Review of Mathiot et al. "Explicit and parametrised representation of under ice shelf seas in a z* coordinate ocean model"

Reviewer: Xylar Asay-Davis

I wish my name to be relayed to the authors, as I do not support the practice of anonymous review.

General comments:

This paper discusses the addition of ice-shelf cavities into the NEMO ocean model, and a series of tests used to gain confidence in the model's behavior through idealized simulation results that can be compared with those from other models, to understand sensitivity to certain parameters (notably ocean vertical resolution), and to validate the model against observations in a realistic configuration. The paper also presents a parameterization for prescribing known melt fluxes in the absence of ice shelf cavities, and shows that the parameterization captures many of the features of the flow produced with ice shelf cavities.

Overall, I find that this paper does a very good job at documenting the new NEMO features. The work is important for the field, especially because NEMO's capability to simulate ice shelf cavities is already used by several groups and NEMO is likely to become one of the most widely used models with this capability. The paper is well organized and the experiments are sensible and appropriate, exploring both the potential of the model and making clear some if its limitations and biases.

I recommend a number of minor revisions to the manuscript. If these are addressed, I would recommend the manuscript for publication.

Specific comments:

Title: I believe that GMD requires the model name and version to be part of the title for model description papers.

P. 1:

L. 10 I would suggest defining the acronym NEMO here, the first time you use it (other than the title, assuming you follow my previous suggestion)

L. 15 HSSW needs to be defined the first time it is used here.

L. 20 "that has been assessed": It is not clear to me what this phrase means in this context. Perhaps you could replace it with something more specific and meaningful?

L. 28 "very specific": I would suggest a different phrase, like "different from other freshwater sources". The whole sentence may need to be reworded to avoid too many redundant references to "freshwater".

P. 2:

L. 1-2 Does the freshwater forcing from melting sea ice also deserve to be mentioned in this context?

L. 11 "spread": To me, this verb implies that water masses arrive at the continental shelf in specific locations and spread out from there. For some water masses like CDW, this may be correct but it strikes me as strange to think of all water masses spreading across the continental shelf in this way.

L. 13 "towards the surface" I would be careful about this phrase because you make a point that it is important to correctly model the fact that melt water doesn't necessarily reach the surface. Perhaps just saying "upward" instead of "towards the surface" would avoid implying that the meltwater reaches the surface.

L. 17 "...a temperature close to that of the surface freezing point..." should be "...a temperature close to the surface freezing point...", since the freezing point *is* a temperature.

L. 17-22 This sentence is *way* too long. I would suggest one sentence for each mode.

L. 22-23 "The process is usually referred to as the ice pump." Because you've just mentioned refreezing in the previous sentence, it seems like the refreezing process is referred to as the ice pump. I would suggest clarifying which process it is that you are referring to.

P. 3:

L. 8-9 "So whatever the resolution, some cavities remain unresolved." This is clearly not true, since 1 km resolution (for example) should be sufficient to resolve even Ferrigno ice shelf. In the remainder of the manuscript, you are careful to state that some ice shelves will remain unresolved at any *practical* resolution for global modeling. Please include those caveats here, too. Keep in mind that what seems impractical may become practical in the coming years to decades.

L. 11-16 Please include section numbers as part of describing the structure. This helps the reader to better navigate the paper based on this outline.

L. 19 The definition of the NEMO acronym should go earlier (in the abstract). The version number should go in the title, meaning it may not need to be mentioned again here.

L. 20 Please explain what an Arakawa C-grid is. It also seems awkward to mention the "nonlinear filtered free surface option" without giving some sort of explanation of what this is and why it is the appropriate choice for this work.

L. 26 Maybe z* needs to be explained first, at least qualitatively?

L. 26 "can be used with sea ice model" should probably be "can be used, unmodified, with a sea ice model". (Note also the missing "a" in front of "sea ice model" After all, you are saying that *z** can also be used with an ice shelf but it requires modification.

L. 30 What about shallow regions covered in thick sea ice? Is there a provision in NEMO for preventing sea ice thickness from becoming of the same order as the ocean column thickness?

P. 4

Eqs. (1)-(4) Many problems here:

- The indexing here isn't entirely clear. Either a diagram or further explanation in the text would be helpful. k=1 would appear to be the surface, but this isn't explicitly stated. kz=1 would seem to be the first level.
- In (2), the upper limit on the sum should be k-1, not k_{isf} -1, I think
- Z_w appears to be an inconsistent mix of positive up in (1) (assuming eta is positive up, which (4) seems to imply) and positive down in (2) and (3). You use a negative sign for depth in most subsequent figures and text, so I think (2) and (3) need a minus sign
- It seems like eta needs to be added to (2) and (3) for them to be consistent with (1) and (4). That is, If I plug in k=1 into (2), I would expect to get (1). If I plug in k_{max} into (3), I would expect to hit the sea floor, Z_w(k_{max}) = -H_{isf} H.
- It would be helpful to have H be written explicitly as a sum of dz_{0.T}

Eqs. (5)-(6) It might be relevant to indicate how these equations are discretized in the model. For example, presumably density is piecewise constant in layers and pressure gradients are explicitly substituted with density gradients?

L. 32 "The same limitation is expected..." You just said that partial cells compare favorably to sigma coordinate. You mentioned that bottom topography can be "challenging" but you haven't mentioned any specific "limitation" that should apply along the ice shelf base.

P. 5:

L. 7 "it is sometime necessary" should probably be "it would sometimes be necessary" since you state right after this sentence that you don't do this.

L. 8-10 You talk about the importance of parameterizing melt from ice shelves that are too small to resolve otherwise. You indicate later on that significant regions close to grounding lines and even most of some ice shelves are removed they are too steep and/or too thin to be easily represented in a *z** coordinate without significant "digging" into bathymetry and/or ice draft. Might this not be having a comparable effect to the unresolved ice shelves and require some alternative treatment or parameterization? In many cases, the largest melt rates are at or near the grounding line. By moving the grounding line, particularly by moving it systematically toward the ocean, don't you think you are biasing the model toward lower

total melt (perhaps offset by other biases to produce the higher total melt you find in the end)?

L. 13-14 It would be nice to have a more mathematical description of what is meant by "correction" here.

L. 23 You don't explain until the middle of the next page how T_w is computed from model temperature. You have also not mentioned anything about a boundary layer so far. It might be worth saying something like " T_w the temperature averaged over a boundary layer below the ice shelf (explained below),"

L. 36 "ISOMIP formulation". You should define the ISOMIP acronym here and explain why the formulation is named this (since ISOMIP has not been mentioned previously).

L. 27 "Jenkins et al. (2001)" There are 2 formulations for the heat and freshwater fluxes in this paper. Could you point to the specific equations in the paper you used? I presume you use (24) from that paper, not (25) because the volume flux of freshwater at the surface is explicitly modeled.

Eq. (10):

- There is no Eq. (9), so you need to renumber.
- What about vertical advection, a la Holland and Jenkins (1999). Advection typically dominates diffusion except where melt/freezing rates are very small in magnitude.

P. 6:

Eq. (12) Units are needed. It would be cleaner to define liquidus coefficients with symbols and put them in Table 1.

L. 28-29 "averaged over the first cell and that part of the second wet cell required to make up the constant boundary layer thickness" You never need a third cell to get to 30 m? You don't allow the user to set a boundary layer thickness that is significantly larger than the resolution (e.g 30 m for 5 m resolution)? What would happen in your variable resolution case if you had a shallow ice shelf so that dz < 25 m but you specified a 30-m boundary layer thickness? Is the BL thickness never allowed to be thicker than the local resolution of a full cell?

P. 7:

L. 1-2 This could use some clarifying, especially for the non-constant layer thicknesses with variable numbers of levels. How are the layer thicknesses determined? What is the range of values?

L. 4-6: This point has been made almost word for word in the intro. I would suggest shortening or removing this sentence.

L. 9: "Figure 1c" should be "Fig. 1c". It's slightly odd to mention only this panel of the figure and get to the others only much later in 5.2. Maybe you could mention here that you will explain the remaining panels in Fig. 1 in Sect. 5.2.

L. 12-13: "spread the freshwater due to ice shelf melting evenly between the grounding line depth and the depth of the calving front" This maybe deserves a bit more emphasis and explanation. One might think the plume-like structure of melting would be more consistent with melt fluxes exiting closer to the surface. My ISOMIP+ simulations, for example, and those of most other models suggest that T and S are not strongly affected by melting except close to the interface. Why, then, is a uniformly distributed flux (both horizontally and vertically) the preferred choice? Is this for simplicity and because results are reasonable, or is there a deeper physical reason? Comparison with observations near PIG in Fig. 9 suggest that neither the explicit modeling nor the parameterization is mixing deep enough. This suggests maybe not enough entrainment when explicitly modeling the ice shelf cavity, and may suggest that more melt flux should actually go in at depth than closer to the surface.

L. 26 ISOMIP was never defined so should be defined either here or above when you speak of the "ISOMIP formulation".

L. 26 Also, you should mention that you are performing ISOMIP experiment 1.01 (there were 3 experiments defined).

P. 8:

L. 6-7 "at which time the system is in quasi-steady state". Two things: first, to me "quasi-steady state" is used for systems that oscillate (possibly chaotically) around a steady state, whereas this system has enough viscosity to relax toward what I would expect is a true steady state. Second, I have found in my own simulations that even 30 years isn't really enough time to be that close to steady state. Since NEMO's behavior is typically similar to POP2x, the mode I use, I would expect that the same is true for you. Do you have reason to believe that it *is* close to steady state (e.g. you ran another 5 or 10 years without much appreciable change)?

L. 31 Each ISOMIP experiment named in Table 2 needs to be explained, either in the caption or in the text. Also, adding a prefix like "I_" for ISOMIP would make the division between the different experiment categories clearer and would be more consistent with other experiment names in the table.

L. 31 Also, why no experiment with (say) a 5-m vertical res. but a 30-m TBL? Is this not supported? Such an experiment would better demonstrate whether the model converges with increasing vertical resolution. In my experience with POP2x, it does. This means that, if we want a boundary layer to be present, we should use a physical length scale to determine its depth (like KPP does, for example), rather than tying it to the vertical resolution. More discussion of this point below.

L. 9 "coarsest resolution in the cavity seems to determine the total melt." I think this needs some more discussion. This is likely because the coarsest resolution corresponds to the deepest part of the ice shelf where melt rates are typically highest (thus having the greatest effect on the total flux), right?

L. 11-12 This is almost identical to text in 5.1, so maybe trim one or the other (probably trim here and refer to that section). Also, there you say that the maximum resolution is 150 m, which is very different from 40 m.

L. 26 This geometry is the one for ISOMIP expt. 2.01. Maybe change to "The geometry is the same as ISOMP expt. 2.01, which is the geometry from ISOMIP expt. 1.01 except ..."

L. 27 Maybe give a specific equation and/or figure number from Asay-Davis et al. (2106)?

L. 29-30 The viscosity used in ISOMIP is already quite large compared to what we use in realistic simulations with similar resolution. It seems like increasing this value by another factor of 5 renders any comparisons with a realistic configuration nearly impossible. Also, can you talk about the cause of the noise at the ice shelf front? That sounds troubling and viscosity may not have been the best way to handle it. Why didn't similar noise show up in the realistic simulations?

P. 10

L. 21 "so the behaviour described above may differ in a realistic configuration". I'm not sure which "behaviour described above" is being referred to here for sure. Do you mean that a good comparison in an idealized context doesn't necessarily imply good behavior under realistic conditions?

L. 28-30 This is a brilliant solution for coarsening the grid resolution close to the South Pole!

P. 11

L. 1-2 As mentioned, this is almost identical to text in 3.3, where you claim instead a vertical resolution as coarse as 40 m in cavities. Please trim the text in 3.3 and refer to here, making sure the sections are consistent with each other.

L. 3-5 How did you blend these data sets together?

L. 5 It might be worth mentioning the strange choice made in Sect. 5.2 of Fretwell et al. (2013) for ice shelf cavities with poorly sampled bathymetry, since you state later on that you had trouble with many of these ice shelves. Their choice might have been appropriate for ice-sheet modeling but it has the effect of making the bathymetry closely follow the ice draft with a very thin water column between them in many places. The resulting ocean circulation is likely completely false because the cavity geometry is essentially nonsensical. Becaue of this, many of us have resorted back to RTOPO1 or adopted newer gravity-inversion data sets for the ice shelves where this technique was applied.

"We tested for areas where ice-shelf thickness and sub-shelf bathymetry falsely indicated grounded ice, and where necessary, enforced flota- tion by lowering the (poorly sampled) sea bed. We did this by interpolating the thickness of the sub-ice-shelf water column between the point where cavity thickness declined to 100m and the grounding line where cavity thickness is 0 m. This approach was required for Getz, Venable, Stange, Nivlisen, Shackleton, Totten and Moscow University ice shelves, for some of the thickest areas of the Filchner, Ronne, Ross, Amery ice shelves and for the ice shelves of Dronning Maud Land."

L. 9 "Moscow University" There seems to be confusion in the literature about which is Dalton and which is Moscow University. The Australian groups whose research seems to be most focused on these shelves prefer to call the larger 2 shelves Totten and Dalton, with Moscow University as the small shelf between the 2. Rignot et al. instead use Moscow University to refer to Dalton. While I don't know for sure who is correct, I would tend to defer to the Australians and call this Dalton.

L. 10-11. This was covered above and can be removed.

P. 13

L. 11 "associated with" would maybe be more correct as "in addition to". To my knowledge, Nakayama et al. (2014) attributes the fresher coastal current to sub-ice-shelf melting and does not draw any direct causal connection to weak winds in the atmospheric forcing.

P. 14

L. 25 "the deficiency in representing the giant ice shelves..." It is not clear from the context here which deficiencies you mean. You presumably mean the lack of horizontal circulation due to not explicitly representing the ice shelf cavities.

L. 31 I would change "Nevertheless, current coarse resolution..." to "This may not be a significant problem because current coarse resolution..."

P. 15.

L. 30-31. Any idea why the water on the continental shelf has such a large warm bias here?

P. 16

L. 4-5 "integrated melt rate" Elsewhere, you use "total melt" for this concept, so maybe here as well.

L. 11 In the case of Getz, might the problem be the bad BEDMAP2 bathymetry? George VI is more complicated but the BAS observations (which you could cite here -- Kimura and Venerable papers come to mind -- contact me if you don't know which ones I mean) show stairstep stratification that is likely poorly represented by the boundary-layer formulation assumed in the 3 equations and related heat and freshwater fluxes.

L. 13-15 These studies used RTOPO1 bathymetry for Getz. They may have reasonable melt rates at George VI for the wrong reasons (e.g. cold water masses than observed or poor circulation).

L. 22 FESOM uses a sigma coordinate only near continental margins. In the deep ocean, it is a z-level model. Maybe state this as "while FESOM uses a sigma-coordinate around the Antarctic continental margin."

P. 17

L. 5-7 The bathymetry is not extrapolated from the surrounding region. Instead, the cavity thickness is extrapolated. This leads to ridiculously thin cavities in many, many places. The ice draft and the (completely made up) bathymetry may vary in tandem in the vertical over many ocean thicknesses, maintaining a thin ocean cavity between them. Nothing like this happens in any of the sub-ice-shelf cavities where observations are available, so (to beat a dead horse) this choice of interpolation was not appropriate for ocean modeling applications.

L. 15 I'm not sure what is meant by "the friction law directly". I would take out the word "directly" or replace it with a clearer explanation of what, besides the friction coefficient, is meant here.

L. 17 "is very sensitive" I would recommend against using subjective phrases like "very sensitive" if you can be more quantitative. Maybe just drop "very".

P. 18

L. 2 "very sensitive" again, I would drop "very" (or be more quantitative).

L. 2-5 You imply that the finer resolution solution is the more realistic but this assumes that the true boundary layer is correctly represented at high vertical resolution. It is not clear to me that this is the case, at least for realistic configurations. Unless the vertical viscosity and diffusivity (or another parameterization of turbulent mixing) are being adapted in such a way as to correctly represent the physics of turbulent mixing below the ice shelf, the finer resolution solution may markedly underestimate mixing and entrainment. Indeed, your Fig. 9 seems to suggest that this might be the case in NEMO (though processes outside of ice shelf cavities may also be responsible for the biases, of course).

L. 24 Once again, maybe replace "very dependent" with something more quantitative.

P. 19

L. 12 "prescribe the melt rate" might be clearer if it were replaced with "distribute the melt fluxes". It is unclear if "prescribe the melt rate" refers to computing is or distributing it, and you *don't* explain how to compute the melt rate.

L. 31-32 While these processes might very well be important elsewhere (e.g. Greenland), it's not clear that melting on ice faces can be a first-order effect in Antarctica. The areas of calving faces are so small compared with ice-shelf bases that the melt rates would need to be many orders of magnitude higher than those at the base of the ice for them to play a significant role in ice loss. Furthermore, melting at calving faces can indirectly be accounted for in the calving flux of icebergs. So I don't see these effects being of primary importance for coupled ice sheet/ocean modeling in the Antarctic.

P. 24

L. 6-7 It would be good to provide a URL, since this is not a journal article. Unfortunately, I am not aware of a working link so you may need to email Ben Galton-Fenzi to get him to put it somewhere permanent (like the other ISOMIP link I mentioned above).

Fig. 2: Sign of panel c) is wrong.

Fig. 4: Sign of both panels is wrong.

Fig. 5: Sign of depth is wrong (should be negative to match other plots). Titles of b) and c) are a bit misleading because the difference only applies to the temperature (colormap) not the overturning. In the caption, I would explicitly state that the MOC is in contours. As it is, it seems like you assume the reader will notice the MOC first (and that this is the primary piece of information being shown) and that the temperature is secondary. For me, the opposite was true: I noticed the temperature first.

Fig. 6: Nice figure!

Figs. 7-8: Maybe remind the reader that the model data is averaged over simulation year 10. Add citations for WOA. (I think they might be different for PT and for S.)

Fig. 13: White was not the best color choice for zero melting because it is hard to tell the difference between absence of ice shelves and presence but with zero melting. This figure is the only one zoomed in enough to give us a sense of how well resolved the smaller ice shelves are. I would suggest using light gray either from zero melting or for the background of each panel so the two can be distinguished (with slight preference for the latter).

Typographic and grammatical corrections:

Line numbering: For future manuscripts, it would be more helpful if line numbering continues through the whole manuscript (as in Latex) rather than being for each page. This makes the review process easier.

P. 1:

L. 13 comma needed after "at the surface)"

L. 16 "...under ice shelf seas overturning circulation..." This is an awkward phrase. Might I recommend, "...overturning circulation under ice shelves..."?

L. 17 comma missing after "at the surface"

L. 17-18 "It yields similar improvements... than the explicit..." In this sentence, "than" should be replace with something like "to those from" (i.e. "similar to", rather than "similar than").

L. 19 "widely used" does not need a hyphen; "3 equations" should be "3 equation" or possibly "3-equation"

P. 2:

L. 14 "...inflowing water mass that could..." should be "...inflowing water mass, which could..."

L. 18 no comma needed after "high"

L. 18 This is kind of picky, I know, but I would change "...meling can be high..." to "...melt rates can be high...", since melting is kind of a state of being that, to me at least, isn't really high or low.

L. 30-33 "Furthermore" seems to imply that the second of these two sentences follows from the first, but they are not really related. I would suggest changing the second sentence to something like, "Global conservation is also an important issue, as the ocean/sea-ice model is used as a component within Earth System Models."

L. 32 comma needed after "this issue"

L. 33-34 I would change "the z* vertical coordinate" to "a z* vertical coordinate".

P. 3:

L. 20 "nonlinear" does not need a hyphen

P. 4:

L. 14 "the z axis in" should be "the z axis of"

L. 31 "sigma coordinates models" should be "sigma coordinate models"

P. 5:

L. 20 I would much prefer TBL to tbl (and FWF to fwf later on). It is much easier to read and to spot the definition if you encounter the acronym later on and need to be reminded what it stood for.

L. 23 Here and *many* other places, you use a period to add spacing to your units. In Latex, the correct way to do this is with a half-space (\,). I suspect this manuscript was written in Word, so I don't know how a half-space is achieved and would recommend a full space instead. In any case, a period is not correct.

P. 6:

L. 8 " (Q_{h}) " the second parenthesis should not be subscript.

L. 12 "tbl" again better as "TBL"

L. 13-14 "(Jenkins et al., 2010)" should be "Jenkins et al. (2010)"

L. 17 move "(Jenkins et al., 2010)" (no comma) to after "their values" and change "are based on" to "is based on". Should now read: "Furthermore, uncertainties in the Stanton numbers are also large, as the study used to determine their values (Jenkins et al., 2010) is based on data from a single borehole."

L. 18 "Eq. 7-12" should probably be "Eqs. 7-12" and "Eq. (10) to (12)" should be "Eqs. 10-12".

L. 25 "smallest" should be "thinnest" (or "thickest" should be "largest") for consistency.

P. 7:

L. 10 comma missing after "...parameterisation is that"

L. 12 "fresh water" should be "freshwater"

L. 16 I would prefer "FWF" to "fwf". Please define the acronym FWF here.

L. 17 Use "BG03" instead of the full citation, since you took the trouble to define a shorthand.

P. 8:

L. 10-11 In my experience, URLs are most cleanly done as footnotes. They could also be done as citations, in which case you need an author and the last date they were accessed. Also, John Hunter's website is now down. I had asked Ben Galton-Fenzi to post it on a more permanent place. That place ended up being Ben's staff website, which also now seems to have gone down. I would suggest contacting Ben to get this website posted somewhere permanent (once again!).

L. 11 "(Asay-Davis, 2013)" this citation isn't in the bibliography. Is this my EGU presentation?

L. 19 Here and elsewhere, "m/y" should probably be "m y^{-1} " or "m a^{-1} ".

L. 21 "Figure 2" should be "Fig. 2". Also, you are showing melt rates but you have never explicitly said how melt rates are computed from q. Presumably they are in m a⁻¹ of freshwater and are positive for melting (as stated in the figure caption). In this case, the field plotted in Fig. 2 needs to be multiplied by -1 (i.e. you're plotting positive freezing).

L. 21 "similar to the one" would be slightly better as "similar to that"

- L. 25 "Losch" should probably be "L08"
- L. 29 "top boundary layer" could be "TBL"

L. 30 "9 simulations" should, I think, be "nine simulations". The rule I learned was to write out numbers ten or smaller.

P. 12:

L. 20 and 22 "Fig. 7-8" and "Fig. 7, 8 and 10" should be "Figs. 7-8" and "Figs. 7, 8 and 10"

P. 13

L. 1 "Figure 7-8" should be "Figs. 7-8".

L. 8 "10y" should be written out as "ten years"

L. 17-19 Consider reorganizing for clarity: "The position of the ice edge, being too far south in the Amundsen Sea and too far north in the Weddell Sea and around East Antarctica in both simulation, is not changed significantly by the presence of ice shelf cavities (Fig. 11)." When I first read this, I thought the presence or absence of ice shelves was related to the location of the ice edge, whereas you want to point out that these biases exist regardless.

L. 25-26 "Sea ice is thus thinner in R_ISF than in R_noISF..." This was already stated above.

L. 30 "as the impact..." should be "as is the impact..."

P. 14

L. 12 "similar in both" should be "similar between" ("similar" implies a relationship between two things, not a property of both things.)

L. 18 More grammatical would be "In R_PAR, this is due to the lack of a HSSW circulation..."

L. 32: "1° x cos (latitude)" This is some strange formatting with a mix of math and text as well as notation that is not very standard. Maybe "a nominal resolution of 1° cos(θ), where θ is the latitude, which is sufficient to..."

P. 15

L. 26 No spaces in "(51-260 Gt y⁻¹)".

P. 17

L. 3 "our model setup as the large..." should probably be "our model setup as well as the large..."

P. 18

L. 16 "observed" I would opt of another word like "seen" because "observed" seems to imply "observations" to me, which is not your intent here.

P. 19

L. 13 "physically sensible" does not need a hyphen.

Table 1: many symbols have not been properly subscripted (Cp, Lf, Cpi, Rhoi, Cd). Rhoi should be the Greek symbol rho, right? Remove dots in the units.

Table 2: Many of the ISOMIP experiments are not explicitly mentioned in the text. The names need to be explained either here in the caption or in the text, particularly 31L, 46L and 75L.

Table 3: In the caption, it would be good if you could define ++/+/0/-/-- more quantitatively. Otherwise, this seems rather subjective. Regarding the table itself, I don't think GMD is likely to let you format the table the way you have it here (see instructions for authors). Specifically, they are unlikely to support color like this. You do have some control over horizontal lines, and this may be the best way to differentiate the different regions. I don't think you explicitly discuss the last two columns of the table in the text, which it seems like you should.