This work has been carried out within the framework of the EUROfusion Consortium, funded by the European Union via the Euratom Research and Training Programme (Grant Agreement No 101052200 — EUROfusion). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.

November 10th, 2026

Physics of Alfvén wave and energetic particles in burning plasmas*

F. Zonca[1,2]

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*In collaboration with L. Chen, M. V. Falessi, Ph. Lauber, A. Mishchenko, Z. Qiu, X. Tao and G. Wei

Center for Nonlinear Plasma Science

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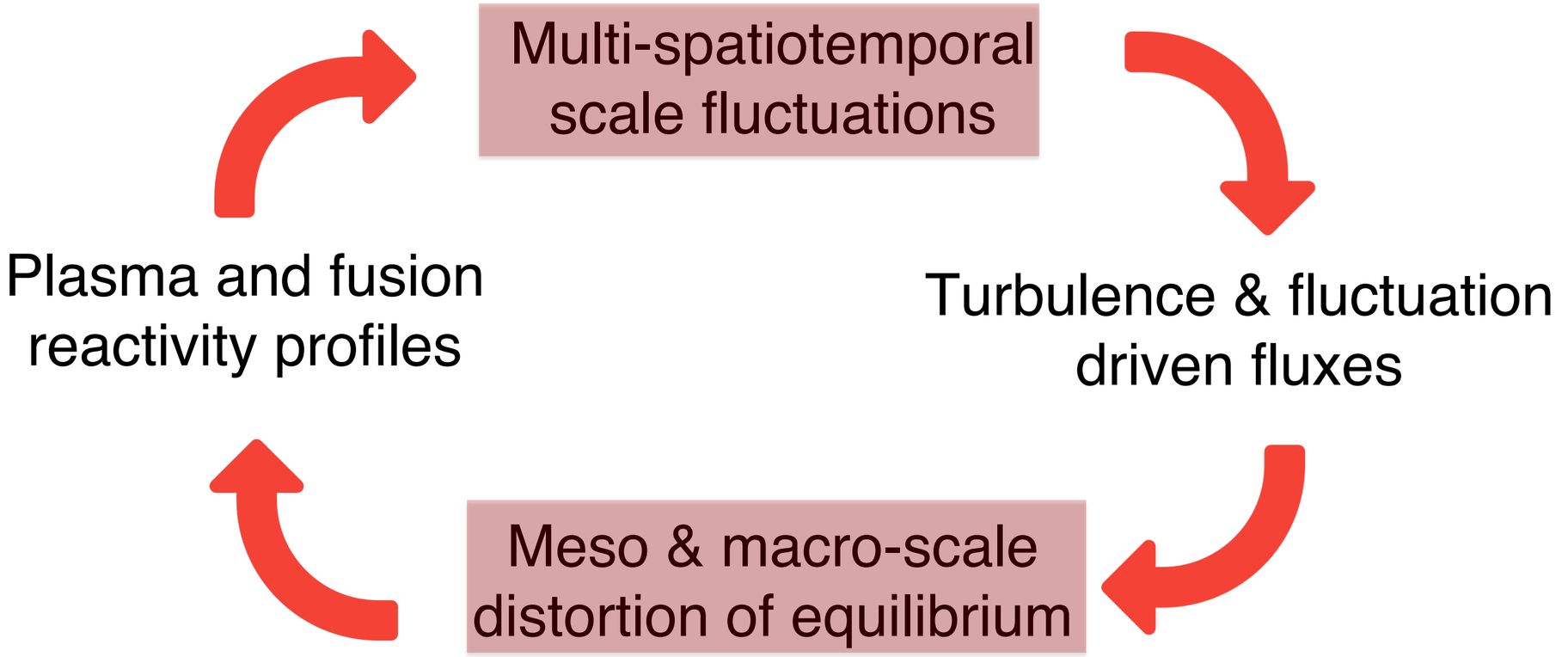
Shear Alfvén waves and the physics of burning plasmas

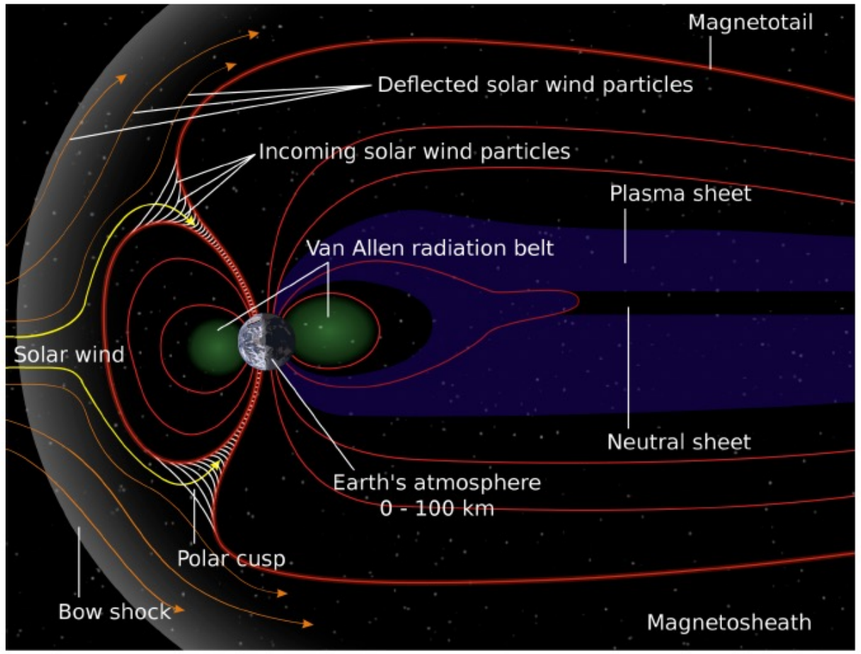
❑ Burning plasmas as complex self-organized systems:

[C&Z Rev. Mod. Phys. Review article]: Nonlinear gyrokinetic description]



Broader relevance: Earth's radiation belts

Diagram of Earth's magnetosphere



Source:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnetosphere
Original: NASA Vector: Aaron Kaase, Medium69 - Structure of the magnetosphere numbered.svg

- ❑ Significant MeV electron population
- ❑ Formation mechanism?

Earth's radiation belts

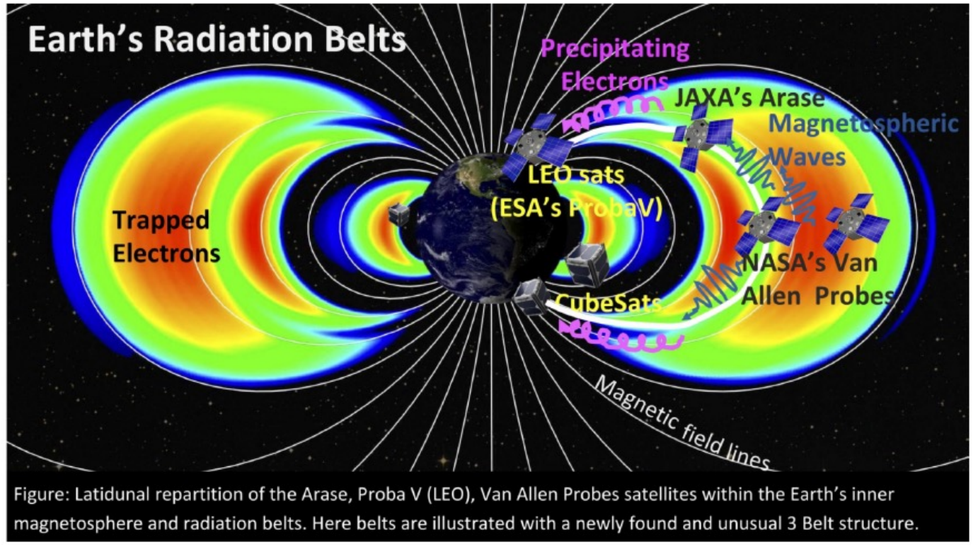


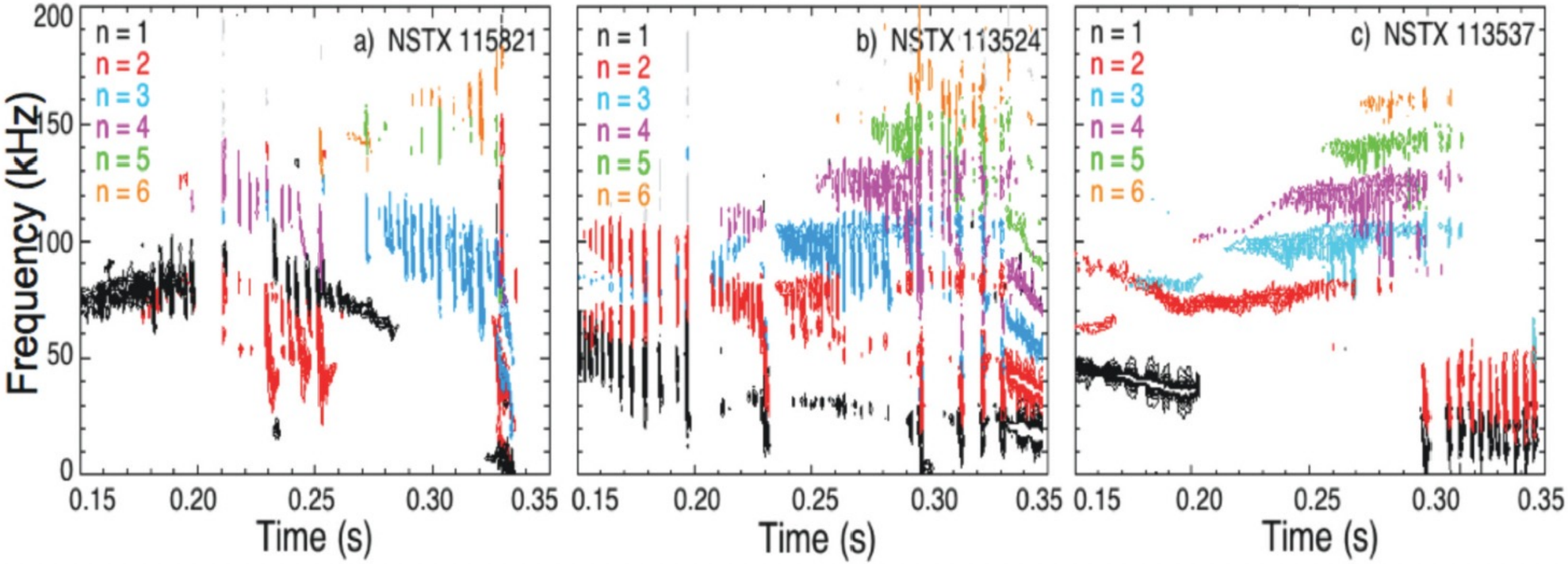
Figure: Latidunal repartition of the Arase, Proba V (LEO), Van Allen Probes satellites within the Earth's inner magnetosphere and radiation belts. Here belts are illustrated with a newly found and unusual 3 Belt structure.

Source: https://www.issibern.ch/teams/radbeltphysics/

- ❑ Whistler mode chorus is responsible for electron acceleration to MeV energy in Earth's radiation belts (R. B. Horne, Nature 2005)

Experimental observations

- Rich spectrum of Alfvénic fluctuations is observed experimentally (E. D. Fredrickson et al., Phys. Plasmas 2006)



- Resonant excitation of Alfvén eigenmodes, EPM and fishbones by energetic particles and ensuing effects on transport

Unified theoretical approach

- The general fishbone like dispersion relation (GFLDR) provides the unified description of spectral properties, mode structure, and resonant excitation by energetic particles in realistic nonuniform equilibria (Z&C Phys. Plasmas 2014)

$$\mathcal{F}[\delta\phi, \delta A_{\parallel}] = (2\pi)^3 \sum_{j\in\mathbb{Z}} \int_0^a dr \frac{d\psi/dr}{2} e^{i2\pi nqj} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \mathcal{J} d\vartheta$$

$$\left[-\boldsymbol{\nabla} \times \left(\boldsymbol{b}_0 c \partial_t^{-1} \nabla_{\parallel} \delta\hat{\phi}^{\dagger}(r, \vartheta + 2\pi j) \right) \cdot \frac{\delta \hat{\boldsymbol{B}}_{\perp}(r, \vartheta)}{4\pi} \right.$$

$$\left. + \partial_t^{-1} \delta\hat{\phi}^{\dagger}(r, \vartheta + 2\pi j) \boldsymbol{\nabla} \cdot \delta \hat{\boldsymbol{J}}_{\perp}(r, \vartheta) \right] = \delta W - \delta I \ .$$

- Constructed from the GK energy functional (Hasegawa and Chen 1991)

The General fishbone like dispersion relation

- The GFLDR can be cast as (Z&C Phys. Plasmas 2014)

"fluid" potential energy/MHD

$$i|s|\Lambda = \delta\hat{W}_f + \delta\hat{W}_k$$

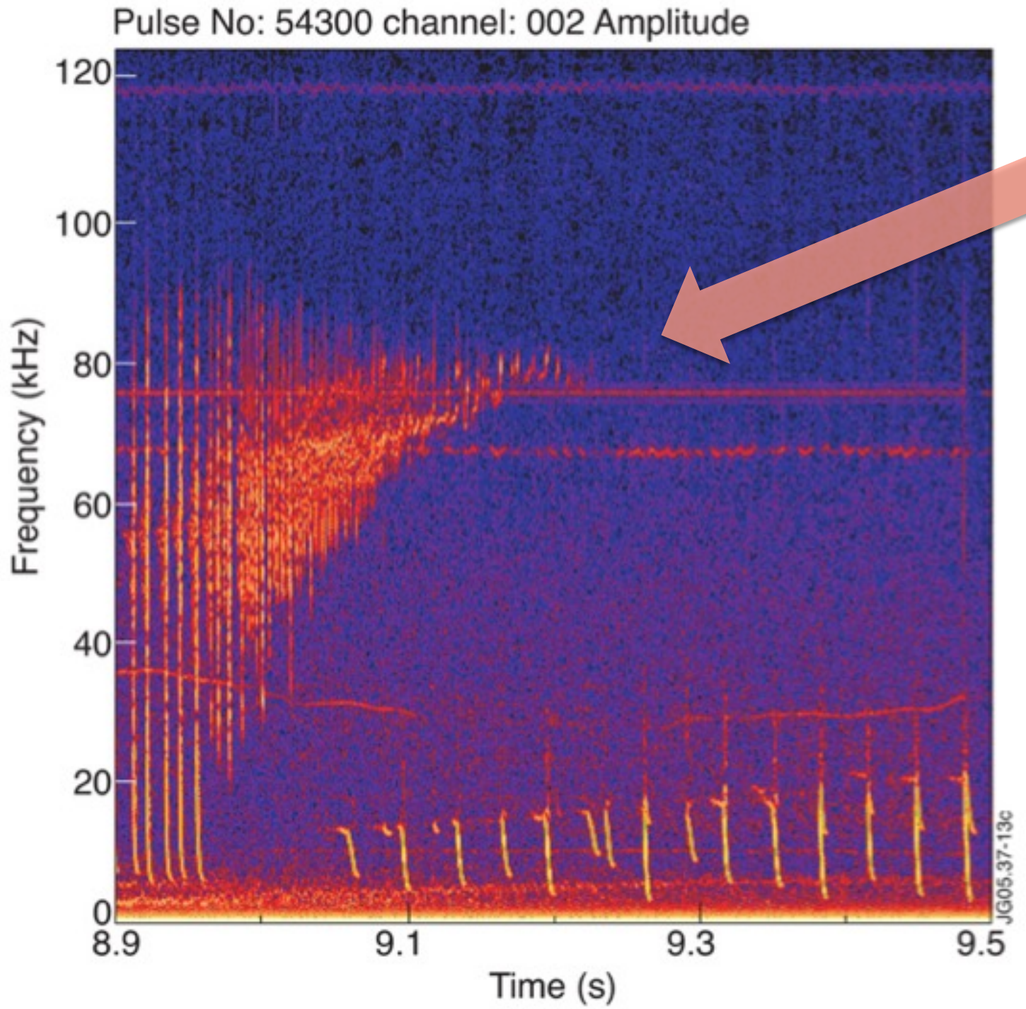
generalized GK inertia

GK potential energy/compression

- The GFLDR is a prediction first approach, which readily offers a falsification test to experimental observations
- The GFLDR identifies spatiotemporal scales underlying relevant physics: it elevates interpretation of experimental observations and numerical simulation results

High frequency fishbones at JET

- The GFLDR has successfully been applied to AUG, DIII-D, FTU, HL-2A, HL-3, JET, NSTX, DTT, …



$$i|s|\Lambda = \delta\hat{W}_f + \delta\hat{W}_k$$

Z&C et al 2009 Nuc. Fus. ***49*** *085009*

- Shear Alfvén continuum accumulation point is degenerate with GAM frequency
- Thermal plasma kinetic effects set onset threshold for high frequency fishbones

Courtesy of F. Nabais et al. 2005 Phys. Plasmas ***12*** *102509*

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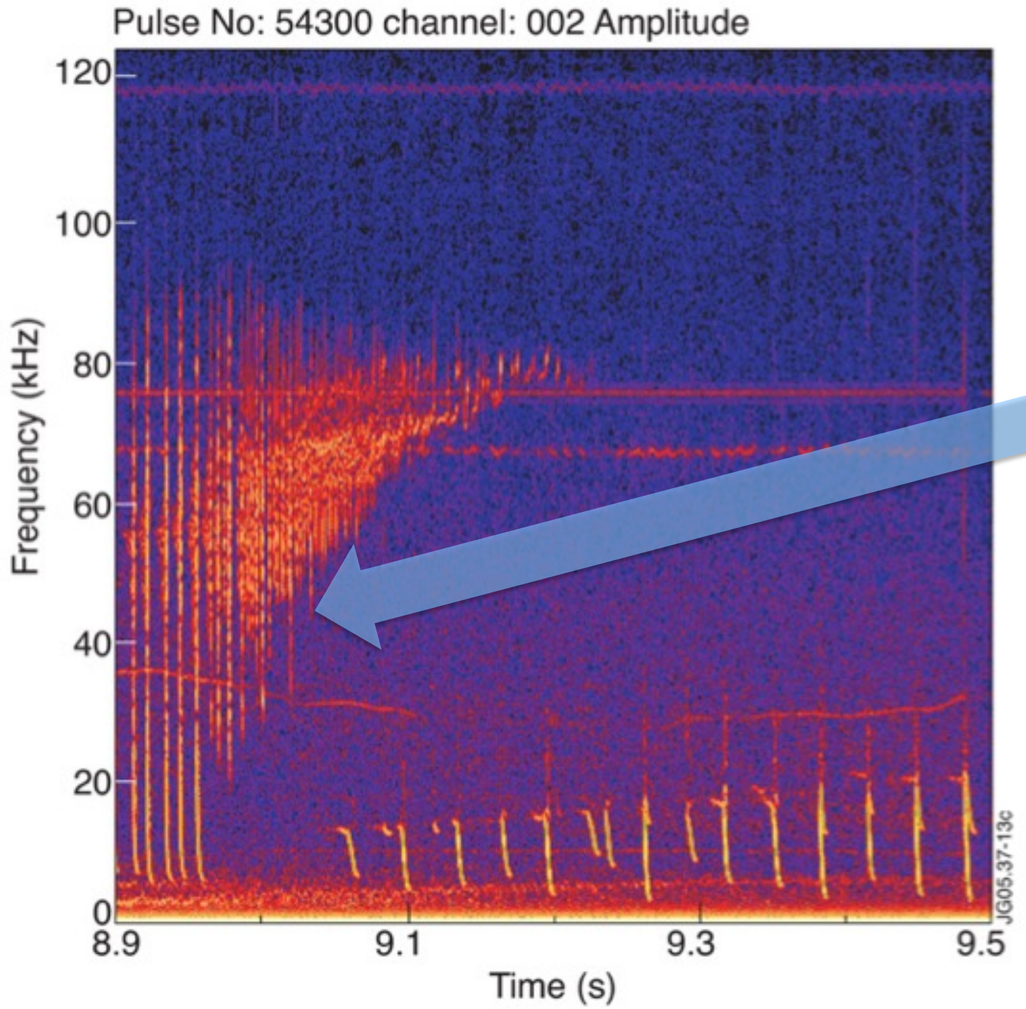


$$i|s|\Lambda = \delta\hat{W}_f + \delta\hat{W}_k$$

Z&C et al 2009 Nuc. Fus. ***49*** *085009*

- Energetic particles provide effective drive with strong ICRH in low-density plasma
- Nonlinear chirping dynamics is consistent with predicted evolution due to precession resonance of EP tail

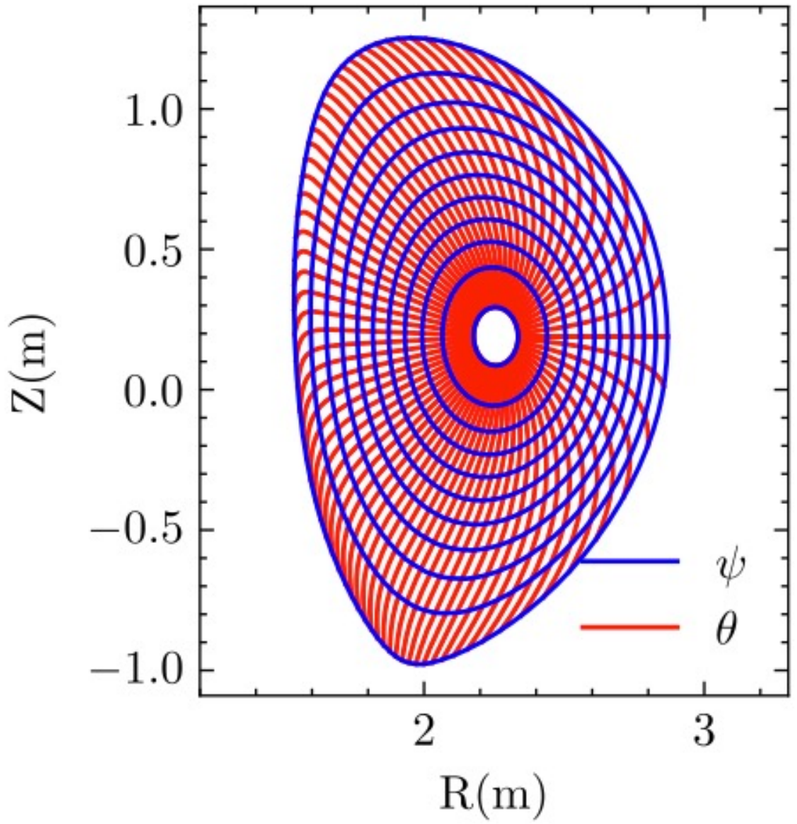
Courtesy of F. Nabais et al. 2005 Phys. Plasmas ***12*** *102509*

Importance of polarization

- SAW-ISW (Shear Alfvén-Ion Sound) continuum computed by GFLDR for realistic DTT equilibrium

*G. Wei et al. 2024 Phys. Plasmas **31** 072505*

Divertor Tokamak Test



$$g_1(\vartheta) = \frac{\hat{\kappa}_\perp \hat{\Phi}_s(\vartheta)}{(\beta q^2)^{1/2}} \frac{c k_\vartheta}{B_0 R_0}, \qquad g_2(\vartheta) = \frac{i\delta\hat{P}_{\rm comp}(\vartheta)}{(2\Gamma)^{1/2} P_0},$$

$$\delta\boldsymbol{\xi}_\perp = (c/B_0)\, \boldsymbol{b}_0 \times \nabla\Phi_s \qquad \delta P_{\rm comp} = -\Gamma P_0 \boldsymbol{\nabla}\cdot\delta\boldsymbol{\xi}$$

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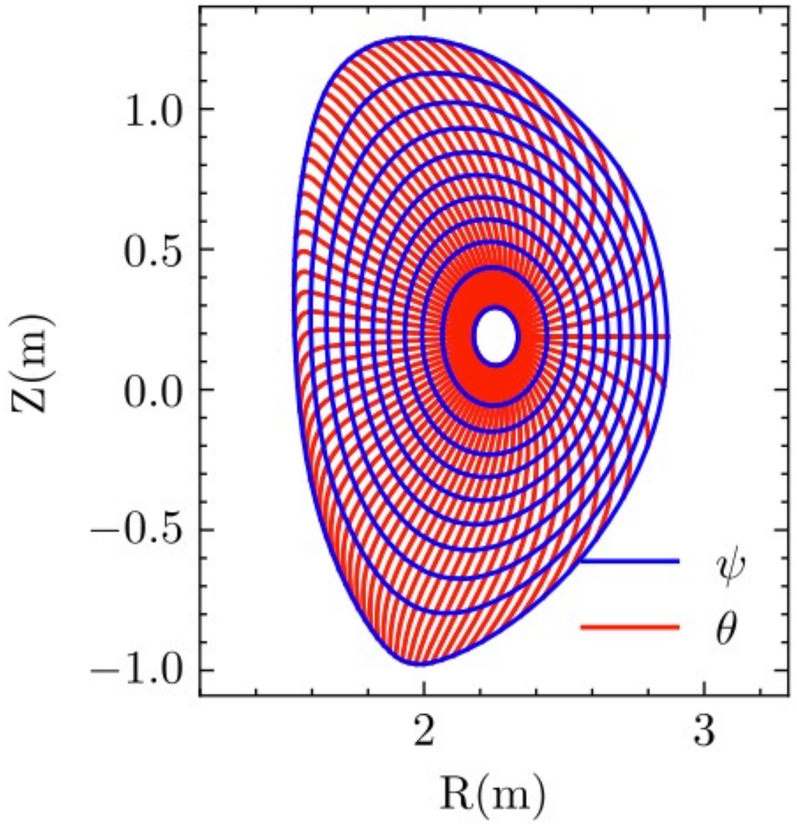

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Alfvénicity

$$A = \frac{\int_0^{2\pi} g_1^2(\vartheta;\nu,r)\,d\vartheta}{\int_0^{2\pi} \left[g_1^2(\vartheta;\nu,r) + g_2^2(\vartheta;\nu,r)\right] d\vartheta},$$

*M.V. Falessi et al. 2019 Phys. Plasmas **26** 082502*

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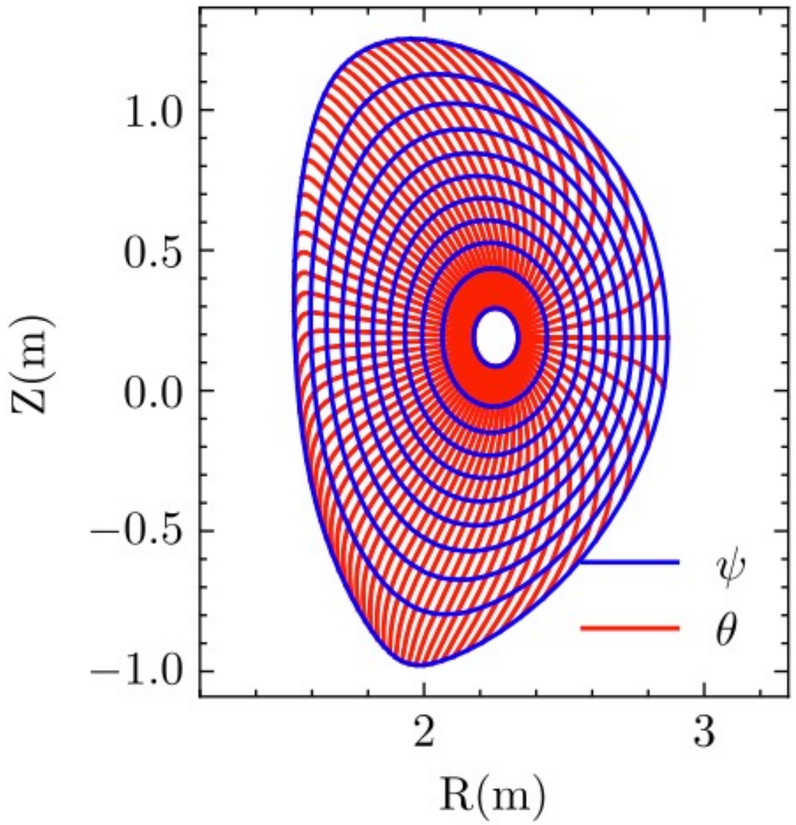
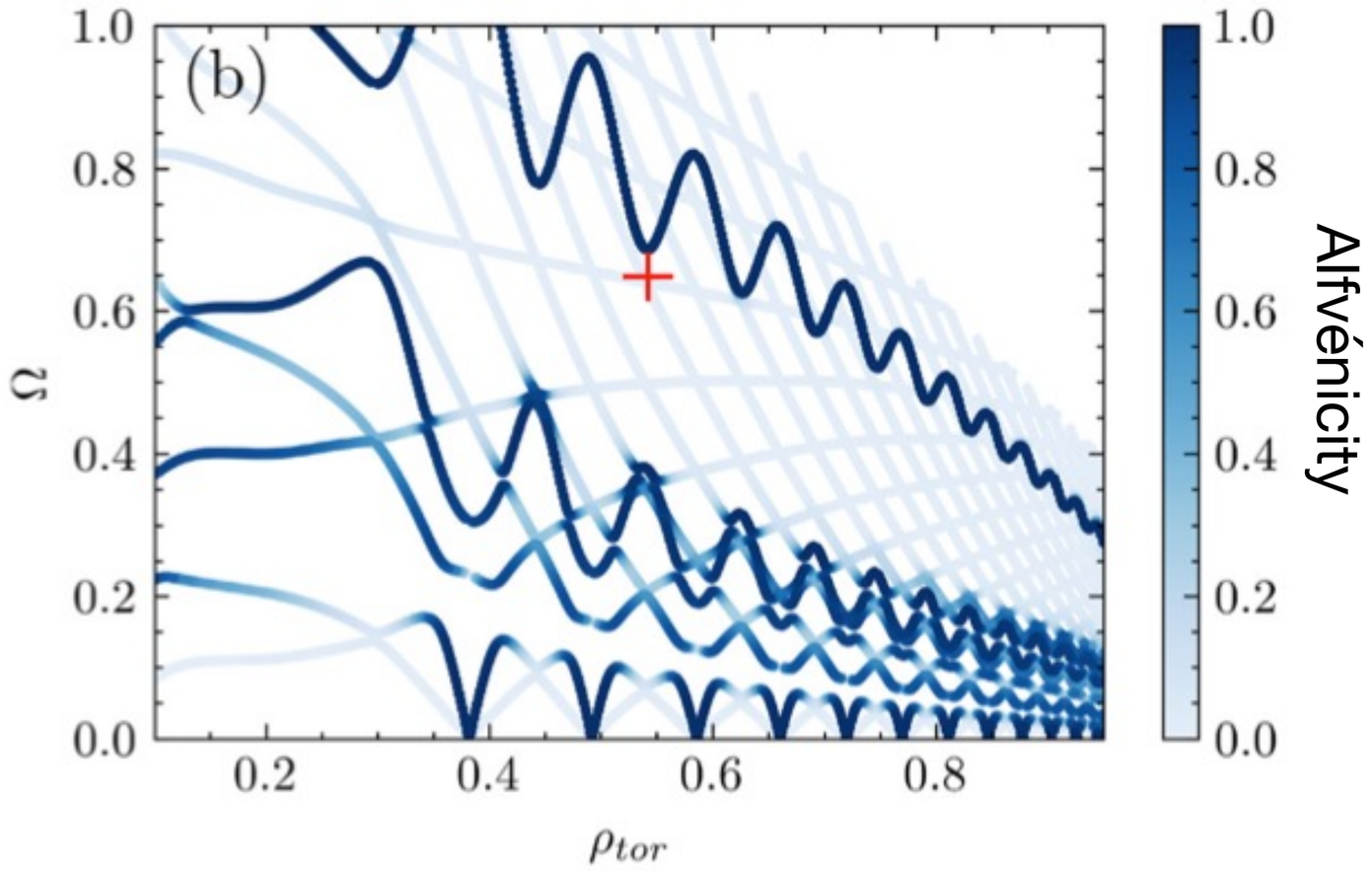
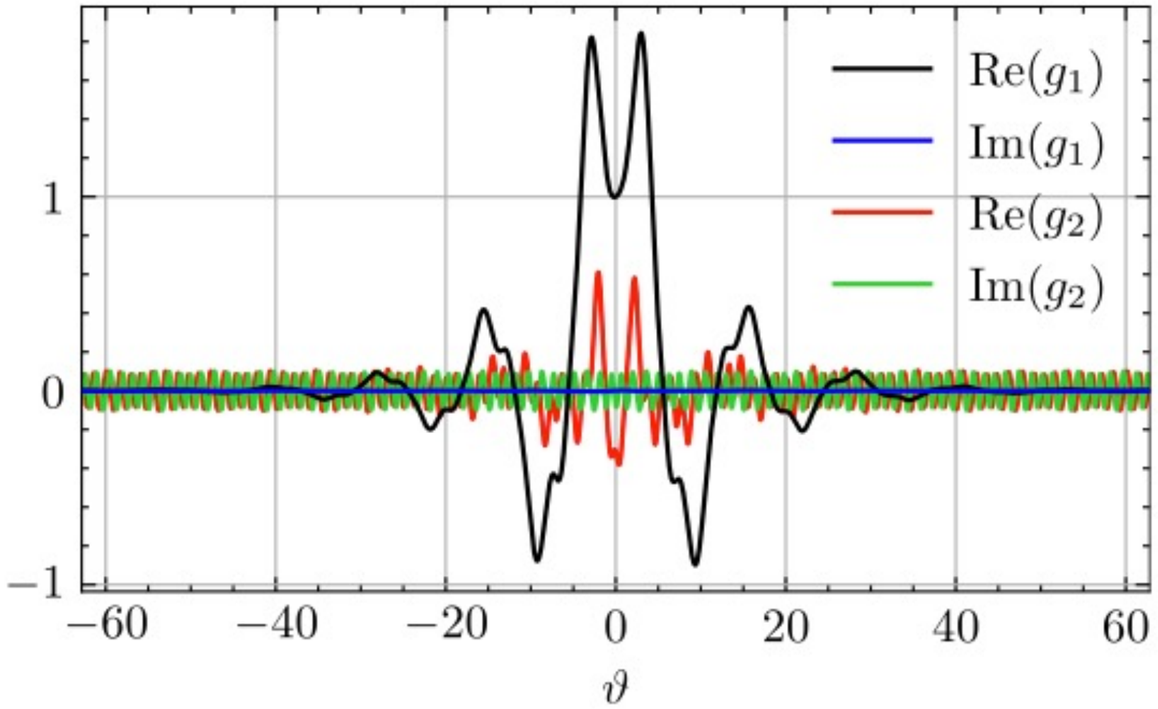


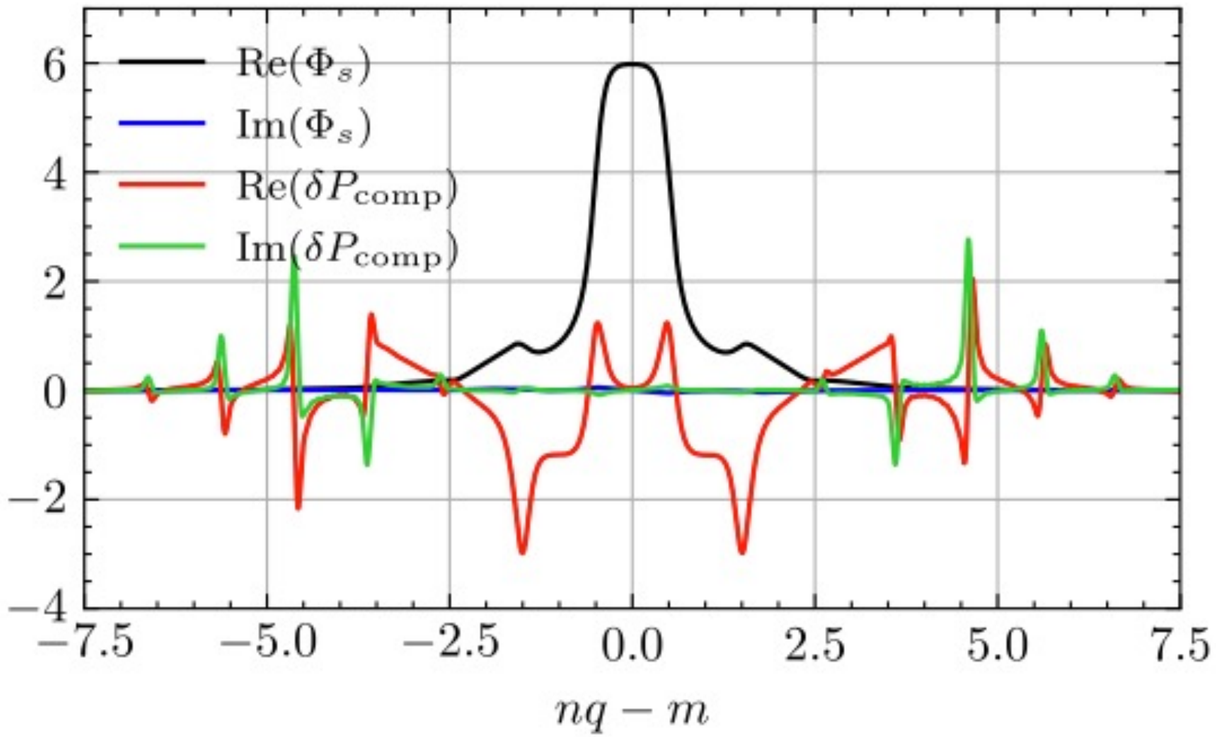


Crucial role of mode structures

- Interaction of TAE with SAW-ISW continuum leads to resonant absorption and damping

*G. Wei et al. 2024 Phys. Plasmas **31** 072505*





- Mode structures in ballooning and real space are crucial for correct description of damping and drive

Recent experimental observations

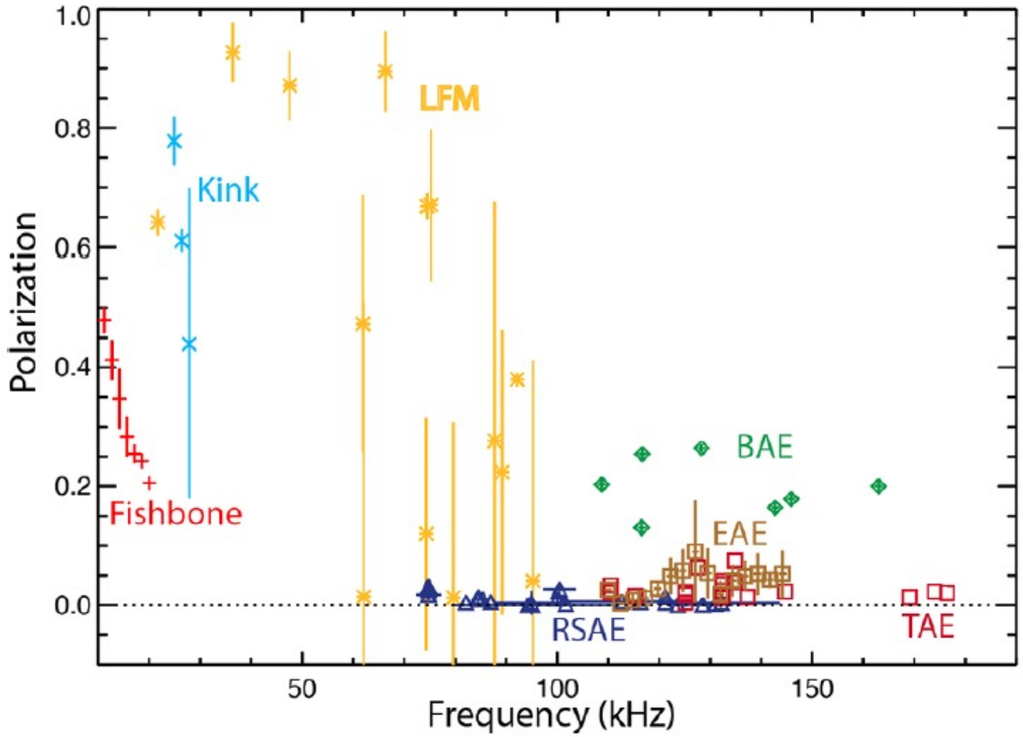
- Recent experimental observations from DIII-D capture mode polarization effects

*W.W Heidbrink et al. 2025 Nucl. Fusion **65** 112002*

Polarization analogous to **Alfvénicity** defined in

*M.V. Falessi et al. 2019 Phys. Plasmas **26** 082502*

F. Zonca et al. 2026 PPCF submitted



- GFLDR provides precise prediction of experimental measurements and awaits for falsification test

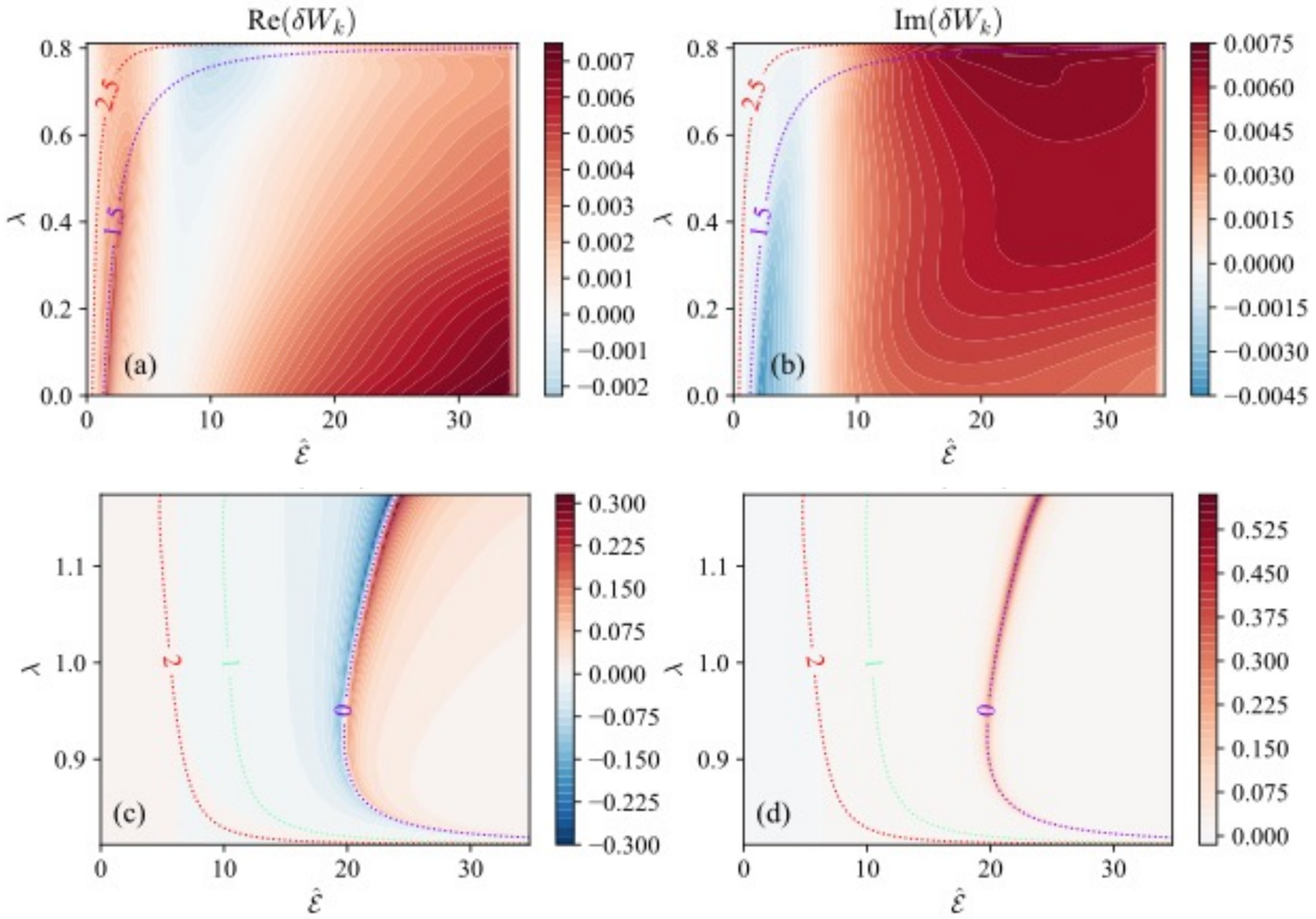
Crucial role of wave particle resonances

- Mode structures in ballooning and real space also affect the wave-particle resonances and power exchange

*G. Wei et al. 2025 Nucl. Fusion **65** 106035*

EP: isotropic slowing down

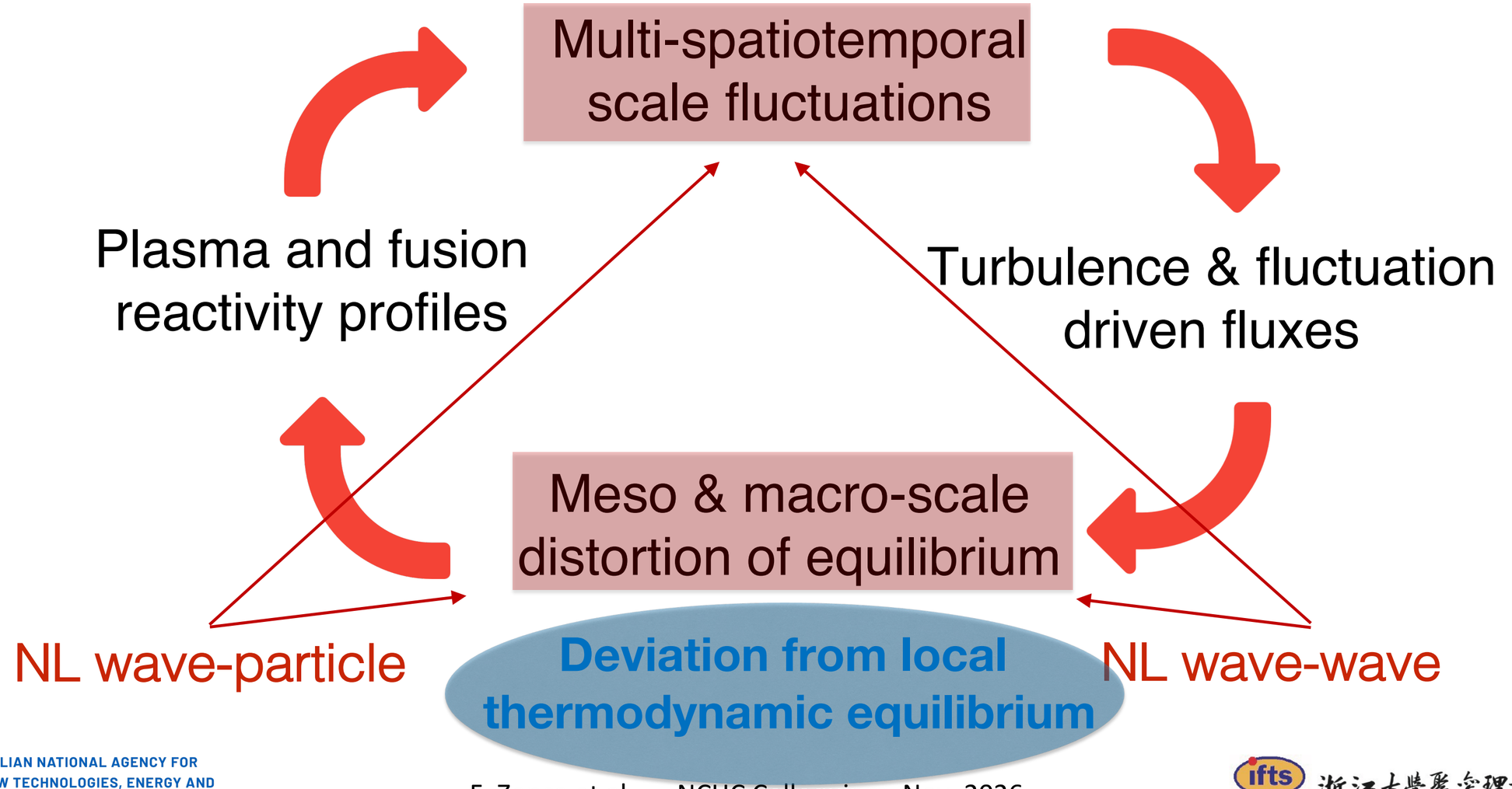
GFLDR synthetic diagnostics



Nonlinear dynamics and transport

- Burning plasmas as complex self-organized systems:

[C&Z Rev. Mod. Phys. Review article]: Nonlinear gyrokinetic description]



Phase space transport - I

- A **first-principle-based**, **self-consistent approach** is crucial for developing a predictive capability of plasma behaviors on long time scales
- **Proper nonlinear equilibrium**
  - Long lived (undamped by collision) zonal e.m. fields and corresponding phase space zonal structures: **Zonal State**
  - Must self-consistently compute Zonal State in the presence of finite level of fluctuations

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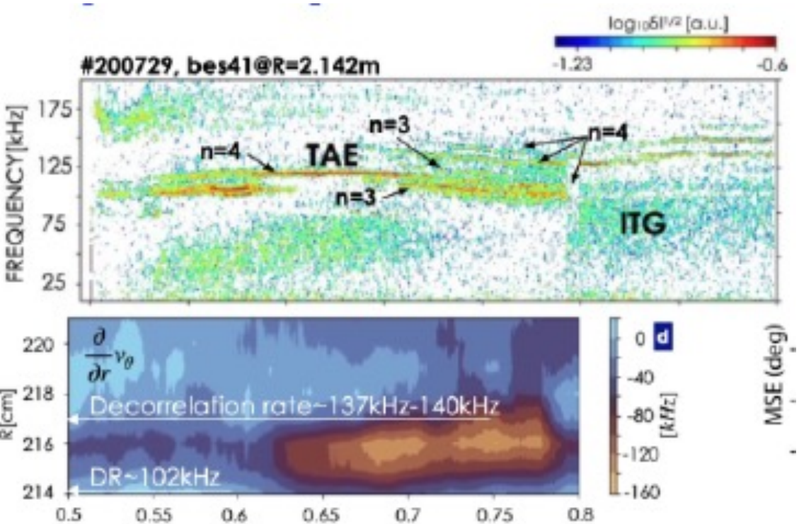
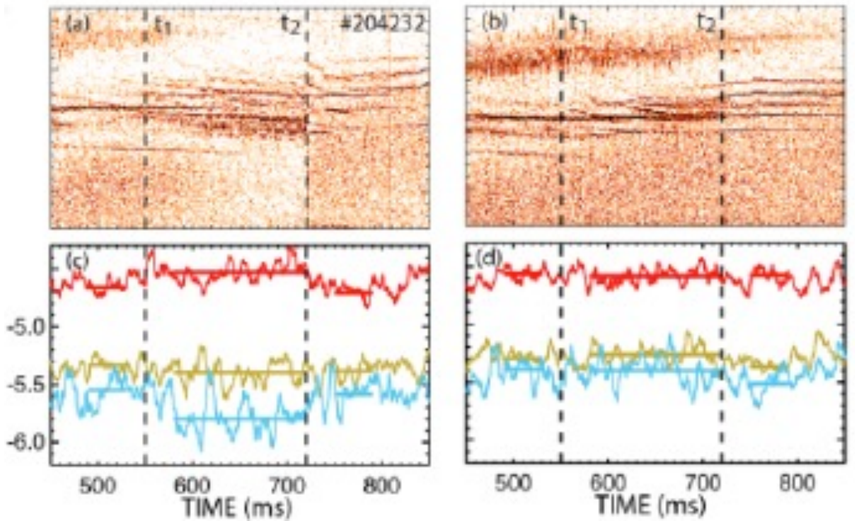
  - Routinely observed experimentally [zonal flows – X. Du et al. PRL 2025; zonal currents – W.W. Heidbrink et al. ITPEA EP 2026]



zonal flow zonal current



F. Zonca et al. — NCHC Colloquium, Nov. 2026

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  - Must self-consistently compute Zonal State in the presence of finite level of fluctuations
- Separate macro-meso spatiotemporal scales from micro-meso scales
  - Renormalized equilibrium accounting for self-interaction

$$F_{0*} \equiv \bar{F}_0 + \overline{e^{-iQ_z}\, \overline{e^{iQ_z}\delta F_z}\Big|_F}\,.$$

$\overline{(\text{orbit averaging})}$

meso-macro

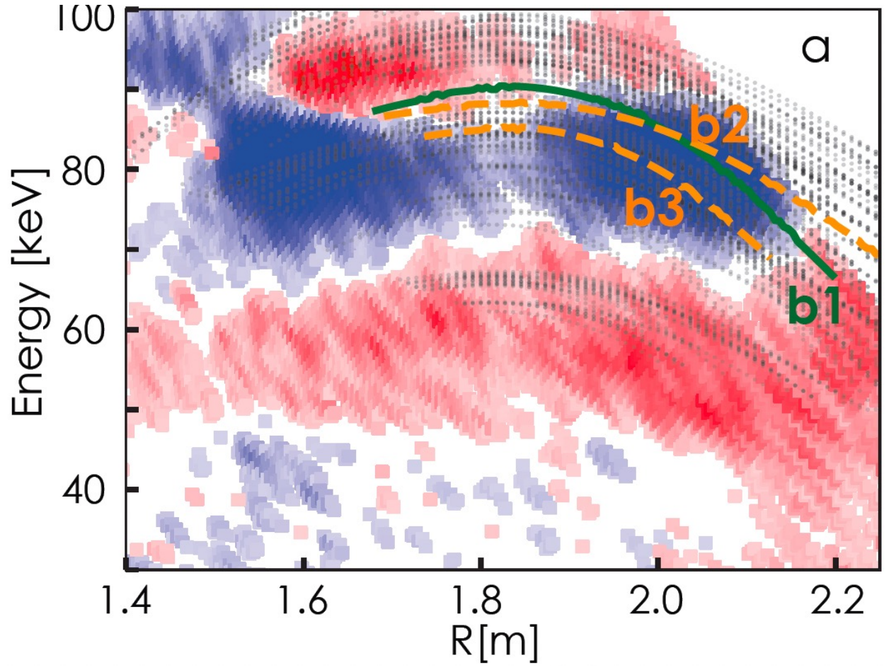
micro-meso

Phase space transport - II

❑ **Phase space zonal structure (PSZS)** evolution equation (nearly integrable system) [Falessi et al NJP 2023]

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial t}\overline{F_{z0}} + \frac{1}{\tau_b}\left[\frac{\partial}{\partial P_\phi}\overline{\left(\tau_b \delta\dot{P}_\phi \delta F\right)_z} + \frac{\partial}{\partial \mathcal{E}}\overline{\left(\tau_b \delta\dot{\mathcal{E}} \delta F\right)_z}\right]_S = \overline{\left(\sum_b C_b^g\left[F, F_b\right] + \mathcal{S}\right)_{z\,S}}$$

Measured RSAE induced flow images along with the streamlines; at INPA measured pitch of 0:78 in DIII-D



X. Du et al. 2021 Phys. Rev. Lett. ***26*** *082502*

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❑ Intrinsically full-F [Falessi et al NJP 2023] but reduced to the 3D action space (contants of motion) ➔ verified numerically with HMGC+HYMAGYC codes [S. Briguglio and G. Vlad, 2020]

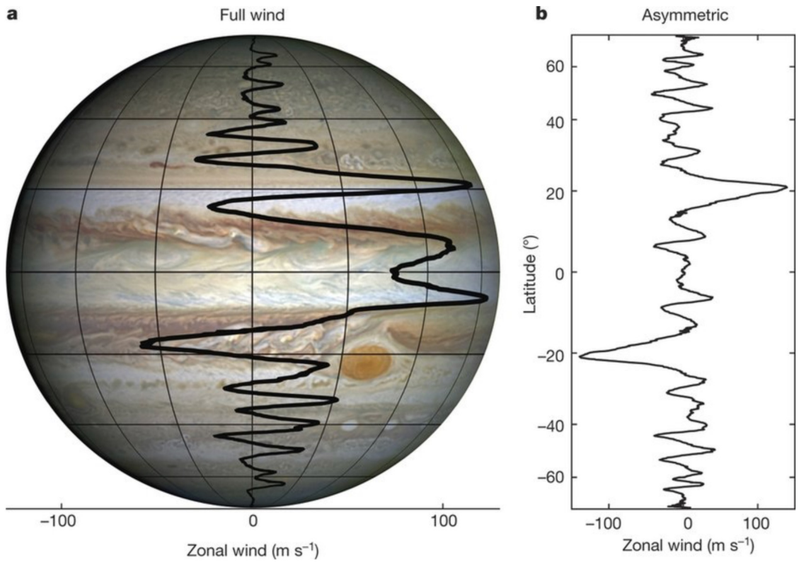
❑ Ready for implementation in non-linear GK codes, including thermal component if **whole transport description is lifted to the phase space** [S.J. Wang et al. PRL 2024, ITB by ITG]

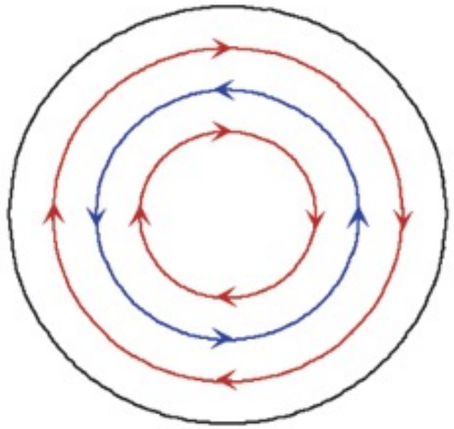
Zonal electromagnetic fields

- Zonal flows and currents are equally important in NL dynamic evolution

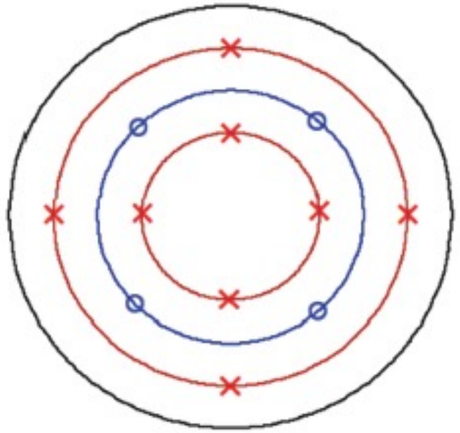
*C&Z. 2012 Phys. Rev. Lett.. **109** 145002*
*Z. Qiu et al. 2013 Europhys. Lett.. **101** 35001*

Jupiter's wind



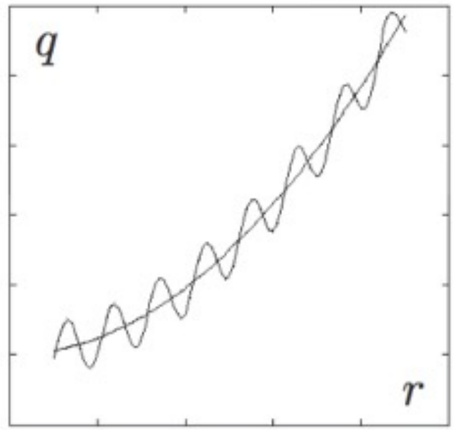


zonal flow



zonal current

$\Rightarrow$



[Y. Kaspi et al 2018 Nature 555(7695):223-226]

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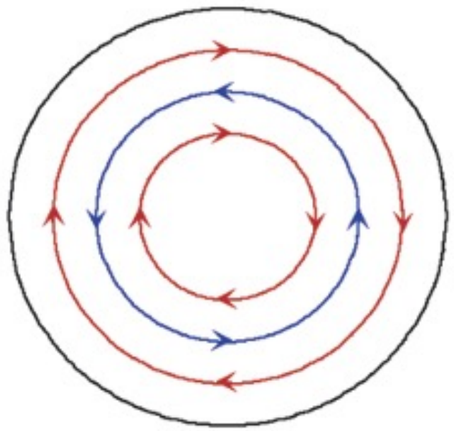
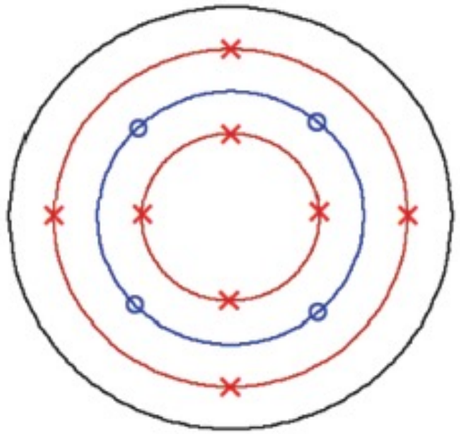
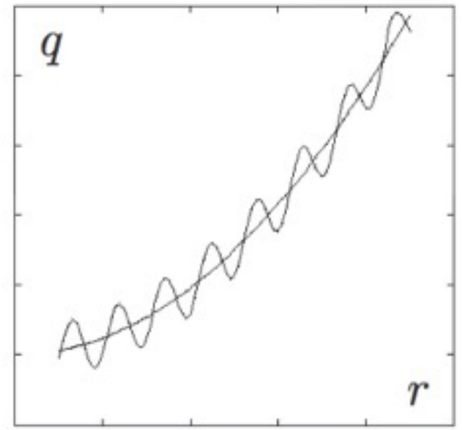
NOVEL FINDINGS
*Chen et al. 2025 Nucl Fusion. **65** 016018*



zonal flow



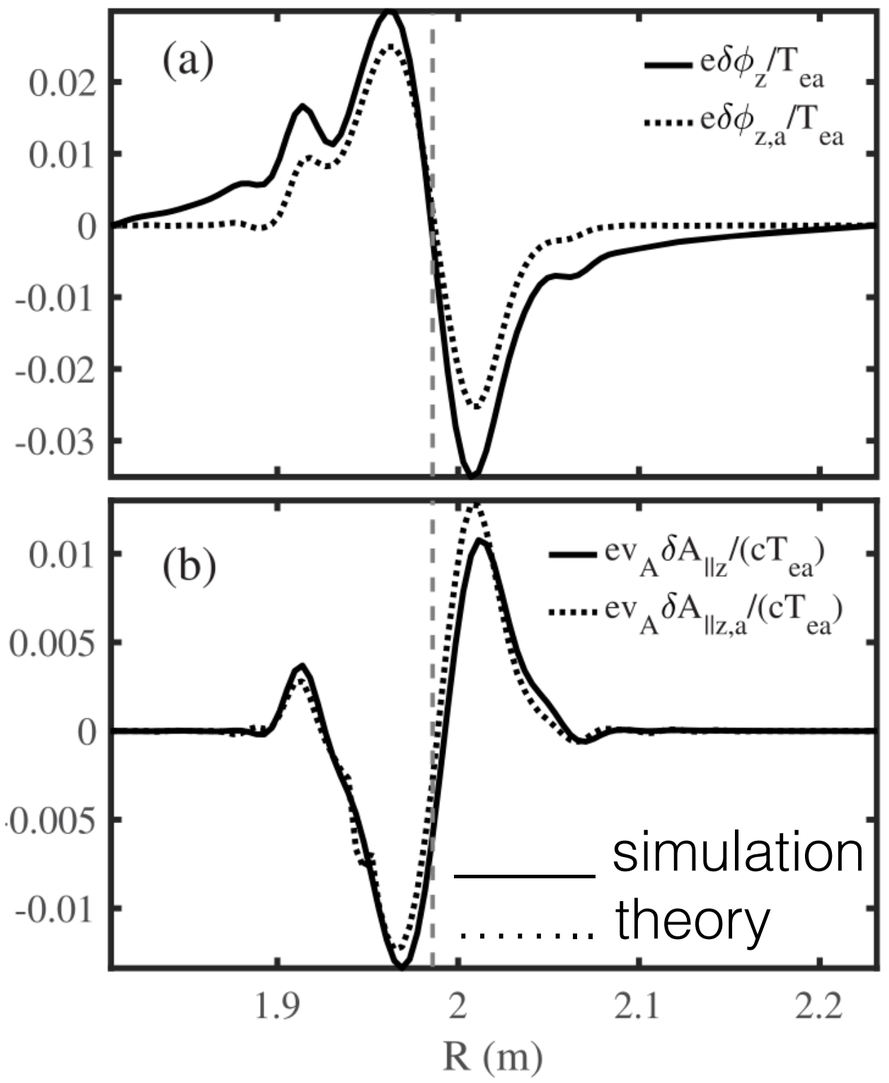
zonal current



- Core plasma also plays a crucial role in determining the properties of the zonal state
- Reversed shear Alfvén eigenmodes (RSAE): paradigm for Alfvénic fluctuation dominating the core of reactor relevant plasmas

Zonal State: RSAE case

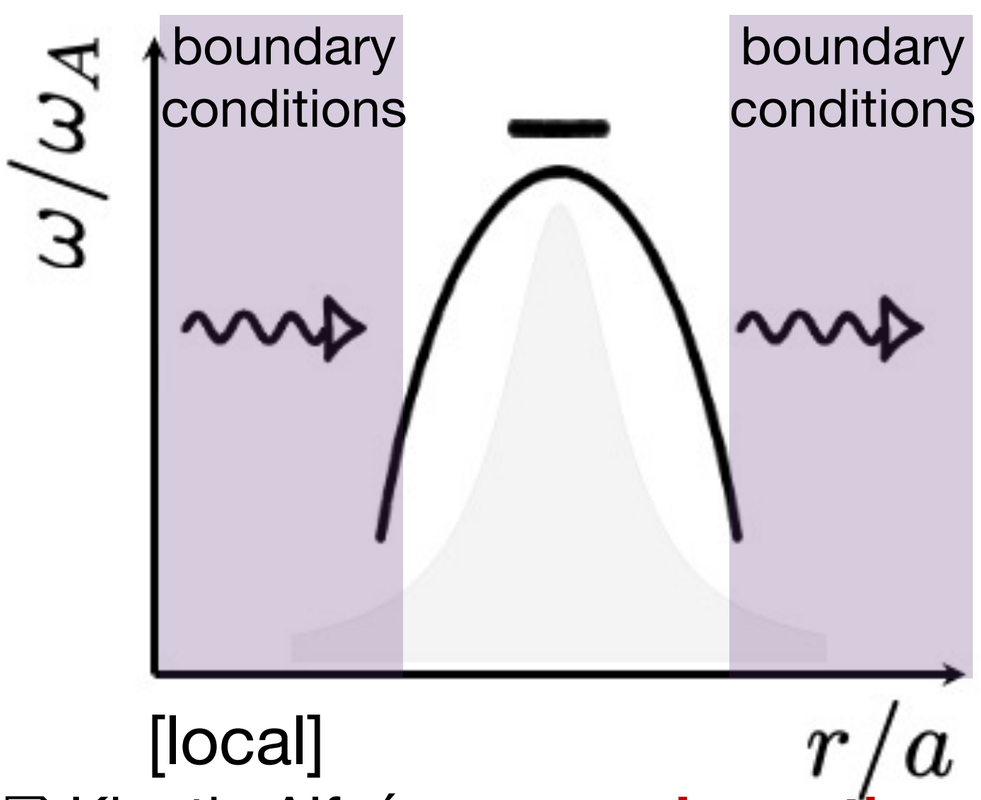
- Core plasma also plays a crucial role in determining the properties of the zonal state
- Reversed shear Alfvén eigenmodes (RSAE): paradigm for Alfvénic fluctuation dominating the core of reactor relevant plasmas
- Theory and GTC code simulations of RSAE saturation show [Chen et al, Nucl. Fusion 65 (2025) 016018]
  - zonal flow has negligible effect on EP resonance detuning (shearing)
  - zonal e.m. fields enhance the EP drive via phase space zonal structures
  - zonal e.m. fields are dominated by zonal current
  - saturation takes place via downward frequency shift and enhanced damping due to core plasma effects [R. Ma et al, Phys Rev Lett 137 (2026) 045101]



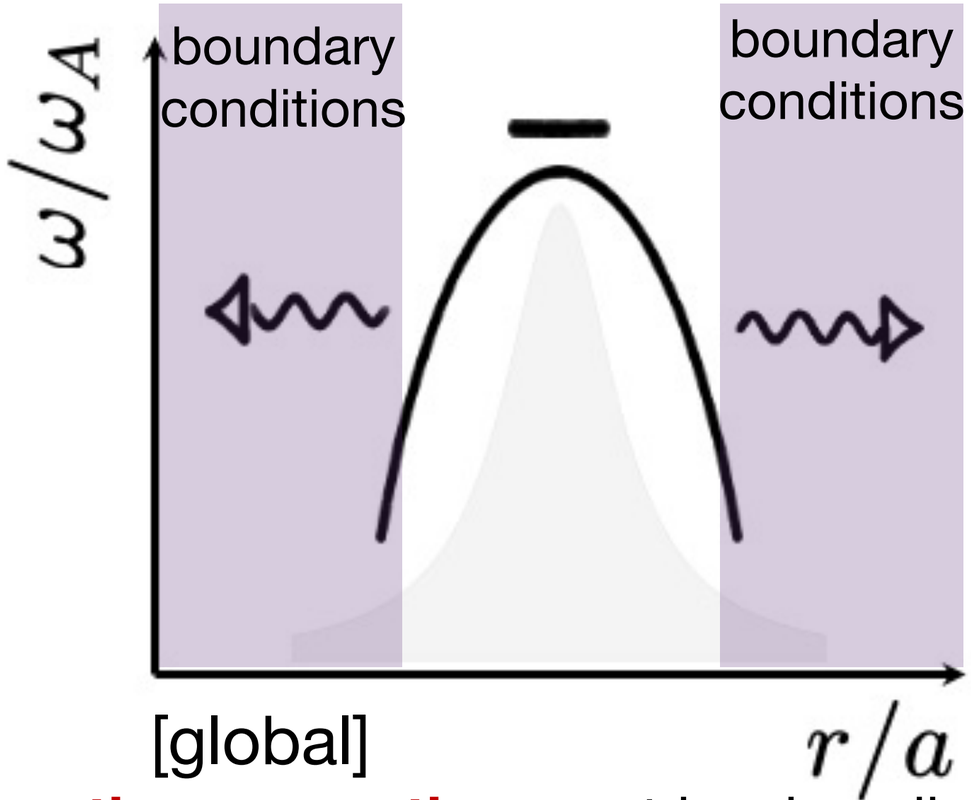
→ contrary to common wisdom ←

Importance of global kinetic approaches

- Generation of **zonal electromagnetic fields** strongly depends on the **spectral features** of the underlying fluctuations [F. Zonca et al., AAPPS-DPP 2025]



[local]

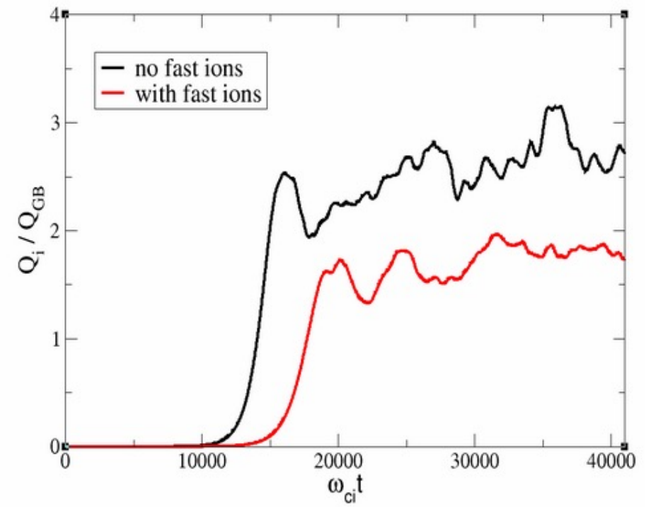


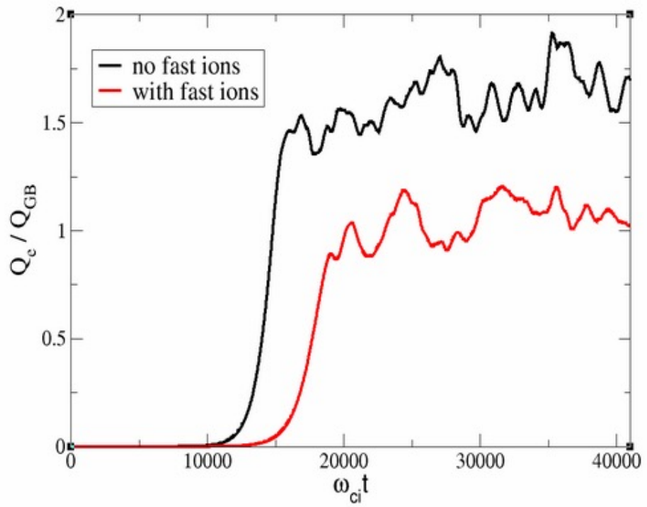
[global]

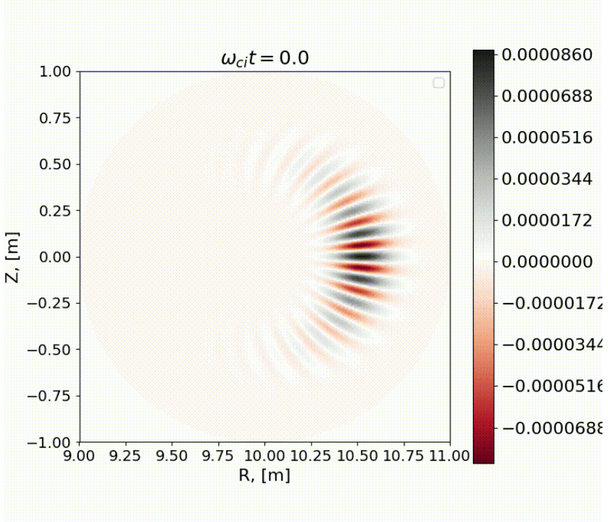
- Kinetic Alfvén waves **absorption and propagation properties** must be described by **proper global kinetic approaches.**

ORB5 code: core plasma confinement improvement

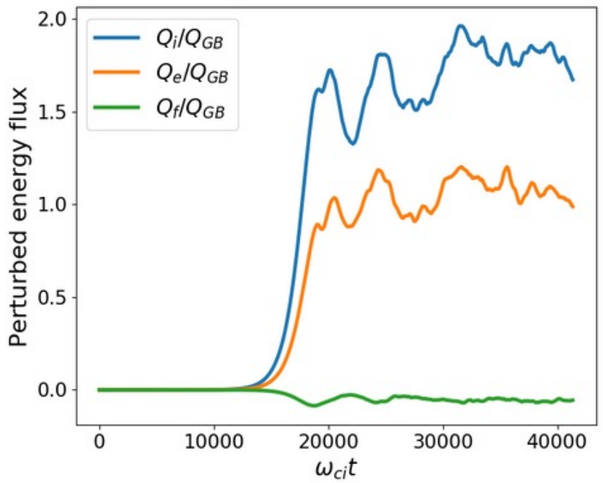
- Nonlinear gyrokinetic simulations with ORB5 code demonstrate clear reduction in the heat flux for both the bulk ions and the electrons [Courtesy A. Mishchenko and ORB5 Team 2025]

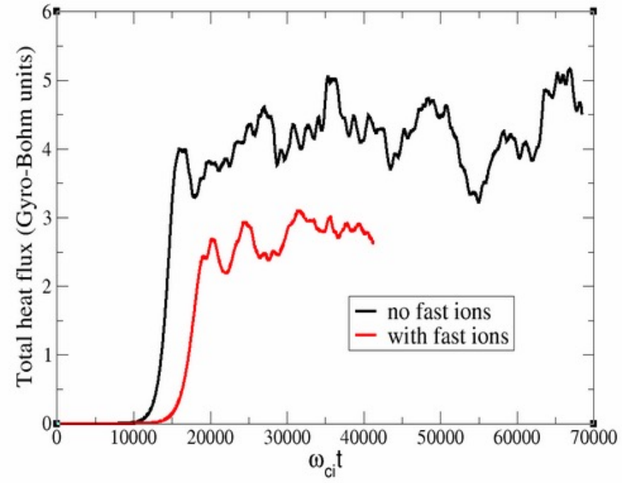


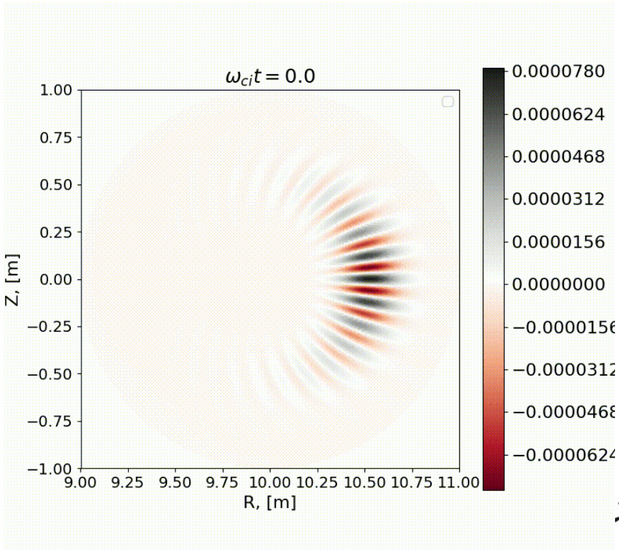




- Total heat flux reduced by the fast ions! $\boldsymbol{\beta_e = 0.1\%}$



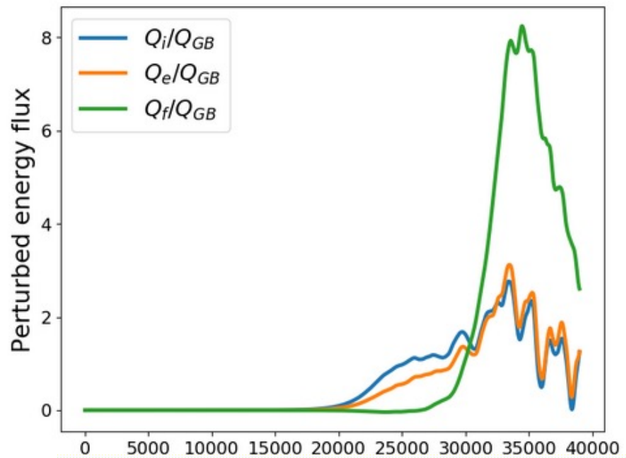


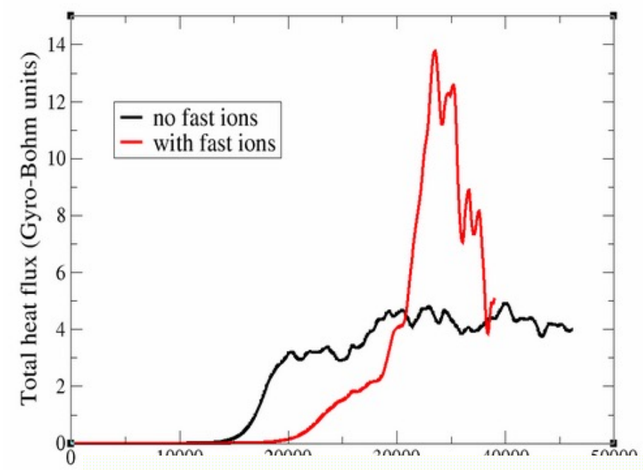


ORB5 code: AITG/KBM Zonal State

- Properties of the Zonal State become increasingly more global as plasma β is increased
- Mesoscale phenomena, such as kinetic Alfvén wave propagation, need to be captured for a correct description of the plasma dynamics

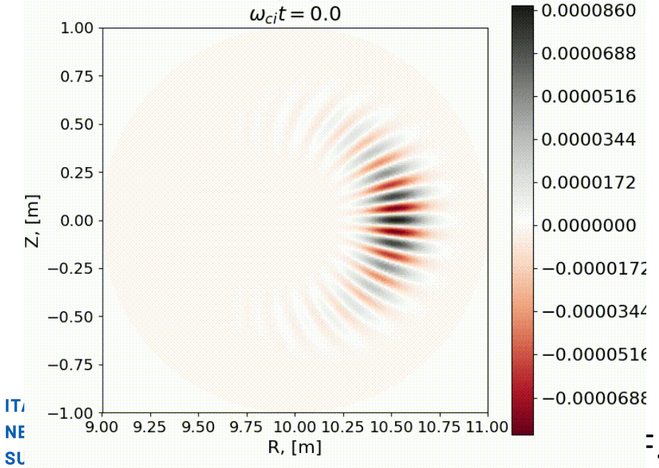
[Courtesy A. Mishchenko and ORB5 Team 2025]



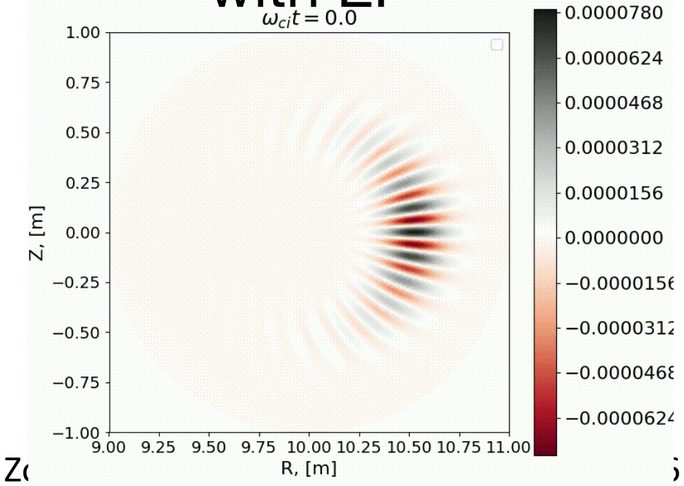


- For $\boldsymbol{\beta_e = 0.24\%}$, the dynamics is different. Fast ion heat flux is substantial. Total heat flux is not reduced

without EP



with EP

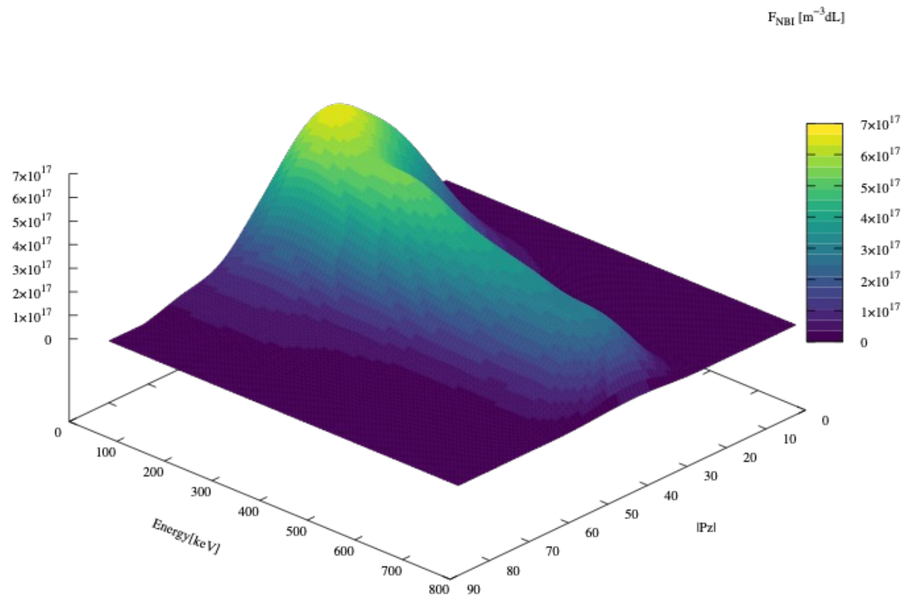


- Global Alfvenic mode (a BAE?) develops driving fast ion energy flux. Work in progress!

EP workflow: PSZS in LIGKA/HAGIS

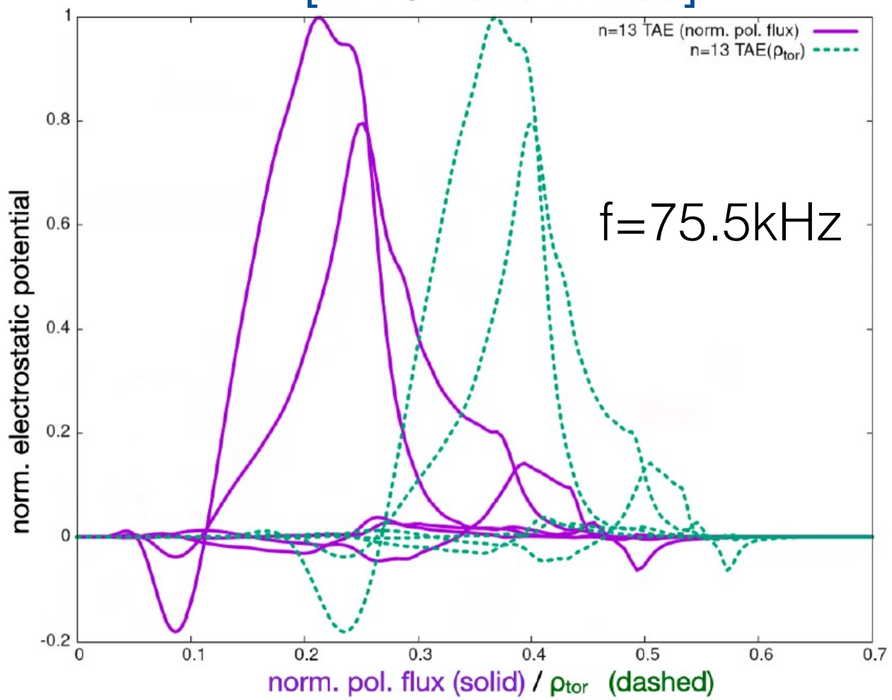
- Energetic Particle workflow fully integrated in IMAS [P. Lauber et al., NF 64, 096010 (2024)]
  [EUROfusion Enabling Research project ATEP (Lauber/Falessi)]

ITER 15MA case;
TAE n=13



ITER plasma from H&CD WF by M. Schneider

[Courtesy of Ph. Lauber; 2022]
[EFTC 2023 invited]



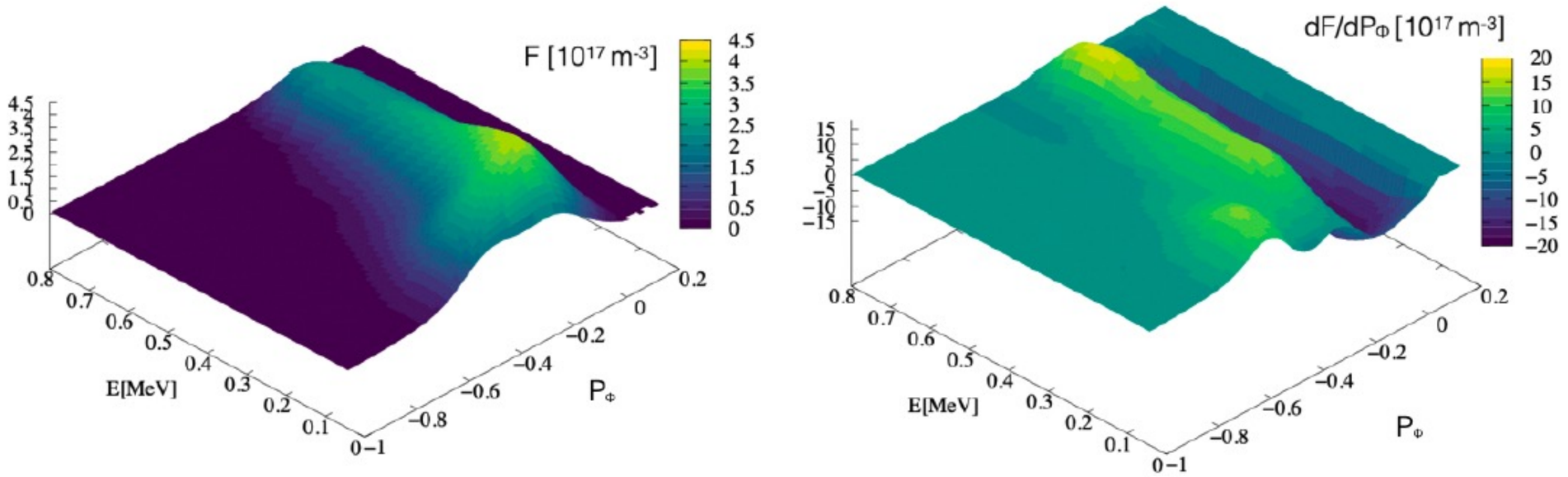
Computed by LIGKA
Using EP Workflow

Distribution function representation

[P. Lauber et al., NF 64, 096010 (2024)]

original marker data as calculated by the NEMO/SPOT package

[Courtesy of Ph. Lauber]



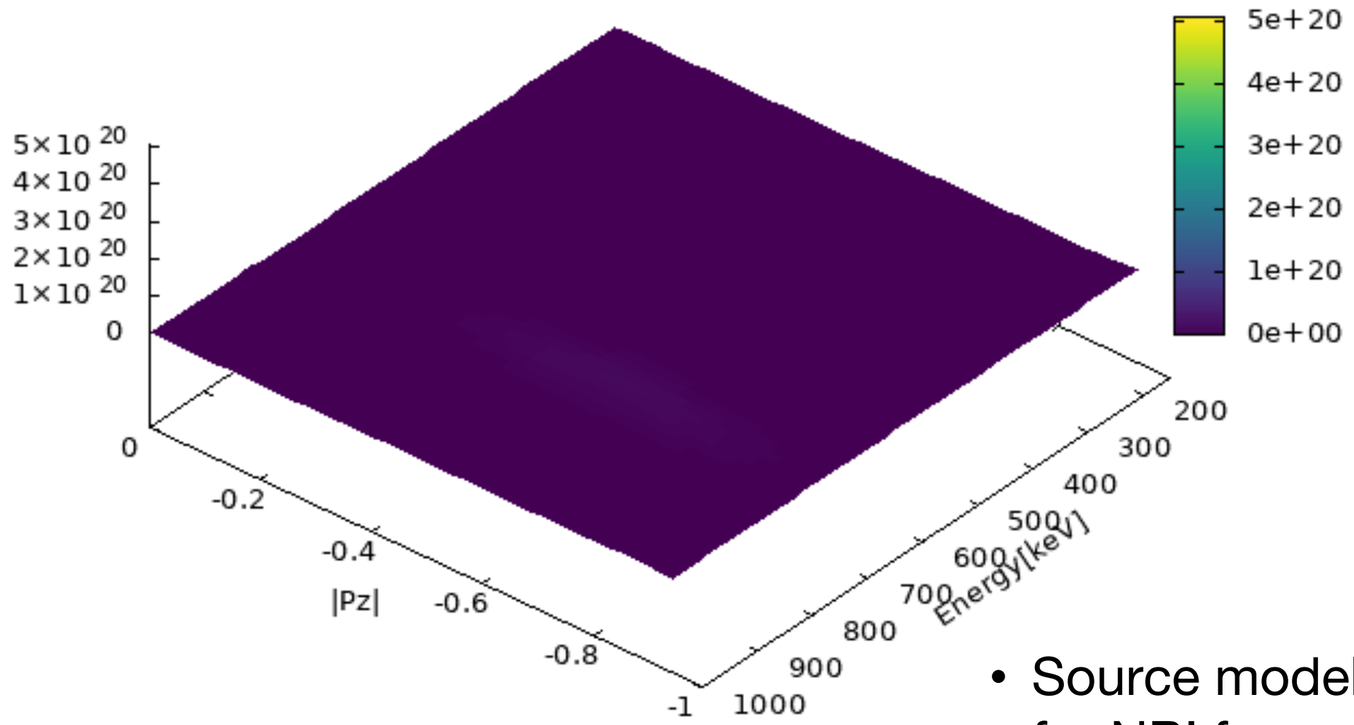
- Binning, smoothing and splining allow to construct regular derivatives in phase space

ATEP 3D code - I

- ATEP: and advanced transport model for energetic particles

[Courtesy G. Meng]
[Invited EPS 2024]

- Initial value problem solved with orbit averaged collision operator:

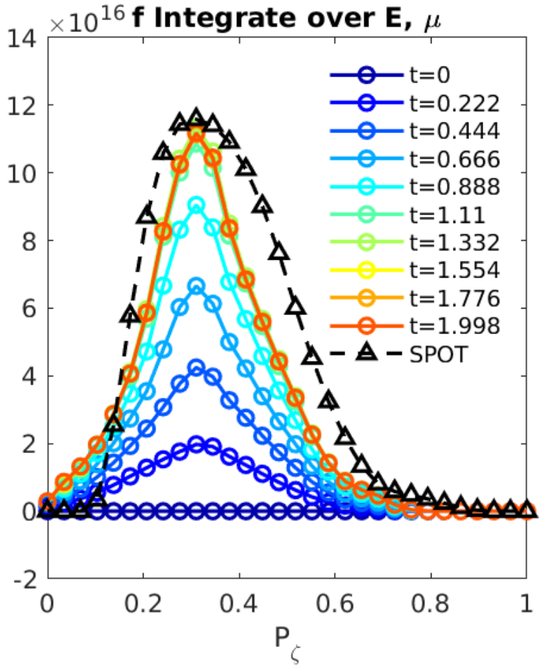


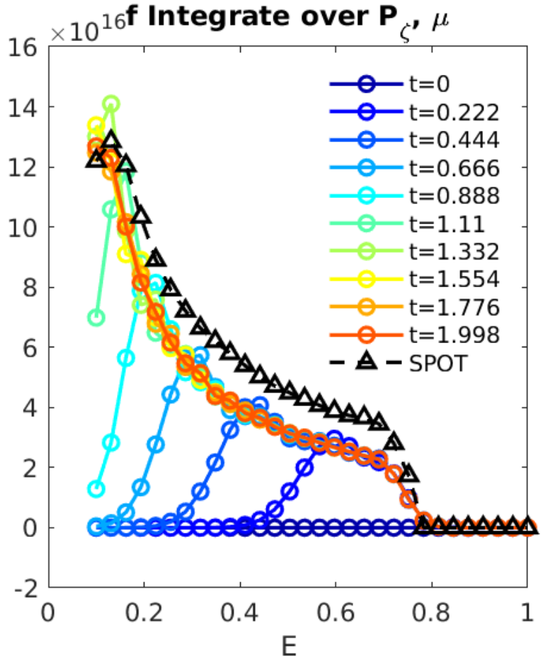
- Source model: Gaussian function for NBI for comparison with SPOT

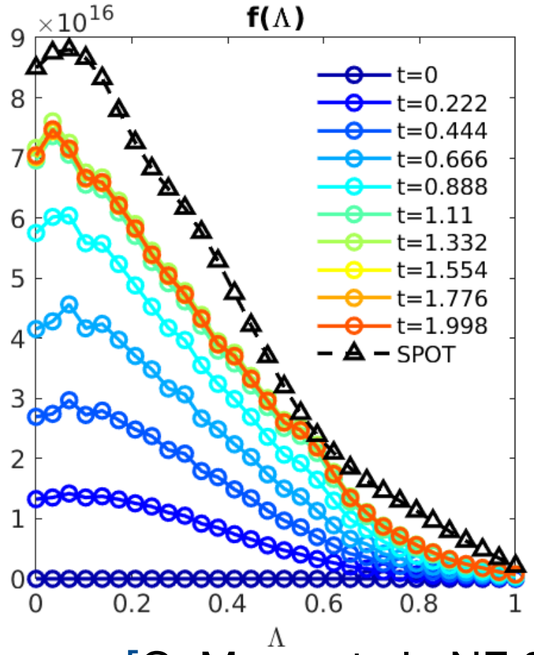
ATEP 3D code - II

- Steady state solution obtained with sources and collisions

[Courtesy G. Meng]
[Invited EPS 2024]







[G. Meng et al., NF 64, 096009 (2024)]

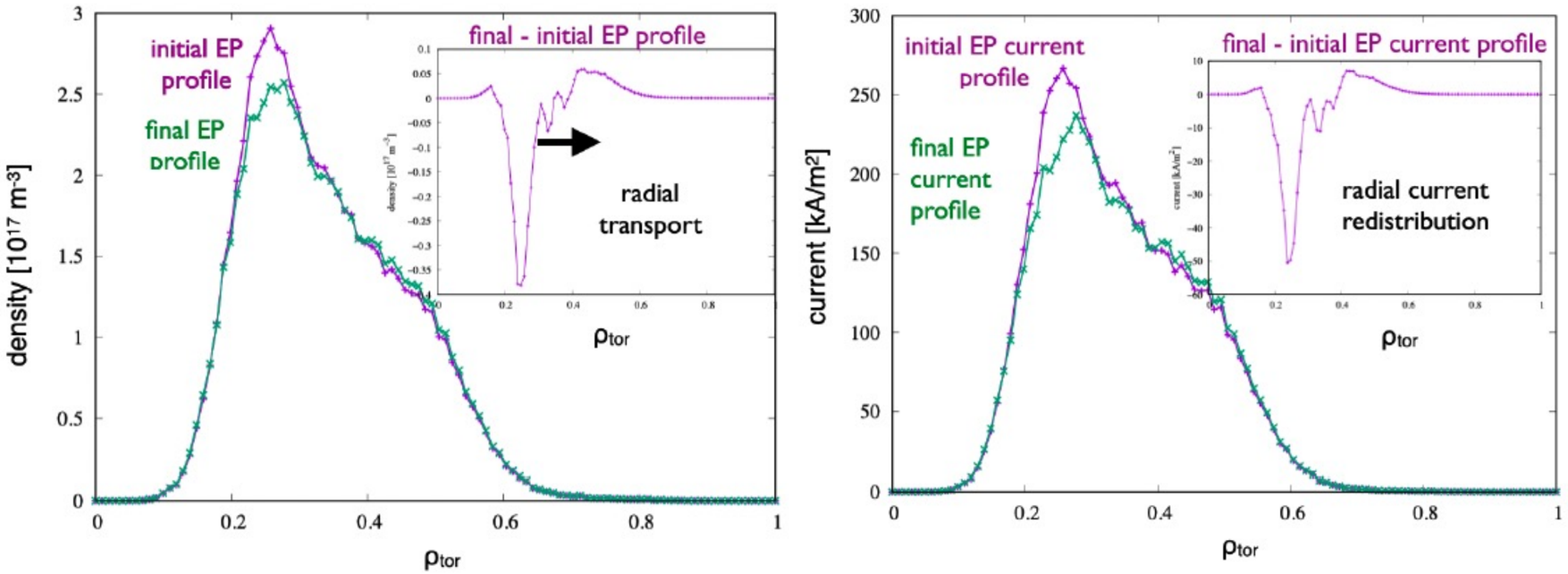
- Source model: Gaussian function for NBI
- Comparison with SPOT, reasonable agreement
- slowed-down in 1 second: transport time scale!
- ATEP-3D, 30 mins/case
- Monte-Carlo code, several days/case

Off-axis beam relaxation in ITER

[P. Lauber et al., NF 64, 096010 (2024)]

ITER 15MA case;
TAE n=13

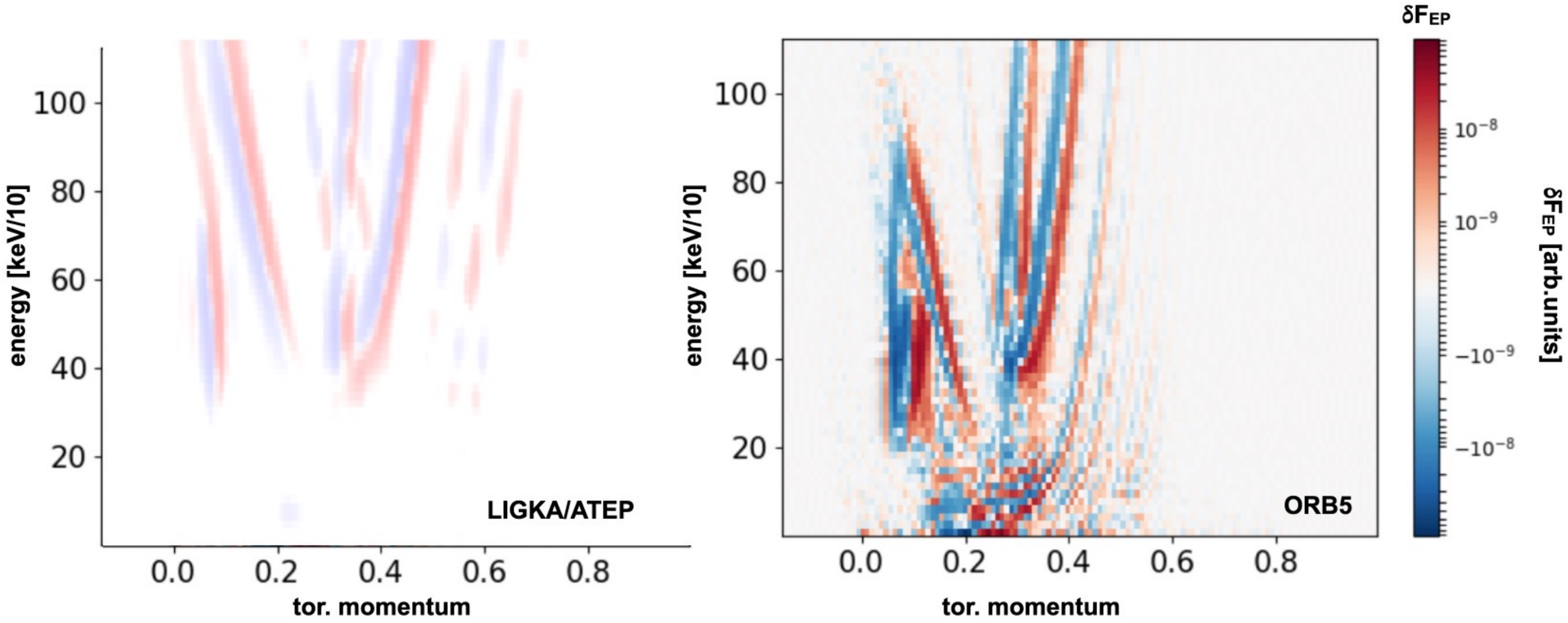
[Courtesy of Ph. Lauber]



Radial projection (ϱtor) of the distribution function of energetic hydrogen particles, #100015/1, initial (as given by NEMO/SPOT) and final state after evolving the PSZS transport equation for 700ms (1000 time steps) with constant-amplitude TAE with $\delta B/B = 10^{-5}$

Verification of phase space fluxes

- Phase space fluxes computed with ATEP 3D and ORB5 demostrate a good level of consistency

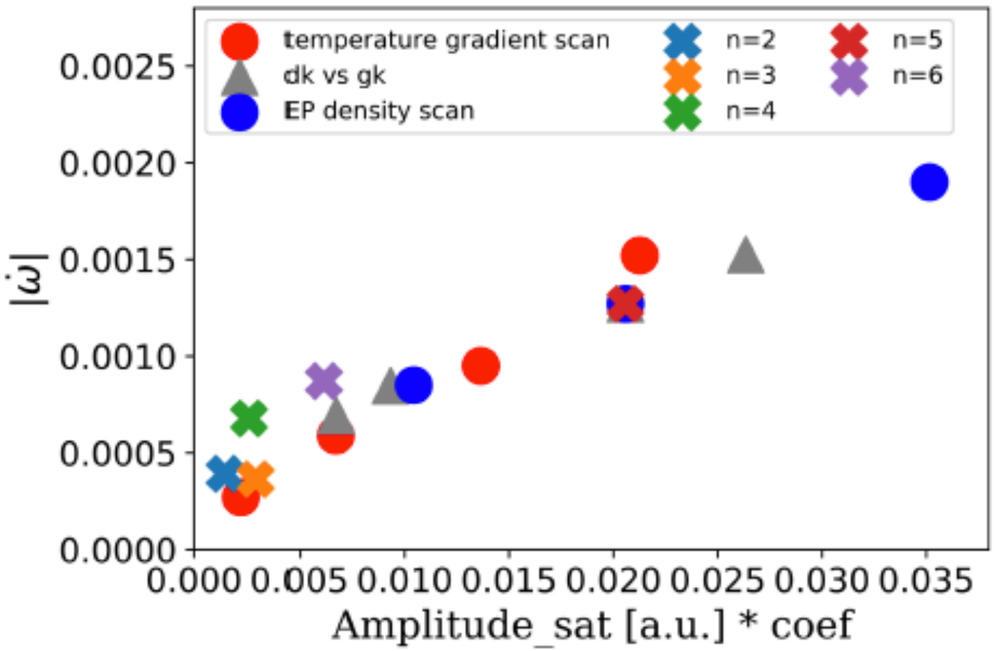


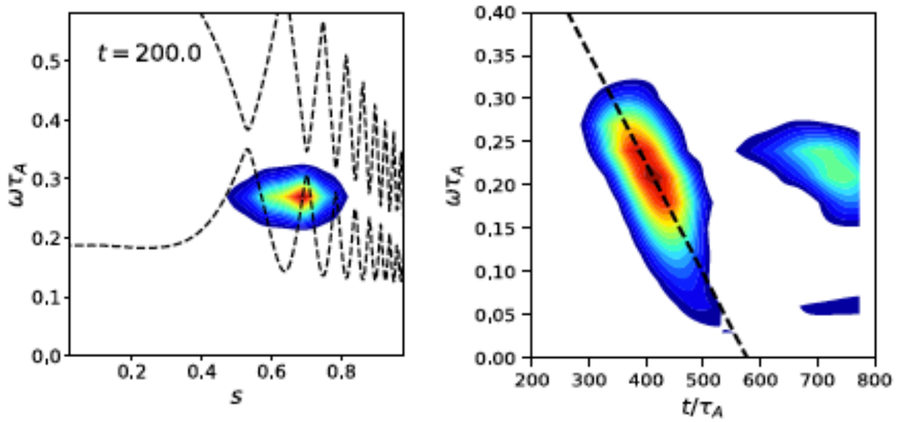
Phase space zonal structure δF_{EP} as function of canonical toroidal momentum and energy for passing particles as calculated by LIGKA/ATEP (left) and ORB5 (right). An ITER NBI case with two TAEs n=18 and n=19 is compared in the non-linear saturation phase.

Numerical simulation of EPM chirping

- PIC simulations in tokamaks show linear scaling of chirping rate with amplitude [X. Wang et al, EPS-DPP invited 2023]

  - **Chirping rate vs. Saturation amplitude**





intensity contour plot

$$\dot{\omega} \simeq \delta \dot{X}_{\perp} \cdot \nabla \omega_{res}$$

← theory prediction

Earth's chorus chirping

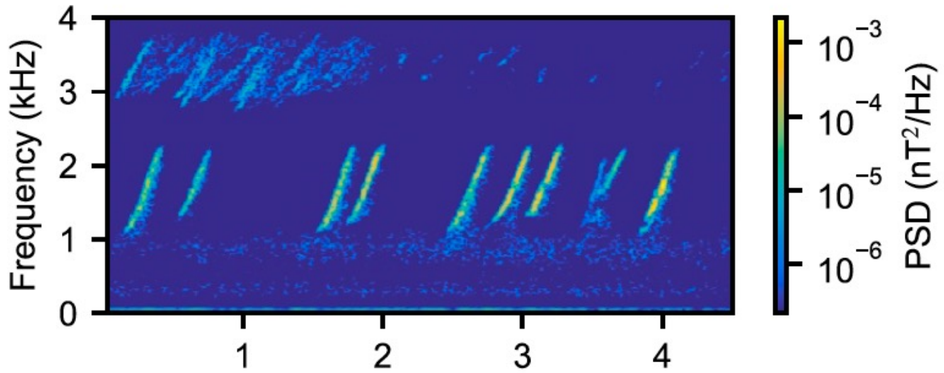
- Adopt the general approach to construct the nonlinear growth rate and frequency shift

$$\frac{\partial \omega}{\partial t} = \pm \frac{1}{2} \frac{\left\langle \left\langle \omega_{trk}^4 \right\rangle \right\rangle^{1/2}}{\left(1 - v_{r\omega}/v_{g\omega}\right)^2}$$

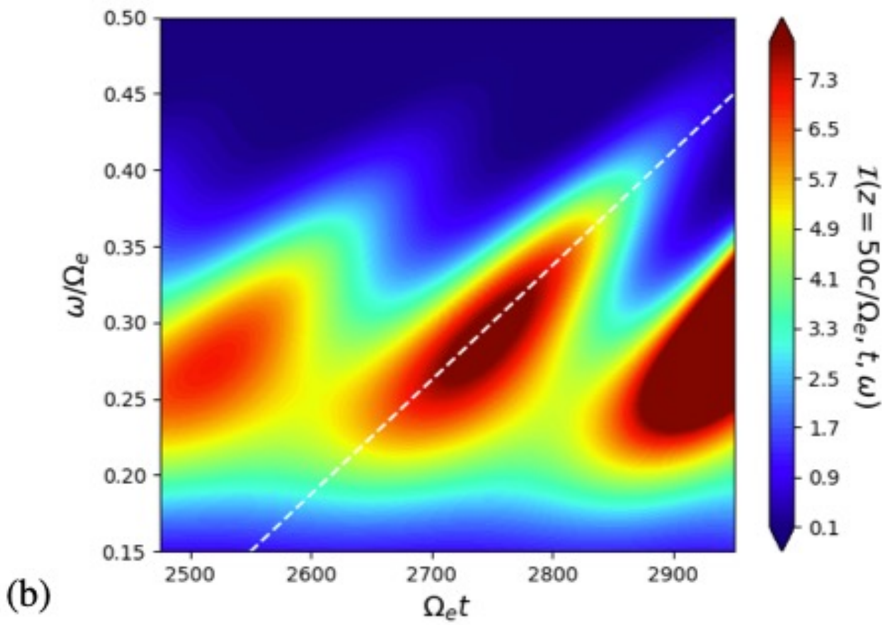
[Vomvoridis et al 1982]

X. Tao, F. Zonca, L. Chen, A "Trap-Release-Amplify" model of Chorus Waves, JGR: Space Physics, 126, e2021JA029585

F. Zonca, X. Tao, L. Chen, Nonlinear dynamics and phase space transport by chorus emission RMPP 5, 8; A theoretical framework of chorus wave excitation, JGR 127, e2021JA029760



Van Allen probe [Mauk et al 2013]



Chorus Power Spectral Densities (PSD)

Earth's chorus chirping

- Adopt the general approach to construct the nonlinear growth rate and frequency shift

$$\frac{\partial \omega}{\partial t} = \pm \frac{1}{2} \frac{\left\langle \left\langle \omega_{trk}^4 \right\rangle \right\rangle^{1/2}}{\left(1 - v_{r\omega}/v_{g\omega}\right)^2}$$

[Vomvoridis et al 1982]

X. Tao, F. Zonca, L. Chen, A "Trap-Release-Amplify" model of Chorus Waves, JGR: Space Physics, 126, e2021JA029585

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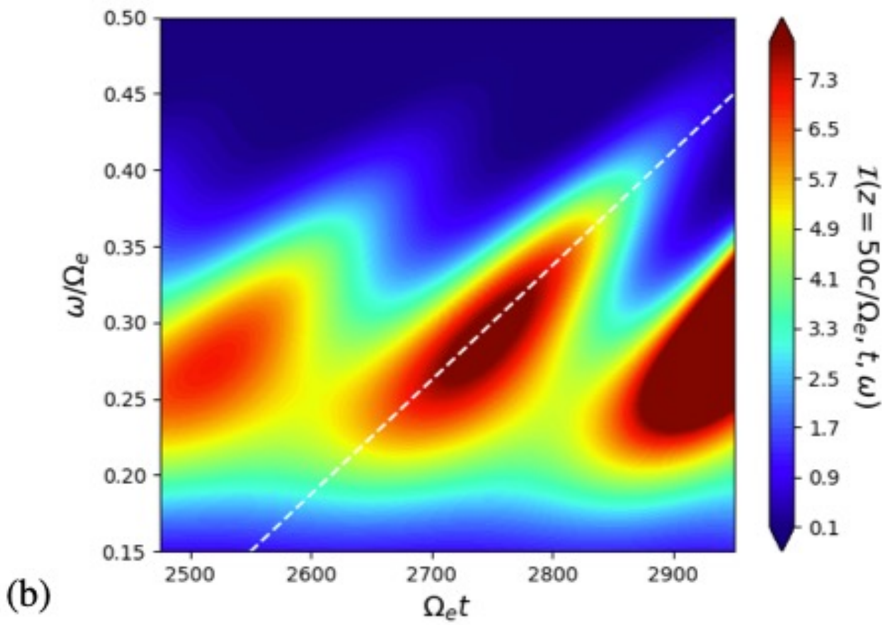
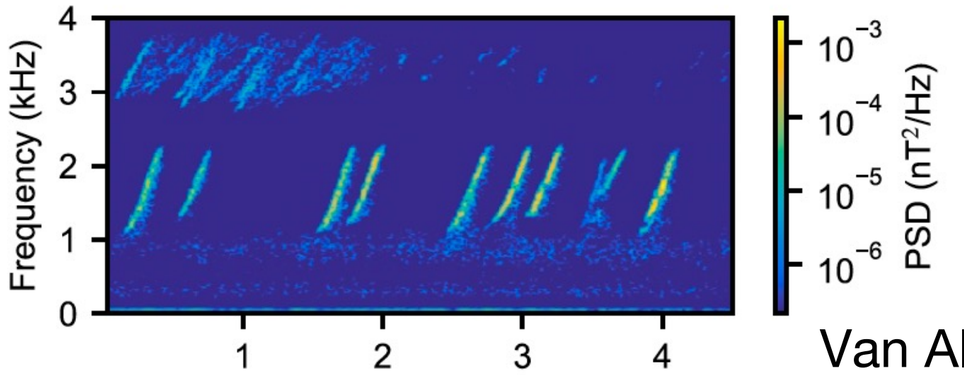




Chorus Power Spectral Densities (PSD)

Universality of chirping process

Van Allen probe [Mauk et al 2013]

Discussion and Conclusions

- There exists an overarching and unified theoretical framework for self-consistent description of fluctuation spectra and corresponding transport in reactor-relevant fusion plasmas

- Numerical applications have been made for selected reference cases and verification of the approach is complete

- Applications to realistic cases of practical interest (ITER, JET, AUG, DTT, etc.) are in progress along with extension to 3D confinement systems [EUROfusion projects ATEP/TSVV#10/G (Lauber/Mishchenko); MAECI-NSFC projects (ENEA-SWIP)]

Main references are available at the CNPS site:
https://www.afs.enea.it/zonca/CNPS/

Extending the GFLDR to short wavelength

- Separate linear and nonlinear responses and project on linear parallel mode structures to derive nonlinear envelope equations [C&Z Rev. Mod. Phys. Review article]

$$\hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n^+ \cdot \boldsymbol{D}\left(r,t,k_{nr},\omega_n\right)\cdot \boldsymbol{A}_n(r,t)e^{iS_n(r,t)} = \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n^+ \cdot \boldsymbol{F}(r,t)$$

linear response — nonlinear response

- Introduced envelope $\boldsymbol{A}_n(r,t) = \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n A_n(r,t)$, with polarization vector $\hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n$, eikonal representation and parallel mode structure, $y_{1,2}(r,\vartheta)$

$$\begin{pmatrix} e\delta\hat{\psi}_n(r,\vartheta;t)/T_{0i} \\ e\delta\hat{\phi}_{\parallel n}(r,\vartheta;t)/T_{0i} \end{pmatrix} \equiv A_n(r,t)e^{iS_n(r,t)} \begin{pmatrix} e_1(r,t)y_1(r,\vartheta) \\ e_2(r,t)y_2(r,\vartheta) \end{pmatrix}$$

$$\delta\hat{\phi}_{\parallel n} \equiv \delta\hat{\phi}_n - \delta\hat{\psi}_n$$

$$\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} |y_{1,2}(r,\vartheta)|^2 \, d\vartheta = 1 \,. \qquad \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n^+ \cdot \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n = 1 \,.$$

Extending the GFLDR to short wavelength

- Nonlinear evolution equation has NLSE-like form

propagation
freq.shift/growth
dispersiveness
nonlinear/forcing

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial t}\left(\frac{\partial D^0_{Rn}}{\partial \omega_n}A_n^2\right)-\frac{\partial}{\partial r}\left(\frac{\partial D^0_{Rn}}{\partial k_{nr}}A_n^2\right)+2D^1_{An}A_n^2-2iD^1_{Rn}A_n^2$$

$$+iA_n\left(\frac{\partial^2 D^0_{Rn}}{\partial k_{nr}^2}+2\frac{\partial \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n^+}{\partial k_{nr}}\cdot\boldsymbol{D}^0_{Rn}\cdot\frac{\partial \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n}{\partial k_{nr}}\right)\frac{\partial^2 A_n}{\partial r^2}=-2ie^{-iS_n}A_n\hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n^+\cdot\boldsymbol{F}$$

$$-\left(\hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n^+\cdot\frac{d}{dt}\hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n-\frac{d}{dt}\hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n^+\cdot\hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n\right)\frac{\partial D^0_{Rn}}{\partial \omega_n}A_n^2+\left(\frac{\partial \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n^+}{\partial \omega_n}\cdot\boldsymbol{D}^0_{Rn}\cdot\frac{\partial \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n}{\partial t}-\frac{\partial \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n^+}{\partial t}\cdot\boldsymbol{D}^0_{Rn}\cdot\frac{\partial \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n}{\partial \omega_n}\right)A_n^2$$

$$-\left(\frac{\partial \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n^+}{\partial k_{nr}}\cdot\boldsymbol{D}^0_{Rn}\cdot\frac{\partial \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n}{\partial r}-\frac{\partial \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n^+}{\partial r}\cdot\boldsymbol{D}^0_{Rn}\cdot\frac{\partial \hat{\boldsymbol{e}}_n}{\partial k_{nr}}\right)A_n^2 .$$

From local dispersion rel.

[FZ etal JPCS 2021]

- By formal manipulation of spectral evolution and assumption on NL term it is possible to reduce this equation to a Stochastic Differential Equation (SDE)

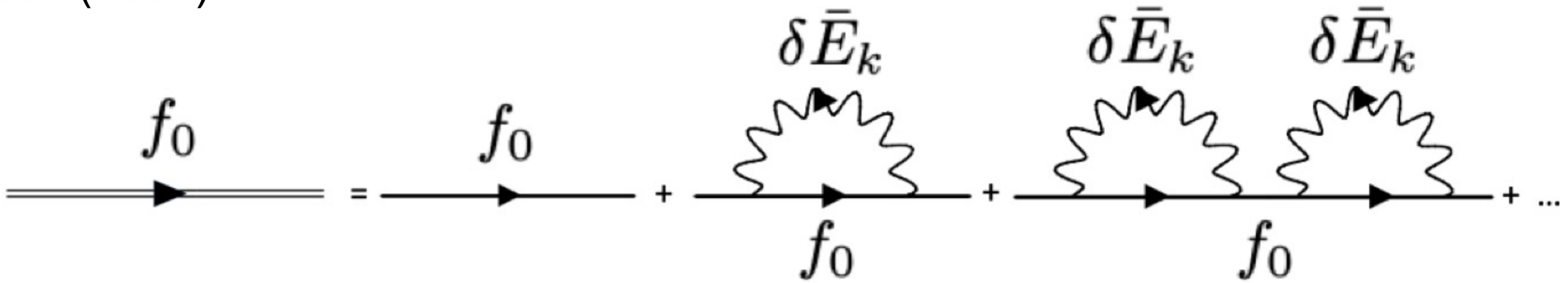
The Dyson-like equation

- Evolution of PSZS are dominated by emission and absorption of same k

$$\partial_t \left(\overline{e^{iQ_z} \bar{F}_0} + \overline{e^{iQ_z} \delta F_z} \right) = -\frac{1}{\tau_b} \frac{\partial}{\partial \psi} \left[\tau_b \overline{e^{iQ_z} \delta \dot{\psi} \delta F} \right]_z - \frac{1}{\tau_b} \frac{\partial}{\partial \mathcal{E}} \left[\tau_b \overline{e^{iQ_z} \delta \dot{\mathcal{E}} \delta F} \right]_z$$

Van Hove L (1955)
Prigoginel(1962)
BalescuR(1963)

- **Slow terms generate "secularities"**
- **Renormalization & Dyson like equation**



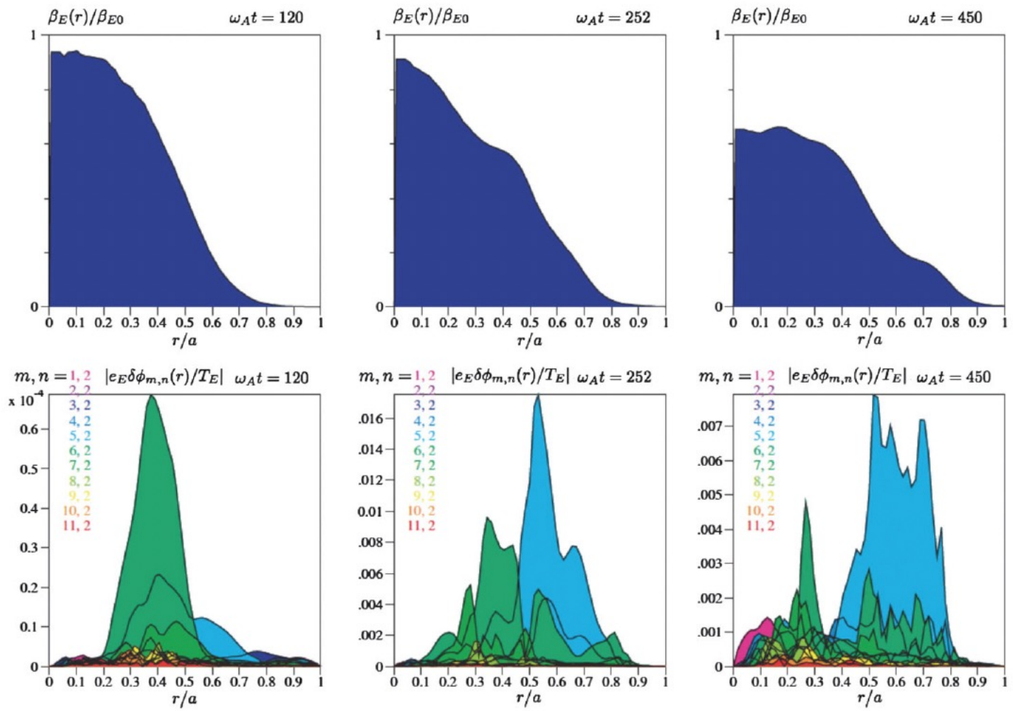
- Principal series of secular terms

The Dyson Schrödinger Model

- Combining the NLSE description of radial envelope and DSE for PSZS one can obtain description of EP avalanches and due to EPM evolution

Z&C equation

[C&Z Rev. Mod. Phys. Review article]



From Vlad et al PPCF 2004

$$\partial_\xi^2 U = \lambda U - 2iU|U|^2$$

$$U(\xi) \equiv e^{i\varphi(\xi)} W(\xi) \begin{cases} W(\xi) = \operatorname{sech}\left[(\sqrt{2}/3)^{1/2}\xi\right], \\ \varphi(\xi) = -2\ln\cosh\left[(\sqrt{2}/3)^{1/2}\xi\right], \\ \lambda = -\sqrt{2}/3 + i4/3 \end{cases}$$

$$\xi - \xi_0 \equiv \frac{k_{n0}}{|sk_\vartheta|}(x - x_0)$$

$$\equiv \frac{k_{n0}}{|sk_\vartheta|}\left(x - |sk_\vartheta|\int_0^t v_g(t')dt'\right), \quad x = |sk_\vartheta|(r - r_0)$$

- Radial group velocity of wave-packet maximizes wave-particle power transfer for chirping rate

$$\dot{\omega} = R\omega_{tr}^2 \qquad R \simeq 1/2$$