

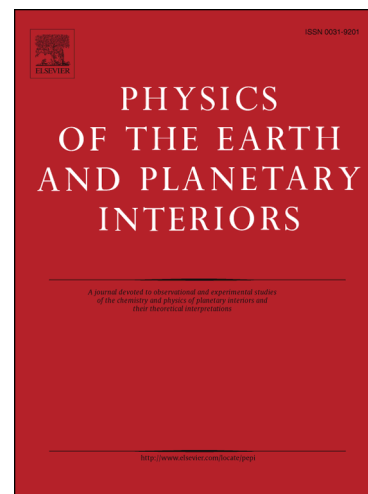
Accepted Manuscript

Benchmark of three-dimensional numerical models of subduction against a laboratory experiment

C.A. Mériaux, Dave A. May, John Mansour, Owen Kaluza, Zhihao Chen

PII: S0031-9201(18)30036-0
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pepi.2018.07.009>
Reference: PEPI 6175

To appear in: *Physics of the Earth and Planetary Interiors*



Please cite this article as: Mériaux, C.A., May, D.A., Mansour, J., Kaluza, O., Chen, Z., Benchmark of three-dimensional numerical models of subduction against a laboratory experiment, *Physics of the Earth and Planetary Interiors* (2018), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pepi.2018.07.009>

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1 Benchmark of three-dimensional numerical models of
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3 C.A. Mériaux^{a,*}, Dave A. May^b, John Mansour^c, Zhihao Chen^{d,a}, Owen
 4 Kaluza^c

5 ^a*School of Earth, Atmosphere and Environment, Monash University, Clayton, Australia*

6 ^b*Department of Earth Sciences, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom*

7 ^c*Monash eResearch Centre, Monash University, Clayton, Australia*

8 ^d*Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology, Yokohama, Japan*

9 **Abstract**

In this paper, we validate three-dimensional numerical models of subduction against a laboratory experiment. The design of our numerical models follows that of the laboratory, and employs a single subducting plate fixed at its trailing edge without an overriding plate. Rheology and buoyancy are not thermally dependent, but importantly the model has a free surface boundary. All the models include a sticky air layer, which is an approximation to a free surface boundary condition, as opposed to a free-slip condition that unrealistically binds the plate to the upper surface. We use a parallel, Python, particle-in-cell, finite-element scheme, and present 6 different models that differ in their viscosity at the interfaces of the subducting plate. We consider harmonic and arithmetic averaging of the viscosity together with a plate composite rheology associated with arithmetic averaging, which similarly to the harmonic averaging results in two lubricated sub-layers at the plate lower and upper interfaces. Despite showing a similar subduction-induced poloidal and toroidal flow in the mantle, the agreement of the models with the experiment is overall ordinary. The rates at which the slab tip sinks and the plate hinge retreats are approaching the laboratory counterparts to within 7 to 18%, at best, when using the composite plate models. Errors in the characterization of the laboratory parameters can account for 5% of such differences. As the composite plate sub-layers are made stiffer, the plate hinge also begins to depart from the steady retreat observed in

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 Corresponding author: Physics of the Earth and Planetary Interiors
 Email address: catherine.meriaux@monash.edu (C.A. Mériaux)

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