AQUARIUS AND THE AQUARIUS/SAC-D MISSION

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ABSTRACT

Aquarius is a combination L-band radiometer and scatterometer designed to map the salinity field at the ocean surface from space. It will be flown on the Aquarius/SAC-D mission, a partnership between the USA space agency (NASA) and Argentine space agency (CONAE). The mission is composed of two parts: (a) The Aquarius instrument being developed as part of NASA’s Earth System Science Pathfinder (ESSP) program; and (b) SAC-D the fourth spacecraft service platform in the CONAE Satelite de Aplicaciones Cientificas (SAC) program. The primary focus of the mission is to monitor the seasonal and interannual variations of the salinity field in the open ocean. The mission also meets the needs of the Argentine space program for monitoring the environment and for hazard detection and includes several instruments related to these goals.

Index Terms—Microwave Remote Sensing, Radiometry

1. AQUARIUS

The objective of Aquarius is to provide global maps of the surface salinity field with a spatial resolution of 150 km and accuracy of 0.2 psu on a monthly basis. This is a challenging goal (0.2 psu corresponds roughly to 0.1 K) and will require significant averaging [2, 4, 10]. To this end Aquarius has been designed to map the globe in 7 days with an exact repeat orbit. This is accomplished with three independent radiometers with a swath of about 320 km from an altitude is 657 km [5]. Each month this provides 4 samples near the equator and more in the cold waters of northern latitudes where the sensitivity is less [3].

Successful averaging requires a stable radiometer. The Aquarius radiometers are Dicke radiometers with an internal reference noise source based on a design developed in research at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center and Jet Propulsion Laboratory [7, 9]. In addition, careful attention has been given to the thermal stability of the radiometers on the spacecraft. The sensitive elements in the radiometer front end will be controlled to within 0.1 C over 7 days. As part of the design, active thermal control is provided for the front end and other elements of the system less sensitive to changes in gain (e.g. the radiometer backend and antenna feed horn), have been isolated from the front end [5].

Finally, extensive testing has been done to model the response of the radiometer to changes in temperature. The hardware includes temperature sensors and an algorithm has been developed using the test data to make a fine correction for changes in temperature [7].

Another element of the approach to meeting this remote sensing goal is to control as much as possible external sources of error. These include such things as radiation from the sun [6, 8], background radiation from the “sky” and atmosphere, and RFI. In this regard, Aquarius has some unique features: a) A co-located scatterometer to help provide a correction for roughness; b) A polarimetric radiometer channel (third Stokes parameter) to provide a correction for Faraday rotation; c) A sun-synchronous orbit with a 6 pm (ascending) equatorial crossing to minimize Faraday rotation and to permit the antennas to look away from the sun toward the nighttime side of the terminator to minimize reflected radiation from the sun; d) An antenna designed to limit side lobes in the direction of both direct and reflected rays from the Sun; and e) Fast sampling to minimize data lost to RFI.

As part of calibration and to check stability, Aquarius will be rotated 180 degrees to look at cold sky. This will be done as often as monthly and at times and locations chosen to provide a stable “cold” reference (See Abraham et al, 2010 [1]).
2. SAC-D

In addition to Aquarius, the observatory will include several instruments provided by CONAE and its partners. These instruments will be mounted on the SAC-D service platform. They include the New InfraRed Scanner Technology (NIRST) camera developed jointly by CONAE and Canadian Space Agency (CSA) to detect high temperature events such as forest fires and volcanoes, and a High Sensitivity Optical Camera (HSC) and a satellite Data Collection System being developed by CONAE. The Italian Space Agency (ASI) is providing a radio occultation experiment called, ROSA, and the French space agency, Centre National d'Études Spatiales (CNES), is providing a particle and radiation environment experiment called CARMEN I. A list of the instruments and summary of their objectives and specifications is given in Table I. Also among the instruments on the SAC-D is a microwave radiometer (MWR) being developed by CONAE. This consists of two pushbroom radiometers, one at 36.5 GHz looking forward of the satellite ground track and one at 23.8 GHz looking aft. Each consists of 8 beams with a resolution of 50 km and arranged to cover the same swath as Aquarius. The spacecraft will yaw as it orbits so that the MWR and Aquarius footprints overlap. Although the MWR is a research development, among the possible applications is the potential for real time information on rain and perhaps wind speed to improve the Aquarius retrieval algorithm.

3. THE OBSERVATORY

Figure 1 is an artist’s rendition of how the observatory will appear when complete. The collar at the interface between the SAC-D spacecraft bus and Aquarius is a shield for solar radiation that is part of the thermal control of Aquarius (it is not intended to be an RF shield). The spacecraft is oriented with nadir (earth viewing) downward and with the velocity vector into the figure. The sun is on the right, behind the solar panels. As mentioned above, the observatory is in a sun synchronous orbit with equatorial crossings at 6 am and 6 pm which keeps the ground track close to the day/night terminator and the Aquarius radiometer beams pointing toward the nighttime side.

4. STATUS

Aquarius completed testing at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in 2009 and currently is in Bariloche, Argentina, at the facilities of the CONAE prime contractor, INVAP, where the observatory is being assembled. Electrical interface testing was completed in February and mechanical integration of Aquarius with the SAC-D bus is scheduled for early March, 2010.
5. REFERENCES


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<td>Data Collection System</td>
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