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Energy transfer in the Congo deep-sea fan: from terrestrially-derived organic matter to chemosynthetic food webs

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Abstract

Large amounts of recent terrestrial organic matter (OM) from the African continent are delivered to the abyssal plain by turbidity currents and accumulate in the Congo deep-sea fan. In the recent lobe complex, large clusters of vesicomyid bivalves are found all along the active channel in areas of reduced sediment. These soft-sediment communities resemble those fuelled by chemoautotrophy in cold-seep settings. The aim of this study was to elucidate feeding strategies in these macrofaunal assemblages as part of a greater effort to understand the link between the inputs of terrestrially-derived OM and the chemosynthetic habitats. The biochemical composition of the sedimentary OM was first analysed in order to evaluate how nutritious the available particulate OM is for the benthic macrofauna. The terrestrial OM is already degraded when it reaches the final depositional area. However, high biopolymeric carbon contents (proteins, carbohydrates and lipids) are found in the channel of the recent lobe complex. In addition, about one to two thirds of the nitrogen can be

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