

# Review of Millan et al. Ongoing grounding line retreat and fracturation initiated at the Petermann Glacier ice shelf, Greenland after 2016

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## General comments

The authors present a new extended record of grounding line migration and ice velocity for Petermann Glacier and provide insight into the causes of recent retreat and the impact of ice shelf fracturing on the flow of the glacier. They conclude that recent retreat is likely to be as a result of an increase in ocean temperatures in the fjord, but that retreat of the grounding line is modulated by the bed topography. In general the paper is well structured and written and the figures are appropriate. I have some more general comments outlined below prior to publication, followed by some specific line comments.

The introduction needs to include a clearer statement of the justification for the research. Presumably including something about how newly available data make it possible to provide an updated record of grounding line movement to better understand dynamics of Petermann Glacier. You could then better link this to previous observations of calving events, and state how while recent calving events have been observed, there is no recent data on grounding line movement and ice flow speeds over the last 10 years. In addition, I was looking for a better explanation and justification for expanding on the previous work by Hogg et al., 2016. It would be good in general to make a better comparison between your record and theirs in the results or discussion.

I was left a little confused about the timing of events you are presenting. In the first line of the discussion you suggest the speed-up preceded the grounding line retreat in 2017. However, the abstract to me suggests the opposite, saying 'as a result, the glacier sped up'. Again in the discussion you state that the velocity remained stable after 2018 despite continued grounding line retreat. In general, the sequence of events needs to be made clearer, and be consistent throughout the manuscript.

There are a number of different datasets from different time periods that have been integrated into the paper. I think it would be helpful for the reader if you were to include a table or diagram that gives a complete overview of all the datasets used, the time spans and how many measurements were acquired from each.

I found the use of the phrase 'stable' throughout the paper to be unclear, especially given that at present surface thinning inland of the grounding line is on the order of a metre per year (as stated on line 202 of the Discussion). Uses of the term stable need to be qualified throughout, or at least include a clear definition at the first instance.

I have a number of specific line comments (detailed below) that will hopefully help to improve the clarity of the paper.

## Specific comments

**Line 19:** Here you state ‘since 2017’ but the title says ‘after 2016’. It would be better if these were consistent. E.g. ‘initiated in 2017’ or ‘After 2016 the grounding line began to retreat...’

**Line 20:** I guess this 5km is part of the 7 km stated in the previous sentence, but this could be clearer. For example saying ‘the majority of retreat in the central sector took place between 2017 and 2021 (5 km)’

**Line 21:** State the time frame over which these fractures developed. Also, state the direction (along/across flow) in which the ice shelf is split into three sections.

**Line 22:** Do you mean as a result of the ocean warming, or as a result of the grounding line retreat?

**Line 30:** It would be useful to include a sentence to explain the process by which ice shelf weakening would destabilise the sector and lead to an increase in sea level rise.

**Line 34** How is this record over the last 20-years if the paper was published in 2019. Surely it was the 20 years prior to 2019? State the full time period over which this increase occurred. Also are there some error estimates associated with these ice discharge estimates? Is a 1 Gt/yr difference beyond those?

**Line 40:** I think the phrase ‘were not detectable’ could be explained more clearly. State the reason why, and then at some stage how you overcome the challenges/expand on their previous work, given that you cover a similar time period to these studies.

**Line 46:** This paragraph feels disjointed from the rest of the introduction. See general comment on providing a clear justification on extending this record. You do hint at it, but I think a clear statement at the start of this paragraph should be included to make a clear link between the justification of extending the record, the available data, and why it is of interest to measure grounding line migration.

**Line 64:** This subheading might be better as grounding line positions.

**Section 2.1:** I found it difficult to get a clear sense of the number of scenes used to obtain grounding line positions. I suggest including a table of all the data types and dates to provide an overview. I also think that a statement in this section comparing the data/method you use in comparison to Hogg et al., 2016 is necessary here, and importantly how you have expanded upon their existing record.

**Line 83:** This paragraph needs a better starting sentence. Consider moving the final sentence of the paragraph to the start with something along the lines of ‘To complement the Sentinel-1 record we use...’

**Line 91:** Restate the epochs.

**Line 109:** Why did you choose these two time stamps (2000 and 2019) to calculate the strain rates?

**Line 127-128:** I’m still unsure exactly how many scenes/grounding line measurements you have between 1992 and 2011? Is it just 3 (’92,’96,’11) and in which case is that enough to say that it was stable during this period. Also ‘relatively stable’ is ambiguous, something like ‘has not advanced or retreated substantially from its position in 1992’ might be better.

**Line 128:** Make a more quantitative statement about the errors. How did you calculate the uncertainties in your grounding line positions, how did you arrive at 1 km? An error estimate and explanation is needed either here or in the methods (Section 2.1).

**Line 129:** Can you be confident about a 1.1 km retreat being a true signal if you state in the previous sentence that the uncertainties are ‘about 1 km’? Error estimates for your grounding line measurements are needed.

**Line 152:** Why not also describe here the regions of apparent fracture on the eastern section of the tongue near to the calving front. Could these have also decoupled these sections of the lower ice

shelf from the flow? At the very least you could make a comparison to the findings of Ruckamp et al., 2019 in the discussion when you mention the ‘partially-decoupled flow regime’ (Line 190).

**Line 155:** Nowhere in Section 2.2. did you mention the velocity record was extended back to 1984. Also data from 1984 is not shown on Fig. 3b (x-axis starts at 1992), so why mention it here at all?

**Line 155:** Fig. 3c shows a profile approx 20 km long. Do you mean C-C’ here?

**Line 157:** This statement ‘glacier motion was fairly stable’ has to be quantified or reworded, perhaps along the lines of, ‘there was very little variability in ice speeds ( $\pm$  x m yr<sup>-1</sup>) between xxx and 2014’.

**Line 163:** Where is the evidence for this statement? Have you compared summer speed-ups to the melt season?

**Line 176-177:** This statement is ambiguous, what constitutes a warming signal and what is a strong signal? Clarify.

**Line 177:** Last decade from when? Today? or the last decade of the 1970-2000s record? Include the time period for ‘the last decade’.

**Line 179:** Only during the 2000s? or also during the 2010s? State the full time period that you are referring to.

**Line 190:** Can you provide some extra detail on what this term ‘partially-decoupled flow regime’ means and what is the criteria and what the impact may be on the flow upstream of the grounding line?

**Line 192:** What constitutes a ‘destabilised glacier’? Is it one that formerly had an ice shelf/tongue, that has since disappeared. A definition is needed.

**Line 194:** Be specific here. What is it about your results exactly that suggests the glacier might be destabilising or weakening. Can you also make some statements on the implications of this? If it is has already decoupled from the flow inland of the grounding line, would future ‘destabilisation’ of the ice shelf have an impact on ice speeds and grounding line retreat? I think the Discussion in general needs to cover some previous studies (that have been mentioned in the introduction) on this decoupling/impact of calving events/thinning on the ice shelf and put into the context of the results presented here.

**Line 212:** I don’t think ‘coincides’ makes sense here, because the bed topography is not a temporal dataset. Consider rephrasing along the lines of ‘...migration occurred across a section of retrograde bed topography...’

**Line 213:** Perhaps some additional examples, of outlet glaciers in Greenland (albeit without floating ice tongues) would be useful here, e.g. Humboldt Glacier (Carr et al., 2015), or Tracy/Heilprin Glaciers (Porter et al., 2014).

**Line 218:** Perhaps qualify that this retreat would not purely be determined by the bedrock alone, but buttressing plays a role in the stability of the grounding line on a retrograde bed slope (e.g. Gudmundsson et al., 2012).

**Line 222:** ‘first time and quite recently’ is ambiguous. Rephrase to something along the lines of ‘In the last 5 years (2017-2021) the grounding line has begun to retreat more rapidly than in the previous 25’

**Line 225:** State the timeframe.

**Figure 1:** What is the purpose of profile D-D’? It does not appear to be shown in Figure 3 nor referred to in the text.

**Figure 2:** Add labels to the panels in this figure, as you refer to Fig. 2a etc in Section 3.2. The caption for this figure is incomplete. Also, you mention the ‘decorrelation structures’ in the text and refer to Fig.2 so it would be useful to add arrows and labels to point to the reader to the exact

locations of these structures.

**Figure 3:** a) If the grounding line positions are with respect to their position in Feb 1992, why do some of the points shown for Feb 1992 fall below zero? Surely if Feb 1992 is the reference, all points at this start point should equal zero. b) it is quite difficult to see the trend in the velocity data. Perhaps it would be useful to put on the annual or winter average on top? c) The x-axis scale starts off in intervals of 5 up to 10 and then jumps to 19. Is this a mistake?

**Figure 4:** The 1992 line in the legend cannot be seen on the white background (this is the same for Fig.1). Either change the legend background or the colour of the line. Also the white lines are difficult to see on the white background of the strain rates in a) and b). Change 'present' to 2021.

**Figure 5:** You refer to a),b) and c) in the caption but they are not shown on the panels. Also the caption is incorrect, neither a) or c) show data colour coded by years. Add location labels to the first panel, e.g. Petermann Glacier, Petermann Fjord and Nares Strait, all of which are places you refer to in the text but the reader is not shown where they are.

### Technical corrections

**Line 59:** Sometimes you capitalise Glacier (after Petermann) and other times not. Needs to be the same throughout.

**Line 74:** Perhaps start a new paragraph at 'For the time period 2014 to 2021'

**Line 104:** Amend ERS-1/2

**Line 105:** There is no year associated with the Joughin and Howat reference

**Line 157:** I think this should be Fig. 3b