UCAR-DOE Cooperative Agreement
DOE/SC/BER Climate Change Prediction Program

Role of the Bering Strait on Glacial Climate Stability

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Climate and Earth System Modeling Principal Investigators' meeting
Sept. 19-22, 2011

The Bering Strait: a Northern Oceanic Pathway between Pacific and Atlantic

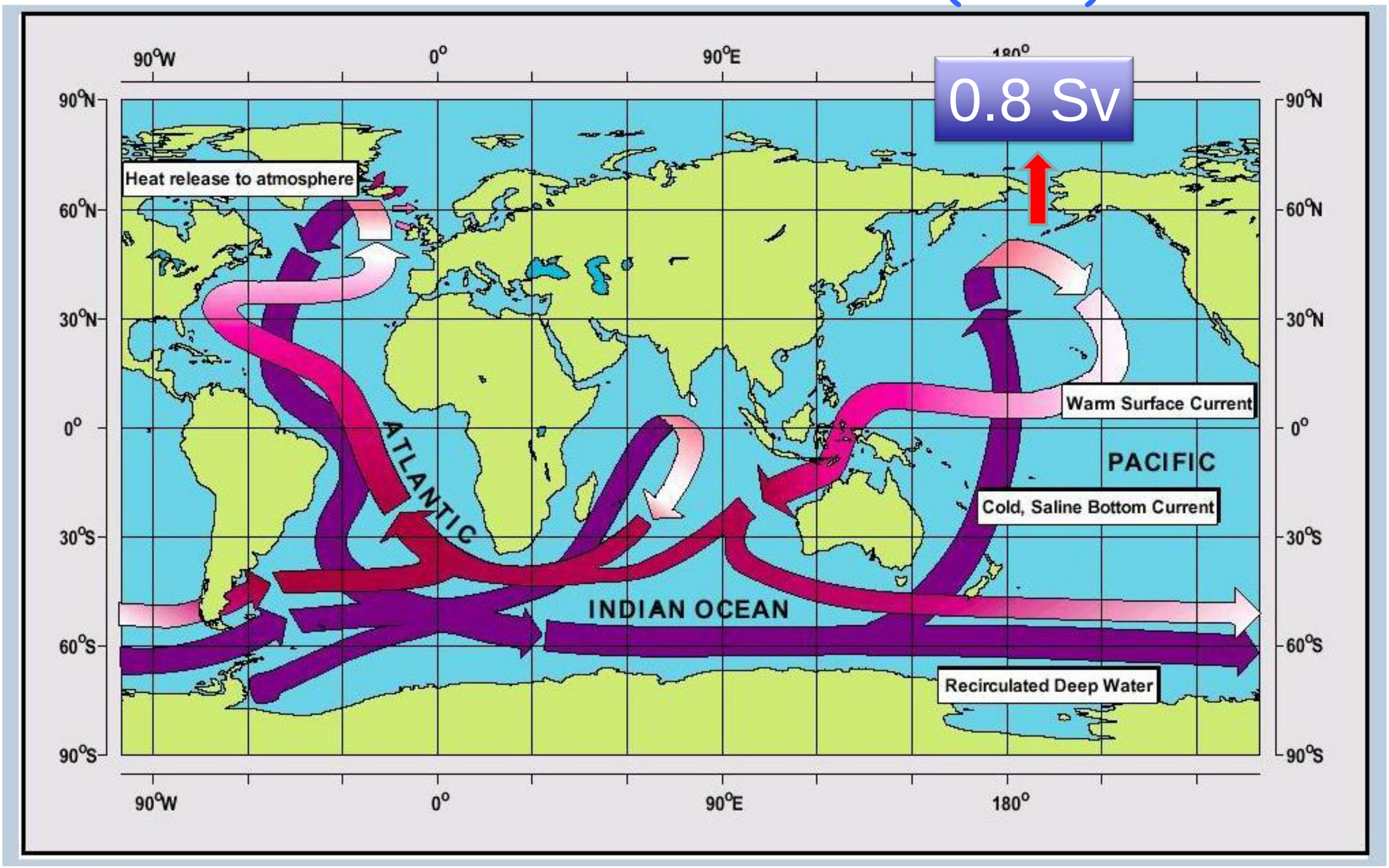
Facts about Bering Strait:

Present: Bering Strait is a narrow (~150 km) and shallow (~50 m) pathway connecting the Pacific and the Arctic between Alaska and Siberia.

On average, about 0.8 Sv fresher North Pacific water flows through this strait into the Arctic, subsequently into the North Atlantic.

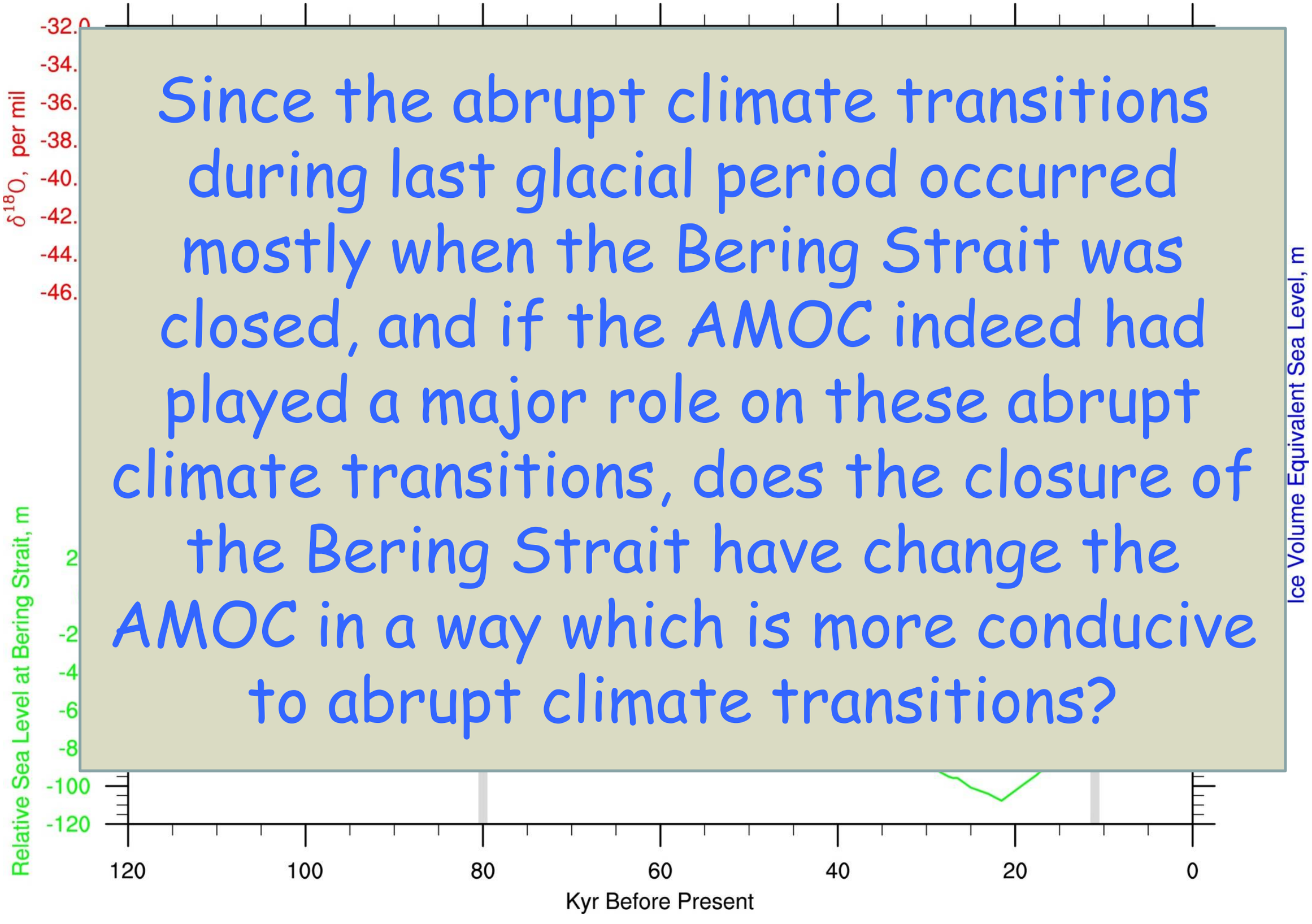
1 Sverdrup (Sv) $\equiv 10^6\ m^3 s^{-1}$ or 1 million cubic meters per second

What is Meridional Overturning Circulation (MOC) or Thermohaline Circulation (THC)?



Past abrupt climate transitions and the possible relation with Bering Strait

Since the abrupt climate transitions during last glacial period occurred mostly when the Bering Strait was closed, and if the AMOC indeed had played a major role on these abrupt climate transitions, does the closure of the Bering Strait have change the AMOC in a way which is more conducive to abrupt climate transitions?



Model and Experiments:

Here we use the National Center for Atmospheric Research Community Climate System Model version 3.

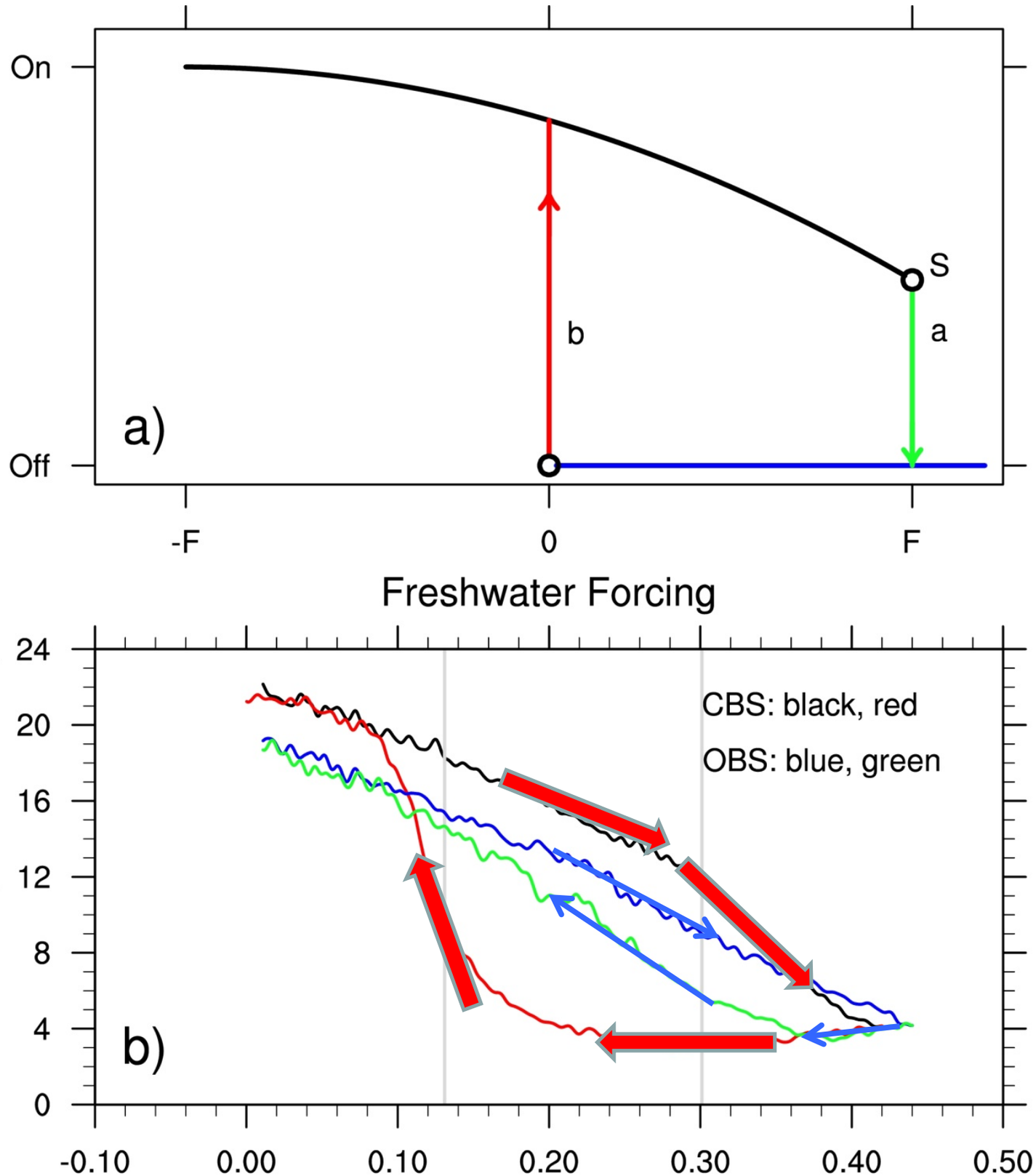
Atmospheric model (CAM3): T42 (2.8 degree), 26 hybrid levels
Land model (CLM3): T42
Ocean model (POP): 1 degree, 40 levels
Sea ice model (CSIM5): 1 degree

Climate boundary condition: present day

AMOC Hysteresis Experiments:
Two experiments are carried out with everything identical, except one with an open Bering Strait (OBS) and the other with a closed one (CBS). Following Rahmstorf et al. (2005), the freshwater forcing is added uniformly in the Atlantic between 20 and 50°N at an initial rate of 0.0002 Sv (200m^3/s), with a linear annual increment of 0.0002 Sv. Note: it takes 500 model years for the freshwater forcing to increase by 0.1 Sv. The each of the model simulations shown run for 4500 years.

Results:

Theoretical AMOC hysteresis diagram



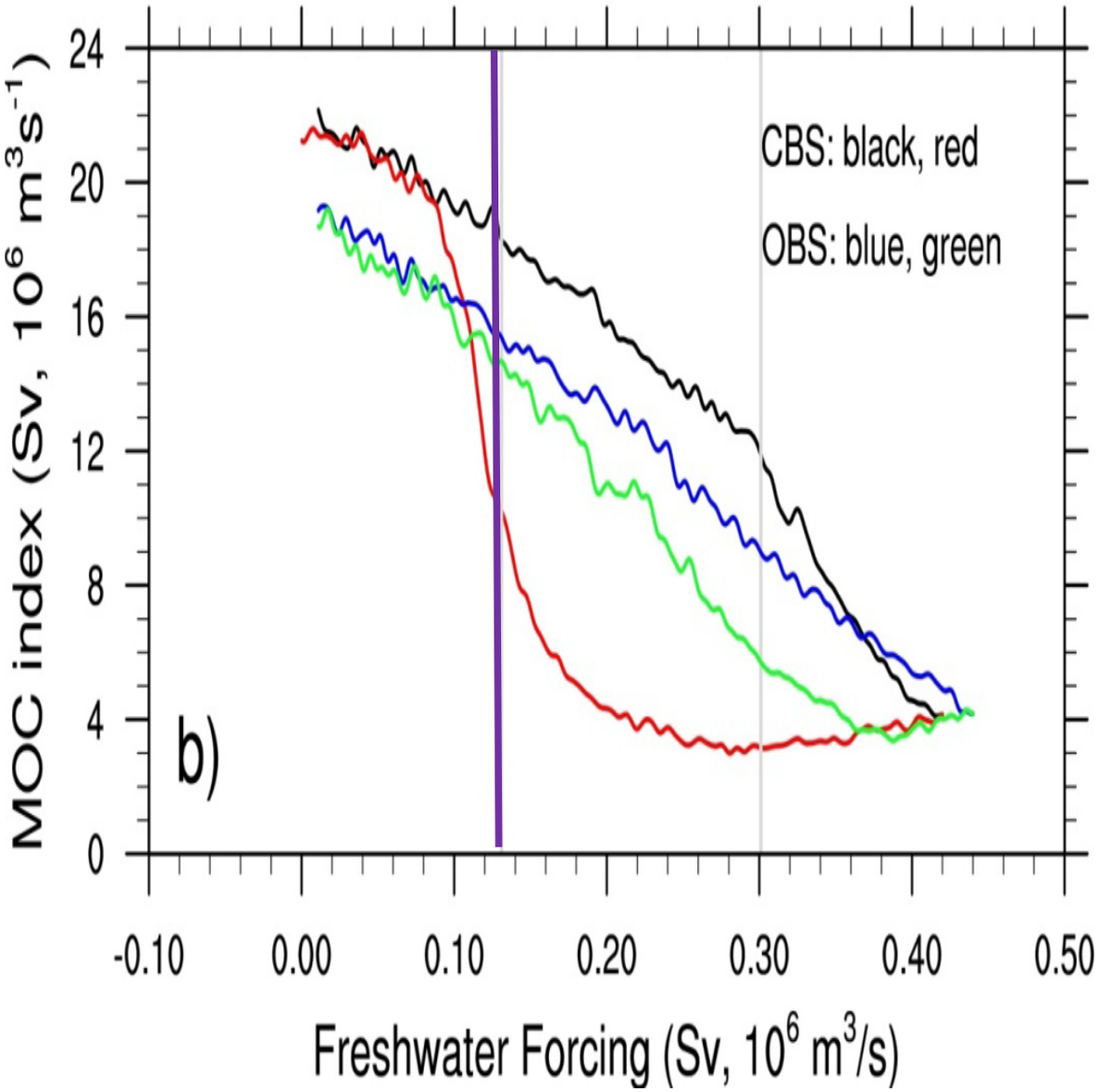
When the Bering Strait is closed, AMOC's hysteresis behavior is much clear. When the Bering Strait is open, AMOC's hysteresis behavior is much weaker.

AMOC hysteresis diagram in CCSM3

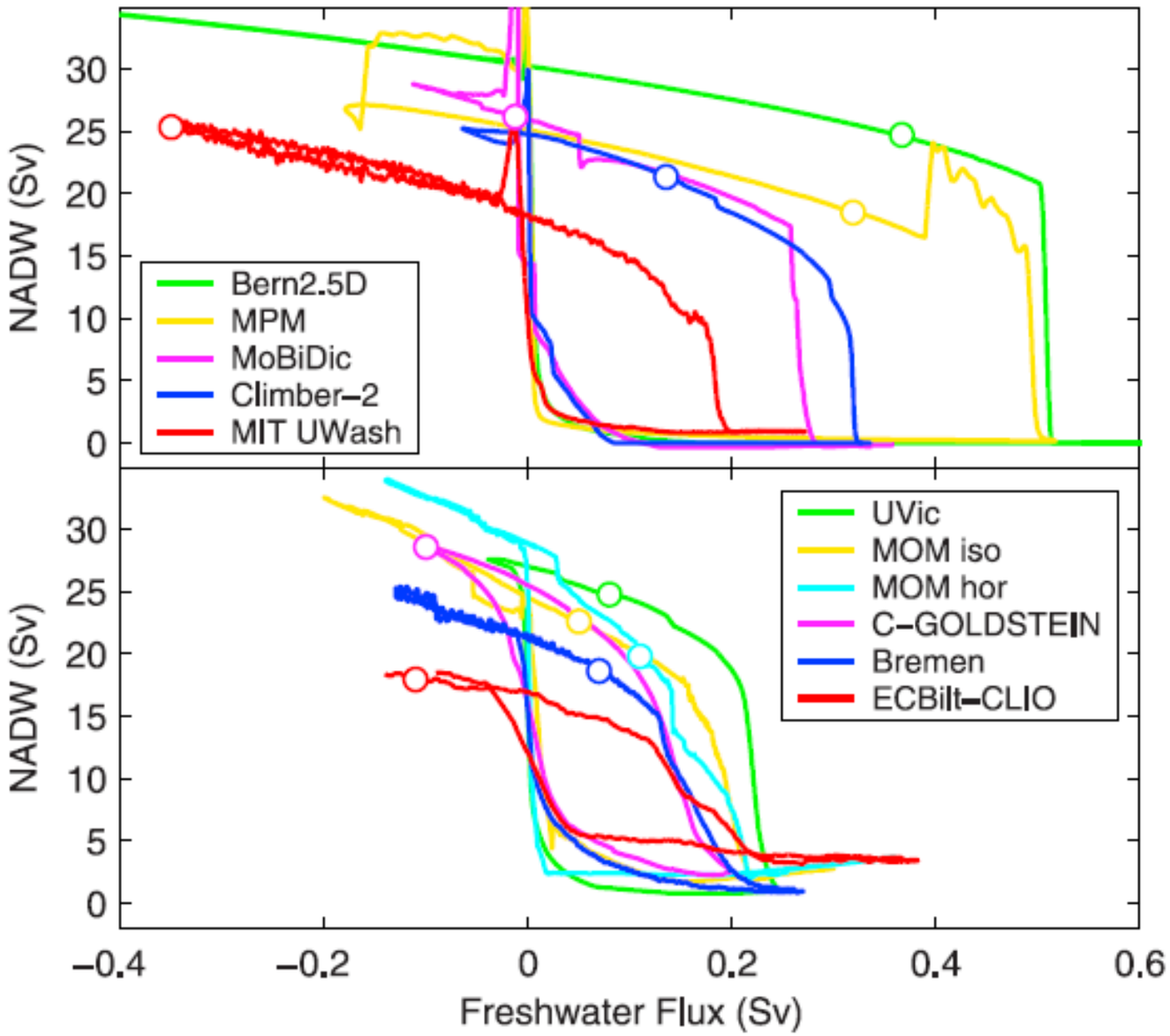
A 0.1 Sv FW change = 500 years
Max FW = 0.42 Sv CBS and 0.44 Sv for OBS

AMOC hysteresis

Fully Coupled Climate Model CCSM3



Earth System Model of Intermediate Complexity



Rahmstorf et al., GRL, 2005

Green
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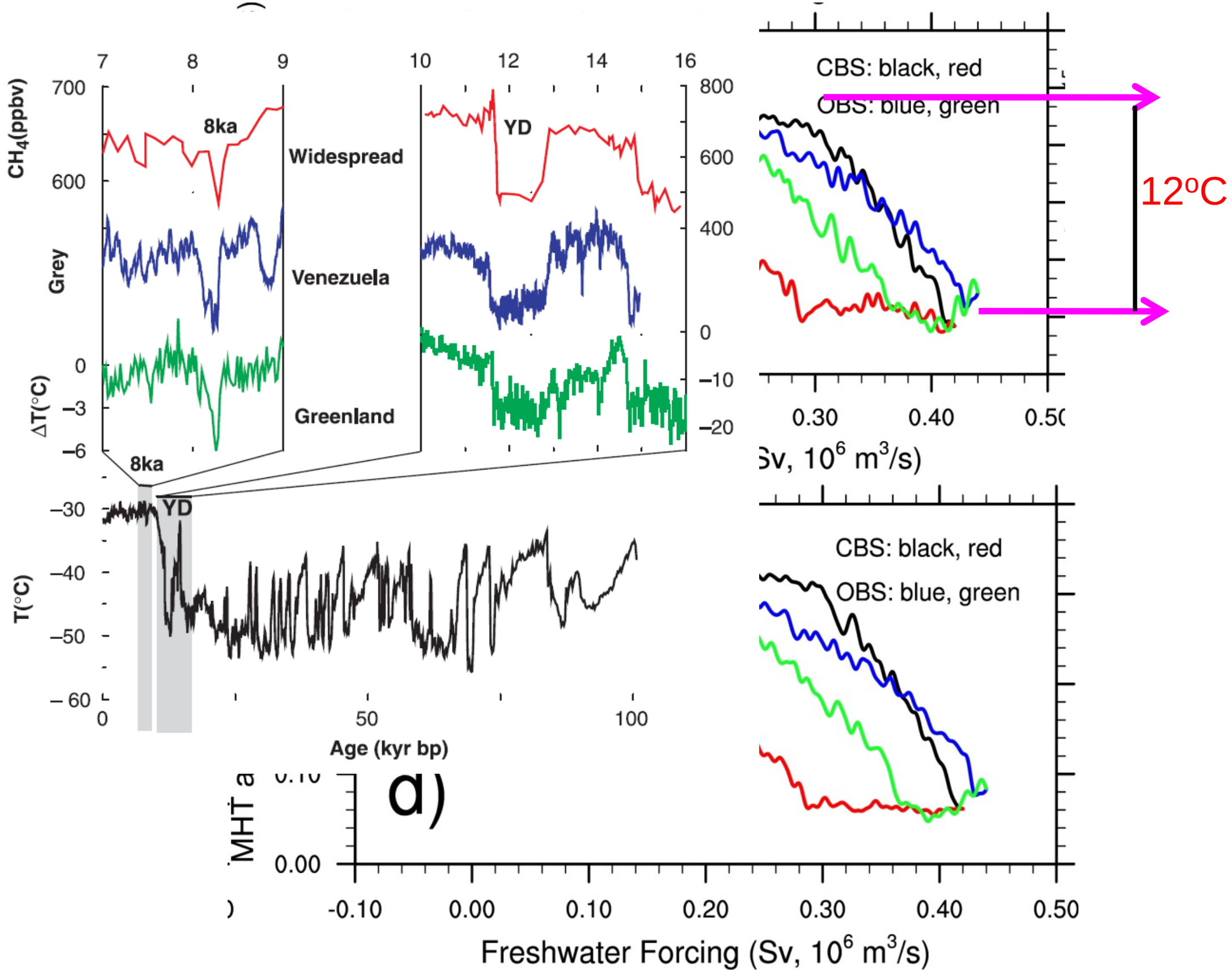
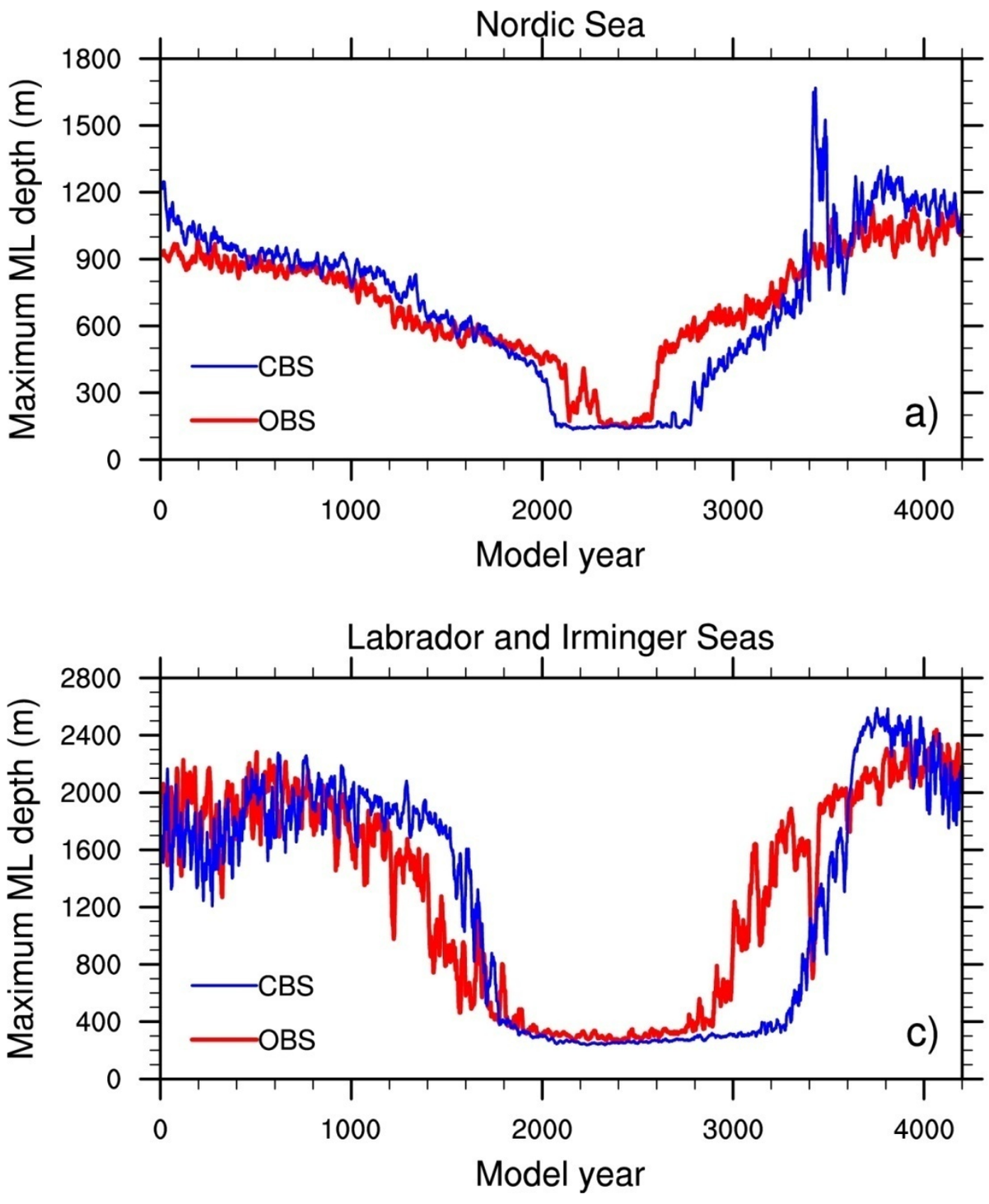
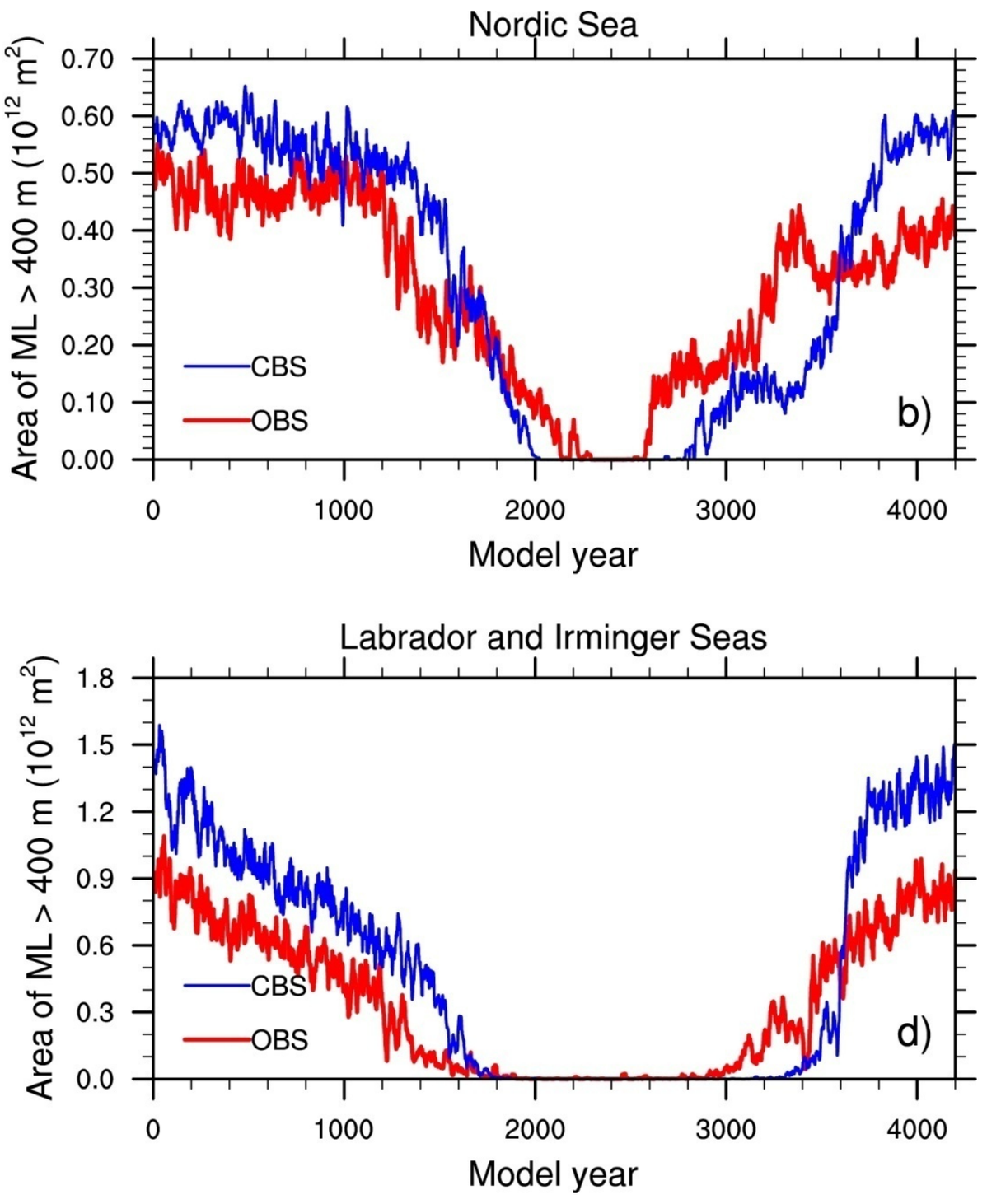


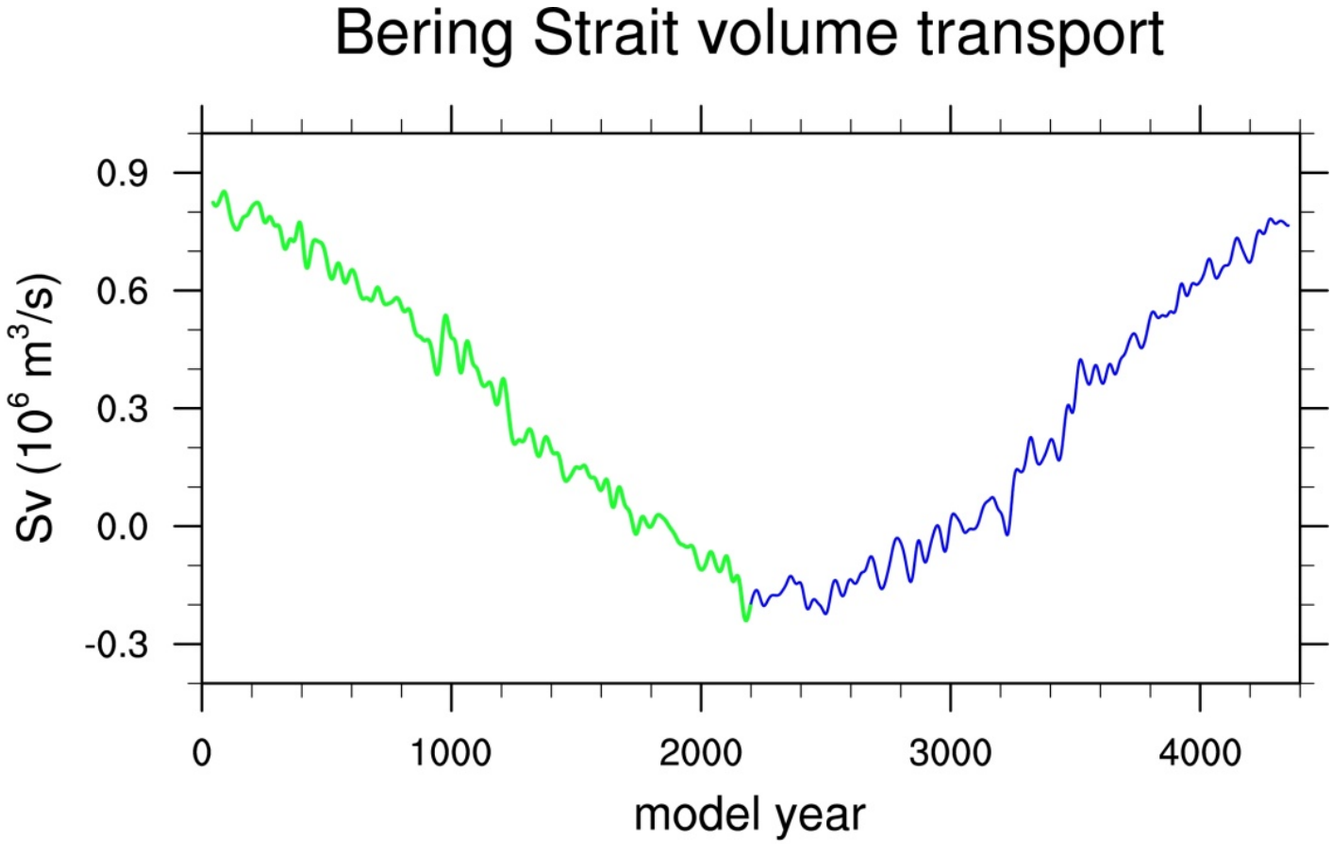
March mean maximum mixed layer depth

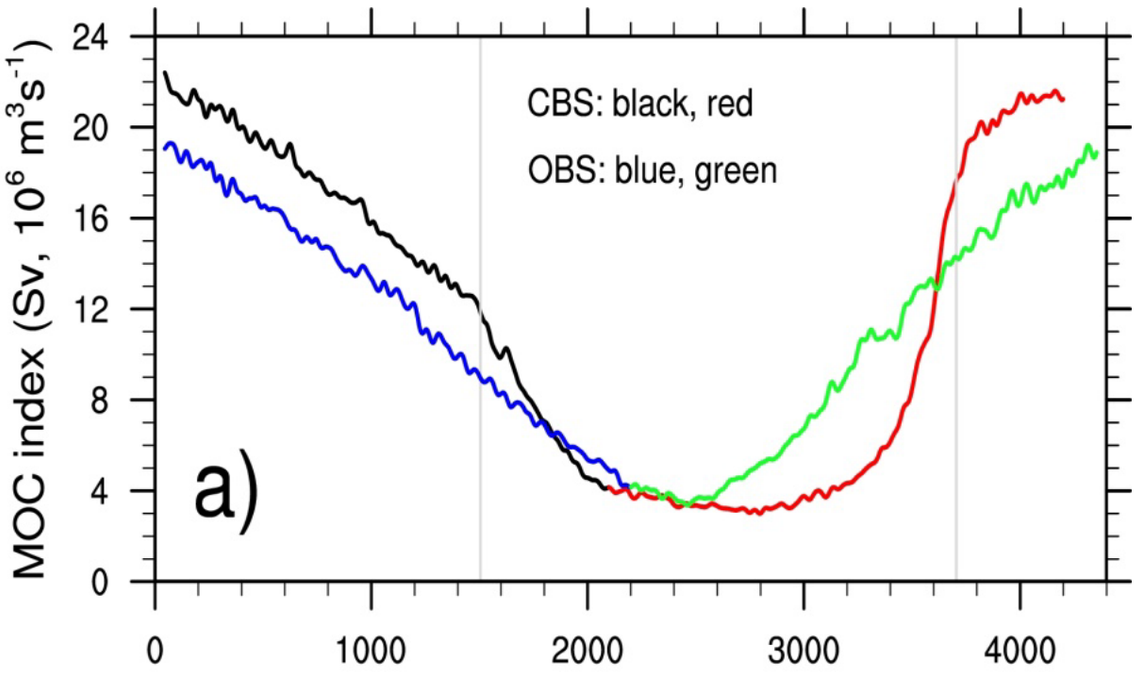


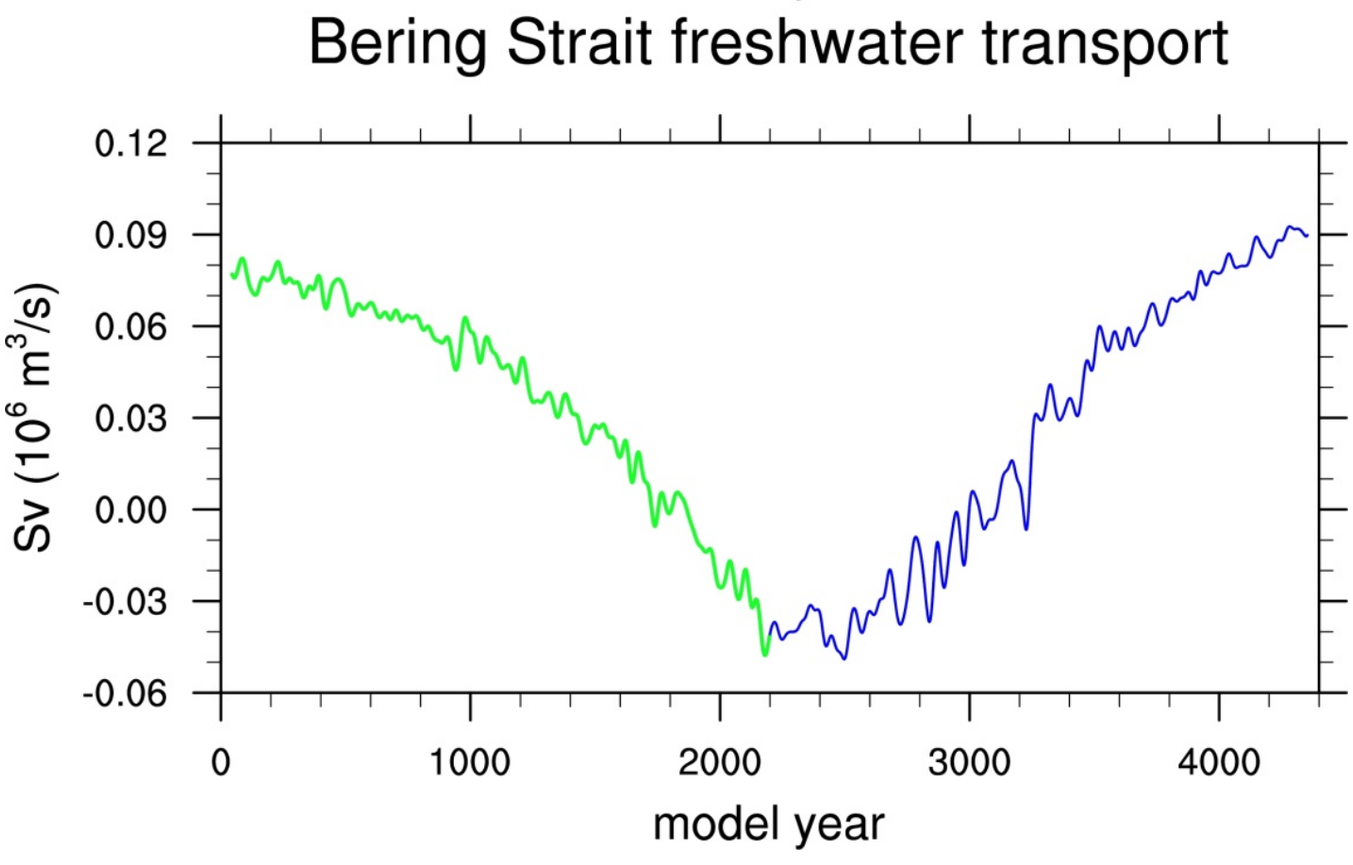
Area of the March mean mixed layer deeper than 400 meters



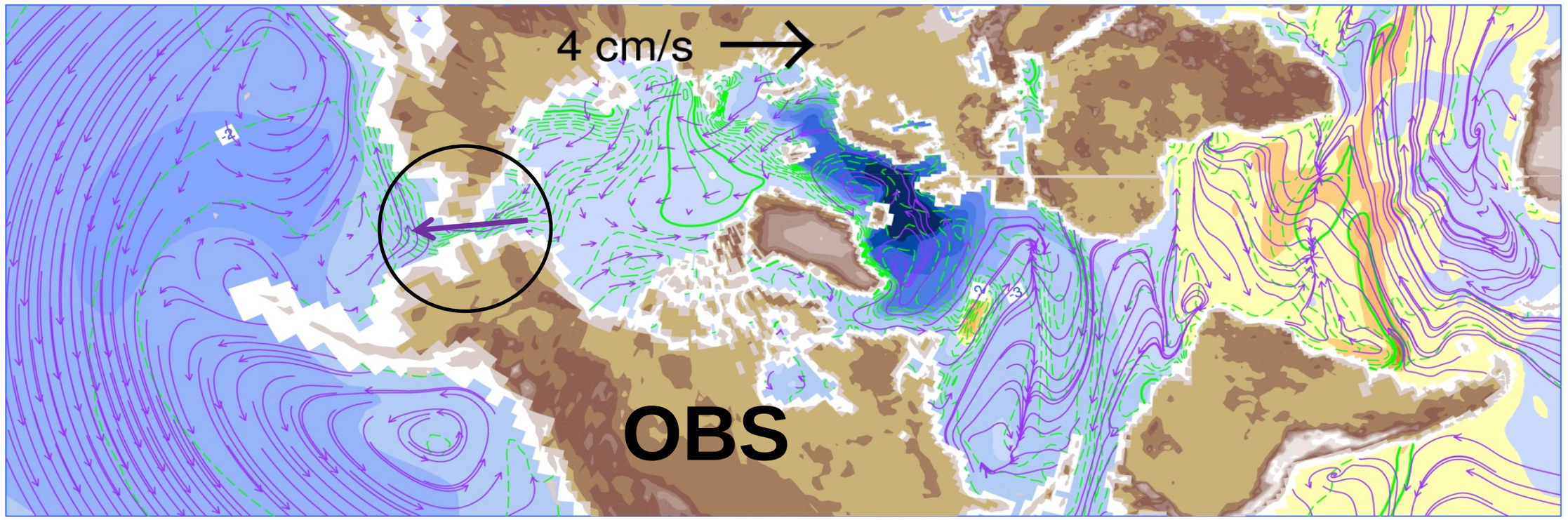
Changes of the Bering Strait mass and freshwater transport as the AMOC weakens/strengthens in the open Bering Strait simulation

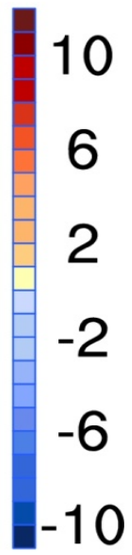


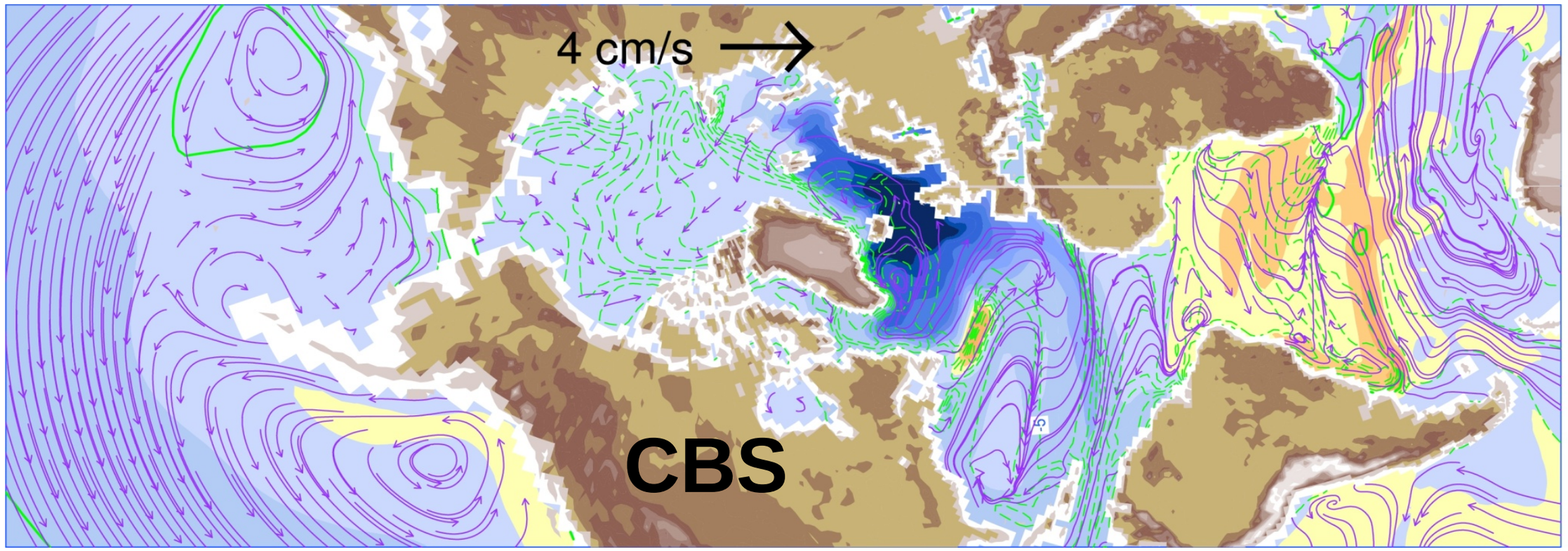


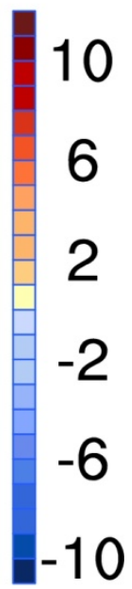


Surface property changes in open/closed Bering Strait simulations









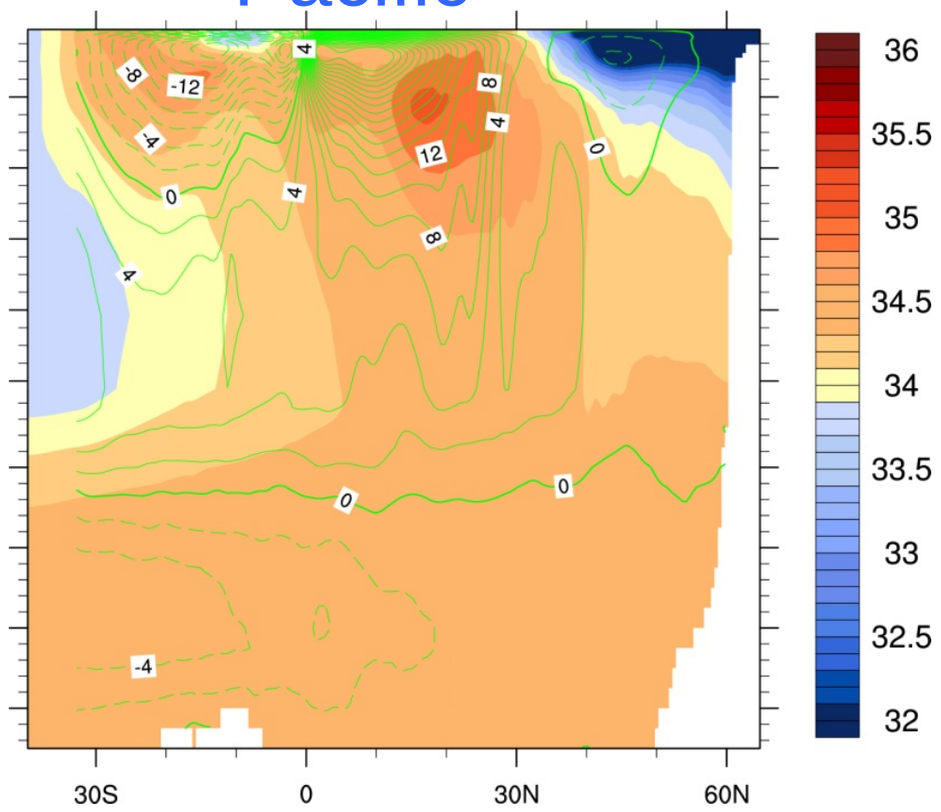
Arrows: surface currents (cm/s); shading: SST anomaly (°C); contours: SSS anomaly (psu)

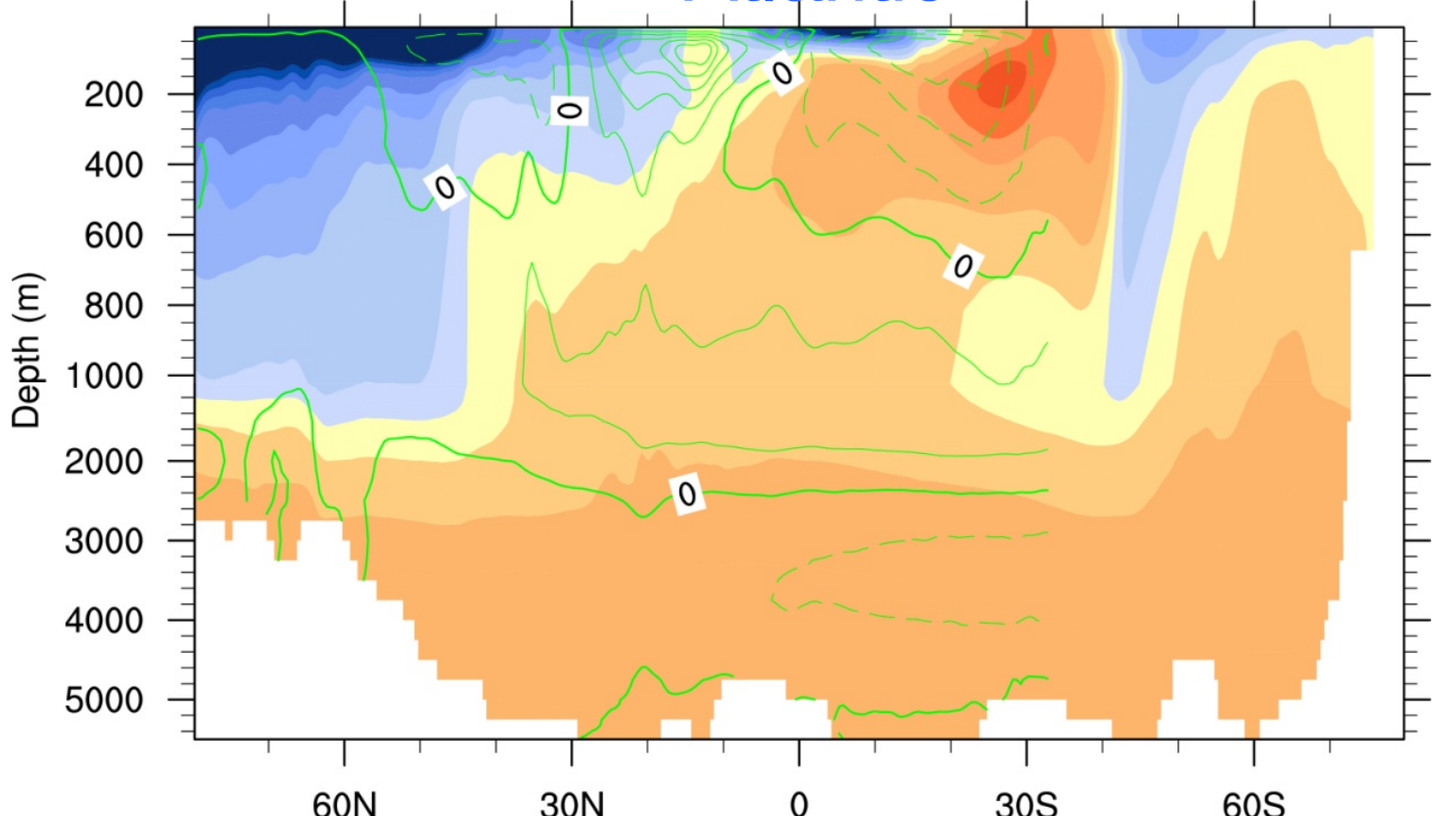
Pacific and Atlantic zonal mean salinity and MSF with a collapsed AMOC

Pacific

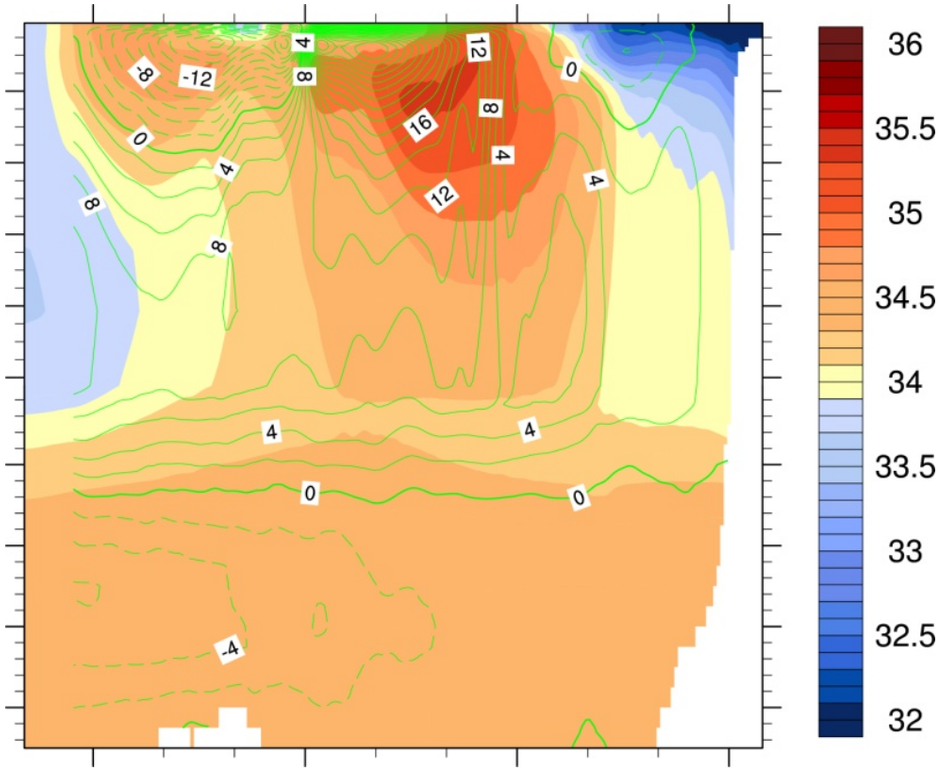
Atlantic

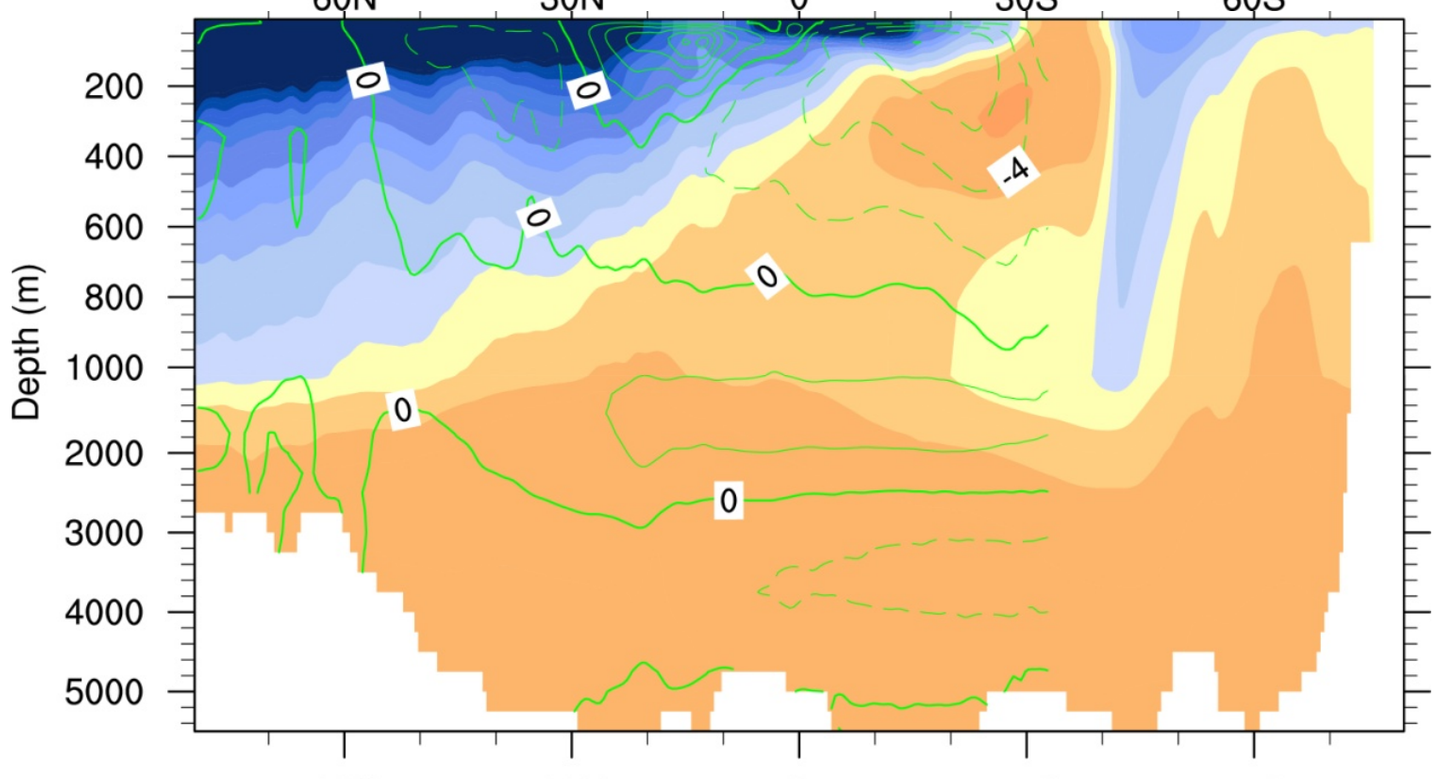
Open Bering Strait





Closed Bering Strait





Summary

Our results suggest that the opening/closure of the Bering Strait may have played an important role in modulating the AMOC and ice age climate, e.g.

i. The Bering Strait closure may have changed the characteristics of the ocean circulation to a state, such as the existence of the AMOC hysteresis, which is in favour of abrupt climate transitions.

ii. Since the open Bering Strait can transport water mass in both direction depending on the AMOC strength, it leads to the absence of the AMOC hysteresis, thus preventing abrupt climate transitions during the Holocene. Thus we propose that abrupt climate transitions due to a sudden collapse of the AMOC would be unlikely to occur in future climate.

Thank You

This work is funded by the Office of Science (BER), US Department of Energy, Cooperative Agreement No. DE-FC02-97ER62402. This research used resources of the National Energy Research Scientific Computing Center, which is supported by the Office of Science of the US Department of Energy under Contract DE-AC02-05CH11231.

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To provide facility support to the wider community; and,
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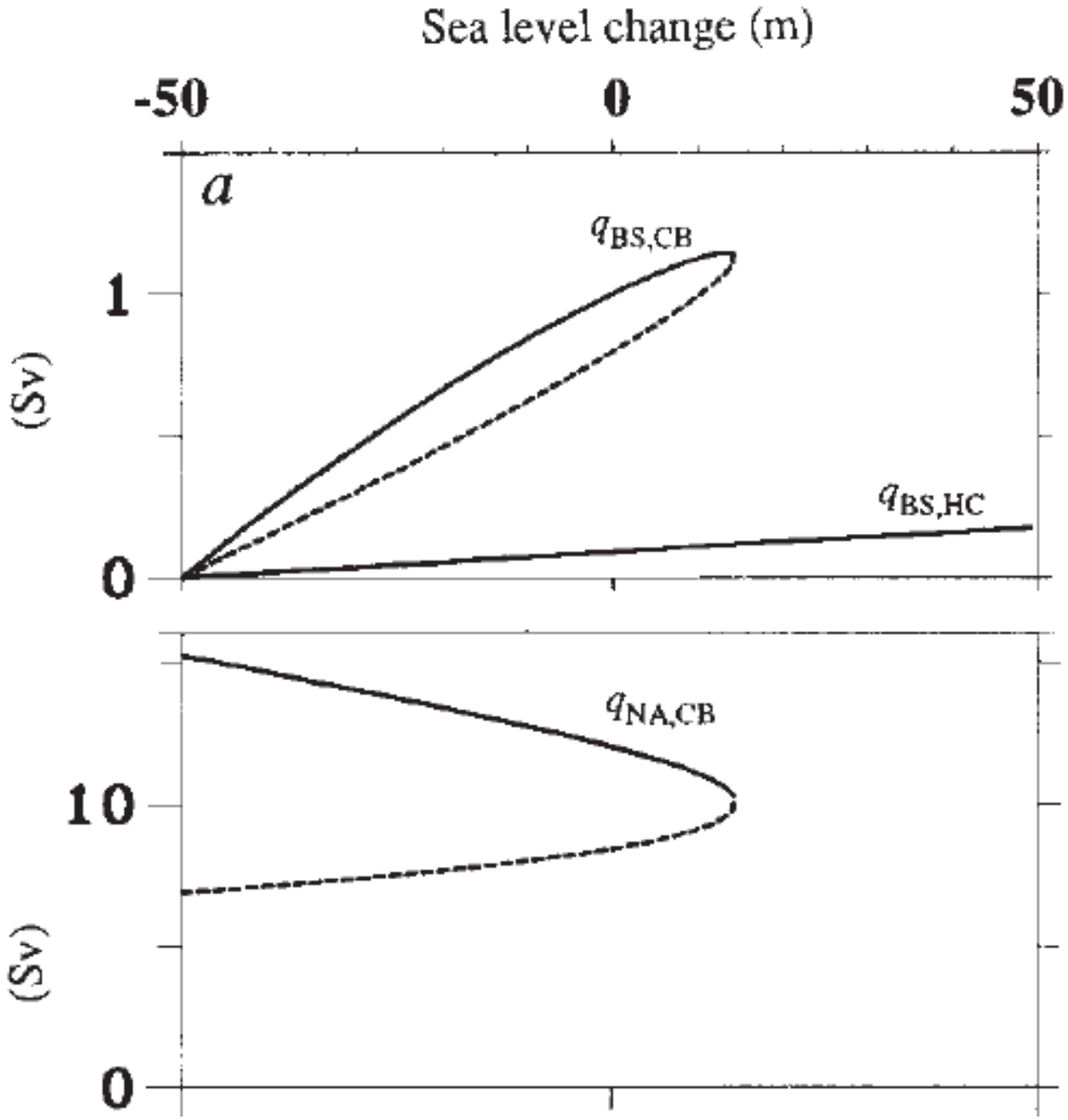
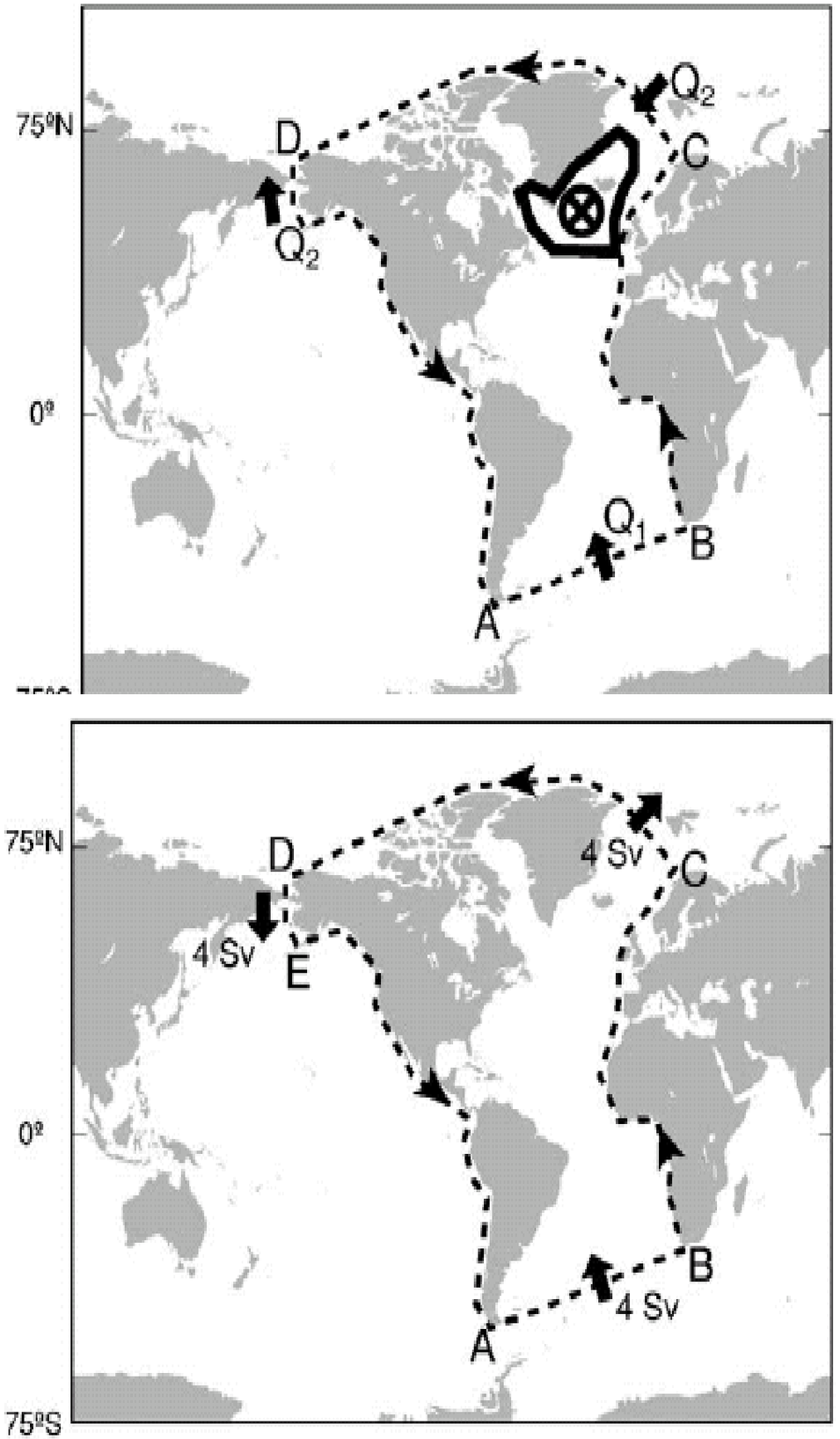
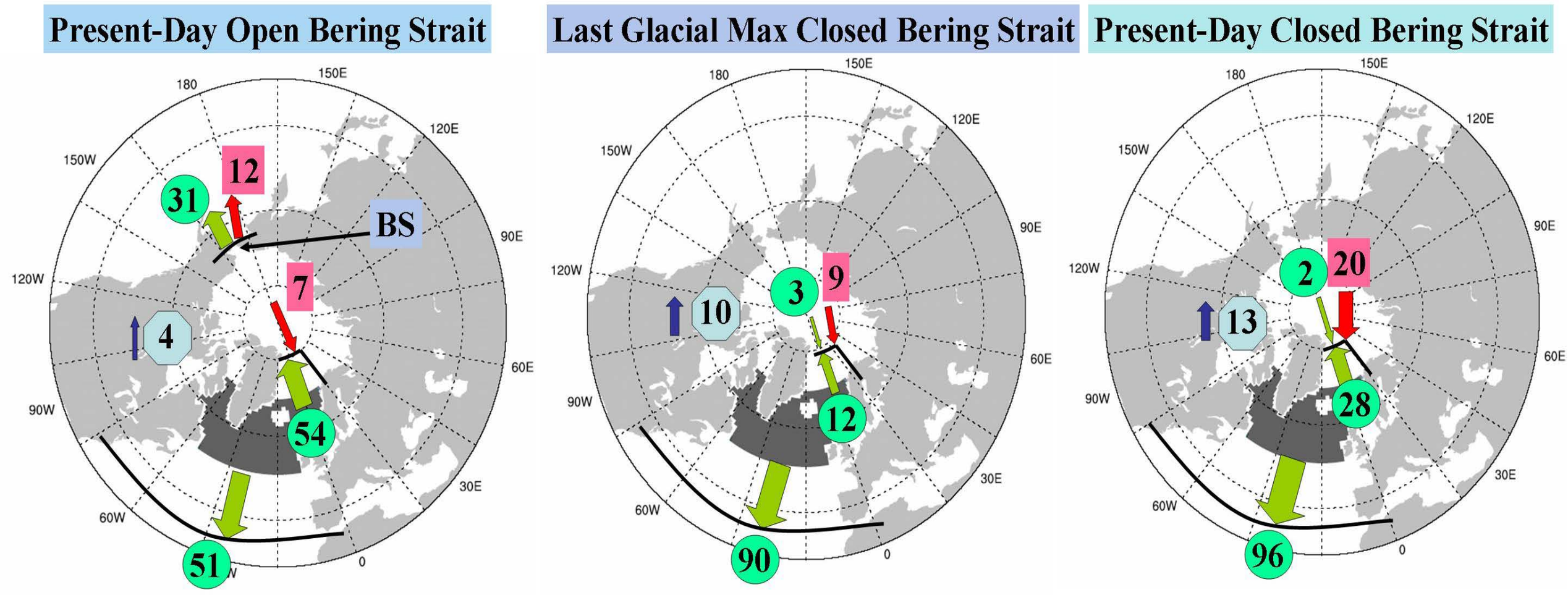


Shaffer and Bendtsen, 1994



De Boer and Nof, 2004a,b

A summary of the comparison of the present day open Bering Strait, closed Bering Strait to LGM closed Bering Strait simulation



Arrows: Green, Oceanic freshwater transport; Blue: P-E+R (Atlantic 35°N~80°N); Red: Sea ice transport

Shape: Circle, liquid freshwater transport; Hexagon, P-E+R (Atlantic 35°N~80°N); Square, sea ice transport

Numbers shown in this figure are the percentage of the total freshwater added into the subpolar North Atlantic during hosing

Hu et al., J. Climate, 2008