1	Results from a fu	ull coupling of the	HIRHAM regional clir	nate model and the MIKE SHE
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## 2 hydrological model for a Danish catchment

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#### 18 Abstract

- 19 A major challenge in the emerging research field of coupling of existing regional climate models and
- 20 hydrology/land-surface models is the computational interaction between the models. Here we present
- results from a full two-way coupling of the HIRHAM regional climate model over a 4000 km x 2800 km
- 22 domain at 11 km resolution and the combined MIKE SHE-SWET hydrology and land-surface models over the
- 23 2500 km<sup>2</sup> Skjern river catchment. A total of 26 one-year runs were performed to assess the influence of the
- 24 data transfer interval (DTI) between the two models and the internal HIRHAM model variability of ten
- 25 variables. DTI frequencies between 12-120 min were assessed, where the computational overhead was

26 found to increase substantially with increasing exchange frequency. In terms of hourly and daily 27 performance statistics the coupled model simulations performed less accurately than the uncoupled 28 simulations whereas for longer term cumulative precipitation the opposite was found especially for more 29 frequent DTI rates. Four of six output variables from HIRHAM, precipitation, relative humidity, wind speed 30 and air temperature, showed statistically significant improvements in root-mean-square-error (RMSE) by 31 reducing the DTI. For these four variables, the HIRHAM RMSE variability corresponded to approximately half of the influence from the DTI frequency and the variability resulted in a large spread in simulated 32 33 precipitation. Conversely, DTI was found to have only a limited impact on the energy fluxes and discharge 34 simulated by MIKE SHE.

35

## 36 **1 – Introduction**

37 Combined modelling of atmospheric, surface and subsurface processes has been performed in a broad 38 range of studies over the years utilizing increasingly complex model codes. For example, by adding more 39 complex process descriptions in the hydrological component of the Lund-Potsdam-Jena vegetation model 40 (LPJ GUESS), more realistic global reproductions of evapotranspiration and runoff is achieved as compared 41 to an offline hydrological model (Gerten et al., 2004). It is further argued that the combination of 42 hydrology and vegetation processes may account for rising CO<sub>2</sub> levels not simulated using hydrological 43 models alone. Similarly Yan et al. (2012) successfully simulate global evapotranspiration using the energy 44 based vegetation and water balance land-surface model ARTS E, while Anyah et al. (2008) show a direct connection between soil moisture and simulations of evapotranspiration over the Western North America, 45 46 where soil water is a limiting factor, using the coupled RAMS-Hydro model. Several studies deal with the 47 influence of surface hydrology, vegetation and land use change on atmospheric processes. Seneviratne et 48 al. (2006) show that land-atmosphere coupling processes are significant in representing the variability of 49 temperature projections for 2070 to 2099 using an ensemble of climate models. Zeng et al. (2003) highlight 50 the considerable influence of land-surface temperature and moisture heterogeneities on simulations of

sensible (H) and latent heat (LE) fluxes as well as the precipitation pattern, using the RegCM2 regional
climate model. Cui et al. (2006) show a substantial change in ECHAM5 general circulation model predictions
as a consequence of projected changes in vegetation. Kunstmann and Stadler (2005), Smiatek et al. (2012)
and York et al. (2002) study the influence of the atmosphere on land-surface and subsurface state. Of
these, York et al. (2002) use the CLASP II model with coupled aquifer-atmosphere processes for a single grid
box to study the response of groundwater levels to climate forcing.

57 Current climate models include only a simplistic surface and subsurface description of hydrology processes 58 and similarly hydrological models generally include atmospheric processes in a surface-near layer in the 59 scale of meters. More recent studies have therefore focused on combining model codes that each 60 represents a component in the total simulation of atmospheric, land-surface and subsurface processes as 61 well as ocean processes. Of these, a few studies have focused on coupling a mesoscale atmospheric model 62 with a combined land-surface and hydrological model. Maxwell et al. (2007) for example study the coupling 63 of the ARPS mesoscale atmospheric model (Xue et al., 2000, 2001) and the ParFlow hydrological model (Kollet and Maxwell, 2008) for a 36 hour period over the Little Washita catchment in Oklahoma, USA, 64 65 showing a high degree of soil moisture influence on the boundary layer development. In Maxwell et al. 66 (2011) the ParFlow hydrological model also including subsurface flow is coupled with the WRF atmospheric 67 model (Skamarock et al., 2008) and the NOAH land-surface model (Ek et al., 2003) for 48 hour idealized and 68 semi-idealized runs emphasizing the applicability of the model setup in integrated water resource studies. 69 Also using the WRF and NOAH models Jiang et al. (2009) couple these with the SIMGM groundwater model 70 highlighting the importance in proper energy flux and soil moisture signal from the land-surface for the 71 reproduction precipitation over the Central USA. A recent study utilizes a fully dynamic coupling of the 72 COSMO atmospheric model, the CLM3.5 land-surface model and the ParFlow hydrology model for a one 73 week summer period (Shresta et al. 2014) indicating slight improvements for surface energy fluxes for the 74 distributed model system as compared to 1D columns. COSMO further has the advantage of being non-75 hydrostatic and therefore able to resolve convective processes. Klüpfel et al. (2011) use COSMO in 2.8 km

76 resolution over Western Africa and demonstrate a high degree of soil moisture influence on simulated 77 precipitation for a convective event. Furthermore, a few recent studies couple atmospheric models in 78 climate mode, i.e. performing longer term simulations at larger spatial scales. Rasmussen (2012) for 79 example studied the HIRHAM regional climate model (Christensen et al., 2006) and the MIKE SHE 80 hydrological model (Graham and Butts, 2005) with the SWET land-surface scheme (Overgaard, 2005) in 81 one-way coupled mode, where output from the regional climate model is transferred to the hydrological 82 model over the FIFE test domain in Kansas, USA, for the period May to October 1987. In that study, data 83 are exchanged over an area represented by a single 0.125 degree HIRHAM grid cell. In two more recent 84 studies, the MM5 regional climate model and the PROMET land-surface model (Zabel and Mauser, 2013) 85 and the CAM atmosphere model and the SWAT hydrology model (Goodall et al., 2013) have been coupled. A comprehensive two-way coupling between the HIRHAM regional climate model and the MIKE SHE 86 87 hydrological model combined with the SWET land-surface model for the 2500 km<sup>2</sup> Skjern river catchment in 88 Denmark has recently been established by Butts et al. (2014) and used for a one-year simulation. To our 89 knowledge, no previous studies have been reported on annual simulations employing couplings between a 90 distributed regional climate model and a full 3D groundwater-surface water hydrological model for 91 catchments larger than a single regional climate model grid point. A limitation of the study of Butts et al. 92 (2014) is the need to understand the influence of the data transfer interval (DTI) between the two models, 93 an issue which has also not been reported in previous studies. Also, in Butts et al. (2014) only a limited part 94 of the full RCM domain is replaced by the local hydrology model land-surface scheme which could lead to 95 local physical discontinuities. Another crucial issue, when systematically evaluating climate model results, is 96 the inherent model variability where minor changes to the model setup, induced either by artificially 97 perturbing initial conditions (Giorgi and Bi, 2000) or by altering the domain location (Larsen et al., 2013) 98 result in significant variations in the simulated atmospheric variables. Giorgi and Bi (2000) show for regions 99 in China that especially during the summer and for high precipitation events, precipitation is highly 100 sensitive to perturbations in the initial and boundary conditions. Similarly, Alexandru et al. (2007) used the

101 Canadian regional climate model CRCM (Caya and Laprise, 1999) over five domains with twenty perturbed 102 runs for each domain to assess model variability in precipitation. They found at least 10 ensemble members 103 were needed to reproduce the correct seasonal means although this number is dependent on the domain 104 size.

105 In this paper we study the interaction and feedback mechanisms between the atmosphere and the land-106 surface by two-way coupling of proven climate and hydrology models each operating in an environment 107 where the other model component deliver high quality boundary conditions using the same setup as Butts 108 et al. (2014). Our hypothesis is that the inclusion of feedback will provide a significantly changed signal 109 when compared to uncoupled simulations. In addition, the current study aims to evaluate the influence of 110 the data transfer interval (DTI) between the two models since this strongly influences computation time 111 and to evaluate the importance of the internal HIRHAM model variability by assessing the sensitivity of the 112 simulation results to perturbations of boundary and initial conditions.

113

### 114 2 – Method

### 115 2.1 – Study area

116 The climate and hydrological models used in this study each cover areas typical of their application range. 117 The HIRHAM regional climate domain model covers an area of approximately 2800 km x 4000 km from 118 northwest of Iceland to southern Ukraine (figure 1). Approximately 60% of the latitudinal stretch is located 119 west of the Skjern catchment where most local weather systems originate. The MIKE SHE model setup covers the Skjern catchment area of 2500 km<sup>2</sup> (figure 1) located in the western part of the Jutland 120 121 peninsula. The data exchange between the models occurs at the overlapping grid cells with the hydrological 122 catchment nested within the climate model domain (figure 1). Skjern River emerges in the central Jutland 123 ridge at approx. 125 m above sea level and has its outlet into the Ringkøbing fjord. The Jutland ridge has a 124 maximum elevation of approx. 130 m. Two general soil classes can be distinguished within the catchment; 125 sandy soils generated by the Weichsel ice age glacial outwash and till soils from the previous Saalian ice

age. The catchment land use is divided between 61% agriculture, 24% meadow/grass/heath, 13% forest
and 2% other. For the period 2000-2009 the average annual measured precipitation is 940 mm, which
when corrected for turbulence related gauge undercatch (Allerup et al., 1998) amounts to 1130 mm/year.
The mean annual air temperature for the same period is 9.3 °C.

130

# 131 2.2 – Observed input and validation data

132 Measurements from three sites having flux towers, placed over agricultural, meadow and forest surfaces, 133 respectively, are used for calibration of the hydrological model (figure 1) as described in Larsen et al. 134 (submitted). At these locations we have measurements of latent (LE), sensible (H), and soil heat fluxes (G), 135 radiation components, soil/air temperature, precipitation, wind speed, soil moisture and groundwater 136 table depth. The latent and sensible heat fluxes are measured above the vegetation using eddy-covariance 137 sonic anemometers and the soil heat flux is measured using hukseflux plates at 5 cm depths. Latent and 138 sensible heat fluxes are gap-filled and corrected according to data quality using the Alteddy software 3.5 (Alterra, University of Wageningen, the Netherlands) as described in Ringgard (2012). Up to 45% of the data 139 140 is replaced. For the periods 21 July-16 August and 24 August-28 October in 2009, no data were recorded at 141 the agricultural site and were therefore replaced by data from the forest site (Ringgaard et al. 2011). 142 Discharge measurements (Q) from the three discharge stations Ahlergaarde (1055 km<sup>2</sup>), Soenderskov (500 km<sup>2</sup>) and Gjaldbaek (1550 km<sup>2</sup>) were also used for calibrating the hydrological model (Larsen et al., 143 144 submitted) and in the present study for point validation (figure 1). To drive the MIKE SWET module six climatic variables are needed. Daily precipitation (PRECIP) data are 145 146 derived from gauge stations and interpolated by kriging to a 500 m grid as described in Stisen et al. (2011a). 147 The precipitation data are dynamically corrected for gauge undercatch (Allerup et al., 1998 and Stisen et al., 148 2011b). The remaining five variables; air temperature (Ta), wind speed (V), relative humidity (RH), surface 149 pressure (Ps) and global radiation (Rg) are based on measurements from climatic stations. The data have 150 been interpolated in space and time to produce hourly datasets at a 2 km resolution (Stisen et al., 2011b).

- For the assessments made here, these six distributed variables have been bi-linearly interpolated to match
  the exact grid of the HIRHAM setup allowing for grid-by-grid calculations.
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# 154 2.3 – MIKE SHE

In the present study we use the MIKE SHE hydrological model that represents all key hydrological processes
 in the land-surface part of the hydrological cycle such as evapotranspiration, snow melt, channel flow (the
 MIKE 11 component), overland flow, unsaturated flow, saturated flow as well as irrigation and drainage
 (Graham and Butts, 2005).

159 The SWET component is included to handle the vegetation and energy balance processes occurring in the

160 land-surface interface from the root zone and into the lower atmospheric boundary layer (Overgaard,

161 2005). The SWET model is based on a two-layer system with resistances for both soil and canopy, as

162 presented in Shuttleworth and Wallace (1985), but modified to include energy fluxes from ponded water

and vegetation interception storage (Overgaard, 2005). A limitation to the current SWET model is that snow

accumulation/melt is not yet included, which may be important under Danish conditions.

165 In the current setup, the MIKE SHE model is derived from the Danish national water resources model (DK-

166 model) (Stisen et al., 2011a, 2012; Højberg et al., 2013) at 500 m resolution. The model setup includes 11

167 computational layers in the groundwater system and an extensive river network and is implemented with a

basic (maximum) time step of 1 hour, which is reduced dynamically during precipitation events.

169

## 170 **2.4 – HIRHAM**

The climate model used in the present coupling study is the HIRHAM regional climate model version 5 (Christensen et al., 1996; Christensen et al., 2006). HIRHAM is based on the atmospheric dynamics from the HIRLAM model used for operational weather forecasting (Undén et al., 2002) and physical parameterization schemes from the ECHAM5 general circulation model (Roeckner et al., 2003). HIRHAM is a hydrostatic model and typically implemented in resolutions of 5-50 km, here applied at a resolution of 11 km on a

rectangular grid. The HIRHAM model is here driven by ERA-Interim reanalysis data as lateral boundary
conditions (Uppala et al., 2008), and the internal model time step is 120 sec. The derivation of the domain
is described in Larsen et al. (2013).

179

#### 180 2.5 – Coupling code

181 A challenge in developing the coupling code used for this work is that the MIKE SHE and HIRHAM models 182 operate on different computing platforms, i.e. a Windows workstation and a highly parallelized Linux 183 supercomputing facility, respectively. To facilitate communication across these very different platforms, an 184 Open Modelling Interface (OpenMI, www.openmi.org) code have therefore been developed and used on 185 the Windows workstation side, and MIKE SHE was modified to exploit OpenMI. On the Linux side 186 modifications to the HIRHAM code were made and additional code controlling the data exchange 187 developed. An OpenMI interface was installed in order to facilitate the communication between existing 188 time-dependent model codes running simultaneously and to handle differences in time step, model domain, resolution and discretization (Gregersen et al., 2005; Gregersen et al., 2007). 189 190 The OpenMI and Linux/HIRHAM coupling code served four general functions: 1) To control the timing 191 between models so that data are stored from one model waiting for the other to reach the point in time of 192 specified data exchange. 2) To define which variables to be exchanged in both directions and to handle 193 potential unit conversion factors, offsets and aggregation types. 3) To handle the spatial grid structure of 194 each model and transfer the data based on a selected spatial interpolation mapping. 4) To collect and 195 interpolate data for each separate model time step to be exchanged between models at each data 196 exchange time step, based on the differing time steps in the two model codes, including MIKE SHE's 197 dynamically varying time steps during precipitation events. 198 The exchange of data between the models are selected within the modelling scope of using the HIRHAM

climate forcing as input to MIKE SHE/SWET as well as transferring energy and water fluxes in the opposite
direction. The exchange of data between the models is as follows: (1) MIKE SHE receives the driving

201	variables: PRECIP, RH, V, Rg, Ta and Ps from HIRHAM, and (2) HIRHAM receives the variables LE and surface
202	temperature (Ts) from MIKE SHE. Ts is then used to calculate H within the HIRHAM code. The spatial
203	mapping in this study was based on a weighted mean method where each grid cell contributes relatively
204	according to the land share fraction.
205	In the current version of the coupling LE and Ts (and therefore H) calculated by MIKE SHE directly replaces
206	the corresponding variables within HIRHAM one-to-one over the shared domain, whereas outside of the
207	domain the simple land-surface scheme embedded in the regional climate model is preserved.
208	Atmospheric fields are then updated based on the modified surface energy balance from MIKE SHE. In this
209	study no means are implemented to assure ensuing internal physical consistency of fields within HIRHAM.
210	Therefore, effects directly related to differences in spatial and temporal scales and in the physical
211	formulation of the land-surface scheme may be found along the boundary of the hydrological catchment.
212	The boundary effects seen here are however relatively small, which again to a large degree is due to
213	differences in spatial and temporal scales, i.e. to cell averaging and cancellation of errors when feeding the
214	MIKE SHE surface back to HIRHAM. In this work we address primarily the effect of the temporal scale
215	differences on the coupled system i.e. by varying DTI.
216	The standard OpenMI method for data exchange is memory-based. However, due to local safety
217	regulations for network data exchange at the location of model execution, the current setup is constrained
218	to the exchange of data files on a shared drive visible to both the Windows and Linux model setups.
219	Naturally, this network file transfer generates a significant overhead with respect to execution time when
220	data exchange is frequent, which by far exceeds that of the added overhead on each of the individual
221	models.
222	

223 2.6 – Simulations

All model simulations were performed for the one-year period from 1 May 2009 to 30 April 2010 with a spin-up period from the beginning of March to 30 April 2009. A total of 26 model runs were used; in the present study they are divided into four main categories (see also table 1):

- Transfer interval (TI): Eight two-way fully coupled simulations were performed by varying the data
- transfer interval (DTI), between the HIRHAM and MIKE SHE models, between 12 and 120 min.
- 229 These DTI values were chosen to conform to time step restrictions imposed by MIKE SHE (given in
- 230 fractions of an hour) to ensure accurate process modelling and to allow for executing model runs
- within the time slots allocated by DMI's supercomputing facility. The TI runs used 1 March 2009 as
  starting day.
- HIRHAM uncoupled variability (HUV): Eight HIRHAM uncoupled simulations were performed each
   starting one day apart from 1 March to 8 March 2009.
- Coupled variability (CV): Eight two-way fully coupled simulations using a 60 min DTI were
   performed using starting dates from 1 March to 8 March 2009 as above.
- MIKE SHE data source (MSDS): To assess the influence of data sources on MIKE SHE performance
   two MIKE SHE simulations were performed. (1) Uncoupled mode using observed values of PRECIP,
- 239 RH, V, Rg, Ta and Ps and (2) One-way coupled mode using simulated values as driving variables
- 240 based on HIRHAM model simulations with 30 min DTI and without feedback to HIRHAM.
- 241 The eight uncoupled HIRHAM runs all show varying geographical and temporal patterns of, in particular,
- 242 precipitation. With these changes in precipitation, the water available for evapotranspiration and the
- energy balance is altered, and therefore attention should be given to which simulations are compared. For
- all models runs, simulation output from HIRHAM were assessed for the six climatic variables PRECIP, RH, V,
- Rg, Ta and Ps since observations were available. The same observational data were also used as input to
- 246 MIKE SHE SWET for the uncoupled runs. Likewise, the output from the MIKE SHE simulations was assessed
- by comparing to measurements of LE, H and G at the agricultural, forest and meadow sites (figure 1) as well
- as discharge measurements from three gauging stations.

249	Figure 2 outlines the data flow and simulation categories. As the Skjern Catchment has an irregular shape,
250	different degrees of overlap are found between the HIRHAM grid cells and the hydrological catchment
251	(figure 1). Analyses of PRECIP, RH, V, Rg, Ta and Ps were therefore performed for five domains that reflect
252	these different degrees of overlap;
253	• Dom1: Cells with 100% overlap (9 cells)
254	• Dom2: Dom1 + the cells with 50-100% overlap (23 cells)
255	• Dom3: Dom2 + the cells with 0-50% overlap (30 cells)
256	• Dom4: Dom3 + cells located immediately downstream of the catchment with regards to the
257	dominant western wind direction (42 cells)
258	• Dom5: A cluster of cells east of the coupled catchment (4 cells)
259	For HIRHAM output, the evaluation was performed on all five test domains by calculating a single root
260	mean square error (RMSE) value for each full model simulation. For MIKE SHE output, the RMSE was
261	performed on the point data only. The RMSE was calculated on the basis of hourly values of RH, V, Rg, Ta,
262	Ps, LE, H and G and daily values of PRECIP and Q against the corresponding observations for the six HIRHAM
263	and four MIKE SHE variables:

264 
$$RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i,t} (SIM_{i,t} - OBS_{i,t})^2}{n}}$$
 (1)

where SIM and OBS are simulated and observed values respectively, i and t are location and time
respectively, and n is the total number of data points. To assess the output variability from each of the
three simulation groups involving HIRHAM (TI, CV and HUV), simulation box plots with the 25<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup>
percentiles including whiskers for the most extreme data were created (figure 5 and 8).
Similarly, the mean absolute errors (MAE) were assessed to gain more information on the expected
improvements for simulations with a more frequent DTI:

271 
$$MAE = \frac{\sum_{i,t} |SIM_{i,t} - OBS_{i,t}|}{n}$$
 (2)

where the terms correspond to the RMSE calculations. The MAE calculations, for the TI simulations, were performed for each of the six HIRHAM variables over each of the five test domains and the four MIKE SHE variables at point scale. Linear trend lines, using least squares, were then fitted to the 12-120 min DTI MAE values for each of the test domains and point scale output and for each variable. The mean absolute and percentage change in MAE, based on the trend lines from the 120 min to the 12 min data points, were then calculated. Also, correlation coefficients on the basis of the trend lines were calculated to detect statistical significance at a 95% two-tailed level.

The HUV and CV simulation groups apply the same changes in initial conditions by using different start dates to perturb these initial conditions but differ by having different land-surface schemes over the Skjern catchment. These simulations were therefore used to test for statistical significance of the coupling. A simple two-sample t-test was performed for each of the test domains and variables for the HUV and CV simulations to test the hypothesis of these simulation groups having unequal means.

284

285 **3 – Results** 

### 286 3.1 – HIRHAM output

#### 287 **3.1.1 - Data transfer interval (DTI)**

288 Of the six HIRHAM output variables, the four variables of PRECIP, RH, V and Ta show a significant decrease 289 in RMSE with decreasing DTI in the fully two-way coupled mode simulations, whereas Ps is less affected and 290 Rg is unaffected (figure 3). Based on the linear trend line averages between the domains, RMSE 291 improvements of 1.1 mm/day, 1.1%, 0.2 m/s and 0.3 °C are seen for PRECIP, RH, V and Ta respectively 292 (table 2). Similarly, MAE shows improvements of 0.3 mm/day, 0.8%, -0.1 m/s and 0.2 corresponding to a 293 change from the 120 to the 12 min simulations of 7.2% averaged for the four significant variables (table 2). 294 For the variables with statistically significant trends, PRECIP, RH, V and Ta, there is a specific order in the 295 resulting RMSE trend line locations with the largest RMSE values for Dom1, Dom2 etc., decreasing down to 296 Dom5.

The execution time for the coupled setup, as a function of DTI, is shown in figure 4. Only a moderate increase in execution time is seen in the range of 60-120 min DTI values whereas a sharp increase is seen from DTI values of around 15-30 min.

300

#### 301 **3.1.2 – HIRHAM model variability**

302 Figure 5 shows the output variability for each of the TI, CV and HUV group runs for each of the five test 303 domains, Dom1-Dom5. For PRECIP, RH, V and to some extent Ta, the largest variability is seen for the two-304 way coupled runs (TI). The RH and V, using a 60 min DTI, for both the coupled (CV) and uncoupled (HUV) 305 runs show almost negligible variability. For PRECIP the CV variability is greater than for HUV whereas the 306 opposite is the case for Ta. with a larger variability in the HUV simulations. For the variables, PRECIP, RH, V 307 and Ta, a general decrease in RMSE is seen for the coupled TI and CV simulations with increasing test 308 domain number from Dom1 to Dom5. For the HUV simulations, this pattern is seen, to some extent, for 309 PRECIP only. The Rg and Ps variables show comparable levels of variability between the TI, CV and HUV simulations groups. For Rg, the RMSE values increase with test domain number whereas the opposite is the 310 311 case for Ps. When comparing the influence of variability with the influence of DTI it is seen that the range in 312 RMSE values from the perturbation induced HUV variability corresponds to 47% of the RMSE improvement 313 for the TI simulations when going from 120 to 12 min (based on the linear trend lines). The corresponding 314 number when comparing TI with CV is 46%.

Two-sample t-tests confirmed the hypotheses that the results from the HUV and CV simulations belong to two separate populations for the variables PRECIP, RH, V and Ta with significance levels of 98.2% or above. For these four variables, there was a clear pattern of decreasing significance with increasing test domain number corresponding to a lesser degree of coupling.

Figure 6 shows the simulated PRECIP for each run, for each of the TI, HUV and CV simulation groups and for each test domain. PRECIP is seen to decrease with increasing domain number for all three simulation groups as well as for observations. This decrease is strongest for the two-way coupled TI and CV simulation

322 groups which also show the highest PRECIP levels compared to the uncoupled HUV simulations. Compared 323 to the observed PRECIP mean over the five test domains of 892 mm over the simulation period, both the TI 324 and CV simulations consistently overestimate PRECIP with accumulated values of 1004 mm and 1027 mm 325 respectively. In contrast, the HUV underestimates the PRECIP for this period, with an accumulated value of 326 868 mm. Despite generally overestimating the rainfall, the coupled TI runs, with high frequency DTIs and a 327 high degree of coupling (Dom1-Dom3), show better estimates of accumulated rainfall compared to 328 uncoupled run (CV). With regard to timing there is a tendency for the main part of the TI simulation 329 variability to arise from events in the fall months of 2009 whereas most of the HUV and CV variability 330 occurs in early 2010 events.

331 In addition to comparing simulation statistics and precipitation accumulation plots, the HIRHAM output 332 variables for all 24 TI, HUV and CV simulations are plotted in figure 7. This figure shows hourly values for 333 the period 10 July-17 July, 2009, with the exception of precipitation data which are given as daily values for 334 all of August, 2009. The one-week period was chosen to reflect high dynamics in the peak summer period whereas the one-month period of august showed more precipitation as compared to July. A large spread is 335 336 seen for precipitation amounts on individual days that appears to increase with the mean intensity, most 337 pronounced on 10 and 20 August. Reasonable agreement is seen between these simulations in terms of 338 capturing the dry days. For the remaining five variables, RH, Ta, Ps and especially V and Rg, the period with 339 low pressure and precipitation, 10 July to 12 July, exhibits a fair amount of spread between the individual 340 simulations, whereas the remaining period, 13 July to 17 July, shows a higher degree of consistency within each simulation group (TI, HUV and CV) especially in terms of dynamics. For the PRECIP, RH, V and Ta 341 342 variables the coupled simulations groups of TI and CV clearly deviate from the HUV simulations in terms of 343 the timing, dynamics and absolute levels. Of these, the most noticeable difference is the daytime RH and 344 night time Ta, which are notably higher and lower, respectively, for the HUV simulations.

345

### **346 3.2 – MIKE SHE output**

347 As for the HIRHAM simulations, the MIKE SHE RMSE results are plotted as a function of DTI (figure 8). LE 348 shows a general improvement in RMSE with a higher frequency of exchange (smaller DTI), which is 349 strongest for the agriculture and forest sites. Correlation coefficients between RMSE and DTI of 0.83, 0.55 350 and 0.13 are found for the agriculture, forest and meadow sites respectively. Conversely, H shows general 351 decreases in RMSE with increased DTI and with correlation coefficients of -0.80 to -0.83. The changes in LE 352 and H thereby represent opposing signals which could be expected, to some degree, from the conservation of the energy balance. No clear trend between DTI and RSME results is seen for both G and Q and the 353 354 corresponding correlation coefficients are generally low.

For LE, an absolute improvement of 1.9 W/m<sup>2</sup> in both MAE and RMSE is seen from the 120 to 12 min trend line average data points corresponding to 6.9% and 4.5% for MAE and RMSE respectively (table 2). Overall the one-way coupled and uncoupled MSDS simulations are superior to the TI simulations with the exception of agricultural LE and G and meadow G. The HIRHAM climate model variability as represented by the CV simulations produces a resulting MIKE SHE RMSE total output span of 1.5 W/m<sup>2</sup>, 1.5 W/m<sup>2</sup>, 0.7 W/m<sup>2</sup> and 2.2 m<sup>3</sup>/s for LE, H, G and Q as an average of the three surfaces and the three discharge stations (figure 8). By comparison the TI simulations induce a spread in the corresponding results, not based on the

362 trend lines as in table 2, of  $3.7 \text{ W/m}^2$ ,  $3.8 \text{ W/m}^2$ ,  $4.5 \text{ W/m}^2$  and  $1.3 \text{ m}^3$ /s, respectively.

363 The variations in the MIKE SHE output for four variables LE, H, G and Q, for the CV and TI model runs, are 364 shown in figure 9. Also here there is no distinct pattern distinguishing the TI and CV simulation group 365 results. The simulations for 10-12 July show larger variations in simulated fluxes reflecting the variability in the HIRHAM simulations. Using either observation data as driving input for MIKE SHE or the HIRHAM data 366 367 (i.e. the MSDS runs) however resulted in substantial variations in the results. As expected due to the change 368 in forcing data, the uncoupled (observation data input) runs resulted in shifts in LE, H and G values for both 369 peaks (day time) and lows (night time) most obvious for G. The one-way coupled run output (HIRHAM data input) seems to provide better match than when based on observation data, especially for night time LE 370 371 and G, than the TI and CV runs. It should be pointed out that for this analysis (figure 9), that although

372 results are extracted from three single MIKE SHE cells (for meadow, forest and agriculture), the forcing data
373 are based on either 11 km resolution HIRHAM data input (TI and CV) or 10 km observation gridded data
374 (station interpolated – MSDS), which can be expected to smooth out local features.

375

#### 376 **4 – Discussion**

The motivation for performing this coupling study is to include the land-surface-atmosphere interactions between the RCM and the hydrological model. Our hypothesis is that the RCM will benefit from the more detailed representation of the surface and subsurface processes provided by the dedicated hydrological model as compared to the much simpler land-surface schemes that climate models usually rely on. Similarly, we expect that the hydrological model would benefit from the better representation of the horizontal redistribution processes in the atmosphere offered by the dynamic coupling with the climate model.

384

#### 385 **4.1 - Performance of coupled versus uncoupled model**

386 As shown above, the performance of the coupled model simulations (TI and CV) when compared to hourly 387 values of RH, V and Ta and daily PRECIP, is generally poorer than the uncoupled model simulations (HUV). 388 This is not surprising. Even though it is based on basic physical principles the HIRHAM RCM has been 389 refined over the years, e.g. in terms of convective parameterization and land-surface albedo, to better 390 reproduce observations. Moreover, the model configuration (domain extent and grid size) used here was 391 the best performing in terms of simulating precipitation and air temperature, as well as representing the 392 atmospheric circulation patterns (Larsen et al., 2013). Likewise, MIKE SHE SWET has been subject to 393 rigorous inverse modelling to assess parameter values (Larsen et al., submitted). By coupling, the existing 394 land-surface scheme in HIRHAM is replaced by MIKE SHE SWET over the Skjern catchment. Calibration or 395 parameter tuning of complex models comprising several processes often introduces compensational errors 396 (i.e. providing the right answer for the wrong reason) in the different model components, in order to

397 ensure that the model fits observational data as well as possible (Graham and Jacob, 2000). When the 398 existing land-surface scheme in HIRHAM is replaced by MIKE SHE SWET, it will inevitably provide different 399 results likely to be poorer in terms of a hindcast assessment. We should, however, highlight that the 400 coupled system shows benefits over the uncoupled when assessing longer term periods such as cumulative 401 precipitation where high frequency DTI's produce better results (figure 6). Also, greater accuracy in the 402 representation of soil moisture and water available for evapotranspiration, in the coupled system, could 403 explain these findings. In terms of future climate projections, which are typically in the range of 10-30 year 404 integrations, this is very promising and suggests that there could be potential added value in using the 405 coupled model system. Similar results, where the added complexity when joining two existing model 406 systems does not lead to obvious direct improvements in simulations, has also been seen in studies of 407 coupling ocean models and atmosphere models (Covey et al., 2004).

From a different perspective the fact that the hourly to daily coupled model performance in many respects is poorer, when replacing the existing land-surface scheme with a more elaborate and well-calibrated one (MIKE SHE SWET), suggests that some of the HIRHAM components could be improved. So far very few attempts have been made in formalised calibration of RCMs, and we are not aware of any study that aims at calibrating coupled hydrology-RCM models. While there is a very interesting perspective here in a formal calibration of HIRHAM, e.g. as done by Bellprat et al. (2012), and in learning from the coupled model to improve the HIRHAM parameterisations, this is outside the scope of the current study.

To some degree the atmospheric variables are likely to be affected by the discontinuity in model physics between HIRHAM uncoupled cells and MIKE SHE coupled cells for the present version of the modelling setup. With the current experimental setup it was however not possible to distinguish between this effect and the change in land-surface signal from MIKE SHE as opposed to the inherent HIRHAM land-surface scheme signal. Large differences in surface fluxes between neighbouring grid cells both inside and outside the coupled area are nonetheless seen, as induced by differences in vegetation, soil, topography etc., and discontinuities at the uncoupled-coupled interface are therefore not considered important.

#### 423 4.2 – Data transfer interval (DTI)

424 As four out of six of the assessed climatic variables exhibit improved performance statistics with a lower 425 DTI, the relation between computation time and DTI (figure 4) is highly relevant for studies over longer 426 periods. This improved performance of the coupled setup is constrained, however, by a corresponding 427 increase in computation time. The general decrease in RMSE levels with lower DTI is not surprising as a 428 more frequent update of the surface forcing from MIKE SHE will include more dynamic features in the land-429 surface exchange and better align with variations in the surface energy balance affecting the land-430 atmosphere interaction. To fully capture the higher degree of dynamics in the land-surface-atmosphere 431 interaction and dependence during unstable atmospheric conditions, a high frequency DTI closer to the 432 RCM time step is likely to be important. One might suspect the effect of DTI to level off when approaching 433 the internal HIRHAM model time step of 120 seconds and to obtain results affected by coupling features 434 alone. Along these lines, a more dynamic pattern is seen for most variables for days with a higher degree of 435 cloud cover and lower Rg levels (10 and 17 July) (figure 7). 436 Similar to this study Maxwell et al. (2011) have tested the timing of data transfer between the ParFlow 437 hydrological model and the WRF atmospheric model in a 48 hour idealized constructed setup. The 438 simulations were performed by using four transfer intervals of 5, 10, 60 and 360 seconds, where WRF used 439 a constant time step of 5 seconds (nonhydrostatic model) and the time step in ParFlow varied with the 440 transfer interval. Good water balance results were obtained for transfer rates up to 12 times that of WRF 441 (60 seconds) whereas the results for transfer interval of 360 second deteriorated. Even though a smaller time step was used in WRF than in HIRHAM in the present study (5 seconds compared to 120 seconds), the 442 443 results of Maxwell et al. (2011) correspond reasonably well to our results, where a transfer rate of 12 times 444 that of HIRHAM would correspond to a 24 min DTI.

445

#### 446 **4.3** - Impact of coupling evaluated against climate model variability

Climate models as proxies for real atmospheric conditions show considerable internal variability and the effects of introducing a full coupling therefore need to be evaluated on the basis of several simulations, where e.g. the initial boundary conditions are perturbed. In some cases the internal variability could be as large as effects introduced by the coupling of a regional climate model and a hydrology model. Hence, it is critically recommendable to explore variations caused by the physical changes (i.e. the coupling) as opposed to the internal climate model variation when developing coupled climate-hydrology modelling systems.

454 In our study the precipitation amounts spanning 75-99 mm and 52-134 mm for the HUV and CV simulations 455 respectively, exhibit a significant variability in simulated PRECIP simply as a result of changes in the initial 456 conditions. This has also been shown in several other studies (Casati et al., 2004; van de Beek et al., 2011; 457 Larsen et al., 2013), which have highlighted the importance of considering climate model variability when 458 assessing model performance. In the present case the coupling is seen to inflate the variability of local 459 precipitation as compared to the uncoupled climate model simulations even considering internal climate model variability. Since many climate models generally tend to underestimate the variability of local 460 461 precipitation thus providing unrealistic projections of e.g. extreme precipitation events, this is again a 462 potentially promising feature of a coupled model system e.g., with respect to the representation of long-463 term trends in precipitation for longer periods (multiple years) and in future climate projections, and will be 464 investigated in future studies.

465

### 466 **4.4 – Test domains**

There is a clear tendency for increased RMSE levels from the TI simulations with a higher degree of coupling from Dom1 to Dom5 with the exception of Rg results (figure 3). An important consideration in this regard is, however, the specific location of each of the domains within Denmark (figure 1). For the uncoupled HUV simulations, a similar pattern of increased RMSE values is seen in PRECIP for the same test domains as for the TI simulations. Therefore, it is not possible to directly relate the share of MIKE SHE influence on the

472 HIRHAM simulations to the results. An additional cause of the pattern of higher RMSE levels for test 473 domains located in central Jutland (Dom1 – Dom4) as compared to the eastern Dom5 could be related to 474 certain geographical biases in the precipitation as often seen in RCMs, including HIRHAM (Jacob et al., 475 2007; Polanski et al., 2010). Corresponding biases for temperature have also been found (Kjellström et al., 476 2007; Plavcová and Kyselý, 2011). Proximity to the coastline has also been shown to affect precipitation 477 results from HIRHAM (Larsen et al., 2013) and thereby the available water affecting the energy balance 478 budget. In this regard, the test domains Dom2 and specifically Dom3-Dom4 are located close to Ringkøbing 479 Fjord, which might contribute to the higher RMSE levels of these compared to Dom5.

480

# 481 4.5 - Scale of variables

482 An essential consideration is to assess at which spatial scale the atmospheric variables are affected by the 483 land-surface. The Skjern River catchment covers an area of approximately 70 km x 50 km, and our 484 hypothesis is that areas in the proximity of the catchment and up to 25 km downstream of the catchment (in relation to the dominant wind direction) may be affected by the model coupling. This corresponds to 485 486 atmospheric scales from smaller mesoscale to microscale. It could be argued, however, that the effect of 487 the coupling, although tested on regional scales below 100 km, could likely be imposed regionally on top of 488 larger scale atmospheric phenomena such as larger mesoscale and synoptic scale features. In this regard it 489 should be noted that global incoming solar radiation (Rg) which is by and large affected by cloud cover and 490 therefore by upstream larger meso- and synoptic scale conditions, shows no effect of the coupling scenario, 491 as the RSME pattern resembles a somewhat random pattern as a function of DTI, test domain and model 492 variability (figure 3). Similarly surface pressure (Ps) would be connected with larger scale weather systems 493 and sea surface temperatures (Køltzow et al., 2011) and is seen to be constrained, to some degree, by 494 lateral boundary conditions (Seth and Georgi, 1998; Diaconescu et al., 2007; Leduc and Laprise, 2009) but is 495 highly influenced by domain characteristics (Larsen et al., 2013). The variables RH, V and Ta all vary on 496 spatial scales far below the resolution of HIRHAM and even MIKE SHE and the improved results with a more

frequent DTI could therefore be anticipated to some extent. Also PRECIP, in particular convective rainfall,
can be seen at grid scales below the HIRHAM resolution (Casati et al., 2004).

499 Another potential contribution to the coupled model performance comes from the fact that HIRHAM is a 500 hydrostatic RCM with a convective scheme close to, or at, the threshold of its minimum resolution as also 501 suggested in Larsen et al. (2013). Although, HIRHAM has been tested at similar spatial scales previously and 502 was found to provide reasonable results, at very fine temporal scales the hydrostatic nature of HIRHAM 503 could arguably contribute to the degree of variability seen for precipitation, and the 11 km resolution 504 naturally has its limits compared to newer studies utilizing atmospheric model resolutions of a few 505 kilometres such as Kendon et al. (2014). For hydrological studies forcing data having finer resolutions are 506 highly beneficial (Xue et al., 2014) and must be expected even more important for regions with a complex 507 topography and a high degree of convective precipitation. One approach to reach fine resolutions 508 appropriate for hydrological studies is seen in Berg et al. (2012) using a range of downscaling methods to 509 achieve a resolution of 1 km over a Northern European region thereby demonstrating significant 510 improvements for both temperature and precipitation. Conversely, the uncertainty related to, e.g. the 511 location and timing of precipitation events, are in general much larger than the model resolution even for 512 very high resolution non-hydrostatic models, particularly at the time scales of climate projections 513 (Rasmussen et al., 2012). Hence, in practical terms, the HIRHAM-MIKE SHE setup explored in this paper 514 represents a reasonable compromise in terms of delivering results of sufficient spatial representation for a 515 number of problems in climate projection studies.

516

## 517 4.6 - Perspectives for further use

518 Computationally, we show that it is feasible to run simulations using coupled models dedicated to different 519 types of computing systems, in this case a high performance computer and a personal computer.

520 Moreover, we have demonstrated that transient coupled climate-hydrology simulations at the decadal

521 scale or longer is well within reach. The present proto-type implements a number of technical decisions

522 inherent to the computing environment available for this study and more work is needed in order to reduce 523 computation times, e.g. implementation of a more efficient memory-based data transmission schemes as 524 prescribed in the OpenMI standard. In its current form the coupling approach, however, may easily be 525 generalized to other computing environments. In terms of further model development this work suggests 526 that several steps may be undertaken to improve the coupled model performance. While we directly link 527 model variables in the present study using an OpenMI interface, the present framework could easily be 528 extended by imposing empirical downscaling and bias correction methods to further improve model 529 compatibility across time and spatial scales.

530

# 531 **5 – Conclusions**

This study presents the performance of the fully two-way coupled setup between the HIRHAM RCM and the combined MIKE SHE/SWET hydrological and land-surface models. In particular, the influence of the data transfer interval between the models (DTI), the domain of coupling influence and the HIRHAM model variability, was assessed.

536 Of the six HIRHAM output climate variables, precipitation, relative humidity, wind speed and air 537 temperature (PRECIP, RH, V and Ta) showed significant differences between simulations from perturbed 538 runs of HIRHAM and perturbed runs of two-way coupled MIKE SHE-HIRHAM, as well as significant 539 improvements in RMSE with a reduced DTI in the evaluated range of 12 to 120 min DTIs. The improvement 540 for precipitation is highlighted with regard to the potential in the coupled setup as this is considered one of 541 the most difficult variables to simulate. The global radiation and surface pressure variables (Rg and Ps) were 542 shown to have little to no impact from the coupling. Little to no improvement in the MIKE SHE output 543 variables is seen for decreased DTI values as the improvement in latent heat flux (LE) is in the same range 544 as the sensible heat flux (H) decline.

The uncoupled and coupled HIRHAM model variability, induced by perturbing the HIRHAM runs with
varying starting dates, was shown to correspond to 47% and 46%, respectively, of the average

547 improvements in RMSE and MAE for the four significant variables when going from a 120 min to a 12 min 548 DTI. Similarly significant variations were seen in the simulated precipitation where the eight two-way fully 549 coupled simulations with 12 to 120 min DTI values (TI) produced spans in precipitation during the one year 550 period of 108-170 mm for the five test domains. Similarly, the uncoupled (HUV) and coupled (CV) 551 simulations where model variability was induced by changing initial conditions showed precipitation spans 552 of 75-99 mm and 52-134 mm respectively. For all of these, the resulting span increased with a higher 553 degree of coupling. Part of this pattern may be attributed to well-known geographical HIRHAM bias over 554 the central Jutland ridge. The HIRHAM model variability as transferred to the MIKE SHE model in the 60 min 555 DTI CV simulations were substantially higher for discharge than for the LE, H or soil (G) heat fluxes. 556 In general, the coupled modeling results (TI and CV) are poorer than the uncoupled results (HUV) when 557 assessed on a sub-daily to daily basis whereas longer term precipitation is better reproduced by more 558 frequent DTI coupled simulations. The poorer short-term coupled performance is not surprising as each of 559 the models over the years, also prior to this study, have been separately refined (convective scheme and land-surface energy balance) or calibrated to accurately reproduce observations. These calibrations are 560 561 likely to have compensated for errors in the separate and complex model components to ensure a proper 562 data fit. We suggest that the replacement of the land-surface scheme in HIRHAM, as introduced by MIKE 563 SHE, and the change in data input in MIKE SHE, as introduced by HIRHAM, causes this deterioration. A 564 potential calibration of the coupled setup is outside the time-frame and scope of the present paper, 565 however we see a great potential for further improvements.

566

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	Simulation group name	No. of runs	Description	HIRHAM	MIKE SHE
Coupled simulations	ті	8	Fully two-way coupled, DTI's of 12, 15, 24, 30, 48, 60, 90 and 120 min	x	x
	CV	8	Fully two-way coupled, DTI's of 60 min, perturbed initial conditions (simulations start between 1-8. May)	x	x
One-way or uncoupled simulations	HUV	8	HIRHAM runs alone, perturbed initial conditions (simulations start between 1-8. May)	x	
	MSDS	2	Two MIKE SHE runs with 1) observation data forcing and 2) with HIRHAM forcing through a one-way coupling		x

Table 1.

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	Variable	MAE absolute change	MAE percentage change	MAE CV variability	MAE HUV variability	RMSE absolute change	RMSE percentage change	RMSE CV variability	RMSE HUV variability
	PRECIP (mm/day)	0.3	8.3	0.2	0.2	1.1	16.4	0.7	0.6
	RH (%)	0.8	7.9	0.3	0.1	1.1	8	0.3	0.2
HIRHAM	V (m/s)	0.1	5.4	0.0	0.0	0.2	5.8	0.5	0.1
output variables	Rg (W/m <sup>2</sup> )	-0.1	-0.2	2.6	1.3	-0.1	-0.1	6.0	3.2
	Ta (°C)	0.2	10.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	8.8	0.1	0.2
	Ps (hPa)	0.0	1.8	0.1	0.1	0.1	2.7	0.2	0.2
	LE (W/m²)	1.9	6.9	0.9	-	1.9	4.5	1.5	-
MIKE SHE	H (W/m²)	-2.3	-7.4	0.5	-	-3.1	-6	1.5	-
output variables	G (W/m²)	-0.1	-3.1	0.2	-	-0.7	-7.9	0.7	-
	Q (W <sup>3</sup> /s)	-0.4	-12.2	0.7	-	0.1	-0.1	2.2	-
Table 2.									

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770

771 Figure 1. Location of HIRHAM regional climate domain within Europe, MIKE SHE catchment within Denmark, three

point measurement sites, and location of five evaluation domains.

773

Table 1. Simulation outline showing simulation groups, number of runs in each group and short description of

simulation group characteristics. The two latter columns show from which of the two model components the

simulation output derives.

777

Figure 2. Flow chart of the data flow and analyses performed in the present study and a legend of the variablesmentioned in the study.

Figure 3. HIRHAM output RMSE statistics for each of the test domains for the coupled TI simulations. Linear trend lines
 are shown with RMSE as a function of DTI as well as the average trend line correlation coefficients where the
 significant correlations on a two-sided 95% confidence level are underlined.

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Figure 4. Model execution time in hours of wall time as a function of DTI. DTI steps of 6, 9, 12, 15, 24, 30, 48, 60, 90
(eight CV runs), and 120 min were used whereas 6 and 9 min DTI values were extrapolated from unfinished runs. For
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Elsevier.

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Figure 5. RMSE variability for the TI, HUV and CV simulations for each of the five test domains. The dots represent the
 median value, the box plots represent the 25-75<sup>th</sup> percentiles and the whiskers represent the entire data range.

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Table 2. Absolute and percentage change in MAE and RMSE between the largest (120 min) and smallest (12 min) DTI
based on the average value of the linear trendlines of either the five test domains (HIRHAM output) or the
measurement sites (MIKE SHE output). Also shown is the absolute variability from the CV and HUV runs defined as the
minimum value subtracted from the maximum for the 60 min DTI averaged between test domains (HIRHAM output)
or measurement sites (MIKE SHE output) for each tested variable.

801

Figure 6. Precipitation sum curve for the evaluation period 1 May 2009 to 30 April 2010 for the five test domains and the TI, HUV and CV simulations as well as the observations. Also given are the simulated mean values, the span in the period sum for each plot group (minimum value subtracted from maximum value) and the observed mean values.

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808	Figure 7. The six HIRHAM output variables assessed in the present study in the 10-17 July period (precipitation is 1-31
809	August to match the period in figure 9 with a higher dynamic in discharge) for all 24 TI, HUV and CV runs and for Dom1
810	(nine cell mean). The legend colouring reflects the overall simulation group (TI, HUV or CV) whereas each simulation is
811	in the colour shade as in figure 6.
812	
813	Figure 8. MIKE SHE output RMSE statistics for each of the three flux tower measurement sites and the three discharge
814	stations for the TI, MSDS and CV simulations. For the TI simulations linear trendlines are shown with RMSE as a
815	function of DTI as well as the average trendline correlation coefficients where significant correlations on a two-sided
816	95% confidence level are underlined. Also, the variability of the perturbed CV simulations is shown.
817	
818	Figure 9. Four MIKE SHE output variables for the period 10-17 July (discharge is 1-31 August) for the TI, CV and MSDS
819	runs and for Dom1 (nine cell mean). The legend colouring reflects the overall simulation group (TI, CV and MSDS) and
820	each simulation has the same colour shade as in figure 6. The individual flux sites are shown for LE only. Notice the y-
821	axis shifts to accommodate more sites.
822	
823	



















