Original Research Article

Calcareous Nannofossil Biostratigraphic Analysis of Well '*K-2',* Deep Offshore Niger Delta, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

A study on the calcareous nannofossil biostratigraphy has been carried out on sequences within the interval 1640 m -1980 m of well *'K-2'* which is located in the deep offshore of the Niger Delta, Nigeria.

Lithologic description of the samples was done using a stereo-binocular microscope. Thirty-four slides of the samples were prepared in the laboratory. The prepared slides were studied for their calcareous nannofossil contents using Olympus Light Microscope in both plane-polarized and cross-polarized light.

The litho-stratigraphic descriptions on the samples showed the abundance of shale and mudstone/siltstone with minor amount of thin intercalated units of sand bed. Seventeen calcareous nannofossil species were identified and used to predict the biostratigraphic deductions such as zonation, dating and a tentative sequence stratigraphic framework. With the aid of a standard zonation schemes, two major nannofossil zones (NN 19 and NN 18) were identified. These zones belongs to Pleistocene and Pliocene ages respectively. Two major zones of *Gephyrocapsa carribeanica* and *Gephyrocapsa parallela* were identified for the studied well on the basis of the index taxa and fossil assemblage recorded. The insufficient amount of nannofossils in the lower part of the well precluded a definite zonation made the zone to be indeterminable. One Condensed Section believed to be associated with 2.0 Ma Maximum Flooding Surfaces was recognized.

Keywords: Biostratigraphy, Gephyrocapsa carribeanica, Gephyrocapsa parallela, Condensed Section, Maximum Flooding Surfaces

1. INTRODUCTION

The focus on the Tertiary Niger Delta basin by various workers gained prominence following its discovery as a petroleum laden basin in the 1950's by Shell BP. Since then, Nigeria has been rated as the sixth largest oil producing country in the world with a proven ultimate reserve of about thirty four billion barrels of oil and two hundred and sixty trillion cubic feet of gas [1].

However, about 90% of the twenty six billion barrels recoverable oil reserve earlier estimated for the Niger Delta by [2] is said to be from the onshore areas of Niger Delta. This could have been due to the extensive exploration activities, which concentrates on the onshore areas of the Niger Delta compared to offshore regions.

Presently, attention has been directed to the offshore regions and so far prospects have been encouraging. The advancement in deep-water drilling technology and various exploration techniques have aided this development.

More recently, the integration of biostratigraphy with other methods like geophysics, well log reserve, sequence stratigraphy, have contributed immensely to hydrocarbon exploration in the offshore Niger Delta.

However, based on the biostratigraphy, three major fossil groups are focused on. These are foraminifera, pollen and spores and nannofossils. These three have proven very useful and complementary to each other but the use of nannofossils is becoming increasingly important because of the following:

(a) They are planktonic, abundant, evolve rapidly and largely cosmopolitan.

(b) They can be studied from minute rock chips because of their small size. This found application in hydrocarbon exploration and development, and scientific drilling.

Calcareous nannofossil therefore is defined as all calcareous fossils that are smaller than 30 microns (μm). They are exclusively marine fossils of great importance in deep water exploration and they have been used in various ways to assist in operational situation in the well site during drilling which include achieving a straight-forward age monitoring of wells where stratigraphy is uncertain and also in confirmation of terminal depth where there is commitment to drill to deposit of specific age and in coring point selection to mention a few. This means that a pragmatic approach to nannofossils biostratigraphy is required. Many esearchers have worked on the calcareous nannofossils ([3]; [4]; [5]).

1.1 Location of the Study Area

Ditch cutting samples were obtained from well 'K–2' in the offshore deep-water Nigeria. The samples were given out by one of the deep water operators. The name and the exact location of the well were not made available for proprietary reasons.

However, the Nigeria deep-water region is believed to be roughly between water depth of 600 m on the inboard side and 200 m in the outboard side for an area of approximately 48,500 Km^2 (Figure 1) [6].

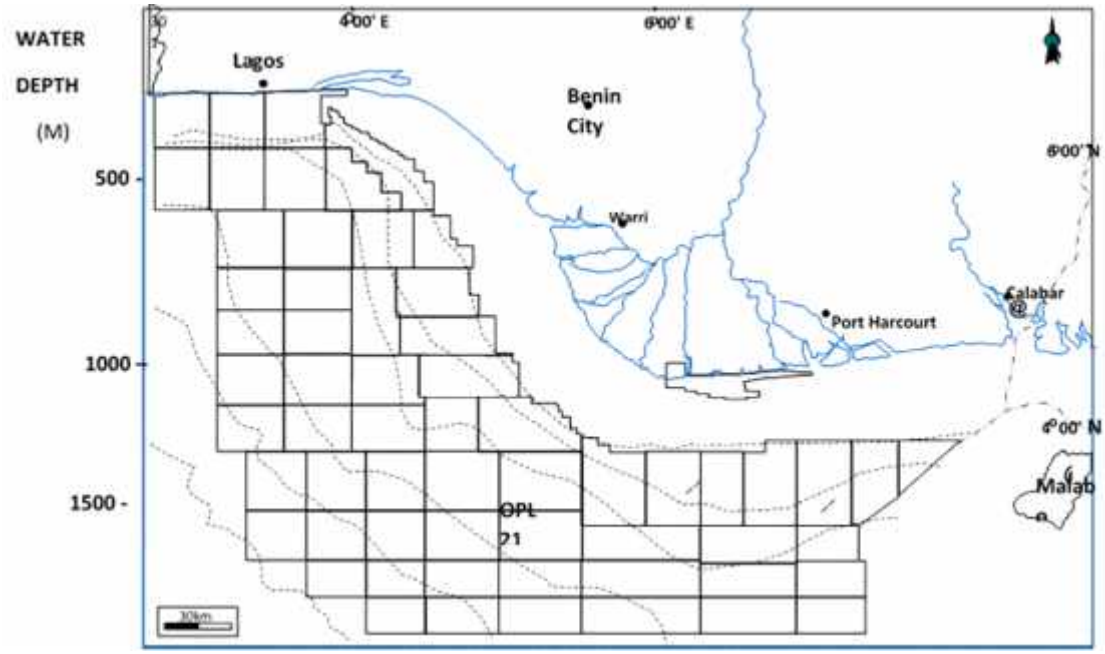

Figure 1: Map showing the acreage of study area

The samples were obtained at 10 m interval. This study covers an interval of 1640 m to 1980 m comprising thirty-four samples in all.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To establish the lithostratigraphic sequence of the section.
- To identify the calcareous nannofossil species in the strata penetrated by the well.
- To identify new nannofossil species in the analyzed sequence (if any).
- To determine the age of the strata penetrated by the well.
- To determine a tentative sequence stratigraphic framework for the section.

1.3 Geology of the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta is one of the basins in West Africa formed as a result of basement tectonics related to crustal divergence and translation during the Late Mesozoic to Cretaceous continental rifting of Gondwanaland. The Niger Delta is a thick prism of clastic sediments which has prograded down the Benue Trough into the Gulf of Guinea since Early

Tertiary. These sediments began to reach the continental slope by Late Eocene time and subsequent progradation has progressively enlarged the continental margin to its present position [2].

The results of numerous studies of Tertiary Niger Delta indicate that the Delta consists of a thick sedimentary prism of about 12 km. The overall succession in ascending order consists of over pressure continuous marine shales (Akata Formation) with interbedded thin bed of siltstone interpreted as slope channel fills. These are overlain by a paralic sequence of shales and sands (Agbada Formation) and thick continental sands and gravels at the top (Benin Formation).

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The materials used for this study were ditch cutting samples. The well is code-named as well 'K-2' for confidential reasons. These samples were supplied by one of the major Niger Delta deep-water operators.

The samples were obtained at depth within the intervals of 1640-1980 m. Thirty-four samples were analyzed and the samples were packed in small polythene bags which bear the name of the well and sampling depth. The bags were arranged serially in a tray in the laboratory for lithologic description and sample processing for calcareous nannofossil analyses.

2.1 Lithologic Description

The lithologic description of the samples was done using a stereo-binocular microscope. A lithostratigraphic column for the well was then constructed based on the lithologic description of the samples and lithostratigraphic units penetrated by the well were delineated.

2.2 Preparation

Thirty four samples were processed for their calcareous nannofossil content. The technique employed for this study is the standard preparation technique of [7]. The technique involves:

(i) Taking a fresh inner portion of the sample provided and spreading over a cover slip (22 mm x 40 mm) of a glass slide (25.4 mm x 76 mm).

(ii) Adding a few drop of distilled water and making a thick sediment suspension with the help of a flat – sided toothpick.

(iii) Smearing the suspension thinly across the surface of the cover-slip using a toothpick, and drying rapidly on a hot-plate at a temperature of about 60-70 ^{o}C for few minutes.

(iv) Labeling a glass microscope slide, and affixing the coverslip (smear-side down) using a few drops of Norland optical adhesive mounting medium.

(v) Placing this under an ultraviolet light for about forty five minutes.

2.2 Identification of Calcareous Nannofossil

The prepared slides were studied for their calcareous nannofossil content under a high power Olympus Light Microscope in plane-polarized and cross-polarized light.

The abundance and diversity of the assemblages were made by consulting the work of [8] and [9].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Lithostratigraphy of Well 'K-2'

The samples analyzed in this well from intervals 1640 m to 1980 m have been found to have similar lithology. The sequences in the well correspond to the lower units of the Agbada paralic facies described by [10]. Most of the lithofacies are composed of shale and siltstone mudstone with thin intercalated units of sand beds. This is revealed in the lithologic description of ditch cutting samples. A summary of the lithologic log is given in Table 1.

The shales and mudstones are mostly grey to dark grey and black in colour. The sands range from coarsed to fine grained, angular to rounded and poor to well sorted. Accessory minerals occurring in high abundances include ferruginous materials and pyrites. Common to few occurrences of glauconite, mica flakes and carbonates are found within certain intervals of the studied sections.

Table 1: Summary of Lithologic Log of Well 'K-2'

DEPTH [m]	LITHOLOGY	AGE	FORMATION
1640-1650	SHALE	Pleistocene	Agbada
1650-1660	SHALE	Pleistocene	Agbada
1660-1670	SHALE	Pleistocene	Agbada
1670-1680	SHALE	Pleistocene	Agbada
1680-1690	SHALE	Pleistocene	Agbada
1700-1710	SHALE	Pleistocene	Agbada
1710-1720	SHALE	Pleistocene	Agbada
1720-1730	SHALE	Pleistocene	Agbada
1730-1740	SHALE	Pleistocene	Agbada
1740-1750	SHALE	Pleistocene	Agbada
1750-1760	SHALY SAND	Pleistocene	Agbada
1760-1770	SAND	Pleistocene	Agbada
1770-1780	SHALE	Pleistocene	Agbada
1780-1790	SHALE	Pleistocene	Agbada
1790-1800	SHALE	Pliocene	Agbada

1800-1810	SANDY SHALE	Pliocene	Agbada
1810-1820	SHALY SAND	Pliocene	Agbada
1820-1830	SHALY SAND	Pliocene	Agbada
1830-1840	SHALY SAND	Pliocene	Agbada
1840-1850	SHALY SAND	Pliocene	Agbada
1850-1860	SHALY SAND	Pliocene	Agbada
1860-1870	SHALY SAND	Pliocene	Agbada
1870-1880	SHALY SAND	Pliocene	Agbada
1880-1890	SANDY SHALE	Pliocene	Agbada
1890-1900	SHALY SAND	Pliocene	Agbada
1900-1910	ARGILLACEOUS SANDSTONE	Pliocene	Agbada
1910-1920	ARGILLACEOUS SANDSTONE	Pliocene	Agbada
1920-1930	ARGILLACEOUS SANDSTONE	Pliocene	Agbada
1930-1940	ARGILLACEOUS SANDSTONE	Pliocene	Agbada
1940-1950	ARGILLACEOUS SANDSTONE	Pliocene	Agbada
1950-1960	SANDY MUDSTONE	Pliocene	Agbada
1960-1970	SHALY SAND	Pliocene	Agbada
1970-1980	SANDY MUDSTONE	Pliocene	Agbada

3.2 Calcareous Nannofossils Identification

The result shows highly abundant and diverse calcareous nannofossils. A total of seventeen nannofossils species comprising mainly of *coccoliths*, *placoliths* and *nannoliths* were identified in the analysed section of well 'K-2'. Of these, *Gephyrocapsa carribeanica* is the most abundant. *Helicosphaera carteri* occur almost throughout the entire analyzed section. Influxes of *Gephyrocapsa carrribeanica* were noticed within interval 1660-1680 m and at depth 1720 m and 1790 m. *Gephyrocapsa oceanica* also occur in high abundance within the upper part of the studied section.

The family *Noelaerhabdacea* are represented by the genus *Reticulofenestra* and genus *Gephyrocapsa*. *Reticulofenestra productella* represents the most abundant of the genus *Reticulofenestra* and are more abundant at depth 1670m. *Gephyrocapsa* has three of its species well represented within the studied interval of well 'K-2'. The three species are *Gephyrocapsa carribeanica, Gephyrocapsa oceanica* and *Gephyrocapsa parallela* and are all in abundance within the studied section. These *Gephyrocapsa* species are important stratigraphically and are commonly employed as zonal markers. They are also of chronostratigraphic value in the Neogene. The two major zones proposed for the studied section of well 'K-2' were delineated using *Gephyrocapsa* species.

The family *Helicosphaeraceae* has two of its species well represented in the studied section. These two species are *Helicosphaera carteri* and *Helicosphaera selli*. Of these two species,

Helicosphaera carteri are very abundant and are diverse within the studied section. *Helicosphaera selli* showed a rare occurrence in the studied section.

The *Calcidiscaceae* family is also represented by two of its species which are *Calcidiscus leptoporus* and *calcidiscus macintyrei. Calcidiscus macintyrei* revealed a rare occurrence, occurring only at depth 1660m. *Calcidiscus leptoporus* showed high abundance and diversity occurring within the interval 1680 m-1760 m and also at depths 1780 m, 1810 m and 1840 m within the studied section.

Other nannofossil assemblage of high abundance and diversity are *Pseudoemiliana lacunosa* and *Thoracosphaera spp*. Other nannofossils with rare occurrence in the studied section include *Ceratolithus cristatus, coccolithus pelagicus, scyphosphaera globulata, scyphosphaera apsteinii* and *Pontosphaera multipora.*

The observed nannofossils are well preserved with minimum effect of dissolution.

A nannofossil distribution chart was plotted with depth on the vertical axis and recorded taxa on the horizontal axis. The chart also includes the interpretations made from this work (Figure 3)

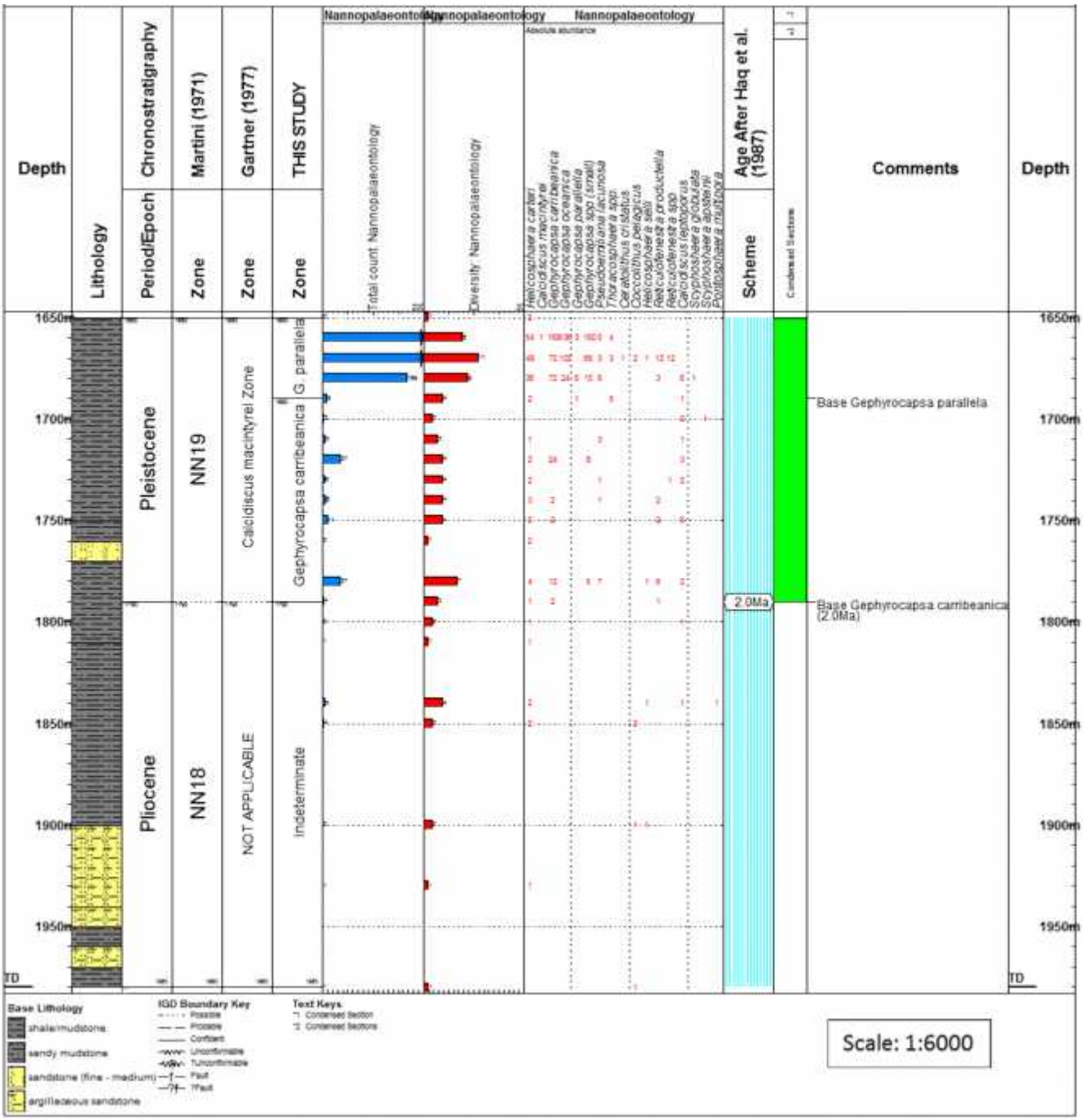

Figure 3: Calcareous nannofossil distribution chart of well ‘K-2’

Depth(m)	Epoch	Age (Ma)	Zones [11]	Zones [12]	Established Zones (well 'K-2')	Bioevents	
1650	PLEISTOCENE	2.0	NN 19	*CALCIDISCUS MACINTYRE I*	*G. PARALLELA*	← base of *Gephyrocapsa parallela*	1690
1660							
1670							
1680							
1690							
					G. CARRIBEANICA	Base of *G. Carribeanica*	1790
1710							
1720							
1730							
1740							
1750							
1760							
1770							
1780							
1790							
1800	PLIOCENE	NN 18	NOT APPLICABLE	INDETERMINATE		(2.0Ma)	
1810							
1820							
1830							
1840							
1850							
1860							
1870							
1880							
1890							
1900							
1910							
1920							
1930							
1940							

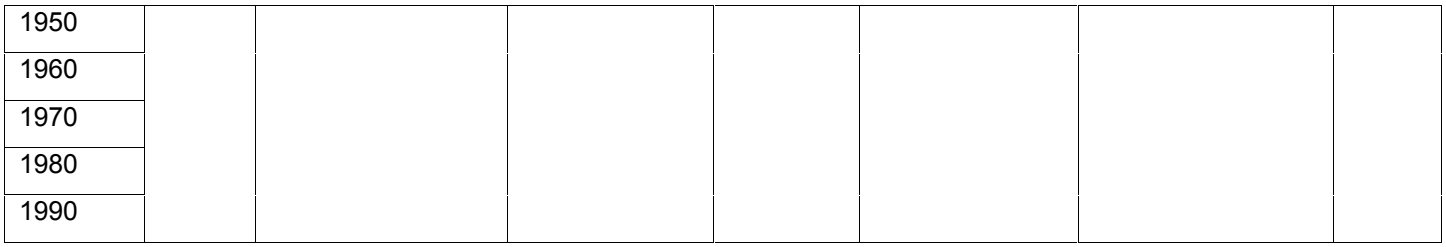

Figure 4: Calcareous nannofossil zones recognized in well 'K-2'.

3.3 Calcareous Nannofossil Zonation

The stratigraphic interval studied in well 'K-2' has been sub-divided into biostratigraphic zones on the basis of their calcareous nannofossil. The well section was zoned using the globally recognized calcareous nannofossil zonation scheme of [11] and [12]. [11] zones were tagged NN zones (Neogene Nannofossils). [12] established his zones based on the index taxa.

Two major zones belonging to Pleistocene and Pliocene ages were established in the studied section of well 'K-2' as shown in the table above. These are the NN19 and NN18 zones of [11].

3.4 Zonal Description

Zone NN 19

Stratigraphic interval: 1640 – 1790 m

Age : Pleistocene

Nannofossil zone : NN 19

Top: The top of this zone is believed to be shallower than the first sample analysed.

Base: The base of this zone is marked by the base of *Gephyrocapsa carribeanica* at depth 1790 m.

Description: Zone NN 19 is otherwise known as *Pseudoemiliana lacunosa* zone according to Martini (1971) and it is divided into four sub-zones which are *Pseudoemiliana lacunosa* zone, small *Gephyrocapsa* zone, *Helicosphaera selli* zone and *Calcidiscus macintyrei* zone by Gartner (1977). The sub-zone that fall within the studied well is *Calcidiscus macintyrei* zone. This zone is characterized by abundant and diverse nannofossil assemblage at the upper half. The lower half is characterized by a slight reduction in fossil diversity and abundance. Index taxa recognized in the section which are in abundance include *Gephyrocapsa carribeanica, Gephyrocapsa oceanica, Gephyrocapsa parallela, Calcidiscus macintyrei* and *Pseudoemiliana lacunosa*. Other nannofossils in the zone include *Helicosphaera carteri*, *Thoracosphaera spp*., *Calcidiscus leptoporus, Reticulofenestra spp., Coccolithus. pelagicus* and *Ceratholithus cristatus.*

Zone NN 18

Stratigraphic Interval: 1790 – 1980 m

Age : Pliocene

Nannofossil zone : NN 18

Description: This interval is marked by rare occurrences of nannofossils. This precludes a definite zonation of the interval. However the interval has been assigned zone NN18 based on the stratigraphic position below the positively recognized zone NN 19 above. Some of the nannofossil species in this zone are *Helicosphaera carteri*, *Coccolithus pelagicus, Helicosphaera selli*, *Calcidiscus leptoporus* and *Pontosphaera multipora*. These assemblages comprises mainly of long range, non-age diagnostic species. However, [12] zonation scheme is not applicable to this age.

3.5 Zonation Based on this Study

Two major zones were erected for the studied section of well 'K–2'. No subzones were delineated. The erection of these zones is based on the following criteria:

- First and last occurrence of marker species.
- Assemblage characteristics

The erected zones are:

(i) Gephyrocapa carribeanica zone

(ii) Gephyrocapsa parallela zone

(iii) Intervals 1790-1990 m has been designated indeterminate zone based on lack of index taxa.

3.5.1 Zonal Description

***Gephyrocapsa parallela* zone**

Stratigraphic interval: 1640 – 1690 m

Age: Pleistocene

Nannofossil zone: *Gephyrocapsa parallela*

Top: The top of the zone is probably shallower than the first analyzed sample.

Base: The base of this zone is marked by the base of *Gephyrocapsa parallela* at depth 1690m.

Description: This zone is marked by abundant and diverse occurrence of nannofossil assemblages. The top is probably shallower than the first analyzed sample in the studied section of well 'K–2'. It has been observed that *Gephyrocapsa parallela* occurs shallower in this study than observed by earlier authors who placed the base of *Gephyrocapsa parallela* at a relatively younger age. The base of *Gephyrocapsa parallela* was used by [12] to delineate his younger subzone (*Pseudoemiliana lacunosa*) of the NN19 zone earlier subdivided by [11]. Other index taxa found in this zone include *Gephyrocapsa carribeanica,*

Gephyrocapsa oceanica and *Pseudoemiliana lacunosa*. Other nannofossil species in this zone include *Helicosphaera carteri, Calcidiscus macintyrei, Pseudoemiliana lacunosa, Coccolithus pelagicus, Helicosphaera selli* and *Reticulofenestra productella.*

***Gephyrocapsa carribeanica* zone**

Stratigraphic interval: 1690 – 1790 m

Age: Pleistocene

Nannofossil zone: *Gephyrocapsa carribeanica*

Top: The top of the zone is marked by the base of Gephyrocapsa parallela at depth 1690 m.

Base: The base of the zone is marked by the base of *Gephyrocapsa carribeanica*

Description: This zone is characterized by fairly abundant and diverse nannofossil assemblage. This interval is delineated based on the continuous occurrence of *Gephyrocapsa carribeanica* within the section. Other index taxa occurring in high abundance within the zone include *Gephyrocapsa oceanica, Gephyrocapsa parallela* and *Pseudoemiliana lacunosa*. Other nannofossils in common but few abundance within this zone include *Helicosphaera carteri, Calcidiscus macintyrei, Thoracospharea spp., Ceratolithus cristatus, Coccolithus pelagicus, Helicosphaera selli, Reticulofenestra productella, Calcidiscus leptoporus, Scyphosphaera globulata* and *Scyphosphaera apsteinii*.

The base of *Gephyrocapsa carribeanica* at depth 1790 m is dated 2.0 Ma, hence, the observed condensed interval 1650-1790 m is believed to be associated with 2.0 Ma Maximum Flooding Surface.

3.6 Sequence Stratigraphy

The basic procedure of sequence stratigraphic interpretation according to [13] involves the following steps:

(i) Lithology to be interpreted from log character (gamma ray and sonic ray and ditch cuttings).

(ii) Deduction of depositional environment from foraminifera data and characters.

(iii) Interpretation of condensed section from faunal abundance and diversity peaks.

(iv) Determination of sequence boundaries and system tracts from log character.

(v) Age dating of well sequence from biostratigraphic data.

Due to the absence of steps (ii) and (iv), an attempt was made of a tentative sequence stratigraphic interpretation for the well section based on the available information. The

absence of e-logs and palaeobathymetric data from foraminifera studies prevent a detailed sequence stratigraphic interpretation of the well sequence.

The tentative interpretation therefore led to the identification of dated Condensed Section.

3.7 Condensed Section and Maximum Flooding Surfaces

Based on nannofossil abundance and diversity patterns, calibrated with chrono-stratigraphically important bio-events, one condensed section has been identified and correlated with the Global Cycle Chart of [14] as shown in Table 3. This is believed to be associated with the 2.0 Ma Maximum Flooding Surface.

Table 3: Condensed section recognized in well 'K-2'

Condensed Section	Interval (metres)	Age (Ma) After [14]	Dating Criteria
1	1650 – 1790	2.0	· Base *Gephyrocapsa carribeanica* at depth 1790 m (2.0 Ma). · Base *Gephyrocapsa parallela* at depth 1690m

4. CONCLUSION

A calcareous nannofossil biostratigraphy has been done on sequences having intervals 1640 – 1980 m of well 'K-2' in the deep offshore area of the Niger Delta, Nigeria.

A lithostratigraphic description made on the ditch cuttings revealed sandy mudstone and hemipelagic shale and the accessory minerals in them. This was done with the aid of stereobinocular microscope.

The results of the analysis revealed moderately abundant and diverse nannofossil assemblages. Seventeen calcareous nannofossil species identified were used to make biostratigraphic deduction including zonation, dating and a tentative sequence stratigraphic framework for the sequences studied.

Two major nannofossil zones (NN19 and NN18) belonging to Pleistocene and Pliocene respectively were recognized based on the standard zonation schemes of Martini (1971) and Gartner (1977) respectively. Two major zones were erected for the studied well. The two zones are *Gephyrocapsa carribeanica* and *Gephyrocapsa parallela* zones. The Pleistocene portion of the well section based on this study was characterized by abundant and diverse occurrence of nannofossils. The Pliocene portion of the studied interval was

characterized by rare and scattered occurrences of nannofossils which precludes a definite zonal and age assignment to the interval.

Nannofossil abundance and diversity patterns calibrated with chrono-stratigraphically important bio-events enhanced the identification of only one condensed section correlated to the Global Cycle Chart of Haq et al., (1987). This is thought to be associated with the 2.0Ma Maximum Flooding Surface.

It is recommended that a local nannofossil zonation scheme be erected for the Niger Delta Pleistocene age.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author have declared that no competing interests exist

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The author designed the study, performed the analysis and interpretation of the samples. The author also prepared the manuscript.

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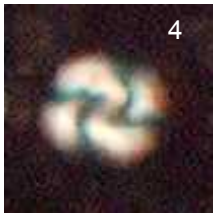
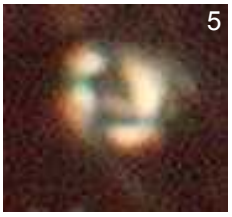
APPENDIX

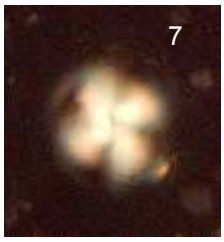
PLATE 1

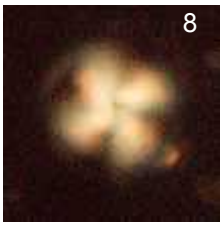
***Helicosphaera carteri* (fig. 1-2) [15]**
***Gephyrocapsa carribeanica* (fig. 3-6) [16].**
***Calcidiscus leptoporus* (fig. 7-9) [15].**
***Gephyrocapsa oceanica* (fig. 10-12) [15]**

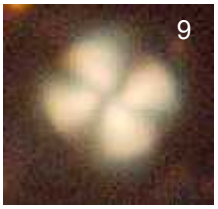
PLATE 1

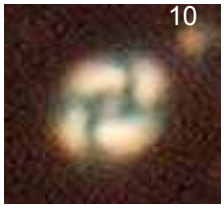












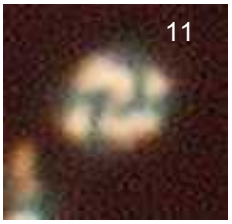


PLATE 2

***Gephyrocapsa oceanica* (fig. 1-4)** **[15]**
***Gephyrocapsa parallela* (fig. 5-8)** **[17]**
***Pseusoemiliana lacunosa* (fig. 9-10)** **[15]**
***Helicosphaera selli* (11-12)** **[18]**

PLATE 2

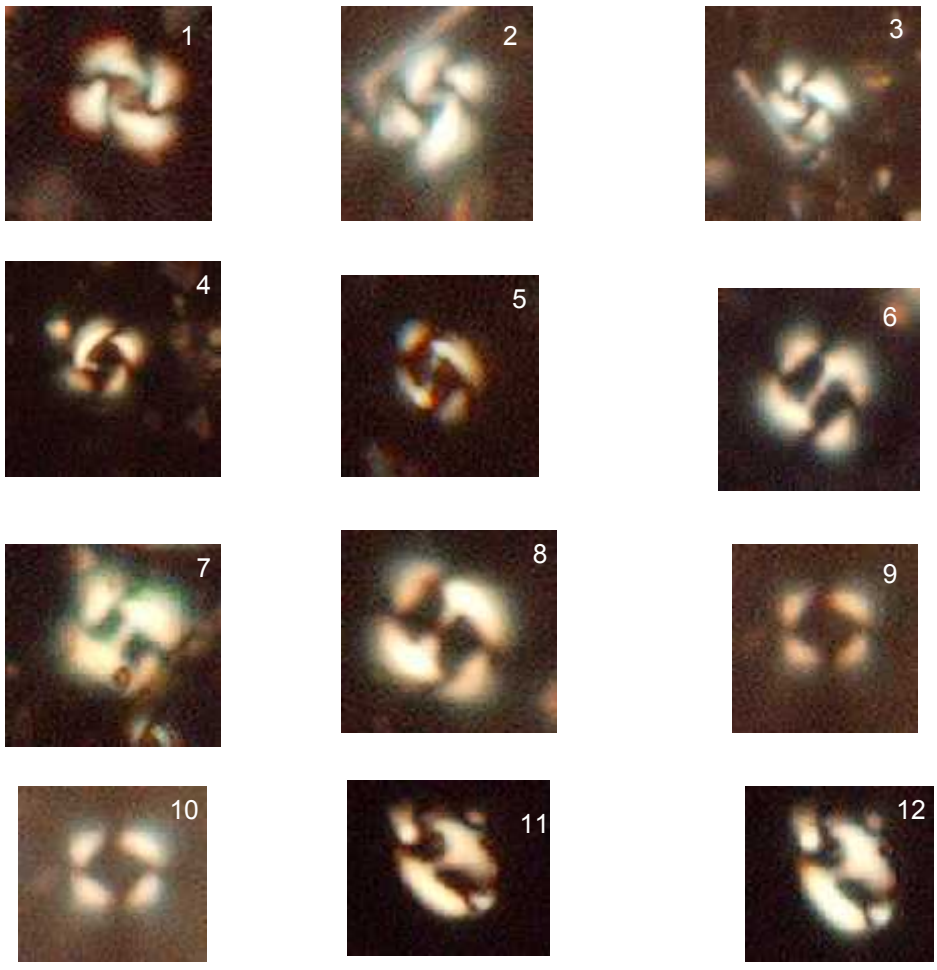


PLATE 3

Helicosphaera selli **(fig. 1)** **[18]**
Coccolithus pelagicus **(fig.2-5)** **[15]**
Scyphosphaera globulata **(fig. 6)** **[19]**
Pontosphaera multipora **(fig. 7)** **[15]**
Reticulofenestra productella **(fig. 8-11)** **[20]**
Ceratolithus cristatus **(fig. 12)** **[15]**

PLATE 3

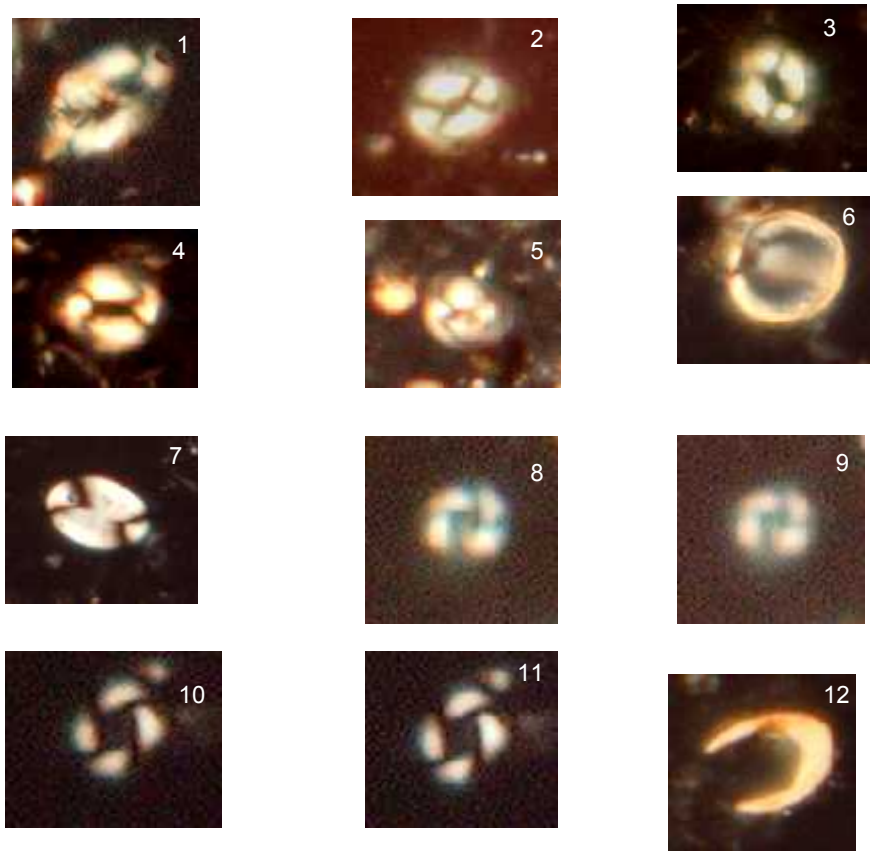


PLATE 4

Calcidiscus macintyrei **(fig. 1)** **[18].**

Reticulofenestra spp. **(fig. 2-3)** **[18]**