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The functional role of the fish microbiome

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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June 2021

Table of Contents

THESIS ABSTRACT	3
THESIS DECLARATION	5
PUBLICATIONS	6
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	7
INTRODUCTION.....	9
AQUACULTURE: A GROWING INDUSTRY.....	9
YELLOWTAIL KINGFISH AS AN EMERGING HIGH VALUE SPECIES.....	9
THE FISH MUCOSAL SURFACES.....	12
THE ‘MICROBIOME’ CONCEPT	12
<i>Defining the microbiome and its relevance to the host.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Strategies for evaluating the microbiome.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>The fish microbiome</i>	<i>15</i>
THESIS OVERVIEW.....	16
REFERENCES	18
CHAPTER 1: A MICROBIAL SEA OF POSSIBILITIES: CURRENT KNOWLEDGE AND PROSPECTS FOR AN IMPROVED UNDERSTANDING OF THE FISH MICROBIOME	23
CHAPTER 2: INVESTIGATING BOTH MUCOSAL IMMUNITY AND MICROBIOTA IN RESPONSE TO GUT ENTERITIS IN YELLOWTAIL KINGFISH	60
CHAPTER 3: ANTIBIOTIC-INDUCED ALTERATIONS AND REPOPULATION DYNAMICS OF YELLOWTAIL KINGFISH MICROBIOTA	80
CHAPTER 4: DEAD OR ALIVE: MICROBIAL VIABILITY TREATMENT REVEALS BOTH ACTIVE AND INACTIVE BACTERIAL CONSTITUENTS IN THE FISH GUT MICROBIOTA.....	99
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	113
PREAMBLE.....	114
DISCUSSION.....	117
<i>Fish microbiome perturbations and fish immune response: who is behind the wheel?.....</i>	<i>117</i>

<i>Modulation of the fish microbiome</i>	118
<i>Investigating the functional role of the fish microbiome</i>	120
LIMITATIONS OF FISH MICROBIOME RESEARCH AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS	121
CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	123
REFERENCES	123
APPENDIX 1: SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR CHAPTER 2	127
APPENDIX 2: SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR CHAPTER 3	133
APPENDIX 3: SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR CHAPTER 4	148

Thesis abstract

Aquaculture is the fastest growing sector of agriculture, currently producing more than half of all seafood. Within Australia, yellowtail kingfish (*Seriola lalandi*) is an emerging fish species farmed in temperate waters. While the production of this species is in constant growth, the development of this industry is not without hurdles. For instance, diseases associated with the mucosal surfaces of the fish (e.g. gut enteritis - an inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract) are a recurrent issue in the production of this species. However, the underlying mechanisms inducing this gut inflammation remain poorly understood. New research has elucidated the importance of microbial communities in mucosal surfaces (microbiota) that may play a key role in this disease. These mucosal surfaces (comprising the gut, skin, gill and olfactory organs) support important functions for the host including digestion and nutrient uptake, osmoregulation and recycling waste products, provide the first line of defence against potential pathogens, and form a barrier – along with the host microbiota. Most fish mucosal diseases are linked to the disruption of these microbial communities, which no longer supports the well-functioning of these mucosal surfaces and therefore influence fish health.

Within this thesis, I synthesise our current understanding of the fish microbiota, in particular in a health and disease context (Chapter I). I also explain how this wealth of information can be of particular value for the aquaculture industry by proposing new prospects to improve the fish resilience to disease. Using the yellowtail kingfish as species model, I explore both changes in the fish microbiota across the gut and skin mucosal surfaces and the evolution of the fish immune response during gut enteritis (Chapter II). By doing so, I also investigate important host-microbiota interactions to further understand the interplay between the fish immune system and its microbiota during disease. Of particular note, I found significant gene expression changes (e.g. upregulation of cytokines related genes) and microbiota perturbations (e.g. loss of diversity) in the skin of fish at the early state of the disease, revealing the sensitivity of this mucosal tissue in response to a gut disease. In Chapter III, I explored the impacts of novel treatment options by modulating the fish microbiota using faecal microbiota transplantation (FMT) in conjunction or in replacement of antibiotic treatment to re-establish a more balanced and healthy fish gut microbiota. This also shed light on the process of microbial repopulation following antibiotic exposure, a feature well under studied though paramount for the successful recovery of the host. In this study, antibiotics

greatly influenced the fish gut microbiota and was marked by a significant decrease in diversity, accompanied by an increase in the relative abundance of an uncultured *Mycoplasmataceae* sp. in the antibiotic treated fish. The effect of the FMT treatment appeared to vary substantially between individuals, and was associated with stark differences in bacterial diversity, suggesting that modulation of the gut microbiota can only be induced in some individuals and for a short time period. In the final Chapter, I develop a new laboratory protocol using PMA to assess microbial viability in the fish gut microbiota. Such information is particularly relevant when investigating the influence of the microbiota in health and disease to better characterise the activity and likely role of these microbial communities, a feature currently overlooked with the gold standard 16S metabarcoding approach. Using this approach, I found that PMA treatment reduced the microbial diversity and richness from both digesta and mucosal gut samples, as well as induced a loss of important bacterial members considered as beneficial (e.g. lactic acid bacteria).

In essence, my research aimed to explore the involvement of the fish microbiota in the health and fitness of the host and improve our understanding of host-microbiota interactions. Such knowledge would ultimately allow us to better modulate the fish microbiota and develop new treatment options. Overall, my thesis contributes to fish health research by providing context and perspective of the fish microbiota. Even though much more effort is needed, I aimed at producing translational research by demonstrating the importance of such studies for the aquaculture industry to potentially enhance fish resilience to infection/disease and ultimately improve current production systems.

Thesis declaration

I, Thibault Legrand, certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of a University of Adelaide Wildcard Scholarship and Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) Postgraduate Scholarship.

Thibault Legrand

Date: 15/12/2020

Publications

Journal articles

Legrand, T.P.R.A., Wynne, J.W., Weyrich, L.S., Oxley, A.P.A (2020) A microbial sea of possibilities: current knowledge and prospects for an improved understanding of the fish microbiome. *Reviews in Aquaculture* **12**, 1101-1134.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/raq.12375>

Legrand, T.P.R.A., Wynne, J.W., Weyrich, L.S., Oxley, A.P.A (2020) Investigating both mucosal immunity and microbiota in response to gut enteritis in yellowtail kingfish. *Microorganisms* **8**, 1267.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/microorganisms8091267>

Legrand, T.P.R.A., Catalano, S.R., Wos-Oxley, M.L., Wynne, J.W., Weyrich, L.S., Oxley, A.P.A (2020) Antibiotic-induced alterations and repopulation dynamics of yellowtail kingfish microbiota. *Animal Microbiome* **2**, 26.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s42523-020-00046-4>

Legrand, T.P.R.A., Wynne, J.W., Weyrich, L.S., Oxley, A.P.A (2021) Dead or alive: Microbial viability treatment reveals both active and inactive bacterial constituents in the fish gut microbiota. *Journal of Applied Microbiology*.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jam.15113>

Acknowledgments

None of this work would have been possible without the help of numerous people who directly or indirectly played a role in the completion of this thesis.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Andrew Oxley. He was at the origin of this project when we started working together during my Honours degree. At the time, I was a fish farmer and despite having no background in this field, he somehow gave me a chance to study something completely new for me. Since then, I keep being amazed by his trust and willingness to help me, as if I was part of his family. He has substantially helped me securing several grants during my PhD which considerably increased the quality of my thesis. His high expectations and commitment for doing better than just fine pushed me along this incredible journey and I can't thank him enough for his continuous support. There is no doubt I will forever be grateful for what he has given me and if someday I become some sort of a scientist, this will definitely be thanks to him. Thanks matey!

I would also like to thank my other supervisors Laura Weyrich and James Wynne for their continuous support during my PhD. I sincerely appreciated Laura's trust in me during the entire length of my candidature. She brings a lot of positivity at work and I thank her for the support she has given me during my candidature. My appreciation also goes to James for introducing me to the world of bioinformatics and for his willingness to help during my PhD.

I acknowledge all members of ACAD, especially the metagenomics team including Raph, Caitlin, Emily, Matilda, Yichen, Gina, Luis and Muslih. Although studying very different topics than me, I have enjoyed being part of ACAD which allowed me to discover the system of a world class research group. Thanks to Adrien for all the serious discussions we have had in our native language. It was a pleasure putting the world to rights with you. Thanks to Ray, geneticist, handyman, bird enthusiast, curry chef, lightning-fast rugby winger but more importantly the best AirBnB host I have ever met to date. Huge shout out to my German fellows from Hohenheim including Daniel (x2), Diego, Andrej, Johanna, Angelica and Amélia. Thanks for introducing me to all the gourmet food that Germany has to offer as well as sharing a few dunkels with me.

Many thanks to the very organised Sarah Catalano and Fran Samsing. I thank Sarah for her help with laboratory work and Fran for introducing me to bioinformatics and RNA-seq analysis. Special thanks to Melissa Wos-Oxley, who I consider part of my Aussie family alongside Andrew and their two little devils. She is a passionate data analyst and I enjoyed our engaging discussions regarding the analysis and interpretation of the data.

I do not forget the Nitschke family who hosted me when I started my PhD. Your kindness and welcoming attitude truly touched me, and I wish my mate Josh all the best for the end of his PhD. I also want to thank my mate Lewis. I doubt he will be interested in reading this thesis but no matter what, I want to thank him for making me discover the bush Aussie culture which I have fell in love with. Thanks to my ex-housemates from South Australia, Bethany and Katie for all the good times and for pretending to be interested in what I do. Cheers to my ex-housemates from Victoria, especially Ludo for the banter during Covid restrictions and for keeping playing poker and tennis with me despite losing consistently.

I always try not to forget people that have helped me along the way. Hence, I must acknowledge my former fish hatchery manager, Bennan Chen. At the time, he suggested me to pursue onto a PhD and introduced me to many people so that I could find an Honours project. I can't thank him enough for his trust and help which without a doubt contributed in the completion of this degree.

Lastly and not least, despite living far away from them, I do not forget my roots. Thus, I want to thank my family in France. Cheers to my brothers Romain and Hugo. This PhD thesis must feel particularly sweet for my parents, both teachers and who consider education has an important step for the success and personal development of an individual. Though not sharing this opinion, I cannot thank them enough for their consistent support and the unwavering love they have showed me since I was born, and which makes me the person I am today. I considered this PhD as a new challenge, something unfamiliar and completely new that no one expected me to do. And I can't wait for the next one...

"There is no finish line. When you reach one goal, find a new one."

- Chuck Norris

Introduction

Aquaculture: A growing industry

The status of fishery resources is a major concern considering that marine fish stocks are decreasing at an alarming rate. For instance, the fraction of fish stocks that are within biologically sustainable levels has dropped from 90% in 1975 to 66% in 2017 (FAO 2020). This has presented a significant challenge for meeting the increasing demands for sources of protein needed in order to feed the world's rapidly growing population (which reached ~7.6 billion in 2016), and is exemplified by estimates of seafood consumption, which increased from 6.5kg per capita in 1950 to 20.5kg in 2018 (FAO 2020).

In response to this, the farming of aquatic animals has seen a marked increase in growth since 1990 from less than 20 million tonnes to more than 80 million tonnes in 2018 (FAO 2020). In fact, aquaculture is the fastest growing food production sector. Since 2013, more than half of the seafood consumed by humans has come from aquaculture (FAO 2018). This industry was dominated by finfish (54.3 million tonnes) from both inland (47 million tonnes) and marine (7.3 million tonnes) aquaculture, followed by molluscs (17.7 million tonnes) and crustaceans (9.4 million tonnes) (FAO 2020).

In Australia, while there are more than 40 fish species farmed commercially, five account for more than 80% of the total gross value of production (ABARES 2019). The most valuable of these are salmonids (mainly the Atlantic salmon farmed in Tasmania) which have a production value of ~\$756 million in 2016-2017 (ABARES 2019). Other large value species include the southern bluefin tuna (\$115 million), edible oysters (\$112 million), prawns (\$86 million) and pearl oysters (\$70 million) (ABARES 2019).

Yellowtail kingfish as an emerging high value species

The yellowtail kingfish (*Seriola lalandi*, herein referred as YTK) is an emergent commercial finfish species farmed in Australia. YTK have long bodies that are marked by a blue-green

colour along their back, a white-silver underbelly, and a conspicuous yellow caudal fin (Figure 3). They are powerful swimmers adapted to a pelagic lifestyle that make them a highly prized species for anglers. YTK are found in tropical and temperate waters ranging from Western Australia all the way south and up to Southern Queensland, though some individuals have also been seen in the Northern Territory (Nakada 2008).



Figure 1: Picture of a YTK caught in South Australia

Outside of Australia, YTK are also farmed in New Zealand, Japan, Europe, and North and South America, both in the open in seacages and on land using recirculation water systems. YTK are considered an ideal aquaculture species due to their rapid growth rates and high value. They can reach market size (~4kg) in under 2 years (Kolkovski and Sakakura 2004). In addition, YTK is considered a delicacy in most Asian countries, where it is cooked or eaten raw as sashimi.

While the farming of other *Seriola* species rely on the capture and grow-out of wild-caught juveniles (e.g. Japanese yellowtail, *Seriola quinqueradiata*), the farming of YTK is solely based on hatchery-reared fish. Typically, eggs from domesticated broodstock are collected and incubated in tanks (Figure 4). Once hatched, the larvae are transferred to larval rearing tanks, then into nursery tanks and finally (as juveniles) moved into open seacages for grow-out until they reach market size (~1-4 kg) (Figure 2).

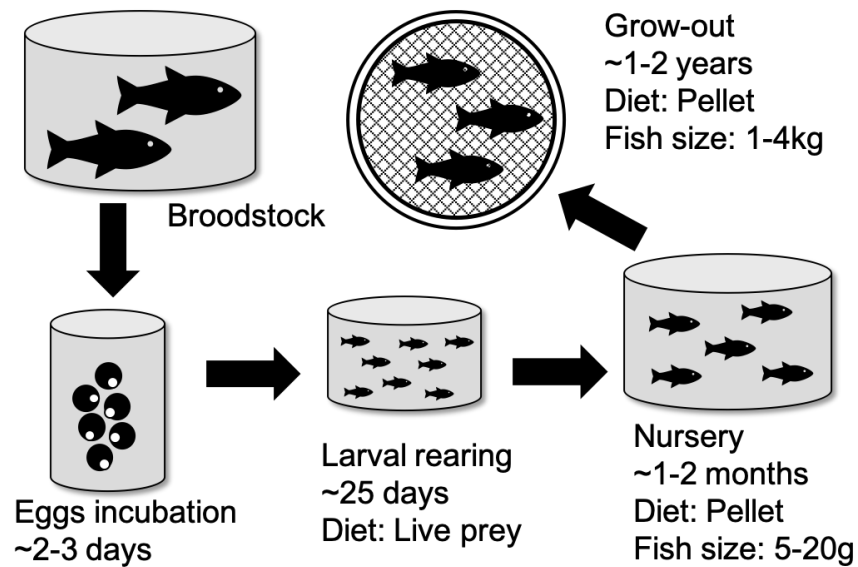


Figure 2: Farming process of YTK

Although the farming of YTK in Australia has seen a marked expansion in recent years, some major drawbacks hinder the further development of the industry. Earlier on, this included the presence of deformities (particularly those of the jaw and skeleton) which became apparent during the larval stage (Cobcroft et al. 2004; Kolkovski and Sakakura 2007). However, recent improvements in larval rearing protocols have significantly reduced the rate of deformities in hatchery-reared fish. In addition to this, YTK can suffer from several diseases of the mucosal tissues associated with the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, skin and gills. For instance, infection with parasitic flatworms (fluke) on the skin (*Benedenia seriolae*) and gill (*Zeuxapta seriolae*) of YTK is a common issue during the grow-out stage. These infections can cause reduced appetite, leading to slower growth and even death due to the loss of osmoregulatory capacity (Sharp et al. 2003; Hutson et al. 2007). Current treatments include the oral administration of praziquantel and bathing in hydrogen peroxide (Mansell et al. 2005; Partridge et al. 2014). In relation to the GI tract, enteritis (also called ‘red intestine syndrome’ or ‘winter gut’) is an inflammatory condition which is thought to arise from exposure to sub-optimal water temperatures (usually in winter) and diets comprising plant-based components such as soybean meal, which are sought as a more sustainable feed ingredients (Bansemer et al. 2015). However, to date, there is still no clear understanding of the underlying mechanisms inducing this inflammation. In all cases, the perturbation of these mucosal tissues induced by these conditions often leads to enhanced disease susceptibility and poor growth, resulting in a loss of productivity for the farmers.

The fish mucosal surfaces

The mucosal body surfaces (of the gut, skin, gill and olfactory organs) play important roles in the normal, healthy functioning of fish. Such roles include osmoregulation (within the gut, skin and gills) (Edwards and Marshall 2012), the recycling of waste products (gills) (Evans et al. 2005), and digestion and nutrient uptake (gut) (Grosell et al. 2010). In addition, these surfaces also act as a primary barrier, and are the first line of defense against potential pathogens from the surrounding environment (Salinas 2015). This role is facilitated through the unique physical and chemical properties of the mucosa, as well as the underlying lymphoid tissues (referred to as the mucosa-associated lymphoid tissues or MALT) which are involved in the detection, recognition and defense against pathogen (Salinas 2015). Fish have four MALTs: the gut-associated lymphoid tissues (GALT), the skin-associated lymphoid tissues (SALT), the gill-associated lymphoid tissues (GIALT) and the nasopharynx-associated lymphoid tissues (NALT) (Salinas 2015). They are composed of both innate and adaptive immune cells, whereby T cells are the most abundant (Kelly and Salinas 2017). Furthermore, goblet, club and sacciform cells induce the production of mucus, which is primarily composed of mucins (Reverter et al. 2018). This mucus also contains numerous antimicrobial and immune-related bioactive molecules that limit the growth of pathogens (Reverter et al. 2018). Mucus, alongside the scales and the epithelium, also acts as a physical barrier against the invasion of pathogens (Cabillon and Lazado 2019). Lastly, a complex microbial community (the ‘microbiota’) colonise this mucus and interact closely with the host, regulating the immune system and directly competing with opportunistic pathogens in order to maintain homeostasis (a balanced microbiota) within these mucosal surfaces (Kelly and Salinas 2017). When these microbial communities are perturbed by disease, infection or environmental changes, a dysbiosis (disturbed or imbalanced microbiota) occurs and increases the host disease susceptibility (Brugman et al. 2018). During recent years, changes in fish microbiota associated with disease and stress were investigated in many studies (Legrand et al. 2020). However, there is still a lack of understanding regarding whether these microbial disturbances are more likely the cause or the result of these conditions and further work is warranted in this regard.

The ‘microbiome’ concept

Defining the microbiome and its relevance to the host

Despite some contention surrounding the origins of the term ‘microbiome’ (Prescott 2017), it likely stems from ‘microbiota’, though refers to the ‘entire habitat, including the microorganisms, their genomes, and the surrounding environmental conditions’ (Marchesi and Ravel 2015). Insights into the microbiota, the relationships they share with certain hosts, and the processes that drive or govern their dynamics, have thus been an important prelude into our understanding of specific microbiomes. Pioneering studies in humans and animal models have revealed that the host microbiome develops from colonisation of the external body surfaces (including the skin, mouth, nose, digestive system and reproductive tract) by various microbes at birth, leading to the formation of stable core community assemblages (and likely encoded functions) during maturity (Turnbaugh et al. 2007; Huttenhower et al. 2012; Greenhalgh et al. 2016). These assemblages are often highly diverse in nature, comprising various microorganisms including bacteria, archaea, fungi, protozoa and viruses (Gill et al. 2006; Rajilic-Stojanovic et al. 2007; Dave et al. 2012; Hacquard et al. 2015); though bacteria are often the predominant component (Qin et al. 2010). Having forged complex commensal or symbiotic relationships with the host through diverse ecological and evolutionary pressures (Ley et al. 2006), these assemblages are regulated by the host and interact with each other to support the host’s healthy development and functioning through diverse contributions to processes ranging from digestion and metabolism to regulation and modulation of the immune and nervous systems (Semova et al. 2012; Hacquard et al. 2015). In this regard, the microbiota is thought to act as an additional body organ (Eckburg et al. 2005; Gill et al. 2006) and has been referred to as the ‘second genome’ of the host (Grice and Segre 2012).

The significance of the microbiome to the host is evident in its capacity to drive the emergence of specific phenotypes. Seminal work by Turnbaugh et al. (2006) perhaps best exemplifies the importance of such relationships through the experimental transplantation of ‘obese’ microbiomes into germ-free mice, endowing the recipient animals with the capacity to increase the energy harvested from the diet, leading to the increased accumulation of total body fat and consequently an altered ‘obese’ phenotype. Though a case for elucidating the specific involvement of the microbiome in the pathophysiology of obesity, other studies have since gone on to establish the relevance of the microbiome in the occurrence of a wide array of other diseases (Young 2017). From these studies, it is evident that compositional imbalances (or

‘dysbioses’) are primary features, whereby deleterious effects on the host are likely imparted through altered microbial diversity and the concomitant dysregulation of certain functions (Petersen and Round 2014; Valdes et al. 2018). The microbiome, however, does not work alone in the manifestation of such phenotypes, but instead is significantly influenced by host genetics, environmental factors (e.g. diet) and relevant pathogen/s (Hall et al. 2017). In this regard, the microbiome has the capacity to be manipulated, with numerous studies indicating a role for dietary modulation or the utility of probiotics in restoring health and optimal functioning (Valdes et al. 2018).

Strategies for evaluating the microbiome

For a long time, characterisation of the composition and structure of these communities was made using cultured based techniques. Though having informed our current understanding of these systems and being important for e.g. evaluating the physiology or pathogenicity of individual microbes or discovering novel biomolecules (Zengler 2009), these methods are limited in their capacity as <2% of all microorganisms are thought to be readily cultured (Vartoukian et al. 2010). The development of culture-independent molecular technologies, particularly recent advances such as next generation sequencing (NGS), have thus been used over the last decades for this purpose and have led to the proliferation of microbiome studies in various hosts, including fish. In particular, targeted amplicon sequencing procedures (e.g. 16S ribosomal RNA sequencing) have become the gold standard when assessing the structural diversity of the microbiota (Jovel et al. 2016). However, while cost-effective, this technique is usually restricted to the identification of a particular group of microbes (e.g. bacteria or archaea) and does not provide functional information about what each microbe or group of microbes are doing. As a result, metagenomics procedures have also been developed to study both the structural diversity and functional potential of these communities as a whole (Quince et al. 2017). As a further approach, these procedures can be modified to assess the actual functions being expressed by assessing the RNA rather than the DNA through metatranscriptomics (Bashiardes et al. 2016). The type of method implemented by individual studies, of course, being dependent upon the research question being posed (Knight et al. 2018). Due to the tremendous cost associated with such techniques, alternative strategies for assessing the function of the microbiome have been recently developed and include certain

bioinformatics tools (e.g. Tax4Fun, PICRUSt) that can predict functions from 16S amplicon data through comparisons with microbial reference genomes (Ortiz-Estrada et al. 2018).

The fish microbiome

While the concept of microbiome has emerged from human studies, fish microbiome related studies have flourished within the last few years, in particular from 2010 (Figure 3). To date, most of the studies have focused on the microbiome of model species (e.g. zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) and three-spine stickleback (*Gasterosteus culeatus*)) or important aquaculture species (e.g. salmonids and carps) (Lescak and Milligan-Myhre 2017; Legrand et al. 2020; López Nadal et al. 2020). The aims of these studies are often very different depending on the host species, and are often orientated towards answering ecological or medical related questions, typically through evaluation of the associated host-microbe interactions under a given experimental condition/s. For the latter, zebrafish are primarily used due to their body transparency, ease of culture and capacity to be raised and implemented as gnotobiotic (germ-free) model systems (Lescak and Milligan-Myhre 2017). In recent years, however, there has been increasing interest beyond model systems to include various aquaculture species in order to understand how the microbiome may improve productivity by supporting health and nutrition (e.g. through enhanced disease resistance or nutrient absorption) (de Bruijn et al. 2018; Egerton et al. 2018). For a more detailed review of the literature regarding the fish microbiome, please refer to chapter 1.

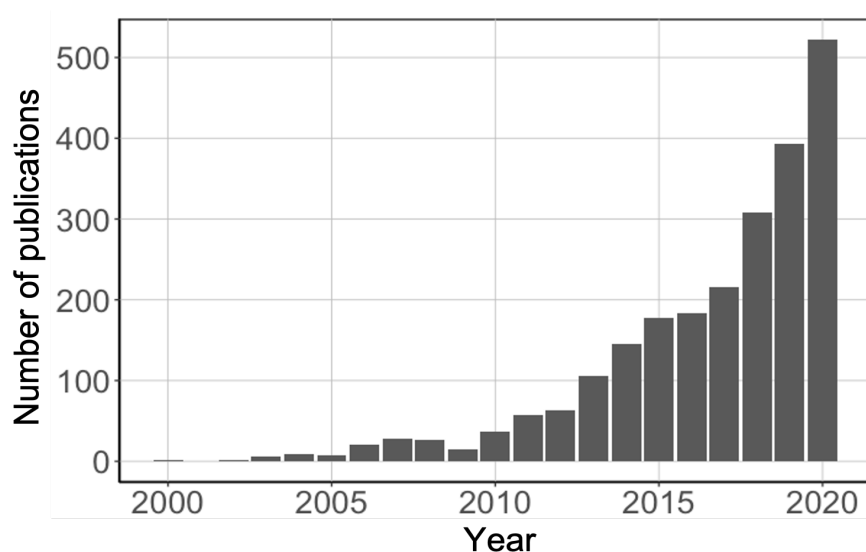


Figure 3: Annual number of publications found in PubMed with the search “fish microbiome” since 2000

Thesis overview

Over the last decade, there has been tremendous interest in the role the microbiome plays in driving the normal, healthy functioning of the vertebrate host. For aquacultured species, such studies are likely to be critical for informing how farms may become more sustainable and productive. The penultimate objective being the capacity to manipulate the microbiome in order to enhance nutrition and improve disease resistance to a range of common conditions (e.g. bacterial, viral or parasitic infections, and gastrointestinal inflammation). However, in order to achieve these far-reaching goals, an improved understanding of the role the microbiome plays in the health and disease of farmed species is required. Collectively, this thesis aims to shed light on the role of the gut and skin mucosal microbiomes in the health and disease of the commercially important species YTK. More specifically, this thesis aims to:

- 1) Identify if conditions such as gut inflammation perturb the mucosal microbiomes of YTK.
- 2) Determine bacterial biomarkers of changing health status within the gut and/or skin.
- 3) Explore host-microbe interactions in a health and disease context.
- 4) Investigate whether the YTK microbiome could be modulated to re-establish a more balanced microbiome through the use of antibiotic therapies and/or faecal microbiota transplantation (FMT).
- 5) Assess bacterial viability in the YTK gut microbiome from both digesta and mucosal samples.

The following chapters represent material that has been published or submitted for peer-review, and includes a detailed literature review of the fish microbiome and a series of experiments using a range of current analytical approaches (e.g. 16S rRNA profiling, RNA-seq, shotgun metagenomics) and fish from commercial operations and experimental systems to improve our understanding of the role of the microbiome. While this thesis focuses on YTK, such work has broader relevance to other fish/animal species, making this thesis interesting to a broader audience. New approaches and considerations will be proposed and discussed from the knowledge gained in this thesis.

Chapter 1: A microbial sea of possibilities: current knowledge and prospects for an improved understanding of the fish microbiome

This first chapter reviews the current knowledge of the fish microbiome, in particular in a health and disease context. I review the major microbial constituents found in the fish mucosal microbiomes and the different factors influencing them, notably in farming conditions. I also discuss the limitations of fish microbiome studies to date by exploring a range of different factors influencing the findings and their interpretation. In addition, I review the functional information pertaining to the fish microbiome, as generated from a range of different Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) technologies based on 16S rRNA gene analyses, metagenomics, metatranscriptomics and using germ-free model systems. Furthermore, I discuss the relevance and importance of the regulation of microbial communities by the host (host-microbe interactions) and the competition between the microbiota (microbe-microbe interactions). Finally, I propose different microbiome related management applications for the industry and explain how this wealth of information could be useful for improving productivity in aquaculture systems.

Chapter 2: Investigating mucosal immunity and microbiota in response to gut enteritis in YTK

Conditions such as gut enteritis are a common issue encountered in the farming of several fish species including YTK, and may result in a decrease in productivity due to stock losses. While this condition has been linked with inappropriate diets (typically those enriched with plant-based feed ingredients such as soybean meal) and suboptimal rearing temperatures (< 16°C for YTK), very little is known regarding the underlying mechanisms inducing this disease. In this chapter, I investigate the gut and skin microbiota responses to the disease by comparing healthy fish and fish displaying signs of early and late stages of gut enteritis. In addition, I constructed RNA-seq libraries from the same samples to explore the host response in these mucosal surfaces with the aim to correlate changes in microbiota structure with changes in host gene expression (particularly those associated with immunity).

Chapter 3: Antibiotic-induced alterations and repopulation dynamics of YTK microbiota

Antibiotic therapy is a common treatment for various microbial infections in the farming of various fish species, including YTK. However, its use is marred by environmental concerns and the development of antimicrobial resistance (as attributed to the acquisition of antibiotic resistance genes or ARGs among pathogens). In addition, most antibiotics have broad-

spectrum activity and are thus a non-targeted approach that depletes bacterial communities as a whole. This can have negative effects for fish health, inducing a perturbation in the microbiome and its associated diversity. Furthermore, the process of microbial repopulation following antibiotic treatment is not well understood, though an important feature for the host recovery following infection. This study aims to improve our understanding of microbial recovery following antibiotic treatment in poor-performing YTK suffering from gastrointestinal disorders. I also investigate the influence of faecal microbiota transplantation (FMT) following the use of antibiotics in order to modulate the fish microbiome and re-establish a more balanced and healthy microbial community within the fish gut.

Chapter 4: Dead or alive: microbial viability treatment reveals both active and inactive bacterial constituents in the fish gut microbiota

Current metagenomics approaches (e.g. 16S rRNA gene and shotgun metagenome sequencing) rely on the sequencing of total DNA samples. As a result, standard approaches explore both the viable and non-viable microbial communities. When investigating the role of the microbiome in health and disease, it appears paramount to delineate the viable microbial cells from the non-viable ones, as only viable cells are likely to interact with the host (as resident rather than transient assemblages) and contribute to key functions for the host. This last chapter explores a novel method that aims to characterise the active microbial components of the YTK gut microbiome in both digesta and faecal samples.

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**Chapter 1: A microbial sea of possibilities:
current knowledge and prospects for an
improved understanding of the fish microbiome**

Statement of Authorship

Title of Paper	A microbial sea of possibilities: current knowledge and prospects for an improved understanding of the fish microbiome
Publication Status	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Published <input type="checkbox"/> Accepted for Publication <input type="checkbox"/> Submitted for Publication <input type="checkbox"/> Unpublished and Unsubmitted work written in manuscript style
Publication Details	Legrand, T.P.R.A., Wynne, J.W., Weyrich, L.S., Oxley, A.P.A. (2020) A microbial sea of possibilities: current knowledge and prospects for an improved understanding of the fish microbiome. <i>Reviews in Aquaculture</i> , 12, 1101-1134. https://doi.org/10.1111/raq.12375

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Contribution to the Paper	Conceptualised, researched literature, and wrote the manuscript		
Overall percentage (%)	70		
Certification:	This paper reports on original research I conducted during the period of my Higher Degree by Research candidature and is not subject to any obligations or contractual agreements with a third party that would constrain its inclusion in this thesis. I am the primary author of this paper.		
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It is also available online to authorised users at:

<https://doi.org/10.1111/raq.12375>

**Chapter 2: Investigating both mucosal
immunity and microbiota in response to gut
enteritis in yellowtail kingfish**

Statement of Authorship

Title of Paper	Investigating Both Mucosal Immunity and Microbiota in Response to Gut Enteritis in Yellowtail Kingfish
Publication Status	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Published <input type="checkbox"/> Accepted for Publication <input type="checkbox"/> Submitted for Publication <input type="checkbox"/> Unpublished and Unsubmitted work written in manuscript style
Publication Details	Legrand, T.P.R.A., Wynne, J.W., Weyrich, L.S., Oxley, A.P.A. (2020) Investigating Both Mucosal Immunity and Microbiota in Response to Gut Enteritis in Yellowtail Kingfish. <i>Microorganisms</i> , 8(9), 1267. https://doi.org/10.3390/microorganisms8091267

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Overall percentage (%)	70		
Certification:	This paper reports on original research I conducted during the period of my Higher Degree by Research candidature and is not subject to any obligations or contractual agreements with a third party that would constrain its inclusion in this thesis. I am the primary author of this paper.		
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- i. the candidate's stated contribution to the publication is accurate (as detailed above);
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Contribution to the Paper	Contributed in data analysis, contributed and edited the manuscript.		
Signature		Date	24-11-20



Article

Investigating Both Mucosal Immunity and Microbiota in Response to Gut Enteritis in Yellowtail Kingfish

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Received: 16 June 2020; Accepted: 19 August 2020; Published: 20 August 2020



Abstract: The mucosal surfaces of fish play numerous roles including, but not limited to, protection against pathogens, nutrient digestion and absorption, excretion of nitrogenous wastes and osmotic regulation. During infection or disease, these surfaces act as the first line of defense, where the mucosal immune system interacts closely with the associated microbiota to maintain homeostasis. This study evaluated microbial changes across the gut and skin mucosal surfaces in yellowtail kingfish displaying signs of gut inflammation, as well as explored the host gene expression in these tissues in order to improve our understanding of the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the emergence of these conditions. For this, we obtained and analyzed 16S rDNA and transcriptomic (RNA-Seq) sequence data from the gut and skin mucosa of fish exhibiting different health states (i.e., healthy fish and fish at the early and late stages of enteritis). Both the gut and skin microbiota were perturbed by the disease. More specifically, the gastrointestinal microbiota of diseased fish was dominated by an uncultured *Mycoplasmataceae* sp., and fish at the early stage of the disease showed a significant loss of diversity in the skin. Using transcriptomics, we found that only a few genes were significantly differentially expressed in the gut. In contrast, gene expression in the skin differed widely between health states, in particular in the fish at the late stage of the disease. These changes were associated with several metabolic pathways that were differentially expressed and reflected a weakened host. Altogether, this study highlights the sensitivity of the skin mucosal surface in response to gut inflammation.

Keywords: microbiota; immunity; fish; gut; skin; health; mucosa; aquaculture

1. Introduction

The mucosal surfaces of fish, comprising the gut, skin, gills and olfactory organ act as the first lines of defense against pathogens and represent important primary barriers [1,2]. These surfaces are composed of various layers with different physical and chemical properties that protect the host from the environment and potential pathogens. More specifically, the mucosa are coated in a secretion of mucus, mainly composed of mucin, which acts as a physical barrier between the environment and the fish and limits the growth of microbes [3]. This mucus also houses an array of microbes called

microbiota. Recent works on animals including fish have revealed that these microbial communities support important functions including the development and regulation of the immune response, and as such interact closely with the host immune system to fight infections and disease [2,4]. The mucosal surfaces also comprise lymphoid tissues (termed mucosa-associated lymphoid tissues: MALTs) which play an important role in the detection, recognition and defense against potential pathogens [2]. These MALTs contain cells responsible for both the innate and adaptive immune system of fish [5]. Thus, the interactions between these different systems are a fundamental feature in maintaining homeostasis and permeability within the mucosal surfaces.

The relevance of gut health in the farming of finfish has increased within recent years due to the emergence of various gastrointestinal disorders that have hindered the development of the industry [6]. Particular conditions such as enteritis (a gut inflammation) have become especially problematic in the farming of a number of different species such as Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), zebrafish (*Danio rerio*), turbot (*Scophthalmus maximus*), yellowtail kingfish (*Seriola lalandi*), California yellowtail (*Seriola dorsalis*), pearl gentian grouper (*Epinephelus* sp.) and common carp (*Cyprinus carpio* L.) [7–13]. Dietary components including high supplementation of soybean meal in the feed seem to play an important role in the emergence of this disease (or other related inflammatory disorders) in several species [7–10,14,15]. However, it has been reported that this disease can also be induced by various pathogens, either bacterial (e.g., *Aeromonas hydrophila*) or parasitic (e.g., *Enteromyxum leei* and *Pseudocapillaria tomentosa*) [16–18]. Furthermore, studies on zebrafish have shown that the intestinal inflammation is dependent on the microbiota where specific microbiota can predispose an animal to this condition, highlighting the important role of microbial communities in the onset of inflammation [19]. In grass carp (*Ctenopharyngodon idellus*), it was shown that fish with inflammatory intestinal disorders had an altered gut microbiota associated with an increase in diversity in diseased fish [20]. In addition, in yellowtail kingfish suffering from enteritis, alterations in the microbiota of the skin and gills have also been observed, suggesting that broader, body-wide host responses may play a role in the dynamics of these communities [21].

Recent research has greatly enhanced our understanding of host–microbiota interactions in health and disease, in particular in mammalian systems [22]. It is now clear that there is a bidirectional relationship between the microbiota and the host, where the microbiota play an important role in the training and regulation of both the host's innate and adaptive immunity which, in turn regulates and selects for specific bacterial assemblages across the different mucosal tissues [22]. As such, a balanced (homeostatic) state is thought to be required for normal functioning and defense against environmental stress (e.g., diet or antibiotics) [23]. Any dysregulation of this equilibrium is often linked to poorer performance and can ultimately result in disease [22]. However, in fish, host microbiota interactions are poorly understood, and research thus far has been mainly focused on gnotobiotic models such as zebrafish and threespine stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*) [24].

Studies investigating the fish immune response against diet induced gut inflammation have revealed useful biomarkers at the early stages of the disease including some proinflammatory cytokines and antioxidant enzyme related genes [11,13,25]. However, there is a lack of information regarding the interactions between the host and the microbiota during disease. Considering the importance of host–microbe interactions and the role of the fish microbiome in health and disease [26], further research is required to elucidate the underlying mechanisms leading to the development of the disease. Here, we investigated the influence of gut enteritis on the gut and skin microbiota of yellowtail kingfish and examined the host response using transcriptomics (RNA-Seq) to better understand the effect of a gut disease on the fish mucosal surfaces.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Experimental Design and Sample Collection

This study expands on earlier experimental work conducted on yellowtail kingfish that investigated the influence of gut enteritis on the outer surface (skin and gill) microbiota [21]. Specifically, in this study we expand on the earlier bacterial community (16S rDNA) analyses of the outer (skin) surfaces and surrounding environment (seawater) to include a comparison with the microbiota of the hindgut, as well as the assessment of the host response in the skin and hindgut tissues using transcriptomics (RNA-Seq). For this, RNA extracted from samples obtained by Legrand et al. [21] from a total of 36 fish of differing health states was used to generate Next Generation Sequencing (NGS) 16S rDNA amplicon libraries from the hindgut (for comparison with the data generated earlier for the skin (Accession number under the BioProject ID PRJNA396452)), and RNA-Seq libraries from the skin and hindgut. This included samples from 12 healthy fish (referred to herein as the “healthy” group) from a single seacage containing only individuals with no signs of infection, and 24 fish from a nearby seacage (<7 km) exhibiting signs of early and late stages of gut enteritis (herein referred to as the “early” and “late” groups, respectively). All fish were obtained and sampled under the auspices of a commercial aquaculture enterprise according to industry best practice veterinary care, with the health status of each treatment group confirmed by necropsy and histopathological assessment by farm health and veterinary personnel and an external pathology provider. All fish had been fed the same pelleted feed and came from the same hatchery run. For each fish, skin swabs were first collected upon netting by swabbing one side of the fish using FLOQSwabs® (COPAN, Murrieta, CA, USA) and stabilized in tubes comprising RNAlater™ (Ambion, Austin, TX, USA). Fish were then euthanized using a lethal dose of AQUI-S (AQUI-S New Zealand Ltd., Lower Hutt, New Zealand) in seawater, and the gastrointestinal tract was carefully excised with a sterile scalpel. A scraping of the inner mucosal surface of the hindgut region was obtained using a sterile glass microscope slide. The contents of the hindgut were also stabilized in tubes comprising RNAlater™ (Ambion). All RNA samples were treated with the Turbo DNase free™ (Life Technologies, Carlsbad, CA, USA) kit to remove any residual gDNA, and were stored at −80 °C.

2.2. Library Preparation and Sequencing

In order to compare the bacterial (16S rDNA) community composition data obtained earlier from the skin, the same NGS 16S rDNA amplicon library preparation protocol was performed for the hindgut samples as conducted previously [21]. Briefly, purified total RNA extracted from the hindgut samples (as obtained using bead-beating and the RNeasy mini kit (Qiagen, Hilden, Germany) as detailed in Legrand et al. [21]) was converted into cDNA using the Superscript™ III First Strand Synthesis System (Life Technologies, Carlsbad, CA, USA) according to the manufacturer’s instructions. The cDNA was subsequently concentrated by ethanol precipitation using standard procedures, quantified using the NanoDrop 2000 spectrophotometer (ThermoFisher Scientific, Indianapolis, IN, USA) and stored at −20 °C. The V1-V2 hypervariable region of the 16S rRNA gene was amplified from the cDNA from all hindgut samples ($n = 36$ fish) using a multistep approach using universal eubacterial primers 27F and 338R. Following the library preparation, samples were quantified and pooled in equimolar ratios before being sequenced on the MiSeq Illumina platform using 250nt paired-end sequencing chemistry through the Australian Genome Research Facility (AGRF, Melbourne, Australia). Raw demultiplexed sequencing data with sample annotations were deposited in the NCBI SRA data repository under the BioProject ID PRJNA637190.

For assessing host gene expression, transcriptomic (RNA-Seq) libraries were prepared from purified RNA extracts from a total of 9 skin and 9 hindgut samples ($n = 3$ per treatment group per sample type) following initial quality assessment using the LabChip System (Caliper Life Sciences, Inc., Hopkinton, MA, USA). Libraries were generated using the ScriptSeq™ Complete Gold Kit (Epidemiology) (Illumina, San Diego, CA, USA), which included the initial depletion of the rRNA using

the Ribo-Zero™ Gold rRNA Removal Kit (Epidemiology) (Epicentre, Madison, WI, USA). For each library, a minimum of 100 ng of rRNA depleted RNA was used in each reaction according to the manufacturer's instructions, and the libraries were purified using the MinElute™ PCR Purification Kit (Qiagen). Potential contaminating primer dimers were removed by Exonuclease I treatment (Illumina) and further size selection of fragments (~200–600 bp) using the SPRIselect Reagent Kit (Beckman Coulter, Brea, CA, USA). Fragments were then assessed for quantity and quality using the Quant-iT™ picogreen™ dsDNA Assay Kit (Invitrogen) and the LabChip System (Caliper Life Sciences, Inc.). Libraries were pooled in equimolar ratios, and 6 samples were multiplexed per lane and sequenced on the Illumina HiSeq4000 platform (Illumina) using 150nt paired-end sequencing chemistry through the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI)—Translational Genomics Unit (Melbourne, Australia). Raw demultiplexed sequencing data with sample annotations were deposited in the NCBI SRA data repository under the BioProject ID PRJNA639544.

2.3. Bioinformatics and Statistical Analysis

The raw 16S rDNA sequence reads obtained from 33 hindgut samples (3 samples failed in library preparation which were fish #114, #128 and #129) were paired using PEAR (v. 0.9.5), and the primer regions were removed [27]. These trimmed sequence reads were subsequently merged with the 36 skin and 2 seawater sample fastq files obtained in the earlier study of Legrand et al. [21] (NCBI SRA accession numbers under the project PRJNA396452) and were processed and analyzed together using the QIIME2 (v. 2019.1) pipeline [28]. Demultiplexed paired-end sequence reads were truncated to a length of 320 bp, quality filtered and denoised into amplicon sequence variants (ASVs) using the DADA2 plugin [29]. A total of 3,183,303 demultiplexed paired-end sequence reads were assigned to 9155 ASVs features from a total of 71 samples. The number of reads ranged from 16,255 to 135,287 with a median of 40,799 per sample. Following the denoising and removal of reads associated with chloroplast, mitochondria and eukaryotes (after assigning taxonomy), a total of 3,116,835 reads were obtained for downstream analysis. Each sample was rarefied to a depth of 16,255 reads, resulting in a total of 7863 ASVs in the dataset. Alpha rarefaction showed sufficient coverage of the samples (Figure S1). Taxonomy was assigned to the ASVs using the q2-feature-classifier against the Silva 132 99% OTUs (Operational Taxonomic Units) reference sequences resource [27]. Alpha-diversity metrics (Shannon's diversity, Pielou's evenness and Chao1 richness), beta diversity metrics (Bray–Curtis), and Principle Coordinate Analysis (PCoA) using both the weighted and unweighted Unifrac distance matrix were estimated using q2-diversity. Statistical differences for alpha diversity were assessed using the Kruskal–Wallis test with Benjamini–Hochberg correction for pairwise comparison. Statistical differences for the ASV dataset as a whole were identified using PERMANOVA. QIIME artifacts were imported into R using the package Qiime2R, and plots were made using Phyloseq and ggplot2 [30]. Statistical differences for each ASV (differential abundance) were assessed using Deseq2 [29], as suggested recently for the analysis of microbiome data with a small number of replicates per treatment (<20) [31,32].

Sequencing of the transcriptomic libraries from the 9 hindgut and 9 skin samples yielded ~1064 million reads, with an average of 59 ± 17 million reads per sample (Table S1). Reads were quality filtered to remove low quality reads and Illumina adapters using Trimmomatic (v0.38) with the parameters ILLUMINACLIP:TruSeq3-PE-2.fa:2:30:10 LEADING:10 TRAILING:10 SLIDINGWINDOW:4:20 MINLEN:40 [33]. Then, rRNA sequence reads were removed from the dataset using SortmeRNA (v. 2.1) by using the default settings, which included interrogation against the SILVA rRNA database [34]. A total of 476 million cleaned paired-end reads (average of 26 ± 13 million reads per sample) were subsequently obtained and, in the absence of an annotated reference genome for *S. lalandi*, were mapped to the genome from the related species *Seriola dumerili* (accession number GCA_002260705.1 in ensembl.org) using STAR (v. 2.5.3a) [35]. Reads were aligned back to the genome and counted with Subread (v. 1.6.2) using the function featureCounts [36]. Approximately $80 \pm 2\%$ of the reads was able to be mapped to the *S. dumerili* genome (a similar mapping rate around ~80% was found using the *S. lalandi* reference genome). The resultant count data were used to initially

identify biological outliers via ordination of the relative abundances of the transcript sequence reads using Deseq2 (wherein one hindgut sample from the early group was removed from the downstream analysis (Figure S2)), and Deseq2 was used to calculate differential gene expression [29]. Genes were identified as significantly differentially expressed when $p\text{-adj} < 0.05$ and $\log_2 \text{fold-change} > \text{or} < 1.5$. Differential pathway analysis was performed using Voronto [37] and the R package clusterProfiler [38] using the KEGG (Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes) database [39].

3. Results

3.1. Analysis of the Gut and Skin Microbiota

To explore whether the impact of gut enteritis on bacterial community dynamics is similarly reflected across the mucosal surfaces of yellowtail kingfish, hindgut samples from fish belonging to three different health states ($n = 12$ fish per health state) were compared with data obtained earlier from the skin of the same fish and environmental (seawater) samples [21].

The overall gut microbiota was significantly different from the skin samples based on the Bray–Curtis similarity matrix (Pseudo-F = 38.80, $p = 0.002$). In addition, the gut microbiota had a significantly lower Shannon diversity than the skin ($p < 0.001$) and significantly lower ASV richness ($p < 0.001$) with 40 ± 20 ASVs when skin samples had an average of 545 ± 296 ASVs per sample.

3.1.1. Influence of Gut Enteritis on the Global Gastrointestinal and Skin Mucosal Microbiota

We investigated the effect of gut enteritis on the gastrointestinal and skin mucosal bacterial communities. We found that the health status had a significant influence on the global gut (Figure 1a; Pseudo-F = 4.43, $p = 0.003$) and skin (Figure 1b; Pseudo-F = 4.55, $p = 0.003$) bacterial communities based on the weighted Unifrac distance matrix. More specifically, the gut microbiota of healthy fish were significantly different when compared to fish at the early (Pseudo-F = 7.05, $p = 0.045$) and late stage of the disease (Pseudo-F = 4.99, $p = 0.045$). However, the gut microbiota of the fish at the early and late stage of the disease were not significantly different (Pseudo-F = 0.44, $p = 0.615$). In contrast, no global bacterial communities differences were found when using the unweighted Unifrac distance (Figure S3, Pseudo-F = 1.15, $p = 0.268$). On the other hand, the skin microbiota were significantly different between all health states using both weighted Unifrac ($p < 0.05$ for all pairwise comparisons) and unweighted Unifrac distances (Figure S4, $p < 0.001$ for all pairwise comparisons).

The alpha-diversity (Shannon index) in the gut microbiota of the fish at the late stage of the disease was lower than both healthy and early fish, though not significantly different (Figure 1c; $p = 0.123$ and $p = 0.291$, respectively). Similarly, the microbial community evenness (Pielou's index) was lower in the fish at the late stage of the disease but was not significant, while the richness (Chao1 index) was fairly consistent across all three health status (Figures S5 and S6). Unlike the gut, fish at the early stage of the disease exhibited a significant loss of Shannon's diversity in the skin compared to both healthy and fish at the late stage of the disease (Figure 1d; $p = 0.007$ and $p = 0.020$, respectively). This was associated with a significant loss of both evenness and richness in the fish at the early stage of the disease when compared to both healthy and early stages of the disease (Figures S7 and S8).

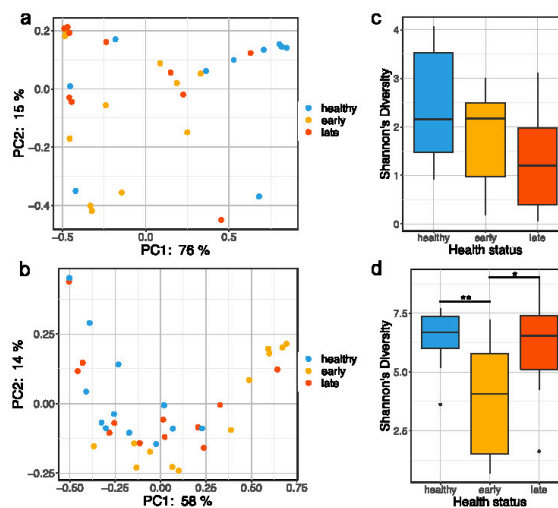


Figure 1. Global bacterial community changes associated with gut enteritis. PCoA plot based on the weighted Unifrac distance matrix showing clustering of gut (a) and skin (b) microbiota samples by health status (e.g., healthy, early stage of enteritis and late stage of enteritis); boxplot representing the Shannon's diversity of the gut (c) and skin (d) microbiota for the different health status. Statistical differences were assessed using a Kruskal–Wallis test, with the levels of statistical significance between groups denoted by asterisks, with alpha set at 0.05.

3.1.2. Taxonomic Composition and Potential Biomarkers of Gut Enteritis in the Gut and Skin Microbiota

The gut microbiota was dominated by a few bacterial members, including *Mycoplasmataceae*, *Aliivibrio*, *Photobacterium* and *Brevinema* (Figure 2a). The most dominant ASV was associated with an uncultured *Mycoplasmataceae* sp. and represented $54 \pm 34\%$ of the total relative abundance in the gut samples. This ASV was significantly less prevalent in healthy fish than both fish at the early and late stage of the disease (Figure 2b; $p = 0.021$ and $p = 0.013$, respectively, using the Kruskal–Wallis test). At the genus level, the other most dominant members were *Photobacterium* (13% of the total relative abundance), *Aliivibrio* (11%), *Brevinema* (10%) and *Vibrio* (9%). In contrast, the skin microbiota was more diverse and dominated by other bacterial lineages in both health states. At the order level, the skin microbiota was dominated by *Flavobacteriales* members, representing 46% of the total relative abundance (Figure 2c). Other important members were related to *Alteromonadales* (10%), *Rhodobacterales* (9%), *Oceanospirillales* (5%) and *Synechococcales* (3%).

To further characterize the change of gut and skin microbial communities associated with the disease, we performed some differential abundance analyses to identify potential biomarkers within these mucosal tissues. In the gut, we found 12 ASVs that were significantly differentially abundant between healthy fish and fish at the early stage of the disease (Table S2). All of them were less abundant in the fish at the early stage, with four associated with *Aliivibrio* and four associated with *Photobacterium*. Within the fish at the late stage of the disease, we found 11 ASVs that were differentially abundant when compared with healthy fish (all less abundant in diseased fish) (Table S3). Among these, we found the same ASVs related to *Aliivibrio* and *Photobacterium*, indicating that these ASVs are less abundant in diseased fish, regardless of the stage of the disease. Finally, only one ASV was significantly different between fish at the early and late stage of the disease, which was *Gammaproteobacteria* (Table S4).

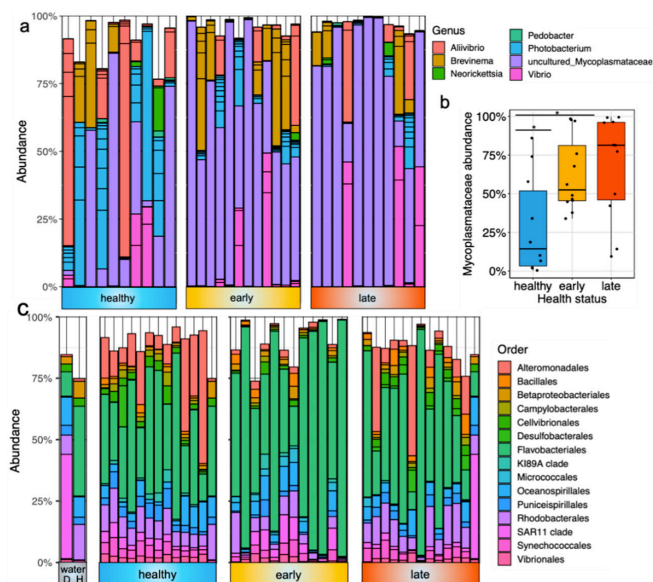


Figure 2. Taxonomic composition of the fish gut and skin microbiota with different health states: (a) barplot representing the relative abundance of the top 30 most abundant ASVs in the gut microbiota of fish exhibiting different health states (e.g., healthy, early stage of enteritis and late stage of enteritis); (b) boxplot representing the relative abundance of an uncultured *Mycoplasmataceae* sp. in the gut microbiota of fish exhibiting different health states; statistical differences were assessed using Wilcoxon test, with the levels of statistical significance between groups denoted by asterisks, with alpha set at 0.05; (c) barplot representing the relative abundance of the top 15 most abundant order in the skin microbiota of fish exhibiting different health status as well as seawater bacterial communities (D = diseased cage and H = healthy cage).

In stark contrast to the gut, we found more differentially abundant ASVs associated with disease within the skin. Interestingly, while most of the differentially abundant ASVs in the gut were found in the two diseased states (both early and late), those found in the skin were mainly in the early condition only. More specifically, 195 and 263 ASVs were found differentially abundant between fish at the early stage of the disease and healthy and late condition, respectively (Tables S5 and S6). However, despite being housed in two different cages with relatively distinct water bacterial communities (Figure 2c), we only found 18 differentially abundant ASVs between healthy fish and fish at the late stage of the disease (Table S7). At the genus level, *Alteromonas*, *Pseudoalteromonas*, *Glaciecola*, *Halomonas*, *Marinobacter*, *Cobetia*, *Idiomarina*, *Arcobacter*, SAR 92 clade, *Synechococcus* CC9902 and *Litoricola* were all found to be significantly depleted in the fish at the early stage of the disease when compared to healthy fish or fish at the late stage of the disease.

3.2. Analysis of the Transcriptomics Data

In order to evaluate the mucosal immunity across both the gut and skin mucosal surfaces of yellowtail kingfish in response to gut enteritis, we performed some differential gene expressions on selected samples representing the three different conditions (i.e., healthy, early and late stage of enteritis; $n = 3$ per condition). We found <100 significantly differentially expressed genes (DEGs) in the gut when comparing all treatment groups (Table 1). On the other hand, more DEGs were found in the skin, in particular in the group at the late stage of the disease (1467 DEGs when compared to healthy and 2068 DEGs when compared to early).

Table 1. Table representing the number of differentially expressed genes (DEGs) in the gut and skin of fish exhibiting different health states (H = healthy, E = early stage of enteritis and L = late stage of enteritis).

Sample Type	Gene Expression	HvsE	HvsL	EvsL
gut	upregulated	15	31	18
	downregulated	52	57	1
	total	67	88	19
skin	upregulated	54	481	552
	downregulated	130	986	1516
	total	184	1467	2068

3.2.1. Differential Expression in the Gut of Fish Exhibiting Different Health States

Of particular interest, we found a number of genes associated with the intestinal immune network for immunoglobulin production (H-2 class II histocompatibility antigen and HLA class II histocompatibility antigen associated genes) and the Toll-like receptor signaling pathway (TIR domain containing adaptor protein and Toll-like receptor 2 type-2) downregulated in the fish at the late stage of the disease (Table S7). In addition, we found a neutrophil related gene (*ncf4*) downregulated in these late fish ($\log_2\text{fold} = -1.58$); this gene group plays a role in the phagosome pathway and a procathepsin H-like gene involved in the lysosome and apoptosis pathway. In contrast, some genes related to glycerolipid metabolism (patatin-like phospholipase) and glycine metabolism (glycine dehydrogenase and glycine decarboxylase) were found upregulated in the fish at the late stage of the disease (Table S8).

In the fish at the early stage of the disease, we found an upregulation of the histone H2A-like gene involved in the necroptosis pathway ($\log_2\text{fold} = 6.15$, Table S9). On the other hand, two genes involved in the apoptosis pathway (procathepsin H-like and inositol 1,4,5-trisphosphate receptor type 1-like) were downregulated in these early group fish (Table S8). Overall, due to the low number of DEGs found in the gut, no pathways were significantly differently expressed between groups.

3.2.2. Differential Gene Expression and Associated Pathways in the Skin of Fish at the Late Stage of the Disease

Due to the high number of DEGs found in the skin, we used Voronoi tessellation diagrams (using Voronto) to represent the expression of the different pathways between the different health states. In the fish at the late stage of the disease, the immune system pathway was downregulated compared to healthy fish (Figure 3). In fact, all six pathways at level 3 of the KEGG database (including but not limited to the Toll-like receptor signaling pathway, NOD-like receptor signaling pathway and intestinal immune network for immunoglobulin production pathway) were downregulated. In addition, we found a downregulation of the cytokine–cytokine receptor interaction pathway including the downregulation of cytokines (such as *il1*, *il8*, *il12*, *il17* and *il23*) and chemokines (Figure 3, Table S10). In contrast, the ECM (extracellular matrix)–receptor interaction and focal adhesion pathways were upregulated in these fish at the late stage of the disease (Figure 3).

We then investigated the significantly differentially expressed pathways in these fish at the late stage of the disease. Using clusterProfiler, we identified six significantly downregulated and four significantly upregulated pathways (Figure 4). The most significant pathways were ECM–receptor interaction and focal adhesion (both upregulated) and the cytokine–cytokine receptor interaction pathway (downregulated). The upregulation of the ECM–receptor interaction was characterized by an upregulation of collagen, laminin, reelin, thrombospondin, fibronectin and tenascin (Figure S9).

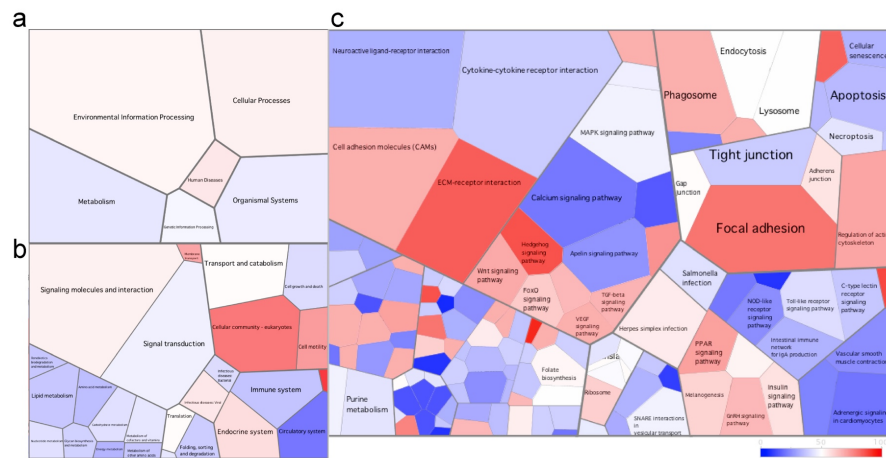


Figure 3. Voronoi tessellation diagrams representing differentially expressed pathways at (a) level 1, (b) level 2 and (c) level 3 of the KEGG database in the skin of the fish at the late stage of the disease. Each polygon represents an ontology term, with their size corresponding to the numbers of genes involved in the associated pathway. To further explore the pathways differentially expressed between health states, we imported all DEGs (and associated logs values) to generate the Voronoi tessellations. Pathways colored in red are upregulated, and those in blue are downregulated in the fish at the late stage of the disease when compared to healthy fish. A quantile color scale was used to show differential expression.

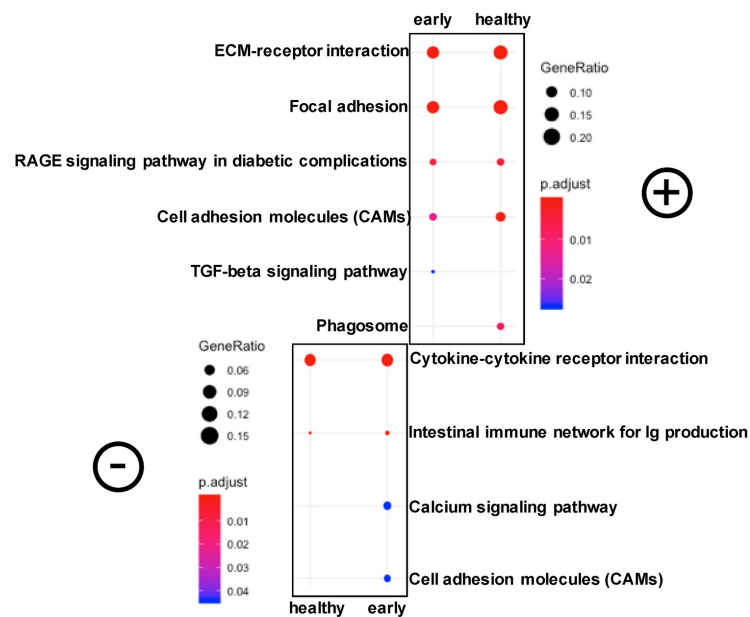


Figure 4. A representation of significantly differentially expressed pathways in the skin of fish at the late stage of the disease compared to both healthy and early conditions using clusterProfiler. Symbols were used to designate upregulated (+) and downregulated (-) pathways.

3.2.3. Differential Gene Expression and Associated Pathways in the Skin of Fish at the early Stage of the Disease

Although no significant differentially expressed pathways were identified, numerous genes were differentially expressed in the fish at the early stage of the disease compared to healthy fish (Table S11). In contrast to the fish at the late stage of the disease, we found that the cytokine–cytokine receptor interaction pathway was upregulated in the early stage fish compared to healthy fish (Figure 5). The immune system (including four out of five pathways at level 3) was also upregulated in the fish at the early stage of the disease. Furthermore, we found a notable upregulation of the foxO signaling pathway due to the strong upregulation of the recombination-activating gene (*rag1*, log2fold = 6.74). The cellular community pathways were downregulated (including all four associated pathways at level 3 comprising focal adhesion, tight junction, gap junction and adherens junction) in these early fish.

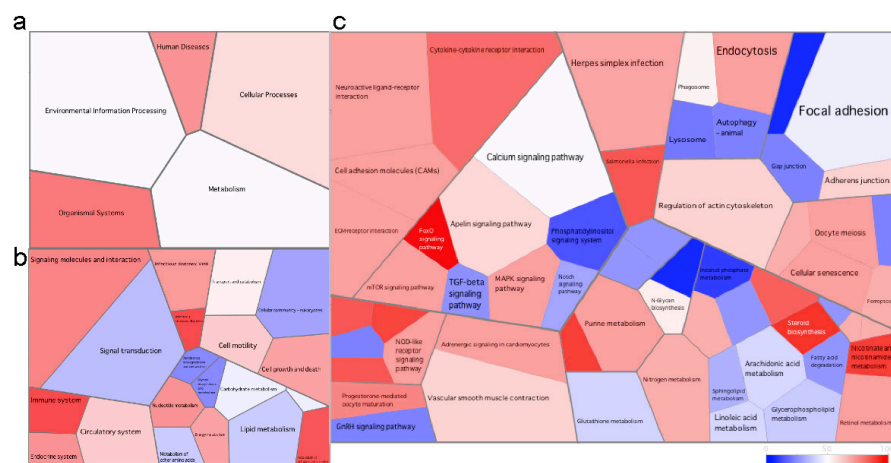


Figure 5. Voronoi tessellation diagrams representing differentially expressed pathways at (a) level 1, (b) level 2 and (c) level 3 of the KEGG database in the skin of the fish at the early stage of the disease. Each polygon represents an ontology term, with their size corresponding to the numbers of genes involved in the associated pathway. To further explore the pathways differentially expressed between health states, we imported all DEGs (and associated logs values) to generate the Voronoi tessellations. Pathways colored in red are upregulated, and those in blue are downregulated in the fish at the early stage of the disease when compared to the healthy fish. A quantile color scale was used to show differential expression.

4. Discussion

To date, enteritis remains a major issue in the farming of numerous carnivorous species fed a diet partly constituted of soybean meal. Numerous strategies have been deployed to mitigate soybean-induced inflammation in fish. These include the supplementation of glutamine, arginine, resveratrol, microalgae, bacteria grown on natural gas and lactoferrin in the feed [40–44]. Fermentation of soybean meal prior to feeding has also been tested in turbot with encouraging results, suppressing the intestinal inflammation and enhancing the intestinal integrity [45]. Furthermore, efforts in selecting resistant fish with increased tolerance to plant diets have been made in some species such as rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) [46]. In yellowtail kingfish, efforts in finding alternatives to soybean meal showed that poultry byproduct, faba bean and lupin kernel meals represent good protein sources compared to corn gluten and blood meals [47]. Here, we investigate both the microbiota and gene expression across the gut and skin mucosal surfaces of healthy fish and fish at different

stages of enteritis, identifying important microbial changes and differentially expressed host genes and associated pathways that reflect the health status of the fish.

The gastrointestinal microbiota of diseased farmed yellowtail kingfish was dominated by an uncultured *Mycoplasmataceae* sp. Members of this family are typically found in the gut of farmed fish including Atlantic salmon, rainbow trout and common carp [48–50]. In our study, we found that this member was prevalent in diseased fish (both at the early and late stage of gut enteritis) when compared to healthy fish, indicating a potential harmful effect of these bacteria. In zebrafish, *Mycoplasma* was prevalent in fish exposed to a parasite (*Pseudocapillaria tomentosa*) and positively correlated with hyperplasia [18]. It was hypothesized that this member was responsible for the lesions in the fish, confirming a potential harmful role of certain *Mycoplasma* sp. In fact, this genus already includes known fish pathogens, such as *Mycoplasma mobile*, a bacterium colonizing the gills of freshwater fish [51]. In contrast, recent genome reconstruction analysis revealed a mutualistic lifestyle of new *Mycoplasma* species isolated from Atlantic salmon and hadal snailfish (*Pseudoliparis swirei*) [50,52]. In our study, it is unclear whether this bacterium played a role in the disease, or was the result of the poor overall health of the fish. Thus, functional analyses (e.g., shotgun metagenomics or metatranscriptomics) may be further required to elucidate the role of this bacterium in yellowtail kingfish health.

The overall gut bacterial community was significantly different between healthy and diseased fish, and was associated with a loss of diversity in the fish at the late stage of the disease. This is supported by the literature, where numerous investigations reported a loss of microbial diversity in fish exposed to stress or disease [26]. In addition, the overall skin microbiota was significantly different between all three health states, indicating that this gut disease not only influences the gut microbiota but also the outer surface microbiota, as previously shown by our group [21]. We found the largest number of differentially abundant ASVs between fish at the early stage of the disease and fish at the late stage of the disease, even though these fish were housed in the same cage. In contrast, very few differentially abundant ASVs were detected between healthy and fish at the late stage of the disease despite them being housed in two different cages separated by almost 7 km. While the fish skin microbiota has been shown to be a lot more sensitive to the environment than the gut [53], our results shows that health status can also play a major role in shaping the fish skin microbiota regardless of the surrounding environment. Interestingly and in contrast to the gut microbiota, we found a drastic loss of skin microbial diversity and evenness in the fish at the early stage of the disease when compared to healthy fish and fish at the late stage of the disease. Loss of diversity and evenness are characterized by a reduced resilience and functional capacity of the microbial communities, indicating that the gut and skin microbiota of diseased fish may have lost important functions including resistance to opportunistic pathogens [54].

To better understand this loss of bacterial diversity in the fish skin at the early stage of the disease, we investigated the immune response through transcriptomic (RNA-Seq) analysis. Firstly, we found that the immune system pathway was upregulated in the fish at the early stage. More specifically, the cytokine–cytokine receptor interaction pathway was upregulated in this condition compared to healthy fish, and significantly upregulated when compared to fish at the late stage of the disease. In this pathway, interleukin 8-like, regakine 1-like and CXC (Cystine-X-Cystine, where X is any amino acid) chemokine receptor type2-like genes were significantly upregulated in the fish at the early stage of the disease compared to the other two health states. These genes could potentially be used as biomarkers for the early detection of gut enteritis in yellowtail kingfish, although this requires further validation. Interleukin 8 was found to modulate the early cytokine immune response in rainbow trout, and its upregulation at the early stage of the disease indicates a proinflammatory response in the fish skin [55]. This same gene was found to be upregulated in the skin of rainbow trout after Ich infection, suggesting that its expression could be a potential useful biomarker for the detection of a proinflammatory response in fish [56]. CXC motif chemokine receptor 2 (*cxcr2*) upregulation has been associated with numerous inflammations and is known to induce the recruitment of neutrophils, supporting the idea of an immune response at this stage of the disease [57]. In addition, we found

a strong upregulation of the foxO signaling pathway in the early stage fish, driven by a significant upregulation of recombination activating gene 1 (*rag1*). The protein encoded by this gene is involved in antibody and T-cell receptors and as such, plays an important role in the recognition of pathogen and immunoregulation. In fact, *rag1* is a known gene marker for the early development of the fish immune system, and therefore, the upregulation of this gene at the earliest stage of the disease confirmed an immune response in the skin mucosal surface [58]. In support of this, a recent study showed that *rag1*-deficient zebrafish did not develop intestinal inflammation when fed an inflammatory diet constituted of soybean, in contrast to normal fish [11]. This highlights the role of adaptive immunity in the response against enteritis, a feature confirmed in yellowtail kingfish. Altogether, these changes in gene expression suggest a strong immune response located in the fish skin. Some changes also highlight compromised functions within this mucosal surface. For instance, we observed a downregulation of the adherens junction, gap junction and tight junction—three pathways extremely important for barrier function [59]. Considering the vital role of the skin as a physical barrier to prevent the intrusion of potential pathogens, these changes could lead to the dysfunction of this organ, resulting in an increased disease susceptibility [60].

In the skin of fish at the late stage of the disease, we observed a significant upregulation of the ECM–receptor interaction and focal adhesion pathways. The ECM–receptor interaction pathway plays important functions in the host immune system including cell proliferation, differentiation and survival, intercellular communication and the regulation of leukocytes into inflamed tissues [61]. The upregulation of several proteins involved in this pathway likely reflect the advanced stage of the disease in which the host is developing a strong response to repair tissues. The upregulation of the focal adhesion pathway is not surprising considering its close interaction with the ECM–receptor interaction pathway. Indeed, focal adhesion also plays a role in the regulation of cell cycle progression and its dysregulation has been shown in numerous human diseases such as cancer and Alzheimer’s disease [62,63]. Within this pathway, we found an upregulation of integrin alpha subunit (ITGA) associated genes. These integrins are also involved in the ECM pathway and can be characterized as signaling molecules controlling cell differentiation, growth and survival [64]. In contrast to the fish at the early stage of the disease, fish at the late stage showed a downregulation of numerous cytokines (e.g., chemokines and interleukins) in the skin. This would suggest that the fish have passed the acute immune response phase and is reflective of a very weakened host. The downregulation of the immune system across the six KEGG pathways at level 3 confirms this hypothesis.

Although we investigated the influence of a gut disease, few genes were differentially regulated during disease in the gastrointestinal tract. Recently, it was shown that grass carp can exert different responses along the intestinal tract to induce inflammation when fed soybean β -conglycinin [65]. More specifically, while the midgut and hindgut showed signs of inflammation, no changes were found in the foregut. Similarly, it was found that rainbow trout exhibits different microbial and immune responses across different regions of the digestive tract (e.g., mouth, pharynx, stomach, foregut, midgut and hindgut) following viral infection [66]. In this study, we only investigated the hindgut gene expression and microbiota, and therefore, other parts of the intestinal system could have had differential gene expression and/or microbial changes that went undetected.

Recently, the concept of the hologenome has gained popularity. This concept argues that the genome of the host and its associated microbial communities (microbiome) are in constant interaction, and as such, cannot be viewed independently [67]. It is well known that fish regulate their microbiota across all mucosal surfaces through mucus production, immune related cells and antimicrobial peptides [2]. Here, we speculate that the loss of microbial diversity observed in the skin of fish at the early stage of the disease could be linked with the upregulation of the immune system. More specifically, the upregulation of *rag1*, *il8* and *cxc2* may be in part responsible for the observed changes in the skin microbiota. Moreover, *cxc2* (also called *il8rb*) encodes a protein which is a receptor for *il8*. As such, *il8* and *cxc2* interact closely and the upregulation of them both is not surprising. Since *il8* is associated with antimicrobial responses [66,68–70], its upregulation in the skin of fish at the early

stage of the disease may have played a role in this observed loss of microbial diversity. Furthermore, the microbiota is known to modulate the host immune response [71]. More specifically, the production of several inflammatory cytokines can be driven by specific microbiota, highlighting the importance of host–microbiota interactions [72]. In this study, the number of replicates was insufficient in order to correlate the host gene expression with microbial diversity and further work should be performed in order to better understand host–microbe interactions, in particular in a health and disease context.

5. Conclusions

In this study, we found that gut enteritis perturbed the yellowtail kingfish gut microbiota, with an enrichment of an uncultured *Mycoplasmataceae* sp. in diseased fish. We observed profound changes within the skin microbiota, highlighting the sensitivity of this mucosal surface in relation to the host health. More specifically, fish at the early stage of the disease had a significant loss of microbial skin diversity when compared to both healthy fish and fish at the late stage of the disease. Surprisingly, gene expression within the gut did not widely differ between health conditions. In contrast, numerous differentially expressed pathways and genes were found in the skin, particularly in the fish at the late stage of the disease where several metabolic pathways were differentially expressed.

Supplementary Materials: The following are available online at <http://www.mdpi.com/2076-2607/8/9/1267/s1>. Figure S1: Rarefaction plot of all samples used in this study showing sufficient sequencing depth at 16,255 reads/sample. Figure S2: PCoA plot representing the gene expression of both gut and skin samples of all fish used in this study. Figure S3: Boxplot representing the Pielou’s evenness of the gut microbiota for the different health status. Statistical differences were assessed using a Kruskal–Wallis test. Figure S4: Boxplot representing the Pielou’s evenness of the skin microbiota for the different health status. Statistical differences were assessed using a Kruskal–Wallis test. Figure S5: Representation of genes involved in the ECM–receptor interaction pathway in the fish at the late stage of the disease. Genes in red were upregulated, in blue were downregulated and in green were not statistically differentially expressed. Figure S6: Boxplot representing the Chao1 richness in the gut microbiota for the different health status. Statistical differences were assessed using a Kruskal–Wallis test. Figure S7: Boxplot representing the Pielou’s evenness in the skin microbiota for the different health status. Statistical differences were assessed using a Kruskal–Wallis test. Figure S8: Boxplot representing the Chao1 richness in the skin microbiota for the different health status. Statistical differences were assessed using a Kruskal–Wallis test. Figure S9: Representation of genes involved in the ECM–receptor interaction pathway in the fish at the late stage of the disease. Genes in red were upregulated, in blue were downregulated and in green were not statistically differentially expressed. Table S1: Number of RNA-seq reads retained for analysis following each step of the bioinformatic pipeline. Table S2: Differential abundant ASVs found in the gut microbiota of fish at the early stage of the disease when compared to healthy fish. Table S3: Differential abundant ASVs found in the gut microbiota of fish at the late stage of the disease when compared to healthy fish. Table S4: Differential abundant ASVs found in the gut microbiota of fish at the late stage of the disease when compared to fish at the early stage of the disease. Table S5: Differential abundant ASVs found in the skin microbiota of fish at the early stage of the disease when compared to healthy fish. Table S6: Differential abundant ASVs found in the skin microbiota of fish at the late stage of the disease when compared to fish at the early stage of the disease. Table S7: Differential abundant ASVs found in the skin microbiota of fish at the late stage of the disease when compared to healthy fish. Table S8: Differentially expressed genes (DEGs) found in the gut of fish at the late stage of the disease when compared to healthy fish. Table S9: Differentially expressed genes (DEGs) found in the gut of fish at the early stage of the disease when compared to healthy fish. Table S10: Differentially expressed genes (DEGs) found in the skin of fish at the late stage of the disease when compared to healthy fish. Table S11: Differentially expressed genes (DEGs) found in the skin of fish at the early stage of the disease when compared to healthy fish.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, A.P.A.O. and T.P.R.A.L.; methodology, A.P.A.O. and T.P.R.A.L.; formal analysis, A.P.A.O., T.P.R.A.L. and J.W.W.; investigation, A.P.A.O. and T.P.R.A.L.; writing—original draft preparation, T.P.R.A.L.; writing—review and editing, A.P.A.O., L.S.W. and J.W.W.; visualization, T.P.R.A.L.; supervision, A.P.A.O., L.S.W. and J.W.W.; funding acquisition, A.P.A.O. and T.P.R.A.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the Australian Government, Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (project number 2016-200.30) and represents an extension of the Nutritional HEALTH theme for the Fisheries and Research Development Corporation (FRDC) project RnD4Profit 14-01-027. Additional funds were provided by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) Postgraduate Scholarship program to cover sequencing cost and APC. Funding for TPRAL was provided by The University of Adelaide International Wildcard Scholarship and CSIRO Postgraduate Scholarship program.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to acknowledge Sarah Catalano for her help during the laboratory work. We thank relevant industry personnel for organizing and allowing access to fish and for assistance in the collection of samples. We also gratefully thank Daniel Borda, Diego Chavez-Moreno, Amelia Camarinha-Silva and Francisca Samsing for their help and discussion regarding data analysis. We also wish to acknowledge AGRF and the MCRI Translational Genomics Unit for providing excellent support in the sequencing of our customized assays.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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**Chapter 3: Antibiotic-induced alterations and
repopulation dynamics of yellowtail kingfish
microbiota**

Statement of Authorship

Title of Paper	Antibiotic-induced alterations and repopulation dynamics of yellowtail kingfish microbiota.
Publication Status	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Published <input type="checkbox"/> Accepted for Publication <input type="checkbox"/> Submitted for Publication <input type="checkbox"/> Unpublished and Unsubmitted work written in manuscript style
Publication Details	Legrand, T.P.R.A., Catalano, S.R., Wos-Oxley, M.L., Wynne, J.W., Weyrich, L.S., Oxley, A.P.A. (2020) Antibiotic-induced alterations and repopulation dynamics of yellowtail kingfish microbiota. <i>Animal microbiome</i> , 2, 26. https://doi.org/10.1186/s42523-020-00046-4

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Contribution to the Paper	Designed and performed the experiment, performed data processing, analysed and interpreted the data, wrote the manuscript.		
Overall percentage (%)	65		
Certification:	This paper reports on original research I conducted during the period of my Higher Degree by Research candidature and is not subject to any obligations or contractual agreements with a third party that would constrain its inclusion in this thesis. I am the primary author of this paper.		
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Co-Author Contributions

By signing the Statement of Authorship, each author certifies that:

- i. the candidate's stated contribution to the publication is accurate (as detailed above);
- ii. permission is granted for the candidate to include the publication in the thesis; and
- iii. the sum of all co-author contributions is equal to 100% less the candidate's stated contribution.

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Contribution to the Paper	Contributed and edited the manuscript.		
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Signature		Date	17/11/2020

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Contribution to the Paper	Advised on interpretation, contributed and edited the manuscript.		
Signature		Date	17/11/2020

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Antibiotic-induced alterations and repopulation dynamics of yellowtail kingfish microbiota

Thibault P. R. A. Legrand^{1,2,3*}, Sarah R. Catalano³, Melissa L. Wos-Oxley⁴, James W. Wynne², Laura S. Weyrich^{1,5} and Andrew P. A. Oxley^{3,6*} **Abstract**

Background: The use of antibiotics in aquaculture is a common infection treatment and is increasing in some sectors and jurisdictions. While antibiotic treatment can negatively shift gut bacterial communities, recovery and examination of these communities in fish of commercial importance is not well documented. Examining the impacts of antibiotics on farmed fish microbiota is fundamental for improving our understanding and management of healthy farmed fish. This work assessed yellowtail kingfish (*Seriola lalandi*) skin and gut bacterial communities after an oral antibiotic combination therapy in poor performing fish that displayed signs of enteritis over an 18-day period. In an attempt to promote improved bacterial re-establishment after antibiotic treatment, faecal microbiota transplantation (FMT) was also administered via gavage or in the surrounding seawater, and its effect was evaluated over 15 days post-delivery.

Results: Antibiotic treatment greatly perturbed the global gut bacterial communities of poor-performing fish – an effect that lasted for up to 18 days post treatment. This perturbation was marked by a significant decrease in species diversity and evenness, as well as a concomitant increase in particular taxa like an uncultured *Mycoplasmataceae* sp., which persisted and dominated antibiotic-treated fish for the entire 18-day period. The skin-associated bacterial communities were also perturbed by the antibiotic treatment, notably within the first 3 days; however, this was unlike the gut, as skin microbiota appeared to shift towards a more ‘normal’ (though disparate) state after 5 days post antibiotic treatment. FMT was only able to modulate the impacts of antibiotics in some individuals for a short time period, as the magnitude of change varied substantially between individuals. Some fish maintained certain transplanted gut taxa (i.e. present in the FMT inoculum; namely various *Aliivibrio* related ASVs) at Day 2 post FMT, although these were lost by Day 8 post FMT.

Conclusion: As we observed notable, prolonged perturbations induced by antibiotics on the gut bacterial assemblages, further work is required to better understand the processes/dynamics of their re-establishment following antibiotic exposure. In this regard, procedures like FMT represent a novel approach for promoting improved microbial recovery, although their efficacy and the factors that support their success requires further investigation.

Keywords: 16SrRNA, Microbiome, FMT, Antibiotics, Fish

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Introduction

Aquaculture is the fastest growing sector in the food animal industry [1]. However, its development is not without challenges. Due to the intensive methods used in production, diseases are common and often require the use of therapeutics. While there are a range of alternative treatment options available (e.g. probiotics, prebiotics, synbiotics, postbiotics, phytobiotics, phage therapy, or quorum sensing interference), antibiotics remains the most common therapy used in some aquaculture sectors to treat microbial infections [2, 3]. Worldwide, 67 antibiotic compounds were reported to be used in 11 of the top 15 highest producing countries, with oxytetracycline, sulphadiazine, and florfenicol the most commonly used in the industry [4]. In some countries, usage has increased substantially in recent years. For instance, antibiotic use doubled over a three-year period (from 143 to 382 tons between 2013 and 2016) in the Chilean salmon industry, which was largely attributed to the increased use of florfenicol and oxytetracycline for combatting *Piscirickettsia salmonis* infection [5]. While antibiotic use varies significantly between countries due to different laws and regulations [4, 6], there is widespread concern regarding the development of antimicrobial resistance in the global aquaculture industry and their broader impacts on the environment [5, 7–10].

The risks posed by the use of antimicrobials also include changes in an animal's microbiota. Many of the antibiotics used in the aquaculture industry are considered to be broad-spectrum, and may indiscriminately act on both the pathogenic and commensal constituents [11]. Perturbation of the gut microbiota following antibiotic exposure has been reported in various fish species [8, 12, 13] and may be associated with changes in microbial enzymatic activity, gene expression, and protein and metabolite synthesis [14]. In humans and other animals, antibiotic use may have prolonged effects on the gut bacterial composition, leading to widespread perturbations and the extinction of some species [15]. Considering the importance of the microbiota in nutrient metabolism, digestion, and disease resistance [16], antibiotic-induced changes may be functionally detrimental, impacting the health and fitness of the animal. Knowledge of the specific impacts caused by select antibiotics as well as strategies that seek to minimise their effects on the fishes' microbiota are thus likely to be a critical feature for supporting optimal performance and productivity of the system.

Prospects for overcoming or improving the inherent effects that antibiotics impose on the microbiota, or for optimising the overall health and fitness of fish in a production context, are increasing in demand and have been extensively studied within the last decade. This includes common strategies that aim to modulate the fish

microbiota through the diet in order to improve disease resistance, nutrient digestibility, tolerance to stress, and reproduction [17]. More recently, however, procedures such as faecal microbiota transplantation (FMT) have been touted as a prospective, more holistic approach that has the capacity to improve outcomes by modulating the entire microbial community and facilitating the re-establishment of defunct species [18, 19]. First developed in 1958 to cure pseudomembranous enterocolitis in humans [20], FMT has since been used to successfully treat a range of other conditions including, among others, *Clostridioides difficile* infection, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), and obesity [21]. Its role in mitigating the effects of antibiotics has also been recently demonstrated in humans and mice and has been shown to be more effective than treatment with probiotics, which instead resulted in a delayed or incomplete reconstitution of the microbiota [22]. In animal production systems, similar findings have also been reported for chickens, alongside improvements in nutritional capacity [23]. To the best of our knowledge, FMT has thus far not been investigated in fish in response to antibiotic-induced microbiota alterations, although experiments in African turquoise killifish (*Nothobranchius furzeri*) have demonstrated the power of the approach, revealing its capacity to restore bacterial diversity in old fish and influence longevity [24].

In Australia, the commercial production of valuable species, such as yellowtail kingfish (*Seriola lalandi*), is impeded by a variety of diseases including fluke infestation and gut enteritis [25, 26]. The latter is known to occur when fish are farmed at suboptimal temperatures and fed with a high proportion of soybean meal, although the mechanisms underlying this disease remain poorly understood and have limited treatment options available beyond antibiotics [26]. Such conditions have also been reported to be accompanied by changes in the bacterial diversity of the outer mucosa (skin and gills), suggesting a body-wide response [27]. An improved understanding of the effects of treatments, as well as new strategies that ameliorate treatment effects on the microbiota of fish suffering from gut disease, are warranted. Here, we investigated the influence of a novel antibiotic combination-therapy formulated for broad spectrum activity against a range of microorganisms (comprising commonly used oxytetracycline, as well as erythromycin and metronidazole) on the gut and skin mucosal microbiota of poor performing yellowtail kingfish (i.e. those suffering from enteritis); and the prospective role of FMT in gut microbiota repopulation.

Methods

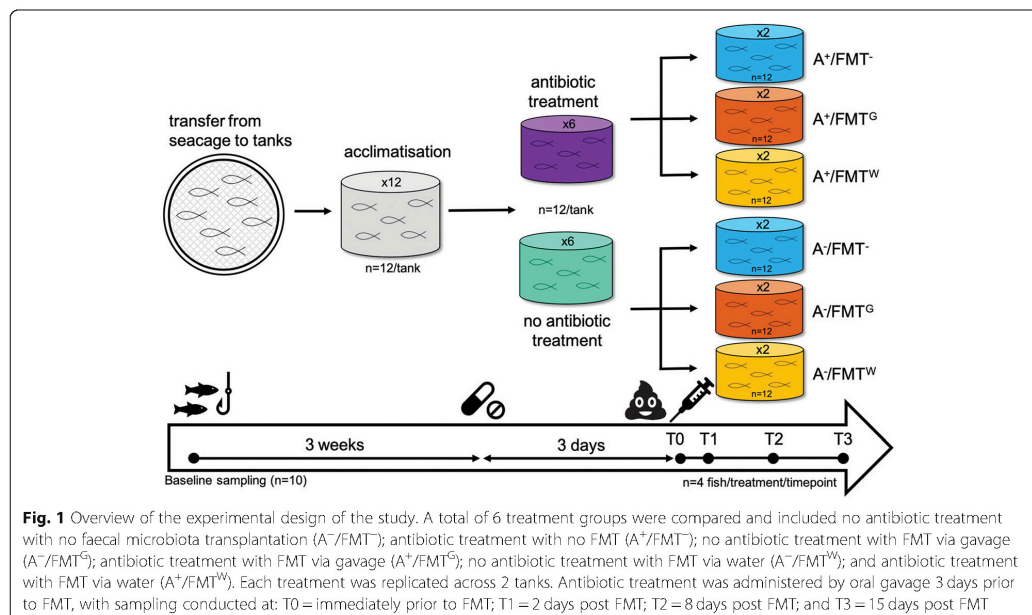
Study design and experimental set-up

To assess the impacts of antibiotics and FMT on the gut and skin microbiota of yellowtail kingfish exhibiting

symptomatic features of gut disease (as characterised by low body condition and weight loss), a total of 217 fish with a mean weight of ~1.6 kg were obtained from a single seacage (comprising fish of the same cohort, though of mixed genetics) under the auspices of a commercial aquaculture enterprise from temperate waters of southern Australia according to industry best practice veterinary care. Of these, 10 fish were randomly sampled to provide baseline bacterial community composition data. Fish were transported in a water tanker (with oxygen supplementation) to a research facility and housed in 5000 L tanks. Tanks were supplied with seawater at ambient temperature (12.7–14.0 °C; see Additional file 1: Table S1) from a flow-through system with mechanical filtration (drum filter). Additional water parameters were also recorded during the length of the experiment such as dissolved oxygen (94–115% saturation; see Additional file 1: Table S2), pH (7.59–7.73; see Additional file 1: Table S3), salinity (36–37‰; see Additional file 1: Table S4), ammonia concentration (< 0.25 ppm; see Additional file 1: Table S5), and CO₂ concentration (always below detection level). Fish were fed to satiation once a day with the same proprietary feed formulation used in the commercial operation and were allowed to acclimatise for 3 weeks prior to the investigation. Tanks were flushed once a day to eliminate faeces at the bottom of the tanks. During acclimation, 15 fish were randomly sampled for histopathological examination to confirm their condition, revealing mild enteritis (as conducted by

an external fish pathologist). After acclimation (~3 weeks), a total of 144 fish were distributed among 12 tanks ($n = 12$ fish/tank). The lengths and weights of all fish were recorded following brief sedation in 14 mg/L AQUI-S (AQUI-S New Zealand Ltd.) solution in surrounding seawater as described previously [26]. The total fish weight for each tank was recorded with an attempt to make these as even as possible (see Additional file 1: Table S6).

The experimental design comprised 6 treatment groups: (1) no antibiotic treatment with no FMT (A⁻/FMT⁻); (2) antibiotic treatment with no FMT (A⁺/FMT⁻); (3) no antibiotic treatment with FMT via oral gavage (A⁻/FMT^G); (4) antibiotic treatment with FMT via oral gavage (A⁺/FMT^G); (5) no antibiotic treatment with FMT via water (A⁻/FMT^W); and (6) antibiotic treatment with FMT via water (A⁺/FMT^W). Each treatment was replicated across two tanks of 12 fish (Fig. 1). Antibiotic treatment was administered by oral gavage 3 days prior to FMT treatment and consisted of a combination therapy comprising oxytetracycline (200 mg/kg), erythromycin (50 mg/kg) and metronidazole (50 mg/kg) (Sigma-Aldrich), which was prepared the morning of administration in polypropylene glycol (Sigma-Aldrich). Dose was determined in consultation with veterinary staff based on existing knowledge from *Seriola* or other species and was formulated to maximise the depletion of various types of gram positive and negative bacteria.



The FMT inoculum comprised the gut contents from 102 \times ~3.5–4.5 kg healthy fish from a “healthy” seacage, where fish showed no signs of disease. The gut contents were obtained by the manual stripping of fish on-site at the commercial operation, which was immediately transported back to the research facility on ice for use in the trial on the same day. A total of 110 mL of faecal material was obtained and was made up to 400 mL in filter-sterilised seawater (as prepared using a 0.22 μ m Nalgene™ Rapid-Flow™ filter unit, Thermo Fisher Scientific), and mixed thoroughly by vortexing. The inoculum was subsequently split into two parts, where one part (200 mL) was inoculated with one capsule (containing ~10 billion cells, ~ 5×10^7 cells/mL) of the commercial probiotic *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GG (LGG®) (Inner Health), a strain previously reported to have protective effects against pathogen infection [28], while the other part was left untreated; these are herein referred to as ‘spiked’ and ‘unspiked’ inoculum respectively. FMT was administered by oral gavage or in the surrounding seawater of the tanks 3 days post-antibiotic treatment, as described below.

For the treatment groups that received antibiotics and/or FMT via gavage, fish were first sedated in seawater comprising 14 mg/L AQUI-S (as described above) and then administered the treatment via a sterile 5 mL syringe fitted with a soft silicone tube [ϕ 5 mm] (Gecko Optical Scientific Equipment, Australia) that was just long enough to enter the stomach (~17 cm), as guided through a larger [ϕ 10 mm] flexible PVC tube. Care was taken to minimise stress by placing the fish on a cushioned surface, covering with a seawater saturated cloth, and gently restraining the fish during the brief procedure. A total of 1.5 mL of antibiotics and/or 3 mL of FMT inoculum was administered to each fish during the respective treatments.

For the treatment groups that received the FMT inoculum within the surrounding seawater, the water level of the tanks was dropped to ~1500 L. The tanks were cleaned to remove any accumulated faecal material and then 60 mL of the spiked or unspiked inoculum sample was added to a 5 liter bucket of seawater which was then added to the respective treatment tanks. Fish were then allowed to bath in the FMT inoculum treated water with no exchange (though with oxygen supplementation) for 3 hours before being refilled to full capacity.

Sampling of fish

Alongside the 10 fish collected for baseline analyses, four fish per treatment/time point ($n = 2$ fish/replicate tank) were sampled over an 18 day period (i.e. at T0 [3 days post antibiotic treatment]; T1 [5 days post antibiotic treatment and 2 days after FMT]; T2 [11 days post antibiotic treatment and 8 days after FMT]; and T3 [18 days

post antibiotic treatment and 15 days after FMT]) (Fig. 1). From each fish, a swab of the skin and a scraping of the hindgut was collected. Swabs of the skin were conducted as detailed earlier using sterile FLOQSwabs® (COPAN) [27]. For the hindgut, the gastrointestinal tract was first removed, separated from the fore and midgut, an incision made along its length with a sterile scalpel blade to expose the inner mucosal surface, and a scraping of the entire region obtained using a sterile glass microscope slide (with care taken to avoid excessive faecal material). Samples were stabilised immediately in RNAlater™ (Ambion) and stored at -20°C until downstream RNA extraction. In addition, 500 μ L aliquots of the spiked and unspiked inoculum sample were placed in 15 mL tubes with 1.5 mL of RNAlater™ and stored at -20°C until downstream nucleic acid extraction. Finally, 1 liter of seawater was also taken from the seacage at the time of the initial fish collection, and 1 liter from a tank at the start and end of the experiment (i.e. at T0 and T3).

Nucleic acid extraction, library preparation and Illumina sequencing

To investigate the active and thus likely resident bacterial community constituents, RNA was extracted from hindgut scrapings, skin swabs and spiked and unspiked FMT inoculum as described previously [27]. In brief, samples were placed into lysing matrix B tubes (MP Biomedicals) containing 1 mL of ice-cold RLT buffer supplemented with 1% β -mercaptoethanol v/v (Sigma-Aldrich). Bead-beating was performed to disrupt the samples using the FastPrep-24™ 5G instrument (MP Biomedicals) at an intensity setting of 5.5 for 45 s. Samples were then placed on ice, disrupted a second time using the same settings, and centrifuged at $14,000\times g$ for 10 min at 4°C . RNA was then extracted from the supernatant using the RNeasy mini kit (Qiagen) following the manufacturer’s instructions. The Turbo DNA-free™ kit (Life Technologies) was used to remove any contaminating gDNA. RNA extracts were then converted to cDNA using the Superscript™ III First Strand Synthesis System (Life Technologies) according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

To evaluate the contribution of the surrounding environmental bacterial consortia on the fish microbiota, DNA was extracted from the seawater samples following filtration onto 0.22 μ m Nalgene™ Rapid-Flow™ filters (Thermo Fisher Scientific) using the FastDNA™ Spin Kit for Soil (MP Biomedicals) according to the manufacturer’s instructions. In addition, DNA was also extracted from the spiked and unspiked FMT inoculum samples using the same kit to evaluate the contribution of any taxa not represented in the RNA extracts. All samples were subsequently concentrated by ethanol precipitation

using standard procedures, quantified using the Nano-Drop 2000 spectrophotometer (ThermoFisher Scientific) and stored at -20°C prior to downstream library preparation.

The V1-V2 region of the 16S rRNA gene was amplified from the extracted cDNA and DNA extracts using universal eubacterial primers 27F and 338R, as described previously [27], and in conjunction with positive and negative (no template) PCR reagent controls. Briefly, two μL of cDNA and five μL of each sample were first subjected to 20 cycles of PCR, whereby one μL of this mixture from the first round was used as template in a further 15 cycles of PCR for incorporating individual barcodes and Illumina specific adaptors. Finally, one μL of the resultant mixture was used as a template in a final 10-cycle PCR for incorporating the Illumina multiplexing sequencing and index primers. Libraries were then purified using Agencourt AMPure XP beads (Beckman Coulter) and quantified using the Quant-iT[™] Picogreen[®] dsDNA kit (Life Technologies) before being pooled in equimolar ratios and sequenced on the MiSeq platform (Illumina, San Diego, CA, United States) using 250 nt paired-end sequencing chemistry through the Australian Genome Research Facility (AGRF, North Melbourne, VIC, Australia).

Bioinformatics and statistical analysis

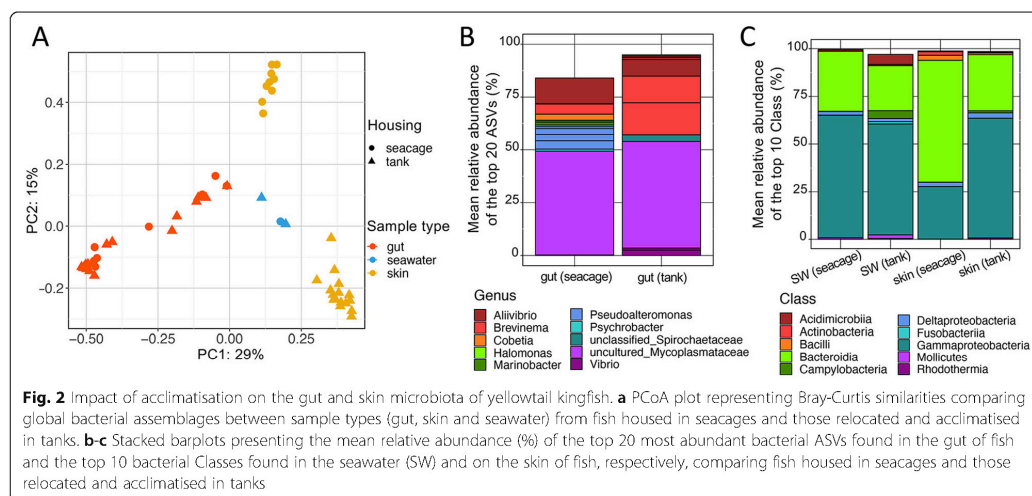
Sequence reads were paired using PEAR (v0.9.5) where adapter sequences were also removed [29]. The merged fastq files were then processed and analysed using the QIIME2 (v2019.1) pipeline [30]. Demultiplexed paired-end sequence reads were truncated to a length of 300 bp, quality filtered and denoised into amplicon sequence variants (ASVs) using the DADA2 plugin [31]. Sequencing resulted in a total of 15,187,504 demultiplexed paired-end reads from 214 samples (average of 65,463 reads/sample, range 7254 – 159,600). Subsequent denoising, removal of reads associated with mitochondria, filtering of Eukaryote and unclassified Kingdom (after assigning taxonomy) sequences, and removal of samples with low coverage (< 9848 reads), resulted in 12, 116,464 reads across 211 samples for downstream analysis. Each sample was rarefied to a depth of 9848 reads resulting in a total of 8255 ASVs in the dataset. Alpha rarefaction revealed sufficient sequencing coverage of the remaining samples (Additional file 2: Figure S1). Taxonomy was assigned to each ASV using the q2-feature-classifier against the Silva 132 99% OTUs reference sequences resource [32]. Alpha-diversity metrics (Shannon's diversity, Pielou's evenness, Faith's phylogenetic diversity and total observed ASVs as a measure of richness) were estimated using q2-diversity. QIIME artefacts were imported into R using the package Qiime2R and plots were made using Phyloseq and ggplot2 [33].

Beta diversity metrics (Bray-Curtis dissimilarity matrix) and Principle Coordinate Analysis (PCoA) using the Bray-Curtis matrix were performed with Phyloseq. To investigate the influence of antibiotic and FMT treatment on the bacterial assemblages, read abundances for each ASV in the feature table were square-root transformed to down-weight the impact of a few extremely dominant ASVs. Statistical differences for the univariate measures, such as, alpha diversity were performed using 2-way ANOVA, accounting for both the treatment (i.e. antibiotic or FMT treatment) and time. For multivariate measures, significant differences between a priori predefined groups of samples were evaluated using both two-way and one-way permutational multivariate analysis of variance (PERMANOVA), allowing for type III (partial) sums of squares, fixed effects of sum to 0 for mixed terms, and exact p -values generated using unrestricted permutation of raw data [34], using the Adonis function in R. The function *pairwise.adonis* with Bonferroni correction was used to investigate the significance between timepoints when time was a significant factor from the PERMANOVA analysis. Differential abundance was assessed using Deseq2 with p -value corrected using the default Benjamini-Hochberg false discovery rate method, as suggested recently for the analysis of microbiome data with a small number of replicates per treatment (< 20) [35, 36]. In some cases (e.g. for some ASVs), the data distribution was assumed to not follow a normal distribution, so the non-parametric version of 2-sample or k -sample tests were performed (e.g. the Mann-Whitney U test or Kruskal-Wallis H test). In order to quantify the change in magnitude in the bacterial communities after antibiotic and FMT treatment, pair-wise comparisons between each pair of samples were made using the Bray-Curtis similarity algorithm, where a higher value indicates that samples share more ASVs of a similar abundance.

Results

Impact of acclimatisation on the gut and skin microbiota

In order to evaluate the effects of antibiotics and FMT on the gut and skin bacterial communities of yellowtail kingfish with poor gut health, fish suffering from a putative enteritis were first translocated from an offshore seacage to a series of onshore treatment tanks where they were allowed to acclimatise for 3 weeks prior to commencing the trial. The impact of this change was initially assessed by comparing a subset of fish sampled at the time of collection from the seacage ($n = 10$) to a group of fish sampled from the tanks 3 weeks post acclimatisation ($n = 12$). Ordination of the samples based on Bray-Curtis dissimilarity matrix revealed independent clustering of the skin and gut samples (Fig. 2a) (one-way PERMANOVA: Pseudo-F = 38.3, $p < 0.01$), as expected.

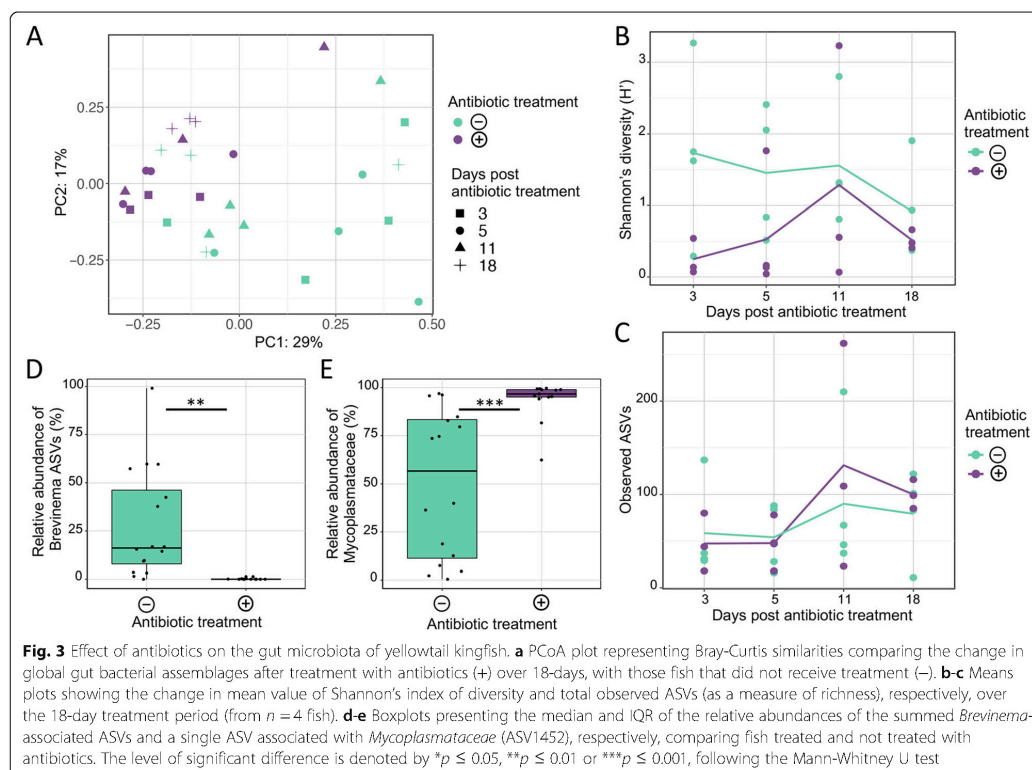


However, the acclimatisation process had no effect on the global gut bacterial communities (one-way PERMANOVA: Pseudo-F = 2.5, $p = 0.063$) (Fig. 2a), with both the seacage and tank fish comprising similar mean relative abundances of the most dominant ASVs (namely unclassified *Mycoplasmataceae* and *Allivibrio*) (Fig. 2b). However, for these and many of the other ASVs detected in this study, species level assignment could not be determined. The gut bacterial assemblages of tank fish comprised a number of additional notable ASVs, representing various genera particularly *Brevinema*, *Vibrio*, and an unclassified *Spirochaetaceae*, while seacage fish also comprised *Pseudoalteromonas*, *Cobetia* and *Halomonas* (Fig. 2b). Differential abundance analysis identified a total of 17 ASVs that were differentially abundant, whereby two were enriched in tank fish (namely *Brevinema* and *Allivibrio*) vs. 15 in seacage fish (which included eight that were associated with *Pseudoalteromonas*) (Fig. 2b, Additional file 1: Table S7).

In evaluating the effect of acclimatisation on the skin bacterial communities, a significant difference was linked to acclimatisation (one-way PERMANOVA: Pseudo-F = 14.8, $p < 0.001$, Fig. 2a), as the fish acclimatised in tanks showed a shift in the ratio of *Proteobacteria*:*Bacteroidetes* (P:B ratio) with the *Gammaproteobacteria* becoming the more dominant Class (Fig. 2c). Specifically, the mean P:B ratio changed from < 0.5 to > 2 after fish were translocated from seacages and acclimatised in tanks for 3 weeks (Additional file 2: Figure S2). The seawater samples taken from the seacage and the tanks comprised similar bacterial assemblages and clustered independently to those taken from the skin and gut (Fig. 2a).

Effect of antibiotics on the gut and skin microbiota

To explore the impact of the antibiotic combination therapy on the gut and skin associated bacterial communities, fish from two tanks treated with antibiotics were compared with fish from two untreated tanks over a period of 18 days (i.e. at days 3, 5, 11 and 18 days post antibiotic treatment). Antibiotic treatment had a significant effect on the global gut bacterial communities (two-way PERMANOVA: Pseudo-F = 4.4, $p < 0.001$), with no significant difference over time (Pseudo-F = 1.39, $p = 0.085$) and no significant interaction effect between antibiotic treatment and time (Pseudo-F = 0.86, $p = 0.669$) (Fig. 3a), indicating that the antibiotic effect lasted for up to 18 days. This corresponded with a loss of ASV diversity and evenness within the gut bacterial assemblages of fish treated with antibiotics (Fig. 3b and Additional file 2: Figure S3a), as based on measures of Shannon's diversity (two-way ANOVA: $F = 5.36$, $p = 0.029$) and Pielou's evenness ($F = 10.98$, $p = 0.003$) respectively. No significant differences were observed for these diversity metrics over time, indicating that the community did not recover over the 18-day period ($p > 0.05$). However, this did not correspond to a loss in ASV richness or phylogenetic diversity (two-way ANOVA: $p > 0.05$; Fig. 3c and Additional file 2: Figure S3b), indicating that ASVs were diminished but not completely eliminated following antibiotic treatment. To further explore which microbes were susceptible to the antibiotics, differential abundance analysis of ASVs was performed. Three ASVs were significantly reduced in the gut of antibiotic treated fish: two associated with *Brevinema* (Fig. 3d) and one associated with *Allivibrio* (Additional file 1: Table S8). Moreover, an unclassified *Mycoplasmataceae* related ASV became substantially more dominant in fish



exposed to antibiotic treatment (Fig. 3e). While its abundance in control fish varied considerably, this ASV was always dominant in fish administered antibiotics.

Antibiotic treatment also had a significant impact on the global skin bacterial communities (two-way PERMANOVA: Pseudo-F = 2.74, $p < 0.01$), with the most notable differences occurring up to 3 days post-treatment (Additional file 1: Table S9; Additional file 2: Figure S4). Changes in the global bacterial assemblages were also observed over time, irrespective of antibiotic treatment (two-way PERMANOVA: Pseudo-F = 8.41, $p < 0.001$). Despite some disparity in the clustering of samples from antibiotic treated and control fish, there was a lack of notable difference in the diversity, evenness, richness or phylogenetic diversity, which is likely due to variation observed among fish within some treatment groups (Additional file 2: Figure S5a-S5d). Eight of the total 2672 skin ASVs were significantly more abundant in antibiotic treated fish compared to the control. These included *Tenacibaculum*, *Oleiphilus*, *Glaciecola*, *Paraglaciecola* and an uncultured *Saccharospirillaceae* (Additional file 1: Table S10).

Impact of FMT on the gut microbiota

To measure the effect of FMT on antibiotic perturbed and unperturbed gut associated bacterial communities of yellowtail kingfish, fish from 4 tanks administered FMT via gavage and from 4 tanks administered FMT via water bathing were compared with and without antibiotic pre-treatment (2 tanks per treatment group). In addition, these treatment groups were also compared to fish from untreated tanks and tanks that only received the antibiotic treatment (serving as controls). Fish were endpoint sampled at 0, 2, 8 and 15-days post FMT treatment. In addition, half of FMT-treated tanks were spiked with a specific *Lactobacillus* strain as an internal control (i.e. *L. rhamnosus* GG or LGG[®]). However, this organism was not established or detected in fish receiving this treatment despite its predominance in the spiked inoculum (Fig. 4a). The unspiked FMT inoculum was also sampled to discern the global catalogue and active bacterial constituents by sampling the DNA and RNA respectively. A total of 95 ASVs were detected from DNA, 41 from RNA, and 27 that were detected in both (Additional file 2: Figure S6). To exclude the influence of the environment (seawater) on FMT treatment, ASVs

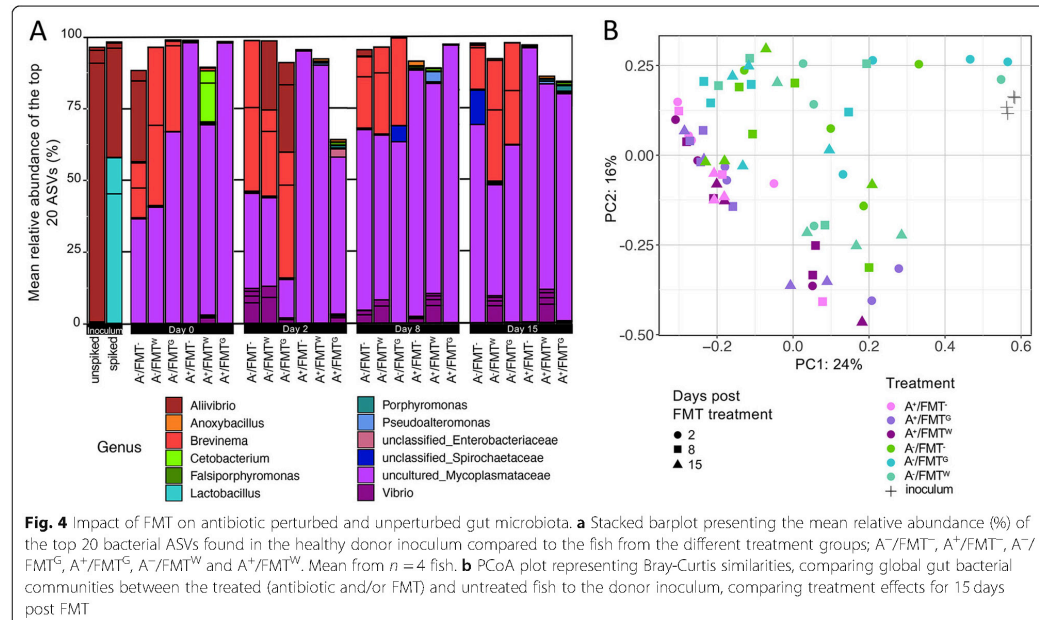


Fig. 4 Impact of FMT on antibiotic perturbed and unperturbed gut microbiota. **a** Stacked barplot presenting the mean relative abundance (%) of the top 20 bacterial ASVs found in the healthy donor inoculum compared to the fish from the different treatment groups; A⁻/FMT^G, A⁻/FMT^W, A⁺/FMT^G, A⁺/FMT^W and A⁺/FMT^W. Mean from $n = 4$ fish. **b** PCoA plot representing Bray-Curtis similarities, comparing global gut bacterial communities between the treated (antibiotic and/or FMT) and untreated fish to the donor inoculum, comparing treatment effects for 15 days post FMT

from the unspiked inoculum were also compared with those from the seawater. Of the 562 ASVs detected in seawater, only 13 occurred in DNA, one in RNA and two occurred in both the DNA and RNA inoculum samples (Additional file 2: Figure S6). These two shared ASVs belonged to an unclassified *Lactobacillus* sp. and *Allivibrio* and were predominant in the unspiked inoculum, with the seawater samples only comprising minute counts, indicating that they likely represent host rather than environmental associated ASVs. The low numbers of host-associated (gut-derived inoculum) ASVs in seawater highlights the independent nature of the sampled niches, and is reflected in the independent clustering of the samples as detailed above and depicted in Fig. 2a.

Fish that received FMT following antibiotic treatment clustered independently away from the donor inoculum as well as to those fish that received FMT without antibiotic treatment, indicating that the antibiotics had a prolonged effect on the global gut bacterial assemblages and FMT establishment (Fig. 4b). This is evident by a clear separation of the A⁺/FMT^G and A⁺/FMT^W samples (purple shaded symbols) from the A⁻/FMT^G and A⁻/FMT^W samples (green shaded symbols). There were no significant differences between the global bacterial communities of fish who received FMT via water or gavage to fish who did not receive FMT, in either the antibiotic treated cohort (two-way PERMANOVA: Pseudo-F = 1.23, p -value = 0.183) or the non-antibiotic treated

cohort (two-way PERMANOVA: Pseudo-F = 0.97, p -value > 0.486). However, there was a significant difference in respect to time post FMT in the non-antibiotic treated cohort (two-way PERMANOVA: Pseudo-F = 2.26, p -value < 0.01), indicating that any slight modifications to the global bacterial communities in this treatment group were not static. Indeed, the fish gut microbiota was significantly different in T1 compared to both T2 ($p = 0.018$) and T3 ($p = 0.018$) although it did not change from T2 to T3 ($p = 0.176$). In contrast, time had no influence on the bacterial communities on the antibiotic-treated cohort (two-way PERMANOVA: Pseudo-F = 1.34, p -value = 0.132).

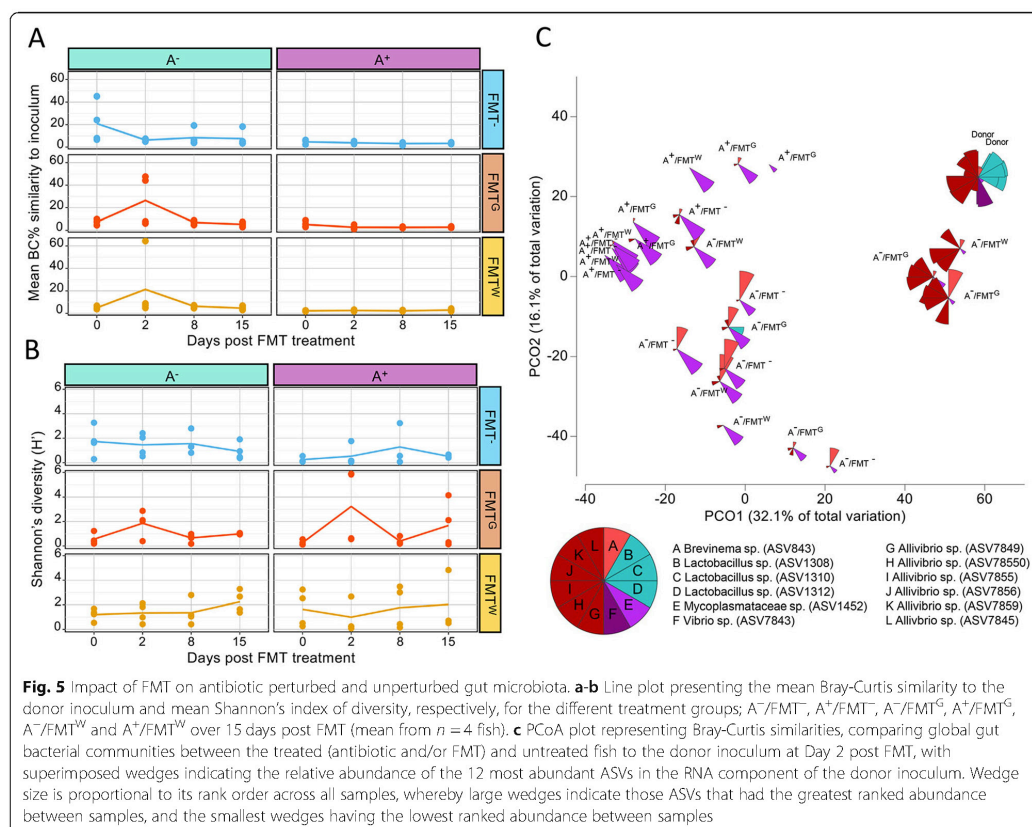
There was notably high variation between treated fish within the same treatment group/tank. For example, of the four fish sampled from each treatment at Day 2, two fish from the A⁻/FMT^G and one fish from the A⁻/FMT^W had global gut bacterial assemblages better resembling the donor inoculum as indicated by the three symbols clustering closely to the grey crosses on Fig. 4b. This suggests that FMT treatment via gavage and water did have some impact on some individual fish (despite the PERMANOVA results on the global bacterial communities above indicating that the effect of FMT was minor). To best quantify the effect of FMT on establishment within treated fish, the change in resemblance to the healthy donor inoculum was calculated using the Bray-Curtis (BC) similarity algorithm. This gives a

percent similarity between pairs of samples. First, the mean similarity between the 16 control fish that received no antibiotic or FMT treatment to the unspiked inoculum was 10.8% (median of 6.5%). This indicates that the healthy donor fish and the poor performing fish do not share the same ASVs or that the relative ASV abundance of shared ASVs differ vastly between these fish cohorts. At the RNA level, the inoculum was dominated by an ASV associated with *Aliivibrio* (see Fig. 4a), while the remaining ASVs belonged to uncultured *Mycoplasmataceae*, *Brevinema*, *Aliivibrio*, *Vibrio*, and *Lactobacillus*.

By comparing the global gut bacterial communities of both treated and untreated fish to the healthy donor inoculum, there was a clear shift in both BC% value and diversity in some treated groups at Day 2 post FMT (Fig. 5a-b). For example, there was an increase in diversity in some fish from the FMT via gavage treatment group, especially in fish treated with antibiotics (A⁺/FMT^G) (Fig. 5b). This increased diversity was also associated with an increased richness in some individuals (Additional file 2: Figure S7). The two fish with high

diversity and richness were sampled from different tanks, excluding a tank effect during the experimental period. As noted above, the fish with greatest similarity to the donor inoculum belonged to the A⁻/FMT^G and A⁻/FMT^W groups, with similarities to the inoculum of 44–64% (Fig. 5a), a marked difference from the median value of ~6% for control fish. However, the other fish within these treatment groups did not have such high similarities to the inoculum (6–8%), suggesting that FMT only works on some animals (Fig. 5a). Furthermore, the lower BC% at later timepoints (8 and 15 days post FMT) indicates that FMT only induced short-lived changes in the bacterial communities.

Of the 79 healthy-donor (RNA/DNA) inoculum ASVs that were not detected in any control fish (A⁻/FMT⁻) or seawater, 17 were detected at least once in the FMT⁺ treatment groups (11 ASVs in the A⁻/FMT⁺ and 6 ASVs in the A⁺/FMT⁺). Sixty-two ASVs were only detected in the inoculum and were not found in any fish from any treatment group or from seawater. A deeper look into those ASVs that were able to be transplanted or



enriched at Day 2 post FMT in these fish that resembled the inoculum included several *Allivibrio* ASVs such as ASV7859, ASV7856, ASV7855, ASV7850 and ASV7849, and a *Lactobacillus* ASV (ASV1312) (Fig. 5c).

Discussion

In commercial aquaculture operations, marine fish species are raised either in open water seacages or on land in tanks. Inherent variations exist between these systems and may have an impact on the fishes' associated microbiota. For example, the gut bacterial assemblages of Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) raised in a recirculation system compared to those from open commercial cages, have been shown to vary and are associated with the occurrence of unique species in each system [37]. In this study, however, no significant differences were observed in the global gut bacterial communities between seacage fish and those that were translocated from seacages and allowed to acclimate in tanks for 3 weeks. Given that both groups of fish originated from the same seacage and were maintained on the same pelleted diet, this is not surprising and suggests that any potential stresses imposed on the translocated fish (e.g. transport and variations in water quality) did not impact their gut communities prior to the commencement of the trial. In contrast, the global skin bacterial communities differed between seacage fish and translocated seacage fish acclimated in tanks, where a shift in the ratio of *Proteobacteria*:*Bacteroidetes* (P:B ratio) was apparent due to the increased abundance of *Gammaproteobacteria* in fish acclimated in tanks. Given the occurrence of similar types of environmental (seawater) bacterial assemblages in both systems, it is likely then that other factors may have contributed to the selection of particular taxa in this instance. This may include factors that contribute to the physiological stress of the animal (e.g. stocking density, current, swimming and oxygen availability), which in turn may impact the way in which they respond and regulate their microbiota [15]. This was recently demonstrated in work reporting on the skin P:B ratio as a biomarker for performance in yellowtail kingfish, where in comparing wild to farmed healthy and diseased seacage fish, low P:B ratios of < 2 were associated with fish with early stages of disease (compared to > 10 in wild) [26]. In this work, the mean P:B ratio changed from < 0.5 to > 2 after fish were translocated from seacages and acclimated in tanks for 3 weeks and may suggest a positive change in the balance of the bacterial communities. However, further work would be required to elucidate whether this corresponds to improvements in the health status of these fish.

In poor performing yellowtail kingfish in this trial, the gut bacterial assemblages were dominated by a number of ASVs relating to uncultured *Mycoplasmataceae* and

Allivibrio. Some additional ASVs were more abundant in either tank or seacage fish and included, among others, *Brevinema* in tank fish, and *Pseudoalteromonas* in the seacage fish. As the dominant constituent here in poor performing fish, the occurrence of a single ASV related to an uncultured *Mycoplasmataceae* raises questions around its association with disease. As a member of the bacterial family, *Mycoplasma* have been previously identified in the gut of other fish such as Atlantic salmon, Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), zebrafish (*Danio rerio*), common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), large-mouth bronze gudgeon (*Coreius guichenoti*) and rainbow trout [38–44]. While recent genome reconstruction indicates a mutualistic lifestyle of this organism in the intestine of certain species like Atlantic salmon and hadal snailfish (*Pseudoliparis swirei*) [45, 46], for others it has been associated with disease [42]. Members of the genus *Allivibrio* largely form part of the natural gut microbiota of various fish (e.g. cods, Atlantic salmon) [47, 48], though certain species have also been found to be pathogenic (e.g. *A. wodanis*, *A. salmonicida*, *A. fischeri*) [49–51]. *Brevinema* has been found in the gut of Atlantic salmon and Atlantic cod (*Gadus morhua*) [52, 53] as well as in rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) with genetic susceptibility to particular pathogens (e.g. *Flavobacterium psychrophylum*) [54]. Some members of the genus *Brevinema* found in Atlantic salmon have, however, been reported to produce butyrate [53], which may support intestinal barrier function and mucosal immunity [55, 56]. With other dominant constituents found here (e.g. *Pseudoalteromonas*) also reported to comprise both pathogenic [57] and beneficial (probiotic-like) species [58–61] questions thus remain around their role and changes in abundance between cultivation systems and requires further elucidation, particularly given the inability to resolve many of the ASVs to a species level in this study.

Antibiotic treatment (consisting of a combination therapy comprising oxytetracycline, erythromycin and metronidazole) had a notable impact on these taxa (e.g. uncultured *Mycoplasmataceae* and *Brevinema*), and the bacterial communities more broadly. Specifically, in the gut, a shift in the global bacterial assemblages was evident immediately in response to the treatment and was marked by a loss of species (ASV) diversity and evenness, which did not recover over the 18 day period. Despite this, the species (ASV) richness did not change substantially over this period, indicating that while antibiotic treatment had a significant effect on these assemblages, many of the species were likely diminished but not completely eliminated. This raises questions around whether these populations have the capacity to return to their 'original' composition over a prolonged period (in this case beyond 18 days), or whether they are likely to

remain in (and continue to evolve from) an altered state after antibiotic treatment. Studies from other fish species have also demonstrated the notable effects that antibiotics may have on the gut microbiota. For example, a loss of gut diversity was observed in Atlantic salmon following oxytetracycline treatment [62], in channel catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*) following florfenicol treatment [63], in fathead minnow (*Pimephales promelas*) after triclosan use [64] and in zebrafish following olaquinox treatment [65]. In contrast, in some cases, it has been reported that antibiotic treatment may even increase or cause a shift in species diversity, as shown for Atlantic salmon and zebrafish [12, 13], and pacu (*Piaractus mesopotamicus*) [8] respectively. This is pertinent given that changes in diversity and evenness within the gut has been suggested to influence functional capacity and disease resilience [66]. While contentious, the consequences of this may be significant, particularly where the communities fail to recover over an extended period, as observed here. Attempts to investigate the functional changes in these communities in response to antibiotic treatment (e.g. using metagenomics or metatranscriptomics) is thus warranted.

Antibiotic treatment also had a significant impact on the global skin bacterial communities, with the most notable differences occurring up to 3 days post-treatment. Unlike the gut though, global changes were also observed to occur with time (irrespective of antibiotic treatment), indicating that while antibiotic treatment may have immediate, broader effects outside of the gut, the skin communities are also inherently more dynamic. This was further exemplified by the notable variation observed between individuals, which obscured any apparent differences in the diversity, evenness, richness or phylogenetic diversity. Instead, several ASVs were found to be significantly enriched in the skin of antibiotic treated fish, particularly *Tenacibaculum*. This is a concern, as this genus encompasses numerous pathogenic species which have the capacity to cause serious ulcerative disease (tenacibaculosis) in a wide range of marine fish species [67–69]. In other fish, treatment with antibiotics has also been shown to have negative effects that extend across the mucosal surfaces. For example, rifampicin exposure (via bathing rather than oral administration) led to the reduction of both the skin and gut associated microbial diversity in western mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*) [70] and led to an increase in the susceptibility to certain opportunistic pathogens and stressors, and a failure to thrive over a prolonged period. Furthermore, it was shown that while these communities stabilise during recovery, they do not appear to return to their original state in the short-term (~ 1 week). In some fish such as sea bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*), it has also been shown that recovery over the longer term (~ 3

weeks following oral administration of oxytetracycline) may vary between the different mucosal surfaces, with the communities associated with the skin reported to be more resilient to those of the gills [71]. In support of this, we also observed here a greater disparity in the effects of antibiotic treatment on the gut rather than the skin bacterial communities. While we cannot exclude the possibility that variations in dosing may have contributed to this finding (e.g. from partial or complete regurgitation of the administered antibiotics), it is likely that this was due to the mode in which the antibiotics were delivered, whereby in this case initial exposure and uptake occurred first in the gut followed by its subsequent dissemination through the body and into the outer mucosal surfaces. Further variations in the specific pharmacokinetics of the antibiotics, however, may also be a contributing feature, particularly given the low level of absorption (< 3% of the administered dose) reported for antibiotics like oxytetracycline in other fish species [72]. The approach to antibiotic administration and treatment should thus be extended to include varied and alternative dosing regimens.

To further assess for which taxa were affected by the antibiotics, differential abundance analysis was performed, revealing three ASVs that were significantly reduced in the gut of antibiotic treated fish (two associated with *Brevinema* and one associated with *Allivibrio*) and one that became substantially more dominant (namely an unclassified *Mycoplasmataceae* sp.). As stated above, the antibiotic treatment administered in this study comprised a combination of agents (namely oxytetracycline, erythromycin and metronidazole), which together have the capacity to target a wide range of both gram-positive and gram-negative organisms. Given that both *Brevinema* and *Allivibrio* are gram-negative (micro-aerophilic or facultative anaerobic) bacteria [73, 74], their depletion following treatment was not surprising. What was unexpected, however, was the increase in dominance of an ASV representing an unclassified *Mycoplasmataceae* species. As a member of this bacterial family, *Mycoplasma* are characterised by a lack of cell wall around their membrane which makes them resistant to antibiotics targeting cell wall synthesis such as beta-lactams, glycopeptides and fosfomycin [75]. However, oxytetracycline (a tetracycline) is known to be an effective treatment for *Mycoplasma* infections as it targets protein rather than cell wall synthesis [76]. In addition, erythromycin (a macrolide) and metronidazole (a nitroimidazole) are also both inhibitors of protein synthesis [77, 78], thus their mode of action should presumably have contributed to the depletion (rather than the increase in abundance) of *Mycoplasma*. Despite this, it has been found that this genus can quickly develop resistance to both macrolides and tetracyclines [79]. While it

is tempting to postulate then that such mechanisms may have led to its increase in abundance here, it is important to note that it could have equally been depleted following antibiotics but remained at a high relative abundance because of the depletion of other taxa. Nevertheless, given the inherent parasitic nature of the *Mycoplasma* [80], it would be prudent to further investigate changes in their actual abundance in response to antibiotic treatment (e.g. using qPCR) in a farm setting more broadly, as well as the likely resistance mechanisms encoded within its genome, and would support an improved understanding of its role in yellowtail kingfish health.

Since antibiotic exposure can perturb the microbiota and may have possible consequences for the health of the animal, attempts have been made in helping the microbiota recover to re-establish homeostasis. Traditionally, this has included, among others, the use of various probiotic microorganisms. For instance, within black molly (*Poecilia sphenops*) the administration of native probiotics (namely *Phaeobacter inhibens* and *Bacillus pumilus*) following antibiotic exposure led to improved disease resistance to pathogenic *Vibrio* species [81]. In this study, we attempted to introduce a purported probiotic *Lactobacillus* species (*L. rhamnosus* GG or LGG[®], of human origin) in conjunction with FMT, which was previously used to improve disease resistance and the immune response in other fish species [82]. However, this organism was not detected in any of the samples here. While this suggests that this strain may thus not be able to colonise the mucosal surfaces of yellowtail kingfish, further validation using more sensitive approaches like qPCR would be required. Despite this, other differentiable *Lactobacillus* related ASVs were detected in the gut samples following FMT treatment, indicating that these organisms may naturally occur in yellowtail kingfish as part of a broader group of other lactic acid bacteria (LAB) reported in finfish [83]. In this regard, the use of autochthonous probiotics for this species would be more appropriate and would likely improve the prospect of successful establishment within the gastrointestinal tract. Recently, a total of 11 isolates (including members of *Shewanella*, *Psychrobacter*, *Acinetobacter*) from yellowtail kingfish was discovered but further work is required to evaluate their potential benefits in the farming of this species [84].

As an alternative, more holistic biological approach for modulating the gut microbiota, FMT was also investigated in this study and was administered to a total of 96 poor-performing yellowtail kingfish. Alongside groups of fish that solely received or were administered FMT following antibiotic pre-treatment, two approaches to FMT were evaluated. As strategies used previously for fish [24, 85, 86], this included the direct delivery of a single FMT inoculum via oral gavage, and the indirect delivery of

this inoculum via bathing in a reduced volume of seawater for a prolonged period (~3 hours). To elucidate the effects of FMT and the approach to its administration, end-point samples of both the gut and skin were evaluated over a 15-day period (i.e. at 0, 2, 8 and 15-days post FMT administration). Although no significant differences in the global bacterial communities were observed between the FMT treated and control groups of fish (regardless of the route of administration), any broad effect of FMT was masked by the notable variation apparent between individuals. Despite this, samples from several of the oral-gavage and seawater bathed FMT-treated fish appeared to cluster more closely to the FMT donor inoculum samples, indicating some level of impact. Indeed, for some fish, a similarity with the donor inoculum of up to 64% was observed (compared to only ~6% for the control fish) and was most notable at Day 2 post FMT treatment. Much lower similarities were observed, however, at the later time points (i.e. at 8 and 15 days post FMT delivery) and for many of the other fish, thus indicating that FMT may only induce short-lived changes in certain individuals. While it is unclear why this was observed, likely explanations may include variations in the “colonisation resistance” of the respective gut communities to the introduction of exogenous microorganisms; a feature that has been suggested for humans and rodents and purported to be exacerbated by treatment with antibiotics [87, 88]. Further investigations into the mechanisms that contribute to resilience would thus be pertinent for improving the efficacy of FMT.

While it is not possible to completely exclude variations in the initial composition of the microbiota between fish in the individual treatment groups (due to end-point sampling), the gut bacterial assemblages of the poor-performing control fish at the beginning of the trial were markedly different to those from the healthy donor inoculum (as derived from 102 healthy seacage fish), and suggests that other factors may have contributed to the higher similarities observed for these select individuals. As postulated in studies using FMT to modulate the gut microbiota of killifish [24], such findings may also include variations in the fish’s immune response and its capacity to influence establishment. Furthermore, genetic diversity is also known to shape the selection of the host microbiota [89–91], potentially resulting in the varied responses to FMT among the same population of fish. Considering that these fish came from a cohort comprising mixed genetics, this may in part also explain why only a small proportion of the total ASVs detected in the inoculum (i.e. 17/79) were observed in the FMT treated fish and may reflect a limitation of the current approach. Nevertheless, given that certain dominant constituents prone to the antibiotic treatment were able to be transferred to select individuals (e.g. *Allivibrio* spp.), this suggests that FMT has some

capacity to influence the microbiota (irrespective of whether it is delivered directly or indirectly) and warrants further investigation. This should include strategies used elsewhere to improve and prolong its effects in other animals, e.g. through the administration of multiple consecutive doses of the FMT inoculum and by pre-treating the inoculum to support the survival of potentially fastidious constituents [92] or by using material derived from wild (rather than healthy farmed) individuals for restoring potentially 'extinct' autochthonous taxa [93]. In addition, given the profound impacts FMT mediated gut microbiota alterations can have on the animal's health (as recently demonstrated in Pacific white shrimp, *Litopenaeus vannamei* [94]), further work is also required to elucidate the role of FMT in modulating the health outcomes in yellowtail kingfish.

Conclusion

In this study, the impacts of antibiotics on the gut and skin microbiota of a commercially important farmed fin-fish species *Seriola lalandi* (yellowtail kingfish) was investigated. The oral administration of a broad-spectrum antibiotic combination therapy in poor-performing fish significantly perturbed the global gut and skin bacterial assemblages and led to the loss of key constituents and the concomitant enrichment of potentially opportunistic species. Unlike the gut where a prolonged effect was observed, the bacterial assemblages of the skin appeared to be dynamic and inherently more resilient to the treatment (likely due to the varied pharmacokinetics of the compounds), and shifted towards a more 'normal' (though disparate) state over the recovery period. Given the increasing awareness of the role the microbiota plays in supporting host health, attempts to restore changes exerted by the antibiotic treatment on these bacterial communities was undertaken using faecal microbiota transplantation (FMT). As derived from a population of healthy farmed yellowtail kingfish, FMT was delivered both directly (via oral gavage) and indirectly (through the surrounding seawater). Despite the lack of notable global changes in the gut bacterial communities in FMT treated fish, for some individuals the effect was profound (regardless of the mode of delivery) and was associated with a change in the bacterial composition that more closely resembled that of the donor inoculum. Though short-lived, this suggests the potential of FMT for modulating these communities. Further work is required, however, to improve the approach (e.g. using more varied, pre-screened inoculums) and to evaluate its capacity to influence health in yellowtail kingfish. To this end, metagenomic and/or metatranscriptomic methods would represent useful tools for supporting an improved understanding of the global functional changes in these communities in response to these treatment regimens.

Supplementary information

Supplementary information accompanies this paper at <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42523-020-00046-4>.

Additional file 1: Table S1. Water temperature (°C) recorded during the experiment. **Table S2:** Oxygen concentration (%) recorded during the experiment. **Table S3:** pH recorded during the experiment. **Table S4:** Salinity (‰) recorded during the experiment. **Table S5:** Ammonia concentration (ppm) recorded during the experiment. **Table S6:** Characteristics (weight and length) of the fish stocked in the 12 experimental tanks prior the start of the experiment. **Table S7:** Differential abundant ASVs found in the gut microbiota of fish housed in seacage and tanks. **Table S8:** Differential abundant ASVs found in the gut microbiota of fish treated with antibiotic and non-treated with antibiotic. **Table S9:** Pair-wise PERMANOVA results investigating the influence of time on the skin microbial communities. **Table S10:** Differential abundant ASVs found in the skin microbiota of fish treated with antibiotic and non-treated with antibiotic.

Additional file 2: Figure S1. Rarefaction plot of all samples analysed in this study. **Figure S2:** Stacked barplots presenting the mean relative abundance (%) of the top 10 bacterial Phylum found in the seawater (SW) and on the skin of fish, comparing fish housed in seacages and those relocated and acclimatised in tanks. **Figure S3:** Means plots showing the change in mean value of Pielou's evenness (a) and Faith's phylogenetic diversity (b) in the gut bacterial communities, over the 18-day treatment period (from $n = 4$ fish). **Figure S4:** PCoA plot representing Bray-Curtis similarities comparing the change in global skin bacterial assemblages after treatment with antibiotics (+) over 18-days, with those fish that did not receive treatment (-). **Figure S5:** Means plots showing the change in mean value of Shannon's index of diversity (a), Pielou's evenness (b), total observed ASVs (as a measure of richness) (c) and Faith's phylogenetic diversity (d) in the skin bacterial communities, over the 18-day treatment period (from $n = 4$ fish). **Figure S6:** Venn diagram showing the distribution of unique and shared ASVs in the seawater, and the DNA and RNA inoculum samples. The total number of ASVs within each group are denoted in parentheses. **Figure S7:** Mean plot presenting the mean number of observed ASVs for the different treatment groups; A⁻/FMT⁻, A⁺/FMT⁺, A⁻/FMT⁺, A⁺/FMT⁻, A⁻/FMT^W and A⁺/FMT^W over 15 days post FMT (mean from $n = 4$ fish).

Abbreviations

16S rRNA: 16 Svedberg ribosomal ribonucleic acid; ARG: Antimicrobial resistant gene; ASV: Amplicon sequence variant; cDNA: Complementary DNA; FMT: Faecal microbiota transplantation; NCB: National Centre for Biotechnology Information; PCoA: Principle Coordinate Analysis; PCR: Polymerase Chain Reaction; PERMANOVA: Permutational Multivariate Analysis Of Variance

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge Dr. Matthew Bansemer and Leigh Kuerschner for their help during the experiment. We thank relevant industry personnel, including Jay Dent for organizing and allowing access to fish and for assistance in the collection of samples. We also gratefully thank Dr. Stephen Pyecroft for the veterinary diagnostics of the fish. We also wish to acknowledge AGRF and their staff for providing excellent support in the sequencing of our customised assays.

Authors' contributions

APA conceived the study; APA, SRC and TPRAL designed the experiment; APA, SRC and TPRAL performed the experiment; SRC performed the laboratory work; TPRAL analysed the data; TPRA, MLWO and APA wrote the manuscript; LSW and JWW provided overall guidance. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

Funding for this project was provided by the Australian Government, Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (project number 2016–200.30) and represents an extension of the Nutritional HEALTH theme for the Fisheries and Research Development Corporation (FRDC) project RnD4Profit 14–01-027. Funding for TPRAL was provided by The University of Adelaide

International Wildcard Scholarship and Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) Postgraduate Scholarship program.

Availability of data and materials

Sequencing reads from the demultiplexed samples analysed in this study have been deposited in the NCBI Sequence Read Archive (SRA) under the BioProject accession PRJNA602789. Scripts used to analyse the 16S rRNA gene sequence data using phyloseq have been deposited in GitHub at <https://github.com/axoley1975/Kingfish>

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study was exempt from ethics approval as the fish were privately owned and were sampled under the auspices of a commercial aquaculture enterprise according to industry best practice veterinary care.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Received: 21 April 2020 Accepted: 24 July 2020

Published online: 03 August 2020

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**Chapter 4: Dead or alive: microbial viability
treatment reveals both active and inactive
bacterial constituents in the fish gut microbiota**

Statement of Authorship

Title of Paper	Dead or alive: microbial viability treatment reveals both active and inactive bacterial constituents in the fish gut microbiota
Publication Status	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Published <input type="checkbox"/> Accepted for Publication <input type="checkbox"/> Submitted for Publication <input type="checkbox"/> Unpublished and Unsubmitted work written in manuscript style
Publication Details	Legrand, T.P.R.A., Wynne, J.W., Weyrich, L.S., Oxley, A.P.A. (2021) Dead or alive: microbial viability treatment reveals both active and inactive bacterial constituents in the fish microbiota. Journal of applied microbiology. https://doi.org/10.1111/jam.15113

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Contribution to the Paper	Obtained funding, conceived and designed the experiment, performed laboratory work and data processing, analysed and interpreted the data, wrote the manuscript.		
Overall percentage (%)	75		
Certification:	This paper reports on original research I conducted during the period of my Higher Degree by Research candidature and is not subject to any obligations or contractual agreements with a third party that would constrain its inclusion in this thesis. I am the primary author of this paper.		
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Co-Author Contributions

By signing the Statement of Authorship, each author certifies that:

- i. the candidate's stated contribution to the publication is accurate (as detailed above);
- ii. permission is granted for the candidate to include the publication in the thesis; and
- iii. the sum of all co-author contributions is equal to 100% less the candidate's stated contribution.

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Signature		Date	24-11-20

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Dead or alive: microbial viability treatment reveals both active and inactive bacterial constituents in the fish gut microbiota

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Keywords

16S rRNA, fish, gut, microbiota, PMA, viability, yellowtail kingfish.

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2021/0192: received 30 January 2021, revised 22 March 2021 and accepted 17 April 2021

doi:10.1111/jam.15113

Abstract

Aims: This study evaluated the microbial viability of fish gut microbiota in both digesta (faecal) and mucosal samples using a modified propidium monoazide (PMA) protocol, followed by 16S ribosomal RNA (rRNA) gene sequencing.

Methods and results: Digesta and gut mucosal samples from farmed yellowtail kingfish (*Seriola lalandi*) were collected and a modified PMA treatment was applied prior to DNA extraction to differentiate both active and nonviable microbial cells in the samples. All samples were then sequenced using a standard 16S rRNA approach. The digesta and mucosal samples contained significantly different bacterial communities, with a higher diversity observed in digesta samples. In addition, PMA treatment significantly reduced the microbial diversity and richness of digesta and mucosal samples and depleted bacterial constituents typically considered to be important within fish, such as Lactobacillales and Clostridiales taxa.

Conclusions: These findings suggest that important bacterial members may not be active in the fish gut microbiota. In particular, several beneficial lactic acid bacteria (LAB) were identified as nonviable bacterial cells, potentially influencing the functional potential of the fish microbiota.

Significance and impacts of the study: Standardizing the methods for characterizing the fish microbiota are paramount in order to compare studies. In this study, we showed that both sample type and PMA treatment influence the bacterial communities found in the fish gut microbiota. Our findings also suggest that several microbes previously described in the fish gut may not be active constituents. As a result, these factors should be considered in future studies to better evaluate the active bacterial communities associated with the host.

Introduction

Nucleic acid sequence-based techniques have greatly improved our understanding of microbial communities living in and around animals. More specifically, these approaches have elucidated the involvement of the

microbiome in the health and disease of numerous hosts, including fish (Chow *et al.* 2010; Kostic *et al.* 2013; de Bruijn *et al.* 2018; Legrand *et al.* 2020b; Wynne *et al.* 2020). In addition to supporting the host immune system functions and combatting pathogens, the fish microbiota has been shown to be involved in numerous other

functions, such as nutrient metabolism, digestion, reproduction and the recycling of waste products (van Kessel *et al.* 2016; Banerjee and Ray 2017; Butt and Volkoff 2019). This wealth of information is of particular value for the fish farming industry, as such knowledge can be applied to improve fish health and performance (Legrand *et al.* 2020b).

Next generation sequencing (NGS) techniques are not without caveats, and despite efforts in developing standardized approaches (Vatsos 2017; Poussin *et al.* 2018), care needs to be taken when drawing conclusions from fish microbiome related studies. For instance, sample collection, laboratory procedures, sequencing and data analysis can widely differ between studies, limiting reproducibility and resulting in differing conclusions (Pollock *et al.* 2018; Poussin *et al.* 2018; Legrand *et al.* 2020b). Different sample types (e.g. mucosa and digesta) also produce distinct microbiota; different samples from Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) (Gajardo *et al.* 2016) and rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) (Lyons *et al.* 2017) have been shown to exhibit different bacterial communities. Furthermore, metagenomics techniques are often performed using genomic DNA (gDNA) from the collected samples, limiting the ability to differentiate viable and nonviable microbial cells.

Several techniques have been developed to differentiate between viable and nonviable cells when using NGS. For instance, RNA instead of gDNA can be used to generate libraries and thus better characterize the active constituents of the host gut microbiota (De Vrieze *et al.* 2018; Legrand *et al.* 2020a; Legrand *et al.* 2020c). Alternative methods that assess microbial viability of gDNA in samples can also be utilized, such as molecular viability testing (MVT) and viability PCR (vPCR) (Cangelosi and Meschke 2014). The latter is by far the most studied method, which assesses viability based on cell envelope impermeability where samples are pretreated with a membrane-impermeable reagent such as propidium monoazide (PMA) (Nocker and Camper 2009; Cangelosi and Meschke 2014). During treatment, this reagent covalently binds to free DNA and nucleic acids in cells that do not have intact cell membranes which, following photoactivation, enables them to be separated from viable cells with intact membranes prior to DNA extraction and PCR amplification, and thus interfering with downstream sequencing (Cangelosi and Meschke 2014). Due to this advantageous property, PMA has thus been used on a wide range of samples to discriminate between viable and nonviable bacterial cells and/or spores in microbiome-related studies, including human saliva, human sputum, human stool, rex rabbits gut contents and water (Rawsthorne *et al.* 2009; Rogers *et al.* 2013; Li *et al.* 2017; Young *et al.* 2017; Fu *et al.* 2018; Marotz *et al.* 2018;

Papanicolas *et al.* 2019). Recently, a study investigating the gut microbiota of Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) using PMA showed that up to 9.1% of the sequencing reads came from nonviable bacterial cells (Dvergedal *et al.* 2020). However, this study only investigated the influence of PMA treatment on digesta samples, thus the application of PMA treatment on other fish tissues, such as mucosal samples with high levels of resident microbes, remains unknown.

Here, we characterized the intestinal bacterial communities in both gut contents and mucosal samples from farmed yellowtail kingfish (*Seriola lalandi*) using next generation 16S rRNA gene sequencing. We also assessed the microbial viability of yellowtail kingfish gut microbiota in both sample types using a modified PMA treatment protocol. The gastrointestinal tract is a physically perturbed and acidic environment, with food constantly moving through, epithelial cells being shed and microbial cells competing with each other for space and nutrients. As such, we hypothesized that numerous microbial cells (e.g. originating from the environment or food) become nonviable when exposed to this dynamic environment. Therefore, the intestinal content and gut mucosa would harbour complex bacterial communities comprising both viable (and likely active) and nonviable (not being able to survive in the gut environment) microbial cells.

Materials and methods

Sample collection

Five fish with a mean weight of 1.3 ± 0.1 kg and a mean length of 47 ± 1 cm were collected on the 18th of November 2019 from a single offshore sea cage under the auspices of a commercial aquaculture enterprise of southern Australia according to industry best practice veterinary care. Fish originated from the same cohort and were fed the same proprietary diet prior to sampling. Fish were immediately transported on ice to a laboratory for dissection. Within 4 h post-mortem, the body cavity of the fish was opened, and the digestive tract was extracted. The digesta was then collected by squeezing the gastrointestinal tract into a sterile 15 ml falcon tube and immediately placed on ice. Then, an incision was made along the length of the hindgut and midgut sections using a sterile scalpel blade to expose the inner mucosal surface. The exposed mucosa was then collected using a sterile glass microscope slide as described previously (Legrand *et al.* 2020c) and placed in a 50-ml falcon tube. Gloves were used and changed between the collection of each sample type to avoid contamination.

For all digesta samples, 5 ml of digesta was placed into 15 ml falcon tubes containing 10 ml of phosphate

buffered saline (Invitrogen™ PBS, ThermoFisher Scientific, San Jose, CA, USA), and all samples were homogenized by vortexing. Samples were then centrifuged at 500 g for 3 min to remove debris using the Eppendorf 5810R centrifuge (Eppendorf, Hamburg, Germany). The supernatant was collected using a sterile pipette for each sample and transferred into a new 15 ml falcon tube. The clean samples were then centrifuged at 12 000 g for 8 min. The supernatant was subsequently collected and discarded. Finally, the cell pellet was resuspended in 2 ml of PBS, vortexed and split in two 1 ml aliquots in 1.5 ml centrifuge tubes. The samples were then placed back on ice until PMA treatment. For all mucosal samples, 3 ml of PBS was added to each 50 ml falcon tube while removing the glass microscope slide from the tube. Each tube was then vortexed vigorously and hand shaken until all the mucosa was well mixed with the PBS. Next, 1 ml of this solution was transferred into two 1.5 ml tubes (1 ml per tube) and placed on ice until PMA treatment.

PMA treatment

Prior to PMA treatment, all samples were left at room temperature for 5 min. Then, half of the digesta and mucosal samples were placed back on ice and were used as nontreated (control) samples to investigate the influence of PMA on the resultant bacterial community composition. For the other half of the samples, 50 μ l of a solution containing 0.2 mmol l⁻¹ of PMA (PMAxx™, Biotium Inc, Hayward, CA, USA) was added in order to obtain a final concentration of 10 μ mol l⁻¹ of PMA, as described previously (Marotz *et al.* 2018). Samples were then gently vortexed and incubated in the dark at room temperature for 5 min. Next, samples were laid horizontally on ice at <30 cm from a light source comprising two 500W halogen globes (Philips Plusline S 500W R7s) for a period of 25 min, with brief mixing of the samples every 5 min. Samples were then placed back on ice with the control samples. All samples were subsequently stored at -20°C until DNA extraction.

DNA extraction, library preparation and sequencing

Prior to DNA extraction, all 20 samples (10 PMA-treated and 10 controls from 5 digesta and 5 mucosal samples) were thawed at air temperature and mixed with light vortex. Then, 1 ml of each sample was used as input for DNA extraction using the MP Bio Fast DNA Spin Kit for faeces (MP Biomedicals, Solon, OH, USA) following the manufacturer's instructions. All DNA extracts were subsequently purified by ethanol precipitation using standard procedures and quantified using the NanoDrop 2000

spectrophotometer (ThermoFisher Scientific) and stored at -20°C.

Sample DNA extracts were sent to the Australian Genome Research Facility (AGRF, Melbourne, Australia) for Illumina NGS library preparation. The V3-V4 hypervariable region of the 16S rRNA gene was amplified from the purified DNA samples using the universal eubacterial primers 341F/806R (Takahashi *et al.* 2014). PCR products were then indexed using Nextera XT indexes, and libraries were normalized and pooled in equimolar concentrations for sequencing on the Miseq platform (Illumina, San Diego, CA, USA) using 300 bp paired-end sequencing chemistry. Raw demultiplexed sequencing data with sample annotation were deposited in the NCBI SRA data repository under the BioProject ID PRJNA681418.

Bioinformatics and statistical analysis

Sequencing of the 20 samples resulted in a total of 2 602 389 paired end reads (130 119 \pm 34 150 per sample). Demultiplexed sequences were processed using QIIME2 (v.2019.10) (Bolyen *et al.* 2019). First of all, paired-end reads were imported using the Casava 1.8 format. Then, forward reads were truncated to 297 bp and reverse reads to 223 bp to remove low-quality sequences and denoised into amplicon sequence variants (ASVs) using the DADA2 plugin (Callahan *et al.* 2016). This resulted in a total of 2 134 733 merged reads retained for downstream analysis. Taxonomy was assigned to each ASV using the q2-feature-classifier against the Silva 132 99% OTUs (Operational Taxonomic Units) reference sequences resource (Quast *et al.* 2013). ASVs with <10 reads, as well as those which were unassigned or which represented mitochondria, chloroplast, eukaryote sequences, were removed from the dataset. Samples were rarefied to an even depth of 40 000 reads, resulting in a total of 1709 ASVs. Alpha rarefaction revealed sufficient sequencing coverage (Fig. S1). The plugin q2-diversity was used to measure both alpha diversity metrics (Simpson diversity and observed ASVs) and beta diversity metrics (e.g. weighted and unweighted UniFrac). Functional profiles of the microbiome were predicted with Tax4Fun2 based on the KEGG database (Wemheuer *et al.* 2020). For univariate measures, statistical differences were assessed using the Wilcoxon rank-sum test. For multivariate measures, the function permdisp was first used to check the assumption of homogeneous dispersion between groups. When the assumption was met, a PERMANOVA was conducted using the function Adonis (allowing for type III (partial) sums of squares, fixed effects of sum to 0 for mixed terms, and exact *P*-values generated using unrestricted permutation of raw data) to measure for

statistical differences between groups, accounting for both the treatment group (e.g. sample type or PMA treatment) and fish id (Anderson 2001). Due to the relatively low number of replicates between groups, differential abundance for each ASV was assessed using Deseq2 with Benjamini-Hochberg false discovery rate method applied to correct the *P*-values (Love *et al.* 2014; Weiss *et al.* 2017).

Results

Sample type influences the fish gut microbiota

We first investigated the influence of sample type on the fish gut bacterial communities using the 10 control samples (five digesta and five mucosa samples). Using the unweighted Unifrac matrix, we found that the bacterial community composition was significantly different according to sample type (F.model = 2.26, *P* = 0.008) (Fig. 1a). This indicates that different microbial communities populate the mucosa of fish, compared to the digesta.

To further characterize this change in bacterial communities, we compared the alpha diversity in the two sample types. Simpson's diversity was higher in digesta than mucosal samples though not significant (*P* = 0.056, Fig. S2a). This was supported by significantly higher richness (observed Amplicon Sequence Variants ASVs, *P* = 0.008; Fig. 1b) and evenness (Pielou's evenness, *P* = 0.016; Fig. S2b) in the digesta samples compared to mucosal samples. This suggests that the fish mucosal samples contain fewer microbial species than digesta samples.

We also explored taxonomic differences between the two sample types (Fig. 2a). While *Ralstonia* was the most prevalent genus in both sample types, both sample types

contained distinct bacterial taxa (Fig. 2a). Specifically, 23 differentially abundant ASVs were identified between these sample types (Table S1). *Brevinema*, *Aliivibrio* and *Vibrio* ASVs were significantly more prevalent in mucosa samples (Fig. 2b, Table S1). Clostridiales and Lactobacillales ASVs were more abundant in digesta samples (Fig. 2b, Table S1). Overall, these findings indicated that the type of biological sample examined can influence the microbiota signatures in the yellowtail kingfish gut microbiota.

The prediction of the functional profiles of all samples was generated using an average of $73 \pm 22\%$ of all sequences. However, in some samples, predictions were made using as low as 20% of the sequences (as observed in a mucosal sample, Table S2). In total, Tax4Fun2 was able to generate predictions for 356 KEGG pathways (Table S3). However, no significant differences in the functional profiles were found between digesta and mucosal samples.

Sample treatment with PMA has an impact on the resulting microbiota in both digesta and mucosal samples

PMA treatment of digesta samples

Since both digesta and mucosal samples comprised distinct bacterial communities, we evaluated the influence of PMA treatment on these two sample types separately. Using the unweighted Unifrac distance matrix, PMA treatment had a significant effect on the global bacterial communities of digesta samples (F.model = 2.98, *P* = 0.013) (Fig. 3a).

PMA treatment also had a slight, yet nonsignificant, impact on the bacterial alpha diversity of digesta samples, as marked by a lower Simpson diversity in the PMA-

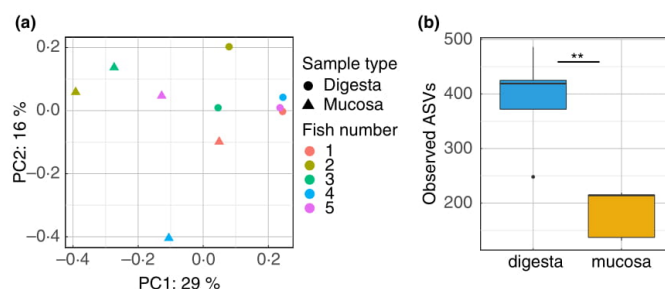


Figure 1 Impact of sample type on the global bacterial communities associated with the fish gut. (a) PCoA plot representing unweighted Unifrac distances comparing the change in bacterial communities found in digesta and mucosal samples for all five fish replicates used in this study. (b) Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of the number of observed amplicon sequence variants (ASVs) identified in digesta and mucosal samples. The levels of significant difference are denoted by $*P \leq 0.05$, $**P \leq 0.01$ and $***P \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

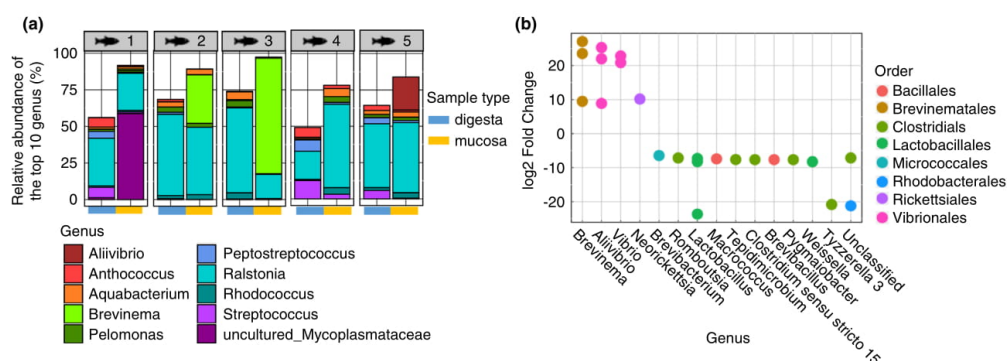


Figure 2 Impact of sample type on the taxonomical composition of the fish gut microbiota. (a) Stacked barplot presenting the relative abundance (%) of the top 10 most abundant bacterial genus found in the gut microbiota of all five replicates, comparing digesta and mucosal samples. (b) Dotplot showing significantly differentially abundant amplicon sequence variants (ASVs) between digesta and mucosal samples, as identified using Deseq2.

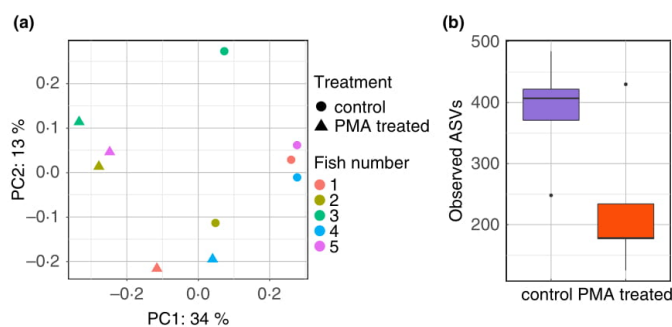


Figure 3 Impact of propidium monoazide (PMA) treatment on the global bacterial communities associated with the fish digesta. (a) PCoA plot representing unweighted Unifrac distances comparing the change in bacterial communities found in PMA-treated and control samples for all five digesta replicates used in this study. (b) Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of the number of observed amplicon sequence variants (ASVs) identified in PMA-treated and control digesta samples. The levels of significant difference are denoted by $*P \leq 0.05$, $**P \leq 0.01$ and $***P \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

treated samples ($P = 0.056$, Fig. S3a). Untreated samples exhibited higher Pielou's evenness ($P = 0.056$, Fig. S3b) and higher numbers of observed ASVs ($P = 0.095$, Fig. 3b) although not significant. This indicates that several ASVs were detected from nonviable cells in digesta samples.

The taxonomic composition of the samples post PMA treatment was changed (Fig. 4a). Typically, *Ralstonia* was more abundant in PMA-treated digesta samples (Fig. 4a). Some taxa were not observed in PMA samples such as *Anthococcus*, *Streptococcus*, *Peptostreptococcus* and *Vagococcus* (Fig. 4a). In total, 153 ASVs were found to be significantly differentially abundant between PMA-treated and control digesta samples (Table S4). Among those,

only two taxa were more prevalent in PMA-treated samples and were *Brevibacillus* and *Staphylococcus* ASVs from the Bacillales order (Fig. 4b). Most of the ASVs found to be more abundant in control samples were associated with Bacillales, Clostridiales and Lactobacillales (Fig. 4b). Of particular note, 12 ASVs associated with *Lactobacillus*, 12 with *Enterococcus*, 5 with *Lactococcus*, 16 with *Streptococcus*, 8 with *Vagococcus* and 3 *Methanobrevibacter* were significantly less abundant in PMA-treated samples. While the total relative abundance of Lactobacillales-related ASVs in control samples was about 22%, the relative abundance of the same ASVs decreased to 0% in PMA-treated samples (Fig. S4). No significant differences were observed in the functional profiles between PMA-

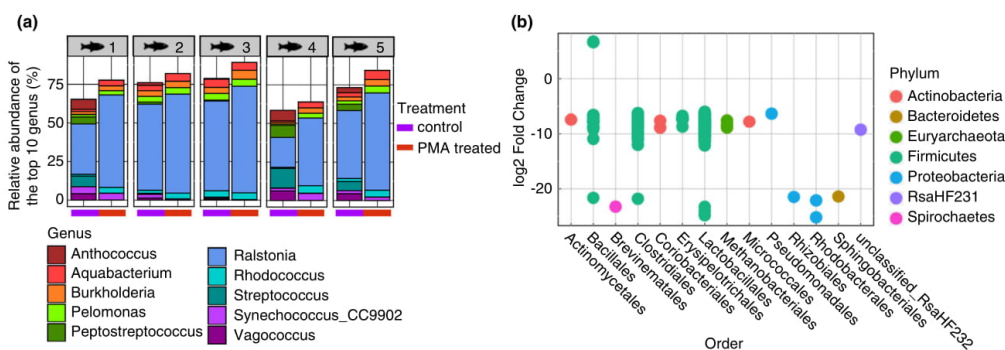


Figure 4 Impact of propidium monoazide (PMA) treatment on the taxonomical composition of the digesta-associated microbiota. (a) Stacked barplot presenting the relative abundance (%) of the top 10 most abundant bacterial genera found in the digesta of all five fish replicates, comparing PMA-treated and control samples. (b) Dotplot showing significantly differentially abundant amplicon sequence variants (ASVs) between PMA-treated and control digesta samples, as identified using Deseq2.

treated and nontreated digesta samples. Overall, this suggests that PMA treatment impacts composition, but not diversity, of gut digesta samples.

PMA treatment of mucosal samples

Next, we explored the impact of PMA treatment on the mucosal samples. Similar to the digesta samples, the bacterial community composition of mucosal samples were significantly different after PMA treatment when using the unweighted Unifrac distance matrix (F.model = 2.19, $P = 0.002$) (Fig. 5a). This indicates that PMA treatment significantly impacted the bacterial composition of gut mucosal samples.

PMA treatment was found to significantly decrease the number of ASVs identified in mucosal samples (observed ASVs, $P = 0.008$) (Fig. 5b). However, PMA treatment did

not affect the Simpson's diversity (Simpson diversity, $P = 1$; Fig. S5a) or evenness (Pielou's evenness, $P = 1$; Fig. S5b) of the mucosal samples. This suggests that similarly to digesta samples, a number of ASVs detected in mucosal samples originated from nonviable cells.

PMA treatment impacted the downstream taxonomical composition of the mucosal samples. Although the relative abundance of the most dominant taxa (e.g. *Ralstonia*, *Brevinema* and uncultured Mycoplasmataceae) remained similar between PMA-treated and control samples, some ASVs were not detected in PMA-treated samples (Fig. 6a). More specifically, 21 ASVs were significantly reduced in PMA-treated samples (Fig. 6b, Table S5). Most of these ASVs were associated with Clostridiales, Lactobacillales and Vibrionales (Fig. 6b). Similarly to digesta samples, ASVs associated with *Enterococcus*,

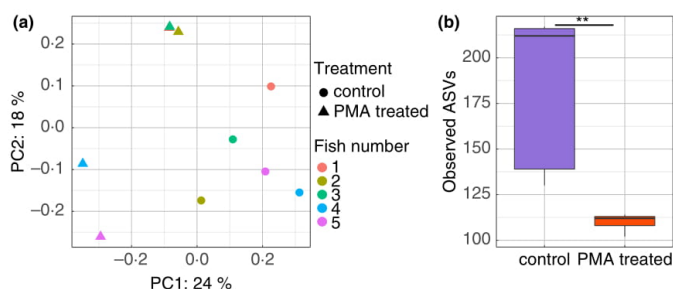


Figure 5 Impact of propidium monoazide (PMA) treatment on the global bacterial communities associated with the fish gut mucosa. (a) PCoA plot representing unweighted Unifrac distances comparing the change in bacterial communities found in PMA-treated and control samples for all five mucosal replicates used in this study. (b) Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of the number of observed amplicon sequence variants (ASVs) identified in PMA-treated and control mucosal samples. The levels of significant difference are denoted by $*P \leq 0.05$, $**P \leq 0.01$ and $***P \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

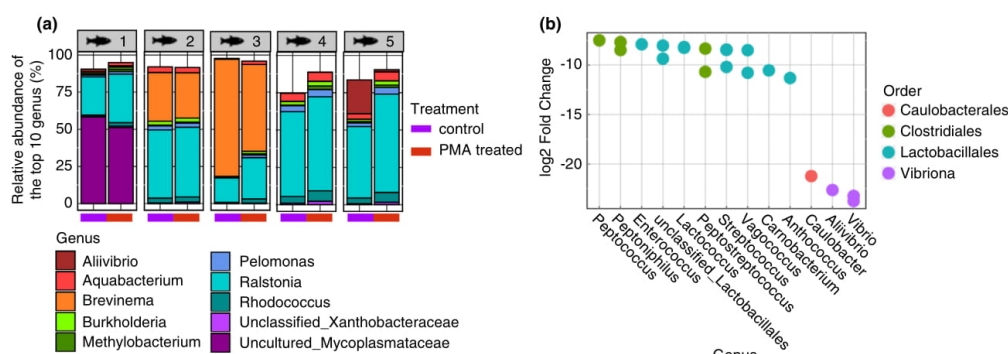


Figure 6 Impact of propidium monoazide (PMA) treatment on the taxonomical composition of the gut mucosa associated microbiota. (a) Stacked barplot presenting the relative abundance (%) of the top 10 most abundant bacterial genus found in the mucosa of all five fish replicates, comparing PMA-treated and control samples. (b) Dotplot showing significantly differentially abundant amplicon sequence variants (ASVs) between PMA-treated and control mucosal samples, as identified using Deseq2.

Lactococcus, *Streptococcus* and *Vagococcus* were lost after PMA treatment. Furthermore, the total relative abundance of Lactobacillales related ASVs decreased from 4% in control samples to 0% in PMA-treated samples (Fig. S6), although these species were not as abundant as in digesta samples. No significant differences were observed in the functional profiles between PMA-treated and nontreated mucosal samples. Overall, this suggests that PMA treatment significantly influenced the downstream microbial composition and diversity of gut mucosal samples.

Discussion

Faecal (digesta) material is often used as a proxy in animal gut microbiome investigations due to it being a non-invasive method in contrast to collecting the gut mucosa (Tang *et al.* 2020). However, there are major drawbacks when using this sample type such as incomplete separation between faecal bacteria and mucosal microbiota, homogenization of the sample and the effect of storage method (Tang *et al.* 2020). For instance, studies have shown that the mucus layer and intestinal lumen host distinct intestinal microbial niches with different biological roles in humans and other animals like dairy cattle and mice (Li *et al.* 2015; Mao *et al.* 2015; Ringel *et al.* 2015). In yellowtail kingfish, studies investigating the gut microbiota have used digesta, as well as a wide range of other sample types, including whole larvae, whole intestinal tract and intestinal mucosa (Wilkes Walburn *et al.* 2018; Horlick *et al.* 2020; Legrand *et al.* 2020c). In this study, we first investigated whether the microbial communities of digesta samples were different to those

associated with mucosal samples. Based on both alpha and beta diversity indices, the two sample types exhibited distinct bacterial communities. We found a higher diversity and richness in digesta samples when compared to mucosa, a feature also identified in Atlantic salmon (Gajardo *et al.* 2016). However, this contrasts with previous results found in yellowtail kingfish, where a higher microbial diversity and richness were found in mucosal samples when compared to digesta samples (Horlick *et al.* 2020). Such variation within the same fish species can be explained with differences in environmental conditions (e.g. surrounding water, temperature), diet and number of replicates (Legrand *et al.* 2020b; Panteli *et al.* 2020). Taken together, this highlights the need to select the right sample type in relation to the research question when investigating fish gut microbiome. Typically, digesta is often collected when exploring transient (allochthonous) microbes that are influenced by environmental factors (e.g. diet or surrounding water) (Legrand *et al.* 2020b). In contrast, the mucosa contains more resident (autochthonous) microbes that are more influenced by the host and therefore more closely interact with the host mucosal surfaces (Ringo *et al.* 2016).

Another major limit of current fish microbiome studies is the inability to differentiate viable and nonviable microbial cells. There are several methods available to explore the bacterial viability in gut samples (e.g. plate counts, fluorescence approaches, staining of dead/viable cells), but these techniques are rarely used in current studies because of the expense of sequencing approaches (Hammes *et al.* 2010). While sequencing techniques focusing on RNA, proteins and metabolites (e.g. metatranscriptomics, metaproteomics and metabolomics)

provide information on active microbial communities, they are not commonly used in studies exploring the fish microbiota due to their high cost and limited bacterial cells in specific sample type (e.g. mucosa) (Ghanbari *et al.* 2015; Legrand *et al.* 2020b). Instead, DNA-based techniques (e.g. 16S rRNA gene and shotgun sequencing) are often used, but these methods cannot determine the viability and thus likely activity of microbial communities. This is of particular interest for studies that aim to assess the potential functional roles of the fish microbiome using predictive tools, such as PICRUSt or Tax4Fun, as sequencing data from total DNA will result in predicting the role of both active and non-active microbial communities (Langille *et al.* 2013; Asshauer *et al.* 2015). As such, we investigated the use of PMA treatment in order to estimate the viability of the microbial communities found in digesta and mucosal samples.

In this study, we used a modified PMA treatment protocol and found that there were significant changes in bacterial communities between PMA-treated and untreated digesta and mucosal samples. In both sample types, the composition of bacterial communities was significantly different after PMA treatment, as shown with the unweighted Unifrac matrix. In addition, we found a lower microbial richness and evenness in PMA-treated samples, indicating that some microbes were not detected in PMA-treated samples. More specifically, we found some bacterial lineages that were significantly reduced in PMA-treated samples, which would imply that these microbes are not viable (and thus not active) in the fish gut microbiota. For instance, several ASVs associated with Bacillales, Clostridiales and Lactobacillales were significantly less abundant in digesta samples following PMA treatment. This trend was also observed in mucosal samples, where several Clostridiales and Lactobacillales were significantly less abundant in PMA-treated samples. This is of particular interest to therapeutic treatments in aquaculture, as these lactic acid bacteria (LAB) are often considered as favourable micro-organisms due to their beneficial roles in enhancing immune responses, disease resistance, digestive functions and mucosal tolerance (Ringo *et al.* 2018). Interestingly, several LAB-associated genera that were depleted after PMA treatment (such as *Carnobacterium*, *Streptococcus*, *Enterococcus* and *Lactococcus*) are also known to contain potential pathogens (Ringo *et al.* 2018). As 16S rRNA gene sequencing is limited in its taxonomic resolution, further work should be implemented to better characterize the role of these important microbes found in the yellowtail kingfish gut microbiota.

While some bacterial lineages seem to be associated with nonviable cells, this study characterized the viability of the fish gut microbiota at only one point in time.

Recently, it was revealed that time following feeding is an important driver of fish microbiota structure and functionality, as shown in clownfish (*Premnas biaculeatus*) and coral trout (*Plectropomus leopardus*) (Mekuchi *et al.* 2018; Parris *et al.* 2019). In this experiment, fish were collected in the morning, and their gastrointestinal tract contained leftover food from the previous day. As a result, bacterial viability could have been different if sampling occurred at a different time following feeding. Thus, the influence of feeding retention on bacterial viability requires further elucidation. In addition, it is unknown whether the nonviable bacteria detected in this study came from the environment/food or were already established in the fish gastrointestinal tract. In Atlantic salmon, it was demonstrated that diet and seawater derived bacteria were found in the fish hindgut (Zarkasi *et al.* 2016). It is therefore possible that the nonviable bacteria found in the yellowtail kingfish gut microbiota originate from feed or the surrounding environment. Despite this, LAB are typically occurring in the fish gut microbiota, as observed in numerous fish species (Ringo *et al.* 2018; Wang *et al.* 2018). In this study, LAB was more abundant in digesta samples than mucosal samples. This suggests that LAB are prevalent in the fish allochthonous bacterial communities and therefore not in close interactions with the host, in contrast to the autochthonous micro-organisms. Considering that the gastrointestinal tract is a complex environment where microbes are constantly under pressure (e.g. host-microbe and microbe-microbe interactions) (Perez *et al.* 2010; Legrand *et al.* 2020b), it remains unclear if these non-viable cells were previously viable before sampling. In addition, no differences in the predicted functional profiles were found between sample type and PMA treatment. This result could be explained by the low number of replicates used in this study (5 per treatment group) and poor level of prediction in some samples, as no reference genome for some of the bacteria found in the gut microbiota of yellowtail kingfish are available in the database used to generate the predictions. Therefore, further studies including the collection of samples at different time points, as well as exploring the gene expression and metabolite profile of these communities, are required to better elucidate the role of these micro-organisms within the fish gastrointestinal tract.

Overall, this study highlights important caveats found in fish microbiota related studies. Here, we showed that the digesta and gut mucosa contain distinct bacterial communities. As such, care should be taken when selecting sample type to investigate the fish gut microbiota. While collecting digesta has the advantage of being a non-invasive method, collecting the gut mucosa seems more appropriate if the overall aim of the study was to explore the micro-organisms that are in closer interaction

with the host. In addition, the microbial activity of the fish gut microbiota is likely to have an influence on the resultant role of these communities in disease resistance and nutrient digestibility, and ultimately fish health and performance. As a result, characterizing the active microbial communities found in the fish microbiota is paramount. In this regard, PMA treatment can be a very useful, cost effective tool. This simple, rapid and cost-effective method can easily be applied to better characterize and understand the contribution of dominant fish gut microbiota constituents.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank relevant industry personnel, including Jay Dent and Dr Samantha Chown for their assistance with the collection of samples. The authors also thank AGRF and their staff for the sequencing of our samples. Funding for this study was provided by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) Postgraduate Scholarship program. Funding for T.P.R.A.L. was supported by the University of Adelaide International Wildcard Scholarship and the CSIRO Postgraduate Scholarship program.

Authors' contributions

T.P.R.A.L. conceptualized the study, collected samples, performed laboratory work, analysed the data and wrote the manuscript. A.P.A.O. wrote the manuscript and supervised the study. M.L.W. contributed to data interpretation and edited the manuscript. J.W.W. provided reagents, edited the manuscript and supervised the study. L.S.W. edited the manuscript and supervised the study.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest declared.

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

Figure S1 Rarefaction plot of all samples analysed in this study.

Figure S2 Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of (a) Simpson's diversity and (b) Pielou's evenness in digesta and mucosal samples. The levels of significant difference are denoted by $*P \leq 0.05$, $**P \leq 0.01$ and $***P \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

Figure S3 Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of (a) Simpson's diversity and (b) Pielou's evenness in PMA-treated and control digesta samples. The levels of significant difference are denoted by $*P \leq 0.05$, $**P \leq 0.01$ and $***P \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

Figure S4 Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of the relative abundances of the summed Lactobacillales associated ASVs found in PMA-treated and control digesta samples. The levels of significant difference are denoted by $*P \leq 0.05$, $**P \leq 0.01$ and $***P \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

Figure S5 Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of (a) Simpson's diversity and (b) Pielou's evenness in PMA-treated and control mucosal samples. The levels of significant difference are denoted by $*P \leq 0.05$, $**P \leq 0.01$ and $***P \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

Figure S6 Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of the relative abundances of the summed Lactobacillales associated ASVs found in PMA-treated and control mucosal samples. The levels of significant difference are denoted by $*P \leq 0.05$, $**P \leq 0.01$ and $***P \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank-sum test.

Table S1 Differentially abundant ASVs found in digesta and mucosal samples.

Table S2 Amount of sequences used to generate the prediction of microbial functions using Tax4Fun2.

Table S3 Prediction of the functional profiles of all samples used in this study.

Table S4 Differentially abundant ASVs found in PMA-treated and control digesta samples.

Table S5 Differentially abundant ASVs found in PMA-treated and control mucosal samples.

Discussion and conclusion

Preamble

The study of the fish microbiome provides a new lens through which to understand and improve the overall health and performance of the host. This is of particular interest for the fish farming industry, where this wealth of information can be used to enhance the animal's ability to digest and absorb nutrients, resist pathogens, reproduce, or even recycle waste products (Banerjee and Ray 2017b; Butt and Volkoff 2019; Legrand et al. 2020b). The contribution of the microbiome to immune function is of particular interest, and is thought to play a primary role in the fish's response to infection or disease (Gomez and Balcazar 2008; Perez et al. 2010). In addition, the microbiome can also directly compete against exogenous microorganisms and pathobiont invasion through the "colonisation resistance" effect, where commensal microbes can resist colonisation of pathogens by competing for space and nutrients (Perez et al. 2010). Specific microbes can also produce antimicrobial compounds that limit the propagation of select microbial constituents (Austin 2006; Balcazar et al. 2006). As a result, elucidating the structure of the fish microbiome and improving our understanding of their role/s, and how they interact with the host is key to developing new management strategies and treatment options for the industry in order to improve farm productivity and sustainability.

In this work, the role of the microbiome in the health and disease of YTK (as a model farmed species) from commercial operations and experimental systems was investigated using Next Generation Sequencing (NGS)-based 'omics' approaches. Specifically, the dynamics of the microbiome and its contribution to the immune response in YTK, as well as the application of conventional and novel treatment options were explored to gauge the effects and recovery of the microbiome in the host health and disease. In addition, a new analytical approach was also evaluated in order to better characterise the active constituents of the fish microbiome, and thus those likely to be involved in the overall health of the fish. Altogether, this thesis sought to gain insight into four keys areas as follows:

1. To provide context and perspective to microbiome science from the field of aquaculture to improve production systems.
2. To investigate the interactions between the fish and its microbiome during health and disease.

3. To explore the utility of novel treatment options (as an alternative to conventional therapies) in common gut related fish diseases.
4. To develop and evaluate a new protocol to investigate the active microbial constituents of the fish microbiome.

In this section, I begin with a chapter-by-chapter synthesis of the main findings arising from this thesis, and demonstrate their contributions and significance to the field/s of research. This is followed by a discussion of the broader contributions of the results, as well as the current limitations of the work and potential future directions.

Overview and main findings from Chapter 1

This chapter provides a descriptive review of the current knowledge of the fish microbiome. In recent years, a considerable amount of research has been dedicated to the study of the fish microbiome, in particular using NGS-based ‘omics’ technologies. Here, I summarise the microbial constituents associated with the mucosal surfaces of fish (i.e. from the gut, skin and gill), the different factors that likely influence the structure of the fish microbiome (particularly within a farm setting), and our current understanding of the functional involvement of the microbiome. I also discuss the interplay between the host and the microbiome, how this knowledge can be applied to the fish farming industry, identify current gaps in knowledge, and propose future directions in order to improve our understanding of the fish microbiome.

Overview and main findings from Chapter 2

Although the interactions between the fish microbiome and immune system during disease is central to understanding its etiology and in order to develop new management strategies and/or treatment options, this area of research remains poorly understood. In this chapter, I investigate changes in both the fish microbiota and immune system across the gut and skin mucosal surfaces in response to gut enteritis, a common disease in the farming of YTK. This work demonstrated that despite the disease being located in the fish gastrointestinal tract, the biggest changes (in terms of both microbial composition and host-gene expression) were found within the skin mucosa, highlighting the sensitivity of this organ in regard to changes in host health.

Overview and main findings from Chapter 3

The most typical, conventional treatment approach to combat disease in aquaculture is the administration of antimicrobials such as antibiotics. However, these compounds are non-targeted and may cause the depletion of both pathogens and commensals (leading to an altered or 'dysbiotic' microbiome state). In order to determine the broader impacts of these conventional therapies, it is thus fundamental to determine what microbes are depleted and whether they are able to recolonise and repopulate within the fish microbiota following treatment. In addition, with growing concern over the use of antibiotics on the environment and human health, alternative treatment options are eagerly sought, and extend to include approaches that seek to modulate the microbiome. Beyond probiotics, this includes approaches such as faecal microbiota transplantation (FMT), which have shown promise in the treatment of gut disease in humans and mammal model systems. This chapter represents the first study to investigate the influence antibiotics on the gut and skin microbiota of YTK, and explores the efficacy of FMT in the re-establishment of the microbiota following antibiotic exposure.

Overview and main findings from Chapter 4

It is well known that many biases can be introduced in metagenomic studies, potentially leading to inaccurate results and the misinterpretation of findings. When investigating the microbiome in health and disease, it appears paramount to differentiate both viable and non-viable microbial cells to better understand the influence of the microbiome on the health of the host. In this study, a novel approach was used to investigate the viable constituents of the fish microbiome from gut mucosa and digesta samples. Significant differences between the two approaches (with or without viable cell differentiation) were observed, indicating that non-viable microbial cells are naturally occurring in the fish gut microbiota. Such results are extremely valuable when investigating the functional role of the microbiome, as only viable microbial cells will likely contribute to pertinent host functions such as digestion, nutrient metabolism or colonisation resistance.

In summary, this thesis highlights the broad interdisciplinary nature of microbiome studies and their importance for the aquaculture industry. In demonstrating the interactions between the fish immune system and the fish microbiome, as well as exploring new treatment options for diseased fish, this thesis has been able to contribute valuable peer-reviewed information pertaining to the microbiome of fish and which has broader implications for

extending knowledge within the fields of host microbial ecology, fish immunology, veterinary medicine and aquaculture.

Discussion

Fish microbiome perturbations and fish immune response: who is behind the wheel?

Within the last few years, there has been considerable research effort in evaluating changes in the microbiome of various fish species in relation to stress and diseases (de Bruijn et al. 2018; Legrand et al. 2020b). However, it remains difficult to disentangle the effect that disease may have on the microbiome with those that may arise from the host and its immune response. For instance, in the case of a change in the fish microbiome towards a more “pathogenic” state and a concurrent activation of immune pathways, it is often unknown which came first. In Chapter 2, it was observed that the skin microbiota of fish suffering from gut enteritis was significantly different to healthy individuals, particularly at the early stages of disease where the community diversity was substantially lower (Legrand et al. 2020a). In addition, key genes related to the host immune response (notably several cytokines and related genes) were significantly differentially expressed in fish at the early stages of disease. This indicates that both microbial composition and host gene expression of the skin are perturbed in response to an underlying gut disease, and highlights the prospect of skin as a useful (non-invasive) sample type for exploring changes in both microbiota composition and gene expression in relation to the overall health of the animal. From this, two scenarios may be proposed: 1) changes in the expression of immune related genes drive the microbial perturbations; or 2) the alteration of the fish microbiota (as marked by a decrease in diversity and an increase in the abundance of opportunistic pathogens) lead to the increased gene expression of key immune related genes. In order to resolve these scenarios, and in order to develop new therapeutic strategies, further work is required to better understand the underlying mechanisms contributing to the emergence and progression of the disease itself. To do this, temporal studies involving experimentally infected fish could be used to track alterations in the microbiota and host gene expression across different stages of the disease (i.e. from its onset to establishment to the animals deterioration). Techniques that complement or enhance the metatranscriptomic approach used here (e.g. dual RNA-seq, metaproteomics or metabolomics), would be useful in this regard to better

disentangle the complex interactions between the pathogen, host and the microbiota (Le Luyer et al. 2020).

The need to better understand the complex interplay that likely exists between the host and its microbiota and how such interactions drive disease, is particularly important for farmed systems where the microbiota of both healthy and diseased fish may also comprise opportunistic pathogens, as was recently shown in Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) (Wynne et al. 2020). These organisms may occur year round in the surrounding water, regardless of the system (Rudi et al. 2017) and may become virulent under specific conditions, e.g. when fish are under stress induced by environmental changes or farming practices (Conte 2004; Mateus et al. 2017). Consequently, there is a need for microbiome related studies to go beyond characterising changes in the composition of the microbiota to include strategies that seek to identify the factors that contribute to or trigger the infection process, thereby improving the prospect of developing new intervention or targeted therapeutic strategies (e.g. vaccines).

Modulation of the fish microbiome

In recent years, growing awareness of the microbiome's role in promoting host health and nutrition (as highlighted by it being termed an additional 'organ' system in humans and other animals (Eckburg et al. 2005; Gill et al. 2006)) has led to a renewed interest in better understanding how current treatments may affect its structure and function, and whether alternative approaches may exist to support its optimisation. This is of particular importance given the overwhelming dependence on antibiotic use in some countries, despite the development of antimicrobial resistance and environmental related threats these therapies pose alongside the broader non-targeted effects they have on the commensal constituents of the microbiota (Perez-Sanchez et al. 2018; Lulijwa et al. 2020; Vincent et al. 2019; Schar et al. 2020). This was exemplified in Chapter 3, where an antibiotic combination therapy was administered to poor performing YTK and resulted in a loss of bacterial diversity in the gut for up to 18 days following treatment (Legrand et al. 2020c). This is a major limitation for the use of antibiotics, as the depletion of beneficial microbes may increase disease susceptibility as shown for Atlantic salmon, western mosquitofish (*Gambusia affinis*) and zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) (Navarrete et al. 2008; Gaulke et al. 2016; Carlson et al. 2017). Interestingly though, the influence of antibiotics on the fish gut microbiota can differ, as recently shown in European

seabass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) where the gut microbiota persisted following treatment, indicating its stability to the use of particular antibiotics (Kokou et al. 2020). While these results could be explained by fish species differences, prior exposure to antibiotic can also play a role in the resistance to antibiotic. Indeed, fish microbiota that had been exposed to antibiotic in the past may harbour already resistant microbes to specific antibiotic, potentially resulting in the absence of observed changes in the fish microbiota following antibiotic exposure. Nevertheless, the resilience of these specific microbes under different types of antibiotics still remains to be explored. Antibiotic treatment has also been associated with profound changes in the overall bacterial communities of other mucosal tissues including the skin and gills (Rosado et al. 2019; Legrand et al. 2020c). This highlights the need to further explore the influence of antibiotic on the integrity and resilience of the outer mucosal surfaces, which act as important primary barriers for the host (Kelly and Salinas 2017; Cabillon and Lazado 2019). Furthermore, there is a lack of information regarding the recovery of the microbiota following antibiotic treatment. In Chapter 3, FMT was explored as a strategy for the repopulation of the fish gut microbiota following antibiotic treatment. However, while several bacteria from the inoculum were successfully transferred to select individuals, the delivery and efficacy of FMT on repopulating the fish gut microbiota remain elusive and this requires further investigation.

Other strategies can be used to modulate the fish microbiota and include changes in diet, probiotics, prebiotics, synbiotics, postbiotics, phytobiotics, quorum sensing inhibitors, phage therapy and biofilters to favour slow-growing specialists (K-strategists) over fast-growing specialists (r-strategists) (Defoirdt et al. 2011; Perez-Sanchez et al. 2018; Derome and Filteau 2020). To date, modification of the dietary components is the most studied method to modulate the fish microbiome with the aim to improve nutrient absorption and/or increase disease resistance (Ringo et al. 2016). This includes changes in the protein/lipid/carbohydrate source and the addition of vitamins, essential amino acids, bioactive compounds (e.g. sodium butyrate), dietary acidifiers and metals in the diet (Ringo et al. 2016; Piazzon et al. 2017). Tremendous research efforts have been dedicated to the use of various probiotics (notably lactic acid bacteria - LAB) in cultivated fish species with the aim to improve nutrient absorption and/or increase disease resistance (Merrifield and Ringo 2014; Banerjee and Ray 2017a; Hoseinifar et al. 2018). However, despite their use as prospective beneficial microbes, many of the current probiotics have been shown to have limited or species-specific effects. To improve the utility of these strategies, independent research focusing on individual fish species is required to identify prospective probiotics and their acceptance (colonisation) within the host

(Ringo et al. 2018; Wanka et al. 2018). To this end, current knowledge from microbiome (metagenomic) studies could be used to support culture-based investigations targeting putative probiotics through the identification of traits that may better support their isolation. In a study of YTK, several strains of *Shewanella*, *Psychrobacter* and *Acinetobacter* were isolated from wild individuals as prospective autochthonous probiotics, though further work is warranted to confirm their beneficial role to the host (Ramírez et al. 2019).

Investigating the functional role of the fish microbiome

Studies of the fish microbiome have mainly focused on structure (microbial diversity) rather than on function. However, in order to elucidate whether the microbiome may be modulated to improve outcomes that may be of benefit for the farming industry (e.g. improved disease resistance or growth), it is fundamental to also understand the functional involvement of these microbial communities. In Chapters 2, 3 and 4, it was shown that the gastrointestinal microbiota of YTK is frequently dominated by only a few bacterial species. For instance, an uncultured Mycoplasmataceae species has been found to be a primary constituent in the gut mucosal surface, in particular in the diseased or weakened host (Legrand et al. 2020a; Legrand et al. 2020c). Interestingly a *Mycoplasma* sp. was found to be associated with diseased zebrafish but in Atlantic salmon and hadal snailfish (*Pseudoliparis swirei*), genome reconstruction revealed a potential symbiotic relationship between *Mycoplasma* sp. and the host (Gaulke et al. 2019; Jin et al. 2019; Lian et al. 2020). Genome sequencing is a useful tool to investigate the role of particular microbes, revealing pathogen-gene clusters and ultimately helping understand their strategies to invade and develop within the host (Sudheesh et al. 2012). As such, to elucidate the potential involvement of the uncultured Mycoplasmataceae species in YTK, and in the absence of suitable reference sequences, further work should be implemented to generate the genome of this specific microbe. During my candidature, attempts were made in performing metagenomic assembled genomes (MAGs) for a number of key species from DNA extracts from gut mucus and faeces. However, not enough microbial DNA was recovered in order to assemble the genomes of these bacteria. As a result, this work was not included in this thesis.

Microbial functionality can also be investigated using other omics-based approaches including metatranscriptomics, metaproteomics and metabolomics (Ghanbari et al. 2015). In

Chapter 2, a metatranscriptomic approach was used to sequence the RNA from gut and skin samples (following the depletion of rRNA) to investigate the gene expression of both the host and microbial constituents. However, despite a high sequencing depth (~60 million sequence reads per sample), insufficient numbers of microbial sequences (< 1% of the total reads) were generated to facilitate the reliable analysis of the gene expression from these constituents. Instead, a high proportion of host RNA (~79% of the total reads) was sequenced, allowing some unique insights into host gene expression. Despite this shortcoming, metatranscriptomics has been successfully used elsewhere to investigate the role of the gut microbiome in other species (Wu et al. 2015; Ngugi et al. 2017; Parris et al. 2019). In these studies, intestinal contents (rather than the mucosa) were sampled, suggesting that a higher microbial cell content is more likely in these samples compared to those from the mucosa (as used here). While such results are useful, given that intestinal contents comprise a high proportion of transient (rather than resident) organisms which are less likely to have a close association with the host (Ringo et al. 2016), caution should be taken in their interpretation. Nonetheless, metatranscriptomics remains a powerful tool for exploring the role of the host microbiome in health and disease, and modified approaches should be investigated in the future to recover more microbial RNA from mucosal samples.

Limitations of fish microbiome research and future directions

NGS technologies have revolutionised the way in which we are able to study the ecology of microorganisms in comparison to traditional culture-dependent methods. Due to the constant decrease in sequencing cost and emergence of new bioinformatics tools, NGS is nowadays the most commonly used approach in microbiome investigations of fish as well as other host and environmental systems. However, despite encouraging standardised approaches, many biases can be introduced in the generation and analysis of sequencing data, ultimately limiting reproducibility and comparison between studies (Vatsos 2017; Poussin et al. 2018). For instance, the experimental design, choice of sample type, nucleic acid extraction method, library preparation and bioinformatics pipeline can all influence the results and interpretation of the data. In Chapter 4, the two most commonly used sample types in fish microbiome studies were evaluated (i.e. intestinal contents and mucosa), highlighting the differences that exist in their associated microbial communities (Legrand et al. 2021). As a result, comparisons between studies using different sample types cannot be performed. Since most fish microbiome related

studies seek to identify those constituents that are more likely to interact with the host, it is recommended that studies use mucosal samples instead of intestinal contents. In addition, the mucosal microbial communities are less likely to be influenced by environmental factors (e.g. surrounding environment) and diet, thus rendering comparison between studies more suitable. In Chapter 4, the influence of bacterial viability was also investigated using a combination of PMA treatment and 16S rRNA sequencing approaches (Legrand et al. 2021). Here, it was found that several bacterial lineages were identified from non-viable cells. Indeed, by sequencing all DNA from the samples, both viable and non-viable microbial cells are included in the dataset and thus do not reflect the activity of the microbial constituents. As such, if the aim of the study is to characterise the viable (and thus likely active) microbial constituents, methods such as PMA treatment or the generation of libraries from RNA (rather than DNA) are required and may support more reliable findings (Legrand et al. 2018; Legrand et al. 2021; Dvergedal et al. 2020).

Recent bioinformatics tools can generate functional predictions from phylogenetic inference of 16S rRNA sequencing data such as PICRUSt and Tax4Fun (Langille et al. 2013; Asshauer et al. 2015). Numerous fish microbiome related studies have used these tools to predict the involvement and likely role of the fish microbiome (Ortiz-Estrada et al. 2018; Legrand et al. 2020b). However, these tools rely on already established microbial genome databases. In fish, especially in species not well studied, the vast majority of microbes detected using 16S rRNA sequencing are poorly characterised (at least at the species level) and lack suitable genome sequences, thereby restricting the extent to which functional predictions can be made. Using Tax4Fun2 and the datasets created in this thesis, only ~20% of the sequences were able to be used in generating functional predictions. This is not surprising considering that microbial constituents found in the YTK microbiota are largely underrepresented in the available databases. To this end, generating microbial genomes from YTK could be useful to examine the 16S rDNA sequences generated throughout this study, thereby providing a platform for enabling more informative investigations of the involvement of the microbiome in the health and disease of this commercially important fish species.

Concluding remarks

In this thesis, each chapter maintains its own significance and contribution to the field of fish microbiome research. Altogether, this work explores the influence of the microbiome in the health and disease of YTK, in particular in a production context. By understanding how the host and its microbiome interact, by exploring the functional involvement of the fish microbiome, and by identifying how the fish microbiome can be modulated, new strategies can be developed and implemented to support disease treatment or its mitigation. To this end, a more holistic approach that extends to include the elucidation of the involvement and interactions between the host, the microbiome, the pathogen and the environment is needed to further improve our understanding of these unique systems and their capacity to support a stronger and more productive aquaculture industry.

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**Appendix 1: Supplementary materials for
Chapter 2**

Figure S1: Rarefaction plot of all samples used in this study showing sufficient sequencing depth at 16,255 reads/sample.

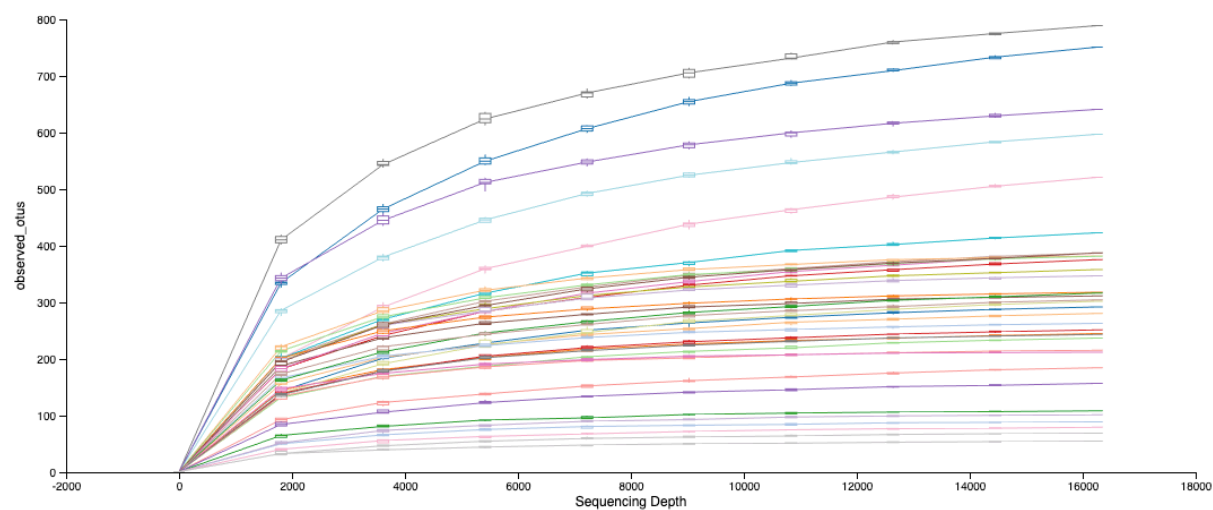


Figure S2: PCoA plot representing the gene expression of both gut and skin samples of all fish used in this study.

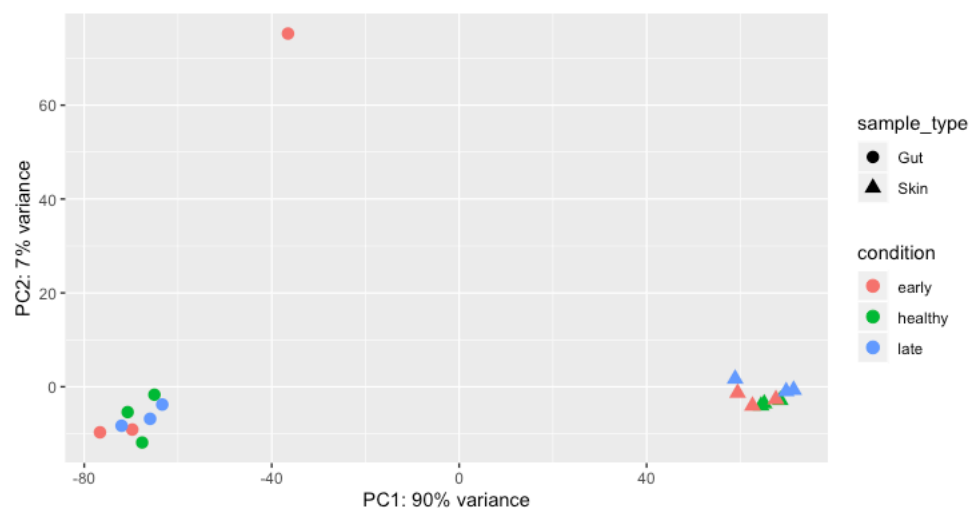


Figure S3: Gut global bacterial community changes associated with gut enteritis. PCoA plot based on the unweighted Unifrac distance matrix.

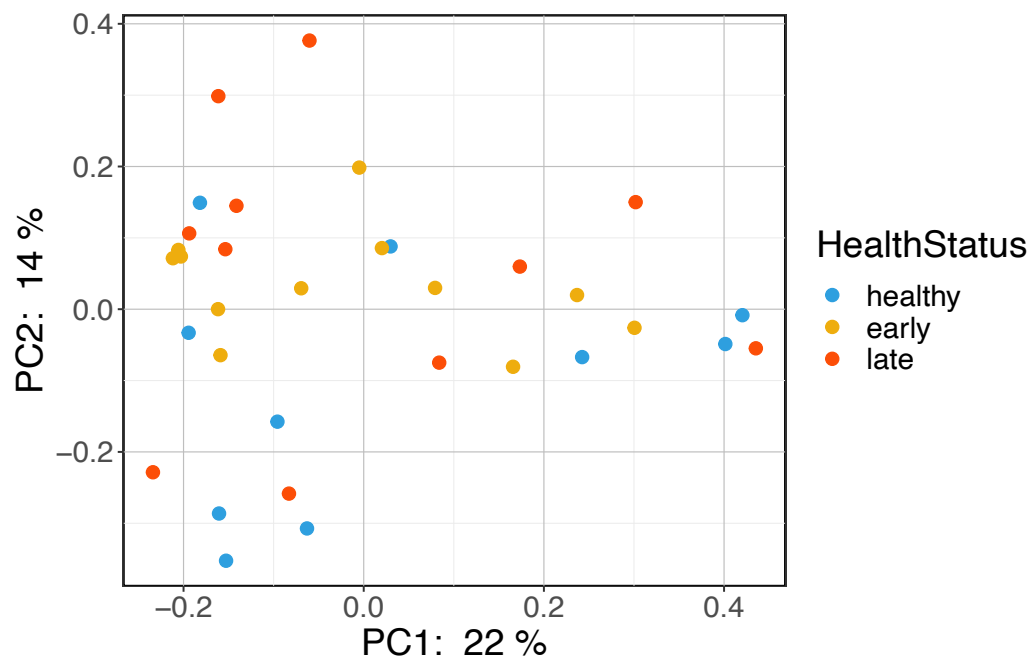


Figure S4: Skin global bacterial community changes associated with gut enteritis. PCoA plot based on the unweighted Unifrac distance matrix.

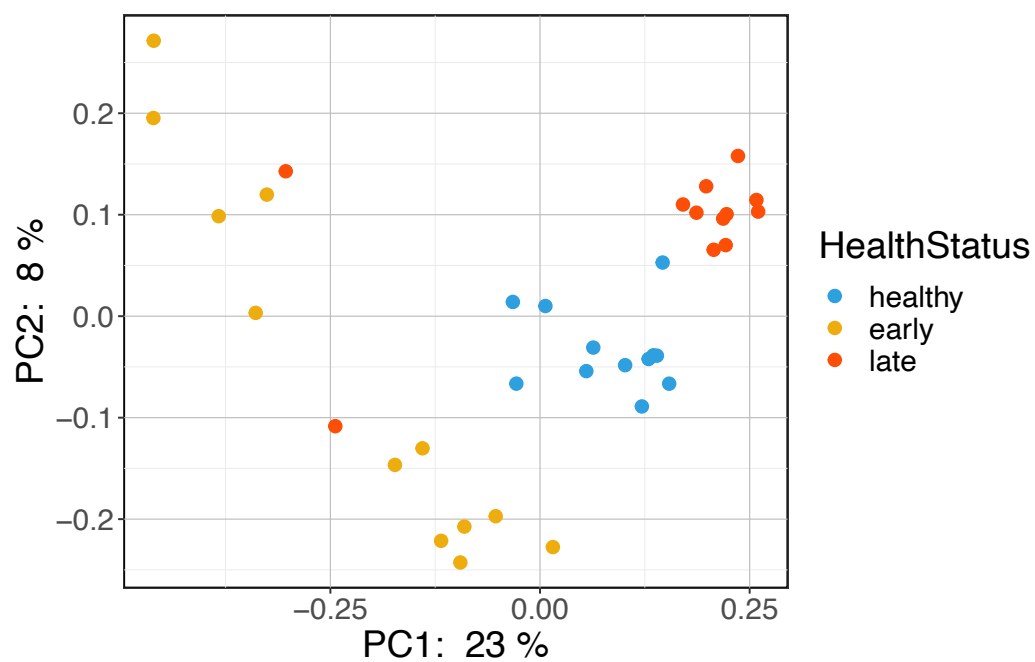


Figure S5: Boxplot representing the Pielou's evenness in the gut microbiota for the different health status. Statistical differences were assessed using a Kruskal-Wallis test.

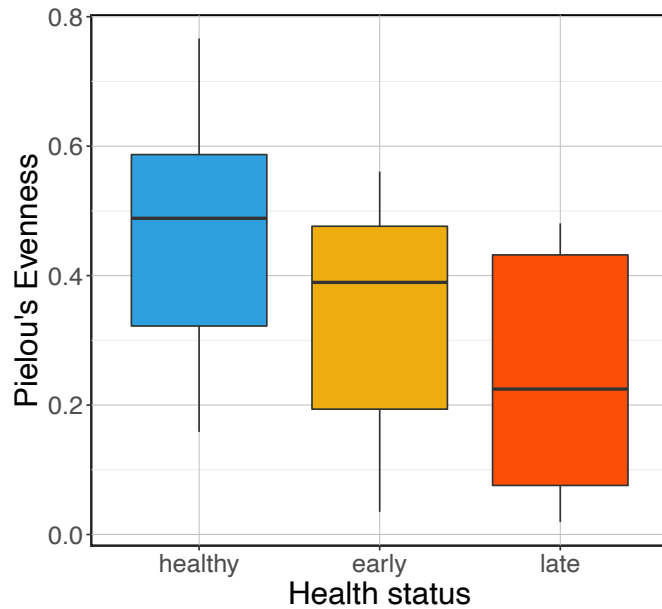


Figure S6: Boxplot representing the Chao1 richness in the gut microbiota for the different health status. Statistical differences were assessed using a Kruskal-Wallis test.

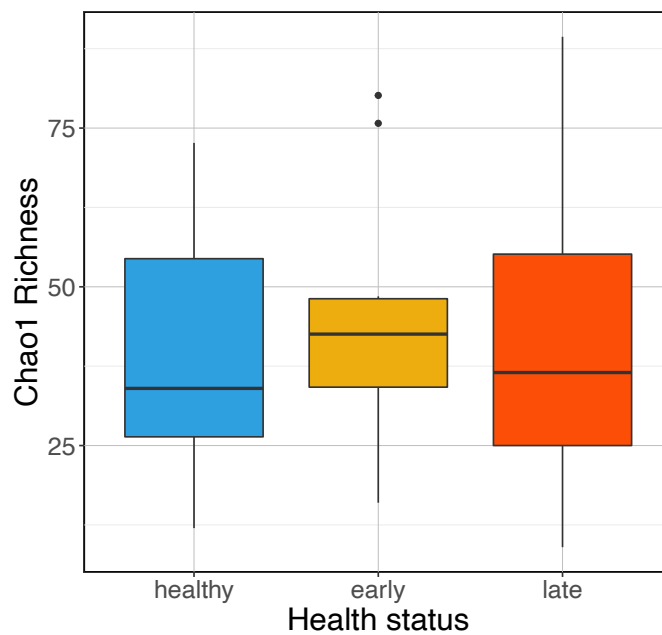


Figure S7: Boxplot representing the Pielou's evenness in the skin microbiota for the different health status. Statistical differences were assessed using a Kruskal-Wallis test.

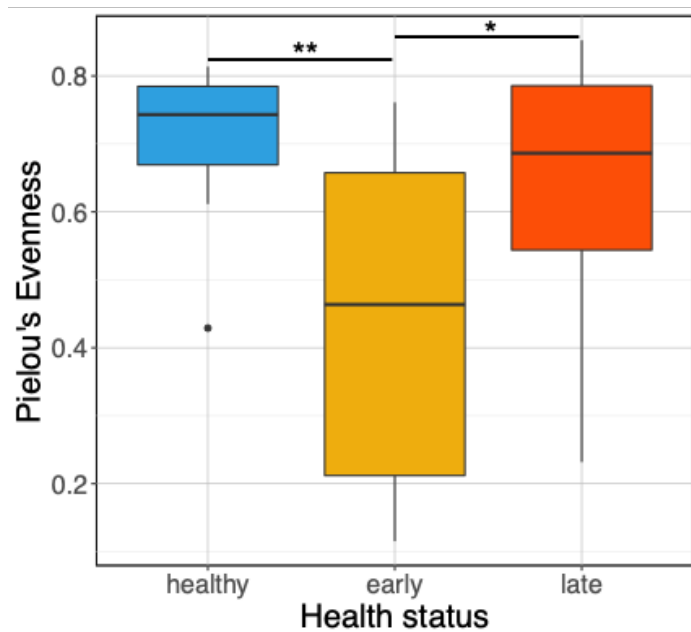


Figure S8: Boxplot representing the Chao1 richness in the skin microbiota for the different health status. Statistical differences were assessed using a Kruskal-Wallis test.

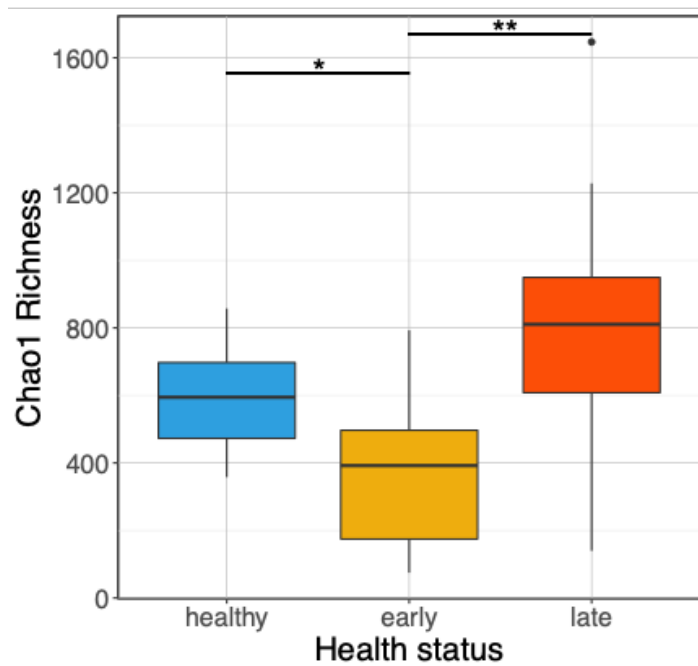
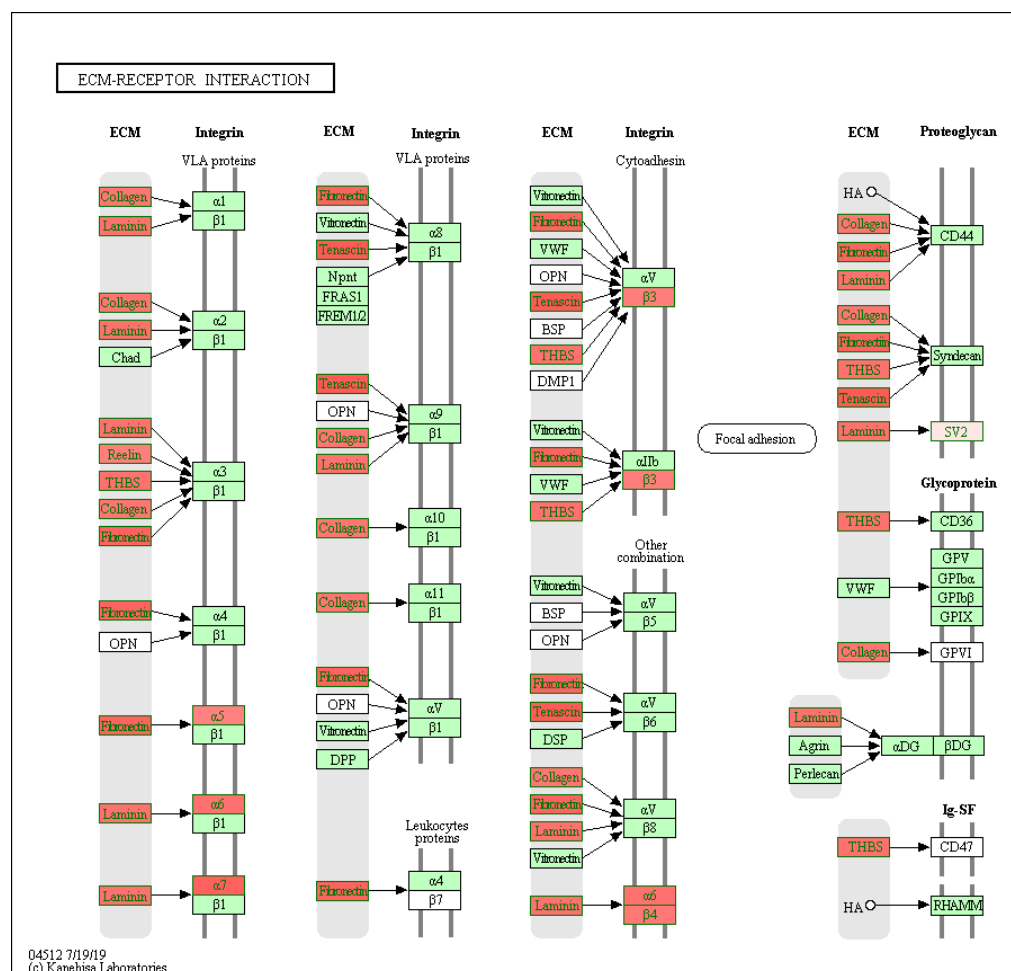


Figure S9: Representation of genes involved in the ECM-receptor interaction pathway in the fish at the late stage of the disease. Genes in red were upregulated, in blue were downregulated and in green were not statistically differentially expressed.



Supplementary tables

Due to the length of the supplementary tables, they were not included in this thesis. However, all supplementary tables are available at <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2607/8/9/1267/s1>

**Appendix 2: Supplementary materials for
Chapter 3**

Figure S1: Rarefaction plot of all samples analysed in this study

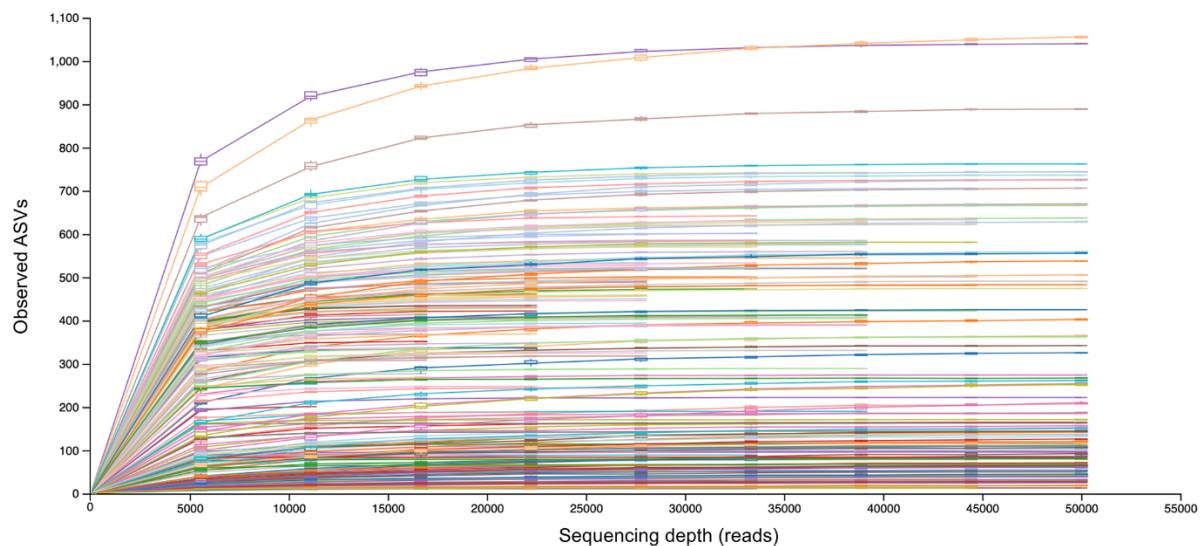
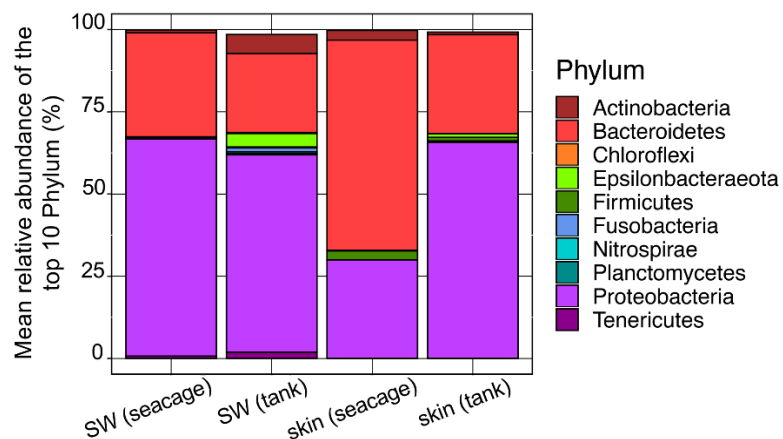


Figure S2: Stacked barplots presenting the mean relative abundance (%) of the top 10 bacterial Phylum found in the seawater (SW) and on the skin of fish, comparing fish housed in seacages and those relocated and acclimatised in tanks.

Figure S3: Means plots showing the change in mean value of Pielou's evenness (a) and Faith's phylogenetic diversity (b) in the gut bacterial communities, over the 18-day treatment period (from $n = 4$ fish).

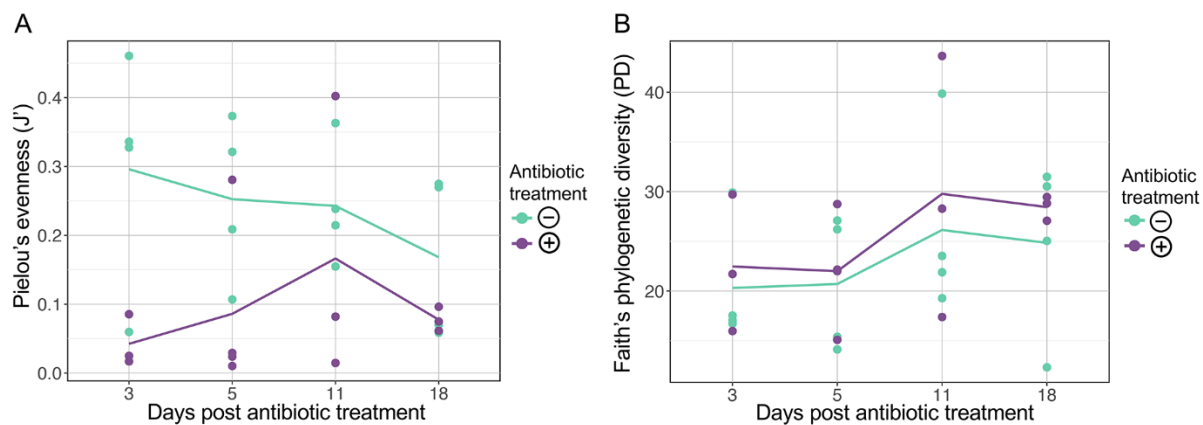


Figure S4: PCoA plot representing Bray-Curtis similarities comparing the change in global skin bacterial assemblages after treatment with antibiotics (+) over 18-days, with those fish that did not receive treatment (-).

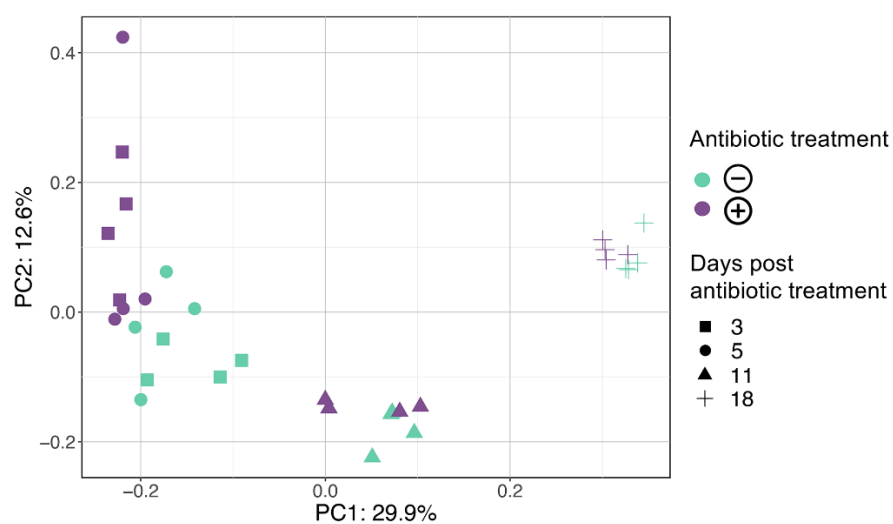


Figure S5: Means plots showing the change in mean value of Shannon's index of diversity (a), Pielou's evenness (b), total observed ASVs (as a measure of richness) (c) and Faith's phylogenetic diversity (d) in the skin bacterial communities, over the 18-day treatment period (from $n = 4$ fish).

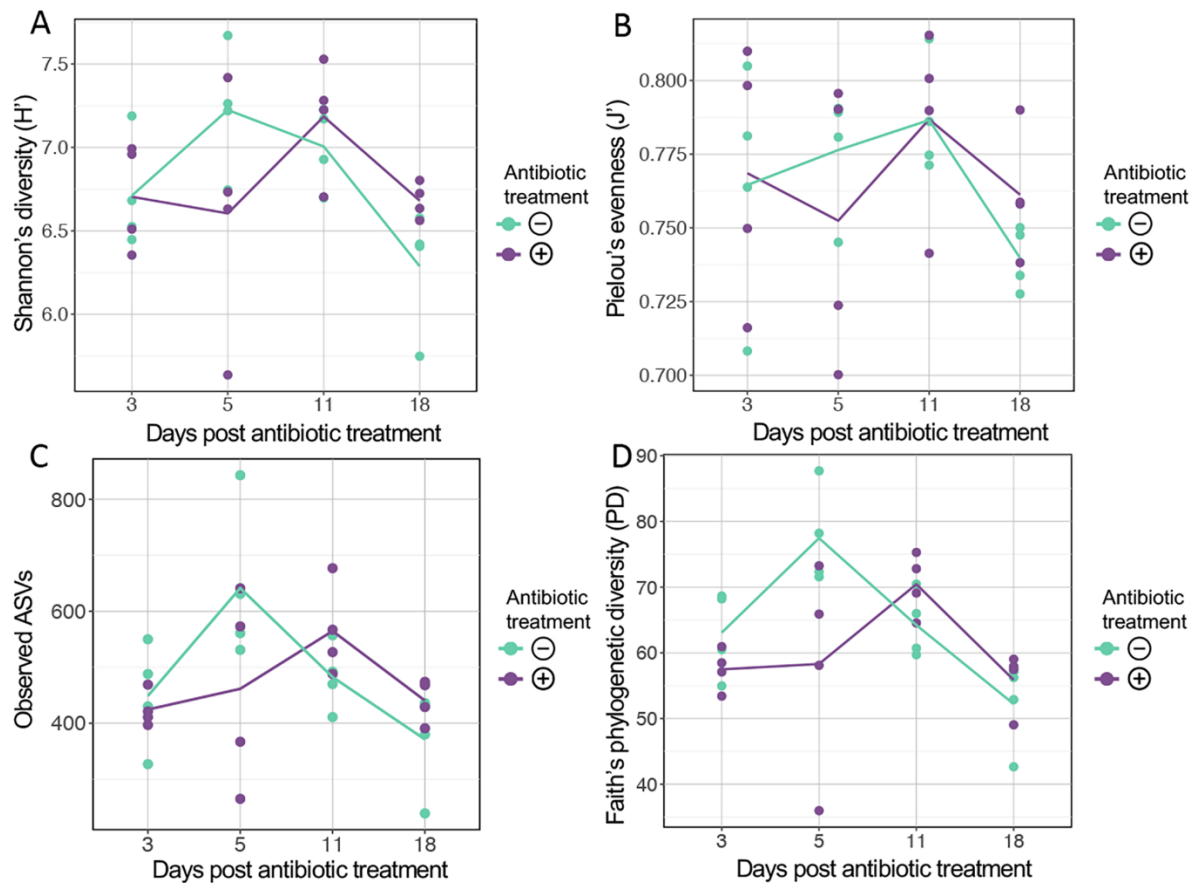


Figure S6: Venn diagram showing the distribution of unique and shared ASVs in the seawater, and the DNA and RNA inoculum samples. The total number of ASVs within each group are denoted in parentheses.

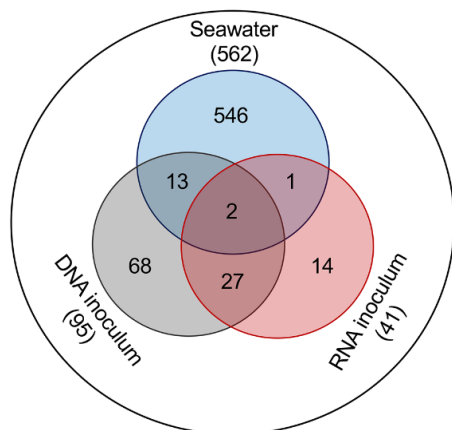
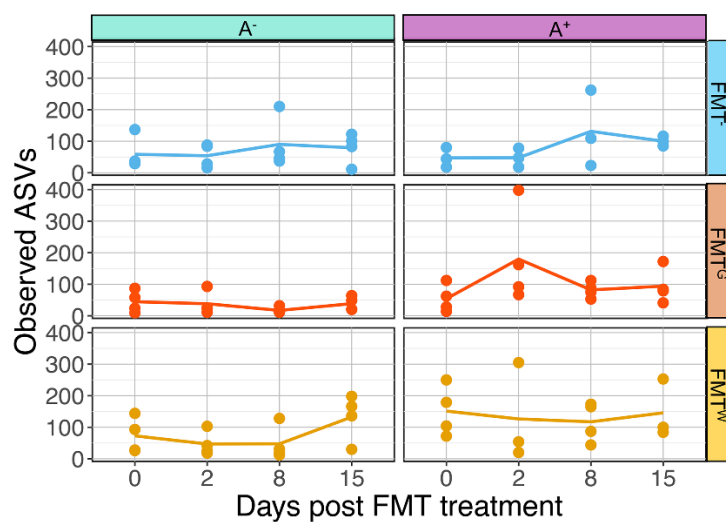


Figure S7: Mean plot presenting the mean number of observed ASVs for the different treatment groups; A⁻/FMT⁻, A⁺/FMT⁻, A⁻/FMT^G, A⁺/FMT^G, A⁻/FMT^W and A⁺/FMT^W over 15 days post FMT (mean from $n = 4$ fish).



TableS1: Water temperature (°C) recorded during the experiment.

Tank	Day0	Day1	Day2	Day3	Day4	Day5	Day6	Day7	Day8	Day9	Day10	Day11	Day12	Day13	Day14	Day15	Day16	Day17	Day18
1	14	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13	12.9	12.9	13	13.4	13.2		13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4
2	14	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13	12.9	12.9	13	13.4	13.2		13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4
3	14	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13	12.9	12.9	13	13.4	13.2		13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4
4	14	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13	12.9	12.9	13	13.4	13.1	13.1	13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4
5	14	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13	12.9	12.9	13	13.4	13.2		13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4
6	14	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13	12.9	12.9	13	13.4	13.2		13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4
7	14	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13	12.9	12.9	13	13.4	13.2		13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4
8	14	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13	12.9	12.9	13	13.4	13.1	13.2	13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4
9	14	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13	12.9	12.9	13	13.4	13.2		13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4
10	14	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13	12.9	12.9	13	13.4	13.2		13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4
11	14	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13	12.9	12.9	13	13.4	13.2		13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4
12	14	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13	12.9	12.9	13	13.4	13.2	13.2	13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4
Average	14.0	13.6	13.5		12.7	13.4	13.4	13.0	12.9	12.9	13.0	13.4	13.2	13.2	13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9	13.4

Table S2: Oxygen concentration (%) recorded during the experiment.

Tank	Day0	Day1	Day2	Day3	Day4	Day5	Day6	Day7	Day8	Day9	Day10	Day11	Day12	Day13	Day14	Day15	Day16	Day17	Day18
1	105	111	106		100	99	99	98	92	94	95	96	97	93	95	95	95	95	97
2	109	124	109		97	97	95	101	96	99	97	100	100	96	99	100	97	99	100
3	110	114	107		101	101	101	98	93	95	93	98	97	94	97	98	96	98	99
4	115	125	119		102	101	100	97	91	97	95	97	97	95	95	97	95	98	97
5	116	116	114		106	107	107	100	95	98	97	99	98	95	98	98	95	97	98
6	111	112	107		100	100	100	100	94	96	93	97	98	94	97	97	96	96	98
7	115	115	113		102	101	102	99	93	95	92	97	96	94	96	98	95	96	99
8	112	115	111		101	98	102	100	93	95	91	93	97	92	92	96	94	95	94
9	110	110	104		100	101	103	100	92	93	93	98	98	94	95	97	94	97	98
10	110	113	113		109	107	103	100	92	95	93	95	98	95	94	98	94	97	97
11	104	120	120		91	96	97	101	94	97	92	96	98	95	97	98	96	98	97
12	106	107	104		95	94	97	100	91	93	93	93	95	91	95	96	94	95	97
Average	110	115	111		100	100	101	100	93	96	94	97	97	94	96	97	95	97	98

Table S3: pH recorded during the experiment.

Tank	Day0	Day1	Day2	Day3	Day4	Day5	Day6	Day7	Day8	Day9	Day10	Day11	Day12	Day13	Day14	Day15	Day16	Day17	Day18
1		7.63	7.66		7.62				7.6	7.61	7.68			7.73	7.64	7.61	7.61	7.63	
2		7.64	7.66		7.63				7.61	7.61	7.67			7.72	7.63	7.61	7.63	7.63	
3		7.63	7.66		7.63				7.61	7.61	7.67			7.72	7.65	7.61	7.63	7.63	
4		7.63	7.65		7.63		7.65	7.58	7.62	7.61	7.67		7.67	7.69	7.72	7.62	7.61	7.63	
5		7.63	7.65		7.61				7.6	7.61	7.67			7.73	7.64	7.61	7.61	7.62	
6		7.62	7.65		7.61				7.6	7.61	7.67			7.72	7.65	7.61	7.63	7.63	
7		7.63	7.65		7.62				7.61	7.61	7.67			7.73	7.63	7.61	7.61	7.63	
8		7.63	7.65		7.62		7.65	7.59	7.61	7.61	7.66		7.68	7.68	7.72	7.65	7.61	7.63	
9		7.64	7.66		7.61				7.6	7.62	7.67			7.73	7.62	7.63	7.63	7.63	
10		7.65	7.66		7.62				7.59	7.61	7.66			7.74	7.64	7.61	7.61	7.62	
11		7.63	7.65		7.61				7.6	7.61	7.66			7.74	7.64	7.61	7.61	7.63	
12		7.63	7.64		7.61		7.64	7.6	7.6	7.61	7.67		7.7	7.68	7.73	7.63	7.61	7.63	
Average		7.63	7.65		7.62		7.65	7.59	7.60	7.61	7.67		7.68	7.68	7.73	7.64	7.61	7.63	

Table S4: Salinity (‰) recorded during the experiment.

Tank	Day0	Day1	Day2	Day3	Day4	Day5	Day6	Day7	Day8	Day9	Day10	Day11	Day12	Day13	Day14	Day15	Day16	Day17	Day18		
1		36						36			37		36							36	
2		36						36			37		36								36
3		36						36			37		36								36
4		36						36			37		36								36
5		36						36			37		36								36
6		36						36			37		36								36
7		36						36			37		36								36
8		36						36			37		36								36
9		36						36			37		36								36
10		36						36			37		36								36
11		36						36			37		36								36
12		36						36			37		36								36
Average		36						36			37		36								36

Table S5: Ammonia concentration (ppm) recorded during the experiment.

Tank	Day0	Day1	Day2	Day3	Day4	Day5	Day6	Day7	Day8	Day9	Day10	Day11	Day12	Day13	Day14	Day15	Day16	Day17	Day18		
1																					
2																					
3																					
4				<0.25		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<0.25	<0.25	<0.25				
5																					
6																					
7																					
8				<0.25		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<0.25	<0.25	<0.25				
9		<0.25	<0.25																		
10		<0.25	<0.25																		
11		<0.25	<0.25																		
12				<0.25		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<0.25	<0.25	<0.25				
Average		<0.25	<0.25		<0.25		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<0.25	<0.25	<0.25				

Table S6: Characteristics (weight and length) of the fish stocked in the 12 experimental tanks prior the start of the experiment.

TANK 1	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)	TANK 2	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)	TANK 3	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)	TANK 4	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)	TANK 5	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)	TANK 6	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)
	1.775	50		1.581	47		1.675	50.5		1.545	47		1.73	49		1.676	48.5
	1.853	50		1.62	48.5		1.781	50		1.69	50		1.594	46.5		1.504	47
	1.632	48.5		1.505	47		1.608	47.5		1.381	45.5		1.81	50		1.516	47.5
	1.686	49		1.72	50		1.575	47.5		1.645	48.5		1.723	48.5		1.686	48.5
	1.682	48		1.636	48.5		1.498	46		1.671	49		1.811	51		1.339	45
	1.762	48.5		1.584	48.5		1.625	47.5		1.652	49		1.747	50.5		1.854	50
	1.64	49		1.657	49		1.636	47.5		1.826	50.5		1.81	51		1.508	48
	1.653	48.5		1.249	45.5		1.6	48.5		1.505	47.5		1.773	50		1.821	49.5
	1.761	51.5		1.678	48.5		1.694	50		1.705	47.5		1.294	46		1.644	49
	1.934	49.5		1.485	47		1.807	51		1.771	49.5		1.33	46.5		1.563	49
	1.599	48		1.786	49		1.624	48		1.734	48.5		1.62	49		1.403	47
	1.703	50		1.794	50.5		1.733	49.5		1.801	49		1.684	49.5		1.706	50.5
TOTAL	20.680		TOTAL	19.295		TOTAL	19.856		TOTAL	19.926		TOTAL	19.926		TOTAL	19.21	
AVERAGE	1.72	49.21	AVERAGE	1.61	48.25	AVERAGE	1.66	48.63	AVERAGE	1.66	48.46	AVERAGE	1.66	48.88	AVERAGE	1.60	48.29
TANK 7	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)	TANK 8	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)	TANK 9	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)	TANK 10	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)	TANK 11	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)	TANK 12	Weight (kg)	Length (cm)
	1.743	50		1.855	49		1.968	52		1.84	51		1.521	47.5		1.858	50.5
	1.801	51.5		1.644	48		1.612	49		1.897	50.5		1.258	44.5		1.357	45.5
	1.65	50.5		1.772	50		1.669	49.5		1.875	51		1.486	45.5		1.834	50
	1.712	49		1.723	49.5		1.665	48		1.618	50		1.796	50.5		1.828	51
	1.847	50.5		1.887	52		1.653	49.5		1.869	49		1.683	50.5		1.8	50
	1.785	50.5		1.725	50		1.835	50		1.96	52		1.614	48		1.502	47.5
	1.726	48		1.571	48.5		1.556	47.5		1.836	49.5		1.531	46		1.723	50
	1.621	47		1.721	48.5		1.341	46.5		1.856	50.5		1.46	48		1.663	48
	1.634	47.5		1.705	51		1.744	47		1.91	50.5		1.574	47.5		1.713	49
	1.654	51		1.526	48		1.73	48.5		2.001	52		1.135	43		1.759	49
	1.541	47		1.992	52		1.89	50		1.935	52		1.728	48.5		1.517	47.5
	1.709	49.5		1.643	49.5		1.987	52		1.953	51		1.615	47.5		1.704	49
TOTAL	20.423		TOTAL	20.764		TOTAL	20.65		TOTAL	22.55		TOTAL	18.401		TOTAL	20.268	
AVERAGE	1.70	49.33	AVERAGE	1.73	49.67	AVERAGE	1.72	49.13	AVERAGE	1.88	50.75	AVERAGE	1.53	47.25	AVERAGE	1.69	48.92

Table S7: Differential abundant ASVs found in the gut microbiota of fish housed in seage and tanks.

ASV	baseMean	log2FoldChc	lfcSE	stat	pvalue	padj	Kingdom	Phylum	Class	Order	Family	Genus	Species
2967622bca36c5b344cc32c40c037486	2435.51928	5.73888737	1.15778534	3.26483959	0.00109526	0.03388458	Bacteria	Spirochaetes	Spirochaelia	Brevinematales	Brevinemataceae	Brevinema	uncultured spirochaete
ed1e4d07d5435c713e709e9a7905644	14.8953633	-7.69441032	2.37411855	-3.23672246	0.00120202	0.03520395	Bacteria	Bacteroidetes	Bacteroidia	Flavobacteriales	Crociniomacaceae	Brumimicrobium	Brumimicrobium sp. N62
8693-dc4d62b5b3b5b30c303080c61b	19.8954441	-7.75210553	2.22794121	-3.47949286	0.00050236	0.016579	Bacteria	Bacteroidetes	Bacteroidia	Flavobacteriales	Flavobacteriaceae	Marcinia	Saieggnibacter sp. p58
82-143e7f8e08b9d7f7ed3-43a4e28832	33.2414074	-8.84653544	2.27211208	-3.69440975	9.84E-05	0.00487269	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Mariobacteriaceae	Mariobacter	unclassified
b5c5e6e5b53a2b476d1e627f86020d	11.440587	-7.31127643	2.06199805	-3.5436941	0.00039158	0.01491018	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Mariobacteriaceae	Mariobacter	Mariobacter sp. H3 (2009)
00f3f9f8a9c844436417d0f0f916390	66.9560973	-9.52967843	2.10789995	-4.53381162	5.79E-06	0.00059121	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Oceanospirillales	Halomonadaceae	Cobelia	unclassified
0643d94d8aa3d543d0f09110537846b	30.9708023	-8.78123439	2.15769865	-4.05891663	5.00E-05	0.00309121	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Oceanospirillales	Halomonadaceae	Halomonas	unclassified
bc611b6d2ec09fbb4ee970654829bd1	25.494582	-8.45895387	2.42231169	-3.49209967	0.00047924	0.016579	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Pseudomonadales	Moraxellaceae	Psychrobacter	unclassified
5a91d809a445a483a050b3277c8345d5	15.2094582	-7.72883948	2.11509834	-3.65412773	0.00025806	0.0116126	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Pseudoalteromonadaceae	Pseudoalteromonas	unclassified
929408f6eb57656bb8496989b63389	55.1317287	-9.57912858	2.21200706	-4.33054447	1.49E-05	0.00122728	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Pseudoalteromonadaceae	Pseudoalteromonas	unclassified
ee0a9568e050e1e2226a21a1b29560941	181.896101	-11.3020721	2.19276075	-5.1973805	2.55E-07	4.20E-05	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Pseudoalteromonadaceae	Pseudoalteromonas	unclassified
5b229fd1347c24c1285b33c5b4624747	53.8730525	-26.9555914	2.64336391	-10.1973805	2.04E-24	1.01E-21	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Pseudoalteromonadaceae	Pseudoalteromonas	unclassified
b250705e023a3e80838fca46f91023	225.44225	-7.87301387	1.62900714	-4.83301374	1.34E-06	0.00030887	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Pseudoalteromonadaceae	Pseudoalteromonas	unclassified
984a138b195c1546cb4914a57f9e975	29.7055832	-8.67803533	2.40538841	-3.60774804	0.00030887	0.01274072	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Pseudoalteromonadaceae	Pseudoalteromonas	unclassified
5c06c95e9430e1f99680d211743758	280.065488	-8.57280943	2.05380843	-4.15219316	3.29E-05	0.00232865	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Pseudoalteromonadaceae	Pseudoalteromonas	unclassified
b59622e8f08bc8e534e29cfe303a5	26.9456905	-8.54232034	2.18166944	-3.91549888	9.02E-05	0.00487269	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Pseudoalteromonadaceae	Pseudoalteromonas	unclassified
96282be5f76c9e80651d391b669b6a0	42.4116301	21.8954389	3.14687988	6.9603631	3.40E-12	8.42E-10	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Vibrionales	Vibrionaceae	Vibrio	unclassified

Table S8: Differential abundant ASVs found in the gut microbiota of fish treated with antibiotic and non-treated with antibiotic.

ASV	baseMean	log2FoldChc	lfcSE	stat	pvalue	padj	Kingdom	Phylum	Class	Order	Family	Genus	Species
2987622bcea36c5b3bc32ce0c037486	3538.44844	-12.0976066	1.66285306	-7.27521082	3.46E-13	3.29E-10	Bacteria	Spirochaetes	Spirochaetia	Brevinematales	Brevinemataceae	Brevinema	uncultured spirochete
524446332769bad5d0a40c9c46db146	1879.71492	-7.62165454	1.48615969	-5.12842234	2.92E-07	9.19E-05	Bacteria	Spirochaetes	Spirochaetia	Brevinematales	Brevinemataceae	Brevinema	uncultured spirochete
51744aa9aa296ff5e30846f5a6665c20	969.175022	-9.90533175	1.70941256	-5.79458229	6.85E-09	3.22E-06	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Vibrionales	Vibrionaceae	Alivibrio	unclassified

Table S9: Pair-wise PERMANOVA results investigating the influence of time on the skin microbial communities.

pairs	Df	SumsOfSqs	F.Model	R2	p.value	p.adjusted
T0vsT1	1	0.3255113	2.551344	0.1541472	0.001	0.006
T0vsT2	1	0.5518907	5.94727	0.2981496	0.001	0.006
T0vsT3	1	1.1222352	12.791463	0.4774455	0.001	0.006
T1vsT2	1	0.5927852	5.522193	0.2828675	0.001	0.006
T1vsT3	1	1.16844	11.423734	0.4493334	0.001	0.006
T2vsT3	1	0.629703	9.329643	0.3999051	0.002	0.012

Table S10: Differential abundant ASVs found in the skin microbiota of fish treated with antibiotic and non-treated with antibiotic.

ASV	baseMean	log2FoldChange	lfcSE	stat	pvalue	padj	Kingdom	Phylum	Class	Order	Family	Genus	Species
51aa2d85026604a6976bc6d7c50392d2	1.36562556	19.6466254	2.94077871	6.68075615	2.38E-11	7.56E-09	Bacteria	Bacteroidetes	Bacteroidia	Flavobacteriales	Flavobacteriaceae	Tenacibaculum	unclassified
67841821561c630c0c6e97543ad1571	11.4628156	7.08238194	1.83661038	3.85622451	0.00011515	0.01046236	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaaproteobacteria	Oceanospirillales	Olephillaceae	Olephilus	uncultured Olephilus sp.
172d3413675bcbca3b8e154706663aa6	26.801354	3.9848501	0.76177326	5.23101863	1.69E-07	2.68E-05	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaaproteobacteria	Oceanospirillales	Olephillaceae	Olephilus	uncultured gamma proteobacterium
706af6657aa3a94c4606ef25f631378	4.9995939	5.5035281	1.26984938	4.33400068	1.46E-05	0.00155209	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaaproteobacteria	Oceanospirillales	Olephillaceae	Olephilus	uncultured bacterium
b070273d0c47ab55cfe1094428e4931	24.6709529	2.81011745	0.59159776	4.75004748	2.03E-06	0.00025869	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaaproteobacteria	Oceanospirillales	Saccharospirillaceae	uncultured	unclassified
f6d1d0bbaef546997e1d1c0e5581b7c00	3.37808197	3.74380204	1.07539481	3.48132797	0.00049893	0.03966527	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Alteromonadaceae	Glacieola	Glacieola nitratireducens FR1064
e89af6561c14574801437267abc834ed	8.3395473	5.33218898	0.89675393	5.94610049	2.75E-09	5.82E-07	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Alteromonadaceae	Glacieola	Cylinrotheca closterium
628aa430aac608f3ade029d13483400	19.1512744	6.18796174	0.89614994	6.90505179	5.02E-12	3.19E-09	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaaproteobacteria	Alteromonadales	Alteromonadaceae	Paraglacieola	unclassified

**Appendix 3: Supplementary materials for
Chapter 4**

Figure S1: Rarefaction plot of all samples analysed in this study.

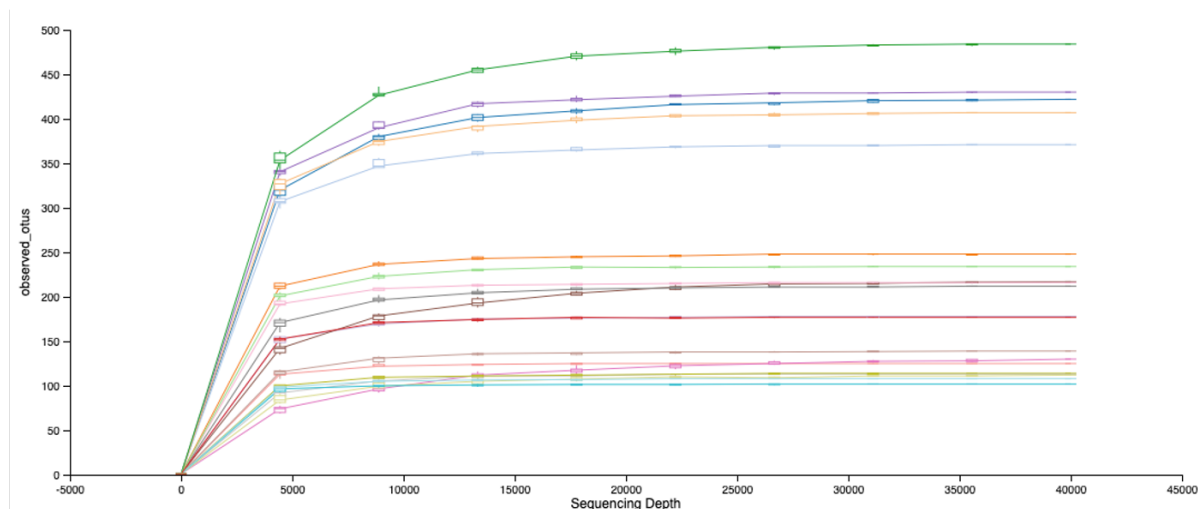


Figure S2: Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of (a) Simpson's diversity and (b) Pielou's evenness in digesta and mucosal samples. The levels of significant difference is denoted by $*p \leq 0.05$, $**p \leq 0.01$ and $***p \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank sum test.

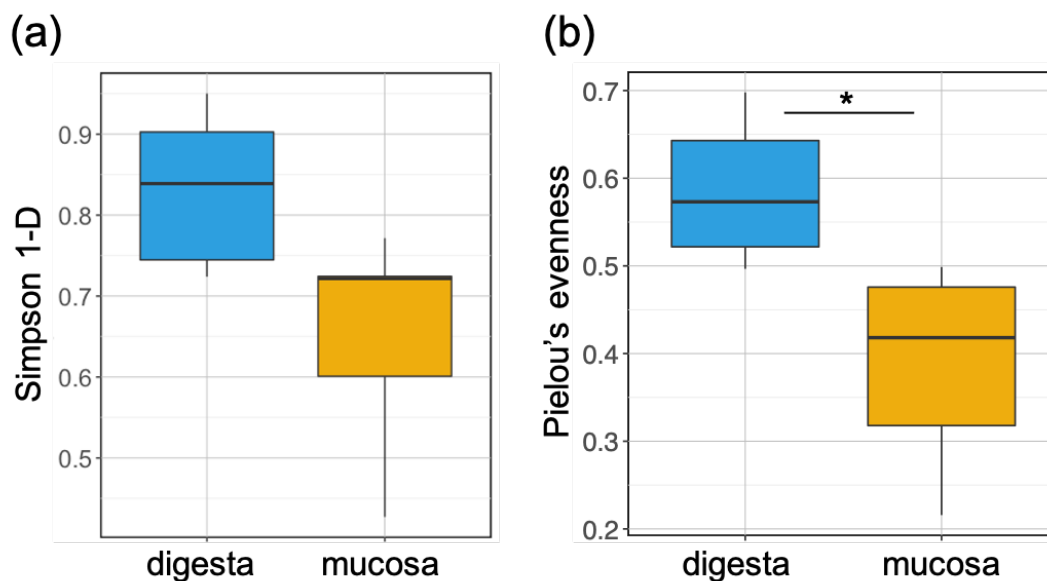


Figure S3: Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of (a) Simpson's diversity and (b) Pielou's evenness in PMA treated and control digesta samples. The levels of significant difference is denoted by * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$ and *** $p \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank sum test.

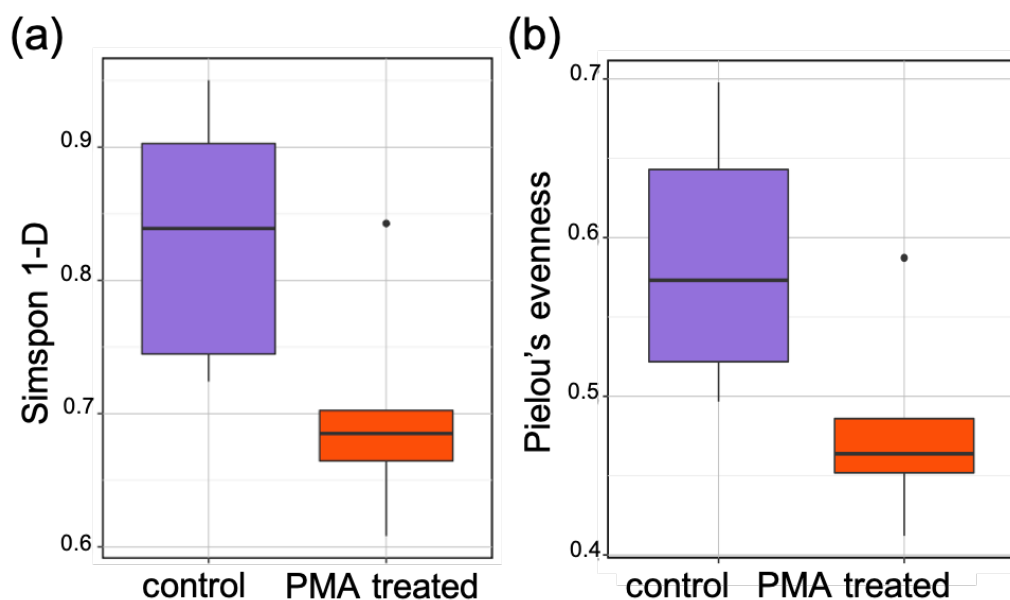


Figure S4: Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of the relative abundances of the summed Lactobacillales associated ASVs found in PMA treated and control digesta samples. The levels of significant difference is denoted by * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$ and *** $p \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank sum test.

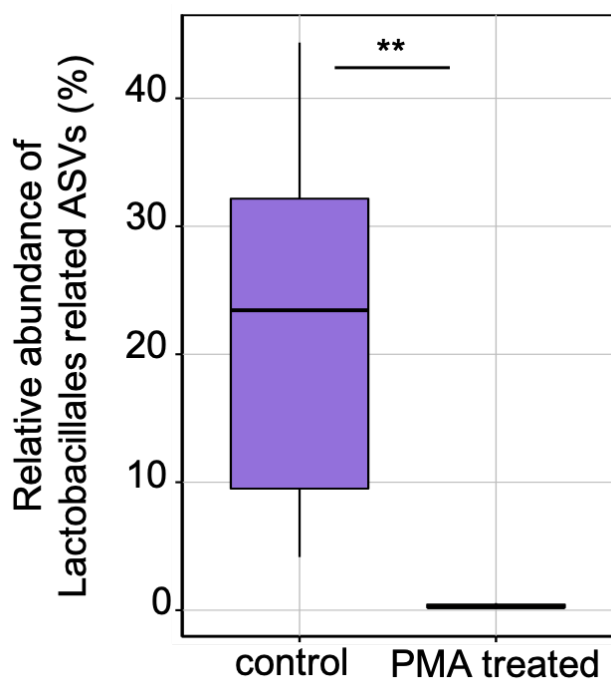


Figure S5: Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of (a) Simpson's diversity and (b) Pielou's evenness in PMA treated and control mucosal samples. The levels of significant difference is denoted by * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$ and *** $p \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank sum test.

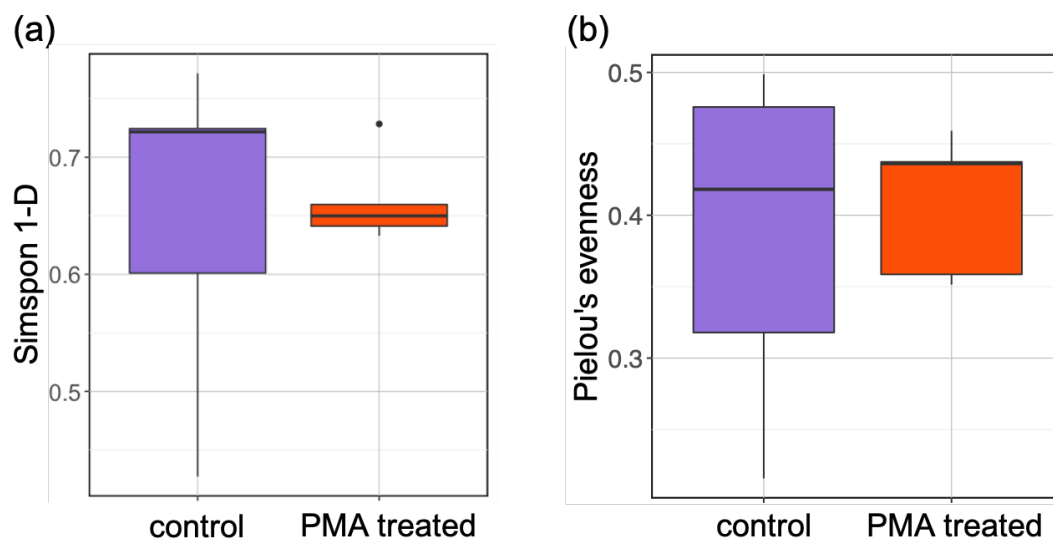


Figure S6: Boxplot presenting the median and IQR of the relative abundances of the summed Lactobacillales associated ASVs found in PMA treated and control mucosal samples. The levels of significant difference is denoted by * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$ and *** $p \leq 0.001$, following the Wilcoxon rank sum test.

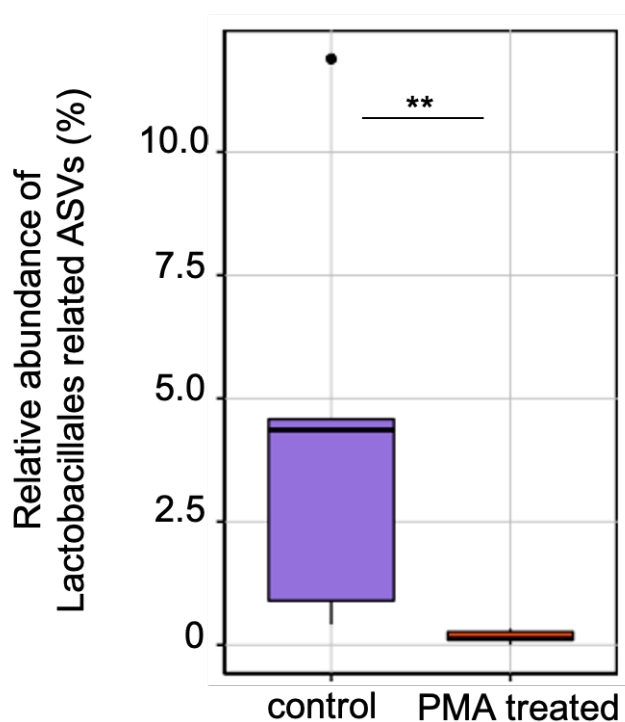


Table S1: Differentially abundant ASVs found in digesta and mucosal samples.

ASV	baseMean	log2FoldChaiIrcE	stat	pvalue	padj	Domain	Phylum	Class	Order	Family	Genus	Confidence
d058c5dc742ae3188a79190c2860e1	8.96139106	-6.4381861	2.09071674	-3.0794158	0.000207407	0.0343859	Bacteria	Actinobacteria	Micrococcales	Brevbacteriaceae	Brevbacterium	0.9999954
52f605d9dfe254459307af6a4a66d61b7	89.9303591	10.160434	2.78125804	3.65317919	0.00025901	0.0067991	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Rickettsiales	Anaplasmataceae	Neorickettsia	0.7249088
86d77218e88557a0d33483e63be71322	6.97094749	-21.209651	3.03808776	-6.9980192	2.60E-12	1.17E-10	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Rhodobacterales	Rhodobacteraceae	NA	0.9999962
3707712689019c4e293136a2e2b8bc8	521.681565	8.88195091	2.91580268	3.04614265	0.00231798	0.03650816	Bacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Vibrionales	Vibrionaceae	Allivibrio	0.7697352
412e7831e6c074e82dfcb70f9a50442	195.31081	25.2970534	3.02643982	8.35868376	6.34E-17	9.99E-15	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Vibrionales	Vibrionaceae	Allivibrio	0.935329
f919a4626475814fcded74302666e883	18.18355	21.988128	3.02889417	7.25945732	3.89E-13	2.04E-11	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Vibrionales	Vibrionaceae	Allivibrio	0.9133922
40afea1c0f80c98d2f97be0c6d4b83b2	22.648261	20.8763011	3.02836278	6.89359319	5.44E-12	2.14E-10	Bacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Vibrionales	Vibrionaceae	Vibrio	0.946339
8f5e9ebcb9f1eeae5071b4b64375d2	33.0394246	22.8193827	3.02767985	7.53692061	4.81E-14	3.03E-12	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Vibrionales	Vibrionaceae	Vibrio	0.9804048
d9b14a887a0caaa601c7c7e4846e99e	55.1364368	23.5275985	3.02708467	7.7723622	7.70E-15	6.07E-13	Bacteria	Spirochaetes	Brevinematales	Brevinemataceae	Brevinema	0.9716926
7c393bae925a0d8f34832eccd7c0d1d9	11802.1942	9.48027819	2.88741973	3.28330451	0.00102598	0.0230845	Bacteria	Spirochaetes	Brevinematales	Brevinemataceae	Brevinema	0.9765096
5fab83e2d0bb4ea79f03b63df3cfba1	691.192075	27.0615491	3.02625825	8.94224711	3.81E-19	1.20E-16	Bacteria	Spirochaetes	Brevinematales	Brevinemataceae	Brevinema	0.9582485
dc7e74b2230573eed3a6d8833eb4b816	20.3056173	-7.6186463	2.42195781	-3.1456561	0.00165715	0.03262509	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridiales	Family XI	Teplidimicrobium	0.9999656
504c43d105d63e8e55959f5b9ec9b0a9	14.7587031	-7.1579545	2.40961799	-2.9705765	0.00297241	0.04070915	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridiales	Peptostreptococaceae	Romboutsia	0.9278561
f67715ab7175c217e599a88a29a36b	20.8295418	-7.6547269	2.48001966	-3.086559	0.00202488	0.0343859	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridiales	Ruminococaceae	Pigmalobacter	0.9955584
c7da083319d1c05e351d16a7b079a1a1	14.6011264	-7.1432012	2.39817667	-2.9785967	0.00289572	0.04070915	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridiales	Lachnospiraceae	NA	0.99868
967cb3751471774d6bcdaf621f2c1c1	5.35496776	-20.832813	3.03219927	-6.8705289	6.40E-12	2.24E-10	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridiales	Lachnospiraceae	Tyzerella 3	0.9999821
7fcd376afa09566956d5ca0f55d5662	20.7362982	-7.6490436	2.44781983	-3.1248393	0.00177902	0.03296424	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridiales	Clostridiaceae 1	Clostridium sensu stricto 15	0.8057801
9a5573e8614d2654d057bdd4e770a8d5	17.6040632	-7.412235	2.45820365	-3.0153055	0.00256721	0.03850808	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Bacillales	Staphylococaceae	Macrococcus	0.9998405
3fd6015bac4b72e6b01567795bedc4	20.7642826	-7.6517257	2.39115578	-3.2000114	0.00137422	0.02885866	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Bacillales	Paenibacillaceae	Brevibacillus	0.9999963
522b62504f41a1b9fce76711483a3a23	42.3055954	-23.648595	3.02695455	-7.8126692	5.60E-15	5.88E-13	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Lactobacillales	Lactobacillaceae	Lactobacillus	0.7452057
fec8a59a5e2636b5690bd66fa4d28a5c	31.0514374	-8.2327464	2.12797476	-3.8688177	0.00010936	0.00344498	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Lactobacillales	Lactobacillaceae	Lactobacillus	0.9999982
9a891705636a19d582ac09f6289337eb	50.2427089	-7.2972315	2.05393591	-3.5528039	0.00038115	0.00923552	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Lactobacillales	Lactobacillaceae	Lactobacillus	0.9986214
7366c88f0a2b76212aa6fb8b08f460	31.5251678	-8.2538503	2.18949707	-3.7697471	0.00016341	0.00467955	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Lactobacillales	Leuconostocaceae	Weissella	1

Table S2: Amount of sequences used to generate the prediction of microbial functions using Tax4Fun2.

Sample Id	Proportion of sequences (%)
Dig10.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	72%
Dig13.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	85%
Dig2.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	83%
Dig4.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	65%
Dig5.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	77%
Digd10.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	88%
Digd13.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	88%
Digd2.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	93%
Digd4.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	82%
Digd5.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	90%
M10.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	35%
M13.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	62%
M2.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	20%
M4.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	86%
M5.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	92%
Md10.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	45%
Md13.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	65%
Md2.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	38%
Md4.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	92%
Md5.16S_V3.V4_CVDWN	93%

Table with columns for identifiers (ko04261 to ko05416) and various numerical values, followed by descriptive text for each identifier.

Table S4: Differentially abundant ASVs found in PMA treated and control digesta samples.

ASV	baseMean	log2FoldChange	stat	pvalue	padj	Domain	Phylum	Class	Order	Family	Genus	Confidence	
030050f1504395da27ff6a0c04778	13.1037487	-7.6237776	2.7492197	< 2.730066e-06	0.0055330	Bacteria	Actinobacteria	Coriobacteriales	Coriobacteriales	Eggerthellaceae	Paragetterthella	0.750793	
75487697629a262271f6e4a4b9672	33.3558868	-8.8848287	2.4998815	< 2.5540999e-06	0.0037928	Bacteria	Actinobacteria	Coriobacteriales	Coriobacteriales	Coriobacteriales incertae	uncultured	0.870897	
16c450b95c534eac7000217f2645d41	47.4525079	-8.7539296	2.5237873	< 2.4325079e-06	0.0020870	Bacteria	Actinobacteria	Micrococcales	Micrococcales	Brevitaleaceae	Brevitaleaceae	0.9599954	
4f058ca542aae1388a79932086201	14.789523	-7.80033	3.1399562	< 3.6449501e-06	0.0020870	Bacteria	Actinobacteria	Micrococcales	Micrococcales	Brevitaleaceae	Brevitaleaceae	0.9599954	
86072128e85730d33483e3e71322	10.0814765	-22.08991	3.0317395	< 7.2865844e-13	2.73e-11	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Alphaproteobacteria	Rhodobacteriales	Rhodobacteriales	NA	0.9599952	
1c67c310d313a3e3a30232802a14	99.4562679	-21.72543	3.0207828	< 8.3167499e-17	9.04e-17	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Alphaproteobacteria	Rhodobacteriales	Rhodobacteriales	Albinimus	0.9370054	
1444c478c2717f8a59d50c4261919	6.42498468	-3.1984999	3.0207828	< 8.3167499e-17	9.04e-17	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Alphaproteobacteria	Rhodobacteriales	Rhodobacteriales	Rhodobacteriales	0.9848805	
b3c274267700d80b0c65643c04a	5.36228889	-8.344127	1.8843219	< 2.9042443e-06	0.0038411	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaproteobacteria	Pseudomonadales	Moraxellaceae	Enhydrobacter	0.9599953	
7c9339a295d6a0f748329cf0cd49	23.858612	-23.249081	3.0284359	< 7.6769379e-16	1.63e-14	Bacteria	Spirochaetes	Spirochaetes	Brevinematodes	Brevinematodes	Brevinematodes	0.9765096	
9f150388f1501b313e313e313e313e	21.6529321	-8.348321	2.7855200	< 2.9970117e-06	0.0027426	Archaea	Euryarchaeota	Methanobacteriales	Methanobacteriales	Methanobacteriales	Methanobacteriales	0.9596714	
4602449692896828364646749495	30.9048957	-8.864252	2.4883251	< 3.5622994e-06	0.0036716	Archaea	Euryarchaeota	Methanobacteriales	Methanobacteriales	Methanobacteriales	Methanobacteriales	0.9942246	
858e49059129199263974fd44d	12.6054904	-7.5665885	2.7654708	< 2.7360975e-06	0.0026275	Archaea	Euryarchaeota	Methanobacteriales	Methanobacteriales	Methanobacteriales	Methanobacteriales	0.9595313	
98476207f24e320c51eac67e7d3	6.0058988	-31.89303	3.0550789	< 7.0497344e-12	3.90e-12	Bacteria	Bacteroidetes	Sphingobacteriales	Sphingobacteriales	env_DPS_1	NA	0.9599998	
19f73084e4417f9d66f9026f0	21.4088402	-9.2819506	2.7921624	< 2.9939704e-06	0.0025428	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Fabaceae	Bacterium	0.9782031	
7e2ca27a278087c52feaf40c9ef99	9.7582677	-7.1948411	2.7666834	< 6.8005283e-06	0.0038102	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Erysipelotrichales	Erysipelotrichales	Erysipelotrichaceae	Erysipelotrich	0.9987451	
726a4b015018a3374a4d19f945c67	7.1358818	-8.7490121	2.4388246	< 2.7679596e-06	0.0056474	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Erysipelotrichales	Erysipelotrichales	Erysipelotrichaceae	Erysipelotrich	0.9988857	
39f06f0670703c1e3d62c0b75a	27.4710466	-8.6919323	2.4585245	< 3.5352425e-06	0.0040272	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Erysipelotrichales	Erysipelotrichales	Erysipelotrichaceae	Erysipelotrich	0.9827386	
6e2315c30d0b088420272f330	8.696436	-7.028484	1.8841318	< 3.2181893e-06	0.0012903	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Erysipelotrichales	Erysipelotrichales	Erysipelotrichaceae	Erysipelotrich	0.9140210	
19046c5d1c20720c284b5475e4c	10.7132363	-7.3349023	2.7534862	< 2.8816218e-06	0.0023262	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Erysipelotrichales	Erysipelotrichales	Erysipelotrichaceae	Erysipelotrich	0.9854352	
94ac00470b47a7e7f99a252c7571	10.687344	-3.22575	2.7430239	< 2.6790899e-06	0.0073697	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Erysipelotrichales	Erysipelotrichales	Erysipelotrichaceae	Erysipelotrich	0.9999999	
8a97e74c2d989f3a20c909e9d0	40.269312	-8.2504929	2.9298491	< 3.9039339e-06	0.0092339	Bacteria	Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	0.99996	
8a03937617042866094744441474	62.9639142	-8.8915478	2.8248249	< 3.5019303e-06	0.0039955	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Unclassified	0.9943005	
170664e8a504662215ee0f4e698	12.4532048	-7.843372	2.2129394	< 3.5447299e-06	0.0039686	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	W5053	0.8284118	
99c6b31504145a3a50b674d843c12	34.178837	-8.260997	2.2235466	< 3.5062008e-06	0.0039698	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	W5053	0.9615851	
7e33064a45c5863803805a89a0c	11.1447769	-7.3899098	3.0012003	< 2.4271036e-06	0.0148054	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	W5053	0.95775	
cb87f889193519e9f50e787a	38.6228265	-8.118792	2.4585046	< 3.6535559e-06	0.0027749	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Unclassified	0.9594919	
93f20f88869919f6b764179209	13.2926207	-7.40719	2.7605244	< 2.8882007e-06	0.0012913	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Gallicella	0.9981126	
7d28999794a4b1c1c02445826a426	26.949524	-8.1905264	2.9007926	< 3.1577481e-06	0.0064289	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Gallicella	0.9593949	
1907110b5c70b79af75641a048487e	12.5439607	-10.17652	2.5180286	< 9.6197943e-07	3.00e-07	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Gallicella	0.9502732	
2a4008c67e74c7913902755f9ee1e	14.070227	-7.726866	2.7637197	< 2.795398e-06	0.0051835	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Pentophilus	0.964601	
4e491e3e3003738e1447e21c9e40212	19.725754	-8.4515984	2.6457295	< 3.0298928e-06	0.0028928	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Pentophilus	0.994281	
697512b703a0a48375d544489	27.325287	-10.01099	2.2063247	< 5.4440448e-06	5.21e-08	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Pentophilus	0.943662	
cd50791188ed40f4047a2f93c586	89.693913	-10.40303	2.5281827	< 4.1148939e-06	0.0005191	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Pentophilus	0.9378867	
4963c2779d10509602e0d43491	33.882389	-8.997129	2.4907423	< 3.6126125e-06	0.0031763	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Pentophilus	0.9599993	
480218301945a4e4816d3443454	26.81519	-7.133426	2.6845099	< 4.1444249e-06	0.0015461	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Pentophilus	0.9999998	
197823c20392040644c6459980a69	27.2600567	-10.00947	2.2435548	< 4.4977494e-06	6.87e-06	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Pentophilus	0.9480701	
9f797170205d446250f8f9802b	13.3887007	-7.418306	3.0309163	< 2.4473454e-06	0.0148384	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Pentophilus	0.99892	
4c50e5f5d0192700602c1935d4214	30.520789	-8.8340961	2.9358291	< 3.1582441e-06	0.0013372	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Pentophilus	0.9999999	
4939e1448392949448d446545107	26.825197	-6.859473	2.7912164	< 3.1029995e-06	0.0191963	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Pentophilus	0.9599992	
376664e4869e95a540e66d674095	10.2540985	-8.882887	2.5665588	< 4.2734031e-06	0.0003182	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Unclassified	0.998041
899e9e48444e70bd806d1ca5d	10.47318	-7.303649	2.8796044	< 2.9700448e-06	0.0148717	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	NA	0.9982317
4648486968d6c27891021ca71c0a	34.178837	-8.260997	2.2235466	< 3.5062008e-06	0.0039698	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	NA	0.9745621
0021024f9c205721ec1e36e1d0	8.1843037	-6.682662	2.415497	< 2.7660816e-06	0.0057378	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.9599951
21a1899f5661837017ad63a703d8	12.0170188	-10.37741	2.1968421	< 4.2372949e-06	2.31e-06	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.9599998
199f0c3d6e4861e93214e3443251e0	16.252778	-7.283297	2.926868	< 6.2967823e-06	0.0008438	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.9993338
9f70838494011554b33986819d1	21.8195371	-8.83409	2.7685504	< 3.0201197e-06	0.0023568	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.9599996
3e0f9c5968495a08e2c193e2d91	29.2688167	-8.784515	2.754448	< 3.1657572e-06	0.0015468	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.9599996
3e0f9c5968495a08e2c193e2d91	33.620263	-7.648831	3.0302253	< 3.5237959e-06	0.0181883	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.9599998
98d377e44c31e3e771913964002f	30.520789	-8.8340961	2.9358291	< 3.1582441e-06	0.0013372	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.9599998
3e0f9c5968495a08e2c193e2d91	27.0049084	-8.6909989	2.7840621	< 3.1207957e-06	0.0018028	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.903261
513d6100e8a5075d2f3e3cafd4	22.9447378	-8.432572	2.7954523	< 3.0167772e-06	0.0025747	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.9599998
44a48e12508b3a7070a2e94a3250	14.312889	-8.763889	2.8188891	< 2.7952495e-06	0.0054815	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.9745621
4f1e607f949994473b5d01ca4d	15.8288448	-6.726641	2.6273573	< 3.5500013e-06	0.0010184	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.7575387
217552318	8.3652175	-7.666187	3.1257121	< 0.0011105e-06	0.0077663	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.7376313
989c1e12a88471c5350d0a8170ab5	33.882389	-8.997129	2.4907423	< 3.6126125e-06	0.0031763	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.8005374
96544733e206c074011990271	12.840927	-7.99027	2.781937	< 3.872324e-06	0.0189129	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.994747
5ad44914c180129cd236f73e315	6.3877151	-9.480804	2.5174713	< 3.8883258e-06	0.0013959	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.738382
9f797170205d446250f8f9802b	17.9698335	-9.04780	2.8044222	< 2.4610373e-06	0.0174879	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.7406133
9f797170205d446250f8f9802b	28.248928	-8.1254668	2.953688	< 3.8207335e-06	0.0025435	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.980013
41f5e83d86a3e0c7845f41a02d	9.0617134	-7.088652	2.7429716	< 2.5842798e-06	0.0097526	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.9207059
6127992659928173d12e0a4d443	5.0262367	-2.629514	2.4567482	< 2.5383051e-06	0.0048572	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.9448495
970d025f36a99176f305b70e151f	10.124289	-2.542781	2.744751	< 2.6429699e-06	0.0023043	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridia	Family XI	Peptonitretosaceae	Peptonitretosaceae	0.9599989
54071373e206													

Table S5: Differentially abundant ASVs found in PMA treated and control mucosal samples.

ASV	baseMean	log2FoldChange	fcSE	stat	pvalue	padj	Domain	Phylum	Class	Order	Family	Genus	Confidence
abedeacac6b0ef8a19a2bc2dbce302661	5.54513016	-21.22928183	3.03580812	-6.9929705	2.69E-12	1.26E-10	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Alphaproteobacteria	Caulobacteriales	Caulobacteraceae	Caulobacter	0.9961402
fb19a46264758f4c0e47434266be883	18.8857399	-22.63352765	3.02904612	-7.4721634	7.89E-14	4.94E-12	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaaproteobacteria	Vibrionales	Vibrionaceae	Aliivibrio	0.9133922
40afaea1c0f90c98d2f97be0c604f83b2	23.5228635	-23.23003819	3.0284849	-7.6705148	1.71E-14	1.61E-12	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaaproteobacteria	Vibrionales	Vibrionaceae	Vibrio	0.9463339
8f55eebbcb9f1eaae5d71b4b64375d2	34.5961843	-23.75138962	3.02775372	-7.844558	4.34E-15	8.17E-13	Bacteria	Proteobacteria	Gammaaproteobacteria	Vibrionales	Vibrionaceae	Vibrio	0.9804048
6c972512b70f3cbb04ac83754d4a4489	14.43252	-7.681411075	2.7168185	-2.8273553	0.00469342	0.04411817	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridiales	Family XI	Peptoniphilus	0.9436652
4857183803c4b5ac8d1f6bd31e3d633d	25.708419	-8.485823465	2.15977543	-3.9299403	8.50E-05	0.00145216	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridiales	Family XI	Peptoniphilus	0.9999995
21a1896566183d7276e33ca7023a8d	11.6042131	-10.68791648	2.21413785	-4.8271233	1.39E-06	3.72E-05	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridiales	Peptostreptococaceae	Peptostreptococcus	0.9999998
19f99c686ab4c981924fbf60075a5	22.8259745	-8.3433266	2.71635145	-3.0715196	0.00212972	0.02355222	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridiales	Peptostreptococaceae	Peptostreptococcus	0.9999999
59b1c84d94df30bf6075b9781979a1f	12.7520863	-7.503688193	2.70580474	-2.7731817	0.00555111	0.04969567	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Clostridia	Clostridiales	Peptococaceae	Peptococcus	0.8086646
fc581702f613c76066be766c009afb6f	18.3973044	-8.033360557	2.72277998	-2.9504259	0.00317336	0.03139958	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Badilli	Lactobacillales	unclassified_Lactobacillales	unclassified_Lactobacillales	0.9900712
f008eeee750e241b43034931c6827292	46.2344595	-9.360556993	2.13270043	-4.3890632	1.14E-05	0.0002378	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Badilli	Lactobacillales	unclassified_Lactobacillales	unclassified_Lactobacillales	0.9900401
ada2fe787c9abdd697ea94ff6db9abc	104.634594	-10.53864053	2.24497573	-4.6943227	2.67E-06	6.29E-05	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Badilli	Lactobacillales	Carnobacteriaceae	Carnobacterium	0.9995522
ceac3908d9744056767c7b33321d23	25.4789016	-8.500094253	2.45900848	-3.4567161	0.0005468	0.00788131	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Badilli	Lactobacillales	Enterococaceae	Vagococcus	0.9435546
b57f3b429c543042b54c8af6d67f057	123.927084	-10.78284003	2.18296674	-4.9395347	7.83E-07	2.45E-05	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Badilli	Lactobacillales	Enterococaceae	Vagococcus	0.9955289
563efbf0750ab6f42f1d182438b9e9d	179.758293	-11.31927799	2.18762789	-5.1742246	2.29E-07	8.61E-06	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Badilli	Lactobacillales	Streptococaceae	Anthococcus	0.9833737
1368a0bcf0bb5c524d8f3164135cad	20.4211701	-8.18154094	2.44527378	-3.3458589	0.00082028	0.01028086	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Badilli	Lactobacillales	Streptococaceae	Lactococcus	0.9999779
264c57e2d0c321eb3912386c5118b35b	21.6487824	-8.266434771	2.74018902	-3.0167389	0.0025551	0.02668658	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Badilli	Lactobacillales	Streptococaceae	Lactococcus	0.9998157
70ac1b0517a99686ff342d18be48705	24.9182953	-8.469252463	2.46371491	-3.4375944	0.00058691	0.00788131	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Badilli	Lactobacillales	Streptococaceae	Streptococcus	0.9678453
3397061d8eb2e1a16f6601040296fa35	24.3933332	-8.43903773	2.16709655	-3.8941679	9.85E-05	0.00154374	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Badilli	Lactobacillales	Streptococaceae	Streptococcus	0.7050089
2c595a2f852c6c4b28e6e3e2eb16d6ed	82.3070843	-10.19244968	2.51396654	-4.0542399	5.03E-05	0.00094523	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Badilli	Lactobacillales	Streptococaceae	Streptococcus	0.8996151
fc281204b7ef0a6f75be499497f0a99	16.8617159	-7.907743437	2.39454541	-3.3023986	0.00095862	0.01126375	Bacteria	Firmicutes	Badilli	Lactobacillales	Enterococaceae	Enterococcus	0.9987112