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1 **Development of high-resolution multi-scale modelling system**

2 **for simulation of coastal-fluvial urban flooding**

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7

8 **Abstract.** Urban developments in coastal zones are often exposed to natural hazards such as flooding. In this
9 research, a state-of-the-art, multi-scale nested flood (MSN_Flood) model is applied to simulate complex coastal-
10 fluvial urban flooding due to combined effects of tides, surges and river discharges. Cork City on Ireland's
11 southwest coast is a study case. The flood modelling system comprises of a cascade of four dynamically linked
12 models that resolve the hydrodynamics of Cork Harbour and/or its sub region at four scales 90m, 30m, 6m and
13 2m.

14 Results demonstrate that the internalisation of the nested boundary through a use of ghost cells combined with a
15 tailored adaptive interpolation technique creates a highly dynamic moving boundary that permits flooding and
16 drying of the nested boundary. This novel feature of MSN_Flood provides a high degree of choice regarding the
17 location of the boundaries to the nested domain and therefore flexibility in model application. The nested
18 MSN_Flood model through dynamic downscaling facilitates significant improvements in accuracy of model
19 output without incurring the computational expense of high spatial resolution over the entire model domain. The
20 urban flood model provides full characteristics of water levels and flow regimes necessary for flood hazard
21 identification and flood risk assessment.

22

23

24 **Keywords:** Urban flooding; Coastal flooding; Fluvial flooding; Hydrodynamic modelling; Nesting; Moving
25 boundary

26

27

28

29 **1 Introduction**

30 Low lying developments in coastal zones are exposed to natural hazards such as storm surges, waves, tsunamis
31 and/or high river flows which can lead to significant flooding. Coastal flooding can result in substantial
32 economic and social impacts including loss of life, damage to property and disruption of essential services
33 (Brown et al., 2007).

34 Coastal flooding results from a rise of sea water level above normal predicted tide level. On the European
35 Continental Shelf, coastal flooding is associated with storms generated in the Atlantic Ocean that travel through,
36 or in proximity to, the shelf. Storm surges are important consequences of these storms – a temporary water setup
37 resulting from synoptic variation of atmospheric pressure and strong winds blowing towards the shelf causing
38 water to pile up against the coast. Surge physics is well understood in principle (Ponte, 1994); the mechanism of
39 its propagation on the European continental shelf as a response to meteorological conditions (wind stress and
40 atmospheric pressure signal separate) has been explained by Olbert and Hartnett (2010).

41 Flood dynamics due to a combination of multiple process drivers such as tides, surges and river inflows and
42 their interactions is extremely difficult to understand using non-modelling methods (Robins et al., 2011). In
43 recent years the amount of flood modelling work has risen dramatically. Yet the modelling still encounters
44 various problems of which input data such as topography (Mason et al, 2007; Smith, 2002), mesh resolution
45 (Sanders et al, 2010; Fewtrell, 2011; Horritt et al, 2006; Yu and Lane, 2006), bottom roughness (Mason et al.,
46 2003; Horritt, 2000) or modelling framework (Hunter et al., 2008) are of greatest challenge. So far, one of the
47 main issues hampering research into coastal flood modelling has been the lack of topographic data of
48 sufficiently high resolution and accuracy along with highly resolvable efficient models. In the past decade, high
49 resolution topographic has become more available with airborne scanning laser altimetry (LIDAR) technology
50 (Gomes-Pereira and Wicherson, 1999) providing high resolution digital surface maps that can be used as model
51 bathymetry (Marks and Bates, 2000). Although there are still problems with mapping urban areas and
52 considerable post-processing is necessary to extract digital terrain model from digital surface model (Mason at
53 al., 2007), the hydraulic/hydrodynamic models developed using LIDAR data allow them to numerically
54 propagate surge and tidal waves into coastal areas. Model accuracy and computational cost are still issues to be
55 addressed.

56 The most common and simple approach to the modelling of coastal flooding in urban areas is to link (externally
57 or dynamically) longitudinal 1D or latterly averaged 2D hydraulic models with coastal models (e.g. Formaggia,
58 2001; Chen, 2007; Brown et al., 2007). Such a set up has two significant drawbacks. Firstly, 1D/2D hydraulic

59 models work with the assumption that the lateral variations in velocity magnitudes are small, while in reality
60 many coastal floodplains (e.g. urban areas) contain channels that have a significant influence on the
61 development of inundation by providing routes along which storm surges propagate inland (Bates et al., 2005)
62 and therefore may lead to misrepresentation of localized flooding (Cook and Merwade, 2009; Mark et al, 2004).
63 Secondly, numerical errors may be introduced when linking different models with different dimensions resulting
64 from poor conservation of momentum (Yang et al., 2012). There is evidence of proven difficulty in ensuring
65 that each model interprets the model inputs and boundary conditions in the same way (Hunter et al. 2008;
66 Pender and Neelz, 2010).

67 These problems may be overcome by application of a single hydrodynamic model to both coastal waters and
68 coastal floodplains. Although such a model would allow smooth transition of the model solution between
69 coastal waters and floodplains, the full solution at scales appropriate for flood inundation would incur a
70 significant computational cost. On one hand, such models need to extend far enough offshore to capture the
71 development and propagation of surge and to resolve the nonlinear shallow water dynamics (interactions
72 between tides, surges and waves) at a resolution that is commensurate with flow features. On the other hand the
73 model needs to include upstream river channels, tidal flats, low-lying land and urban areas which are susceptible
74 to flooding at very fine resolution. This often results in a model setup that requires a large computational domain
75 of which the area of particular interest (such as floodplains here) comprises only a small percentage. For
76 structured grid models such requirements are often cost prohibitive and the alternative is to use lower resolution
77 at the expense of accuracy. This means that model discretization is performed at scales well below those
78 achievable with LIDAR data (the level of individual buildings in the case of urban flooding) meaning the
79 highly-resolved LIDAR data are not being optimally used (McMillian and Brasington, 2007). Some quite
80 successful attempts have been made using unstructured-grid models allowing selective grid refinement (e.g.
81 Yang et al., 2012; Robins et al., 2011); however, the computational demand of these models is high. A relatively
82 new approach to address this problem in high-resolution flood modelling makes use of continuing advances in
83 computational resources through numerical domain decomposition and multi core architecture runs (Sanders et
84 al., 2010). This method, however, requires substantial computational resources not commonly available yet.

85 In reality the modelling of coastal flooding (particularly in an urban environment) is a multi-scale problem that
86 requires accurate solution at various scales ranging from coastal sea or estuary scale down to a dense street
87 network of the inundated urban area. In the case of single rectilinear grid models, which are still the most
88 commonly used hydrodynamic models, this spatial resolution problem may be overcome by grid nesting; this

89 involves embedding higher resolution grids within a lower resolution global large-scale grid model. Such a
90 solution allows users to specify high resolution in a sub-region of the model domain without incurring the
91 computational expense of fine resolution over the entire domain. Nonetheless, the nested model for simulation
92 of floodplains must be very carefully chosen due to the flooding and drying properties of such zones; most
93 nested models developed to date do not incorporate flooding and drying as they have been developed
94 specifically for large-scale application where this phenomenon is not important (e.g. ROMS, Haidvogel et al.,
95 2008) or, even if they incorporate flooding and drying such as Mike21 (DHI Software, 2001) flooding and
96 drying of open boundaries is prohibited. This problem has been recently resolved in the multi-scale nested flood
97 (MSN_Flood) model of Nash and Hartnett (2010) which allows flooding and drying both within the domain and
98 along boundaries, while maintaining accuracy and computational efficiency. This model is ideally suited for
99 high-resolution modelling of urban flooding and, therefore, has been adopted for further development in this
100 research.

101 In this context, the authors present in this paper for the first time the application of the state-of-the-art flood
102 model, MSN_Flood, to complex coastal-fluvial urban flooding in the estuary-lying Cork City which is subject to
103 the combined effects of tides, surges and river discharges. The primary objectives of this paper then are to
104 present the development of this model and to critically examine its capability to forecast/hindcast the urban
105 inundation. It will be demonstrated in this paper that through the novel solution to the nested boundary, the so-
106 called moving boundary, the nested model allows simulation of the propagation of open sea conditions up to the
107 tidally active river upstream as well as rural and urban floodplains in a computationally efficient manner without
108 compromising model accuracy or stability.

109 The modelling framework proposed in this research comprises of a cascade of multiple nested models that
110 dynamically downscale large scale, coastal sea processes to the fine resolution scale of urban environments.
111 MSN_Flood was applied to the area of Cork City, Ireland, and its coastal floodplains; Cork City is frequently
112 subject to coastal-fluvial flooding. An extreme flood event of November 2009 that resulted in approximately
113 €100 million of flood damage in the city and its surrounds was chosen as a test case. The main features of this
114 accurate and efficient hydraulic modelling are illustrated through the Cork City application. In particular,
115 wetting and drying routine, computational efficiency and accuracy of simulated water elevations and velocity
116 fields are subject to in-depth analysis in this research.

117 This paper is organized as follows: section 1 describes the motivation for this research and related work; section
118 2 describes modelling, model setup and datasets; section 3 presents and compares numerical model results with

119 observed datasets; section 4 discusses the advantages the MSN_Flood modelling system, and finally section 5
120 contains conclusions from the research.

121

122 **2 Methodology**

123 In this section a modelling system for coastal flood inundation is described along with the datasets and model
124 setup for the Cork City flood event.

125

126 **2.1 Modelling framework**

127 Many flood inundation events in urban environments have been modelled using simple hydraulic models, such
128 as HEC-RAS (Pappenberger et al., 2005) or LISFLOOD-FP (Bates and De Roo, 2000), incapable of simulating
129 flood water velocities required for accurate determination of flood wave propagation routes and assessment of
130 risks associated with a certain flood flow magnitude. A more realistic analysis can be achieved using a
131 hydrodynamic model that resolves both the continuity and momentum equations throughout the entire domain.

132 Here, the MSN_Flood model was applied to Cork City using a cascade of four nested grids to describe
133 hydrodynamics at various scales with particular interest in water elevations and velocity fields over the
134 inundated area. This nested model facilitates the refinement of spatial resolution in Cork Harbour from 90 m at
135 the outer reaches of the harbour down to 2 m in the streets of Cork City.

136

137 **2.2 Hydrodynamics**

138 MSN is a two-dimensional, depth-averaged, finite difference model and its solver is based on the alternate
139 direction implicit (ADI) solver developed by Falconer (1984) (Lin and Falconer, 1997; Nash and Hartnett,
140 2010). The governing differential equations used in the model to determine the water elevation and depth
141 integrated velocity fields in the horizontal plane are based on integrating the three-dimensional continuity and
142 Navier-Stokes equations over the water column depth. Assuming vertical accelerations are negligible compared
143 with gravity and that the Reynolds stresses in the vertical plane can be represented by a Boussinesq
144 approximation, then the depth integrated continuity and x-direction momentum equations are of the following
145 form (Falconer and Chen, 1991):

146

147

148

149 Continuity equation

$$150 \quad \frac{\partial \zeta}{\partial t} + \frac{\partial q_x}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial q_y}{\partial y} = 0 \quad (1)$$

151

152 Momentum equation in x-direction

$$153 \quad \frac{\partial q_x}{\partial t} + \beta \left[\frac{\partial U q_x}{\partial x} + \frac{\partial U q_y}{\partial y} \right] = f q_y - g H \frac{\partial \zeta}{\partial x} + \frac{\rho_a C^* W_x (W_x^2 + W_y^2)^{1/2}}{\rho} \quad (2)$$

154

$$155 \quad - \frac{g U (U^2 + V^2)^{1/2}}{C^2} + 2 \frac{\partial}{\partial x} \left[\varepsilon H \frac{\partial U}{\partial x} \right] + \frac{\partial}{\partial y} \left[\varepsilon H \left[\frac{\partial U}{\partial y} + \frac{\partial V}{\partial x} \right] \right]$$

156 where, t = time

157 U, V = depth-averaged velocity components in the x,y directions

158 q_x, q_y = depth integrated volumetric flux components in the x,y directions ($q_x = UH$, $q_y = VH$)

159 H = total water depth

160 β = momentum correction factor for non-uniform vertical velocity profile

161 f = Coriolis parameter ($= 2\omega \sin \phi$, where ω = angular velocity of the earth's rotation and ϕ =
162 geographical latitude)

163 g = gravitational acceleration

164 ρ_a, ρ = air and fluid densities respectively

165 C^* = air-water interfacial resistance coefficient

166 W_x, W_y = wind velocity components in x,y directions

167 C = Chezy bed roughness coefficient

168 ε = depth mean eddy viscosity

169

170

171 2.3 Nesting structure and procedure

172 MSN_Flood consists of one outer coarse grid called the parent grid (PG) into which one or more inner fine grids

173 (child grids, CG) are one-way nested. The model also enables multiple nesting such that a child grid may also be

174 a parent to another child. In this way, multi-scale nesting can be specified enabling high spatial resolution in
 175 areas of interest. PG and CG models are dynamically coupled and synchronous. An overview of the nesting
 176 procedure is schematically presented in Fig. 1. As can be seen, the time integration is a bottom-up approach
 177 where PG can be advanced in time only when all of its children are integrated to the parent current time. The
 178 ADI solution technique to solve the governing continuity and momentum equations requires the sub-division of
 179 each timestep into two half-timesteps. The nesting procedure, for each nesting level, is summarized in the
 180 following 5 steps:

- 181 1. integrate outermost parent grid one timestep ($t+\Delta t_p$)
- 182 2. extract parent grid data and interpolate (spatially and temporally) along child grid boundary to next time
 183 levels of child grid ($t+\frac{1}{2}\Delta t_c$) and ($t+\Delta t_c$)
- 184 3. integrate child grid one timestep ($t+\Delta t_c$)
- 185 4. repeat Steps 2 and 3 so that the child grid is synchronised to the current timestep of parent grid ($t+\Delta t_p$)
- 186 5. return to Step 1 and continue.

187 The nesting procedure is similar in principle to other nested models (Holt et al., 2009; Korres and Lascaratos,
 188 2003; Nittis et al., 2006) but the uniqueness of MSN_Flood is a novel approach to boundary formulation
 189 through an incorporation of ghost cells in a manner that the nested boundary operates as an internal boundary.
 190 Ghost cells (GC) are specified adjacent to nested boundaries so that the boundary configuration consist of two
 191 rows/columns of CG cells: internal boundary cells and the adjacent exterior ghost cells. A schematic of the
 192 general configuration of the nested boundary is shown in Fig. 2. In this internal boundary approach, PG
 193 boundary data is specified to both the ghost cells outside the CG domain and to the internal boundary cells
 194 allowing the governing equations of motion at the internal boundary grid cells to be formulated and solved in
 195 the same way as interior grid cells. This enables accurate specification and conservation of incoming fluxes of
 196 mass and momentum along the boundaries of the nests. To demonstrate benefits of this approach the finite
 197 difference formulation for the advective term in the momentum equation, which is key to momentum
 198 conservation, at boundary cells becomes:

$$\begin{aligned}
 200 \quad \frac{\partial U q_x}{\partial x} = & \left[\frac{[U(x+\Delta x, y)+U(x, y)]}{2} \cdot \frac{[q_x(x+\Delta x, y)+q_x(x, y)]}{2} \right. \\
 201 \quad & \left. - \frac{[U(x, y)+U(x-\Delta x, y)]}{2} \cdot \frac{[q_x(x, y)+q_x(x-\Delta x, y)]}{2} \right] \quad (3)
 \end{aligned}$$

202 For comparison, in a boundary formulation without ghost cells, the derivative $\partial U q_x / \partial x$ would be set to zero
203 as ghost cell grid points $U(x + \Delta x, y)$ or $U(x - \Delta x, y)$ would not exist, therefore momentum would not be
204 conserved between parent grid and child grid.

205 An important feature of the nesting approach in MSN_Flood is the implementation of moving boundaries along
206 the boundary of the nested domains. The flooding and drying routine originally developed in by Falconer and
207 Chen (1991) is implemented in MSN_Flood; this boundary formulation allows the model to be applied to areas
208 of inter-tidal zone or coastal flooding where there is typically a considerable degree of alternate flooding and
209 drying throughout the domain. The flooding and drying routine by Falconer and Chen has been extensively
210 tested in laboratory conditions and natural waterbodies and shown to be stable and robust. However, when the
211 nested boundary was subject to flooding and drying, despite the overall improvement in mass and momentum
212 conservation along the nested boundary, significant errors were found to occur near the boundary in areas of
213 flooding and drying. This problem was overcome by implementation of an adaptive interpolation scheme which
214 uses linear interpolation or zeroth-order interpolation depending on the status (wet or dry) and the configuration
215 of parent grids along the boundary interface. More details of the method can be found in Nash (2010). This
216 adaptive interpolation in combination with ghost cell and internal boundary formulation ensures the stable
217 flooding and drying of boundary cells.

218 The ghost cell formulation of the boundary was found to significantly reduce boundary formulation errors, one
219 of three error sources in nested models as classified by Nash and Hartnett (2010). Boundary formulation errors
220 arise from simplification of mathematical formulation of the governing equations of motion at open boundary
221 grid cells. Two other sources of errors at the boundary interface are boundary specification errors and boundary
222 operation errors. While the former errors arise from incorrect boundary data, and can be minimised by locating
223 nested boundary in areas of high PG accuracy, boundary operator errors result from the use of an inadequate
224 interpolation schemes and/or boundary condition for prescribing PG data to the CG boundary and are more
225 challenging to reduce. During the course of model developments various interpolation schemes were tested
226 including a zeroth order scheme, a linear scheme, a mass-conserving quadratic scheme and an inverse distance
227 weighted scheme. The linear interpolation was found to be most accurate in both time and space and therefore
228 was implemented in the model (Nash, 2010). With regards to the boundary conditions, three different types of
229 boundary conditions were tested, namely: Dirichlet condition, flow relaxation condition and radiation condition.
230 Extensive numerical testing showed that the most stable and accurate model solution could be achieved by

231 implementing the Dirichlet boundary condition. Accuracies of various interpolation and boundary condition
232 schemes were analysed and compared in Nash and Hartnett (2014).

233 Reduction in boundary errors due to the accurate development of boundary operators and more accurate
234 mathematical formulation of the nested boundary yielded significant improvements in conservation of mass and
235 momentum between parent and child grids. This in turn improved model stability at the nested boundary and
236 CG accuracy. These features make MSN_Flood highly applicable to modelling complex coastal flooding events
237 as in the current test case, where the nested boundary is located in the flooding and drying zone, and therefore
238 its length changes dynamically throughout the flooding event. This non-continuous moving boundary feature is
239 the subject of in-depth investigation in this research.

240

241

242 **2.4 Study area description and model setup**

243 Cork Harbour, in the southwest of Ireland, is a shallow (average depth 8.4 m) meso-tidal estuary with typical
244 spring tide ranges of 4.2m. Return levels of tides for 2- and 100-year return periods are 4.45 m and 4.52 m
245 above chart datum, respectively, while surge residual return levels for the same return periods are 0.56 m and
246 0.85 m, respectively (Olbert and Hartnett, 2013). The Cork Harbour domain is presented in Fig. 3. Cork City is a
247 densely populated urban area of approximately 120,000 people, located at the mouth of the River Lee which
248 drains into Cork Harbour. Tidal components of flooding in Cork City are due to combinations of high
249 astronomical tides and storm surges generated in the open ocean and propagating into the Harbour and
250 throughout the city streets. The River Lee corridor flows from west to east along the post-glacial valley into the
251 Lee proper, through Cork City, into Lough Mahon, Cork Harbour and south into Atlantic Ocean. In the city, the
252 River Lee bifurcates into the north and south channels around the Mardyke area and merges again at the eastern
253 edge of the city. The river flows for 2- and 100-year return periods are 208.6 and 307.7 m³/s, respectively
254 (Halcrow, 2008). Sea water intrusion up the river is bounded by a weir located 8km upstream from the river
255 mouth.

256 MSN_Flood was used in this research to develop a coastal-urban hydraulic model capable of simulating fluvial
257 and coastal flooding in the Cork City. The model grid needs to be setup to include not only river channel and
258 urban floodplains but also offshore waters necessary to resolve the non-linear hydrodynamics. The Cork
259 Harbour/City model is therefore configured as a four level cascade of dynamically linked nested grids that
260 resolve the hydrodynamics of the region at spatial scales of 90m, 30m, 6m and 2m. Each coarser grid provides

261 boundary conditions to the next finer grid, i.e. the 90m grid provides boundary conditions to the 30m grid and
262 the 30 m grid provides boundary conditions to the 6m grid, etc. Fig. 4a illustrates the extent of each grid and the
263 nesting structure, while Fig. 4b shows details of the high resolution 6m grid and the 2m urban flood grid.

264 The parent grid (PG90) representing the full domain of Cork Harbour was resolved at a grid spacing of 90m. At
265 3:1 nesting ratio, the first child grid (CG30), completely embedded within the parent model domain, has a grid
266 spacing of 30m. The CG30 model provides boundary conditions to a 6m grid (CG06) at a 5:1 nesting ratio. The
267 domains of CG30 and CG06 models only partially overlap. Water elevations computed on CG30 are passed to
268 the eastern boundary of CG06 while River Lee flow data are specified at the western boundary of CG06.
269 Finally, the ultra-high resolution 2m child grid (CG02) is entirely embedded within CG06 and is used to
270 simulate urban flooding of Cork City. The nesting ratios of 3:1 and 5:1 used in this setup are in line with nesting
271 ratios used in other studies (e.g. Spall and Holland, 1991). Configurations of the nested models are summarized
272 in Table 1.

273 Open boundary conditions to the MSN_Flood parent grid, PG90, are provided as total water elevations
274 containing tidal and surge signals extracted from an ocean model of the North East Atlantic (Olbert and
275 Hartnett, 2010). The surface boundary of the MSN_Flood model is forced by 10-m wind fields and mean sea
276 level atmospheric pressure obtained from the regional analysis ERA-40 model (Uppala et al., 2005) and
277 operational model first-guess dataset (Simmons et al., 1989). River Lee discharges from gauge station 19011
278 were provided by Office of Public Works (OPW), Ireland. Admiralty Chart data were used to develop the
279 bathymetric model of Cork Harbour, while high resolution LiDAR data provided by the OPW were used to
280 construct the high resolution urban digital bathymetric model. The channel of the River Lee was included in the
281 model based on cross-sectional survey data also provided by the OPW from an extensive survey of the River
282 Lee catchment in 2008.

283

284 **2.5 Verification**

285 The numerical model skill was assessed by statistically comparing observations and model solutions. Following
286 statistical measures were used:

- 287 • root mean square error

$$288 \quad RMSE = \left[\frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N (Y_n - X_n)^2 \right]^{1/2} \quad (4)$$

- 289 • root mean square difference between model and observations

290
$$RMSdiff = \left[\frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N (Y_n)^2 \right]^{1/2} - \left[\frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N (X_n)^2 \right]^{1/2} \quad (5)$$

- 291 • centered root mean square difference

292
$$RMSD = \left[\frac{1}{N} \sum_{n=1}^N \left((Y_n - \bar{Y}) - (X_n - \bar{X}) \right)^2 \right]^{1/2} \quad (6)$$

293 where \bar{X} and \bar{Y} are the mean values of variables X and Y , respectively, for N observations. These
 294 measures were also used to inter-compare time-series of models of different resolutions.

295 The spatially comparative measures between various models are based on spatial distribution of errors between
 296 fine and coarse resolution models and are quantified using following expressions:

- 297 • tidally-averaged relative errors

298
$$RE_T = \frac{\sum_{n=1}^N |Y_n - X_n|}{\sum_{n=1}^N |X_n|} \cdot 100 \quad (7)$$

- 299 • domain-averaged relative error

300
$$RE_D = \frac{RE_T}{M} \quad (8)$$

- 301 • absolute error

302
$$AE_T = \frac{\sum_{n=1}^N |Y_n - X_n|}{N} \quad (9)$$

- 303 • relative difference

304
$$RD = \frac{|X_n - Y_n|}{X_n} \quad (10)$$

305 where X and Y are higher and coarser resolution solutions, respectively, n is the output time over a tidal
 306 cycle, $N=25$ is the total number of tidal cycles and M is the number of discrete points in space.

307

308 **3 Results**

309 Showcasing the capability of the multilevel nesting integrated system to accurately simulate the extent and level
 310 of urban flooding is central to this research. MSN_Flood has been extensively tested in both laboratory settings

311 (against physical tidal models) and natural open harbours. In this research, a comprehensive validation of the
312 model in a coastal flood application to Cork Harbour and the urban environment of Cork City is presented.
313 Initial evaluation of model accuracy is carried out at each of the four levels of nesting; both modelled water
314 elevations and velocities are compared to available field data. The assessment of the model skill in simulation of
315 urban flooding is carried out for the November 2009 coastal-fluvial flooding of Cork City. In this application,
316 the city streets and open areas are treated as hydraulics channels and plains that can be inundated depending on
317 the tide, surge and fluvial conditions. This is a highly complex hydrodynamic region to model and, therefore,
318 represents a robust test of the model.

319

320

321 **3.1 Validation of the nesting procedure**

322 **3.1.1 PG90 model**

323 Firstly, the performance of the low resolution 90m parent grid (PG90) model was assessed. Figure 5 compares
324 current velocities simulated by the PG90 model with measured data at Passage West in Cork Harbour over a
325 spring tidal cycle (see Fig. 3 for point P1 location). Results show that although pattern of currents through flood
326 and ebb conditions are relatively well predicted, the slack water conditions, where velocities are generally
327 smaller, are not reproduced correctly by the PG90 model. A higher resolution single grid (SG30) model at 30m
328 grid spacing was developed to test the accuracy of PG90. The same domain extents (Fig. 4) and the same
329 physical conditions were specified to the SG30 and PG90 models. As shown in Fig. 5 an increased resolution of
330 the model significantly improves model predictions throughout the tidal cycle and particularly during periods of
331 slack water.

332 The spatial distribution of PG model error was quantified by calculating the tidally-averaged relative errors
333 RE_T expressing a percentage error in a PG solution relative to a higher resolution SG reference solution
334 (Equation 7). Figure 6 shows the distribution of RE_T in PG velocities in Cork Harbour; it can be seen that the
335 errors generated by the PG model are well over 30% at certain locations within the harbour (harbour entrance,
336 along the coastline, narrow channels and estuaries) so increasing the resolution from 90m to 30m leads to
337 significant reduction in the error. However, improvements in accuracy due to higher spatial resolution come at a
338 high computational cost which for the SG model (80min for 50hrs run) is nine times that of the PG model (9min
339 for 50 hrs run). The use of nested model is then a justifiable and favourable solution.

340 In the course of extensive validation, the timeseries of PG90 and SG30 were also inter-compared. Figure 7
341 shows water elevations and current velocities in Lough Mahon (see Fig. 3 for point C1 location). Water
342 elevations computed by both models are in very good agreement. In contrast, current velocities are significantly
343 overpredicted by the PG90 model. Linear regression of current speeds of PG90 against SG30 solution is shown
344 in Fig. 8. As can be seen from this figure the correlation coefficient between PG90 and SG30 is 0.89 while slope
345 and intercept are $m=1.24$ and $c=0.03$, respectively.

346

347 **3.1.2 CG30 model**

348 The selection of a child grid domain configuration is sensitive to the location of boundaries that may affect the
349 overall stability and performance of the nested model solution. Suitable CG boundaries must be located in areas
350 of low PG inaccuracy and at a sufficient distance from the area of interest as location of the boundary close to
351 the area of interest may result in boundary errors propagating into the area causing the accuracy of the solution
352 to deteriorate. On the other hand, boundaries need to be sufficiently close to the area of interest in order to
353 minimize the domain size (computational cost).

354 The first level child grid, CG30, was located in the north-west part of Cork Harbour with the centrally located
355 Lough Mahon (directly feeding to the River Lee estuary) being the area of interest. The boundaries for the CG30
356 domain were chosen based on the RE_T distribution plot for the PG90 current velocities presented in Fig. 6. The
357 upper section of Passage West, connecting Lough Mahon with Lower Harbour, was selected as a suitable
358 southern boundary (SB) due to its relatively low RE_T while the closest suitable location for the eastern
359 boundary (EB) was at a much greater distance from Lough Mahon due to generally high PG inaccuracies in the
360 North Channel.

361 The accuracy of the CG30 boundary location was assessed by comparing the net fluxes of mass and momentum
362 across the corresponding interfaces in the PG90, SG30 and CG30 models. Net fluxes were calculated normal to
363 boundaries. Mass and momentum fluxes through the SB and EB boundaries are compared in Fig. 9 and 10,
364 respectively. It can be seen that the predominant forcing-boundary for the CG30 domain is the SB boundary.
365 The tidally-averaged errors in PG90 fluxes relative to the SG30 were approximately 4% for both mass and
366 momentum indicating a high level of PG90 accuracy. At the EB boundary, the PG90 accuracy was slightly
367 lower resulting in error in PG90 mass flux of 5% and momentum flux of 10%. However, this boundary
368 accounted for a smaller portion of the total boundary forcing, and its distant location from the area of interest
369 allowed boundary errors more time to dissipate. The tidally-averaged errors in CG30 fluxes (both mass and

370 momentum) relative to PG90 fluxes were less than 2% at both boundaries, demonstrating high levels of
371 conservation from parent grid to child grid.

372 Relative error analysis was also carried out for the entire CG30 model domain with respect to water elevations
373 and velocities, and results of these analyses are summarized in Table 2. The domain-averaged relative error
374 (Equation 8) in the PG90 water elevations relative to the SG30 were 5.9% while in the CG30 model this error
375 was reduced to 1.1%. The extent of the domains with RE_T greater than 1% was 94% for PG90 and 28% for
376 CG30. The absolute error (Equation 9) was also calculated. AE_T in water level significantly decreased from
377 8cm in the PG90 to 1.2 cm in the CG30. In relation to current velocities, the RE_D was reduced from a large
378 value of 22.4% in PG90 to just 0.5% in CG30; while RE_T values exceeding 5% were found in 72% and 4% of
379 the PG90 and CG30 domains, respectively.

380 As shown in Fig. 7, timeseries of water elevations and current speed show very good agreement between SG30
381 and CG30 throughout the tidal cycle. This indicates significant improvement in the accuracy of velocity
382 computation using the high resolution nested CG30 and is verified by the linear regression analysis shown in
383 Fig. 8. The superiority of CG30 over PG90 model when compared to SG30 is clear and confirmed by a
384 correlation coefficient of 0.99 compared to 0.89. The slope and intercept were also improved for CG30 when
385 compared to PG90; with $m=1.01$ and $c=-0.01$ the CG30 against SG30 model solutions lie approximately on the
386 45° line.

387 These results demonstrate that the application of the nested high resolution model results in significant
388 improvement in the accuracy of the model solution over the lower resolution PG solution. Similar to the
389 improvement in model accuracy, an equally significant reduction in computational effort was achieved. For
390 example, the application of MSN_Flood model to level 1 domain nesting yields 21 minutes simulation time for
391 the PG90-CG30 model; this is contrasted by 80 minutes simulation time for the SG30 model. Thus the nested
392 model runs 3.8 times quicker than the single grid model.

393

394

395 **3.1.3 CG06 model**

396 In contrast to the CG30 grid being fully embedded within the PG90 grid, in the second level of nesting CG06 is
397 only partially nested within its parent CG30 (Fig. 4). Approximately 38% of wet cells in CG06 overlap CG30.
398 This is a hybrid boundary structure where the east boundary is prescribed using hydrodynamic data from the

399 parent model while the west boundary is prescribed using measured data. The west boundary is a flow
400 boundary, with River Lee inflows extracted from river gauging station 19011. The east boundary is a water
401 elevation boundary where water elevations are supplied along the boundary by the CG30 model. The location of
402 the latter boundary was selected to correspond to the position of the Tivoli tidal gauge station and therefore to
403 contribute to model validation (see Fig. 3 for location of Tivoli gauge).

404 Validation of the CG06 model is conducted for the flood event of November 2009, which due to a combination
405 of heavy river discharges and high tides coinciding with moderate surges resulted in extensive inundation of the
406 area delineated by this nested grid. Figure 11 compares timeseries of water elevation computed at the CG30-
407 CG06 nested boundary (east boundary) against tidal gauge records from the same location. Overall, there is a
408 very good agreement between predicted water elevations and measured data. The high degree of model accuracy
409 is manifested by high correlation (0.992) and a low value of RMSdiff (0.022m) shown in Table 3 (model
410 CG06_1). Both the RMSE (0.142m) and centred RMSD (0.141m) indicate that the model is able to reproduce
411 variability of water elevation with a good accuracy (order 0.14m). Further, a small difference between these two
412 statistical measures implies that the mean values of observations and simulation are very close. Interestingly, the
413 accuracy of the CG06 model is improved when a 6 minutes phase shift (one record timestep) between
414 observations and simulation is artificially introduced (model CG06_2 in Table 3). This results in RMSE
415 (RMSD) reduction to 0.106m (0.104m) and an increase of correlation to 0.996. It is deemed then that there is a
416 phase lag between model and observations of approximately one observational timestep. Another aspect of the
417 analysis involved temporal occurrence of an error. As the model-observations discrepancies are observed around
418 low water levels (which is not so significant to this study), by not considering negative water elevations (below
419 0 mOD Malin) the RMSE is further reduced to 0.075m (model CG06_3 in Table 3). Such level of agreement
420 between model and observation is considered to be satisfactory.

421 The effect of horizontal resolution on model skill is also examined. This is carried out by comparing the model
422 performance at 6 m and 2m resolutions. For this purpose a single grid 2m reference model (SG02) covering the
423 area delineated by the CG06 model was developed. Figure 12 presents the distribution of water level RE_T in
424 the CG06 solution relative to the SG02 reference solution. In general, errors in CG06 outside the Cork City
425 centre are very low (<10%) implying that flooding in the rural area of Cork is well resolved using the 6m grid.
426 In contrast, significantly higher errors are obtained in the Cork City (CG02 domain), and in particularly in areas
427 of narrow dense streets where errors exceed 30%. Here, an increase in model resolution leads to a significant

428 reduction in errors. This implies that next level of nesting is required to improve the model accuracy in the city
429 centre.

430

431 **3.1.4 CG02 model**

432 Finally, the highest resolution 2m model (CG02), fully embedded within CG06, covers the urban area of Cork
433 City; this area is particularly prone to flooding. In the first step of model skill analysis, water elevations
434 simulated by the CG06 and CG02 models at four locations along the river channel are compared in Fig. 13 and
435 statistically summarized in Table 4. Again, the November 2009 flood event was used as a benchmark. Close to
436 the east boundary, at point CG02_4 (see Fig. 14 for point location), both models perform almost identical and
437 this is visually and statistically confirmed in Fig. 13d and in Table 4, respectively. Discrepancies between the
438 CG06 and CG02 models increase with distance from the nested east boundary and are manifested by overall
439 higher water elevations computed by the coarser CG06 model. Location CG02_2 (Fig. 13b) shows the biggest
440 discrepancy evidenced by the statistical measures RMSE=0.195m, RMSD=0.109m, RMSdiff=-0.181m. Despite
441 overprediction of water elevations by the CG06 model, the general water level trends in the two models are in
442 good agreement (COR=0.997). Another important advantage of a high resolution model is an improved
443 numerical stability of the model solution. As can be seen from Fig. 13 a-c, some infrequent random oscillations
444 in water levels occurring in CG06 from numerical instability due to insufficient grid resolution are not present in
445 the finer CG02 model.

446 The numerical instability of the MSN_Flood model is directly related to the grid resolution and results from an
447 alternating direction implicit (ADI) algorithm used in the model's solution procedure. In general, the models
448 using ADI are very accurate numerically in modelling flows, however, in the presence of a discontinuity, such
449 as in regions of sharp gradients (e.g. velocity gradients, elevation gradient or high elevations), the numerical
450 models using such schemes are prone to generate spurious numerical oscillations (Kvočka et al., 2015). A
451 common solution used to reduce these oscillations is to increase the grid resolution so the slopes over numerical
452 grids are milder. Comparing time series outputs from CG06 and CG02 (Fig. 13), it is evident that increasing
453 resolution of the model significantly reduces numerical errors and hence oscillations.

454 The effect of improved horizontal resolution is analysed spatially by means of RE_T distribution plots. As
455 shown in Fig. 12, the 2m resolution is essential to resolve small scale processes of complex urban area. Figure
456 14 compares RE_T between CG02 and SG02. In general, RE_T is quite low at 10% in the western part of the
457 city along river banks increasing in eastward direction to 20% in narrow streets of city centre. This is a

458 considerable improvement when compared to RE_T in CG06 relative to SG02. Moreover, as CG02 achieves a
459 similar level of accuracy to SG02 the computational cost is significantly reduced and constitutes enormous 96%
460 saving.

461 From this analysis it can be seen that the CG06-CG02 nesting results in a model performance generally
462 comparable to the single grid SG02 model but at a significantly reduced computational cost when compared to
463 the single grid model.

464 The ultimate conclusion from the model validation is that MSN_Flood facilitates significant improvements in
465 model accuracy without incurring the computational expense of high spatial resolution over the entire model
466 domain. The model setup constitutes a rigorous test of model performance and on that basis it can be further
467 concluded that the model is applicable to situations where nested boundaries are located in complex urban
468 floodplains that periodically wet and dry.

469

470 **3.2 Urban flood modelling**

471 For most of the time, city streets are dry and rivers draining the hinterland are contained within well-defined
472 river banks or walls. However, when extreme flood events occur rivers may burst their banks and the city
473 streets become water conveyance channels. The simulation of the hydrodynamics associated with rapid urban
474 flood events is complex; many significant issues must be addressed such as flooding and drying, spatial
475 resolution, domain definition, frictional resistance and boundary descriptions. When modelling flood events, the
476 mathematical formulation of the nested boundaries that permit flooding and drying is of particular importance.
477 Also, the horizontal resolution necessary to resolve small scale processes must be considered. In particular,
478 these aspects of the MSN_Flood model will be discussed in this section.

479

480 **3.2.1 Extreme flood event**

481 On the 19th and 20th of November 2009 high River Lee flows combined with high astronomical tides and
482 moderate surge caused localized overtopping/breaching of the river banks resulting in widespread flooding of
483 Cork City. Evolution of the flood wave propagation simulated by the CG02 model is shown in Fig. 15.
484 Maximum flooding was reached at 9:30 on 20/11/2009 around the time of high tide and approximately 5 hours
485 after peak discharge of River Lee. At this juncture over 62ha of Cork City had been flooded. The most affected
486 zone was the city centre located between the north and south channels of the river; this area is a low-lying island

487 that over centuries was gradually reclaimed from marshland and its low-lying topography combined with the
488 influence of river, estuary and harbour makes the area particularly vulnerable to flooding.

489 The accuracy of the urban inundation simulation was assessed against field observations of inundation extent
490 and maximum heights of flood waters. The observed and modelled ultimate extents of flooding in the city are
491 shown in the Fig. 16; the hindcasted extent of inundation matches very well that observed during the flood
492 event. With regards to flood level heights, observed water level marks were collected and post-processed by
493 OPW at 38 survey points across the flooded area; their distribution is shown in Fig. 17. The survey point data
494 were subsequently used to calibrate the model. Initial calibration tests showed that the model was most sensitive
495 to bottom roughness coefficient. An extensive statistical analysis of bed roughness parameterization was used to
496 provide an accurate model solution for flood inundation; **details of that analysis are presented in Olbert et al.**
497 **(2017)**. The best fitting results ($R=0.97$, $RMSD=0.26$) were obtained for the following roughness values: upper
498 channel=0.90, lower channel=0.90, roads=0.1, city floodplain=0.1 and upstream floodplain=0.30. Figure 18
499 provides visual assessment of the best fit model skill; good agreement between the model and observations is
500 achieved as the model solution falls on the 45° line. Interestingly, better agreement was found for survey
501 locations in floodplains as opposed to points adjacent to the river bank. This could be attributed to the fact that
502 the majority of survey points are located away from the channel edge (many are actually at the floodplain edge).

503

504 **3.3 Moving boundary**

505 The specification of a nested boundary in a flood-prone area is particularly problematic; nested models
506 developed so far prohibit flooding and drying along open boundaries. This problem has been overcome in
507 MSN_Flood; its unique mathematical formulation of the nested boundary involving ghost cells, internal
508 boundary formulation and adaptive interpolation, ensures stable flooding and drying of boundary cells. In
509 MSN_Flood, any nested boundary can be placed within a flooding and drying zone and therefore may be subject
510 to significant lateral expansion and contraction. Moreover, the internalization of the boundary allows the
511 flooding and drying mechanism to approach the boundary of the nested domain from either upstream or
512 downstream. As the boundary alternatively floods or dries, the number of active boundary cells expands and
513 contracts accordingly. Depending on local topography, not only the length of the boundary may change but also
514 the number of active boundaries changes. Such a boundary is therefore a complex, non-continuous, moving
515 boundary that spatially and temporally changes its characteristics. This is a significant aspect of this research.

516 In the model setup, the urban CG02 model is entirely embedded within the CG06 model; mass and momentum
517 from the 6m model is transferred to the 2 m model via two nested boundaries – the western boundary
518 transferring River Lee waters from the upper to the lower channel of the river (it also geographically divides the
519 floodplains into upper and lower floodplains), and the eastern boundary exchanging waters with the estuary. The
520 western boundary of CG02 is located on the upstream fluvial floodplain which is prone to wetting and drying. A
521 cross section through this boundary illustrating the steep gradients of the river channel bathymetry and the
522 topography of the adjacent urban floodplains (which includes buildings) is shown in Fig. 19. The temporal
523 progression of water levels throughout the November 2009 flooding is also plotted. The reference water level at
524 simulation time $t=4\text{hr}$ corresponds to a $187\text{ m}^3/\text{s}$ river flow (19th of November 2009 at 01:30). At this juncture
525 the flow greatly exceeds the average river flow of $40\text{ m}^3/\text{s}$ as it results from increased discharges from Inniscarra
526 dam. The storage capacity of Inniscarra Reservoir had been reached after a month-long period of record high
527 rainfalls and heavy downpours on the 18th and 19th of November. Over the course of the subsequent 28 hours
528 the discharges further increased to reach a maximum value of $560\text{ m}^3/\text{s}$ at 2:30 on November 20th. The water
529 level at the boundary increased from 4.57 mOD at 22:30 November 18th to a peak of 5.74 mOD 28 hours later.
530 The extensive inundation of the upper channel floodplains (upstream floodplains) has a major effect on the
531 western boundary of the CG02 model. It can be seen in Fig. 19 that as the flooding progresses to a simulation
532 time of 8hrs a second wetted boundary is created south of the main channel boundary due to bifurcation of
533 flood waters into two channels (called here the main and side channels) approximately 1.2km upstream of the
534 boundary. Importantly, there is a significant difference in water elevation of 0.41m between the two channels of
535 the boundary. This results from the topography of the upstream floodplains and therefore local flow conditions.
536 The reason for the difference in water elevations along the two sections of the boundary can be explained with
537 the help of Fig. 20 showing three cross-sections including one (cross-section 3) located close to the nested
538 western boundary. As simulated by the CG06 model, downstream from cross-section 1, representing the
539 maximum cross-sectional extent of the inundated area, flood waters must flow around an elevated strip of rural
540 land and so splits at this point into two floodplain channels. This is shown in cross-section 2, located at mid
541 length of this 1 km long strip of land; here the water elevation difference between two channels is 0.31m. This
542 elevation difference further increases to 0.41m near the nested boundary (cross-section 3).
543 The temporal rise of water levels at a number of points across the western nested boundary is shown in Fig. 21.
544 Series A represents the main river channel, series B and C correspond to points adjacent to the river channel

545 while series D is located in the side channel. The difference in water elevations between the two boundaries is
546 apparent throughout the entire flooding period, though it is reduced with the progress of flooding.

547 An interesting characteristics of the moving boundary is it change in its length. As flood waters continue
548 overtopping the river banks, the area of inundation increases and is reflected in the elongation of the boundary.
549 The length of the main channel boundary is initially equal to the river width, this nearly doubles during flooding
550 as shown for $t=12$ hrs in Fig. 19. The temporal evolution of flooding through the boundary clearly demonstrates
551 that the nested boundary is a discontinuous moving boundary with a variable head.

552 The numerical stability of such dynamically changing properties of nested boundary is an important aspect of
553 nesting procedures. Overall, a change in length as well as division into separate subsections does not markedly
554 impact computational stability nor model performance. In fact, as shown in Fig. 14, RE_T computed over the
555 flooding period remain low within the CG02 domain despite significant changes to nested boundary
556 configurations and flow conditions.

557 As demonstrated in this section MSN_Flood is developed in a general-purpose manner that through stable and
558 accurate moving boundary provides a high degree of choice and flexibility regarding the location of the
559 boundaries to the nested domain.

560

561 **3.4 Model resolution**

562 Due to the highly irregular topography of urban environments and the highly dynamic flows involved, urban
563 flooding is a complex problem. Most of the flood models developed so far have focused on rural or semi
564 developed floodplains where isolated large structures can be modelled while small objects are ignored or
565 parameterized as bottom friction (Brown et al., 2007). Such modelling does not implicitly account for locking
566 effects of building on flow. As the presence of buildings may substantially increase flood extent when compared
567 with undeveloped floodplains the role of high resolution discretization is paramount. However, as Brown et al.,
568 (2007) found, the greatest source of modelling error with respect to grid resolution is associated with the
569 steepest gradients in topography which are susceptible to interpolation error.

570 Modelling of flood flow through urban area is difficult because of its need for stable and accurate solution of the
571 flow equation (Brown et al., 2007). Since accurate modelling requires a resolution commensurate with flow
572 features, dense street network flows through urban floodplains can only be fully resolved with a sufficiently
573 high resolution. However, satisfactory model resolution, and thus accuracy, incurs computational expense; a

574 balance between these two contradicting factors provides an optimal solution. Gallegos et al. (2009) found that a
575 5m resolution mesh that spans a street by approximately three cells achieves such balance. The characteristics of
576 urban residential areas of southern Californian investigated in their study is different than that of an old
577 European development type towns comprising of narrow dense streets as Cork City. It follows that the 5m
578 model resolution is insufficient to resolve flow dynamics in such city centre street networks.

579 In order to analyse the overall effect of model resolution on simulation results, CG06 and CG02 model results
580 are compared. Visual comparison of flood inundation can be made from Fig. 22 which shows CG06 and CG02
581 model outputs representing the maximum extent of inundation during the November 2009 flooding. There is a
582 discrepancy in the extent and magnitude of flooding between the two models. Some zones and streets do not get
583 flooded in the CG06 model, which may be caused by the coarse representation of the street network and
584 associated lack of connectivity between certain streets, while in other zones flood water is present in areas
585 which remain dry according to observations and CG02 output. Figure 23 (a) shows the difference in water
586 elevations between CG02 and CG06 interpolated onto the 2m grid. It is clear that both the height and area of
587 flooding are affected. The absolute difference in water level is on average 0.13m and is underestimated by the
588 6m model by up to 0.4m in the upper section of river and overestimated by approximately 0.3m in the lower
589 section. Figure 23 (b) shows a spatial distribution of RMSE between two models. There is a noticeable reduction
590 in model performance at coarser resolution of 0.08m RMSE over the entire domain and the error is generally
591 larger in the dense street network of the urbanized zone. Based on model results it is clear that a substantial
592 portion of the error results from the coarse representation of topography since its gradient is greater than the
593 slope in water surface; however, some small portion of the error could be attributed to errors in LIDAR data
594 (~0.1m RMSE according to Bates et al, 2010) as well as interpolation from 6m down to 2m grid.

595 Another comparative measure involves a computation of relative differences (Equation 10) in inundated area
596 and flood water volume between fine and coarse grid models at a particular time. Figures 24 (a) and (b) show
597 the evolution of differences between CG02 and CG06 solutions in inundated areas and volumes throughout the
598 simulation. The significantly high relative difference in the area at the initial stage of flooding reaching 36% is
599 misleading as the relatively small total inundated area with a small flood time lag results in large discrepancies
600 at this stage (ca. 11ha). Nevertheless, when the flooding is more pronounced (over 30 ha, max 62.6ha) the
601 relative difference is still up to 10%. With regards to flood water volume in inundated areas the difference is
602 over 20% during first hours of flooding and still remains as high as 10% throughout the flood peak only falling

603 to below 10% when the flood recedes. The total RMSE of inundated area and volume between 2m and 6m
604 models are 3.4ha and 21,367m³. This comparison demonstrates that horizontal resolution is of paramount
605 importance when simulating flows through complex topography. It seems that for Cork City centre comprising
606 of dense network of narrow streets, neither the 5m resolution requirement nor 3 cell street span would resolve
607 complex flood flow at satisfactory level of accuracy.

608

609 **3.5 Flood water velocities**

610 Another significant advantage of MSN_Flood is its ability to simulate the velocities of flood waters. As opposed
611 to simplified 2D hydraulic models frequently used in urban flooding, the hydrodynamic MSN_Flood includes
612 both the continuity and momentum equations, solving for both water elevations and water velocities. Figure 25
613 shows an example of flood water velocities computed by MSN_Flood in a selected area of Cork city centre
614 blown up for ease of viewing; one can see flood waters in both the river channel and the urban floodplain. This
615 zone is characterized by fast flowing shallow water subject to rapid transitions as it flows down through the
616 steep section of recreational grounds adjacent to the river channel. The city downtown, in contrast, is a ponding
617 area with relatively stagnant waters.

618 Knowledge of velocity fields facilitates better understanding of flood water hydrodynamics and in particular the
619 mechanisms of flood propagation. The routes and speeds of flood waves provide important information for the
620 evaluation of flood risks to people's safety and to property, as well as to the planning and actions of emergency
621 response teams.

622

623 **4 Discussion**

624 Inundation of coastal areas due to coastal and/or fluvial urban flooding mechanisms is a very complex
625 hydrological phenomena, and developing a modelling system to accurately simulate it is not a trivial task. The
626 research presented in this paper demonstrates that the concept of nesting models is very suitable for complex
627 urban coastal flooding as they facilitate the development of an integrated system capable of resolving
628 hydrodynamics at spatial scales commensurate with flows and physical features of the region of interest. The
629 modelling system adopted here determines physical processes simultaneously at different scales ranging from
630 bay-size circulation (90 m) through mesoscale processes of coastal waters at 30 m resolution down to the ultra-
631 high scale environment of 2m. Validation results show that the model performs well at each of these scales.

632 The MSN_Flood model developed for use in this research is well suited for high resolution urban flood
633 simulation for a number of reasons. Firstly, it allows smooth transition of the model solution between coastal
634 waters and river floodplains while giving a very high level of conservation of mass and momentum between
635 parent and child grid (Nash and Hartnett, 2010). Through incorporation of ghost cells and formulation of a
636 dynamic internal boundary, MSN_Flood is designed to minimize boundary formulation error and therefore to
637 transfer mass and momentum across the nested boundary without loss of nested solution accuracy. The
638 reduction in boundary errors yields also a significant improvement in model stability at the nested boundary and
639 CG accuracy. This in turn permits stable flooding and drying at the boundary; moreover, these process are
640 allowed to approach the boundary of the nested domain from either upstream or downstream. The so-called
641 moving boundary allows then embedding of a child grid model within the parent model in areas where the
642 nested boundary may wet or dry making the model highly flexible in application. Interestingly, such highly
643 reduced boundary formulation errors is achieved in a nesting mechanism where the nested boundary comprises
644 of only two cells of columns or rows (ghost cells and internal boundary cells). For comparison, in many nested
645 models poor accuracy due to boundary formulation errors is commonly compensated by indirect solutions such
646 as boundary configuration (e.g. location). For example, Kashefipour et al. (2002) in order to reduce possible
647 nesting error dynamically link 2D coastal model with 1D river model by using overlapping grids at the
648 boundary – a common area where boundary values are exchanged between two models. Such model setup is
649 not required in MSN_Flood where accurate exchange of boundary conditions occurs along a boundary.

650 Secondly, the model has virtually no limit to the number of specified nesting levels (and spatial resolution) and
651 is primarily constrained by computational effort rather than numerical stability. The highest resolution of 2 m set
652 for this study was dictated solely by the resolution of available LiDAR data and higher resolutions are easily
653 achievable if suitable terrain data is available. For example, a 0.025 m resolution was used to simulate flows
654 corresponding to those in a physical scale model of a harbour of dimensions 1.0x1.0x0.25 m (Nash and Hartnett
655 2014). In this way, the model allows improved accuracy of solution when compared to a lower resolution parent
656 model where the improved accuracy is similar to that of a similar high resolution single grid model but the
657 computational effort is significantly reduced.

658 Thirdly, the model provides adequate solutions at scales sufficient for processes of interest, such as coarse
659 resolution coastal circulation and fine resolution flood inundation. This is attributed to the robust hydrodynamic
660 module which in essence adopts the well-tested numerical scheme and discretisation methods described by
661 Falconer and Chen (1991). The uniqueness and improvement of MSN_Flood over other nested models is its

662 formulation of the nested boundary in the area where flooding and drying may occur. In order to accommodate
663 flooding and drying of boundary cells the model allows a moving nested boundary so that large sections of the
664 boundary can alternatively wet and dry. The stable flooding and drying of boundary cells results from the
665 internalisation of the nested boundary combined with an adaptive interpolation technique tailored specifically
666 for this model. To the author's knowledge the development of a non-continuous moving nested boundary in a
667 circulation model is novel. Such an innovative solution does not pose restrictions on the location of nested grids
668 with regards wetting and drying (as demonstrated by the application to Cork Harbour) and, therefore, allows
669 flexibility of model setup.

670 Finally, in the context of urban flood modelling, MSN_Flood's ability to simulate horizontal components of
671 water velocity is a significant advantage over simpler hydraulic models commonly used in flood modelling; the
672 complexity of urban topography (buildings, vegetation, walls, roads, embankments, ditches etc) necessitates at
673 least two-dimensional treatment of surface flows (Cook and Merwade, 2009). Spatial and temporal distribution
674 of velocity fields is also required for assessment of flood risk to people and property associated with a certain
675 flood flow magnitude. Thus, this feature will greatly benefit flood hazard management.

676 Although the modelling framework seems to be the main factor controlling accuracy of model predictions, other
677 factors such as model resolution, datasets and model parameterization also play a crucial role. In relation to
678 model topography/bathymetry, these aspects are interconnected and need to be considered jointly. Comparing
679 the 6m and 2 m grid models it can be seen that results are quite sensitive to the spatial resolution of the model.
680 The resolution acts as a filter on the model terrain so the model error increases with decreasing spatial
681 resolution, as the definition of topographic features (walls, hedges etc) are progressively lost from the model
682 bathymetry. There is a dual effect of this. Firstly, as the resolution becomes less granular the topographic
683 complexity of high density small features become sub-grid phenomena which then become parameterised
684 through roughness coefficients. Spatially varying roughness needs to be specified for different terrains, this is
685 determined based on surface classification (such as land type, vegetation or roads) within model sensitivity and
686 calibration. Secondly, the loss of larger objects such as buildings makes the model inherently ill-conditioned and
687 their loss cannot be remedied through modification of roughness coefficient alone. Errors are additionally
688 amplified by a presence of bias in the topographic data resulting from LIDAR related post-processing
689 difficulties such as representation of surface objects discussed in Mason et al. (2003).

690

691

692 **5 Conclusions**

693 In this research, high-resolution multi-scale modelling of coastal flooding due to tides, storm surges and rivers
694 inflows is performed. The MSN_Flood modelling system is used to simulate flood water inundation of Cork
695 City. The main findings from this research fall into two categories as follows:

- 696 1. Model computational performance:
- 697 (a) The nesting model framework allows the model operation at practically any desired horizontal
698 resolution, including scales commensurate with resolution of LiDAR data making an optimal use of
699 such datasets. In the current setup, a four-nest cascade telescopes resolution down to the level of
700 LiDAR resolution which is sufficient to capture small scale flow features.
 - 701 (b) The model has no limits as to the number of nesting levels and the numerical stability is maintained
702 down to the finest resolution.
 - 703 (c) Computational effort is dictated by the number of nesting levels, the horizontal resolution of each
704 nested grid and the extents of each nested grid. Nevertheless, at the finest resolution the nested model
705 was found to be almost as accurate as a single grid model of the same resolution but at 96% saving in
706 computational cost.
 - 707 (d) Due to its robust flooding and drying routine, the model maintains numerical stability and accuracy in
708 any part of the model domain affected by these processes.
 - 709 (e) Internalisation of the nested boundary through a use of ghost cells combined with a tailored adaptive
710 interpolation technique permits flooding and drying of the nested boundary creating highly dynamic
711 moving boundaries. Moreover, the flooding and drying mechanism can approach the boundary of the
712 nested domain from either upstream or downstream. Nesting with a moving boundary allows
713 embedding of a child grid model within the parent model in areas where the nested boundary may wet
714 or dry. This unique feature of MSN_Flood provides a high degree of choice regarding the location of
715 the boundaries to the nested domain and therefore flexibility in model application. This capability gives
716 MSN_Flood significant advantages over other models.
- 717
- 718 2. Model accuracy:
- 719 (f) The modelling system demonstrates a good capability to accurately determine physical processes at
720 different spatial scales including mesoscale coastal water circulation (90m) and small scale
721 hydrodynamics of complex urban floodplains (2m).

- 722 (g) The extent of flood inundation into floodplains of Cork City and maximum water levels reached during
723 flooding were accurately simulated by the urban flood 2 m grid model.
- 724 (h) Fine horizontal resolution is crucial for accurate assessment of inundation. Comparison of 6m and 2m
725 grid model RE_T in water levels shows a noticeable reduction in model performance at coarser resolution
726 over the entire domain and the error is generally greater in the dense street network of urbanized zone.
- 727 (i) The urban flood model provides full characteristics of water levels and flow regimes necessary for
728 assessment of flood risk to people's safety associated with particular flood water levels and associated
729 flood water velocities.

730

731 To conclude, near-unlimited model resolution, geographically unconstrained (due to wetting and drying) nested
732 model setup, robust wetting and drying routine, computational efficiency and the capability to simulate both
733 water elevations and velocity fields, make the MSN_Flood a valuable tool for studying coastal flood inundation.
734 This research demonstrates that the adopted methodology can be successfully used in applications to coastal
735 flood modelling including complex urban environments. It can provide, at specific instances of time, accurate
736 spatial distributions of water elevations and flow magnitudes in inundated areas and can, thus, provide critical
737 information to assess possible extents of flood inundation, periods of inundation, maximum water elevations
738 reached and flood wave propagation routes and speeds. Ultimately, it can be directly used for evaluation of
739 flood risks to the area and indirectly, through some functional relationships, for risk assessment of human safety
740 and property damage. The methodology explored in this research, when applied in a forecasting sense,
741 constitutes a high resolution flood warning and planning system that can aid local decision makers targeting
742 high flood risk areas.

743

744 **Acknowledgements**

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746 Foundation Ireland (SFI) under Grant Numbers SFI/12/RC/2302 and SFI/14/ADV/RC3021.

747

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874 Tables

875

876 Table 1. Configuration of nested models

Model	Grid size m	Timestep s	Parent model	Parent-to-model grid ratio
Parent grid (PG90)	90	18	--	1:1
Single grid (SG30)	30	6	PG90	1:1
Child grid 1 (CG30)	30	6	PG90	3:1
Child grid 2 (CG06)	6	0.6	CG30	5:1
Child grid 3 (CG02)	2	0.2	CG06	3:1
Single grid (SG02)	2	0.2	CG06	1:1

877

878

879 Table 2. Summary of error analyses for PG90 and CG30 models within CG30 model area.

Error Analyses Parameter	SG30	
	PG90	CG30
Water Elevation:		
- RE_D [%]	5.9	1.1
- AE_D [$\times 10^{-2}$ m]	8.0	1.2
- $RE_T > 1\%$ [%]	94	28
Current Velocity:		
- RE_D [%]	22.4	0.5
- AE_D [$\times 10^{-3}$ m/s]	2.70	0.13

- $RE_T > 5\%$ [%]	72	4
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882

883 Table 3. Error statistics of water elevations simulated by the CG06 model and measured at Tivoli tidal gauge
 884 station. Heights are in meters

Code	COR	NSD	RMSD	RMSE	RMSdiff
CG06_1	0.992	1.021	0.141	0.142	0.022
CG06_2	0.996	1.023	0.104	0.106	0.024
CG06_3	0.995	1.084	0.075	0.075	0.020

885

886

887 Table 4. Error statistics of water elevations at four locations simulated by the CG06 and CG02 models. Heights
 888 are in meters

Code	COR	NSD	RMSD	RMSE	RMSdiff
CG02_1	0.995	1.033	0.080	0.111	-0.081
CG02_2	0.997	1.014	0.109	0.195	-0.181
CG02_3	0.998	1.045	0.056	0.076	-0.064
CG02_4	0.999	0.999	0.006	0.006	0.000

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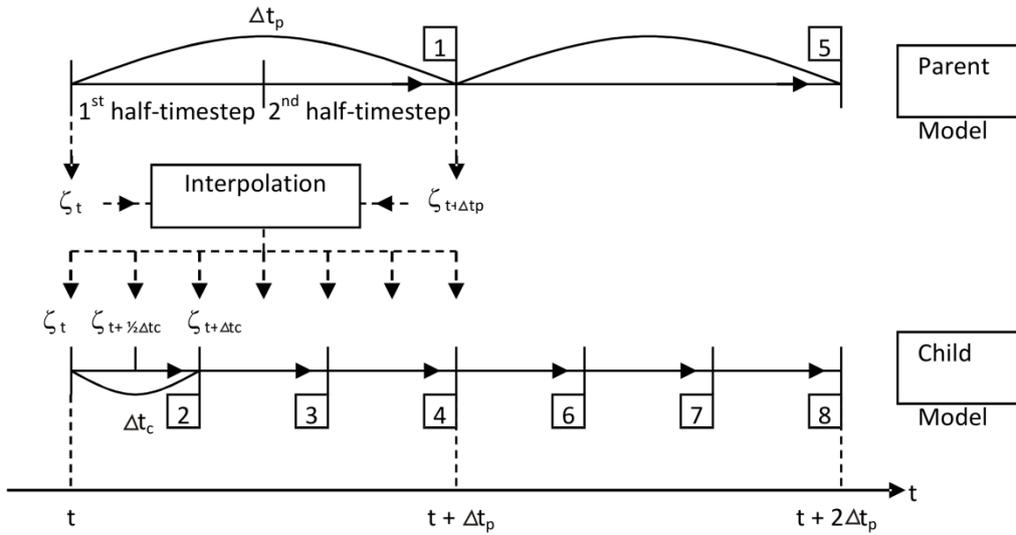
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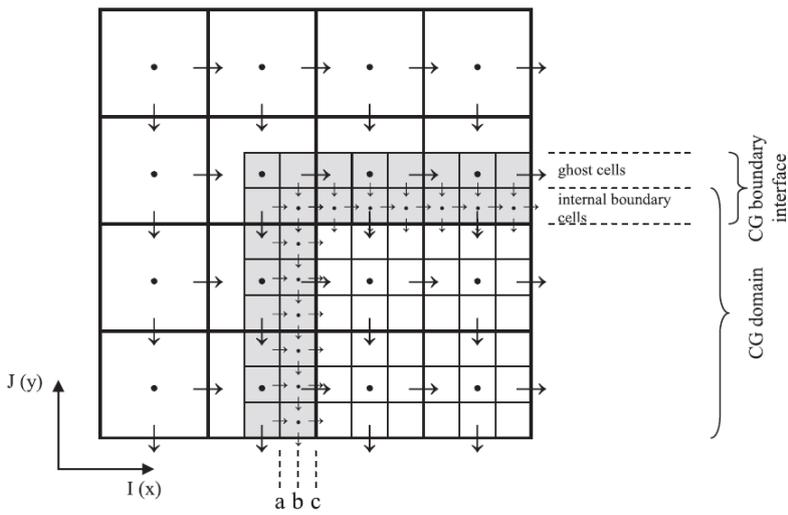
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Figures



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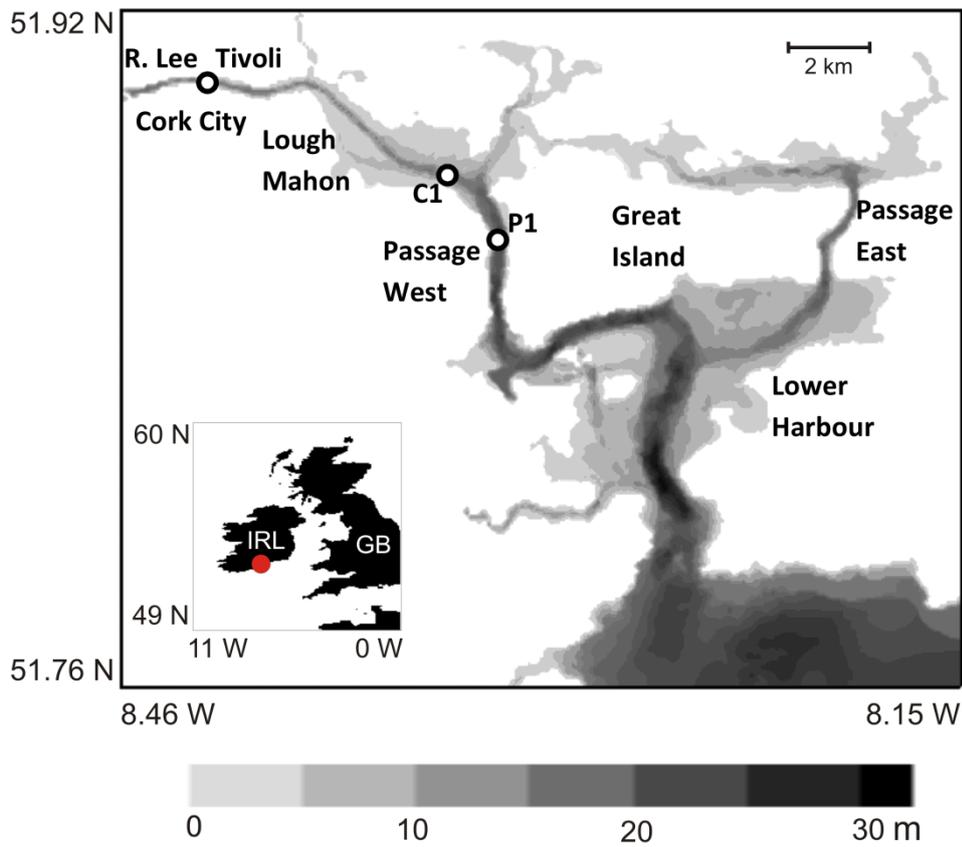
Figure 1: The nesting procedure for a single level of nesting and one variable only - water surface elevation, ζ .



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Figure 2: Schematic illustration of the internal boundary configuration for 3:1 nesting ratio.

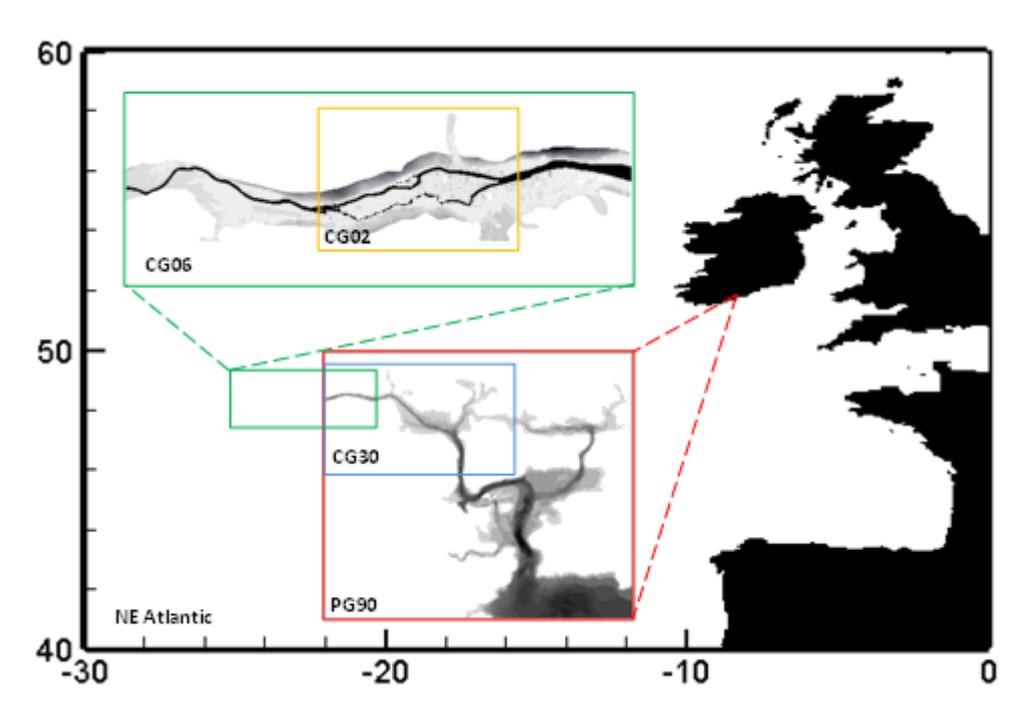
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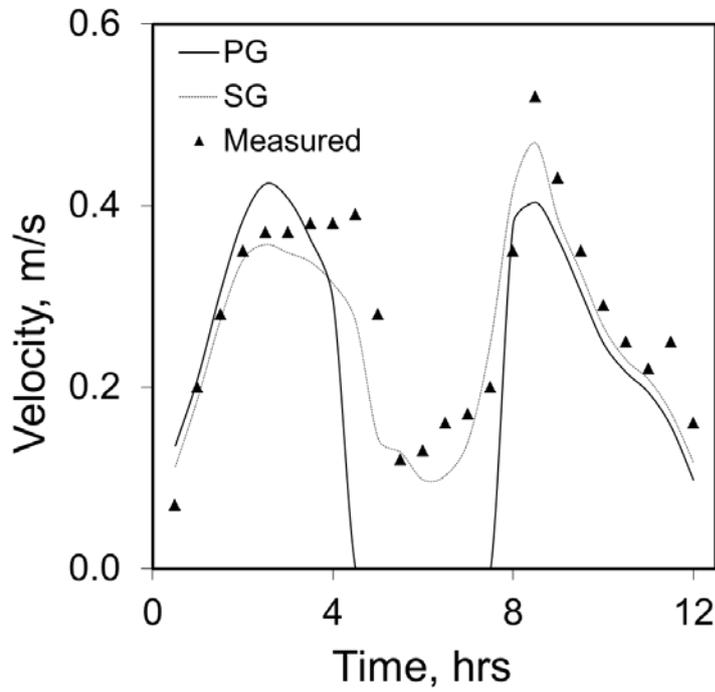
911 Figure 3: Bathymetry of Cork Harbour (m) with selected locations. Red dot denotes location of Cork Harbour

912 on the coast of Ireland.



913

914 Figure 4: Four-level nesting structure of Cork Harbour and Cork City nested models.

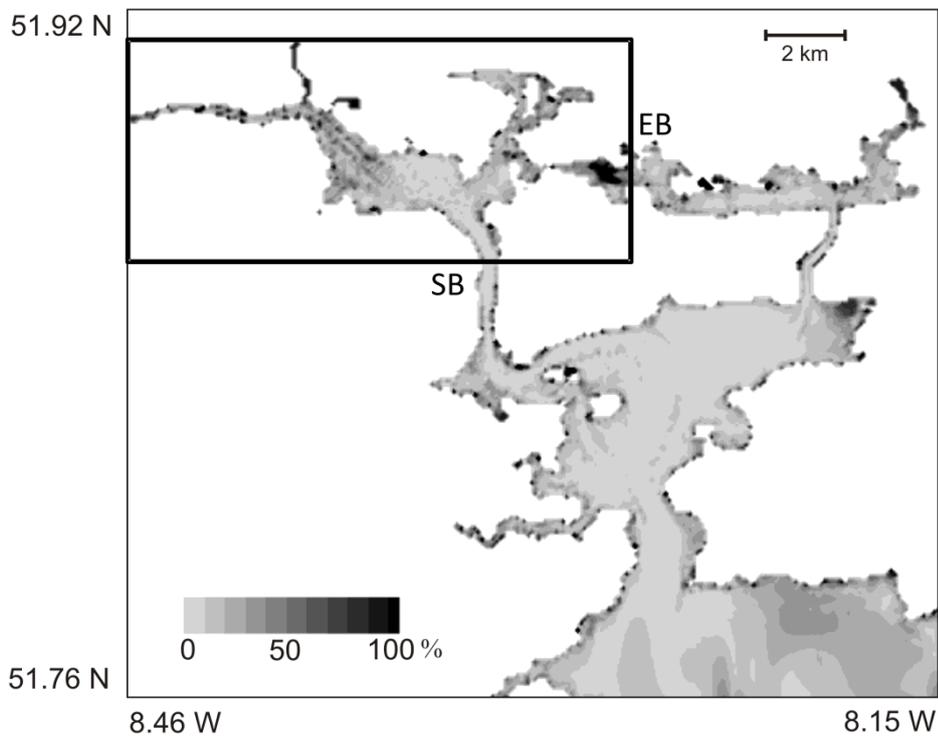


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916 Figure 5: Comparison of computed and measured velocities at point P1 in Passage West. Point location shown

917 in Fig. 3.

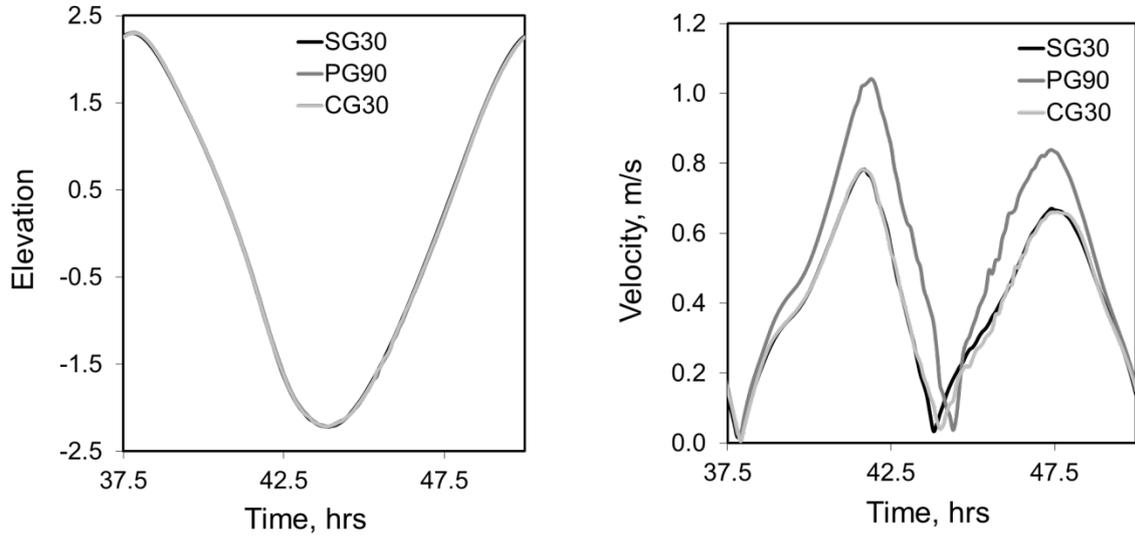
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920 Figure 6: Current velocity RE_T (%) in PG90 relative to SG30. Black box shows the extent of CG30 and
 921 locations of nested boundaries. EB - east boundary, SB – south boundary.

922 (b)

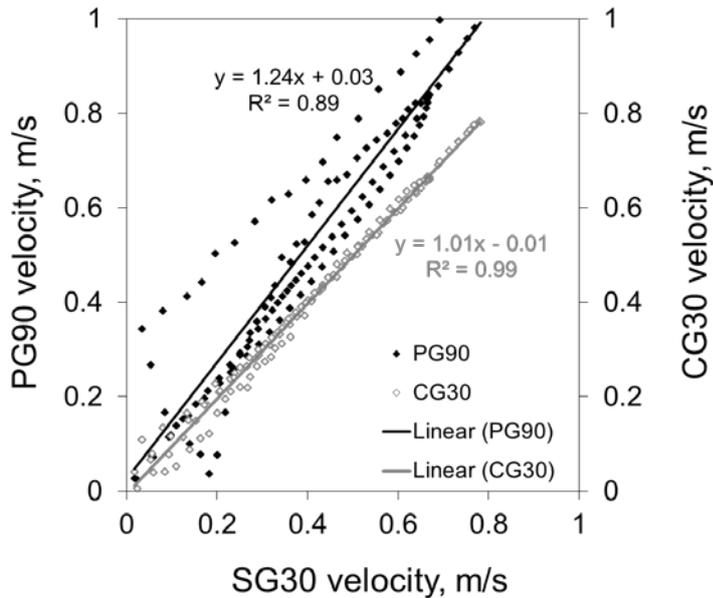


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925 Figure7: Comparison of (a) water elevations and (b) current velocities at point C1 in Lough Mahon. Point
 926 location shown in Fig. 3.

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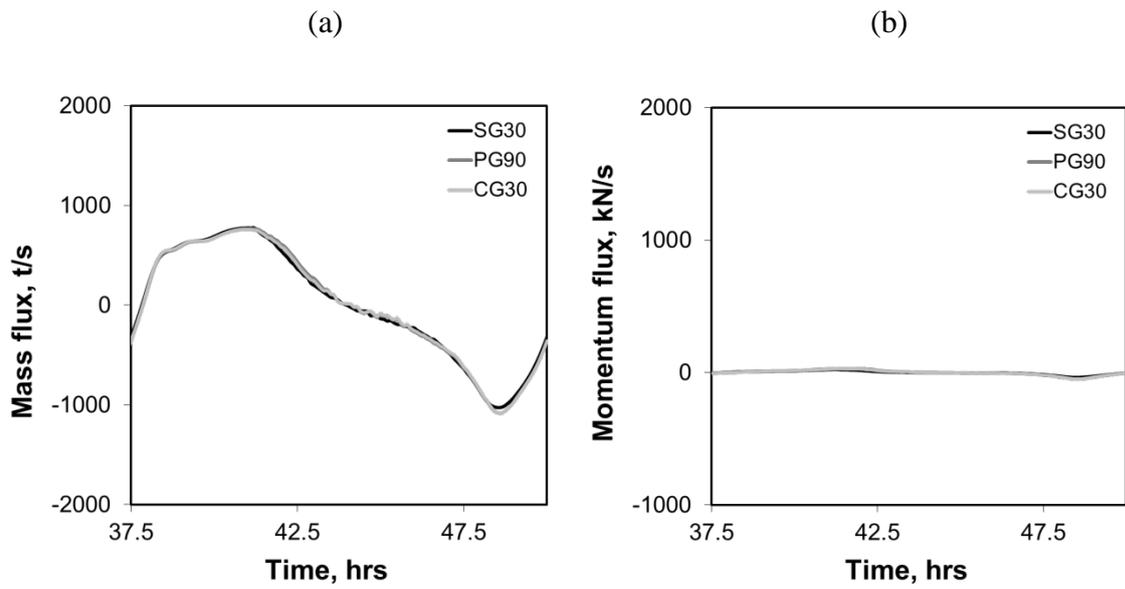
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929 Figure 8: Comparison of modelled velocities for various grid setups at point C1 in Lough Mahon (point location
 930 shown in Fig. 3). Time series data are overlain by a linear trend.

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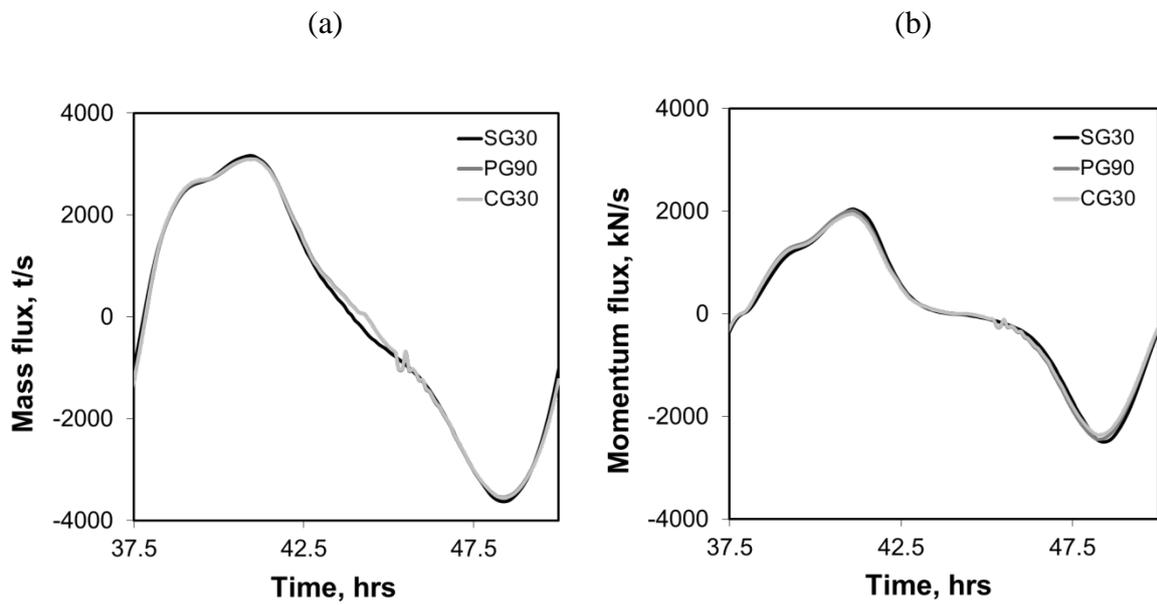


934

935 Figure 9: Comparison of (a) mass and (b) momentum fluxes across EB boundary; PG90 and CG30 timeseries
936 are coincident.

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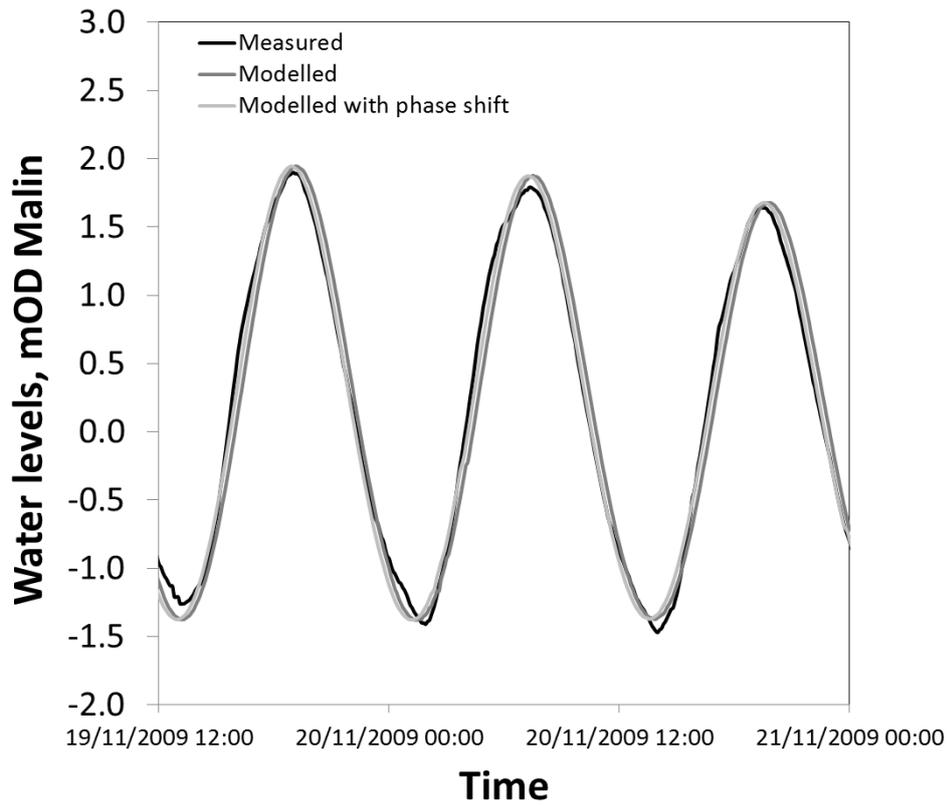
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940 Figure 10: Comparison of (a) mass and (b) momentum fluxes across SB boundary; PG90 and CG30 timeseries
941 are coincident.

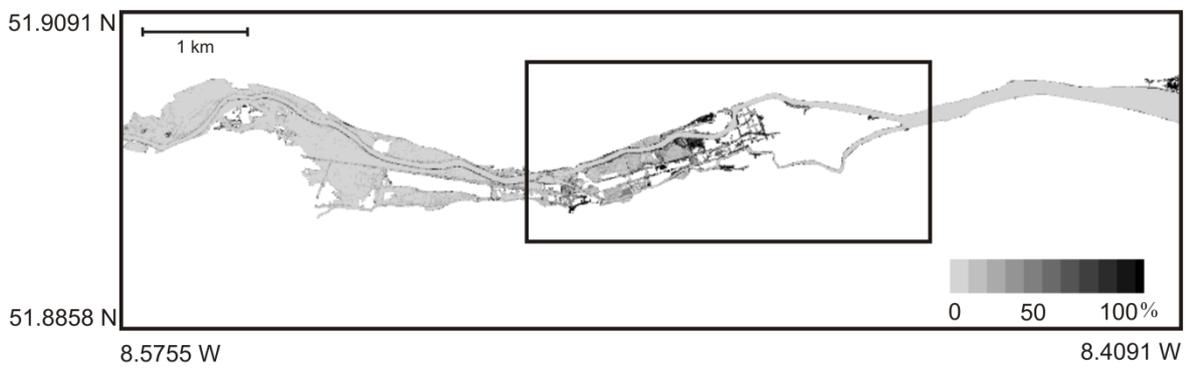
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944 Figure 11: Water elevations modelled by CG06 and measured at Tivoli tidal gauge station.

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947 Figure 12: Water level RE_T (%) in CG06 relative to SG02 . Black box shows extent of CG02 and locations of
 948 nested boundaries.

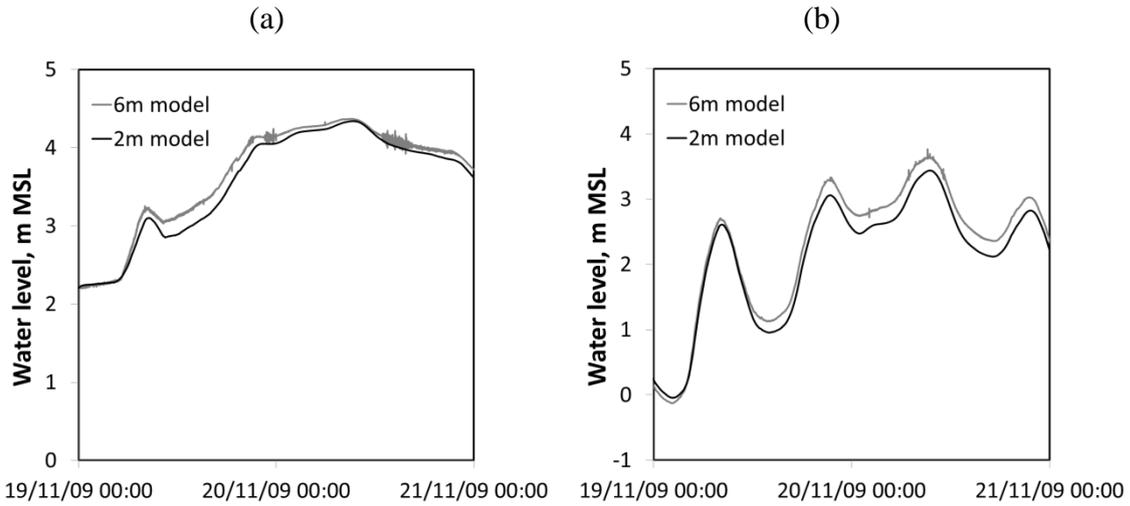
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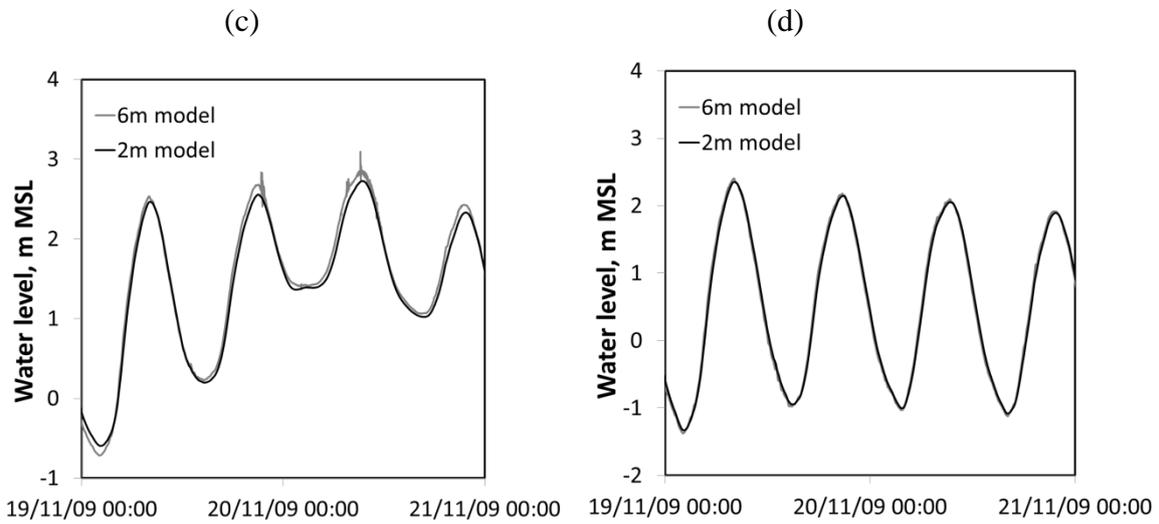
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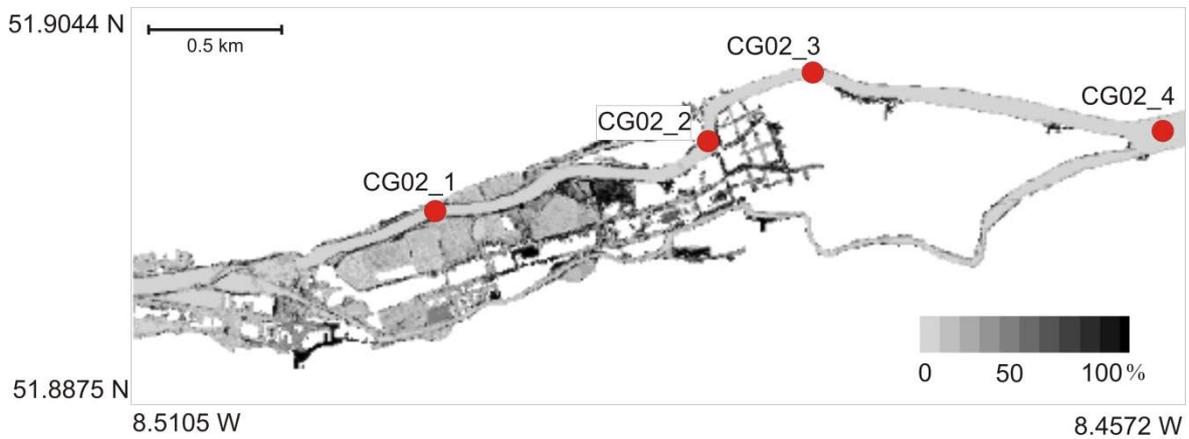
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957 Figure 13: Timeseries of water elevations predicted by CG06 and CG02 at four locations (a) CG02_1, (b)

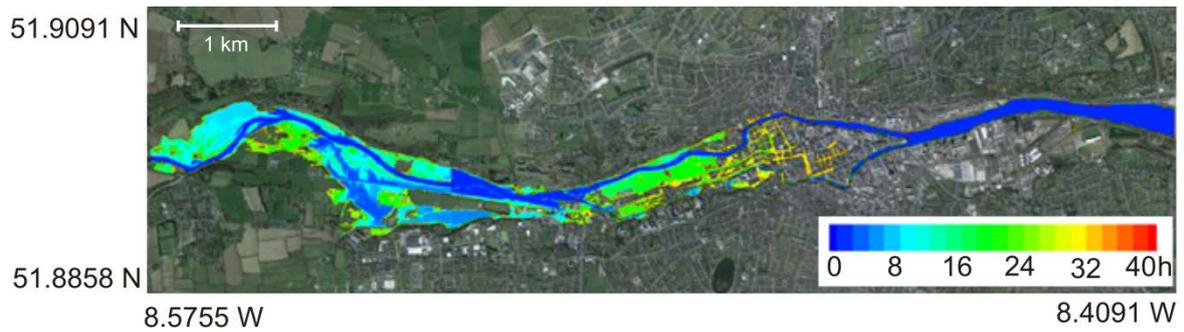
958 CG02_2, (c) CG02_3, (d) CG02_4. Point locations shown in Fig. 14.



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960 Figure 14: Water level RE_T (%) in CG02 relative to SG02 . Red dots denote points used in water level analysis

961 (see Figure 13).

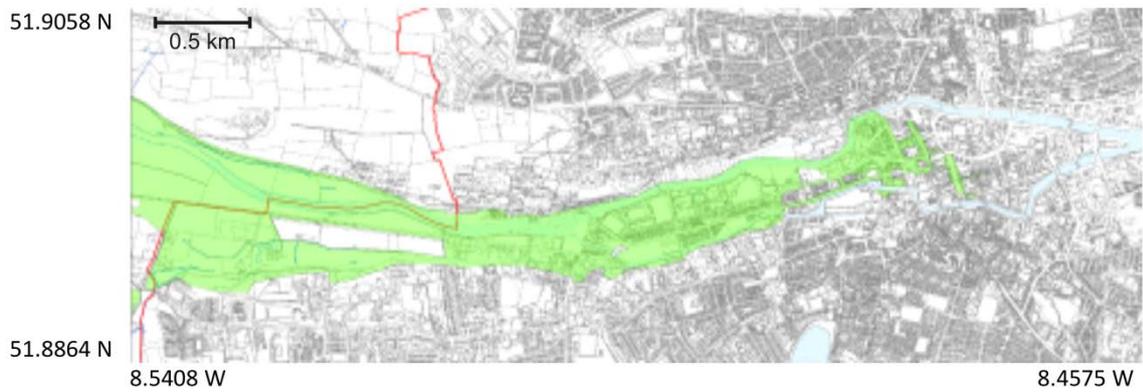


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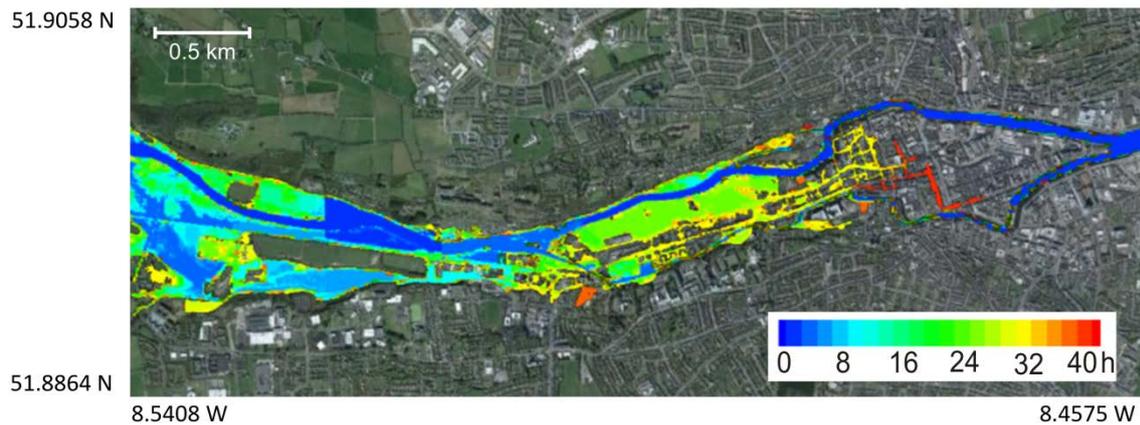
963 Figure 15: Temporal evolution of flood wave through upper and lower floodplains of Cork City during
 964 November 2009 flood event modelled by CG06; contours represent 2-h intervals.

965

(a)



(b)



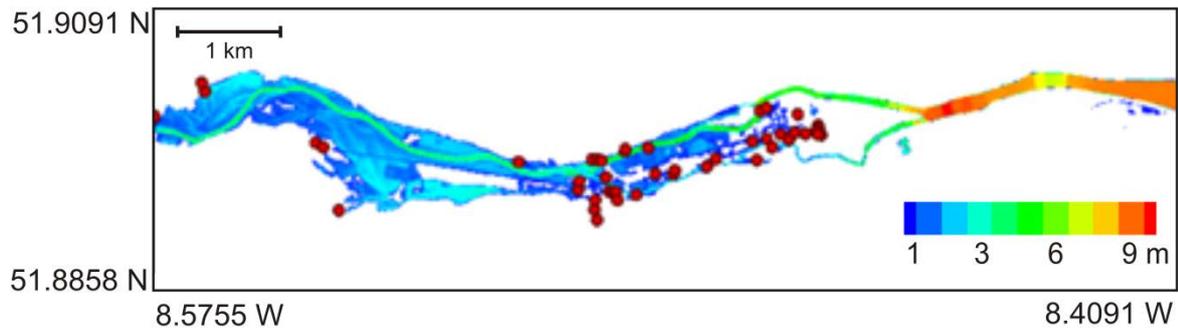
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967 Figure 16: Maps of flood inundation (a) observed by OPW and (b) modelled; contours represent 2-h intervals.

968 Evolution of modelled flood wave is a combined output of CG06 and CG02.

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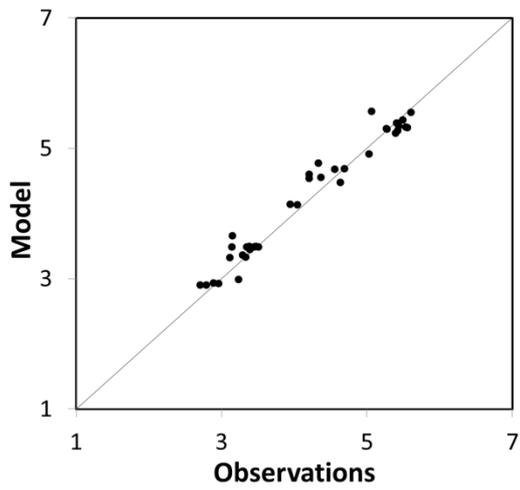


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972 Figure 17: Maximum water levels during November 2009 flood event and water level survey points marked as
 973 red dots.

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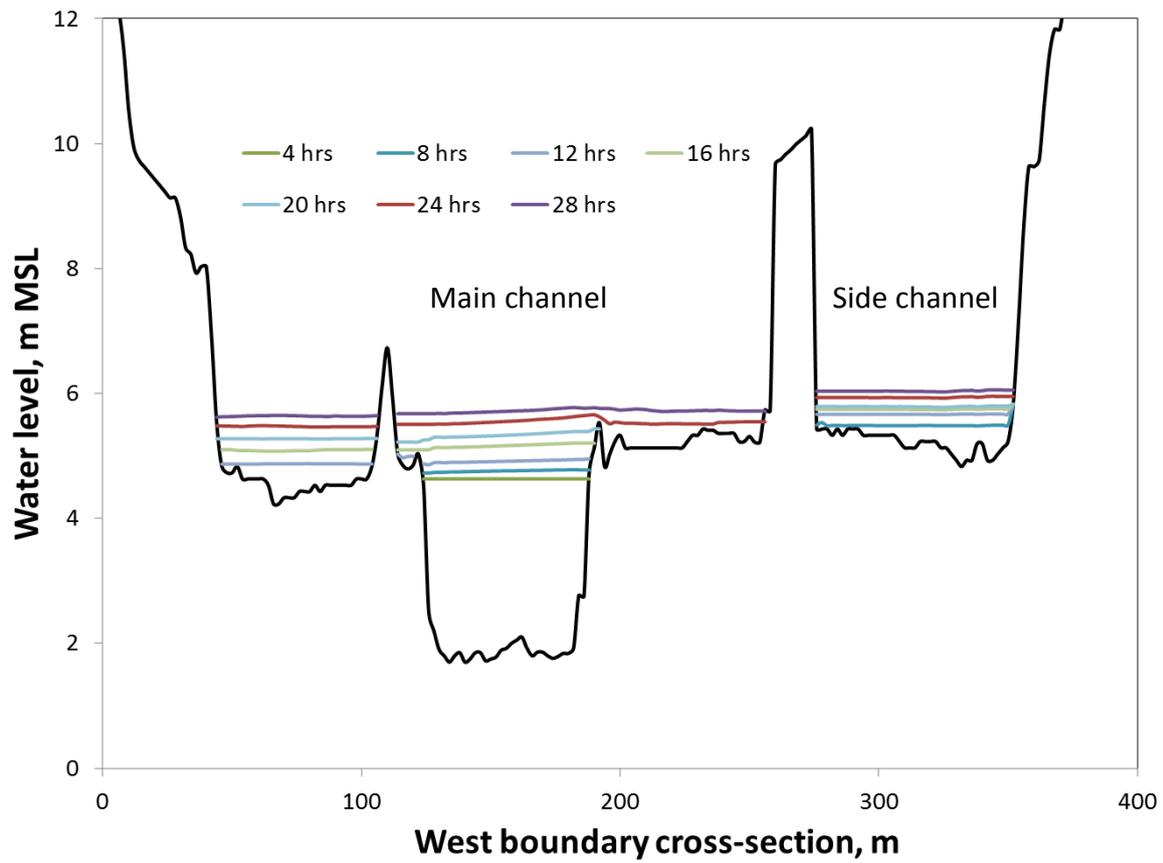
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977 Figure 18: Comparison of modelled and observed maximum water elevations at 38 survey stations.

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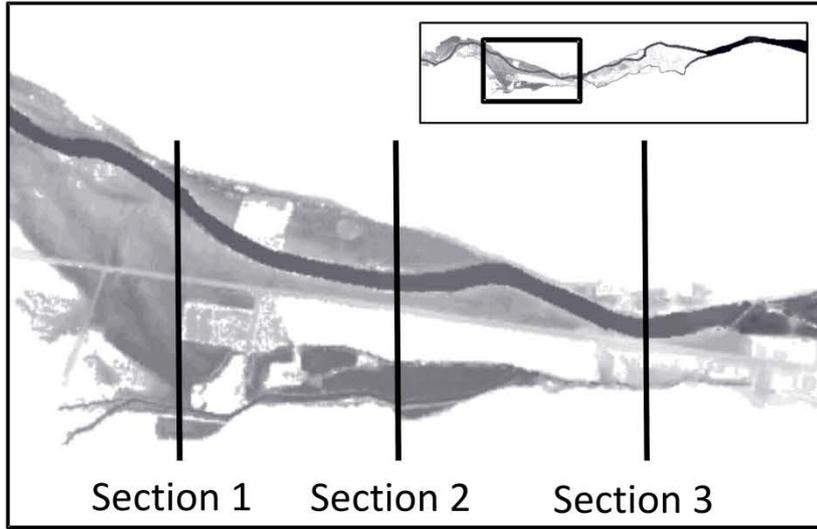


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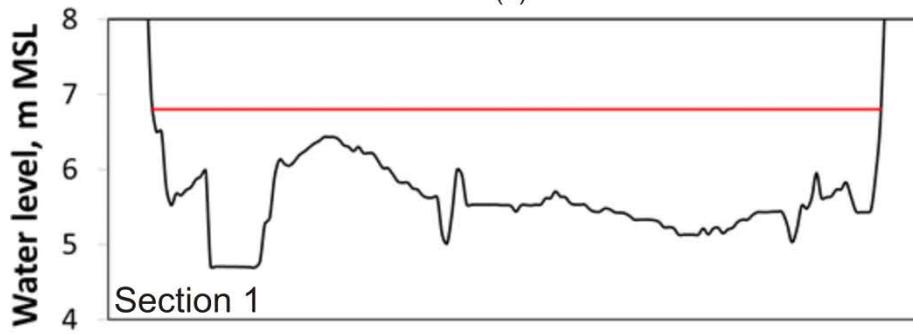
980 Figure 19: Cross-section through west boundary of CG02 with water elevation marks for selected time points.

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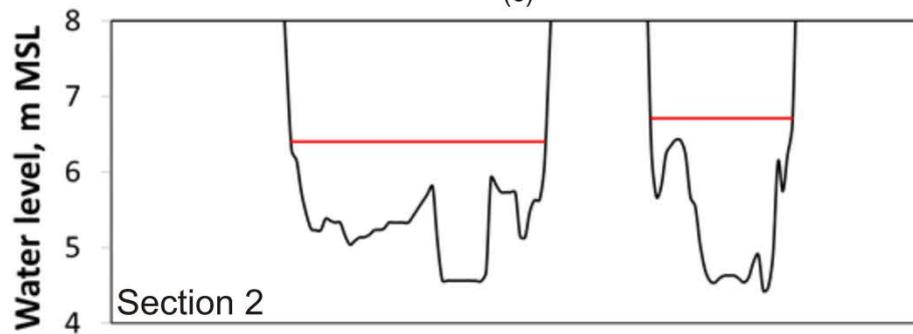
(a)



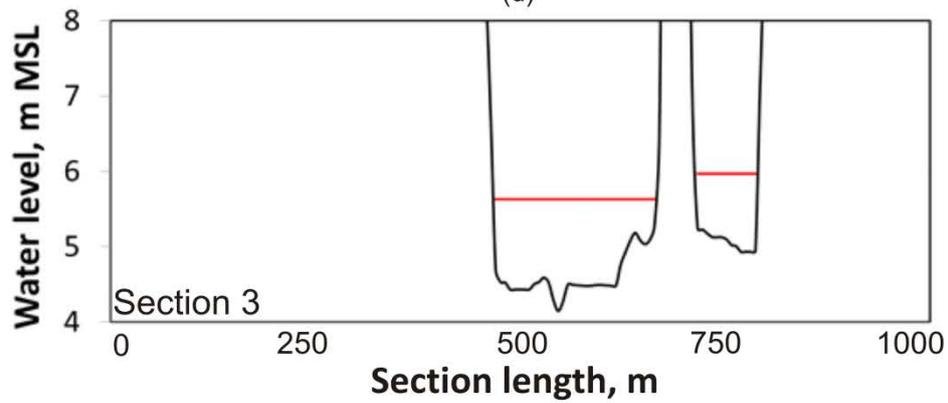
(b)



(c)



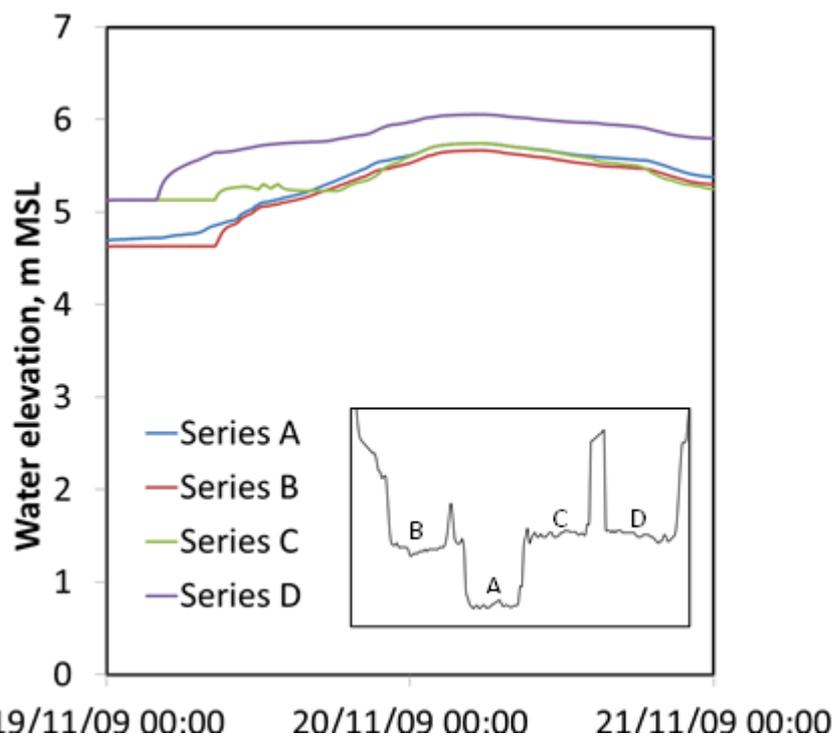
(d)



—Bathymetry —Water level

983 Figure 20: (a) Flood extent in upper floodplains and (a-c) water elevations at three cross-sections during flood
984 simulated by CG06.

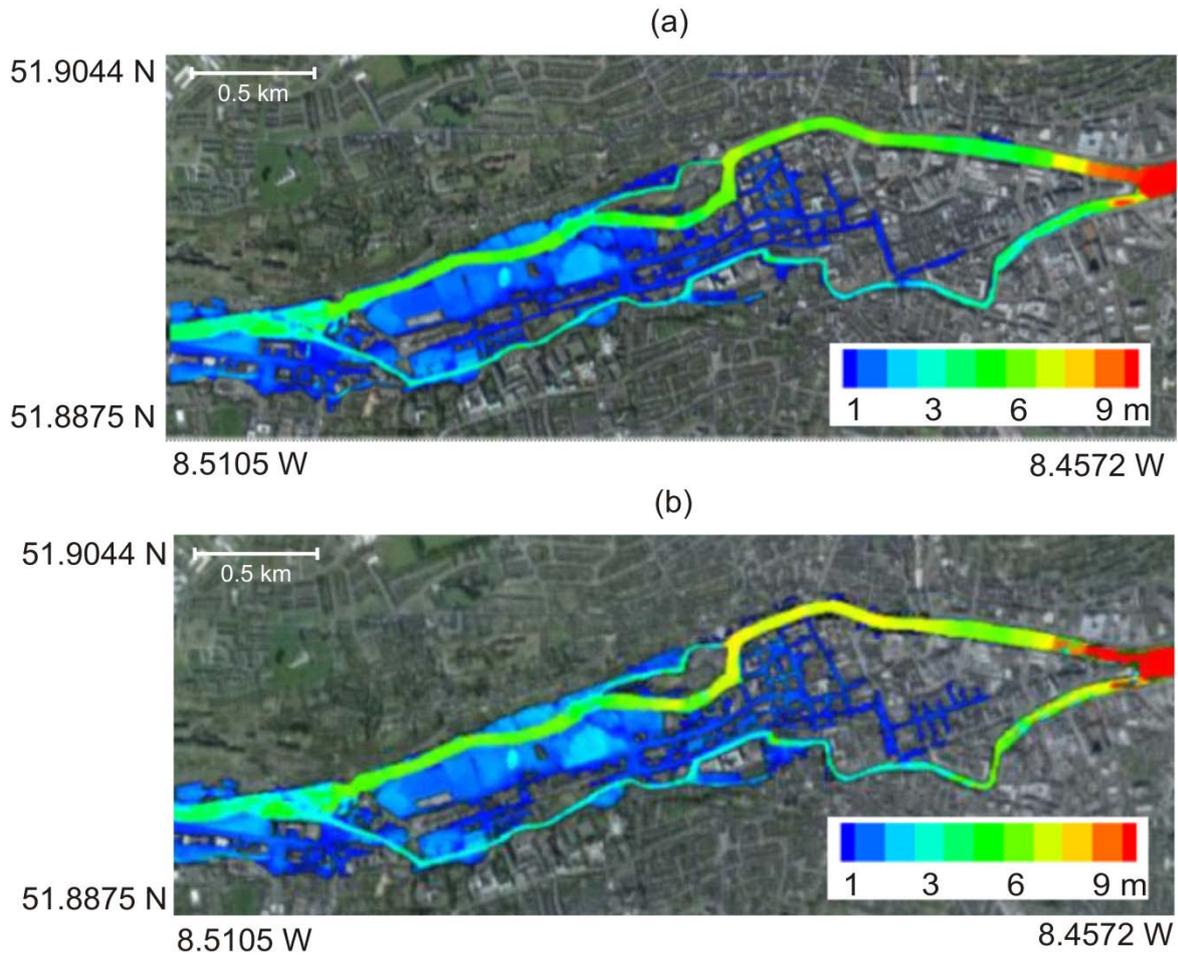
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986 19/11/09 00:00 20/11/09 00:00 21/11/09 00:00
987 Figure 21: Timeseries of water elevations across the western nested boundary of CG02.

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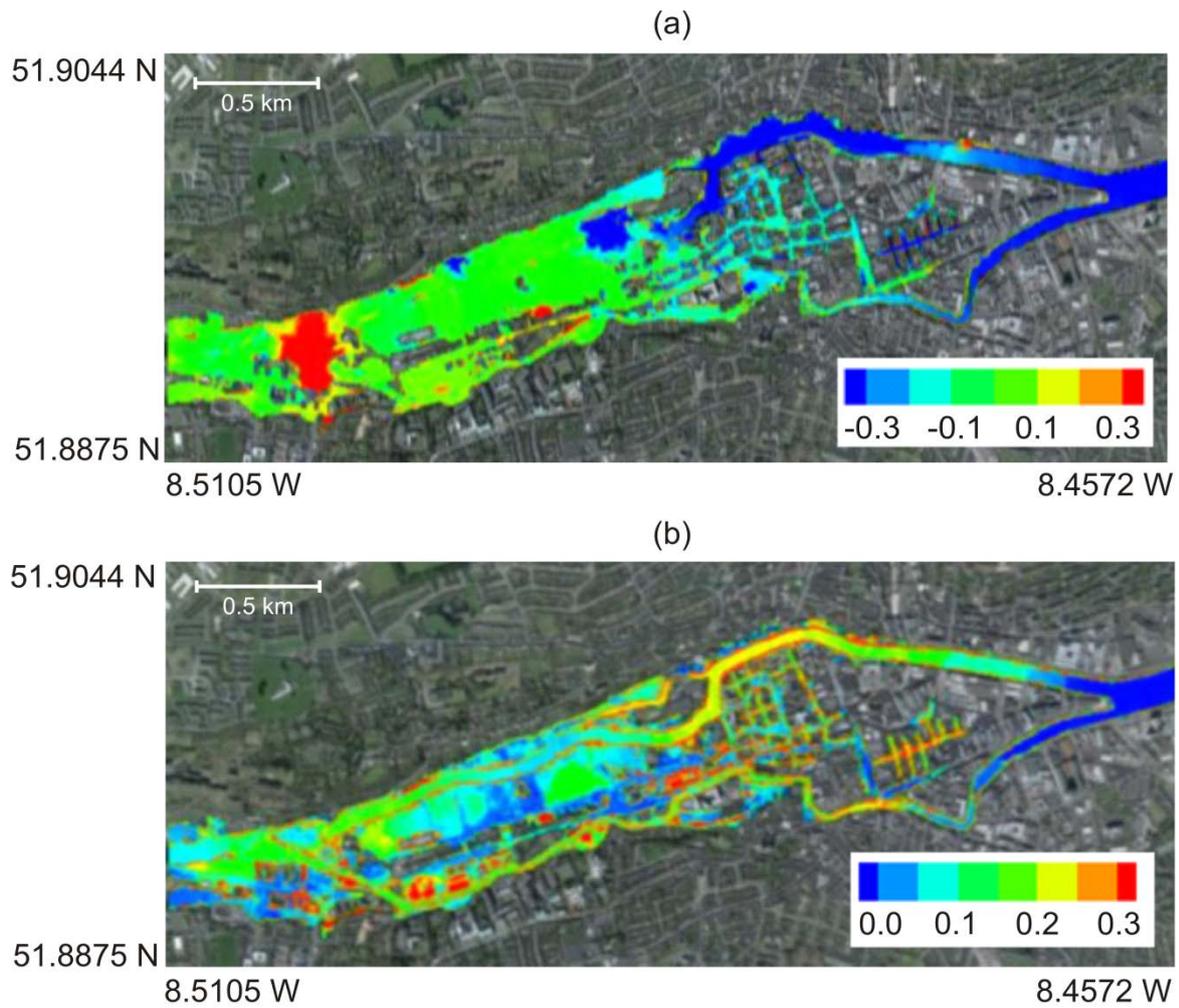
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991 Figure 22: Comparison of flood extent simulated by (a) CG02 and (b) CG06. Contours represent water levels
 992 (m).

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995 Figure 23: Contour plots of (a) difference in water elevations (m) between CG06 and CG02, and (b) RMSE
 996 over time.

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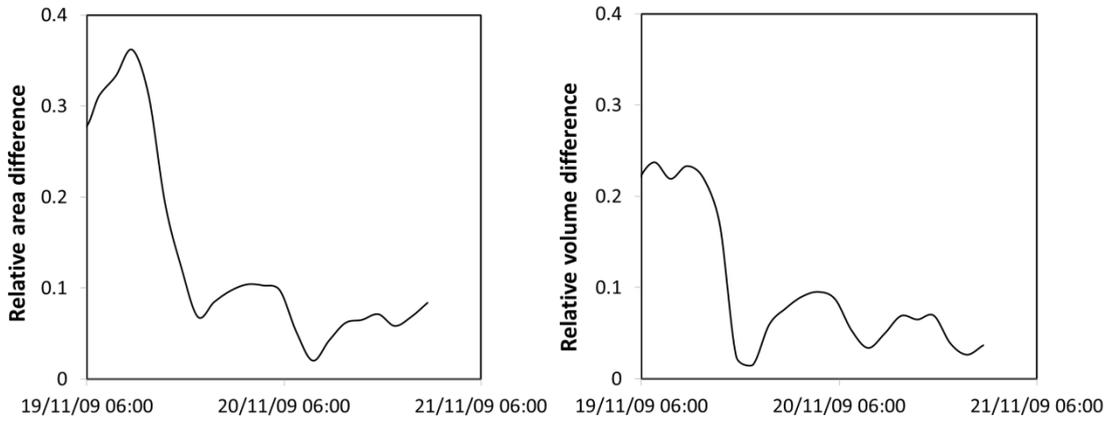
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(a)

(b)

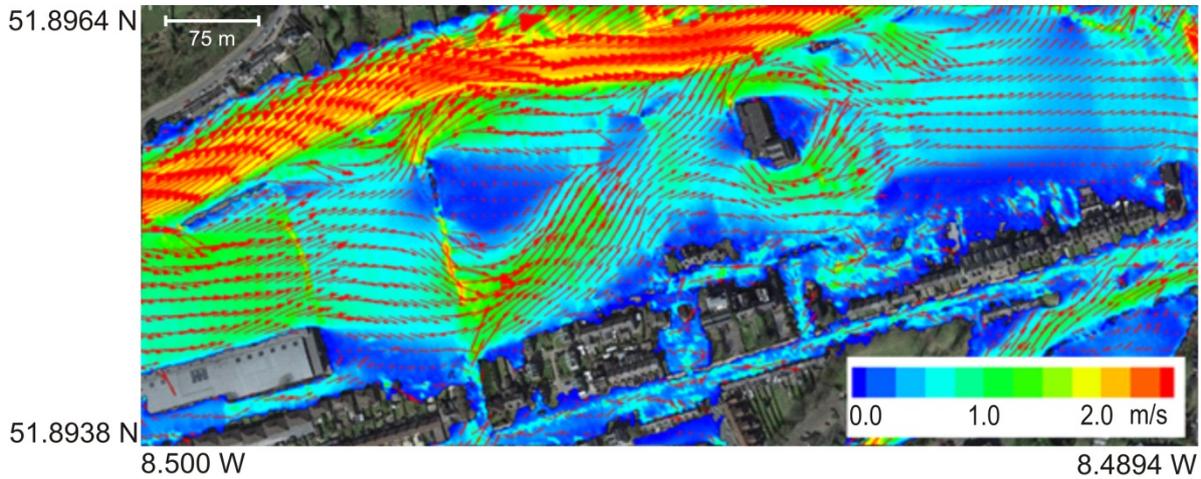


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1007 Figure 24: Evolution of the relative difference in (a) total area of inundation and (b) volume of water in
1008 inundated area between CG06 and CG02. See text for explanation of relative difference.

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1011 Figure 25: Map of velocity contours (m/s) with vectors showing magnitude and direction of velocities in the
1012 downstream floodplains of Cork City.

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