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A Novel Machine Learning Algorithm for Tracking Remotely Sensed Waves in the Surf Zone

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13 Abstract

This paper describes a novel image processing technique that detects wave breaking and tracks 14 waves in the surf zone using machine learning procedures. Using time-space images (timestacks), 15 the algorithm detects white pixel intensity peaks generated by breaking waves, confirms these 16 peaks as true wave breaking events by learning from the data's true colour representation, clusters 17 individual waves, and obtains optimal wave paths. The method was developed and tested using 18 data from four sandy Australian beaches under different incident wave and light conditions. 19 20 Results are a representation of the position of the wave front front through time, i.e., space-time 21 data, which when shown overlaid on the original timestack shows the high degree of accuracy of the method developed here. The utility of the method is demonstrated in two ways: 1) through a 22 comparison between the instantaneous wave speed calculated from the wave paths with the 23 24 theoretical shallow water wave speed, and 2) by obtaining optical intensities that could be translated into wave roller lengths. The algorithm developed here has the potential to improve 25 understanding numerous nearshore process such as bore propagation and capture in the surf zone, 26

surf zone energy dissipation, surf beat and infragravity waves, and as a direct speed input for depth
inversion methods.

29 **1 Introduction**

Wind-generated gravity waves are the main driver for nearshore dynamics (Komar, 1998; 30 Battjes, 1998). In particular, surf and swash zone processes have a significant impact on the 31 subaqueous-subaerial nearshore boundary, and are the primary driver of sediment exchange in this 32 region (Masselink and Puleo 2006). Several recent studies have focused on wave-by-wave (Power 33 34 et al., 2010; Postacchini and Brocchini, 2014; Martins et. al, 2017b) or swash-by-swash (Power et 35 al., 2011; Padilla and Alsina, 2017; Martins et al., 2017a) approaches to investigate nearshore phenomena, but have found high variability for nearly all processes investigated (e.g., Power et 36 37 al., 2010; Power et al., 2011; and Martins et al., 2017a). Such results suggest that, even under 38 laboratory conditions, the full the evolution of shallow water waves on a wave-by-wave scale must 39 be considered in order to understand the full wave transformation in the nearshore.

Very few studies have tracked the evolution of individual waves across the surf zone of 40 41 natural beaches. To the authors' knowledge, only Suhayda and Pettigrew (1977), Yoo et al. (2011), and Power et al. (2015) have made attempts. Suhayda and Pettigrew (1977) used a method in which 42 individual waves were videoed and visually compared to wave poles in the surf zone. Such a 43 method has the disadvantage of being extremely labour intensive and is thus only suitable for 44 tracking a few waves. Yoo et al. (2011) used the Radon transform to track individual waves on 45 timestack images (see Aagaard and Holm, 1989), but only presented results for averaged wave 46 conditions which may not account for the full variability of wave heights and speeds seen in the 47 surf zone. More recently, Power et al. (2015) tracked waves using closely spaced arrays of pressure 48 transducers (PTs) deployed in the surf zone. This method has the advantage of tracking parameters 49

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such as the wave height (H) and the local water depth (h) but was sensitive to the definition of the temporal searching window which could lead to a different number of waves being tracked.

To address the difficulties in tracking individual waves, and thus to further understanding 52 of the variability observed in surf and swash zone processes, this paper describes a novel algorithm 53 for tracking waves in the surf zone that uses computer vision, peak detection, and machine learning 54 techniques. The method is similar in concept to the method of Power et al. (2015) in that it tracks 55 peaks in timeseries in a cross-shore orientation, however, the method presented here uses data 56 derived from coastal video imagery instead of PT measurements. The algorithm exploits the fact 57 that colour signature of breaking waves is significantly different to the colour signature of calm 58 water, unbroken waves, or sand. This colour signature of breaking waves is seen as white pixel 59 60 peaks in timeseries extracted from timestacks. When these peaks are clustered and tracked using 61 machine learning methods, it is possible to fully track the paths of breaking waves in the surf zone. 62 The method derived here gives similar results to the Radon transform method of Yoo et al. (2011) and Almar et al. (2014) but can be directly applied to any timestack image without the need of 63 64 complex transforms (e.g., Radon or Hough transforms), thus greatly reducing computation costs and analysis complexity. More importantly, the method described here is, to the authors' 65 knowledge, the only method capable of automatically tracking the occurrence of wave overrunning 66 67 (bore merging) in the nearshore.

This paper is organized as follows: Section 2.1 describes the study sites, data collection methods and datasets to be investigated, and Sections 2.2 and 2.3 describe how wave breaking events are detected, confirmed, and tracked. Section 3.1 presents the results in the forms of the obtained wave paths overlayed on to the original timestacks, and a comparison to the Yoo et al.'s (2011) method. Sections 3.2 and 3.3 present brief examples of applications of the method: in

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Section 3.2, the instantaneous wave speed is directly obtained from the wave paths, and in Section
3.3, phase-averaged optical intensities are obtained and compared to Haller and Catálan's (2009)
results. Section 4 discusses of the results presented in Section 3, and conclusions are given in
Section 5.

77 **2 Methods**

78 2.1 Field data

Video imagery of the nearshore was collected at four different News South Wales (NSW) 79 beaches covering different wave breaking, light, and grazing angle conditions (Figure 1 and Table 80 81 1). For each experiment, a consumer-grade high-resolution video camera (Sony HDR-CX240) recorded the surf and swash zones at 25 frames per second from an elevated location (headland or 82 a house balcony) for several hours. All study sites were surveyed at low tide using a total station 83 84 to obtain a beach profile and at least four ground control points (GCPs) per site. The coordinate system for all data was such that the PT line is cross-shore oriented (positive seaward); the video 85 and survey data were adjusted accordingly. Beach profiles were surveyed from the location of the 86 first foredune to the maximum depth possible, limited by wave breaking conditions. The beach 87 slope $(tan\beta)$ was calculated across the surf and swash zones from the beach berm to the end of 88 89 the profile. Transformed spectral offshore wave parameters (significant wave high, peak period and mean wave direction) were obtained from the NSW Nearshore Wave Forecast toolbox (NSW-90 OEH, 2017) at the nearest 10m isobath. The surf zone spectral wave height (H_{m0}) and period 91 (T_{m01}) were calculated from data measured by a PT deployed in the mid to outer surf zone using 92 the methods of Holthuijsen (2007). Additionally, a cross-shore array of evenly spaced PTs was 93 deployed in the surf and swash zones along the timestack transect (Figure 1 and Table 1). 94

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Three of the four study sites are classed as intermediate beach states in the Australian 95 morphodynamic beach model (Wright and Short, 1984), which is the most frequently occurring 96 beach state for microtidal, swell-dominated Australian beaches. During the data collection period, 97 One Mile Beach (OMB, Figure 1-a) had a low tide terrace morphology with rhythmic beach cusps, 98 and plunging breakers. Werri Beach (WB, Figure 1-b) had a steep beach profile, especially the 99 100 beach face, low tide terrace morphology (without apparent rhythmic beach cusps), and plunging breakers. Birubi Beach (BB, Figure 1-d) had a very gently sloping profile, one longshore bar, and 101 102 spilling breakers. Seven Mile Beach, Gerroa, (SMB, Figure 1-c), was the only dissipative study site, and had a gently sloping profile, no apparent longshore bars or troughs, and spilling breakers. 103 Reflective beaches were not considered because of the absence of wave breaking before the outer 104 limit of the swash zone, which precludes them from any significant surf zone data collection. 105

The light conditions and camera grazing angles varied between the experiments. OMB and 106 WB were imaged from elevated headlands with clear sky conditions. SMB was imaged from a 107 108 house balcony located on the elevated peninsula to the north of the beach with a shallow grazing angle and had moderately overcast conditions, which resulted in low-contrast images. BB was 109 110 recorded from a non-ideal grazing angle (very shallow) with clear skies, which resulted in a large 111 amount of specular reflection, particularly in the swash zone. The BB experiment also had strong 112 winds throughout the duration of the experiment, which resulted in large amounts of foam in the 113 surf zone, making wave paths less defined.



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Figure 1. Time averaged (Timex) images for the four data collection sites: a) One Mile Beach (OMB), b) Werri Beach (WB), c) Seven Mile Beach (SMB), and d) Birubi Beach (BB). All Timex images were calculated from 10 minutes of video data resampled at 2Hz following Holland et al. (1997). The black dashed lines indicate the timestack and PT transect locations.

119 **Table 1.** Data for each beach: location, date of the experiment, total number of PTs (nPT) 120 deployed, PT array cross-shore spacing (dx), beach slope $(\tan\beta)$ from the berm to the end of the 121 profile, offshore significant wave height $(H_{m0_{\infty}})$, offshore peak period $(T_p, offshore mean wave$

122 direction (D_m), Offshore Iribarren number ($\xi_o = \tan\beta / \sqrt{H_{m0_{\infty}} / [(g/2\pi) * T_p^2]}$), spectral

123 significant wave height in the surf zone (H_{m0}) , spectral significant wave period in the surf zone

Leastion	Data	D T	dx	tanβ	$H_{m0_{\infty}}$	T_p	Dm	ξo	H _{m0}	T _{m01}	Breaker
Location	Date	nP1	(m)	(-)	(m)	(s)	(°)	(-)	(m)	(s)	(observed)
One Mile Beach	07/08/14	12	3	0.076	0.98	13.8	Е	1.32	0.81	9.37	plunging
Seven Mile Beach	13/08/14	12	10	0.03	1.18	12.7	SE	0.44	0.57	7.98	spilling
Werri Beach	16/08/14	13	3	0.355	0.96	7.8	SE	3.53	0.92	8.26	Heavy plunging
Birubi Beach	06/07/17	9	6	0.02	0.78	8.4	S	0.12	0.43	10.24	Spilling/weak

124 (T_{m01}) , and observed breaker type.

125

2.2 Wave breaking detection

All video imagery was pre-processed following Holland et al. (1997) using the algorithm 126 of Hoonhotut et al. (2015). To ensure a high temporal resolution for wave tracking, the camera 127 data were downsampled to 10Hz instead of the usual rate of 2Hz that is most frequently used in 128 the literature. Each frame was projected into metric coordinates and frames were grouped into five 129 minutes batches, the optimal duration for this analysis. From these frame batches, a cross-shore 130 array of pixels was extracted and stacked in time (dashed black lines in Figure 1 and Figure 2-b), 131 resulting in an image known as timestack (Aagaard and Holm, 1989) (Figure 2-a). Using these 132 timestack images, two methods were developed to identify wave breaking depending on the 133 breaker type. Firstly, for spilling and plunging breakers, pixel intensity timeseries were extracted 134 every 10cm in the cross-shore direction (with sub-pixel accuracy) and pixel peaks were identified 135 using a peak detection algorithm that iteratively searches for local extrema in the timeseries. Pixel 136

intensity local maxima were found to closely correspond to white pixels generated by foam 137 corresponding to the crests of breaking waves (Figure 2-c). Secondly, for strongly plunging 138 139 breakers, wave breaking was detected as sharp pixel intensity transitions in the timestack by applying the horizontal Sobel operator (Sobel, 1968) and tracking the location of the resulting 140 edges in the cross-shore orientation by obtaining the argument of the maxima of the detected edges 141 142 at every timestamp. The second method was developed in order to track the exact front edge of the wave in cases where the original local maxima method showed high sensitivity to the white 143 signatures of residual foam in the surf zone, which was more problematic in the detection of heavy 144 plunging breakers. 145

146 In most cases, the identified pixel peaks directly corresponded to white foam associated with breaking wave crests; however, there were several instances where specular light reflection 147 both offshore and in the swash zone was incorrectly identified as wave breaking (Figure 3-a). To 148 avoid such misclassifications, all identified peaks were confirmed as true breaking waves (i.e., 149 150 white foam) by a machine learning algorithm that obtained information from the timestack's true colour representation (i.e., from the raw RGB values). The training dataset for this algorithm was 151 152 created by manually defining regions in the timestack that corresponded to breaking waves, sand, and undisturbed water (i.e., unbroken waves). Each training region was defined once for each 153 154 location from the first five minute data batch using a Graphic User Interface (GUI) built in the tracking algorithm and was re-used for all subsequent data batches. For each of these regions, a 155 dominant colour was obtained using a colour quantisation procedure (Celebi, 2011), and the 156 157 previously identified pixel peaks were tested against these colours (Figure 4-d). For an identified pixel peak to be confirmed as a true wave breaking event, its true colour needed to be more than 158 50% similar to the dominant colour of the wave breaking region defined in the training dataset. 159

The metric used for the comparison was the colour similarity (ΔE^*) calculated using the CIE (International Commission on Illumination) standard computed in the CIECAM02 (CIE Color Appearance Modelling for Color Management Systems) colour space (CIE, 2017). The metric ΔE^* is a direct measurement of how different (or similar) two colours are, and it is calculated as the Euclidian distance between these two colours in an appropriated colour space. In the simplest case, the RGB (Red, Green and Blue) colour space, it is written as:

166
$$\Delta E^* = \sqrt{(R_1 - R_2)^2 + (G_1 - G_2)^2 + (B_1 - B_2)^2}$$
(1)

in which the subscripts 1 and 2 represent two different colours. Simpler, non-perceptual, colour 167 spaces (e.g., RGB and XY; Smith and Guild, 1931) do not correspond directly to the way humans 168 perceive colour because the human eye has a lower tolerance to some colours (particularly blue 169 shades) causing the Euclidian distance to not to be perceived uniformly across the colour space 170 (Lou et al., 2006, CIE2007). To avoid this issue, the more sophisticated CIECAM02 colour space, 171 172 which is perceptually uniform and should thus closely correspond to the human colour perception (Lou et al., 2006), was used instead. Therefore, the algorithm described here mimics the human 173 perception of breaking wave crests as seen in the timestack images. 174



176 Figure 2. Example of the wave breaking detection process. a) Subset (300s) of a timestack generated from data collected at One Mile Beach. The continuous blue line indicates the cross-177 shore location where the timeseries shown in c) was extracted for the pixel peak detection and 178 179 colour classification. The red squares show the space-time occurrence of the wave breaking events as identified by the machine learning procedure. b) Timex image calculated for the same time 180 period shown in a). The black dashed line indicates the cross-shore transect along which the 181 timestack shown in a) was extracted, and the blue cross indicates the location where the timeseries 182 shown in c) was extracted. c) Pixel intensity timeseries coloured using the corresponding true 183 colour values. The red markers indicate the pixel peaks that correspond to broken waves as 184 identified by the machine learning procedure. d) Pixel data from c) represented in the XY (Smith 185 and Guild, 1931) colour space (for illustration purposes only) showing the corresponding 186

dominant colours for each region (sand, foam, and undisturbed water) which were used to assess
the pixel peaks identified breaking waves.

189 2.3 Wave tracking

190 The peak detection and classification step described above produces a point-cloud-like representation of wave breaking events in the space-time domain (red circles in Figure 3-a), i.e., it 191 does not allocate pixel peaks to a particular wave. To group pixel peaks that correspond to a single 192 193 wave and to effectively track that wave, the DBSCAN clustering method (Esther et al, 1996) was 194 used (Figure 3-b). This unsupervised classification method clusters data based on two criteria: 1) 195 the distance between each data point (eps), and 2) the minimum number of points required to form a cluster (n_{min}) . Before applying the algorithm, the data were transformed to scaled coordinates 196 by dividing the time (space) occurrence of each breaking event by the total length along the time 197 198 (space) axis. This was done as a requirement for using the distance metrics implemented in the DBSCAN algorithm. As the algorithm is not optimized to work with wave data, it occasionally 199 200 grouped two different waves into one cluster if the distance criterion was met. Another issue with the DBSCAN algorithm was that instances of bore merging/captures were always grouped as one 201 cluster. For cases where two waves merged with a clear separation between the two wave paths, 202 203 (e.g., wave 6 in Figure 3-b), it was possible to split the wave paths using the Random Sample Consensus (RANSAC) estimator (Fischler and Bolles, 1981). In this technique, the points forming 204 one wave path were identified as being inliers whereas the points of the secondary wave were 205 identified as outliers, enabling the cluster to be split into two separate clusters. Other clustering 206 errors (e.g., waves 5 and 27 in Figure 2-b) were manually fixed in QGIS using data exported from 207 the wave paths into an appropriate file format (ESRI® shapefiles). The procedures described in 208 Sections 2.2 and 2.3, as a well the functionality to export and import data into QGIS, were coded 209

- in Python and rely heavily on the Scikit-Learn (Pedregosa et al, 2011) and Open-CV (ITSEEZ,
- 211 2014) packages for machine learning and computer vision, respectively. The code and a sample
- dataset (OMB) are available at <u>https://github.com/caiostringari/pywavelearn¹</u>.



Figure 3. Conversion of point could data to grouped waves. a) Wave breaking events in the timespace domain before (blue and red markers) and after (red markers) the machine learning procedure. These data are initially not assigned to any wave. b) Points clustered into discrete wave events whereby the clustering is done based on the squared Euclidian distance between each point

¹ The repository is currently in private mode. It will be made public available once the paper is accepted for publication. Before publication, access can be granted upon contacting the first author with an email informing a valid GitHub account, or contacting the first author directly via GitHub at <u>https://github.com/caiostringari</u>.

and the minimum number of members in a cluster (eps=0.005 and $n_{min}=15$, in this example). Each cluster represents a unique wave traveling shoreward (excluding bore-merging events).

For further analyses, it was useful to obtain a continuous representation of each wave path. 220 This was done by interpolating the detected breaking events in each cluster to a target frequency 221 (2Hz) using a quadratic spline interpolator, and fitting a (minimum) second-order ordinary least-222 squares (OLS) model. A confidence interval (CI) for each wave path was also defined to account 223 224 for the uncertainties from both the wave breaking detection and interpolation steps. Two criteria were used to define these confidence intervals. The first criterion considered the curve defined by 225 the OLS model \pm one quarter of the standard deviation in both time and space. The second 226 227 criterion, which was only used in the cases where the standard deviation in time was less than one second, added a buffer of 0.5s to each side of the curve defined by the OLS model. The definition 228 of second method was necessary in order to create a CI for very short-period waves that had no 229 significant standard deviations in either time or space, and to keep the method's consistency. 230 231 Examples of the continuous wave paths defined by the OLS model (coloured lines) and the confidence intervals (solid lines) are shown in Figure 4. 232

233 **3 Results**

3.1. Wave tracking

Figure 4 shows examples of the results produced by the tracking algorithm applied to the datasets shown in Figure 1. The algorithm tracked individual waves in the surf and swash zones efficiently and accurately in all four cases. For OMB, SMB, and BB datasets, the algorithm was set to track local maxima in the cross-shore pixel intensity timeseries, whereas for WB, the Sobel version was used due to the strong plunging characteristics of the breakers during the experiment.

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Varying the peak detection algorithm (local maxima or Sobel edge detection) resulted either in similar results (e.g., OMB dataset), or completely wrong results (See Section 4). The method performed well even under low-contrast (SMB) and non-optimal grazing angles (SMB and BB), and the machine learning step of the algorithm could correct falsely identified intensity peaks in the majority (>90%) of the cases (e.g., Figure 3-a).

A comparison between the number of waves in the surface elevation record (see Figure 5b) 245 and the number of waves tracked from the video imagery during a one hour interval at all locations 246 was also carried-out. Considering all waves (broken and unbroken) in the PT records, the 247 algorithm tracked, in average, 75% of the waves. When the one third highest waves are considered 248 (i.e., waves which $H \ge H_{m0}$), the algorithm tracked the vast majority of the waves (average of 249 250 97.25%), and when the 10% highest waves are considered ($H_{1/10}$), the algorithm tracked all waves. Table 2 shows the results of this analysis sorted by location. However, it should be noted that this 251 comparison is not expected to produce directly comparable results because it compares two 252 different types of waves: tracked waves (i.e., broken waves) and all waves (i.e., broken and 253 unbroken waves). 254

In comparison to the method of Yoo et al. (2011), the method developed here tracks 30% more waves, and represents a significant improvement in the number of breaking points detected. In fact, from visual inspection, the vast majority (>95%) of the breaking points were detected due to the algorithm's capability to learn colour transitions (blue to white). In comparison, Yoo et al's., (2011) method only detected 42% of the breaking points. 260 **Table 2.** Comparison between the number of waves in the PT record and the number of waves

tracked by the algorithm in each location during a one hour interval.

Location	Birubi Beach	One Mile Beach	Seven Mile Beach	Werri Beach
N. PTs in the surf zone	7	4	4	3
N. of waves (all PTs)	1970	1495	1309	1236
% Tracked Waves	72%	79%	76%	75%
% Trac. W. $H \ge H_{m0}$	98%	97%	96%	98%
% Trac. W. $H \ge H_{1/10}$	100%	100%	100%	100%



Figure 4. Results of the wave tracking algorithm for: a) One Mile Beach. b) Seven Mile Beach. c) Werri Beach. d) Birubi Beach. Panels from e) to h) show a subset of 20 seconds for the same locations as in a) to d). The dashed coloured lines show the unique wave paths defined by the OLS model after corrections using the RANSAC estimator and minimal manual fixes. The black dashed lines show the confidence intervals for each wave. Panels i) to l) show the beach profile and the mean water level during the experiment (thick blue line). Note that the vertical exaggeration (V. Ex.) varies between panels.

270

3.2 Instantaneous surf zone wave speed

To illustrate of the potential of the method developed here, results for the observed instantaneous surf zone wave speed are presented for a one hour subset of collocated PT and video imagery from the OMB dataset. This dataset was chosen because it had a high grazing angle, clear skies, and, more importantly, because it had the lowest rectification errors (average of 0.11m calculated based on back-projection of GCPs). Using the wave paths defined by the OLS model, the instantaneous wave phase speed (c_{wn}) can be calculated as

277
$$c_{wp} = \lim_{\Delta t \to 0} \left(\frac{\Delta x}{\Delta t}\right) = \frac{dx}{dt}$$
(2)

where Δt is the time interval between two measurements and Δx is spatial displacement of the wave front. Figure 5-a shows the results of Equation 2 applied to the OMB data subset (see Table 1 and Figure 4-a).

As the video timestacks were collocated with the PTs deployed in the surf zone, it was possible to identify both the velocity calculated from the remotely sensed wave paths and the water depths recorded in situ by the PTs. For each five-minute batch of data, the wave paths were linked to the matching individual waves in the pressure transducer record that were obtained using a local

extrema analysis following Power et al. (2010) (Figure 5-a and b, red markers and dashed 285 connection lines). Although the camera and the PTs clocks were synchronized before the 286 287 deployment, a residual delay between the two datasets (usually between 1 and 10 seconds) was observed in all datasets. This time difference was primarily due to small differences between the 288 camera clock and the PT clocks introduced in the programing stage which unfortunately were not 289 290 fully accounted for in the synchronization step. To optimize the alignment between the peaks in the pressure record and the wave paths, an averaged optimal time delay for each data run was 291 obtained using a cross-spectral analysis and then the PT timeseries was shifted to align with the 292 timestack. 293

The wave speed calculated from Eq. 2 was then compared to the wave crest (h_{cr}) and 294 trough depths (h_{tr}) (Figure 5-c and d). The results showed that the crest depth accounted for more 295 296 variability (relatively, 55% more) than the trough depth. In addition, a comparison between the calculated wave speed and the theoretical shallow water wave speed ($c_{th} = \sqrt{g(h + \eta)} = \sqrt{gh_{cr}}$ 297 298 where h is the mean water depth, and η is the instantaneous water surface elevation) was carried 299 out. Only data seaward of the surf-swash boundary were considered in this analysis (see Figure 5-300 a). The surf-swash boundary was obtained directly from the timestack as the lowest observed 301 rundown in each 5min data batch. Figure 5-e showed that the theoretical wave speed was only partially correlated (68%) to the optically derived wave speeds. The correlation coefficients were 302 calculated on unbinned data using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r_{xy}) and a 303 two-tailed normal distribution for p values. The observed root mean square error (RMSE) was of 304 0.69 m.s⁻¹, the mean absolute error was 0.55 m.s⁻¹, and there was virtually no bias (-0.002 m.s⁻¹). 305

To validate the results shown in Figure 5-e, the difference between the time of travel of individual waves in the PT record and in the wave paths was calculated for two adjacent PTs (at x=84m and x=81m) was calculated (Figure 6-a). The mean absolute error for this analysis was 0.25s, which is six times smaller than the threshold used by Power et al. (2015) to distinguish between individual waves in the surf zone using PT data only, and falls within the confidence intervals for the wave paths shown in Figure 4-a. In addition, the mean time of travel was 0.63s for both PT and wave path, thus resulting in the same averaged wave speed for both datasets (4.74 m.s⁻¹). No significant trends or biases were observed when this analysis was performed (see Figure 6-b).

- 19 -



Figure 5. *a)* Example of the instantaneous wave speeds calculated using Equation 2 for five minutes of data collected at OMB. The black line represents the location of the PT used in b), the hatched area represents the region from where PT data were obtained for the analyses in c), d) and e), and the dashed green line shows the surf-swash boundary. b) Pressure transducer timeseries data collected at OMB for the same time interval. The blue squares represent the local minima, and the red squares the local maxima obtained from a wave-by-wave analysis following

Power et al. (2010). The dashed red lines indicate the optimal alignment between the timestack 322 tracked wave crests and the wave crests from the wave-by-wave analysis. c) Comparison between 323 the wave speed (c_{wp}) and the crest depth (h_{cr}) obtained from the PT deployed at x=78m. d) 324 Comparison between the wave speed (c_{wn}) and the trough depth (h_{tr}) . e) Comparison between the 325 measured instantaneous wave speed (c_{wp}) and the theoretical shallow water wave speed $(c_{th} =$ 326 $\sqrt{g(h+\eta)}$ for one hour of data for four PTs spaced 3 meters apart starting at the PT at x=84m in 327 the shoreward direction. Data are binned to aid visualisation and the number of bins was 328 calculated following the Freedman-Diaconis rule (Freedman and Diaconis, 1981). The dashed 329 black line in e) shows the one-to-one correspondence, and the dashed green line shows a linear 330 regression to the data without consideration of an intercept term. In c) d), and e), r_{xy} is the Pearson 331 332 product-moment correlation coefficient and p was calculated using a two-tailed normal distribution. All regressions shown in Figure 5 used unbinned data. 333



334

Figure 6. a) Absolute difference in time of travel between individual waves in the based on two adjacent PTs (x=84m and x=81m) and based on the wave paths at the same location. b)

Comparison between the times of travel calculated based on the PT and on the WP data (black
markers). The dashed black line in b) shows the bisector.

339

3.3. Optical intensities of breaking waves

340 Another application of the algorithm developed here is to obtain the optical intensities of the breaking waves which can be translated into wave roller lengths, as per the method of Haller 341 and Catálan (2009). This method relies on phase-averaging pixel intensity timeseries in both time 342 and space and projecting these intensities into the timestack domain in order to obtain wave roller 343 344 lengths. Under laboratory conditions, and for a narrow bandwidth wave spectrum, the optical 345 intensities correlate very well with surface elevation data (η) thus justifying the application of the method (Haller and Catálan, 2009; their Figures 4 and 5). However, the same authors suggested 346 that for natural surf zones, where the wave spectrum bandwidth is typically broader than in a 347 laboratory context, a more sophisticated means of wave tracking would be needed to perform a 348 similar analysis. The method developed here has the required characteristics to enable a similar 349 analysis to be carried out on natural surf zone data. 350

Using the data described in Section 3.2, optical intensities were initially extracted at three 351 cross-shore locations (Figure 7a - 78m, 81m and 84m). At each location, a buffer of 2.5 meters in 352 the cross-shore orientation was used to extract and average optical intensity timeseries in order to 353 remove short-period period oscillations (similar to the method of Haller and Catálan, 2009; their 354 Figure 2). These cross-shore locations coincided with the locations of three PTs from which 355 individual wave pressure time series were extracted following the method of Power et al. (2010) 356 (See Figure 5-a). Each individual wave was then interpolated to a regular grid, normalized by its 357 period (T), shifted so that all crests are aligned, and the median wave profile was obtained for each 358 PT (Figure 7-b, c, and d). For each individual wave in the PT data, an analogue timeseries was 359

extracted from the optical intensity data. In order to ensure that the surface elevation and pixel 360 intensity timeseries were aligned as best as possible (i.e., so that the time delays seen in Figure 6-361 362 b are minimised), a wave-by-wave optimal time delay was obtained via cross-correlation analysis and, if needed, the pixel intensity timeseries was shifted in order to match the PT data. From these 363 individual optical timeseries, a median intensity profile was calculated (Figure 7-e, f, and, g). In 364 365 contrast with Haller and Catálan (2009), the field data shown here did not show a strong match between the optical intensities and the median water surface profile. This occurs because in natural 366 surf zones, with a random wave field, each individual wave is at a different stage of evolution at 367 any given cross-shore location (e.g., the waves between 50s and 100s in Figure 7-a). 368

To minimize the variability seen in the optical intensities at fixed cross-shore locations 369 (i.e., Figure 7-b), the same analysis was repeated at equivalent locations along the individual wave 370 propagation pathways across the surf zone. This was done by obtaining the length of the wave 371 propagation path from the break point to the bore collapse for each individual wave and using this 372 373 to define comparable hydrokinematic locations for each individual wave (Svendsen et al., 1976). Three locations were investigated: 1) the breakpoint (defined as 5% of the wave path length after 374 375 the break point location; Figure 7-a, orange markers), 2) the mid-point of wave transformation across the surf zone (50% of the wave path length after the breakpoint location; Figure 7-a, blue 376 377 markers), and 3) the point immediately prior to bore collapse (95% of the wave path length after 378 the break point location or 5% of the wave path length before the point of bore collapse (Figure 7a, green markers). The points of bore collapse were manually defined using the QGIS data 379 380 exchange interface described in Section 2.3. At each of these locations, and for each wave, 15s optical intensity timeseries with the centre of wave path at one-third of the wave duration were 381 extracted and then phase-averaged to obtain a median optical intensity (Figure 7-h, i, and j). This 382

time interval was chosen to cover the temporal evolution at a given hydrokinematic location but does not necessarily represent the period of individual waves due to the random characteristic of the wave field. It was used instead of the normalised wave period also because there was no clear way to define wave periods based only on the pixel record since the local minima in the pixel record does not necessary correspond to wave troughs.

In comparison to Haller and Catálan's (2009) method (which relies on a regular wave field 388 and thus a given distance consistently represents a given hydrokinematic region in the surf zone), 389 the approach taken here showed improved clustering of the optical intensities and smoother 390 medians suggesting that this method is a sensible alternative to define hydrokinematic for 391 392 individual waves. The optical intensities obtained at equivalent hydrokinematic regions could be re-projected into the timestack domain and then be used to estimate wave roller lengths for an 393 irregular wave field; however, this is beyond the scope of this paper but will be investigated in a 394 future publication. 395



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Figure 7. Comparison between the phase-averaging method of Haller and Catálan (2009) at
fixed spatial and at variable spatial (fixed hydrokinematic) locations for obtaining optical
intensities from timestack images. a) Five minute subset of a timestack for OMB (300s). The

400	dashed black line represents the location of the PT at $x=78m$ and the red swath represents the
401	spatial region used for averaging the pixel intensity signal (see panels b-d). The square markers
402	indicate variable hydrokinematic regions for each tracked wave (see text for details). b, c, and
403	d) Individual waves (thin lines) and medians (thick lines) for PT data at three different cross-
404	shore locations ($x=84m$, $x=81m$, and $x=78m$). e, f, and g) Individual pixel intensities (thin lines)
405	and respective medians (thick lines) at the same locations shown in b), c), and d). h, i, and j)
406	Individual pixel intensity and respective medians (thick lines) at the three different wave-by-wave
407	hydrokinematic locations.

4 Discussion 408

The novel remote sensing method for wave breaking detection and wave tracking in the 409 410 surf zone presented here consists of two main components: 1) detecting wave breaking events and 411 correcting errors using the data's true colour representation with machine learning techniques, and 2) clustering the detected breaking events into unique wave paths and obtaining optimal wave 412 paths using an OLS model. The wave tracking step successfully tracked waves in the surf zone 413 414 when applied to four sandy Australian beaches with varying morphodynamic characteristics, grazing angles, and light conditions. The two peak detection implementations (the cross-shore 415 pixel intensity extrema and the horizontal Sobel operator) were accurate at detecting white pixel 416 peaks that directly corresponded to the crests of breaking waves in the varying conditions in which 417 data were collected. In the cases where the peak detection step misidentified pixel peaks, the 418 machine learning colour comparison algorithm was able to correct errors due to its capability to 419 learn from the data's true colour (See Figure 3). Although the wave crests of unbroken waves 420 appeared clearly in some cases (e.g., Figure 4-a and c), there was not enough colour contrast 421 422 between the wave crest and the adjacent undisturbed water to apply the same techniques used to

distinguish between the crest of broken waves and undisturbed water, thus this algorithm remains
restricted to breaking waves.

The most problematic step was the clustering of the identified wave breaking instances, in 425 which the DBSCAN algorithm was highly sensitive to the minimum distance (*eps*) parameter. 426 The optimal eps values were found after extensive trial and error, which was found to be time 427 428 consuming, and there did not seem to be a consistent method to obtain the eps value nor any correlation to any environmental parameters (e.g., H_{m0} or T_p); for example, it varied from 0.005 429 in the OMB dataset to 0.15 in the SMB dataset. On the other hand, the minimum number of points 430 of cluster parameter (n_{min}) was far more consistent between the datasets, with $n_{min} = 20$ working 431 well for all data tested. Once the optimal eps and n_{min} were identified for each location, the 432 number of wave paths being misclustered was significantly reduced. The RANSAC algorithm was 433 effective at separating wave paths clustered as one wave in the cases where two waves merged 434 (e.g., wave 6 in Figure 3-b), however, all other erroneous clustering required manual corrections. 435 The average time required to run the method, assuming that the timestack image has already been 436 obtained, the optimal eps and n_{min} are known, and there is no need for manual corrections, is less 437 438 than 10 seconds on a standard laptop, which is at least one order of magnitude less than the Radon 439 or Hough transforms methods. Initially, if the eps and n_{min} values are unknown, the method takes 10 to 15 minutes to produce good results for a five minute timestack depending on the users 440 familiarity with the method. Once *eps* and n_{min} are known for a site, the time required to run the 441 method would decrease for subsequent timestacks but is depending on the number of clustering 442 errors that cannot be automatically fixed using RANSAC. 443

In general, the full method (i.e., wave breaking detection, colour machine learning, clustering, optimal wave path from OLS, and wave path correction) worked well for different

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incident wave conditions but was somewhat sensitive to light and grazing angle conditions, with
better tracking results occurring under optimal imaging and light conditions (i.e., clear skies and
high grazing angle). This is consistent with results from other remote sensing algorithms (e.g., Yoo
et al., 2011, Catálan and Haller, 2008).

The optically derived wave speeds correlated poorly with the predictions from the linear 450 wave theory ($r_{xy} = 0.68$) and there is a high intercept term in the regression, although the RMSE 451 (0.69m.s⁻¹), MAE (0.55m.s⁻¹) and Bias (-0.002m.s⁻¹) are relatively low. The results showed that 452 linear theory greatly underestimated observed wave speeds in deeper water depths and 453 overestimated in shallower water depths. However, the water depth range in this paper was 454 relatively small (of the order of 1m, see Figure 5-c), and these results may not hold for other depth 455 ranges. Nonetheless, similar results have been observed by Postacchini and Brocchini (2014) 456 (particularly the binned values seen in their Figure 20), and when the same regression analysis is 457 completed for the data presented here (dashed green line in Figure 5-e), a coefficient of correlation 458 (R^2) of 0.67 was found, which is close to the values reported by these authors. 459

The over-estimation of the wave speed by the theory at deeper water depths (outer surf 460 zone) and subsequent underestimation at shallower water depths (inner surf zone) has been 461 previously observed in natural surf zones (Suhayda and Pettigrew, 1977). There are physical 462 mechanisms that would account for such differences, e.g., sea-swell waves propagating in the crest 463 of infragravity waves propagate faster than it would be predicted by the theory and the reverse 464 465 situation (sea-swell waves in the trough of an infragravity wave) is also possible (Tissier et al, 2015). In addition, some of the analysed data were very close to the surf-swash boundary (see 466 Figure 5-a); a region where downrush and undertow could lead to a reduction of the wave speed 467 that would not be accounted by the theory (Komar, 1978). Nonetheless, the exact physical 468

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469 mechanisms responsible for the observed differences are not fully understood and will be470 investigated in a subsequent publication.

Another factor that could contribute to the observed differences is vertical pixel 471 misregistration due to non-optimal grazing angle and proximity of the camera to the timestack 472 transect (Catálan and Haller, 2008). Unfortunately, no data were available to directly measure the 473 vertical pixel misregistration in the dataset presented here. Considering that the measured 474 475 horizontal RMSE for rectification in the OMB dataset was 0.11m, and considering that the vertical error is the same order of magnitude or less, the error in the wave speed calculations due to vertical 476 pixel misregistration should be of the order of 1%. Moreover, the results for the comparison 477 between times of travel of individual waves in the PT and wave path data presented in Section 3.1 478 (see Figure 6) are another strong suggestion that the trends seen in difference between the observed 479 and theoretical wave speeds are not artefacts produced by errors in the rectification process. 480

481 In the comparison between optical intensities and surface elevation profiles, when the 482 method described in Haller and Catálan (2009) was applied to the OMB dataset, no strong correlation between optical intensity and the surface elevations was observed when the phase-483 averaging was done at fixed spatial locations. When the method was adapted to take into account 484 the variable spatial locations of hydrokinematic locations for individual waves, the correlation 485 improved significantly. This is due to the fact that in natural surf zones, where the wave spectrum 486 is rarely narrow, individual waves are at different stages of their hydrokinematic evolution at a 487 given spatial location. It should be noted that, although a robust wave-by-wave cross-correlation 488 method was used to align surface elevation profiles and optical intensities for individual waves, 489 490 delays of up to 1 second between the wave crest and the maximum optical intensity were still observed in the data presented here, which could explain some the variability seen in Figure 7e-g. 491

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These delays were mainly generated by strong white pixel peaks from foam being advected in the front of the wave crest that were an optical intensity maxima but did not necessarily corresponded to the wave crest in the pressure record. Although these delays could be responsible for some of the observed scattering, a high degree of optical variability would still be expected when extracting pixel intensity timeseries for individual waves at a fixed cross-shore location due to the wide bandwidth spectrum present in natural surf zones, as previously mentioned.

498 The method presented here has the potential to allow for novel investigations of several surf and swash zone process. To demonstrate the utility of the method we have examined the 499 variability of instantaneous surf zone wave speeds and the variability of optical intensities 500 501 associated with breaking waves. Potential other applications of this method include, but are not limited to: quantification of bore propagation and capture in the surf zone (e.g., Tissier et al., 2015, 502 Garcia-Medina et al., 2017), investigation of the roles of reflected waves at the surf-swash 503 boundary (Martins et al., 2017a), quantification of surf zone energy dissipation (as it provides a 504 505 direct measurement of the fraction of broken waves in the surf zone) (e.g., Thornton and Guza, 1983, Baldock et al., 1998, Alsina et al., 2007), improved quantification of the interactions between 506 incident wind-generated waves, infragravity waves, and run-up heights (e.g., de Bakker et al., 507 2016; de Moura and Baldock, 2017a; Padilla and Alsina, 2017), and as a direct input for 508 509 bathymetry inversion methods (Holman et al., 2013; Catálan and Haller, 2008; van Dongeren et 510 al., 2008; Bergsma et al., 2016).

511 5 Conclusions

512 This paper has presented a novel method for tracking individual waves in the surf zone 513 using data derived from nearshore imagery. The hybrid computer vision, peak detection, and 514 machine learning method was tested using data from four microtidal, swell-dominated, sandy

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Australian beaches under varying incident wave, grazing angle, and light conditions, and for 515 varying morphodynamic beach states. Results showed that the method successfully tracked waves 516 in all four locations with better results obtained when grazing angles and light conditions were 517 optimal (i.e., clear skies and high grazing angles). In these cases, the algorithm tracked all the 518 broken waves and correctly identified all initial break point locations. The method was then used 519 520 to derive instantaneous surf zone wave speeds which were compared to theoretical values derived from in-situ measurements. The results of this analysis showed that the theoretically predicted 521 speeds agreed poorly with the optically derived speeds. Additionally, optical intensity profiles 522 were extracted and compared to surface elevation profiles on a wave-by-wave basis. These results 523 showed that phase-averaging in natural surf zones, or under wide bandwidth conditions, should be 524 performed at equivalent hydrokinematic regions in the surf zone as identified on a wave-by-wave 525 basis. The method developed in this paper has the potential to be used in novel investigations of 526 several other surf zone phenomena that require wave tracking. 527

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