

**Original citation:**

Taubert, Martin, Grob, Carolina, Howat, Alexandra M., Burns, Oliver J., Pratscher, Jennifer, Jehmlich, Nico, von Bergen, Martin, Richnow, Hans H., Chen, Yin and Murrell, J. C. (J. Colin). (2017) Methylamine as a nitrogen source for microorganisms from a coastal marine environment. *Environmental Microbiology*, 19 (6). pp. 2246-2257.

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# **Methylamine as a Nitrogen Source for Microorganisms from a Coastal Marine**

## **Environment**

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Keywords: marine methylotrophs, <sup>15</sup>N stable isotope probing, methylamine, metagenomics, metaproteomics

Classification: BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES/Microbiology

Short title: Methylamine as a Nitrogen Source for Marine Microbes

26

## 27 **Originality-Significance Statement**

28 Methylated amine compounds such as methylamine are very important sources of nitrogen for  
29 microorganisms in seawater. In the marine environment, methylamine is generated by degradation  
30 of organic matter, and this volatile one-carbon compound can escape to the atmosphere where it  
31 affects global climate processes. Microbes which can use methylamine as a nitrogen source prevent  
32 the escape of this climate-active molecule to the atmosphere and recycle organic nitrogen  
33 compounds released from complex organic matter. We know little about the identity and activity of  
34 methylamine-degrading microorganisms occurring in marine environments. In these experiments, we  
35 combine  $^{15}\text{N}$  stable isotope probing, metagenomics and metaproteomics to detect and identify  
36 bacteria from a coastal environment that utilize methylamine and employ it as a nitrogen source.

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39

## 40 **Abstract**

41 Nitrogen is a key limiting resource for biomass production in the marine environment. Methylated  
42 amines, released from the degradation of osmolytes, could provide a nitrogen source for marine  
43 microbes. Thus far, studies in aquatic habitats on the utilization of methylamine, the simplest  
44 methylated amine, have mainly focussed on the fate of the carbon from this compound. Various  
45 groups of methylotrophs, microorganisms that can grow on one-carbon compounds, use  
46 methylamine as a carbon source. Non-methylotrophic microorganisms may also utilize methylamine  
47 as a nitrogen source, but little is known about their diversity, especially in the marine environment.  
48 In this proof-of-concept study, stable isotope probing (SIP) was used to identify microorganisms from  
49 a coastal environment that assimilate nitrogen from methylamine. SIP experiments using  $^{15}\text{N}$   
50 methylamine combined with metagenomics and metaproteomics facilitated identification of active  
51 methylamine-utilizing Alpha- and Gammaproteobacteria. The draft genomes of two methylamine  
52 utilizers were obtained and their metabolism with respect to methylamine was examined. Both  
53 bacteria identified in these SIP experiments used the  $\gamma$ -glutamyl-methylamide pathway, found in  
54 both methylotrophs and non-methylotrophs, to metabolize methylamine. The utilization of  $^{15}\text{N}$   
55 methylamine also led to the release of  $^{15}\text{N}$  ammonium that was used as nitrogen source by other  
56 microorganisms not directly using methylamine.

57

## 59 **Introduction**

60 Nitrogen is one of the major limiting elements for biological productivity in the marine environment  
61 (Gruber, 2008). Dissolved organic nitrogen compounds, including methylated amines, are likely to be  
62 an important source of nitrogen for marine microorganisms (Capone et al., 2008). In the oceans,  
63 methylated amines are produced in large amounts, resulting in the release of 0.6 Tg N per annum  
64 into the atmosphere (Lee, 1988). Little is known, however, about the turnover of methylated amines  
65 in the marine environment. The low standing concentrations of methylated amines found in the  
66 open ocean, typically in the nanomolar range (Naqvi et al., 2005), may be what remains after  
67 microbial utilization.

68 Methylamine, the simplest alkylated amine, is released through the biodegradation of proteins and  
69 N-containing osmolytes (Barrett and Kwan, 1985; Neff et al., 2002). Containing carbon and nitrogen,  
70 this compound constitutes a direct link between the biogeochemical cycles of the two elements.  
71 Certain microbes can grow on methylamine as sole source of carbon and energy (Anthony, 1982). As  
72 methylamine is a one-carbon (C1) compound, these microbes are classified as methylotrophs.  
73 Phylogenetically diverse, ubiquitous and often metabolically versatile, methylotrophs play major  
74 roles in C1-cycling in marine habitats (Anthony, 1982; Strand and Lidstrom, 1984; Neufeld et al.,  
75 2007a; Giovannoni et al., 2008; Chen, 2012). A wide range of non-methylotrophic organisms, some of  
76 which can be found in marine environments, can also degrade methylamine to CO<sub>2</sub> and ammonium,  
77 the latter being used as a nitrogen source by these and other microorganisms (Budd and Spencer,  
78 1968; Bicknell and Owens, 1980; Anthony, 1982; Murrell and Lidstrom, 1983; Chen et al., 2010a;  
79 Wischer et al., 2015).

80 The ability to utilize methylamine is found mainly in the Gram-negative phylum Proteobacteria, but  
81 also in Gram-positive methylotrophs such as some Actinobacteria and *Bacillus* species (McIntire et  
82 al., 1990; McTaggart et al., 2015), and in Eukaryotes such as the fungus *Aspergillus niger* (Frebort et

al., 1999). Gram-positive bacteria and Eukaryotes typically employ a copper-containing methylamine oxidase to cleave methylamine to formaldehyde and ammonium (Anthony, 1982). Within the Proteobacteria, two different pathways for methylamine utilization are known. The methylamine dehydrogenase (MaDH) pathway employs a tryptophan tryptophyl-quinone (TTP)-dependent, periplasmic dehydrogenase catalysing the oxidative cleavage of methylamine to formaldehyde and ammonium. The alternative pathway proceeds via formation of the methylated amino acids  $\gamma$ -glutamyl-methylamide (GMA) and *N*-methylglutamate (NMG) (Anthony, 1982; Chen et al., 2010a; Chen et al., 2010b; Latypova et al., 2010; Good et al., 2015). This cytoplasmic pathway typically requires three enzymes, a GMA synthetase (GmaS), an NMG synthase (MgsABC) and an NMG dehydrogenase (MgdABCD). The GMA pathway transfers the C1 group of methylamine to tetrahydrofolate, and also releases ammonium. The eight polypeptides required for this pathway are typically encoded in one gene cluster in bacterial genomes (Chen, 2012).

Both the MaDH and the GMA pathway are present in methylotrophs that grow on methylamine as sole carbon and energy source. Some methylotrophs, such as *Methylophaga* species or *Methylobacterium extorquens* strains, possess both pathways (Vuilleumier et al., 2009; Grob et al., 2015). The GMA pathway is also present in non-methylotrophs that use methylamine as a nitrogen source (Chen et al., 2010a; Chen, 2012; Nayak et al., 2016) and its presence in some Gram-positive bacteria has been suggested (McTaggart et al., 2015). Little is known, however, about the distribution of microbes using the GMA pathway in the marine environment. Initial investigations in aquatic ecosystems revealed a high diversity of *gmaS* genes, suggesting an important role for the GMA pathway in methylamine utilization (Chen, 2012; Wischer et al., 2015).

To identify active microorganisms in environmental samples, where classical enrichment and isolation experiments have proven to be difficult, the technique of stable isotope probing (SIP) has been established. In this cultivation-independent method, substrates labelled with heavy isotopes such as  $^{13}\text{C}$  are used, leading to the incorporation of these isotopes in the biomass of active microbes. The application of SIP in combination with analysis of DNA and RNA, i.e., DNA- and RNA-SIP

(Radajewski et al., 2003; Neufeld et al., 2007b), as well as proteins, i.e., Protein-SIP, (Jehmlich et al., 2010), has enabled the detection of the heavy isotopes in a variety of biomolecules. Active marine methylotrophs utilizing methylamine, such as *Methylophaga* spp., have previously been identified by  $^{13}\text{C}$  stable isotope probing (SIP) experiments (Neufeld et al., 2007a). However, non-methylotrophic organisms that utilize methylamine as a nitrogen source would be missed in  $^{13}\text{C}$  SIP studies, as only those who have assimilated methylamine derived carbon into biomass would be detected (Neufeld et al., 2007b).

In this study, a SIP experiment using  $^{15}\text{N}$  labelled methylamine was combined with metaproteomics and metagenomics to identify microbes from a coastal marine habitat that are capable of utilizing methylamine and assimilating methylamine-derived nitrogen. The quantification of  $^{15}\text{N}$  incorporated into proteins after incubation with  $^{15}\text{N}$  methylamine showed a clear link between nitrogen uptake and the pathways used for methylamine utilization, and revealed the identity of different methylamine utilizing bacteria. A “blueprint” for the central metabolism of two of these key species was reconstructed from metagenomic sequence data generated from  $^{15}\text{N}$  labelled DNA from the same samples, and then validated using metaproteomics.

## Results and Discussion

The seawater samples used in this study were obtained from Station L4 of the Western Channel Observatory (WCO, Plymouth, UK). Genomic DNA and proteins were extracted after incubating seawater with  $100\ \mu\text{M}$   $^{14}\text{N}$  or  $^{15}\text{N}$  methylamine for 3, 6 or 8 days in duplicate, and at the beginning of the incubation experiments (T0) to establish the initial microbial community composition in the seawater used. The aim of this SIP experiment was to explore the metabolism of microbes from coastal seawater capable of responding to an increase in the concentration of methylamine. Although the relatively large amount of substrate added here is not strictly environmentally relevant, and the resulting microbial activities are not necessarily representative of *in situ* conditions, it

enabled enriching for groups of microbes of interest. This in turn allowed evaluation of the potential of naturally occurring marine microbes to utilize methylamine without the need to cultivate them.

### **Composition of the microbial community in methylamine incubations**

Microbial diversity in methylamine incubations was determined using 454 amplicon pyrosequencing targeting bacterial 16S rRNA genes in the total extracted DNA. Three of the samples (one incubated with <sup>15</sup>N methylamine for 3 days and two incubated with <sup>14</sup>N methylamine for 6 and 8 days) showed a distinct difference in community composition compared to the others (Fig. S1). In these samples, a single OTU related to the genus *Methylophaga* (Piscirickettsiaceae) was enriched up to 92%, whereas in the remaining samples, *Methylophaga* were present at <1% of relative abundance or not detected at all (T0).

Analysis of 16S rRNA gene diversity from the remaining DNA samples consistently yielded the same major phylogenetic groups (Fig. 1). In the seawater used to set up the incubation experiments (T0), the dominant operational taxonomic units (OTUs) were related to *Candidatus* Pelagibacter (Pelagibacteraceae, approximately 60%), but this group decreased in relative abundance to between 1 and 27% after incubation. *C. Pelagibacter* belong to the SAR11 cluster, first described in the Sargasso Sea, and are commonly found at high abundance in marine habitats (Morris et al., 2002; Rappe and Giovannoni, 2003). OTUs related to Rhodobacteraceae increased in relative abundance from approximately 5% at T0 to between 20 and 70% after incubation. Up to 50% of the Rhodobacteraceae OTUs were related to *Leisingera*, the remaining OTUs being mostly related to *Roseobacter*, *Ruegeria* and *Phaeobacter*. OTUs related to the Gammaproteobacterium strain IMCC2047 also increased in abundance after 3 days of incubation, reaching up to 24%. This OTU was found in low abundance (0.2%) at T0, and decreased again at later time points to around 1%.

The changes observed in the microbial community composition were most likely caused by the relatively high methylamine concentration used for the SIP experiment, leading to an enrichment of the most capable and rapidly growing organisms during incubation. Other organisms, such as the

slow growing *Pelagibacter* (Carini et al., 2013), seemed to disappear as they were outcompeted by fast growing methylamine utilizers. After 6 and 8 days of incubation, 16S rRNA genes of other bacterial families, such as Flavobacteriaceae and Cryomorphaceae, increased in abundance. This diversification is likely to be a result of cross-feeding and metabolic processes other than methylamine utilization. We thus focused our investigation on those microorganisms that first responded to the addition of methylamine: *Leisingera* sp. and the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium.

### **Retrieval of genomes of enriched methylamine utilizers by $^{15}\text{N}$ DNA-SIP**

The incorporation of  $^{15}\text{N}$  into DNA leads to an increase of its density that can be detected by density gradient centrifugation. While for  $^{13}\text{C}$  DNA of microbial communities, this increase is large enough to allow a complete separation from  $^{12}\text{C}$  DNA, separation of  $^{14}\text{N}$  and  $^{15}\text{N}$  DNA is not possible, as DNA contains less nitrogen than carbon, and DNA density is also influenced by GC content, resulting in an overlap of GC-rich  $^{14}\text{N}$  DNA and AT-rich  $^{15}\text{N}$  DNA (Fig. S2) (Cupples et al., 2007). Here, density gradient centrifugation of a DNA sample from seawater incubated for 3 days with  $^{15}\text{N}$  methylamine was used to enrich for DNA of OTUs related to Rhodobacteraceae and strain IMCC2047 that were presumed to be involved in methylamine utilization. The enrichment was quantified by a comparison of 16S rRNA gene profiles obtained by amplicon pyrosequencing from unfractionated DNA and from DNA fractions obtained after density gradient centrifugation. For the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium, a relative 16S rRNA gene abundance of 34.9% was observed in the fraction with a density of  $1.695 \text{ g ml}^{-1}$ , corresponding to a ~2-fold enrichment compared to unfractionated DNA (see Fig. S2). For Rhodobacteraceae, an abundance of 98.7% was observed in the fraction with a density of  $1.704 \text{ g ml}^{-1}$ , corresponding to a ~1.6-fold enrichment. These two fractions were selected for metagenomic sequencing, allowing a targeted reconstruction of the genomes of the corresponding organisms that would not have been possible without the fractionation process. The completeness of the genomes obtained was assessed with CheckM (Parks et al., 2015) after removal of phylogenetically unrelated sequences.

The genome of the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium constructed was estimated to be approximately 89% complete (Table 1), based on the presence of 401 out of 452 single-copy core genes defined by CheckM for this phylogenetic group. Based on the abundance of multiple versions of these single copy genes, the genome was estimated to contain approximately 3% of genes likely related to other taxa. The genome obtained from the fraction enriched in OTUs related to Rhodobacteraceae was phylogenetically classified as belonging to the genus *Leisingera*, and was most closely related to *Leisingera aquimarina* (Vandecandelaere et al., 2008). All of the 626 core genes of this phylogenetic group (based on CheckM analysis) were present (Table 1). However, a high number of these single-copy genes were found multiple times, showing more than 90% protein sequence similarity to each other. This indicates the presence of genomic sequences from more than one *Leisingera* strain, but for simplicity, these were treated as one phylogenetic entity in the following analysis. The *Leisingera* genome contained about 8% of genes which were likely to be related to other taxa based on the CheckM analysis. In summary, metagenomic sequencing of DNA fractions from the  $^{15}\text{N}$  DNA-SIP experiment, containing a high enrichment of DNA from the organisms related to *Leisingera* and strain IMCC2047, led to the successful recovery of two almost complete microbial genomes of organisms rapidly responding to an increase in the availability of methylamine in seawater.

## **$^{15}\text{N}$ incorporation into peptides confirms methylamine utilization by enriched microbes**

The incorporation of  $^{15}\text{N}$  from methylamine in microbial biomass, as evidence for an assimilation of methylamine derived nitrogen, was investigated in DNA and proteins obtained from seawater after 3 days of incubation with methylamine. To detect potential changes in density of the DNA of particular organisms between  $^{14}\text{N}$  and  $^{15}\text{N}$  methylamine incubations, DNA distribution profiles were calculated based on 16S rRNA gene amplicon pyrosequencing data of DNA fractions. For *Leisingera* and the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium, an increase in DNA density between  $^{14}\text{N}$  to  $^{15}\text{N}$  samples

was observed (Fig. S2). A similar increase was observed between  $^{14}\text{N}$  DNA and  $^{15}\text{N}$  DNA of reference strains investigated in control experiments (Fig. S2). OTUs related to *C. Pelagibacter* were also investigated, and showed a partial and minor increase in DNA density between the  $^{14}\text{N}$  and  $^{15}\text{N}$  sample. This was the first indication for  $^{15}\text{N}$  assimilation from methylamine by *Leisingera* and the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium, but lack thereof to any appreciable extent, by *C. Pelagibacter*. However, as a complete separation of  $^{14}\text{N}$  and  $^{15}\text{N}$  DNA was not possible, mass spectrometric investigation of the  $^{15}\text{N}$  incorporation in peptides was performed for validation, since this can quantify changes in  $^{15}\text{N}$  abundance down to 0.1 at.% (Taubert et al., 2013).

Protein extracts obtained from seawater incubated for 3 days with methylamine were investigated by high resolution mass spectrometry (MS) after tryptic digestion, using the NCBI nr database for peptide identification. A total of 8,184 non-redundant peptides were identified in the samples incubated with  $^{14}\text{N}$  methylamine. Of these, 131 peptides, 997 peptides and 2,010 peptides were unique for *C. Pelagibacter*, Rhodobacteraceae (including *Leisingera*), and strain IMCC2047, respectively (Table S1). The  $^{15}\text{N}$  at.% in peptides of these three phylogenetic groups was assessed in the samples incubated with  $^{15}\text{N}$  methylamine to investigate whether these bacteria assimilated methylamine-derived nitrogen, or unlabelled ammonium that had been added to the incubations as an alternative nitrogen source. Under the conditions present in our SIP incubations, bacteria using methylamine directly as a nitrogen source should be almost completely labelled (i.e. close to 100 at.%  $^{15}\text{N}$ ). However, the breakdown of  $^{15}\text{N}$  methylamine will also lead to an isotopic enrichment of the ammonium pool in the incubations. Due to the unlabelled ammonium in the incubations, however, organisms that assimilate ammonium, and are thus cross-feeding on methylamine-derived ammonium, should show a significantly lower  $^{15}\text{N}$  labelling compared to those assimilating methylamine-N. All Rhodobacteraceae- and IMCC2047-related peptides were found to be more than 90% enriched in  $^{15}\text{N}$ , which indicated that under the SIP incubation conditions used, these bacteria mostly assimilated nitrogen from methylamine (Fig. 2, Table S2). *C. Pelagibacter*-related peptides contained a significantly lower amount ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $t$ -test) of  $^{15}\text{N}$  with an average of 44%. This low  $^{15}\text{N}$

incorporation suggests mostly assimilation of nitrogen from the ammonium pool in the incubations, which got only slightly enriched in  $^{15}\text{N}$  by ammonium release from methylamine utilizing organisms. In the  $^{15}\text{N}$  sample enriched in *Methylophaga*, a  $^{15}\text{N}$  content of 70-75%, differing significantly from all other organisms investigated ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $t$ -test), was found in peptides unique for *Methylophaga*, indicating a different route of nitrogen assimilation as compared to Rhodobacteraceae and the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium, most likely at least partially via ammonium. The  $^{15}\text{N}$  incorporation patterns in peptides thus enabled a clear discrimination of bacteria using mostly methylamine as nitrogen source (Rhodobacteraceae and the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium), and organisms either additionally or exclusively using ammonium as nitrogen source (*C. Pelagibacter* and *Methylophaga*).

### **Metabolic pathways for methylamine utilization and ammonium assimilation**

The genomes obtained from the two enriched methylamine utilizers related to *Leisingera* and IMCC2047 in the SIP incubations with  $^{15}\text{N}$  methylamine were investigated for the presence of genes required for methylamine utilization and ammonium assimilation. In the assembled genomes, no genes of the MaDH pathway were present. Genes of the GMA pathway were found in both genomes. In the *Leisingera*-related genome, putative *gmaS* and *mgsABC* genes (encoding GMA synthetase and NMG synthase) were present in one gene cluster, and two separate *mghABCD* clusters (encoding NMG dehydrogenase) were found. In the genome of the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium, a single gene cluster containing all eight genes of the GMA pathway was present. The *gmaS* gene of the *Leisingera*-related genome was 93% identical to that of *Leisingera aquimarina*, while the *gmaS* genes of the genome related to the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium was 96% identical to that of strain IMCC2047 (both at the nucleic acid level). An overview of the phylogenetic distribution of the derived GmaS-sequences is given in Fig. S3.

Protein sequences derived from the genomes obtained were used to reanalyse the metaproteomics data from the SIP incubations to verify the expression of proteins from the GMA pathway. Proteins

encoded by both GMA gene clusters related to *Leisingera* and the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium were found to be expressed (Fig. S4). This confirmed that both organisms used the GMA pathway for methylamine utilization. No peptides specific for GMA gene clusters related to *C. Pelagibacter* were detected. For comparison, we also checked for expression of proteins of GMA and MaDH gene clusters related to *Methylophaga*, using the samples where *Methylophaga* was enriched in 16S rRNA gene profiles (6 and 8 days incubations). The published genome of *Methylophaga thiooxydans* (Grob et al., 2015), the closest relative of the *Methylophaga* sp. detected in our incubations, was used as reference. We detected 25 peptides encoded in the MaDH gene cluster, but only 5 peptides encoded in the GMA gene cluster. This strongly suggests that in our SIP incubations, *Methylophaga* used the MaDH pathway for methylamine utilization.

Genes involved in ammonium assimilation, encoding the glutamine synthetase/glutamine:oxoglutarate amidotransferase system (GS/GOGAT), the ammonium transporter *amtB* and the glutamate dehydrogenase, were present in the genomes of *Leisingera* and the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium. The corresponding proteins related to both organisms were also expressed. An alanine dehydrogenase gene was only present in the *Leisingera* genome, but no corresponding protein was detected, hinting to a primary use of the GS/GOGAT system for ammonium assimilation by *Leisingera* during these SIP incubations.

In summary, the methylamine SIP experiment revealed the presence of two key methylamine utilizers related to *Leisingera* and strain IMCC2047, both employing the GMA pathway for methylamine utilization. Concomitantly, these organisms showed a high  $^{15}\text{N}$  incorporation in their peptides (Table S2), indicating the use of methylamine as sole nitrogen source. The *Methylophaga* sp. enriched in three of our incubations, conversely, was found to use the MaDH pathway for methylamine utilization, employing the two-subunit methylamine dehydrogenase (MauAB). Peptide analysis revealed a lower incorporation of  $^{15}\text{N}$ , indicating the additional uptake of unlabelled ammonium by *Methylophaga* sp. A possible explanation for this difference is the cellular location of the pathways. Enzymes of the GMA pathway are found in the cytoplasm, thus the  $^{15}\text{N}$  ammonium is

released directly inside of the cell, where it can be immediately assimilated via the GS/GOGAT pathway or by glutamate dehydrogenase (Fig. 3). The MaDH is located in the periplasm, and therefore ammonium is released to the outside of the cell. Any  $^{15}\text{N}$  ammonium released in this way would thus need to be transported back into the cell (together with unlabelled ammonium from the seawater) before assimilation.

## **Genomic and proteomic analysis of the metabolism of methylamine utilizers**

The draft genome sequences of the two key methylamine utilizers related to *Leisingera* and strain IMCC2047 that we obtained were analysed in order to reconstruct their central metabolic pathways. Peptides identified were mapped to the protein sequences derived from these genomes to obtain data on gene expression in our SIP incubations.

The *Leisingera*-related organism expressed key proteins of the serine pathway for carbon assimilation, including serine hydroxymethyltransferase and malate thiokinase. Furthermore, the pathway for tetrahydrofolate-dependent reduction of formate as well as an S-(hydroxymethyl) glutathione dehydrogenase for the glutathione-dependent oxidation of formaldehyde to formate, and a formate dehydrogenase were expressed by this organism. It was thus presumably utilizing methylamine not only as nitrogen source, but also as an energy source, by oxidising formaldehyde derived from the GMA pathway to  $\text{CO}_2$ , and as carbon source by reduction of formate and assimilation via the serine pathway. This follows the classical mode of carbon utilization in alphaproteobacterial methylotrophs (Anthony, 1982). The Rhodobacteraceae, including the marine *Roseobacter* clade comprising up to 25% of marine microbial communities, contain a variety of organisms able to utilize C1 compounds, including methylated sulfur compounds (Buchan et al., 2005) and amines (Chen, 2012). The closest relatives of the *Leisingera*-related organism, *L. aquimarina* and *L. methylhalidivorans*, possess genes of the GMA pathway and are able to use methylamine as nitrogen source but not as carbon source (Chen, 2012). The observed enrichment of the *Leisingera*-related organism in our SIP experiment hints to the ability of this organism to employ

311 methylamine also as carbon source, indicating an interesting deviation from the metabolic  
312 capabilities found in other members of *Leisingera*. In the *Leisingera*-related genome, genes encoding  
313 enzymes involved in degradation of dimethylsulfoniopropionate (*dmdA*, *dddD*) (Todd et al., 2007;  
314 Reisch et al., 2008) and dimethyl sulfoxide (*dmsABC*) (Weiner et al., 1992) were present.  
315 Furthermore, this genome also contained a *sox* gene cluster encoding enzymes involved in  
316 thiosulfate oxidation (Friedrich et al., 2000). These genes are also present in other *Leisingera* species  
317 (Schaefer et al., 2002; Vandecandelaere et al., 2008), suggesting that these organisms can utilize  
318 various sulfur compounds, but none of these genes were found to be expressed under the incubation  
319 conditions used in our experiments.

320 The genome of the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium lacked genes encoding  
321 hydroxypyruvate reductase and malyl-CoA lyase, which are key enzymes of the serine pathway. Key  
322 genes of the ribulose monophosphate cycle, another methylotrophic pathway for the assimilation of  
323 carbon from methylamine (Anthony, 1982), were also missing. Alternatively, a ribulose-bisphosphate  
324 carboxylase and a phosphoribulokinase gene were found, suggesting that carbon might be  
325 assimilated into biomass at the level of CO<sub>2</sub> via the Calvin Benson Bassham (CBB) cycle. The protein  
326 products of these genes were not detected, so it remained uncertain whether the organism used  
327 methylamine or CO<sub>2</sub> as carbon source. The IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium expressed  
328 various proteins involved in oxidation/reduction of C1 groups (methylenetetrahydrofolate  
329 dehydrogenase/methenyltetrahydrofolate cyclohydrolase, formate:tetrahydrofolate ligase, S-  
330 (hydroxymethyl)glutathione dehydrogenase, S-formylglutathione hydrolase, and formate  
331 dehydrogenase). This indicated the likely use of methylamine as a source of reducing power and  
332 energy by the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium. No further genes encoding enzymes  
333 involved in C1 metabolism were found in the genome of the IMCC2047-related  
334 Gammaproteobacterium. The presence of a proteorhodopsin for light driven formation of a proton  
335 gradient is described in strain IMCC2047 (Kang et al., 2011). The combination of proteorhodopsin and  
336 the CBB cycle has been suggested to allow a photoheterotrophic growth of strain IMCC2047, with

reducing power obtained from exogenous chemical compounds (Pinhassi et al., 2016) such as methylamine. However, no photorhodopsin encoding gene was found in the genome of the IMCC2047-related Gammaproteobacterium obtained here, potentially due to its incompleteness.

Only a low number of peptides related to *C. Pelagibacter* were identified, and no evidence for the expression of *C. Pelagibacter*-specific proteins involved in methylamine utilization was found.

However, *Candidatus Pelagibacter* ubique strain HTCC1062, the first cultivated representative of this genus (Giovannoni et al., 1990; Giovannoni et al., 2005), possesses genes of the GMA pathway for methylamine utilization and can oxidise methylamine for ATP production (Sun et al., 2011).

Environments containing *C. Pelagibacter* strains are highly oligotrophic, and presumably these bacteria grow on the low concentrations of such compounds when they are released from dissolved organic matter (Tripp, 2013). When grown in culture, *C. Pelagibacter* strains have strict nutritional requirements for compounds such as pyruvate, glycine and reduced sulfur compounds, and typically have doubling times of more than 2 days even under optimal conditions (Carini et al., 2013). In our incubations, *C. Pelagibacter* was thus outcompeted by organisms capable of higher growth rates responding rapidly to methylamine addition. Nevertheless, as even slow growth with  $^{15}\text{N}$  methylamine as nitrogen source would result in a measurable abundance of peptides highly enriched in  $^{15}\text{N}$  (> 90% at.%), we still believe that *C. Pelagibacter* was not involved in methylamine utilization in our SIP incubations. *C. Pelagibacter* strains are adapted to nitrogen-limited conditions, and only switch to uptake of organic nitrogen sources under high nitrogen stress (Smith et al., 2013). Under the conditions present in our incubations, cross-feeding on  $^{15}\text{N}$  ammonium released by other methylamine utilizers might thus have been sufficient to satisfy the nitrogen requirement of *C. Pelagibacter* (Fig. 3), which would also explain the amount of  $^{15}\text{N}$  labelling observed in *C. Pelagibacter* peptides.

For *Methylophaga* sp., key enzymes of the ribulose monophosphate cycle for carbon assimilation and enzymes involved in the tetrahydromethanopterin- and tetrahydrofolate-dependent oxidation/reduction of C1 groups were detected. This resembles the metabolism of the closely

related *Methylophaga thiooxydans* during growth on methanol as previously described (Grob et al., 2015). *Methylophaga* spp. are known *bona fide* methylotrophs (Janvier et al., 1985), thus it is not surprising that the *Methylophaga* sp. in our incubations used methylamine as source of carbon and energy, with release of ammonium as a by-product of this activity. Interestingly, *Methylophaga* species are commonly observed in enrichment cultures and SIP experiments where marine samples are incubated with C1 compounds such as methanol, methylamine or dimethylsulfide (Neufeld et al., 2007a; Moussard et al., 2009; Boden et al., 2010), even though they appear to be present only at very low relative abundance in 16S rRNA gene surveys of seawater samples (Janvier et al., 2003; Rusch et al., 2007; Grob et al., 2015). The bloom-like appearance of *Methylophaga* sp. in three of our incubations might indicate a preference to the high concentrations of methylamine used in our SIP experiment, in contrast to the ability of e.g. *C. Pelagibacter* to grow under highly oligotrophic conditions. The ecological niche of *Methylophaga* spp. in the environment, however, remains unknown.

In summary, the draft genomes of two methylamine utilizing organisms were recovered after <sup>15</sup>N-SIP experiments. Both bacteria used the GMA pathway for methylamine utilization and assimilated nitrogen from the methylamine present. Based on the expressed proteins we detected, they probably also used methylamine as an energy source, but potentially employed different carbon uptake pathways, using either methylamine or CO<sub>2</sub> as carbon source.

## Conclusion

In this study, we used a <sup>15</sup>N-SIP experiment to investigate the metabolism of methylamine in bacteria from a coastal environment. A combination of SIP, metagenomics and metaproteomics revealed that phylogenetically diverse methylamine utilizers of the Alpha- and Gammaproteobacteria assimilate the nitrogen from methylamine into biomass using the GMA pathway. Furthermore, ammonium released during methylamine utilization, e.g. also via the MaDH pathway, can be a nitrogen source for bacteria not utilizing methylamine. Our study demonstrated that <sup>15</sup>N-SIP is a powerful technique

to detect bacteria present in seawater samples that are able to respond to an increase in the availability of methylamine, and facilitates retrieval of their genomes by metagenomic sequencing of  $^{15}\text{N}$  labelled DNA. When coupled with proteomics,  $^{15}\text{N}$ -SIP can be used to reconstruct putative metabolic pathways and assess the expression of key proteins involved in cycling nitrogen from methylated amines by these bacteria. Since measurements of the *in situ* concentrations of methylated amines in seawater are difficult, further development of process-based methods, coupled with molecular ecology techniques such as SIP and metagenomics, will be required to analyse in depth the exact contribution of bacteria in the cycling of methylated amines in the marine environment.

## Experimental Procedures

### $^{15}\text{N}$ stable isotope probing experimental setup

Surface seawater was collected at the WCO Station L4 (50°15.0'N; 4°13.0'W) on 29<sup>th</sup> of September, 2014. Three sets of four 2 L gas-tight glass bottles were filled with 0.75 L of seawater, to which 75  $\mu\text{mol}$  of  $^{15}\text{N}$  or  $^{14}\text{N}$  methylamine (two bottles each per set) were added (100  $\mu\text{M}$  final concentration) as well as 750  $\mu\text{l}$  marine ammonium mineral salt medium (MAMS,  $\text{NH}_4^+$  15  $\mu\text{M}$  final concentration) (Schäfer et al., 2005). Bottles were incubated at 25°C in a shaking incubator at 50 rpm. Methylamine concentration in the incubation bottles was measured daily by ion chromatography (see Supp. Info). When methylamine concentrations were below the limit of detection (5  $\mu\text{M}$ ), again 75  $\mu\text{mol}$  of  $^{15}\text{N}$  or  $^{14}\text{N}$  methylamine were added. Seawater from a set of bottles was filtered through 0.22  $\mu\text{m}$  Sterivex<sup>TM</sup> filters (Merck Millipore) after 3, 6 and 8 days of incubation, by which time a cumulative amount of 75  $\mu\text{mol}$ , 150  $\mu\text{mol}$  and 300  $\mu\text{mol}$  of methylamine had been added per bottle, respectively. For T0, 3.4 L of seawater were filtered in duplicate through Sterivex filters within 24 h of collection using a peristaltic pump (Watson-Marlow 502S, 50  $\text{ml min}^{-1}$ ).

All filters were stored at -20°C for a maximum of two weeks before extraction of DNA and proteins, which was performed as described in (Grob et al., 2015).

### **Protein-SIP analyses**

Protein extracts were subjected to SDS polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis followed by in-gel tryptic digestion and LC-MS/MS analysis (see Supp. Info). Peptide identification was performed in Proteome Discoverer v1.4 (Thermo Fisher Scientific) via the Mascot search algorithm (Koenig et al., 2008). Only peptides with a false discovery rate (FDR) <1% and peptide rank of 1 were considered as identified. Searches against two different reference databases were performed: the NCBI nr database with taxonomy set to Bacteria and Archaea and a database consisting of the predicted protein sequences of metagenome-derived DNA sequence data. To exclude peptides that were conserved in multiple phylogenetic groups, the taxonomic range of all peptides was checked with UniPept ([www.unipept.ugent.be](http://www.unipept.ugent.be)). Proteins were considered as identified if at least one unique peptide was identified.

### **Quantification of <sup>15</sup>N incorporation in peptides**

A subset of peptides from proteins identified in samples incubated with <sup>14</sup>N methylamine was selected for investigation of <sup>15</sup>N incorporation in phylogenetic groups of interest (see Supp. Info). Mass spectra from samples of the corresponding <sup>15</sup>N methylamine incubations were analysed, the signals of the selected peptides were identified based on expected *m/z*, chromatographic retention time and MS/MS fragmentation pattern, and <sup>15</sup>N incorporation was quantified as previously described (Taubert et al., 2013).

### **DNA-SIP ultracentrifugation and fractionation**

DNA extracted from the incubations with <sup>14</sup>N and <sup>15</sup>N methylamine after 3 days was fractionated by ultracentrifugation in CsCl density gradients. For comparison, <sup>14</sup>N and <sup>15</sup>N DNA from reference strains (*Methylophaga marina*, *Escherichia coli* DH5α, *Rhodococcus* AD45) was also investigated. The

435 gradients were prepared by adding 3 µg of DNA per sample to a mixture of 7.163 M CsCl solution and  
436 gradient buffer (0.1 M Tris, 0.1 M KCl and 1 mM EDTA) set to a final density of 1.700 g ml<sup>-1</sup>.  
437 Ultracentrifugation at 40,900 rpm (164,000 x g max) for 64 hours at 20°C and with vacuum,  
438 maximum acceleration and no brake set was performed, using a VTi 65.2 rotor and an Optima™ LE-  
439 80K Ultracentrifuge (Beckman Coulter) (see Supp. Info).

#### 440 **16S rRNA gene amplicon sequencing**

441 To generate amplicons of the 16S rRNA gene from DNA fractions and unfractionated DNA, the primer  
442 set 27Fmod (5'-AGR GTT GAT CMT GGCT CAG-3') and 519Rmodbio (5'-GTNTTACNGCGGCKGCTG-3')  
443 was used. After amplification by PCR, 454 pyrosequencing was performed on a GS FLX Titanium  
444 system (MR DNA, Shallowater, TX, USA) followed by sequence analysis and phylogenetic  
445 classification (see Supp. Info).

#### 446 **Selection and preparation of DNA fractions for shotgun sequencing**

447 Normalised distribution profiles of DNA from phylogenetic groups of interest along the density  
448 gradient were estimated in order to enable the selection of samples with the highest enrichment of  
449 DNA from a particular phylogenetic group for metagenome sequencing (see Supp. Info). Multiple  
450 displacement amplification (MDA) using the REPLI-g Mini Kit (Qiagen) was done to increase the low  
451 amounts of available DNA (see Supp. Info). A total of 4 µg of amplified DNA from each sample were  
452 sent for MiSeq, 2 x 300 bp, Illumina sequencing (2 million reads; MR DNA, Shallowater, TX, USA).

#### 453 **Genome reconstruction and analysis**

454 The MiSeq sequencing datasets were assembled using SPAdes Genome Assembler v3.0 (Bankevich et  
455 al., 2012). Contigs below 1 kb were removed, the remaining contigs were binned based on  
456 tetranucleotide frequencies and % GC-content using VizBin (Laczny et al., 2015) and comparison with  
457 reference genomes using blastn (Altschul et al., 1997). Completeness of genomic bins was checked  
458 using CheckM (Parks et al., 2015). Selected genomic bins were annotated in RAST (Aziz et al., 2008),

followed by manual revision. Annotation of genes related to the GMA pathway was done as previously described ((Chen, 2012; Wischer et al., 2015), see Supp. Info).

## Sequence data deposition

Raw data from 454 amplicon pyrosequencing of 16S rRNA gene amplicons have been deposited in the Sequence Read Archive (SRA) of NCBI under accession numbers SRR3183712-SRR3183751. Genome sequences obtained are available in the GenBank Whole Genome Shotgun (WGS) database under accession number LUKH000000000 (*Leisingera*) and LUKI000000000 (IMCC2047-related *Gammaproteobacterium*). Raw Illumina MiSeq data were deposited at BaseSpace (<https://basespace.illumina.com/s/gDb2v3gnAbxU>).

## Acknowledgments

We thank the Captain and crew of the R.V. Plymouth Quest, as well as Michael Cunliffe and Kimberley Bird, for collecting the seawater used in this work. The authors are grateful for using the analytical facilities of the Centre for Chemical Microscopy (ProVIS) at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research which is supported by European Regional Development Funds (EFRE – Europe funds Saxony) and the Helmholtz Association. This work was supported by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation Marine Microbiology Initiative Grant GBMF3303 to J. Colin Murrell and Yin Chen and through the Earth and Life Systems Alliance, Norwich Research Park, Norwich, UK.

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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632

## 633 Table and Figure Legends

### 634 Figure 1: Phylogenetic profiles of samples from the methylamine SIP experiment obtained by 16S

635 **rRNA gene amplicon sequencing.** Relative abundance of taxonomic groups within each sample is  
636 shown at the family level. Profiles are derived from total DNA extracted from seawater samples  
637 collected at the Western Channel Observatory Station L4 (T0) and after incubating the same  
638 seawater with  $^{14}\text{N}$  or  $^{15}\text{N}$  methylamine and 0.1% MAMS ( $\text{NH}_4^+$  15  $\mu\text{M}$  final conc.) for 3, 6 or 8 days,  
639 when 75, 150 and 300  $\mu\text{mol}$  of methylamine had been consumed, respectively. Mean values from 3  
640 replicates (incubation for 3, 6 and 8 days) or 2 replicates (T0) and standard deviations are shown.  
641 Families containing less than 3% of sequences are combined in the “unknown/other” category.

### 642 Figure 2: Incorporation of $^{15}\text{N}$ into peptides after 3 days of incubation of seawater with $^{15}\text{N}$

643 **methylamine.** Boxplots show median, first and third quartile for  $^{15}\text{N}$  relative isotope abundance in  
644 unique peptides of Gammaproteobacterium IMCC2047, *Leisingera*, *C. Pelagibacter* and  
645 *Methylophaga*. Whiskers indicate minimum and maximum values. \*\*\*All four groups differ  
646 significantly from each other ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $t$ -test).

### 647 Figure 3: Hypothetical overview of nitrogen utilization by the major phylogenetic groups identified

648 **in the  $^{15}\text{N}$  methylamine SIP experiment.** Red discs show release of ammonium by methylamine  
649 utilization. Enzymes shown in black have been detected by metaproteomics. Enzymes shown in grey  
650 have not been detected, but the corresponding organisms possess the genes encoding these  
651 enzymes. GmaS:  $\gamma$ -glutamylmethylamide synthetase, Mgs: *N*-methylglutamate synthase, Mgd: *N*-  
652 methylglutamate dehydrogenase, MauAB: methylamine dehydrogenase; GS/GOGAT: Glutamine  
653 synthetase/ Glutamine 2-oxoglutarate amidotransferase pathway of ammonium assimilation.

### 654 Table 1: Summary of genome statistics based on CheckM analysis (see Parks et al., 2015). N50/L50:

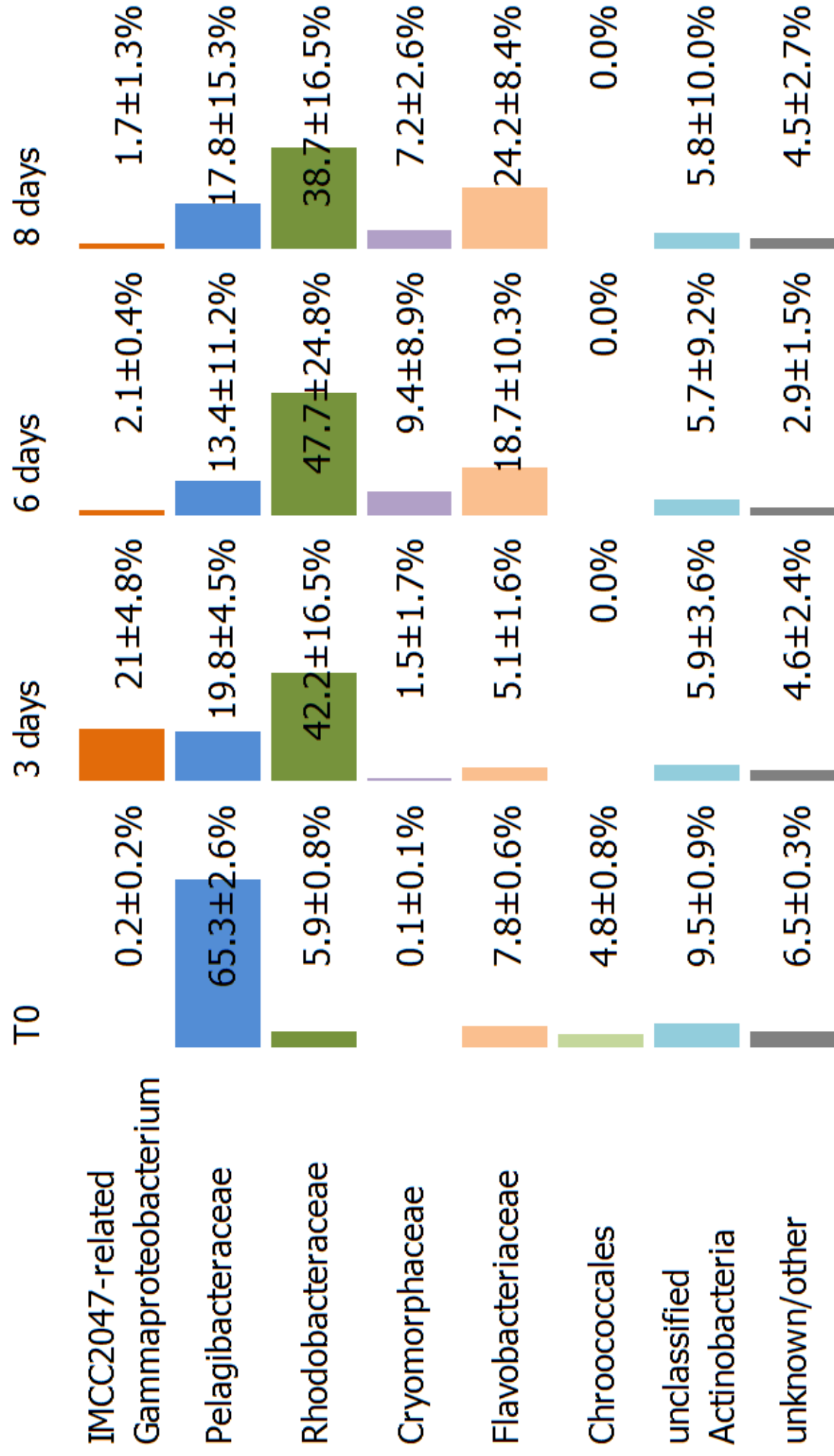
655 length and number of the contig for which the collection of all contigs of at least that length contains

656 at least half of the total length of the genome. Strain heterogeneity comprises the fraction of core  
657 genes present multiple times with an identity of > 90% on amino acid level.

**Table 1:** Summary of genome statistics based on CheckM analysis.  
N50/L50: length and number of the contig for which the collection of all contigs of at least that length contains at least half of the total length of the genome. Strain heterogeneity comprises the fraction of core genes present multiple times with an identity of > 90% on amino acid level.

	fraction 5 <i>Leisingera</i>	fraction 7 IMCC2047	<i>Methylophaga</i> str. L4 <sup>1</sup>
no. of contigs	1488	214	8
total length / bp	7,813,916	2,494,546	2,589,653
N50 / bp	52,902	36,700	397,852
L50	32	22	3
GC / %	61.8 %	48.5 %	45.7 %
no. of predicted genes	8,600	2,656	2,521
core genes present	100 %	88.9 %	100 %
core genes present multiple times	66.1 %	3.0 %	0.3 %
strain heterogeneity	87.9 %	44.4 %	66.7 %
core genes related to other taxa	8.0 %	1.7 %	0.1 %

<sup>1</sup>*Methylophaga thiooxydans* strain L4, Accession JRQD01,  
from Grob et al., 2015 (23)



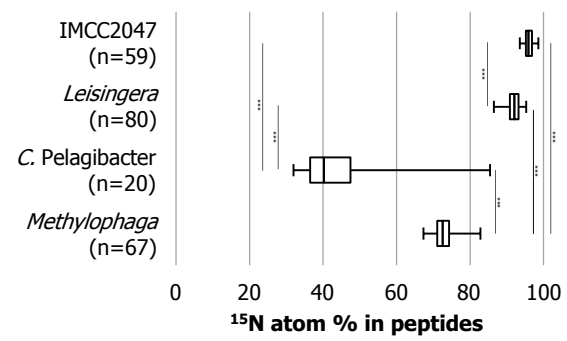


Figure 2

