

1 **Title:** Sensory, microbial and biochemical effects of a novel ozonised-slurry ice system for
2 the on-board storage of megrim (*Lepidorhombus whiffiagonis*)

3 On-board quality preservation of megrim (*Lepidorhombus whiffiagonis*) by a novel ozonised-
4 slurry ice system

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16 **Running head:** On-board storage of megrim in ozonised slurry ice

17 On-board megrim preservation by ozonised slurry ice

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24

1 **Abstract**

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4

5 **Key words:** on-board storage, megrim, slurry ice, ozone, shelf-life, freshness

1 **Introduction**

2

3 Marine species provide highly perishable products whose quality and freshness rapidly
4 declines *post-mortem* due to a variety of microbial and biochemical degradation
5 mechanisms. These undesirable events make mandatory the efficient refrigeration of
6 marine food products on-board in the fish vessels immediately after the catch and the
7 imposition of hygienic handling and storage conditions, since these will directly affect
8 both the fish quality and its commercial shelf-life [1, 2].

9 Traditionally, fish species have been preserved by cooling and storing in flake ice
10 [3], refrigerated seawater [4], or by exposure to the action of chemical preservation
11 agents [5, 6]. In the last decade, slurry ice-based cooling and storage methods have been
12 introduced in the fish sector [for an updated review: 7]. Slurry ice consists of a biphasic
13 system composed by microscopic spherical ice crystals dispersed in refrigerated
14 seawater cooled at subzero temperature in the range of -0.5°C to -1.5°C . Slurry ice
15 systems exhibit several technical features of applied interest, among them: (i) its higher
16 heat-exchange capacity as compared to flake ice, this reducing the cooling times of the
17 fish catch, (ii) the reduced physical damage caused to the fish surface by the
18 microscopic spherical particles as compared with flake ice aciculate crystals, (iii) the
19 slowing down of a wide variety of chemical and enzymatic degradation mechanisms
20 due to the subzero temperature imposed, and (iv) the fluid nature of slurry ice, which
21 allows its pumping and a more hygienic handling of the fish specimens[7].

22 Pioneer works by Chapman [8] demonstrated a better maintenance of quality of
23 finfish stored on-board in slurry ice as compared with other more traditional chilling
24 technologies. Similar good conclusions were raised when slurry ice was used for the on-
25 board storage of albacore tuna [9] and as a pre-cooling method [10]. Evidences of the

1 advantages of slurry ice systems for the management of shellfish batches have also been
2 reported, both for inland storage [11], and, more recently, for on-board storage [12].

3 In our laboratory, refrigeration and subzero storage in slurry ice has proven to slow
4 down microbial growth in lean [13], medium-fat [14] and fat [15] fish species.
5 Likewise, refrigeration and storage in slurry ice have also been described to decrease the
6 rates of a variety of biochemical mechanisms involved in quality loss in lean fish
7 species [16], medium-fat [17] or fat [18] fish species. As a consequence of these effects,
8 better sensory quality and extended shelf-lives have been reported for such fish species
9 stored in slurry ice, as compared with traditional flake ice [13-18].

10 A technical relevant feature of slurry ice is that it may be combined with other
11 agents, such as ozone, to achieve an antiseptic surface effect, or melanosis inhibitors, to
12 prevent browning reactions in shellfish [12]. We have demonstrated the benefits of a
13 novel ozonised-slurry ice combined system for the inland storage of sardine [14, 18]
14 and farmed turbot [19]. However, such system has not been installed in a fishing vessel
15 for its evaluation in the on-board storage of fish material. Thus, the main goal of this
16 work was to combine a slurry ice prototype and an ozone generator for the on-board
17 refrigeration and storage of megrim (*Lepidorhombus whiffiagonis*). This flat fish species
18 represents the most fished species in the Gran Sol North Atlantic Fishing Bank,
19 exploited by a number of European countries [20]. The capture of megrim in such a
20 distant fishing bank usually means that the time elapsed between the catch and arrival at
21 destiny varies from 10 to 15 days, this fact underlining the need to optimise
22 refrigeration parameters in order to provide consumers with fish of the highest quality
23 possible, especially in the case of fish specimens caught during the first days of the
24 fishing run.

1 **Materials and methods**

2

3 *Slurry ice system used*

4 A combined slurry ice prototype (FLO-ICE, Kinarca S.A.U., Vigo, Spain) provided
5 with an ozone generator (Cosemar Ozono, Madrid, Spain) was installed in the ship
6 Cantábrico, based on Vigo fishing harbour (Northwestern Spain). The composition of
7 the slurry ice binary mixture was 40% ice and 60% water, prepared on-board with
8 filtered seawater (salinity: 3.3%). The temperature of the slurry ice mixture was -1.5°C.
9 Flake ice was prepared using freshwater with an Icematic F100 Compact device
10 (Castelmac SPA, Castelfranco, Italy).

11

12 *Fish material, processing and sampling*

13 Two batches of megrim specimens were prepared in flake ice (FI) and slurry ice
14 (SI). Another two batches were prepared with ozonised slurry ice (oSI batches). In such
15 batches, the injection of ozone in the slurry ice mixture was accomplished with the
16 ozone generator (Cosemar Ozono), the redox potential being adjusted to 600 mV (0.16
17 mg ozone/l) (oSI₆₀₀ batch) or to 300 mV (0.08 mg ozone/l) (oSI₃₀₀ batch), respectively.
18 In both batches, the ozone concentration was monitored by readings of the redox
19 potential in the liquid phase. The fish specimens were surrounded by either ozonised
20 slurry ice, slurry ice or flake ice at a fish:ice ratio of 1:1, and stored on-board for 14
21 days in a refrigerated room at 2°C. The temperature of megrim in the SI and oSI batches
22 was in the range of -1°C/-1.5°C, while the temperature in the flake ice was in the range
23 of 0°C/+1°C. When required, the ice mixtures were renewed on-board.
24 The fish specimens were gutted and not headed. The length of the megrim specimens
25 was in the 15–20 cm range and their weight was in the 80-100 (¿tan poco?) g range.

1 Once the four batches were unloaded at Vigo fishing harbour, they were transported to
2 the laboratory of IIM (Vigo, Spain) and kept in an isothermal room in each type of ice
3 at +2°C for up to 6 days. Sensory, microbiological and biochemical analyses were
4 performed at days 0, 2 and 6 after unloading, these corresponding to 14, 16 and 20 days
5 after the catch. All analyses were performed in triplicate.

6

7 *Sensory analyses*

8 Sensory analysis was conducted by a sensory panel consisting of five experienced
9 judges, according to traditional guidelines concerning fresh and refrigerated fish [21].
10 Four categories were ranked: highest quality (E), good quality (A), fair quality (B), and
11 unacceptable quality (C). Sensory assessment of the fish included the following
12 parameters: external odour and appearance, gill cavity and flesh odour.

13

14 *Microbiological analyses*

15 Samples of 10 g of fish muscle were dissected aseptically from chilled hake specimens,
16 mixed with 90 ml of 0.1% peptone water (Oxoid Ltd., London, UK), and homogenised
17 in a stomacher (Seward Medical, London, UK) as previously described [22, 23]. In all
18 cases, serial dilutions from the microbial extracts were prepared in 0.1% peptone water.
19 Total aerobes were investigated by surface inoculation in plate count agar (PCA, Oxoid)
20 after incubation at 30°C for 72 h. Psychrotrophes were also investigated in PCA (Oxoid)
21 but incubation was carried out at 7-8°C for 10 days. *Enterobacteriaceae* were
22 investigated in Crystal Violet Neutral Red Bile Glucose Agar (VRBD Agar, Merck,
23 Darmstadt, Germany) after incubation at 37°C for 24 h. Microorganisms exhibiting a
24 proteolytic phenotype were investigated in casein-agar medium [24] after incubation at
25 30°C for 48 h, as previously described [25].

1

2 *Chemical analyses*

3 The evolution of pH values in megrim muscle along storage time was determined by
4 means of a 6-mm diameter insertion electrode (Crison, Barcelona, Spain).

5 Total volatile base-nitrogen (TVB-N) values were measured as described elsewhere
6 [26]. Briefly, fish muscle (10 g) was extracted with 6% perchloric acid and brought up
7 to 50 ml -the TVB-N content being determined, following steam-distillation of the acid
8 extracts rendered alkaline to pH 13 with 20% NaOH- by titration of the distillate with
9 10 mM HCl. The results were expressed as mg TVB-N/100 g muscle. Trimethylamine-
10 nitrogen (TMA-N) values were determined by the picrate method, as previously
11 described [27]. This technique involves the preparation of a 5% trichloroacetic acid
12 extract of fish muscle (10 g /25 ml). The results were expressed as mg TMA-N/100 g
13 muscle.

14 Lipid hydrolysis was evaluated by the free fatty acid (FFA) content, determined by
15 the Lowry and Tinsley [28] method based on complex formation with cupric acetate-
16 pyridine. Results were expressed as g FFA/100 g lipids. Lipid oxidation was evaluated
17 by estimating the formation of fluorescent compounds with a Perkin Elmer LS 3B
18 fluorimeter. Measurements were performed at 393/463 nm and 327/415 nm as
19 previously described [26]. The relative fluorescence (RF) was calculated as follows: RF
20 $= F/F_{st}$, where F is the fluorescence measured at each excitation/emission maximum,
21 and F_{st} is the fluorescence intensity of a quinine sulphate solution (1 μ g/mL in 0.05 M
22 H_2SO_4) at the corresponding wavelength. The fluorescence ratio (FR) was calculated as
23 the ratio between the two RF values: $FR = RF_{393/463 \text{ nm}}/RF_{327/415 \text{ nm}}$. The FR value was
24 determined in the aqueous phase resulting from the lipid extraction [30].

25

1 *Statistical analyses*

2 Bacterial counts were transformed into log CFU/g before undergoing statistical analysis.
3 The SPSS 11.5 for Windows software (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL) was used to explore the
4 statistical significance of the results obtained, this including multivariate contrasts and
5 multiple comparisons by the DMS test. A confidence interval at the 95% level ($p < 0.05$)
6 was considered in all cases.

7

8 **Results and discussion**

9

10 *Sensory analyses*

11 The megrim specimens stored on board in any of the two oSI systems were classified
12 into the A category at unloading (Table 1). After this sampling time, quality decreased
13 to B category in the batch oSI₃₀₀ on day 6, this was 20 days after the catch, while the
14 oSI₆₀₀ batch maintained the A quality at that time. On contrast, megrim specimens kept
15 on board in FI or SI exhibited B category when unloading, although the latter batch
16 exhibited a better sensory quality than the former. The quality of the FI batch after
17 unloading decreased rapidly and, unlike the SI batches, was not acceptable on day 20
18 (Table 1).

19 The main negative aspect related to quality loss in the batches was both the gills and
20 external odour. No significant alteration in the eye appearance was observed in any of
21 the four batches studied this not being in agreement with the results obtained for
22 seabream stored in slurry ice by other authors [31]. According to our results, on-board
23 storage of megrim in ozonised slurry ice (oSI₆₀₀ batch) allowed a significant extension
24 of its shelf-life, such batch maintaining the A quality even after 20 days of storage. This
25 result confirms at the sensory level previous works performed with oSI batches [15, 19],

1 although the present work represents the first scientific evaluation of an oSI system for
2 the on-board storage of a commercial fish species.

3

4 *Microbiological analyses*

5 Initially, one-way ANOVA was carried out considering aerobes, psychrotrophes,
6 *Enterobacteriaceae* and proteolytic bacteria as dependent variables, and time as the
7 factor. *Post-hoc* analyses were performed by means of the DMS test. Table 2 compiles
8 the average counts and ranges determined for the above-cited microbial groups in the
9 FI, SI, oSI₃₀₀, oSI₆₀₀ batches after 14, 16 and 20 days of storage. Statistically significant
10 ($p < 0.05$) lower microbial numbers were determined for all four above-cited microbial
11 groups in the oSI₆₀₀ with respect to the FI and SI batches.

12 With respect to the counts of total aerobes, the average difference between oSI₆₀₀
13 batch and FI and SI batches was 0.469 and 0.525 log units, respectively (Table 2).
14 However, the bacterial counts reached levels slightly above 10^4 CFU/g only in the FI
15 and SI batches, these numbers being considerably below those considered to be required
16 for the spoilage of fish stored aerobically [32]. These results are in agreement with the
17 significantly lower counts determined for aerobes in sardine [15] and turbot [19] muscle
18 stored in ozonised slurry ice with respect to FI and SI, although the latter two works
19 were not performed on-board.

20 The numbers determined for psychrotrophic bacteria in megrim specimens stored in
21 the oSI₆₀₀ batch were also significantly ($p < 0.05$) lower than those determined in the FI
22 and SI batches, with average differences of 0.445 and 0.446, respectively (Table 2), this
23 revealing a significant slow down of the growth of this bacterial group in the oSI₆₀₀
24 batch. However, and as in the case of aerobes, the numbers of psychrotrophes in all four
25 batches were not high, being in all cases below 10^6 CFU/g. More intense growth

1 reductions had been determined for psychrotrophes in sardine [15] and turbot [19]
2 muscle stored in ozonised slurry ice.

3 With respect to the development of *Enterobacteriaceae* in megrim muscle stored in
4 either slurry ice or flake ice, significant ($p < 0.05$) differences were observed between the
5 oSI₆₀₀ batch and both FI and SI batches, as in the case of aerobes and psychrotrophes
6 (Table 3). However, the average counts were so low that the contribution on this
7 bacterial group to megrim spoilage must be discarded.

8 The greatest differences between the oSI batches and both FI and SI batches were
9 determined for proteolytic bacteria. This bacterial group may lead to the formation of
10 microbial metabolites such as peptides or amino acids, derived from protein hydrolysis,
11 thus contributing to undesirable sensory changes in seafood products [33-35]. As can be
12 observed in Table 2, significant ($p < 0.05$) lower counts of proteolytic bacteria were
13 observed in the oSI₆₀₀ and oSI₃₀₀ batches than in the FI and SI batches. The greatest
14 average difference (1.463 log CFU/g units) was found between oSI₃₀₀ and FI batches.
15 These results confirm a previous work indicating a significantly slower growth of
16 proteolytic bacteria in sardine stored in ozonised slurry ice [15].

17 Chen *et al.* [36] reported that the presence of ozone in water or in NaCl solutions
18 were effective for the inactivation of a wide variety of Gram-negative and Gram-
19 positive bacteria. Although the present study was performed with slurry ice prepared
20 with marine water, and not with a NaCl solution, the results described in our study and
21 those described by Chen *et al.* [36] were in agreement. It should also be underlined that
22 the results obtained in the microbiological analyses in the present study, correlated well
23 with the differences observed in the sensory analyses, again confirming the better
24 maintenance of quality in the megrim specimens stored in the oSI₆₀₀ batch with respect
25 to the other three batches.

1

2 *Chemical analyses*

3 It is widely accepted that pH increase denotes the accumulation of undesirable alkaline
4 compounds, such as ammonia and TMA, which are mostly derived from microbial
5 action [37]. It has been suggested that pH values above 7 may limit the consumption of
6 certain lean fish species such as hake [38]. In our study regarding pH, significant
7 ($p<0.05$) differences were determined between the FI batch on one hand, and the other
8 SI-based batches, on the other (Table 3). Thus, at day 20 of storage the pH value of
9 megrim muscle stored in FI resulted to be 7.38. On contrast, significantly ($p<0.05$)
10 lower pH values of 7.07, 6.95 and 6.99 were determined in the SI, oSI₃₀₀ and oSI₆₀₀
11 batches, respectively. These results seem to be related to a more intense development of
12 alkalising microflora in the FI batch and are in agreement with previous reports that
13 reported steady increases in pH for other lean fish species such as hake [38] and turbot
14 [35], and a better control of the pH value as a consequence of their storage in slurry ice
15 [13, 19] or in ozonised slurry ice [39].

16 As in the case of the pH values, TVB-N formation in megrim stored in FI was
17 significantly ($p<0.05$) higher than in the other three batches (Table 3). Thus, TVB-N
18 concentrations below 22 mg/100 g muscle were determined in the SI and oSI batches on
19 day 14, while such values rose above 34 mg/100 g in the case of the FI batch. A similar
20 trend was observed on days 16 and 20 (Table 3). Interestingly, the presence of ozone in
21 the oSI batches implied the lowest TVB-N contents in megrim muscle, although such
22 batches were not statistically different with respect to the SI batch. The FI batch would
23 reach the legal limit of 35 mg/100 g set for TVB-N (Directive 95/149/EEC) on day 14,
24 while such limit was not surpassed by the SI and oSI batches up to day 20. These results

1 are also in agreement with a previous study on farmed turbot stored in ozonised slurry
2 ice, SI and FI [19].

3 A similar trend was also observed for TMA-N, another parameter that together with
4 TVB-N has been previously proposed to estimate freshness in megrim [40]. Thus,
5 TMA-N formation in megrim stored in FI was significantly ($p < 0.05$) higher than in the
6 case of the other three batches (Table 3). In example, TMA-N concentrations below 15
7 mg/100 g muscle were determined in the SI and oSI batches on day 16, while TMA-N
8 reached values above 25 mg/100 g on that day. A similar trend was observed on day 20
9 (Table 3). As in the case of pH and TVB-N, the presence of ozone in the oSI batches
10 implied lower TMA-N formation than in the SI batch, although all these three batches
11 were not significantly ($p < 0.05$) different. In this sense, the oSI₆₀₀ batch was in the range
12 of the legal limit of 12 mg/100 g set for TMA-N (Directive 91/493/EEC) on day 16,
13 while the other three batches were above that limit. Our results clearly indicate a better
14 control of TMA-N formation in the SI and oSI batches with respect to FI, a result that is
15 in agreement with a previous study on farmed turbot [19].

16 Lipid hydrolysis was studied according to the FFA formation. A faster hydrolysis
17 development was observed till day 16 for the FI treatment when compared to the three
18 SI systems. At the end of the experiment, a high FFA formation was observed for the SI
19 systems so that no differences ($p > 0.05$) could be outlined among treatments. A strong
20 inhibition on hydrolytic enzyme activity is inferred for the SI treatments according to
21 previous research (jur2, sard2). Ozone presence has not afforded a different behaviour
22 in the FFA production, according to previous research (sard2).

23 Interaction compounds produced between oxidised lipids and nucleophilic
24 compounds present in the muscle were studied by fluorescence assessment. No
25 differences could be outlined after the on-board storage. However, during the latest

1 storage period (days 16-20) a higher fluorescence development could be outlined,
2 according to an increase in lipid oxidation. At day 20, all treatments showed a
3 significant ($p < 0.05$) increase, although no differences ($p > 0.05$) could be found among
4 the SI systems.

5

6

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2

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- 23
- 24
- 25

TABLE 1

1

Time (days)	Process	ODOUR		
		External	Gill cavity	Muscle
14	HT	B	B	A
	HL	B	A	A
	HL300	A	A	A
	HL600	A	A	A
16	HT	B	B	B
	HL	B	B	A
	HL300	A	A	A
	HL600	A	A	A
20	HT	C	C	B
	HL	B	B	A
	HL300	B	B	A
	HL600	A	A	A

2

TABLE 2

Ir  una tabla con las medias y los rangos de la microbiolog a: aerobios mes filos, psic filos, enterobacterias y proteol ticos

TABLE 3

(Eliminaría DMA-N y TBA-i)

Time (days)	Process	Chemical index					
		TVB-N	TMA-N	DMA-N	FFA	TBA-i	Fluoresc
14	FI	34.15 b (3.00)	8.03 b (0.97)	0.96 c (0.16)	5.01 b (1.18)	0.18 a (0.05)	2.14 a (0.28)
	SI	18.55 a (1.99)	2.39 a (1.09)	0.13 a (0.07)	1.62 a (0.55)	0.43 b (0.14)	1.97 a (0.45)
	SI-300	21.34 a (7.79)	5.02 ab (2.99)	0.29 ab (0.15)	1.97 a (1.00)	0.41 b (0.16)	2.05 a (0.21)
	SI-600	21.61 a (4.38)	7.69 b (1.53)	0.39 b (0.14)	2.44 a (1.37)	0.24 ab (0.04)	1.32 a (0.71)
16	FI	45.04 b (3.17)	25.54 b (4.14)	1.35 b (0.10)	15.91 b (2.90)	0.18 a (0.09)	5.23 b (0.72)
	SI	29.67 a (1.75)	14.72 a (1.56)	0.85 a (0.10)	4.42 a (2.28)	0.25 a (0.07)	2.70 a (0.63)
	SI-300	28.49 a (2.75)	13.04 a (0.89)	0.71 a (0.11)	2.73 a (0.55)	0.14 a (0.03)	2.49 a (0.59)
	SI-600	26.16 a (3.60)	12.47 a (5.96)	0.68 a (0.21)	5.08 a (3.42)	0.26 a (0.15)	2.94 a (0.07)
20	FI	57.14 b (3.61)	39.76 b (4.60)	1.50 b (0.07)	18.78 a (5.88)	0.42 b (0.12)	7.11 b (1.09)
	SI	46.65 a (4.91)	23.65 a (4.51)	1.13 a (0.15)	14.38 a (1.33)	0.20 a (0.05)	4.48 a (0.37)
	SI-300	43.09 a (6.29)	27.40 a (2.18)	1.36 b (0.04)	13.60 a (1.80)	0.17 a (0.05)	3.07 a (0.74)
	SI-600	41.04 a (6.09)	28.07 a (4.08)	1.35 b (0.10)	19.41 a (3.89)	0.12 a (0.03)	4.21 a (1.21)