

Dear Dr Feng,

Thank you for your helpful comments and fast turnaround of the manuscript. Below we outline our responses to the reviewer in blue text.

Kind Regards,  
David Hutchinson

### Reviewer 3

I was asked to comment on the revised version of the manuscript by Hutchinson and colleagues. I have read the revision along with authors' response to the comments provided by the two previous reviewers. In general, I feel that authors have done an excellent job addressing reviewers' comments and improving the presentation of the manuscript.

In this study, Hutchinson et al. conducted a thorough and up-to-date review on the EOT study. The review includes marine and terrestrial proxy data, model simulations, and model-data comparisons, as well as paleogeography and forcing mechanisms. Even though I have been working on this topic for a while, I could still get some new information from this review. Re-defining and clarifying the terminology used in the EOT study in Section 1 is also very helpful to eliminate the ambiguity of the terminology used in current studies. Thus my overall assessment on this review is very positive and I'd like to see this review officially published after technical corrections/minor revisions. Below I provide some minor comments/suggestions for authors' consideration in their revision, which are mostly for clarification and correcting typos.

We thank the reviewer for their positive assessment and constructive comments on the manuscript.

Comments and Suggestions:

1. Low-latitude TEX86 records: It is pretty clear that some of the low latitude TEX86 records showing large amplitude of EOT cooling is problematic. Liu et al. (2009) made it clear that the signal, especially from Site 803 and 998, may be related to non-thermal factors, and suggested that low-latitude cooling should be on the order of 2-3C. I hope these problematic TEX86 data were not used in authors' data-model comparisons (Fig. 8). Otherwise, it would affect authors' assessment on the model performance. The data points based on these TEX86 records could also be removed from Fig. 3 in order not to mislead readers.

In the previous submission, Site 803 was included in the data compilation and the model-data comparison (Site 998 was not). However, since the reviewer has highlighted that the TEX<sub>86</sub><sup>H</sup> data from Site 803 are regarded as having a spuriously large temperature change (Liu et al, 2009), we have now removed this site from the model-data comparison. We have also removed Site 803 from Figure 3, and updated our skill metrics and model-data comparison figures accordingly. This changes our global mean metrics slightly, but our main conclusions are unaffected.

2. Authors correctly discussed influencing factors for individual temperature indicators, but I feel the completeness of the individual records also matters in order to derive reliable temperature changes across the EOT. For instance, the available 336 UK'37 SST record only

has a couple of data points from a snapshot time interval. Thus it may not be representative of the mean SSTs for the broadly defined Late Eocene and Early Oligocene periods. As currently data resolution in many SST records is not very high and some key intervals are missing due to sediment hiatus, this could largely contribute to the uncertainty in the estimates of SST changes for the two intervals. Authors could add one or two sentences somewhere to address this issue.

Our priority in creating this data compilation was to ensure as wide a geographic coverage as possible, and therefore to include all sites which recorded a signal on both sides of the transition, even if the sampling is minimal in some cases. To this end, we have used broader averaging windows than might be applied to the highest resolution SST records, but which records a wide global signal. Our choice of averaging helps to capture a response from both marine and terrestrial records, and allows a consistent methodology independent of how coarse or fine the resolution of individual records might be. We have added a discussion at the end of Section 3.1 which clarifies the choices we have made in the averaging windows, and how this affects the SST signal.

3. The time interval to represent post-EOT: Authors used a broad time interval between 33.9 Ma and 30 Ma to represent post-EOT. However, based on the relatively well resolved 1404 SST record, SST values between 29 Ma and 31 Ma could reach the late Eocene level, thus the mean SST over this broad time interval could potentially underestimate post-EOT temperature changes. I would suggest using a time interval broadly consistent with the defined interval for the EOGM, 33.9-33.16 Ma for post-EOT. On the other hand, I recognize that this approach could reduce the number of records to be qualified for this requirement. If the number is significantly reduced, I would suggest discarding my suggestion here, but perhaps it is better to mention in the text that the shorter time interval is more appropriate but due to practical reasons not adopted. Lastly, I note that 1404 SST record was not used in Fig. 3, which could fit the data gap around 40N.

As discussed above, we have mentioned in Section 3.1 the rationale for using a broad averaging window. In particular, we have mentioned that: “A consequence of this choice is that the averaging may dampen the peak-to-peak signal of EOT SST change in high-resolution records.”

U1404 was indeed included in Figure 3, but perhaps it was not obvious, since it was plotted at its paleolatitude of 32°N, rather than its modern day latitude of 40°N. We have clarified in both the figure and the manuscript that these data points are plotted at their paleolatitudes (at 34 Ma), derived using the paleomagnetic reference frame of Torsvik et al. (2012) and cross-checked using the online calculator of van Hinsbergen et al. (2015).

4. CO<sub>2</sub> changes across the EOT: Authors mentioned the intriguing rebound of CO<sub>2</sub> in Pearson et al. (2009) record. Indeed, such a feature is quite common in alkenone-based CO<sub>2</sub> records reconstructed from Southern Ocean. Pagani et al. (2011) suggested that oceanic changes in the Southern Ocean due to opening gateways could bias the long-term CO<sub>2</sub> trend, and the reconstruction from tropical sites 925/929 is more representative of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> changes across the EOT. Also recently Zhang et al. (2020, GCA, 281, 118-134, Fig. 10) have adjusted the assumed  $b$  values to allow the reconstructed CO<sub>2</sub> values falling into a reasonable range. I'm not sure whether it is worth for authors to discuss this in the text, but it does provide a slightly better justification for the CO<sub>2</sub> changes used in model experiments (~300

ppm from data and halving in model), as tropical sites provide larger CO<sub>2</sub> changes across the EOT than southern Ocean sites.

We considered this suggestion carefully, and in Section 7.2.2 we note the agreement with the Pagani et al (2011) record:

“A 325 ppmv decrease is within the range of CO<sub>2</sub> proxy estimates, shown in Figure 5, with alkenone records in particular suggesting a drop of this magnitude across the EOT (Pagani et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2013).”

However, given that there are multiple lines of evidence of CO<sub>2</sub> change, we feel it is best not to over-emphasise this result. As noted in our response to Reviewer 2, we acknowledge that the ‘best fit’ CO<sub>2</sub> change across the EOT from the multi-proxy compilation of Foster et al (2017) is a decrease of approximately 90 ppmv.

Other minor ones:

1. Table 1: EOGM should be 33.65 Ma to ~33.16 Ma in order to be consistent with the ~490 kyr duration. A typo here? Fig. 1 also suggests 33.16 Ma.

Thanks, this has been corrected to 33.16 Ma.

2. Line 325, Meridional Overturning Circulation: Authors could briefly mention/summarize the various timing of the onset of AMOC suggested in previous studies.

We have edited this paragraph to highlight several perspectives on the onset of the AMOC. These perspectives broadly suggest two alternatives: (i) that the AMOC either started up or expanded at the EOT, (ii) that the AMOC was present in some form from the middle Eocene. Both perspectives are now more clearly explained here.

3. Line 496: The UK’37 index saturates at ~29C for the Muller et al. calibration (1C makes slight difference).

This has been corrected to 29°C.

4. Line 508-509: see my previous comment # 1.

We have added a comment that such a large tropical change in SST is regarded as a spurious signal.

5. Line 519: I believe they suggest an apparent decrease in CO<sub>2</sub> over that period, not increase.

Thanks, this correction has been made.

6. Line 576-578. I feel that the 2C surface cooling is OK for tropics, but for high latitude southern hemisphere, the cooling should be >5C. I recognize that some of the records could not resolve the detailed structure of cooling, but if only 2C cooling is assumed at the first step in the Southern Ocean, then additional cooling has to take place at the second step? Perhaps rephrase this sentence?

We have rephrased this to clarify that low latitude surface waters cooled by ~2 °C

“... Step 1 of the EOT was associated with a cooling of both deep waters and low latitude surface waters on the order of 2 °C, while the increase in global ice volume was relatively minor...”

7. Line 721: I think this is related to the completeness of the SST record. The same might be also true for Site 277 and 1090 where data points representing the EOGM interval are generally missing.

We have added a sentence:

“Some of the discrepancies between the temperature signals may be due to differences in sampling rates during key events of the EOT.”

8. Line 924-926: So the shallow Barents Sea gateway re-opened some time later? Is there any geological evidence for that?

We have added the following:

“This theory suggests that the North Atlantic reconnected to the Arctic when the Fram Strait opened in the early Miocene (Jakobsson et al, 2007).”

# The Eocene-Oligocene transition: a review of marine and terrestrial proxy data, models and model-data comparisons

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**Abstract.** The Eocene-Oligocene transition (EOT) was a climate shift from a largely ice-free greenhouse world to an icehouse climate, involving the first major glaciation of Antarctica and global cooling occurring ~34 million years ago (Ma) and lasting ~790 kyr. The change is marked by a global shift in deep sea  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  representing a combination of deep-ocean cooling and growth in land ice volume. At the same time, multiple independent proxies for ocean temperature indicate sea surface cooling, and major changes in global fauna and flora record a shift toward more cold-climate adapted species. The two principal suggested explanations of this transition are: a decline in atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$ , and changes to ocean gateways, while orbital forcing likely influenced the precise timing of the glaciation. Here we review and synthesize proxy evidence of paleogeography, temperature, ice sheets, ocean circulation, and  $\text{CO}_2$  change from the marine and terrestrial realms. Furthermore, we quantitatively compare proxy records of change to an ensemble of climate model simulations of temperature change across the EOT. The simulations compare three forcing mechanisms across the EOT:  $\text{CO}_2$  decrease, paleogeographic

changes, and ice sheet growth. Our model ensemble results demonstrate the need for a global cooling mechanism beyond the imposition of an ice sheet or paleogeographic changes. We find that CO<sub>2</sub> forcing involving a large decrease in CO<sub>2</sub> of ca. 40% (40 (~325 ppm drop) provides the best fit to the available proxy evidence, with ice sheet and paleogeographic changes playing a secondary role. While this large decrease is consistent with some CO<sub>2</sub> proxy records (the extreme end member of decrease), the positive feedback mechanisms on ice growth are so strong that a modest CO<sub>2</sub> decrease beyond a critical threshold for ice sheet initiation is well capable of triggering rapid ice-sheet growth. Thus, the amplitude of CO<sub>2</sub> decrease signalled by our data-model comparison should be considered an upper- estimate and perhaps artificially large, not least because the current 45 generation of climate models do not include dynamic ice sheets and in some cases may be under-sensitive to CO<sub>2</sub> forcing. The model ensemble also cannot exclude the possibility that paleogeographic changes could have triggered a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub>.

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Scope of Review

Since the last major review of the EOT (Coxall and Pearson, 2007) the fields of palaeoceanography and palaeoclimatology 50 have advanced considerably. New proxy techniques, drilling and field archives of Cenozoic (66 Ma to present) climates, have expanded global coverage and added increasingly detailed views of past climate patterns, forcings and feedbacks. From a broad perspective, statistical interrogation of an astronomically dated, continuous composite of benthic foraminifera isotope records confirms that the EOT is the most prominent climate transition of the whole Cenozoic and suggests that the polar ice sheets that ensued seem to play a critical role in determining the predictability of Earth's climatological response to 55 astronomical forcing (Westerhold et al., 2020). New proxy records capture near and far-field signals of the onset of Antarctic glaciation. Meanwhile, efforts to simulate the onset of the Cenozoic 'icehouse', using the latest and most sophisticated climate models, have also progressed. Here we review both observations and the results of modelling experiments of the EOT. From the marine realm, we review records of sea surface temperature, as well as deep sea time series of the temperature and land ice proxy  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and carbon cycle proxy  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ . From the terrestrial realm we cover plant records and biogeochemical proxies of 60 temperature, CO<sub>2</sub> and vegetation change. We summarise the main evidence of temperature, glaciation and carbon cycle perturbations and constraints on the terrestrial ice extent during the EOT, and review indicators of ocean circulation change and deep water formation, including how these changes reconcile with paleogeography, in particular, ocean gateway effects.

Finally, we synthesise existing model experiments that test three major proposed mechanisms driving the EOT: (i) 65 paleogeography changes, (ii) greenhouse forcing and (iii) ice sheet forcing upon climate. We highlight what has been achieved from these modelling studies to illuminate each of these mechanisms, and explain various aspects of the observations. We also discuss the limitations of these approaches, and highlight areas for future work. We then combine and synthesise the observational and modelling aspects of the literature in a model-data intercomparison of the available models of the EOT. This approach allows us to assess the relative effectiveness of the three modelled mechanisms in explaining the EOT observations.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 1.2 defines the chronology of events around the EOT, and clarifies the terminology of associated events, transitions, and intervals, thereby setting the framework for the rest of the review. Section 2 reviews our understanding of palaeogeographic change across the EOT, and discusses proxy evidence for changes in ocean circulation and ice sheets. Section 3 synthesises marine proxy evidence for sea surface temperatures (SST) and deep-ocean temperature change. Section 4 synthesises terrestrial proxy evidence for continental temperature change, with a focus on pollen-based reconstructions. Section 5 presents estimates of CO<sub>2</sub> forcing across the EOT, from geochemical and stomatal-based proxies. Section 6 qualitatively reviews previous modelling work, and Section 7 provides a new quantitative intercomparison of previous modelling studies, with a focus on model-data comparisons to elucidate the relative importance of different forcings across the EOT. Section 8 provides a brief conclusion.

### 1.2 Terminology of the Eocene-Oligocene transition

Palaeontological evidence has long established Eocene (56 to 34 Ma) warmth in comparison to a long term Cenozoic cooling trend (Lyell and Deshayes 1830, p. 99-100). As modern stratigraphic records improved, a prominent step in that cooling towards the end of the Eocene began to be resolved. This became evident in early oxygen isotope records ( $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ) derived from deep-sea benthic foraminifera, which show an isotope shift towards higher  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values (Kennett and Shackleton, 1976; Shackleton and Kennett, 1975) which was subsequently attributed to a combination of continental ice growth and cooling (Lear et al., 2008). In the 1980s the search was on for a suitable Global Stratotype Section and Point (GSSP) to define the Eocene-Oligocene boundary (EOB). Much of the evidence was brought together in an important synthesis edited by Pomerol and Premoli Silva (1986). The GSSP was eventually fixed at the Massignano outcrop section in the Marche region of Italy in 1992 (Premoli Silva and Jenkins, 1993) at the 19.0 m mark which corresponds to the extinction of the planktonic foraminifer family Hantkeninidae (Coccione, 1988; Nocchi et al., 1986). By the conventions of stratigraphy, Massignano is the only place where the EOB is defined unambiguously; everywhere else the EOB must be correlated to it, whether by biostratigraphy, magnetostratigraphy, isotope stratigraphy or other methods.

Coxall and Pearson, (2007, p 352) described the EOT as "a phase of accelerated climatic and biotic change lasting 500 kyr that began before and ended after the E/O boundary". Recognizing and applying this in practice turns out to be problematic due to variability in the pattern of  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  between records and on different timescales. Widespread records now show the positive  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  shift with increasing detail. A high-resolution record from ODP Site 1218 in the Pacific Ocean revealed two  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  'steps' separated by a more stable 'plateau interval' (Coxall et al., 2005; Coxall and Wilson, 2011). The EOT brackets these isotopic steps with the EOB falling in the plateau between them (Coxall and Pearson, 2007; Coxall and Wilson, 2011; Dunkley Jones et al., 2008; Pearson et al., 2008). However, while two-step  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  patterns have now been interpreted in other deep sea records, thus far largely from the Southern Hemisphere (Figure 1) (Bohaty et al., 2012; Borrelli et al., 2014; Coxall and Wilson, 2011; Langton et al., 2016; Pearson et al., 2008; Wade et al., 2012; Zachos et al., 1996), there is often ambiguity in their

105 identification. In particular, while the second  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  step, 'Step 2' of Coxall and Pearson (2007), is an abrupt and readily  
correlated feature, the first step (Step 1 of Pearson et al., 2008; EOT-1 of Katz et al. 2008) is often less prominent than at Site  
1218 (Figure 1). Furthermore, some records have been interpreted to show more than two  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  steps (e.g. Katz et al. 2008).  
Benthic  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  records provide a powerful complementary stratigraphic tool. These also show a correlatable stepped pattern of  
increase across the EOT, although in detail  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  are not synchronous (Coxall et al., 2005; Zachos et al., 1996) and  
further complications arise in correlation to other sites (Coxall and Wilson, 2011). In attempting to synthesize the pattern  
110 across multiple sites we suggest that attempts to define and correlate an initial 'Step-1' are premature at this point and should  
await better resolved records. Nonetheless, we maintain a tentative Step-1 in our terminology because it is important for  
differentiating phases of cooling vs ice growth during the EOT.

Settling on a consistent terminology for other features of the EOT is also problematic because usage of certain terms has  
115 changed through time. In order to clarify the definition of two key stratigraphic features, we recommend using the following  
terms: (i) for the basal Oligocene  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  increase we suggest the term "Earliest Oligocene oxygen Isotope Step" (EOIS) to  
denote the large isotope step that occurs well after the EOB and within the lower part of Chron C13n (Figure 1); ii) Early  
Oligocene Glacial Maximum (EOGM; Liu et al. 2004; Figure 1) to denote the peak-to-peak isotope stratigraphic interval,  
corresponding to most of Chron C13n (starting at the top of the EOIS). Other terms for these features have been used  
120 inconsistently in the literature (Table 1). For example, the term 'Oi-1' was originally defined (at DSDP Site 522) by Miller et  
al. (1991) as an isotope stratigraphic 'zone' between one oxygen isotope peak and another, corresponding to a duration of  
several millions of years. Here there was a distinction between the 'Zone Oi-1' and the 'Oi-1 Event', the latter being equivalent  
to our EOIS. Subsequent articles variously refer to 'Oi-1' as an extended isotope zone, the peak  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  value at the base of that  
zone, an extended phase of high  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values in the lower Oligocene approximately synonymous with the EOGM, or the 'step'  
125 that led up to the peak value (see discussion and references in Coxall and Pearson, 2007, p. 352). The terms 'Oi-1a' and 'Oi-  
1b', originally defined by Zachos et al. (1996) as "...two distinct, 100 to 150-kyr-long glacial maxima...separated by an  
'interglacial' ", have also been inconsistently applied in the literature and are now arguably an impediment to clear  
communication. Due to this ambiguity, we avoid the term 'Oi-1' here. Katz et al. (2008) referred to prominent oxygen isotope  
steps within the EOT as 'EOT-1' and 'EOT-2', which might seem a convenient nomenclature for the steps referred to here, but  
130 whereas 'EOT-1' arguably corresponds to the 'Step 1' of Coxall and Pearson (2007), 'EOT-2' was a separate feature identified  
in the St. Stephen's Quarry record some way below the level identified as 'Oi-1' (Katz et al. 2008, p330). Hence it is not  
appropriate to use 'EOT-2' to denote the second step. Note, for clarity, the EOIS is not instantaneous and several records show  
some 'intermediate' values; its inferred duration in the records presented here is in the tens of kyr (40 kyr at Site 1218, Coxall  
et al., 2005).

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Event	Abbr.	Definition	Correlation	Timing	Comment	Also known as
Early Oligocene Glacial Maximum	<b>EOGM</b>	Period of cold climate / glaciation in the early Oligocene corresponding to most of Magnetic Chron C13n	Peak to peak $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ stratigraphic interval starting at the top of the EOIS & extending to another peak around the top of C13n	33.65 to ~33.16 Ma, ~490 kyr duration	Defined by Liu et al. (2004). The end of the EOGM may correspond to a 2nd $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ peak sometimes referred to as Oi-1b	Oi-1 (Zachos et al., 1996) including the separate $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ maxima Oi-1a and Oi-1b
Chron C13n	<b>C13n</b>	Interval of normal magnetic polarity in the early Oligocene broadly correlative with the EOGM	Between specific magnetic reversals	33.705 - 33.157 Ma (GTS2012)	Very useful for correlation & dating when available	-
Eocene - Oligocene Transition	<b>EOT</b>	A phase of accelerated climatic & biotic change that began before and ended after the EOB	Stratigraphic interval between the extinction of <i>Discoaster saipanensis</i> & the top of the EOIS	Start = 'Top' <i>D. saipanensis</i> extinction event; End = end of EOIS $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ maximum event. Duration ~790 kyr.	Definition revised here after Coxall & Pearson (2007)	-
Earliest Oligocene oxygen isotope Step	<b>EOIS</b>	Short period of rapid $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ increase (0.7‰ or more) that occurred well after the EOB & within the lower part of Chron C13n	Stratigraphically above the EOB & within the lowermost part of Chron C13n	The peak is at ~33.65 Ma (GTS2012) Duration ~40 kyr.	Herein defined. Defines the end of the EOT and the start of the EOGM	The 'Oil Event' "... at the base of Zone Oil", Miller et al. (1991); Oi-1a of Zachos et al. (1996)
Eocene Oligocene boundary	<b>EOB</b>	The stratigraphic boundary between the Eocene and Oligocene Epochs defined at the Messignano GSSP	Denoted by the extinction of the planktonic foraminifera <i>Hantkenina</i> in the marine realm	33.9 Ma (GTS2012) 33.7 Ma (CK95)	-	Base Oligocene epoch; base Rupelian stage
Step-1	-	The first step increase in $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ occurring shortly before the EOB in some records	Harder to identify & correlate than the EOIS.	? ~34.15 Ma, Duration ~40 kyr.	-	EOT-1, Katz et al. (2008); 'Precursor glaciation', Scher et al. (2011)
Late Eocene Event	-	A transient late Eocene cool or glacial event near the start of the EOT	Transient interval of positive $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ seen in some records.	Onset is coincident (within 80 kyr analytical error; Coxall et al., 2005) with the <i>D. saipanensis</i> extinction (34.44 Ma) at Site 1218.	Defined by Katz et al. (2008) Defines the start of the EOT as defined herein	-
Priabonian oxygen isotope maximum	<b>PrOM</b>	A transient late Eocene cool or glacial event	Transient interval of positive $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ seen in some records well below the EOT	~37.3 Ma. Duration ~140 kyrs, tentatively placed within Chron C17n.1n	Defined by Scher et al. (2014)	-

**Table 1:** Summary of Eocene Oligocene terminology and approximate timings of events, as interpreted at the time of writing. Timescales referred to are GTS2012 (Gradstein et al., 2012) and CK95 (Cande and Kent, 1995).

This brings us back to the definition of the 'EOT'. Based on the stratigraphic record from Tanzania, Dunkley Jones et al. (2008) and Pearson et al. (2008) placed the base of the EOT at the extinction of the tropical warm-water nannofossil *Discoaster saipanensis*, a reliable bioevent which they regarded as the first sign of biotic extinction associated with the late Eocene cooling. This extinction event has long been used to mark the base of nannofossil Zone NP21 (Martini, 1971) or more recently Zone CNE21 (Agnini et al., 2014). On the timescale used by Dunkley Jones et al. (2008) it was estimated to be 500 kyr before the top of the EOIS. However, a subsequent calibration from ODP Site 1218 (Blaj et al., 2009) placed this event significantly earlier than previously suggested, which is supported by recent work in Java (Jones et al., 2019). In the record from Site 1218 the *D. saipanensis* extinction is coincident (within 80 kyr analytical error; Coxall et al., 2005) with the base of a significant  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  increase – possibly a 'failed' glaciation – that seems to be visible in many of the records (including Tanzania) and has been termed the 'Late Eocene Event' by Katz et al., (2008). It seems desirable to include these biotic and climatic events within the definition of the EOT rather than insist on an arbitrary 500 kyr duration. On the most commonly used current timescale, 'Geological Timescale 2012' (GTS2012; Gradstein et al., 2012), the critical levels are calibrated as follows: top of the EOIS at 33.65 Ma, base of Chron C13n at 33.705 Ma, EOB at 33.9 Ma, and extinction of *D. saipanensis* at 34.44 Ma. Hence the

Event	Abbr.	Definition	
Early Oligocene Glacial Maximum	<b>EOGM</b>	Period of cold climate / glaciation in the early Oligocene corresponding to most of Magnetic Chron C13n	Peak to interval; EOIS & peak aro
Chron C13n	<b>C13n</b>	Interval of normal magnetic polarity in the early Oligocene broadly correlative with the EOGM	Between reversals
Eocene - Oligocene Transition	<b>EOT</b>	A phase of accelerated climatic & biotic change that began before and ended after the EOB	Stratigraphic the extn <i>saipanensis</i> ; EOIS
Earliest Oligocene oxygen isotope Step	<b>EOIS</b>	Short period of rapid $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ increase (0.7‰ or more) that occurred well after the EOB & within the lower part of Chron C13n	Stratigraphically & within Chron C13n
Eocene Oligocene boundary	<b>EOB</b>	The stratigraphic boundary between the Eocene and Oligocene Epochs defined at the Messignano GSSP	Denoted plankton <i>Hantken</i> .
Step-1	-	The first step increase in $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ occurring shortly before the EOB in some records	Harder to than the
Late Eocene Event	-	A transient late Eocene cool or glacial event near the start of the EOT	Transient $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ seen
Priabonian oxygen isotope maximum	<b>PrOM</b>	A transient late Eocene cool or glacial event	Transient $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ seen below th

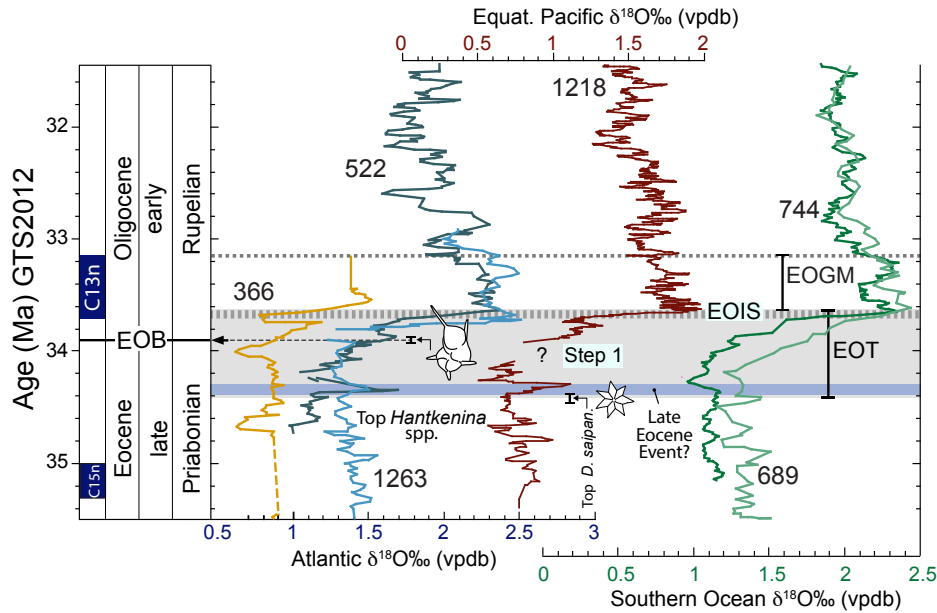
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stratigraphic interval of the EOT according to our preferred definition is now given an estimated duration of 790 kyr (Figure 1). This terminology and the alternatives are summarized in Table 1 and illustrated below in Figure 1.

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**Figure 1:** Oxygen stable isotope and chrono-stratigraphic characteristics of the Eocene-Oligocene transition (EOT) from deep marine records and EOT terminology on the GTS 2012 time scale. Benthic foraminiferal  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  from six deep sea drill holes are shown: tropical Atlantic Site 366, South Atlantic Sites 522 and 1263 (Zachos et al. 1996; Langton et al., 2016); Southern Ocean Sites 744 and 689 (Zachos et al. 1996; Diester-Haass and Zahn 1996) and the Equatorial Pacific Site 1218 (Coxall and Wilson 2011). Due to different sample resolutions, running means are applied using a 3-point filter for Sites 522, 689 and 1263, 5-point filter for Sites 366 and 744 and a 7-point filter for Site 1218. Time scale conversions were made by aligning common magneto-stratigraphic tie points. The EOT is defined as a ca. 790 kyr long phase of accelerated climatic and biotic change that began before and ended after the Eocene-Oligocene boundary (EOB) (after Coxall and Pearson (2007)). It is bounded at the base by the 'Top' *D. saipanensis* nannofossil extinction event, and above by the EOIS- $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  maximum. Benthic data are all *Cibicidoides* spp. or 'Cibs. Equivalent' and have not been adjusted to sea water equilibrium values. 'Step-1' comprises a modest  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  increase linked to ocean cooling (Lear et al., 2008; Bohaty et al., 2012). The 'Top *Hantkenina* spp.' marker corresponds to the position of this extinction event at DSDP Site 522 (including sampling bracket) with respect to the corresponding Site 522  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  curve. That it coincides with the published calibrated age of this event (33.9 Ma) is entirely independent. The 'Late Eocene Event'  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  maximum (after Katz et al., 2008) may represent a failed glaciation.

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Combined  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and trace element investigations (see Section 3.2) have led to the suggestion that the  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  increase commonly referred to as Step-1 (Figure 1) is mostly attributable to ocean cooling, with subordinate ice sheet growth, whereas the more

180 prominent  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  increase at the end of the EOT (i.e., the EOIS in our terminology) largely represents ice growth with a little  
further cooling (Bohaty et al., 2012; Katz et al., 2008; Lear et al., 2008). Estimates of the combined total sea-level fall across  
the EOT are on the order of 70 m (Miller et al., 2008; Wilson et al., 2013) and microfacies and paleontological records from  
shelf environments (Houben et al., 2012) are consistent with this generalization. A recent shallow marine sediment record also  
indicates the onset of major glaciation at  $\sim 33.7$  Ma (Gallagher et al., 2020), in agreement with deep sea records. The EOIS is  
the sharpest feature in most records, culminating with the highest benthic  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values of the Eocene and Oligocene. It is widely  
185 suggested that it signifies the initiation of major sustained Antarctic glaciation, most likely an early East Antarctic Ice Sheet  
(EAIS) (Bohaty et al., 2012; Coxall et al., 2005; Galeotti et al., 2016; Miller et al., 1987; Shackleton and Kennett, 1975; Zachos  
et al., 1992). The EOGM is interpreted as an approximately 500 kyr-long glacial maximum, with lower values visible in some  
records Zachos et al., 1996; Liu et al. 2004) (Figure 1). Oxygen isotope maxima in the late Eocene imply substantial ephemeral  
precursor glaciations in the approach to the EOT (Galeotti et al., 2016; Houben et al., 2012; Katz et al., 2008; Scher et al.,  
190 2011, 2014). The oldest and most prominent of these hypothesized transient glacial events occurred at  $\sim 37.3$  Ma (within  
magnetostratigraphic C17n) and is referred to as the Priabonian Oxygen Isotope Maximum (PrOM) Event (Scher et al., 2014). The  
'Late Eocene Event' of Katz et al. (2008) at  $\sim 34.15$  Ma may be regarded as the second, the third being  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  'Step- 1' at  $\sim 34$   
Ma (the 'precursor glaciation' of Scher et al., 2011). Nevertheless, differences between  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  curves from different water  
depths and ocean regions, combined with increasing detail in individual records afforded by high-resolution sampling  
195 emphasizes that the EOT cannot be adequately understood as a series of discrete events because it is clearly imprinted by  
orbitally paced variability throughout (Coxall et al., 2005).

A detailed discussion of the *Hantkenina* extinction and associated bioevents at the EOB was provided by Berggren et al.,  
(2018, p 30-32). The highest stratigraphic occurrence of the planktonic foraminifera family Hantkeninidae denotes the EOB  
200 in its type section (Nocchi et al., 1986). This is thought to have involved simultaneous extinction of all five morphospecies  
and two genera of late Eocene hantkeninids (Coxall and Pearson, 2007) (Figure 1). Insofar as the principles of biostratigraphy  
require a particular species to denote a biozone boundary, the commonest species *Hantkenina alabamensis* is used to define  
the base of Zone O1 (Berggren et al., 2018; Berggren and Pearson, 2005; Wade et al., 2011). The extinction of *H. alabamensis*  
can be considered the 'primary marker' for worldwide correlation of the EOB. It occurs at a slightly higher (later) level than  
205 another set of prominent planktonic foraminifer extinctions, namely *Turborotalia cerroazulensis* and related species. DSDP  
Site 522 (South Atlantic), thus far, is one of the few deep sea records to have both a detailed  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  stratigraphy and planktonic  
foraminifera assemblages that capture these evolutionary events. Here, the *Hantkenina* extinction horizon occurs  
approximately two thirds of the way through the EOT (Figure 1). It occurs at a similar relative position in the hemipelagic  
EOT sequence in Tanzania (Pearson et al., 2008), also in unpublished data from Indian Ocean ODP Site 757 (Coxall et al.,  
210 unpublished). This finding implies that the extinction of the hantkeninids was approximately synchronous although its cause  
is currently unknown. Existing constraints on the hantkeninid extinction horizon remain rather coarse in terms of sampling

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215 resolution compared to many isotopic records and the matter will benefit greatly from incoming high-resolution records from Site U1411, which boasts both excellent (glassy) preservation and orbital level sampling.

220 Dating and correlation of non-marine records, which usually lack  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  stratigraphy, is more challenging and there are far fewer well-dated records on land. Here a strict concept of the EOT is difficult to apply and relies on correlations using other stratigraphic approaches, including magnetostratigraphy and palynomorph or mammal tooth biostratigraphy that have been cross calibrated in a few marine and marginal-marine sections (Abels et al., 2011; Dupont-Nivet et al., 2007, 2008; Hooker et al., 2004). Central Asian sections are the exception, where even the step features of the EOT can be identified using magneto, bio- and cyclostratigraphy (Xiao et al., 2010). Moreover, combined  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and clumped isotope analyses on fresh water gastropod shells from a terrestrial EOT section in the south of England has permitted the first direct correlation of marine and non-marine realms and identified coupling between cooling and hydrological changes in the terrestrial realm (Sheldon et al., 2016). This finding suggests a close timing and causal relation between the earliest Oligocene glaciation and a major Eurasian mammalian turnover event called the 'Grande Coupure' (Hooker et al., 2004; Sheldon et al., 2016). During the Grand Coupure, many endemic European mammal species became extinct and were replaced by Asian immigrant species. These changes have been attributed to a combination of climate-driven extinction and species dispersal due to the closing of Turgai Strait; which provided a greater connection between Europe and Asia (Akhmetiev and Beniamovski, 2009; Costa et al., 2011; Hooker et al., 230 2004).

In shallow water carbonate successions, the EOB has traditionally been approximated by the prominent extinctions of a series of long-ranging larger benthic foraminifers (LBFs) often called orthofragminids (corresponding to the Families Discocyclinidae and Asterocyclinidae; Adams et al. 1986). The general expectation was that these extinctions likely occurred 235 at the time of maximum ice growth and sea level regression – in our terminology the EOIS. However evidence from Tanzania (Cotton and Pearson, 2011) and Indonesia (Cotton et al., 2014) suggest that the extinctions occurred within the EOT. In Tanzania the extinctions occur quite precisely at the level of the EOB, hinting that the EOB itself may have had a global cause affecting different environments, possibly independent of the events that caused the isotope increases (Cotton and Pearson, 2011).

240 The definition of the EOT used here excludes the long-term Eocene cooling trend. That trend began in the Ypresian (early Eocene) and continued through much of the Lutetian and Bartonian (middle Eocene; albeit interrupted by the Middle Eocene Climatic Optimum; MECO; Bohaty and Zachos 2003) and Priabonian (late Eocene) (Cramwinckel et al., 2018; Inglis et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2018; Śliwińska et al., 2019; Zachos et al., 2001). In particular, prominent extinctions in various marine groups 245 occurred around the beginning of the Priabonian (late Eocene), possibly connected with global cooling (e.g. Wade and Pearson 2008; note that the base of the Priabonian has recently been defined in the Alano section in Italy; Agnini et al., 2020). These

data are excluded by our definition from the EOT but may be part of the same general long-term pattern. In some stratigraphic records, especially terrestrial ones, it may not be easy to distinguish these longer-term events from the EOT.

## 2 Proxy evidence for paleogeography, ocean circulation, and terrestrial ice evolution

250 Here we discuss proxy evidence for the global paleogeography of the EOT (Section 2.1) including the state and evolution of ocean gateways (Section 2.2), and proxy evidence for ocean circulation (Section 2.3) and Antarctic glaciation (Section 2.4). We then briefly discuss the timing of the Northern Hemisphere glaciation (Section 2.5).

### 2.1 Tectonic Reconstruction

The tectonic evolution of the southern continents, opening a pathway for the Antarctic Circumpolar Current, has long been linked with long-term Eocene cooling and the EOT (Kennett et al., 1975). However, there remain major challenges in reconstructing the paleogeography at or around the EOT, requiring a series of methodological steps (Baatsen et al., 2016; Kennett et al., 1975; Markwick, 2007, 2019; Markwick and Valdes, 2004; Müller et al., 2008). The first step is to use modern geography and relocate the continental and ocean plates according to a plate tectonic evolution model, used in software such as GPlates (Boyden et al., 2011). This software uses the interpretation of seafloor spreading and paleomagnetic data to reconstruct relative plate motion (e.g. Scotese et al. 1988), and an absolute reference frame to position the plates relative to the Earth's mantle (e.g. Dupont-Nivet et al. 2008). Currently, there are two such absolute reference frames: one based on a global network of volcanic hot-spots (Seton et al., 2012) and one based on a paleomagnetic reference frame (van Hinsbergen et al., 2015; Torsvik et al., 2012). Importantly, these two reference frames give virtually the same continental outlines, but the orientation of the continents is shifted. This results in differences in continental positions between the reference frames of up to 5-6° (Baatsen et al., 2016) around the EOT, creating an uncertainty in reconstructing paleogeography, especially in southern latitudes between 40 to 70 °S where important land and ocean geological archives exist. This latitudinal uncertainty also impacts the reconstruction of Antarctic glaciation, since glacial dynamics are highly sensitive to latitude.

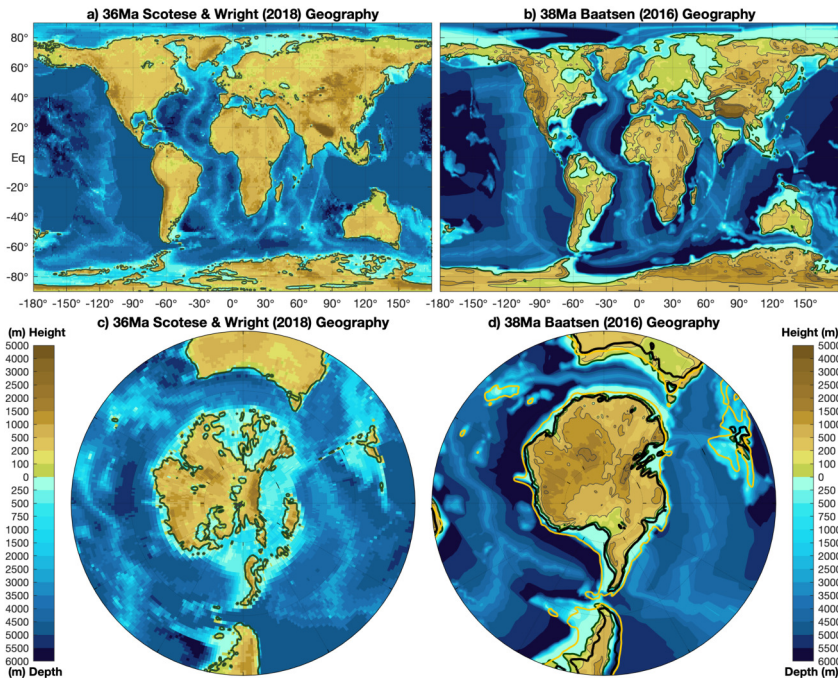
After the plate tectonic reconstruction has been applied, adjustments are needed to capture the age-depth evolution of the seafloor (Crosby et al., 2006) and seafloor sedimentation rate (Müller et al., 2008). Adjusting land topography is more difficult, and requires knowledge of paleoaltimetry, including processes such as plate collision processes, uplift, subsidence and erosion. Several publicly available reconstructions exist for the Eocene; Markwick (2007) reconstructed paleotopography for the late Eocene (38 Ma), while Sewall et al. (2000) and more recently (Zhang et al., 2011) and Herold et al. (2014) have generated paleotopographies for the early Eocene (~55 to 50 Ma). These are based on the Hot Spot reference frame. Baatsen et al. (2016) have recently created a paleogeographic reconstruction of the late Eocene using the Paleomagnetic reference frame. Such efforts to develop realistic paleogeography for each time slice represents a major undertaking in blending geomorphic evidence with tectonic evolution, and thus includes many specific details that are beyond the scope of this review.

280 Recently, a stage-by-stage paleogeographic reconstruction of the entire Phanerozoic has been made publicly available in digital  
format (Scotese and Wright, 2018). This includes snapshots of the Priabonian (35.9 Ma) and Rupelian (31 Ma). Another stage-  
by-stage reconstruction of Cenozoic paleogeography evolution originates from Markwick (2007); this reconstruction has been  
incorporated into a modelling study of climate dependence on paleogeography (Farnsworth et al., 2019; Lunt et al., 2016), and  
paleogeography changes across the EOT (Kennedy et al., 2015). However, the most recent versions of the (Markwick, 2007)  
paleogeography reconstructions are proprietary and are thus not included in this paper. Therefore, we present a summary of  
285 late Eocene (38 Ma) paleogeography in

[Figure 2](#) from the publicly available datasets of Baatsen et al. (2016) and Scotese and Wright (2018). Our aim here is not to  
evaluate these reconstructions, but to present them such that their differences can be taken as broadly indicative of the  
uncertainties in paleogeography at this time.

290 The reconstructions contain several notable regions of uncertainty which we briefly mention. They include (i) the Tibetan  
Plateau and the Indian subcontinent, where there are clear disagreements between the reconstructions, (ii) the Turgai strait and  
Tethys region, which has far greater shallow marine shelf regions in the Baatsen et al. (2016) reconstruction, (iii) the Fram  
Strait, which is arguably closed by the Eocene-Oligocene transition but is open in both reconstructions (Lasabuda et al., 2018),  
and (iv) the Rocky Mountains and North American continent exhibit key differences in elevation and coastlines, which has  
295 implications for Eocene-Oligocene climate evolution (Chamberlain et al., 2012). A full review of these uncertainties is beyond  
the scope of this paper, however we briefly discuss some impacts of these paleogeography uncertainties on terrestrial  
temperature reconstructions in Section 4, while we discuss the impacts on ocean circulation in Section 2.2 and 2.3.

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**Figure 2:** Paleogeography at the late Eocene showing two alternative reconstructions. (a) and (c) use the Hot Spot reference frame, using the Scotese and Wright (2018) paleogeography at 36 Ma, while (b) and (d) use the Paleomagnetic reference frame showing the reconstruction of Baatsen et al. (2016) at 38 Ma. These two reconstructions use different methodologies, and are presented as broadly indicative of the uncertainties in paleogeography at this time. Also shown in (d) are post-EOT coastlines at 30 Ma (black contours) and 1000 m depth (orange contours), which illustrate the widening of the Southern Ocean gateways during the 8 Myr interval around the EOT.

**2.2 Southern Ocean Gateways**

A long-held hypothesis on the cause of the EOT glaciation is that Antarctica cooled because of tectonic opening of Southern Ocean gateways (Barker and Burrell, 1977; Kennett, 1977). This mechanism suggests that the onset of the Antarctic Circumpolar Current (ACC) reorganised ocean currents from a configuration of subpolar gyres with strong meridional heat transport to predominantly zonal flow, thereby causing thermal isolation of Antarctica (Barker and Thomas, 2004). The hypothesis is supported by foraminiferal isotopic evidence from deep sea drill cores in the Southern Ocean, which indicate a

315 shift from warm to cold currents (Exon et al., 2004). As such, there has been considerable effort to reconstruct the tectonic history of the Southern Ocean gateways.

The Drake Passage opening has been dated to around 50 Ma (Livermore et al., 2007) or even earlier (Markwick, 2007); however it was likely shallow and narrow at this time. The timing of the transition to a wide and deep gateway, potentially capable of sustaining a vigorous ACC, occurred on a timescale of tens of millions of years. Even with substantial widening of Drake Passage, several intervening ridges in the region are likely to have blocked the deep circumpolar flow (Eagles et al., 2005). These barriers may have not have cleared until the Miocene at around 22 Ma (Barker and Thomas, 2004; Dalziel et al., 2013). The evolution of the Tasman Gateway is better constrained. Geophysical reconstructions of continent-ocean boundaries (Williams et al., 2011) place the opening of a deep (greater than ~500 m) Tasmanian Gateway at  $33.5 \pm 1.5$  Ma (Scher et al., 2015; Stickley et al., 2004). Marine microfossil records suggest the circumpolar flow was initially westward (Bijl et al., 2013). Multiproxy based evidence from ODP Leg 189 suggests that the opening of the Tasmanian Gateway significantly preceded Antarctic glaciation and might therefore not been its primary cause (Huber et al., 2004; Stickley et al., 2004; Wei, 2004). The results also indicate that the gateway deepening at the EOT initially produced an eastward flow of warm surface waters into the southwestern Pacific, and not of cold surface waters as previously assumed. Subsequently, the Tasmanian Gateway steadily opened during the Oligocene, hypothesised to cross a threshold when the northern margin of the ACC aligned with the westerly winds (Scher et al., 2015), triggering the onset of an eastward flowing ACC at around 30 Ma. However, the westerly winds can also shift position due to changes in orographic barriers or an increase in the meridional temperature gradient after glaciation. Thus, the opening of Southern Ocean gateways approximately coincides with the EOT, but with large uncertainty on the timing and implications. We discuss modelling of this mechanism in Section 6.1.

### 2.3 Meridional overturning circulation

335 Throughout much of the Eocene, deep water formation is suggested to have occurred dominantly in the Southern Ocean and the North Pacific (Ferreira et al., 2018), based on numerical modelling and supported by stable and radiogenic isotope work (Cramer et al., 2009; McKinley et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2014). Compilations of  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  throughout the Atlantic basin suggest that the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation (AMOC) either started up or strengthened at the EOT (Borrelli et al., 2014; Coxall et al., 2018; Katz et al., 2011). This view of the AMOC expansion is supported by a decrease in South Atlantic  $\epsilon_{\text{Nd}}$  around the EOT (Via and Thomas, 2006). Significant seafloor spreading was occurring in the Southern Hemisphere, such that these changes in ocean circulation have previously been explained by the opening of Southern Ocean gateways (Borrelli et al., 2014). However, studies of deep sea sediment drifts suggest that some kind of North Atlantic overturning operated from the middle Eocene (Boyle et al., 2017; Hohbein et al., 2012). This earlier onset is supported by climate modelling that suggested that AMOC fluctuations in the middle Eocene are linked to obliquity forcing cycles (Vahlenkamp et al., 2018a, 2018b). Moreover, interactions between the Arctic and Atlantic oceans are gaining interest as potential triggers of a late Eocene proto AMOC (Hutchinson et al., 2019). Data from the Labrador Sea and western North Atlantic margin indicate that North Atlantic

**Deleted:** A shift in the north-south gradient of  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  and decrease in South Atlantic  $\epsilon_{\text{Nd}}$  around the EOT suggests that North Atlantic convection may have begun or strengthened at this time

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waters became saltier and denser from 37 to 33 Ma (Coxall et al., 2018). This densification may then have strengthened or even triggered an AMOC, suggesting a possible forcing mechanism for Antarctic cooling that predates the EOT and Southern Ocean gateway openings.

Proxy records suggest that the Arctic Ocean was much fresher during the Eocene than the present day, with typical surface salinities around 20-25 psu and periodic excursions to very low salinity conditions (<10 psu) (Brinkhuis et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2014; Waddell and Moore, 2008). Outflow of this fresh surface water into the North Atlantic can potentially prohibit deep water formation (Baatsen et al., 2020; Hutchinson et al., 2018). A new line of evidence suggests that deepening of the Greenland-Scotland Ridge (GSR) around the EOT may have enabled North Atlantic surface waters to become saltier (Abelson and Erez, 2017; Stürz et al., 2017), by allowing a deeper exchange between the basins. A related hypothesis derived from sea level and paleo-shoreline estimates in the Nordic Seas is that the Arctic likely became isolated during the Oligocene (Hegewald and Jokat, 2013; O'Regan et al., 2011). Thus a gradual constriction of the connection between the Arctic and Atlantic presents a newly hypothesised priming mechanism for establishment of a well-developed AMOC (Coxall et al., 2018; Hutchinson et al., 2019).

#### 2.4 Antarctic glaciation

Although transient glacial events on Antarctica are proposed for the late Eocene, the most significant long term glaciations likely began on eastern Antarctica on the Gamburtsev Mountains and other highlands (Young et al., 2011) as a result of rapid global cooling in the early Oligocene around 33.7 Ma (EOGM, [Figure 1](#)). Evidence for glacial discharge into open ocean basins in the earliest Oligocene is long established, with ice-rafted debris (IRD) appearing in deep-sea Southern Ocean sediment cores (Zachos et al., 1992). Since these initial results, efforts have continued to document and understand early Cenozoic Antarctic ice dynamics (Barker et al., 2007; Francis et al., 2008; McKay et al., 2016). Combining perspectives from marine geology, geophysics, geochemical proxies and modelling, these efforts have largely focused on the evolution and stability of the early Oligocene Antarctic ice sheets, and estimates of ice volume contributions to sea-level change. Other important developments in the study of Antarctic ice include modelled thresholds for Antarctic glaciation (DeConto et al., 2008; Gasson et al., 2014), and improved reconstructions of Eocene-Oligocene subglacial bedrock topography (from airborne radar surveys). These bedrock reconstructions are important for reconstructing the nucleation centres of precursor ice sheets (Scher et al. 2011, 2014) and subsequent development of continental-sized ice sheets (Bo et al., 2009; Thomson et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2013; Wilson and Luyendyk, 2009; Young et al., 2011).

Evidence for glaciation in the Weddell Sea and Ross Sea suggest that there was an increase in physical weathering over West Antarctica around the EOT (Anderson et al., 2011; Ehrmann and Mackensen, 1992; Huang et al., 2014; Olivetti et al., 2015; Scher et al., 2011; Sorlien et al., 2007). However, in the Ross Sea, evidence suggests that an expansion over West Antarctica in Marie Byrd Land occurred after the EOT (Olivetti et al., 2013), while in the Weddell Sea sedimentation rates were still

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lower than recent times, suggesting the West Antarctic ice sheet was not expanded to modern proportions (Huang et al., 2014). This is consistent with approximations of ice volume based upon oxygen isotopes (Bohaty et al., 2012; Lear et al., 2008) and is supported by the record of relatively diverse vegetation around at least coastal regions of Antarctica through the Oligocene (Francis et al., 2008).

Recent evidence has emerged of transient ‘precursor’ Antarctic glaciations occurred in the late Eocene (Carter et al., 2017; Escutia et al., 2011; Passchier et al., 2017; Scher et al., 2014), suggesting a ‘flickering’ transition out of the greenhouse. Importantly, several Southern Ocean sites revealed evidence that Antarctic glaciation induced crustal deformation and gravitational perturbations resulting in local sea level rise close to the young Antarctic ice sheet (Stocchi et al., 2013). Finally, detailed core sedimentary records drilled close to Antarctica in the western Ross Sea invoke a transition from a modestly sized highly dynamic late Eocene-early Oligocene ice sheet, existing from ~34 - 32.8 Ma, to a more stable, continental-scale ice sheet thereafter, which calved at the coastline (Galeotti et al., 2016).

## 2.5 Northern hemisphere glaciation

While there is clear evidence for Antarctic glaciations at the EOT, the question of contemporaneous northern hemisphere glaciation is contentious. The prevailing view is that the Oligocene represented a non-modern-like state with only Antarctica glaciated (Westerhold et al., 2020; Zachos et al., 2001). Glaciation in mountain areas around the globe is suggested to have followed through the Miocene and Pliocene, with evidence for the first significant build-up of ice on Greenland (in the southern highlands) traced to the late Miocene, sometime between 7.5 - 6 Ma (Bierman et al., 2016; Larsen et al., 1994; Maslin et al., 1998; Pérez et al., 2018) or as early as 11 Ma (Helland and Holmes, 1997). Northern Hemisphere glaciation intensified during the late Pliocene (~2.7 Ma) when large terrestrial glaciers began rhythmically advancing and retreating across North America, Greenland, and Eurasia (Bailey et al., 2013; Ehlers and Gibbard, 2007; Lunt et al., 2008; Maslin et al., 1998; Raymo, 1994; De Schepper et al., 2014; Shackleton et al., 1984). It is important to note that a delay in northern hemisphere glaciation relative to Antarctica is predicted by climate models—the stabilizing effect of the hysteresis in the height-mass balance feedback becomes weaker with greater distance from the poles (Pollard and DeConto, 2005), because with decreasing latitude summers become warmer for a given radiative forcing (DeConto et al., 2008).

Nevertheless, a series of studies (Tripathi et al., 2005, 2008; Tripathi and Darby, 2018) argue that bipolar glaciation was triggered in the Eocene and/or Oligocene. This suggestion is based on two lines of evidence from the sedimentary record: (i) estimates of global seawater  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values (Tripathi et al., 2005) and (ii) identification of ice-transported sediment grains inferred to have originated from Greenland in both interior Arctic Ocean and subarctic Atlantic sediment cores associated with the EOT (Eldrett et al., 2007), or earlier (middle Eocene) (St. John, 2008; Tripathi and Darby, 2018; Tripathi et al., 2008). Certainly, several lines of evidence provide support for winter sea ice in the Arctic from the middle Eocene (Darby, 2014; St. John, 2008; Stickley et al., 2009) and perennial sea ice from 13 Ma (Krylov et al., 2008). It is possible that small mountain glaciers on East Greenland,

425 perhaps comparable to the modern Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers of New Zealand (which extend from the Southern Alps  
through lush rain forest), reached sea level during cooler orbital phases of the Eocene, intensifying in the late Eocene and early  
Oligocene (Eldrett et al., 2007). Yet, the results of a recent detailed analysis of expanded EOT sections from the North  
Atlantic's modern day iceberg alley on the Newfoundland margin are inconsistent with the presence of extensive ice sheets on  
southern and western Greenland and the northeastern Canadian Arctic, contradicting the suggestion of extensive early northern  
430 hemisphere glaciation in favour of a unipolar icehouse climate state at the EOT (Spray et al., 2019). Furthermore, it is unlikely  
that ice growth on land in the Northern Hemisphere was sufficiently extensive to impact global seawater  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  budgets sea  
level at the EOT (Coxall et al., 2005; Lear et al., 2008; Mudelsee et al., 2014). Marine SSTs and floral records from the  
subarctic and Arctic imply sustained warm temperatures and extensive lowland temperate vegetation well into the middle  
Miocene (O'Regan et al. 2011), that are not readily reconciled with large continental ice sheets fringing Greenland and other  
435 Arctic landmasses then or before this time.

From a theoretical perspective, climate and ice sheet modelling suggest that the  $\text{CO}_2$  threshold for Northern Hemisphere ice-  
sheet inception is fundamentally lower than for Antarctica (DeConto et al., 2008; Gasson et al., 2014), implying that the climate  
must be cooler to glaciolate Greenland than Antarctica. This is also consistent with evidence that the modern Greenland ice sheet  
440 is highly sensitive to climatic warming and that Greenland may have been almost ice-free for extended periods even in the  
Pleistocene (Schaefer et al., 2016). This asymmetry between the northern and southern hemispheres in susceptibility to  
glaciation has been attributed to (i) the lower latitudes of the continents encircling the Arctic Ocean relative to the Antarctic,  
together with different ocean and atmospheric circulation patterns (DeConto et al., 2008; Gasson et al., 2012) and (ii) the ice  
sheet carrying capacity of the continents; it has been argued that Greenland topography was low during the Paleogene  
445 compared to Antarctica and extensive mountain building, providing high-altitude terrain needed for glaciation, did not occur  
until the late Miocene-Pliocene (Gasson et al., 2012; Solgaard et al., 2013).

But even in the question of Greenland topography there is uncertainty. Reconstructions of plate kinematics in suspected ice  
sheet nucleation sites (e.g., northern Greenland, Ellesmere Island) are equivocal. It has been argued that Greenland topography  
450 was low during the Paleogene compared to Antarctica and extensive mountain building, providing high-altitude terrain needed  
for glaciation, did not occur until the late Miocene-Pliocene (Gasson et al., 2012; Japsen et al., 2006; Solgaard et al., 2013).  
Recent work on the plate kinematic history of the Eurekan orogeny, taking into account crustal shortening (Gurnis et al., 2018),  
indicate a period of significant compression in northern Greenland and Ellesmere from 55-35 Ma (Gion et al., 2017) that was  
probably associated with uplift (Piepjohn et al., 2016). These latest tectonic insights are compatible with insights from apatite  
455 fission track and helium data that support the onset of a rapid phase of exhumation of the East Greenland margin around 30  
+/- 5 Ma (Bernard et al., 2016; Japsen et al., 2015). Together, these approaches support a view of high mountains on  
Greenland/Ellesmere that began eroding in the late Eocene to early Oligocene with a greater possibility of supporting glaciers.

### 3 Marine observations

#### 3.1 Sea surface temperature observations

460 A key requirement for understanding the cause and consequences of the Eocene-Oligocene climatic transition is good spatial and temporal constraints on global temperatures and our most numerous and well-resolved records of this undoubtedly come from the oceans. Quantitative reconstruction of sea surface and deep ocean temperatures has been ongoing for decades. This requires use of various geochemical proxies, both to provide independent support for absolute temperature estimates and because different proxy options are available for different ocean/sedimentary settings, and deep sea versus surface ocean water masses. Each method has its own limitations and uncertainties resulting in a currently patchy but steadily improving view of global change. Quantitative assemblage-based SST proxies akin to transfer functions are not available because there are no living plankton relatives during the EOT. For a thorough review of pre-Quaternary marine SST proxies, and their strengths and weaknesses, see Hollis et al., (2019).

470 While more heterogeneous than the deep sea, reconstruction of SST in the EOT is in some ways currently more achievable than bottom water temperatures because more proxies are available, although there are still multiple confounding factors to consider. Classical marine  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  paleothermometry extracted from the calcium carbonate shells of fossil planktonic (surface floating) foraminifera is especially complicated because of the combining influences of (i) compromised fossil preservation under the shallow late Eocene ocean calcite compensation depth, limiting the availability of planktonic records, (ii) increasing  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  of sea water as a consequence of ice sheet expansion, which enriches ocean water and thus increases calcite  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ; a signal which can otherwise indicate cooling. However, a growing number of clay-rich hemipelagic marine sequences containing exceptionally well-preserved (glassy) fossil material are yielding  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  paleotemperatures that provide useful SST perspectives.  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  SSTs derived from glassy foraminifera (Haiblen et al., 2019; Norris and Wilson, 1998; Pearson et al., 2001; Wilson et al., 2002; Wilson and Norris, 2001) contrast greatly from those measured on recrystallized 'frosty' material (Sexton et al., 2006). A detailed compilation of glassy versus recrystallized foraminiferal  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  proxies around the EOT is given in Piga (2020).

Planktonic foraminifera Mg/Ca paleothermometry provides another means of quantifying SSTs (Evans et al., 2016; Lear et al., 2008), however such records are even more sparse than  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  equivalents due to the scarcity of appropriate EOT fossils. This method is especially useful since, in theory, unlike  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  it should be independent of Antarctic glaciation and, when coupled with  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  paleothermometry, past variations in the  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  composition of seawater, and thus ice volume changes may also be estimated (Lear et al., 2004, 2008; Mudelsee et al., 2014). The two key existing records are from Tanzania (Lear et al., 2008) and the Gulf of Mexico (Evans et al., 2016; Wade et al., 2012). The Tanzanian planktonic Mg/Ca record provides cornerstone evidence for a permanent 2.5 °C tropical surface and bottom water, ocean cooling, and therefore likely global cooling, associated with the Step 1 of the EOT (Figure 1). The Gulf of Mexico Mg/Ca temperature record resembles the

490 biomarker-derived (i.e. TEX<sub>86</sub>, see below) SST record from this site (Wade et al., 2012). Both imply a distinct and slightly larger surface cooling of 3-4°C limited to Step 1. To what extent secular change in seawater Mg/Ca reconstruction might have influenced these actual numbers is an ongoing question (Evans et al., 2018). Clumped isotope paleothermometry (Ghosh et al., 2006; Zaarur et al., 2013), also independent of seawater δ<sup>18</sup>O, is still in its infancy, but this is a third method applicable to calcareous microfossils that will help address some of these problems. Thus far only one clumped isotope (Δ<sub>47</sub>) record from 495 Maud Rise spans the EOT (Petersen and Schrag, 2015). This record shows cooling preceding the EOT, and then relatively minor changes across the EOT. Early to middle Eocene clumped isotope SST records are consistent with other proxies, specifically cooler values at high southern latitudes compared to the early and middle Eocene (Evans et al., 2018). Many new SST records base on Mg/Ca and Δ<sub>47</sub> are expected in coming years.

500 In some regions, Eocene-Oligocene age sediments lack biogenic calcium carbonates (e.g. Bijl et al., 2009). Therefore low- and non-calcareous areas, like the Arctic and high-latitudes of the North Atlantic and North Pacific, have suffered for lack of paleotemperature data. However, the development of independent organic proxies based on biomarkers such as alkenones (U<sup>K</sup><sub>37</sub> index; Brassell et al. 1986) and glycerol dialkyl glycerol tetraethers (GDGTs) from the membrane lipids of Thaumarchaeota (TEX<sub>86</sub> index; Schouten et al. 2002), which can be preserved in high sedimentation settings close to 505 continental margins or restricted basins where carbonate is often scarce, have helped fill this gap. Importantly, these organic biomarkers are often the only marine archive for paleothermometry at high latitudes, where SST constraints are particularly useful for model-data comparisons.

While the U<sup>K</sup><sub>37</sub> index is well established, the TEX<sub>86</sub> index is relatively new and its accuracy as a paleotemperature proxy is 510 under critical review. There have been several different TEX<sub>86</sub> indices developed, with different SST calibrations (e.g. TEX<sup>\*</sup><sub>86</sub> by Sluijs et al. 2009; TEX<sub>86</sub><sup>H</sup> and TEX<sub>86</sub><sup>L</sup> by Kim et al. 2010; Bayspar by Tierney and Tingley 2015). As suggested by some of the recent studies conducted on cultures of Thaumarchaeota, GDGT composition may be sensitive not only to SST but also other factors such as oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>) concentration (Qin et al., 2015) or ammonia oxidation rate (Hurley et al., 2016). Furthermore, there is uncertainty in the source of the GDGTs used for SST estimations, i.e. their production level in the water column and 515 possible summer biases, and therefore their value as an SST proxy. Recent reviews are available for both the paleotemperatures U<sup>K</sup><sub>37</sub> (Brassell, 2014) and for TEX<sub>86</sub> (Hurley et al., 2016; Pearson and Ingalls, 2013; Qin et al., 2015; Tierney and Tingley, 2015). Despite these issues, in some studies where both U<sup>K</sup><sub>37</sub> and TEX<sub>86</sub> indices were applied, temperature estimations show remarkably similar results (Liu et al., 2009) suggesting that TEX<sub>86</sub>, after an evaluation of the source and the distribution of GDGTs (Inglis et al., 2015), can successfully be applied as a paleotemperature proxy. TEX<sub>86</sub> is especially useful at lower 520 latitudes, since the U<sup>K</sup><sub>37</sub> index saturates at about 29°C (Müller et al., 1998).

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Cross-latitude biomarker proxy records (U<sup>K</sup><sub>37</sub> and TEX<sub>86</sub>) suggest that SSTs were higher than today in both the late Eocene and early Oligocene SSTs with annual means of up to 20 °C at both 60 °N and 60 °S respectively and low meridional

525 temperature gradients (Hollis et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2009; Wade et al., 2012). One record from the Gulf of Mexico (Wade et al., 2012) suggests consistently higher SSTs derived from TEX<sub>86</sub> than from inorganic proxies (Hollis et al., 2009, 2012; Liu et al., 2009). Where records span the EOT (i.e. ~33-34 Ma), between 1 to 5 °C of surface cooling in both hemispheres is found. To date, temperature records from the high northern latitudes are sparse but coverage from the high southern latitudes is richer where several records suggest a cooling of subantarctic waters across the EOT of 4 to 8°C, although some records are indistinguishable from 0°C change (Figure 3). In the low latitude Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Ocean tropical SSTs were significantly warmer than today in the late Eocene, with SSTs up to 31°C (Liu et al., 2009) or even ~33°C (Lear et al., 2008; Wade et al., 2012). One TEX<sub>86</sub> record from the Gulf of Mexico implies gradual surface cooling of 3-4 °C between ~34 and 33 Ma (Wade et al., 2012). TEX<sub>86</sub> data from Site 803 in the tropical Pacific shows a large transient cooling of up to 6°C across the EOT, however, such a large change in tropical temperatures is regarded as unrealistic and is more likely caused by a reorganization of the water column (Liu et al., 2009). We therefore do not include Site 803 in our compilation of temperature change across the EOT (Figure 3).

Newly available records from the North Atlantic region are starting to challenge earlier evidence of homogeneous bipolar cooling (Liu et al., 2018; Śliwińska et al., 2019). Furthermore, comparison of a uniquely well-resolved record from the Newfoundland margin, western North Atlantic (Liu et al., 2018), with data from the subantarctic South Atlantic, confirms this in new detail, leading the authors to the conclusion that surface ocean cooling during the EOT was strongly asymmetric between hemispheres. Liu et al. (2018) interpret this finding as evidence for ‘transient thermal decoupling of the North Atlantic Ocean from the southern high latitudes’, as a result of changes in ocean circulation-driven heat transport associated with Antarctic glaciation. Recent TEX<sub>86</sub> data spanning the Oligocene suggests that the low meridional gradient similar to the late Eocene persists well after the EOT, and that warming occurs in the late Oligocene despite an apparent decrease in CO<sub>2</sub> (O’Brien et al., 2020).

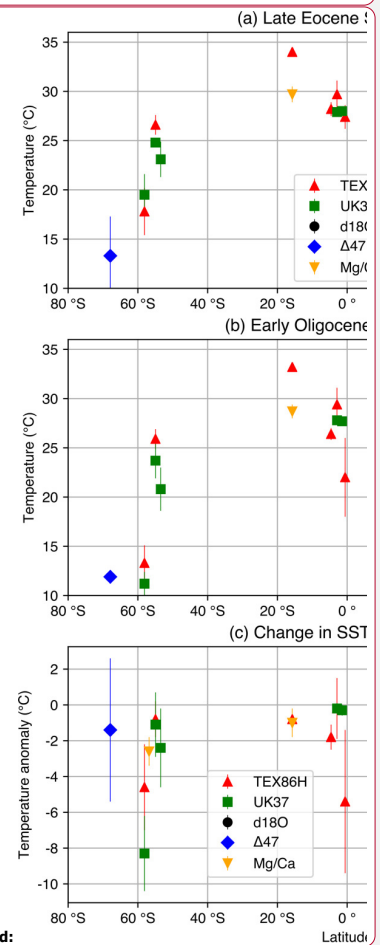
Here we present a new compilation of SST change across the EOT (Figure 3; Supplementary Table S1). For this compilation, we define two windows of time-averaging: one for the late Eocene (38 to 33.9 Ma) and one for the early Oligocene (33.9 to 30 Ma), with the change across the EOT defined as the difference between the two windows. The compilation includes only SST proxy records that record a signal in both the late Eocene and early Oligocene. We chose these broad averages in order to incorporate data from as wide a geographical region as possible, and to apply a consistent methodology to both SST and terrestrial temperature change. A consequence of this choice is that the averaging may dampen the peak-to-peak signal of EOT SST change in high-resolution records, or increase uncertainty in certain records. However, by choosing longer windows, our averaging method provides a clear picture of the lasting climate change from the late Eocene to the early Oligocene. A summary of SST records across the EOT is shown in Figure 3. The data are plotted against their paleolatitude at 34 Ma, derived using the paleomagnetic reference frame of Torsvik et al., (2012) and van Hinsbergen et al., (2015).

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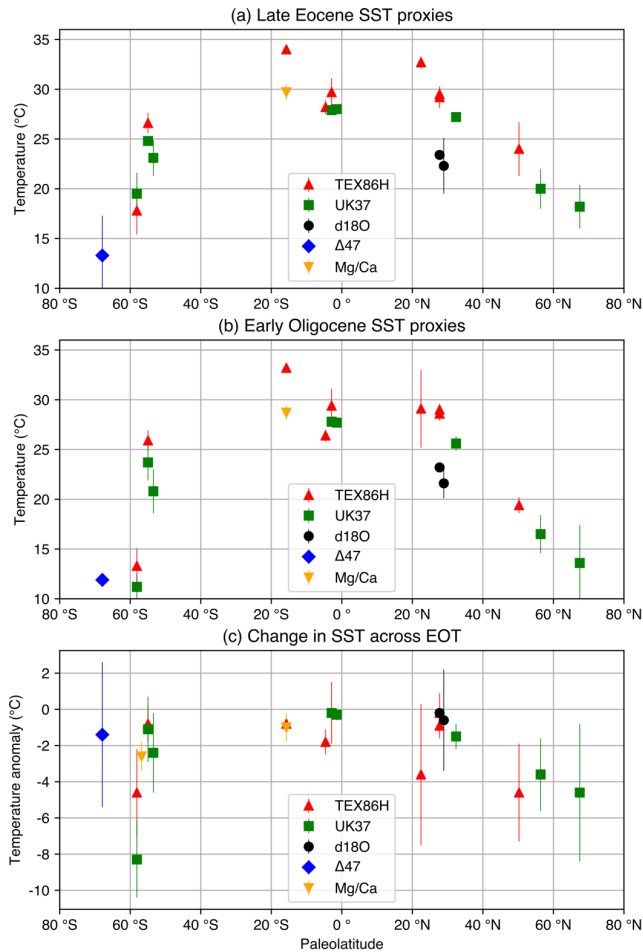
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early Oligocene value was calculated as the average between 33.9 and 30 Ma (post-EOT), and the change across the EOT is the difference between these values. The data compilation is provided in digital form in Supplementary Table S1.

### 3.2 Deep sea temperature changes

575 As described in Section 1.2, the Eocene-Oligocene climate transition is defined by high-resolution benthic foraminiferal  
oxygen isotope ( $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ) records from deep sea sites (Coxall et al., 2005; Zachos et al., 1996). These records describe a benthic  
 $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  increase of about 1.5‰, a combination of deep sea cooling and terrestrial ice growth. While surface ocean temperature  
580 temperature and, thus, the picture of deep ocean cooling remains uncertain. This is because, on its own, it is impossible to  
deconvolve the temperature and ice volume components of  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  records, and hence quantify the timing, magnitude and spatial  
distribution of deep ocean temperature change through the climate transition. Indeed, an early interpretation of the Cenozoic  
benthic oxygen isotope record suggested that the  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  increase at the EOT represented a pure cooling signal (Shackleton and  
Kennett, 1975), whereas numerous lines of evidence have since shown that a substantial component of the  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  shift reflects  
585 the glaciation of Antarctica (e.g. Zachos et al. 1996). Independent paleotemperature proxies provide a potential means to  
deconvolve the two contributors to  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  records, and benthic foraminiferal Mg/Ca paleothermometry has been applied to  
several marine EOT sections (Billups and Schrag, 2003; Bohaty et al., 2012; Katz et al., 2008; Lear et al., 2000, 2004, 2008,  
2010; Peck et al., 2010; Pusz et al., 2011; Wade et al., 2012). Yet, calculating absolute bottom water temperatures from benthic  
foraminiferal Mg/Ca ratios requires an estimate of the Mg/Ca ratio of seawater, while Mg-partitioning into foraminiferal calcite  
590 shows modest sensitivity to temperature at low temperatures and is subject to the competing influence of seawater carbonate  
chemistry (Evans et al., 2018; Lear et al., 2015). Relative temperature trends over short time intervals are generally considered  
more robust than absolute temperatures, although the residence time of calcium in seawater (~ 1 Myr; Broecker and Peng  
1982) compared with the duration of the entire climate transition (~500 kyr) adds some uncertainty to calculated relative  
temperature changes across the EOT. High resolution reconstructions of seawater Mg/Ca are therefore required to improve  
595 both absolute and relative temperature changes using Mg/Ca paleothermometry.

Furthermore, although the benthic foraminiferal Mg/Ca paleothermometer appears to capture the long-term cooling trend since  
the early Eocene Climatic Optimum, the concomitant ~1km deepening of the calcite compensation depth (CCD) hinders its  
use across the EOT (Coxall et al., 2005; Lear et al., 2004). Specifically, the increase in bottom water calcite saturation state  
600 across the EOT acts to increase benthic foraminiferal Mg/Ca, and mask the deep sea cooling signal (Coxall et al., 2005; Lear  
et al., 2004). Attempts have been made to use Li/Ca to correct this  $\Delta\text{CO}_3^{2-}$  effect from Mg/Ca records (Lear et al., 2010; Peck  
et al., 2010; Pusz et al., 2011), but this approach brings with it additional uncertainties including the species-specific  
sensitivities to both temperature and  $\Delta\text{CO}_3^{2-}$ . An alternative, and perhaps more robust approach at present, is to combine



605 planktonic  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  records with salinity-independent sea surface paleotemperature records to calculate the change in the surface  
water  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  ( $\delta^{18}\text{O}_{\text{sw}}$ ). The overall change in surface  $\delta^{18}\text{O}_{\text{sw}}$  across the EOT has been estimated using planktonic  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and  
Mg/Ca at many sites, including a section in Tanzania containing exceptionally well-preserved (glassy) foraminifera (Lear et  
al., 2008). The similarity between this  $\Delta\delta^{18}\text{O}_{\text{sw}}$  estimate from the Indian Ocean ( $\sim 0.6\text{‰}$ ; Lear et al. 2008) and those from  
other sites, e.g., the Southern Ocean (Bohaty et al., 2012) and the southeast Atlantic (Peck et al., 2010) suggests that the surface  
 $\delta^{18}\text{O}_{\text{sw}}$  change is dominated by a global (ice volume) signal. If we can assume that the surface  $\delta^{18}\text{O}_{\text{sw}}$  signal is dominated  
610 by the ice volume signal (as opposed to a local change in the salinity) then these records can be used in conjunction with the  
benthic  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  records to estimate changes in bottom water temperature across the climate transition (Kennedy et al., 2015). As  
noted above, inter-basin similarities suggest this assumption holds true in Indian Ocean, Southern Ocean and southeast Atlantic  
sites, whereas sites in the Pacific and North Atlantic are not as clearly constrained. The associated estimated volume of  
Antarctic ice depends upon the assumed isotopic composition of the ice sheet, but was likely between 70 and 110% of the size  
615 of the modern day Antarctic ice sheet (Bohaty et al., 2012; Lear et al., 2008), representing a sea level difference to modern of  
approximately minus 18 metres to plus 6 metres. Spatial heterogeneities in the deep ocean temperature history may therefore  
be inferred by calculating inter-site offsets in benthic foraminiferal  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  records (Abelson and Erez, 2017; Bohaty et al., 2012;  
Cramer et al., 2009).

620 There is a growing consensus that Step 1 of the EOT was associated with a cooling of both deep waters and low latitude surface  
waters on the order of  $2\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ , while the increase in global ice volume was relatively minor (Bohaty et al., 2012; Lear et al., 2004,  
2008, 2010; Peck et al., 2010; Pusz et al., 2011). We note that the combination of this magnitude of cooling and an overall  
increase in  $\delta^{18}\text{O}_{\text{sw}}$  of  $\sim 0.6\text{‰}$  is enough to account for the average  $\sim 1.0\text{‰}$  shift in benthic foraminiferal  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  observed in deep  
sea records (Mudelsee et al., 2014). However, this overall shift across the entire climate transition ignores the apparent  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$   
625 “overshoot” (Zachos et al., 1996) observed in some high resolution records, at the base of the EOGM (Coxall and Pearson,  
2007). Determining whether the “overshoot” reflects deep sea cooling, a transient further increase in global ice volume, or a  
combination of the two has implications for our understanding of Antarctic ice sheet dynamics and indeed the cause of the  
EOT itself. Unfortunately, it is Step 2 (EOIS) of the transition, into the EOGM where the CCD reaches its maximum depth  
and benthic foraminiferal Mg/Ca records appear most compromised by the  $\Delta\text{CO}_3^{2-}$  effect (Lear et al., 2004, 2010), even at  
630 depths above the implied depth of CCD deepening (Peck et al., 2010), so we currently have no robust and direct evidence of  
deep ocean cooling across this step. Future work may go some way to address these problems using clumped isotopes or by  
generating high resolution B/Ca records across the transition, and by using deep infaunal benthic species (e.g. Elderfield et al.  
2012). However, by combining benthic and planktonic records, it appears that the EOGM in the deep Pacific Ocean reflects,  
at least in part, a transient cooling of deep waters associated with the major expansion of the Antarctic ice sheet (Kennedy et  
635 al., 2015).

**Deleted:** based on southern hemisphere and low latitude records

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640 An additional complication is that the Mg/Ca composition of seawater may itself have shifted during the EOT, as suggested  
by incoming constraints from other proxies, including paired Mg/Ca and clumped isotope temperature constraints in shallow  
living larger benthic foraminifera (Evans et al., 2018). Further investigation into this possibility is required, which could  
ultimately help identify Mg/Ca adjustment factors needed to improve the ability to extract paleotemperature estimates for this  
geological time interval.

#### 645 4 The terrestrial realm at the EOT

There are several proxy indicators of past terrestrial climate change. These include geochemical indices, leaf margin analysis,  
Climate Leaf Analysis Multivariate Program (CLAMP) (Yang et al., 2011), and pollen assemblages (see review in Hollis et  
al. 2019). Here we focus on pollen assemblages as a broad indicator of terrestrial change across the EOT, because an EOT  
synthesis of these data already exists (Pound and Salzmann, 2017). This dataset, a global paleo-biome reconstruction of pollen  
650 and spore assemblages, indicates that the terrestrial realm of the late Eocene and early Oligocene has a vegetation distribution  
that in general indicates a warmer and wetter world than today. The response of the terrestrial realm to the EOT is more  
heterogeneous than the marine realm, and biome changes do not record a uniform global response (Pound and Salzmann,  
2017). Terrestrial biomes record not only global climate change but also regional changes due to local factors. These include  
orographic uplift, which reduces local temperature and changes regional precipitation patterns. Further changes in precipitation  
655 are induced by the retreat of a number of inland seaways due to sea-level changes and tectonics (Chamberlain et al., 2012;  
Dupont-Nivet et al., 2008; Kocsis et al., 2014; Sheldon et al., 2016). These complicating factors mean that changes in  
vegetation must be interpreted within the context of local paleoenvironmental changes. However, there are some emerging  
terrestrial records that record a significant temperature drop and perturbation of the hydrological cycle, consistent with global  
cooling. Thus, we present the terrestrial records on a continent-by-continent basis below, with a summary of temperature  
660 change across the EOT shown in Figure 4. [As for the marine data, we derive a temperature change across the EOT by taking  
the difference between a late Eocene window \(38 to 33.9 Ma\) and an early Oligocene window \(33.9 to 30 Ma\). The data in  
Figure 4 are plotted against paleolatitude at 34 Ma, using the paleomagnetic reference frame of Torsvik et al., \(2012\) and van  
Hinsbergen et al., \(2015\).](#) For a summary of strengths and limitations of deriving quantitative climate estimates from the pre-  
Quaternary plant record, see Hollis et al. (2019).

#### 665 4.1 North America

In North America, the paleobiome distribution of the EOT ranges from tropical mangroves, swamps and forests in the south  
of the continent to cool-temperature forests at the high latitudes (Breedlovestrout et al., 2013; Pound and Salzmann, 2017;  
Wolfe, 1985, 1994). Gradual cooling and drying from the middle Eocene until the late Oligocene allowed the mixed coniferous  
and deciduous broadleaf forests to become more dominant (Wing, 1987). Fossil leaves found in Washington State  
670 (Breedlovestrout et al., 2013) indicate no clear temperature trend from the middle Eocene to the EOT. Instead variations are

attributed to differing paleoaltitude, combined with a gradual long-term cooling. Pollen records from Texas indicate a long term cooling and aridification from the middle Eocene to the early Oligocene (Yancey et al., 2003), whereas pollen records from 5° longitude further east show no turnover at the EOT boundary (Oboh-Ikuenobe and Jaramillo, 2003). Pollen from the far north Yukon Territory show a transition from warmer adapted angiosperm forests in the Late Eocene to cooler adapted gymnosperm forests during the Early Oligocene (Ridgway and Sweet, 1995).

In Oregon, well dated floras and marine invertebrates show no evidence for a rapid change at the EOT (Retallack et al., 2004), but rather a gradual cooling during the early to middle Oligocene. By contrast, paleosols indicate a  $2.8 \pm 2.1^\circ\text{C}$  drop across the EOT in the same region (Gallagher and Sheldon, 2013). Isotopic data from horse teeth indicate a  $8 \pm 3.1^\circ\text{C}$  drop in mean annual temperature (MAT) across the EOT, but with a 400 kyr lag behind the marine realm (Zanazzi et al., 2007), though part of this shift is due to changes in the hydrological cycle (Chamberlain et al., 2012; Hren et al., 2013). Moreover, a clumped isotope study of Fan et al., (2017) records a decrease of  $\sim 7^\circ\text{C}$  across the EOT in the north central USA, similar to the findings of Zanazzi et al. (2007). Conversely a study on White River mammals interprets no significant change in MAT, but an aridification of the local environment (Boardman and Secord, 2013). This conclusion is in line with paleosol studies, which suggest a change in vegetation structure from a forest to a more open environment (Retallack, 1983).

Oxygen isotope analyses in the western North American Cordillera suggest the changing hydrological regime of North America (Chamberlain et al., 2012) was influenced by factors other than large-scale climate. Rising orography, starting in British Columbia at  $\sim 50$  Ma and moving south to Nevada by  $\sim 23$  Ma shifted the North American Monsoon further south during this time. This not only impacts terrestrial oxygen isotopes, but also the regional vegetation – creating an aridification not linked to global climatic events (Chamberlain et al., 2012). There is a significant increase in dust deposition in the foothills of the North American cordillera (Fan et al., 2020), suggesting cooling and aridification. No response to the EOT is evident from North American mammals (Figueirido et al., 2012; Prothero, 2012, 2004), while fossil Equidae analyses from North America indicate that horses had a browsing diet before, at and after the EOT (Mihlbachler et al., 2011). One study argues that North American mammals had already adapted to Oligocene-like cold and arid conditions prior to the EOT (Eronen et al., 2015), suggesting that any further environmental change at the EOT would not be expressed in changes to these species.

#### 4.2 South America

Late Eocene and early Oligocene paleo-biome distributions of South America indicate tropical evergreen rainforest in the north and cool-temperate biomes in the south (Pound and Salzmann, 2017). In South America there was a greater change in vegetation from the middle Eocene into the late Eocene, rather than at the EOT (Barreda and Palazzesi, 2007). Patagonian pollen floras from the middle Eocene to the end of the early Oligocene are termed the “Mixed Paleoflora”. These show a long-term cooling trend rather than a step change at the EOT (Quattrocchio et al., 2013). Phytolith and oxygen isotope records from

705 Patagonia show no change in vegetation across the EOT (Kohn et al., 2004, 2015; Strömberg et al., 2013). However, this view  
has recently been challenged by a higher stratigraphic resolution study of phytoliths and magnetic properties, pointing to a  
clearer ecosystem change (Selkin et al., 2015). A recent stable isotope hydrology study from Patagonia indicates rapid cooling  
during the EOT (Colwyn and Hren, 2019). Faunal turnovers in South America began at approximately 42 – 39 Ma (Woodburne  
et al., 2014). This relates to the end of the MECO, but also correlates with the appearance of rodents from Africa. The mammal  
turnover associated with the EOT is no more dramatic than those during the late Eocene or late Oligocene (Woodburne et al.,  
710 2014). The Amazonian region had a diverse, primarily frugivorous fauna during the EOT, suggesting productive stable forest  
(Negri et al., 2009). To summarise, there are some indications of significant cooling in South America at the EOT, but overall  
the signal is mixed, with both faunal and plant-based proxies suggesting a heterogeneous response.

#### 4.3 Africa

715 Vegetation in Africa shows little change in structure from the Late Eocene into the Early Oligocene, but there is a documented  
drop in palm diversity (Jacobs et al., 2010; Pan et al., 2006; Pound and Salzmann, 2017). There are significant gaps in the  
paleobotanical record for Africa over this time interval, with most information coming from the region between 10° north and  
south of the Equator (Jacobs et al., 2010; Pound and Salzmann, 2017). One exception is the Fayum Depression in Egypt which  
contains macrofossil and microfossil evidence for tropical vegetation in the late Eocene (Tiffney and Wing, 1991; Wing et al.,  
1995).

#### 720 4.4 Eurasia

In Eurasia there was a progressive change from para-tropical evergreen forests in the middle Eocene to warm-temperate  
evergreen and deciduous mixed forests by the early Oligocene (Collinson and Hooker, 2003; Teodoridis and Kvaček, 2015).  
The paleo-biome reconstructions show a dominance of subtropical and warm-temperate mixed forests throughout Eurasia with  
seasonal biomes in the Iberian Peninsula and arid biomes in central Asia (Pound and Salzmann, 2017). A change from a diverse  
725 mixed broad-leaved to a cooler conifer- dominated pollen flora in North Atlantic cores through the Eocene indicates increasing  
seasonality in Europe (Eldrett et al., 2009). However, leaf floras from Bulgaria show no significant change in vegetation at the  
EOT (Bozukov et al., 2009). There is a greater change in Iberian pollen floras from the early to late Oligocene than at the EOT  
(Postigo Mijarra et al., 2009). Between the late Eocene and early Oligocene no change in MAT or precipitation is reconstructed  
in the Ebro Basin in Spain, but there is a decrease in chemical weathering across the EOT (Sheldon et al., 2012).

730 In Germany and Czechia, macrofloras show a stepwise disappearance of subtropical species and immigration of evergreen and  
deciduous warm-temperate species during the late Eocene (Kunzmann et al., 2016). The first mixed evergreen/deciduous forest  
in azonal biomes is recorded prior to the EOT from Roudniky ( $35.4 \pm 0.9$  Ma; Kvaček et al., 2014) referring to a latest Eocene  
cooling event (Teodoridis and Kvaček, 2015). However, evergreen broadleaved forests were still present in the early Oligocene  
735 (Kovar-Eder, 2016; Teodoridis and Kvaček, 2015) indicating the low impact of global EOT changes in terrestrial central

Europe. Most of the subtropical to warm-temperate genera survived in that region until the Miocene Climatic Optimum (Mai, 1995). Based on proxies from macrofloras, MAT was almost stable at the EOT (Teodoridis and Kvaček, 2015) with ongoing prevailing seasonality in precipitation and a curtailment of the growing season (Moraweck et al., 2019). While cold month mean temperatures (CMMT) in the Priabonian mostly exceed 10°C, the lower limit for the growing season, the earliest  
740 Oligocene floras from Schleenhain and Haselbach (Germany) indicate CMMT below 10°C and a growing season length of 9-11 months (Moraweck et al. 2019).

Recent investigations on late Eocene and earliest Oligocene macrofloras in SE Tibet and Yunnan revealed multiple lines of evidence for the modernization of the vegetation by establishment of present-day genera and families (Linnemann et al., 2017;  
745 Su et al., 2018). Regional vegetation change across EOT from subtropical to temperate and partly cool temperate in SW China has been argued to be influenced by the uplift of the Tibetan Plateau (Su et al., 2018). An Eocene appearance of a modern subtropical / tropical aspect of vegetation is also recorded from Chinese low latitude floras (Hainan; Guangdong) indicating an Eocene establishment of monsoonal climate linked to Tibetan uplift (Jin et al., 2017). However, the evolution of the Tibetan Plateau at the EOT is currently under debate. Earlier studies suggested that a proto-Tibetan highland of more than 4000 m  
750 elevation existed in the late Eocene based on stable isotope paleoaltimetry (Cyr et al., 2005; Quade et al., 2011; Rowley and Currie, 2006). New data-model comparisons have cast doubt on these estimates, finding that the stable isotope paleoaltimetry is influenced by different atmospheric circulation patterns than previously thought (Botsyun et al., 2019; Quade et al., 2020). These studies suggest a lower paleoaltimetry of the Tibetan Plateau (less than 3000 m) in the late Eocene (Botsyun et al., 2019; Quade et al., 2020).

755 Aside from paleoaltimetry, the timing of environmental changes suggests that climate change at the EOT had a distinct impact on Tibetan environments (Dupont-Nivet et al., 2007). Northeastern Tibet (Xining Basin) shows significant changes at the EOT in the depositional environments (Dupont-Nivet et al., 2008), pollen and clumped isotopic temperatures (Hoom et al., 2012; Page et al., 2019) and accumulation rates (Abels et al., 2011). Furthermore, temperature changes in the Xining Basin are too  
760 sudden to be driven by changes in basin altitude (Page et al., 2019). The timing of the large temperature drop suggests a coeval decrease in regional temperature linked to EOT glaciation and monsoonal rainfall (Page et al., 2019). Mongolian and northwestern Chinese faunal records indicate a large mammal turnover at the EOT: the “Mongolian Remodelling” (Kraatz and Geisler, 2010; Meng and McKenna, 1998; Sun et al., 2014), synchronous with the Grand Coupure in Europe. Significant depositional environment change in southwestern Mongolia is also shown by (Sun and Windley, 2015).

765 Freshwater gastropods from southern Britain show that growing season temperatures (Spring – Summer) may have dropped from around 34°C to about 20°C across the Eocene – Oligocene boundary (Hren et al., 2013). This has been translated into a MAT drop of 4 - 6°C (Hren et al., 2013), which is comparable to the  $U^{K_{37}}$  estimated SST change from the high latitude North Atlantic ODP Site 913, but not the smaller SST change at the more comparable latitude ODP Site 336 (Liu et al., 2009).

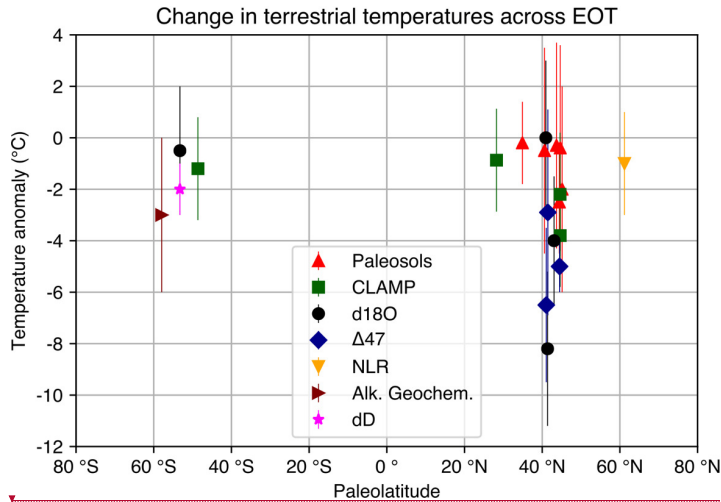
770 Summer temperatures for the Hampshire Basin fell by around 4°C during the EOT (Grimes et al., 2005), but did not drop again  
during the EOIS (see section 1.2). Paleosols of the Hampshire Basin show minimal changes in temperature but an increase in  
precipitation (Sheldon and Tabor, 2009). Some of the discrepancies between these temperature signals may be due to  
differences in sampling rates during key events of the EOT.

#### 4.5 Australia and New Zealand

775 In Australia, the EOT is associated with the loss of rarer taxa in pollen records rather than significant turnovers (Macphail,  
2007). There is a diversity drop from the middle to late Eocene into the latest Eocene – early Oligocene (Martin, 2006). A  
recent review of the distribution of paleo-biomes in Australia showed no change between the late Eocene and the early  
Oligocene (Pound and Salzmman, 2017), though data coverage is sparse apart from in the south of the continent. However, a  
780 recent study of rainforest flora in south-eastern Australia shows a transition from warm-temperature rainforests in the late  
Eocene to cool-temperature rainforests in the early Oligocene (Korasidis et al., 2019). Those biome flora suggest a shift in  
MAT from 14-20 °C in the late Eocene to 10-14 °C in the early Oligocene (Korasidis et al., 2019). Terrestrial paleoclimate  
reconstructions of temperature also show a cooling at around 36 Ma (Pound and Salzmman, 2017). The New Zealand records  
show a warm humid forest with a gradual turnover of palynomorphs through the late Eocene and the early Oligocene (Homes  
et al., 2015; Pocknall, 1991).

#### 785 4.6 Antarctica

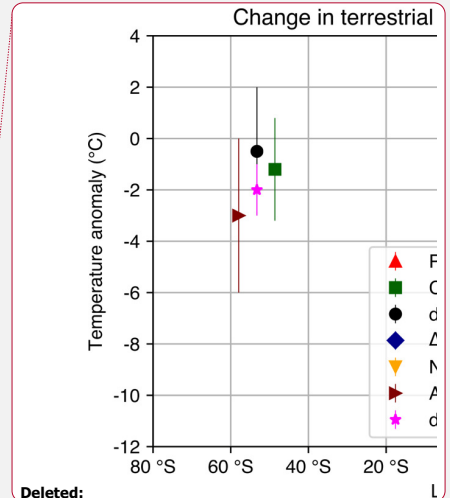
On Antarctica it is known that from the equable climates of the middle Eocene there was a progressive drop in plant diversity  
and stature, from evergreen forests to low-lying vegetation (Francis et al., 2008; Pound and Salzmman, 2017). Changing  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$   
measurements from late Eocene leaves and pollen have been interpreted as decreasing moisture availability on the Antarctic  
Peninsula (Griener et al., 2013). Vegetation at Wilkes Land, East Antarctic, changed from an early Eocene subtropical to a  
790 cool temperate forest, indicating a 5°C decline in MAT (Pross et al., 2012). A further change towards a less diverse, cool-  
temperate shrubland and forest indicates further cooling at Wilkes Land at the onset of the Oligocene (Strother et al., 2017).  
Other evidence supporting decreasing moisture availability is demonstrated by a shift from chemical weathering in a humid  
environment, to physical weathering associated with a colder more arid regime (Basak and Martin, 2013; Dingle et al., 1998;  
Ehrmann and Mackensen, 1992; Robert and Kennett, 1997; Wellner et al., 2011). This aridification of the Antarctic continent  
795 is attributable to a partly glaciated continent in the late Eocene. A new bedrock topography for Antarctica allows for an early  
Oligocene ice sheet of greater areal extent than today (Wilson et al., 2012), raising the possibility that the temperature  
component of the EOT  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  increase was more modest than previously suggested (Wilson et al., 2013).



800 **Figure 4:** Summary of terrestrial air temperature change across the EOT from proxies Paleosols, CLAMP,  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ,  $\Delta_{47}$ , Nearest Living Relative  
 (NLR), alkaline geochemistry and  $\delta\text{D}$  (hydrogen isotopes). Data is compiled from [Boardman and Secord, 2013](#); [Colwyn and Hren, 2019](#);  
[Eldrett et al., 2009](#); [Fan et al., 2017](#); [Gallagher and Sheldon, 2013](#); [Héran et al., 2010](#); [Herman et al., 2017](#); [Hinojosa and Villagrán, 2005](#);  
[Hren et al., 2013](#); [Kohn et al., 2004](#); [Kvaček et al., 2014](#); [Lielke et al., 2012](#); [Lielke et al., 2012](#); [Meyers, 2003](#); [Page et al., 2019](#); [Passchier et al., 2013](#); [Roth-  
 805 Nebelsick et al., 2017](#); [Sheldon and Tabor, 2009](#); [Zanazzi et al., 2007](#)). Where possible, we apply the same method as in [Figure 3](#), i.e. the  
 'late Eocene' is taken the average temperature from 38 to 33.9 Ma and the 'early Oligocene' is taken as the average from 33.9 to 30 Ma, and  
 the temperature change shown here is the difference. However, in a number of cases, only a relative temperature change across the EOT was  
 given in the original literature. We therefore limit our compilation to temperature anomaly only. The compilation shown above is provided  
 in digital form in Supplementary Table S2.

### 5 CO<sub>2</sub> and carbon cycle dynamics

810 The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere ( $p\text{CO}_2$ ) is a primary driver of global climate change on geological  
 timescales (Berner and Kothavala, 2001; Foster et al., 2017; Royer et al., 2004), and changes in  $p\text{CO}_2$  have been linked to the  
 phase of acute climate change at the EOT (DeConto and Pollard, 2003; Heuereux and Rickaby, 2015; Pearson et al., 2009;  
 Steinhilber et al., 2016). However atmospheric  $p\text{CO}_2$  reconstructions for the EOT are sparse, variable and, in some cases,  
 contradictory and not readily reconciled with paleo-temperature proxy records or numerical model hindcasts (Beerling and  
 815 Royer, 2011; Heuereux and Rickaby, 2015; Pagani et al., 2005; Pearson et al., 2009; Royer et al., 2004; Zhang et al., 2013).  
 New well-resolved  $p\text{CO}_2$  records with strong age control are pressing needed. [Four proxies have been identified as  
 particularly useful for Cenozoic  \$p\text{CO}\_2\$  reconstructions by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC, 2013\)](#). These  
 are the marine carbon and boron isotope proxies, and the terrestrial paleosol carbon and stomatal density proxies (Beerling and  
 Royer, 2011). Below, we discuss the development and state of the art of existing EOT  $p\text{CO}_2$  records constructed using marine



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and terrestrial proxies.

### 5.1 Marine $p\text{CO}_2$ proxies

To date, the most detailed pre-Pleistocene climate records are derived from marine geochemical proxies, including boron isotopes ( $\delta^{11}\text{B}$ ) in planktonic foraminiferal calcite (Anagnostou et al., 2016; Foster et al., 2012; Greenop et al., 2017; Pearson et al., 2009; Pearson and Palmer, 1999, 2000) and carbon isotopes ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ) in marine organic biomarkers (Heureux and Rickaby, 2015; Liu et al., 2009; Pagani et al., 2005, 2011; Zhang et al., 2013). Each proxy has its own limitations and uncertainties, which initially led to divergent estimates of  $p\text{CO}_2$  using these different proxies. However, recent efforts to address such uncertainties and limitations have led to a more coherent picture of the evolution of  $p\text{CO}_2$  through the Cenozoic from marine  
840 proxies.

While the theoretical basis of the boron isotope proxy is well understood, a major uncertainty in reconstructing surface ocean pH is estimating the boron isotopic composition of seawater (Greenop et al., 2017). A further major uncertainty comes into play when a second carbonate system parameter (e.g. total alkalinity) is required to calculate  $p\text{CO}_2$  from seawater pH, as well  
845 as the major ion composition of seawater, which impacts key dissociation constants. Nevertheless, significant progress has been made to reduce these uncertainties (Anagnostou et al., 2016; Greenop et al., 2017; Sosdian et al., 2018). For the Eocene  $p\text{CO}_2$  estimates, seawater  $\delta^{11}\text{B}$  has been estimated using the  $\delta^{11}\text{B}$ -pH relationship, while self-consistent estimates of the second carbonate parameter have been determined using Earth System modelling (Anagnostou et al., 2016). For the alkenone  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  proxy, there are many factors that can impact algal growth conditions and inaccurate temperature reconstructions have also  
850 been known to bias  $p\text{CO}_2$  reconstructions (Pagani et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2013). Algal carbon-concentrating mechanisms may also lead to biased  $p\text{CO}_2$  reconstructions when using the alkenone  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  proxy in low- $\text{CO}_2$  intervals of the Neogene, but is unlikely to be a significant issue at the EOT (Zhang et al., 2013).

The boron isotope proxy suggests atmospheric  $p\text{CO}_2$  was  $1400 \pm 470$  ppm in the early Eocene, and decreased by several  
855 hundred ppm through the Eocene over several million years (Anagnostou et al., 2016). In the late Eocene (Bartonian-Priabonian),  $p\text{CO}_2$  reconstructions are variable, but the boron isotope and alkenone proxy both indicate  $p\text{CO}_2$  concentrations around 1000 ppm (Anagnostou et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2013). The EOT itself appears to be associated with a further, and perhaps steeper, decline in  $p\text{CO}_2$ , with both proxies supporting the passing of a modelled glaciation threshold of  $\sim 750$  ppm (DeConto and Pollard, 2003; Pagani et al., 2011; Pearson et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2013), although this modelled threshold  
860 itself is highly uncertain (Gasson et al., 2014). A  $\delta^{11}\text{B}$ -based record from Tanzania sediments also suggests an intriguing transient  $p\text{CO}_2$  increase associated with the second  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  step (Pearson et al., 2009).

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## 5.2 Terrestrial proxies

865 The stomatal CO<sub>2</sub> proxy is based on the empirically and experimentally demonstrated inverse relationship between the density  
of stomata on the leaf surfaces of most land plants and *p*CO<sub>2</sub> (Beerling, 1998; Franks et al., 2014; Hincke et al., 2016; Konrad  
et al., 2008; Kürschner et al., 2008; McElwain and Chaloner, 1995; Royer et al., 2001; Steinthorsdottir et al., 2016, 2019, 2020,  
2011, 2013; Steinthorsdottir and Vajda, 2015; Wagner et al., 1996; Woodward, 1987). Previous studies using the stomatal  
870 proxy method of *p*CO<sub>2</sub> reconstructions for the time intervals either side of the EOT (here Bartonian-Rupelian) are still relatively  
few, derived from mostly low-resolution datasets consisting of a variety of fossil plant taxa, and marred by limitations in  
chronological accuracy and correlation to marine records. Consequently, the *p*CO<sub>2</sub> records have so far been highly  
heterogeneous.

The three current methods of stomatal *p*CO<sub>2</sub> reconstruction (e.g. McElwain and Steinthorsdottir, 2017; Steinthorsdottir et al.,  
2020) include: 1) the semiquantitative stomatal ratio method, which compares the stomatal density (SD) or stomatal index (SI  
875 – the % of stomata relative to all leaf epidermal cells) of fossil plants with the SD/SI of its nearest living relative (NLR), to  
estimate paleo- *p*CO<sub>2</sub> (McElwain and Chaloner, 1995), 2) the empirical transfer function method, using experimental data sets  
of NLR responses to variations in *p*CO<sub>2</sub> (e.g. Kürschner et al., 2008; Wagner et al., 1996), and 3) mechanistic gas exchange  
modelling which requires numerous additional parameters such as paleotemperature and leaf δ<sup>13</sup>C (Franks et al., 2014; Konrad  
et al., 2008). All of these methods have been applied to reconstruct *p*CO<sub>2</sub> records spanning the Eocene-Oligocene (Foster et  
880 al., 2017; Figure 5), with the highest-resolution dataset produced using the stomatal ratio method (Steinthorsdottir et al., 2016).  
Due to the semiquantitative approach and potential inter-method variability, these estimates are considered to be less robust in  
their absolute values of *p*CO<sub>2</sub> than the marine estimates (Section 5.1). However, stomatal records are a valuable indicator of  
relative change of *p*CO<sub>2</sub> in the terrestrial realm, especially in data-poor intervals including several stages of the Eocene and  
Oligocene (Beerling and Royer, 2011; Foster et al., 2017).

885 Early results based on datasets of the gymnosperms *Ginkgo biloba* and *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* from the USA suggested  
that *p*CO<sub>2</sub> was more or less stable between 300 and 450 ppm during the Eocene and Oligocene (Royer et al., 2001) - however,  
the fossil leaf record was of too low resolution to draw strong conclusions. Another early study, based on data gathered mainly  
from published images of fossil *Ginkgo* specimens from Russia and USA, suggested a decrease in *p*CO<sub>2</sub> across the EOT  
890 (Retallack, 2001), from ~1300 ppm in the Bartonian, to ~420 ppm at the EOT, and ~330 ppm in the Rupelian. A further  
stomatal dataset from Germany, based on fossil angiosperm leaves from the species *Eotrigonobalanus furcinervis* (Fagaceae)  
and *Laurophyllum acutumontanum* (Lauraceae), again of low temporal resolution, suggested that *p*CO<sub>2</sub> was higher before  
than after the EOT (Roth-Nebelsick et al., 2004). A more recent study from a temporally restricted sedimentary succession in  
Canada suggested high but decreasing *p*CO<sub>2</sub> at the Bartonian/Priabonian boundary (from ~1000–700 ppm to ~450 ppm), based  
895 on a dataset of *Metasequoia* fossil needles (Doria et al., 2011), but does not include the EOT or the Rupelian. In contrast, a

study based on various angiosperm species using a leaf gas exchange model suggested more modest as well as stable  $p\text{CO}_2$  of ~470 ppm during the Bartonian and Priabonian, decreasing to ~400 ppm after the EOT in the Rupelian (Grein et al., 2013). A subsequent study from the same region compiled all data in broad temporal bins and reconstructed early Oligocene to early Miocene  $p\text{CO}_2$  to ~400 ppm throughout, despite significant changes in stomatal densities (Roth-Nebelsick et al., 2012, 2014).  
900 Two studies with restricted temporal ranges reconstructed  $p\text{CO}_2$  in the Bartonian, indicating 400-500 ppm using *Metasequoia* from Canada (Maxbauer et al., 2014) and ~390 ppm using the podocarp conifer *Nageia maomigensis* from China (Liu et al., 2016).

Recently, a new relatively high-resolution dataset consisting of *Eotrigonobalanus furcinervis* from Germany was published,  
905 including data points thought to be temporally located immediately before and after the EOT (Steinhorsdottir et al., 2016). The results show  $p\text{CO}_2$  of ~650 ppm in the Bartonian, decreasing to ~550–400 ppm in the Priabonian, and ~410 ppm at the EOT and the earliest Rupelian (Steinhorsdottir et al., 2016). This higher-resolution record shows a distinct ~40% Bartonian-Priabonian decrease in  $p\text{CO}_2$ , highly comparable to the marine isotope temperature records, but reaching stable levels by the EOT, and not recording a significant  $p\text{CO}_2$  decrease at the EOT proper, unlike in the marine temperature records  
910 (Steinhorsdottir et al., 2016; Zachos et al., 2001, 2008). This discrepancy between  $p\text{CO}_2$  and temperatures suggests that there are factors other than greenhouse forcing that contribute to the threshold climate response of glaciation. New results based on Lauraceae leaf fragments from the Southern Hemisphere (Australia and New Zealand) further confirm Late Eocene  $p\text{CO}_2$  mostly in the order of 550–450 ppm, but are not sufficiently chronologically well-constrained to confirm falling  $p\text{CO}_2$  prior to the EOT (Steinhorsdottir et al., 2019).

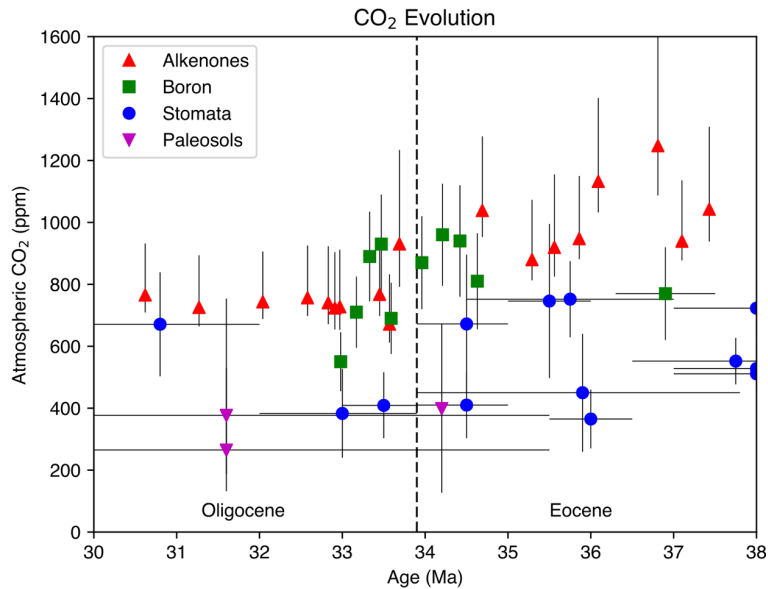
915 Other results show a significant decrease in stomatal density values (indicating increasing  $p\text{CO}_2$ ) of extinct *Platanus neptuni* before the EOT (Moraweck et al., 2019). This unexpected trend, contradictory to the stomata density- $p\text{CO}_2$  relation previously recorded, is not yet understood but is consistent with the suggestion that  $p\text{CO}_2$  change prior to the EOT caused plant responses. Further,  $p\text{CO}_2$  reconstructed using a mechanistic gas exchange model of Konrad et al. (2008) applied to two fossil species  
920 from northern central Europe, *Rhodomyrtophyllum reticulosum* and *Platanus neptuni*, records no significant decrease across the EOT (Moraweck et al., 2019), in agreement with Steinhorsdottir et al. (2016), but not recording decreasing  $p\text{CO}_2$  before the EOT. It should be noted that the gas-exchange model of Konrad et al. (2008) has recently been tested with modern material and was shown to produce the most accurate  $p\text{CO}_2$  estimates when used with multiple species, to derive a consensus  $p\text{CO}_2$  (Grein et al., 2013).

925 When focusing on datasets from central Europe, terrestrial plant based  $p\text{CO}_2$  records support the plant-derived temperature records by indicating no abrupt decrease or environmental change across the EOT (Kunzmann et al., 2016; Teodoridis and Kvaček, 2015). A detectable but not fundamental change in vegetation, temperatures and  $p\text{CO}_2$  is however evident from the interval prior to the EOT (Kunzmann et al., 2016; Kvaček et al., 2014; Steinhorsdottir et al., 2016; Teodoridis and Kvaček,

930 2015). Preliminary results of MAT estimations based on sedimentary GDGT values from some central German sites are in accordance with temperature estimates from plant fossils, i.e. based on CLAMP and the NLR approach. In combination these data refer to a successive decrease in MAT across the Priabonian and the EOT but not to a significant drop during the EOT.

### 5.3 Synthesis of EOT $p\text{CO}_2$ change

935 The most recent marine records indicate  $p\text{CO}_2$  of ~1000 ppm in the Bartonian-Priabonian, decreasing to ~700–800 ppm into the Rupelian. Stomatal proxy-based  $p\text{CO}_2$  records generally indicate elevated Bartonian-Priabonian  $p\text{CO}_2$  of ~500–1000 ppm, decreasing ~40% before the EOT to  $p\text{CO}_2$  of ~400 ppm, and continuing in the Rupelian with  $p\text{CO}_2$  of ~400 ppm or lower. The direction and approximate magnitude of  $p\text{CO}_2$  change leading up to the EOT is therefore consistent between proxies, even though the stomatal records consistently yield lower  $p\text{CO}_2$  levels than the marine proxies. We consider the higher  $p\text{CO}_2$  estimates based on marine proxies to be most robust indicator of  $p\text{CO}_2$  at this time, since they have been shown to reproduce ice-core  $\text{CO}_2$  well (Foster and Rae, 2016), and to agree better with the available modelling evidence from warm climate simulations of the Eocene, and estimated thresholds for glaciation of Antarctica (section 6.2). Some terrestrial records also indicate a decrease in  $\text{CO}_2$  but the decrease is more gradual and long term than in the marine records.



945 **Figure 5:** Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> evolution from 44 to 24 Ma from the compilation of Foster et al., (2017), incorporating data from its original data sources (Anagnostou et al., 2016; Doria et al., 2011; Erdei et al., 2012; Franks et al., 2014; Pearson et al., 2009; Roth-Nebelsick et al., 2012, 2014; Steinthorsdottir et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2013), and Steinthorsdottir et al., (2019).

## 6 Insights into the EOT from modelling studies

In this section we qualitatively synthesise previous modelling studies that have focussed on the EOT. In particular, we discuss the modelled response to changing paleogeography (Section 6.1) and to changes in CO<sub>2</sub> (Section 6.2). Finally, we describe carbon-cycle models that have explored mechanisms behind CO<sub>2</sub> changes at the EOT (Section 6.3).

### 6.1 Modelling the response to changing paleogeography at the EOT

The widening of the Southern Ocean Drake Passage and Tasman gateways has long been considered as a primary driver for the initiation of the AMOC and Antarctic glaciation at the EOT (Section 2.2). Many climate modelling studies have tested the effect of opening these Southern Ocean gateways and found cooling effects on the southern high latitudes (Cristini et al., 2012; Elsworth et al., 2017; England et al., 2017; Mikolajewicz et al., 1993; Sijp et al., 2009, 2014; Sijp and England, 2004; Toggweiler and Bjornsson, 2000; Viebahn et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2014). These studies have variously found that opening Southern Ocean gateways can decrease southward heat transport (e.g. Sijp et al., 2009), trigger the onset of an AMOC (e.g. Yang et al. 2014), and enable some degree of cooling over Antarctica. However, these approaches do not reconcile the timing and evolution of the gateway evolution of the EOT, since they employed either modern-day or idealised geography with specific gateway perturbations. In contrast, climate model simulations that do employ Eocene boundary conditions indicate that Southern Ocean gateway opening caused only a modest change in ocean poleward heat transport and could therefore not be directly responsible for the initiation of the AIS (Goldner et al., 2014; Huber et al., 2004; Huber and Nof, 2006; Huber and Sloan, 2001; Sijp et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2011). Furthermore, opening the Southern gateways under Eocene-like CO<sub>2</sub> forcing may result in a weaker ACC than under pre-industrial conditions (Lefebvre et al., 2012). The long-term evolution of Southern Ocean gateway opening has been found to cause ~3°C of bottom water cooling (Sijp et al., 2014), which may explain some of the observed benthic cooling (Section 3.2). However, Drake Passage opening probably affected deep ocean temperatures and the strength of the ACC. Hill et al. (2013) showed that despite deep water connections through both Drake Passage and the Tasman Gateway, a coherent ACC could not develop until the Australian continent was sufficiently equatorward such that it no longer inhibited strong zonal flow in the Southern Ocean.

970 Imposing an ice sheet in a climate model has been shown to have a significant impact on the ocean circulation and deep water formation regions (Goldner et al., 2014; Kennedy et al., 2015). In particular, the presence of an Antarctic ice sheet may enhance westerly winds over the Southern Ocean, leading to enhanced Southern Ocean deep ocean formation and benthic cooling (Goldner et al., 2014). This result suggests that Southern Ocean gateway changes play a secondary role to radiative forcing, since the ocean circulation change are a consequence of the glaciation, rather than a cause. Other ocean gateways may also

play an important role. In the late Eocene continental configuration, the Central American Seaway and the Tethys gateway, connecting the Indian and Atlantic oceans, were wider than today. The importance of the open Tethys gateway for the EOT circulation has not received much attention but Zhang et al. (2011) found that the tropical seaways need to be sufficiently constricted before the southern high latitudes can cool substantially. This cooling is related to a transition from an ocean circulation with southern hemisphere deep water formation to the modern-like circulation with deep water formation in the North Atlantic.

Recently, focus has shifted to the role of Arctic-Atlantic gateways around the EOT. The evolution of the Arctic-Atlantic gateways has been shown to have a strong influence on the salinity of the North Atlantic and therefore on the AMOC (Hutchinson et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2009; Stürz et al., 2017; Vahlenkamp et al., 2018b). The deepening of the Greenland-Scotland ridge at the EOT has been proposed as a trigger for the AMOC (Abelson and Erez, 2017; Stürz et al., 2017). According to this hypothesis, the deepening changes the flow across the ridge from a shallow unidirectional flow to a deeper bi-directional flow which allows salty subtropical water to penetrate further north and enable North Atlantic sinking. Hutchinson et al. (2019) recently proposed that it is the tectonic closing of the shallow Barents Sea gateway, just prior to the EOT, that initiated the AMOC, by closing off the pathway of extremely fresh Arctic water to the North Atlantic. This theory suggests that the North Atlantic reconnected to the Arctic when the Fram Strait opened in the early Miocene (Jakobsson et al., 2007). In the Hutchinson et al. (2019) study, neither Southern Ocean gateways changes, Greenland-Scotland Ridge changes, nor CO<sub>2</sub> forcing changes could similarly overcome the freshening effect of the Arctic to allow an AMOC. However, their study did not test the feedback of these circulation changes on the carbon cycle, making it unclear what the climatic impact of the Arctic closure would have been. Using an Earth System Model, (Vahlenkamp et al., 2018a, 2018b) experimented with similar changes in the North Atlantic gateways to investigate an alternative idea of significant AMOC behaviour since the early-middle Eocene. They were able to initiate an AMOC when the Greenland Scotland Ridge reached a threshold depth of deeper than 200 m but, only when the Arctic Ocean brackish water outlets were shut off from the North Atlantic. Timing of changes in Arctic-Atlantic 'plumbing', thus, appear to be a critical factor in allowing an AMOC to start up in the Warm Paleogene, and a key area for future research.

**Deleted:** Neither Southern Ocean gateways changes, Greenland-Scotland Ridge changes, or

In all these studies, it is assumed that the final state of the simulation is the only steady solution for that climate and boundary conditions. While there is no consensus yet (Nof et al., 2007), the present day climate is thought to have two global circulation modes; the observed AMOC with sinking in the north, and a southern-sinking only mode with no AMOC (Liu et al., 2017; Srokosz and Bryden, 2015). In continental geometries other than the present day different circulation patterns and co-existing equilibria may be possible but have not been systematically searched for so far (Baatsen et al., 2018). In coupled Eocene simulations, centers of deepwater formation include the North and South Pacific (Hutchinson et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2014) and the North and South Atlantic (Huber et al., 2003; Huber and Sloan, 2001). Conceptual climate models have suggested a potential role for meridional overturning circulation transitions in the EOT (Tigchelaar et al., 2011).

## 6.2 Modelling the response to CO<sub>2</sub> decrease at the EOT

A reduction in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> is hypothesised to be a primary cause of the EOT, because it can plausibly explain both long term cooling during the Eocene, and provide a trigger for the glaciation of Antarctica (DeConto and Pollard, 2003). Although proxy reconstructions of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> during the Eocene have large uncertainties (Section 5), there is general agreement that climate cooled and CO<sub>2</sub> declined through the Eocene (Anagnostou et al., 2016; Foster et al., 2017), making long-term CO<sub>2</sub> drawdown from the atmosphere a prime underlying forcing mechanism for the EOT. Furthermore, CO<sub>2</sub>-forced climate-ice sheet model experiments yield  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  series (DeConto and Pollard, 2003) that closely match the overall form of our best-resolved EOT data sets (Coxall et al., 2005; Coxall and Wilson, 2011).

A long-standing problem in modelling the Eocene climate is to reproduce the low meridional temperature gradient recorded in observations. Proxies suggest that high latitude SSTs were more than 20°C warmer than present day during the early Eocene (Bijl et al., 2009), terrestrial anomalies were 20-40°C (Huber and Caballero, 2011), while tropical temperatures were some 5-10°C warmer than modern (Huber, 2008; Huber and Sloan, 2000). Evidence of frost intolerant flora and fauna in high latitudes (Greenwood and Wing, 1995) provides a challenge to explain how the climate maintained such a low meridional temperature gradient.

When climate models are forced using proxy data-based estimates of Eocene CO<sub>2</sub>, they generally fail to capture these flatter meridional temperature gradients (Huber et al., 2003; Roberts et al., 2009; Shellito et al., 2003). One method that has been used to address this high-latitude cold bias is to increase the CO<sub>2</sub> to extremely high values (2240 or 4480 ppm) (Cramwinckel et al., 2018; Eldrett et al., 2009; Huber and Caballero, 2011; Winguth et al., 2010). These extremely high CO<sub>2</sub> experiments yield an improved match to high-latitude temperature proxies and temperature gradients (Huber and Caballero, 2011; Lunt et al., 2012). Because these extremely high CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations are greater than those implied by proxies, this finding also suggests that modelled climate sensitivity to CO<sub>2</sub> forcing may be too low, probably because of positive feedbacks that are either missing or too weak in the models. Several missing feedbacks suggested recently are those associated with cloud physics and/or greenhouse gases in addition to CO<sub>2</sub> (Beerling et al., 2011; Kiehl and Shields, 2013; Sagoo et al., 2013; Zhu et al., 2019). We also note that recent proxy data from the warmest regions of the tropics (Tanzania, Java) indicate tropical temperatures of up to 35°C in the middle-late Eocene (Evans et al., 2018; Pearson et al., 2007). These temperatures imply a somewhat larger meridional gradient than previously suggested, helping to reduce the magnitude (but not eliminate) the model-data mismatch. In addition, several models have now achieved lower meridional temperature gradients through a combination of higher resolution, which tends to increase poleward heat transport, and improved Eocene boundary conditions (Baatsen et al., 2020; Hutchinson et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2019). A recent model-data comparison demonstrates that the Oligocene retains a low meridional temperature gradient similar to the late Eocene, which is not well explained by currently available climate models (O'Brien et al., 2020). In the Oligocene, CO<sub>2</sub> proxy estimates are lower than in the Eocene, making it arguably more

1045 difficult to model the low temperature gradient with realistic CO<sub>2</sub> forcing (O'Brien et al., 2020), although the CO<sub>2</sub> proxies  
carry large uncertainty.

Despite the challenges faced in modelling the early Eocene, the observed cooling during the Eocene of bottom waters (Zachos  
et al., 2001) and high latitude SSTs (Bijl et al., 2009) and terrestrial temperatures can plausibly be explained by a reduction in  
1050 CO<sub>2</sub> in climate model simulations (Eldrett et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2009). Furthermore, crossing a CO<sub>2</sub> threshold of Antarctic  
glaciation may also explain several degrees of bottom water cooling, through consequent shifts in Southern Ocean winds and  
changes to Southern Ocean circulation (Goldner et al., 2014). A key challenge to adequately testing the CO<sub>2</sub> forcing hypothesis  
is to derive a threshold level of CO<sub>2</sub> for glaciation from climate model reconstructions. The first study to do so found a  
glaciation threshold of around 780 ppm (DeConto and Pollard, 2003), in approximate agreement with CO<sub>2</sub> proxies. However,  
1055 a recent inter-comparison of Eocene climate models used to force an ice sheet model found that this threshold varied  
significantly between models, from roughly 560 to 920 ppm (Gasson et al., 2014). Differences in the lapse-rate feedback were  
identified as the leading cause of this spread, although there were also differences in the paleogeographic boundary conditions.

All ice-sheet modelling studies of the EOT to date have used prescribed climate states to force the glaciation. Likewise, coupled  
1060 ocean-atmosphere-sea ice models currently prescribe ice sheets as either present or absent. Running a full-complexity climate  
model synchronously with an ice sheet model remains a major technical challenge, and has yet to be implemented for the  
Eocene or Oligocene. However, innovative asynchronous coupling, such as the “matrix-method” (Pollard, 2010), has shown  
some promise by allowing a better representation of the ice albedo feedback, leading to a similar yet slightly revised upward  
glaciation threshold of ~900 ppm (Ladant et al., 2014b).

1065

### 6.3 Carbon Cycle Modelling

A slow decline in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> remains a likely priming mechanism for the inception of large ice sheets on Antarctica and  
this pivotal transition in Cenozoic climate was associated during the EOT with pronounced rapid perturbation to the global  
carbon cycle as indicated by a transient increase in ocean δ<sup>13</sup>C and a permanent deepening of the CCD (Coxall et al., 2005).  
1070 Thus, numerical carbon cycle model experiments provide useful insight to forcing mechanisms and feedback processes  
involved.

Many hypotheses have been posited to explain the carbon cycle perturbations at the EOT (Armstrong McKay et al., 2016;  
Coxall et al., 2005; Coxall and Wilson, 2011; Merico et al., 2008). Some of the leading hypotheses include a shift from shelf  
1075 to basin carbonate fractionation (Opdyke and Wilkinson, 1988), increases in organic carbon burial (Olivarez Lyle and Lyle,  
2006), feedbacks between ice sheet coverage and silicate weathering (Zachos and Kump, 2005), and an ecological shift from  
calcareous to siliceous plankton (Falkowski et al., 2004). Carbon cycle box models suggest that the best fit to observations is

1080 achieved by a shift from shelf-to-basin carbonate fractionation (Armstrong McKay et al., 2016; Merico et al., 2008). In this interpretation of events, the fall in sea-level due to Antarctic glaciation (i) reduces the global flux of carbonate into shallow water (reef, bank and shelf) sediments and (ii) exposes fresh, readily dissolved shelf carbonate sediments around the world to rapid subaerial weathering (Merico et al., 2008). The first of these two mechanisms drives the sustained CCD deepening from Eocene to Oligocene and the second drives a one-off dump of carbonate into the ocean that explains the observed initial transient overshoot behaviour (Zachos and Kump, 2005) and, because the shelf carbonate reservoir is enriched in  $^{13}\text{C}$  relative to pelagic carbonate reservoir (Swart, 2008; Swart and Eberli, 2005), the transient increase in benthic  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  (Armstrong McKay et al., 2016; Merico et al., 2008). If the isotopic fractionation between these two carbonate sediment reservoirs is modest, 1085 however, shelf-basin fractionation can only fully explain the transient increase in oceanic  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  if the one-off dump of weathered shelf carbonate is questionably large (Merico et al., 2008). In their follow up study, Armstrong McKay et al. (2016) considered this problem in detail and concluded that, unless shelf carbonates were substantially enriched in  $^{13}\text{C}$  relative to pelagic carbonates (by  $\sim 3\text{‰}$ ), an additional process must also have contributed, with sequestration of  $^{12}\text{C}$ -enriched carbon into carbon 1090 capacitors, and possibly increased ocean ventilation, offering the best fit to the paleorecords when combined with shelf basin fractionation.

Palike et al. (2012) investigated causes of carbon cycle changes over the Eocene using the intermediate complexity climate model cGENIE. They suggest several mechanisms are needed to explain the CCD change in addition to the shelf-basin 1095 fractionation hypothesis above: (i) perturbations to continental weathering and solute input to the deep ocean, or (ii) changes in the partition of organic carbon flux between labile (organic carbon that is readily available for oxidation and driving carbonate dissolution) and refractory (carbon that is more resistant to degradation and largely preserved and buried).

The longer-term decline in  $\text{CO}_2$  over the Eocene needs to be reconciled with the negative feedback between silicate weathering 1100 and surface temperature (Walker et al., 1981). Higher  $\text{CO}_2$  causes warming and enhances the hydrological cycle, which leads to an increase in silicate weathering. The increase in weathering eventually lowers  $\text{CO}_2$  and subsequent cooling, creating a dynamic equilibrium. This silicate weathering feedback is regulated by tectonic processes (Raymo and Ruddiman, 1992), since mountain ranges give rise to greater weathering than low-lying regions (Maher and Chamberlain, 2014).

1105 A climate model study suggests that opening and deepening of the Drake Passage could lower atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  via the silicate weathering feedback (Elsworth et al., 2017). They suggested that the gateway transition enhanced the AMOC, leading to greater precipitation over land regions and a warmer northern hemisphere, both of which enhance silicate weathering and thus drawdown of  $\text{CO}_2$  (Maher and Chamberlain, 2014). However, this study used modern geography with selected gateway perturbations, whereas climate models using paleogeography from the late Eocene have yielded different patterns of 1110 overturning (Baatsen et al., 2020; Hutchinson et al., 2019). Furthermore, a hypothesised change in silicate weathering must be weighed against the CCD record, because silicate weathering changes have implications for carbonate weathering and



bicarbonate ion supply to the ocean (Armstrong McKay et al., 2016; Merico et al., 2008). Fyke et al. (2015) found opening Drake Passage led to a decrease in Atlantic carbon storage and an increase in Pacific and Southern Ocean storage, due to the enhancement of a modern-like AMOC. This led to an overall increase in global carbon storage in the ocean, though their implied drop in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> is relatively small (10-30 ppm). Incorporating carbon cycle processes into full complexity climate models with Eocene or Oligocene paleogeography thus remains an outstanding challenge (e.g. Godd ris et al., 2014).

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Experiments using cGENIE report an increase in carbon re-mineralisation near the ocean surface when temperatures are very warm, such as in the early Eocene (John et al., 2013, 2014). The more temperature dependent re-mineralisation results in a shallower CCD, and a decrease in organic carbon burial, an effect which then decreased over the Eocene as temperatures decreased. This modelled mechanism is consistent with tropical records of  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  during the Eocene (John et al., 2013, 2014), providing a positive feedback on carbon dioxide changes, in opposition to the silicate weathering feedback.

## 7 Model-data intercomparison of temperature change across the EOT

Until this point, this review paper has synthesised the existing literature but has not presented any new quantitative analysis.

Furthermore, we have in general presented the proxy and model-derived insights separately. Here, we combine the information from proxies and models and present a new model-data comparison and quantitative analysis of the mechanisms behind temperature change at the EOT. This section is in two parts: (7.1) a quantitative intercomparison of temperature change across the EOT from a subset of these previous studies, in which we identify those changes that are robust across models; and (7.2) a comparison of the modelled temperature changes with proxy SST and surface air temperature (SAT) data, in which we assess which models best fit the proxy reconstructions, and which mechanisms most likely explain the observed proxy temperature changes.

### 7.1 Intercomparison of modelled SAT change across the EOT

Here we present an intercomparison of some previous model results of SAT change across the EOT. We use SAT data because it provides a consistent surface temperature over both ocean and land regions that reflects changes across the globe. It also enables comparison with proxies of both marine and terrestrial data to be readily included. We include those models and studies for which the authors have provided their model results in digital form. The models and simulations included in this intercomparison are shown in Table 2. This itself is a subset of the simulations that were available – here we show only those simulations that allow us to compare the response of the models to a consistent forcing, for as many models as possible.

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We first consider pairs of simulations that represent the response of the climate system to a perturbation in forcing that may have occurred across the EOT. These pairs can broadly be divided into three categories corresponding to three forcings: a CO<sub>2</sub> decrease, an increase in the volume and extent of the Antarctic ice sheet, and a paleogeographic change. Although these forcing

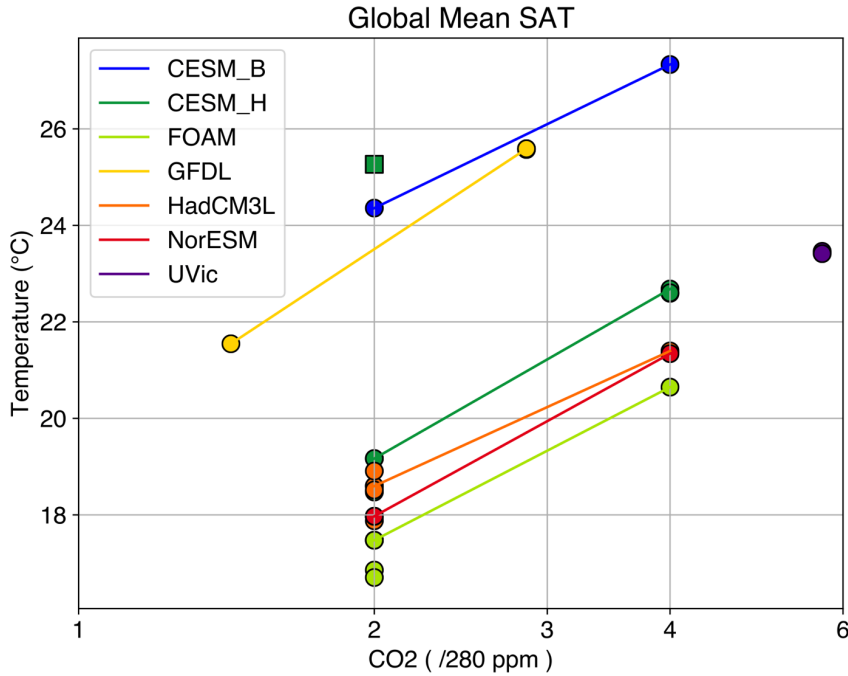
factors are in reality interdependent (for example the ice sheet change may itself be caused by a CO<sub>2</sub> change), for the purposes  
l 145 of modelling they are treated as independent mechanisms.

For the CO<sub>2</sub> forcing, we consider a halving of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, which for most models is from 1120 to 560 ppmv. However,  
for GFDL this is from 800 to 400 ppmv, and for NorESM-L there are CO<sub>2</sub> simulations at 980 and 560 ppmv. For the NorESM-  
L case, we scale the anomaly by a factor of  $\log(2)/\log(980/560)$  in order to approximate the radiative forcing of halving CO<sub>2</sub>.  
l 150 We emphasise here that halving CO<sub>2</sub> is not intended to be a realistic forcing perturbation for the EOT, but rather a standardised  
experimental protocol that can be used to establish the CO<sub>2</sub> climate sensitivity of the models. For the ice sheet forcing, we  
consider a change from an ice-free Antarctic, to an ice sheet similar in volume and area to that of today. However, the  
configuration of these ice sheets, and the ice-free state, does vary from model to model (see Supplementary Figure S1). The  
paleogeographic forcing is less consistent across the models, and includes modelled changes to gateways only (CESM and  
l 155 UVic), to west Antarctic geography (FOAM), or to global paleogeography (HadCM3BL) (see Supplementary Figure S3).

Before examining the SAT response of the system to these three forcings, it is useful to explore the absolute temperatures in  
the model simulations. The annual global mean SAT in each simulation is shown in Figure 6, while the spatial patterns for  
each individual model are shown in Supplementary Figures S1-S3. In terms of global mean surface temperature, the models  
l 160 fall approximately into two groups: (i) a cooler group, consisting of CESM\_H, FOAM, HadCM3BL, NorESM-L, have global  
mean surface temperatures of around 17-19 °C at 560 ppm, and 21 to 23 °C at 1120 ppm; and (ii) a warmer group consisting  
of CESM\_B, CESM\_H (x2) and GFDL CM2.1, where temperatures are roughly 4 °C warmer for the equivalent level of CO<sub>2</sub>  
(Figure 6). A common factor in this split is that the warmer models have higher horizontal resolution (~1° ocean for CESM\_B  
and GFDL CM2.1; ~2° atmosphere for CESM\_H (x2) and CESM\_B), although this is likely to be depend strongly on the  
l 165 individual model and boundary conditions used. It is also clear from Figure 6 and Supplementary Figures S1-S3 that the CO<sub>2</sub>  
forcing has a much greater effect on global mean SST than the ice or paleogeographic forcing.

Model	Atmos resolution	Ocean resolution	Publication	Paleogeography	CO2 [ppm]	Antarc. ice	Tasman	Drake	CO2 expts	ICE expts	GEO expts	Model years
CESM_B (CESM1.0.5)	144 x 96 x 26	384 x 320 x 60	Baatsen et al (2020)	38 Ma	560	N	open	open	L			3600
				Baatsen et al (2016)	1120	N	open	open	H			4600
CESM_H (CESM1.1)	96 x 48 x 26	122 x 100 x 25	Goldner et al (2014)	45 Ma	560	N	closed	open	L	NI		3400
				Sewall et al (2000)	560	Y	closed	open	I			3000
					1120	N	closed	open				3300
					1120	N	closed	open	H		B	1300
					1120	N	open	open			A	1000
560	N	closed	open				1500					
CESM_H (x2)	144 x 96 x 26	122 x 100 x 25	* 2° atmosphere									
FOAM	48 x 40 x 18	128 x 128 x 24	Ladant et al (2014a) Ladant et al (2014b)	34Ma	560	N	open	open	L	NI	B	2000
					560	Y	open	open	I			2000
					1120	N	open	open	H			2000
				30Ma	560	N	open	open			A	2000
GFDL CM2.1	96 x 60 x 24	240 x 175 x 50	Hutchinson et al (2018)	38 Ma	400	N	open	open	L			6500
				Baatsen et al (2016)	800	N	open	open	H		B	6500
				* Arctic closed	800	N	open	open			A	6500
HadCM3BL	96 x 73 x 19	96 x 73 x 20	Kennedy et al (2015)	Rupelian (28-34Ma)	560	N	open	open	L	NI		1422
					1120	N	open	open	H			1422
					560	Y	open	open		I		1422
				Chattian (23-28Ma)	560	N	open	open			A	1422
				Priabonian (34-38Ma)	560	N	open	open			B	1422
NorESM-L	96 x 48 x 26	100 x 116 x 32	Zhang et al (2012, 2014)	35 Ma (Scotese, 2001)	560	N	open	open	L		B	2200
					980	N	open	open	H			2200
				33 Ma	560	N	open	open			A	2200
UVic	150 x 100 x 1	150 x 140 x 40	Sijp et al (2016)	45 Ma	1600	N	open	open			A	9000
				Sewall et al (2000)**	1600	N	open	closed			B	9000

**Table 2:** Details of model simulations that are included in this intercomparison. For each model, the response to CO<sub>2</sub>, ΔT<sub>CO2</sub>, is given by H-L; ΔT<sub>ICE</sub> is given by I-NI; and ΔT<sub>GEO</sub> is given by A-B.



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**Figure 6:** Global mean surface air temperature (SAT) for all models included in this intercomparison as a function of CO<sub>2</sub> concentration. The lines join simulations from a single model at different CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations. References for each model are CESM\_H: (Goldner et al., 2014), UVic: (Sijp et al., 2016), FOAM: (Ladant et al., 2014a, 2014b), GFDL: (Hutchinson et al., 2018, 2019), HadCM3BL: (Kennedy et al., 2015), NorESM-L: (Zhang et al., 2014), CESM\_B: (Baatsen et al., 2020). The dark green square is an additional simulation of CESM\_H with 2° atmosphere resolution (Table 2).

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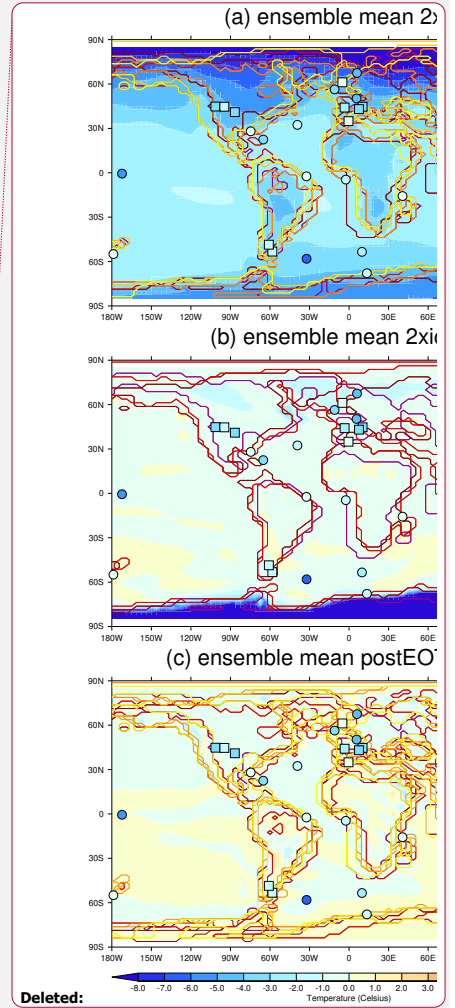
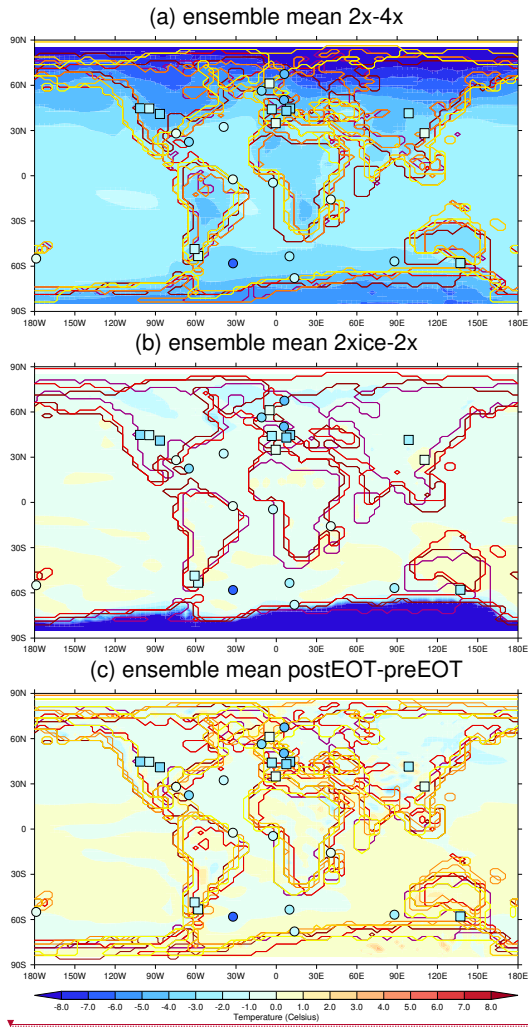
The SAT responses of each of the individual models to the three forcings,  $\Delta T_{CO_2}$ ,  $\Delta T_{ICE}$ ,  $\Delta T_{GEO}$ , are shown in Supplementary Figures S1, S2 and S3 respectively. We also include the annual mean sea ice distribution in each of CO<sub>2</sub>, ICE and GEO experiments in Supplementary Figures S4, S5 and S6 respectively. It is important to highlight that the changes shown have not necessarily been chosen to best represent the EOT transition. In particular, the CO<sub>2</sub> forcing shown is a halving of CO<sub>2</sub> in all models, and although some proxy CO<sub>2</sub> estimates are not inconsistent with this change (Pagani et al., 2011; Pearson et al., 2009), the data come with large uncertainties, albeit more so for absolute concentrations than for relative changes. In Section 7.3 we will explore this further, but here we recognise that the model responses are highly idealised and we treat them as sensitivity studies.

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1185 **7.1.1 SAT response to CO<sub>2</sub> decrease,  $\Delta T_{CO_2}$**

Here we consider the response to halving CO<sub>2</sub> in the absence of an ice sheet. There appear to be two different modes of SAT response to a halving of CO<sub>2</sub> (Supplementary Figure S1). In the first mode, CESM\_H, CESM\_B, FOAM, and GFDL respond with a cooling over all the globe, with greatest cooling in the higher latitudes. In the second mode, HadCM3BL and NorESM-L respond with cooling in most regions (with greatest cooling in the north Pacific), but with warming in the Pacific sector of the Southern Ocean. In HadCM3BL, this is associated with a switch in regions of deep water formation from dominant sinking in the southern Atlantic and north Atlantic at high CO<sub>2</sub>, to dominant sinking in the southern Pacific and north Atlantic at low CO<sub>2</sub>. The onset of sinking in the southern Pacific at low CO<sub>2</sub> leads to increased heat transport from the equatorial Pacific southwards, to such an extent that it leads to net warming in the Pacific sector of the Southern Ocean, despite the decrease in CO<sub>2</sub>. Similar but weaker changes in ocean circulations happen in the NorESM-L. However, this warming response is highly sensitive to the boundary conditions, with other qualitatively similar simulations behaving very differently in the region, with some showing only cooling (Kennedy-Asser et al., 2019). In CESM, a switch in the mode of ocean circulation does not occur, with deep water formation in the Pacific sector of the Southern Ocean at both high and low CO<sub>2</sub> (albeit increased in intensity at low CO<sub>2</sub>). Similarly, for GFDL there is no switch, with deep water formation in the South and North Pacific at high and low CO<sub>2</sub>, and for FOAM there is no switch, with deep water formation predominantly in the North Pacific at high and low CO<sub>2</sub>. The patterns of change in HadCM3BL and NorESM-L are remarkably similar except in the Arctic, where NorESM-L shows much more cooling than HadCM3BL. In this region FOAM also has very little cooling. This is because both HadCM3BL and FOAM have Arctic sea ice in both high and low CO<sub>2</sub> simulations, which maintains the SST close to 0°C.

The ensemble mean SAT change due to a halving of CO<sub>2</sub> is shown in Figure 7a. This shows that the greatest cooling is in the North Pacific and in the Atlantic and Indian sectors of the Southern Ocean. Most of the regional cooling is “robust” in that all models show a change of the same sign and are all within  $\pm 2$  °C of the ensemble mean change. Exceptions are in the south Pacific (because some models show warming rather than cooling) and in the North Pacific and Arctic (because there is large variability in the amount of cooling predicted). Overall, the zonal mean cooling is approximately symmetric about the equator, with equatorial cooling of -2.6 °C and mid-high latitude cooling of -5.0 °C. While this symmetry is at odds with an inferred northward migration of the intertropical convergence zone from dust geochemistry (Hyeong et al., 2016), we stress that this result reflects the fact that the far-field cooling induced by imposing an Antarctic ice sheet (see Figure 7b) is much smaller than the global cooling induced by CO<sub>2</sub> forcing in these models.



1215 **Figure 7:** Ensemble mean modelled SAT response to (a) CO<sub>2</sub> halving ( $\Delta$ TCO<sub>2</sub>), (b) onset of ice on Antarctica ( $\Delta$ TICE), and (c) paleogeographic change ( $\Delta$ TGEO) across the EOT. The continental outlines for all models in each ensemble are shown. The marine proxy data are shown as filled circles, while the terrestrial proxy data are shown as filled squares.

### 7.1.2 SAT response to Antarctic ice, $\Delta T_{ICE}$

1220 The three models that have carried out simulations with and without an Antarctic ice sheet show differing responses to the  
forcing (Supplementary Figure S2). CESM shows a cooling around the margins of Antarctica, and in the Pacific and Atlantic  
sectors of the Southern Ocean; FOAM shows cooling around the margins of Antarctica but warming throughout much of the  
Southern Ocean, and HadCM3BL shows cooling in the Southern Ocean except in the southern Pacific. The mechanisms behind  
the changes are described in the respective papers. In brief, Kennedy et al. (2015) attribute the warming in the Pacific sector  
1225 of the Southern Ocean in HadCM3BL to an increased N-S pressure gradient close to the polar front leading to stronger  
westerlies, intensification of the Ross Sea gyre, and a resulting increase in oceanic poleward heat transport. Goldner et al.  
(2014) focus on changes to deep ocean temperatures, highlighting the importance of increased easterly winds around the  
margins of Antarctica and resulting Ekman transport for bringing cold water to depths. They do not discuss mechanisms for  
the warming around Australia. Ladant et al. (2014a) do not discuss the mechanism of SST change following glaciation, but  
1230 Ladant et al. (2014b) do, for a similar pair of simulations. In their model, the presence of the Antarctic ice sheet enhances the  
strength of the Antarctic Circumpolar Current, and as a result, the Ross Gyre and Weddell Gyre initiate. They also highlight  
the importance of sea ice changes in amplifying the changes in SSTs. More recent work (Kennedy-Asser et al., 2019) has  
highlighted that the particularly strong Southern Ocean warming response in the HadCM3BL simulations could be an artefact  
of insufficient spin-up, with very long simulations showing a more muted temperature response. As a result, these HadCM3BL  
1235 results should be treated with caution.

In terms of the ensemble mean (Figure 7b), there are only a few regions where there is a robust SST signal. Robust cooling in  
response to the addition of the Antarctic ice sheet are around the margins of the East Antarctic ice sheet, in the Drake Passage,  
south of southern Africa, and the tropical and North Atlantic. There is a seemingly robust warming east of Australia, but this  
1240 is a small region and as such it is unclear if it occurs by chance.

### 7.1.3 SAT response to paleogeographic change, $\Delta T_{GEO}$

For examining the response to paleogeographic change (Supplementary Figure S3), for each model we first identify the pair  
of simulations for each model that represents the largest change in paleogeography across the EOT. For CESM this is an  
idealised gateway change from a closed Tasman and Drake Passages to open Tasman and Drake Passages. This forcing results  
1245 in a cooling in the Pacific sector of the Southern Ocean, and a slight warming in the rest of the Southern Ocean, but these  
changes are all small compared with those caused by CO<sub>2</sub> or ice sheet changes. For UVic, the forcing is an idealised gateway  
change from a closed to an open Drake Passage. This has a large impact on SSTs in the Southern Ocean, with cooling south  
of southern Africa, and a N-S dipole of warming and cooling in the Pacific sector of the Southern Ocean, associated with the  
transition from a gyre circulation to an Antarctic Circumpolar Current. For FOAM, the forcing consists of a localised change

1250 in West Antarctica in which continent becomes ocean. However, despite the relatively small forcing the response is quite substantial, leading to global cooling of about 1 °C (Figure 6), especially in the south west Pacific. For HadCM3BL, the forcing is global in nature, but consists of relatively small changes to continental position and topography and bathymetry associated with plate tectonic movements from the Priabonian (34-38 Ma) to the Chattian (23-28 Ma). As a global mean the response is very small, but regionally it is quite large, for example in the North Pacific where there is a N-S dipole response, cooling in 1255 the North Atlantic, and warming in the Southern Ocean. These changes are associated with the strengthening of deep water formation in the Atlantic sector of the Southern Ocean. NorESM-L shows a relatively muted response, but a substantial cooling of about 2 °C in the southwest Pacific.

Given that all models have carried out different simulations to differing forcings, interpreting the differences in response is 1260 challenging. However, the ensemble mean response, shown in Figure 7c, can be interpreted as the best estimate of the SAT-response to paleogeographic change across the EOT, given the uncertainty in the paleogeographic forcing itself, as well as in the different models. The only substantial region of robust change is in the tropical Atlantic, where all models indicate a cooling response of about 1 °C.

## 7.2 Model-data comparison across the EOT

1265 It is important to assess the realism (or otherwise) of the model simulations by comparison with evidence from the geological record. Such model-data comparison can also improve our understanding of the likely mechanisms that drove change. Given the ‘snapshot’ nature of the model simulations, and uncertainties in dating and limitations due to sparse data coverage, it is necessary to use data that extend throughout the EOT, and that are clearly either ‘pre-EOT’ or ‘post-EOT’. Here we use an updated compilation of SST (Figure 3) and terrestrial surface temperature proxies (Figure 4), which we present in 1270 Supplementary Tables S1 and S2 respectively. In total there are ~~24~~ data points from marine sources and 20 data points from terrestrial sources. Before performing the intercomparison, we first combine and average data points that either come from different proxies from the same location, or from neighbouring data points when they are less than one grid cell apart. This process yields a final proxy dataset of ~~27~~ data points, shown in Supplementary Table S3. Each data point is then given an equal weight in determining a root mean square error skill score.

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### 1275 7.2.1 Comparison of model simulations with proxy data

The observed proxy temperature changes compared with the individual model responses to CO<sub>2</sub>, Antarctic ice and paleogeography are shown in Supplementary Figures S1-S3. As discussed in Section 7.1.1, when CO<sub>2</sub> is halved, all models predict a cooling at all sites, in agreement with the data, except NorESM-L that warms at one of the Arctic sites. ~~There are no~~ 1280 data to evaluate the warming signal in the southern Pacific in HadCM3BL and NorESM-L. When an Antarctic ice sheet is imposed, the agreement is not so good, with all models showing warming for at least 2 of the sites. When paleogeographic

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changes are imposed, the model-data agreement is worse again for most models, with all models showing warming for at least 3 of the sites. The exception is FOAM, for which all sites cool, in agreement with the data. The ensemble means capture the broad changes reasonably well, with all sites cooling for the CO<sub>2</sub> case, and all but one site cooling for the ice and paleogeographic changes.

This model-data comparison is limited by the fact that the models have carried out idealised simulations, especially for CO<sub>2</sub> forcing for which the halving of CO<sub>2</sub> is somewhat arbitrary. Although some proxy CO<sub>2</sub> records do indicate a drop of this order of magnitude (Pagani et al., 2011; Pearson et al., 2009), the associated uncertainties are large. Similarly, the changes to the Antarctic ice sheet imposed in the model may be greater or less than in reality, or the imposed changes in paleogeography may be too extreme. As such, we carry out the model-data comparison such that each model SAT response to each forcing is scaled by a constant in such a way that it best fits the data. To assess the goodness-of-fit, we calculate a skill score,  $s$ , for each pair of model simulations, simply as the RMS difference between the proxy temperature and modelled temperature, calculated from model gridpoint that is in closest proximity to the data. For the purposes of the skill score we treat neighbouring sites (e.g. tropical sites 925 and 929) as a single data point by averaging the proxy and the scaled modelled temperatures at the two sites. The values of  $s$  for each modelled best-fit change to the proxy SATs are shown in Table 3. When comparing models and proxies, it is informative to consider what may be called a “good agreement”, and to provide a point of reference for assessing the skill scores. As such, in Table 3 we also show the skill score that would be obtained in the case of an idealised model simulating (i) no SAT change across the EOT, (ii) a global mean change that best fits the data, and (iii) a zonal-mean change of the form  $\Delta SST = A + B \cos(\theta)$ , (where  $\theta$  is latitude), that best fits the data.

Model	$s$ for best-fit $\Delta T_{CO_2}$	$s$ for best-fit $\Delta T_{ice}$	$s$ for best-fit $\Delta T_{geog}$
CESM_B	0.278		
CESM_H	0.284	0.524	0.546
FOAM	0.278	0.492	0.402
GFDL	0.280		0.546
HadCM3BL	0.311	0.458	0.546
NorESM-L	0.312		0.546
UVic			0.537
Ensemble mean	0.274	0.478	0.546
	$s$ for idealised $\Delta T$		
No change	0.546		
Constant change	0.296		
$\cos(\theta)$ change	0.275		

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1335 **Table 3:** Skill scores,  $s$ , for the best-fit modelled changes in response to CO<sub>2</sub>, ice, and paleogeographic forcing, for each model and for the  
ensemble mean (a lower value of  $s$  represents a better fit to data). Also shown are the values of  $s$  for three idealised SAT changes. The  
models all achieve their best skill performance with CO<sub>2</sub> forcing (UVic does not include CO<sub>2</sub> forcing). Three models (CESM\_B, FOAM and  
GFDL) achieve a better skill than an idealised constant temperature change, while CESM\_B and the ensemble mean achieve better than the  
idealised  $\cos(\theta)$  case. However, the spread in skill across the different models is narrow. Changes highlighted in green are better than or  
340 equal to the idealised constant change case, while the ensemble mean is better than the  $\cos(\theta)$  case.

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It is clear from Table 3 that the best modelled fit to the SAT proxy data arises from changes to CO<sub>2</sub>. In particular, the ensemble  
mean response to a decrease in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> has the best (lowest) skill score, and performing slightly better than a  $\cos(\theta)$   
fit. The only individual model that outperforms the  $\cos(\theta)$  fit is CESM\_H, when including both CO<sub>2</sub> and ICE forcing changes  
345 (Table 4). We note however, that a  $\cos(\theta)$  fit to the data produces only a 7% improved skill score over the constant change fit.  
The CESM\_B, CESM\_H, FOAM and GFDL models perform somewhat better than the constant change fit to the data, while  
HadCM3BL and NorESM-L all perform slightly worse than this, but their skill scores are within a margin of ~5% of the  
constant change fit. The CO<sub>2</sub> change provides by far the best temperature fit over the ICE and GEOG changes. The UVic  
model does not apply a CO<sub>2</sub> change, and consequently achieves a poorer skill score. We note however, that the ICE changes  
350 improve the skill score in the CESM\_H and HadCM3BL models, while the GEOG changes improve the skill score in the  
FOAM, NorESM-L and UVic models. Since those forcing factors are independent to CO<sub>2</sub>, they also improve the overall skill  
score in combination, as we show below. These results broadly agree with a recent Southern Ocean-only model-data  
comparison, which showed that CO<sub>2</sub> forcing provided the best explanation of temperature changes across the EOT, with  
secondary improvements made from ice and paleogeography changes (Kennedy-Asser et al., 2020).

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### 1355 7.2.2 Mechanisms of change

The above analysis implies that the change in SST at the EOT can be best explained by a decrease in CO<sub>2</sub>, as opposed to  
changes in ice or paleogeography. However, it is possible that changes in ice or paleogeography, combined with CO<sub>2</sub> change,  
may fit even better with the data. To test this possibility, we assume that the various responses add together linearly, and find  
the best scaled combination of each mechanism, i.e. we find  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$  such that the skill score,  $s$ , of  $(\alpha\Delta T_{CO_2} + \beta\Delta T_{ice} + \gamma\Delta T_{geo})$   
360 is minimised. The result of this exercise for each model and for the ensemble mean is shown in Table 4. This shows that  
CESM\_H and HadCM3BL achieve a better fit to the data when including the full response to ice sheet change and no  
paleogeographic change, while FOAM and NorESM-L achieve a better fit when including a paleogeographic change and no  
ice sheet change. The ensemble mean agrees best with the proxies when incorporating a CO<sub>2</sub> shift of 885 to 560 ppm ( $\alpha=0.66$ ),  
with the GEO forcing providing further improvement to the fit ( $\gamma=0.12$ ) while the ICE forcing does not improve the ensemble  
365 mean skill score. This best-fit ensemble mean change is shown in Figure 8. Given the close agreement between the models in  
fitting a CO<sub>2</sub> change to the data, we can estimate from the full model spread that the CO<sub>2</sub> drop was by a factor of  $1.58 \pm 0.15$ .  
If for example we assume an Oligocene CO<sub>2</sub> value of 2x pre-industrial levels, the CO<sub>2</sub> drop would be from 885  $\pm$  90 ppmv to  
560 ppmv. However, we would caution that this estimate reflects the model spread in matching this particular set of data, and

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1390 that the true uncertainty is larger. Additionally, the models that included changes due to ice sheet forcing or paleogeographic  
 1395 forcing achieved some improvement in fitting the data, but this played a lesser role than CO<sub>2</sub> forcing, as measured by these  
 skill metrics.

A 325 ppmv decrease is within the range of CO<sub>2</sub> proxy estimates, shown in Figure 5, with alkenone records in particular  
 1395 suggesting a drop of this magnitude across the EOT (Pagani et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2013). Boron and stomatal records  
 indicate that such a change is plausible but is likely of lesser magnitude. The recent multi-proxy compilation of Foster et al.  
 (2017) uses a smoothed regression to derive ‘best fit’ CO<sub>2</sub> estimates of 893 ppmv and 806 ppm during the late Eocene (38-34  
 Ma) and early Oligocene (33.5-30 Ma) respectively, or a decrease of ~10%. Thus, our model-derived CO<sub>2</sub> decrease is likely  
 to be an overestimate of the change across the EOT. There are several reasons why this mismatch may occur in our model  
 1400 ensemble, which we discuss in Section 7.2.3.

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Model	s for best-fit $\alpha\Delta T_{CO_2} + \beta\Delta T_{ice} + \gamma\Delta T_{geo}$	$\alpha$ [CO <sub>2</sub> change ppmv]	$\beta$	$\gamma$
CESM_B	0.278	0.70 [910 to 560]		
CESM_H	0.270	0.56 [826 to 560]	0.90	0
FOAM	0.277	0.60 [849 to 560]	0	0.30
GFDL	0.280	0.52 [803 to 560]		0
HadCM3BL	0.307	0.56 [826 to 560]	0.61	0
NorESM-L	0.311	0.66 [885 to 560]	0	0.25
UVic	0.537			0.68
Ensemble mean	0.273	0.66 [885 to 560]	0.0	0.12
	s for idealised $\Delta T$			
No change	0.546			
Constant change	0.296			
cos( $\theta$ ) change	0.275			

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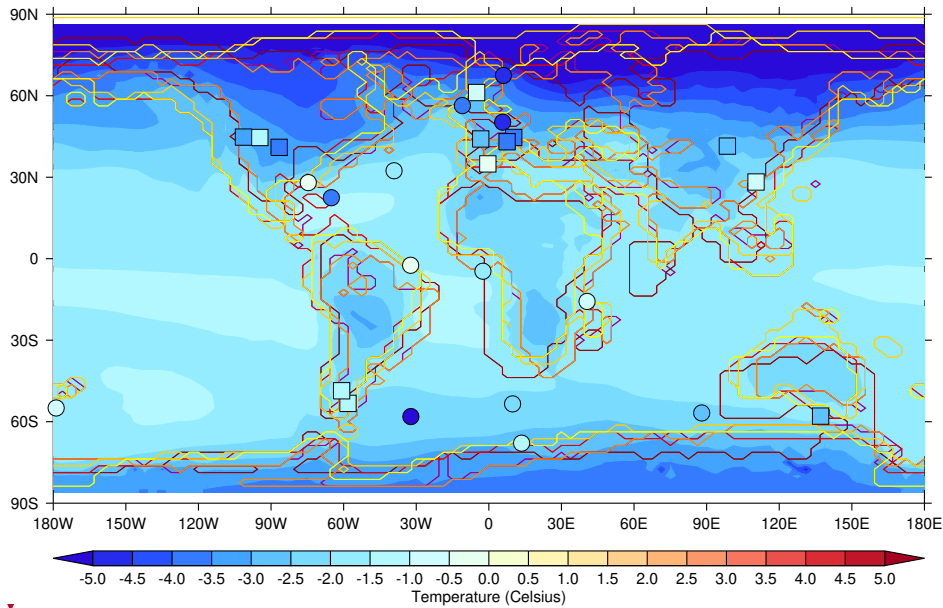
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1405 **Table 4:** Skill scores, s, for the best-fit modelled changes in response to a combination of CO<sub>2</sub>, ice, and paleogeographic forcing, for each  
 model and for the ensemble mean (a lower value of s represents a better fit to data). Also shown are the values of  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ , and  $\gamma$  that give the  
 best fit, and the CO<sub>2</sub> change corresponding to  $\alpha$ , assuming a post-EOT value of 560 ppmv. Also shown are the values of s for three idealised  
 SAT changes. Changes highlighted in green are better than or equal to the idealised constant change case, while CESM\_H and the ensemble  
 mean achieve better than the idealised cos( $\theta$ ) case.

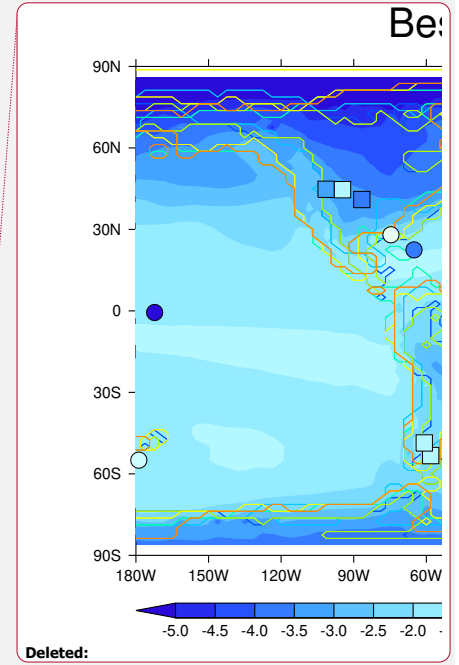
## Best Fit to EOT data



**Figure 8:** Ensemble mean modelled SAT response to a CO<sub>2</sub> decrease from 885 to 560 ppmv, representing the best fit to the proxy data. The marine proxy data are shown as filled circles, while the terrestrial proxy data are shown as filled squares. Coastlines from each model are plotted to illustrate the uncertainties associated with the paleogeographic reconstructions.

### 7.2.3 Uncertainties associated with the modelling

1440 There are several uncertainties that should be considered when interpreting the results above. Some of these are discussed here. There is uncertainty in the models themselves. These models could be characterised as AR4-class or even TAR-class in that they were state-of-the-art at the time of the 4<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> IPCC assessment report, as opposed to the most recent AR5, or the upcoming AR6. The use of less complex models can be an advantage for deep-time paleoclimate work, as these models allow greater length of simulation, which is especially important for the deep ocean where the initial condition may be far from the equilibrium state, which is unknown at the start of the simulation. However, there is a trade-off between simulation length and model complexity, and some of the model simulations presented here are relatively short (e.g. HadCM3BL; Table 2). A potential manifestation of this lack of complexity relates to the modelled change in land-sea contrast. The EOT temperature change from marine records is slightly larger (-2.5 °C) than that recorded from land temperature proxies (-2.3 °C). This in part



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reflects the heterogeneous pattern of changes in plant species, from which the land temperature proxies are derived, but is in general a globally robust signal. On the other hand, the temperature changes recorded in the model simulations show the opposite; land temperature changes are more sensitive to greenhouse cooling than ocean temperature changes. This makes it challenging to achieve a close fit to all of the temperature records available.

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There are several possible reasons why our model-derived CO<sub>2</sub> decrease is larger than the ‘best fit’ to the Foster et al (2017) CO<sub>2</sub> proxy compilation. First, the models may be under-sensitive to CO<sub>2</sub> forcing, as has been suggested in previous attempts to model the Eocene (Huber and Caballero, 2011; Lunt et al., 2012). The model ensemble climate sensitivity to doubling CO<sub>2</sub> is 3.3°C. [A recent synthesis of Paleocene-Eocene proxy records suggests that climate sensitivity during the latest Paleocene,](#)

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[PETM and EECO was 4.5°C, 3.6°C and 3.1°C respectively \(Inglis et al., 2020\).](#) In addition the 66% confidence interval of climate sensitivity was ~2-7°C over the three intervals combined. Thus, our model ensemble compares well with the best estimates of the early Eocene climate sensitivity, but is towards the lower end of the ‘likely’ confidence interval, suggesting a considerably higher climate sensitivity is possible. Second, the models do not permit dynamic feedbacks between CO<sub>2</sub> forcing and the growth of an ice sheet, which in reality would cause ice-albedo, land-albedo, and cloud radiative forcing feedbacks.

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These missing feedbacks may amplify the global temperature change when crossing a critical threshold of glaciation. Since these models prescribe their ice sheets as on or off, such feedbacks are not possible here. However, it is still useful to examine which forcing mechanisms provide the best explanation of the proxy record. In this sense, it is notable that CO<sub>2</sub> forcing provides the best explanation of the far-field cooling away from Antarctica, while imposing an ice sheet has a lesser effect on the global mean (Goldner et al., 2014).

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The boundary conditions applied to the models is a large source of uncertainty. The spread in paleogeographic forcing between models is testament to the fact that the paleogeography both pre-EOT and post-EOT is relatively uncertain (See Section 2.1 and 2.2). Recent climate model simulations of the early Eocene suggest that the paleogeographic forcing plays a similarly important role as CO<sub>2</sub> forcing in capturing Eocene warm climates (Lunt et al., 2020). These simulations suggest that 3-5°C of

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the warming from pre-industrial to Eocene climates comes from non-CO<sub>2</sub> forcing, i.e. forcing from changes to geography, land surface properties and the removal of ice sheets. Therefore, while increasing the climate sensitivity may be part of solving the Eocene model-data mismatch, improving the paleogeographic boundary conditions is also a high priority for obtaining a better model-data agreement. The proxy dataset we have used is also limited in areal coverage. As such, the models remain untested in several key regions, such as the North and tropical Pacific, or the Indian Ocean. New data in the regions predicted to warm

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in response to a CO<sub>2</sub> drop in HadCM3BL and NorESM-L would be particularly useful for discriminating between models. The model-data comparison does not consider any uncertainty in the proxy estimates themselves. In reality, each site is associated with a different and substantial uncertainty in its estimate of SST change across the EOT.

**Deleted:** A recent synthesis of Paleocene-Eocene proxy records suggests that climate sensitivity during the latest Paleocene, PETM and EECO was 4.5°C, 3.6°C and 3.1°C respectively (Inglis et al., 2020)

Here we have considered only the change in temperature across the EOT, rather than absolute temperatures. However, this can mask biases in the simulated base state of the pre-EOT and post-EOT simulations. Not all models do a good job of  
1495 simulating the base state (see e.g. discussion of meridional temperature gradients in Section 6.2). Although the ensemble results achieve the best fit from CO<sub>2</sub> forcing (with a small contribution from ice sheet forcing), it is worth noting that the ultimate cause of the CO<sub>2</sub> drop itself remains unclear; it could itself be driven by changes to geological sources and sinks, changes in weathering rates, or feedbacks associated with ocean and land sinks due to circulation changes (see Section 6.3).

## 8 Conclusions

1500 Earth's modern 'icehouse' climate is defined by the presence of significant ice masses on land at both poles but that ice is now retreating. Understanding the drivers and scale of polar ice growth during the initial inception of this icehouse at the EOT, which involved cooling and glaciation under a yet still warm Eocene-Oligocene climate, can provide crucial insights into ice sheet stability and behaviour under a warm climate, something that is more critical than ever. Here, we have reviewed current literature regarding the EOT, in terms of stratigraphic definitions, geological records of paleogeographic and Earth system  
1505 change, and modelling insights into mechanisms of change. Marine records currently provide the most extensive global record of temperature change across the EOT, with a SST cooling found across most regions. The marine records suggest a global average temperature change of approximately -2.5 °C across the EOT, although individual records range from approximately 0 to -8 °C change. Terrestrial records of temperature change are more geographically limited, with a concentration of records in the midlatitude Northern Hemisphere, and very little coverage of the Southern Hemisphere. The terrestrial records average  
1510 change is -2.3 °C, but like the marine records, the change recorded at individual locations ranges from approximately 0 to -8 °C across the EOT. Records of CO<sub>2</sub> across the EOT also indicate some differences between marine and terrestrial records. Marine records suggest a higher concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> overall and a clearer transition towards lower CO<sub>2</sub> across the EOT. Terrestrial records, by contrast, indicate a lower CO<sub>2</sub> concentration overall and a more gradual CO<sub>2</sub> decline with no obvious shift coinciding with the EOT. There is an ongoing need to reconcile the different CO<sub>2</sub> signals found in the marine and  
1515 terrestrial realms.

A new model-data comparison presented in this paper reveals that a halving of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> across the EOT has a substantially greater effect on global mean and regional SAT than either the onset of Antarctic glaciation or changes in paleogeography. The response to CO<sub>2</sub> forcing is robust across models, with cooling increasing towards higher latitudes, helping  
1520 to explain high latitude cooling in the marine records. While individual models achieved a better fit to the data by including paleogeographic forcing and ice sheet forcing, these changes are more variable across the models. As a result, the best fit in the ensemble mean is dominated by decreasing CO<sub>2</sub> by a factor of 1.58x, with ice sheet forcing and paleogeography forcing playing a secondary role. Assuming an Oligocene value of 560 ppmv, the corresponding pre-EOT value is 885 ppmv. However, we do not exclude the importance of contributions from other forcings. Indeed, two models in the ensemble achieve their best

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fit to the temperature records with a combination of CO<sub>2</sub> and ice-sheet induced changes, while two models show an improved fit when paleogeographic changes are combined with CO<sub>2</sub> forcing. Paleogeographic changes and ice sheet feedbacks are inherently regional and harder to aggregate across different model experiments. Nevertheless, it remains possible that gateway-induced ocean circulation change is somehow implicated in CO<sub>2</sub> decline. For a more complete understanding of these feedbacks, future climate modelling of the EOT must incorporate dynamic feedbacks between these different forcing factors.

#### **Appendix – List of Acronyms**

- 1535 ACC: Antarctic Circumpolar Current  
AMOC: Atlantic meridional overturning circulation  
CCD: Calcite compensation depth  
CMMT: cold month mean temperature  
CLAMP: Climate Leaf Analysis Multivariate Program
- 1540 EAIS: East Antarctic ice sheet  
EOGM: Early Oligocene glacial maximum  
EOB: Eocene-Oligocene boundary  
EOT: Eocene-Oligocene transition  
EOIS: Early Oligocene oxygen isotope step
- 1545 GSSP: Global boundary stratotype section and point  
MAT: mean annual temperature  
MECO: Middle Eocene climatic optimum  
NLR: Nearest Living Relative  
ODP: Ocean drilling program
- 1550 PrOM: Priabonian oxygen isotope maximum  
SAT: Surface air temperature  
SST: Sea surface temperature

#### **Data Availability**

The data compilation plotted in the manuscript are included in the supplementary material. The model data are available upon request from the corresponding authors listed in [Table 2](#).

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### Author Contributions

The manuscript was conceived and planned by DKH, AMdB, HKC, and MS, in collaboration with all authors. Section 1 was led by HKC, PNP and PAW. Section 2 was led by DKH, MB, HDS and AvdH. Section 3 was led by KKS, HKC and CHL. Section 4 was led by MS, MJP and LK, with contributions from KM. Section 5 was led by MS, CHL and LK. Section 6 was led by DKH and AMdB. Section 7 was led by DJL and DKH. Compilations of SST records were made by KKS and MH, terrestrial records by MJP, US and MH, coordinated by DKH.  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  records were compiled by EP. Model simulation data were contributed by DKH, ATK-A, J-BL, MB, MH, WPS, ZZ. All authors contributed to editing and review of the manuscript.

### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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