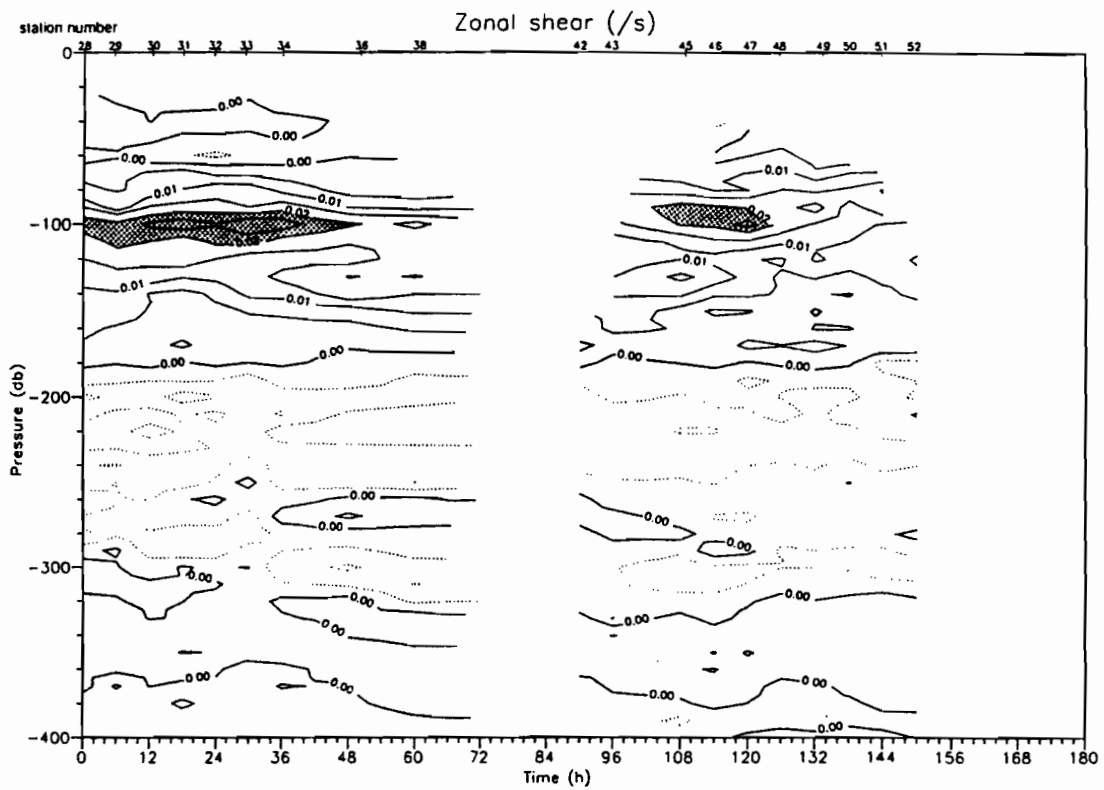


FIG.3b. Evolution of zonal vertical shear during the equatorial 8-day station.

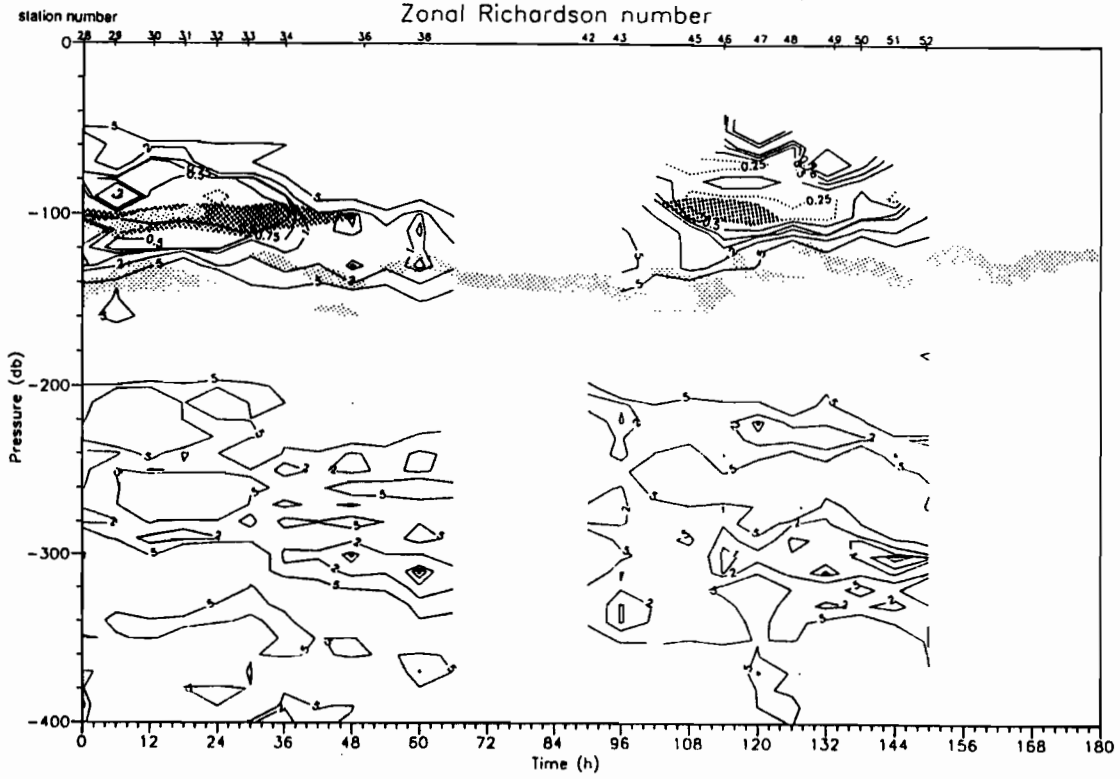


FIG.3c. Evolution of zonal Richardson number during the equatorial 8-day station.

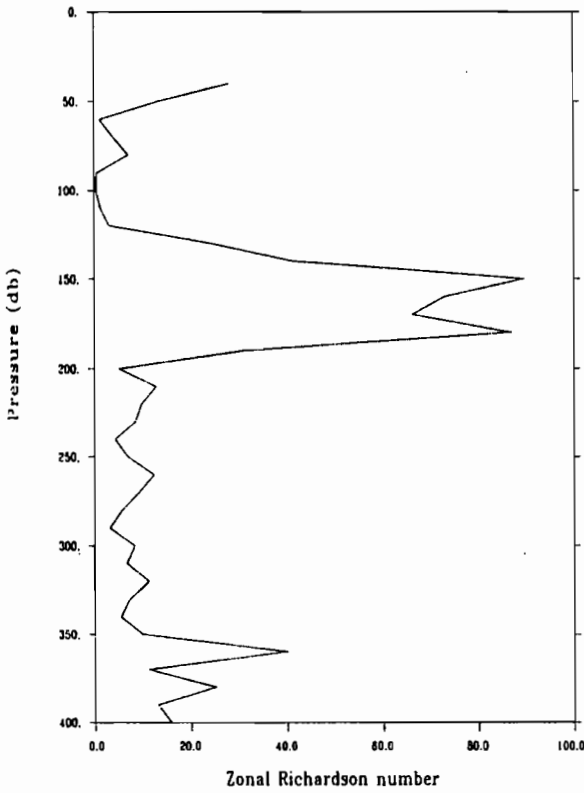


FIG.4a. Mean zonal Richardson number during the equatorial 8-day station.

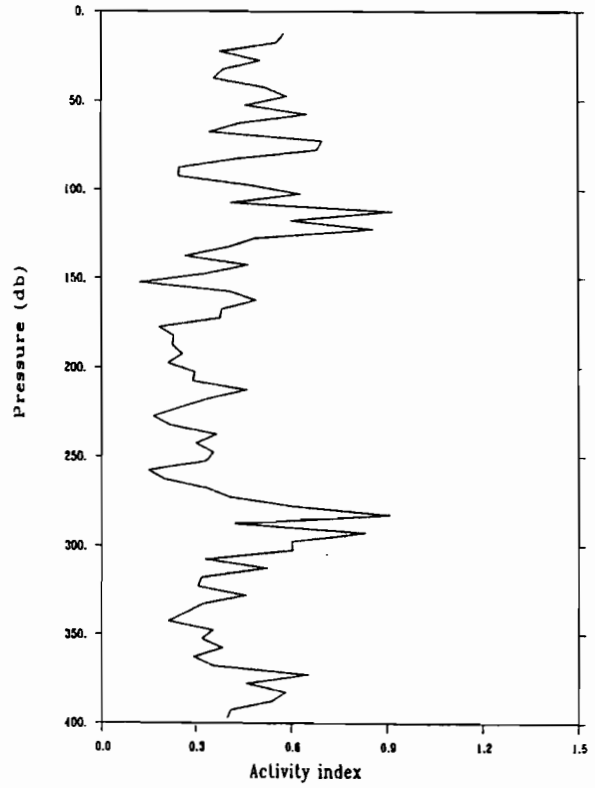


FIG.4b. Activity index computed from the potential density profiles of the equatorial 8-day station.

3. Fine scale variability

In this section, we identify layers of strong static stability and layers of large vertical shear of zonal current component and compare them to a statistical activity index. We also calculate Richardson numbers. Richardson numbers greater than 1. indicate a high stability regim in contrast to values smaller than 1. which represent destabilized system. If it is smaller than .25, the regim is considered as turbulent.

During all the 8-day station, the upper part of the thermocline constitutes the layer of strongest static stability (Fig. 3a).

The EUC core (evidenced in Figure 3b as the zero zonal shear value) is associated with a high Richardson number band (Fig. 3c).

Above the core, lowest Richardson numbers are confined in a layer closely linked to the highest shear region between 60 and 80 m. The critical value of 0.25 is reached during about 24 hours (it matches an intensive shear period) at the end of the station in a 15 m thick layer.

Around 300 m, between EUC and EIC, we find a layer where, although being bigger than 1., Richardson number is significantly lower than in the surrounding layers.

An activity index has been calculated from the potential density data of the 8-day station. It is defined as:

$$A = \text{Var} (|\sigma/z|) / (\langle |\sigma/z| \rangle)^2$$

where the sign $\langle \rangle$ indicates mean value. It is equal to the square of activity index used in McPhaden (1985).

Comparing the profile of averaged Richardson numbers (Fig. 4a) and the profile of activity index (Fig. 4b), two different regims are detected.

- Around 100 m, high activity index is associated with low Richardson number ($< 1.$). In this layer, part of the variability observed from the mean density profile may be caused by shear instabilities between SEC and EUC.

- At 300 m, there is also a high activity index peak (as well as a small standard deviation maximum in potential density) which lies in a layer where Richardson number remains high ($> 1.$). It is not clear that this variability only results from vertical shear because of the weakness of the shear between EUC and EIC. We still have to remember that, even if it is weak, this layer lies in a discontinuity zone for temperature or salinity gradients, as well as for velocity. Mechanisms other than shear instabilities are probably related to this high activity. They may be associated with this weak discontinuity property.

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**WESTERN PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL MEETING
AND WORKSHOP ON TOGA COARE**

**Nouméa, New Caledonia
May 24-30, 1989**

PROCEEDINGS

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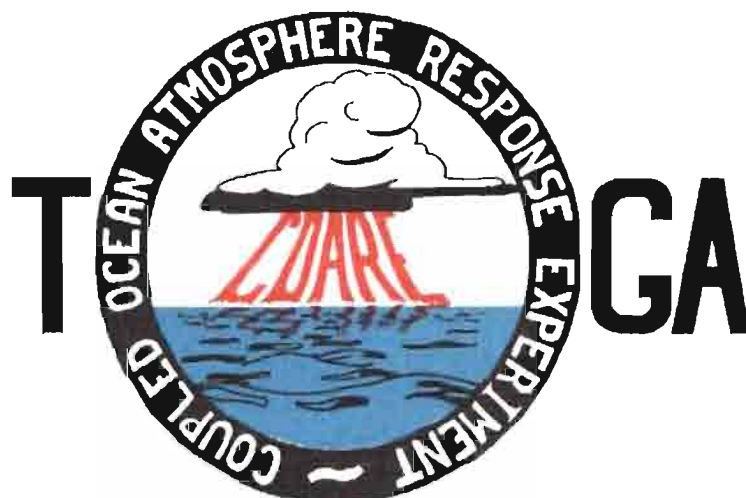


TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
RESUME	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
INTRODUCTION	
1. Motivation	1
2. Structure	2
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS	5
AGENDA	7
WORKSHOP REPORT	
1. Introduction	19
2. Working group discussions, recommendations, and plans	20
a. Air-Sea Fluxes and Boundary Layer Processes	20
b. Regional Scale Atmospheric Circulation and Waves	24
c. Regional Scale Oceanic Circulation and Waves	30
3. Related programs	35
a. NASA Ocean Processes and Satellite Missions	35
b. Tropical Rainfall Measuring Mission	37
c. Typhoon Motion Program	39
d. World Ocean Circulation Experiment	39
4. Presentations on related technology	40
5. National reports	40
6. Meeting of the International Ad Hoc Committee on TOGA COARE	40
APPENDIX: WORKSHOP RELATED PAPERS	
Robert A. Weller and David S. Hosom: Improved Meteorological Measurements from Buoys and Ships for the World Ocean Circulation Experiment	45
Peter H. Hildebrand: Flux Measurement using Aircraft and Radars	57
Walter F. Dabberdt, Hale Cole, K. Gage, W. Ecklund and W.L. Smith: Determination of Boundary-Layer Fluxes with an Integrated Sounding System	81

MEETING COLLECTED PAPERS

WATER MASSES, SEA SURFACE TOPOGRAPHY, AND CIRCULATION

Klaus Wyrtki: Some Thoughts about the West Pacific Warm Pool	99
Jean René Donguy, Gary Meyers, and Eric Lindstrom: Comparison of the Results of two West Pacific Oceanographic Expeditions FOC (1971) and WEPOCS (1985-86)	111
Dunxin Hu, and Maochang Cui: The Western Boundary Current in the Far Western Pacific Ocean	123
Peter Hacker, Eric Firing, Roger Lukas, Philipp L. Richardson, and Curtis A. Collins: Observations of the Low-latitude Western Boundary Circulation in the Pacific during WEPOCS III	135
Stephen P. Murray, John Kindle, Dharma Arief, and Harley Hurlburt: Comparison of Observations and Numerical Model Results in the Indonesian Throughflow Region	145
Christian Henin: Thermohaline Structure Variability along 165°E in the Western Tropical Pacific Ocean (January 1984 - January 1989)	155
David J. Webb, and Brian A. King: Preliminary Results from Charles Darwin Cruise 34A in the Western Equatorial Pacific	165
Warren B. White, Nicholas Graham, and Chang-Kou Tai: Reflection of Annual Rossby Waves at The Maritime Western Boundary of the Tropical Pacific	173
William S. Kessler: Observations of Long Rossby Waves in the Northern Tropical Pacific	185
Eric Firing, and Jiang Songnian: Variable Currents in the Western Pacific Measured During the US/PRC Bilateral Air-Sea Interaction Program and WEPOCS	205
John S. Godfrey, and A. Weaver: Why are there Such Strong Steric Height Gradients off Western Australia ?	215
John M. Toole, R.C. Millard, Z. Wang, and S. Pu: Observations of the Pacific North Equatorial Current Bifurcation at the Philippine Coast	223

EL NINO/SOUTHERN OSCILLATION 1986-87

Gary Meyers, Rick Bailey, Eric Lindstrom, and Helen Phillips: Air/Sea Interaction in the Western Tropical Pacific Ocean during 1982/83 and 1986/87	229
Laury Miller, and Robert Cheney: GEOSAT Observations of Sea Level in the Tropical Pacific and Indian Oceans during the 1986-87 El Nino Event	247
Thierry Delcroix, Gérard Eldin, and Joël Picaut: GEOSAT Sea Level Anomalies in the Western Equatorial Pacific during the 1986-87 El Nino, Elucidated as Equatorial Kelvin and Rossby Waves	259
Gérard Eldin, and Thierry Delcroix: Vertical Thermal Structure Variability along 165°E during the 1986-87 ENSO Event	269
Michael J. McPhaden: On the Relationship between Winds and Upper Ocean Temperature Variability in the Western Equatorial Pacific	283

John S. Godfrey, K. Ridgway, Gary Meyers, and Rick Bailey: Sea Level and Thermal Response to the 1986-87 ENSO Event in the Far Western Pacific	291
Joël Picaut, Bruno Camusat, Thierry Delcroix, Michael J. McPhaden, and Antonio J. Busalacchi: Surface Equatorial Flow Anomalies in the Pacific Ocean during the 1986-87 ENSO using GEOSAT Altimeter Data	301

THEORETICAL AND MODELING STUDIES OF ENSO AND RELATED PROCESSES

Julian P. McCreary, Jr.: An Overview of Coupled Ocean-Atmosphere Models of El Nino and the Southern Oscillation	313
Kensuke Takeuchi: On Warm Rossby Waves and their Relations to ENSO Events	329
Yves du Penhoat, and Mark A. Cane: Effect of Low Latitude Western Boundary Gaps on the Reflection of Equatorial Motions	335
Harley Hurlburt, John Kindle, E. Joseph Metzger, and Alan Wallcraft: Results from a Global Ocean Model in the Western Tropical Pacific	343
John C. Kindle, Harley E. Hurlburt, and E. Joseph Metzger: On the Seasonal and Interannual Variability of the Pacific to Indian Ocean Throughflow	355
Antonio J. Busalacchi, Michael J. McPhaden, Joël Picaut, and Scott Springer: Uncertainties in Tropical Pacific Ocean Simulations: The Seasonal and Interannual Sea Level Response to Three Analyses of the Surface Wind Field	367
Stephen E. Zebiak: Intraseasonal Variability - A Critical Component of ENSO ?	379
Akimasa Sumi: Behavior of Convective Activity over the "Jovian-type" Aqua-Planet Experiments	389
Ka-Ming Lau: Dynamics of Multi-Scale Interactions Relevant to ENSO	397
Pecheng C. Chu and Roland W. Garwood, Jr.: Hydrological Effects on the Air-Ocean Coupled System	407
Sam F. Iacobellis, and Richard C.J. Somerville: A one Dimensional Coupled Air-Sea Model for Diagnostic Studies during TOGA-COARE	419
Allan J. Clarke: On the Reflection and Transmission of Low Frequency Energy at the Irregular Western Pacific Ocean Boundary - a Preliminary Report	423
Roland W. Garwood, Jr., Pecheng C. Chu, Peter Muller, and Niklas Schneider: Equatorial Entrainment Zone : the Diurnal Cycle	435
Peter R. Gent: A New Ocean GCM for Tropical Ocean and ENSO Studies	445
Wasito Hadi, and Nuraini: The Steady State Response of Indonesian Sea to a Steady Wind Field	451
Pedro Ripa: Instability Conditions and Energetics in the Equatorial Pacific	457
Lewis M. Rothstein: Mixed Layer Modelling in the Western Equatorial Pacific Ocean	465
Neville R. Smith: An Oceanic Subsurface Thermal Analysis Scheme with Objective Quality Control	475
Duane E. Stevens, Qi Hu, Graeme Stephens, and David Randall: The hydrological Cycle of the Intraseasonal Oscillation	485
Peter J. Webster, Hai-Ru Chang, and Chidong Zhang: Transmission Characteristics of the Dynamic Response to Episodic Forcing in the Warm Pool Regions of the Tropical Oceans	493

MOMENTUM, HEAT, AND MOISTURE FLUXES BETWEEN ATMOSPHERE AND OCEAN

W. Timothy Liu: An Overview of Bulk Parametrization and Remote Sensing of Latent Heat Flux in the Tropical Ocean	513
E. Frank Bradley, Peter A. Coppin, and John S. Godfrey: Measurements of Heat and Moisture Fluxes from the Western Tropical Pacific Ocean	523
Richard W. Reynolds, and Ants Leetmaa: Evaluation of NMC's Operational Surface Fluxes in the Tropical Pacific	535
Stanley P. Hayes, Michael J. McPhaden, John M. Wallace, and Joël Picaut: The Influence of Sea-Surface Temperature on Surface Wind in the Equatorial Pacific Ocean	543
T.D. Keenan, and Richard E. Carbone: A Preliminary Morphology of Precipitation Systems In Tropical Northern Australia	549
Phillip A. Arkin: Estimation of Large-Scale Oceanic Rainfall for TOGA	561
Catherine Gautier, and Robert Frouin: Surface Radiation Processes in the Tropical Pacific	571
Thierry Delcroix, and Christian Henin: Mechanisms of Subsurface Thermal Structure and Sea Surface Thermo-Haline Variabilities in the South Western Tropical Pacific during 1979-85 - A Preliminary Report	581
Greg. J. Holland, T.D. Keenan, and M.J. Manton: Observations from the Maritime Continent : Darwin, Australia	591
Roger Lukas: Observations of Air-Sea Interactions in the Western Pacific Warm Pool during WEPOCS	599
M. Nunez, and K. Michael: Satellite Derivation of Ocean-Atmosphere Heat Fluxes in a Tropical Environment	611

EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF ENSO AND SHORT-TERM CLIMATE VARIABILITY

Klaus M. Weickmann: Convection and Circulation Anomalies over the Oceanic Warm Pool during 1981-1982	623
Claire Perigaud: Instability Waves in the Tropical Pacific Observed with GEOSAT	637
Ryuichi Kawamura: Intraseasonal and Interannual Modes of Atmosphere-Ocean System Over the Tropical Western Pacific	649
David Gutzler, and Tamara M. Wood: Observed Structure of Convective Anomalies	659
Siri Jodha Khalsa: Remote Sensing of Atmospheric Thermodynamics in the Tropics	665
Bingrong Xu: Some Features of the Western Tropical Pacific: Surface Wind Field and its Influence on the Upper Ocean Thermal Structure	677
Bret A. Mullan: Influence of Southern Oscillation on New Zealand Weather	687
Kenneth S. Gage, Ben Basley, Warner Ecklund, D.A. Carter, and John R. McAfee: Wind Profiler Related Research in the Tropical Pacific	699
John Joseph Bates: Signature of a West Wind Convective Event in SSM/I Data	711
David S. Gutzler: Seasonal and Interannual Variability of the Madden-Julian Oscillation	723
Marie-Hélène Radenac: Fine Structure Variability in the Equatorial Western Pacific Ocean	735
George C. Reid, Kenneth S. Gage, and John R. McAfee: The Climatology of the Western Tropical Pacific: Analysis of the Radiosonde Data Base	741

Chung-Hsiung Sui, and Ka-Ming Lau: Multi-Scale Processes in the Equatorial Western Pacific	747
Stephen E. Zebiak: Diagnostic Studies of Pacific Surface Winds	757

MISCELLANEOUS

Rick J. Bailey, Helene E. Phillips, and Gary Meyers: Relevance to TOGA of Systematic XBT Errors	775
Jean Blanchot, Robert Le Borgne, Aubert Le Bouteiller, and Martine Rodier: ENSO Events and Consequences on Nutrient, Planktonic Biomass, and Production in the Western Tropical Pacific Ocean	785
Yves Dandonneau: Abnormal Bloom of Phytoplankton around 10°N in the Western Pacific during the 1982-83 ENSO	791
Cécile Dupouy: Sea Surface Chlorophyll Concentration in the South Western Tropical Pacific, as seen from NIMBUS Coastal Zone Color Scanner from 1979 to 1984 (New Caledonia and Vanuatu)	803
Michael Szabados, and Darren Wright: Field Evaluation of Real-Time XBT Systems	811
Pierre Rual: For a Better XBT Bathy-Message: Onboard Quality Control, plus a New Data Reduction Method	823