

Accepted refereed manuscript of:

Dong Y, Zhao J, Chen J, Wang S, Liu Y, Zhang Q, You C, Monroig O, Tocher DR & Li Y (2018) Cloning and characterization of  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  fatty acyl desaturase (Fad) gene promoter in the marine teleost *Siganus canaliculatus*, *Gene*, 647, pp. 174-180.

DOI: [10.1016/j.gene.2018.01.031](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gene.2018.01.031)

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**Title**

Cloning and characterization of  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  fatty acyl desaturase (Fad) gene promoter in the marine teleost *Siganus canaliculatus*

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**Running Title:** Analysis of rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* promoter

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## **Abbreviations**

ALA,  $\alpha$ -linolenic acid (18:3n-3)

AP1, activated protein 1

ARA, arachidonic acid (20:4n-6)

C/EBP, CCAAT enhancer binding protein

DHA, docosahexaenoic acid (22:6n-3)

DR1, direct repeat 1 element

EFA, essential fatty acid

EPA, eicosapentaenoic acid (20:5n-3)

Fad, fatty acyl desaturase

FAS, fatty acid synthase

GATA-2, GATA binding protein 2

HEK 293T cell, human embryonic kidney 293T cell

HNF4 $\alpha$ , hepatocyte nuclear factor 4 $\alpha$

LC-MS, liquid chromatography coupled with tandem mass spectrometry

LC-PUFA, long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids

LNA, linoleic acid (18:2n-6)

NF-1, nuclear factor 1

NF-Y, nuclear factor Y

PPAR $\gamma$ , peroxisome proliferator activated receptor  $\gamma$

PUFA, polyunsaturated fatty acids

Sp1, stimulatory protein 1

SRE, sterol regulatory element

TF, transcription factor

TSS, transcription start site

UTR, untranslated region

## **Abstract**

The rabbitfish *Siganus canaliculatus* was the first marine teleost demonstrated to have the ability of biosynthesizing long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids (LC-PUFA) from C<sub>18</sub> PUFA precursors, and all genes encoding the key enzymes for LC-PUFA biosynthesis have been cloned and functionally characterized, which provides us a potential model to study the regulatory mechanisms of LC-PUFA biosynthesis in teleosts. As the primary step to clarify such mechanisms, present research focused on promoter analysis of gene encoding  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  fatty acyl desaturase (Fad), a rate-limiting enzyme catalyzing the first step in the conversion of C<sub>18</sub> PUFA to LC-PUFA. First, 2044 bp promoter sequence was cloned by genome walking, and the sequence from -456 bp to + 51bp was determined as core promoter by progressive deletion mutation. Moreover, binding sites of transcription factors (TF) such as CCAAT enhancer binding protein (C/EBP), nuclear factor 1 (NF-1), stimulatory protein 1 (Sp1), nuclear factor Y (NF-Y), activated protein 1 (AP1), sterol regulatory element (SRE), hepatocyte nuclear factor 4 $\alpha$  (HNF4 $\alpha$ ) and peroxisome proliferator activated receptor  $\gamma$  (PPAR $\gamma$ ) were identified in the core promoter by site-directed mutation and functional assays. Moreover, NF-1 and HNF4 $\alpha$  were confirmed to interact with the core promoter region by gel shift assay and mass spectrometry. This is the first report of the promoter structure of a  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  Fad in a marine teleost, and a novel discovery of NF-1 and HNF4 $\alpha$  binding to the  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  Fad promoter.

## **Key words**

Fatty acyl desaturase; LC-PUFA biosynthesis; transcriptional regulation mechanism; rabbitfish *Siganus canaliculatus*; marine teleost; NF-1; HNF4 $\alpha$

## 1. Introduction

It is known that long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids (LC-PUFA) such as eicosapentaenoic (EPA; 20:5n-3), docosahexaenoic (DHA; 22:6n-3) and arachidonic (ARA; 20:4n-6) acids are essential fatty acids (EFA) for normal growth and development of vertebrates including fish. Freshwater fish generally have the ability to convert linoleic (LNA; 18:2n-6) and  $\alpha$ -linolenic (ALA; 18:3n-3) acids into LC-PUFA, and thus these two C<sub>18</sub> precursors can satisfy the EFA requirements of these species. On the contrary, most marine teleosts require LC-PUFA as EFA due to the low or absent capability of LC-PUFA biosynthesis (Yone, 1978; Watanabe, 1982 ; Kanazawa, 1985). Accordingly, fish oil (FO) rich in LC-PUFA must be added to compound feed for the aquaculture of marine fish. The limited resource and high price of FO seriously restricted the development of marine aquaculture. Consequently, many studies have been conducted to develop feasible and sustainable alternatives of FO, and vegetable oils (VO) which is rich in C<sub>18</sub> precursors but devoid of LC-PUFA, have been considered as the prime candidates (Turchini and Francis, 2009). However, replacement of dietary FO by VO results in reduced flesh n-3 LC-PUFA contents of farmed fish, which could significantly compromise their nutritional quality for humans, and possibly have other negative effects on fish growth and health (Turchini and Francis, 2009; Geay et al., 2015). Over the last decade, therefore, considerable efforts have been made to understand the molecular basis of endogenous LC-PUFA biosynthesis, so as to facilitate the efficient and effective utilization of sustainable plant lipid sources while maintaining the nutritional quality of farmed fish, especially marine teleosts.

The biosynthesis of LC-PUFA from C<sub>18</sub> precursors requires a series of desaturations and

elongations catalyzed by fatty acyl desaturases (Fad) and elongases of very long-chain fatty acids (Elovl), respectively (Sprecher, 1981). At present, most studies have focused on the cloning and characterization of genes encoding key enzymes in LC-PUFA biosynthesis, including Fad and Elovl. Irrespective of specificity, Fad in teleosts all belong to the FADS2 gene cluster, which includes  $\Delta 6$  Fad,  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  Fad,  $\Delta 5$  Fad and  $\Delta 4$  Fad. So far,  $\Delta 6$  Fad has been found in more than fifteen fish species (Castro et al., 2016), while  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  Fad has been reported in one marine teleost, rabbitfish (*Siganus canaliculatus*) (Li et al., 2008), and four freshwater fish including zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) (Hastings et al., 2001), Mexican whitefish (*Chirostoma estor*) (Jorge Fonseca-Madrigo, 2014), Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) (Tanomman et al., 2013) and striped snakehead (*Channa striata*) (Kuah et al., 2016).  $\Delta 5$  Fad is reported in Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) (Hastings et al., 2004) and rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) (Abdul Hamid et al., 2016).  $\Delta 4$  Fad is identified in vertebrates first by our group in rabbitfish (Li et al., 2010), followed by Senegalese sole (*Solea senegalensis*) (Morais et al., 2012), Mexican silverside (*Chirostoma estor*) (Jorge Fonseca-Madrigo, 2014), striped snakehead (*Channa striata*) (Kuah et al., 2015), and primates, the baboon (Park et al., 2015).

The accumulating studies demonstrated that the activity of Fad was regulated mainly at the transcription level (Nakamura and Nara, 2004). For examples, the expression of Atlantic salmon  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* was up-regulated by replacement of dietary FO with VO (Zheng et al., 2004). Moreover, the transcription activity of Atlantic salmon  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter was much higher than that of marine fish Atlantic cod (Zheng et al., 2009). In contrast, the mRNA expression of Atlantic cod  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* did not respond to dietary lipid and its activity was also weak (Tocher

et al., 2006). The expression of European sea bass  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* was increased by VO treatment, however, its activity and protein content were not changed, suggesting a potential regulatory mechanism of  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* activity at post-transcriptional level (Geay et al., 2010). However, the detailed regulatory mechanisms of LC-PUFA biosynthesis in teleosts are largely unknown at present, which are important for increasing the efficient and effective utilization of sustainable VO in feed while maintaining the nutritional quality of farmed fish, especially marine teleosts.

Rabbitfish *S. canaliculatus* is an economically important marine teleost, which is widespread along the Indo-West Pacific coast and farmed in southeastern Asia including China. What is worthy specially mentioned is that *S. canaliculatus* was the first marine teleost demonstrated to have the ability of biosynthesizing LC-PUFA from C<sub>18</sub> PUFA precursors (Li et al., 2008; Xie, 2015). Moreover, all genes encoding the key enzymes for LC-PUFA biosynthesis have been cloned and functionally characterized including a  $\Delta 4$  *Fad* (the first report in vertebrates) and a  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* (the first report in marine teleosts) (Li et al., 2010), and two elongases (Elov14 and Elov15) (Monroig et al., 2012). These provide us a good model for investigating the regulatory mechanisms of LC-PUFA biosynthesis in teleosts. Recently, studies at transcriptional levels have demonstrated the roles of HNF4 $\alpha$  and Lxr-Srebp in *Fad* expression (Dong et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2016a). At post-transcriptional level, miR17 targeted at the 3' untranslated region (3' UTR) of  $\Delta 4$  *Fad* and downregulated its gene expression, and miR-33 was involved in the regulation of LC-PUFA biosynthesis probably through targeting *insig1* in rabbitfish (Zhang et al., 2016b). Moreover, the structure of rabbitfish  $\Delta 4$  *Fad* promoter was characterized and HNF4 $\alpha$  was identified as a TF of *Fad*

genes, for the first time in vertebrates (Dong et al., 2016) .

$\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  Fad is a rate-limiting enzyme catalyzing the first step in the conversion of C<sub>18</sub> PUFA to LC-PUFA, and thus understanding the regulatory mechanisms of this gene is important for comprehensively exploring the regulation mechanisms of LC-PUFA biosynthesis in teleost. As the first step to the goal, the present study focused on the promoter structure analysis of rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* gene, including the cloning of promoter sequence, determination of core promoter region by progressive deletion mutation, identification of possible binding sites for TFs by a combination of bioinformatics analysis and site-directed mutagenesis. Moreover, TFs interacting with core promoter were confirmed by gel shift assay and liquid chromatography coupled with tandem mass spectrometry (LC-MS). The results will increase our understanding on the regulatory mechanisms of LC-PUFA biosynthesis in vertebrates, which at last contribute to the optimization and/or enhancement of the LC-PUFA pathway in teleosts.

## **2. Materials and methods**

### **2.1 Ethics statement**

Nan Ao Marine Biology Station (NAMBS) of Shantou University provided wild rabbitfish for the present study. In order to minimize the suffering of rabbitfish, 0.01% 2-phenoxyethanol (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO, USA) was used for anesthesia. Based on the National Institutes of Health guide for the care and use of Laboratory animals (NIH Publications No. 8023, revised 1978), all the experiments with fish in the present research were assessed as correct and reasonable by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee



of Shantou University (Guangdong, China).

## **2.2 Cloning of $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$ Fad gene promoter**

Genomic DNA was extracted from muscle tissue of rabbitfish *S. canaliculatus* (Joseph Sambrook, 2001) and used for thermal asymmetric interlaced PCR (TAIL PCR) to clone the  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  Fad gene promoter with forward primer AP4 in the Genome Walking Kit (TaKaRa, Dalian, China) and three reverse primers SP1, SP2, SP3 (Table 1), which was designed from the cloned  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  Fad mRNA of *S. canaliculatus* (GenBank: EF424276.2). The PCR method was the same as we used before (Dong et al., 2016). Fragments of upstream sequence were purified and inserted into pMD18-T vector (TaKaRa, Dalian, China), and sequenced (Shanghai Sangon Biotech Co., Ltd, China).

## **2.3 Construction of progressive deletion mutants from $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$ Fad gene promoter**

With the sequence data from promoter cloning, another three sense primers (DF3, DF2, DF1) with an *EcoRV* site and an antisense primer DR with a *HindIII* site (Table 1) were designed to obtain the accurate sequence of the full-length promoter fragment (D3: 2044 bp) and two progressive deletion fragments (D2: 1085 bp, D1: 578 bp). The PCR was performed with genomic DNA as template by high-fidelity 2 $\times$  *Pfu* PCR Master Mix (Tiangen Biotech, Beijing, China). The PCR product and pGL4.10 [luc2] vector (Promega Corporation, Madison, WI, USA) were both digested by restriction endonuclease *EcoRV* and *HindIII* (New England Biolabs, Ipswich, MA, UK), then ligated by T4 DNA ligase (New England Biolabs, Ipswich, MA, UK). The upstream sequence in the insert fragments D3, D2 and D1 was of

-1415 bp, -456 bp, and +51 bp length to the putative transcription start site (TSS) +1, respectively (Fig. 1). All the recombinant plasmids were isolated using the High Pure Plasmid Isolation Kit (Roche, Mannheim, Germany).

#### **2.4 Bioinformatic analysis of $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$ *Fad* promoter and site-directed mutant construction**

The 5' flanking sequence of  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* was analyzed by TRANSFAC<sup>®</sup> and TF binding<sup>®</sup>. The rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* promoter was compared with the  $\Delta 4$  *Fad* promoter sequence of *S. canaliculatus* (Dong et al., 2016),  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter sequences of *Dicentrarchus labrax* (Geay et al., 2012), *Gadus morhua* (Zheng et al., 2009), *Salmo salar* (Zheng et al., 2009), and *Homo sapiens* (Tang et al., 2003), and  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  desaturase promoter sequence from *D. rerio* genome (*D. rerio* strain Tuebingen chromosome 25 genomic scaffold, Zv9 scaffold3372), the conservative elements of rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* was identified by alignment with the above *Fad* sequences (BioEdit v7.0.9, Tom Hall, Department of Microbiology, North Carolina State University, USA).

Site-directed mutation of recombinant plasmids was carried out to detect the potential functions of predicted TF elements on core promoter activity. For the  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* promoter, site-directed mutants were designed and produced with Muta-direct<sup>™</sup> site-directed mutagenesis kit (SBS Genetech, Shanghai, China) from the deletion mutant D2 construct (pGL4.10-D2) which was treated as wild-type. The mutation site of elements was designed in the middle of the primer, and the corresponding TFs included CCAAT enhancer binding protein (C/EBP), nuclear factor 1 (NF-1), stimulatory protein 1 (Sp1), nuclear factor Y (NF-Y), sterol regulatory element (SRE), activated protein 1 (AP1) and peroxisome

proliferator activated receptor  $\gamma$  (PPAR $\gamma$ ) (Table 2). The detail procedure of PCR was the same as we did previously (Dong et al., 2016). The mutants were isolated with High Pure Plasmid Isolation Kit (Roche, Mannheim, Germany).

## **2.5 Cell culture and Dual luciferase reporter assay**

Human embryonic kidney (HEK 293T) cells (Chinese Type Culture Collection, Shanghai, China) were seeded in 96-well cell culture plates with 100  $\mu$ l high glucose Dulbecco's Modified Eagle Medium (Gluta-MAX DMEM) (Gibco, Life Technologies, USA) supplemented with 10 % fetal bovine serum (FBS, Sijiqing Biological Engineering Material Company, Hangzhou, China) per well for plasmid transfection in dual luciferase reporter assay. After growing for 24 h to 80 % confluence, 100 ng of reporter firefly luciferase construct (progressive deletion or site directed mutants) and 0.01 ng of internal control vector pGL4.75 (Promega Corporation, Madison, WI, USA) was co-transfected into the cells with 0.25  $\mu$ l Lipofectamine<sup>®</sup> 2000 Reagent (Invitrogen, Carlsbad, CA, USA) per well, and empty vector pGL4.10 (D0 group) was set as a negative control. Cells were transfected with plasmid complex in triplicate in three independent experiments. Twenty-four h after transfection, media was replaced with 75  $\mu$ l fresh medium and luciferase assays were performed 24 h later (48 h after transfection) with the Dual-Glo<sup>™</sup> luciferase assay system (Promega, Madison, WI, USA). Chemical luminescence intensity was detected in duplicate readings using a microplate reader (Infinite M200 Pro, Tecan, Switzerland), and promoter activity was calculated from the luminescence ratio of firefly:renilla luciferase for each construct.

## 2.6 Gel shift assay and LC-MS

To determine interaction between TFs and the core promoter of the  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* gene, Beyotime Nuclear Extract Kit (Beyotime, China) and Non-Interference Protein Assay Kit (Sangon, China) were used to extract and quantify nucleus and cytoplasmic proteins from rabbitfish liver, then a 5' end biotin-labeled probe of 270 bp covering the TF elements (C/EBP, NF-1, Sp1, NF-Y, SRE, AP1 and PPAR $\gamma$ ) was designed and incubated with rabbitfish liver proteins. The experimental probe was produced in a 50  $\mu$ l PCR reaction system including 18  $\mu$ l dd H<sub>2</sub>O, 25  $\mu$ l 2 $\times$  *Pfu* PCR Master Mix (TIANGEN, China), 3  $\mu$ l 10 mM 5' end biotin-labeled forward primer, 3  $\mu$ l 10 mM 5' end biotin-labeled reverse primer and 1  $\mu$ l pGL 4.10-D2 recombinant plasmid (100 ng/ $\mu$ l), with the competitor probe produced in the same system using unlabeled primers. PCR conditions were one cycle (95 °C for 3 min), 35 cycles (94 °C for 30 sec, 51 °C for 30 sec, 72 °C for 40 sec), one cycle (72 °C for 5 min) and one cycle (10 °C for 5 min). The detail experimental condition of EMSA was the same as we did previously (Dong et al., 2016). The reaction was carried out in lane A (no proteins, 5' biotin labeled probe), lane B (liver cytoplasmic proteins, 5' biotin labeled free probe), lane C (liver cytoplasmic proteins, unlabeled competitor probe, 5' biotin labeled free probe), lane D (liver nucleus proteins, 5' biotin labeled probe), lane E (liver nucleus proteins, unlabeled competitor probe, 5' biotin labeled probe) (Fig. 5).

To confirm the TFs in rabbitfish nucleus, the proteins for LC-MS detection were isolated by PureProteome<sup>TM</sup> Streptavidin Magnetic Beads (Millipore, Bedford, MA, USA) and Amicon<sup>®</sup> Ultra-0.5 Centrifugal Filter Devices (Millipore, Bedford, MA, USA). The procedure detail for LC-MS was the same as our previous study (Dong et al., 2016).

## **2.7 Statistical analysis**

Data in present study was presented as means  $\pm$  SEM (n = 3). One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by Tukey's multiple comparison test (software Origin 7.0) were used to analyze promoter activity, with a significance of  $P < 0.05$  applied to all statistical tests.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1 The structure of rabbitfish $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$ *Fad* gene promoter**

A 2044 bp length of 5' flanking sequence from the initiation codon ATG of the  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* gene was cloned and treated as the promoter candidate (Fig. 1). The first base of the first non-coding exon was defined as +1 in the sequence and assumed as the putative transcription start site (TSS). One 500 bp intron was found between two noncoding-exons, which were 100 bp and 29 bp, respectively. Based on progressive deletion analysis of 5' flanking sequence of the  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* gene promoter, it was shown that, compared with the activity of original promoter candidate (D3), deletion of fragment from -1415 bp to -457 bp (construct D2) caused an increase of promoter activity, while deletion of fragment from -456 bp to +51 bp (construct D1) caused a significant decrease of promoter activity, suggesting that the core promoter region was located at -456 bp to +51 bp.

### **3.2 Possible TF binding sites in the core promoter of rabbitfish $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$ *Fad* gene**

Bioinformatics analysis using TRANSFAC<sup>®</sup> and TF binding<sup>®</sup> software indicated that there were five predicted TF binding sites including C/EBP, NF-1, Sp1, AP1 and PPAR $\gamma$  in the

core promoter region of rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* (Table 2). In addition, two highly conserved elements including NF-Y and SRE were also identified in the core promoter region of rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* according to the promoter alignment among  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* and  $\Delta 4$  *Fad* of *S. canaliculatus*,  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* of *D. labrax*, *G. morhua*, *S. salar* and *H. sapiens*, and  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* of *D. rerio* (*D. rerio* strain Tuebingen chromosome 25 genomic scaffold, Zv9 scaffold3372) (Fig. 2). The relative location of seven potential TF binding sites in the rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* promoter is shown in Fig. 3.

### **3.3 Confirmation of TF binding sites in the core promoter by site-directed mutagenesis**

According to the information on the above predicated TF binding sites in the core promoter, a series of site-directed mutants was constructed and transfected into HEK 293T cells for determining effects on transcriptional activity. Compared with wild type D2, mutation of TF binding sites for C/EBP, NF-1, Sp1, AP1, PPAR $\gamma$ , NF-Y and SRE resulted in significantly decreased transcriptional activity ( $P < 0.05$ ) (Fig. 4), which suggested that these TF binding sites were important for maintaining promoter activity.

### **3.4 Demonstration of TFs in liver interacting with the TFs binding sites in the core promoter by Gel shift assay and LC-MS analysis**

To further confirm whether the TFs identified *in vitro* were present in rabbitfish liver, Gel shift assay was performed with liver cytoplasmic and nucleus proteins. The electrophoretic results showed that a gel shift band was observed only in lane D with liver nucleus proteins

and 5' biotin labeled probe, which indicated interaction between nucleus proteins and the core promoter of rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* gene (Fig. 5). No gel shift band was seen in lane A without protein, lane B or C with liver cytoplasmic proteins, or lane E with liver nucleus proteins, unlabeled competitor probe and 5' biotin labeled probe. The results suggested there were nucleus proteins in rabbitfish liver that could bind to the core promoter of rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad*.

For further identification of the DNA-protein complex isolated from lane D, the digested protein sample was analyzed by LC-MS and the IPI Zebrafish database (40470 seqs) (<ftp://ftp.ebi.ac.uk/pub/databases/IPI>). The binding proteins were identified and classified by GO (Gene Ontology) and COG (Cluster of Orthologous Group of proteins), respectively (Fig. 6). There were 259 identified spectra in a total of 14730 spectra, and 85 identified proteins from a total of 147 peptides. Among them, HNF4 $\alpha$  and NF-1 protein fragments were identified (Table 3), while the predicted TFs including C/EBP, Sp1, AP1, PPAR $\gamma$ , NF-Y and SREBP-1c were not found.

## 4. Discussion

The present study identified the structure of the rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* promoter. Previously, several vertebrate *Fad* gene promoters had been reported including that of  $\Delta 4$  *Fad* from *S. canaliculatus* recently characterized by our group (Dong et al., 2016), and those of  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* genes from *D. labrax* (Geay et al., 2012), *G. morhua* (Zheng et al., 2009), *S. salar* (Zheng et al., 2009), *H. sapiens* (Tang et al., 2003), and the  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* from *D. rerio*. These provided a

detailed background for promoter analysis including core region, TF binding sites and the discovery of a possible role for HNF4 $\alpha$  and NF-1 in rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* transcription.

As to the core region, differences existed within and between species. The rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* core promoter was located from -456 bp to +51 bp, while in  $\Delta 4$  *Fad* it was from -262 bp to +203 bp, and  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* of *D. labrax*, *G. morhua*, *S. salar* and *H. sapiens* was located from -194 bp, -167 bp, -546 bp, -385 bp to TSS, respectively. Alignment of the mentioned *Fad* core promoter sequences above demonstrated that NF-Y and SRE binding sites were highly conserved among these genes. Other than NF-Y and SRE, binding sites of other TFs in the *Fad* core promoter varied with species. A C/EBP $\alpha$  element was located in the *G. morhua*  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter at -99 bp to TSS, and an Sp1 element was situated in the *S. salar*  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter at -314 bp to TSS (Zheng et al., 2009). While in human  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter there were five Sp1 elements, moreover, a DR-1 element (PPAR $\alpha$  binding) from -385 to -373 bp was reported (Tang et al., 2003). The present study showed that potential binding sites for C/EBP, NF-1, Sp1, NF-Y, AP1, PPAR $\gamma$  and SRE existed in rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* promoter. Thus, the promoter of rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* had the same binding site for C/EBP in common with the *G. morhua*  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter, a similar Sp1 element to those of *S. salar* and *H. sapiens*  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoters, and similar PPRE (peroxisome proliferator response element) with *H. sapiens*  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter (PPAR $\alpha$  element in *H. sapiens*  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter and PPAR $\gamma$  element in rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* promoter). Moreover, rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* and  $\Delta 4$  *Fad* promoter shared the same elements for C/EBP, NF-1, NF-Y and SRE, while there were special binding sites for Sp1, AP1 and PPAR $\gamma$  in  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad*, GATA binding protein 2 (GATA-2) and HNF4 $\alpha$  in  $\Delta 4$  *Fad*. Whether these reported transcription factors are involved in the regulation of rabbitfish



$\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* transcription requires to be further clarified.

HNF4 $\alpha$  is a positive regulator in LC-PUFA *de novo* biosynthesis, which could activate various genes involved in lipid and cholesterol metabolism such as ApoCIII, Cyp7 $\alpha$  hydroxylase, fatty acid synthase (FAS) and stearyl-CoA desaturase (SCD) (Hayhurst et al., 2001; Lu et al., 2001; Odom et al., 2004; Adamson et al., 2006). The binding of unsaturated fatty acids like ALA, EPA and DHA to HNF4 $\alpha$  would repress its influence on activating transcription (Rachel Hertz, 1998). A previous study on human  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter found that HNF4 $\alpha$  did not affect  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter activity when co-transfecting CV1 cells expression vector of human  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter and HNF4 $\alpha$  (Tang et al., 2003). Recently, our group first discovered that HNF4 $\alpha$  was a transcription factor of vertebrate *Fad* gene ( $\Delta 4$  *Fad*) as identified in *Siganus canaliculatus* (Dong et al., 2016). Interestingly, present research also identified HNF4 $\alpha$  fragment in the core promoter region of rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad*, suggesting that it was a potential regulatory TF in LC-PUFA biosynthesis, and a further study was required for clarification.

HNF4 $\alpha$  and PPAR $\gamma$  might be involved in the transcriptional regulation of rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* by competition for DR-1 element. It was reported that HNF4 $\alpha$  and PPAR $\alpha$  shared a similar consensus binding site, a direct repeat 1 (DR1) element (AGGTCA n-AGGTCA or variants thereof) in the promoter or intron of genes such as acyl-CoA oxidase and acyl-CoA thioesterase I, and that they could compete for the DR-1 site when involved in the regulation of target genes (Nishiyama et al., 1998; Rachel Hertz, 1998; Mandard et al., 2004; Dongol et al., 2007). However, the predicted DR-1 element in the human  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter was only regarded as a PPRE element since the  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter activity did not response to

pcDNA3.1-HNF4 $\alpha$  over-expression (Tang et al., 2003). The present study predicted a PPAR $\gamma$  site in rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* promoter, which was quite similar to DR-1 element, and further identified such site was important for  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* promoter activity. However, based on the proteomic data of LC-MS analysis, PPAR $\gamma$  was not identified, while HNF4 $\alpha$  was not predicted, but a protein fragment of such TF was identified in rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* promoter. This might be due to competition for the DR-1 element between PPAR $\gamma$  and HNF4 $\alpha$  in the transcription of rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad*. Although some of the other predicted TFs including C/EBP, Sp1, NF-Y, AP1, and SREBP-1c could not be identified by LC-MS, NF-1 was another protein fragment identified, indicating its potential regulatory role in rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* transcription. Further investigations are required to clarify the regulatory function of NF-1 in the rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* transcription.

In summary, the present study characterized the structure of the *S. canaliculatus*  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* gene promoter, which is the first report of a  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* gene promoter in marine teleost. Moreover, HNF4 $\alpha$  and NF-1 were confirmed as potential TFs of  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* gene. These results might provide a new background for regulatory mechanism of LC-PUFA biosynthesis in marine teleost.

## **Competing Interests**

The authors declared that there are no competing interests.

## **Acknowledgements**

This work was financially supported by the Major International Joint Research Project from

National Natural Science Foundation of China (31110103913) and China Agriculture Research System (CARS-47).

## Author Contributions

Conceived and designed the experiments: Yuanyou Li, Shuqi Wang, Yewei Dong, Jianhong Zhao and Junliang Chen

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1 **Figure Legends**

2 Figure 1. Functional analysis of *Siganus canaliculatus*  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* gene promoter. On the left,  
3 D3 represents whole promoter region, while D2 and D1 are the progressive deletion mutants,  
4 and D0 is the negative control without promoter region. The white boxes stand for non-coding  
5 exons, and black bar between the two exons represented the intron. The first base of first 5'  
6 non-coding exon is assumed to be +1, the other sequence is numbered relative to the  
7 transcription start site (TSS). Promoter activity of each construct is represented as the value  
8 normalized activity (Firefly luciferase: Renilla luciferase) on the right. The letters a, b, c and d  
9 indicate significant differences of promoter activity relative to each other ( $P < 0.05$ ).

10

11 Figure 2. The core promoter regions alignment of *Siganus canaliculatus*  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* with *S.*  
12 *canaliculatus*  $\Delta 4$  *Fad* promoter (Dong et al., 2016),  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* promoter from *Danio rerio*  
13 genome data and  $\Delta 6$  *Fad* promoter from *Dicentrarchus labrax* (Geay et al., 2012), *Gadus*  
14 *morhua*, *Salmon salar* (Zheng et al., 2009) and *Homo sapiens* (Tang et al., 2003). NF-Y and  
15 SRE are identified with shading. The predicted binding sites of PPAR $\gamma$  in  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad*  
16 promoter and HNF4 $\alpha$  in  $\Delta 4$  *Fad* promoter are also labelled with gray.

17

18 Figure 3. The distribution of possible transcription factors binding sites predicted by  
19 corresponding online software in *Siganus canaliculatus*  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* core promoter region. The  
20 underlined sections represent the probe region of gel shift assay in Fig. 5.

21

22 Figure 4. Effects of site-directed mutation of possible transcription factors binding sites on the  
23 promoter activity of *Siganus canaliculatus*  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* gene. The letters a, b, c and d indicate  
24 significant differences relative to each other ( $P < 0.05$ ).

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26 Figure 5. The gel shift assay of *Siganus canaliculatus*  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* core promoter with protein  
27 from liver extract. The reaction was performed in the following lane, A (no proteins, 5' biotin

28 labeled probe), B (liver cytoplasmic proteins, 5' biotin labeled free probe), C (liver  
29 cytoplasmic proteins, unlabeled competitor probe, 5' biotin labeled free probe), D (liver  
30 nucleus proteins, 5' biotin labeled probe), E (liver nucleus proteins, unlabeled competitor  
31 probe, 5' biotin labeled probe).

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33 Figure 6. Classification of nucleus proteins in core promoter of *Siganus canaliculatus*  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$   
34 *Fad*. COG (Cluster of Orthologous Group of proteins) method is used to identify the proteins  
35 isolated from lane D in gel shift assay. The number above each column represents the amount  
36 of identified proteins.

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41 **Table 1.** Primers used in present study.

Subject	Primers	Nucleotide sequence
TAIL PCR for 5' flanking sequence cloning	SP1	5'-GTCTGCTTTCCTATGGTCACGTTG-3'
	SP2	5'-GTGCTCCGTCCACATTCGAGTT-3'
	SP3	5'-TCATCCTCCTCAAATAGG -3'
<i>Pfu</i> PCR for deletion mutant construction	DF3	5'- <u>CCCGATATCTTGCTGACG</u> TAAAGTGTGGA-3'
	DF2	5'- <u>CCCGATATCGGCCATTTGATTA</u> ACTCTGCT-3'
	DF1	5'- <u>CCCGATATCGGAGCACGGTCA</u> ACGTGAC-3'
	DR	5'- <u>CCCAAGCTTCATCTTCACTGCTGTCTCTGCTT</u> -3'
EMSA for gel shift	BF (5' biotinlabeled)	5'-GTATTT <u>CATCAGACTGTTTCCGT</u> -3'
	BR (5' biotinlabeled)	5'-CAAACGTTGTCTGCTTTCCTAT-3'
	UF (5' unlabeled)	5'-GTATTT <u>CATCAGACTGTTTCCGT</u> -3'
	UR (5' unlabeled)	5'-CAAACGTTGTCTGCTTTCCTAT-3'

42 Restriction sites underlined are *EcoRV* (5'-GATATC-3') and *HindIII* (5'-AAGCTT-3') in expression vector pGL4.10

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52 **Table 2.** The data of TF binding sites in rabbitfish  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  *Fad* core promoter.

TF	Software	Position	Predicted element	Mutation site
C/EBP	TF binding <sup>®</sup>	-164	GTATTTCATCAGAC	GTATTTCATCAGAC→×
NF-1	TF binding <sup>®</sup>	-138	TC <u>TGGGC</u> GCAGGCGAC	TGGGC→×
Sp1	TF binding <sup>®</sup>	-144	TGGGC <u>GC</u> GC	GG→TT
NF-Y	Sequence alignment	-59	GCGCCATTGG	GCGCCATTGG→×
SRE	Sequence alignment	-26	CTCGAATGATCGGCTCGGAATT	CTCGAATGATCGGCTCGGAATT→×
AP1	TF binding <sup>®</sup>	-13	ACTGAATCAGT	ACTGAATCAGT→×
PPAR $\gamma$	TRANSFAC <sup>®</sup>	+53	AGCACGGTCAACGTGACCATAGG	AGCACGGTCAACGTGACCATAGG→×

53 The position of each element is numbered relative to supposed transcription start site (TSS). The bases underlined are conservative part in mutation, × means

54 deletion. TF binding<sup>®</sup>, TRANSFAC<sup>®</sup> are two software tools online used for the prediction.

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60 **Table 3.** Proteomics information of TFs identified by LC-MS

Transcription factor	NF-1	HNF4 $\alpha$
Protein fragments	LDLVMVILFK	QQLLVLEWAK

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Figure. 1.

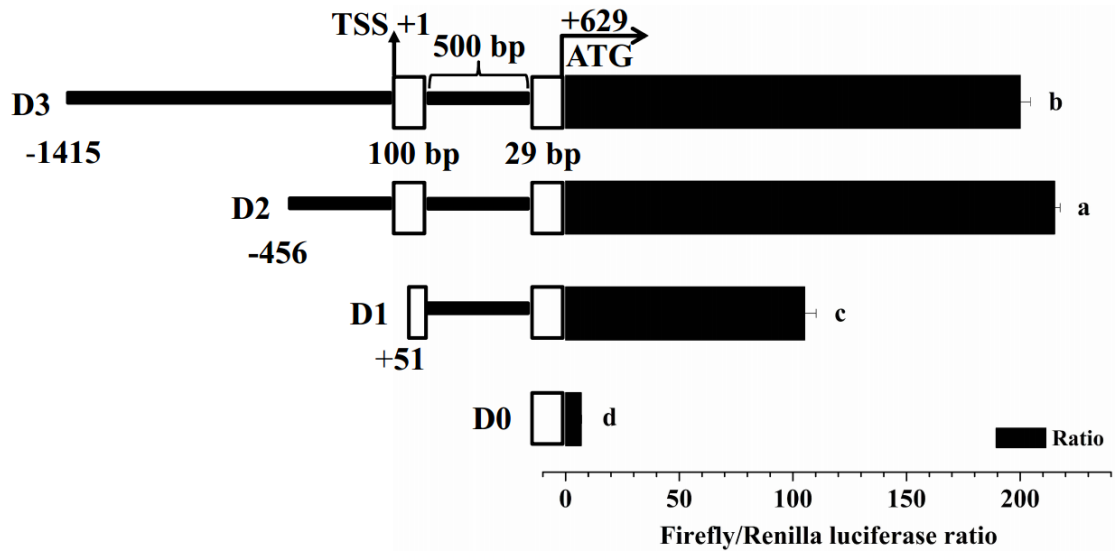


Figure. 2.



**Figure. 3.**

-456 GGCCATTTGATTAAGCTCTGCTAATTTAGATTAAATCTTACTGTCTGTAGGCTGTAAAATCATT  
-392 ACATTACGACCACCTTTATCAGGCAGGGTACAGATGTACAGATTAATTTTTGCAGGATGCTA  
-329 TGTC AATTCCTTTTAATGCAGATTTTGACGTTTTCGTTTCTTTGTTTTCTTTGTTGTTTT  
-263 TTTGTTTTTTTGTTC AAACACCACACTG CATATTTTTTTAATAAAAAAACATGGTAAAAA

**C/EBP** **NF-1**

-199 CTAAGAAAGCTGTAAAAGAGTC GTATTTCA TCAGACTGTTTCCGTCTGGGCGCGCAGGCGACG

**Sp-1**

-136 TTTTAATATTCAGACGAACCGTTTATTGACCCTATTGCGCATCACCCGGTGGTTCAGGATTAC

**NF-Y** **SRE** **API**

-72 TGTGCGCCCATTTGCCAGAAACCCTCGAATGATCGGCTCGGAATTGTACTGAATCAGTGGG

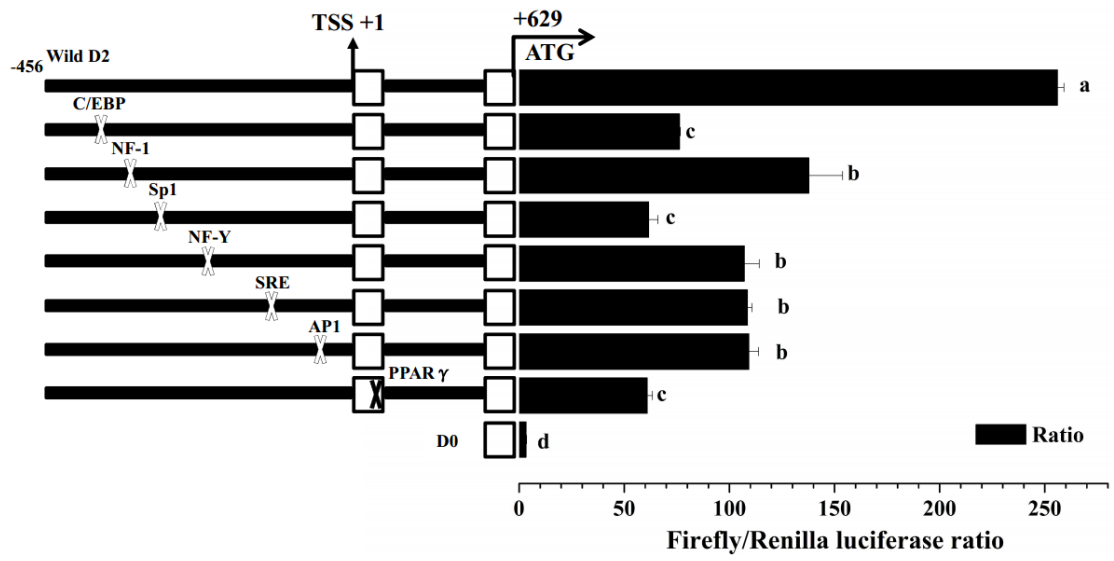
**TSS+1**  
→

-9 TGAATCCCTGAACCTATTGAGGAGGATGAGGATGTGAGGAGGTGAACTCGAATGTGGACGG +53

**PPAR $\gamma$**

AGCACGGTCAACGTGACCATAGGAAAGCAGACAACGTTTGCAAATAAGTAAGTTACAAATCT +115

Figure. 4.



**Figure. 5.**

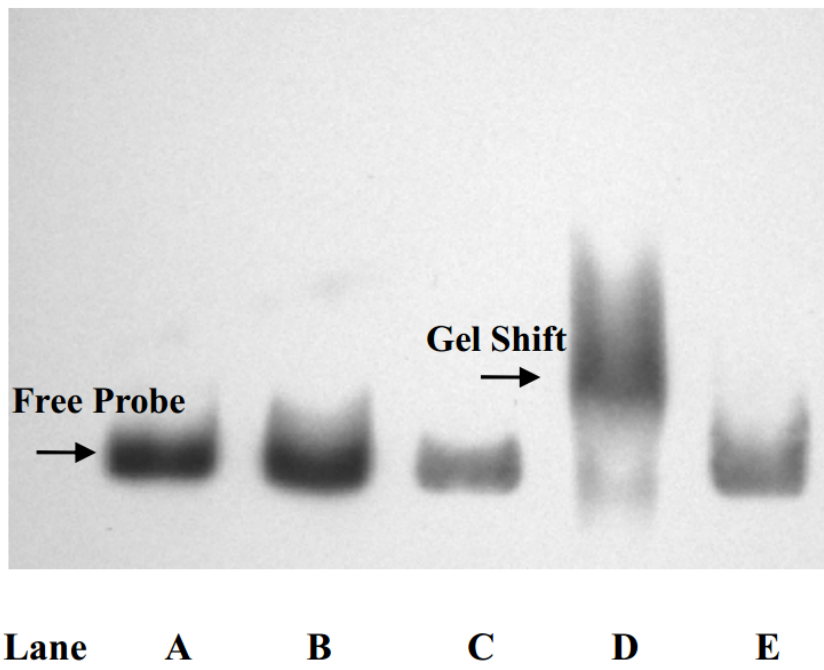




Figure. 6.

