

1 **Monitoring seasonal variations in seismic velocity and**
2 **groundwater levels in Harvey, Western Australia using**
3 **borehole ambient seismic noise interferometry**

4 **Leiyu He^{1,2}, Erdinc Saygin^{2,3}, David Lumley^{2,4}, Chaoying Bai¹**

5 ¹Department of Geophysics, Chang'an University, Xi'an, China

6 ²Department of Physics, The University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia

7 ³Deep Earth Imaging, Future Science Platform, CSIRO, Perth, Australia

8 ⁴School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, The University of Texas at Dallas, Dallas, USA

9 **Key Points:**

- 10 • We use ambient seismic noise recorded in a borehole to monitor changes of seis-
11 mic velocity using interferometric analysis in Harvey.
12 • We find that the change in seismic velocity is seasonal and strongly correlated with
13 changes in near-surface groundwater levels.
14 • Modeled elastic and poroelastic velocity changes are consistent with the observed
15 seismic velocity changes.

Corresponding author: Leiyu He, leiyuhe@chd.edu.cn

Abstract

In order to explore the relationships between environmental subsurface changes and seismic velocities, we use nearly four years (2015-2018) of continuous ambient seismic noise data recorded in a multi-level borehole sensor array to measure relative seismic velocity changes at the SW Hub CO₂ Geosequestration Site in Harvey, Western Australia using seismic noise interferometry. We find a direct correlation between seismic velocity and seasonal groundwater changes, where seismic velocity changes follow groundwater level changes. Our rock and fluid physics modeling are highly consistent with the observations suggesting the seismic velocity changes are a direct result of groundwater table fluctuations.

Plain Language Summary

Groundwater resources are extremely important for society. In the context of global climate change, human activities have greatly changed the distribution and utilization potential of groundwater resources. Dynamic monitoring of groundwater level changes is of great significance for the rational use and protection of groundwater resources. By analyzing the ambient seismic noise recorded with geophones, we show that we can indirectly monitor the changes in groundwater level in Harvey, Western Australia. We find that the velocity change curve is highly correlated with the groundwater level change. Our analyses show that it is feasible to use ambient seismic noise data to monitor groundwater level changes.

1 Introduction

The surface layer of the earth supports life and has become known as the Critical Zone (Brantley et al., 2007). This area ranges from the top of the vegetation canopy down to the bottom of the aquifer (H. Lin, 2010). In order to meet society's increasing demand for food and water resources, the use of plant and soil will be expanded in the next few decades with the effect that the critical zone (CZ) will be increasingly impacted by human activities, including land and groundwater use (D. d. Richter & Mobley, 2009), so research on the CZ will be important to optimally manage the use of these resources. Based on this, the role of ambient seismic noise is increasingly important and gives us new approaches to study the physical properties of the CZ (Larose et al., 2015).

Ambient seismic noise has proven to be an extremely useful method and has been applied in many areas of seismology (Lecocq et al., 2014; Larose et al., 2015), where it has been used for subsurface imaging (Shapiro et al., 2005; F.-C. Lin et al., 2008; Poli et al., 2012; Saygin & Kennett, 2012; Issa et al., 2017), and environmental monitoring (Mainsant et al., 2012; Minato et al., 2012; Froment et al., 2013).

Since seismic noise is continuous, ubiquitous, it gives the opportunity to study temporal changes of the subsurface over time (Nakata et al., 2019). Recently, many studies use ambient seismic noise to measure relative seismic velocity changes (dv/v), such as groundwater level changes (Sens-Schönfelder & Wegler, 2006; Lecocq et al., 2017; Clements & Denolle, 2018; Yang et al., 2018; Kim & Lekic, 2019), temperature induced changes (T. Richter et al., 2014; Mao et al., 2019), earth tide variations (Hillers et al., 2015; Mao et al., 2019), subsurface changes from volcanic activity (Breguier, Shapiro, et al., 2008; Bennington et al., 2018; De Plaen et al., 2019; Yates et al., 2019), stress variations caused by post-seismic relaxation (Breguier, Campillo, et al., 2008; Hobiger et al., 2012; Obermann et al., 2014; Hillers et al., 2019), and other applications.

The SW Hub Project is located in the South Perth Basin of Western Australia, approximately 110 km south of the state capital Perth. The project site represents a major carbon capture and storage (CCS) research effort, intending to store industrial CO₂

64 from coal-fired power plants, mineral processing facilities and other sources, in order to
 65 help meet Australia’s national CO₂ emission reduction goals (Stalker et al., 2013). As
 66 a part of the project, in order to characterize natural environmental seismicity prior to
 67 any CO₂ injection, an eight-element 44 m deep seismic borehole was deployed and op-
 68 erated continuously with three-component sensors between 2015 and 2018 (Lumley et
 69 al., 2015).

70 The primary goal of this study is to explore the cause of seasonal seismic velocity
 71 changes (dv/v) observed at the SW Hub CO₂ Geosequestration Site borehole, by inte-
 72 grating continuous seismic noise recordings using interferometric analysis. The borehole
 73 array is approximately 17 km east of the Indian Ocean coast (Figure 1a), where highly
 74 energetic ocean seismic noise was recorded during the operation of the borehole. In our
 75 analyses, we integrate other environmental datasets such as groundwater, tidal, rainfall
 76 and temperature data to investigate whether there is an apparent correlation between
 77 these environmental phenomena and the observed seismic velocity changes.

78 2 Data and Methods

79 2.1 Data

80 The seismic data were recorded continuously at the borehole array between Au-
 81 gust 2015 and April 2018 at a sampling rate of 1 kHz. The borehole comprises eight lev-
 82 els of three-component 15 Hz geophones of broad sensitivity range; with a vertical el-
 83 ement spacing of 6 m (Figure 1b) where the deepest sensor element is located at 44 m.
 84 During the nearly three year operation of the borehole, there was only a limited amount
 85 of downtime of approximately five months in total.

86 2.2 Noise Cross-correlations & Measuring Seismic Velocity Changes

87 The cross-correlation operation can turn “noise” into a useful signal by providing
 88 an estimate of Green’s functions between seismic stations (Bensen et al., 2007). Most
 89 of the noise tomography results and time-lapse analyses are based on cross-correlations
 90 retrieval (Nakata et al., 2019). Since ambient seismic noise is recorded continuously, these
 91 cross-correlations can also be used to estimate the relative variations in velocities (Clarke
 92 et al., 2011).

93 We calculate three kinds of cross-correlation functions using all three components
 94 of the geophones: “vertical-vertical”, “north-north”, and “east-east” and other cross-component
 95 correlations. Daily cross-correlations are calculated using a deconvolution technique (Helmberger
 96 & Wiggins, 1971), where the raw data is detrended (remove mean and trend) and a one
 97 hour correlation window with no overlap is used in the computations. For the end of each
 98 day, the resulting cross-correlations from each sensor pair are stacked to create a daily
 99 stacked cross-correlation. The whole suite of cross-correlation is shown in the Support-
 100 ing Information (Figure S1).

101 After calculating the cross-correlations from the inter-elements of the borehole for
 102 each day, we measure the relative velocity change by comparing each day’s cross-correlation
 103 with a reference cross-correlation created from the average of all cross-correlations us-
 104 ing the Moving Window Cross-Spectrum (MWCS) method of Clarke et al. (2011); Lecocq
 105 et al. (2014). The MWCS technique has the advantage of operating in the frequency do-
 106 main, where the bandwidth of a coherent signal in the correlation function can be clearly
 107 defined (Clarke et al., 2011). This method calculates relative velocity changes by com-
 108 paring the ‘reference’ waveform with the ‘observed’ waveform (Clarke et al., 2011).

109 In the calculations, we use both acausal and causal data time windows spanning
 110 from -4 to 4 s for the analysis windows for cross-correlations. We also test the influence
 111 of user-selected parameters in the estimation of dv/v by trying different windows and

112 step sizes. In the end, we use 0.2 s as the size of the moving window, and 0.04 s for the
 113 step size (20% of the window size), which yields robust and consistent measurements.
 114 Our test results show that velocity perturbation estimates are generally not sensitive to
 115 input parameters, i.e., window and step sizes (see Figure S5-S7), suggesting the robust-
 116 ness of our measurements. In order to ensure the accuracy of the calculations, and to
 117 eliminate the influence of noisy data segments, we only retain data with a coherency (mean
 118 coherence for each window) greater than 0.75 when calculating dv/v . The dv/v curve
 119 is shown in Figure 2a-c and Figure 3a.

120 Since each sensor has three components, we calculated 84 (3x28) cross-correlation
 121 functions for all 28 possible combinations for each of the sensor components. For each
 122 cross-correlation function, we calculated the corresponding velocity change compared to
 123 the overall average. In Figures 2a-c, we plot the relative velocity changes measured at
 124 1-5 Hz for three different components (Z-Z, N-N, E-E), where each colored curve is the
 125 velocity curve for a different cross-correlation and the thick black line is the average curve
 126 for all combinations (colored curve) of sensor pairs.

127 Previous studies (Obermann et al., 2013) have shown that the seismic coda wave
 128 is composed of surface waves and scattered body waves, the surface wave dominates the
 129 early times and scattered body waves dominate the later times. In our analyses, we use
 130 a time window from -4 s to 4 s which is mostly dominated by deterministic surface waves
 131 with typical moveouts around 100 m/s (Figure S11) and also its coda. In this window,
 132 it is expected to see the contribution of coda waves of both surface and body waves types
 133 as well as the deterministic surface waves as demonstrated by previous studies (Obermann
 134 et al., 2013, 2014). For the surface waves part, we calculate the sensitivity of Rayleigh
 135 waves between 1 and 25 Hz (Herrmann, 1987) for a V_s velocity model derived from Lumley
 136 et al. (2015) (See supporting information Figure S10). In this frequency range, phase ve-
 137 locities of Rayleigh waves are most sensitive to velocity structure in the top 800 m. For
 138 comparison, we also calculated the relative velocity changes of other frequency ranges
 139 (See Figure S2 - S4 in Supporting information), it can be seen that the amplitude of the
 140 relative velocity changes at 1-5 Hz is the largest, followed by 5-10 Hz and 10-25 Hz as
 141 the smallest. We also find that most of the energy is concentrated in 1-10 Hz by apply-
 142 ing a time-frequency analysis (See Figure S12 - S20), which possibly explains the observed
 143 dominant amplitudes of the velocity changes between 1 and 5 Hz.

144 From Figures 2a-c, we observe that the dv/v curve has obvious seasonal and pe-
 145 riodic variations ($\pm 0.5\%$ on average) and its wavelength of change is about one year. It
 146 reaches a negative maximum around September of each year and a positive maximum
 147 around April of the following year. These phenomena can be observed across all of the
 148 channel combinations of Z-Z, N-N, and E-E and other cross-components combinations
 149 (See Figure 3a).

150 Figure 2d shows the Reduced Standing Water Level (RSWL: the elevation of the
 151 water level is calculated by subtracting the depth to water from a reference elevation)
 152 after normalization. Since there is no groundwater data available directly at the shal-
 153 low seismic borehole, we select data from 11 nearby groundwater boreholes from Aus-
 154 tralian Groundwater Explorer that cover the majority of the recording duration from 2015
 155 to 2018. Given the different baselines of groundwater changes in each groundwater bore-
 156 hole, we normalize the data to identify the trends better. See Figure S8 for the absolute
 157 groundwater data in the supporting information). The tidal variations, precipitation and
 158 the ambient air temperature are given in Figures 2d-e. We also see that these environ-
 159 mental data exhibit a strong seasonal, but a time-lagged, variation.

160 The general trend of groundwater variations in all of the 11 nearby wells is highly
 161 consistent (Figure 2d) and shows a high level of correlation with dv/v (Figure 2a-d). Pre-
 162 vious studies have explored the relationship between seismic velocity and groundwater
 163 level changes. One common observation found was that as groundwater levels rise, the

164 dv/v will decrease gradually, producing a clear negative correlation between the two pa-
 165 rameters (Gassenmeier et al., 2014; Sens-Schönfelder & Wegler, 2006; Clements & De-
 166 nolle, 2018). In October of 2015, the groundwater amplitude increases to a maximum,
 167 the result of increased precipitation during the rainy season, and in April of 2016, it drops
 168 to the minimum because of the lack of precipitation (2015.09 - 2016.04) (Commander,
 169 2013). This process can be explained by Darcy’s Law if the groundwater variations oc-
 170 cur through a stationary aquifer, the groundwater level changes in the aquifer will cause
 171 the velocity change (Sens-Schönfelder & Wegler, 2011). The patterns of change in other
 172 years are similar. The periodicity of groundwater variation is also about one year, equal
 173 to the wavelength of the change in dv/v . The correlation coefficient between mean dv/v
 174 and normalised mean RSWL is 0.928, the delay time between these two factors is almost
 175 0 day, indicating a significant likelihood that the change in dv/v is caused by ground-
 176 water level changes. However, Kim and Lekic (2019) have found that the relationship
 177 between these two parameters can be positively correlated. The primary reason behind
 178 the positive correlation is that auto-correlation method was used to calculate dv/v rather
 179 than cross-correlation in their study, they modeled the velocity change and found the
 180 dv/v is primarily sensitive the P wave velocity change.

181 Large earthquakes can also cause changes in the velocity of the subsurface (Hobiger
 182 et al., 2012; Minato et al., 2012). However, this change rate is more instantaneous rather
 183 than seasonal periodicity, and we did not find evidence of earthquake activity with M_w
 184 magnitude greater than 4.0, within 50 km of Harvey, during the analyses period. The
 185 variation of tide also exhibits an expected natural seasonal pattern (See Figure 2e). We
 186 calculate the correlation coefficient between mean dv/v and tide as 0.127, and the de-
 187 lay time is about 86 days. Mao et al. (2019) estimated the order of seismic velocity vari-
 188 ations induced by the tide to be approximately around 0.01%, which is much smaller than
 189 the relative velocity variations that we observed. Consequently, we suggest that tidal vari-
 190 ations are unlikely to be the primary cause of our observed seismic velocity changes.

191 The seismic velocities we observe do not show obvious correspondence with the tem-
 192 perature data unlike that observed by T. Richter et al. (2014). They reported a strong
 193 correlation between temperature and induced seasonal velocity changes. They found that
 194 if the velocity change is caused by temperature variations, a significant velocity change
 195 would have been observed within one day (T. Richter et al., 2014). We did not observe
 196 this phenomenon as shown in the diurnal plot (See Figure S9). The temperature-induced
 197 velocity change may be too small (less than 0.1%) and not easily observed (Yang et al.,
 198 2018; T. Richter et al., 2014; Clements & Denolle, 2018; Tsai, 2011). One possible rea-
 199 son is that our geophones are located in a borehole, thus being at depth they are less
 200 affected by surface heat fluctuations (T. Richter et al., 2014). We also calculate delay
 201 time between temperature and observed dv/v as around 40 days, and the correlation co-
 202 efficient between dv/v and temperature is 0.400, which is much smaller than the dv/v
 203 and groundwater correlation. Interestingly, it can be seen from Figures S9 a-c that the
 204 noise fluctuations between 00:00–10:00 UTC (8:00–18:00 local time) are significantly higher
 205 than at other times, which is likely caused by the result of an increase in human and farm
 206 animal (cattle) activity during day time near the borehole.

207 **3 Modelling Seismic Velocity Changes**

208 In order to quantitatively evaluate the velocity change caused by groundwater, we
 209 use Tsai’s model (Tsai, 2011) to calculate the velocity changes caused by groundwater
 210 and the velocity changes caused by temperature change. We use the rock physics param-
 211 eter (bold) derived from the lab measurements of Lumley et al. (2015) given in Table
 212 1-3.

Table 1. Thermoelastic modeling parameters. m is the Murnaghan constant, μ is the shear modulus, ν is Poisson’s ratio, k is the horizontal wavenumber, ω is the frequency of annual variation, κ is thermal diffusivity, Δt is the delay between temperature variations and the observed dv/v curve.

$\frac{m}{\mu}$	ν	α_{th}	k	κ	ω	Δt
-10000	0.2	$10^{-5} \text{ } ^\circ\text{C}^{-1}$	$2\pi/(20 \text{ km})$	$10^{-6} \text{ m}^2/\text{s}$	$2 \times 10^{-7} \text{ s}^{-1}$	$\approx 40 \text{ days}$

Table 2. Direct elastic modeling parameters. ϕ is porosity, P_0 is pore pressure, E is Young’s modulus. Other parameters are the same as Table 1.

$\frac{m}{\mu}$	ν	k	ϕ	P_0	E
-10000	0.2	$2\pi/(20 \text{ km})$	0.25	$4.3 \times 10^4 \text{ Pa}$	$1.6 \times 10^{10} \text{ Pa}$

Table 3. Poroelastic modeling parameters. α is the Biot-Willis coefficient, κ_{hy} is hydraulic diffusivity. Δt_{poro} is the delay between poroelastic effect and the groundwater level variations. Other parameters are the same as Table 2.

$\frac{m}{\mu}$	ν	k	α	ϕ	P_0	E	κ_{hy}	Δt_{poro}
-10000	0.2	$2\pi/(20 \text{ km})$	0.25	0.25	$4.3 \times 10^4 \text{ Pa}$	$1.6 \times 10^{10} \text{ Pa}$	$2.5 \text{ m}^2/\text{s}$	11 days

213 **3.1 Temperature induced velocity changes**

214 We use the following model of Tsai (2011) to calculate the dv/v induced by tem-
 215 perature changes. The velocity changes due to the temperature can be approximated by:

$$dv/v \approx \frac{m}{\mu} A(t) e^{-ky} \sin(kx) (1 - 2\nu), \tag{1}$$

216 where strain caused by temperature is $A(t)$ is given by:

$$A(t) = \frac{1 + \nu}{1 - \nu} k \alpha_{th} T_0 \sqrt{\frac{\kappa}{\omega}} e^{\pi/4 - \omega \Delta t} \cos[\omega(t - \Delta t)], \tag{2}$$

217 m is the Murnaghan constant, μ is the shear modulus, x is the horizontal position, y is
 218 the depth, t is time, ν is Poisson’s ratio, k is the horizontal wave number, ω is the fre-
 219 quency of annual variation, κ is thermal diffusivity, T_0 is half of the peak to peak am-
 220 plitude of the temperature variation, Δt is the delay between temperature variations and
 221 the observed dv/v curve. The parameters are given in Table 1, where ν is from Lumley
 222 et al. (2015), other parameters are from Tsai (2011); Clements and Denolle (2018).

223 By comparing the modelling results (See Figure 3d), we find that the velocity ef-
 224 fect of temperature is minimal (less than 0.04%), which is not sufficient to generate ob-
 225 served velocity change. We conclude that temperature can not be a significant cause of
 226 the observed relative velocity changes at the Harvey seismic borehole.

227 **3.2 Groundwater induced velocity changes**

228 In Tsai (2011), two mechanisms are proposed to describe the seismic velocity changes
 229 caused by groundwater, 1) Direct elastic model, 2) Poroelastic model.

230 For the direct elastic model, by a simple substitution of $A(t)$ to $A_e(t)$, where $A_e(t)$
 231 is:

$$A_e(t) = \frac{(1 + \nu)\phi P_0}{E}, \quad (3)$$

232 where ϕ is porosity, P_0 is pore pressure, E is Young's modulus. See Table 2 for other pa-
 233 rameters. If the water variation is 4.3 m, the $P_0 = 4.3 \times 10^4 Pa$, the modeled and ob-
 234 served data match is reasonable (See real groundwater level changes in Figure S8). Other
 235 parameters are the same as the thermoelastic model.

236 Substituting these into Equation 1 then we can get the velocity caused by direct
 237 elastic effect (See Figure 3c).

238 For the poroelastic model, the calculation is similar to thermoelastic model, because
 239 (double-headed arrow representing logical equivalence),

$$\frac{\alpha_{th}ET}{1 - 2\nu} \leftrightarrow \alpha P \quad (4)$$

$$\kappa \leftrightarrow \kappa_{hy}, \quad (5)$$

240 where α is the Biot-Willis coefficient, κ_{hy} is hydraulic diffusivity, by substituting these
 241 to Equation 2, we can get $A_{poro}(t)$, then we can get dv/v caused by poroelastic effect
 242 (See Figure 3c).

243 The modeled dv/v (Figure 3c) shows a similar pattern in both direct elastic and
 244 poroelastic model, the calculated amplitude is basically consistent with the observed. But
 245 it is not completely consistent with the observed curve, because we use a simple cosine
 246 function to model the annual groundwater variations. The magnitude of the velocity change
 247 for the two models is directly related to the magnitude of the corresponding strain. The
 248 amplitude of $A_{poro}(t)$ is influenced by wavenumber k , therefore, decreasing k results in
 249 a smaller velocity change but does not affect the direct elastic model (Tsai, 2011). This
 250 suggests that the direct elastic effect is most likely the cause of the observed seismic ve-
 251 locity change. However, these three calculations are just a reference, because not all pa-
 252 rameters have been measured by lab experiments (e.g., $\frac{m}{\mu}$). More rock physics exper-
 253 iments using rocks/soil from the Harvey site would be required to make the calculation
 254 results more realistic.

255 4 Conclusions

256 In this study, we use continuous seismic borehole data to calculate seismic veloc-
 257 ity changes at the SW Hub site in Harvey, Western Australia. We found that the mea-
 258 sured velocity changes are similar at different frequencies with different amplitudes. In
 259 order to describe the observed relative seismic velocity changes, we study four different
 260 environmental datasets collected in the vicinity of the seismic borehole. We rule out the
 261 influence of temperature and tide on seismic velocity changes, since the observed changes
 262 at SW Hub are significantly larger than, and out of phase with, these effects. The change
 263 of groundwater level has a strong correlation (93%) with the dv/v curve, where the de-
 264 lay time between groundwater fluctuations and observed velocity changes is very small.
 265 We use two different models of Tsai (2011) to quantify the seismic velocity changes with
 266 respect to the groundwater changes. Both the direct elastic and poroelastic models yield
 267 very similar amplitudes of dv/v . We conclude that the observed seismic velocity changes
 268 are most likely caused by the changes in groundwater levels at the SW Hub Borehole.

Our research further shows that it is feasible to detect and monitor changes in ground-water level with passive seismic ambient noise data, which is useful for future studies of groundwater resources and the critical zone.

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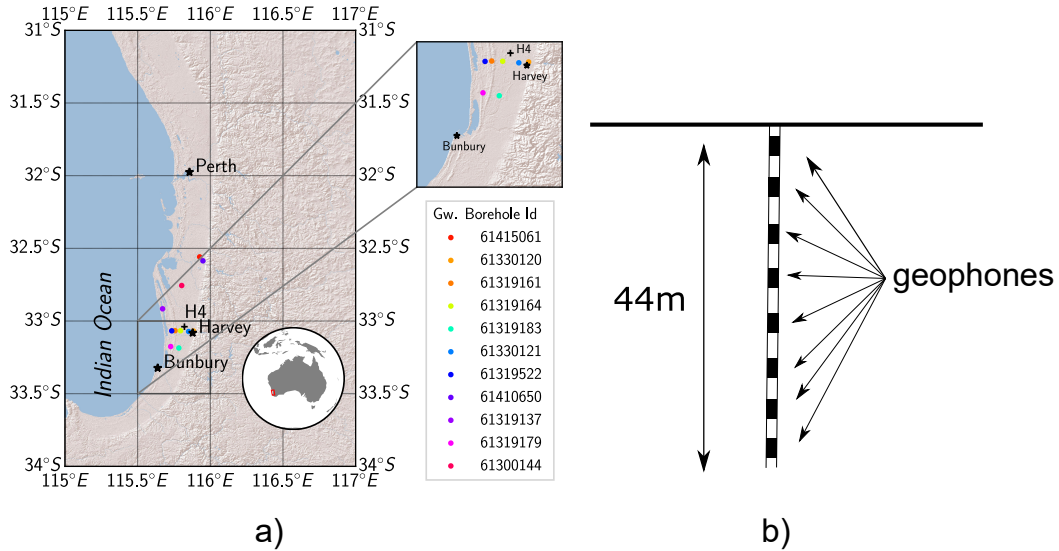


Figure 1. a) The map shows the location of the H4 seismic borehole well (black cross) and groundwater boreholes (circles). The location of the nearby cities are shown with stars, and the red rectangle in the inset map shows the location of the study area. b) The schematic of the borehole array. 3C geophones (black rectangles) are positioned at depths: 2, 8, 14, 20, 26, 32, 38 and 44 m (Lumley et al., 2015).

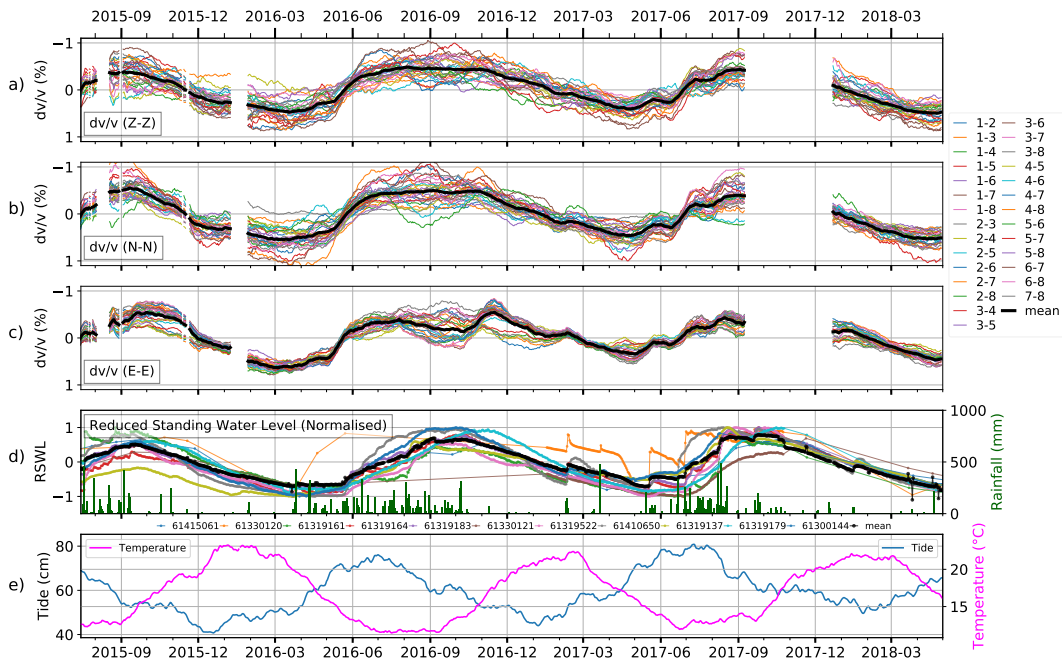


Figure 2. a) Relative velocity change as a function of time for Z-Z (1-5 Hz), the thick black line is the result of averaging all 28 curves. b) Same as 2a, but for N-N. c) Same as 2a, but for E-E. White areas denote the time periods, where the array did not record. d) Reduced standing groundwater levels after normalization at ten wells near Harvey, where the black line is the mean curve. Their positions are shown in Figure 1. The green bar plot is the rainfall data; e) Sea level data (blue curve) and temperature data (magenta curve) at Bunbury.

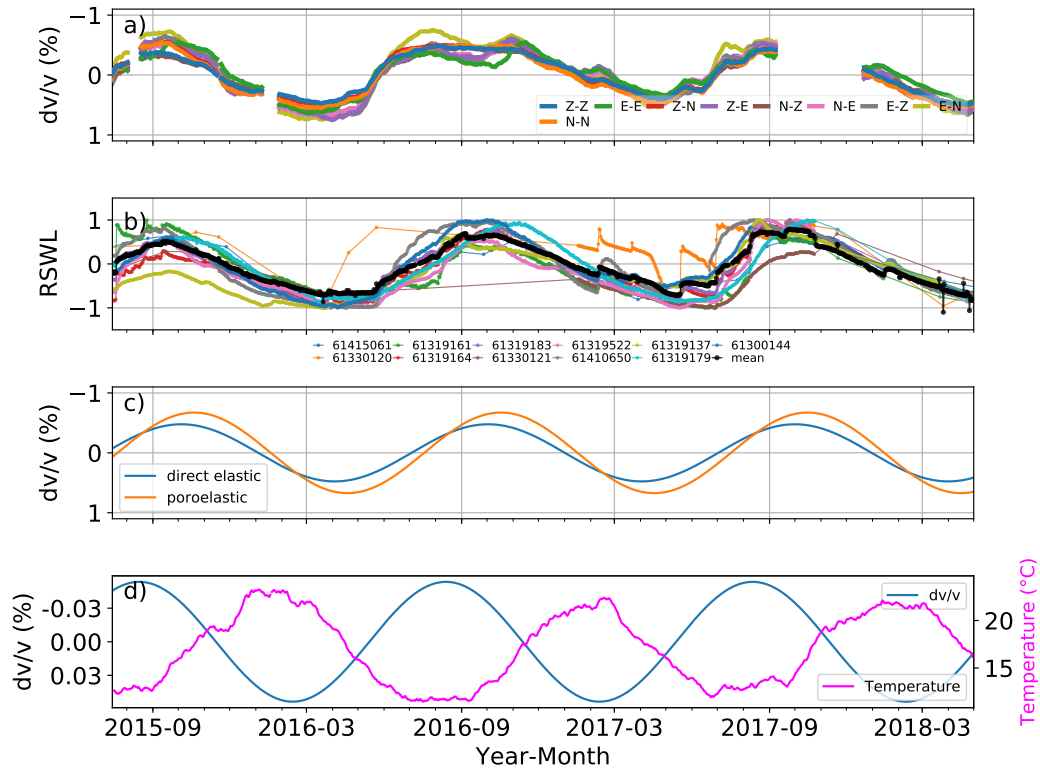


Figure 3. a) Relative velocity changes for different cross-correlation components (1-5 Hz). b) Reduced standing groundwater levels (RSWL) after normalization at ten wells near Harvey, where the black line is the mean curve. Their positions are shown in Figure 1. c) Modeled dv/v , the blue curve is for the direct elastic model, the orange curve is for the poroelastic model of Tsai (2011). d) Ambient air temperature changes (magenta) and the theoretical temperature induced dv/v (blue).