Aerial observations of sea ice break-up by ship waves

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Abstract. We provide high resolution in situ observations of wave-induced sea ice breakup in the natural environment. In order to obtain such data, an unmanned aerial vehicle was deployed from the Canadian Coast Guard Ship *Amundsen* as it sailed in the vicinity of large ice floes in Baffin Bay and in the St. Lawrence Estuary, Canada. The footage obtained from these experiment was used to obtain the floe size distribution (FSD) and the temporal evolution of the break-up. When expressed as probability density functions weighted by the floe area, FSDs exhibit a modal shape that indicates a preferential size associated to nearly monochromatic wave-induced break-up. FSDs from both experiments are compared to a flexural rigidity length scale, which depends on ice properties, and to the incident wavelength. Results show that the mean floe size increases with ice thickness and that the maximum floe size seems to be dictated by the ice rigidity but also by the wavelength. We also found out that the observed in-ice wavelength is smaller than the estimated incident wavelength, thus suggesting that waves responsible for the break-up obey to the mass loading dispersion and that the break-up advances almost as fast as the wave energy. Moreover, the observed break-up extents show that thicker ice can attenuate wave less than thinner ice. Overall, this dataset provides key information on wave-induced sea ice break-up and highlights the potential for better understanding the physics of natural sea ice in response to waves.

1 Introduction

The marginal ice zone (MIZ) is the ice-covered region that is affected by waves, usually found in the periphery of the polar and subpolar oceans. Reductions of Arctic sea ice thickness and summer extent in response to global warming (Kwok and Rothrock, 2009; Cavalieri and Parkinson, 2012) generally contribute to increase the extent of the MIZ (Horvat and Tziperman, 2015; Squire, 2020). The decrease of the summer minimum extent at a rate of 10% per decade over the last 30 years (Comiso et al., 2008) provides larger fetch to increasingly frequent cyclones (Rinke et al., 2017), which generate a more energetic wave field in the Arctic basin (Smith and Thomson, 2016; Stopa et al., 2016; Li et al., 2019; Thomson and Rogers, 2014; Casas-Prat and Wang, 2020). The increasingly energetic waves may then have greater potential to break-up sea ice thus generating a larger MIZ. That way, changes in sea ice dynamics and in ocean-atmosphere heat exchanges could be observed at the large scale.

By fracturing large pieces of sea ice into smaller ones, waves change the floe size distribution (FSD) locally and thus contribute to an increase in the total lateral sea ice surface being in contact with water. This results in a greater total sea ice perimeter and in the exposure to the atmosphere of water areas that were previously capped under a layer of sea ice. During the melt season, both the increase of the total ice perimeter and the lower albedo caused by the exposure of darker waters

can increase the melt rate (Steele, 1992). On the other hand, enhanced heat loss from the ocean to the atmosphere due to the creation of leads and cracks can promote ice formation in cold conditions.

A fragmented ice cover can also have a significantly different dynamical response to external forces, as discussed by Dumont et al. (2011). Herman et al. (2021) report with great detail, using high resolution satellite imagery, how waves broke up a very large ice floe into much smaller ones, and how easily they drifted and deformed in response to wind, waves and current. Floe size is also important for constraining some parameterizations of wave propagation and attenuation, although it is still unclear whether and how it is significant in reality. For instance, it determines the flexural response of the ice cover, and consequently the possible scattering of wave energy (Squire, 2007). Wave scattering by sea ice can be important especially when floe size is comparable or larger than the wavelength (Kohout and Meylan, 2008; Bennetts et al., 2010; Squire, 2018). It also determines the importance of energy dissipation through inelastic and anelastic strain (Boutin et al., 2018).

The FSD is an undoubtedly important parameter for sea ice dynamics, such that there has been great efforts to quantify it. Yet, to our knowledge, there are no observational studies that directly relate the FSD to the processes that generated it in the natural environment. Most observations come from satellite or aerial imagery of Arctic and Antarctic MIZs where observable floes have an unknown history (Weeks et al., 1980; Rothrock and Thorndike, 1984; Holt and Martin, 2001; Toyota and Enomoto, 2002; Toyota et al., 2006, 2011; Lu et al., 2008; Herman, 2010; Alberello et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2021). After identifying the boundaries of individual ice floes, either manually or using autonomous image processing algorithms, a characteristic length scale is determined and used as a metric for the *floe size*. The FSD is represented either as a number density (ND) or as a probability density function (PDF). The former approach, which is the most widely used, takes the form of a continuous curve relating the number of floes per square kilometers to the floe size in a cumulative or non-cumulative way (see Figure 1 of Stern et al., 2018). In the second approach, floe size categories are given a probability of occurrence based on the frequency of observation in order to represent the FSD as an histogram. It appears from the above-mentioned studies that when represented as a ND, the FSD generally follows a power law of the form $n(d) \propto d^{-\gamma}$ where n is the number of floes having a characteristic floe size d. This type of distribution has been tied to the fractal and possibly scale invariant morphology of fractured sea ice Rothrock and Thorndike (1984), and sometimes presented as a path for understanding the broad characteristics of underlying physical processes (Herman, 2010). A review of the available FSD observations and of the power law is made by Stern et al. (2018). In the end, these observations give a large scale view of the MIZ morphology and can give information on the seasonal evolution of the FSD. However, both the low temporal resolution of satellite images and the sparseness of aerial observations do not allow, for example, to capture the contribution of individual break-up events to the overall FSD.

Large-scale spectral WIMs (Dumont et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2013a, b; Zhang et al., 2016; Bennetts et al., 2017; Boutin et al., 2018; Bateson et al., 2020; Boutin et al., 2020) use a power-law FSD to estimate sea ice morphological properties such as the mean floe size. Such statistical moments are dependent on the shape of the FSD and are further used to parameterize numerous MIZ processes, such as the lateral melt. This allows studying floe-size dependent processes on sea ice dynamics, which represents a necessary step for improving global climate models and climate projections. However, by simplifying and idealizing how MIZ processes affect the shape of the FSD, these models do not represent a physically-based solution of the MIZ dynamics but rather the effects of including a FSD obeying prescribed rules on the evolution of a sea ice cover (Herman,

2017). For example, Dumont et al. (2011), Williams et al. (2013a), Williams et al. (2013b), Boutin et al. (2018), Bateson et al. (2020) and Boutin et al. (2020) all model the influence of break-up by updating the maximum floe size (d_{max}) of a power-law FSD even though there is no empirical evidence showing that this is how fragmentation affects the shape of the FSD.

65   Focusing on the process of break-up itself rather than on its influence on dynamics, Fox and Squire (1991) studied the propagation of strain into an ice sheet. Modeling sea ice as a thin, semi-infinite elastic plate, they obtained that "*the position [of maximum strain] depends crucially on ice thickness and to a lesser extent on wave period*". On the other hand, Herman (2017), by modeling the ice cover as a strip of discrete cubic-shaped grains being linked by elastic bonds, obtained that "*breaking of a continuous ice sheet by waves produces floes of almost equal size, dependent on thickness and strength of the ice but not on the*

70   *characteristics of the incoming waves*". By coupling a two-dimensional flexural breakup model to a three-dimensional model of wave scattering by circular floes, (Montiel and Squire, 2017) found out that either a modal or bimodal FSD was generated from wave-induced sea ice breakup, thus also suggesting that a preferential size is generated from breakup. More recently, Mokus and Montiel (2021) created a 2-D hydrodynamic model for wave-induced sea ice breakup which combines linear wave theory and viscoelastic sea ice rheology in order to compute the scattering of wave by sea ice floes. Using an empirical strain

75   threshold to define the floe size resulting from breakup, they obtained that the FSD follows a lognormal distribution under realistic wave forcings thus demonstrating that a preferential size is indeed generated by the process. They also show that the median floe size evolves with both wave period and ice thickness, result that partly contrasts with the findings of Fox and Squire (1991) and Herman (2017) in which the FSD is independent of the sea state.

    In the end, there seems to be a consensus from process-based model studies towards the fact that a preferential size is

80   generated by wave-induced sea ice breakup and that the observed power law does not come out from this process alone. However, it is still unclear what the respective contributions of sea ice rigidity and wave properties are in determining the preferential size and the shape of the FSD. The question remains as to whether these theoretical conclusions are supported by field observations.

    Although there has been significant efforts to model the break-up process, only few studies have approached the problem

85   from an observational perspective (e.g. Langhorne et al., 1998; Kohout et al., 2014). Furthermore, little attention has been put towards the analysis of the resulting FSD and its possible connection to sea ice flexural rigidity and to waves properties. The first anecdotal observations of wave-induced breakup were reported in Squire (1995) where he states that "*the width of the strips [...] created by the process is remarkably consistent and appears [...] to be rather insensitive to the spectral structure of the sea but highly dependent on ice thickness*". In other words, he observed that the distance between successive cracks

90   generated by break-up seems to be constant and independent from the sea state but rather dependent on the material properties of sea ice. This remark qualitatively supports the conclusions of Fox and Squire (1991) and Herman (2017), but quantitative analysis of observational data is required to fully test these hypotheses. More recently, Herman et al. (2018) carried out break-up experiments in large tanks where waves were generated artificially to break apart a layer of laboratory-grown ice with the goal of testing the conclusions of Herman (2017) and Squire (1995) on the independence of the break-up pattern on wave

95   properties. Herman et al. (2018) compared the mean sizes obtained from the experiments to a theoretical fracture distance x^* derived by Mellor (1983), which is solely dependent on the flexural rigidity of the ice. For a group of experiment (group A

test 2060), the value of x^* was close to the mean size which lead Herman et al. (2018) to conclude that "*the floe size resulting from breaking by waves depends not on the incoming wavelength, but rather on the mechanical properties of the ice itself*". Unfortunately, a factor of $\frac{1}{2}$ was omitted in the mathematical expression of x^* (as is demonstrated in section. 5.1) so that this conclusion needs to be revisited. Hence, observations of wave-induced sea ice break up in the natural environment are needed since available laboratory and field studies do not paint a complete picture of the respective role of sea ice and wave properties on determining the shape and extent of the FSD arising from this process.

Few field studies about natural break-up have been made yet mainly because the MIZ is an arduous area to sample directly from. It is indeed hard to be in the MIZ at the right place and at the right time, with good but not too harsh weather conditions for break-up to happen, and with the right apparatus and available people to measure all relevant variables during a natural break-up event. Indeed it is possible to study wave-ice interactions in the laboratory but it is not clear if the results directly apply to the natural environment owing mostly to the complex life history of naturally-grown sea ice compared to the more homogeneous growth conditions of the laboratory.

Rather than waiting for the stars to be aligned in the natural environment, we chose to create waves with a ship in order to simulate breakup events. With the help of a unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV or drone) and image processing, the breakup experiments conducted in the Gulf of Saint-Lawrence (GSL) and in the northern Baffin Bay (NBB) allowed us to measure the outcome of small period waves breaking naturally grown sea ice. While no apparatus measuring curvature of the ice or incident wave properties were successfully deployed, it was possible to extract information about the resulting FSD, the breakup speed and its extent. When compared to thin elastic plate theory, these results give insight on the underlying physics of wave-induced sea ice breakup.

2   Methods

The setup for the experiments conducted to obtain FSDs resulting from wave-induced breakup is as follows. First, a large level ice floe having a side exposed to open water is identified. Then a UAV is deployed and positioned above the ice edge to record high resolution footage of the break-up event. Finally, the Canadian Coast Guard Ship (CCGS) *Amundsen* cruises near the floe edge at a high and constant speed such that waves are generated in the vicinity of the ice. Two experiments are carried out, the first one in February 2019 in the GSL and the second in August 2019 in NBB. In both experiments, no wind-generated wave nor swell were present, hence the observed break-up can only be attributed to ship-generated waves. The use of a ship for these experiments provides a better management of weather conditions for drone deployments while still allowing to study break-up in the natural environment. Such a setup also allows to have no constraint on the location of deployments and to search for the right sea ice to break. A DJI Mavic 2 Pro is used for both experiments because of its autonomy, resilience to cold temperature, hovering stability and high resolution camera. The camera has a $65.5°$ field of view and a sensor that record photos at a resolution of 20 Mpx and 4K videos. The camera is factory-calibrated by DJI. While its height relative to the takeoff location is obtained by a barometric sensor, it uses both GPS and GLONASS for geopositioning, hovering in a still position

and correcting its altitude. The error on its vertical and horizontal position are respectively of 0.5 and 1.5 m. The specifics of each experiment are described below.

2.1 Gulf of St. Lawrence

The first experiment was conducted in the northwestern Gulf of St. Lawrence (GSL), Canada, at (49.584°N, 66.152°W) on 7 February 2019 during clear sky conditions and air temperature of $T_{air} = -7.2$°C. According to the ice chart produced by the Canadian Ice Service (CIS) on the same date, there was 9+/10 of grey and grey-white ice, between 10 and 30 cm-thick.
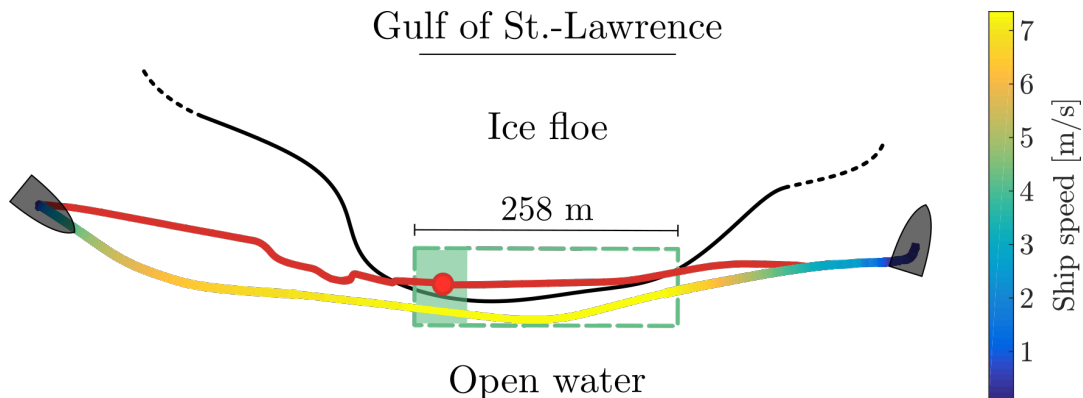
Figure 1. Schematic representation of the experiment conducted in the GSL. The grey shape represents the ship. The red and blue-to-yellow lines are respectively the UAV and ship GPS tracks. The red dot is the position where the drone filmed the break-up from a fixed position, and the filled green rectangle is its field of view. The dashed green rectangle is the area covered by the panoramic picture obtained by taking multiple pictures of the resulting broken ice (Figure 7). The black line shows the approximate location of the floe edge.

Figure 1 shows the schematic of the GSL experiment. The *CCGS Amundsen* accelerated and reached an average speed of 7.25 m s^{-1} less than 50 m from the region of interest, thereby generating a wave train with an amplitude that was sufficient to break up the ice floe. The ship speed over the portion of the trajectory that generated the observed waves remained relatively uniform, with a standard deviation of 0.08 m s^{-1}. Oblique sunlight conditions allowed us quantifying the wavelength, the period and the direction of the waves (see. section 3.2). Unfortunately, we could not deploy any wave sensor on the ice or in the water so that we can't quantify wave amplitude during the experiment. Using UAV's mean altitude (94.7 ± 0.5 m) and the camera field of view, a metric conversion factor of 3.1 cm px^{-1} is obtained with an uncertainty of ca. 0.01 cm px^{-1} mostly due to altitude variations.

2.2 Northern Baffin Bay

The second experiment was conducted in northern Baffin Bay (NBB) at (77.883°N, −77.341°W) on August 5 2019 in cloudy conditions and with air temperature of $T_{air} = 4.9$°C. According to the ice chart produced by the Canadian Ice Service (CIS) on this day, ice concentration was 4/10 and the ice thickness was identified to be between 30 and over 120 cm as thin and thick

first year ice were indicated to be present. The floe chosen for the experiment consisted in a plate of heavily rotten first year ice of about 540-m wide and more than 2-km long. The thickness was assessed on some floes resulting from the experiment using a meter stick and was measured to be between 40 and 60 cm.

Northern Baffin Bay
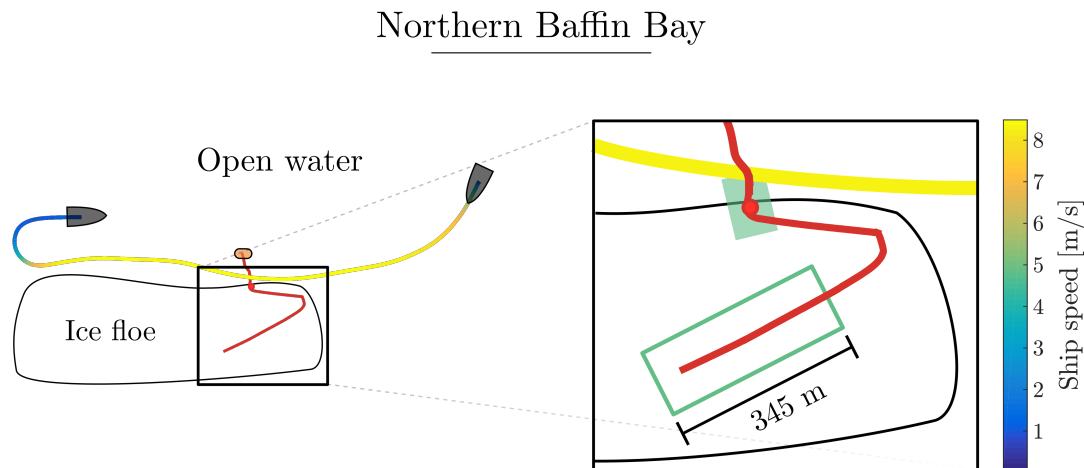
Figure 2. Schematic representation of the NBB experiment. The grey shape represents the ship and the orange ellipse the zodiac. The red and blue-to-yellow lines are respectively the UAV and ship GPS tracks. The solid green rectangle is the area of the panoramic picture selected for analysis (Figure 8). The approximate shape of the ice floe is also shown.
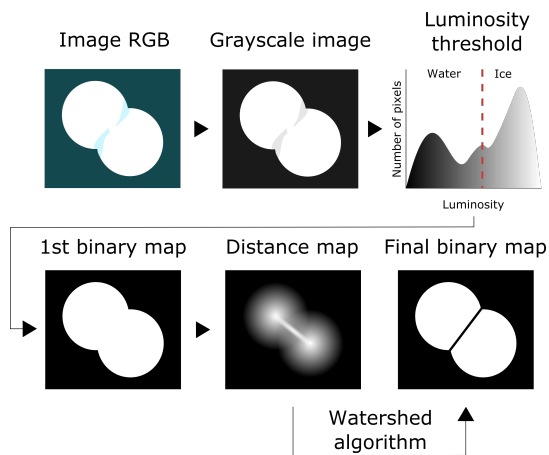
Figure 3. Steps of the image processing algorithm used for the boundary identification of floes in the GSL experiment.

Figure 2 describes the experimental setup in NBB. The average speed of *CCGS Amundsen* evaluated during its passage near the floe is 8.37 m s^{-1} with a standard deviation of 0.05 m s^{-1}. In this experiment, an attempt was made to deploy wave buoys on the ice with the zodiac before waves hit and fractured the floe. Two SKIb wave buoys (Guimarães et al., 2018) were installed on the floe 2 to 3 m of the edge and roughly 10 m apart in order to measure the wavelength. The zodiac then went at a safe

distance from the ice floe to launch the UAV. Unfortunately, overwash from the primary wave pushed and flipped the buoys

155 such that their data is unusable. The propagation of flexural waves in the ice floe could not be observed visually due to the flat

lighting conditions of an overcast sky. No in-ice wave properties could be measured. The UAV took pictures of the fragmented

ice floe after the passage of the waves. These pictures were used to generate an orthomosaic picture of a portion of the broken

floe using the open source software Open Drone Map (ODM), with a resolution of 5 cm px^{-1}.

3 Image processing

160 ### 3.1 Sea ice segmentation
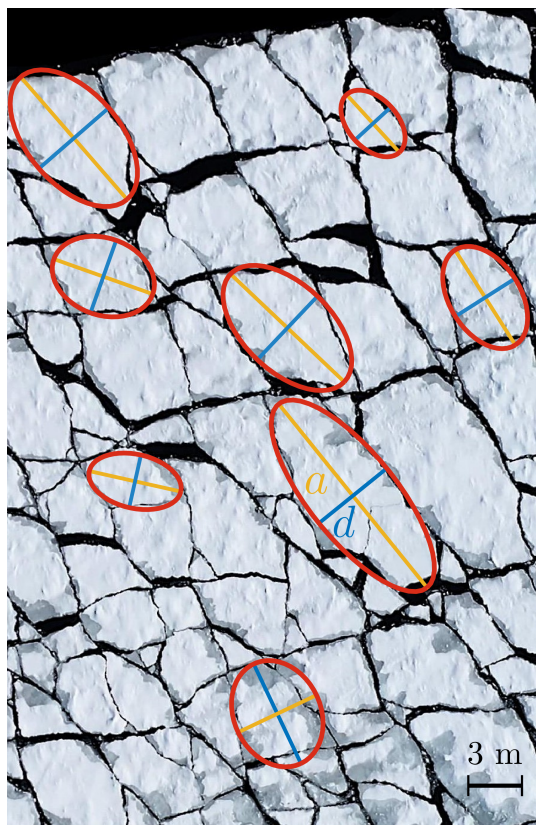
Figure 4. Sample of the ellipses fitted on the ice floes by Matlab. Yellow and blue lines indicate the major and minor axes of length a and d, respectively.

The detection of sea ice floes in each individual video frames consists of a series of steps that are illustrated in Figure 3. First the RGB image is converted to grayscale, with values from 0 to 255. From the histogram of the grayscale image, an intensity threshold separating dark water pixels from bright ice pixels is used to create a binary images where 1 indicates ice

and 0 indicates water. For many reasons, this binary map does not perfectly separate ice and water, and each ice floe from their neighbors. The presence of slush or very small ice fragments in between floes can merge many floes into a larger one. Conversely, wet ice can generate holes in floes. To circumvent these imperfections, various segmentation algorithms have been developed and applied in similar contexts, namely the morphology gradient (Zhang et al., 2012), the watershed transform (Meyer, 1994; Zhang et al., 2013) or the gradient vector flow (Zhang and Skjetne, 2014, 2015). We refer the reader to Zhang and Skjetne (2018) for a good review of image processing methods that are applicable to sea ice segmentation.

Here, the method that gives the best results is the watershed transform (Meyer, 1994). It uses the Euclidean distance transform of the first binary map to generate a topographic map for each individual object. When two objects are in contact, the two watersheds connect through a *valley*. If this valley is deeper than some chosen threshold depth, then the two watersheds are segmented across that valley and the original floe is separated in two. This method can sometimes generate new floes, under-segment or over-segment existing floes (Zhang and Skjetne, 2018), but it is possible to circumvent these issues with fine adjustments. To avoid over-segmentation, local minima in the distance transform are removed. To avoid under-segmentation, successive morphological erosion and dilation steps are applied to separate floes that are in contact. Finally, only objects with an isoperimetric ratio $\Gamma = P^2/4\pi A$ smaller or equal to 3.5 are identified as floes for further analysis.

Similarly to Herman et al. (2018), floes having a horizontal dimension that is close to their thickness are removed, since they can't be generated by flexural failure. In the GSL experiment, $h = 20 \pm 10$ cm. Thus, floes having a surface area $A \leq 900$ cm^2 are removed. For the NBB experiment, $h = 50 \pm 10$ cm and floes with $A \leq 3600$ cm^2 are removed. A thorough visual examination of the final binary image of the GSL experiment shows that it corresponds well to the initial image so that morphological properties of sea ice floes can be extracted from it. For the NBB experiment, the omnipresence of large melt ponds at the surface of the floes made it impossible to detect efficiently sea ice boundaries using the watershed transform method. Images were thus manually segmented. Using the Matlab Image Processing Toolbox, numerous morphological properties of sea ice floes are extracted. For instance, each floe is fitted to an ellipse of major axis length a, minor axis length d (Fig. 4), which is indicative of the distance between wave-induced cracks. Following Squire (1995) and Herman et al. (2018), the minor axis length is the chosen floe length scale as it represents the characteristic break-up length scale.

3.2 Break-up evolution

Using drone footage in the GSL, it was possible to estimate the wavelength and the wave period due to favorable lighting conditions provided by the oblique sunlight. The in-ice wavelength λ is obtained from a visual estimation of the distance between two consecutive wave crests. The period T is obtained from a Fourier transform of the time series of the mean brightness in a region of interest. (dashed rectangle in Figure 5). The wave phase speed is then obtained by $c_p = \lambda/T$.

The speed of the break-up front is evaluated using an automated and unsupervised algorithm that identifies the furthest fracture point along each of the colored lines in the direction of wave propagation shown in Figure 5. The algorithm computes the brightness as the mean of the image RGB values and finds the furthest pixel having a brightness value under 90, the maximum being 255. This threshold is chosen manually after verification with a limited number of frames, and the algorithm
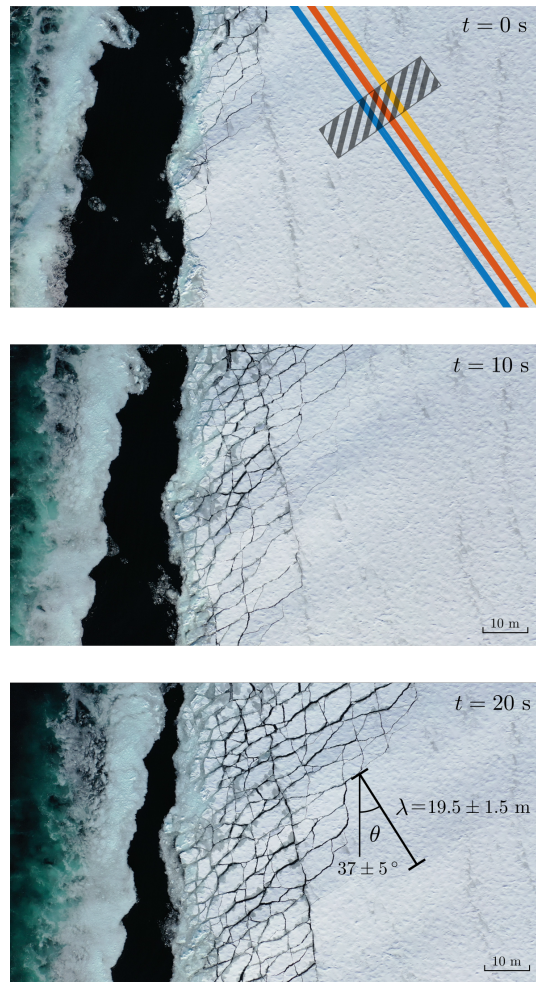
Figure 5. Snapshots of the wave-induced break-up experiment at $t = 0$, $t = 10$ s and $t = 20$ s. Waves are visible in the ice prior to break-up with $\lambda = 19.5 \pm 1.5$ m. Colored polygons in the top panel were used to calculate the break-up speed, and the dashed rectangle is the region of interest (ROI) used for the estimation of wave period.

is applied every 0.2 s. The break-up speed is then obtained as the slope of the linear regression relating fracture distance to elapsed time.

4 Results

4.1 Waves and break-up

Table 1 presents a summary of the physical parameters that were measured and estimated in both experiments. In the GSL experiment, the wave period measured from brightness variations in the UAV footage is $T = 4.0 \pm 0.2$ s (Fig. 5). The in-ice

wavelength is $\lambda_{\mathrm{ice}} = 19.5 \pm 1.5$ m. To estimate the incident wavelength and the in-ice wavelength in the NBB experiment, for which no direct measurements were made, we revert to the first order linear Kelvin ship wake theory (Thomson, 1887). This

205   theory states that the wavelength generated by point source moving in a straight line at a speed U is

$$\lambda^* = \frac{2\pi U^2}{g} \cos^2 \vartheta \tag{1}$$

where ϑ is the wave angle with respect to the ship heading and g is the gravitational acceleration. Waves generated from a moving ship can have any angle between 0 and 90° but waves of maximum amplitude (a_{max}) propagate at an angle of $\vartheta\big|_{a_{\mathrm{max}}} = \sin^{-1}\left(1/\sqrt{3}\right) \simeq 35.26°$ (Soomere, 2007). Since this value is within the uncertainty range of our measurement in

210   the GSL we use this angle for the computation of the incident wavelength for both experiments are thus $\lambda^*_{\mathrm{GSL}} = 22.4$ m and $\lambda^*_{\mathrm{NBB}} = 29.9$ m. Using the deep water dispersion relation, the wave periods are then valued to $T_{\mathrm{GSL}} = 3.8$ s and $T_{\mathrm{NBB}} = 4.4$ s. These values are going to be useful later in the discussion. Note that for this theory to apply it requires that the sea state is stationary and that the ship speed is constant, which is the case in both experiments.

    Figure 5 shows snapshots of wave-induced break-up in the GSL experiment. Flexure-induced cracks are parallel to the wave

215   phase plane, which propagates at an angle of 37°±5 with respect to the ship heading. The three colored step-like curves on figure 6 show the position of the furthest crack along the corresponding line shown on figure 5 as a function of time. The break-up speed is obtained as the mean slope of the three linear regression, with a 95% confidence interval, and is 1.86 ± 0.04 m s^{-1}. This value is approximately 2.5 times slower than the measured wave phase speed $c_p = \lambda/T \simeq 5.0 \pm 0.8$ m s^{-1}.
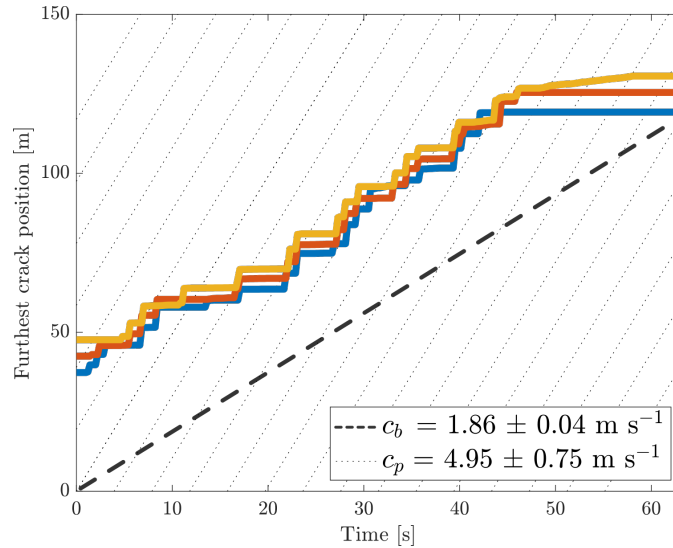
Figure 6. Temporal evolution of the furthest crack location relative to the floe edge at $x = 0$ along the three colored polygons shown in Fig. 5. Dotted lines indicate position of wave crests while the slope of the bold dashed line is obtained from the linear regression.

    In the GSL, the ice fractured up to 60 m from the ice edge leading to a partial break-up of the floe. In the NBB experiment,

220   the 540 m-wide floe was completely broken up by the ship-generated waves. Figure 7 shows the breakup that has been captured

Table 1. Wave and ice parameter values measured, estimated or calculated for both experiments, with associated uncertainties. Values in parentheses indicate extreme values whenever they are not equidistant from the mean.

Parameter	Symbol	GSL	NBB
Ship speed	U	7.24 ± 0.08 m s^{-1}	8.35 ± 0.05 m s^{-1}
Wave period	T	4.0 ± 0.2 s	4.4 ± 0.2 s[a]
Incident wavelength	$\lambda^\star$	22.4 ± 0.5 m[b]	29.9 ± 0.5 m[b]
In-ice wavelength	λ	19.5 ± 1.5 m	24.2 ± 1.4 m[c]
Incident wave amplitude	a_0	0.25 ± 0.15	0.35 ± 0.15
Ice floe thickness	h	0.3 ± 0.1 m	0.5 ± 0.1 m
Air temperature	T_{air}	$-7.2\,°$C	$+4.9\,°$C
Ice temperature	T_{ice}	$-7 \pm 2\,°$C	$-3 \pm 1\,°$C
Ice salinity	S_{ice}	5 ± 1	3 ± 1
Brine volume	v_b	$0.04\,(0.02, 0.06)$	$0.06\,(0.03, 0.10)$
Break-up extent	L_{MIZ}	60 m	> 560 m

[a] Estimated using the Kelvin theory Eq. (1) and the deep water dispersion relation $\omega^2 = gk$.

[b] Estimated using Eq. (1) with $\vartheta\big|_{a_{\max}}$ and respective ship speeds U.

[c] Estimated using the mass loading dispersion relation Eq. (16).

by the UAV shortly after the passage of the ship (parallel to the horizontal axis of the of the image) in the GSL. Figure 8 shows only a part of the broken-up floe in NBB, where the floe was too large to be mapped entirely. In both images, one can distinguish that the largest floes have a preferential size, that the crack pattern is quite homogeneous and that floes have various sizes and shapes with sharp corners. Those are clear signs indicating that they have been broken-up by the bending of surface waves.

225 **4.2   FSD as a number density**

To quantify the morphology of sea ice floes, the floe size distribution is first computed using the number density as it is done in most studies for decades (e.g. Rothrock and Thorndike, 1984; Toyota et al., 2006; Herman et al., 2021). The metric used as the floe size is the minor axis d since it is a good approximation of the distance between cracks which represents the length scale generated by the breakup. To build the distribution, we first determine a certain number M of size categories d_i, $i = 1 \dots M$. 230 To make sure that the result remains independent of the binning, we follow the normalization proposed by Stern et al. (2018) and set the number of bins $M = \sqrt{N}$, N being the total number of floes. The constant bin width Δd is set equal to the size range divided by the number of bins, i.e. $\Delta d = (d_{\max} - d_{\min})/M$. The probability density function computed from the number density, referred to as the NFSD, is then given by

$$P_N(d_i) = \frac{n_i}{N \Delta d}, \qquad \sum_{i=1}^{M} P_N(d_i)\Delta d = 1, \tag{2}$$
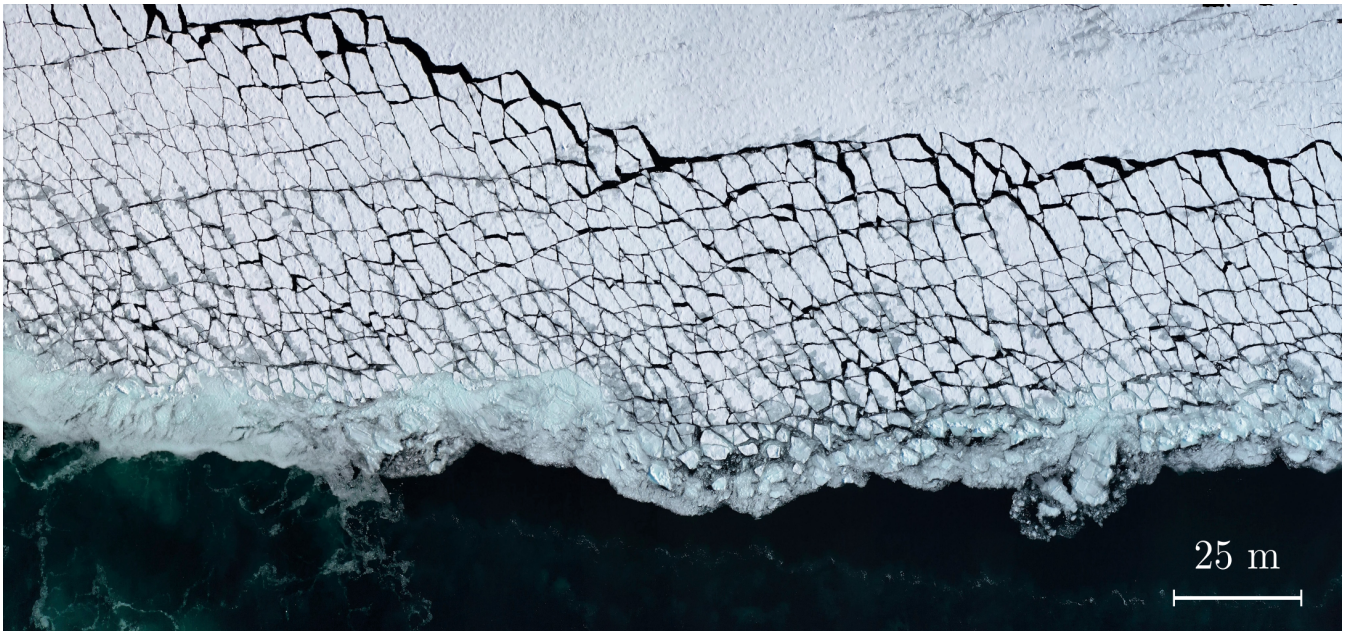
Figure 7. Break-up resulting from the GSL experiment. The ship sailed along the horizontal axis of the image.
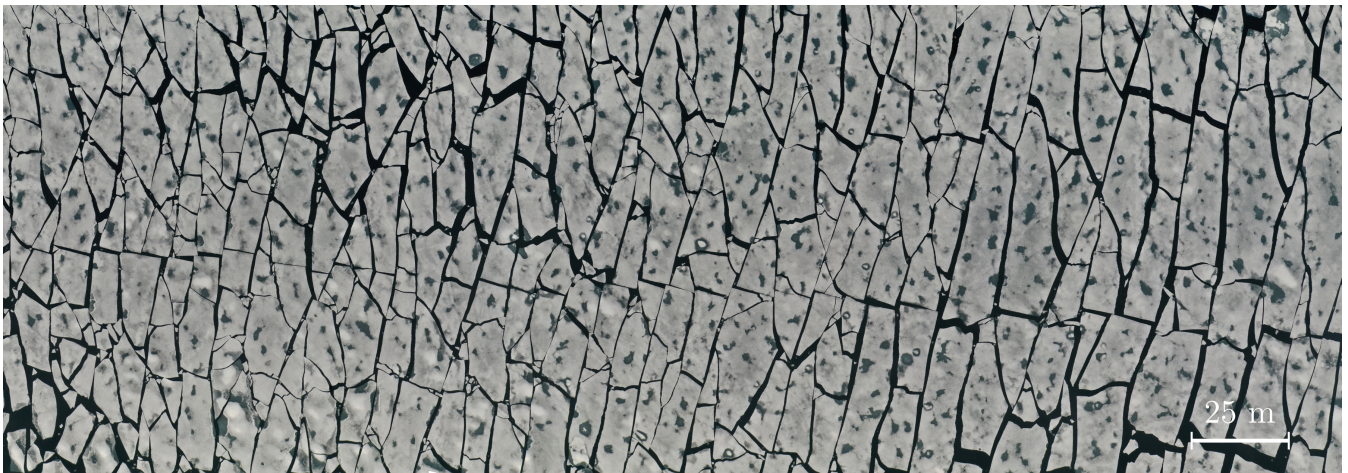
Figure 8. Partial view of the break-up resulting from the NBB experiment, corresponding to the green rectangle in Figure 2.

235 Figure 9 shows the NFSDs resulting from both experiments. The GSL NFSD exhibits a modal shape with a mean value of
2.8 m and a standard deviation of 1.2 m. The NBB NFSD on the other hand has a bimodal shape with a mean value of 5.9 m
and a standard deviation of 3.4 m. It is interesting to see that the NBB FSD as a shape similar to what Herman et al. (2018)
obtained in a laboratory wave-induced ice fracture experiment (more precisely in their test A 2060), which was interpreted as
the sum of a power-law and a Gaussian distribution. However, when looking at Figs. 7 and 8, one can see that the area is mostly

covered by large floes of similar size and a large number of very small ice fragments filling the cracks between the larger floes. The underestimation of the probabilities of finding a large floe in Fig. 8 comes from the fact that the NFSD weighs each floe equally, whereas a visual assessment puts more weight on larger floes because they cover a larger portion of the image than small floes.
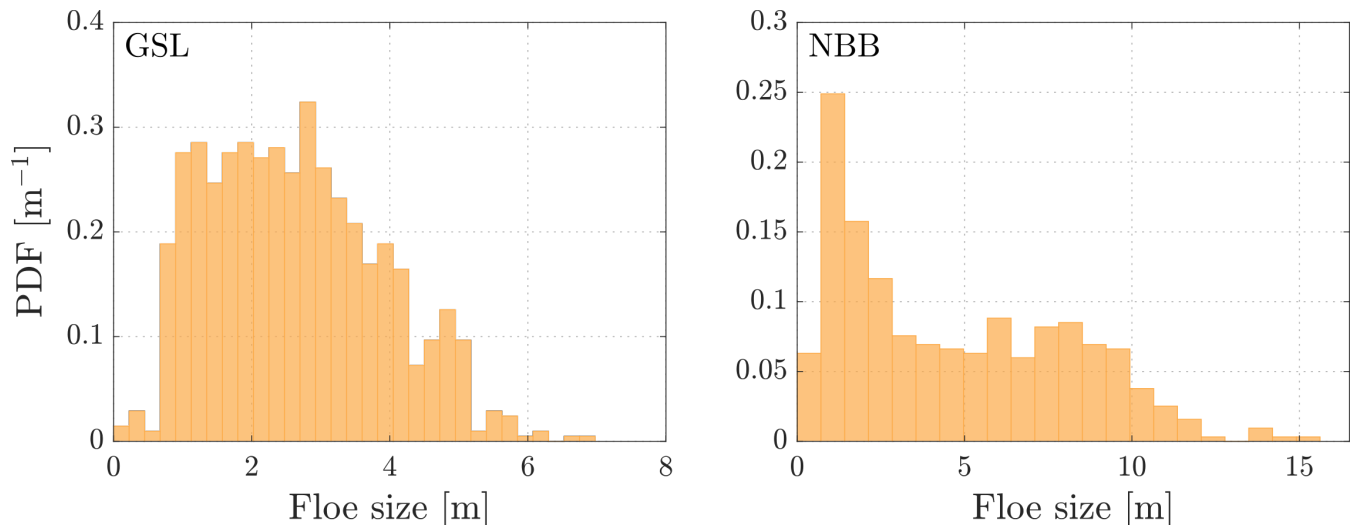
Figure 9. Number-based probability density functions of floe size (NFSDs) resulting from the break-up experiments.

4.3 Using the partial aerial concentration to compute the FSD

Let A be the total area covered by ice floes such that $A = \sum_{k=1}^{N} a_k$, with a_k the area of floe $k = 1, ..., N$. Here, we consider that the probability for a given ice pixel in the image to belong to floe k to be directly related its the partial aerial concentration a_k/A. Hence, the bigger the floe, the higher the probability. Following the same procedure as for the number-based PDF for the binning, the probabilities are obtained by

$$P_A(d_i) = \frac{1}{\Delta d} \sum_{j=1}^{n_i} \frac{a_j}{A}, \qquad \sum_i P_A(d_i)\Delta d = 1, \tag{3}$$

where a_j is the area of the jth floe belonging to the ith size bin. This representation is not only compatible with a visual evaluation of an arrangement of flat plates on a surface, it is also compatible with the definition of the ice thickness distribution (ITD) that is widely used in sea ice models to characterize the state of the ice cover over a given area (Hunke and Lipscomb, 2010). More recently, the FSD has also been defined that way in a large-scale coupled wave-ice model (Boutin et al., 2020). Using this approach to build the FSD thus makes its shape directly translatable from observations to models like the one of Boutin et al. (2020), which, at the moment, used the NSFD shape since it is the only available from observations. The FSD computed as partial aerial concentrations will be referred to as the AFSD in the following.

Figure 10 shows the AFSD for both experiments. By comparing the right panels of Figures 9 and 10 to Figure 8, it is clear that the AFSD is more coherent with what can be seen in orthomosaic than the NFSD does. The modal floe size for the GSL experiment is slightly shifted towards larger values with the AFSD (Fig. 10) compared to the NFSD (Fig. 9). It is worth noting here that the AFSD is much more robust to segmentation errors than the NFSD, since small artifact floes generated during the segmentation process are given a much smaller weight.
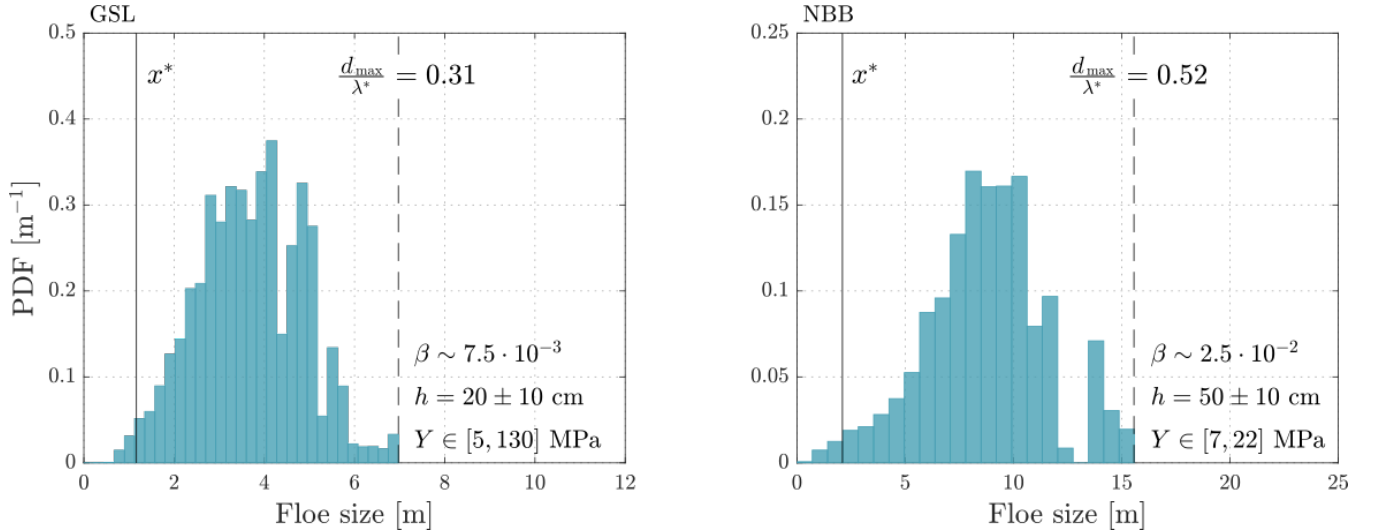
Figure 10. Area-based floe size distributions (AFSD) resulting from the break-up experiments computed with Eq. (3). The maximal floe size is compared to λ^*, the wavelength of the highest amplitude ship-generated wave estimated using Eq. (1), and to x^*, the flexural rigidity length scale given by Eq. (10) with values of Y derived from Tkacheva (2001).

5 Discussion

There are very few reports in the literature on wave-induced sea ice break-up events, and even fewer that are observed at adequate time and spatial scales. The two experiments presented here, carried out in two contrasting sets of environmental conditions, shed light on multiple aspects of wave-ice interactions: 1) the floe size distribution that results from wave-induced break-up, 2) wave propagation in sea ice and 3) wave attenuation, all of which are discussed below.

5.1 Wave-induced floe size distribution

The AFSDs obtained in this study (Figure 10) follow modal distributions, meaning that a preferential size results from wave-induced sea ice breakup, thus confirming what was obtained by process-based modelling studies (e.g. Fox and Squire, 1991; Herman, 2017; Montiel and Squire, 2017; Mokus and Montiel, 2021) and what was anecdotally reported by Squire (1995). The shape of the AFSDs also highlights the fact that this process alone does not explain the power law distributions observed at a

larger scale where sea ice is potentially influenced by many different mechanisms and events. Additionally, the mean value $\overline{d}$ of the AFSD increases with thickness: $\overline{d}_{\text{GSL}} = 3.57$ m with $h_{\text{GSL}} \in [10, 30]$ cm, while to $\overline{d}_{\text{NBB}} = 9.00$ m with $h_{\text{NBB}} \in [40, 60]$ cm, suggesting, like in a number of previous studies (e.g. Fox and Squire, 1991; Squire, 1995; Herman, 2017), that the preferential floe size obtained from wave-induced sea ice break-up is influenced by sea ice thickness. Another quantity associated with the FSD that is often used as a state variable in wave-ice interaction modeling studies (e.g. Dumont et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2013a; Bateson et al., 2020) is the maximum size d_{max}. Different theoretical frameworks have been propose to relate the maximum size to a relevant physical length scale in the hope of identifying the underlying physical processes involved. Let's recall here the two main hypotheses there are in the literature.

The first hypothesis is the one used by Dumont et al. (2011) in their wave-ice interaction model. Their parameterization considered that the maximum floe size is the distance between two consecutive location of maximal flexural strain in a semi-infinite ice floe. In order to compute strains, they have assumed that sea ice is thin and homogeneous through its thickness so that it can be considered as an Euler-Bernoulli beam that conforms to a monochromatic sinusoidal wave described as $\eta(x,t) = a \sin(\omega t - kx)$. The flexural strain ε applied at a given time on the ice surface is therefore

$$\varepsilon = \frac{h}{2} \frac{\partial^2 \eta}{\partial x^2} = -\frac{ak^2 h}{2} \sin(kx - \omega t). \tag{4}$$

where ω is the wave angular frequency, k is the wavenumber, a its amplitude, and h the ice thickness. Taking the first-order derivative of Eq. (4) and setting it to zero gives the location of strain extrema, which are separated by a distance of $\lambda/2$ (Dumont et al., 2011). This approach assumes that the break-up occurs after a monochromatic wave has propagated into an unbroken ice plate, at many places within the ice plate simultaneously, and far from the stress-free edge.

Another theoretical framework that has been used in the last decade in the wave-ice interaction community (e.g. Toyota et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2013a; Herman, 2017; Boutin et al., 2018; Bateson et al., 2020) is the one described by Mellor (1983) based on Hétenyi (1946), in which he derives an analytical solution for the position x^* of the maximum bending moment in a beam subject to a downward force at its edge. Since an arithmetic error is present in the derivation made by Mellor (1983), which was briefly underlined by Boutin et al. (2018), we deemed important to recall the derivation of x^*.

First, Hétenyi (1946) considers a semi-infinite Euler-Bernoulli beam of uniform thickness h that extends along the x-axis. When submitted to a load P acting downwards at its edge, a vertical deflection of the edge is generated and imposes a bending moment M along the beam defined as

$$M = -EI \frac{\partial^2 \eta}{\partial x^2}, \tag{5}$$

where E and I are respectively the elastic modulus and the second moment of area of the beam, i.e. its massless inertia (Hétenyi, 1946). Considering a stress-free condition at the edge and that M vanishes for large x, the general solution is

$$M = -\frac{P}{\mu} e^{-\mu x} \sin \mu x, \qquad \mu = \left(\frac{k_f}{4EI} \right)^{\frac{1}{4}}, \tag{6}$$

where k_f is the foundation modulus, which can be viewed as a Hooke's constant, and x is the axial direction of the beam (Hétenyi, 1946). Setting the first-order derivative of Eq. (6) with respect to x to zero, we obtain the following algebraic

equation :

305   $e^{-\mu x}(\cos \mu x - \sin \mu x) = 0,$ (7)

which is satisfied when $x \to \infty$ or when $x = (4n+1)\pi/4\mu$ with $n = 0, 1, 2, ...$. This implies that the location of the maximum bending moment, and therefore of maximal deformation, is

$$x^* = \frac{\pi}{4}\left(\frac{4EI}{k_f}\right)^{1/4}. \tag{8}$$

Even though x^* is derived for an Euler-Bernoulli beam, the second moment of area I of a Kirchoff-Love plate is used and the
310   Young's modulus, noted Y, is set to be equivalent to the elastic modulus E of the plate. That way, we have

$$E = Y, \quad I = \frac{h^3}{12(1-\nu^2)} \tag{9}$$

which implies that

$$x^* = \frac{\pi}{4}\left(\frac{Y^* h^3}{3\rho_w g(1-\nu^2)}\right)^{1/4}. \tag{10}$$

where $\nu = 0.3$ the Poisson ratio, $\rho_w \simeq 1025$ kg m^{-3} the sea water density and g the gravitational acceleration. Another con-
315   sideration made here is that, in order to take into account for the fact that the plate lies on water, the foundation modulus was set to $\rho_w g$.

Mellor (1983) used this framework for determining a flexure-induced fracture distance in the context of ice rafting, not for the case of wave-induced breakup. He wrote that "*when the ice is flexed, it will tend to break first at a distance x^* from the free edge*". This comment has led numerous wave-ice interaction studies, namely Toyota et al. (2011), to consider that
320   x^* is "*the minimum ice length at which breakup will occur due to flexure stress*", Williams et al. (2013a) to interpret x^* as "*[corresponding] to the diameter below which flexural failure cannot occur*" and Boutin et al. (2018) to assume x^* is the diameter "*below which [...] no flexural failure is possible*". But, since WIMs use $\lambda/2$ as $d_{\max}$ based on the fact that sea ice will break at extrema of deformation, shouldn't x^* be also considered as a maximum floe length scale since it is based upon the same mathematical premise ?

325   In order to compute $x^\star$ and compare this length scale with the observed maximum floe sizes, it is necessary to estimate the effective Young's modulus. Estimations of Young's modulus in wave-ice interaction studies (e.g. Williams et al., 2013a) are commonly based on empirical relationships. For Young's modulus, Timco and Weeks (2010) obtained

$$Y = Y_0(1 - 3.51 v_b) \tag{11}$$

where $Y_0 \simeq 10$ GPa and v_b is the brine volume. As argued by Williams et al. (2013a), an effective value of $Y^* = Y - 0.5$ GPa
330   must be used when a cyclic loading of a period less than 10 s is considered. Y^* might thus be used for calculating the flexural rigidity length scale x^* since waves in our experiments had a period lower than 10 seconds. The brine volume depends on ice

salinity, but even more strongly on ice temperature. The warmer the ice, the larger the brine volume and the porosity are. Here we use the empirical relationship of Cox and Weeks (1983) to estimate v_b, which is

$$v_b = \frac{\rho_{\text{ice}}S}{F} \quad \text{with} \tag{12}$$

$$F = \begin{cases} -4.732 - 22.45\, T_{\text{ice}} - 0.6397\, T_{\text{ice}}^2 - 0.01074\, T_{\text{ice}}^3 & \text{for} -2°\text{C} \geq T_{\text{ice}} \geq -22.9°\text{C} \\ 9899 + 1309\, T_{\text{ice}} + 55.27\, T_{\text{ice}}^2 + 0.716\, T_{\text{ice}}^3 & \text{for} -22.9°\text{C} > T_{\text{ice}} > -30°\text{C} \end{cases} \tag{13}$$

Unfortunately, the salinity of the ice was not measured during the experiments. To estimate it, we revert to the empirical study of Cox and Weeks (1974) who showed that thin and cold young ice has a typical salinity around 5 ppt, while warm sea ice at the end of the melt season can have as low as 2 ppt. We thus set $S_{\text{GSL}} = 5 \pm 1$ and $S_{\text{NBB}} = 3 \pm 1$ to account for the two different situations as well as the uncertainty associated to these estimates. The ice temperature is set close to the freezing point of sea water for NBB, and close to the air temperature for GSL (see Table 1). This gives $v_b = 0.04\,(0.02, 0.06)$ for GSL and $v_b = 0.06\,(0.03, 0.10)$, with extrema values shown in parentheses. Using Eq. (11) with these parameter values, the maximum and minimum values for the effective Young's modulus values in the GSL experiment are $[Y_{\text{min}}^*, Y_{\text{max}}^*] = [7.93, 9.23]$ GPa and are $[Y_{\text{min}}^*, Y_{\text{max}}^*] = [6.56, 8.85]$ GPa in the NBB. Given these value intervals for Young's modulus and the thickness estimation and measurement made respectively for the GSL and the NBB, it is possible to compute x^* for both experiment (see Table 2).

It is worth mentioning that it is by using a quasi-static framework that Mellor (1983) obtained x^* and, since wave-induced sea ice breakup is inherently dynamic, we wonder if x^* is an appropriate scale for the phenomenon under study. Tkacheva (2001), on the other hand, studied the diffraction of a plane wave by a semi-infinite plate and focuses on quantities relevant to the context of wave-induced breakup, namely the transmission coefficient and the position of maximum strain relative to wave and ice properties. One key quantity introduced in Tkacheva (2001) is the dimensionless reduced rigidity β mathematically expressed by

$$\beta = \frac{16\pi^4 EI}{\rho_w g \lambda^4} \tag{14}$$

and which translates to

$$\beta = \frac{4\pi^4 Y h^3}{3(1-\nu^2)\rho_w g \lambda^4} \tag{15}$$

under the Kirchoff-Love plate approximation and when assuming that the elastic modulus is equal to Young's modulus. Computing β with the reference values of Young's modulus derived from Timco and Weeks (2010), the incident wavelengths and the ice thicknesses estimated for the two experiments gives $\beta_{\text{GSL}} \in [0.4, 14.0]$ $\beta_{\text{NBB}} \in [7.5, 33.9]$. which translate to transmission coefficients $|T|_{\text{GSL}} \in [0.6, 0.4]$ and $|T|_{\text{NBB}} \in [0.5, 0.4]$ (see Fig. 2 of Tkacheva, 2001). These values are contradictory of what was observed, that is a near perfect transmission of the ship waves into the ice plate. This contradiction can either come from a bad estimation of the ice thickness, the incident wavelength or Young's modulus. Despite the uncertainties, thickness and wavelength have been measured and estimated, and do not allow for lower values of β. Young's modulus on the other hand have been estimated from empirical relationships that might not be applicable to the sampled sea ice, which was grey,

Table 2. Physical quantities related to the AFSDs and comparison to x^* with different approaches to estimate sea ice Young's modulus.

Exp.	h	$\bar{d}$	d_{mode}	d_{max}	$d_{\mathrm{max}}/\lambda^*$	Ref.	β	Y	x^*
	cm	m	m	m	-			Pa	m
GSL	20 ± 10	3.7	4.1	7.0	0.31	Timco and Weeks (2010)		$[7.93, 9.23] \times 10^9$	[3.3, 7.5]
						Tkacheva (2001)	$\sim 7.5 \times 10^{-3}$	$[130, 5] \times 10^6$	1.2
NBB	50 ± 10	8.7	7.8	15.5	0.52	Timco and Weeks (2010)		$[6.56, 8.85] \times 10^9$	[9.1, 12.3]
						Tkacheva (2001)	$\sim 2.5 \times 10^{-2}$	$[22, 7] \times 10^6$	2.1

grey-white ice in the GSL and heavily rotten first-year ice in NBB. Also, the way waves propagated through sea ice, with the in-ice wavelength smaller than the incident wavelength (see Table 1), suggests that its elasticity is very low. An alternative method to quantify Y may thus be used in order to see if x^* represents adequately d_{max}.

365   Tkacheva (2001) also computed the position of maximum strain, expressed as a fraction of the incident wavelength, as a function of β (see Fig. 7 of Tkacheva, 2001). Since d_{max} has been derived from the position of maximum strain in both Mellor (1983) and Dumont et al. (2011), we can translate this way of thinking with Tkacheva (2001) an obtain a value of β by measuring the maximal size and dividing it by the incident wavelength. Table 2 displays values of d_{max}/λ, which amounts to 0.31 for the GSL and 0.52 for the NBB. These values lead to $\beta_{\mathrm{GSL}} \sim 7.5 \times 10^{-3}$ and $\beta_{\mathrm{NBB}} \sim 2.5 \times 10^{-2}$ to transmission

370   coefficients of over 95 % according to the derivation made Tkacheva (2001). We dismiss the possible value of $\beta_{\mathrm{NBB}} > 10^0$ since it corresponds to situations where more than 50 % of the incident wave would have been reflected.

With values of β, thickness and wavelength for each experiment, it is possible to estimate Young's modulus by inverting Eq. (15). Doing so we obtain $Y_{\mathrm{GSL}} \in [5, 130] \times 10^6$ Pa and $Y_{\mathrm{NBB}} \in [7, 22] \times 10^6$ Pa, with the lower (upper) bound corresponding the highest (lowest) thickness value, values that are 1 to 4 orders of magnitude smaller than what is obtained from empirical

375   relationships (see Table 2). Using these values to compute x^* as an indicator for d_{max} does not fit with observations. This suggests that the quasi-static theoretical framework of Mellor (1983) does not grasp the underlying physics of wave-induced sea ice breakup. In our opinion, it should also be considered as a coincidence that x^* is close to the minimal size in Fig. 10 since it should in principle represent a maximum size.

Tkacheva (2001) provides interesting information relating the position of maximum strain, hence d_{max}, to the sea ice rigidity

380   and incident wavelength. But, since many models obtain modal shaped FSDs by assuming that sea ice breaks up at the position where ε_c is reached, this quantity may be tied to the preferential size. Relating ε_c and the maximum strain to β might allow to parametrize the wave-induced FSD with the physical properties of waves and ice but also to identify where does the preferential size come from.

5.2   Break-up evolution and wave propagation

385   In the two experiments, ice broke-up from the edge inward with the furthest crack at a given time oriented parallel to the wave phase plane. The speed at which the break-up progressed could only be measured in the GSL experiment using the UAV

footage. The speed at which it progressed c_b was slower than the phase speed of the wave c_p estimated also using the UAV imagery. Considering the uncertainties, the ratio between the two is $r = c_b/c_p = 0.41 \pm 0.07$, which is close to $1/2$, the ratio of the group speed to the phase speed for waves traveling in deep water. However, here waves travel in sea ice, first in a long (compared to wavelength) consolidated ice sheet of thickness h and second, into a set of smaller fragments of that same sheet after it broke. A modification of this ratio is thus expected as waves travel in ice with a different dispersion relation. Figure 11 shows the group-to-phase speed ratio for two dispersion relations, the first one describing flexural waves propagating in a thin elastic plate and the second one describing waves affected by the inertia of a floating material, usually called *mass loading*, and given by

$$\omega^2 = gk \left(1 + \frac{\rho_i h k}{\rho_w} \right). \tag{16}$$

It shows quite clearly that at this frequency, waves that are responsible for the break-up and that are visible from the UAV propagate following the mass loading dispersion relation. The break-up speed $c_b \simeq 1.86 \pm 0.04$ m s^{-1} is only slightly slower than the group speed, i.e. the speed at which wave energy propagates $c_g = \frac{\partial \omega}{\partial k} \simeq 2.13 \pm 0.18$ m s^{-1}, but still within the uncertainty interval. In comparison, the group speed of the corresponding flexural wave is on the order of 60 m s^{-1}.

5.3 Break-up extent and wave energy attenuation

In the GSL, the break-up extent reached 60 m from the original floe edge. In the NBB experiment the entire floe that was approximately 540 m wide broke-up. Assuming that the incident waves were similar in terms of period, wavelength and amplitude for both experiments (see Table 1), this suggests that the wave attenuation rate was higher (up to one order of magnitude) for thinner ice than for thicker ice. This might be a counter-intuitive result in regards to proposed theories for wave attenuation. Far from criticizing these theories, that are meant to be applied at large scale where waves experience averaged ice properties, this result rather suggest that wave energy dissipation or scattering depend on material properties that are not considered by models (e.g. ice porosity, temperature, heterogeneity, composition, rigidity) and often not carefully measured in field experiments.

6 Conclusions

Results obtained from the analysis of two wave-induced sea ice break-up experiments, captured by an unmanned aerial vehicle and carried out in two contrasting sets of environmental conditions, provide direct and detailed measurements that shed light on many aspects related to wave-ice interactions. The aerial imagery of the break-up event also allowed the characterization of wave propagation, break-up evolution and extent.

A novel way of computing the FSD, that is using the partial aerial concentration rather than the number density, was first proposed. Not only is this approach coherent with FSD and ITD formulations often used in wave-ice models, it also allows to observe that wave-induced breakup generates a modal-shaped FSD and thus that a preferential size is generated by this process. The observation of a preferential size, along with the fact that ice thickness has an effect on it, resonates with many
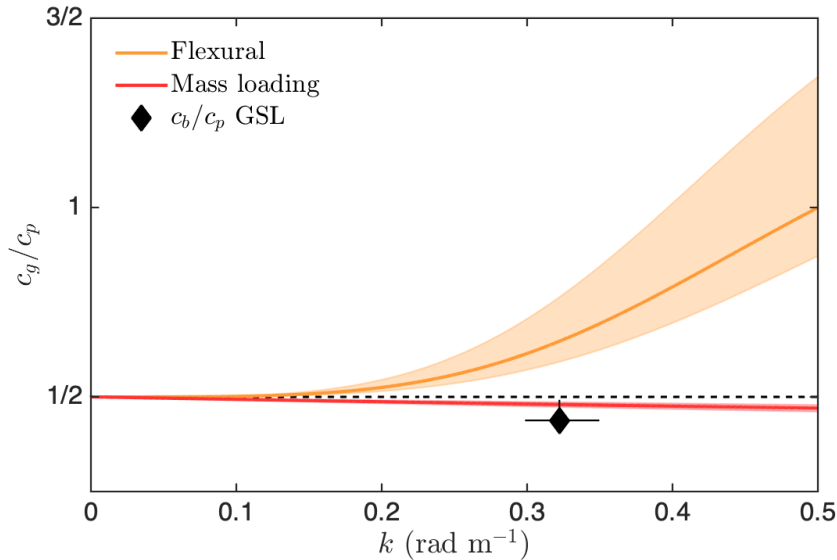
Figure 11. Ratio between the group speed and the phase speed of waves traveling into sea ice as a flexural wave (orange) or influenced by mass loading (red). Mean and extreme values for ice thickness h and Young's modulus Y are those of Figure 10 and Table 2. The black diamond indicates the ratio between the break-up speed c_b and the measured phase speed c_p, with associated uncertainties described in Table 1.

other process-based modeling studies and anecdotal evidences reported in the literature (e.g. Fox and Squire, 1991; Squire, 1995; Herman, 2017).

Two theoretical frameworks used in numerous wave-ice interaction studies were recalled here : the one proposed by Dumont et al. (2011) and the one brought up by Mellor (1983). Both of them derive a quantity that describes the position of maximum strain in the ice, which is thought to generate the maximal floe size. The first one ($\lambda/2$) is strictly dependent on wavelength and the second (x^*) on ice rigidity and thickness. In order to compute x^*, the ice Young's modulus needed to be known and empirical relationships were first used to obtain ranges of values (Cox and Weeks, 1974, 1983; Timco and Weeks, 2010). Comparison with theory relevant to wave-induced breakup (Tkacheva, 2001) exposed that the Young's modulus derived from these empirical relationships lead to an underestimation of the observed transmission of the incident waves into the ice. This makes us conclude that these empirical relationships derived from first-year ice might not be representative of the ice types present during our experiments.

The use of results obtained by Tkacheva (2001) allowed us to infer a Young's modulus for sea ice by using the ratio between the observed maximal size $d_{\max}$ and the incident wavelength λ^*. This was done via a quantity introduced by Tkacheva (2001),

that is the dimensionless reduced rigidity β, which is not only dependent on sea ice rigidity but also on wavelength – bringing together the approaches of Mellor (1983) and Dumont et al. (2011). The use of this theory in the context of our experiments is deemed relevant since the computation of β from $d_{\max}/\lambda$ leads to transmission coefficients that are representative of what was observed in the drone footage.

435   Quantification of the transmission coefficient via the measurement of the amplitudes of both the incident and in-ice waves in further experiments would allow for a better assessment of the applicability of the theoretical framework of Tkacheva (2001), which considers the diffraction of a plane wave by a massless plate, to a real situation.

It was also identified that waves follow mass loading dispersion relation, such that the wavelength and the phase speed is smaller in unbroken ice than in deep water. Flexural waves might have been present, but with an amplitude so small that it

440   could not be detected. Moreover, the break-up advanced progressively from the floe edge inward at a speed that is close to the group speed of the wave.

Finally, waves were attenuated much faster in the thinner ice floe. However, the lack of in situ data about sea ice properties and wave characteristics over the course of their propagation does not allow us to identify the processes at play or to partition the contributions in broken and unbroken ice. In the end, these results show that using a ship to generate waves allows carrying

445   experiment in a controlled yet natural environment. This is a promising way to study wave-induced sea ice break-up and advance our understanding of numerous wave-ice interactions. Collecting key in situ data to complement the UAV could significantly improve the scientific output. It could be done by using ice-going platforms such as an ice canoe to deploy wave buoys and measure ice properties (thickness, temperature, salinity, snow cover), as was done by Sutherland and Dumont (2018).

Code and data availability. The code and data required to produce the results are available on demand at the following git repository:

450   https://gitlasso.uqar.ca/dumael02/breakup.

Video supplement. The video of the GSL experiment is available on ResearchGate at the following https:/doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.32873. 62564 under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.

Author contributions. EDL planned and conducted both experiments, developed the image processing tools, performed the data analysis, wrote the first draft of the paper and participated to the discussion and writing. DD provided the original idea for the experiment, provided

455   guidance in data analysis, and participated to the discussion and writing.

Competing interests. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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