

Stimulation of bacterial exoproteolytic activity by fish farming in coastal marine ponds: effect on dissolved protein cycling



The effect of fish farming on dissolved amino acid concentrations, bacterioplankton abundance and exoproteolytic activity was assessed in 3 experimental marine ponds. Different standing stocks of fish were introduced (semi-intensive pond: 250 g.m⁻², semi-extensive pond: 50 g.m⁻², control pond: 0). Sea bass farming increased dissolved combined amino acid (DCAA) concentrations only in the semi-intensive pond. Bacterial standing stock was unaffected by fish food supply. However, bacterial exoproteolytic activity was strongly stimulated by aquaculture intensification; the average maximal rate of dissolved protein hydrolysis (V_m) increased with intensity (control pond: 1 500 nM.h⁻¹; semi-extensive pond: 2 600 nM.h⁻¹; semi-intensive pond: 5 100 nM.h⁻¹). DCAA fluxes through bacterial exoproteolytic activity ranged between 16 (semi-extensive) and 11% (semi-intensive) of the daily nitrogen input by fish food. Bacterial exoproteolytic activity allowed a substantial part of the increased supply of dissolved amino nitrogen to be incorporated into bacterial biomass, then available for transfer to higher trophic levels within the ponds. It also significantly decreased dissolved organic nitrogen export from the ponds to the surrounding environment.

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