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Moon, E.M. orcid.org/0000-0002-1779-8587, Ogden, M.D.
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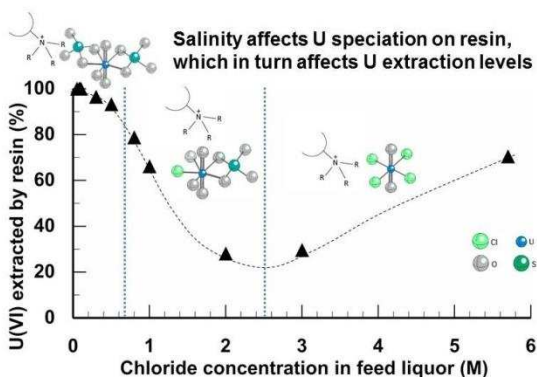
24 **ABSTRACT**

25
26 Using X-ray absorption spectroscopy, we have identified the mechanism by which chloride impacts the
27 extraction of U(VI) by a weak base anion exchange resin from acidic sulfate solutions. The amount of
28 chloride present affects U(VI) speciation both in the feed solutions and adsorbed by the resin, and we find
29 three distinct U(VI) species taken up by the resin across the salinity gradient, directly corresponding to
30 changes in levels of U(VI) extraction. These findings are integral to the effective design of mineral
31 processing circuits incorporating seawater – a cheaper and more sustainable water source than fresh
32 water.

33
34

35 **GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT**

36



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39
40

41 **KEY WORDS**

42 uranium; mineral processing; ion exchange; EXAFS; saline.

43

1. INTRODUCTION

Uranium represents the major fuel source for nuclear energy. In 2014, nuclear power generated 2410.4 TWh of electricity worldwide, 11.1 % of the total global electricity production [1]. The International Atomic Energy Agency estimates this figure will rise to between 2992 and 7771 TWh by 2050 [1]. To accommodate this increased demand for processed uranium, there is continuing need to develop more efficient and cost effective strategies to separate uranium from aqueous streams, both uranium mineral processing streams, and radioactive wastewater streams. Key to effective separation and extraction strategies is a thorough understanding of the uranium speciation before, during and after separation.

The processing of uranium ores with sulfuric acid provides a number of reasons to extend our understanding of uranium speciation in acidic sulfate systems to those in which chloride is also present. There are geochemical drivers: For example, the mobility of uranium in subsurface environments can be heavily dependent on the pH and activity of ligands present in wastewaters (i.e. tailings ponds and mine drainage sites), which are often highly acidic, with high sulfate concentrations [2,3]. Where the surrounding waters are naturally saline, such as borewaters, or seawater, the speciation of uranium may deviate from the typical uranyl sulfate complexes expected, and current thermodynamic data may not be able to predict uranium mobility [4]. There are also industrial drivers: The provision of freshwater for uranium processing circuits is not straight forward, especially in arid areas such as the interior of South Australia, where the world's largest uranium deposit is located [5,6]. There is significant potential for the uranium mining industry to reduce processing costs, and transition to more sustainable water sources, by modifying their processing circuits to accommodate saline process water such as borewater or seawater.

Salinity, however, is known to have a deleterious impact on conventional hydrometallurgical processes used for uranium separation and extraction [7,8]. Chloride concentrations of less than 0.1 M in the feed liquor streams have been shown to reduce uranium extraction by up to 20% [7,9]. Anion exchange resins are routinely used in the uranium processing industry, especially for feed liquor streams containing low uranium concentrations. Weak base anion exchange resins in particular, containing tertiary or secondary amine functional groups, show good selectivity for uranium over impurities, a lower susceptibility to the impact of chloride [10] and have been proposed for use in the extraction of uranium from sulfuric acid liquor streams with elevated chloride concentrations [10,11]. However, a survey of the literature indicates that the chemical mechanisms underpinning the reduced uranium extraction in the presence of chloride has not been extensively studied. In particular, it is not clear to what extent the reduced uranium uptake is due to competition with the chloride anion for surface sites on the resin, or the influence of chloride on uranium speciation. Further, the relationship between the aqueous U speciation, and the speciation of U on the resin surface, is not understood. This is crucial for determining the

78 mechanism by which chloride impacts ion exchange circuits. Until the underpinning chemistry is
79 understood, it will be difficult to determine how best to adapt current circuits, or design improved circuits,
80 to tolerate saline water.

81 To the authors' knowledge, there are no studies concerning the speciation of U(VI) in mixed
82 sulfate-chloride media. However, there have been a number of studies concerning the aqueous speciation
83 of U(VI) in chloride and sulfate media separately. In acidic sulfate solutions, there is no consensus over
84 the speciation of U(VI). Some authors have reported that the major species of U(VI) is the $\text{UO}_2(\text{SO}_4)_3^{4-}$
85 anion [12-14], whereas others, using spectroscopy and density function theory (DFT), have reported that
86 the major species is the neutral ion $\text{UO}_2(\text{H}_2\text{O})_3(\text{SO}_4)$ and the anion $\text{UO}_2(\text{H}_2\text{O})(\text{SO}_4)_2^{2-}$ [15-17] and indeed,
87 that in solution, 5-fold coordination in the UO_2^{2+} equatorial plane is much more likely than 6-fold
88 coordination [17]. Whether the sulfate is coordinated monodentately or bidentately (and thus the number
89 of aquo ligands in the equatorial plane) seems to depend on the ratio between sulfate and uranyl, with a
90 high $[\text{SO}_4^{2-}]/[\text{UO}_2^{2+}]$ ratio i.e. 5-600 favouring bidentate complexation [16,18,19] and a low ratio (i.e. < 3)
91 favouring monodentate complexation [16,20,21]. In acidic chloride media, where $0 < [\text{Cl}^-] < 3 \text{ M}$, the
92 U(VI) speciation has been shown using X-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS) to be dominated by the
93 $\text{UO}_2(\text{H}_2\text{O})_5^{2+}$ cation with a contribution from $\text{UO}_2(\text{H}_2\text{O})_4\text{Cl}^+$ cation [22,23].

94 To the authors' knowledge, there has only been one spectroscopic study concerning U(VI) uptake
95 by an anion exchange resin, and this was from chloride media (10 M $[\text{Cl}^-]$). Using X-ray absorption
96 spectroscopy (XAS), Allen et al. showed that the speciation of U(VI) on the surface of a strong base resin
97 was $[\text{UO}_2\text{Cl}_4]^{2-}$, which differed from that identified in the feed solution $[\text{UO}_2(\text{H}_2\text{O})\text{Cl}_4]^{2-}$ [22].

98 Synchrotron-based XAS is a powerful tool that probes the average local coordination geometry of
99 an element of interest within a sample, and as such can help identify the uranium speciation in both the
100 feed liquor and on the resin surface. This study aims to provide a spectroscopic insight into the
101 mechanisms by which chloride affects U(VI) speciation in sulfate-based acidic liquor streams under
102 saline conditions, and subsequent uptake by ion exchange resins. Batch adsorption experiments will be
103 used to quantify U(VI) extraction as a function of chloride concentration, and X-ray absorption
104 spectroscopy will provide the identity of the U(VI) species in solution and taken up by the resin.

105

106 2. EXPERIMENTAL

107 2.1 Resin preparation

108 2.1.1 Batch experiments

109 Dowex Monophere 77 is a macroporous tertiary amine anion exchange resin with a polystyrene divinyl
110 benzene (PS-DVB) matrix. Its properties are described in Table 1, and its functionality represented in
111 Figure S1. The presence of both weak base and strong base functionality was determined experimentally

112 via the Harland method [24]. Resins were pre-treated with 20 bed volumes of 1 M H₂SO₄ in a column at 5
113 BV h⁻¹ to convert to the sulfate form. Resins were then stored in an airtight container in 18.2 MΩ
114 deionised water and adjusted to pH 1.6 with concentrated H₂SO₄.

115

116 2.1.2 Synchrotron samples

117 In order to make the resin suitable for presentation to the synchrotron beam (and avoid artefacts
118 associated with the packing of small spheres), conditioned resin (sulfate form) was dried at 40 °C in an
119 oven for 24 hours. It was then ground with a pestle and mortar into a fine powder.

120

121 2.2 Batch extractions from sulfate media

122 2.2.1 Batch experiments

123 AR grade reagents and 18.2 MΩ deionised water were used throughout the experiments. The simulant
124 feed (pH 1.6) was prepared at [SO₄²⁻] = 0.25 M (using H₂SO₄), [UO₂²⁺] = 0.004 M (using a sulfate-based
125 UO₂²⁺ stock solution of 100 g/L U) and at varying Cl⁻ concentrations (using NaCl). Small volumes of the
126 feed solutions were retained for synchrotron analysis. All batch extractions were carried out as single
127 contacts with the contact of 2 mL of resin with 50 mL of aqueous simulant feed, as a function of chloride
128 concentration. The resin and aqueous feed were allowed to equilibrate for a period of 24 h at room
129 temperature (21 °C) on an orbital shaker.

130

131 2.2.2 Synchrotron samples

132 Dry resin powder (0.1 g, approximately 0.1 mL)) was contacted with 2.5 mL of feed solution in a 10 mL
133 vial and allowed to equilibrate for a period of 24 hrs at room temperature (21 °C) on an orbital shaker. At
134 100 % adsorption this equated to a resin sample containing 2.5 wt. % uranium, which is sufficient for
135 EXAFS data acquisition. After 24 hours, the sample was centrifuged at 3000 g for 10 minutes. The
136 supernatant was decanted and retained for analysis, and the resin (a wet paste) was loaded directly into
137 XAS sample holders and sealed with Kapton tape.

138

139 2.2.3 Distribution behaviour

140 The extraction percentage was determined by difference (using eqn. 1) and the concentrations of the
141 individual metal ions determined by either ICP-MS (U) or ICP-OES (S, Cl).

$$142 \quad E_{\%} = (C_i - C_{aq}) / C_i \times 100 \quad (1)$$

143 Where C_i is the initial metal concentration before contact and C_{aq} is the concentration of the metal ion in
144 the aqueous phase after contact with the resin. pH measurements for solutions were determined using a
145 silver/silver chloride reference electrode calibrated to from pH 1-10 using buffers. At higher acid

146 concentrations [H^+] were determined by titration and verified by chloride concentration via ion selective
147 electrode analysis. Error was determined by triplicate measurement in aqueous feed solution
148 concentrations prior to contact.

149

150 2.3 X-ray absorption spectroscopy

151 2.3.1 EXAFS data collection

152 EXAFS fluorescence spectra of the U L3-edge (17.166 keV) were collected at the XAS beamline at the
153 Australian Synchrotron in Victoria, Australia. During data collection, storage ring energy was 3.0 GeV
154 and the beam current was approximately 200 mA. Samples were held in a cryostat at roughly 20 K
155 throughout the data collection process. XAS data were collected from up to 10 scans using a Canberra
156 100-element Ge solid-state detector. Before data collection, a series of XANES and EXAFS scans was
157 performed on test solution and resin samples to monitor potential U(VI) photo-reduction and X-ray beam
158 damage on the sample. Results indicated no photo-reduction or visible drying of the sample after 10
159 EXAFS scans to $k = 16 \text{ \AA}^{-1}$. Resin samples were presented to the X-ray beam as a thick paste held in a 1.5
160 mm-thick Teflon slide with a 4 x 7 mm sample slot. Kapton tape was used either side of the Teflon slide
161 to seal the pastes in and minimize drying. Solution samples were also held within Teflon slides with the
162 same dimensions, again sealed with Kapton tape. All samples were flash frozen in liquid nitrogen before
163 being placed inside the cryostat for data collection. Solution samples were checked for the formation of
164 ice crystals by monitoring the fluorescence detector output for signs of diffraction lines or rings before
165 data collection began.

166

167 2.3.2 EXAFS data analysis

168 XAS data reduction was performed using Viper [25] and PySpline [26]. Viper was used to calibrate from
169 monochromator position (millidegrees) to energy (eV), to deglitch data and to average multiple spectra
170 from individual samples. PySpline was used to perform background subtraction. The pre-edge was fitted
171 to a linear function and the post-edge background to two 3rd-order and two 2nd-order polynomial
172 segments. U EXAFS data were fitted in EXCURV98 [27]. The phase-shifts and potentials were calculated
173 in the small atom (plane-wave) approximation and the phase-shift functions used in the curve fitting were
174 derived by ab initio methods in EXCURV98 using Hedin–Lundqvist potentials [28] and von Barth
175 ground states. All spectra were fitted in k-space and no Fourier filtering was performed during the data
176 analysis. Typical errors associated with EXAFS modelling over the k-range used here are 15 % and 25
177 % for first and second shell coordination numbers, respectively, ± 0.02 and 0.05 \AA for first and second
178 shell distances, respectively, and 15 % and 25 % for first and second shell Debye-Waller factors (DWFs),
179 respectively [27].

180 Multiple scattering was allowed for as coded in EXCURV98. Multiple scattering calculations
181 require specification of the full three dimensional structure of the U coordination environment (i.e., bond
182 angles in addition to bond lengths). This was done using hypothetical model complexes with C_1 symmetry
183 (Fig. 1 & 2). The number of independent data points (N_{ind}) was determined using Stern's rule [29] as
184 $2\Delta k\Delta R/(\pi+2)$ where Δk and ΔR are the range in k- and R-space actually fitted [30]; as such, $N_{ind} = 23$.
185 Initial complexes were constructed using parameters derived from previous EXAFS investigations into
186 uranium-chloride and uranium-sulfate solution coordination [16,22,23]. Complexes were built in three
187 dimensions, atom by atom, until the addition of another atom failed to improve the fit (as determined by
188 the R-factor) by more than 5 %.

189 For the resin samples, a total of 19 parameters were refined for the U-bis-sulfato species (EF, 7
190 U-O distances, 2 U-S distances, 9 DWF's; Fig. 1a), 11 parameters for the U-tetra-chloro species (EF, 2
191 U-O istance, 4 U-Cl distances, 6 DWF's; Fig. 1b), and 15 parameters for the mixed U-chloro-sulfato
192 species (EF, 6 U-O distances, 1 U-Cl distance, 1 U-S distance, 8 DWF's; Fig. 1c). Fits to all spectra were
193 also generated using a linear combination of the optimized U-bis-sulfato and U-tetra-chloro complexes
194 (section 3.2.1) as coded in EXCURV98. The linear combination was performed over k-range 3.5–15 \AA^{-1}
195 with a linear combination of the k^3 -weighted $\chi(k)$ for the two complexes. In the linear combination,
196 only EF and relative site occupancies were optimized. In all fits $N_{ind} > N_{pars}$.

197 For the aqueous samples, we refined a total of 10 parameters for the U-bis-chloro species (EF, 3
198 U-O distances, 2 U-Cl distances, 5 DWF's; Fig. 2a), and 19 parameters for the mixed U-chloro-sulfato
199 species (EF, 6 U-O distances, 1 U-Cl distance, 2 U-S distance, 9 DWF's; Fig. 2b). In all fits $N_{ind} > N_{pars}$.

200 Fit quality was assessed using the EXAFS R-factor (as coded in EXCURV98) and the EXAFS Fit
201 Index [31], with an absolute index of goodness of fit given by the reduced χ^2 function as coded in
202 EXCURV98 [27]. Further details on the goodness of fit parameters are given in the Electronic
203 Supplementary Information.

204

205 3. RESULTS

206 3.1 Batch extraction studies

207 The extraction results for uranium adsorption as a function of chloride concentration at pH 1.6 are given
208 in Figure 3. The negative impact of increasing Cl^- concentration on U(VI) uptake by the resin is clear.
209 Below 0.5 M Cl^- , extraction was >90 %, but by 2 M Cl^- , it dropped to ~30 % extraction. Interestingly,
210 U(VI) extraction then steadily increased up to 5.8 M Cl^- to ~70 %. Competition with Cl^- ion uptake could
211 account for the behaviour up to 2 M Cl^- , but it is unlikely to explain the subsequent increase in U(VI)
212 extraction from 3-6 M $[\text{Cl}^-]$. This change in behaviour suggests a change in U(VI) speciation on the resin
213 surface, [perhaps to a species for which the tertiary amine resin surface sites have a higher affinity than](#)

214 **Cl⁻ ions.** X-ray absorption spectroscopy, which provides the local coordination geometry around a central
215 atom (i.e. U) is the ideal tool to investigate this possible change in speciation.

216

217 3.2 U L3-edge X-ray absorption spectroscopy

218 3.2.1 EXAFS of U(VI) bound to the resin surface

219 EXAFS data and fits for the U(VI) adsorbed resin samples are shown in Figure 4. EXAFS fits are
220 summarized in Tables S1, S2 and S3 in the electronic supplementary information.

221 Upon inspection of the EXAFS data, two ‘end member’ samples were identified: R1, the resin
222 exposed to a 0.24 M SO₄²⁻ feed solution free from chloride, which likely represented some form of
223 ‘U(VI)-sulfato’ surface complex; and R7, the resin exposed to a 5.8 M Cl⁻ U(VI) feed solution, which
224 likely represented some form of ‘U(VI)-chloro’ surface complex. Model complexes were constructed in
225 the EXCURV98 program using parameters (bond lengths and angles, and coordination numbers)
226 identified by previous XAS studies of typical U(VI)-chloride and sulfato solution species [16,23]. Model
227 complexes were built up atom by atom, shell by shell, until subtle iterations of the structural parameters
228 produced good fits to the EXAFS data.

229 For resin sample R1, fitting showed that the U first shell coordination environment consisted of 2
230 O at 1.76 and 1.81 Å. The second shell coordination environment consisted of 5 O at 2.41-2.52 Å, with
231 the U third shell coordination environment consisting of 2 S at 3.08-3.15 Å. These distances and
232 coordination environment are consistent with other U(VI) surface complexes identified by EXAFS
233 spectroscopy [32,33] as well U(VI) solution complexes present in solutions with a ‘high’ [SO₄²⁻]/[UO₂²⁺]
234 ratio ([SO₄²⁻]/[UO₂²⁺] > 5) [15] which is the characteristic of the liquor contacted with the resin. Note that
235 the longest U-O distance represents an oxygen from bound water [33]. The resulting complex can
236 therefore be described as a U-bis-sulfato species with both sulfate groups coordinated in a bidentate
237 fashion with U (Fig. 1a). As often occurs, the range of U-O distances and small DWF’s of 2nd shells may
238 be an artefact of fitting the five O’s to five distinct shells.

239 For the U complex in resin sample R7, the U first shell coordination environment consisted of 2
240 O at 1.79 and 1.75 Å. The U second shell coordination environment consisted of 4 Cl at 2.68-2.73 Å, with
241 no U third shell coordination environment discernible. These distances are consistent with other U(VI)
242 complexes identified by EXAFS spectroscopy [22,23]. The resulting complex can therefore be described
243 as a U-tetra-chloro species (Fig. 1b). Again, the small range of U-Cl distances and small DWF’s of 2nd
244 shells may be an artefact of fitting the four Cl’s to four distinct shells. A fifth Cl atom was not required:
245 The fit using 4 Cl’s was very good (R = 17.6), and the addition of a fifth Cl actually lowered the goodness
246 of fit. A U(VI)-tetra-chloro species on the resin is consistent with the findings of Allen et al. [22].

247 A visual comparison of the EXAFS and Fourier transforms of the EXAFS for the ‘end-member’
248 resin samples (R1 and R7) and spectra for the other resin samples shows R2 and R3 bear a close
249 resemblance to R1, and that samples R5 and R6 closely resemble R7. To fit R2-6, three approaches were
250 compared: 1) Fitting with an optimised version of either the R1 or R7 complex, 2) Fitting with a linear
251 combination of the R1 and R7 complexes, and 3) Fitting with a ‘mixed’ sulfato-chloro complex. The
252 results of the three fitting approaches are presented in Table 2. They are described by the goodness of fit
253 parameter, R, for which $R < 30$ represents a good fit, and $R < 20$ represents a very good fit. For the linear
254 combination fit, the goodness of fit parameter, R, is presented alongside the relative proportions of the
255 two components of the linear combination, the U-bis-sulfato complex used to fit sample R1, and the U-
256 tetra-chloro complex used to fit sample R7.

257 The fitting for R1, R2, R3, R6 and R7 proved straightforward, with R2 and R3 being fit with
258 optimised versions of the R1 U-bis-sulfato complex, and R6 with an optimised version of the R7 U-tetra-
259 chloro complex. Optimisation allows for subtle changes in bond lengths and Debye-Waller factors to
260 better fit the individual resin data, but without changing the overall coordination geometry. Fits are
261 presented in Figure 4 and Tables S1 and S2.

262 The fitting of R4 and R5 was less straightforward. Linear combinations of the complexes used to
263 fit R1 and R7 proved to be an acceptable fit, but a much better fit (both statistically and visually) was
264 achieved by using a mixed sulfate-chloro complex. A number of mixed complexes were constructed and
265 compared to the data: A complex containing 1 bidentate sulfate and 3 chlorides provided a bad fit and was
266 discounted. Further complexes containing 1 or 2 monodentate sulfates, plus a mixture of chlorides and
267 aquo ligands also provided bad fits and were discounted. Two further complexes (the first containing 1
268 bidentate sulfate, 2 chlorides and an aquo ligand; and the second containing 1 bidentate sulfate, 1 chloride
269 and 2 aquo ligands) provided equally good fits (both statistically and visually). The main difference
270 between these complexes is their charge: $[\text{UO}_2\text{Cl}_2\text{SO}_4(\text{H}_2\text{O})]^{2-}$ is more negatively charged than
271 $[\text{UO}_2\text{ClSO}_4(\text{H}_2\text{O})_2]^-$. These complexes were identified in 1 and 2 M $[\text{Cl}^-]$ (samples R4 and R5
272 respectively), which is the region across which the U extraction dropped significantly (see Figure 3).
273 Competition with chloride uptake has previously been proposed as an explanation for this drop in U
274 extraction [7] and competition would most likely exist with another -1 charged anion. Given that the
275 EXAFS fits were equal for both species, we hypothesise that the $[\text{UO}_2\text{ClSO}_4(\text{H}_2\text{O})_2]^-$ species is present on
276 the resin, because $[\text{UO}_2\text{Cl}_2\text{SO}_4(\text{H}_2\text{O})]^{2-}$ would easily out-compete Cl^- based on electrostatics, and there
277 would be minimal decrease in U extraction as $[\text{Cl}^-]$ increases. We hypothesise that the drop in U
278 extraction occurs because as chloride in solution increases, there is more available to compete with
279 $[\text{UO}_2\text{ClSO}_4(\text{H}_2\text{O})_2]^-$. Despite the greater affinity of the resin functional group for the $[\text{UO}_2\text{ClSO}_4(\text{H}_2\text{O})_2]^-$
280 species, because the chloride ion is much smaller and more charge dense, and increases in concentration

281 while the U concentration remains constant, it competes effectively with $[\text{UO}_2\text{ClSO}_4(\text{H}_2\text{O})_2]^-$ in the 1-2 M
282 Cl^- regime. The affinity for the $[\text{UO}_2\text{ClSO}_4(\text{H}_2\text{O})_2]^-$ species is greater than for Cl^- (explaining why there is
283 still U extracted, albeit at a reduced percentage), but it doesn't preclude chloride uptake from occurring,
284 especially considering that at 2 M Cl^- , the ratio of U:Cl is 1:500.

285 The U(VI) complex containing 1 bidentate sulfate, 1 chloride and 2 aquo ligands as represented in
286 Figure 1c. Note that for R6, the mixed species was able to provide a goodness of fit value, R, lower than
287 the U-tetra-chloro complex, but the DWFs of the mixed chloro-sulfato complex were unreasonable. It
288 was not possible to produce a version of this complex with reasonable parameters that could provide a
289 better fit than the U-tetra-chloro complex.

290 For all samples, a single complex provided a better fit than the linear combination. These best fit
291 values are highlighted in grey in Table 2. As such we attribute the results to the observation of 3 different
292 U(VI) species covering distinct salinity ranges: 0-0.5 M, 1-2 M and 3-6 M Cl^- . Given the best fitting
293 approach for each sample as identified above in Table 2, the detailed EXAFS fits for each resin sample
294 are presented in Tables S1, S2 and S3 in the electronic supplementary information.

295

296 3.2.2 EXAFS of U(VI) in feed solutions

297 Uranium L3-edge EXAFS and Fourier transforms of the EXAFS for U(VI) feed solutions, plus
298 their corresponding fits, are shown in Figure 5, and EXAFS fits are summarized in Table S4 in the
299 electronic supplementary information.

300 The EXAFS and Fourier transforms of the EXAFS for the U(VI) adsorbed resin samples (Fig. 4)
301 can be visually compared to the spectra for the corresponding U(VI) feed solutions (Fig. 5) for a
302 qualitative determination of whether the U species adsorbed by the resin is a direct reflection of the U
303 species present in solution). There are significant differences in the EXAFS data between the feed
304 solutions and resins, namely the presence of more features in the EXAFS and more distinct peaks in the
305 Fourier transforms of the EXAFS for the resin samples. This indicates a higher degree of structure in the
306 U(VI) species on the resin samples.

307 For each feed solution, the aqueous U speciation was dominated by 5-fold coordination in the
308 equatorial plane. This is consistent with other EXAFS and DFT studies for U(VI) solution speciation
309 [16,17,23], but in disagreement with studies on mineral processing liquors where the speciation was
310 assumed in the absence of any spectroscopic data [12-14]. This highlights the importance of using
311 spectroscopy and/or density functional theory when determining speciation of complex solutions.

312 For feed solution sample A0 (0 M $[\text{SO}_4^{2-}]$, 1 M $[\text{Cl}^-]$) the U first shell coordination environment
313 was fitted with 2 O at 1.76 Å with DWF's, $2\sigma^2$, for these bonds fixed to 0.007 as per Hennig et al. [23].
314 This was done to allow a greater degree of freedom to be given over to the fitting of the second and third

315 shells, if necessary. The U second shell coordination environment was found to consist of 3 O at 2.25-
316 2.42 Å, and 2 Cl at 2.63-2.74 Å with no U third shell coordination environment discernible. One
317 relatively short equatorial oxygen distance (here O_{eq2} at 2.25 Å) is not unexpected, and may represent a
318 hydroxyl oxygen rather than a water oxygen. Similar results were observed by Sherman et al. in their
319 density functional theory calculations [33]. While pH 1.6 may be considered too acidic for the hydrolysis
320 of U, recent Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy measurements identified the presence of U-OH
321 species at much lower pH values than predicted by speciation modelling [34]. The resulting complex can
322 therefore be described as a U-bis-chloro species (Fig. 2a). Our findings differ from those of Hennig et al.
323 [23] who found only one equatorial chloride at 3 M [Cl⁻]. However, the U(VI) concentration here was
324 ~2.5 times less than that employed by Hennig et al., elevating the relative chloride concentration and
325 possibly explaining the presence of two equatorial chlorides in our 1 M [Cl⁻] feed solution.

326 For feed solution samples A3 and A4 (0.24 M [SO₄²⁻], 0.5 & 1 M [Cl⁻] respectively), the U first
327 shell coordination environment consisted of 2 O at 1.78-1.80 and 1.72-1.73 Å. The U second shell
328 coordination environment consisted of 4 O at 2.25-2.43 Å, and 1 Cl at 2.67 or 2.68 Å, and the U third
329 shell coordination environment consisted of 1 bidentate S at 3.11 or 3.12 Å, and 1 monodentate S at 3.56
330 or 3.57 Å (Figure 2b). Here, the shortest second shell O distance for A3 and A4 (2.25 Å for both
331 complexes) arise from association with the monodentate sulfate ligand [16] and the lone oxygen distances
332 (2.29 and 2.34 Å, respectively, for A3 and A4) arise from H₂O ligands [23,33].

333 The range of U-O and U-Cl bond lengths in the solution samples, as well as the mixed speciation
334 for samples A3 and A4 (with chloride and mono- and bi-dentate sulfate) is likely reflective of the fact that
335 under the solution conditions tested, there are a variety of U species present (a combination of U-aquo, -
336 hydroxy, -chloro, -sulfato, -bis-sulfato etc.) that are similar, but not identical. As EXAFS is only able to
337 measure the average coordination environment over the measurement time, the data analysis indicates a
338 mixture of complexes is present.

339

340 4. DISCUSSION

341 4.1 Change in U(VI) speciation between liquor and resin surface

342 The EXAFS data demonstrates that U(VI) speciation in the feed solutions differed from the
343 species adsorbed on to the resin surface. This is especially apparent in the transition from solution species
344 that are 5-coordinate in the equatorial plane, to the U-tetra-chloro resin species that is 4-coordinate in the
345 equatorial plane. This implies there is a re-organisation of U coordination at the surface during
346 adsorption. This is proposed to be due to a de-watering process, which would be consistent with the
347 hydrophobic nature of the resin. This is a significant result, and is consistent with the findings of Allen et
348 al. for U(VI) from chloride media [22]. Importantly, our results show that the reorganization of U(VI)

349 coordination at the surface happens in relatively low concentration media (~0.25 M [SO₄²⁻]), as well as in
350 heavily concentrated media (5.8 M [Cl⁻]) [22]. Typically, in mineral processing circuits incorporating ion
351 exchange, resin functionality is chosen or designed based on the assumption that the dominant solution
352 species will be the one taken up by the resin. This study has shown that this is an incorrect assumption,
353 and where a mixed chloride-sulfate media is concerned, a more fundamental approach examining the
354 solution speciation should be considered.

355

356 4.2 Implications for uranium mineral processing circuits

357 Across the range of [Cl⁻] examined, it has been shown that a weak base resin is able to adsorb
358 three distinct U(VI) species. In the case of seawater, where the salinity is around 0.6 M, these results
359 suggest that the U-bis-sulfato species will be the predominant species adsorbed by the resin. This allows
360 for the design of an anion exchange resin with functional group chemistry that can selectively target the
361 uptake of the U-bis-sulfato species, and a stripping solution chemistry that can specifically target the
362 removal of this species.

363 Work to refine the most appropriate resin functionality for U(VI) extraction from sulfate mineral
364 processing circuits incorporating seawater is an ongoing focus of our group [35], and will be the subject
365 of forthcoming communications. Uptake of large species by Dowex Monosphere 77 can often be affected
366 by steric hindrance due to the proximity of the tertiary amine functionality to the resin matrix. By
367 increasing the chain lengths, it may be possible to increase the potential for chelation, and hence further
368 improve uranium uptake in the presence of chloride. Chelation has much faster U(VI) uptake kinetics than
369 anion exchange, but is more likely to be impacted by impurities such as iron which will preferentially
370 chelate. The anion exchange process has better selectivity for uranium over iron but the kinetics are
371 slower than chelation and hence larger volumes of resin are required.

372 In order to design targeted resin functional group chemistry and stripping solution chemistry, it is
373 also necessary to understand the impact of contaminant ions other than chloride. Here, our synthetic
374 liquor stream was effectively 'clean': it contained only water, sulfuric acid, uranyl sulfate and sodium
375 chloride. In real mineral processing systems or wastewater streams, there are often many contaminant
376 ions present. Of particular concern is Fe³⁺, which is often present in appreciable concentrations and is
377 known to compete with uranium for resin surface sites, especially with increasing chloride [36]. As for
378 uranium however, there are no spectroscopic studies on the speciation of iron in mixed chloride/sulfate
379 media, nor any concerning the mechanisms by which iron outcompetes uranium for anion
380 exchange/chelation sites. To fully understand the mechanism by which Fe competes with U in a chloride
381 impacted anion exchange circuit an XAS study concerning both Fe and U speciation on the resin surface

382 would be highly beneficial. This would allow greatly selectivity to be built into the resin functional group
383 design, as well as into the stripping process.

384

385 5. CONCLUSIONS

386 • Using commercially available resins, the proportion of U(VI) extracted from acidic sulfate-based
387 liquor streams is strongly dependent on the salinity of the liquor. For $0 \leq [\text{Cl}^-] \leq 0.5 \text{ M}$ leach solutions, >
388 95 % of U(VI) is extracted, for $0.5 \leq [\text{Cl}^-] \leq 2 \text{ M}$ there is a systematic decrease in U(VI) extraction to ~
389 30 %, and for $[\text{Cl}^-] > 2 \text{ M}$ a gradual increase in U(VI) extraction to ~70 % at 5.8 M Cl^- .

390 • Across the salinity range 0-6 M Cl^- , 3 distinct U(VI) species are adsorbed by the weak-base anion
391 exchange resin. These complexes have been identified as a $[\text{UO}_2(\text{SO}_4)_2\text{H}_2\text{O}]^{2-}$ (U-bis-sulfato) species
392 from 0-0.5 M Cl^- solutions, a $[\text{UO}_2\text{Cl}(\text{SO}_4)_2 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}]^-$ (U-chloro-sulfato) species from 1-2 M Cl^- , and a
393 $[\text{UO}_2\text{Cl}_4]^{2-}$ (U-tetra-chloro) species in 3-5.8 M Cl^- solutions.

394 • Electrostatics appears to be the dominant factor, dictating the degree to which the uranium
395 species are extracted. The two -2 charged U species readily outcompete Cl^- uptake, and while the tertiary
396 amine functional groups of the resin have a greater affinity for the -1 charged U species over chloride, this
397 does not preclude the uptake of the smaller, more charge dense Cl^- ion, especially given the degree to
398 which it outnumbers U complexes (1:500 at 2 M Cl^-).

399 • The predominant U(VI) species present in the liquor differ from those taken up by the resin. In
400 order for this to occur, there must be a reorganisation of the U coordination at the surface, likely by a
401 dewatering process. This has been identified for chloride media but not previously for sulfate media.

402 • Seawater has a salinity of around 0.6 M $[\text{Cl}^-]$. At this concentration the most likely U(VI) species
403 encountered on the surface of a weak base anion exchange resin is the $[\text{UO}_2(\text{SO}_4)_2\text{H}_2\text{O}]^{2-}$. With this
404 knowledge, it will be possible to design an anion exchange resin with functionality that has a high affinity
405 for this species over Cl^- . Further, stripping solution chemistry could also be redesigned to preferentially
406 strip this specific uranium species.

407 • EXAFS has been shown to be a powerful tool for determining both the dominant aqueous and
408 adsorbed speciation of U in an ion exchange circuit. Here, chloride was considered as the sole
409 ‘contaminant’. This technique could also be applied to systems containing iron as an additional
410 contaminant, determining both the influence of iron on the U speciation, but also the effect of chloride on
411 iron speciation. This extended knowledge would allow for increased efficiency in the design of new anion
412 exchange resins.

413

414

415

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485
486
487

488 **Tables**

489 Table 1

490

Parameter	Value	
Total exchange capacity	1.7	1.57 ^b
Weak base capacity	1.5	1.32 ^b
Commercial equivalent	Purolite , Lewatit	
Particle size	475 – 600 μm ^a	
Functionality	Tertiary amine	
Form	Free base	
Moisture	40 - 50%	

491 ^a – Volume median diameter

492 ^b –Experimentally determined via Harland method [24]

493

494 Table 1 - Manufacturer specifications of weak base anion exchange resin Dowex Monosphere 77

495

496

497

498 Table 2

499

Sample	U-bis-sulfato complex	U-tetra-chloro complex	Mixed complex	Linear Combination		
	Fit (R)	Fit (R)	Fit (R)	Fit (R)	% R1	% R7
R1	25.8	-	-	-	-	-
R2	23.4	47.2	24.7	26.2	99	1
R3	21.0	43.7	22.8	26.3	89	11
R4	28.2	29.2	20.7	26.1	51	49
R5	38.6	25.4	20.4	25.9	34	66
R6	46.0	26.0	N/A*	30.1	26	74
R7	-	17.6	-	-	-	-

500 *N/A indicates that the complex could not produce a fit with reasonable parameters

501 Table 2 – Summary of different EXAFS fitting approaches for the resin samples presented in terms of the
 502 goodness of fit parameter (R) for each sample. The best fitting approach (i.e. lowest goodness of fit value)
 503 for each sample spectrum is highlighted in grey.

504

505

506

507 **Figure Captions:**

508 Figure 1 - Best fitting U(VI) complexes for resin samples. a) U-bis-sulfato species $[\text{UO}_2(\text{SO}_4)_2 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}]^{2-}$, b)
509 U-tetra-chloro species $[\text{UO}_2\text{Cl}_4]^{2-}$ c) a mixed U-chloro-sulfato species $[\text{UO}_2(\text{SO}_4)\text{Cl} \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}]^-$. Dashed
510 atoms were not included in the fit, but are displayed for clarity.

511
512 Figure 2 - Best fitting U(VI) complexes for feed solution samples. a) U-bis-chloro species
513 $[\text{UO}_2\text{Cl}_2(\text{OH})_2 \cdot \text{H}_2\text{O}]^{2-}$, b) U-chloro-bis-sulfato species $[\text{UO}_2\text{Cl}(\text{SO}_4)_2(\text{OH})]^{4-}$. Dashed atoms were not
514 included in the fit, but are displayed for clarity.

515
516 Figure 3 -Uranium extraction from a sulfate-based mineral processing liquor by a weak-base anion
517 exchange resin, Dowex Monosphere 77 ($[\text{U(VI)}] = 0.004 \text{ M}$, $[\text{SO}_4^{2-}] = 0.24 \text{ M}$, pH 1.6, 21°C, 24 h contact
518 time, resin functional group = tertiary amine).

519
520 Figure 4 - EXAFS and Fourier transform of EXAFS for U(VI) speciation on the IX resin surface. Solid
521 lines are data, dotted lines are fits.

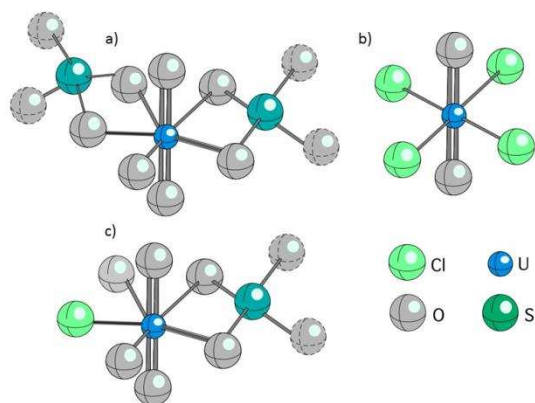
522
523 Figure 5 – EXAFS and Fourier transform of EXAFS for U(VI) speciation in the feed solutions. Solid
524 lines are data, dotted lines are fits.

525

526 **Figures**

527

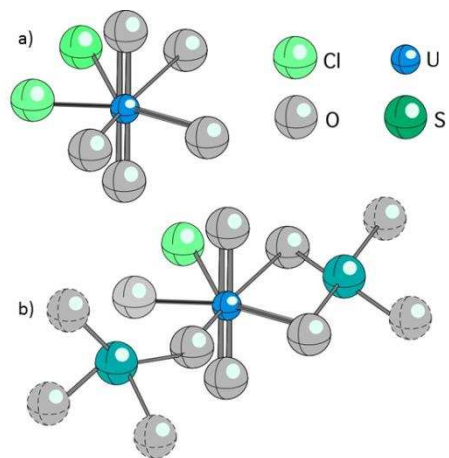
528 Figure 1 (1 column wide - colour)



529

530

531 Figure 2 (1 column wide - colour)

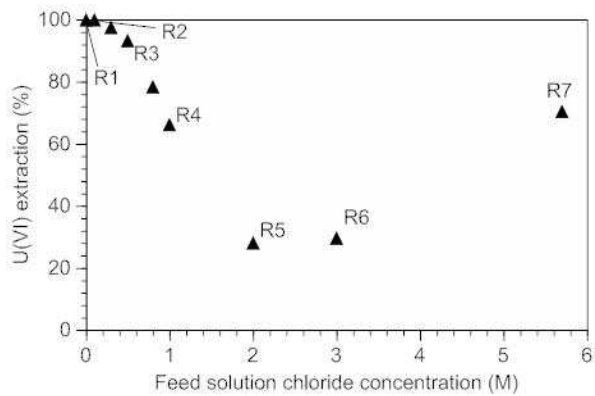


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534 Figure 3 (1 column wide – black and white)

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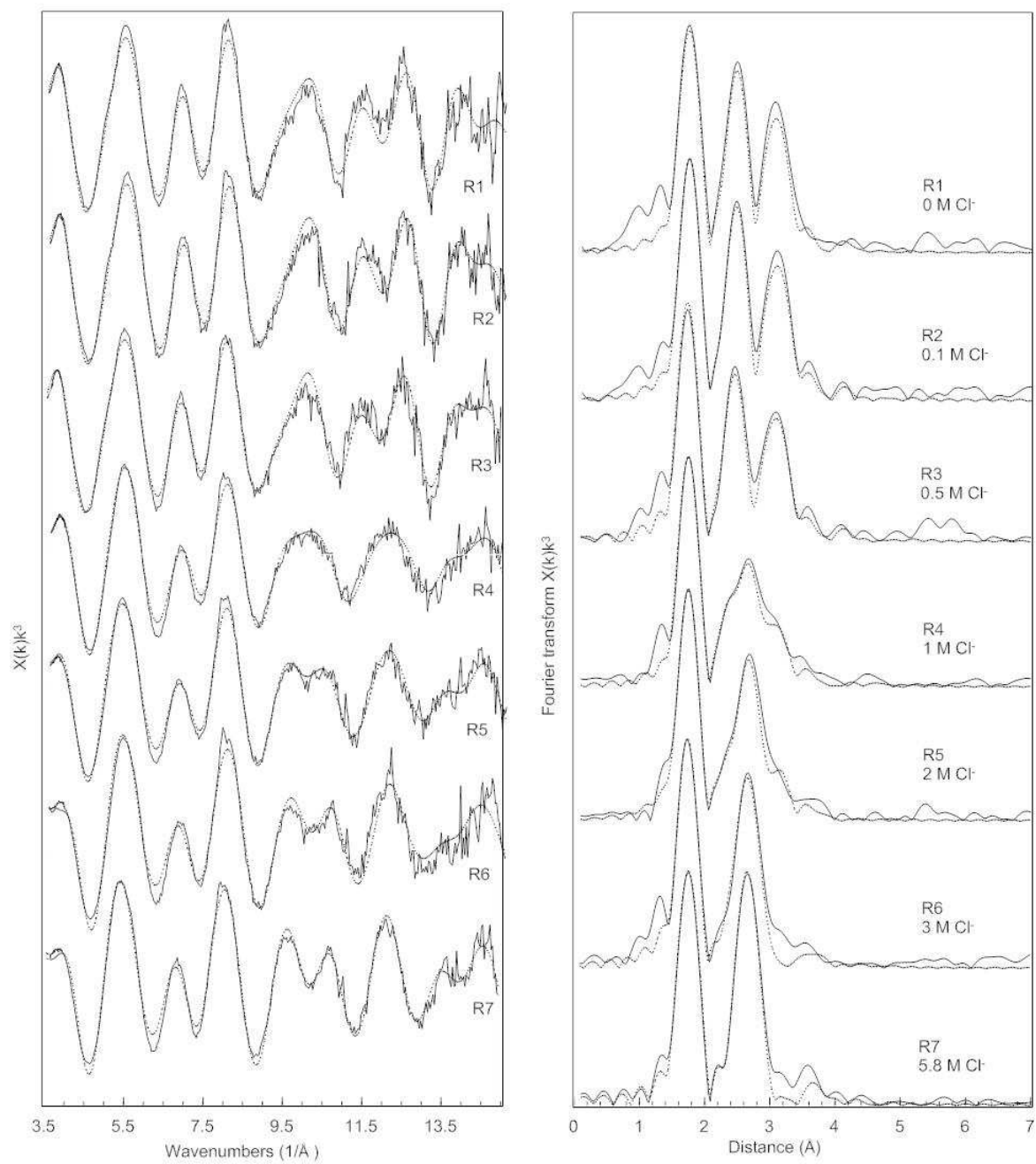


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539 Figure 4 (2 columns wide – black and white)



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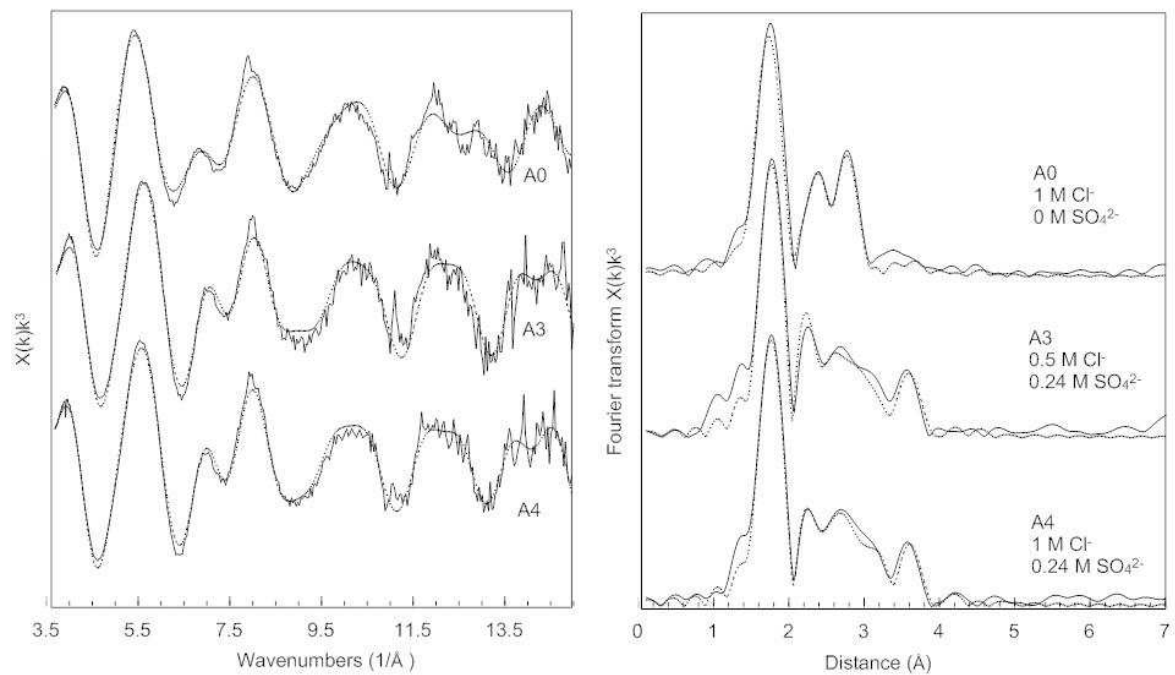
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546 Figure 5 (2 columns wide – black and white)



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