

PREPARATION AND OPERATIONS OF THE MISSION PERFORMANCE
CENTRE (MPC) FOR THE COPERNICUS SENTINEL-3 MISSION

S3-A Wind & Wave Cyclic Performance Report

Cycle No. 016

Start date: 26/03/2017

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Changes Log

Version	Date	Changes
1.0	01/05/2017	First Version

List of Changes

Version	Section	Answers to RID	Changes



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1 Summary

This is a cyclic report on the quality of wind and wave observations from the radar altimeter SRAL on-board Sentinel-3A and their timely availability for Cycle No. 016 (period from 26/03/2017 to 21/04/2017). The product under consideration is the Level 2 Marine Ocean and Sea Ice Areas (SRAL-L2MA) also referred to as S3A_SR_2_WAT that is nominally distributed in near real time (NRT). This work covers the Cal/Val Task SRAL-L2MA-CV-230 (Wind, wave product validation vs models).

Radar backscatter (σ_0), surface wind speed (WS) and significant wave height (SWH) from product S3A_SR_2_WAT are monitored and validated using the procedure used successfully for the validation of the equivalent products from earlier altimeters. The procedure is described in Appendix A. The procedure composed of a set of self-consistency checks and comparisons against other sources of data. Model equivalent products from the ECMWF Integrated Forecasting System (IFS) and in-situ measurements available in NRT through the Global Telecommunication System (GTS) are used for the validation. This specific report does not include the in-situ validation which will be included in later reports.

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2 Events

The major changes and events that may have had impact on the results of the validation of Sentinel-3 wind and wave products presented in this report are listed below (items in **bold are satellite related**):

- **16 February 2016: Launch of Sentinel-3A**
- 08 Mar 2016: Model change to CY41R2. The main change is the implementation of the new 9-km cubic octahedral grid (T_{co1279}) for the high resolution configuration of IFS.
- **09 April 2016: Switch SRAL to LRM Mode**
- **12 April 2016: Switch SRAL back to SAR Mode**
- **14 October 2016: Implementation of SRAL processing chain IPF-SM-2 version 06.03**
- **17 November 2016: Implementation of SRAL processing chain IPF version 06.05***
- 22 November 2016: ECMWF model changed to CY43R1. This change has almost no impact on the products assessed here.
- **29 November 2016: SAR Sigma0 increased by 0.35 dB and PLRM Sigma0 increased by 0.1 dB**
- **05 December 2016: Implementation of the processing chain "SRAL/MWR L2 IPF (SM-2) Ver. 06.05 (PB2.8)"**

All ECMWF Integrated Forecast System (IFS) model changes are summarised at:

<http://www.ecmwf.int/en/forecasts/documentation-and-support/changes-ecmwf-model>

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3 Data Processing

The validation is based on the NRT operational Sentinel-3A Surface Topography Mission Level 2 (S3-A STM L2) wind and wave marine products (S3A_SR_2_WAT) product. For the time being, the product distributed by EUMETSAT in netCDF through their Online Data Access (ODA) system is used after converting into ASCII format but this will be replaced by the formal BUFR (Binary Universal Form for the Representation of meteorological data) format whenever becomes available. The raw data product is collected for 6-hourly time windows centred at synoptic times (00, 06, 12 and 18 UTC).

The data are then averaged along the track to form super-observations with scales compatible with the model scales of around 75 km. It is worthwhile mentioning that the model scale is typically several (4~8) model grid spacing (e.g. Abdalla et al., 2013). This corresponds to 11 individual (1 Hz) Sentinel-3 observations (7 km each).

To achieve this, the stream of altimeter data is split into short observation sequences each consisting of 11 individual (1-Hz) observations. A quality control procedure is performed on each short sequence. Erratic and suspicious individual observations are removed and the remaining data in each sequence are averaged to form a representative super-observation, providing that the sequence has enough number of “good” individual observations (at least 7). The super-observations are collocated with the model and the in-situ (if applicable) data. The raw altimeter data that pass the quality control and the collocated model data are then investigated to derive the conclusions regarding the data quality. The details of the method used for data processing, which is an extension to the method used for ERS-2 RA analysis and described in Abdalla and Hersbach (2004), are presented in Appendix A.

The data are closely monitored and verified using the ECMWF IFS model products. Similar products from other altimeter missions are also used for verification. On a weekly and a monthly basis, the data are verified against available in-situ data in addition to the model data. Internal weekly and monthly plots summarising the quality of Sentinel-3 products for that week or month are also produced, examined and archived for future reference.

This specific report gives the assessment of Level 2 S3A_SR_2_WAT reprocessed products made available by ESA/EUMETSAT through EUMETSAT ODA System covering Cycle No. 016 (from 26/03/2017 to 21/04/2017).

4 Radar Backscatter and Surface Wind Speed

4.1 Backscatter

Backscatter coefficient (σ^0) from Sentinel-3A S3A_SR_2_WAT product seems to be reasonable and compares well with that from other altimeters. The backscatter global histogram (or the probability density function, PDF) of Sentinel-3A SRAL for the whole of Cycle 016 is shown in Figure 1. The shape of the PDF for this cycle is similar to that of all cycles since Cycle 012. Sentinel-3 PDF compares quite well with those of other altimeters (after adjusting Jason-2/3 by about 2.5 dB; not shown).

The time series of the global (ice-free ocean only) mean and standard deviation (SD) of backscatter coefficients from SRAL of Sentinel-3A are shown in Figure 2. The temporal change in the mean and the SD of backscatter is not much different than the other altimeters (not shown). The plot shows the average of a moving window of 7 days moved by one day at a time to produce smooth plots. Both the mean and the SD of the backscatter are stable over the last few cycles. The jump in the mean value at the end of November 2016 (Sigma-0 was adjusted during processing) by more than 0.5 dB cannot be missed.

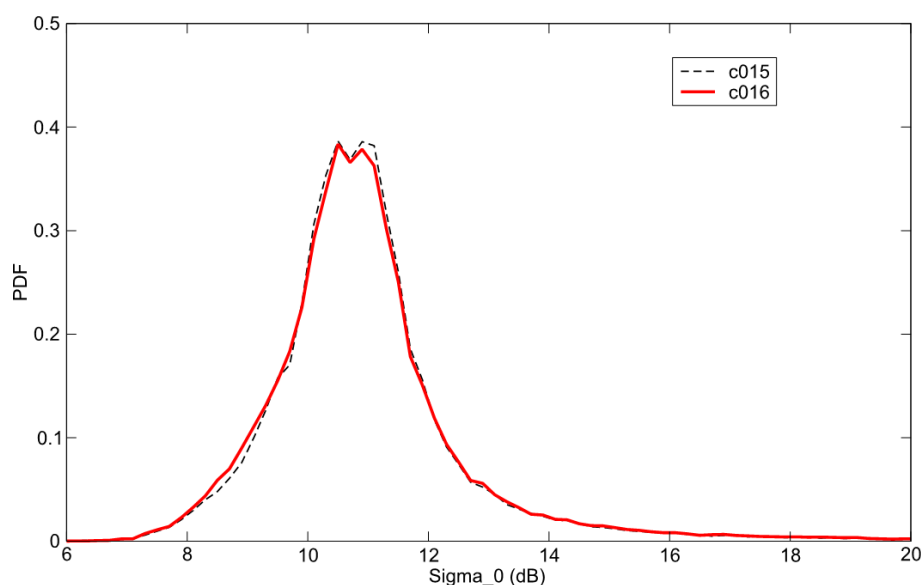


Figure 1: Sentinel-3A SRAL ocean Ku-band backscatter histogram (PDF) over the whole globe and for the period of Cycle 016. For comparison, the same plot from the previous cycle is shown as dashed black line.

4.2 SAR Mode Surface Wind Speed

Figure 3 shows the global wind speed PDF's of Sentinel-3A for the whole period of Cycle 016. The PDF of the ECMWF Integrated Forecast System (IFS) model wind speed collocated with Sentinel-3 during the same period is also shown. It is clear that the PDF of Sentinel-3 wind speed is close to that of the model

as well as the other altimeters (not shown). However, there are some deviations mainly around the peak of the PDF.

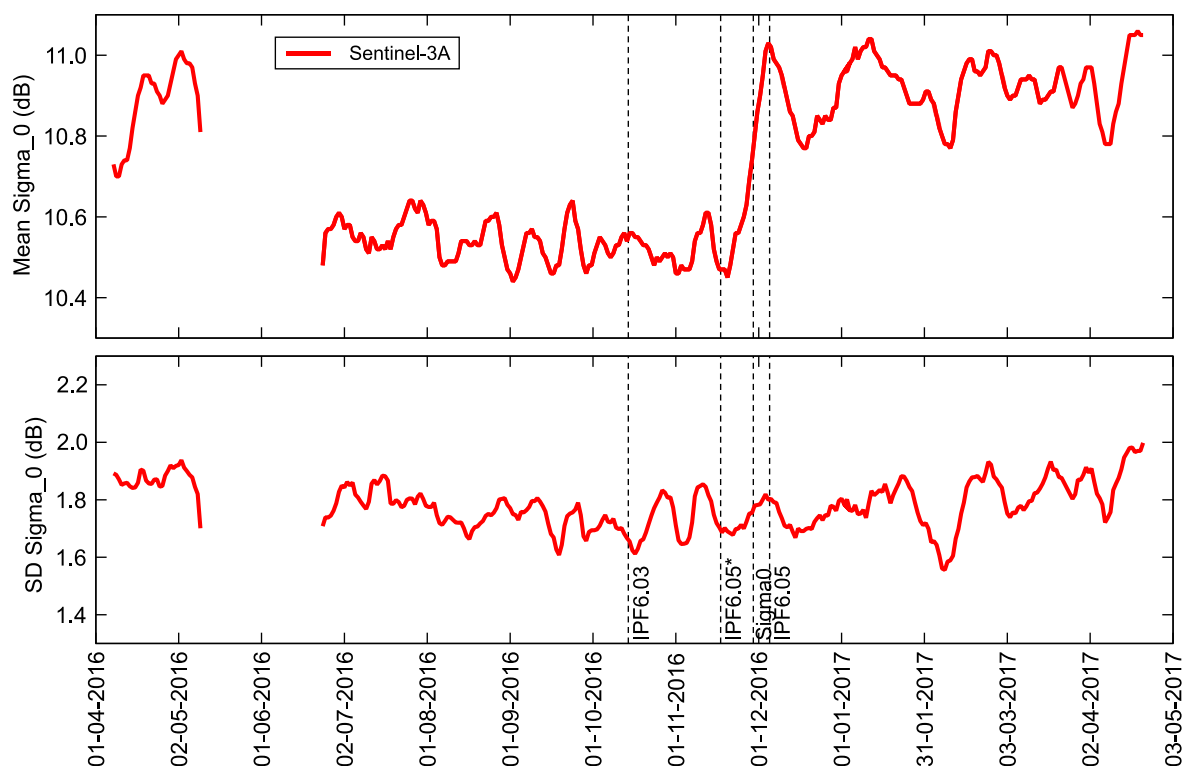


Figure 2: Time series of global mean (top) and standard deviation (bottom) of backscatter coefficient of SRAL Ku-band after quality control. Mean and SD are computed over a moving time window of 7 days.

Collocated pairs of altimeter super-observation and the analysed (AN) ECMWF model wind speeds are plotted in a form of a density scatter plot in Figure 4 for the whole globe over the whole Cycle 016. The scatter plots in Figure 4 and other similar wind speed scatter plots that appear hereafter represent two-dimensional (2-D) histograms showing the number of observations in each 2-D bin of $0.5 \text{ m/s} \times 0.5 \text{ m/s}$ of wind speed. It is clear the agreement between Sentinel-3 winds and their model counterpart is very good with virtually no bias (except for slight bias at high wind speed values). Sentinel-3A wind speed is as good as that of the other altimeters. The standard deviation of the difference with respect to the model is about 1.1 m/s which is similar to that of other altimeters. The scatter plots for Sentinel-3 versus the model collocations discriminated based on their geographical locations whether in the Northern Hemisphere (north of latitude 20°N ; NH), the Tropics (between latitudes 20°S and 20°N) or the Southern Hemisphere (south of latitude 20°S ; SH) are shown in panels (a), (b) and (c) of Figure 5, respectively. **Note that while the SRAL SAR mode slightly overestimates wind speed in NH (Figure 5a) compared to the model AN within the range from 7 to 15 m/s, it slightly underestimates it in the SH (Figure 5c) for the same range.** This needs to be monitored closely although it may be just a seasonal signal.

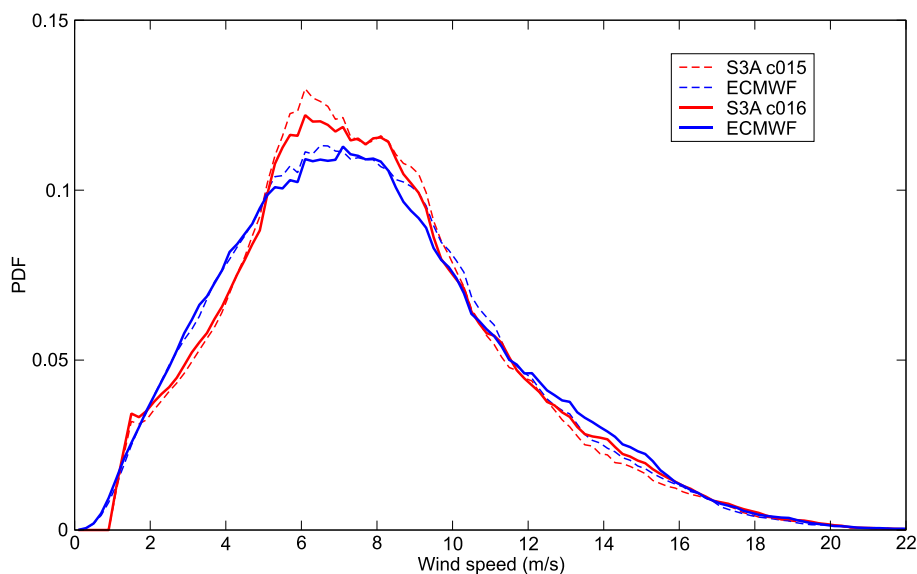


Figure 3: Sentinel-3A SRAL surface wind speed PDF over the whole global ocean and for the period of Cycle 016. The corresponding ECMWF (collocated with Sentinel-3) PDF is also shown for comparison. The corresponding PDF's from the previous cycle are also shown as thin dashed lines.

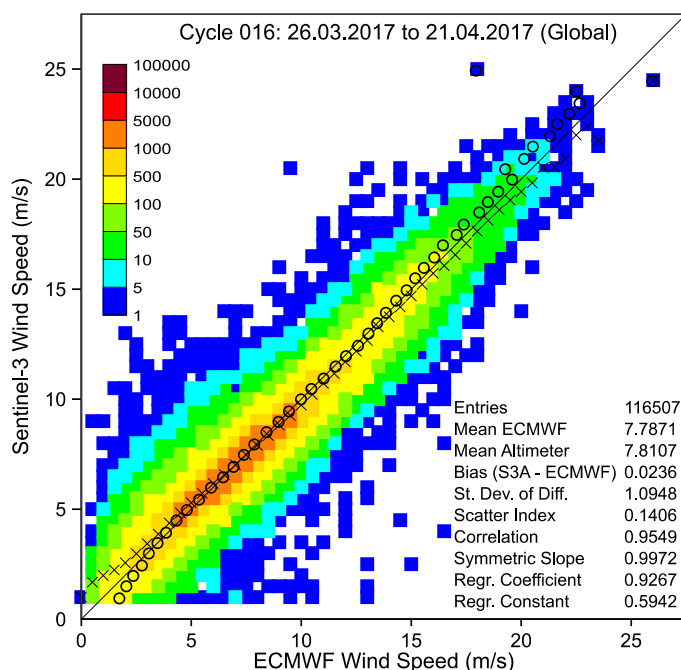


Figure 4: Global comparison between Sentinel-3A SRAL and ECMWF model analysis surface wind speed values over the period of Cycle 016. The number of collocations in each 0.5 m/s x 0.5 m/s 2D bin is color-coded as in the legend. The "x" symbols are the means of the bins for given x-axis values (model) while the "o" symbols are the means for given y-axis values (Sentinel-3).

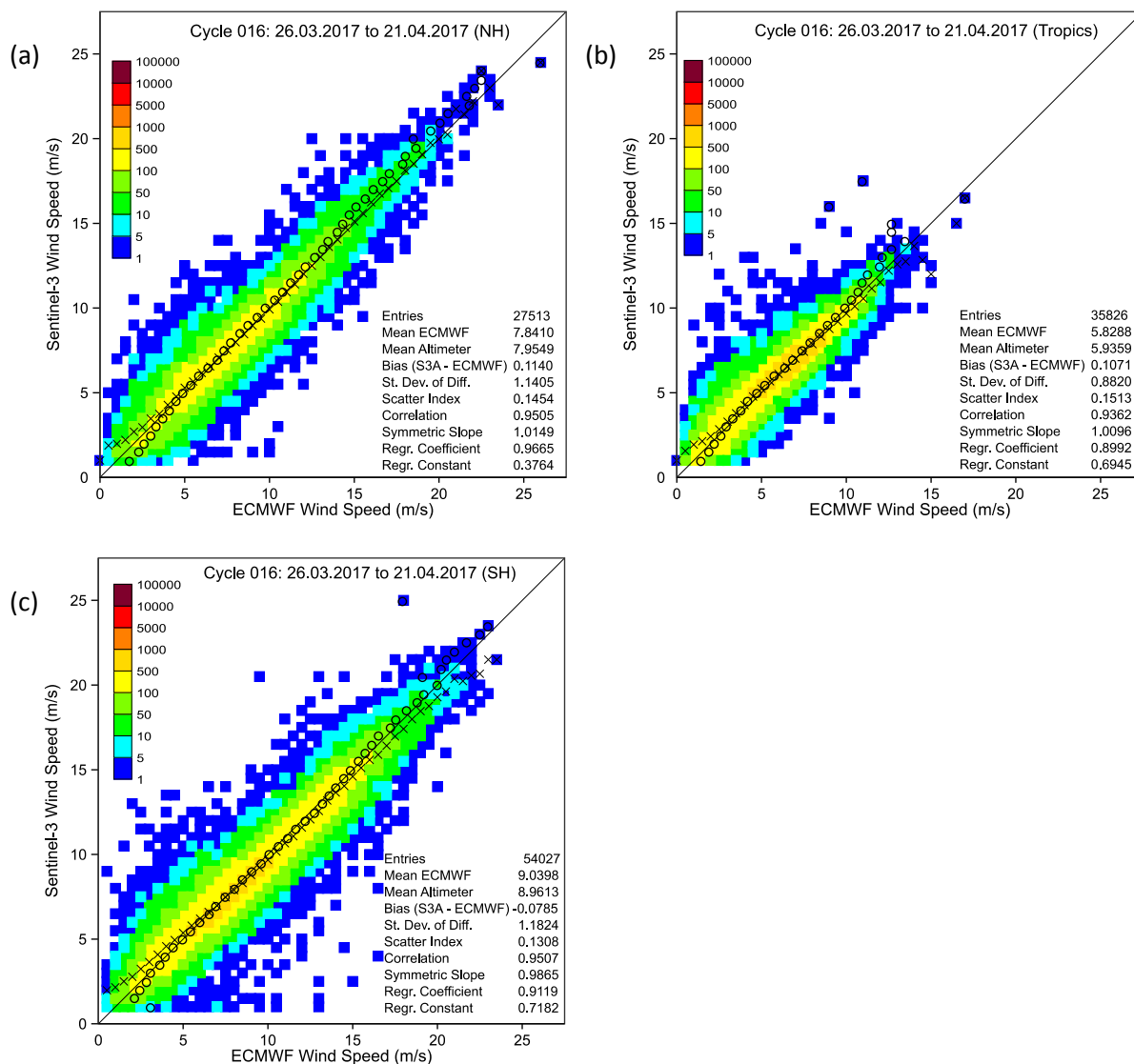


Figure 5: Same as Figure 4 but for Northern Hemisphere (latitudes to the north of 20°N), Tropics (latitudes between 20°S and 20°N) and Southern Hemisphere (latitudes to the south of 20°S), respectively.

The time series of the global mean and standard deviation (SD) of the wind speed from Sentinel-3 over a 7-day time window moving by 1 day at a time are shown in the upper and lower panels, respectively, of Figure 6. The corresponding time series of the model are also shown for comparison. It is clear that Sentinel-3 mean wind speed is almost at the same level of the mean model value. The change started from late November 2016 and by the implementation of IPF 6.05, both Sentinel-3 and the model mean wind speeds became almost equal. The standard deviation of the altimeter and the model wind speed have become very close since IPF 6.05.

The time series of the wind speed weekly bias (defined as the altimeter – model) and standard deviation of the difference (SDD) of SRAL compared to the ECMWF model AN are shown in the upper and lower panels, respectively, of Figure 7. Before the end of November 2016, the global wind speed bias was

stable at about 1 m/s. The impact of IPF change (v. 6.05) in early December is very evident in Figure 7. The bias in all areas collapsed to very small values (well within ± 0.4 m/s).

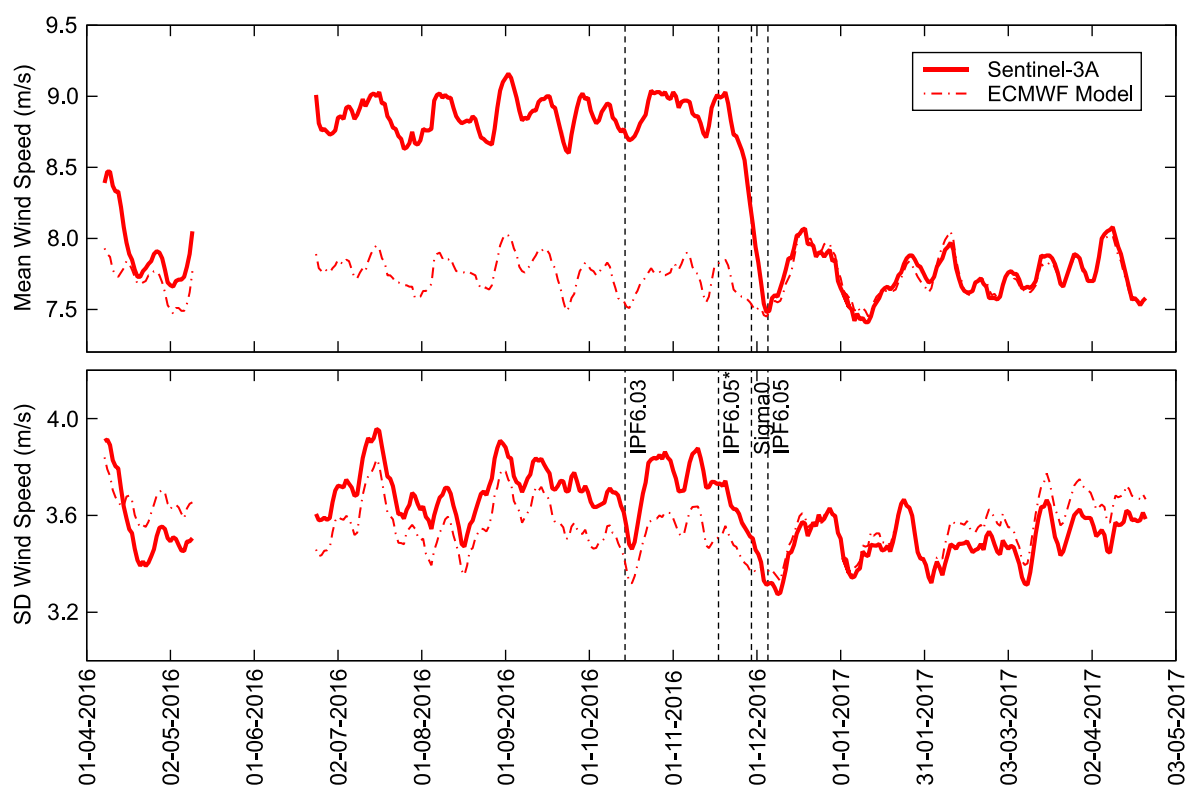


Figure 6: Time series of global mean (top) and standard deviation (bottom) of wind speed from SRAL Ku-band after quality control. The collocated model wind speed mean and SD are also shown. Mean and SD are computed over a moving time window of 7 days.

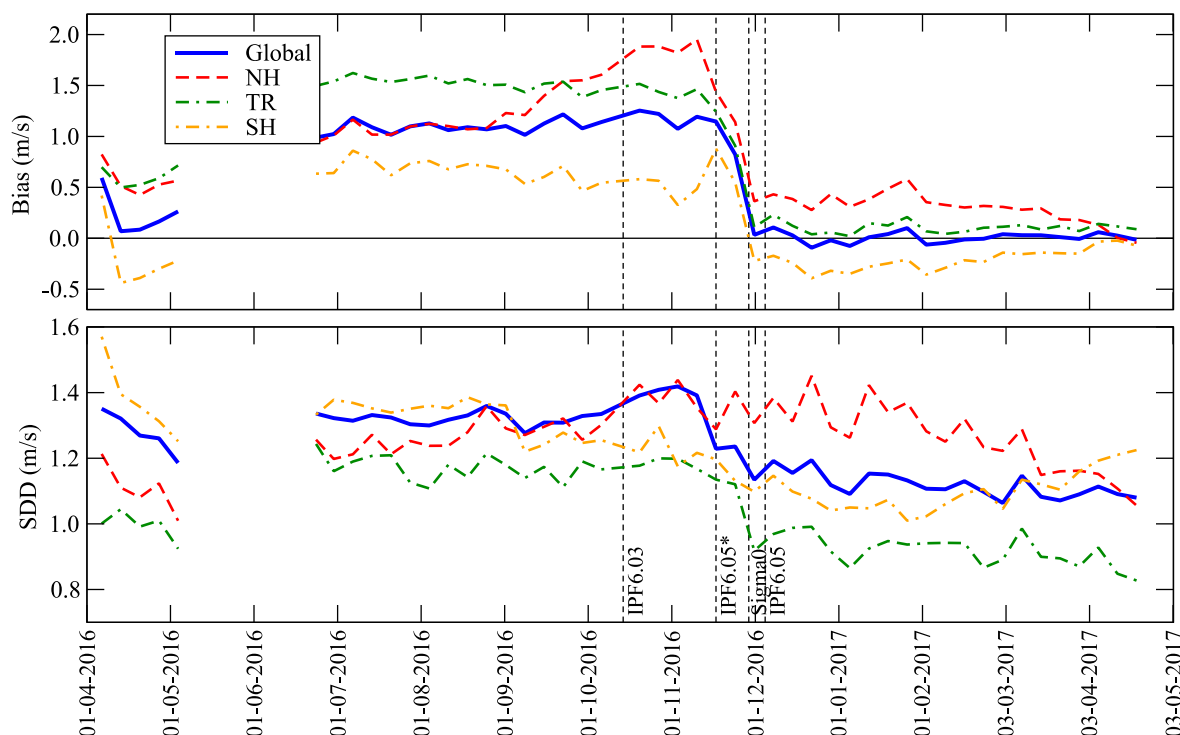



Figure 7: Time series of weekly wind speed bias defined as altimeter - model (top) and standard deviation of the difference (bottom) between SRAL Ku-band and ECMWF model analysis.

Until the beginning of December 2016, the wind speed SDD values were rather high compared to those of other altimeters (Sentinel-3 SDD of 1.2-1.3 m/s versus 1.0-1.2 m/s for the other altimeters). The values decreased with the implementation of IPF6.05 and the increase of backscatter value and apparently they are now in line with other altimeters.

The geographical distribution of the mean Sentinel-3 wind speed and the wind speed bias, SDD and scatter index (SI, defined as the SDD divided by the model mean and expressed in percentage) with respect to the ECMWF model averaged over the period of Cycle 016 are shown in Figure 8. While the mean wind speed, the SDD and SI distributions all look similar to their counterparts from other altimeters (not shown), the bias in panel (b) is rather low almost everywhere.

The comparison against in-situ (mainly buoy) observations is shown in Figure 9. The bias against in-situ observation for this cycle is rather small (~ 0.25 m/s). The SDD (a proxy to the random error) is about 1.2 m/s which is $\sim 15\%$ of the mean. These figures are comparable to same statistics emerging from the comparison of other altimeters against in-situ observations (not shown). It is important to state that most of in-situ observations are located in the Northern Hemisphere around the American and European coasts.

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4.3 PLRM Surface Wind Speed

Collocated pairs of Pseudo Low Rate Mode (PLRM) wind speed super-observation and the analysed (AN) ECMWF model wind speeds are plotted in a form of a density scatter plot in Figure 10 for the whole globe over the whole period of Cycle 016. It is clear that the agreement between PLRM winds and their model counterpart is fairly good. **However, the significant improvement noticed for Cycle 012 and lost for the Cycle 013 was recovered during the last three cycles. The PLRM wind for this cycle seems to perform as well as it was during Cycle 012. The SDD with respect to the model for this cycle is 1.37 m/s compared to 1.60, 1.32, 1.24 and 1.28 m/s for Cycles 012, 013, 014 and 015).** The PLRM is still globally unbiased when compared to the model. The scatter plots for Sentinel-3 versus the model collocations discriminated based on their geographical locations whether they are in the Northern Hemisphere (north of latitude 20°N), the Tropics (between latitudes 20°S and 20°N) or the Southern Hemisphere (south of latitude 20°S) are shown in Figure 11. Note that the zero-valued PLRM wind speeds (see, for example, the cyclic report of Cycle 012) were eliminated from Figure 10 and Figure 11. **The overestimation in NH and underestimation in the SH mentioned in the previous section and noticed for PLRM winds of last cycle does not hold for this cycle. The underestimation in the SH changed and became almost unbiased.**

The time series of the weekly bias and the SDD between PLRM wind speed and that of the model are shown in Figure 12. It is clear that there was a change in the PLRM wind speed statistics during the second week of November 2016. This change, which is associated by an increase of PLRM backscatter, resulted in almost zero bias between the altimeter and the model. **The note regarding the gradual increase in the SDD between the end of Cycle 012 till the end of Cycle 013 seems to be invalid as the SDD has plateaued at about 1.20 m/s (although the value for this cycle is the highest among the last three cycles). This will be observed closely in the coming cycles just in case of the reappearance of the same issue.**

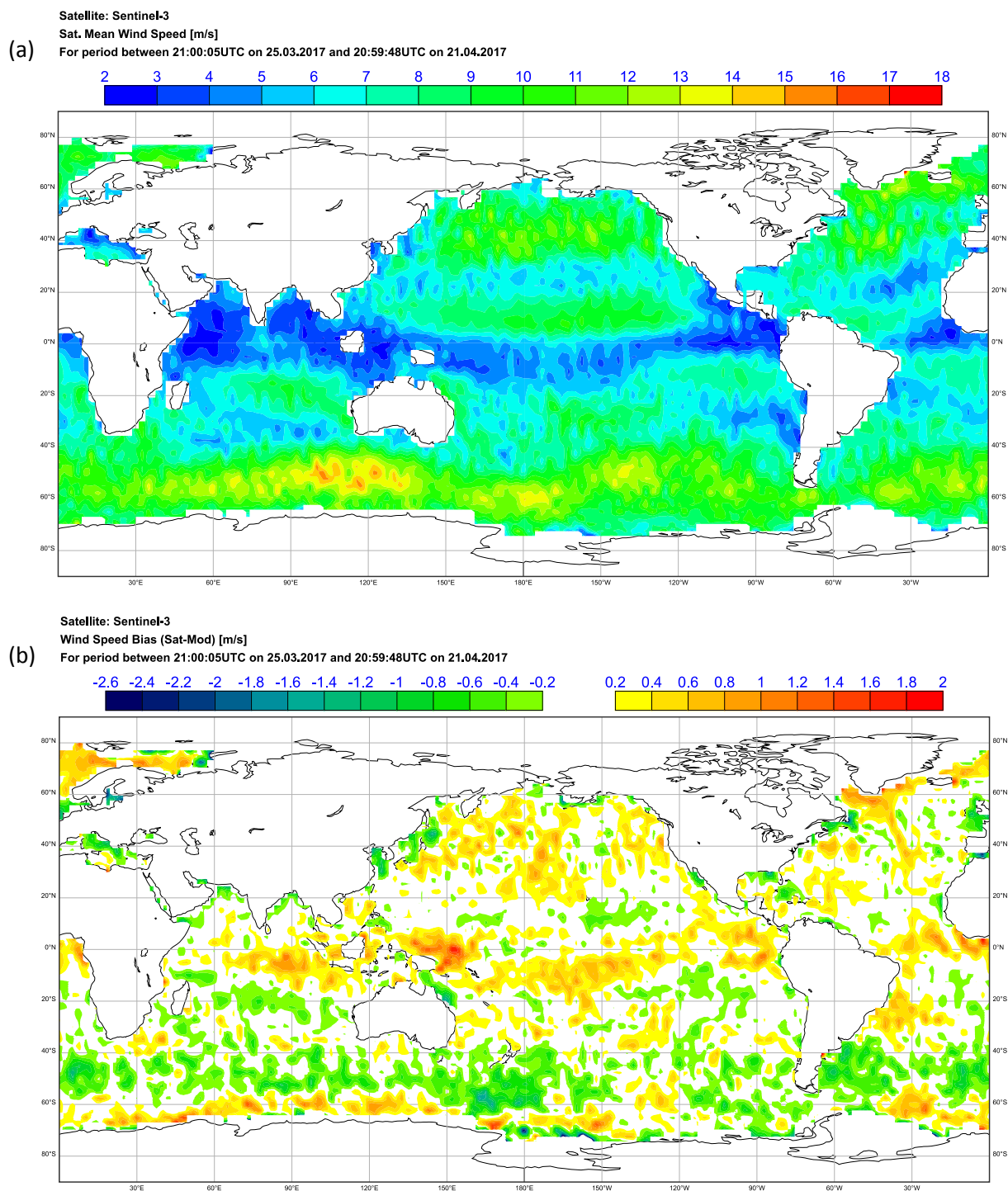


Figure 8: Geographical distribution of mean Sentinel-3 wind speed (a) as well as the bias (b); the SDD (c) and the SI (d) between Sentinel-3 and ECMWF model AN during Cycle 016. Bias is defined as altimeter – model.

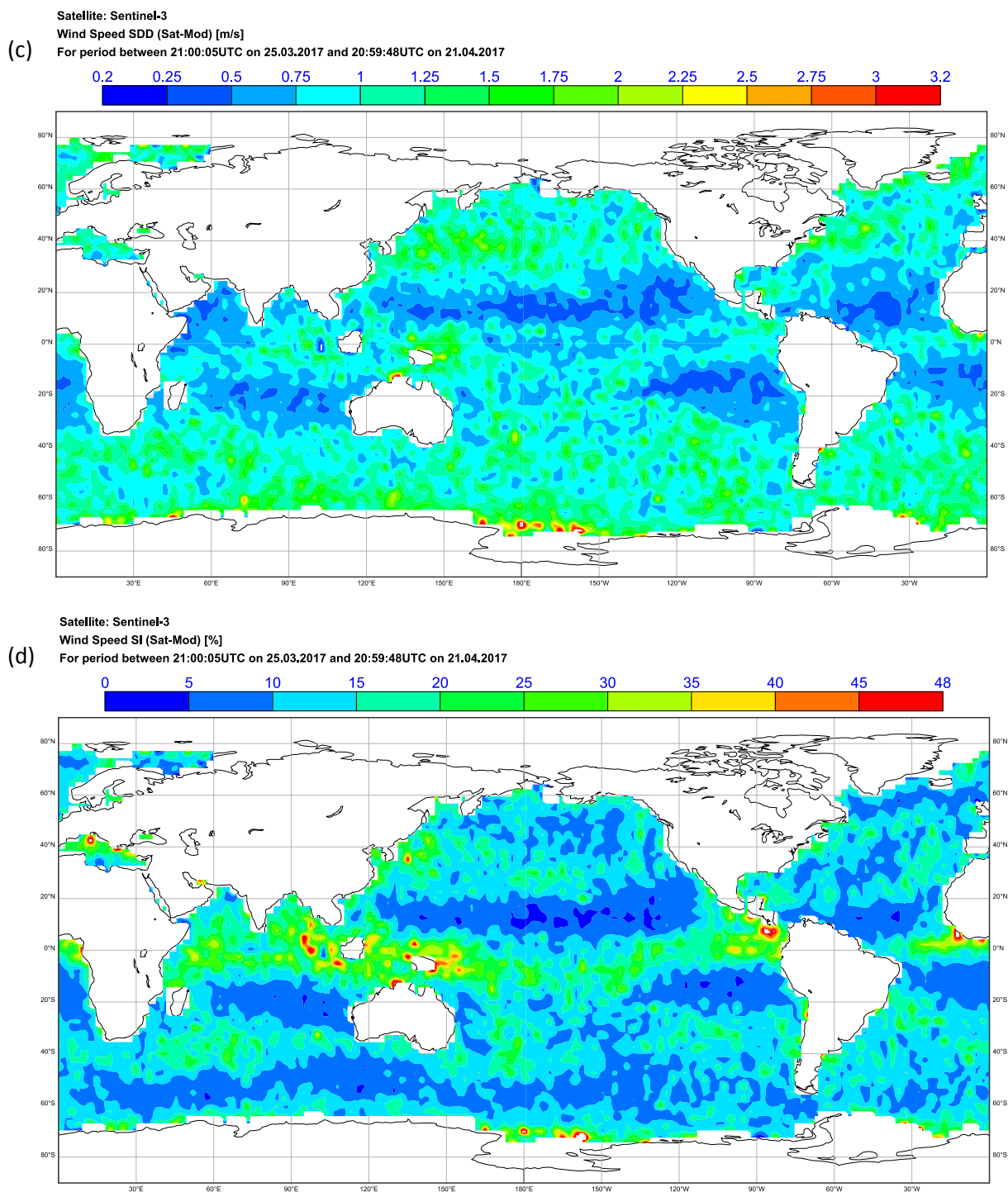


Figure 8: Continued.

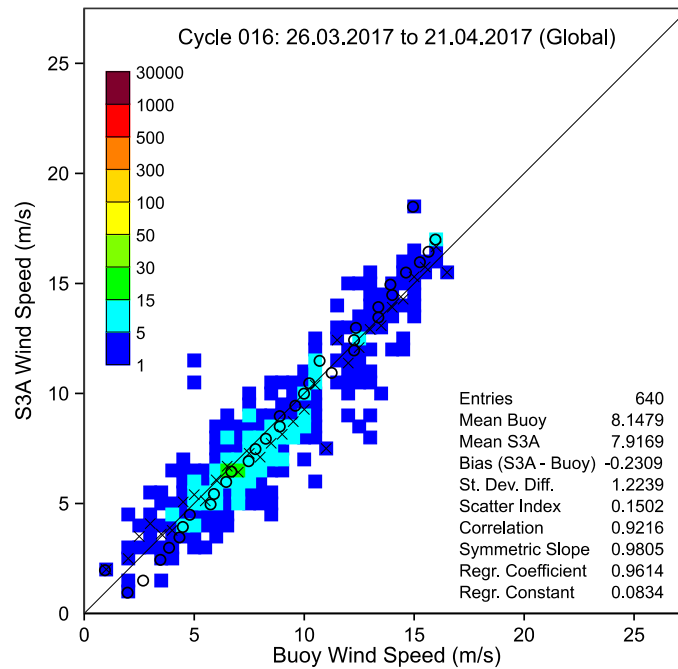


Figure 9: Same as Figure 4 but the comparison is done against in-situ observations (mainly in the NH).

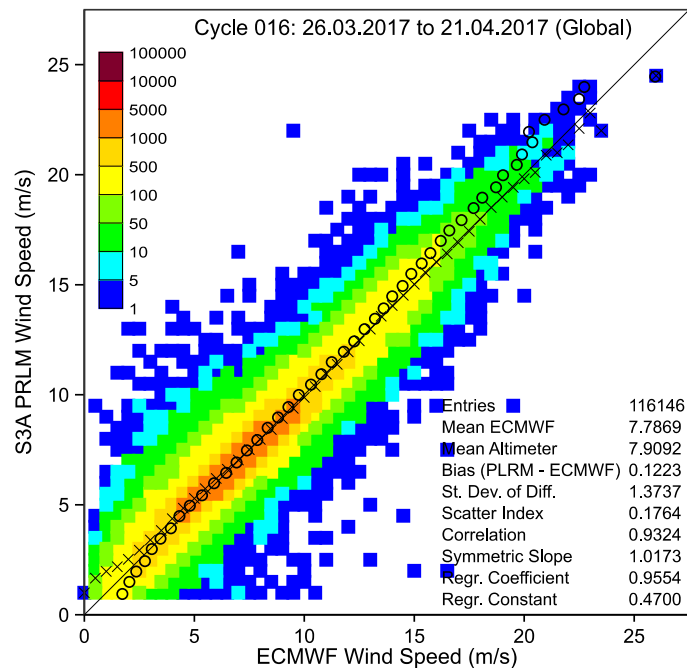


Figure 10: Global comparison between Sentinel-3A PLRM and ECMWF model analysis wind speed values over the period of Cycle 016. Refer to Figure 4 for the meaning of the "x" and "o" symbols as well as the colour coding.

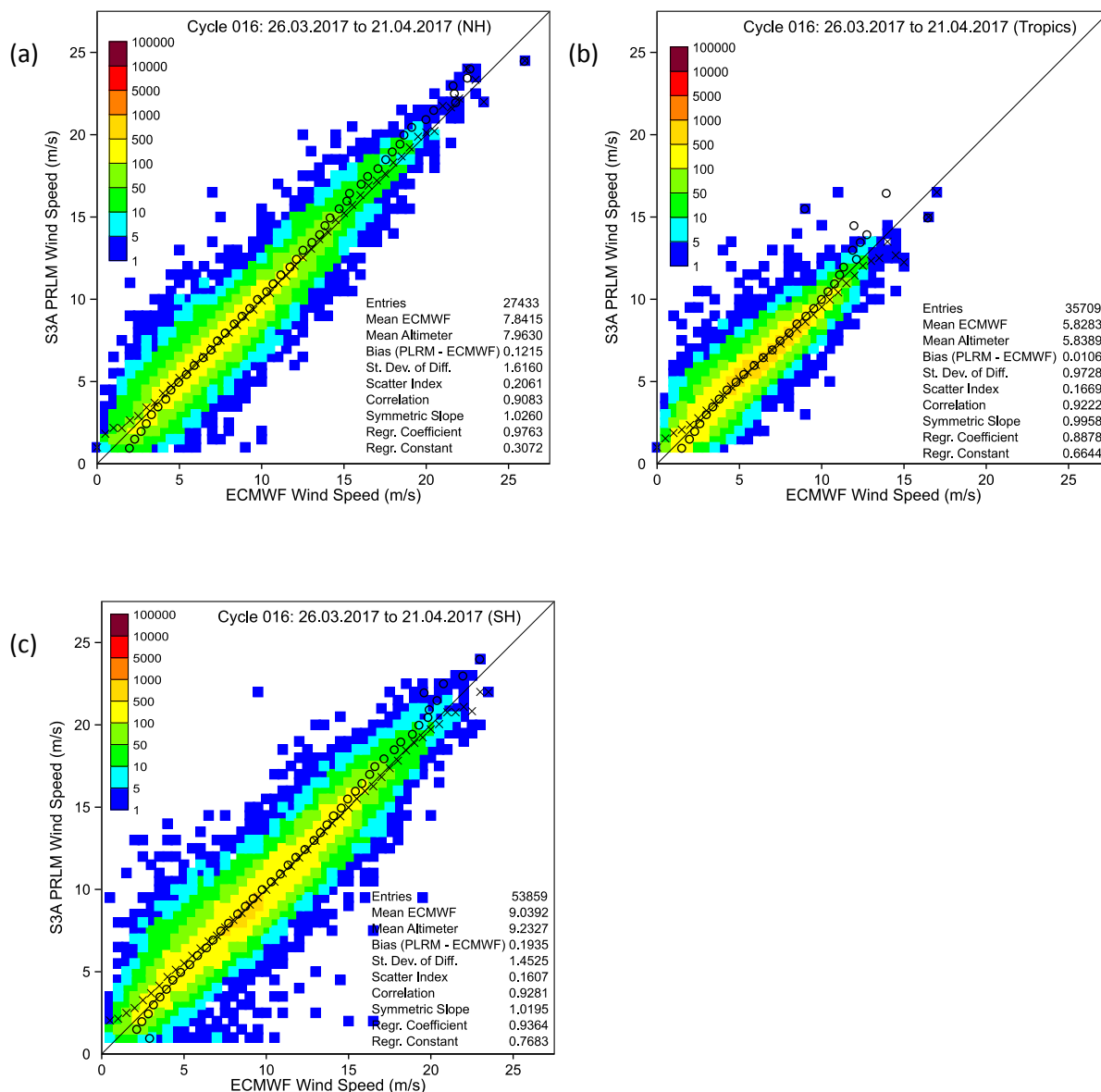


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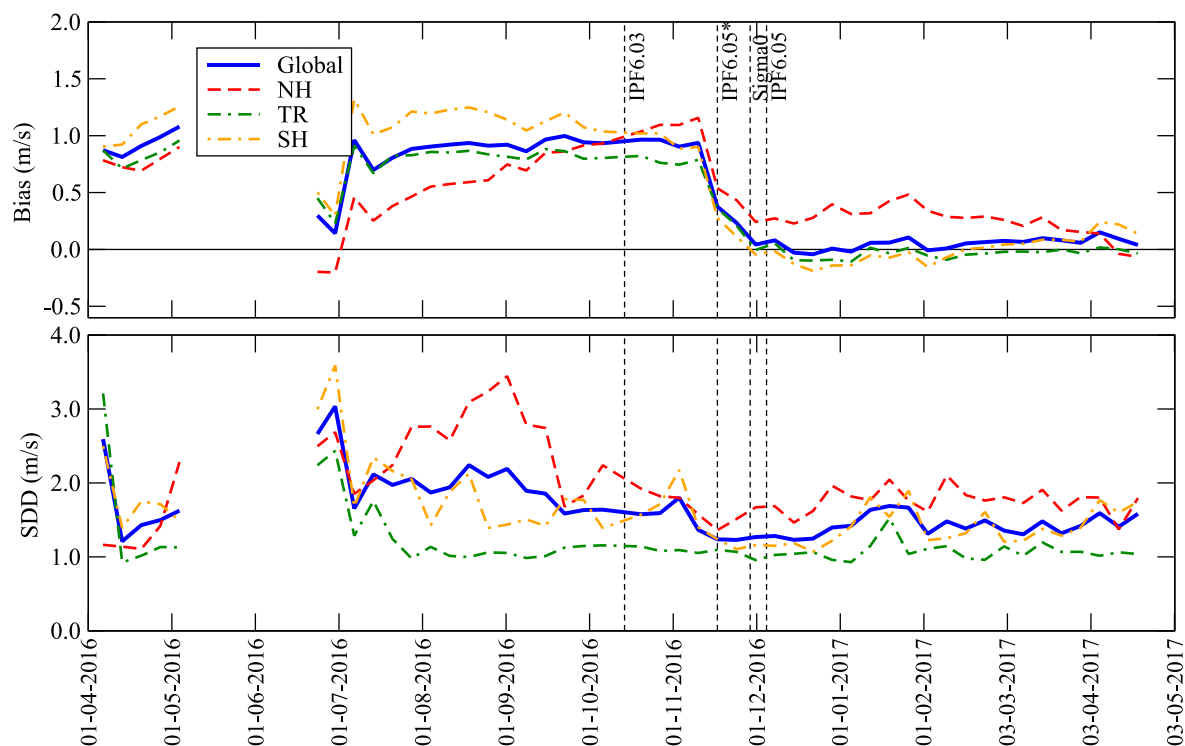


Figure 12: Time series of weekly PLRM wind speed bias defined as altimeter - model (top) and standard deviation of the difference (bottom) between SRAL PLRM and ECMWF model analysis.

5 Significant Wave Height

Altimeter significant wave height (SWH) is the most important product as far as the wave prediction is considered. It is used for data assimilation to improve the model analysis and forecast. Therefore, there is great interest at ECMWF to monitor, validate and assimilate such data products. At the time of writing, the altimeter SWH from Cryosat-2, Jason-2, and SARAL/AltiKa are assimilated in the ECMWF model. Therefore, the model first-guess (which is practically a short model forecast) is used for the verification to reduce the impact of error correlation between the model and Sentinel-3 SRAL that may be conveyed through sharing the same principle of measurement with the altimeters whose SWH products are being assimilated.

Figure 13 shows the global SWH PDF's of Sentinel-3A for the period of Cycle 016. The PDF of the ECMWF model SWH collocated with Sentinel-3 during the same period is also shown. It is clear that PDF of Sentinel-3 SWH deviates slightly from that of the model as well as those of other altimeters (not shown). Although, the IPF changes in late November and early December 2016 (IPF6.05) improved the agreement between the PDF's from Sentinel-3 and the model, there still some differences around the peak of the PDF (~ 2 m). It is difficult to attribute this better agreement to the processing change on 5 December 2016 (namely the IPF 6.05) as similar observation was made in Cycle 011.

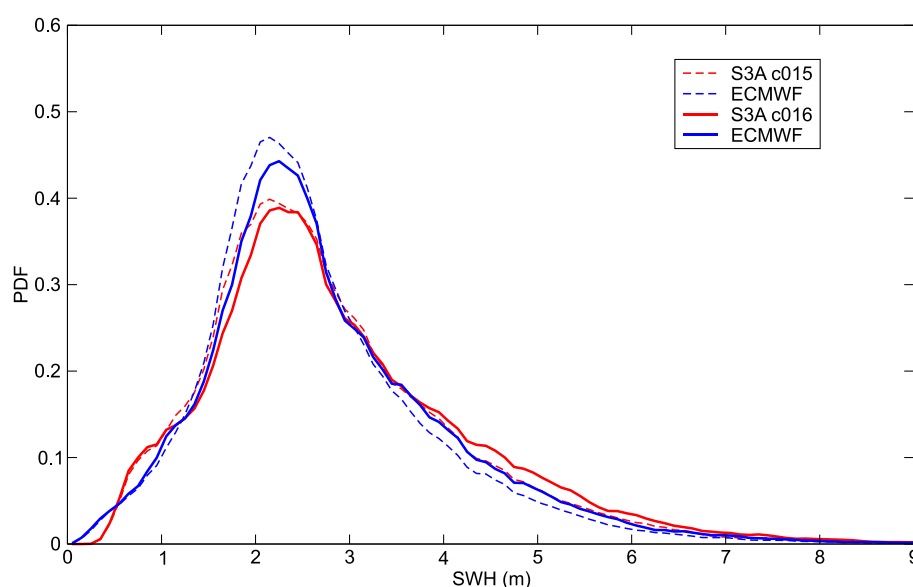



Figure 13: Sentinel-3A SRAL SWH PDF over the whole global ocean and for the period of Cycle 016. The corresponding ECMWF (collocated with Sentinel-3) PDF is also shown for comparison. The corresponding PDF's from the previous cycle are also shown as thin dashed lines.

Collocated pairs of altimeter super-observation and the ECMWF model SWH FG are plotted in a form of a density scatter plot in Figure 14 for the whole globe over the whole period of Cycle 016. The SWH scatter plots (Figure 14 and later) are plotted similar to those of wind speed (e.g. Figure 4) except for the size of the 2-D bin which is $0.25 \text{ m} \times 0.25 \text{ m}$ in the case of SWH. It is clear from Figure 14 that the agreement between Sentinel-3 SWH and its model counterpart is very good except for a slight

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underestimation at SWH values below ~ 2 m (less pronounced during the last few cycles compared to the earlier cycles) and a slight overestimation at moderate to high SWH's (above ~ 4 m). The underestimation at lower wave heights is of concern as a similar behaviour is not noticed in the case of other altimeters. This suggests that although Sentinel-3 provides practically very good SWH product, it is still in need of fine tuning especially at SWH values below ~ 2 m and those above ~ 4 m.

The scatter plots for Sentinel-3 versus the model collocations discriminated based on their geographical locations whether in the Northern hemisphere (north of latitude 20°N), the Tropics (between latitudes 20°S and 20°N) or the Southern hemisphere (south of latitude 20°S) are shown in Figure 15. The underestimation at low SWH's and overestimation at higher wave heights can be clearly seen at all hemispheres (although not many SWH observations exceeding 4 m in the Tropics).

The time series of the global mean and standard deviation (SD) of the SWH from Sentinel-3 averaged over a 7-day time window moved by 1 day at a time are shown in the upper and lower panels, respectively, of Figure 16. The corresponding time series of the model as collocated with Sentinel-3 are also shown for comparison. Sentinel-3 mean and standard deviation are not much different than those of the model (and the other altimeters). The slightly higher Sentinel-3 SWH standard deviation than the model and the other altimeters (not shown) can be thought of as a result of the fact that SAR mode has higher resolution compared to the conventional altimetry (LRM). However, at the scale of the super-observations (~ 75 km), this cannot be correct. Therefore, this enhanced Sentinel-3 SWH activity needs to be monitored closely to see if SWH fine tuning is needed. Figure 16 suggest that the SRAL SWH statistics compared to the model have changed in mid-November. Sentinel-3 mean started to be higher than that of the model.

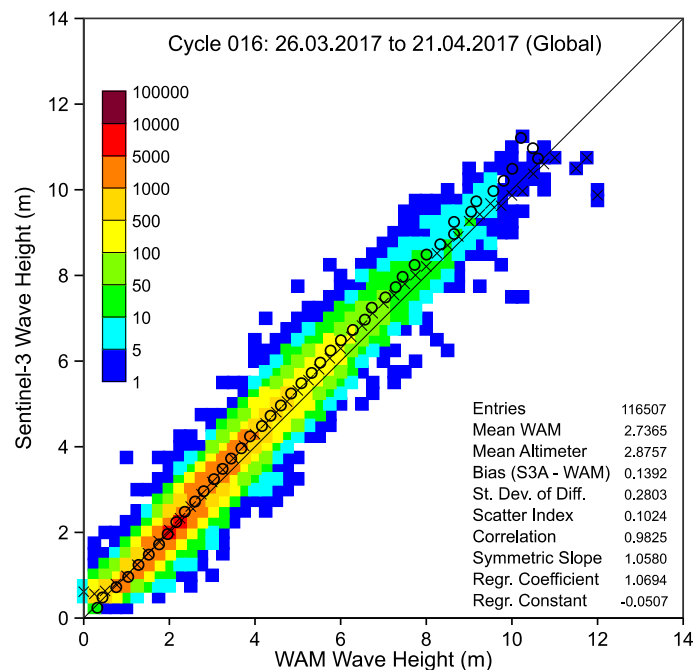


Figure 14: Global comparison between Sentinel-3A and ECMWF model first-guess significant wave height values over the period of Cycle 016. The number of colocations in each 0.25 m x 0.25 m 2D bin is coded as in the legend. Refer to Figure 4 for the meaning of the “x” and “o” symbols.

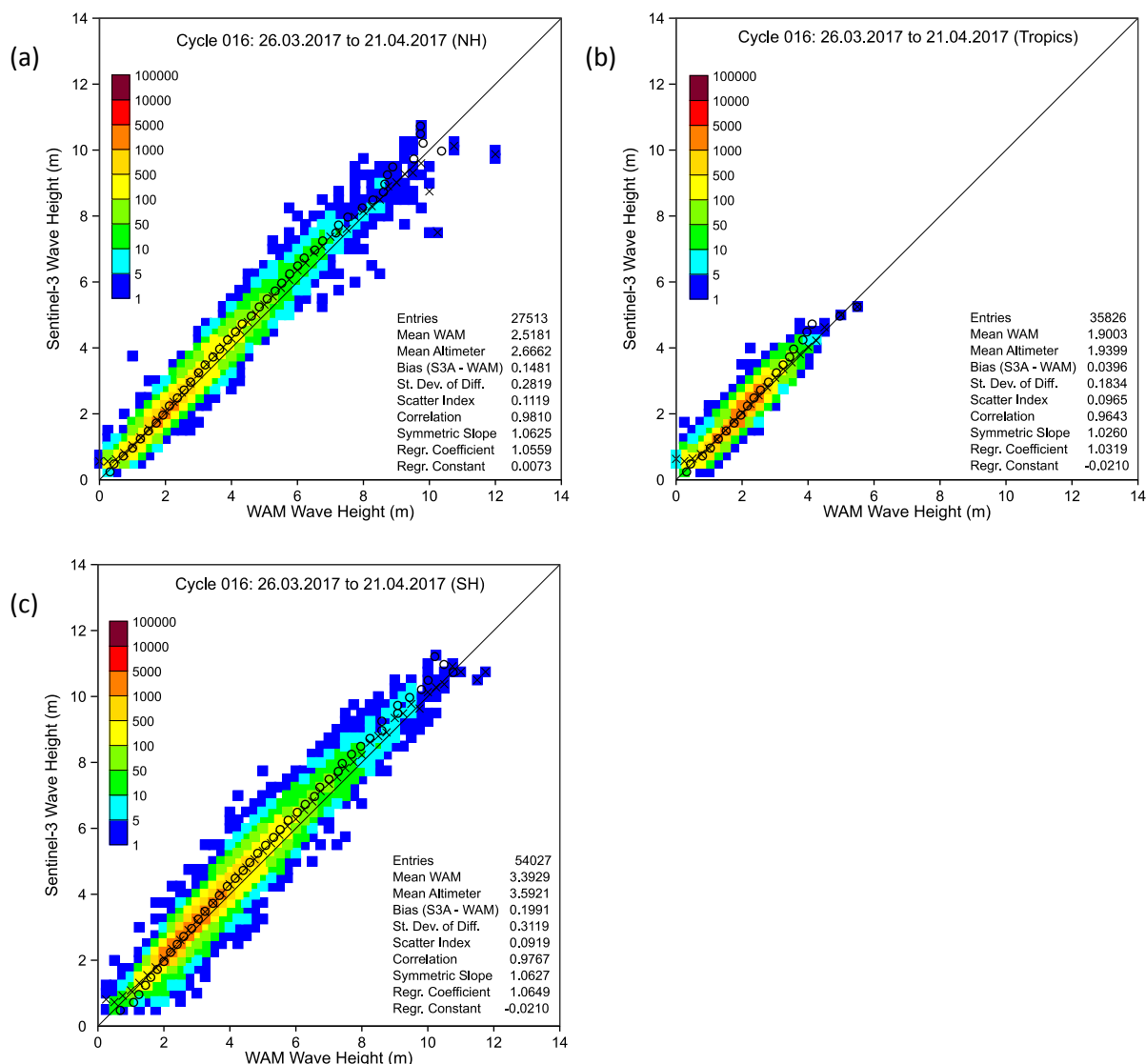


Figure 15: Same as Figure 14 but for Northern Hemisphere (latitudes to the north of 20°N), Tropics (latitudes between 20°S and 20°N) and Southern Hemisphere (latitudes to the south of 20°S), respectively.

The time series of the SWH bias (altimeter – model) and SDD of Sentinel-3 compared to the ECMWF model FG are shown in the upper and lower panels, respectively, of Figure 17. Until the first week of November 2016, Sentinel-3 used to underestimate (negative bias) SWH by about 0.05 m globally, ~ 0.15 m for Northern Hemisphere and the Tropics while it used to overestimate SWH in the Southern Hemisphere. A change in statistics happened during the second week of November 2016 which is the time of the first phase of IPF version 6.05. This led to the increase in Sentinel-3 SWH and in the reverse of the bias sign. However, this change has minor impact on the SDD.

Later changes associated to IPF 6.05 which were implemented on 5 December 2016 do not seem to have any impact on SWH statistics.

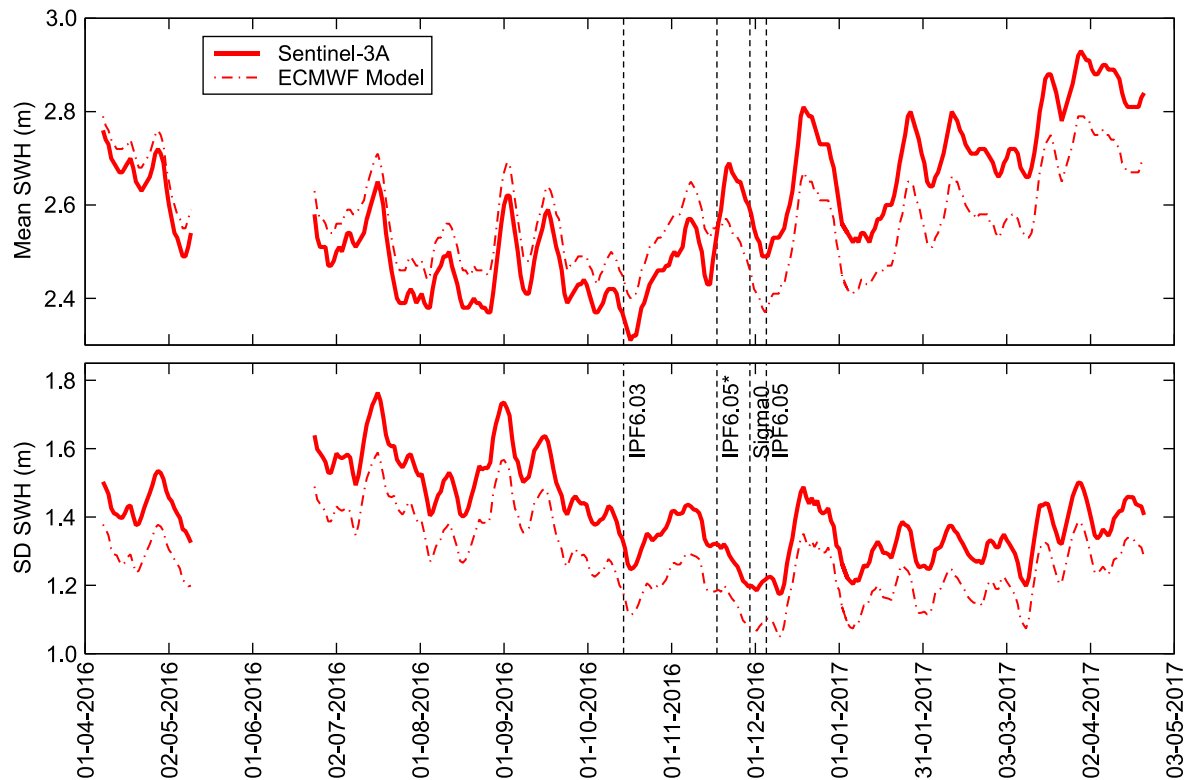


Figure 16: Time series of global mean (top) and standard deviation (bottom) of significant wave height from SRAL Ku-band after quality control. The collocated ECMWF model SWH mean and SD are also shown. The mean and SD are computed over a moving time window of 7 days.

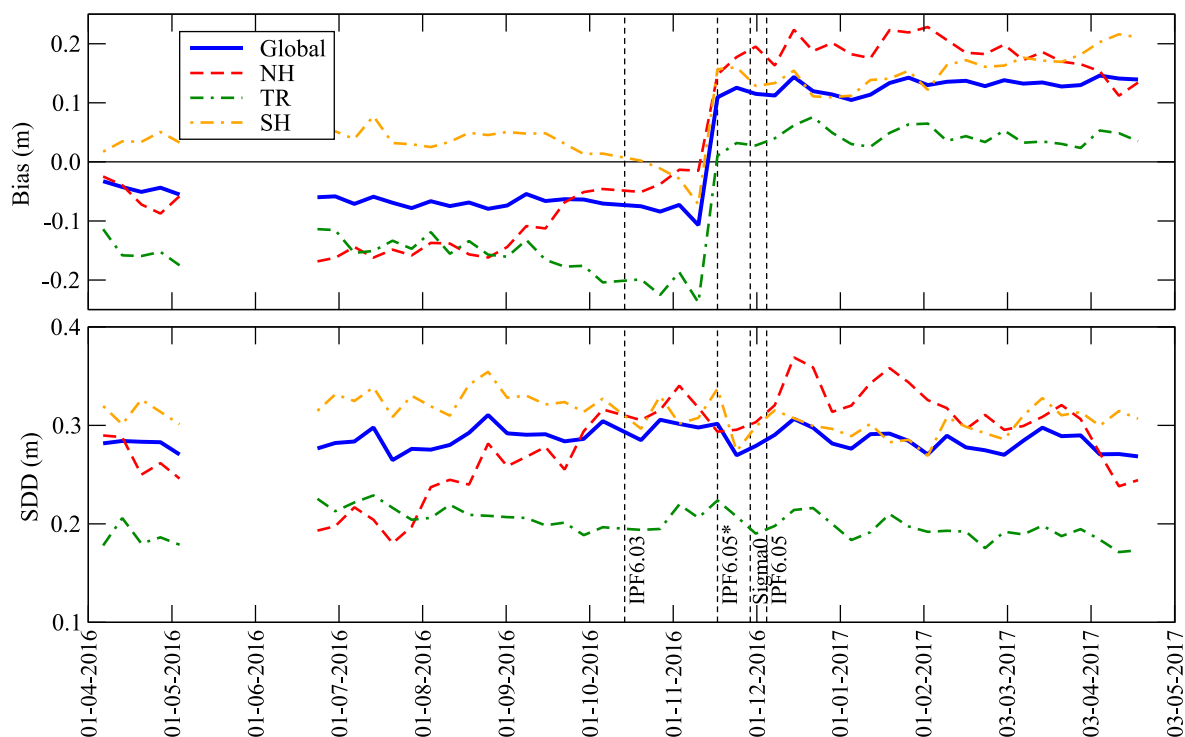


Figure 17: Time series of weekly global significant wave height bias defined as altimeter - model (top) and standard deviation of the difference (bottom) between SRAL and ECMWF model first-guess.

The geographical distribution of the mean Sentinel-3 SWH and the SWH bias, SDD and SI with respect to the ECMWF model averaged over the period of Cycle 016 are shown in Figure 18. All the four plots look similar to their counterparts from other altimeters (not shown).

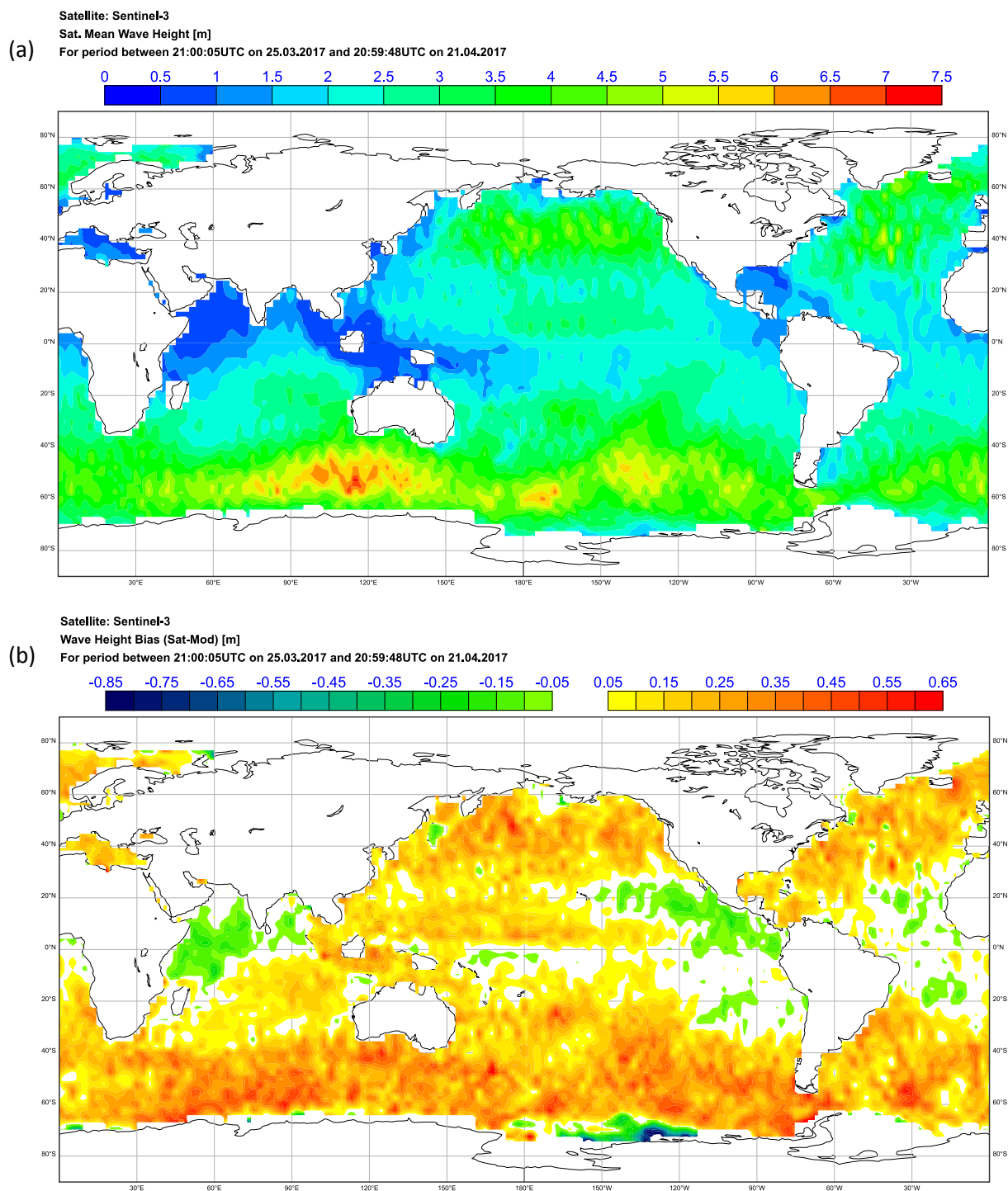


Figure 18: Geographical distribution of mean Sentinel-3 SWH (a) as well as the bias (b); the SDD (c) and the SI (d) between Sentinel-3 and ECMWF model FG during Cycle 016. Bias is defined as altimeter – model.

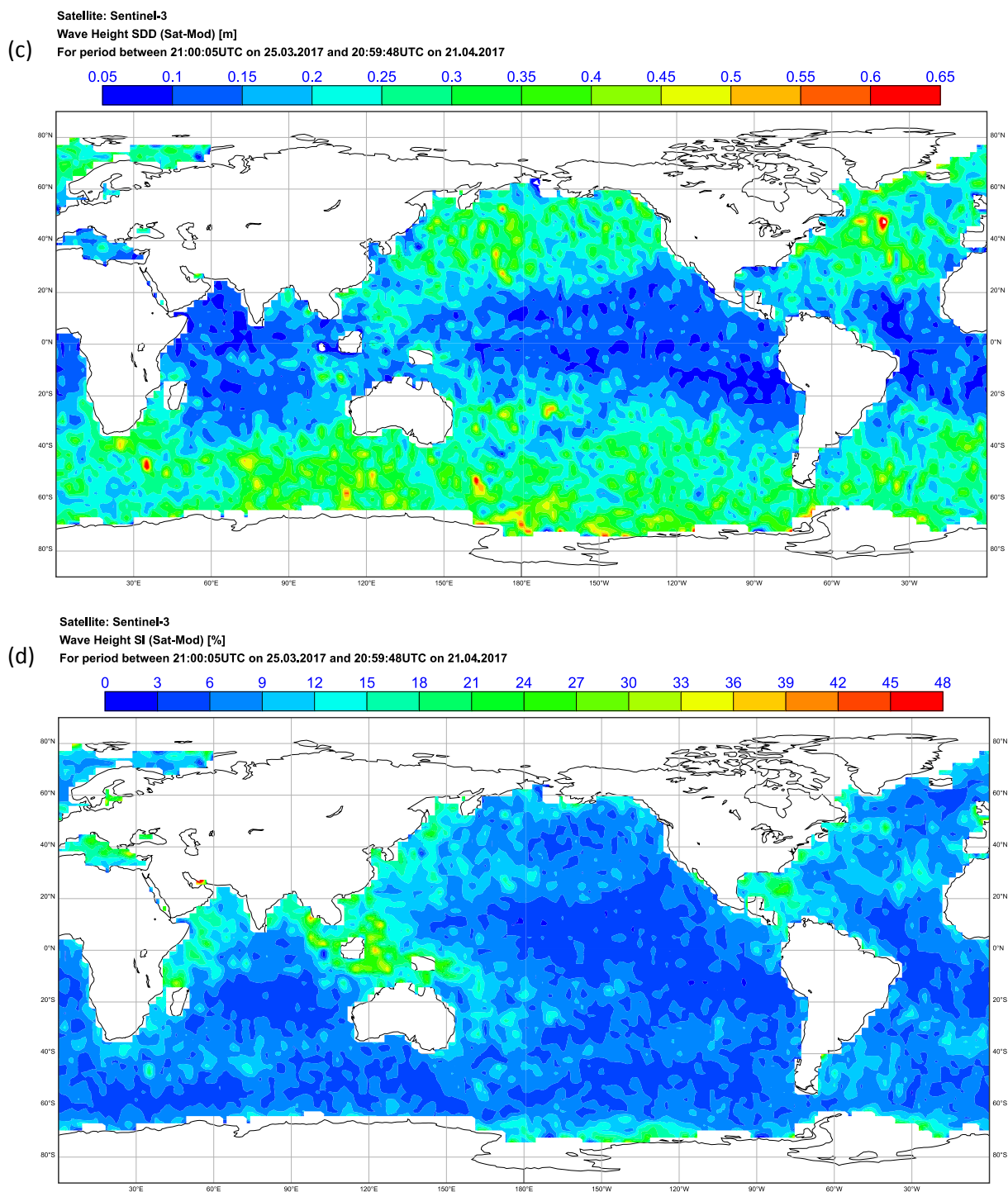


Figure 18: Continued.

The comparison against in-situ (mainly buoy) observations is shown in Figure 19. SRAL SWH is 0.17 m higher than the in-situ observation for this cycle. The SDD (a proxy to the random error) is 0.29 m which

is ~12% of the mean. This figure indicates an improvement in SWH product and it is now close to the similar statistics comparing other altimeters and in-situ observations (not shown). It is important to state that most of in-situ observations are located in the Northern Hemisphere around the American and European coasts.

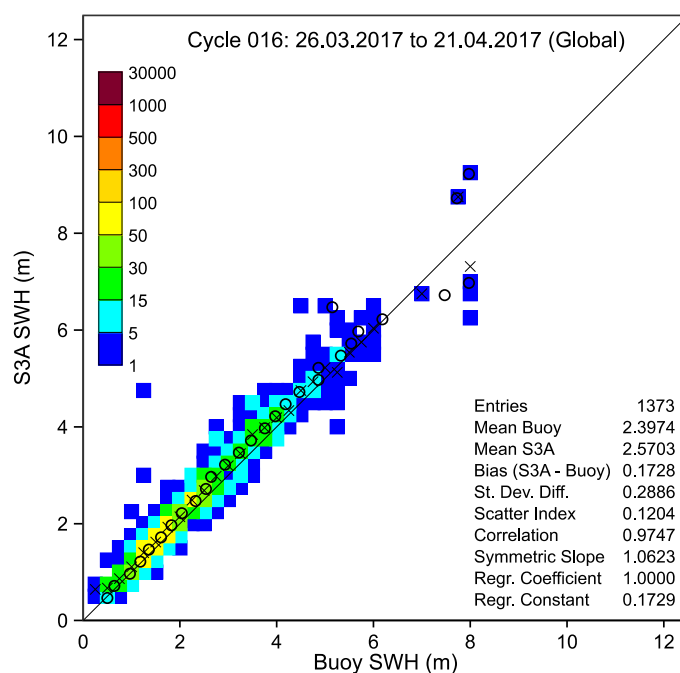



Figure 19: Same as Figure 14 but the comparison is done against in-situ observations (mainly in the NH).

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6 Conclusions


Surface wind speed, PLRM wind speed and significant wave height (SWH), which are part of Level 2 Marine Ocean and Sea Ice Areas (SRAL-L2MA) also referred to as S3A_SR_2_WAT product of Sentinel-3A Radar Altimeter (SRAL) have been monitored and validated against the corresponding parameters from ECMWF Integrated Forecast System (IFS) and other altimeters. The period covers Cycle 016. The data were obtained from the Copernicus Online Data Access (ODA) service of EUMETSAT.

The impact of the processing chain IPF 6.03 which was implemented on October the 14th seems to be very small. However, the statistics show clearly that the IPF changes during November and December 2016 have more impact. The first happened in middle of November, another one at the end of November and the last is the implementation of the processing chain “SRAL/MWR L2 IPF (SM--2) Ver. 06.05 (PB2.8)” on 5 December 2016.

The current quality of SAR wind speed, PLRM wind speed and SWH from Sentinel-3 SRAL can be summarised as being very good and they can be used for practical applications. However, some fine tuning of these products may still be needed to alleviate some of their imperfections:

- ❖ The SAR wind speed is now globally unbiased compared the wind speeds from the model and the other altimeters. The standard deviation of the difference (SDD) between SAR and model wind speeds is as good as that of other altimeters. **The bulk of SRAL wind speed measurements (between 7 and 15 m/s) are higher than the model in the NH and vice versa in the SH. This may be a seasonal signal but it will be under close monitoring.**
- ❖ The PLRM wind speed has also improved and it is now globally unbiased. The SDD with respect to the model reduced considerably during Cycle 012. However, gradual increase (mainly in the Southern Hemisphere) was witnessed during Cycle 013 but has plateaued at about 1.2 m/s since then.
- ❖ Sentinel-3 slightly underestimates small SWH (below ~ 2m) and overestimates high wave heights (above ~ 4 m). The former, although it seems to have been improved recently, is of concern as it is not noticed in the case of other altimeters.
- ❖ The SWH product is smaller and noisier than that from the model and the other altimeters.

The change in mid November 2016 (start of implementation of IPF 6.05), had positive impact on SWH and PLRM wind speed statistics. It caused a general increase in the first and a decrease in the second. The change in late November and early December 2016 (parts of IPF 6.05) has a positive impact on the backscatter and the SAR wind speed. This was confirmed again during the current cycle as well.

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8 Appendix A: Verification Approach

8.1 Introduction

The wind and wave data collected by Sentinel-3 Radar Altimeter (SRAL) are downloaded in netCDF format which is converted into ASCII format. (In the future BUFR format will be received through the Global Telecommunication System, GTS, in near real time, NRT, and will be used directly). This product is monitored daily. The product passes through the quality control procedure described below. The data then are collocated with and verified against the model fields produced by the ECMWF integrated forecasting system (IFS) which includes an atmospheric model and a wave model (WAM) and runs operationally twice a day.


In general, the altimeter significant wave height values that pass the quality control (QC) are assimilated into the operational ECMWF wave model. This assimilation is important to improve the “nowcast” of the model and to provide more accurate initial condition for the medium-range wave forecast (up to 15 days). The altimeter wind speed data are not assimilated into the ECMWF atmospheric model. Therefore, the wind speed information is used as a diagnostic tool for the model output and the model wind speed can be used as an independent verification for the altimeter data.

The best estimate of the weather conditions (which is the model analysis) is used to verify the altimeter wind speed as it is not assimilated in the model. On the other hand, SWH which is usually assimilated in the model are verified against the model first guess (the model state just before the assimilation process). Even if the altimeter SWH product to be verified is not assimilated, the assimilation of SWH from other altimeters still cause error correlation as all altimeter products share the same principle of measurement (Janssen et al., 2007).

Furthermore, the altimeter data are collocated with and verified against available in-situ wave buoys and platform wind and wave measurements which are received at ECMWF through the GTS on weekly and monthly bases. The results of this performance monitoring and geophysical validation are summarised in this monthly report series.

Table A.1: QC Parameters for Altimeter Data from Various Satellites

Satellite	RAW	FLG	1-Hz Δ	N_{max}	N_{min}
ERS-1/2	URA	RFL	7 km	30 (=210 km)	20
ENVISAT	WWV	RF2	7 km	11 (= 77 km)	7
Jason-1	JAS	RFJ	6 km	13 (= 78 km)	8
Jason-2	JA2	RJ2	6 km	13 (= 78 km)	8
Jason-3	JA3	RJ3	6 km	13 (= 78 km)	8
Cryosat-2	CSE	RFC	7 km	11 (= 77 km)	7

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Satellite	RAW	FLG	1-Hz Δ	N_{max}	N_{min}
SRAL/AltiKa	KAB	RFS	7 km	11 (= 77 km)	7
Sentinel-3A	S3A	RFA	7 km	11 (= 77 km)	7

8.2 Quality Control Procedure

The altimeter wave height and wind speed data are subject to a quality control (QC) procedure to eliminate all suspicious measurements. The procedure was first suggested by Janssen et al. (1989) and Bauer et al. (1992) for the SeaSat altimeter data. The procedure was enhanced later and used for ERS-1, ERS-2 (see Abdalla and Hersbach, 2004), ENVISAT (Abdalla, 2005 and 2011), Jason-1, Jason-2 (Abdalla et al., 2010 and 2011), Cryosat-2 and SARAL/AltiKa (Abdalla, 2015) altimeter data.

The daily altimeter data stream is collected for time windows of 6 hours centred at the 4 major synoptic times. Currently monitoring suites are run after the end of day “yyyymmdd”, where yyyy is the year, mm is the month, dd is the day, considering time windows centred at 18:00 UTC of previous day and 00:00, 06:00 and 12:00 UTC on that specific day. This configuration is implemented to go in parallel with the ECMWF operational system. The raw data are stored in a file with the internal naming convention of “RAWyyyymmddhhnn”, where RAW is a 3-letter prefix identifying the satellite or product (see Table A.1) while hh and nn are the hour and the minute, respectively, of the centre of the time window. This file is nothing but the original product (usually in BUFR format) for the whole time window starting 3 hours before the time of the centre of the window (i.e. time “yyyymmddhhnn”) and ending 3 hours afterwards.


The quality control (QC) procedure is divided into two processes:

1. A basic process: to ensure that each individual observation is within the logical range and is collected over water, during the correct time window.
2. A secondary process: to ensure that observations within any given sequence are consistent with each other. This process is only applied on observations passing the first process.

It is important to mention that this classification is just for clarification purposes and has no consequence on the quality control procedure itself.

8.3 Basic Quality Control

The RAW product is first decoded. Any record with missing value of any key parameter (i.e. time, location, backscatter, significant wave height, ... etc.) is considered as a corrupt record and is discarded (as if it does not exist). The records belong to the current time window but found in the files of the previous windows (see below), are read in (if any). All the observation records are then sorted according to the acquisition time. The records are checked to detect any duplicated observation. One of those

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duplicates is retained while the other(s) is/are rejected by setting the “*double-observation flag*” which is the general quality flag number 4 (Table A.2).

If the peakiness factor, which is a measure of the degree of peakiness in the return echo and is supplied as part of the RAW product, is very high, the record should be rejected as this is an indication of the existence of sea ice contaminating the observation. The threshold value for the peakiness factor is selected as 200 based on some empirical numerical tests for ERS-2. The peakiness factor in this context is defined as:


Table A.2: The Standard Quality Flags used in the Quality Control Procedure. A flag is raised (i.e. set to 1) to indicate an issue. An observation record passes QC if all general flags except flag 6 are not raised (i.e. set to zero). SWH and wind speed have their own specific flags.

General Flags

Flag #	Quality Flag Name	Meaning
1	Time window	Record belongs to another time window
2	Land point	Record over land (model land-sea mask)
3	Grid area	Record outside the WAM model grid
4	Double observation	Duplicate observation
5	Peakiness/ Range SD	Std. dev. of main band range > threshold or peakiness* > threshold or ice flagged
6	As above for band2*	Std. dev. of 2nd band range* > threshold
7	Rain flag*	Rain contamination* (if applicable)
8	Data gap	Jump before or after a gap (e.g. island)
9	Short sequence	Too few of accepted records in a sequence

Wave & Wind Flags

Flag #	Quality Flag Name	Meaning
1	SWH range	SWH out of range (< 0.1 m or > 20 m)
2	Noisy SWH	SWH variance too large in the sequence.
3	SWH confidence	SWH outside the 95% confidence interval.
4	Wind speed range	Wind speed out of range (< 0.1 m/s or > 30 m/s)
5	Noisy wind speed	Wind speed variance too large in the sequence.
6	w. speed confid.	Wind speed outside the 95% confidence interval.
7	Band2* SWH range	2nd band* SWH out of range (< 0.1 m or > 20 m)

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Flag #	Quality Flag Name	Meaning
8	Noisy band2* SWH	2nd band* SWH variance too large in sequence.
9	Band2* SWH confid.	2nd band* SWH outside 95% confidence interval.
10	Band2* short seq.	Short sequence of the 2nd band* SWH.

* if applicable

$$\text{Peakiness Factor} = 100 P(t)_{\max} / [2 \langle P(t) \rangle] \quad (\text{A.1})$$

where $P(t)$ is the echo power as a function of time t , $P(t)_{\max}$ and $\langle P(t) \rangle$ denote the maximum and mean values of the echo power. Therefore, if the peakiness factor exceeds the threshold value (=200), the record is rejected by setting the “*peakiness/range SD flag*” which is the general quality flag number 5 (Table A.2).

The “*peakiness/range SD flag*” which is the general quality flag number 5 (Table A.2) is also raised (set to 1) if the 1-Hz range standard deviation (from the main band which is usually the Ku-band if the altimeter has more than one band) exceeds a given threshold. The threshold was set originally as 0.2 m. This caused high rejection rates at extreme sea states and therefore was adjusted later based on careful comparison with the model and buoys to be $0.20 \text{ m} + 0.015 * \text{SWH}$. The same flag is also raised if an ice flag is present and raised in the RAW product.


In the case that the altimeter has a secondary channel (e.g. S-band for ENVISAT and C-band for Jason-1/2/3 and Sentinel-3), if the 1-Hz range standard deviation from the secondary channel exceeds the same threshold above, the “*band-2 peakiness/range SD flag*” which is the general quality flag number 6 (Table A.2) is raised.

If the observation is found to belong to any of the previous time windows, it is assumed that it is too late to process this observation and the record is rejected by setting the “*time window flag*” (flag number 1 in Table A.2). If the observation belongs to a later time window, the record is removed from the observation stream and written into a file that will be read while processing observations of that time window.

The observation is then mapped on the land-sea mask of the wave model (WAM) model. The used land-sea mask is an irregular (reduced) latitude-longitude grid with resolution of 0.25° (around 28 km in both directions). If the observation is mapped on a land point, the record is rejected by raising the general quality flag number 2; namely “*land point flag*” (Table A.2).

If the observation is mapped on a grid point outside the grid area (e.g. over permanent sea ice which used to be north of 81°N but not the case anymore), the record is rejected by raising the “*grid area*” flag (general flag number 3 in Table A.2).

If a “*rain contamination flag*” is available in the RAW product, this information is used to set the general quality flag number 7 which is “*rain flag*” (Table A.2).

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The value of the altimeter significant wave height (SWH) is checked to make sure it is within the accepted logical range. If the SWH value is found to be below the accepted minimum (a value of 0.10 m is used) or above the accepted maximum (a value of 20.0 m is used), then the record is rejected by raising the “*SWH range flag*” which is flag number 1 of the group “wave and wind flags” (Table A.2).


Similar checks are done for the wind speed and the SWH of the secondary band (if available). The corresponding flags are the “*wind speed range*” (wave and wind flag number 4) and “*band2 SWH range*” (wave and wind flag number 7) of Table (A.2). Note that both flags are raised if the SWH is rejected (e.g. “*SWH range flag*” is raised).

8.4 Consistency Quality Control

The observations that pass the basic quality control go through the second stage of quality control, which includes several consistency tests. The altimeter observations are grouped as sequences of neighbouring observations. The maximum number of individual observations within each sequence, N_{max} , is selected to form altimeter “super-observations” of the same scale as that of the model. Table (A.1) lists the values on N_{max} for various satellites. Note that N_{max} value for ERS-1 and ERS-2 is 30. This selection was made in the early days of the ERS missions when the grid resolution of the ECMWF WAM model was 3 degrees (about 330 km) and later reduced to 1.5 degrees (more than 150 km). The value of 30 was never changed to maintain comparability. For reprocessing, it is suggested to change that value to 11.

The sequence construction starts by selecting the first record that passes the basic quality control in the time window under consideration as a possible candidate to be the first member in the new sequence. The time and the SWH observation of the next record is compared with that of the last selected record in the sequence. If the time difference between both records is more than an allowed maximum duration (3 s is used) or if the absolute difference between both SWH values exceeds an allowed maximum value (2.0 m is used), then it is assumed that there is a jump over a gap (e.g. land or sea ice). The previous record is removed from the sequence and is rejected by setting the “*data gap flag*” (the general quality flag number 8) to 1. The current record then becomes the first record in the sequence. The same procedure is repeated until there are two records accumulated in the sequence.

More records are recruited to the sequence in the same manner until either a gap is detected (exceeding either the maximum allowed time difference or the maximum allowed SWH difference) or until the maximum number of observations N_{max} in the sequence is reached. If a gap is detected and the number of the records accumulated in the sequence is less than a predefined minimum, N_{min} , (see Table A.1), all of the already selected records are rejected by raising the general “*short sequence flag*” (general flag 9 in Table A.2) to indicate a “*short sequence*” condition. If the number of observations in the sequence exceeds the predefined minimum (including the case that the maximum number has been reached), then the sequence goes through further quality control checks. The mean and the standard deviation of the observations accumulated in the sequence are computed.

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The next step is to eliminate spikes by rejecting observations with SWH outside the 95% confidence interval. To accomplish this, we compute the SWH confidence limits of the sequence as:

$$\text{Confidence Interval} = \min \{ \alpha, \zeta \cdot \sigma \} \quad (\text{A.2})$$

where α is a maximum value of the confidence interval (used as 2.0 m in the first iteration and as 1.0 m in the second iteration), ζ is a factor for the spike test (a value of 3 is used), and σ is the standard deviation of SWH. If the absolute value of the difference between the SWH of the individual record and the mean SWH of the sequence exceeds the confidence interval computed by Eq. (A.2), then that individual record is rejected by raising the “*SWH range flag*” (Wave & Wind flag number 3 in Table A.2). The flagged records are removed from the sequence and another spikes-removal iteration is carried out using the modified sequence and a rather stricter confidence interval condition (in Eq. (A.2), the value of 1.0 m for α is used in the second iteration).

If the number of individual records passed the spikes test in the sequence is less than the minimum allowed (N_{min} records), all the records in the sequence are rejected by raising the “*short sequence flag*” (general flag number 9 in Table A.2) to indicate a “*short sequence*” condition. If there are enough records, the mean and the standard deviation of SWH, backscatter, wind speed, ... etc. are computed. Also, the mean geographical coordinates and the mean time of the sequence with the records passed the spikes test are also computed. The average value of the sequence is called “super-observation”.

After that, the variance of the SWH values in the sequence is tested. The maximum allowed SWH variability within the sequence is given by:

$$\text{Maximum SD} = \max \{ \beta, \gamma \cdot \mu \} \quad (\text{A.3})$$


where β is the minimum allowed standard deviation (0.5 m is used), γ is a factor for the variance test (0.5 is used) and μ is mean value of SWH in the sequence. If the standard deviation of the SWH exceeds the maximum value computed by (A.3), all records in the sequence are rejected by raising “*Noisy SWH flag*” which is Wave & Wind Flag number 2 in Table A.2) to indicate a “*noisy observation-sequence*” condition.

The same last action is repeated on the surface wind speed (instead of SWH) and the corresponding flags (Wave & Wind flags 4 to 6 in Table A.2) are raised if needed. Similar action is done on the SWH (or wind speed) from the secondary band if one is available. The corresponding Wave & Wind flags 7 to 10 in Table A.2) are raised if needed.

The same whole procedure is repeated by selecting a new sequence until all the observations within the current time window are processed.

8.5 Output Files

The quality control procedure described above generates two types of files: “Radar flagged” (RFL) file, and “Radar averaged” (RAV) file. Furthermore, it appends a record in an “extended statistics file” (ESF)

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for each time window representing the statistics of quality control procedure for that specific window. The ESF file is used to plot the time series of data received, data rejections and data acceptance.

All records processed are written together with their corresponding flags in the “Radar flagged” file with the following naming convention: “FLGyyyyymmddhhnn”, where FLG is replaced by the 3-letter prefix corresponding to the altimeter under consideration as given in Table (A.1). This file contains the complete information included in the RAW product with the values of the quality flags listed in Table (A.2) and described above. This file covers the 6-hour time period centred at time yyyyymmddhhnn. This file is an important product that can be used instead of the original RAW product. For example, this file is used as the input to the data assimilation procedure where only observations passed the quality control are used in assimilation.

The super-observations (i.e. the means and standard deviations of the sequences with records passed the quality control) are written to the “Radar averaged” file with the following naming convention: “RAVyyyyymmddhhnn”. This file contains the sequence means and standard deviations for the whole time window extending from time yyyyymmddhhnn-3 hours to yyyyymmddhhnn+3. This file is not of much practical interest as it is considered as an intermediate medium to pass the averages needed in the next step which is the altimeter-model collocation.


8.6 Altimeter Model Collocation

After the quality control and averaging process, the individual altimeter SWH observations that pass the quality control are prepared for the data assimilation. To be specific, the FLG file is used for this procedure. The individual observations within the catchment area of a grid point (i.e. within a box with dimensions of grid increment and centred on the grid point) are averaged and assigned as the SWH observation corresponding to that grid point. The model is run to produce the first-guess fields. The data assimilation procedure is then used to blend the first guess fields with the RA observations to produce the analysed fields.

The ECMWF analysis wind velocity fields and the various WAM first-guess wave (SWH, mean wave direction, mean wave period, peak wave period, ... etc.) fields are interpolated over a regular grid (e.g. 0.5° by 0.5°) at all analysis times (00:00, 06:00, 12:00, and 18:00 UTC). Each RA super-observation represented by the mean time and position of the corresponding sequence in the RAV file is collocated with the nearest model grid point. The values of the model parameters at the corresponding grid point and at the previous and next analysis times are interpolated at the mean time of the super-observation. The super-observation record and the time-interpolated model parameters are all written in the altimeter-model collocation (RAC) file. The name convention of this file is: “RACyyyyymmddhhnn” covering the 6-hour time period centred at time yyyyymmddhhnn.

8.7 Altimeter Buoy Collocation

In-situ wind and wave observations, which are collected by ships, buoys and platforms (for simplicity, all will be called hereafter: “buoy data”), are routinely received at ECMWF through the GTS and archived.

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Significant portion of the buoy data arrives with some delay. In general, most of the buoy data arrives within 48 hours of the acquisition time.


Most of the buoy observations are collected on hourly basis. The remaining part may be collected at lower frequencies (e.g. 3 hours). The buoy observations collected 2 hours earlier and later than an analysis time (5 observations) are averaged and assigned to be the buoy observation at that analysis time. This buoy observation is collocated with the nearest model grid. The averaged buoy observations and the model analysis parameters (namely: SWH, mean wave direction, peak wave period, wind speed and direction, MSL pressure, air and seawater temperatures) are written to a collocation buoy-model (CBM) file. This task is run operationally every day with a lag of two days to ensure the arrival of most of the buoy data.

The triple-collocation (RA-model-buoy collocation) exercise is done at the beginning of each month (on the 4th of the month) for the whole of the previous month. The contents of the RAC (described above) and the CBM files are used. A RAC record is collocated with a CBM record if the following two conditions are satisfied:

1. both the RA super-observation and the buoy observation are assigned to the same analysis cycle; and
2. the distance between the RA super-observation and the buoy is within a given distance (200 km is used).

Each collocated pair of records are merged as one record and written to a collocation altimeter-buoy (CAB) file. The name convention of this file is: "CAByyyymm010000" covering the whole month mm of year yyyy.

The maximum acceptable collocation distance and time interval between the collocated altimeter and buoy observation pair are rather relaxed (200 km and 2 hours; respectively). This criteria is selected to gather enough number of collocations for meaningful statistics. To reduce the risk that the collocated altimeter and buoy SWH observation pair do not represent the same ground truth, their model counterparts are required not to be different by more than 5%. Furthermore, the mean direction of wave propagation in the model at the two locations should not differ by more than 45°. This ensures the homogeneity of the sea-state conditions at least from the model point of view. The same criteria cannot be used for wind speed. For the results presented here, wind speed collocations are accepted whenever the SWH collocation is accepted. For more detailed analyses (e.g. triple collocation error estimates of wind speed), a relaxed SWH (not wind speed) maximum difference of 50% is used. The maximum allowed difference in model wind direction at the altimeter and buoy locations is set as 20°. The background of this selection for both SWH and wind speed is based on the physics of wind and wave generation and propagation. However, the specific values used here are based on experience (see, for example, Abdalla et al., 2011).

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9 Appendix B: Related Reports

Other reports related to the STM mission are:

- ❖ S3-A SRAL Cyclic Performance Report, Cycle No. 016 (ref. S3MPC.ISR.PR.04-016)
- ❖ S3-A MWR Cyclic Performance Report, Cycle No. 016 (ref. S3MPC.CLS.PR.05-016)
- ❖ S3-A Ocean Validation Cyclic Performance Report, Cycle No. 016 (ref. S3MPC.CLS.PR.06-016)
- ❖ S3-A Land and Sea Ice Cyclic Performance Report, Cycle No. 016 (ref. S3MPC.UCL.PR.08-016)

All Cyclic Performance Reports are available on MPC pages in Sentinel Online website, at:
<https://sentinel.esa.int>

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