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**Report on hydrographic conditions off Southwest Greenland May 2021**

John Mortensen

Greenland Institute of Natural Resources  
Kivioq 2, Box 570  
3900 Nuuk, Greenland

**Abstract**

Hydrographic conditions were monitored at 4 of 10 hydrographic standard sections in May 2021 across the continental shelf off West Greenland. Three offshore stations have been chosen to document changes in hydrographic conditions off Southwest Greenland. The coastal water showed temperatures below the long-term mean south of the Sisimiut section. After some years with a relative saline Subpolar Mode Water mass, salinity dropped below its long-term mean.

**Introduction**

The West Greenland Current that carries water northward along the West Greenland continental slope consists of three components: a cold, fresh, near inshore surface component referred to as Coastal Water (CW), a saltier, warmer and deeper offshore component referred to as Subpolar Mode Water (SPMW) and a freshwater component consisting of runoff from Greenland. The West Greenland Current is part of the cyclonic Subpolar Gyre and thus subject to hydrographic variations at different timescales associated with variability of the gyre and local and regional atmospheric conditions. Hydrographic conditions are monitored at 10 hydrographic sections in June/July across the continental shelf off West Greenland (Figure 1). Three offshore stations have been chosen to document changes in hydrographic conditions in the southern part off West Greenland.

**Materials and Methods**

The 2021 standard hydrographic cruises were carried out by the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources (GINR) onboard the Royal Danish Navy vessel HDMS KNUD RASMUSEN during the period 19 May to 2 June. Observations were carried out on the following standard stations (Figure 1):

HDMS KNUD RASMUSEN section:

Paamiut St. 1-5  
Fyllas Banke St. 1-5  
Maniitsoq St. 1-5  
Sisimiut St. 0-5

Hydrographic data were collected with SBE 19plusV2 instruments. The instruments were pre- and post-cruise calibrated by the manufacturer. The collected data were averaged to 1 m vertical bins.



## Results and Discussion

West Greenland usually experiences warmer than typical conditions when the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) index is negative. The highest annual mean air temperature ever reported for Nuuk occurred in 2010 with a strongly negative NAO index. In 2021, the winter NAO (JFM) index was negative<sup>1</sup>. The annual mean air temperature at the Nuuk weather station in 2020 was 0,1°C, which was 1,1°C above the long-term normal (1991-2020; -1,0°C), and 0,9°C higher than the year before (2020; -0,8°C) (DMI, 2022).

Average water properties between 0 and 50 m depth at Fyllas Banke Station 4 (FB4) in June are used to monitor the variability of the Coastal Water (CW) component of the West Greenland Current (Figure 2). After low temperatures in 2019, the temperatures in 2021 experienced an increase to levels characteristic of the long-term mean, with temperatures 0.10°C lower than the long-term mean (1981-2010,  $T_{\text{mean}}=1.69^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). Conversely, the salinity of the CW resumed its positive trend, which started around 1970. In 2021 salinity was 0.31 above its long-term mean (1981-2010,  $S_{\text{mean}}=33.27$ ).

Average water properties between 0 and 40 m depth at Fyllas Banke Station 2 (FB2) in June/July were previously used to monitor the variability of the sea surface waters off West Greenland (Figure 3). Though the two stations (FB2 and FB4) should tell the same story, they do not. After a break in the negative temperature trend between 2005 and 2015 in the period 2016 to 2017, the temperature in 2021 resumed to levels close to the long-term mean, with temperatures 0.04°C higher than the long-term mean (1981-2010,  $T_{\text{mean}}=1.90^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). The salinity of the sea surface layer experienced a slight positive trend, setting the negative trend which started around 1970 on a halt. In 2021, salinity was 0.28 above its long-term mean (1981-2010,  $S_{\text{mean}}=33.42$ ).

Temperature and salinity of the SPMW component of the West Greenland Current started to increase towards the end of the 1990s (Figure 4), coinciding with changes in the Subpolar Gyre where warm and saline water from the Subtropical Gyre entered the Subpolar Gyre. In early June 2020 (no data in 2021), water temperature in the 75-200 m layer at Cape Desolation Station 3 (KD3) was 3.88°C and salinity was 34.77, i.e., 1.23°C and 0.11 below the long-term mean (1992-2010:  $T_{\text{mean}}=4.65^{\circ}\text{C}$ ;  $S_{\text{mean}}=34.88$ ).

SPMW referred to by others as Atlantic Water or Irminger Sea Water with salinity greater than 34.95 was not observed on the Greenland west coast in June 2021 (Figure 5). Waters with salinities in the range 34.88 to 34.95 could be followed from the Cape Farewell section in the south (60°N) to the Paamiut section in the north at 62°N.

The highest temperature observed on the Greenland west coast during the measuring campaigns in May 2021 was at the Fyllas Banke section at the surface in the deep SPMW core (Rysgaard et al., 2020). Only deep SPMW is observed to enter Baffin Bay. See Rysgaard et al. (2020) for an updated view of water masses on the West Greenland continental shelf.

The lowest temperature observed on the Greenland west coast during the measuring campaigns in May 2021 was north of the Sisimiut section and was associated with Southwest Greenland Coastal Water (CW).

## Acknowledgements

I/we would like to thank the crew of HDMS KNUD RASMUSEN.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/precip/CWlink/pna/season.JFM.nao.gif>

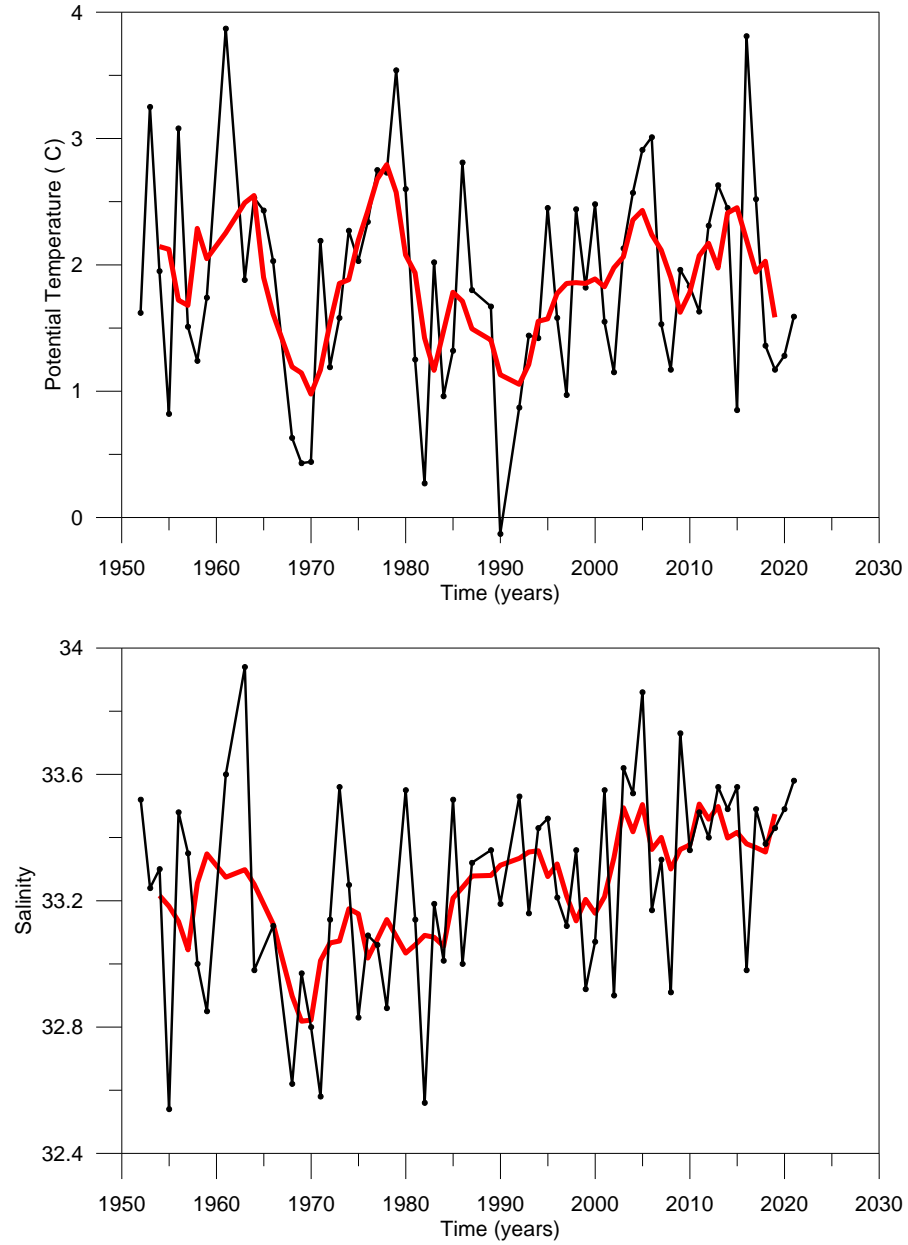
**Reference:**

Jensen, CD (ed.), 2022: Greenland - DMI Historical Climate Data Collection 1784-2021, DMI Report No. 22-04. (in prep.)

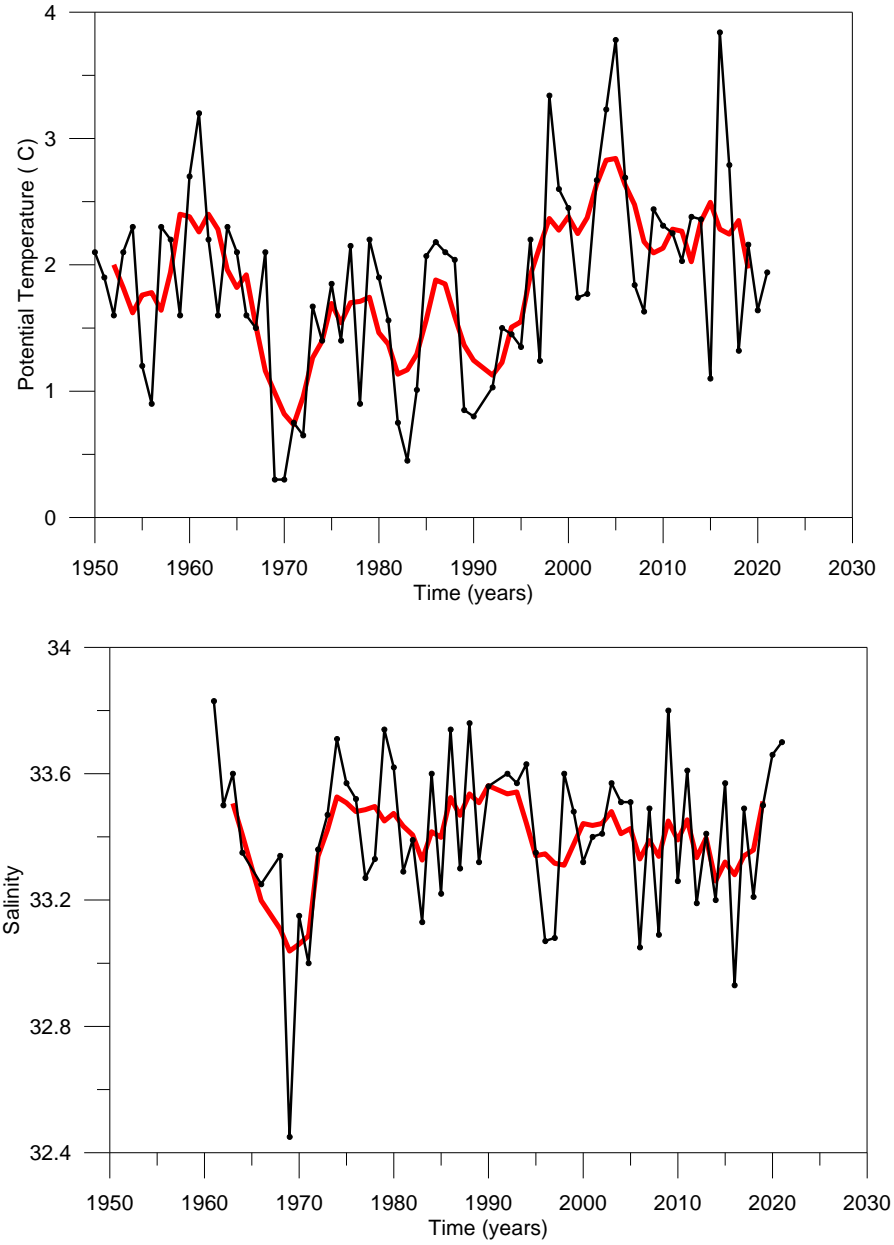
Rysgaard S, Boone W, Carlson D, Sejr MK, Bendtsen J, Juul-Pedersen T, Lund H, Meire L, Mortensen J (2020), An updated view on water masses on the pan-West Greenland continental shelf and their link to proglacial fjords, *J. Geophys. Res. Oceans*, 125, e2019JC015564. doi:10.1029/2019JC015564.



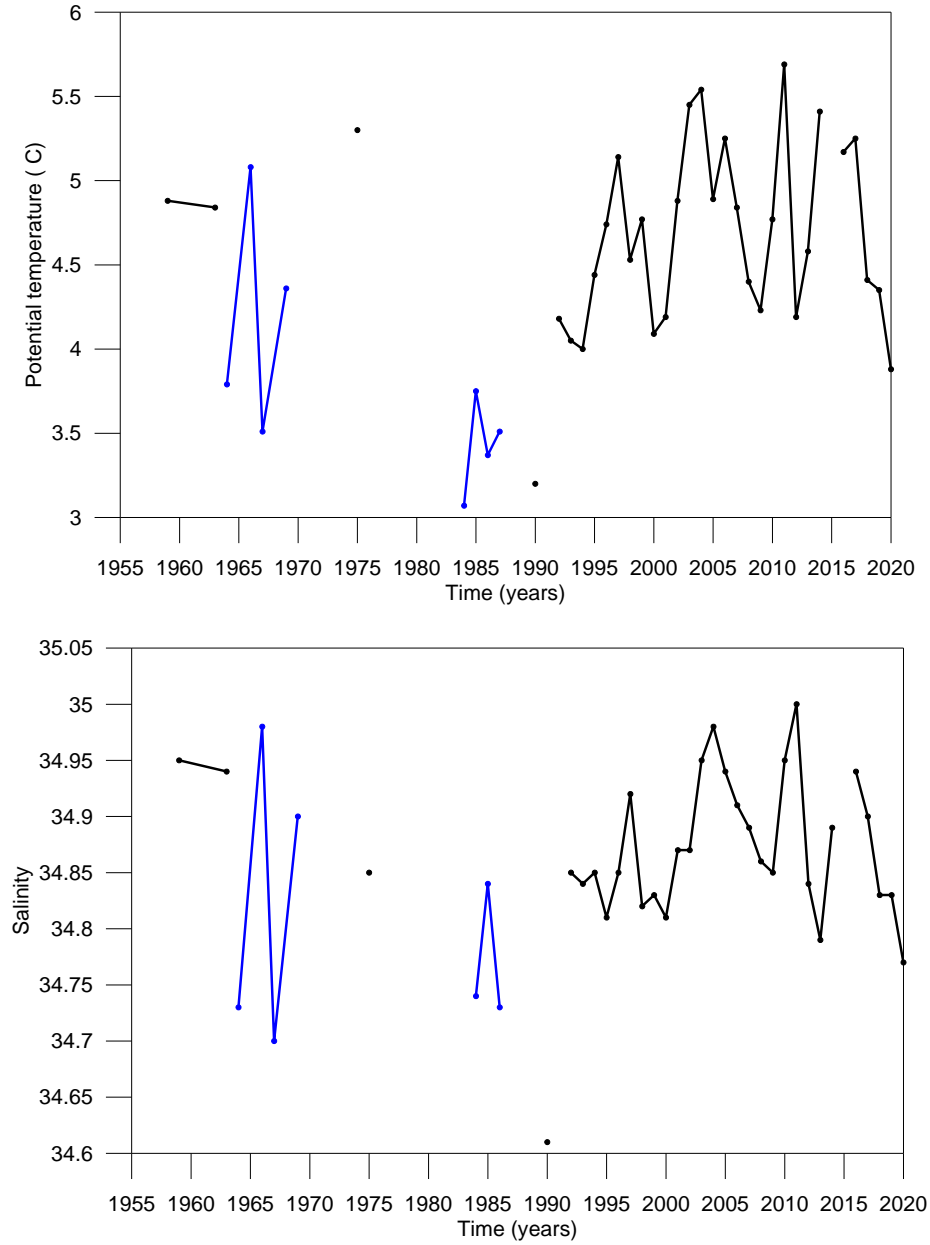
**Figure 1.** Position of the hydrographic standard stations and sections off West Greenland. FB4 (located on the continental slope) and FB2 (located over the continental shelf).



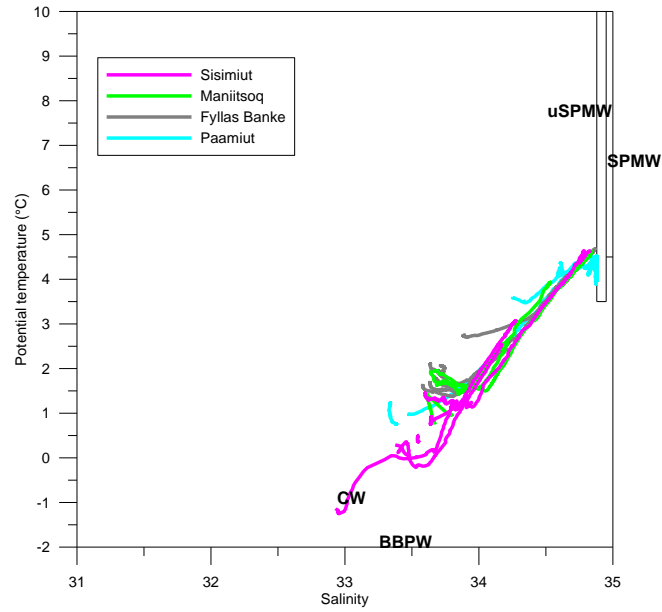
**Figure 2.** Time series of mean potential temperature (°C, top) and salinity (bottom) from the Fyllas Banke continental slope (station 4, 0-50 m) with measurements in June/July for the period 1952-2021. The red curve shows the 5 year running mean.



**Figure 3.** Time series of mean potential temperature (°C, top) and salinity (bottom) from the Fyllas Banke continental shelf (station 2, 0-40 m) with measurements in June/July for the period 1950-2021. The red curve shows the 5 year running mean.



**Figure 4.** Mean potential temperature (°C, top) and salinity (bottom) for the depth range 75-200 m at Cape Desolation 3 (60.47°N, 50°W) June/July 1959-2020. Blue lines indicate observations obtained early in April.



**Figure 5.** Potential temperature – salinity diagram showing every station occupied along the West Greenland continental shelf and slope during the May GINR surveys in 2021. Stations are color coded with respect to sections (see Figure legends and Figure 1). Also indicated are water masses that meet in the region: Coastal Water (CW), Subpolar Mode Water (SPMW), upper Subpolar Mode Water (upper SPMW), and Baffin Bay Polar Water (BBPW).