

DIII-D RESEARCH TO PROVIDE SOLUTIONS FOR ITER AND FUSION ENERGY

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Abstract

The DIII-D tokamak has elucidated crucial physics and developed projectable solutions for ITER and fusion power plants in the key areas of core performance, boundary heat and particle transport, and integrated scenario operation. New experimental validation of high-fidelity, multi-channel, non-linear gyrokinetic turbulent transport models for the ITER baseline scenario (IBS) provides strong confidence in predicted ITER $Q \geq 10$ operation. Experiments in hydrogen identify options for easing H-mode access and give new insight into the isotopic dependence of transport. Analysis of 2,1 islands in unoptimized low-torque IBS demonstration discharges suggests their onset occurs randomly in the constant β phase, often by non-linear 3-wave coupling, thus identifying an NTM seeding mechanism to avoid. At the boundary, measured neutral density and ionization source fluxes are strongly poloidally asymmetric, implying a 2D treatment is needed to model detachment and pedestal fuelling. Deep detachment experiments in ballooning-limited pedestals largely validate predicted trends of pedestal pressure, width and divertor detachment versus pedestal density, using new self-consistent “pedestal-to-divertor” modelling. Measurements of Tungsten (W) sourcing and leakage from a slot divertor with and without ELM control shows ELMs dominate W sourcing and high performance can be maintained without ELMs. Advances have been made in type-1 ELM-free operation in integrated scenarios for ITER and power plants, including negative triangularity. Wide pedestal QH-modes are produced with more ITER-relevant safety factor and shape, and novel feedback-adaptive RMP ELM suppression improves confinement. IBS with W-equivalent radiators can exhibit predator-prey oscillations in T_e and radiation which need control. High- β_P scenarios with $q_{min} > 2$, $\beta_N > 4$, and $H_{98y2} > 1.5$ are sustained with high density ($\bar{n} = 7E19m^{-3}$, $f_G \sim 1$) for $6 \tau_E$, improving confidence in steady-state tokamak reactors.

1. INTRODUCTION

The DIII-D tokamak research program utilizes a favourable combination of fusion-relevant size, flexible and varied actuators, and outstanding diagnostics to provide scientific solutions for ITER and fusion pilot plants (FPPs). Program achievements in the last two years discussed in the paper range from focused and detailed physics model validation studies to broad scope integrated operational scenario development, and address processes from the core plasma to divertor surfaces and the main chamber walls. Results fall into three general categories that are the organizational basis for the paper: (1) investigations of requirements for high core plasma performance, including transport, confinement, and stability; (2) boundary heat and particle transport studies, including understanding and optimizing the pedestal, fuelling, divertors, and impurity influx; and (3) integrated operational scenarios for ITER and FPPs, including ELM control solutions, burn control, high-performance steady states, and negative triangularity.

2. REQUIREMENTS FOR HIGH CORE PERFORMANCE

Accurate prediction of ITER’s potential fusion performance is needed, and recent DIII-D experiments shed light on transport and stability important for ITER and fusion energy. Extensive high-resolution measurements of kinetic profiles (n_e , T_e , T_i), turbulence fluctuations (low-wavenumber (low-k) n_e and T_e), and impurity transport (Li, C, and Ca) were collected in ITER-similar shaped plasmas designed to examine multi-channel transport in relevant conditions ($q_{95} = 3.45$, low rotation, and ELM-suppressed H-mode). These data showed excellent agreement with machine-learning-assisted nonlinear gyrokinetic CGRYO [1] predictive simulations. [2]. Figure 1 shows the T_i , T_e , n_e , and n_C (carbon) profiles were all reproduced within the scatter of the experimental measurements by the ion-scale nonlinear gyrokinetic simulation that matches experimental heat and particle fluxes, and there is good agreement between predicted and measured low-k density fluctuations. This validation motivated the use of these new techniques to project and optimize performance in ITER conditions. The same modeling framework predicts ITER should achieve the primary goal of $Q \sim 10$ with ~ 500 MW of fusion power and suggests paths for further enhancement. Additional simulations predict ITER should still be able to achieve burning plasma conditions with RMP ELM suppression and degraded pedestal conditions.

Before ITER can achieve $Q \sim 10$ it must progress through non-nuclear commissioning phases, so DIII-D has developed better solutions for H-mode access in hydrogen and deepened understanding of energy confinement isotope scaling. Experiments in ITER-similar shaped hydrogen plasmas with edge collisionality less than one have demonstrated that the L-H power threshold P_{LH} can be reduced via applied $n=3$ non-resonant magnetic perturbations (NRMP using the external C-coil [3]. NRMP produces counter-current torque in the plasma edge via Neoclassical Toroidal Viscosity (NTV), driving edge toroidal rotation that increases the local $E \times B$ shear inside the separatrix, reducing P_{LH} by 25-30%. This reduction is observed for plasmas with balanced neutral beam injection (simulating ITER) as well as for finite NBI torque. MARS-F plasma response calculations for low density ITER hydrogen plasmas predict that significant counter- I_p torque can be generated with optimum phasing of the ITER 3-D coil system just inside the ITER last closed flux surface. P_{LH} is also found to decrease 20-50% by initiating H-mode at lower I_p ; the observed hysteresis between L-H and H-L power thresholds in hydrogen suggests ITER could trigger H-mode in the I_p -ramp-up and sustain it into flat-top. Impurity seeding has also been shown to reduce P_{LH} using Helium in DIII-D, with up to 15% seeding reducing P_{LH} by 10-20%, and up to 25% seeding reducing P_{LH} by 30-35% (Fig. 2) [3]. Intrinsic carbon impurity dilution also reduces P_{LH} in hydrogen and deuterium plasmas at low edge collisionality compared to “pure” hydrogen plasmas with very low $Z_{eff} \sim 1.25$ (Fig. 3) [4]. TGLF [5] gyro-fluid and CGYRO gyrokinetic simulations indicate main ion carbon dilution causes an upshift in the ITG critical gradient. In addition, electron non-adiabaticity effects contribute to the higher power threshold in hydrogen, compared to deuterium. The dependence of the ITG critical gradient on ion dilution potentially allows the reduction of P_{LH} during ITER’s early operation with hydrogen plasmas via N or Ne light impurity seeding.

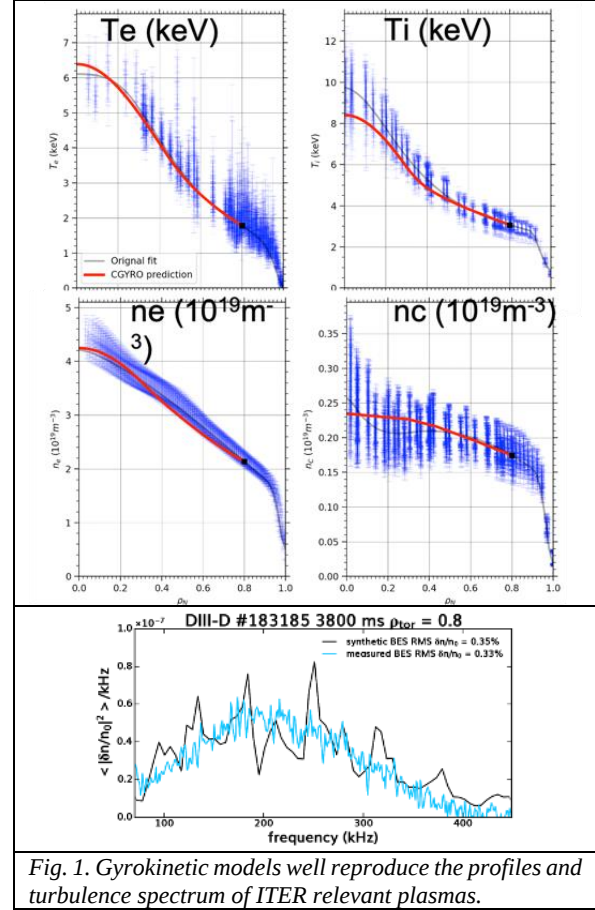


Fig. 1. Gyrokinetic models well reproduce the profiles and turbulence spectrum of ITER relevant plasmas.

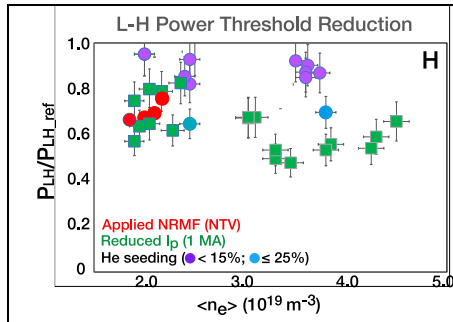


Fig. 2. Reduction in P_{LH} compared to reference case using different techniques.

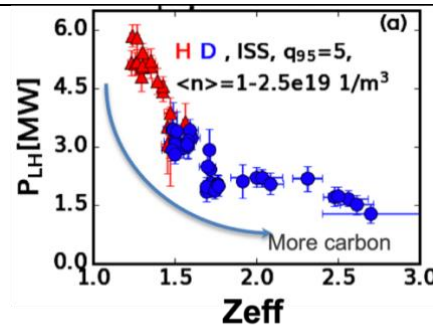


Fig. 3. Intrinsic C-impurity reduces P_{LH} .

New measurements of the detailed turbulence characteristics in dimensionally similar hydrogen and deuterium plasmas partially explain the significant differences in transport and energy confinement time with isotope mass [6]. Energy confinement τ_E is well known to be higher in deuterium

(D) than hydrogen (H); in the specific ITER-shaped ELMy H-mode plasmas heated by NBI and ECH in this study, τ_E of the D plasmas exceeded that in H by a factor of ~ 1.8 . The D and H plasmas had well matched β , safety factor q , and T_e/T_i , while normalized gyroradius ρ^* and collisionality ν^* varied. The factor of 1.8 implies a τ_E -scaling with mass to the power 0.8, which is much stronger than the $\tau_{98,Y2}$ mass scaling to the power of 0.19. In contrast, Beam Emission Spectroscopy (BES) measurements of low wavenumber ($k_{\perp} \rho_i < 1$) turbulent density fluctuations show the amplitude is higher in D than H, with similar spectral structure, in the radial range $0.35 < \rho < 0.8$. While this is consistent with gyroBohm predictions of normalized fluctuation amplitude scaling as $\rho^* \sim \text{square root of mass}$ [7], it is apparently at odds with the observed higher τ_E with mass. However, the BES measurements show H has significantly higher radial correlation length than D, ~ 3.8 cm compared to ~ 2.4 cm (Fig. 4). This contradicts the gyroBohm prediction that the correlation length should also scale as ρ^* , and it offers

a potential explanation for enhanced transport and reduced confinement with lower ion mass because random walk diffusivity scales as the square of the correlation length. BES measurements also show H but not D has a low-to-intermediate wavenumber mode with longer poloidal correlation length but lower amplitude (Fig. 4d). These transport physics insights will help validate nonlinear simulations and confinement projections of D-T plasmas in ITER and other future devices.

MHD stability and disruption avoidance is a fundamental requirement for ITER and all tokamak-based power plants. Analysis of $m/n=2/1$ tearing mode onset time distributions relative to the start time of constant β_N in a wide range of discharge classes indicates most such modes are subject to temporally random processes. A particular focus is DIII-D demonstration low-torque ITER Baseline Scenario (IBS) discharges. Scenario control sequences that reliably and systematically favor either stable or unstable $2/1$ operation for the duration of the I_P flattop exist [8]. The stable sequence includes delayed heating and gas flow to regularize ELMs, resulting in a different current profile at the start of the $\beta_N=1.8$ phase that modeling predicts is farther from ideal kink and classical tearing limits. For IBS discharges that develop a $2/1$ mode, the unstable database onset time distribution in the β_N flattop is well fit by an exponential, meaning $2/1$ mode onsets follow Poisson point-process statistics and have a constant onset rate $\lambda = -(dN/dt)/N$, where N is the number of surviving discharges up to time t . (Fig. 5) [9]. Such an onset time distribution is inconsistent with the modes being triggered by purely classical effects the same way in all discharges, i.e., classical stability index Δ' evolving above a critical value in ~ 1 resistive diffusion time, because modeling predicts this would result in λ peaking at some time, which isn't observed. Poisson statistics imply seeding is happening at random times, and this is consistent with the observation of 3-wave coupling [10] in a majority of $2/1$ -unstable IBS discharges, whereby $2/1$'s are triggered by sawtooth precursors coupling to $3/2$ islands when differential rotation between rational surfaces approaches zero. Rotation flattening occurs with temporally uniform probability due to $n>1$ activity. This shows the importance of properly controlling multiple quantities to help avoid $2/1$ modes in ITER.

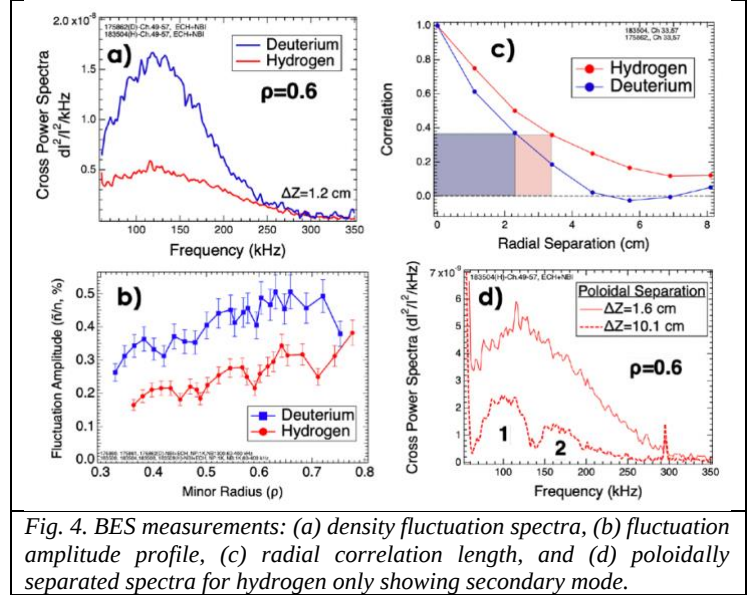


Fig. 4. BES measurements: (a) density fluctuation spectra, (b) fluctuation amplitude profile, (c) radial correlation length, and (d) poloidally separated spectra for hydrogen only showing secondary mode.

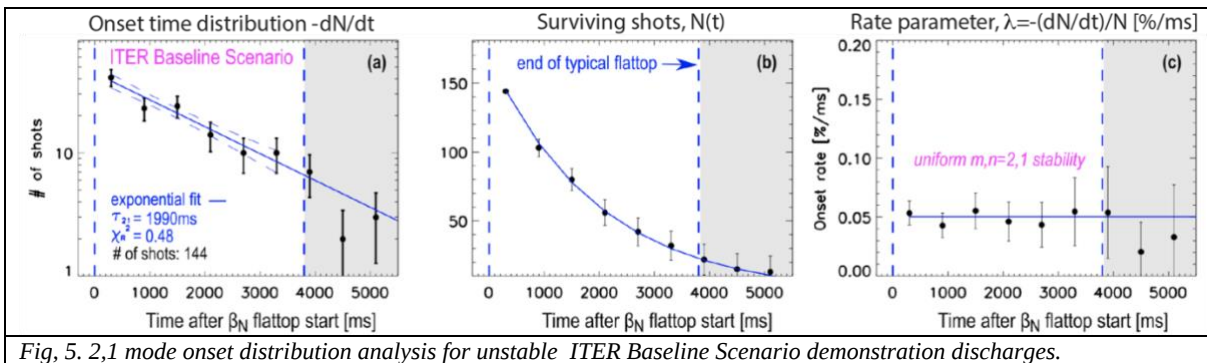
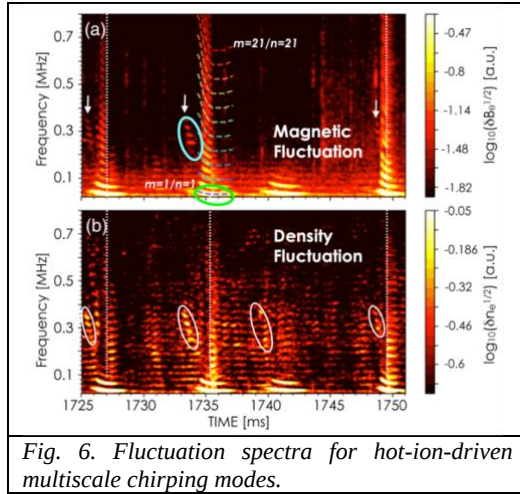


Fig. 5. $2,1$ mode onset distribution analysis for unstable ITER Baseline Scenario demonstration discharges.

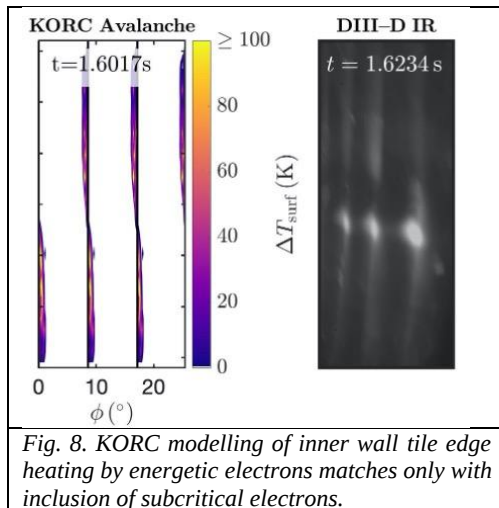
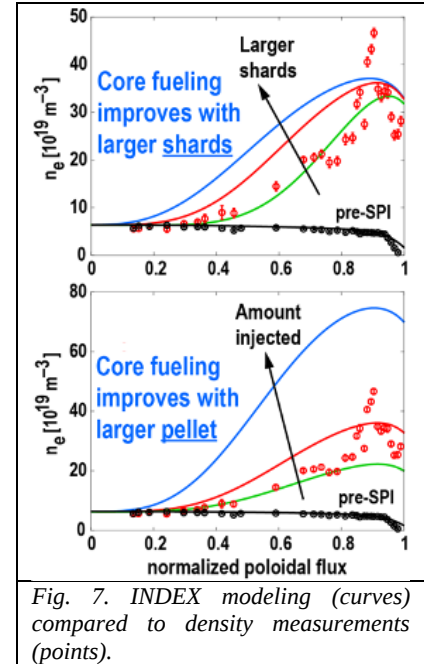
In experiments with ~ 10 keV thermal ions minor disruptions are triggered by multi-scale chirping modes associated with the $q=1$ surface when T_i exceeds a threshold, which is well below the predicted ideal β_N limit [11]. Analysis of magnetic and density fluctuation spectra indicates a strong nonlinear interaction between medium- k and low- k waves. Linear analysis with CGYRO suggest the medium- k modes (cyan ellipse in Fig. 6a) are kinetic ballooning/electromagnetic Alfvén ITG modes resonating with thermal ions on passing orbits. MARS-K [12] suggests the lowest- k mode (green ellipse in Fig. 6b) has a mix of kink and tearing eigenstructure, resonating with thermal ions on trapped orbits [13]. This initially local structure can expand from local to global in ~ 0.5 ms (faster than NTM growth) causing edge islands, current profile redistribution, a moderate drop in I_P , a substantial density

spike, impurity influx, and loss of edge temperature. These results confirm that mode resonances with hot thermal tail ions in reactors will be important, and further study is needed to assess mitigations.



Experiments deploying shattered pellet injection (SPI) inform new optimizations of this technique for disruption mitigation on ITER. Previous studies indicated that mixed or staggered low- and high-Z injection may be required to effectively mitigate thermal loads and runaway electrons [14]. New

experiments tested the staggered approach with spatially and temporally resolved density and temperature profiles after pure D₂ injection, and mixed Ne/D₂ injection. [15]. This used upgrades to the Thomson scattering diagnostic to enable measurements at ~1 eV (new narrow-band polychromators), asynchronous triggering by pellet ablation light, and “burst mode” close sequential firing of the lasers to capture fast dynamics. A single shattered pellet injector on the low field side close to the Thomson scattering measurements was used. Pure D₂ SPI produces a favorable ten or more millisecond delay to the disruption, but very limited core fueling is observed before the disruption. Even during and after the disruption, when strong mixing of the injected material with the plasma is expected, the edge density significantly exceeds the core density. 1D INDEX [16] transport modeling suggests the poor assimilation is caused by strong outward ∇B induced drift of the ablation cloud and predicts larger pellet shards and sizes will improve D₂ assimilation (Fig. 7) whereas greater speed is less effective because it usually results in smaller fragments. The mixed (~50:50) Ne/D₂ pellet impacts are dominated by Ne; these cause fast radiative collapse of the plasma in a few milliseconds and almost uniform density profile once Ne mixes during and after the thermal quench.



lost to the first wall (Fig. 8). Qualitative agreement between simulations and infrared imaging is obtained only when SEEs are included. Since typical predictions of PFC heating due to REs only consider high-energy REs, these results provide an important new guideline.

New comparison of DIII-D infrared imaging measurements of the inner wall to Kinetic Orbit Runaway Electrons Code (KORC) modelling indicates that subcritical energetic electrons (SEEs) produced by the runaway electron (RE) avalanche source at energies below the runaway threshold energy are the primary contributor to transient surface heating of plasma-facing components (PFCs) during final loss events of RE mitigation [17]. The KORC simulations use an analytical first wall for modeling a non-axisymmetric first wall composed of individual tiles; a method was added to approximately include gyrophase to guiding center orbits intersecting PFCs to enable accurate calculations of angle of incidence needed to determine volumetric energy deposition. Simulations show initial REs with significant energy drifts remain confined, even when passing, in magnetic configurations connected to the first wall during the final loss event. But SEEs born at lower energies, below the runaway threshold energy, with little energy drift can be rapidly

3. BOUNDARY HEAT AND PARTICLE TRANSPORT

Studies using DIII-D have elucidated important physics and developed new controls related to the plasma edge and first wall. Novel Lyman-alpha diagnostic measurements [18] show a significant poloidal variation of the main chamber edge ionization source. A one order of magnitude HFS-LFS fueling asymmetry exists when operating with ion $B \times \nabla B$ drift towards the X-point. Operating with ion $B \times \nabla B$ drift out of the divertor eliminates the imbalance (Fig. 9) [19]. The ionization source asymmetries are related to asymmetric recycling fluxes at the inner and outer divertor targets due to directional parallel plasma flows in the scrape-off layer. Gyrokinetic-plasma and kinetic-neutral simulations using the XGC suite of total-f particle-in-cell codes [20] and DEGAS2 Monte Carlo neutral transport calculations [21] reproduce these observations [22]. The parallel plasma flow in the scrape-off-layer is driven primarily by particle orbit and collisional physics, while turbulent transport across the separatrix determines the overall magnitude. That is, while neutral fueling asymmetries appear in ‘neoclassical’ simulations that exclude turbulence, quantitative agreement between simulations and experiment is only found when the turbulent particle losses are included. Analysis of these simulations indicate that a low-recycling edge plasma results in novel flow patterns, which cause neutrals to be dominantly produced on one or the other divertor plates. In a highly collisional scrape-off layer as expected in burning plasma devices with larger spatial scale and higher connection length a symmetrization of the parallel plasma fluxes is expected and, therefore, recycling fluxes and main chamber ionization source are expected to become HFS-LFS symmetric. Still, these results motivate 2D modeling to understand fueling in present devices.

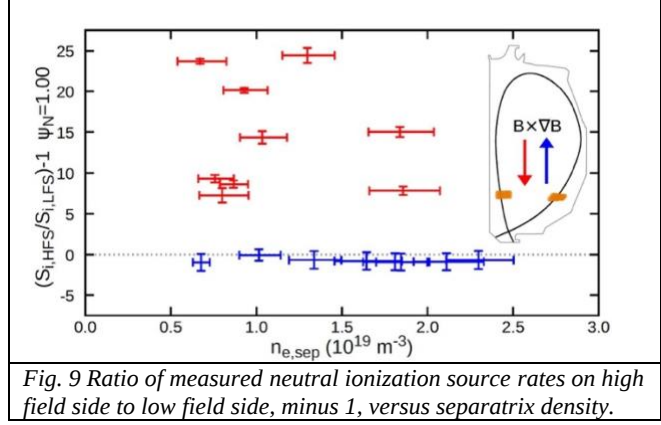


Fig. 9 Ratio of measured neutral ionization source rates on high field side to low field side, minus 1, versus separatrix density.

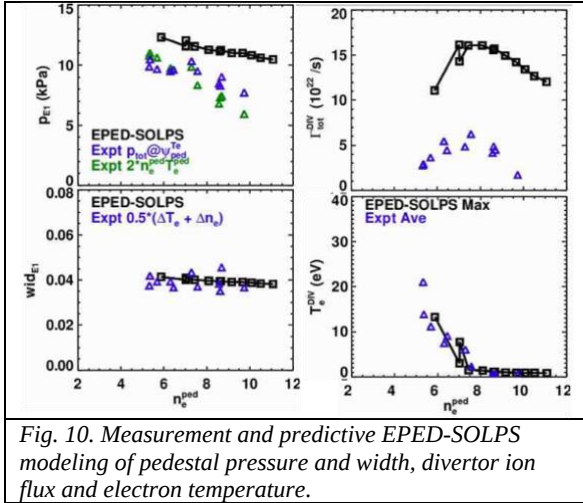


Fig. 10. Measurement and predictive EPED-SOLPS modeling of pedestal pressure and width, divertor ion flux and electron temperature.

accurately predicts the detachment onset density. Accounting for both pedestal and SOL physics in the integrated modeling accurately predicts the pedestal pressure is ballooning limited throughout the density scans, consistent with the generally low pressure observed, while standalone EPED [24] calculations erroneously predict a transition from peeling-limited to ballooning-limited at high density. The key improvement is the integrated model uses an empirical relationship between the divertor temperature from SOLPS [25] and the ratio of pedestal to separatrix densities used by EPED. Similar agreement between experiment and modeling was achieved in three different divertor closure geometries on DIII-D. Bolstered by this validation, the integrated modeling framework is being used to predict pedestals and peak heat flux in proposed fusion pilot plants.

Prediction of detachment in radiative divertor regimes requires validated models of mixed impurity transport and radiation dependence on density, temperature, and P_{SOL} . New 2D multi-wavelength experimental data has been compared to 2D full-drift-physics modeling in single and mixed impurity plasmas with good agreement found [26]. For model validation, it is essential to match the charge state distributions of impurities, which depend on T_e , to accurately predict radiated power density throughout the divertor region. A set of multiple absolutely calibrated spectroscopic and imaging diagnostics in visible and EUV/VUV spectral regions were combined to determine both carbon (C) and nitrogen (N) multi-charge-state divertor concentrations and

radiative power constituents in conditions ranging from attached to fully detached. These were compared to 2D UEDGE [27] fluid simulations with full particle drifts and charge state resolved C and N impurities included. The UEDGE simulations match experimentally resolved 2D divertor Te and reproduced the dominant divertor radiated power sources from VUV resonance transitions of C II – C IV and N II – N V, as well as the relative contributions from C and N to the total divertor radiation (Fig. 11). These results provide confidence in the application of these models to design radiative divertor solutions for future devices.

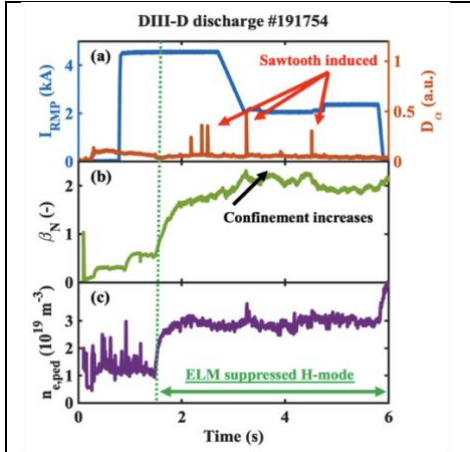


Fig. 12. Feedback adaptive ELM suppression reduces confinement degradation.

attempts to lower it again. Minimization of I_{RMP} increases τ_E in DIII-D test cases by $\sim 18\%$ relative to the start of suppression at full current. The same feedback applied to KSTAR has achieved $\sim 60\%$ τ_E recovery.

Separately, pedestal control and performance has been expanded in two novel regimes [30]. A robust range of counter- I_p edge rotation was found in which density increases with applied $n=2$ RMP still below the suppression threshold. This is opposite to the well-known density pump out usually observed with RMP that tends to reduce global performance. The greatest line-density increase is about 15% and occurs with a counter- I_p pedestal rotation of ~ 40 km/s. (Fig. 13). Doppler back scattering measurements show the prompt increase in particle confinement is due to a drop in inter-ELM pedestal turbulence amplitude and a switch from an ion- to electron-mode at the pedestal top. The other new development is the application of counter- I_p ECCD at the pedestal to reduce the required RMP amplitude for ELM suppression. This results in a higher pedestal pressure with the same τ_E and is a useful tool for pedestal physics exploration.

Other experiments have evaluated the impacts of ELM control on H-mode plasmas with $q_{95}=3.75$ and an outer strike point in a Tungsten (W) coated small angle slot divertor not connected to a cryopump [31], [32]. Without any ELM control, ELMs dominate the W source that contaminates the core plasma. The ELMs, and therefore the W source, tend to be larger with greater plasma stored energy W_{MHD} and lower pedestal collisionality v_{ped}^* . ELM mitigation and in some cases full suppression (Fig. 14) with $n=3$ RMPs significantly reduce or eliminate the W source per ELM at high W_{MHD} and low v_{ped}^* (Fig. 15). Higher W_{MHD} and lower v_{ped}^* are observed to be approximately constant for the duration of the ELM suppressed phase in the I_p flattop (~ 1.5 seconds), indicating that W transport out of the core is still sufficiently high to avoid W build-up despite loss of ELMs, which are also

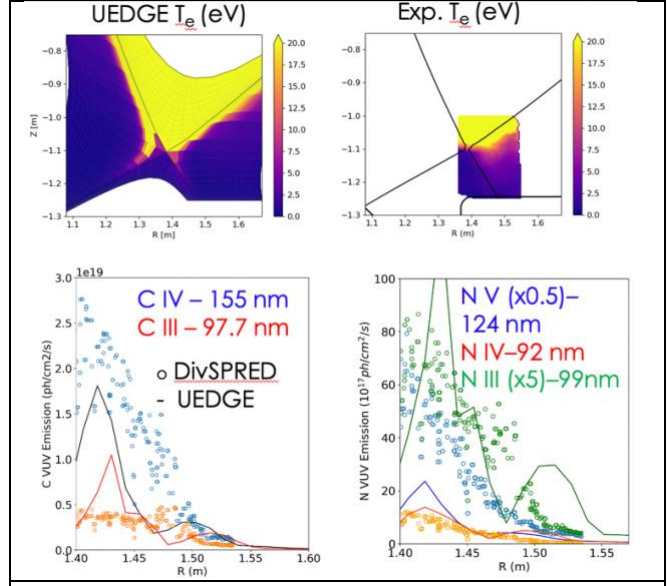


Fig. 11. UEDGE modeling matches measured Te (top) and C and N emission (bottom) in the divertor region.

A new feedback-adaptive RMP ELM suppression control algorithm was tested on DIII-D that provides a new solution for ELM control in reactors (Fig. 12) [28]. Typically, open loop RMP ELM control with fixed 3D coil currents sufficient for suppressing Type-I ELMs results in degraded pedestal pressure and τ_E . After first achieving ELM suppression with a predetermined coil current I_{RMP} , the new algorithm reduces I_{RMP} while monitoring deuterium-alpha signals for ELMs. In KSTAR, ELM precursor events are detected [29], but so far these have not been seen in DIII-D. Upon detection of a precursor or an ELM, the controller sets a new lower limit for I_{RMP} , increases I_{RMP} to recover suppression, and then

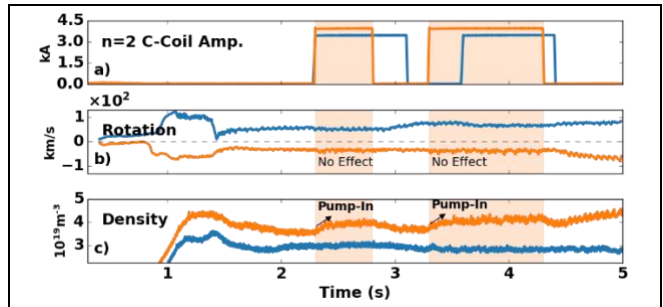


Fig. 13. RMP with edge counter- I_p rotation (orange) raises particle confinement.

known to flush impurities. These results suggest RMP ELM suppression integrated with a W slot divertor is a solution capable of maintaining high fusion performance with minimal PFC damage in future reactors.

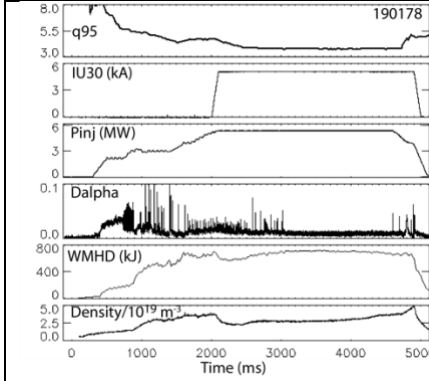


Fig. 14. N=3 RMP ELM suppression with outer strike point in W-coated small angle slot divertor.

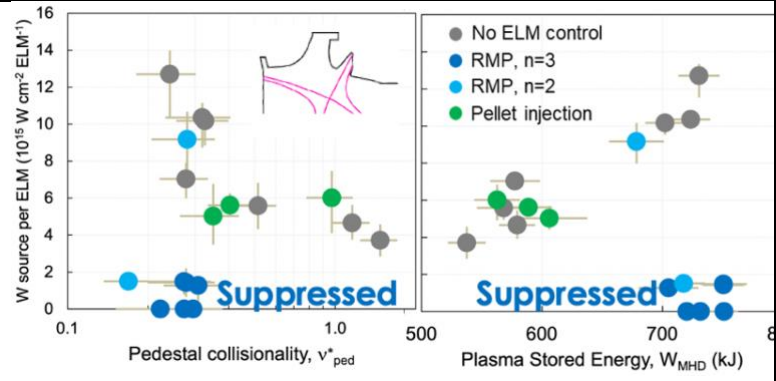


Fig. 15. Measured Tungsten source per ELM versus pedestal collisionality and plasma stored energy. Inset shows the upper divertor geometry with an OSP in a W-coated small angle slot. Legend indicates ELM control method.

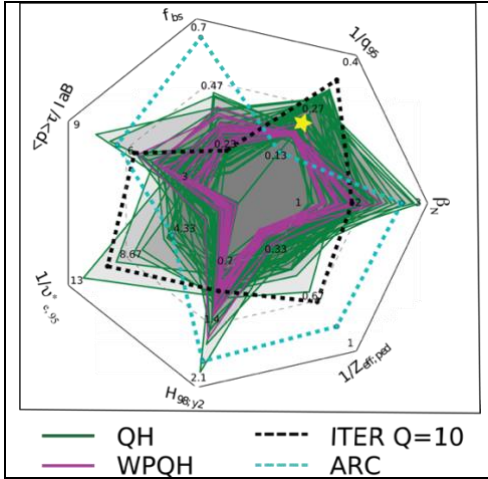


Fig. 16. Spider plot showing key metrics for IBS (Q=10), ARC reactor [39], and achieved DIII-D QH- and WPQH-mode discharges.

4. INTEGRATED OPERATIONAL SCENARIOS

A high-level program goal is to put core and edge solutions together for sustained high performance with sufficient heat and particle exhaust and without damaging transients like ELMs. Several paths are being pursued to provide such operational scenarios for ITER and FPPs along with discerning the key physics requirements of each. Significant progress has been made in expanding the operational space and physics understanding of Wide-Pedestal Quiescent H-mode (WPQH-mode) as a promising naturally ELM-stable high-performance scenario for reactors (Fig. 16) [33]. The range of q_{95} of WPQH-mode operating at low torque ($<1.5\text{Nm}$) has recently been reduced to 4.2, which is the lowest yet achieved for this scenario in a quasi-stationary state. Power handling capability has also been increased from 5.5MW to 7.5MW, limited by the available balanced NBI power to keep the net torque small. WPQH at net-zero injected torque has been achieved in both directions of I_p , with both favorable and unfavorable ion $B \times \nabla B$ drift directions, and in different plasma

shapes including the ITER similar shape. WPQH-modes are observed to lack the standard H-mode ion-channel power degradation of τ_E [34]. Extensive transport modeling using TGYRO/TGLF shows that this could be explained by the large Shafranov shift in these plasmas stabilizing core drift-wave instabilities and enabling high-confinement ELM-stable plasmas [35]. A low ExB shear region in the middle of the pedestal is thought to allow the destabilization of broadband MHD and/or turbulence observed there. Detailed analyses and numerical modeling of pedestal instabilities identify one mild peeling-ballooning mode and one drift-Alfven wave that compete to produce the wide pedestal [36]. The divertor heat width λ_q of WPQH-mode plasmas is observed to increase with edge broadband MHD/turbulence with cases where λ_q exceeds the neoclassical Eich scaling [37]. Modeling indicates this is associated with turbulence spreading across the separatrix. [38]

DIII-D tested the impacts of W radiation on the burn phase of the ITER Baseline Scenario (IBS) by using W-equivalent radiators [40]. Kr and Xe mixtures have the same radiative loss rates L_z in the DIII-D core as W in the hotter ITER core, so they are injected as proxies to simulate the impacts of W radiation in ITER. IBS demonstration plasmas were generated with these radiators (Fig. 17) spanning the range of expected impurity

concentration and W radiated fraction with net NBI torque scanned between 0 and 5 Nm. Impurity concentrations of $n_{Kr}/n_e \sim 2 \times 10^{-4}$ and $n_{Xe}/n_e \sim 6 \times 10^{-5}$ correspond to ITER expected $n_W/n_e \sim 1e-5$ and $f_{rad} \sim 30\%$ (given DIII-D's lower density than ITER). In the range of $f_{rad} = 0.25-0.35$, a bifurcation is observed, which either allows the scenario to be stationary, or trigger an oscillatory regime with T_e and f_{rad} oscillating out of phase, and the core oscillating out of phase from the edge/pedestal. A Lotka-Volterra predator-prey model with full profiles, diffusion, and noise was designed to gain insight into the dynamics of the system, and its results show that this model can reproduce the experimental T_e and f_{rad} profiles. To explore the more specific physics of a tokamak plasma and extrapolate to ITER, a physics-based model not constrained to oscillate was designed that successfully reproduces the oscillatory behavior of the experiment, with the correct range of amplitude and phase difference observed, remaining robustly stable to variations in inputs. This indicates a reasonable understanding of the drivers of this phenomenon for projecting to ITER, as well as mimicking alpha power and burn dynamics in DIII-D, demonstrating the relevance of carbon-wall machines for fusion energy physics. Future DIII-D experiments will aim at controlling burn phase oscillations.

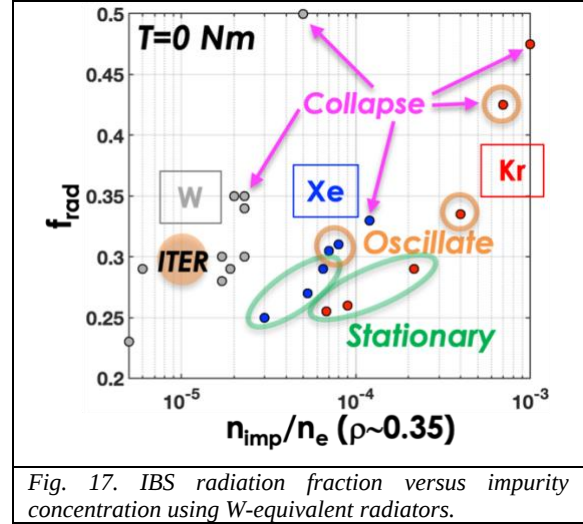


Fig. 17. IBS radiation fraction versus impurity concentration using W -equivalent radiators.

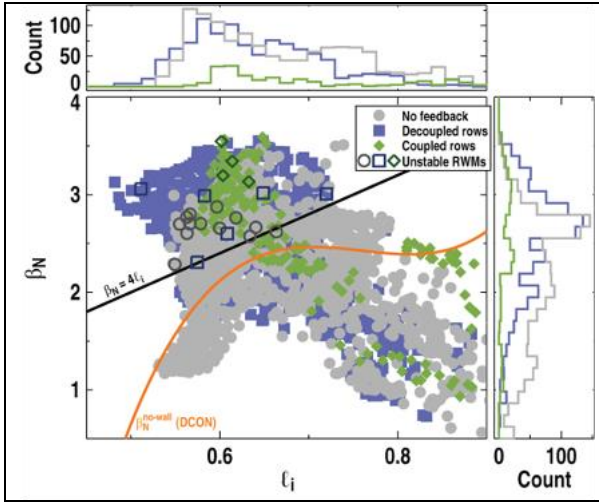


Fig. 18. In the High- β_p Scenario, RWM control using decoupled coil rows extends stable operation.

wall kink stability limit, with a broad current profile and low internal inductance, $\beta_p = 3\%$, and $f_{BS} \approx 60\%$. Such performance extensions, particularly to lower internal inductance ℓ_i (Fig. 18), are not obtained using coupled coil rows. Variable-spectrum feedback helps avoid beta collapses caused by marginally stable resistive wall mode (RWM) activity. These results underscore the utility of MHD mode control for accessing high- β fusion-relevant regimes. The variable spectrum feedback approach is a straightforward way to improve resilience to variations in mode structure that occur as plasma parameters change. The extension to lower ℓ_i is expected to improve the coupling of the plasma kink mode to external (i.e., feedback) fields and beneficial wall eddy currents, and is compatible with high- f_{BS} operation.

In a few High- β_p Scenario discharges, further tuning of the ramp-up sequence has resulted in higher performance sustained for longer [42]. $\beta_N \sim 4.2 \sim 6 \ell_i$, $\beta_T \sim 3.3\%$, and $q_{min} > 2$ was sustained for ~ 0.7 of a current profile relaxation time (more than $6 \tau_E$), with $f_{BS} \approx 80\%$, a large-radius internal transport barrier, $H_{98Y2} \sim 1.7$, $f_{Gr} \sim 1$, and stationary impurity levels (Fig. 19). The high-performance phase is terminated by fast growing modes destabilized at the $n=1$ ideal MHD, ideal-wall kink stability limit, following transient β_N excursions above the feedback-controlled target. Limitations of the β_N feedback control algorithm enable transient excursions above the target. A rapidly growing $n=1$ mode appears as the limiting instability during one of these excursions, preventing stationary sustainment of high performance. GATO [43] calculations indicate that the plasma is crossing the ideal-wall $n=1$ kink limit right before the disruption. New microwave and RF capabilities for off-

The High- β_p Scenario for steady-state operation with high fusion gain and high bootstrap current fraction (f_{BS}) has been optimized for improved MHD stability. One advance is the use of a novel variable-poloidal-spectrum mode control with internal non-axisymmetric coils (I-coils) [41]. A high- β_p regime is often investigated on DIII-D using slow continued ramps of I_p and/or B_T throughout the discharge, resulting in varying q_{95} . The new feedback scheme configures the upper and lower I-coil rows in two independent feedback loops, allowing the feedback field poloidal spectrum to vary and track changes in the plasma mode structure over a range of q_{95} from 6 to 11. The q_{95} dependence of the observed phase difference between the coil rows during feedback is qualitatively compatible with ideal MHD simulations of the least-stable plasma kink mode. This feedback facilitated high β_N operation in excess of the ideal MHD $n=1$ no-wall kink stability limit. This feedback facilitated high β_N operation in excess of the ideal MHD $n=1$ no-wall kink stability limit. This feedback facilitated high β_N operation in excess of the ideal MHD $n=1$ no-wall kink stability limit.

axis current drive (top launch EC [44], helicon [45], high field side lower hybrid [46]) could remove the need for a low- β -phase B_T ramp down and high- β -phase slow I_P ramp up to achieve fully noninductive operation with improved coupling between modes and the wall, thus increasing the ideal-wall β_N limit. Improved β_N feedback controls are being developed to avoid transient excursions. These results improve confidence that the High- β_P Scenario is an attractive option for steady-state operation in ITER and power plants.

DIII-D carried out a multiple-week campaign in 2023 to investigate negative triangularity (NT) [47], building upon previous results from TCV [48] and DIII-D [49]. Graphite-tile armor was installed on the low-field-side lower outer wall to obtain high power diverted plasmas with strong NT (Fig. 20a). High confinement ($H_{98y2} \geq 1$), high current ($q_{95} < 3$), and high normalized pressure ($\beta_N > 2.5$) plasmas were achieved at high-injected-power in a strong NT-shape with a lower outer divertor X-point that also demonstrated high normalized density ($n_e/n_G \leq 2$) and a detached divertor without ELMs. The L-H transition was inhibited at $\delta_{avg} = -0.5$ at all injected beam powers (up to 12 MW) and torques possibly due to restricted second stability access from infinite- n ballooning modes predicted in NT [50], [51]. However, while not an H-mode edge, there is a slight T_e pedestal compared to L-mode plasmas, resulting in the so-called NT-edge. A range of discharges were studied from high gain cases with $q_{95} = 2.7$, to cases with $q_{95} = 4$ and 50-60% non-inductive current. Both cases achieved high performance ($\beta_N > 2.5$ and $H_{98y2} \sim 1$, Fig. 20b). In NBI-heated plasmas, high central densities up to $n_{e0} \sim 1.4 \times 10^{20} \text{ m}^{-3}$ and high Greenwald fractions f_G approaching 2 were achieved, whereas in plasmas with only Ohmic heating f_G was limited to 1 (Fig. 20c). Divertor detachment was obtained (Fig. 19d) in density ramps with only D_2 injection in both favorable and unfavorable ion BxVB drift directions [52]. This showed a more gradual L-mode-like detachment evolution with no detachment cliff [53]. These results demonstrate several key principles indicating the potential viability of NT as the basis for a fusion power plant [54].

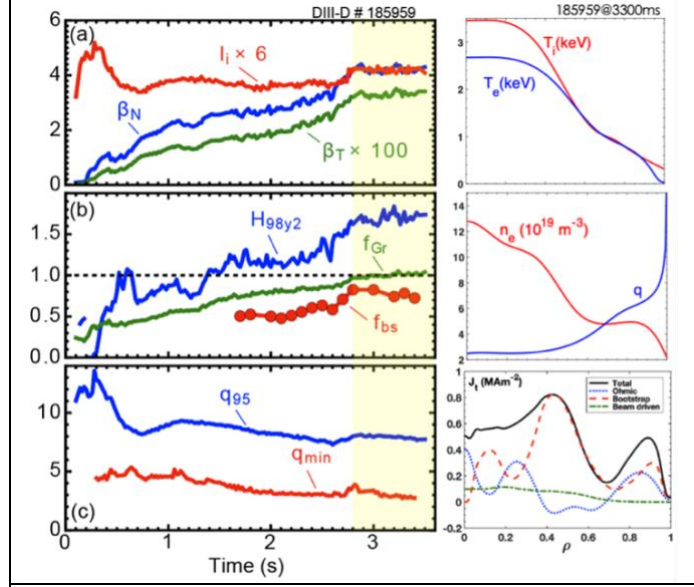


Fig. 19. Time histories and profiles for High- β_P scenario optimized for higher performance.

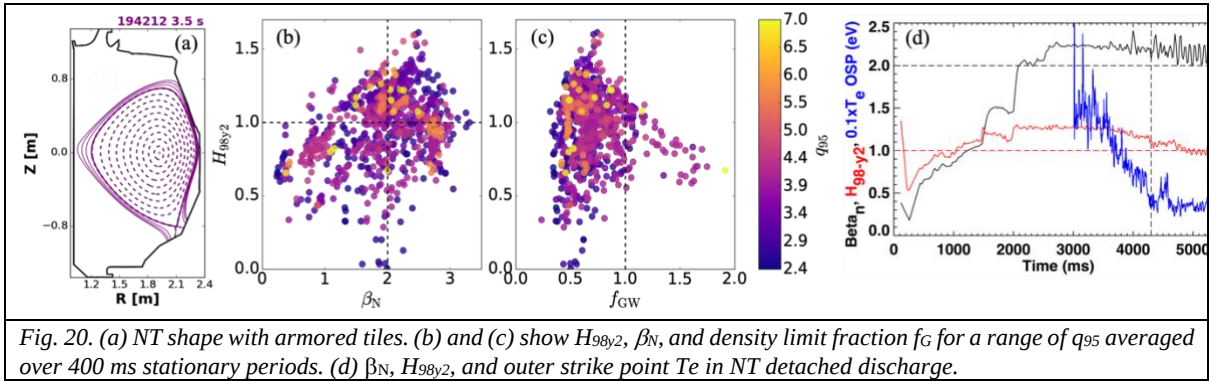


Fig. 20. (a) NT shape with armored tiles. (b) and (c) show H_{98y2} , β_N , and density limit fraction f_G for a range of q_{95} averaged over 400 ms stationary periods. (d) β_N , H_{98y2} , and outer strike point T_e in NT detached discharge.

5. FUTURE PLANS AND CONCLUSIONS

The DIII-D program plans several hardware upgrades between now and 2028 that will better enable it to close key knowledge gaps for a successful ITER program and design of fusion pilot plants. These include increases in flexible heating and current drive power in parallel with testing a series of new divertor designs and new technologies. Raising electron cyclotron heating and current drive delivered power from 5 MW in 2024 to 14 MW in 2028 is key for testing ITER and FPP integrated scenario physics with relevant higher T_e/T_i , lower torque, lower fast ion fraction, lower collisionality, and higher density in a range of inductive and non-inductive equilibria. New high harmonic fast wave (Helicon) and high-field-side launched Lower Hybrid systems coming online will further enhance DIII-D's ability to achieve and test advanced scenarios with broad current and pressure profiles

for high β_N steady-state operation in higher density plasmas. The divertor stages will start with a new relatively small-volume closed divertor optimized for a large volume highly shaped core plasma predicted to enable high peeling-limited pedestal pressures at low collisionality and reactor-relevant pedestal neutral opacity. This will be succeeded by a larger Stage-2 slot-like divertor with sufficient volume for detailed radiative heat dissipation and detachment studies with moderate shaping. Divertor Stage 3 will be optimized to integrate high core performance with efficient and capable heat and particle exhaust. Stage-3 will arrive in 2028 when upgrades to ECH, RF, and NBI systems are complete, providing up to ~ 43 MW total heating power. Along the way, DIII-D will develop technologies: an ECH gyrotron test socket is planned, along with dedicated vacuum ports to test new reactor-relevant diagnostics and first wall materials. The novel Helicon and High-Field-Side Lower Hybrid systems will be further developed, as well as disruption mitigation systems like shell pellets designed to reach and cool the core from the inside out [55], and a passive 3D coil designed to deconfine and render harmless runaway electrons [56].

In conclusion, DIII-D research is finding solutions for fusion energy. It has provided tools and identified essential requirements for achieving high core fusion performance. These include validated turbulent transport models capable of predicting kinetic profiles, new understanding of the isotopic dependence of turbulence, and the demonstration of methods to ease H-mode access in ITER's non-nuclear phases. Harmful MHD instability causes have been diagnosed and new guidance for instability avoidance and disruption mitigation provided. DIII-D research has elucidated boundary heat dissipation and particle fuelling processes that need to be understood and controlled for successful fusion energy. These include assessments of ionization source asymmetries, validation of a model for pedestal and heat flux behaviours during detachment, and characterization of mixed impurity concentrations needed to dissipate power into the SOL. Also, RMP ELM control was shown to mitigate Tungsten contamination, and feedback controlled RMPs were shown to minimize confinement degradation during suppression. Finally, DIII-D has put a range of integrated operational scenarios on a firmer basis. Naturally ELM-free wide pedestal quiescent H-mode operation has been extended to a larger range of reactor relevant conditions, and ITER Baseline Scenarios have been tested with Tungsten equivalent radiators to study and control stationary- and oscillating-temperature regimes that result. For steady-state operation, the High- β_P Scenario has reached higher β_N with lower ℓ_i using new scenario controls. Negative triangularity has been shown to be capable of high performance with a non-ELMing edge and divertor detachment, offering a novel option for future fusion reactors.

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