Reply on AC5
Anonymous Referee #2

Referee comment on "Gravity disturbance driven ocean circulation" by Peter C. Chu,

In his reply to my review, the author states that "Oceanographers have used the geoid for
several decades, but almost no one recognizes that the geoid surface represents the true
horizontal". On this important point I disagree. For independent evidence, I refer the
author to the book “Ocean Dynamics” by Olbers, Willebrand and Eden and published by
Springer. Their Figure 2.9 corresponds exactly to the author’s Figure 1a, showing that
they are aware of the geoid. More to the point, they state on page 45 that "It is hence
very convenient and useful to use a coordinate system which has phi = constant as one
coordinate surface (phi is the geopotential). For orthogonal coordinates, gravity must thus
coincide exactly with one coordinate direction, i.e. \( \mathbf{g} = (0,0, -g) \). The geopotential is then
dependent on the vertical coordinate \( z \). Referring the potential to the mean surface, i.e.
\( \phi(z = 0) = 0 \), we have \( \phi(z) = gz \). The geopotential is thus the work which must be
applied to lift a unit mass from \( z = 0 \) to height \( z \)."

Regarding the Sverdrup/Stommel/Munk problem, the issue is the direction that is used for
the vertical. In the coordinate system used by the author, this is not the same as in the
coordinate system I describe above, or as used in the standard Sverdrup/Stommel/Munk
problem. In the latter, there is no horizontal component of gravity. The different vertical
directions lead to different torque balances in the vertical direction.

Regarding the coordinate system used by the World Ocean Atlas, having talked to
observationalists, I am assured that they regard horizontal surfaces as coinciding with
geopotential surfaces and hence use the coordinate system I describe above.

I am afraid I stand by my original review. The mistake being made by the author is to
work in spherical coordinates from the beginning, whereas the coordinate system used by
modellers and observationalists is an orthogonal, curvilinear coordinate system in which
the vertical direction is perpendicular to geopotential surfaces. As such, I cannot
recommend publication of the manuscript. The author could, nevertheless, make a very
useful contribution by writing an authoritative manuscript dealing with these issues. But
the author needs to be clear about what coordinate system is being used by modelers and
observationalists. It is not the coordinate system he uses in his submitted manuscript.