

## Pyrite trace-element and sulfur isotope geochemistry of paleo-mesoproterozoic McArthur Basin: Proxy for oxidative weathering

INDRANI MUKHERJEE<sup>1,\*</sup>, ROSS R. LARGE<sup>1</sup>, STUART BULL<sup>1</sup>, DANIEL G. GREGORY<sup>2</sup>,  
ALEKSANDR S. STEPANOV<sup>1</sup>, JANAÍNA ÁVILA<sup>3</sup>, TREVOR R. IRELAND<sup>3</sup>, AND ROSS CORKREY<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Centre for Ore Deposit and Earth Sciences (CODES), University of Tasmania, Private Bag 126, Hobart, Tasmania 7001, Australia  
Orcid 0000-0002-2808-1821

<sup>2</sup>Department of Earth Sciences, University of Toronto, 22 Russell Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 3B1, Canada

<sup>3</sup>Research School of Earth Sciences, The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia

<sup>4</sup>Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania 7001, Australia

### ABSTRACT

Redox-sensitive trace elements and sulfur isotope compositions obtained via in situ analyses of sedimentary pyrites from marine black shales are used to track atmosphere-ocean redox conditions between ~1730 and ~1360 Ma in the McArthur Basin, northern Australia. Three black shale formations within the basin (Wollogorang Formation 1730 ± 3 Ma, Barney Creek Formation 1640 ± 3 Ma, and Upper Velkerri Formation 1361 ± 21 Ma) display systematic stratigraphic variations in pyrite trace-element compositions obtained using LA-ICP-MS. The concentrations of several trace elements and their ratios, such as Se, Zn, Se/Co, Ni/Co, Zn/Co, Mo/Co, Se/Bi, Zn/Bi, Ni/Bi, increase from the stratigraphically lower Wollogorang Formation to the Upper Velkerri Formation. Cobalt, Bi, Mo, Cu, and Tl show a consistent decrease in abundance while Ni, As, and Pb show no obvious trends.

We interpret these trace element trends as a response to the gradual increase of oxygen in the atmosphere-ocean system from ~1730 to 1360 Ma. Elements more mobile during erosion under rising atmospheric oxygen show an increase up stratigraphy (e.g., Zn, Se), whereas elements that are less mobile show a decrease (e.g., Co, Bi). We also propose the increase of elemental ratios (Se/Co, Ni/Co, Zn/Co, Mo/Co, Ni/Bi, and Zn/Bi) up stratigraphy are strong indicators of atmospheric oxygenation.

Sulfur isotopic compositions of marine pyrite ( $\delta^{34}\text{S}_{\text{pyrite}}$ ) from these formations, obtained using SHRIMP-SI, are highly variable, with the Wollogorang Formation exhibiting less variation ( $\delta^{34}\text{S} = -29.4$  to  $+9.5\%$ ; mean  $-5.03\%$ ) in comparison to the Barney Creek ( $\delta^{34}\text{S} = -13.8$  to  $+41.8\%$ ; mean  $+19.88\%$ ) and Velkerri Formations ( $\delta^{34}\text{S} = -14.2$  to  $+52.8\%$ ; mean  $+26.9\%$ ). We propose that the shift in mean  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  to heavier values up-section corresponds to increasing deep water oxygenation from ~1730 to 1360 Ma. Incursion of oxygenated waters possibly caused a decrease in the areal extent of anoxic areas, at the same time, creating a possibly efficient reducing system. A stronger reducing system caused the  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  of the sedimentary pyrites to become progressively heavier. Interestingly, heavy  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  in pyrites overlaps with the increase in the concentration of certain trace elements (and their ratios) in sedimentary pyrites (Se, Zn, Se/Co, Ni/Co, Zn/Co, Mo/Co, Ni/Bi, and Zn/Bi). This study concludes that there was a gradual increase of atmospheric oxygen accompanied by ocean oxygenation through the first ~400 million years of the Boring Billion (1800–1400 Ma) in the McArthur Basin.

**Keywords:** McArthur Basin, Sedimentary pyrite, Boring Billion, trace elements, sulphur isotopes; Understanding Paleo-Ocean Proxies: Insights From In Situ Analyses