

# **The Budget of Recent Global Sea Level Rise**

## **2005–2012**



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The text on Page 7 was corrected to include the values for January 2005 to December 2011 shown in Table 1.

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## 1. Introduction

For decadal and longer time scales, global mean sea level change results from two major processes that alter the total volume of the ocean. Changes in the total heat content and salinity produce density (steric) changes. The exchange of water between the oceans and other reservoirs (glaciers, ice caps, and ice sheets, and other land water reservoirs) results in mass variations. With sufficient observations of sea level, ocean temperatures and salinity, and either land reservoirs or ocean mass, the total budget of global mean sea level can in principle be closed. Expressed in terms of globally-averaged height, contributions to the total budget of global mean sea level are

$$SL_{total} = SL_{steric} + SL_{mass}, \quad (1)$$

where  $SL_{total}$  is total sea level,  $SL_{steric}$  is the steric component of sea level, and  $SL_{mass}$  is the ocean mass component.

Until recently, efforts to close the sea level rise budget depended in some part on non-global datasets [Bindoff et al., 2007]. While satellite radar altimeters have provided global observations of  $SL_{total}$  since the early 1990s, only since 2002 have satellite gravity observations allowed for global estimates of  $SL_{mass}$  and not until 2007 had the Argo Project achieved its goal of 3000 floats monitoring  $SL_{steric}$ . Now that all three observations have achieved global or near-global coverage, a complete assessment of the sea level budget is possible.

An analysis of the budget by Lombard et al. [2007] for August 2002 to April 2006 using sea level data from GRACE (Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment), and in situ steric measurements is not able to close (1). Willis et al. [2008] present an analysis of the budget from Jason-1 measurements of sea surface height,  $SL_{steric}$  from ocean temperature and salinity data from Argo profiling floats, and  $SL_{mass}$  from time-variable gravity from the CSR (Center for Space Research) Release 4 version of GRACE and satellite laser ranging observations between mid-2003 and mid-2007. They find that the resulting four-year trends do not close the budget and suggest that systematic long-period errors may remain in one or more of the observing systems.

Initial studies of the sea level budget over a four-year period starting in mid-2003 found that the budget did not close to better than 3 mm/year in terms of its secular trend, which was more than the expected uncertainties. This suggested a systematic drift in one or more of the observing systems (Willis et al., 2008; Chang et al., 2009). For a slightly different period (2004–2008) that included significantly better Argo coverage of the Southern Hemisphere, Leuliette and Miller (2009) and Cazenave et al. (2009) found that the observational sea level rise budget could be closed within applicable uncertainties. However, these studies differed significantly in their estimates of the partition of steric and mass contributions, principally because of different choices of Glacial Isostatic Adjustment (GIA) models used to account for geophysical changes in the shape of the ocean basins.

GIA is the response of the solid earth and oceans to past changes in the ice sheets, largely due to the slow viscous response of the Earth's mantle as it rebounds after the disappearance of the giant ice sheets from the last ice age. This process involves a variety of changes in the Earth's crust, rotational axis, and gravity field, as explained in detail in Tamisiea and Mitrovica (2011).

In the global average, GIA causes a small net sinking of the ocean floor relative to the center of the Earth, which, if the sea surface did not change, would imply a small secular increase in vol-

ume. Thus to account for GIA effects, +0.3 mm/year must be added to the rate of sea level rise observed by altimeters so that the estimate reflects the change in ocean volume (Douglas and Peltier, 2002). Similarly, a GIA signal must be removed from GRACE observations to isolate ocean mass variations. While the GIA signal for altimetry reflects changes in ocean volume, the GIA correction for ocean mass variations from GRACE accounts for mass redistribution from crustal motion, which produces significantly larger apparent changes in terms of equivalent water height (see Tamisiea and Mitrovica 2011). While Willis et al. (2008) and Leuliette and Miller (2009) applied a near +1 mm/year correction based on GIA model predictions developed by Paulson et al. (2007), Cazenave et al. (2009) adopted a correction of +2 mm/year based on Peltier (2004). This sparked considerable debate over the appropriate GIA correction for GRACE (Milne et al. 2009). Recently, Chambers et al. (2010) have suggested that the Paulson et al. (2007) model is more appropriate for correcting global ocean mass calculations from GRACE.

Our new analysis of the sea level rise budget for the period January 2005 to December 2011 uses corrected Jason-1 and Jason-2 altimetry observations of total sea level, improved upper ocean steric sea level from the Argo array, and ocean mass variations inferred from GRACE gravity mission observations. We demonstrate that the sea level rise budget can be closed, providing verification that the altimeters, Argo array, and GRACE mission produce consistent data.

## **1 Components of sea level**

### **1.1 Total sea level**

Variations in total sea level used in this analysis came from altimetry data from the Jason-1 and Jason-2 missions processed using the Radar Altimeter Database System (RADS, <http://rads.tudelft.nl/>). All sea surface height estimates remove the GOT4.8 tide model and a MOG2D model-based inverse barometer.

Jason-1 was moved to an orbit interleaved with Jason-2 in January 2009. In this study, we construct a Jason-1/Jason-2 monthly time series by combining Jason-1 data from January 2004 to June 2008 (cycles 73 to 243) and Jason-2 data from July 2008 to December 2011 (cycles 1 to 129). The Jason-1 data in RADS are largely based on Geophysical Data Records (GDR) version C, and the Jason-2 data are derived from GDRs.

To determine  $SL_{total}$ , maps are first created for each cycle by averaging all individual sea surface heights that are greater than 200 km from the nearest coast into  $2^\circ \times 1^\circ$  bins. An area-weighted mean is made from each map, using a mask that excludes areas with >50% ice coverage to avoid aliasing of the seasonal signal. To account for the effects of glacial isostatic adjustment (GIA), we add a +0.3 mm/a trend [Douglas and Peltier, 2002; Peltier, 2009].

Based on the tide gauge calibration, the errors in each 10-day cycle estimate for global mean sea level for Jason-1/Jason-2 are estimated to be 4.0 mm. Errors for monthly averages are estimated to be 2.3 mm.

### **1.2 Steric sea level**

The Argo Project is a global array of free-drifting profiling floats that measures the temperature and salinity of the upper layer of the ocean. We use in situ temperature and salinity profiles from the Argo floats to estimate changes in ocean density. Only Argo profiles with both salinity and

temperature measurements are included. We use data available from the National Oceanographic Data Center on 2 June 2012, discarding all profiles from so-called greylisted instruments with erroneous pressure values [Willis et al., 2009]. Delayed-mode data are used where available, Argo quality control flags are used to eliminate spurious measurements, and profiles from marginal and inland seas are excluded. While most Argo profiles reach at least 1500 m depth, the tropics lack sufficient coverage at that level. To determine  $SL_{steric}$ , we integrate ocean density to a depth of 900 m.

Argo deployments began in 2000 and in November 2007 the planned deployment of 3000 floats was achieved. In particular, Argo has dramatically improved coverage of the Southern Hemisphere. In January 2004, the array averaged one profile for each 61,800 km<sup>2</sup> in the Northern Hemisphere and one profile for each 169,700 km<sup>2</sup> in the Southern Hemisphere. By December 2007 the array averages fell to 27,800 km<sup>2</sup> and 41,300 km<sup>2</sup>, respectively. We used Argo profile locations to sample the historical altimetry record and concluded that the coverage of the Southern Hemisphere by the Argo array prior to January 2004 is insufficient for closing the sea level rise budget.

Steric height at the location of each profile is also computed from the WOCE gridded hydrographic climatology (WGHC) [Gouretski and Koltermann, 2004]. These WGHC steric heights are then subtracted from the Argo observed steric heights and the resulting anomalies are divided into 5° x 5° horizontal boxes. A standard deviation check is performed in each box, and steric heights more than three standard deviations away from the box mean are removed. Using the steric height anomalies, we create monthly maps of  $SL_{steric}$  variability. As in the work by Willis et al. [2008], the maps are created using objective interpolation with a covariance function that was an exponential function with an 1800 km e-folding scale in the zonal direction and a 700 km e-folding scale in the meridional direction.

The errors in monthly global mean steric sea level range from 3.5 to 2.5 mm for each month, decreasing as Argo coverage increased.

### 1.3 Ocean mass

Satellite measurements of Earth's time-varying gravity field provided by GRACE are used to infer movement of water mass over Earth's surface. We use Release-04 gravity field solutions from the University of Texas Center for Space Research. GRACE does not observe geocenter variations and current GRACE solutions for oblateness variations may be less accurate than satellite laser ranging (SLR) estimates [Chen and Wilson, 2008]. Therefore, we compute ocean mass variations by replacing the degree 2, order 0 coefficients with those from an SLR analysis [Cheng and Tapley, 2004] and adding an estimate of seasonal geocenter motion [Chen et al., 1999] to account for the degree 1 components of the gravity field. Recent estimates based on ocean models and GRACE fields over land suggest that trends in ocean mass from geocenter variations are on the order of a few tenths of a mm/a [Swenson et al., 2008]. We restore the atmosphere and ocean models removed from the gravity field prior to processing. To compute the equivalent sea level of ocean mass variations that can be compared to  $SL_{total}$  as measured by altimetry with an inverse barometer applied, we remove the time-varying mass of the atmosphere averaged over the global ocean.

Secular geoid variations over the ocean that result from GIA must be removed from gravity observations to isolate ocean mass variations. We apply a model [Paulson et al., 2007] that effec-

tively increases the trend in observed  $SL_{mass}$  by 0.9 mm/a. The ice history (ICE-5G) used to produce the GIA model has an estimated uncertainty of roughly 20%.

An averaging function is applied to the GRACE fields that restricts our analysis to the latitudes covered by Jason-1 ( $\pm 66^\circ$ ) and excludes regions within 300 km of the continental coastlines. Mass variations in the ocean estimated from satellite gravity observations are vulnerable to leakage of gravity signals from land hydrology. Chambers et al. [2007] suggest that this could cause the secular trend in ocean mass to be underestimated by  $0.17 \pm 0.08$  mm/a. To minimize the sum of the variance from GRACE errors and the variance of signals outside the ocean, we apply a 300-km Gaussian averaging kernel [Wahr et al., 1998]. Errors in the estimated monthly mass component of the global mean sea level are 2 mm for each month [Willis et al., 2008].

## **2 Sea level budget**

Trends and seasonal terms for  $SL_{mass}$ ,  $SL_{steric}$ , and  $SL_{total}$  are determined with a least squares fit of a sine, cosine, trend, and constant over January 2005 to December 2011. No smoothing was performed on the time series. The Argo and GRACE time series are monthly observations ( $N = 84$ ). Errors in Table 1 are estimated from the least squares fit, where we have assumed that each sample is an independent measurement.

In this analysis, the global sea level rise budget for 2005–2012 is closed when the Paulson GIA correction is applied (Table 1). The sum of steric sea level rise and the ocean mass component has a trend of  $1.2 \pm 0.9$  mm/a over the period when the Paulson GIA mass correction is applied, well overlapping total sea level rise observed by Jason-1 and Jason-2 ( $1.6 \pm 0.8$  mm/a) within a 95% confidence interval.

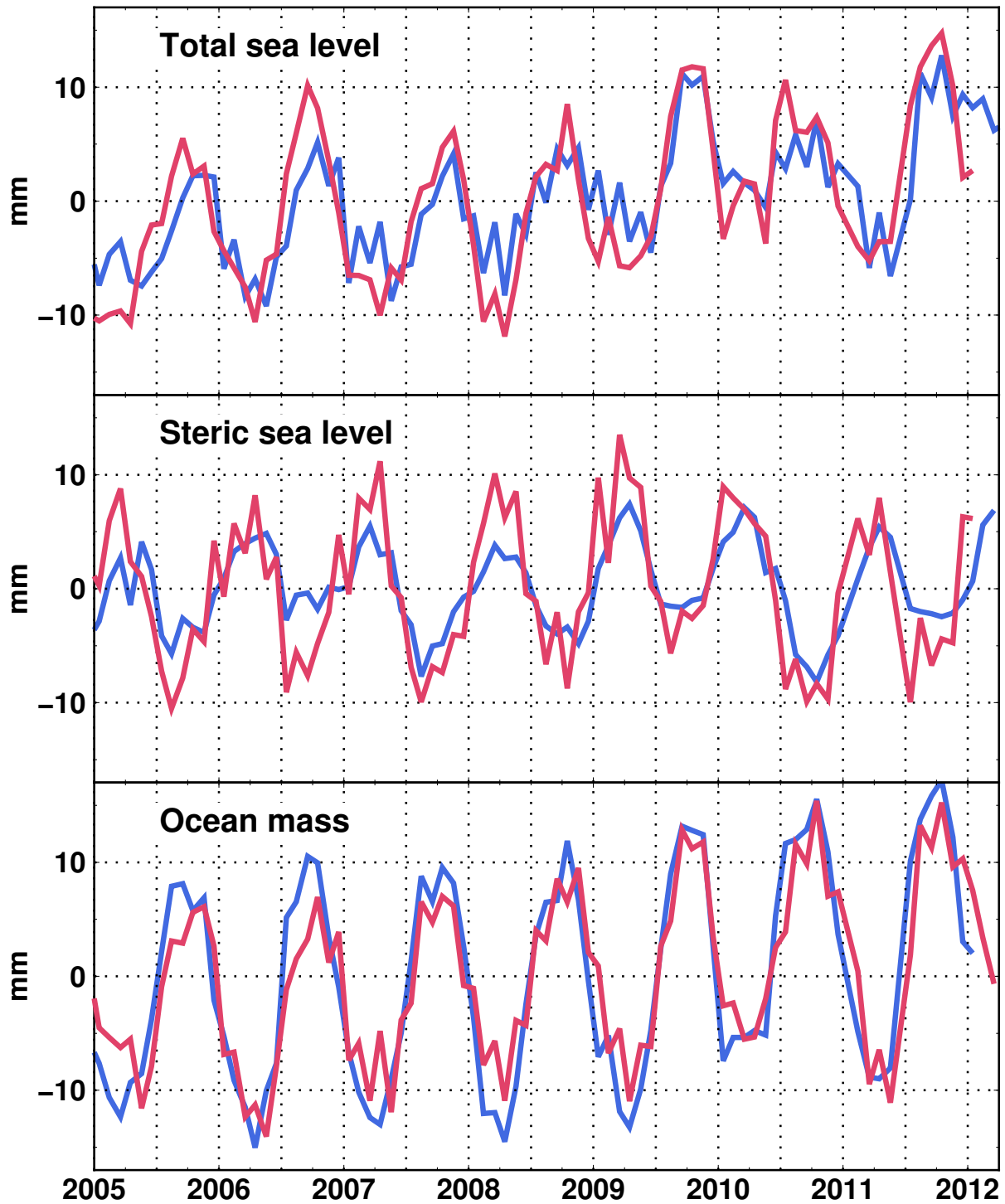
The above numbers represent the globally averaged changes in sea level and have magnitudes on the order of millimeters per year. The regional patterns of sea level change, however, are many times larger and can be extremely complex. Steric sea level change is the dominant contributor to the spatial trend patterns observed for total sea level (Figure 3). While the global ocean has been gaining mass from the continents during this period, the Indian Ocean continues to show a net loss of mass to the other basins (Chambers and Willis 2009).

**Table 1. Trends and Seasonal Fit for Components of Sea Level Rise and Total Sea Level as Measured by Altimeter**

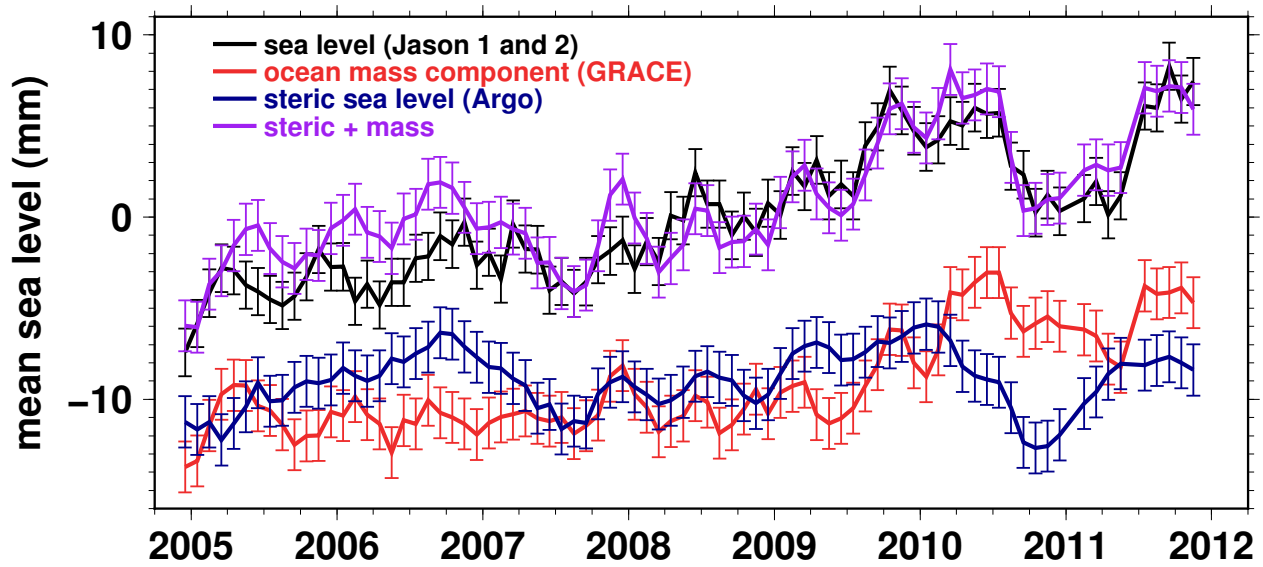
	<b>Trend (mm/year)</b>
Steric (Argo)	$0.2 \pm 0.8$
Mass (GRACE, Paulson GIA)	$1.0 \pm 0.2$
Steric + mass (Paulson GIA)	$1.2 \pm 0.9$
Total sea level (Jason-1 and Jason-2)	$1.6 \pm 0.8$

Determined with a least squares fit of a sine, cosine, trend, and constant over January 2005 to December 2011. The error bounds represent the 95% confidence interval obtained from the least squares fit.

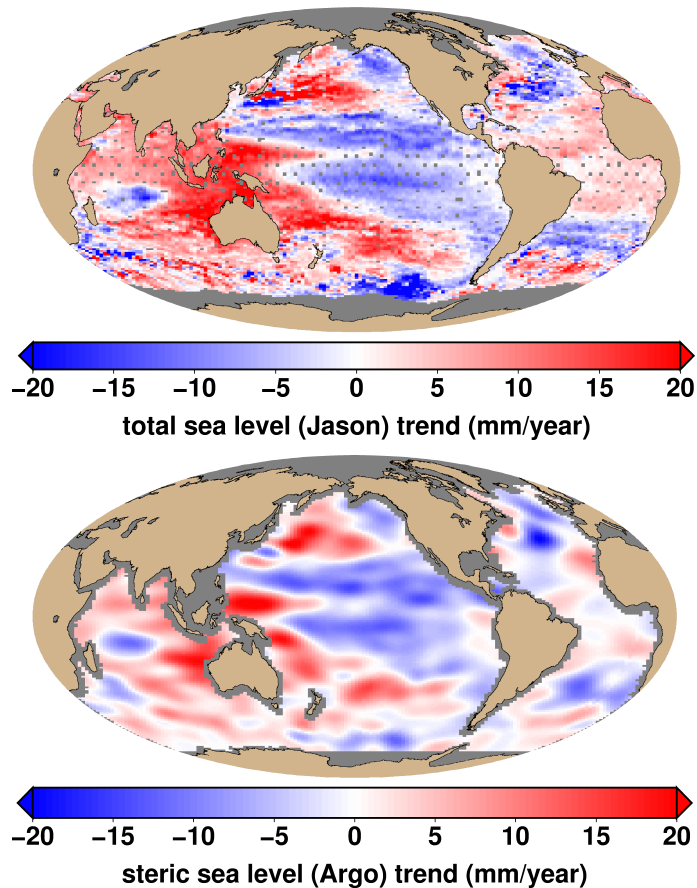


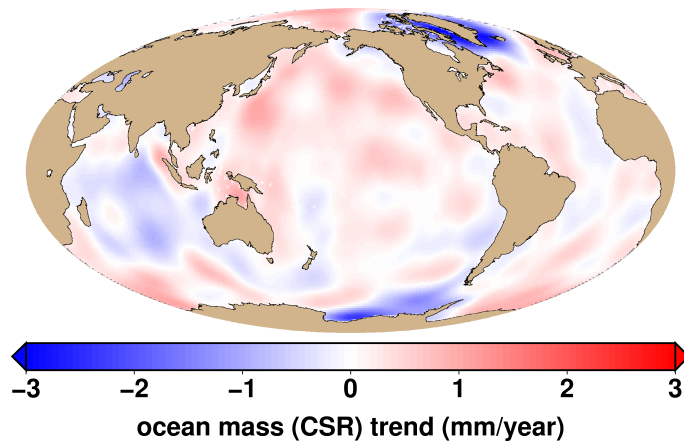


**Figure 1.** Variability in total global mean sea level and its steric and mass components. The blue lines are the observed (top) total sea level from Jason-1 and Jason-2, (middle) steric sea level from Argo, and (bottom) ocean mass from GRACE. The red lines show the inferred variability from the complementary observations computed as in (1). No smoothing has been applied to each time series.



**Figure 2.** Monthly estimates from Jason-1 and Jason-2 of global mean sea level for areas greater than 200 km from the coast (black), which are in general agreement with the sum (purple) of the ocean mass component from the Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment, GRACE (red), and the steric component of the upper 900 m from Argo (blue). Seasonal signals have been removed and smoothed with a three-month running mean. The error bars are one standard error.





**Figure 3.** Spatial distribution of the trends from January 2005 through December 2011 in (top) total sea level from Jason-1 and Jason-2, (middle) steric sea level from Argo, and (bottom) ocean mass from CSR GRACE fields in terms of equivalent sea level.

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