

1   **Bacterially mediated removal of phosphorus**  
2   **and cycling of nitrate and sulfate in the waste**  
3   **stream of a “zero-discharge” recirculating**  
4   **mariculture system**

5

6   **Running head: P, N and S cycling**

7

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22   **Abstract**

23   Simultaneous removal of nitrogen and phosphorus by microbial biofilters has been  
24   used in a variety of water treatment systems including treatment systems in  
25   aquaculture. In this study, phosphorus, nitrate and sulfate cycling in the anaerobic  
26   loop of a zero-discharge, recirculating mariculture system was investigated using  
27   detailed geochemical measurements in the sludge layer of the digestion basin. High  
28   concentrations of nitrate and sulfate, circulating in the overlying water (~15 mM),  
29   were removed by microbial respiration in the sludge resulting in a sulfide  
30   accumulation of up to 3 mM. Modelling of the observed S and O isotopic ratios in the  
31   surface sludge suggested that, with time, major respiration processes shifted from  
32   heterotrophic nitrate and sulfate reduction to autotrophic nitrate reduction. The much  
33   higher inorganic P content of the sludge relative to the fish feces is attributed to  
34   conversion of organic P to authigenic apatite. This conclusion is supported by: (a) X-  
35   ray diffraction analyses, which pointed to an accumulation of a calcium phosphate  
36   mineral phase that was different from P phases found in the feces, (b) the calculation  
37   that the pore waters of the sludge were highly oversaturated with respect to  
38   hydroxyapatite (saturation index = 4.87) and (c) there was a decrease in phosphate  
39   (and in the Ca/Na molar ratio) in the pore waters simultaneous with an increase in  
40   ammonia showing there had to be an additional P removal process at the same time  
41   as the heterotrophic breakdown of organic matter.

42

43   Keywords: aquaculture; anaerobic sludge; phosphorus removal; denitrification; apatite  
44   formation; sulfur cycling.

45     **1. Introduction**

46

47     Fish cages, a widely used industrial mariculture technology, typically discharge up to  
48     80% of the nitrogen and phosphorus that is supplied in the feed into the environment  
49     (Naylor et al., 1998; van Rijn, 2013). Land based mariculture offers more control of  
50     the waste, but is often limited by the shortage of coastal sites and the cost of inland  
51     pumping of seawater and its discharge. The “Zero-Discharge System” (ZDS) is a  
52     recently developed sustainable mariculture system (Gelfand et al., 2003) which uses  
53     natural microbial processes to control water quality (Cytryn et al., 2003; Gelfand et  
54     al., 2003; Neori et al., 2007). The system operates in a completely sealed way,  
55     meaning that only a small amount of freshwater is used to replace losses by  
56     evaporation. There is no continuous or even intermittent discharge of aqueous  
57     effluent to the environment as exists in other mariculture systems. Although the  
58     advantages of ZDS mariculture systems in terms of waste output are clear, the  
59     mechanisms behind the nitrogen, sulfur and phosphorus cycling in such systems are  
60     not well understood.

61                 The ZDS consists of two water treatment loops (Fig. 1). The aerobic loop  
62     converts toxic ammonia produced by fish to nitrate by means of a trickling biofilter. In  
63     the second loop, an anaerobic loop, consisting of a digestion basin (DB) and  
64     fluidized bed reactor, particulate waste organic matter (principally fish feces) and  
65     other nutrients are metabolized to environmentally harmless forms. Previous studies  
66     on this and similar systems revealed that the major processes affecting the overall  
67     water quality are nitrification in the aerobic treatment loop and bacterial breakdown  
68     of organic matter by processes including heterotrophic nitrate and sulfate reduction  
69     as well as autotrophic nitrate reduction coupled to sulfide oxidation in the DB and

70 fluidized bed reactor (Gelfand et al., 2003; Cytryn et al., 2005; Neori et al., 2007;  
71 Sher et al., 2008; Schneider et al., 2011). However the relative contribution of these  
72 anaerobic bacterial processes was not known. Around 70% of the C and N supplied  
73 is lost as carbon dioxide and gaseous nitrogen species, presumed to be the result of  
74 heterotrophic bacterial respiration (Neori et al., 2007). Of the phosphorus supplied  
75 with the fish feed, 21% is taken up for fish growth. Only 5% of the remaining  
76 phosphorus accumulates in the water column while the rest is present as solid and  
77 pore water phosphorus, mainly in the DB sludge accumulating in the anaerobic  
78 treatment loop. It was not known in what form this P accumulates in the sludge nor  
79 what processes are controlling this accumulation.

80 Simultaneous removal of nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) by microbial  
81 biofilters has been used in a variety of water treatment systems to treat nutrient-rich  
82 waste streams. These include systems that use alternating aerobic-anaerobic  
83 conditions to trap phosphate as polyphosphate under aerobic (van Loosdrecht et al.,  
84 1997) or denitrifying conditions (van Loosdrecht et al., 1998) and release it in a  
85 controlled way during the anaerobic cycle. The DB of the ZDS system has free  
86 oxygen in the overlying water while the sludge itself is anaerobic with the precise  
87 location of the redox boundary depending on the balance of recycling processes  
88 within the system. In the DB examined in this study, N and P were found to be  
89 simultaneously removed from the waste stream by the accumulation of P in  
90 denitrifying organisms under entirely anoxic conditions (Barak and van Rijn, 2000a,  
91 2000b; Barak et al., 2003; Neori et al., 2007).

92 Similar microbial processes to those in the digestion basin, may occur in  
93 natural marine systems particularly in sediments underneath the upwelling regions of  
94 the world such as the Benguela current off Namibia and off Oman in the Arabian

95 Sea. These locations have high concentrations of organic matter in the sediment (up  
96 to 40%), much of which is labile causing high rates of heterotrophic bacterial activity  
97 including sulfate reduction and methane production (Schulz et al., 1999).  
98 Phosphorite (diagenetic apatite) nodules often form in the sediments beneath these  
99 upwelling regions. Two processes have been suggested for this apatite formation.  
100 Schenau et al. (2000) suggested that diagenic apatite was formed in pore waters  
101 where phosphate released by heterotrophic respiration of organic matter created  
102 high enough phosphate concentrations to overcome the kinetic barrier to apatite  
103 formation (Van Cappellen and Berner, 1991). More recently, an alternative process  
104 has been suggested in which bacteria, particularly sulfide oxidizing bacteria,  
105 accumulate polyphosphate, which is then rapidly converted into diagenetic apatite  
106 (Goldhammer et al., 2010). Both processes represent a shunt of P from its dissolved  
107 form into bacterial biofilms, which is subsequently converted into mineral apatite.

108 This study examines the types and location of processes that control nitrate,  
109 sulfate and phosphorus cycling within the sludge of the anaerobic loop in the ZDS  
110 system. The major microbial transformations in the DB were determined using  
111 detailed geochemical measurements of the depth distribution of relevant  
112 geochemical parameters and their stable isotope composition in the DB sludge layer  
113 and the overlying water. Detailed measurements of P in the sludge, pore and  
114 overlying waters were made using geochemical and mineralogical methods to  
115 determine the P speciation and its changes with depth. The identified P cycling  
116 processes are compared and contrasted with similar processes in natural and  
117 engineered systems.

118

119

120 **2. Material and Methods**

121

122 **2.1. System description**

123

124 The zero discharge system (ZDS) in this study was an enlarged version of the  
125 system previously described in detail by Gelfand et al. (2003). Briefly, the system  
126 comprised a fish basin ( $5\text{ m}^3$ ) stocked with the gilthead seabream (*Sparus aurata*)  
127 from which water was circulated through aerobic and anaerobic treatment  
128 compartments (Fig. 1). The aerobic compartment consisted of a trickling filter with a  
129 volume of  $8\text{ m}^3$  and a surface area of  $1,920\text{ m}^2$ . Water from the trickling filter was  
130 collected in a trickling filter basin ( $3\text{m}^3$ ) which was situated directly underneath the  
131 trickling filter. Surface water from the fish basin was circulated through the aerobic  
132 compartment at a rate of  $10\text{ m}^3\text{h}^{-1}$ . The digestion basin (DB, gross volume:  $5.4\text{ m}^3$ )  
133 was the main part of the anaerobic treatment compartment. Water from the bottom of  
134 the fish basin was drained continuously ( $0.8\text{ m}^3\text{h}^{-1}$ ) into the DB. Effluent water from  
135 the DB was recirculated ( $0.8\text{ m}^3\text{h}^{-1}$ ) through a fluidized bed reactor (FBR, volume: 13  
136 L) before being returned to the Intermediate Collection Basin. The FBR removes any  
137 sulfide or other reduced potentially toxic compounds by microbial oxidation before  
138 they reach the fish tank. The DB, with a total surface area of  $3.64\text{ m}^2$  (2.6 m length;  
139 1.4 m width), contained a partition in the middle of the basin causing the incoming  
140 water to flow over a total length of 5.2 m before leaving the basin. Total depth of  
141 water and sludge in the DB was 80 cm and sludge thickness ranged between 30 and  
142 50 cm (i.e. the water layer overlying the sludge varied in thickness from 30 to 50 cm).  
143 As no continuous water exchange is required, the system can be operated away

144 from a seawater source. In the absence of such a source and to meet the desired  
145 water salinity, solid sea salt (Red Sea pHarm Ltd, Israel) was initially added to the  
146 DB to reach a final concentration of ~8,500 mgNa/L (i.e.  $20 \pm 2$  ppt) in the system  
147 water. It was allowed to dissolve there and diffuse into the overlying water. Local  
148 Rehovot tap water was periodically added to the system to compensate for  
149 evaporative losses. The system was started in October 2011 with sludge already  
150 present from previous operations of the ZDS over the past seven years. This was  
151 done to avoid an unacceptably long induction period since we added small fish at  
152 first and thus there was limited waste organic matter being supplied to the DB. On  
153 October 31, 2010, 738 fish were stocked with an initial weight of 1.5 g and on  
154 October 16, 2011, 668 fish were harvested with an average weight of 237.6 g. Feed  
155 addition over this period was 241 kg. Hence, the feed conversion coefficient (i.e. total  
156 feed addition divided by to the total fish weight gained) was 1.53

157

158 **2.2. In situ sampling**

159

160 Water quality parameters sampled in the fish basin were recorded for a period of 360  
161 days starting in October 2011. Oxygen and temperature were measured daily while  
162 ammonia, nitrite, nitrate, phosphate, pH and alkalinity were analyzed weekly. The  
163 sediment system was sampled when anaerobic conditions had been clearly  
164 established in the DB sludge (based on removal of nitrate from the overlying water;  
165 see Fig S1).

166 Core samples of sludge from the DB were taken four times from the same  
167 location in the digestion basin (see Fig. 1) using a custom-built corer with a rubber  
168 diaphragm to seal the bottom. These cores were used for subsequent solid and

169 macropore water analysis. Cores were taken during the morning of July 12<sup>th</sup> (pore  
170 water chemistry and solid analyses), July 13<sup>th</sup> (for pH) and two cores for isotopic  
171 analyses were taken on August 4<sup>th</sup> (Core A) and February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012 (core B). The  
172 first collected core (July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011) was taken back to the laboratory and frozen at -  
173 20°C. After 24 hours the frozen core was partially thawed (~20 minutes) and sections  
174 of 1 cm each were extruded from the bottom of the core and sliced off with a metal  
175 saw. The largest part of the sludge disk was placed in a pre-weighed 50 ml  
176 centrifuge tube. It was weighed (wet weight) and then centrifuged for 15 minutes at  
177 3,500 rpm at 4°C. The supernatant pore waters were filtered through a 0.45 µm filter  
178 for phosphate, ammonia and nitrate determination. A subsample was refrozen for  
179 subsequent analysis. After thawing, a small known amount of acid was added to the  
180 tubes. The acidified samples well mixed, weighed accurately so that the volume of  
181 dilution by acid could be determined, and analysed by Inductively Coupled Plasma  
182 Atomic Emission Spectroscopy (ICP-AES) for Na, Ca, Mg, P and S. A wet sludge  
183 subsample was weighed for porosity determination and then frozen for subsequent  
184 freeze-drying. The freeze-dried samples were used for all subsequent solid samples  
185 chemical determinations (see below). A further subsample of each sludge disk was  
186 placed immediately into a centrifuge tube containing 5% zinc acetate solution for  
187 sulfide determination. In addition, in July, 2011, a sample of fish feces was taken  
188 from several fish together with samples of the fish feed for analysis.

189

190 The core sampled on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011 for pH measurements was brought back  
191 to the lab and sludge samples were siphoned off from the top of the core into a  
192 beaker in which pH was measured at the ambient temperature (~26°C). In addition,  
193 one sample from the overlying water was taken for pH measurement.

194           The two cores collected on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (Core A) and February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012  
195           (Core B) were immediately frozen after sampling and transported to Leeds with dry  
196           ice. In Leeds, the cores were extruded frozen, cut into the required depth intervals  
197           for analysis, and trimmed. The ice formed from overlying water at the top of each  
198           core was melted for analysis and sulfate recovery. Each sample was split into two  
199           and each refrozen. One aliquot was weighed, dried at 110°C and reweighed to  
200           determine water content. The other aliquot was placed frozen into a sealed  
201           extraction cell and flushed with N<sub>2</sub>. Pore-water components were extracted by  
202           diffusional exchange (Bottrell et al., 2000; Spence et al., 2005) for chemical analysis  
203           and recovery of sulfate as BaSO<sub>4</sub>. Freezing of core may cause redistribution of  
204           solutes during freezing; however the effects are minimized since the cores are sub-  
205           sampled at a coarse resolution and completely thawed to extract solutes. Freezing  
206           prevents both post-sampling oxidation of S species and physical disturbance/mixing  
207           of the core during transport, each of which would introduce far greater artefacts.

208

209

210           **2.3. Pore water and solid sludge determinations**

211

212           Pore water samples were determined for major cations and anions by ICP-AES and  
213           ion chromatography. Samples used for analysis of cations were acidified with two  
214           drops of HCl (37%). Deionized water was added to some of the samples to facilitate  
215           the dissolution of any observed precipitate. Elemental concentrations were  
216           measured using a Side-On-Plasma ICP-AES model 'ARCOS' (Spectro GmbH,  
217           Germany). Samples for determination of nitrate, sulfate, chloride, and phosphate  
218           were forced through Reverse Phase filters and through 0.25 µm membrane filters to

219 remove organic material. The above anions were determined using an ICS-3000 Ion  
220 Chromatograph (Dionex Corporation, Sunnyvale, California), with an AS17 analytical  
221 column, an AG17 guard column, and an ASRS-Ultra II Anion Micromembrane  
222 Suppressor. Total ammonia ( $\text{NH}_3$ ,  $\text{NH}_4^+$ ), from here on referred to as ammonia, was  
223 determined with the salicylate-hypochlorite method as described by Bower and  
224 Holm-Hansen (1980). Dissolved sulfide was analysed on samples fixed with ZnAc  
225 with the methylene blue method of Cline (1969).

226 Freeze dried sludge samples, feed and fish feces were analyzed for P  
227 speciation using the procedure of Aspila et al. (1976) to determine total P and  
228 inorganic P (and hence by difference: organic P). In addition, adsorbed P was  
229 determined using the first step of the SEDEX P speciation procedure of Ruttenberg  
230 (1992) involving extraction by  $\text{MgCl}_2$ . Extracted samples were determined for  
231 phosphate using the molybdate blue reaction (Golterman et al., 1978). The standard  
232 error (1s) of these analyses was adsorbed P 3% (n =12), inorganic P 8% (n=16) and  
233 organic P 4% (n =16). An additional solid subsample of sludge was analyzed for  
234 major elements on fused glass beads prepared from ignited powders using a sample  
235 to flux ratio of 1:10 (Lithium tetraborate) on PANalytical XRF spectrometer at  
236 University of Leicester, UK. Quantification of inorganic polyphosphate was  
237 accomplished using a fluorometric technique based on the interaction of inorganic  
238 polyphosphate with 4',6'-Diamidino-2-phenylindole (DAPI) (Aschar-Sobbi et al.,  
239 2008; Diaz and Ingall, 2010). DAPI is commonly used as a stain for nucleic acid but  
240 will also bind to polyphosphate, which is then detected using a combination of  
241 incident and observed wavelengths optimized for polyphosphate (Aschar-Sobbi et  
242 al., 2008). Inorganic polyphosphate of at least 15 P atoms in size is quantified

243 independently of chain length to a detection limit of 0.5 µM (Diaz and Ingall, 2010).

244 Typical errors associated with this technique are ± 15% (Diaz and Ingall, 2010).

245

246 For the isotope cores, after pore-water extraction, acid-volatile (AVS =  
247 dissolved sulfides and solid monosulfides) and chromium reducible sulfur (CRS =  
248 pyrite sulfur and elemental sulfur) were extracted from the solid phase and recovered  
249 as a single CuS precipitate for isotopic analysis. The mass of S recovered was  
250 determined titrimetrically (Newton et al., 1995). Residual sulfur in the solid phase is  
251 presumed to be organic-bound S and was converted to BaSO<sub>4</sub> by Eschka fusion and  
252 determined gravimetrically. In addition, the 'Red Sea salt' and Rehovot tap water  
253 used to create half seawater conditions in the system were sampled. The Red Sea  
254 salt was dissolved for chemical analysis and sulfate recovered as BaSO<sub>4</sub> for both S  
255 and O isotopic analysis.

256 The oxygen isotopic composition of aqueous sulfate was determined on  
257 BaSO<sub>4</sub> precipitates using the method described by McCarthy et al. (1998) and using  
258 a VG SIRA 10 gas source isotope ratio mass spectrometer. Data are reported as  
259 δ<sup>18</sup>O in per mille (‰) relative to the Vienna Standard Mean Ocean Water (V-SMOW);  
260 reproducibility (2 x standard error), estimated from replicate analyses of standards, is  
261 0.3‰ or better. Sulfur extracts and fish feed samples were quantitatively converted  
262 to SO<sub>2</sub> by combustion at 1,150°C in the presence of pure oxygen (N5.0) injected into  
263 a stream of helium (CP grade). The combustion gases were quantitatively converted  
264 to N<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub> and SO<sub>2</sub> by passing them through tungstic oxide. Excess oxygen was  
265 removed by reaction with hot copper wires at 850°C and water was removed in a  
266 magnesium perchlorate or Sicapent trap. All solid reagents were sourced from  
267 Elemental Microanalysis, UK, and all gases were sourced from BOC, UK. N<sub>2</sub>

268 continued through the system unchecked, whilst CO<sub>2</sub> and SO<sub>2</sub> were removed from,  
269 and re-injected into, the gas stream using temperature controlled  
270 adsorption/desorption columns. The δ<sup>34</sup>S was derived using the integrated mass 64  
271 and 66 signals relative to those in a pulse of SO<sub>2</sub> reference gas (N3.0). These ratios  
272 are calibrated to the international V-CDT scale using an internal laboratory barium  
273 sulfate standard derived from seawater (SWS-3), which has been analysed against  
274 the international standards NBS-127 (+20.3‰), NBS-123 (+17.01‰), IAEA S-1 (-  
275 0.30‰) and IAEA S-3 (-32.06‰) and assigned a value of +20.3‰, and an inter-lab  
276 chalcopyrite standard CP-1 assigned a value of -4.56‰. If samples were more <sup>34</sup>S  
277 depleted than CP-1, the IAEA S-3 standard was used instead. The precision  
278 obtained for repeat analyses of standard materials was generally better than 0.3‰  
279 δ<sup>34</sup>S<sub>REF</sub> (1 standard deviation).

280

### 281 **3. Results**

282

#### 283 **3.1. Water analyses**

284

285 The water quality was determined weekly in the circulating water of the ZDS system  
286 (Fig. S1). The detailed sampling took place on July 12<sup>th</sup>, when main water quality  
287 parameters had stabilized and ammonia, phosphate, nitrate and nitrite values were  
288 0.02 mM, 1.03 mM, 16.1 mM and 0.017 mM, respectively. The nitrate concentration  
289 in the overlying water at the time of sampling (17.4 mM) was much higher than in the  
290 surface sludge. There was a decrease in nitrate such that the nitrate concentration  
291 below 20 cm was close to or below the practical limit of detection. The nitrate  
292 decrease within the sludge can be explained by the fact that under anoxic conditions

293 nitrate is reduced by bacteria, which oxidise organic matter and other reduced  
294 compounds.

295 Sulfate is also respiration under anoxic conditions within the sludge. In order to  
296 recognize biologically mediated changes in sulfate in the sludge, it was necessary to  
297 compare its concentration to that of sodium since the former compound is found in  
298 measurable amounts in the sea salt added to the system. There was a systematic  
299 increase in Na observed with depth with values increasing from ~ 50% seawater  
300 concentration at the surface to 4 times higher concentration at the base of the sludge  
301 core (Fig. S2A). This increase was most probably caused by the specific manner in  
302 which sea salt was added to the system prior to the experimental period. Salt was  
303 added to the DB with a working volume of 2.9 m<sup>3</sup> (approximately 25% of the total  
304 water volume in the system). Although intended to completely dissolve in the total  
305 system water, it appears that as a result of this mode of salt addition, relatively more  
306 salt accumulated in the bottom layers of the DB. Despite the high porosity of the  
307 sludge (0.95 in the top layers and decreasing to 0.85 at 35 cm depth), there was no  
308 evidence of physical mixing (Fig. S2C). Sulfate decreased rapidly from a value of  
309 60.1 (SO<sub>4</sub> mM/Na M) in the overlying water to 14.8 (SO<sub>4</sub> mM/Na M) at 2.5 cm depth  
310 (Fig. 2A). The ratio continued to decrease with depth to a minimum value of 4.3 (SO<sub>4</sub>  
311 mM/Na M) at 14.5 cm and then increased to 43.9 (SO<sub>4</sub> mM/Na M) at the lowest point  
312 sampled (33.5cm). A similar profile was obtained when (total dissolved sulfur minus  
313 dissolved sulfide)/Na was plotted with depth (Fig. 2A). There was no measurable  
314 sulfide in the overlying water; it increased to a maximum of 3.8 mM at 15.5 cm and  
315 then decreased to a value of 1.1 mM at 34.5 cm (Fig. 2B).

316 In order to understand the diagenetic processes in the sludge, the  
317 concentration of relevant chemical species and parameters were measured.

318 Phosphate and ammonia are commonly measured as the products of the  
319 heterotrophic anaerobic respiration of organic matter. However, the concentration of  
320 these chemical species depends on the sum of all diagenetic processes in the  
321 sludge. Thus, the dissolved phosphate in the sludge depth profile (Fig. 3A) was  
322 lower in the uppermost layers (1.12 mM) compared with the overlying water (1.4  
323 mM) and decreased with depth to values of ~0.7 mM at 35 cm. By contrast,  
324 ammonia (Fig. 3B) was much higher in the surface sludge compared with the  
325 overlying water. The ammonia concentrations in the upper 20 cm were roughly  
326 constant in the range of 13-15 mM, which then decreased to ~10 mM below 25 cm.

327 Further information about the nature of the diagenetic processes in the  
328 sediment comes from measurements of pH. In the sludge, the pH increased from  
329 6.35 in the overlying water to a maximum of 6.8 just below the sediment water  
330 interface (SWI) and then decreased with depth to a value of 6.5 at the base of the  
331 sludge (Fig. S2D).

322 The concentration ratios of Ca/Na and Mg/Na were determined to provide  
323 information about the possible precipitation of inorganic P minerals in the sludge.  
324 The molar ratio in the overlying waters (21.96) was within error the same molar ratio  
325 of Ca/Na (mM/M) in normal seawater (Fig. S2B). The ratio increased just below the  
326 sludge-water interface to 40.7 and then decreased with depth reaching values of ~5  
327 at 35 cm. The Mg/Na (mM/M) remained essentially constant at 60-78 over the depth  
328 profile analysed (not shown).

339

340 **3.2. Solid sludge phase**

341

342 The P speciation and content of the sludge was compared with feces (the major  
343 input) and fish feed (a possible minor input) to characterise the transformations  
344 which have occurred in the DB. The total P in the sludge varies from ~1,500  
345 µmolesP/g in the surface layers increasing to a maximum of 2,090 µmolesP/g at 15.5  
346 cm and decreasing to 1,100 µmolesP/g at the base of the sludge (Fig. 4A). Inorganic  
347 P was the major phase in the sludge and increased from surface values of 1,030  
348 µmolesP/g to >1,500 µmoles/g before decreasing to 1,120 µmoles/g at 35.5 cm. By  
349 contrast, organic P was relatively constant over the upper 20 cm at ~400-500  
350 µmolesP/g and then decreased to <50 µmoles/g at the base of the sludge (Fig.  
351 4A). The total P content of the fish feed (410 µmolesP/g) was lower than the fish  
352 feces (830 µmolesP/g), which is the main source of particulate matter to the sludge.  
353 In contrast to the sludge, the organic P content of the fish feces (465 µmolesP/g)  
354 was higher than its inorganic P content (260 µmolesP/g; Figure 4a; Table S1). The  
355 principal major element in the sludge was Ca, which increased from 2.3 mmolesCa/g  
356 (9.3 wt%Ca) at the surface to 3.2-4.1 mmolesCa/g (12.8-16.4 wt%Ca) at depth  
357 (Table S2). Other elements, which might bind with P (Fe and Al), were present only  
358 in µmoles/g concentrations (Table S2).

359

### 360 3.2.1. *Sulfur mass balance*

361 Sulfur mass balance can be assessed in the cores used for S isotopic  
362 determinations as concentrations were also measured (Table 1). Data are presented  
363 as aqueous concentrations for dissolved species and corrected to concentrations in  
364 total sludge for all species (assuming a linear transition between measured  
365 porosities of 0.95 at core top and 0.85 at core base). As noted above, sulfate  
366 concentrations decline with depth in the upper part of the core (14.2 mM in the

367 overlying water, 7.8 mM in the uppermost core, declining to a minimum of 0.7 mM at  
368 ~20 cm depth). However, although sulfide concentrations increase over a similar  
369 interval (0 mM in the overlying water, 0.4 mM in the uppermost core, reaching a  
370 maximum of 3.5 mM at ~17 cm depth) they never match the losses in sulfate and  
371 thus total dissolved S decreases with depth over this interval. This imbalance is  
372 explained by the general increase in concentration of solid phase S species over the  
373 same depth interval (from ~590 mmol S/L of sludge in the upper core to >1,000  
374 mmol S/L of sludge in the deepest core; Table 1), as sulfide reacts with solid phase  
375 components to produce new organic S and CRS species. Elemental S may be a  
376 product of sulfide reoxidation (e.g. Jiang et al. 2009) and this is analyzed within the  
377 CRS fraction.

378

### 379 **3.3. Stable Isotope ratios**

#### 380 *3.3.1. Inputs to the system*

381 The ‘Red Sea salt’ used to make up the tank water contained sulfate with isotopic  
382 compositions of  $\delta^{34}\text{S} = -1.5\text{\textperthousand}$  and  $\delta^{18}\text{O} = 10.0\text{\textperthousand}$  (Fig. 5); this is not a typical marine  
383 sulfate isotope composition as the sulfate is sourced from terrestrial sulfate deposits.  
384 The local Rehovot tap water used to fill the tank contains 0.16 mM sulfate with  
385 isotopic composition of  $\delta^{34}\text{S} = 6.9\text{\textperthousand}$  and  $\delta^{18}\text{O} = 7.8\text{\textperthousand}$ . As the circulating tank water  
386 was made up to 50% seawater chloride concentration, the dissolved sulfate was  
387 dominated by the added Red Sea salt. Fresh water resources (both groundwater and  
388 river waters) in Israel typically have a narrow range of  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  between -4‰ and -6‰  
389 (Gat and Dansgaard, 1972) and the tap water used should be in this range. The  
390 other main source of S to the system was the fish food, which contains ~0.7 wt% S;

391 two different batches of food were analyzed and had slightly different  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  isotopic  
392 compositions, 6.5‰ and 8.9‰ (Fig. 5).

393

394 *3.3.2. Solid phase sulfur isotopic composition*

395 The combined acid-volatile (AVS) and chromium reducible sulfur (CRS) content of  
396 the sludge was similar in both cores and showed no systematic variation with depth,  
397 ranging from 3.45 to 10.5 mg g<sup>-1</sup>. Organic-S contents were lower (0.81 to 3.54 mg g<sup>-1</sup>)  
398 and again showed no strong depth trend (Table S3). Both forms of S in the sludge  
399 show a similar and quite narrow range of S isotopic composition (AVS + CRS =  
400 1.4‰ to 8.2‰; Org-S = 3.6‰ to 8.3‰, Fig. 5, Table S3) and no systematic variation  
401 with depth. The S isotopic composition of pore-water sulfate was broadly similar in  
402 both cores, particularly so in the upper part of each core (Fig. 5). The lowest  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$   
403 value occurred in the shallowest pore-water sample and was lighter than the sulfate  
404 in the overlying water (7.3‰ vs. 8.8‰ in core A and 8.0‰ vs. 10.2‰ in core B,  
405 differences of 1.5‰ and 2.2‰). Below this, sulfate  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  remained near constant with  
406 depth down to 17 cm and had values closely similar to the sulfate in the overlying  
407 water. Below 17 cm depth the two profiles diverged somewhat, though in general  
408 there was a tendency to higher  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  in the lower part of the profiles. Sulfate  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  in  
409 the shallowest pore-waters was lower than in the overlying water but initially  
410 increased with depth in both profiles. In the deeper pore-waters there is more  
411 variability in sulfate  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and Core A tended to more elevated values (>+10‰) while  
412 core B tended to lighter values (~+2‰); it should be noted that SO<sub>4</sub>/Cl was different  
413 for the two cores in their deeper parts.

414

415     *3.3.3. Calculation of the amount of total P in the sludge and the fraction accumulated  
416     during the present phase of pond operation*

417     The total sludge volume was calculated to be 960,000 cm<sup>3</sup> based on a tank surface  
418     area of 2.4 m<sup>2</sup> and a depth of sludge of 40 cm. With an average sludge porosity of  
419     0.9, it could be calculated that the DB contained 96,000 cm<sup>3</sup> of sediment particles.  
420     Assuming a dry density of 1.4 g/cm<sup>3</sup>, this equals 134,400 g of sediment. Using 1,535  
421     mmolesP/g as the average total P content of the sediment, it is calculated that the  
422     sludge contains 206 moles P. Our calculation of the total P supplied to the ZDS as  
423     fish feed minus the fish growth during the present run (October 2010 until July 2011)  
424     was 65 moles P. This figure assumes that the only location for P accumulation is the  
425     DB and that there was no major residual P build up in the nitrifying filter or  
426     elsewhere. As a result, this is a minimum estimate. Since P in the sludge cannot go  
427     anywhere, this implies that there were 141 moles of P already in the sludge before  
428     the system was started. The system had been operating for seven years  
429     intermittently before the start of this run. Therefore we conclude that the sludge  
430     before we started in October, 2010 was already a long term repository of P, built up  
431     during previous cycles of the ZDS system operating in a similar way to the present  
432     run.

433

434     *3.3.4. Phosphate minerals within the sludge*

435     The X-ray diffraction data of the freeze-dried but untreated core section and fish  
436     feces samples revealed a high background signal (due to high organic matter  
437     concentrations) with main peaks identifiable as calcite, fluorapatite and gypsum. The  
438     fish feed sample contained the same phases but with higher proportions of apatite  
439     and with additional calcium oxalates and hydroxyapatite (Fig. S3A). After the ashing

440 and washing all carbon phases (organic matter and calcite) as well as the highly  
441 soluble gypsum were, as expected, absent from the scans (Fig. S3B). It is worth  
442 noting that with XRD it was difficult to differentiate between the various, crystalline  
443 forms of apatite (A) in these samples. However, a clear distinction between less  
444 crystalline hydroxyapatite (HAP) and other Ca-P phases was observable but not  
445 quantifiable due to the broadness of the peaks. Looking at the XRD scans of the  
446 treated samples compared with the fish feces, which is the main source of organic  
447 matter in the sludge, a clear difference can be seen in the nature of the Ca-P phases  
448 present (Fig. S3B). There was a shift in the peak position for the apatite phases  
449 (labeled A) to a lower angle and a decrease in peak height. The less crystalline HAP  
450 peak also shifted to lower angles but increased in peak height and a new peak,  
451 possibly assignable to Francolite (a carbonate rich form of fluorapatite), appeared in  
452 the sludge. Within the upper 13.5 cm of the sludge, the peaks for all Ca-P phases  
453 remained relatively constant in both angle and relative magnitude. Between 19.5 cm  
454 to 34.5 cm (data not shown) the peak locations remained constant though the  
455 relative peak heights decreased somewhat. In none of the scans were there any  
456 peaks that could be assigned to struvite.

457

458

459 **4. Discussion**

460

461 **4.1 P and N dynamics**

462

463 High concentrations of nitrate in the water flowing over the DB sludge on July  
464 12<sup>th</sup> (17.4 mM) compared to much lower concentration of nitrate just below the SWI

465 (0.6 mM; Fig. 3C) are consistent with intense microbial denitrification in the DB . In  
466 addition to rapid and extensive denitrification, heterotrophic sulfate reduction caused  
467 ~75% of the sulfate present in the overlying water to be reduced within the upper 2.5  
468 cm of the sludge. This sulfate reduction resulted in an accumulation of free sulfide in  
469 the pore waters up to a maximum of 3.8 mM at ~15 cm. Despite the build up of free  
470 sulfide in surface layers of the sludge, no free sulfide was measured in the fish tank  
471 or circulating water. Previous studies have shown that this was due to autotrophic  
472 denitrification (especially in the fluidized bed reactor) and other sulfide oxidation  
473 processes efficiently removing any sulfide, which might leak from the sludge (Cytryn  
474 et al. 2005; Neori et al., 2007; Sher et al., 2008; Schwermer et al., 2010; Neori and  
475 Mendola, 2012).

476 In this study, we have used measurements of stable isotopes of S and O  
477 ( $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  and  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ) in the solids and pore waters of the sludge tank to examine the  
478 nature of the microbial processes in the DB. Water sampled from the system  
479 (overlying water and pore water) contains sulfate that has significantly higher  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$   
480 than the sulfate initially added to the system (i.e. ~ 10‰ vs. -1.4‰). This results from  
481 a combination of two effects: (1) during the operation of the system, fish feed with a  
482 more elevated  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  has been constantly added and processing of this sulfur may  
483 have added sulfate with higher  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  to the sulfate pool and (2) at the present time, S  
484 accumulating in the solid phase (both as AVS+CRS and Org-S) has lower  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  than  
485 the sulfate in the system (Fig. 5). If this solid phase pool has gradually accumulated  
486 S with lower  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  than the contemporaneous sulfate, then this will have driven the  
487 aqueous sulfate to progressively higher  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$ .

488 The  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  of pore-water sulfate in the upper 17 cm varies little from that of the  
489 overlying water. However, the chemical data for pore-waters show large decreases

490 in SO<sub>4</sub>/Cl in the upper parts of both cores, which would normally imply removal of  
491 sulfate by microbial sulfate reduction. This process is usually accompanied by a  
492 large sulfur isotope fractionation (e.g. Canfield 2001) with sulfide produced typically  
493 20‰ to 45‰ depleted in <sup>34</sup>S compared to sulfate. However, in this particular reactor  
494 this process seems to operate with much smaller fractionation. Firstly, there is only a  
495 small offset between pore-water sulfate compositions and average solid phase  
496 sulfide, with only~5‰ depletion in <sup>34</sup>S in the sulfide product and secondly there is no  
497 large systematic increase in sulfate δ<sup>34</sup>S as SO<sub>4</sub>/Cl falls in the upper parts of both  
498 cores (data not shown but similar to the SO<sub>4</sub>/Na profile (Fig 2A). However, the  
499 sulfate in the pore-water is not inert, as there are large changes in sulfate δ<sup>18</sup>O over  
500 this interval in both profiles (Fig. 5). Rather, sulfide produced must be near-  
501 quantitatively reoxidized to sulfate and there is little net conversion of sulfate to  
502 reduced forms such as AVS, CRS or Org-S (e.g. Bottrell et al., 2009). However, as  
503 sulfate is reduced and reoxidized the re-formed sulfate contains oxygen atoms from  
504 different sources and with different δ<sup>18</sup>O to the original sulfate. The fact that sulfate in  
505 the shallowest pore-water has slightly lower δ<sup>34</sup>S than the overlying water or deeper  
506 pore-water indicates that production of sulfate by reoxidation of <sup>34</sup>S-depleted sulfide  
507 dominates at this level. The δ<sup>18</sup>O of this sulfate is lower than the overlying waters (by  
508 6.8‰ in Core A and 4.0‰ in Core B, Fig. 5). Such a shift to lower δ<sup>18</sup>O in sulfate  
509 rules out molecular oxygen as the oxidizing agent as it is highly <sup>18</sup>O enriched, but  
510 rather indicates that the oxygen atoms incorporated into sulfate during sulfide  
511 oxidation are derived from water molecules with negative δ<sup>18</sup>O (McCarthy et al.,  
512 1998; Bottrell and Tranter, 2002; Bottrell et al., 2009) and thus sulfide oxidation was  
513 driven by an alternative electron acceptor, most likely nitrate, based on the chemical  
514 profiles (Fig. 3C). Thus, it is concluded that in the upper layers of the DB there is

515 rapid heterotrophic sulfate reduction, which is approximately balanced by autotrophic  
516 nitrate reduction. Heterotrophic nitrate reduction is a relatively lesser process. To test  
517 the feasibility of such a scenario the system was investigated using a simple model  
518 of the fate of S and N species.

519 The model considers the budgets of sulfur and nitrogen species in a system  
520 where heterotrophic sulfate reduction (HSR), heterotrophic nitrate reduction (HNR)  
521 and autotrophic nitrate reduction (ANR, using sulfide as an electron donor) may  
522 occur. Starting compositions were those of the overlying water (15 mM sulfate, 15  
523 mM nitrate and zero sulfide); reactions were modelled as first-order with respect to  
524 these components. Concentration of organic substrate for heterotrophic respiration  
525 was not considered to limit those reactions. The model describes the evolution of an  
526 aliquot of pore-water as its composition is modified by these reactions. Model runs  
527 were performed with different ratios of reaction rates, i.e.  $R_{HSR}/R_{HNR}$  and  $R_{ANR}/R_{HNR}$ .  
528 Because sulfate is a lower energy-yielding electron acceptor, under similar  
529 conditions  $R_{HSR}$  is generally lower than  $R_{HNR}$ , so all runs were made with  $R_{HSR}/R_{HNR}$   
530  $\leq 1$ . Experimental determination of the effect of sulfide on nitrate reducing systems  
531 shows that  $R_{ANR} > R_{HNR}$ , with autotrophic activity often effectively eliminating  
532 heterotrophic activity as long as sulfide is present (e.g. Sher et al., 2008; Shijie et al.,  
533 2010), so all model runs were made with  $R_{ANR}/R_{HNR} \geq 1$ .

534 Model results are presented in Table 2. During most runs initially  
535 heterotrophic NR dominated, but as sulfide concentration increased due to SR, rates  
536 of autotrophic NR increased and became dominant (except in runs with very low  
537 heterotrophic SR/heterotrophic NR where nitrate was consumed before autotrophic  
538 NR became dominant). Where the rate of autotrophic NR is much greater than that  
539 of heterotrophic NR, little nitrate is consumed by heterotrophic NR before autotrophic

540 NR becomes dominant and sulfide concentrations are low (and sulfate  
541 concentrations remain high) until all nitrate is consumed. Thus, under many realistic  
542 scenarios the system evolves such that SR is the dominant heterotrophic respiration  
543 mechanism and the sulfide generated then accounts for the majority of NR via an  
544 autotrophic pathway. This pattern is consistent with the observed chemistry and  
545 stable isotope compositions that show that sulfate is cycled but not consumed in the  
546 sludge over the interval where nitrate is consumed. Also shown in Table 2 are the  
547 sulfide concentrations at which autotrophic NR becomes dominant; these are lower  
548 than the observed concentrations in the sludge profile, indicating that ample sulfide  
549 is available to drive autotrophic NR. Sulfide concentrations rise in the model runs  
550 after nitrate concentrations fall, conditions similar to those observed deeper in the  
551 sludge profile.

552

#### 553 **4.2. Sediment sludge as a long term sink for P**

554

555 The digestion basin is a bacterial bioreactor in which the sediment sludge is  
556 predominantly a repository of organic rich fish feces from the fish basin. Inputs to the  
557 DB are modified subsequently mainly by anaerobic bacterial processes with the  
558 major bacterial transformations described above. Despite the high fraction of organic  
559 P in the fish feces input most of the particulate P in the DB is not organic P but  
560 inorganic P (Fig. 4A, Table S1). X-Ray diffraction data indicates that the P  
561 accumulating in the DB is a mixture of crystalline apatite and poorly ordered  
562 hydroxyapatite (Fig. S3). There was no evidence of struvite. The XRD data,  
563 however, showed that the fish feed contained large amounts of crystalline apatite  
564 and some hydroxyapatite (probably as ground up fish bone from the fishmeal; Fig.

565 S3A) besides oxalates and calcite. Part of this initial apatite probably survives  
566 through the gut of the *Sparus aurata* and is excreted within the fish feces (Fig. S3B,  
567 top XRD scan). We ask the question whether the apatite measured in the sludge is  
568 simply the residue of accumulating apatite supplied externally alone or whether it is  
569 also formed actively in the sludge by *in situ* processes. The sludge in the uppermost  
570 layer represents most closely the (transformed) fresh organic matter input from the  
571 fish tank. We assume initially that the particulate matter reaching the sludge surface  
572 was 100% fish feces because of good evidence for this based on observations and  
573 on the observed fish growth, i.e. that the fish ate essentially all the food they were  
574 fed. The total P measured in the surface sludge was 1,520  $\mu\text{molesP/g}$ , which is  
575 higher in total concentration than either the fish feces (830  $\mu\text{moles/g}$ ) or the fish feed  
576 (410  $\mu\text{moles/g}$ ; Table S1). It is known that there is significant denitrification and loss  
577 of C by  $\text{CO}_2$  and/or methane production in the ZDS system. Neori et al. (2007)  
578 estimated that over a period of 500 days approximately 70% by weight was lost from  
579 the system as gaseous nitrogen and carbon dioxide. The calculated loss of weight in  
580 the conversion of 832  $\mu\text{molesP/g}$  to 1,520  $\mu\text{molesP/g}$  is 46% assuming that the total  
581 P remained constant. This change in concentration for a period of 220 days was  
582 reasonable based on the results of Neori et al. (2007) for a similar ZDS system. If we  
583 assume that all of the change in measured inorganic P was only due to this loss of  
584 total mass then the inorganic phase should be 480  $\mu\text{molesP/g}$  compared with the  
585 measured inorganic P (1035  $\mu\text{molesP/g}$ ) and the organic P was calculated to be 850  
586  $\mu\text{molesP/g}$  compared with the measured 480  $\mu\text{molesP/g}$  of organic P. Thus, in  
587 addition to any changes in concentration caused by loss of mass, there also had to  
588 be a major and rapid conversion of organic P to inorganic P.

589       The sludge tank is a location of active heterotrophic nitrate and sulfate  
590      reduction. There was major accumulation of ammonia and phosphate in the pore  
591      waters (Fig. 3), an increase in pH (Fig. S2D) as well as rapid reduction in nitrate and  
592      sulfate, which are all characteristic of heterotrophic bacterial reduction. However in  
593      the upper 10 cm, which is the zone of most active heterotrophic reduction, while  
594      ammonia increased with depth by ~ 2 mM, phosphate decreased by ~0.2 mM. This  
595      requires a process within the upper layers of the sludge, which caused a net removal  
596      of phosphate while ammonia (and presumably phosphate) was being released by  
597      heterotrophic reduction. Phosphate could be removed by the formation of  
598      polyphosphate granules in denitrifying and other reducing bacteria. However while  
599      polyphosphate was present in the upper 10 cm, it was only found in  $\mu$ moles/g  
600      amounts (Fig. 4B) which was not sufficient to explain this major removal of  
601      phosphate unless this represented a transient phase. A more likely explanation is the  
602      formation of mineral apatite. Struvite, another possible mineral that could be  
603      removed in such systems, would require the removal of both ammonia and  
604      phosphate simultaneously. Our high-resolution X-Ray diffraction scans over the 50-  
605      55° 2θ range (which is a location where apatite can clearly be separated from  
606      hydroxyapatite and other Ca-P phases) showed the presence of hydroxyapatite  
607      peaks in both the fish feces and the sludge. However, as described above, there was  
608      a clear change in the nature and proportions of the crystalline and poorly ordered  
609      Ca-P phases with depth (Fig. S3B) indicating that new, secondary Ca-P phases –  
610      most likely additional hydroxyapatite and maybe francolite have formed. It needs to  
611      be noted that the input of crystalline apatite from the fish feces and possibly also the  
612      fish feed makes a quantitative determination of these changes difficult.

613           Using our measured pore water concentrations, the degree of saturation of  
614   the pore waters for possible insoluble chemical species was carried out using  
615   PHREEQC thermodynamic software in the upper layers of the sediment sludge. In  
616   addition to measured pore water species (Fig. 3), we assumed a fluoride  
617   concentration of half that in normal seawater (based on the Na and Cl concentrations  
618   which are similar conservative elements and are measured as half seawater  
619   concentration). The bicarbonate concentration was obtained from DIC  
620   measurements on gel probes corrected for incomplete back equilibration assuming  
621   that Cl and bicarbonate were equally affected. The calculation showed that the pore  
622   waters were supersaturated with respect to hydroxyapatite, aragonite, calcite and  
623   dolomite but not with respect to anhydrite, gypsum or struvite (Table 3).

624           Over the same depth interval (0-17 cm) as phosphate decreases by 0.2 mM  
625   (Fig. 3), dissolved Ca decreases by 6 mM and the Ca/Na ratio decreased from 40 to  
626   ~10 (Fig. S2B) while solid phase Ca increased from 2.33 mmolesCa/g to 4.24  
627   mmolesCa/g (Table S2) and inorganic carbonate-C increased by a factor of 2 (Fig.  
628   S2E). This means that ~15% of the Ca in the sludge is  $\text{CaCO}_3$  (assuming that all  
629   inorganic C is  $\text{CaCO}_3$ ) and the remainder is apatite. Taken together, these data  
630   suggest that these upper layers of the sludge are the site of active precipitation of  
631   both hydroxyapatite and calcite from the pore waters of the sludge. The precipitation  
632   of hydroxyapatite is facilitated in this system because not only were the pore waters  
633   highly supersaturated with respect to apatite but also there were available apatite  
634   nuclei in the shape of the ground up fish bones added via the fish food. Attempts to  
635   observe directly the nature of the apatite formation process using XANES  
636   measurements using synchrotron were not successful mainly because there were

637 simply too many phosphorus-rich granules in the observed field to observe the  
638 necessary subtle changes in peak shapes predicted.

639 Our data also shows that in the longer term there was a conversion of organic  
640 P to apatite within the digestion basin. At the time of the start up of this particular  
641 ZDS run, there was sludge in the DB, which was the residue from seven years of  
642 pond operation in various different modes i.e. different masses and sizes of fish but  
643 fundamentally still being operated as a ZDS system. This residual sludge was  
644 expected to contain the end products of ZDS processes. The observed depth profile  
645 of the sludge showed an increase in inorganic P (i.e. apatite P) with depth and a  
646 synchronous decrease in the proportion of organic P within the system particularly in  
647 the lower layers (> 25 cm) where the almost all of the organic P appears to have  
648 converted in a process analogous to the sink switching observed in recent marine  
649 sediments (Ruttenberg and Berner, 1993) into inorganic apatite.

650

#### 651 ***4.3. Synthesis comparing processes in DB to other systems***

652

653 The ZDS was designed to use natural bacterial processes found in marine systems,  
654 particularly in marine sediments, to control water quality conditions over long periods  
655 of time (several months to years). These processes, which include nitrification, oxic  
656 respiration, heterotrophic nitrate and sulfate reduction and autotrophic nitrate  
657 reduction by sulphide, are balanced in such a way as to keep the water quality  
658 conditions in the fishpond within levels acceptable for fish growth. Our results here  
659 suggest that the closest natural analogue for P cycling processes in the DB are the  
660 sediments beneath modern upwelling regions such as off Namibia and in the Arabian  
661 Sea (e.g. Goldhammer et al., 2011; Schenau et al., 2000). These are sediments with

662 very high levels of organic matter (up to 40% OM). They are locations with intense  
663 rates of heterotrophic bacterial respiration including both oxic processes and sulfate  
664 reduction. The sediments underneath upwelling currents are the major areas for  
665 phosphorite (apatite) formation. Schenau et al. (2000) observed high rates of  
666 authigenic apatite formation, which they suggest, are induced by high rates of  
667 organic matter degradation producing phosphate in the pore waters. They also  
668 suggest that dissolution of fish debris acts as an additional source of dissolved  
669 phosphate. The high concentration of dissolved phosphate together with normal  
670 levels of calcium in the pore waters result in sufficient over saturation with respect to  
671 apatite (francolite) precipitation to overcome the kinetic barrier known to exist in less  
672 organic rich 'normal' marine sediments (van Cappellen and Berner, 1991).

673 An alternative mechanism for apatite precipitation has been suggested by  
674 Goldhammer et al. (2010; 2011) who suggest that polyphosphate present in sulfide  
675 oxidizing bacteria is rapidly converted to apatite. This process occurs under anoxic  
676 conditions and they calculate that the rate of phosphate to apatite conversion by this  
677 process exceeds the rate of phosphorus release during organic matter  
678 mineralisation. It is possible that both of these processes are occurring in the DB  
679 since there is direct evidence of both heterotrophic breakdown of organic matter and  
680 extensive oxidation of sulfide and the presence of polyphosphate in the upper most  
681 active layers of the DB. It is however not possible with the data collected in this study  
682 to determine which of these processes dominate in the formation of apatite.

683 The phosphate that is removed from the recirculating system and  
684 accumulates in the DB is mineral apatite. Apatite is the form of phosphate, which is  
685 most commonly used as the primary mineral for commercial phosphate applications.  
686 In a world with dwindling exploitable reserves of phosphorite and other phosphate

687 minerals it is important to recycle phosphorus. Since apatite is acid soluble, the  
688 conversion of solid apatite from the sludge into dissolved P would be relatively easy.  
689 Thus the P accumulated in this system could be easily recovered and converted into  
690 a form of phosphorus that could be used in such applications as fertilizers.

691

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693

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702

703

704 **Appendix A. Supplementary data**

705

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- 816 **Figure legends**

817     Figure 1. A diagram of the system as a whole including a more detailed diagram of  
818     the digestion basin showing the location of the sludge sampling.

819     Figure 2. Pore water concentration of a) Sulfate/Na and {Total dissolved S  
820     (measured by ICP) minus dissolved Sulfide} /Na concentration ratio  
821     (mmolesS/moleNa) and b) Dissolved Sulfide (molesS/l) in the pore waters of the  
822     sludge. Measured value for sulfate/Na molar ratio in the overlying water (OW) is  
823     given. There was no sulfide detected in the overlying water.

824     Figure 3. Pore water nutrient concentrations of dissolved phosphate, ammonia and  
825     nitrate vs depth together with corresponding values for these nutrients in the  
826     overlying water. Note that the concentration of nitrate in the overlying water is 17.4  
827     mM as noted in the data point description.

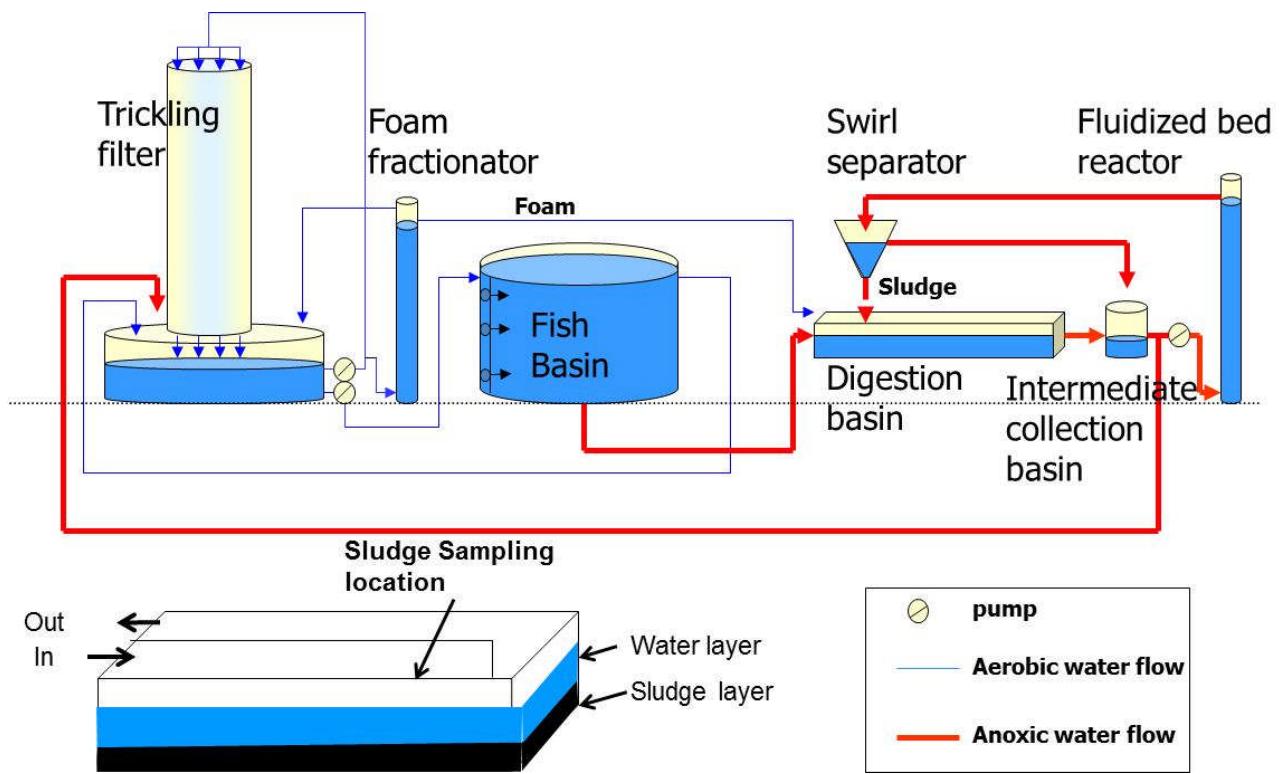
828     Figure 4. Phosphate in sludge: (A) Changes in P speciation with depth in sludge of  
829     the sedimentation basin together with the P speciation of the fish feces which is the  
830     main input of particulate matter to the digestion basin; (B) Polyphosphate  
831     concentrations ( $\mu$ mole/g) with depth.

832     Figure 5. Depth profiles of  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  and  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  of dissolved sulfate for two sludge cores  
833     with depth. Also shown are  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  and  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  of sulfate in the overlying waters and  
834     values for input sources (Red Sea Salt (RSS) and tapwater). On the left hand  
835     diagram the ranges depicted in boxes are for solid phase S species in the core; CRS  
836     = cromium reducible sulfur (monosulfides + pyrite + elemental S), Org S = organic  
837     sulfur;  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  values are also plotted for fish feed.

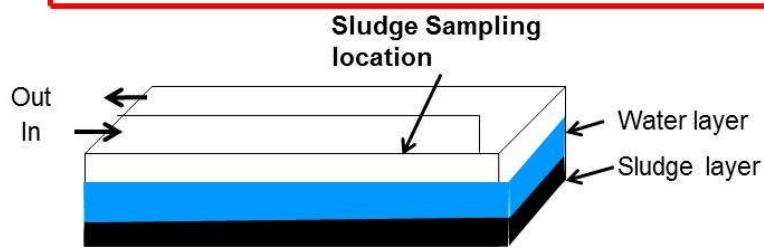
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840 Figure 1:



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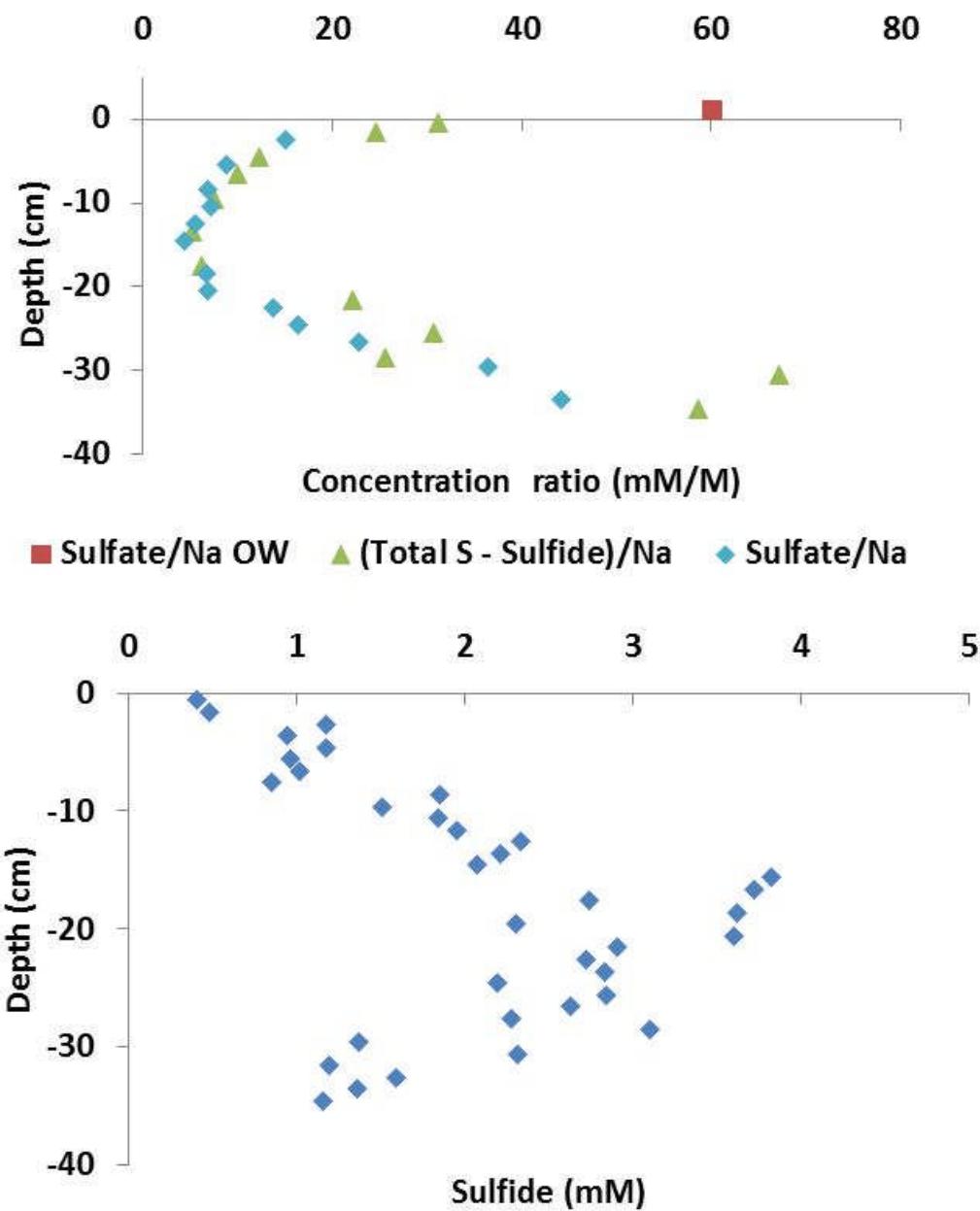
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851 Figure 2:

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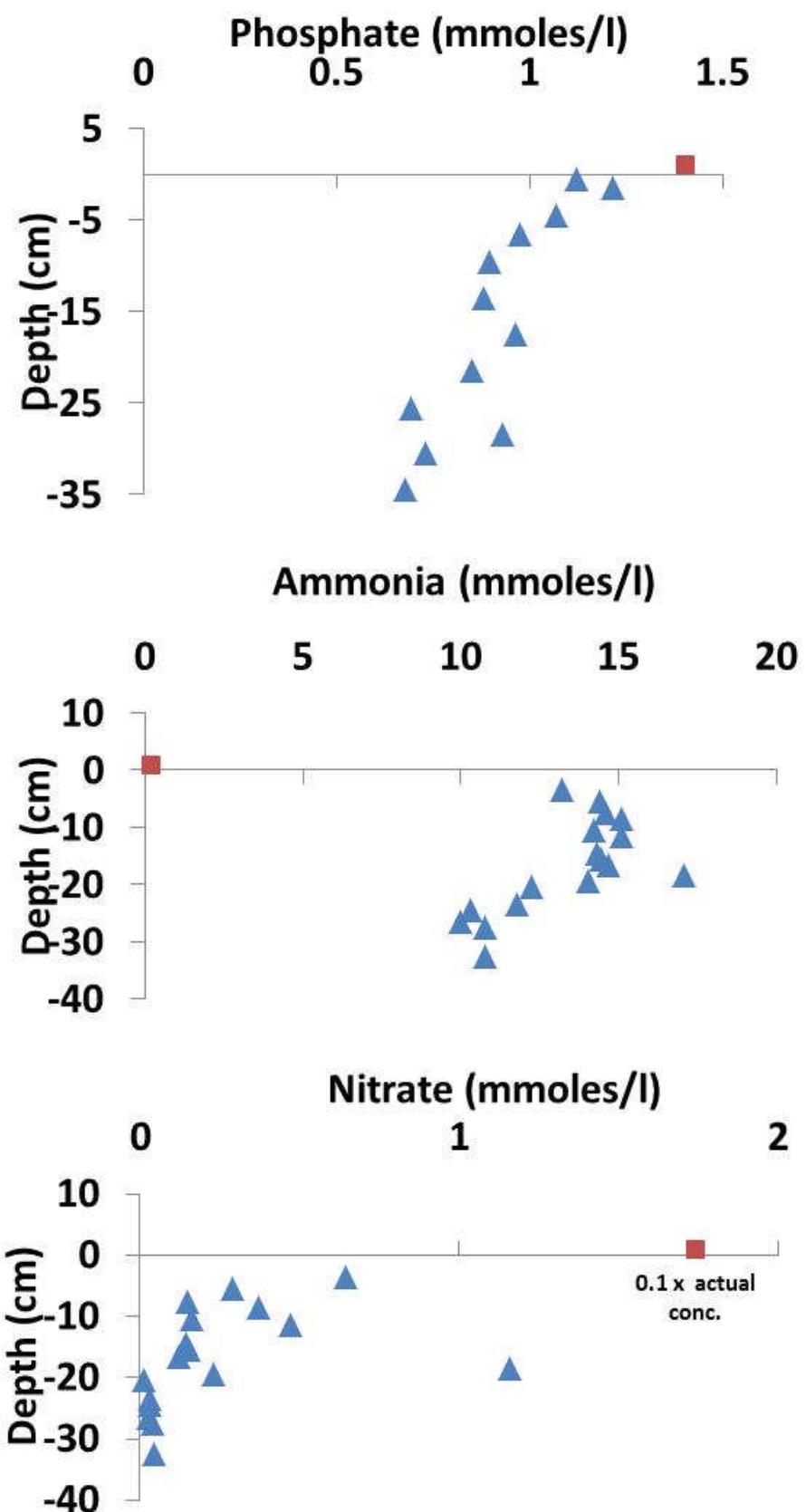


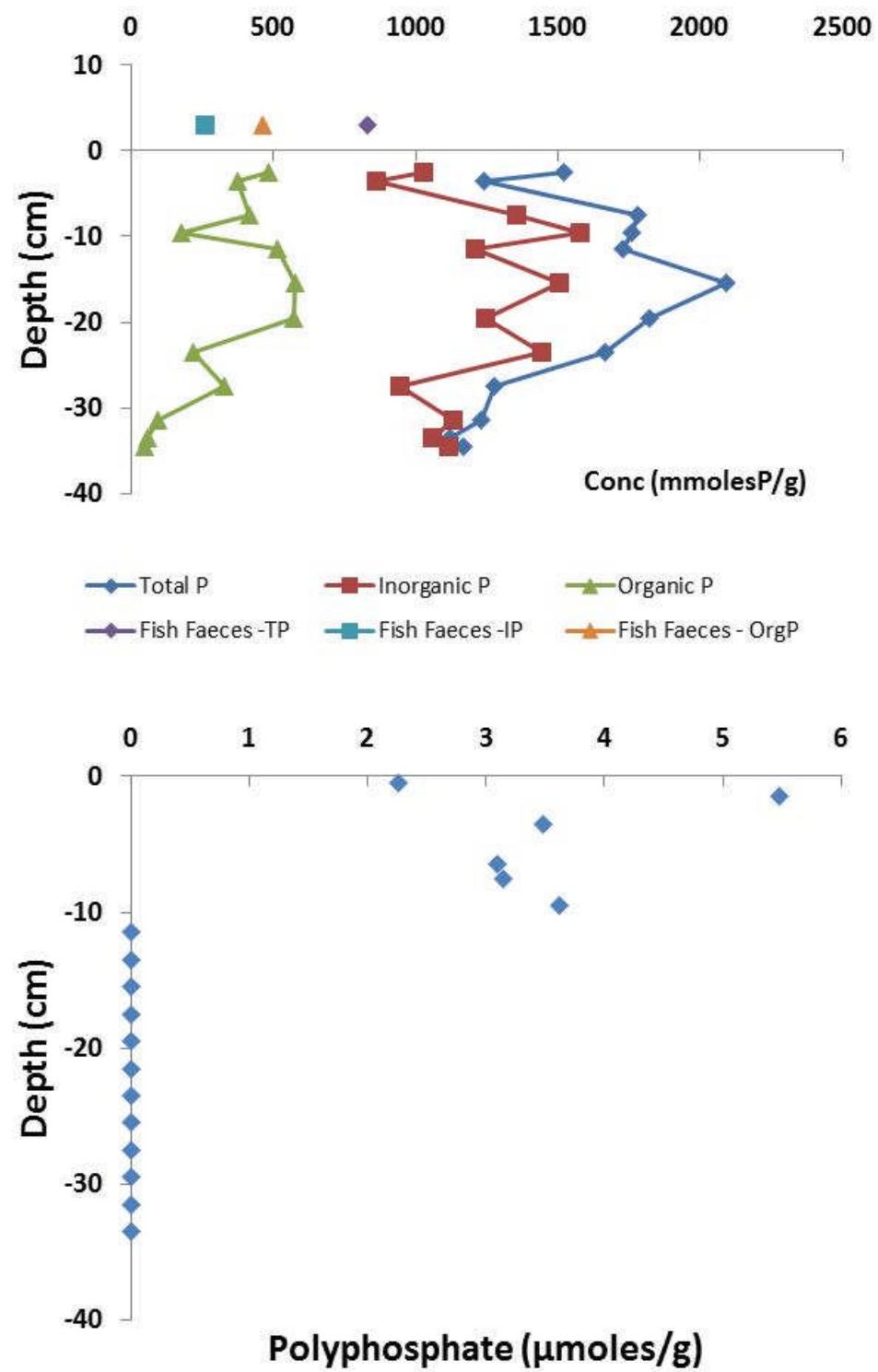
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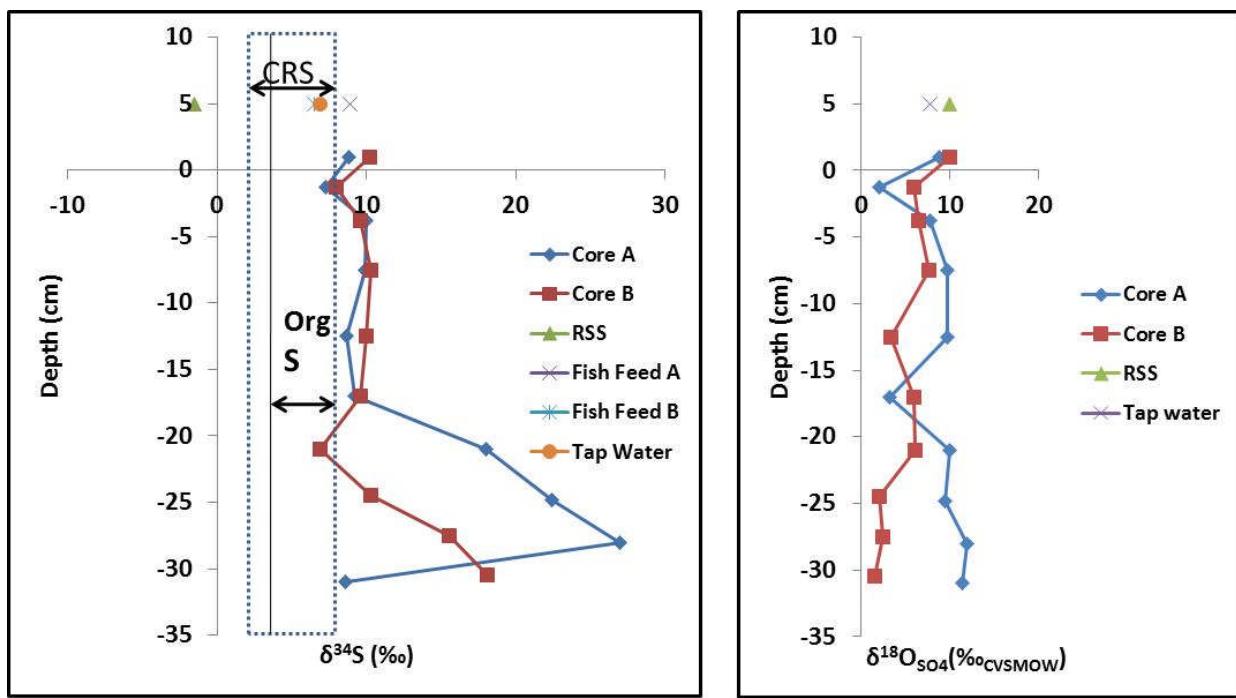
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865 Figure 5

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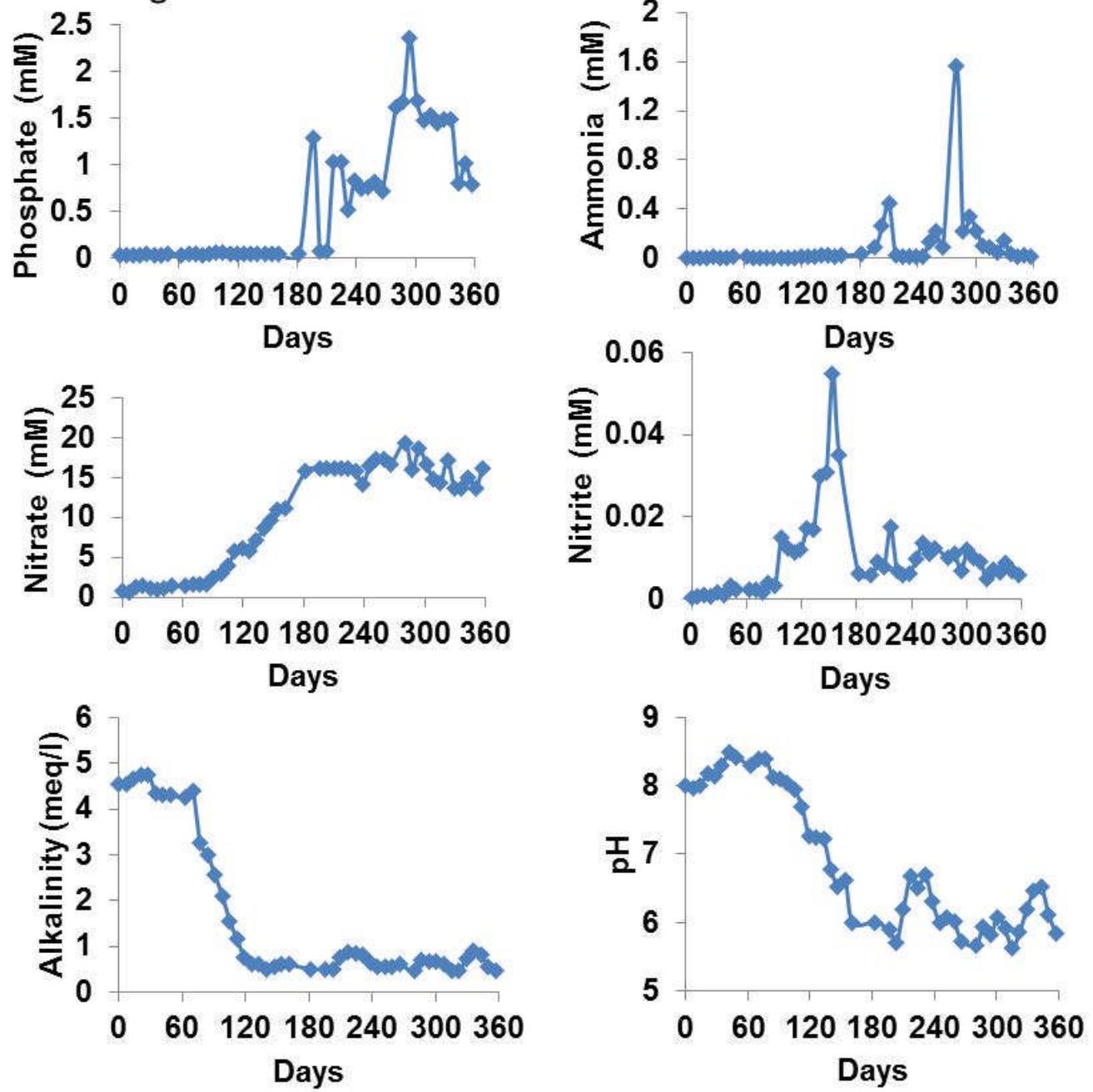
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Figure S1



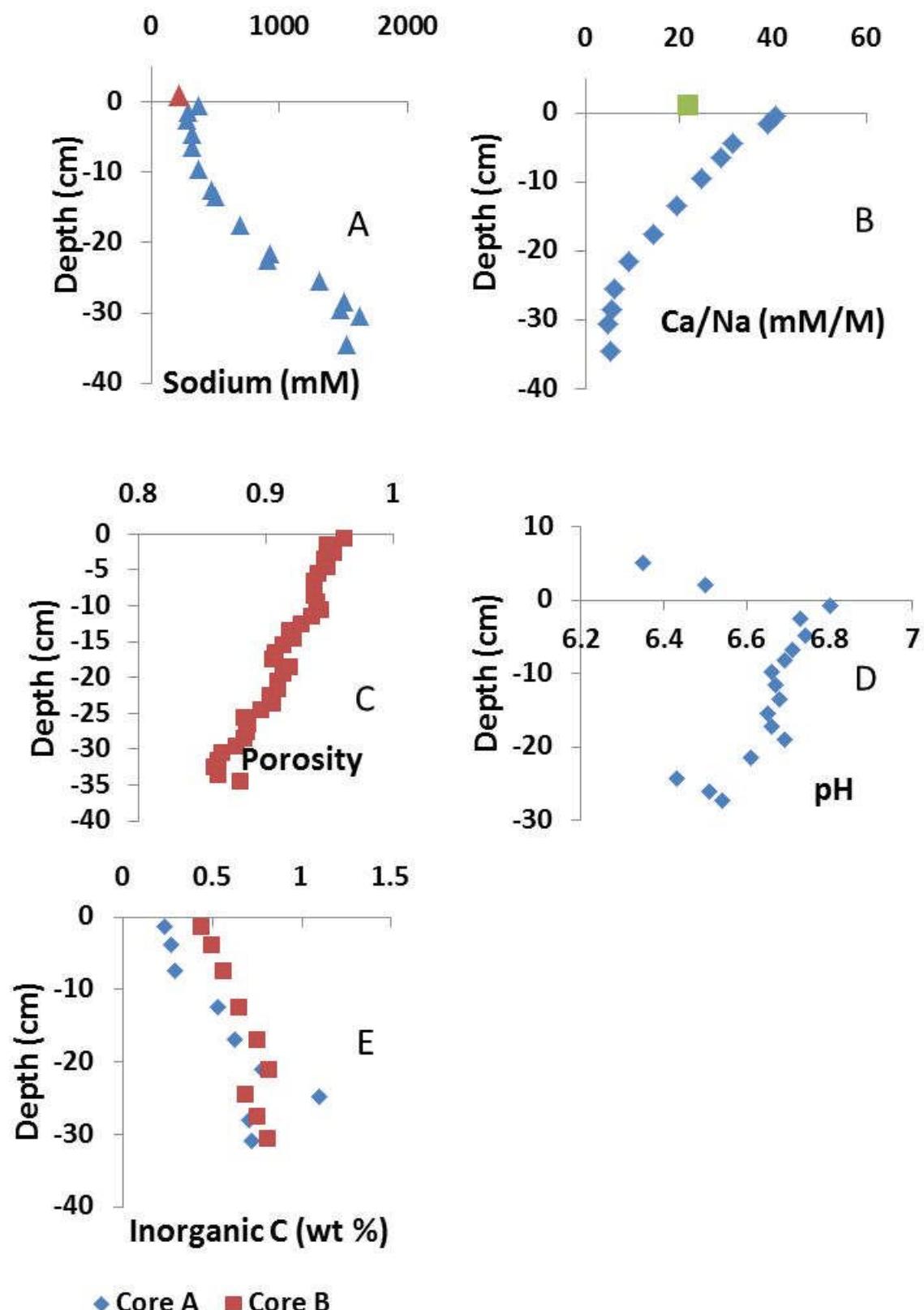
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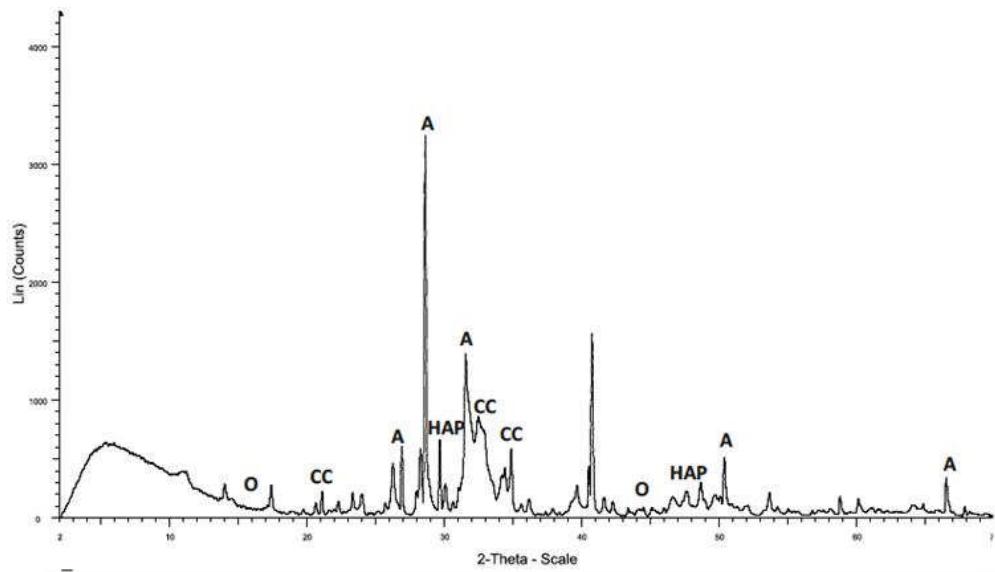
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Figure S2



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Figure S3A



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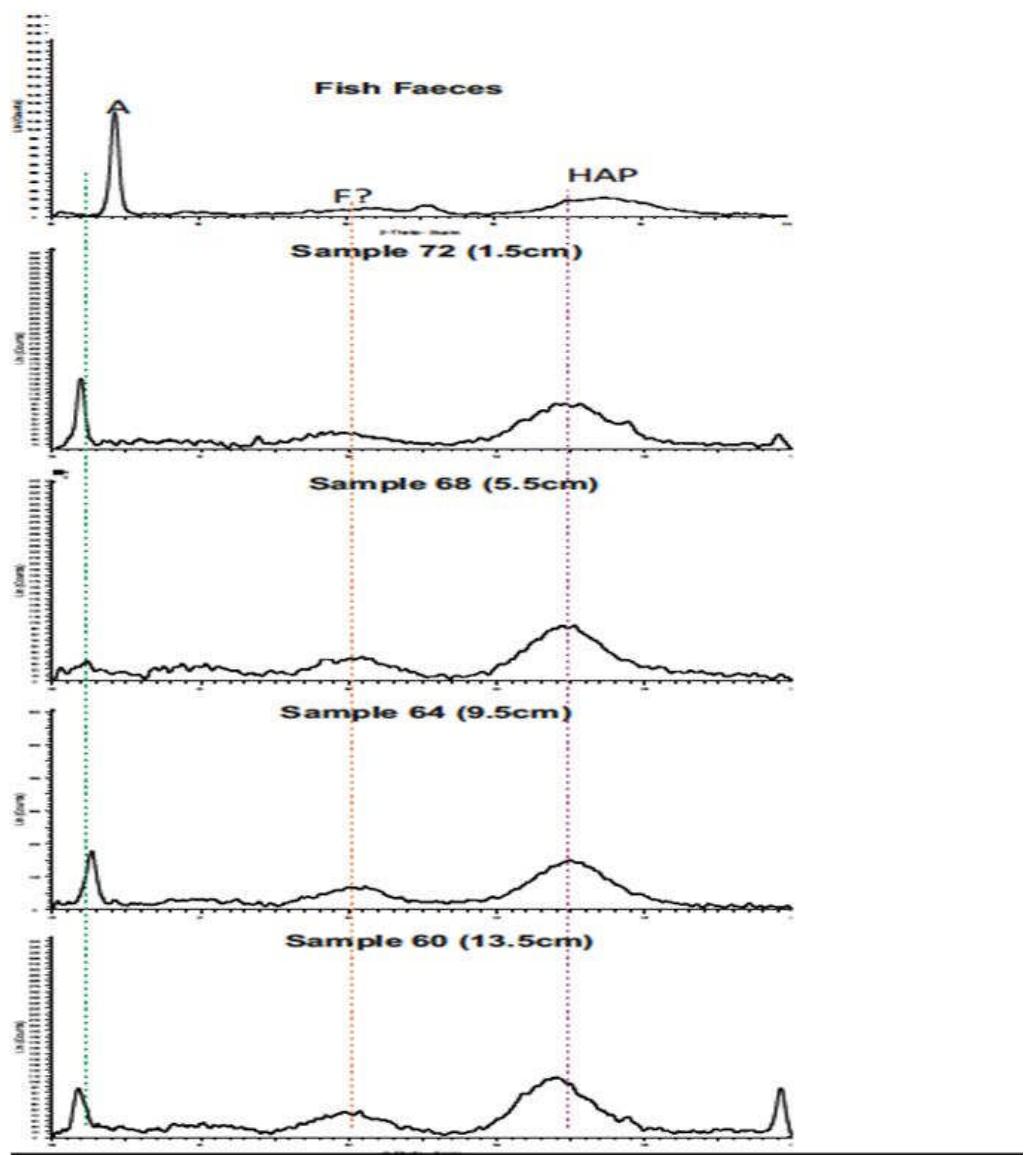
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Figure S3B



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