Dynamic causes of the relation between area and age of the ocean floor

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The distribution of seafloor ages determines fundamental characteristics of our planet: sea-level, ocean chemistry, tectonic forces and heat loss. The present-day distribution suggests that subduction affects lithosphere of all ages with the same probability (B. Parsons, J. Geophys. Res. 87, 289-302, 1982). This is at odds with the theory of thermal convection which predicts that subduction should happen once a critical age has been reached. So far, the area-age distribution remains a primary constraint, which convection models have failed to satisfy (S. Labrosse and C. Jaupart, Earth Planet. Sci. Lett. 260, 465–481, 2007). We will show that combined action of plate-like behavior and continents causes the seafloor area-age distribution in spherical models of mantle convection to be Earth-like. Our simulations suggest that the seafloor age distribution on Earth has evolved in the past 500~Myrs, along with peaks of production rate of new ocean floor that could have reached twice the present-day value.