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7 **Characterization and Genome Sequence of Marine *Alteromonas gracilis* phage PB15**
8 **Isolated from the Yellow Sea, China**

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25 **Characterization and Complete Genome Sequence of Marine *Alteromonas gracilis* phage PB15 Isolated**
26 **from the Yellow Sea, China**

27 **Abstract**

28 A novel marine *Alteromonas gracilis* siphovirus, phage PB15, was isolated from the surface water of the Yellow
29 Sea in August 2015. It has a head diameter of 58 ± 5 nm head and a contractile tail approximately 105 ± 10 nm
30 in length, and overall the morphology suggests that PB15 belongs to the family *Siphoviridae*. PB15 phage is
31 stable at over the temperature range 0-60 °C. The best MOI of these phage was 0.1 and infectivity decreased
32 above 60°C. The results suggest that phage is stable at pH value ranging between 3.0 and 11.0. Chloroform test
33 shows thatPB15is not a lipid-containing phage. A one-step growth curve with a strain of *Alteromonas gracilis*
34 gave a latent period of 16 minutes and rise period of 24 minutes and burst size of 60 PFU/cell. Genomic analysis
35 of PB15 reveals a genome size of 37,333bp with 45.52% G+C content, and 61 ORFs. ORF sequences accounted
36 for 30.36% of the genome sequence. There is no obvious similarity between PB15 and other known phages by
37 genomic comparison using the BLASTN tool in the NCBI database.

38 **Introduction**

39 Bacteria of the genus *Alteromonas* represent one of the oldest known genera of Gram-negative, strictly aerobic,
40 heterotrophic marine bacteria [1]. The genus is primarily marine with examples found in a wide range of oceanic
41 ecosystems ranging from surface waters and sea ice to abyssal sediments. It is very easy to isolate and grow
42 *Alteromonas* in the laboratory [2] and isolates are available that have been isolated from the oceans all around
43 the world. Ecologically they are often associated with nutrient-rich environments including particulate material,
44 marine snow and marine animals [3, 4].

45 Viruses are the most ubiquitous and abundant organisms on Earth with an estimated total number of 10^{31}
46 [5]. Most are bacteriophages that specifically infect bacteria and archaea [5, 6]. In marine ecosystem, bacteria are
47 important drivers for biogeochemical cycle of carbon, other elements (N, P, Si, Fe etc.) and energy production
48 [5]. Hence, as major agents for the mortality of prokaryotic cells, bacteriophage also play a key role in the global
49 biogeochemical cycles and through structuring microbial communities, influencing the microbial food web
50 processes in the ocean and mediating horizontal gene transfer between different microbes [5, 7, 8, 9].

51 As far as we are aware, few *Alteromonas gracilis* phage have been investigated previously. Phage PM2 was
52 first reported in 1968 by Espejo and Canelo. The host cell identified as an *Alteromonas espejiana* BAL-31 strain.
53 Phage PM2 is an icosahedral bacteriophage classified in the Corticoviridae. It is unique from other phages in that
54 it contains lipid components in its virion structure [10]. Here we provide morphological and genomic information
55 for a novel *Alteromonas gracilis* phage PB15 isolated from the Yellow Sea of China.

56 **Materials and Methods**

57 **Location and Sampling**

58 A seawater sample was collected at a depth of 3.0 m at during a cruise of R/V 'Dong FangHong 2' in August 2015
59 in the Yellow Sea, China. The sample was stored at 4°C before analysis [11].

60 **Bacterial Strain and Growth Condition**

61 16S rRNA gene sequence of the host bacterial strain B15 had similarity of 100% to the type strain *Alteromonas*
62 *gracilis* 9a2(T).

63 **Phage Isolation**

64 Seawater was filtered using 3µm pore-size filters (Whatman, England) to remove larger particles, followed by
65 0.2 µm pore-size low protein-binding PVDF filters (Millipore) to remove the remaining bacteria and
66 phytoplankton. The detection and isolation of phage was performed using the standard double-layer agar method
67 described by Middelboe et al. [12]. Plaque picking was repeated five times, and the purified phage were stored in
68 SM buffer [100 mM NaCl, 8 mM MgSO₄, 50 mM TrisHCl] at pH 7.5 and 4°C [12, 13].

69 **Transmission Electron Microscopy**

70 The purified phage were examined at 100 kV using transmission electron microscopy (JEOL-1200 EX,
71 Japan) after negative staining with 2% w/v phosphotungstic acid at pH 7.2 [14, 15].

72 **Determination of the multiplicity of infection (MOI)**

73 An *Alteromonas* culture was grown to exponential growth phase, aliquoted into five vials each with a bacterial
74 density of 1.00×10^8 per ml and infected with different amounts of phage PB15. After 6 hours of incubation the
75 samples were plated out and the optimal multiplicity of infection (MOI) was measured [16].

76 **One-Step Growth Curve of PB15 phage**

77 PB15 phage were added to a culture of the host bacterium B15 at an MOI of 0.1, and the mixture was incubated
78 at 28°C for 1 min. Cells were then collected by centrifugation at 13000 rpm for 1 min and resuspended in 1 mL of
79 fresh Luria-Bertani (LB) medium. This process was repeated twice to remove unadsorbed phage particles. The
80 cell suspension was then added to 500 mL of LB broth and incubated with shaking at 28°C for 2h. The phage
81 titer was measured by the double-layer agar technique [12] in samples taken at 8 min intervals. The experiment
82 was repeated three times [11, 17, 18]. The relative burst size was plotted against time to determine the latent and
83 rise period.

84 **Thermal, pH and chloroform stability tests**

85 Replicate 2 mL aliquots of phage suspension were incubated at temperatures of 0, 25, 40, 50, 60, 70 and 80°C for
86 2 h. Phage infectivity was then assayed by the spot test and the double-layer agar technique [19, 20]. The pH

87 stability of the phage was investigated in SM buffer adjusted to different pH values across the range 2 to 12.
88 After incubating for 2 h at 28 °C, the surviving phage were diluted and enumerated using the double-layer agar
89 method mentioned above. To test the effect of chloroform, 2 mL of a high titer phage suspension (60 PFU/cell)
90 was put into a sterile tube and one drop of chloroform added. The solution was mixed gently, left for 30 min at
91 room temperature and the bacteriophage titer was again assessed using the double-agar-layer technique [11, 17,
92 21].

93 **Genome Sequencing and Bioinformatic Analysis**

94 Phage DNA was extracted according to the protocol of Veheust et al [22]. Purified phage PB15 genomic DNA
95 was sequenced at Sangon Biological Engineering (Shanghai) Co. Ltd. using an Illumina Miseq 2×300
96 paired-end sequence method. Thesequencing was completed using an ABI 3730 automated DNA sequencer. Gaps
97 between remaining contigs were closed using Gapcloser and GapFiller. Genome annotation was conducted using
98 RAST (<http://rast.nmpdr.org/>).Sequence similarity searches were performed using the BLASTP algorithm
99 against the SWISSPROT, NR, and TREMBL databases. Protein domain searches were performed using
100 RPSBLAST against PFAM, CDD, and COG. To investigate the phylogeny of phage PB15, a phylogenetic
101 analysis was performed using the major capsid protein sequence and MEGA 6 software.

102 **Results**

103 **Morphology of Phage PB15**

104 Morphological analysis of Phage PB15 using transmission electron microscopy indicated that this phage belongs
105 to the family *Siphoviridae*. PB15 was found to have a 58 ± 5 nm head diameter and a long non-contractile tail
106 105 ± 10 nm long and 8 ± 2 nm wide (Fig.1). .

107 **Optimal multiplicity of infection**

108 Host bacteria were infected with PB15 at different MOIs, with an MOI of 0.1 yielding the highest titer of phage
109 (Table 1).Therefore, this was considered the optimal MOI and used for phage amplification in all subsequent
110 experiments.

111 **One-Step Growth Curve**

112 The latent period was about 16 minutes. Following this there was a rapid increase in phage number during the
113 rise period, and this lasted approximately 24 min (16 to 40 min post-infection) before the shift into a plateau
114 period. The burst size of phage PB15 was about 60 PFU/cell (Fig. 2A).

115 **Thermal, pH and chloroform stability**

116 Phage PB15 retained plaque forming activity when incubated at temperatures of 50°C or less, indicating good
117 thermal stability. However, at temperatures greater than 50°C, the phage titer declined. Phage incubated at 60°C

118 was viable, but the titer was significantly reduced. There were no viable phage at 70°C and 80°C (Fig. 2B). Phage
119 PB15 were stable for 2 hours at pH values between 4 and 11. Almost no surviving infectious phage were
120 observed at pH 2-3. These results suggested that extremes of pH might affect phage PB15 infectivity (Fig. 2C).
121 PB15 was unaffected by chloroform. The results show that PB15 is not a lipid-containing phage.

122 **Host Range Determination**

123 Host range tests were evaluated on a panel of other strains by cross infectivity test. The results showed that the
124 phage PB15 could not infect other *Alteromonas* and *Pseudoalteromonas* strains.

125 **Genome Sequencing and Bioinformatic Analysis**

126 The Phage PB15 genome is 37,333 bp and has a G+C content of 45.52%. A total of 61 ORFs were predicted in
127 the phage genome without tRNA. Among the total 61 ORFs, 26 (42.62%) ORFs were predicted and assigned
128 based on sequence similarity to other phage proteins (e-value < 10⁻⁵) through BLASTP searches of the GenBank
129 database. The minimum and maximum lengths are 135 and 2247 bp respectively. The total coding gene length is
130 11335 bp and the coding ratio is 30.36%. The remaining 35 (57.38%) ORFs showed no significant evidence of
131 homology with any other known phage proteins (e-value > 10⁻⁵). Overall these results indicate that PB15 is a
132 novel phage.

133 Amongst the latter group of ORFs mentioned above, seven (ORF2, ORF6, ORF13, ORF14, ORF18, ORF19,
134 ORF60) have the highest similarity to ORFs from the *Pseudoalteromonas* phage Pq0 and four (ORF5, ORF7,
135 ORF46, ORF61) are most similar to predicted ORFs from the *Idiomarinaceae* phage 1N2-2 (table 2). These
136 unknown ORFs could be novel proteins whose hypothetical functions could possibly be deduced from their
137 position in the genome.

138 BLASTP analysis of the complete genome sequence showed the main predicted functions modules of the
139 phage PB15 ORFs to be: phage structure, phage packaging and binding, DNA replication and regulation, gene
140 transfer protease (Fig. 3A) (Table 2). A phylogenetic tree was constructed with the protein sequences of the major
141 capsid protein of some selected phages using neighbor-joining analysis. The results show that the
142 siphovirus-type phage *Alteromonas* PB15 is closely related to *Pseudoalteromonas* phage Pq0 (Fig. 3B).

143 **Discussion**

144 According to the overall genomic organization and sequence similarities revealed here and the morphological
145 features presented in a previous study [23], phage PB15 appears to be a member of the Siphoviridae family and
146 closely related to *Pseudoalteromonas* phage Pq0. All of the typical stages in the multiplication of bacteriophage
147 were seen in the one-step growth curve (Fig. 3A). Phage PB15 proliferates efficiently, with a short latent period
148 (16 min), a large burst size (60 PFU/cell), and a high adsorption rate. Highly acidic pH values of 2 to 3 were

149 lethal to phage PB15, whilst the pH range 4-11 favored maximum infectivity (Fig. 3C). It is also notable that
150 phage activity was also observed at pH 12.0. Phage PB15 has good thermal stability between 0 and 60 °C but
151 activity was completely lost at 70 °C (Fig. 3B). Chloroform test shows that PB15 is not a lipid-containing phage.

152 The bioinformatics analyses extend our knowledge of bacteriophage [22]. The functional module for tail
153 structural components and assembly is proposed to cover ORF2, ORF5, ORF7 and ORF8. ORF5 and ORF7 were
154 found to exhibit significant similarity (53% and 39% overall identity) to the tail protein of *Idiomarinaceae* phage
155 1N2-2, and the minor tail proteins of various other phage. The protein specified by ORF2 shares 32% sequence
156 identity with the tape-measure protein (TMP) of *Pseudoalteromonas* phage Pq0. PB15 is a long tailed phage and
157 based on the observed similarities, ORF2 may also function as a tail length TMP in PB15. In almost all phage,
158 the genes located between the major tail and head proteins are involved in the formation and connection of the
159 head and tail structures and DNA packaging [23]. This is consistent with the position of ORF8, which is located
160 between the tail and head proteins of PB15, and the shared 31% resemblance with the protein from
161 *Marinomonas* phage P12026. The module for the capsid protein of the PB15 phage involves ORF13 and ORF18.
162 ORF13 was predicted to encode the major capsid protein and ORF18 was identified as a minor capsid protein
163 based on sequence similarity with that of *Pseudoalteromonas* phage Pq0 (64% and 49%, respectively) [24].

164 The DNA replication and regulation module includes ORF10, ORF14, ORF19, ORF40 and ORF45. ORF10,
165 ORF14 and ORF19 were determined as gene transfer agent proteins, while ORF10 showed homology (27%
166 overall identity) with *Hyphomicrobium sulfonivorans*. ORF14 and ORF19 showed considerable homology (61%
167 and 46% overall identity) with *Pseudoalteromonas* phage Pq0. They help the phage DNA to penetrate and enter
168 the host cells. ORF40 showed 53% similarity to an ATPase of *Escherichia* phage and ORF45 was found to share
169 66% homology with a helicase of *Salicola* phage CGphi29. ORF12, ORF39 and ORF42 have roles in DNA
170 binding and the structure and expression patterns imply it might be a DNA binding transcription regulator [18].
171 All of the above proteins have diverse physiological roles in replication, recombination, repair, and packaging of
172 phage DNA.

173 The terminase is a component of the molecular motor that translocates genomic DNA into empty capsids
174 during DNA packaging [23]. In the PB15 genome, the terminases comprise large and small subunits encoded by
175 ORF20 and ORF21 respectively. ORF20 is 66% homologous with *Neisseria* sp. KH1503 and ORF21 showed 34%
176 similarity with *Clostridium* phage phiCP39-O.

177 A hypothetical protein is a protein whose existence has been predicted, but where there is a lack of
178 experimental evidence that it is expressed *in vivo*. BLASTP analysis of the complete genome sequence showed
179 that of the 61 predicted ORFs in phage PB15, 35 (57.38 %) had no match with putative functions or conserved

180 domains in the BLASTP database. This is probably due to the absence of similar integrase or recombinase genes
181 in the sequence databases. When PB15 was compared with related phages with respect to phylogenetic position,
182 no significant similarity was observed in the genome sequence with other phages at the genomic level. These
183 results provide additional evidence that *Alteromonas* phage PB15 is a novel bacteriophage.

184 In conclusion, we analyzed the morphological properties and the genome sequence of the phage PB15.
185 Previous studies of *Pseudoalteromonas* phage are relatively common, whereas, as far as we can ascertain, few
186 *Alteromonas gracilis* phage have been investigated previously. With the development of marine virology,
187 researchers have recognized that marine phage play important roles in promoting microbial evolution,
188 accelerating microbial food loop dynamics and regulating microbial communities. In addition, the majority of
189 phage gene functions are still unknown and need to be better understood. Our results add to the growing body of
190 data for the research field and open the way for future studies.

191 **Genome Sequence Accession Number**

192 The complete genome sequence of phage PB15 was submitted to NCBI using Sequin under Accession Number
193 KX982260.

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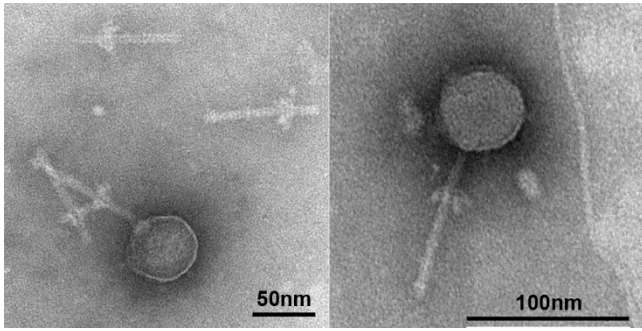
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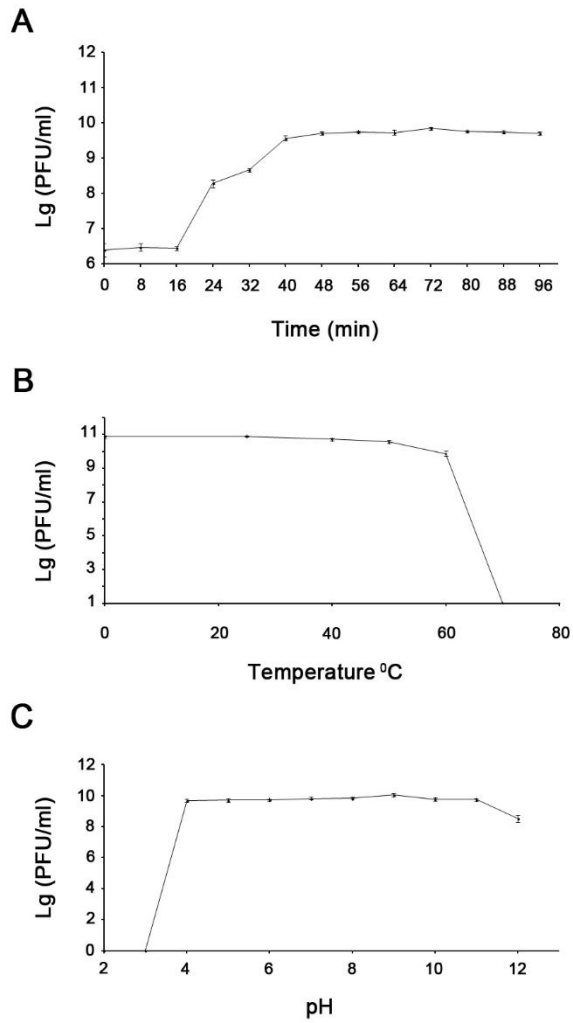
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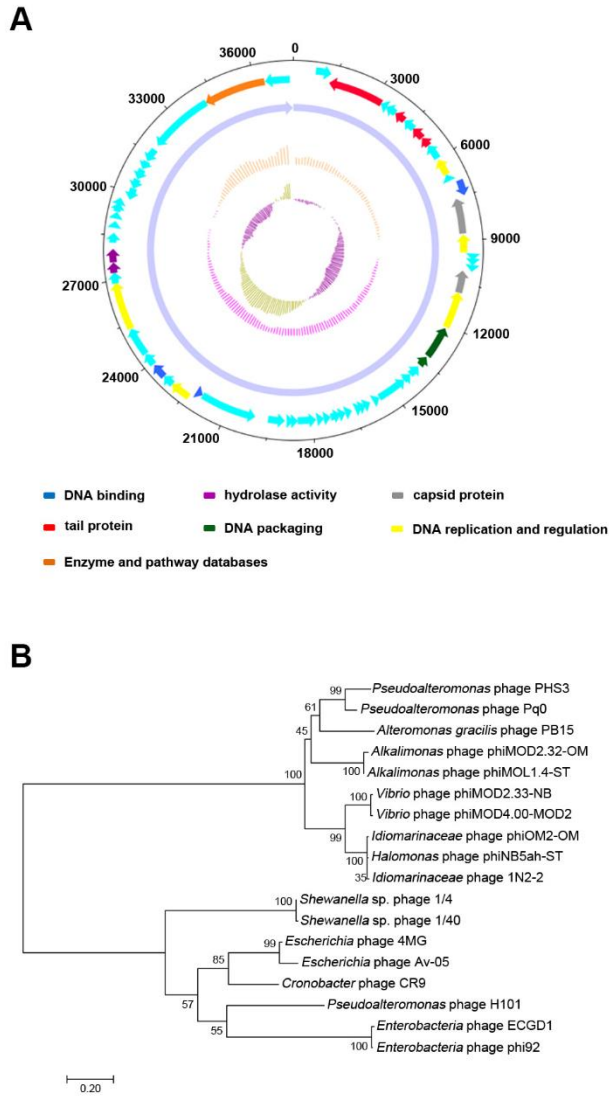
261 **Fig. 1.** Transmission electron microscope images of phage PB15.



262

263 **Fig. 2.** The one-step growth curve for phage PB15 (A); thermal stability test of phage PB15 (B); pH stability test

264 of phage PB15 (C).



265

266 **Fig. 3.** Cycle graph of the signed genome of phage PB15 (A); Neighbour-joining tree for selected phages

267 constructed from their helicase protein sequences. Bootstrap values > 50 are shown on the nodes. The bar

268 represents the 5% sequence change estimated (B).

Table S1. Functional groups of putative genes in phage PB15 and their homology to proteins in the GenBank database determined by BLASTP

Gene	Start	Stop	strand	Function	E-value	Identity	GenBank accession no.	Conserved domain
ORF2	3219	1267	-	tail length tape-measure protein 1 [Pseudoalteromonas phage Pq0]	3.00E-58	32%	YP_009226045.1	
ORF5	4217	3819	-	putative major tail protein [Idiomarinaceae phage 1N2-2]	6.00E-35	53%	YP_009100926.1	pfam06199
ORF7	5092	4640	-	putative tail assembly protein [Idiomarinaceae phage 1N2-2]	5.00E-16	39%	YP_009100924.1	pfam04883
ORF8	5427	5089	-	phage head-tail adaptor [Marinomonas phage P12026]	4.00E-12	31%	YP_006560248.1	pfam05521
ORF10	6616	6029	-	Gene Transfer Agent (GTA) ORFG06 [Hyphomicrobium sulfonivorans]	3.00E-08	27%	KWT68930.1	TIGR02215
ORF12	6954	7493	+	Pathogenesis-related transcriptional factor and ERF protein [Pseudomonas sp. CFT9]	7.00E-37	43%	WP_019816730.1	pfam13392
ORF13	8759	7524	-	major capsid protein [Pseudoalteromonas phage Pq0]	9.00E-180	64%	YP_009226055.1	pfam05065
ORF14	9409	8786	-	gene transfer agent prohead protease [Pseudoalteromonas phage Pq0]	5.00E-73	61%	YP_009226056.1	pfam04586
ORF18	10827	10048	-	minor capsid protein [Pseudoalteromonas phage Pq0]	4.00E-57	49%	YP_009226057.1	COG2369
ORF19	12100	10817	-	gene transfer agent portal protein [Pseudoalteromonas phage Pq0]	2.00E-128	46%	YP_009226058.1	pfam04860
ORF20	13293	12148	-	phage terminase, large subunit [Mannheimia phage vB_MhS_535AP2]	1.00E-168	59%	YP_009203368.1	pfam04466
ORF21	13705	13340	-	DNA-packaging protein gp3 [Gilliamella sp. R-53248]	8.00E-07	37%	SCB88869.1	pfam16677
ORF31	17347	16985	-	protein ninX [Escherichia coli]	2.00E-13	40%	WP_063118699.1	PHA01519
ORF37	19538	18948	-	gp12 [Burkholderia phage Bcep1]	5.00E-47	48%	NP_944320.1	
ORF38	21972	19990	-	TOPRIM domain-containing protein [Alicyclophilus sp. B1]	2.00E-45	30%	GAO20495.1	COG4643
ORF39	22217	21975	-	prophage Afe02, transcriptional regulator, Cro family protein [Acidithiobacillus sp. GGI-221]	8.00E-09	42%	EGQ61560.1	COG4197
ORF40	22345	23025	+	ATPase [Escherichia phage Seurat]	2.00E-78	53%	YP_009151993.1	pfam13479
ORF42	23406	23888	+	multimodular transpeptidase-transglycosylase [Vibrio phage vB_VhaS-tm]	5.00E-15	35%	ANO57479.1	pfam05037
ORF44	24352	25317	+	YqaJ-like viral recombinase domain-containing protein [Endozoicomonas montiporae CL-33]	3.00E-75	44%	AMO55656.1	
ORF45	25321	26919	+	helicase [Salicola phage CGphi29]	3.00E-150	66%	YP_007673683.1	COG1061
ORF47	27240	27593	+	VRR-NUC domain-containing protein [Pseudomonas nitroreducens]	8.00E-28	48%	WP_024767305.1	smart00990
ORF48	27601	28041	+	dUTP diphosphatase [Collinsella sp. CAG:289]	6.00E-33	46%	CDD86562.1	TIGR00576
ORF55	30536	30180	-	carboxypeptidase [uncultured Mediterranean phage uvMED]	9.00E-34	52%	BAR35108.1	pfam08291
ORF56	30910	30533	-	response regulator [Mastigocladopsis repens]	9.00E-06	32%	WP_017316681.1	cd00156
ORF59	34153	31907	-	cell wall surface anchor family protein [Bacillus sonorensis]	1.00E-08	26%	WP_006638621.1	COG0766
ORF60	36348	34153	-	PE family protein [Pseudoalteromonas phage Pq0]	8.00E-178	48%	YP_009226095.1	