



Reassessing the stable isotope composition assigned to methane flux from natural wetlands in isotope-constrained budgets

Edward Hornibrook (1), Peter Maxfield (2), Vincent Gauci (3), and Andrew Stott (4)

(1) University of Bristol, School of Earth Sciences, Bristol, UK (ed.hornibrook@bristol.ac.uk), (2) Department of Applied Sciences, University of the West of England, Frenchay Campus, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol, BS16 1QY, UK (pete.maxfield@uwe.ac.uk), (3) Centre for Earth, Planetary, Space and Astronomical Research (CEPSAR), The Open University, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK (v.gauci@open.ac.uk), (4) Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, CEH-Lancaster, Lancaster Environment Centre, Library Avenue Bailrigg, Lancaster, LA1 4AP UK (astott@ceh.ac.uk)

Stable isotope ratios in CH₄ preserve information about its origin and history, and are commonly used to constrain global CH₄ budgets. Wetlands are key contributors to the atmospheric burden of CH₄ and typically are assigned a stable carbon isotope composition of ~-60 permil in isotope-weighted stable isotope models despite the considerable range of $\delta^{13}\text{C}(\text{CH}_4)$ values (~ -100 to -40 permil) known to occur in these diverse ecosystems. Kinetic isotope effects (KIEs) associated with the metabolism of CH₄-producing microorganisms generate much of the natural variation but highly negative and positive $\delta^{13}\text{C}(\text{CH}_4)$ values generally result from secondary processes (e.g., diffusive transport or oxidation by soil methanotrophs). Despite these complexities, consistent patterns exist in the isotope composition of wetland CH₄ that can be linked conclusively to trophic status and consequently, natural succession or human perturbations that impact nutrient levels.

Another challenge for accurate representation of wetlands in carbon cycle models is parameterisation of sporadic CH₄ emission events. Abrupt release of large volumes of CH₄-rich bubbles in short periods of time can account for a significant proportion of the annual CH₄ flux from a wetland but such events are difficult to detect using conventional methods. New infrared spectroscopy techniques capable of high temporal resolution measurements of CH₄ concentration and stable isotope composition can readily quantify short-lived CH₄ pulses. Moreover, the isotope data can be used conclusively to determine shifts in the mode of CH₄ transport and provide the potential to link initiation of abrupt emission events to forcing by internal or external factors.