

**Title**

Identification of a  $\Delta 5$ -like fatty acyl desaturase from the cephalopod *Octopus vulgaris* (Cuvier 1797) involved in the biosynthesis of essential fatty acids

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## Summary

Long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids (LC-PUFA) have been identified as essential compounds for common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*), but precise dietary requirements have not been determined due in part to the inherent difficulties of performing feeding trials on paralarvae. Our objective is to establish the essential fatty acid (EFA) requirements for paralarval stages of the common octopus through characterisation of the enzymes of endogenous LC-PUFA biosynthetic pathways. In this study we isolated a cDNA with high homology to fatty acyl desaturases (Fad). Functional characterisation in recombinant yeast showed the octopus Fad exhibited  $\Delta 5$  desaturation activity towards saturated and polyunsaturated fatty acyl substrates. Thus, it efficiently converted the yeast's endogenous 16:0 and 18:0 to 16:1n-11 and 18:1n-13, respectively, and desaturated exogenously added PUFA substrates, 20:4n-3 and 20:3n-6, to 20:5n-3 (EPA) and 20:4n-6 (ARA), respectively. Although the  $\Delta 5$  Fad enables common octopus to produce EPA and ARA, the low availability of its adequate substrates 20:4n-3 and 20:3n-6, either in the diet or by limited endogenous synthesis from C<sub>18</sub> PUFA, might indicate that EPA and ARA are indeed EFA for this species. Interestingly, the octopus  $\Delta 5$  Fad can also participate in the biosynthesis of non-methylene interrupted FA, PUFA that are generally uncommon in vertebrates but that have been found previously in marine invertebrates including molluscs, and now also confirmed to be present in specific tissues of common octopus.

## Introduction

The common octopus (*Octopus vulgaris*, Cuvier 1797) is a prime candidate for diversification of marine aquaculture and extensive research efforts have been devoted over the last decade to investigate several aspects of octopus culture including husbandry (Iglesias et al., 2006), reproduction (Estefanell et al. 2010; Otero et al. 2007; Wodinsky 2008) and nutrition (Navarro and Villanueva 2000, 2003; Quintana 2006; Villanueva et al. 2009). Although considerable progress has been made and on-growing wild-captured octopus in floating cages is now possible (Iglesias et al. 2007), a major, yet unresolved, problem in octopus culture is the high mortality of paralarvae, early pelagic life stages, which massively die during metamorphosis to benthic life stages and, consequently, the octopus life cycle in captivity has not yet been closed.

Intensive investigations have been undertaken to elucidate the causes of high mortalities encountered during the paralarval stages of common octopus. Among them, nutritional studies have emphasised the importance that some dietary components including proteins and amino acids (Villanueva et al. 2004), essential and non-essential elements (Villanueva and Bustamante 2006) and vitamins (Villanueva et al. 2009) have for early life-cycle stages of common octopus. Furthermore, the lipid requirements of octopus paralarval stages were investigated by Navarro and Villanueva (2000, 2003), who concluded that increased polar lipids and cholesterol are required in the diet. Comparing the fatty acid (FA) profiles of enriched *Artemia* with those of crab zoeae, a natural prey used with relative success in paralarval cultures of common octopus (Villanueva 1994, 1995), it was suggested that octopus paralarvae have a high requirement for specific polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA), and that suboptimal dietary n-3 PUFA levels, stemming from the use of *Artemia*, might partly explain the low performance during early culture stages (Navarro and Villanueva 2003). These

results, along with the well-known importance of PUFA during early life-cycle stages of organisms (Innis et al. 1999; Lauritzen et al. 2001; Monroig et al. 2009; Watts et al. 2003), has focussed interest in determining essential fatty acid (EFA) requirements during early life stages of common octopus.

The specific FA that can satisfy the EFA requirements in a particular species depends upon the ability for endogenous biosynthesis of PUFA through bioconversion of dietary FA, which in turn is dependent on the complement of enzymes responsible for such conversions (Bell and Tocher 2009). In vertebrates, the so-called elongases of very long-chain fatty acids (Elovl) and fatty acyl desaturases (Fad) have been identified as key enzymes involved in the conversion of the C<sub>18</sub> EFA, linoleic (LOA, 18:2n-6) and  $\alpha$ -linolenic (ALA, 18:3n-3) acids, to the physiologically active long-chain PUFA (LC-PUFA) arachidonic (20:4n-6, ARA), eicosapentaenoic (20:5n-3, EPA) and docosahexaenoic (22:6n-3, DHA) acids. Elovl account for the condensation of malonyl-CoA with activated fatty acyl chain resulting in a net 2C elongation of the preexisting FA (Jakobsson et al. 2006). Fad enzymes introduce unsaturation (a double bond) in fatty acyl chains at C6 ( $\Delta$ 6 Fad) or C5 ( $\Delta$ 5 Fad) from the carboxyl group. Recently, a Fad isolated from the teleost *Siganus canaliculatus* has been found to have  $\Delta$ 4-desaturation activity, so far appearing a unique case of such activity among vertebrates (Li et al. 2010). In vertebrates the LC-PUFA biosynthetic pathway has been extensively investigated and a number of genes encoding either Elovl or Fad proteins have been characterised, particularly from fish, which are the primary source of n-3 LC-PUFA in the human diet. Among non-vertebrates, the eukaryotic protist *Thraustochytrium* sp. (Qiu et al. 2001) and the invertebrate (nematode) *Caenorhabditis elegans* (Beaudoin et al. 2000; Watts and Browse 2002) represent some of the few examples where Fad- and

Elovl- genes have been studied. However, as far as we are aware, neither desaturases nor elongases have been previously isolated and characterised from molluscs.

Our overarching objective is to determine EFA requirements for paralarval stages of the common octopus, so balanced diets can be formulated to improve survival and development in captivity. Due to the difficulties in conducting feeding trials with octopus paralarvae, alluded to above, the aim of the present study was to investigate EFA requirements by characterising Fad and Elovl enzymes responsible for the LC-PUFA biosynthetic pathway in this species. Here we report on the molecular cloning and functional characterisation of a cDNA encoding a putative Fad from the common octopus. The distribution of Fad mRNA along with fatty acid profiles were determined in tissues of adult octopus in order to identify the sites of important metabolic activity.

## **Materials and methods**

### *Tissue samples*

Two (male and female) common octopus adult individuals (~1.5 kg) captured through artisanal fisheries along the Mediterranean East Coast in Spain, were transferred alive to the facilities of the Instituto de Acuicultura Torre de la Sal, cold anaesthetised, and sacrificed by direct brain puncture. Tissues including nerve, nephridium, hepatopancreas, brain, digestive gland, gill, muscle, heart and gonad were sampled and immediately frozen at -80 °C until further analysis.

### *Desaturase cDNA cloning*

Total RNA was extracted from octopus tissues using TRIzol<sup>®</sup> reagent (Gibco BRL, Grand Island, NY, USA). First strand cDNA was synthesised using a Verso<sup>™</sup> cDNA kit (ABgene, Rockford, IL, USA) primed with random hexamers. In order to obtain the first fragment of Fad cDNA, the amino acid (aa) sequences of *Mus musculus*

FADS1 (gb|BAB69894.1|), *Danio rerio*  $\Delta 6\Delta 5$  bifunctional Fad (gb|AAG25710.1) and desaturases from the invertebrates *Schistosoma japonicum* (emb|CAX72705.1|) and *Saccoglossus kowalevskii* (gb|XP\_002736866.1|) were aligned using BioEdit v5.0.6 (Tom Hall, Department of Microbiology, North Carolina State University, USA). Conserved regions were used for *in silico* searches of mollusc expressed sequence tags (EST) using NCBI tblastn tool (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>). Three EST from the Pacific oyster *Crassostrea gigas* (GenBank accession numbers CU998119.1, AM856065.1 and AM855620.1) were identified displaying high homology with Fad encoding genes. *C. gigas* EST alignment allowed the design of degenerate primers UNID5F (5'-CAYTAYGCWGGWCARGAYGC-3') and UNID5R (5'-ATYTGRAARTTVAGRTGWCC-3') that were used for polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using GoTaq<sup>®</sup> Colorless Master Mix (Promega, Southampton, UK) using brain cDNA as template. The PCR consisted of an initial denaturing step at 95 °C for 2 min, followed by 35 cycles of denaturation at 95 °C for 30 s, annealing at 51 °C for 30 s, extension at 72 °C for 1 min 10 s, followed by a final extension at 72 °C for 5 min. The PCR fragment was sequenced at the DNA Sequencing Service of the IBMCP-UPV (Valencia, Spain) and specific primers designed for 5' and 3' rapid amplification of cDNA ends (RACE) PCR (FirstChoice<sup>®</sup> RLM-RACE kit, Ambion, Applied Biosystems, Warrington, UK) to produce full-length cDNA. Details of all primers used for RACE PCR are given in Table 1.

For 3'RACE PCR, a positive fragment was obtained by two-round PCR. The first round PCR was performed using the gene-specific sense primer OVD5F1 and the adapter-specific 3'RACE OUTER primer, with an initial denaturing step at 95 °C for 2 min, followed by 32 cycles of denaturation at 95 °C for 30 s, annealing at 55 °C for 30 s, extension at 72 °C for 1 min 45 s, followed by a final extension at 72 °C for 5 min

(GoTaq<sup>®</sup> Colorless Master Mix, Promega). First round PCR products were used as template for nested PCR with primers OVD5F2 and 3'RACE INNER in a 32-cycle reaction under the same thermal conditions as above. For 5'RACE PCR, a similar two-round approach was followed with first round PCR performed with primers 5'RACE OUTER and OVD5R1, with an initial denaturing step at 95 °C for 1 min, followed by 32 cycles of denaturation at 95 °C for 30 s, annealing at 55 °C for 30 s, extension at 72 °C for 2 min, followed by a final extension at 72 °C for 5 min (GoTaq<sup>®</sup> Colorless Master Mix, Promega). First round PCR product was then used as template for nested PCR with primers 5'RACE INNER and OVD5R2, with thermal conditions as above during 35 cycles. RACE PCR products were cloned into pGEM-T Easy Vector and sequenced as above.

#### *Tissue distribution of desaturase mRNA transcripts*

Expression of the octopus putative Fad was determined in adult tissues by RT-PCR. Total RNA from nerve, nephridium, hepatopancreas, brain, digestive gland, gill, muscle, heart, and female and male gonads was extracted as described above, and 1 µg of total RNA was reverse transcribed into cDNA (M-MLV reverse transcriptase, Promega). In order to determine Fad expression, the tissue cDNAs were used as templates in PCR consisting of a denaturing step at 95 °C for 1 min, followed by 35 cycles of denaturation at 95 °C for 30 s, annealing at 60 °C for 30 s, extension at 72 °C for 30 s, followed by a final extension at 72 °C for 5 min (GoTaq<sup>®</sup> Green Master Mix, Promega). Additionally, the expression of the housekeeping  $\beta$ -actin was determined to check the cDNA integrity. Primers used for RT-PCR are shown in Table 1.

#### *Sequence and phylogenetic analyses*

An alignment of the deduced aa sequence of the newly cloned *O. vulgaris* Fad cDNA with other desaturases including mammalian  $\Delta$ 5 (FADS1) and  $\Delta$ 6 (FADS2), the

bifunctional  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  from zebrafish, and the nematode *C. elegans*  $\Delta 5$  (FAT-4) was performed using ClustalW (BioEdit). The aa sequence identity between Fad-like proteins was compared by the EMBOSS Needle Pairwise Sequence Alignment tool ([http://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/psa/emboss\\_needle/](http://www.ebi.ac.uk/Tools/psa/emboss_needle/)). Phylogenetic analysis of the aa sequences of Fad from common octopus and other organisms including molluscs was performed by constructing a tree using the Neighbour Joining method (Saitou and Nei 1987), with confidence in the resulting tree branch topology measured by bootstrapping through 10000 iterations. Additionally, the phylogenetic tree included some stearyl CoA desaturase (Scd) sequences, another type of membrane-bound desaturase likely to be present in molluscs.

*Functional characterisation of octopus desaturase by heterologous expression in Saccharomyces cerevisiae*

PCR fragments corresponding to the open reading frame (ORF) of the putative desaturase were amplified from octopus brain cDNA using the high fidelity Pfu Turbo DNA polymerase (Stratagene, Agilent Technologies, Cheshire, UK). A two-round PCR approach was used with the first round performed with specific primers OVD5U5F and OVD5U3R (Table 1). PCR conditions consisted of an initial denaturing step at 95 °C for 2 min, followed by 32 cycles of denaturation at 95°C for 30 s, annealing at 57 °C for 30 s, extension at 72 °C for 1 min 45 s, followed by a final extension at 72 °C for 5 min. First round PCR products were used as template for the nested PCR with thermal conditions described above, and with primers containing restriction sites (underlined in Table 1) OVD5VF (*Hind*III) and OVD5VR (*Xho*I). The DNA fragments were then digested with the corresponding restriction endonucleases (New England BioLabs, Herts, UK) and ligated into a similarly restricted pYES2 yeast expression vector (Invitrogen, Paisley, UK). The purified plasmids (GenElute™ Plasmid Miniprep Kit,



Sigma) containing the octopus desaturase ORF were then used to transform *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* competent cells (S.c. EasyComp Transformation Kit, Invitrogen). Transformation and selection of yeast with recombinant pYES2-OVFad plasmids, and yeast culture were performed as described in detail previously (Agaba et al. 2004).

In order to test the ability of octopus Fad to introduce double bonds into saturated or monounsaturated FA, yeast transformed with pYES2 vector containing the octopus desaturase as an insert (pYES2- OVFad) and no insert (control) were grown in *S. cerevisiae* minimal medium<sup>-uracil</sup> with no exogenously added FA substrates. Additionally, the ability of *O. vulgaris* Fad to desaturate PUFA substrates was tested by growing pYES2-OVFad transgenic yeast in medium supplemented with one of the following substrates: 18:3n-3, 18:2n-6, 20:3n-3, 20:2n-6, 20:4n-3, 20:3n-6, 22:5n-3 and 22:4n-6. The FA were added to the yeast cultures at final concentrations of 0.5 (C18), 0.75 (C20) and 1.0 (C22) mM as uptake efficiency decreases with increasing chain length (Zheng et al. 2009). Yeast transformed with empty pYES2 were also grown in presence of PUFA substrates as control treatments. After 2-days culture at 30 °C, yeast were harvested, washed, and lipid extracted by homogenisation in chloroform/methanol (2:1, v/v) containing 0.01% butylated hydroxy toluene (BHT) as antioxidant. Docosapentaenoic and docosatetraenoic acids (> 98 – 99 % pure) were purchased from Cayman Chemical Co. (Ann Arbor, USA) and the remaining FA substrates (> 99 % pure) and chemicals used to prepare the *S. cerevisiae* minimal medium<sup>-uracil</sup> were from Sigma Chemical Co. Ltd. (Dorset, UK).

#### *Fatty acid analysis by GC-MS*

FA from the transgenic yeast were analysed by preparing methyl esters (FAME) as previously described (Hastings et al. 2001). Briefly, FAME were identified and

quantified using a gas chromatograph (GC8000) coupled to an MD800 mass spectrometer (ThermoFisher Scientific, Hemel Hempstead, UK). Desaturation efficiency from potential substrates including the yeast endogenous saturated FA (16:0 and 18:0) and the exogenously added PUFA substrates (18:3n-3, 18:2n-6, 20:3n-3, 20:2n-6, 20:4n-3, 20:3n-6, 22:5n-3 and 22:4n-6) were calculated by the proportion of substrate FA converted to elongated FA product as  $[\text{product area}/(\text{product area} + \text{substrate area})] \times 100$ . When further confirmation of double bond positions was required, picolinyl esters were prepared from FAME according to the methodology described by Destailats and Angers (2002) and modified according to Li et al. (2010). FAME were also prepared from total lipid extracted from octopus tissues, and analysed according to Viciano et al. (2011).

## Results

### *Octopus desaturase sequence and phylogenetics*

A 1603-bp (excluding polyA tail) full-length cDNA sequence was obtained by 5' and 3' RACE PCR and deposited in the GenBank database under the accession number JN120258. It contains an ORF of 1338 bp encoding a putative protein of 445 aa, a 5' untranslated region (UTR) of 44 bp and a 3'UTR of 221 bp excluding polyA tail. *O. vulgaris* putative desaturase possesses three histidine boxes HXXXH, HXXHH and QXXHH common among Fad, the putative cytochrome b5-like domain, and the heme-binding motif, HPGG (Fig. 1).

The deduced aa sequence from the octopus desaturase cDNA predicts a protein that is 49.5-53.3 % identical to several mammalian FADS1 ( $\Delta 5$ ) and FADS2 ( $\Delta 6$ ) proteins including human, mouse and rat, and 48.9-51.5 % identical to teleost desaturases with various desaturation activities including  $\Delta 4$ ,  $\Delta 5$ ,  $\Delta 6$  and bifunctional

$\Delta 6/\Delta 5$ . When compared with non-vertebrate desaturases, octopus desaturase showed relatively low identity with *Thraustochytrium* sp.  $\Delta 5$ -like desaturases (26.0 %), *Caenorhabditis elegans*  $\Delta 5$ - (22.8 %) and  $\Delta 6$ -like desaturases (26.4 %), and relatively high identities with *Saccoglossus kowalevskii* (50.1 %) and *Schistosoma japonicum* (49.0 %) predicted desaturases. Compared to mollusc desaturases, the octopus Fad is 61.9 % identical to the partial (~368 aa) desaturase sequence from the bivalve *Crassostrea gigas*, and 52.2 % identical to the gastropod *Lottia gigantea* Fad-like. Identities between the octopus Fad and several Scd desaturases including that of *L. gigantea* were below 17 %.

#### *Functional characterisation*

The octopus putative Fad was functionally characterised by determining the FA profiles of transgenic yeast *S. cerevisiae* expressing the Fad coding region and grown in the presence of potential FA substrates. In order to test the ability of octopus Fad to introduce double bonds into saturated or monounsaturated FA, the FA profiles of yeast transformed with pYES2- OVFad or empty pYES2 (control) and grown in absence of exogenously added substrate were compared (Fig. 3A and B). The results confirm that octopus Fad is involved in the biosynthesis of monounsaturated FAs. Thus, FA profiles of control yeast transformed with empty vector basically consisted of the main endogenous FA of *S. cerevisiae*, namely 16:0, 16:1 isomers (16:1n-9 and 16:1n-7), 18:0, 18:1n-9 and 18:1n-7 (Fig. 3A). Importantly, pYES2-OVFad transformed yeast were found to have two additional peaks identified as 16:1n-11 and 18:1n-13, thus indicating a  $\Delta 5$ -desaturation from 16:0 and 18:0, respectively (Fig. 3B). Conversion rates for 16:0 and 18:0 were 20 % and 54 %, respectively (Table 2). No activity towards yeast endogenous monounsaturated FA 18:1n-9 and 18:1n-7 was detected in transgenic yeast containing the octopus Fad (Table 2).

In order to assess the role of octopus Fad in PUFA biosynthesis, transgenic yeast transformed with the desaturase ORF were incubated with  $\Delta 6$ - (18:3n-3 and 18:2n-6),  $\Delta 5$ - (20:4n-3 and 20:3n-6),  $\Delta 4$ - (22:5n-3 and 22:4n-6) and  $\Delta 8$ -desaturation (20:3n-3 and 20:2n-6) substrates. The FA composition of the yeast transformed with pYES2 vector containing no insert (control) was characterised by having the main endogenous yeast FA and whichever exogenously added FA substrate, this result being consistent with *S. cerevisiae* possessing no PUFA desaturation activity (Agaba et al. 2004). The transgenic yeast expressing the octopus Fad were able to convert up to 39 % of both 20:4n-3 and 20:3n-6 into 20:5n-3 ( $\Delta^{5,8,11,14,17}20:5$ ) and 20:4n-6 ( $\Delta^{5,8,11,14}20:4$ ), respectively (Table 2; Fig. 3C and D). The octopus Fad also exhibited the ability to efficiently convert 20:3n-3 ( $\Delta^{11,14,17}20:3$ ) and 20:2n-6 ( $\Delta^{11,14}20:2$ ) to their corresponding  $\Delta 5$ -desaturated NMI FA, namely  $\Delta^{5,11,14,17}20:4$  and  $\Delta^{5,11,14}20:3$ , respectively (Table 2; Fig. 3E and F). These results also confirmed that the octopus Fad did not possess  $\Delta 8$  desaturation activity. The ability of the octopus Fad to produce NMI FA was further confirmed by the results obtained with 18:3n-3 ( $\Delta^{9,12,15}18:3$ ) and 18:2n-6 ( $\Delta^{9,12}18:2$ ). Thus, small amounts of desaturated products were detected (Table 2), but these were confirmed as being NMI  $\Delta 5$  desaturated products,  $\Delta^{5,9,12,15}18:4$  and  $\Delta^{5,9,12}18:3$ , respectively, rather than  $\Delta 6$  products. No desaturated products of 22:5n-3 and 22:4n-6 were detected indicating the octopus Fad possessed no  $\Delta 4$ -desaturation activity.

#### *Tissue distribution of octopus desaturase mRNA transcripts*

Tissue expression of common octopus desaturase was studied by RT-PCR on cDNA samples obtained from a range of tissues (Fig. 4). Transcripts of the target gene were detected in all tissues analysed, with gonads, brain, digestive gland and gill showing high expression signals. Low expression signals were detected in nerve,

nephridium, heart, muscle and hepatopancreas, the latter regarded as a major site for lipid metabolism in molluscs (Fig. 4).

#### *Fatty acid composition of octopus tissues*

In order to identify sites of potentially important biosynthesis, FA profiles were determined in a series of octopus tissues where expression of the  $\Delta 5$  desaturase was studied (Table 3). Potential  $\Delta 5$ -desaturated FA were detected in all tissues analysed. Among monoenes, the presence of 18:1n-3 (or  $\Delta^5$ 18:1) was confirmed in all tissues analysed, with female and male gonad showing the highest percentages (1.9 and 1.2 %, respectively). Among polyunsaturates, EPA (20:5n-3 or  $\Delta^{5,8,11,14,17}$  20:5) and ARA (20:4n-6 or  $\Delta^{5,8,11,14}$  20:4) showed relatively high contents in all tissues analysed. Thus, EPA was most abundant in heart (19.9 %), gill (16.8 %) and nerve (15.8 %), whereas it only accounted for 0.2 % of total fatty acids in digestive gland. In contrast, ARA was most abundant in brain (15.2 %) and male gonad (15.2 %), followed by gill (12.9 %) and female gonad (12.9 %). The  $\Delta 5$ -desaturated FA, EPA and ARA, can be subsequently converted by Elovl or other desaturases to FA such as 22:5n-3, 22:6n-3 (DHA) and 22:5n-6, also identified in octopus tissues. Particularly abundant in all tissues was DHA, with eye (27.6 %) and heart (26.4 %) showing the highest concentrations (Table 3). Small amounts of 20:2, 20:3 and 22:2 NMI were found in nephridium, male gonad, eye and digestive gland (Table 3). Whereas the small amount of the solutes meant it was not possible to unequivocally confirm the double bond structure for 20:2 and 22:2 NMI, the 20:3 NMI was confirmed as  $\Delta^{5,11,14}$  20:3. Dimethylacetals (DMA) of 16 and 18 carbons were also detected as previously described (Rosa et al. 2004).

## Discussion

In vertebrates the PUFA biosynthesis pathways have been extensively investigated, partly because of the critical roles that these compounds play in normal growth and development during early life-cycle stages (Innis et al. 1999; Lauritzen et al. 2001; Monroig et al. 2009). This has led to increased understanding of the biochemical and molecular mechanisms involved in the LC-PUFA pathways operating in fish, particularly farmed species, which has allowed the formulation of balanced aquafeeds tailored to the abilities of different fish species for endogenous biosynthesis. Such a strategy can be extended to new aquaculture candidates, especially those such as common octopus in which more empirical approaches through dietary trials are intrinsically difficult to undertake due to the abovementioned paralarval mortalities.

The endogenous FA biosynthetic ability of molluscs has been investigated in the past for both terrestrial (van der Horst 1973, 1974; Weinert et al. 1993; Zhu et al. 1994) and marine species (Chu and Greaves 1991; de Moreno et al. 1976; Waldock and Holland 1984; Zhukova 1986, 1991, 2007), and it is now known that it varies among species. Whereas the specific genes/enzymes responsible for individual reactions have not been characterised in any mollusc species, biochemistry and analytical approaches have allowed the identification of some critical activities (Barnathan 2009; Zhukova 2007). More specifically, three key enzymes appear to mediate the production and metabolism of essential fatty acids in molluscs, those being the elongase and two distinct desaturases: the  $\Delta^9$ - and  $\Delta^5$ -desaturases (Barnathan 2009; Kornprobst and Barnathan 2010; Zhukova 2007). The  $\Delta^9$ -desaturase, encoded by the so-called stearoyl CoA desaturase (Scd), is an enzymatic activity universally present in living organisms (Castro et al. 2011) including molluscs (David et al. 2005), which introduces the first double bond into saturated FAs such as 16:0 and 18:0 producing 16:1n-7 ( $\Delta^9$ 16:1) and

18:1n-9 ( $\Delta^9$ 18:1), respectively. Contrarily, the  $\Delta^5$ -desaturation is the catalytic activity of a Fad, membrane-bound desaturases of a different gene/protein family than that of Scd (Guillou et al. 2010), which act predominantly on PUFA substrates introducing a double bond in the  $\Delta x$  carbon counting from the carboxylic group of the fatty acyl chain. For that reason, Fad enzymes have been also termed ‘front-end’ desaturases (Napier et al. 1999). Below we present evidence that the newly cloned desaturase from the common octopus is a Fad-like desaturase with  $\Delta^5$  specificity, and represents the first molecular proof of the existence of such an enzymatic activity in any mollusc species.

The newly cloned octopus desaturase possesses all typical features of Fad, denoting that these enzymes have conserved functional domains during evolution (Sperling et al. 2003). Phylogenetic analysis further supported that the octopus desaturase was indeed more closely related to Fad-like than to Scd-like desaturases. Previously, phylogenetic analysis of desaturases from 56 eukaryotic genomes had identified four functionally distinct subfamilies with the ability to introduce double bonds into saturated chains being characteristic of so-called “First Desaturases” (such as  $\Delta^9$  or SCD) whereas “Front-End Desaturases” (such as Fads) required pre-existing double bonds for activity (Hashimoto et al., 2008). Therefore, it was interesting that functional characterisation revealed that, despite being phylogenetically a Fad-like or front-end desaturase, the octopus desaturase, in addition to desaturation of PUFA substrates, was also able to introduce the first double bond into saturated acyl chains.

The common octopus Fad was clearly demonstrated to be a  $\Delta^5$ -desaturase, with the ability to introduce new double bonds into both saturated FA and PUFA. Endogenous FA in yeast including 16:0 and 18:0 were  $\Delta^5$ -desaturated to 16:1n-11 ( $\Delta^5$ 16:1) and 18:1n-13 ( $\Delta^5$ 18:1), respectively, by transgenic yeast expressing the octopus Fad. Consistent with the catalytic ability of octopus Fad observed *in vitro*, the FA

profiles of the gastropods *Littorina littorea* and *Lunatia triseriata* indicated the existence of a  $\Delta^5$ -desaturase accounting for the production of the monoenes 18:1n-13 and 20:1n-15 ( $\Delta^5$  20:1) (Joseph 1982). Although 20:0 was not assayed in the yeast expression system, the high conversion efficiency shown on 18:0 (54 %) may suggest that the octopus Fad could have the ability to desaturate 20:0 and produce 20:1n-15. However, 20:1n-15 was not identified in the tissue lipids of *O. vulgaris* in the present study. In vertebrates, the ability to introduce the first double bond into a saturated FA appears limited to Scd-like desaturases and no Fad-like desaturase has been shown to possess this activity in teleosts (Hastings et al. 2001; Li et al. 2010; Monroig et al. 2010; Zheng et al. 2004, 2005, 2009). An exception to this pattern is the human FADS2 ( $\Delta^6$  Fad), which is reported to have the ability to desaturate 16:0 to sapienic acid (16:1n-10 or  $\Delta^6$ 16:1) in specific tissues such as sebaceous glands (Ge et al. 2003). Thus, the octopus Fad might have retained (conserved) the ability to desaturate saturated FA from Scd, the likely ancestor of Fad-like genes (López Alonso et al. 2003).

In addition to the ability to act on saturated FA, the octopus Fad effectively desaturated PUFA substrates in position  $\Delta^5$ . Thus, the results demonstrate that the common octopus  $\Delta^5$  Fad can participate in the biosynthesis of ARA and EPA from 20:3n-6 and 20:4n-3, respectively. Although this result suggests that neither ARA nor EPA can be regarded strictly as EFA for octopus as they can be biosynthesised endogenously, it is only possible (with this  $\Delta^5$  activity) from other LC-PUFA precursors. Therefore, it does not alter the fact that common octopus probably require dietary sources of LC-PUFA, albeit as yet not clearly defined. Data available in the literature are apparently controversial and, whereas ARA has been considered as non-essential for the common octopus (Milou et al. 2006), essentiality of EPA has often been suggested (Navarro and Villanueva 2000; Iglesias et al. 2007). The reason why



two analogous LC-PUFA (ARA and EPA) might have different essentiality status for this species is unclear. However, there is evidence indicating that preformed ARA and EPA are indeed required in the diet of the common octopus as their endogenous biosynthesis might be limited by the availability of immediate biosynthetic precursors 20:3n-6 and 20:4n-3. First, the contents of 20:3n-6 and 20:4n-3 in natural and experimental diets for octopus are extremely low (Navarro and Villanueva 2000; Seixas et al. 2008, 2010), and consequently the endogenous production of ARA and EPA via  $\Delta 5$ -desaturation cannot occur at physiologically significant rates. Second, the endogenous production of 20:3n-6 and 20:4n-3 via biosynthesis from C<sub>18</sub> PUFA (18:2n-6 and 18:3n-3) might also be restricted by the absence of critical enzymatic activities. As molluscs appear to possess elongases that act on PUFA substrates (Barnathan 2009; Kornprobst and Barnathan 2010), we speculate that the endogenous production of 20:3n-6 and 20:4n-3 is limited due to the lack of desaturases with either  $\Delta 6$  activity operating on 18:2n-6 and 18:3n-3 prior to elongation or, alternatively,  $\Delta 8$  activity acting on 20:2n-6 and 20:3n-3 after elongation (Monroig et al. 2011). While the octopus Fad did not show  $\Delta 6$  or  $\Delta 8$  activities, a second Fad could possibly be present. However, this may be unlikely, as further Fad encoding genes do not appear to be present in other molluscs such as the gastropod *Lottia gigantea*, whose genome seems to contain a single Fad-like gene (<http://genome.jgi-psf.org/Lotgi1/Lotgi1.home.html>). Moreover, the absence of further Fad enzymes would likely explain why DHA is regarded as an EFA for the common octopus (Navarro and Villanueva 2000), as either  $\Delta 4$ -desaturation of 22:5n-3, or  $\Delta 6$ -desaturation of 24:5n-3, are necessary for its biosynthesis, at least in vertebrates (Li et al. 2010). While future investigations are necessary to elucidate the presence or absence of other desaturation activities critical for the endogenous biosynthesis of ARA, EPA and DHA, the abundance in all tissues of these LC-PUFA,

especially ARA that is unlikely to be purely of dietary origin, reveals their important physiological functions for common octopus. Furthermore, the highest levels of ARA generally corresponded to the tissues that showed the highest expression of  $\Delta 5$  Fad transcript supporting a potential role for this enzyme in the endogenous production of ARA.

Thus, endogenous production of ARA may be one reason supporting the retention of  $\Delta 5$  desaturase activity in a carnivorous species such as octopus, where preformed EPA and DHA are likely to be readily available in the natural diet. In addition, however, the octopus  $\Delta 5$  Fad might participate in the biosynthesis of non-methylene interrupted (NMI) FA, a group of compounds with unusual unsaturation features occurring in molluscs as well as other marine invertebrates (Barnathan 2009; Kornprobst and Barnathan 2010). Typical mollusc NMI FA include  $\Delta^{7,13}22:2$  and  $\Delta^{7,15}22:2$ . Briefly, their synthesis has been hypothesised to derive from the initial desaturation of 16:0 and 18:0 catalysed by a Scd-like desaturase to produce 16:1n-7 and 18:1n-9, respectively (Barnathan 2009). Subsequent elongase- and  $\Delta 5$  desaturase-mediated reactions account for the synthesis of C<sub>20</sub> NMI including  $\Delta^{5,11}20:2$  and  $\Delta^{5,13}20:2$ , with further elongation to produce  $\Delta^{7,13}22:2$  and  $\Delta^{7,15}22:2$ , respectively. Although we cannot conclude that the octopus Fad is involved in the production of 20:2 NMI as potential FA substrates (20:1n-9 and 20:1n-7) were not assayed, our results clearly demonstrate that the octopus Fad participates in the biosynthesis of NMI FA such as  $\Delta^{5,11,14,17}20:4$  and  $\Delta^{5,11,14}20:3$ , compounds found in bivalves (Kawashima and Ohnishi 2004; Pirini et al. 2007) and gastropods (Kawashima 2005). In addition, NMI FA were detected in tissues of adult octopus, including  $\Delta^{5,11,14}20:3$ , 20:2 and 22:2, although the precise double bond positions in the latter two could not be unequivocally established. The biological functions of NMI FA are not fully understood, but it has

been suggested that they play structural and protective roles in cell membranes (Barnathan 2009).

In summary, our results demonstrate that the common octopus expresses a Fad-like gene that encodes an enzyme with  $\Delta 5$  desaturation activity towards saturated FA and PUFA substrates. The Fad could participate in the endogenous production of EPA and, especially, ARA from other LC-PUFA substrates. In addition the octopus  $\Delta 5$  Fad participates in the biosynthesis of NMI FA, compounds previously found in a series of marine invertebrates, and now also confirmed to exist in specific tissues of common octopus.

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## Tables

Table 1. Sequences of the primer pairs used and accession numbers of the sequences used as references for primer design in the cloning of the octopus fatty acyl desaturase (Fad) ORF and for RT-PCR analysis of gene expression in octopus tissues. Restriction sites for *Hind*III and *Xho*I are underlined in OVD5VF and OVD5VR sequences, respectively.

Aim	Transcript	Primer	Primer sequence	Accession No <sup>a</sup> .
<i>RACE PCR</i>	Fad	OVD5F1	5'-CCATGCGACCTGTGATATT-3'	JN120258
		OVD5F2	5'-ATGATTGGTTTACCGGACATC-3'	
		OVD5R1	5'-ATCTCCGTCCTACTGGGAATTC-3'	
		OVD5R2	5'-GTGGAAAGCACGAAATGCTT-3'	
<i>ORF cloning</i>	Fad	OVD5U5F	5'-CCTGTTTGGTGGATAAAGC-3'	JN120258
		OVD5U3R	5'-ATACACATACACACACACACGC-3'	
		OVD5VF	5'-CCCAAGCTTAAAATGGGAAGAGGCGGAGA-3'	
		OVD5VR	5'-CCGCTCGAGCTATAACATATGATGTGCTTGATA-3'	
<i>RT-PCR</i>	Fad	OVD5F3	5'-AGCCACATGCATTACCAACA-3'	JN120258
		OVD5R3	5'-CAATATCACAGGTCGCATGG-3'	
	$\beta$ -actin	OVACTF	5'-CTTGACTCCGGAGATGGTGT-3'	AB053937
		OVACTR	5'-CGCATTTCATGATGGAGTTG-3'	

<sup>a</sup> GenBank (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>)

Table 2. Substrate conversions of yeast *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* transformed with pYES2 containing the open reading frame (ORF) of the *Octopus vulgairs* desaturase. Transgenic yeast were grown in presence of endogenous saturated (16:0 and 18:0) and monounsaturated (16:1n-7, 18:1n-9 and 18:1n-7) fatty acid (FA) substrates, and the exogenously added polyunsaturated FA substrates 18:3n-3, 18:2n-6, 20:3n-3, 20:2n-6, 20:4n-3, 20:3n-6, 22:5n-3 and 22:4n-6. Results are expressed as a percentage of total FA substrate converted to desaturated product. FA are designated using the ‘n-‘ nomenclature, except for non-methylene interrupted FA where the ‘ $\Delta$ ’ nomenclature was used.

<b>FA substrates</b>	<b>Product</b>	<b>Conversion rate (%)</b>
<b>Saturates</b>		
16:0	16:1n-11	20
18:0	18:1n-13	54
<b>Monounsaturates</b>		
18:1n-7	$\Delta^{5,11}$ 18:2	0
18:1n-9	$\Delta^{5,9}$ 18:2	0
<b>Polyunsaturates</b>		
18:3n-3	$\Delta^{5,9,12,15}$ 18:4	1
18:2n-6	$\Delta^{5,9,12}$ 18:3	1
20:3n-3	$\Delta^{5,11,14,17}$ 20:4	33
20:2n-6	$\Delta^{5,11,14}$ 20:3	19
20:4n-3	20:5n-3	39
20:3n-6	20:4n-6	39
22:5n-3	22:6n-3	0
22:4n-6	22:5n-6	0

Table 3. Fatty acids and dimethyl acetal (DMA) composition (% of totals) of tissues collected from *Octopus vulgaris* adult individuals.

	Brain	Nephridium	Muscle	Male gonad	Female gonad	Skin	Nerve	Eye	Hepatopancreas	Heart	Gill	Digestive gland
14:0	0.9	0.8	1.3	0.7	3.0	1.2	1.0	0.6	3.3	0.6	0.6	2.0
15:0	0.1	nd	nd	nd	nd	0.1	nd	nd	0.2	nd	nd	0.2
16C DMA	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.5	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.6	0.5
16:0	16.1	14.0	20.1	13.4	17.9	19.0	19.2	18.0	14.9	13.8	13.3	12.4
16:1n7	0.4	0.6	1.0	0.9	1.7	0.6	0.6	0.5	4.4	0.7	0.4	3.3
16:2	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.4
17:0	1.6	2.4	1.9	1.4	1.7	1.9	1.6	1.0	1.3	1.8	1.3	1.4
16:3	0.2	nd	nd	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2
18C DMA	4.9	1.9	2.8	1.9	2.7	4.7	4.5	2.1	3.7	3.4	6.8	5.1
18:0	11.9	12.8	11.1	7.4	9.7	14.0	10.2	6.4	10.6	12.9	10.0	12.1
18:1n-13	0.3	0.6	0.2	1.2	1.9	0.2	0.4	1.2	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.2
18:1n-9	2.0	2.1	3.4	4.3	2.8	2.1	2.7	1.2	3.1	1.5	1.4	3.7
18:1n-7	1.1	1.9	2.0	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.8	1.4	2.6	1.3	1.1	3.2
18:3n-3	0.3	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	0.1	0.5	0.1	nd	0.6
18:4n-3	0.1	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	0.8	nd	nd	0.6
20:0	1.3	0.2	0.3	1.6	2.1	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.9
20:1n-9	2.3	9.4	3.2	10.5	7.1	2.6	2.5	2.1	0.9	2.4	2.8	2.3
20:1n-7	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.3	0.4
NMI 20:2	nd	1.9	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
20:2n-6	0.2	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	0.2
NMI 20:3	nd	0.8	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
20:3n-6	0.6	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.9	0.5	0.7	0.2	0.7
20:4n-6	15.2	11.7	7.9	15.2	12.9	12.5	8.1	4.8	10.4	5.5	12.9	11.4
20:3n-3	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	0.1	14.1	0.1	0.1	nd	0.2
20:4n-3	nd	0.1	0.2	nd	nd	nd	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.1	nd	14.7
20:5n-3	11.8	9.9	14.9	7.6	8.0	11.4	15.8	12.1	14.7	19.9	16.8	0.2
22:0	0.2	nd	0.2	nd	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.4	nd	0.2	nd
22:1n-9	1.6	1.8	1.3	2.4	1.3	1.1	1.1	0.5	0.4	0.9	1.9	1.2
NMI 22:2	nd	nd	nd	1.7	nd	nd	nd	0.4	nd	nd	nd	0.6
22:4n-6	0.7	1.3	0.8	5.9	1.9	1.2	0.8	0.3	0.5	0.8	1.2	1.1
22:5n-6	0.9	1.0	1.0	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.3	0.8	1.0	1.0	0.8
22:5n-3	0.9	1.2	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.4	1.6	1.0	1.2	2.1	1.7	1.5
22:6n-3	18.7	19.9	20.7	15.0	14.0	17.4	21.4	27.6	16.4	26.4	21.3	14.0
Total	95.4	97.4	97.4	96.5	94.4	96.0	96.5	98.1	94.2	97.0	97.0	96.1

## Figures

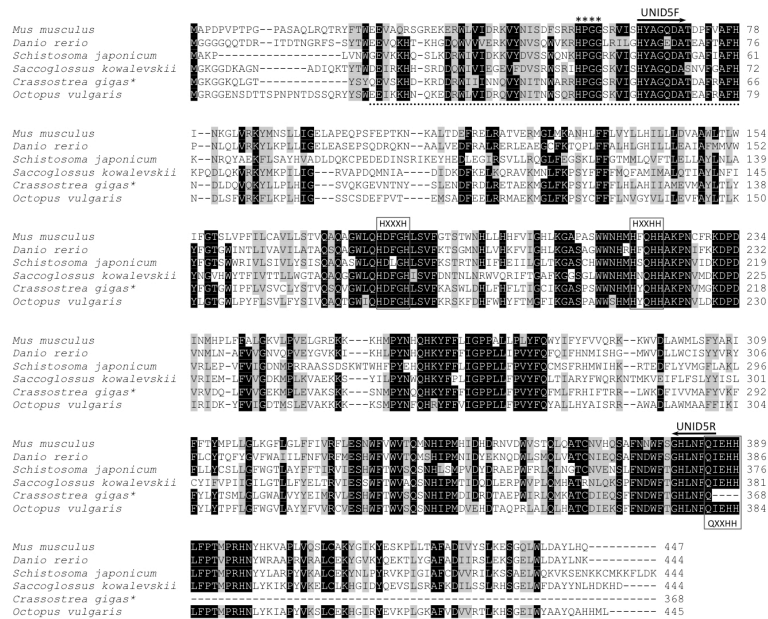


Fig. 1. Alignment of the deduced amino acid (aa) sequence of the newly cloned  $\Delta 5$  fatty acyl desaturases from *Octopus vulgaris*. The aa sequence of the octopus Fad was aligned with the *Mus musculus* FADS1 (gb|NP\_666206.1|), the  $\Delta 6/\Delta 5$  bifunctional desaturase from *Danio rerio* (gb|AAG25710.1|), the fatty acyl desaturase 1 from *Schistosoma japonicum* (emb|CAX72705.1|), the predicted fatty acid desaturase 2-like from *Saccoglossus kowalevskii* (gb|XP\_002736866.1|) and the partial *Crassostrea gigas* putative desaturase. Deduced aa sequences were aligned using ClustalW (Bioedit). Identical residues are shaded black and similar residues are shaded grey. Identity/similarity shading was based on the BLOSUM62 matrix, and the cut-off for shading was 70%. The cytochrome  $b_5$ -like domain is dot-underlined and the three histidine boxes (HXXXH, HXXHH and QXXHH) are highlighted with grey squares. The asterisks on the top mark the heme-binding motif, HPGG. Conserved regions where the degenerate primers UNID5F and UNID5R (see Materials and Methods section) are also indicated.

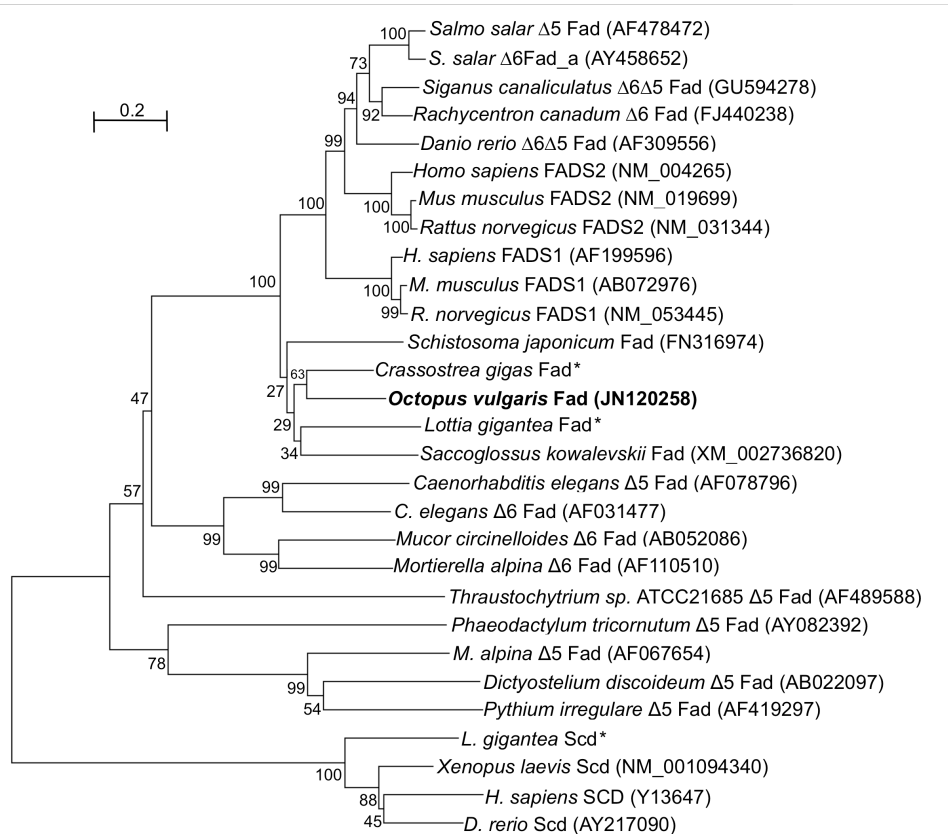


Fig. 2. Phylogenetic tree comparing the deduced amino acid (aa) sequence of the newly cloned *Octopus vulgaris* fatty acyl desaturase (Fad) with other  $\Delta$ 5- and  $\Delta$ 6-like Fad from several organisms. Additionally, the aa sequences of several stearoyl coA desaturase (Scd) were included in the analysis. The tree was constructed using the Neighbour Joining method (Saitou and Nei 1987) with MEGA4. The horizontal branch length is proportional to aa substitution rate per site. The numbers represent the frequencies (%) with which the tree topology presented was replicated after 10000 iterations.

\*Sequences derived from searches in GenBank (*C. gigas*) or *L. gigantea* Genome Project website (<http://genome.jgi-psf.org/Lotgi1/Lotgi1.home.html>).

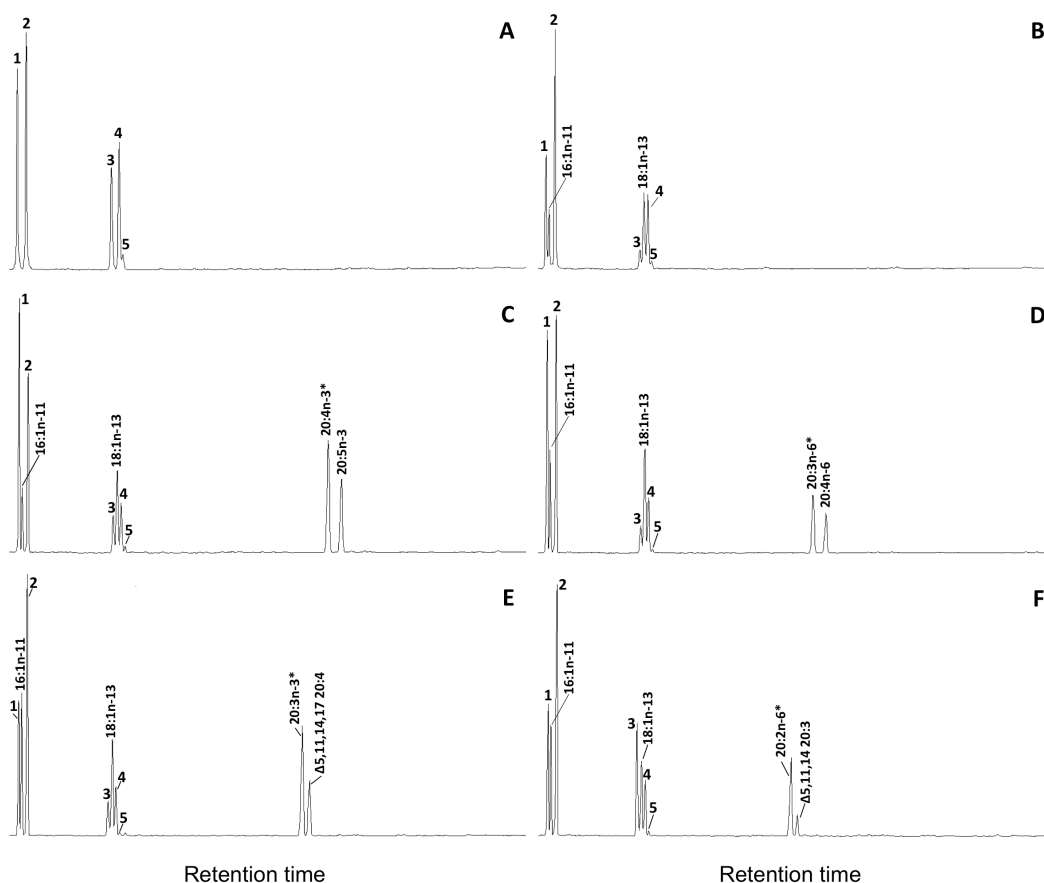


Fig. 3. Functional characterisation of the newly cloned *Octopus vulgaris* fatty acyl desaturase (Fad) in yeast (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*). The fatty acid (FA) profiles were determined from control yeast transformed with pYES2 containing no insert (A). Additionally, yeast transformed with pYES2 containing the ORF of the putative Fad cDNA as an insert were grown with no substrate (B) or in the presence of one of the exogenously added substrates 20:4n-3 (C), 20:3n-6 (D), 20:3n-3 (E) or 20:2n-6 (F). Peaks 1-5 in all panels are the main endogenous FA of *S. cerevisiae*, namely 16:0 (1), 16:1 isomers (2), 18:0 (3), 18:1n-9 (4) and 18:1n-7 (5). Additionally peaks derived from exogenously added substrates (“\*”) or desaturation products are indicated accordingly in panels B-F. Vertical axis, FID response; horizontal axis, retention time.



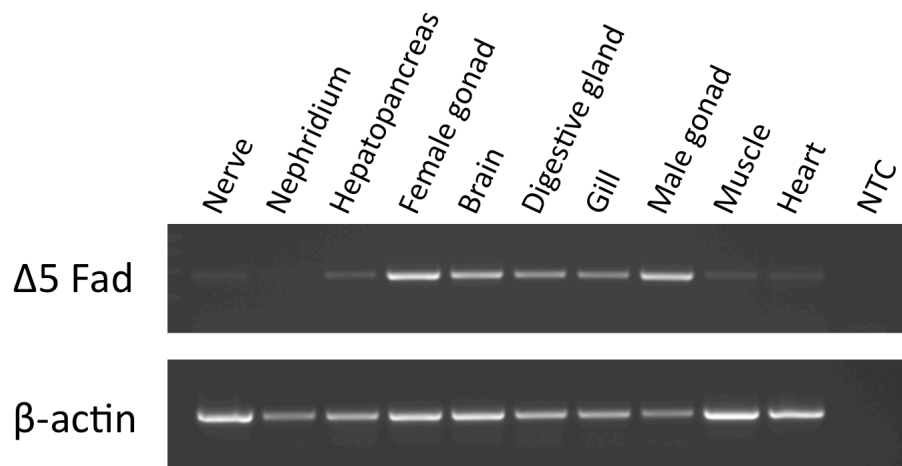


Fig. 4. RT-PCR analyses showing the tissue distribution of octopus fatty acyl desaturase (Fad) mRNA transcripts. Expression of the housekeeping gene  $\beta$ -actin is also shown.