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Spatial Modeling of Micronekton in Biophysically Characterized Marine Regions

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Abstract

Understanding the distribution and dynamics of micronekton the small to medium-sized marine organisms that play a critical role in oceanic ecosystems requires integrating ecological data with biophysical models. This study presents a spatial modeling approach to analyze the distribution patterns of simulated micronekton across biophysically characterized marine regions. Using environmental variables such as temperature, salinity, currents, and primary productivity, we define biophysical provinces that shape the habitats of micronekton. The model simulates the potential habitat suitability and migratory patterns of these organisms, accounting for both oceanographic conditions and biological interactions. By examining micronekton across different biophysical provinces, we aim to identify key drivers of spatial variability and provide insights into how environmental changes may impact marine food webs. The results highlight significant regional differences in micronekton distributions, with implications for ecosystem management and the effects of climate change on marine biodiversity. This framework offers a comprehensive tool for understanding the dynamics of micronekton populations and their role in the broader marine ecosystem.

Keywords: Micronekton; Spatial Modeling; Biophysical Provinces; Marine Ecosystems; Habitat Suitability; Climate Change

Introduction

Micronekton, encompassing small to medium-sized marine organisms such as fish, squid, and crustaceans, are a vital component of ocean ecosystems [1]. These organisms serve as key prey for higher trophic levels, including marine mammals, seabirds, and large fish, and are also important in nutrient cycling. Despite their ecological significance, the distribution and dynamics of micronekton are not well understood, particularly in the context of large-scale spatial patterns and how environmental factors influence their habitats [2]. Traditional studies of marine biodiversity often focus on surface-dwelling organisms, but micronekton occupy a crucial, yet underexplored, niche in the mesopelagic and epipelagic zones of the ocean. Their distribution is highly influenced by physical factors such as water temperature, salinity, ocean currents, and primary productivity, which vary significantly across different marine regions. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of micronekton distribution requires integrating both biological and environmental data within a spatial modeling framework.

These provinces help to delineate distinct marine environments that influence the distribution of marine species, including micronekton [3-5]. By modeling micronekton populations across these biophysically classified regions, we can gain insights into the underlying ecological processes that shape their distribution patterns. This study aims to conduct a global-scale analysis of simulated micronekton populations, using biophysically defined provinces as the basis for spatial modeling. By integrating environmental data with ecological simulations, we seek to identify the primary drivers of micronekton distribution and explore how these organisms may respond to environmental changes, including those driven by climate change [6]. Ultimately, this work provides a new perspective on the ecological role of micronekton and their potential vulnerability to anthropogenic and environmental shifts in the ocean.

Results and Discussion

The spatial modeling of simulated micronekton populations across biophysically characterized marine regions revealed significant variations in their distribution, with distinct patterns emerging from different oceanographic conditions [7]. Our analysis identified several key factors influencing the spatial distribution and abundance of micronekton, including water temperature, salinity, primary productivity, and ocean currents, which all played a critical role in shaping suitable habitats for these organisms. The model's results show that micronekton populations are not uniformly distributed across the globe but are clustered within specific biophysical provinces. These regions, defined by their unique combinations of physical and biological characteristics, consistently exhibited high habitat suitability for micronekton. For instance, areas characterized by high primary productivity such as coastal upwelling zones and productive open ocean regions showed dense concentrations of micronekton. Conversely, regions with lower primary productivity, such as oligotrophic zones, were generally associated with lower densities of micronekton.

These findings support the hypothesis that biophysical provinces, which integrate both environmental and biological data, provide a more accurate and ecologically relevant framework for understanding micronekton distributions compared to broader, less nuanced ecological models [8]. Among the environmental variables, temperature and primary productivity emerged as the strongest determinants of micronekton distribution. Warmer waters, typically associated with higher levels of primary productivity, supported larger and more diverse micronekton populations. Areas with significant seasonal changes in temperature, such as temperate and polar zones, showed pronounced seasonal shifts in micronekton abundance, with peaks occurring during times of increased productivity (e.g., spring

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and summer phytoplankton blooms).

Salinity and ocean currents also played important roles, although their effects were more region-specific. Micronekton in estuarine and coastal regions, for example, was strongly influenced by freshwater input and salinity gradients, while ocean currents primarily affected migratory patterns and horizontal distribution across large marine expanses. The model highlighted the influence of large-scale oceanic currents such as the Gulf Stream and Antarctic Circumpolar Current, which facilitated the movement of micronekton populations between biophysical provinces, contributing to the observed regional differences in distribution. The model also provided valuable insights into how climate change may impact micronekton populations. Under projected climate scenarios, several biophysical provinces, particularly in the tropics and Polar Regions, were shown to experience shifts in temperature and productivity levels that could reduce the suitability of current micronekton habitats. For instance, warming waters in the Arctic are expected to reduce the availability of primary productivity, which could lead to declines in micronekton populations [9]. Conversely, some temperate regions may see an increase in micronekton abundance due to longer growing seasons and elevated productivity.

Furthermore, changes in ocean currents, driven by altered wind patterns and melting ice, could disrupt migratory routes, isolating certain populations and reducing genetic exchange. This fragmentation could have cascading effects on marine food webs, as micronekton is a critical link in the transfer of energy to higher trophic levels. The results of this study highlight the importance of incorporating biophysical regions into ecological and conservation models. By recognizing that micronekton distribution is heavily influenced by environmental factors, and that these factors can vary significantly across biophysical provinces, we can develop more effective management strategies for marine ecosystems [10]. Understanding which regions are likely to support robust micronekton populations under changing environmental conditions is essential for ensuring the resilience of marine food webs. Additionally, the model can be used to predict potential shifts in micronekton distribution, which will be valuable for fisheries management and biodiversity conservation, especially in light of ongoing climate and anthropogenic pressures. Protecting key biophysical provinces, particularly those that are most productive and provide essential habitats for micronekton, may be crucial for maintaining ecosystem health and supporting marine biodiversity.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive spatial modeling framework to better understand the distribution of micronekton across biophysically defined marine regions. By integrating environmental factors such as temperature, salinity, primary productivity, and ocean currents, we were able to identify distinct patterns of micronekton abundance and habitat suitability. The findings highlight the importance of biophysical provinces in shaping the distribution of these key marine organisms, with regions of high primary productivity and favorable oceanographic conditions supporting larger and more diverse micronekton populations. Our results also demonstrate the potential impacts of climate change on micronekton distribution, particularly through shifts in temperature, productivity, and ocean circulation. These changes could disrupt existing ecosystems and food webs, with implications for marine biodiversity and fisheries management. Ultimately, this study underscores the need for more nuanced, regionally tailored approaches to marine conservation and management, emphasizing the importance of biophysical characteristics in defining marine habitats. As climate change continues to alter ocean conditions, understanding and preserving the key biophysical provinces that support micronekton populations will be critical for maintaining ecosystem function and resilience in the face of environmental change.

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Conflict of Interest

None

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