

# 1 **Structure of *Dunaliella* Photosystem II reveals conformational** 2 **flexibility of stacked and unstacked supercomplexes**

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15 cryo-EM

16

## 17 **Abstract**

18 Photosystem II (PSII) generates an oxidant whose redox potential is high enough to enable water

19 oxidation<sup>1,2</sup>, a substrate so abundant that it assures a practically unlimited electron source for life

20 on earth<sup>3</sup>. Our knowledge on the mechanism of water photooxidation was greatly advanced by

21 high-resolution structures of prokaryotic PSII<sup>4-6</sup>. Here we show high-resolution structures of

22 eukaryotic PSII from the green algae *Dunaliella salina* at two distinct conformations. The

23 conformers are also present in stacked PSII, exhibiting flexibility that is relevant to the grana

24 formation in chloroplasts of the green lineage. CP29, one of PSII associated light harvesting

25 antennae, plays a major role in distinguishing the two conformations of the supercomplex. We also

26 show that the stacked PSII dimer, a form suggested to support the organization of thylakoid

27 membranes<sup>7,8</sup>, can appear in many different orientations providing a flexible stacking mechanism

28 for the arrangement of grana stacks in thylakoids. Our findings provide a structural basis for the  
29 heterogenous nature of the eukaryotic PSII on multiple levels.

### 30 **Introduction**

31 In eukaryotes, the light reaction of oxygenic photosynthesis occurs in chloroplasts. Four protein  
32 complexes essential for the light reactions reside in an elaborate membrane system of flattened  
33 sacs called thylakoids<sup>9</sup>. From these four complexes the Photosystem II (PSII) complex catalyzes  
34 light-driven water oxidation and provides the electrons used for carbon fixation<sup>10,11</sup>.

35 Thylakoids form a physically continuous three-dimensional network, differentiated into two  
36 distinct physical domains: cylindrical stacked structures (called grana) and connecting single  
37 membrane regions (stroma lamellae). Photosystem I (PSI) is mainly located in the stroma lamellae  
38 while PSII is found almost exclusively in the grana<sup>12-14</sup>. Grana stacking is a dynamic process  
39 dependent on the internal osmotic pressure, the luminal ion composition, and environmental cues,  
40 and is thought to be supported by interactions among PSII complexes<sup>15-19</sup>.

41 PSII is a homodimer with a molecular mass of ~500 kDa, each monomer contains cofactors such  
42 as chlorophylls (Chls), quinones, carotenoids, and lipids which are coordinated by at least 20  
43 protein subunits<sup>1,20</sup>. In each PSII core, a cluster of four manganese (Mn) and one calcium (Ca)  
44 carries out H<sub>2</sub>O oxidation and O<sub>2</sub> release<sup>21</sup>. The eukaryotic reaction centre (RC) is a dimer  
45 surrounded by tightly bound monomeric light harvesting complexes (LHCs) and trimeric LHCII  
46 complexes<sup>22-24</sup>; Two monomeric LHCs, CP26 and CP29, are located between LHCII trimers and  
47 PSII core subunits<sup>25</sup>; additional LHCII trimers can bind PSII depending on light intensity and  
48 quality<sup>26</sup>.

49 Although more than three billion years of evolution separate cyanobacteria, red algae, green algae  
50 and plants, high resolution PSII structures show that each PSII monomer along with its dimeric

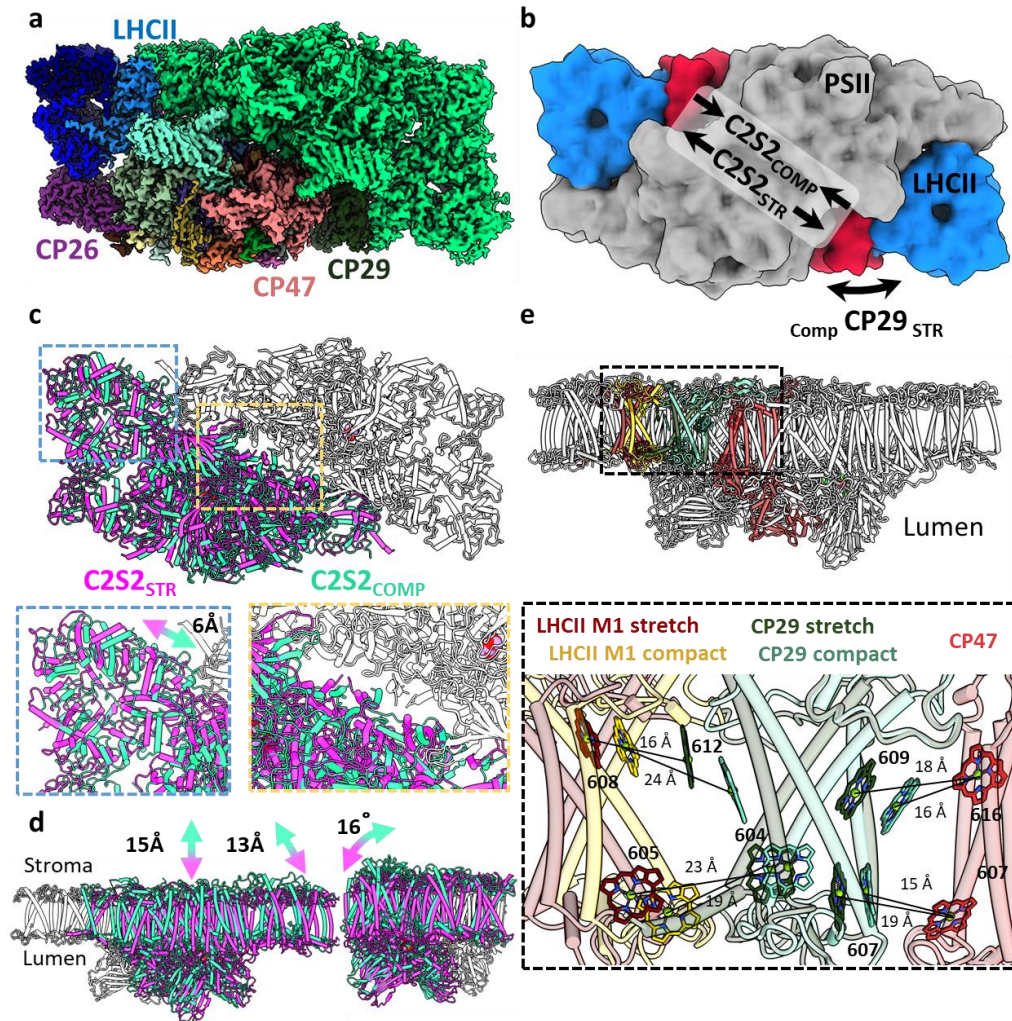
51 arrangement are highly conserved, especially in the membrane bound regions of the PSII<sup>27–32</sup>.  
52 Structural and spectroscopic investigations uncovered various aspects of PSII's water splitting  
53 mechanism, but a complete model is still missing<sup>4,5,33–35</sup>. Most of the mechanistic and structural  
54 studies of PSII were performed in thermophilic cyanobacteria, but structural studies of PSII from  
55 the eukaryotic lineage are lagging<sup>27,31,32,36</sup>.  
56 In this work photosystem II was isolated from the halotolerant green alga *Dunaliella salina*. A  
57 high-resolution (2.43 Å) structure of PSII shows unique structural properties of the *Dunaliella*  
58 PSII supercomplex. The eukaryotic PSII appear to exist in two distinct core conformations that  
59 differ substantially in their inner dimer separation and the location of CP29, an important  
60 monomeric LHC. Structural analysis of stacked PSII dimers showed highly flexible interactions  
61 which can play a role in the dynamic organisation of chloroplast membranes. These finding  
62 introduce an additional, underlying, level of organisation which can impact its excitation energy  
63 transfer properties and the overall organization of the thylakoid membranes.

## 64 **Results**

### 65 **Two distinct PSII conformation in green alga.**

66 Highly active PSII from *D. salina* cells was applied on glow-discharged holey carbon grids that  
67 were vitrified for cryo-EM structural determination (see Methods). Initial classification of the  
68 dataset showed that approximately 20% of the particle population were in a stacked PSII  
69 configuration, containing two PSII dimers facing each other on their stromal side (**Extended Data**  
70 **Fig. 1**). From the unstacked PSII dimers, approximately 20% were in the C2S configuration (two  
71 Cores, one Stable LHCII), which was previously identified by low resolution cryo-EM<sup>25</sup>  
72 (**Extended Data Fig. 1c**). The majority of the PSII particles contained 2 LHCII in the C2S2  
73 configuration. The map of the C2S2 particles refined to a global resolution of 2.82 Å (**Extended**

74 **Data Fig. 2**). Close examination of this map revealed that CP29, one of the monomeric LHC  
75 proteins, implicated as a junction for excitation energy transfer from LHCII trimers to PSII core,  
76 appeared to be in lower resolution than the rest of the supercomplex (**Extended Data Fig. 2a**).  
77 Indeed, when this particle set was further classified, two distinct PSII conformations of the PSII  
78 supercomplex became apparent. In these two conformations the two PSII cores are shifted laterally  
79 with respect to each other (**Fig. 1**). This lateral shift is accompanied by several other associated  
80 movements, most noticeably, a large movement of the CP29 subunit (**Fig. 1**) in line with our initial  
81 observation. The two conformers were denoted compact and stretched PSII (C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> and  
82 C2S2<sub>STR</sub>, respectively), and the high specific activity of 816  $\mu\text{mol O}_2/\text{mg Chl/h}$  measured for the  
83 preparation prior to vitrification suggest that both are highly active. The final reconstruction of the  
84 compact orientation refined to an overall resolution of 2.43 Å, the highest of any eukaryotic PSII  
85 structures (PDB ID 7PI0; **Fig. 1a** and **Extended Data Fig. 1-3**).



86

87 **Fig. 1: Two conformation of the eukaryotic PSII.** a. overall view of the PSII C2S2 map in the compact  
 88 conformation. One asymmetric unit is colored in green, in the other each chain is colored individually. b.  
 89 Low resolution model depicting the overall shifts in subunits between the two PSII conformations. CP29  
 90 in red, LHCII in blue and the two PSII cores in grey. c. The two PSII conformations were superposed on  
 91 one asymmetric unit (colored in grey). The second asymmetric unit is colored in magenta for the stretched  
 92 conformation (C2S2<sub>STR</sub>) and green for the compact conformation (C2S2<sub>COMP</sub>). A close up showing a 6 Å  
 93 shift in the position of LHCII and the lateral displacement between the two cores. d. The stretched PSII  
 94 conformation shows substantial drop in the membrane plane (13 to 15 Å, depending on the precise location),  
 95 contributing to a larger inward curve (compared to the luminal space) of the entire supercomplex. Large  
 96 deformations in the position of CP26 subunit which rotates by 16° between the two conformations. e.  
 97 Considerable changes in the position of CP29 affect the transfer rates between LHCII and CP47. CP47 of  
 98 both conformations (in red) is superposed and distances between key Chls of CP29<sub>COMP</sub> (light turquoise)  
 99 and CP29<sub>STR</sub> (dark green) shows increased transfer distances in the stretched conformation. The distances  
 100 between LHCII and CP29 follow an opposite trend, decreasing in the stretched conformation (LHCII<sub>STR</sub> in  
 101 dark red) and increasing in the compact conformation (LHCII<sub>COMP</sub> in yellow).

102 The C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> structure is similar to the previously determined C2S2 supercomplex from

103 *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii* or higher plants<sup>31,36</sup> and the cyanobacterial core structures<sup>4,6</sup>. The

104 second, stretched conformer, was solved to 2.62 Å resolution, and accounted for about 37% of the  
105 unstacked C2S2 PSII particles. **Fig. 1** and **Extended Data Movies 1-2** depict the superposition of  
106 the polypeptide chains of the two conformers, showing major differences in the location and  
107 orientation of PSII monomers. Superposition of the *Dunaliella* and *Chlamydomonas* C2S2 (PDB  
108 6KAC) structures and maps suggests that the *Chlamydomonas* structure also contains these  
109 different conformers. This may explain the decreased local map resolution presented in the  
110 aforementioned subunits, compared to the rest of the cryo-EM map<sup>31</sup>.

### 111 **Structures of *Dunaliella salina* unstacked PSII at high-resolution.**

112 Thus far, available PSII structures suggested a single, highly conserved organisation of the two  
113 PSII cores<sup>4,27-29,31,32</sup>. The high-resolution structures of *Dunaliella* C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> and C2S2<sub>STR</sub> provide  
114 a new perspective on the dynamic arrangement of eukaryotic PSII and the interaction of the core  
115 complex with its LHCs. To compare the C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> and C2S2<sub>STR</sub>, the core complexes were aligned  
116 (**Fig. 1** and **Extended Data Movies 1-2**). Initial inspection showed that one of the major  
117 differences between the two conformations is the orientation of CP29 (**Fig. 1e**). In C2S2<sub>STR</sub> CP29  
118 helices I and III move towards the LHCII trimer of the opposite monomer and away from CP47,  
119 with helix II of CP29 serving as a rotation axis. Moreover, CP29<sub>COMP</sub> contained only 9 Chls,  
120 compared to 11 in CP29<sub>STR</sub> and 13 Chl in *Chlamydomonas* PSII CP29<sup>31</sup>. Chls 605 and 616 were  
121 absent in both structures and CP29<sub>COMP</sub> was also missing Chls 611 and 613. This might be  
122 attributed to the flexibility of CP29 C-terminus, or the internal rearrangement caused by its  
123 movement.

124 In the C2S2<sub>STR</sub> conformation the PSII monomers slid in the membrane plane along the central  
125 symmetry axis separating them (**Fig. 1b** and **Extended Data Movies 1-2**). The non-aligned core  
126 shows the extent of the shift in the core peptides together with the minor LHCs and LHCII trimer

127 **(Fig.1c and d)**. As a result, all the interactions at the cores interface are modified, leading to local  
128 changes in chain orientations and the conformations of some loops. Core subunits at the centre of  
129 the monomer displayed a greater shift (D1, D2, CP47 CP43 and PsbO were displaced by 6-10 Å;  
130 **Fig. 1**), and the peripheral subunits showed the largest shift and tilt compared to C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> (PsbE,  
131 PsbP and CP26 moved by 13 Å, PsbZ showed the largest relocation of nearly 15 Å. and CP26  
132 showed a maximal tilt of 16°; **Fig. 1**). Multibody refinement<sup>37</sup> of both C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> and C2S2<sub>STR</sub>  
133 demonstrated that the two PSII monomers in each conformation contain additional structural  
134 heterogeneity (**Extended Data Fig.4-5** and **Extended Data Movie 3-6**).

### 135 **Distinct CP29 conformations alter LHCII to PSII core connectivity**

136 The observed conformational change of CP29 alters excitation energy transfer (EET) pathways  
137 from LHCII to the PSII core and may account for the differences between calculated and measured  
138 EET<sup>23,38-41</sup>. To assess changes in transfer rates between the stretched and compact orientations, we  
139 measured how the distances between the closest Chls of CP47 (PSII core), CP29 and LHCII change  
140 between the two PSII conformations. The average distances between CP29 Chls 603, 607 and 609  
141 to the CP47 Chls 607 and 616, changed from 17 Å to 20 Å between the compact to stretched  
142 conformations, suggesting that faster transfer rates from CP29 to CP47 in the compact  
143 conformation. In contrast to this, the distances between CP29 Chls 604 and 612 to LHCII Chls 604  
144 and 608 increased from 20 Å in the compact conformation to 23 Å in the stretched conformation,  
145 suggesting that transfer from LHCII to CP29 is slower in the compact orientation. The missing  
146 CP29 Chls 611 and 613 form part of the interface to LHCII and are missing in the compact  
147 conformation, which should also contribute to slower transfer rates from LHCII to CP29 in the  
148 compact configuration (**Extended Data Fig. 6**). Altogether, transfer from LHCII to the PSII core  
149 should be considerably slower in the compact orientation from both distance and Chl occupancy

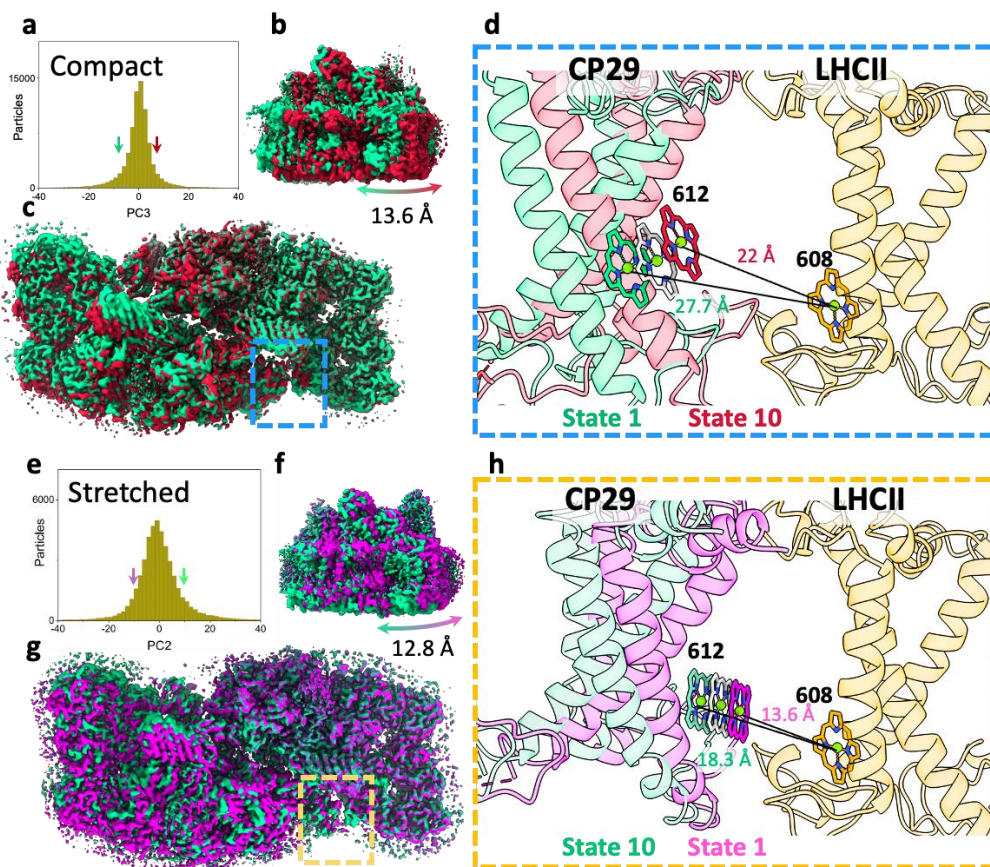
150 considerations. Similar features of altered Chl conformations were identified in molecular  
151 dynamics (MD) simulation of LHCII exploring its structural dynamics<sup>42</sup> compared to its crystal  
152 structure. The analysis showed differences in the excitonic coupling of Chl clusters 606-607 and  
153 611-612. MD suggested an increase in the interaction energies of 606-607 and a decrease in the  
154 interaction energies of similar proportion in 611-612<sup>42</sup>. The 611-612 Chl pair was proposed as a  
155 light-harvesting regulator of excitation energy transfer from CP29 to CP47 and as a quenching  
156 site<sup>38</sup>, as its change in fluorescence yield was attributed to a protein conformational change that  
157 leads to a redistribution of the interpigment energetics<sup>43</sup>.

158 **The compact and stretched PSII conformation contain substantial levels of continuous**  
159 **structural heterogeneity.**

160 Using multibody refinement<sup>37</sup>, with each PSII monomer defined as a separate rigid body,  
161 significantly improved the resolution and map quality in both C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> and C2S2<sub>STR</sub>, showing  
162 that substantial structural heterogeneity exists in both datasets at the level of PSII monomers.  
163 Analyzing the shape of the heterogeneity in C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> and C2S2<sub>STR</sub>, using Principal Component  
164 Analysis (PCA) showed that the first six Principal components (PCs) explains more than 85% of  
165 the variance in the data and consists of continuous heterogeneity (**Extended Data Fig. 4-5;**  
166 **Extended Data Movies 3-6**). Substantial displacements of approximately 13 Å are observed  
167 between the two monomers in the compact conformation (**Extended Data Fig. 4**) and a larger  
168 range of displacements (up to 20 Å) exists in the stretched conformation (**Extended Data Fig. 5**).  
169 The direction of PCs describes translations perpendicular and parallel to the membrane plane. This  
170 suggests that both conformations are flexible and can respond to different membrane curvature  
171 (**Extended Data Movies 3-6**). To examine the possible effects on energy transfer we measured  
172 the change in intermonomer Chl distances across the different components. As expected, the PCs



173 describing changes in the membrane plane significantly change some key distances between  
174 LHCII, CP29 and D1 across monomers (**Fig. 2**). This means that within each PSII conformation,  
175 substantial levels of heterogeneity in transfer rates should be considered. Changes in Chl positions  
176 were observed in CP29 Chls linking CP29 to PSII core and those connecting CP29 with LHCII.  
177 These Chls moved by an average distance of more than 5 Å, in both conformations (**Extended**  
178 **Data Table 2**). This implies that the association between PSII monomers and between PSII cores  
179 and LHCs contains a certain degree of freedom which can modulate excitation energy transfer, the  
180 entire assembly may be affected by changes in thylakoid membrane properties such as fluidity,  
181 composition, and curvature<sup>44,45</sup>.  
182



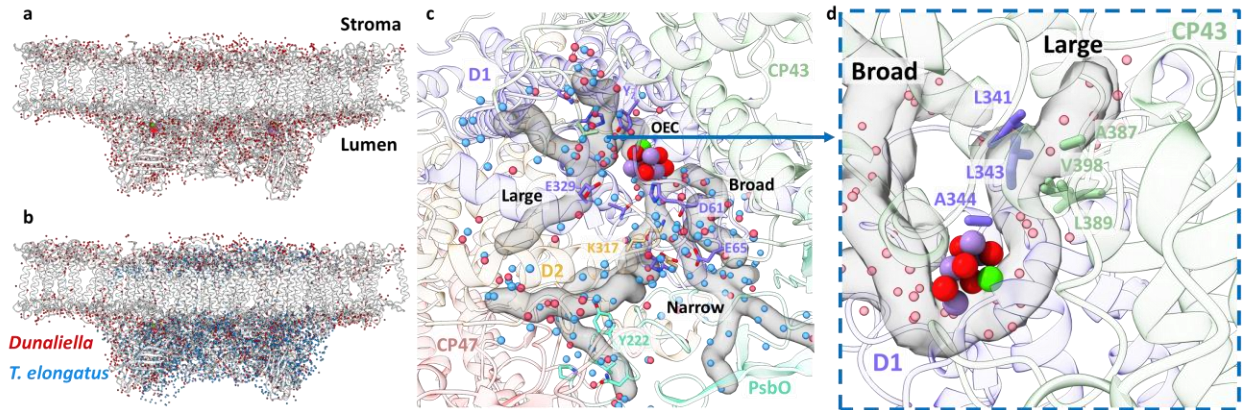
183 **Fig. 2: Heterogeneity within PSII states.** a. Continuous heterogeneity of C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> particles distribution  
184 along the third principal component (PC) axis. Each PC was divided into ten states separated by nine percent  
185 of the particle population along the PC axis. State 1 is marked with a green arrow and state 10 with a red  
186

187 arrow. State 1 and 10 are coloured in green and red in panels a-d. **b.** To visualize the state differences, one  
188 PSII monomer was superposed, and the other monomer was used to visualize the differences. Membrane  
189 plane view of the shift in position of C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> in the third PC. **c.** Luminal view of the shift in position of  
190 C2S2<sub>COMP</sub>. CP29 and LHCII are marked with a blue rectangle **d.** Zoom-in on the change in CP29 position  
191 between states 1 and 10. The change in distance between CP29 Chl 612 and LHCII M1 Chl 608 is shown.  
192 LHCII M1 (from the superposed PSII monomer) is coloured light orange and the consensus position of Chl  
193 612 is shown in grey. **e.** Continuous heterogeneity of C2S2<sub>STR</sub> particles distribution in the second PC. State  
194 1 is marked with a magenta arrow and state 10 with a teal arrow. Colours are maintained in panels e-h. **f.**  
195 Membrane plane view of the shift in position of C2S2<sub>STR</sub> in the second PC. **g.** Luminal view of the shift in  
196 position of C2S2<sub>STR</sub>. CP29 and LHCII are marked with an orange rectangle. **h.** Zoom-in on the change in  
197 CP29 position between states 1 and 10. The change in distance between CP29 Chl 612 and LHCII M1 Chl  
198 608 is shown. LHCII M1 is coloured orange and the consensus position of Chl 612 is shown in grey.

199

## 200 **Water channels and post-translational modifications in *Dunaliella* PSII**

201 More than 2100 water molecules were detected in the C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> model (**Fig. 3a-b**), the first  
202 detailed water molecules structure for a eukaryotic PSII. Overall, water molecules are clearly  
203 excluded from the membrane space in the PSII core, however the region occupied by LHC's show  
204 a relatively high number of water molecules in the membrane region. This stems from the presence  
205 of several conserved charged amino acids in these antennae and is probably important for the  
206 inclusion of such hydrophilic residues within the membrane. We used CAVER<sup>46</sup> to analyze the  
207 structure of internal cavities around the Oxygen Evolving Complex (OEC). As expected from the  
208 highly conserved environment around the OEC, the water channels identified previously in the  
209 high-resolution cyanobacterial core structure<sup>5,47</sup> are clearly visible in the eukaryotic PSII, and  
210 overlap with the results of the internal cavity analysis, these are shown in **Fig. 3c** and named  
211 "Large", "Narrow" and "Wide", following<sup>47</sup>. When analyzing the side chains lining the cavities  
212 around the OEC, a small hydrophobic patch, highly conserved in prokaryotes and eukaryotes  
213 (**Extend Data Fig. 7**), was identified at the beginning of the large channel (**Fig. 3d**). This  
214 hydrophobic element may facilitate O<sub>2</sub> release as part of the catalytic cycle (**Fig. 3d**).



215

216 **Fig. 3: Water distribution and channels in eukaryotic PSII.** **a.** Water molecules distribution in  
217 *Dunaliella* C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> structure. The protein scaffold is coloured grey and water molecules are shown as red  
218 spheres. **b.** Water molecules distribution in *Dunaliella* C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> compared to *T. elongatus* PSII core  
219 (PDBID 3WU2). *T. elongatus* water molecules are shown as blue spheres. **c.** *Dunaliella* PSII water channels  
220 identified by CAVER analysis, shown as grey transparent maps. The Large, Narrow, and Broad channels  
221 are annotated along with selected amino acids coloured according to their respective subunits. Water  
222 molecules are presented as in panel b. **d.** A hydrophobic patch identified in the large channel near the OEC,  
223 which may serve as an O<sub>2</sub> release pathway. The region shown is indicated by the blue arrow, but the  
224 orientation is different to improve visualization.

225 Several unique map densities were identified during model building, close to the OEC of both  
226 configurations a Na<sup>+</sup> ion was modeled. This Na<sup>+</sup> ion is coordinated by D1-His337, the backbone  
227 carbonyls of D1-Glu333, D1-Arg334, D2-Asn350 and a water molecule, in agreement with the  
228 recently identified<sup>48</sup> binding site (**Extended Data Fig. 8a-b**). This agrees with several studies  
229 showing that Na<sup>+</sup> ions are required for optimal activity of PSII<sup>48,49</sup>. Two additional densities,  
230 unique to C2S2<sub>COMP</sub>, were observed close to CP29-Ser84 and CP47-Cys218. These were modelled  
231 as post-translational modifications (PTMs) – Ser84 appears to be phosphorylated and Cys218  
232 seems to be sulfinylated (**Extended Data Fig. 8c-d**). Thus far, PTMs were structurally seen in  
233 photosystems only as phosphorylated LHCI bound to PSI during state transition<sup>50,51</sup>. Although  
234 they were not identified in-situ, several phosphorylation sites were shown to exist in CP29 large  
235 stromal loop<sup>52–55</sup>. CP29 phosphorylation was suggested to be linked with various stress responses,  
236 photosynthetic protein degradation and state transition. Cysteine sulfinylation was shown to be  
237 linked to superoxide radical (O<sub>2</sub><sup>•-</sup>) accumulation, which is subsequently converted by superoxide

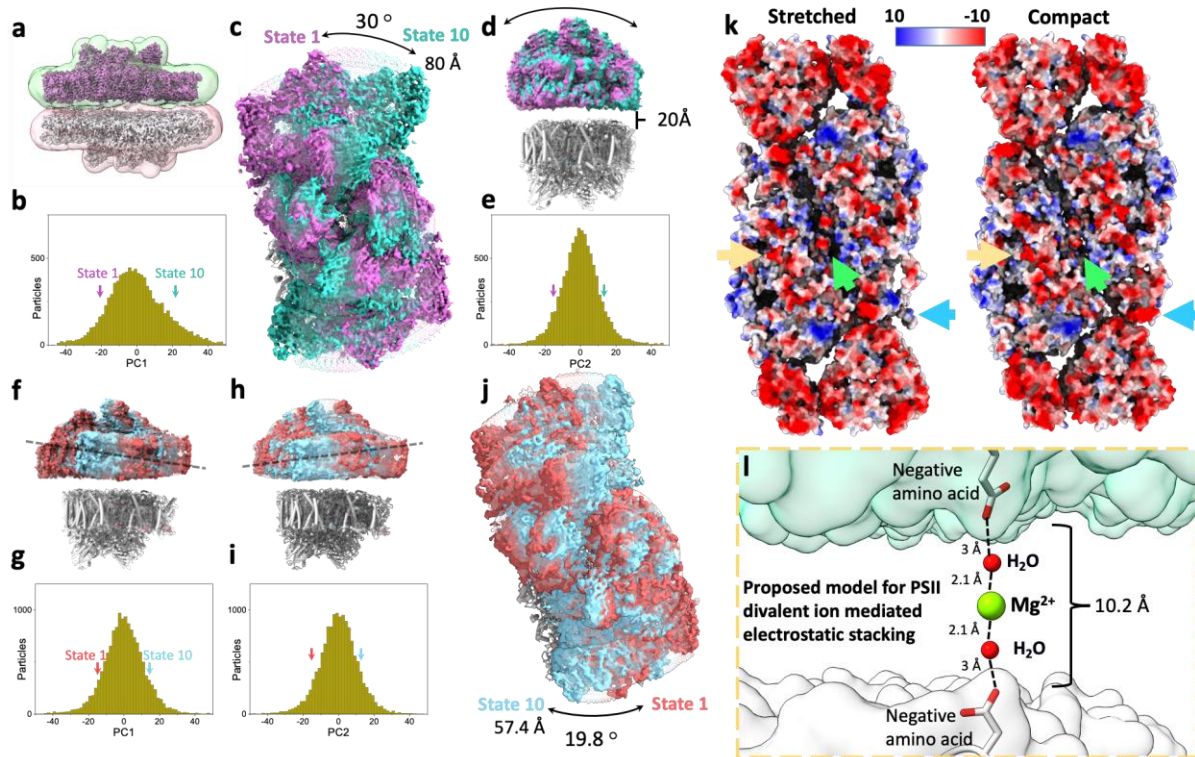
238 dismutase (SOD) to hydrogen peroxide (H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>) molecules<sup>56–58</sup>. CP47-Cys218 is positioned on the  
239 outer edge of PSII, close to the stromal end of the thylakoid membrane, and thus is susceptible to  
240 oxidation by H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>. The map density around Cys218 suggests two cysteine oxidation events which  
241 result in the formation of sulfinic acid (RS-O<sub>2</sub>H).

242 To summarize, the high-resolution structure of the eukaryotic PSII revealed two distinct states of  
243 the PSII complex, adding a new dimension to the known, large compositional heterogeneity of this  
244 important system<sup>39,59,60</sup>. The increased map resolution resulted in the identification of PTM's, and  
245 several conserved hydrophobic residues near the OEC, which may serve as a pathway for the  
246 release of O<sub>2</sub>. In addition to the two distinct conformations, large levels of continuous structural  
247 heterogeneity were discovered within each individual state. Multibody analysis<sup>37</sup> inherently treats  
248 the data as a collection of rigid bodies. This is a good approximation of the heterogeneity in  
249 photosynthetic systems but should be regarded as a conservative estimation to additional modes  
250 of heterogeneity which exist in this system within each body<sup>42</sup>.

### 251 **The structure of *Dunaliella salina* stacked PSII at high resolution.**

252 The thylakoid membrane is made of two spatially distinct regions, stroma lamellae and grana  
253 stacks, each serving a different role in the photosynthetic process<sup>61,62</sup>. Grana stacks size and  
254 numbers are affected by light intensity and ionic composition and can change rapidly<sup>63</sup>. Membrane  
255 stacking depends on the presence of cations, mainly Mg<sup>2+</sup>, which is abundant in the thylakoid  
256 stroma<sup>64</sup>, and between stacked PSII-LHCII<sup>63</sup>. In vitro, suspending chloroplast membranes in low-  
257 salt medium causes grana unstacking, and addition of MgCl<sub>2</sub> reverts the membranes back to their  
258 stacked organisation<sup>65,66</sup>. Several low-resolution cryo-EM models of stacked PSII were obtained  
259 in recent years<sup>67–69</sup>, but a high quality PSII structure that can shed light on the contribution of the  
260 supercomplex to thylakoid membrane stacking is missing.

261 The stacked PSII dataset refined to a 3.68 Å map after applying multibody refinement, with each  
 262 dimer defined as a rigid body. Subsequently, the stacked particles were classified according to the  
 263 higher quality PSII dimer, and two distinct populations of stacked PSII dimers were obtained, as  
 264 observed for the unstacked PSII: one in the C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> conformation solved to 3.36 Å, and the  
 265 other in the C2S2<sub>STR</sub> conformation solved to 3.84 Å (**Fig. 4; Extended Data Fig. 9-10**). In both  
 266 classes the compact conformation exhibited the best fit for the second, lower resolution, PSII  
 267 dimer.



268

269 **Fig. 4: Heterogeneity, electrostatic interactions, and model for PSII stacking.** **a.** Stacked *Dunaliella*  
 270 PSII C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> maps, and the masks used for multibody refinement. Maps are coloured magenta and grey,  
 271 and masks in green and red. **b.** The particle distribution along the first PC shows continuous heterogeneity  
 272 in the stacked C2S2<sub>COMP</sub>. State 1 is marked with a magenta arrow and state 10 with a teal arrow (colours  
 273 are preserved in panels b-e). **c.** Luminal view of the rotation of the upper PSII dimer between state 1 and  
 274 state 10 (the bottom dimer was kept in a fixed position). **d.** Membrane plane view of the shift in position of  
 275 the upper PSII dimer in C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> second PC. The distance between the upper and lower PSII is shown. **e.**  
 276 Particle distribution along the second PC of the stacked C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> shows continuous heterogeneity. **f.**  
 277 Membrane plane view of the tilt in the upper PSII dimer in C2S2<sub>STR</sub> particle set first PC. The direction of  
 278 the tilt is marked with a dashed line. State 1 is coloured red and state 10 in cyan (colours are preserved in

279 panels f-j). **g.** Continuous heterogeneity in the stacked C2S2<sub>STR</sub> particles distribution along the first PC. **h.**  
280 Membrane plane view of the tilt in orientation of the upper PSII dimer in C2S2<sub>STR</sub> second PC (with the  
281 bottom dimer kept fixed). The dashed line shows the tilt axis is opposite to that shown in panel f. **i.**  
282 Continuous heterogeneity of stacked C2S2<sub>STR</sub> particles distribution in the second PC. **j.** Luminal view of  
283 the rotation of the upper PSII dimer between state 1 and state 10. **k.** Coulombic electrostatic potential of  
284 the stromal region of the stretched (left) and compact (right) conformations. Differences are marked for  
285 CP47 C-terminus (orange arrow), the intermonomer space (green arrow) and CP29 (blue arrow). The  
286 negative potentials ( $0 k_B T/e > \Phi > -10 k_B T/e$ ) are coloured red and positive potentials ( $0 k_B T/e < \Phi < 10$   
287  $k_B T/e$ ) are coloured blue. **l.** Proposed model for PSII stacking mediated by negatively charged amino acids  
288 and Mg<sup>2+</sup> ions. Upper PSII shown as a green surface and the lower PSII as a white surface.

289 Roughly 20 Å separate the two stacked dimers in both classes, as previously shown<sup>69</sup>. In several  
290 regions this value decreases to approximately 10 Å (**Fig. 4d** and **l**), owing to PSII stromal loops in  
291 core subunits and LHCs protruding into the space between the two dimers. Both PSII dimers are  
292 shifted by approximately 20 Å relative to each other rather than being perfectly aligned (**Fig. 4a**;  
293 **Extended Data Fig. 11a**). PC analysis showed extensive displacements and rotations across the  
294 population with stacked PSII dimers rotating relatively to their opposite dimer by as much as 30°,  
295 and shifting by 80 Å in C2S2<sub>COMP</sub>, while in C2S2<sub>STR</sub> the rotation is more restricted, showing a  
296 maximum of 19.8° and a shift of 57 Å (**Fig. 4**). The rotation axis of C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> appears to be broad  
297 region containing the N-termini stromal loops of D2 and CP29 on one dimer, and the stromal loop  
298 connecting D2 helices IV and V, CP43 N-terminus, and the C-termini of CP43, CP47 and PsbI on  
299 the opposite dimer (**Extended Data Fig. 11**). In the stacked C2S2<sub>STR</sub> these stacking interactions  
300 also include a stromal loop from D1 which is pushed in the stromal gap by a change in the position  
301 of the PsbT C-terminus (green arrow in **Fig. 4**), this shift pushes the D1 stromal loop (connecting  
302 helices IV and V) into the stromal space and closer to the adjacent dimer (**Extended Data Fig.**  
303 **11c**). On the axis of rotation which consists of PSII core subunits, additional interactions between  
304 different LHCs seem to be essential to maintain stacking. All the rotation states include some  
305 degree of LHCs interacting across the stromal gap between opposite PSII dimers and these seem  
306 to limit the extent of possible rotational states. In the stacked C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> particle set the larger range

307 of rotations means that at the extreme states CP26 and LHCII M2 are not involved in stacking  
308 interaction and can pair with additional complexes (**Extended Data Fig. 12a**), while in the stacked  
309 C2S2<sub>STR</sub> particle set the smaller rotational range seem to be restricted by CP26 and LHCII M2  
310 interactions (**Extended Data Fig. 12b**). These differences, when repeated over many stacked  
311 complexes (with additional LHCII complexes) can translate into substantial changes in thylakoid  
312 membrane stacking<sup>70</sup>.

313 The closest contacts are found at the interface between core subunits from both PSII dimers and  
314 CP29, supported by peripheral interactions between LHCII trimer and CP26. Most of the PSII  
315 stromal surface is electronegative, and accordingly, most of the amino acids that seem to be  
316 involved in stacking interactions are either negatively charged or uncharged (**Fig. 4k**). Interactions  
317 spanning 10 Å are probably insufficient to maintain PSII in its stacked arrangement, however if  
318 mediated by a Mg<sup>2+</sup> ion and two-to-four H<sub>2</sub>O molecules, stacking can be stabilized (**Fig. 4l**). These  
319 interactions comply with the large degree of rotational freedom observed in the stacked dimers  
320 and with the strong dependence of stacked dimers in the presence of Mg<sup>2+</sup> ions and contribute to  
321 thylakoid membrane stacking<sup>66</sup>.

## 322 **Summary**

323 The structure of PSII from green algae revealed an unexpected level of conformational flexibility  
324 in this highly conserved system. The two stable conformations appear to differ in their antennae  
325 connectivity and should be considered in PSII modeling attempts. Within each state, the large  
326 degree of structural heterogeneity also contributes to EET and may facilitate transitioning between  
327 the different states. In the stacked PSII dimer we do not find any evidence for direct protein  
328 interaction connecting the two stacked systems, instead, long range electrostatic interaction can  
329 provide the sufficient flexibility needed for the dynamic behaviour of thylakoid membranes.

## 330 **Methods**

331 ***Dunaliella* PSII sample preparation:** After reaching an OD<sub>730</sub> of 0.4, the culture was harvested  
332 by centrifugation at 4,000 g for 10 min and resuspended in a medium containing 50 mM  
333 HEPES pH 7.5, 300 mM sucrose and 5 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>. The cells were washed ones in the same  
334 buffer and suspended in a buffer containing 25 mM MES, pH 6.5, 10 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>, 10 mM  
335 MgCl<sub>2</sub>, 1 M betaine, 5 mM EDTA, 12.5% glycerol. Protease-inhibitors cocktail was added to  
336 give final concentrations of 1mM PMSF, 1 μM pepstatin , 60 μM bestatin and 1mM  
337 benzamidine. The cells were disrupted by an Avestin EmulsiFlex-C3 at 1,500 psi. Unbroken  
338 cells and starch granules were removed by centrifugation at 5,000 g for 5min and the membranes  
339 in the supernatant were precipitated by centrifugation in Ti70 rotor at 181,000 g for 1 h. The  
340 pellet was suspended in a buffer containing 25 mM MES, pH 6.5, 10 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>, 10 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub>,  
341 1 M betaine, 5 mM EDTA, 12.5% glycerol giving a Chl concentration of 0.4 mg/ml. n-Decyl- $\alpha$ -  
342 D-Maltopyranoside ( $\alpha$ -DM) was added to a final concentration of 1% and following stirring for  
343 30 min at 4<sup>0</sup>C the insoluble material was removed by centrifugation of 10,000 g for 5 min.  
344 Supernatant was concentrated by centrifugation in TI-75 rotor at 377,000 g for 80 minutes. The  
345 pellet was suspended in the above buffer containing 0.3%  $\alpha$ -DM at Chl concentration of about 1  
346 mg/ml, loaded on sucrose gradients of 10 to 50% in SW-60 rotor and run at 336,000 g for 15 h.  
347 **Extended Data Fig. 13a** shows the distribution of green bands in the tubes. The band containing  
348 PSII was concentrated by centrifugation at 550,000 g for 2h and the pellet was suspended in a  
349 buffer containing 25 mM MES (pH 6.5), 1 mM CaCl<sub>2</sub>, 5 mM MgCl<sub>2</sub> and 0.1%  $\alpha$ -DM to give a  
350 Chl concentration of 2 mg Chl/ml. SDS-PAGE of the three bands is presented in **Extended Data**  
351 **Fig. 13b**. The final preparation exhibited oxygen evolution activity of 816 μmole O<sub>2</sub>/mg Chl/h  
352 under 560 μmole photons m<sup>-2</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> illumination **Extended Data Fig. 13c**.



353

354 **Cryo-EM data collection and processing:** Concentrated PSII solution (3  $\mu$ l) was applied on  
355 glow-discharged holey carbon grids (Cu Quantifoil R1.2/1.3) that were vitrified for cryo-EM  
356 structural determination using a Vitrobot FEI (3 s blot at 4°C and 100% humidity). The images  
357 were collected using a 300 kV FEI Titan Krios electron microscope, with a slit width of 20 eV  
358 on a GIF-Quantum energy filter, at the EMBL cryo facility, Heidelberg, Germany. A Gatan  
359 Quantum K3-Summit detector was used in counting mode at a magnification of 130,000  
360 (yielding a pixel size of 0.64 Å), with a total dose of 51.81 e Å<sup>-2</sup>. EPU was used to collect a total  
361 of 13,586 images, which were dose-fractionated into 40 video frames, with defocus values of  
362 0.8–1.9  $\mu$ m at increments of 0.1  $\mu$ m. The collected micrographs were motion-corrected and dose-  
363 weighted using MotionCor2<sup>71</sup>. The contrast transfer function parameters were estimated using  
364 CtfFind v.4.1<sup>72</sup>. A total of 401,467 particles were picked using LoG reference-free picking in  
365 RELION3.1<sup>73</sup>. The picked particles were processed for reference-free two-dimensional (2D)  
366 averaging. After several rounds of 2D classification, which resulted in 253,804 particles, two  
367 initial model was generated using RELION3.1<sup>73</sup>, for the unstacked and stacked PSII.  
368 3D classification of the unstacked PSII revealed two organisations of the light-harvesting  
369 complexes surrounding the core complex – C2S and C2S2. C2S contained 21,066 particles were  
370 resampled at a pixel size of 0.896 Å, pooled together and processed for 3D homogeneous  
371 refinement and multibody refinement<sup>37</sup> using RELION3.1<sup>73</sup>, giving a final resolution of 3.61 Å.  
372 The C2S2 configuration was comprised of 75,904 particles with a C2 symmetry, and these were  
373 resampled at a pixel size of 0.896 Å, pooled together and processed for 3D homogeneous  
374 refinement and postprocessing using RELION3.1<sup>73</sup>, giving a final resolution of 2.82Å. In an  
375 attempt to improve the map density of C2S2, mainly in the vicinity of CP29 and LHCII trimer,

376 3D classification without refinement was performed, and revealed two distinct C2S2  
377 conformations – compact (C2S2<sub>COMP</sub>) and stretched (C2S2<sub>STR</sub>). C2S2<sub>COMP</sub> was composed of  
378 39,357 particles that undergone symmetry expansion, 3D homogeneous refinement and  
379 multibody refinement<sup>37</sup> in C1 symmetry to give a final resolution of 2.43 Å, and C2S2<sub>STR</sub> was  
380 composed of 23,014 particles that undergone symmetry expansion, 3D homogeneous refinement  
381 and multibody refinement<sup>37</sup> in C1 symmetry to give a final resolution of 2.62 Å.  
382 23,874 particles that were assigned to the stacked PSII arrangement were resampled at a pixel  
383 size of 0.96 Å, pooled together and processed for 3D homogeneous refinement and multibody  
384 refinement<sup>37</sup> in C1 symmetry using RELION3.1<sup>73</sup> and yielded a final resolution of 3.68 Å.  
385 Focused refinement on each individual PSII complex yielded similar resolutions before  
386 multibody refinement (3.53 Å and 3.58 Å on each complex), showing both positions are  
387 occupied roughly by the same number of complexes. Focused classification was carried out on  
388 the upper dimer of the stacked PSII particles to determine if the compact and stretched  
389 conformations were also present in the stacked PSII arrangement. This analysis showed that the  
390 stacked PSII also contained a mixed population of the compact and stretched conformations. The  
391 compact set was comprised of 9,567 particles, and these were pooled together and processed for  
392 3D homogeneous refinement followed by multibody refinement<sup>37</sup> to give a final resolution of  
393 3.36 Å. The stretched set comprised of 14,307 particles, these were pooled together and  
394 processed for 3D homogeneous refinement followed by multibody refinement<sup>37</sup> to give a final  
395 resolution of 3.84 Å. Performing focused refinement on the lower PSII dimer of both  
396 conformations suggested a conformation mixture as well, but was less conclusive, due to the  
397 lower map quality of the lower PSII dimer and both were fitted with the PSII<sub>COMP</sub> model (using  
398 rigid body refinement) which gave the best overall fit to the map. All the reported resolutions

399 were based on a gold-standard refinement, applying the 0.143 criterion on the FSC between the  
400 reconstructed half-maps. (**Extended Data Fig. 2**).

401

402 **Model building:** To generate the C2S2 PSII, the cryo-EM structure of the C2S2  
403 *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii* PSII model PDB 6KAC<sup>31</sup> was selected. This model was fitted onto  
404 the cryo-EM density map using phenix.dock\_in\_map in the PHENIX suite<sup>74</sup>, and manually  
405 rebuilt using Coot<sup>75</sup>. Stereochemical refinement was performed using phenix.real\_space\_refine  
406 in the PHENIX suite<sup>74</sup>. The final model was validated using MolProbity<sup>76</sup>. The refinement  
407 statistics are provided in **Extended Data Table 1**. Local resolution was determined using  
408 ResMap<sup>77</sup>, and the figures were generated using UCSF Chimera<sup>78</sup> and UCSF ChimeraX<sup>79</sup>.  
409 Representative cryo-EM densities are shown in **Extended Data Fig. 3**.

410

411 **Data availability:** The atomic coordinates have been deposited in the Protein Data Bank, with  
412 accession code 7PI0 (C2S2<sub>COMP</sub>), 7PI5 (C2S2<sub>STR</sub>), 7PNK (C2S), 7PIN (stacked C2S2<sub>COMP</sub>) and  
413 7PIW (stacked C2S2<sub>STR</sub>). The cryo-EM maps have been deposited in the Electron Microscopy  
414 Data Bank, with accession codes EMD-13429 (C2S2<sub>COMP</sub>), EMD-13430 (C2S2<sub>STR</sub>), EMD-13548  
415 (C2S), EMD-13444 (stacked C2S2<sub>COMP</sub>) and EMD-13455 (stacked C2S2<sub>STR</sub>).

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430

#### 431 **Author Contributions**

432 I.C., M.F., Y.M., and N.N. performed the research. I.C., Y.M, and N.N. analyzed the data. I.C.,  
433 Y.M., and N.N. wrote the manuscript. All the authors discussed, commented on, and approved  
434 the final manuscript.

435

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439

#### 440 **Competing interests**

441 The authors declare that there are no competing interests.

442

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