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Interannual to decadal oxygen variability in the mid-depth water masses of the eastern North Atlantic.

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Abstract

The detection of multi-decadal trends in the oceanic oxygen content and its possible attribution to global warming is protracted by the presence of a substantial amount of interannual to decadal variability, which hitherto is poorly known and characterized. Here we address this gap by studying interannual to decadal changes of the oxygen concentration in the Subpolar Mode Water (SPMW), the Intermediate Water (IW) and the Mediterranean Outflow Water (MOW) in the eastern North Atlantic. We use data from a hydrographic section located in the eastern North Atlantic at about 48°N repeated 12 times over a period of 19 years from 1993 through 2011, with a nearly annual resolution up to 2005. Despite a substantial amount of year-to-year variability, we observe a long-term decrease in the oxygen concentration of all three water masses, with the largest changes occurring from 1993 to 2002. During that time period, the trends were mainly caused by a contraction of the subpolar gyre associated with a northwestward shift of the Subpolar Front (SPF) in the eastern North Atlantic. This caused SPMW to be ventilated at lighter

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