

Discovering Boundary Equations for Wave Breaking using Machine Learning

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Lecturer @ University of Manchester

2025/09/26

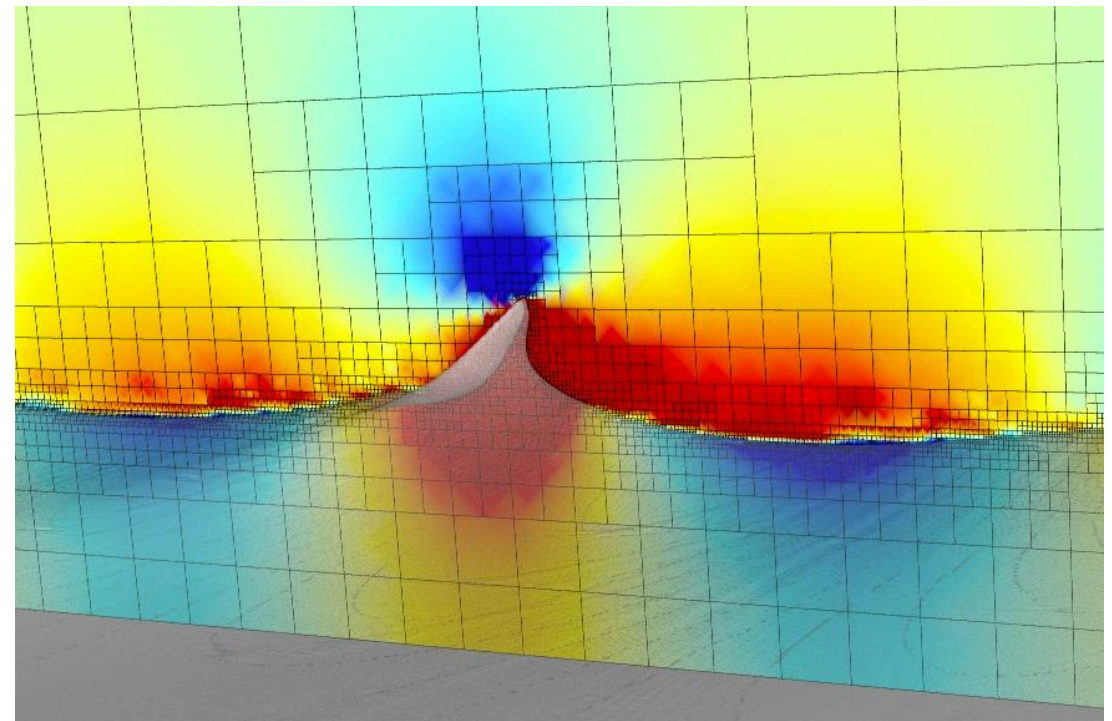
4th International Workshop on Waves, Storm Surges, and Coastal Hazards Incorporating the 18th International Waves Workshop

Background

However, modelling these breaking waves requires DNS solving the **Navier-Stokes equation** and are very **computational heavy**.



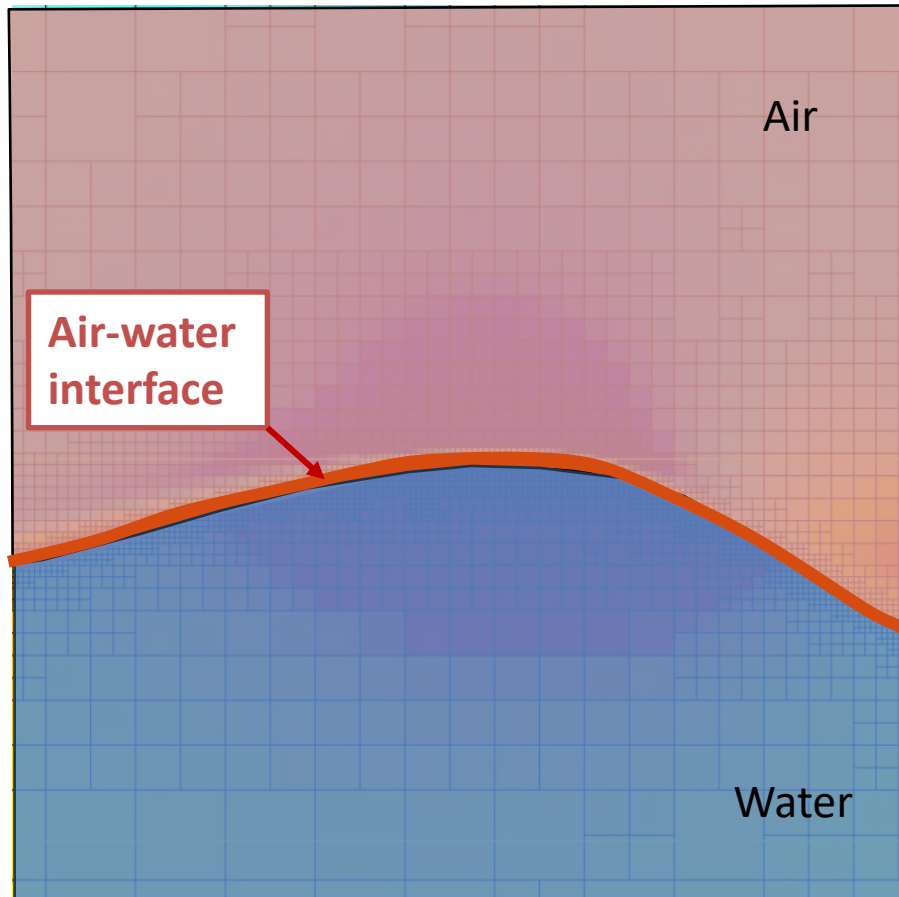
2D breaking wave with Navier Stokes Equations – **3 days on Cluster**



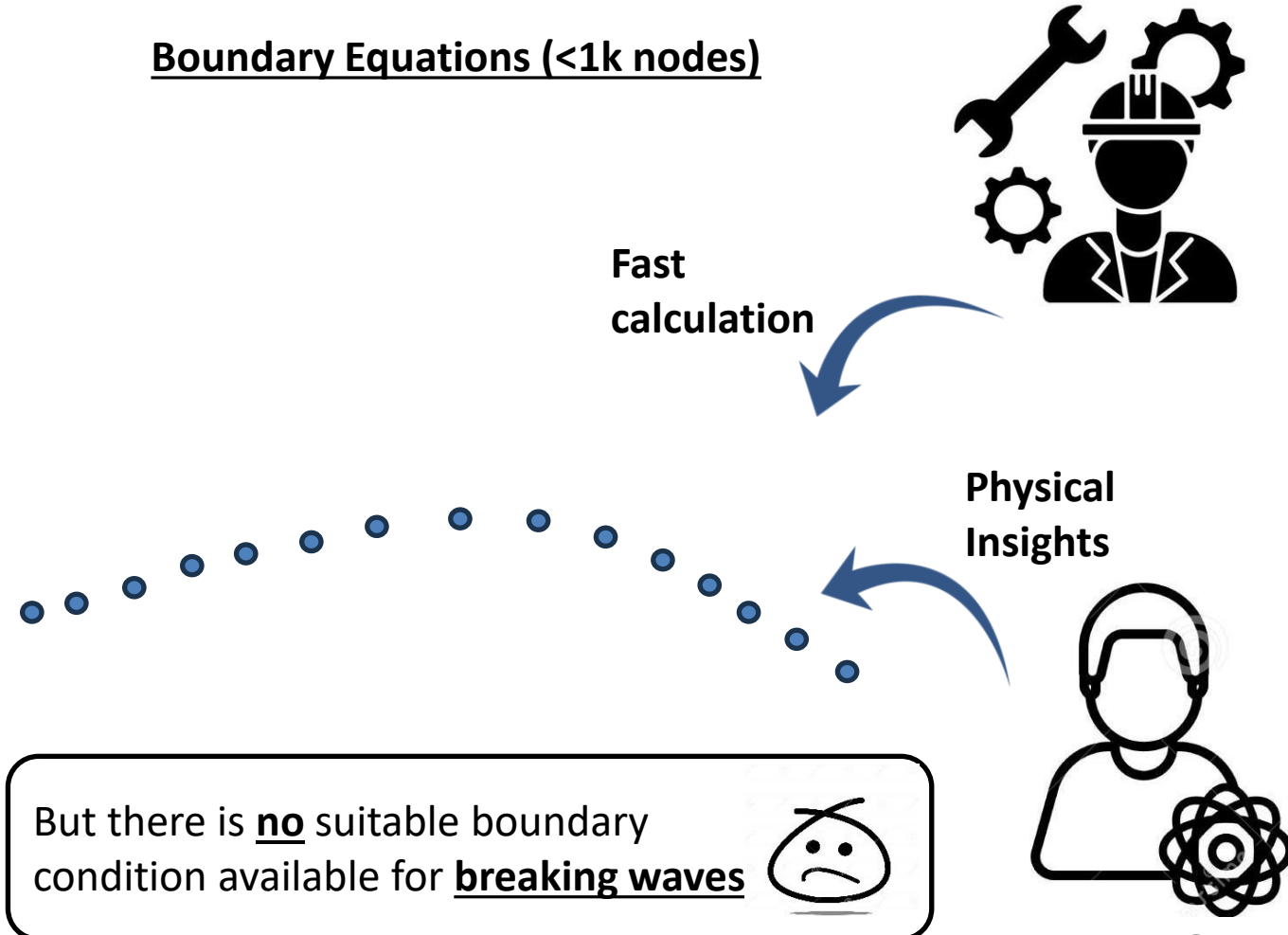
3D breaking wave with Navier Stokes Equations – **3 weeks on Cluster**

Why solving Navier Stokes Equations so slow?

Navier Stokes Equations (500k nodes)

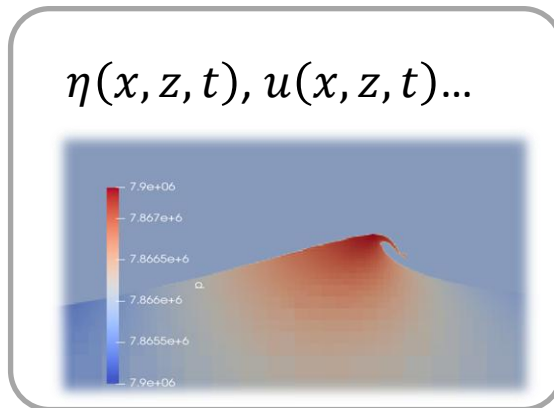


Boundary Equations (<1k nodes)



Machine Learning Approach

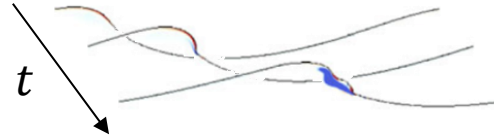
Database Simulation with DNS



Ray
Casting

Effective Description

$$\eta(x, t)|_{z=\eta^*}, u(x, t)|_{z=\eta^*} \dots$$



PySR

New Equation Describing Data

**Breaking Wave
Evolution Equation**

$$\eta_t = -\frac{g}{\omega_p} \eta_x - [abs(U) * \eta_x]$$

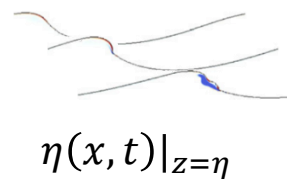
Domain Knowledge

Fully nonlinear boundary conditions :

$$\begin{aligned} \eta_t = & -\eta_x u + w + w \eta_x \eta_x \\ u_t = & -g \eta_x - u_x u - w_x w \\ & - w w_x \eta_x^2 - w^2 \eta_x \eta_{\{x,x\}} \end{aligned}$$

Scientific ML with PySR

Data Collection



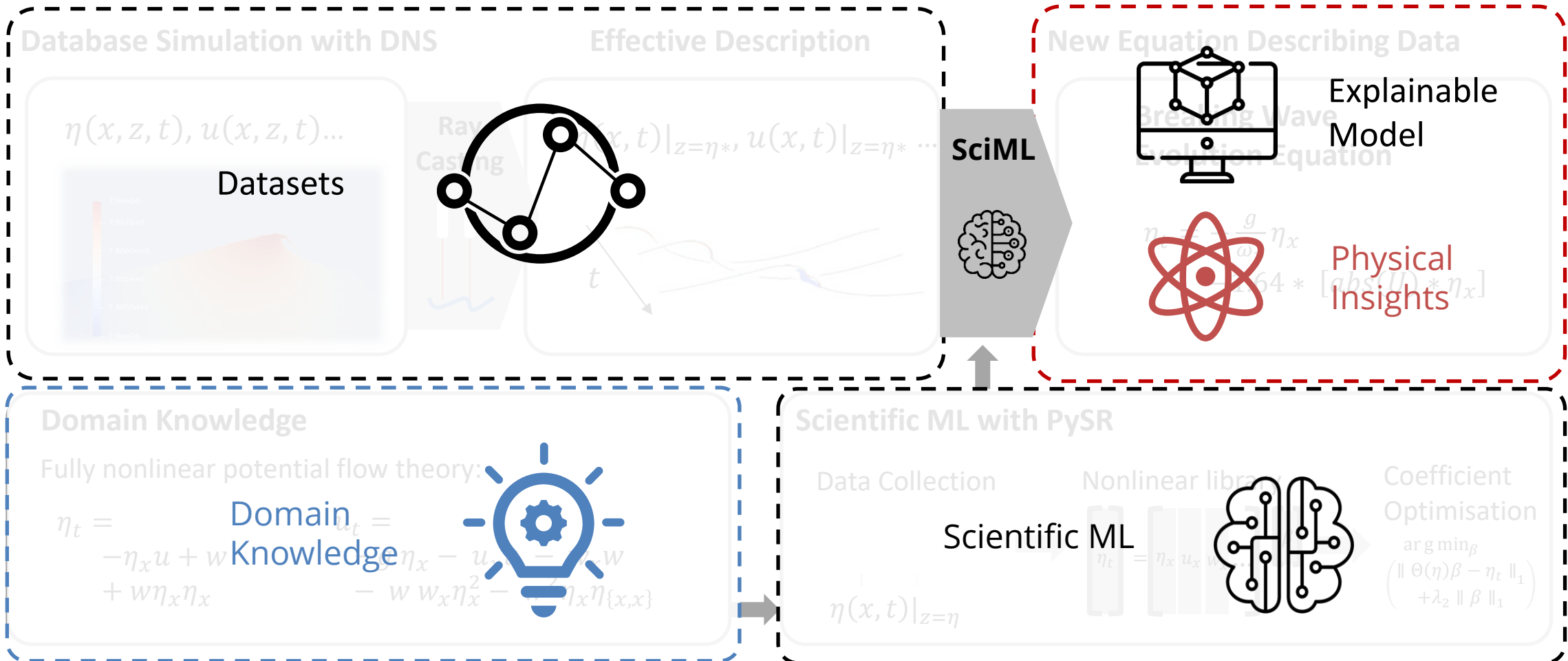
Nonlinear library

$$\eta_t = \begin{bmatrix} \eta_x & u_x & w_x & \dots \end{bmatrix} \beta$$

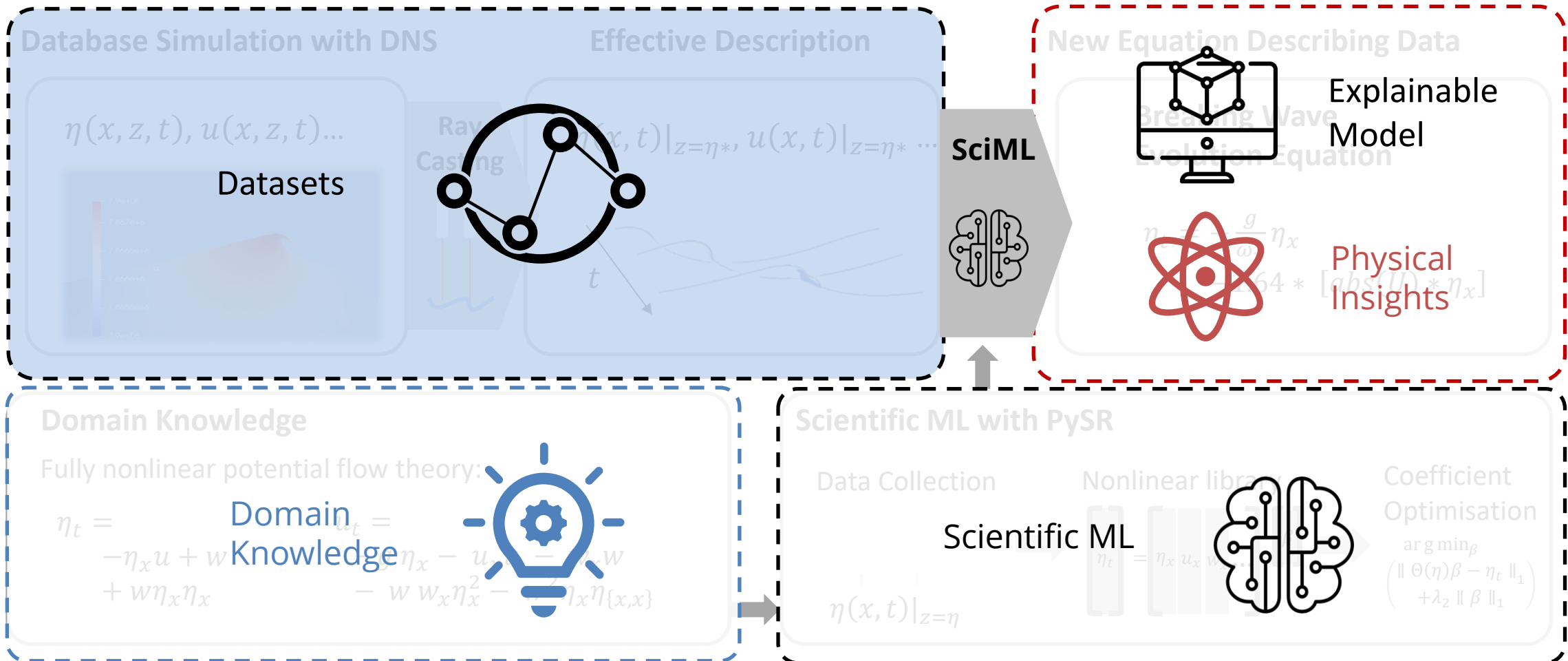
Coefficient
Optimisation

$$\arg \min_{\beta} \left(\|\Theta(\eta)\beta - \eta_t\|_1 + \lambda_2 \|\beta\|_1 \right)$$

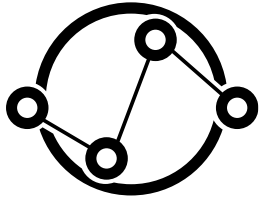
Machine Learning Approach



Machine Learning Approach



Datasets



Datasets

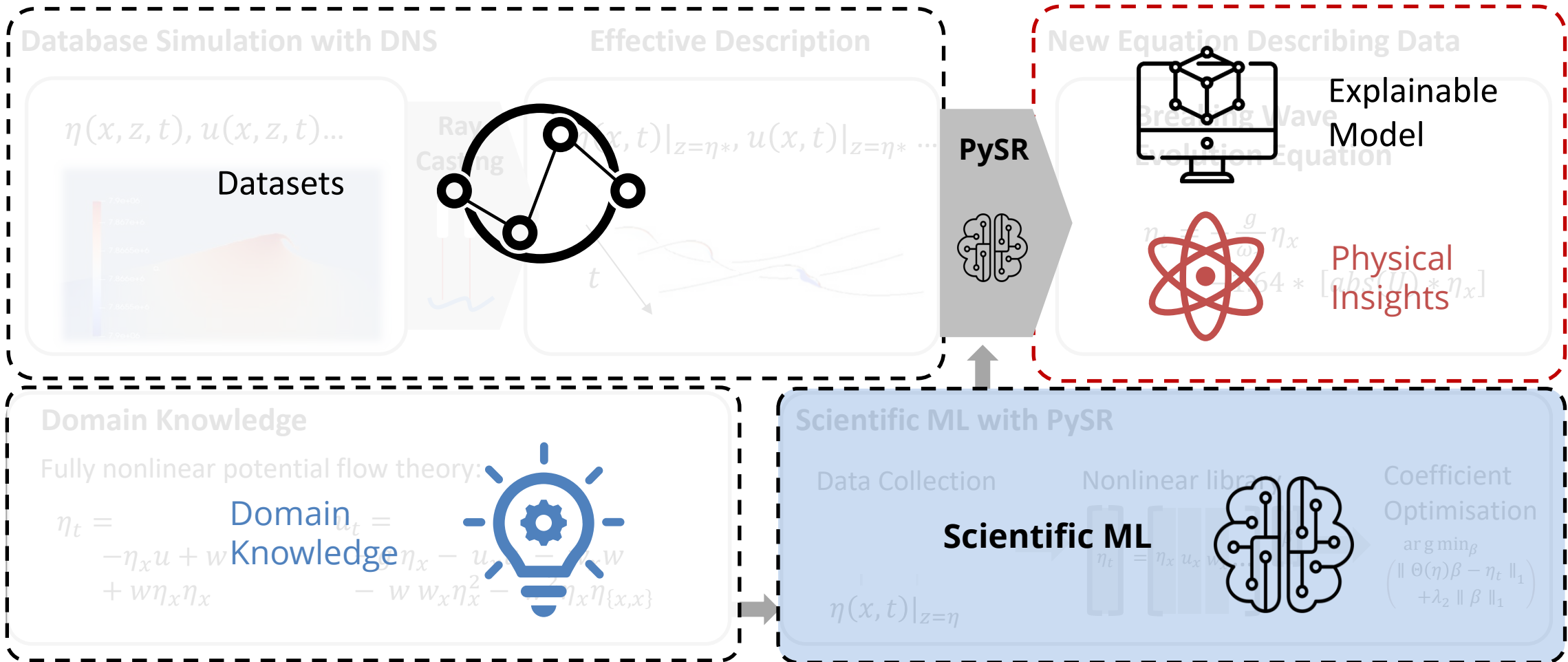
Over 75 2D breaking wave cases with over 1 million data points

A single case



TO BE CONTINUED...

Machine Learning Approach

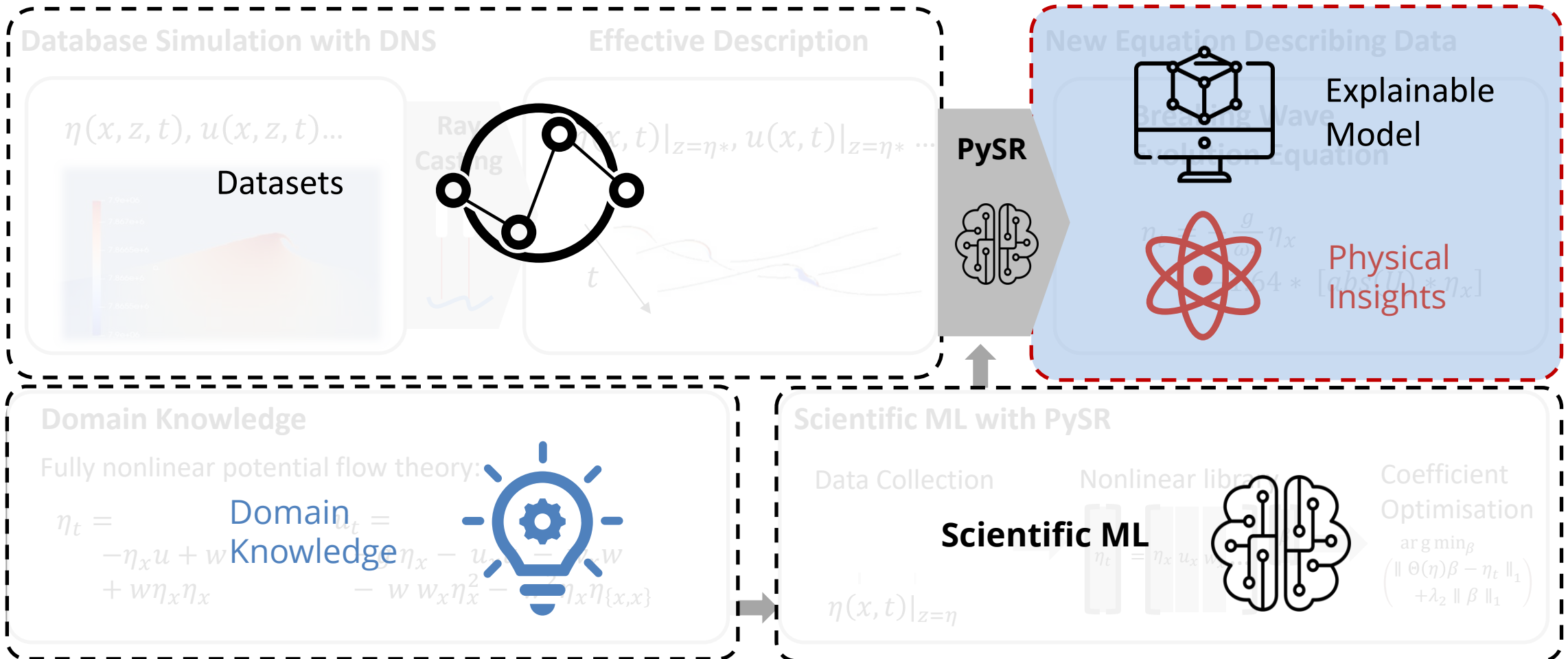


Symbolic Regression

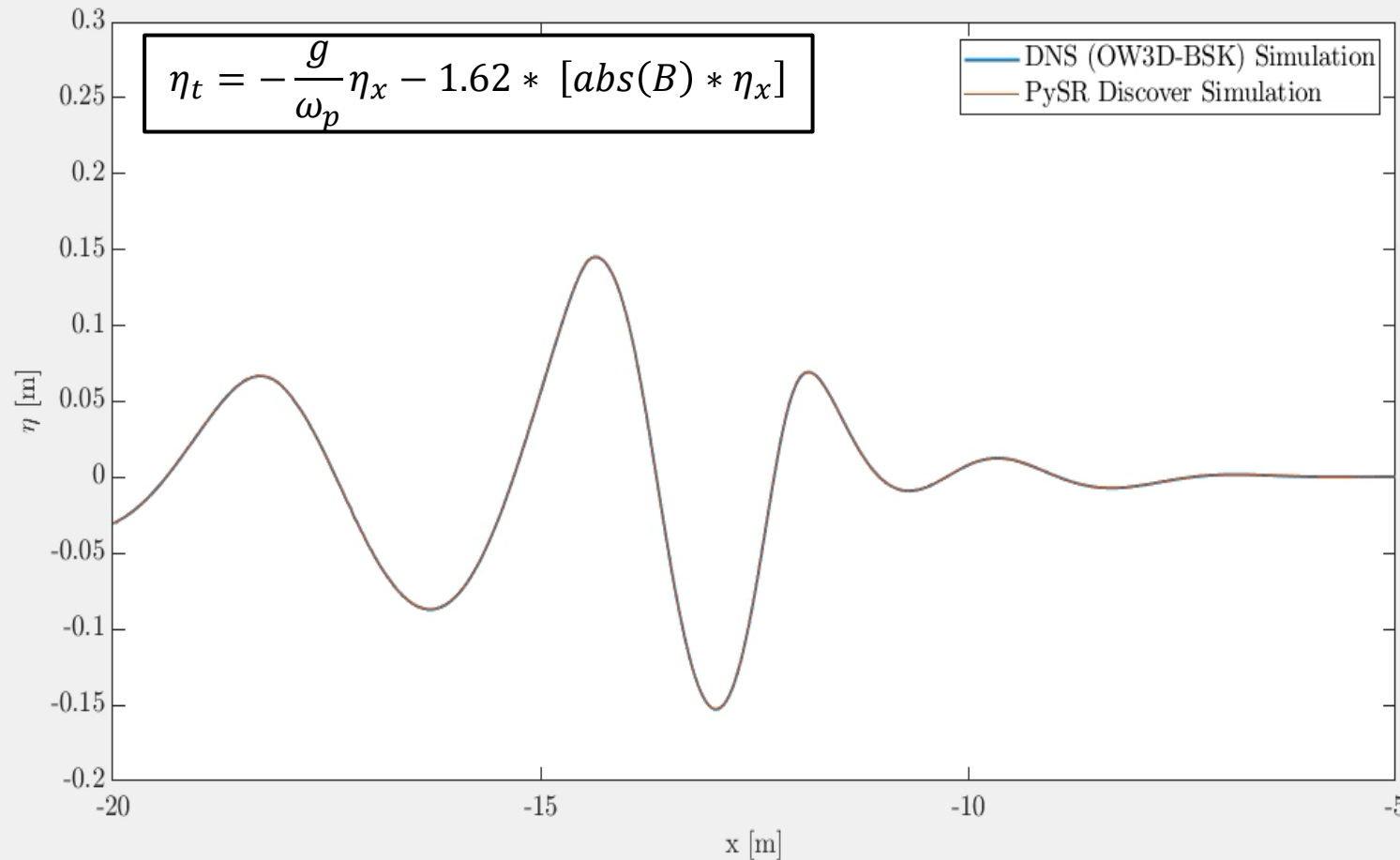
PySR and **SymbolicRegression.jl**

[https://github.com/
MilesCranmer/PySR](https://github.com/MilesCranmer/PySR)

Machine Learning Approach



Preliminary Results



We aim to develop a new model discovered by ML (in-progress) that:

- Overlooks bubbles and white cap details
- Equation based **numerical simulation** (*white box*)
- **Very Fast** (*2 minutes* on desktop vs *3250* of core *hours* on supercomputer)
- Mathematically interpretable
- Directly applicable to various scales of the wave

** Only for 2d deep water spilling breakers so far*

Physical insights

Non-breaking evolution

FNBC framework:

$$\eta_t = -1\eta_x u + 1w + O(3)$$

SciML discovered equation:

$$\eta_t = -1.058\eta_x u + 0.98w + O(3)$$

Breaking evolution

FNBC framework:

$$\eta_t = -1\eta_x u + 1w + O(3)$$

SciML discovered equation:

$$\eta_t = -\frac{g}{\omega_p}\eta_x + 1.6 \text{abs}(U)\eta_x + O(3)$$

Residual is
reduced
significantly

Physical insights

Non-breaking evolution

FNBC framework:

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Terms with surface
elevation

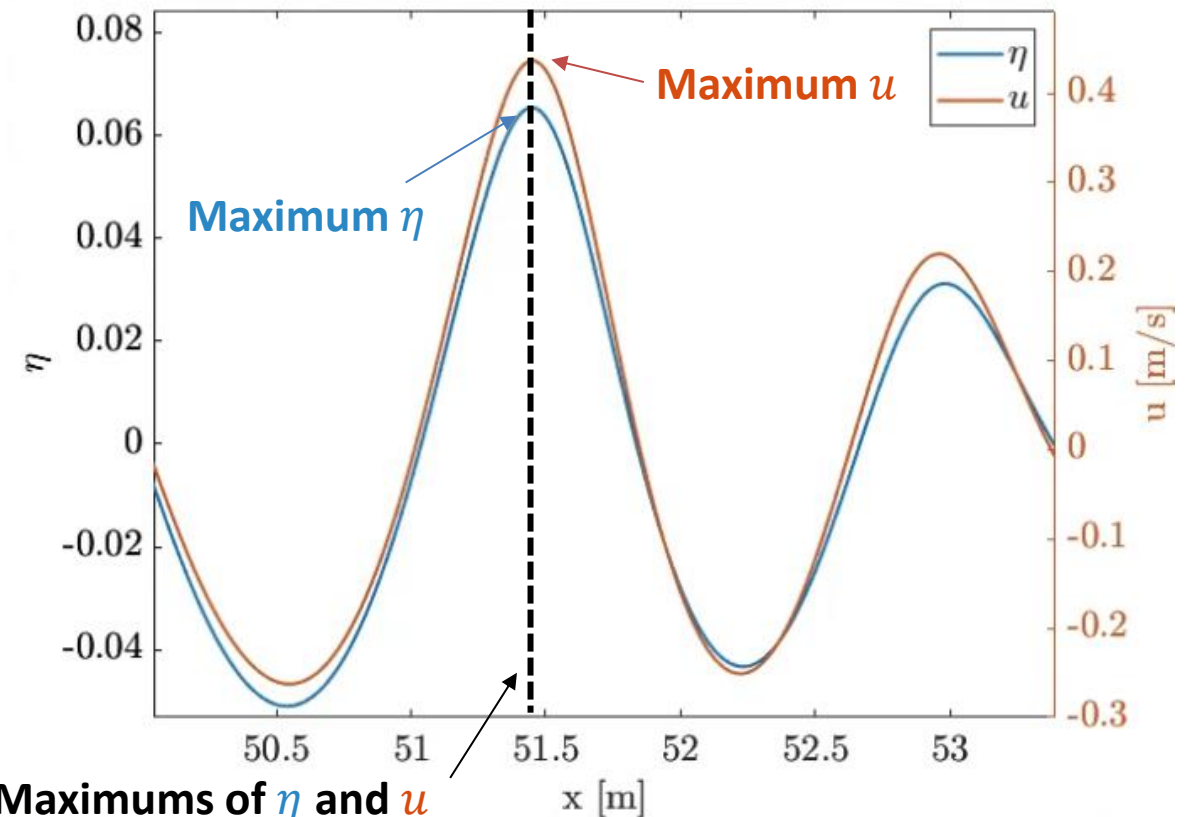
Terms with velocities

FNBC & SciML:



η_t

u terms & η terms



Maximums of η and u
are aligned

Physical insights

Breaking evolution



FNBC framework:

$$\eta_t = 1w - 1\eta_x u + O(3)$$



FNBC:

η_t



u terms & η terms

SciML discovered equation:

$$\eta_t = -\frac{g}{\omega_p} \eta_x + 1.6 \text{abs}(U) \eta_x + O(3)$$

Terms with surface
elevation (η) only



SciML :

η_t

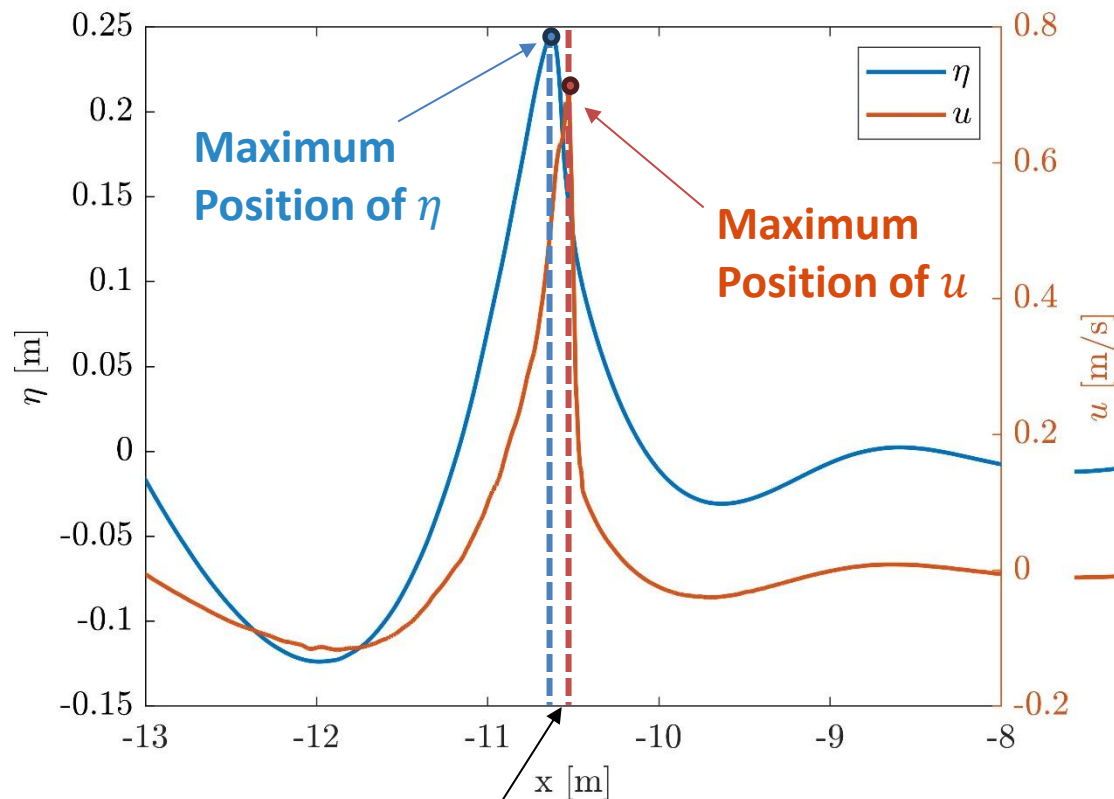


η terms



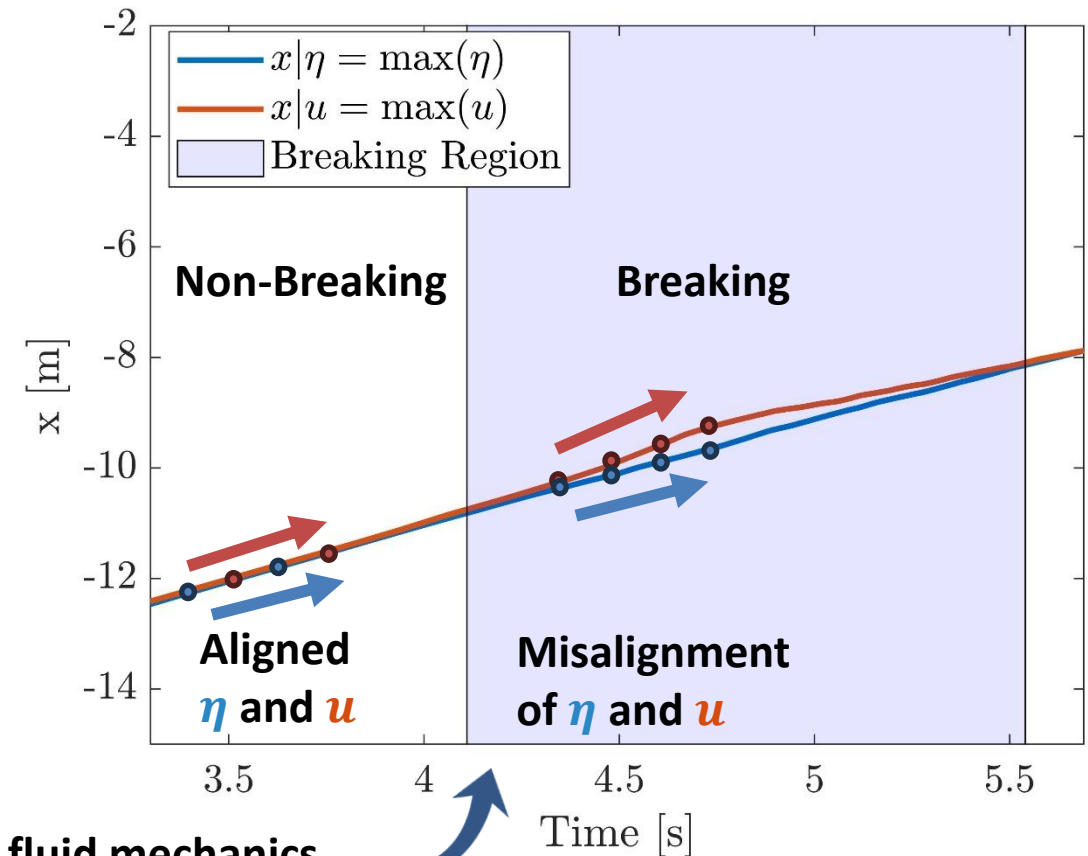
Physical insights

Maximum η and u



Maximums of η and u
are NOT aligned

Evolution of the maximum position η and u

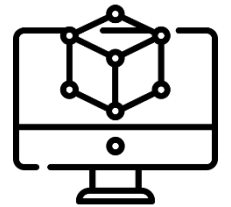
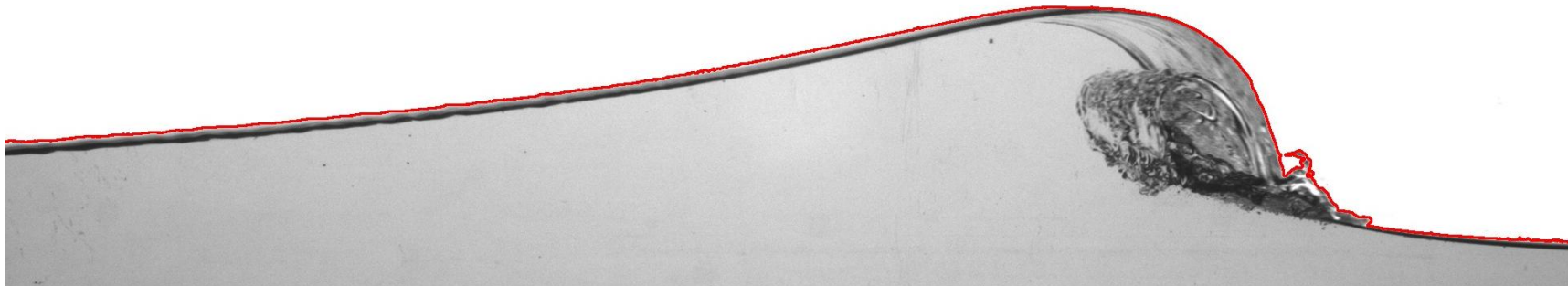
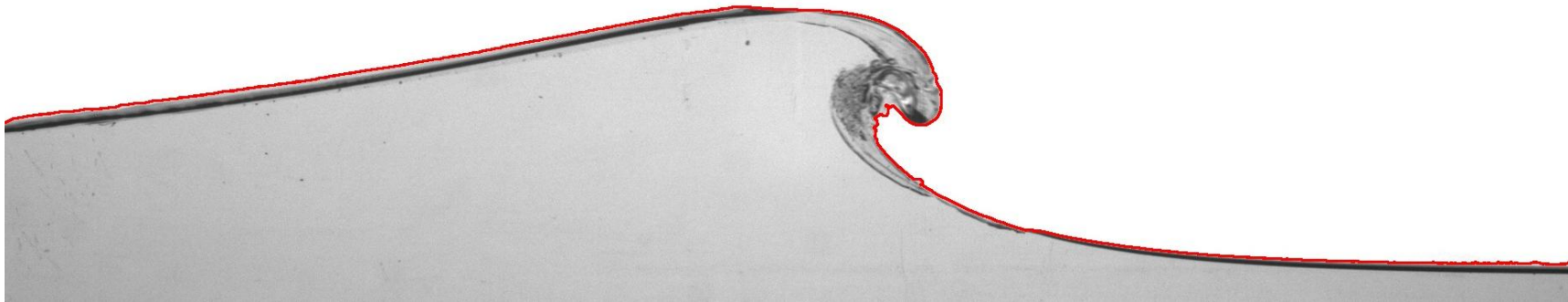


New findings in fluid mechanics

Experiments

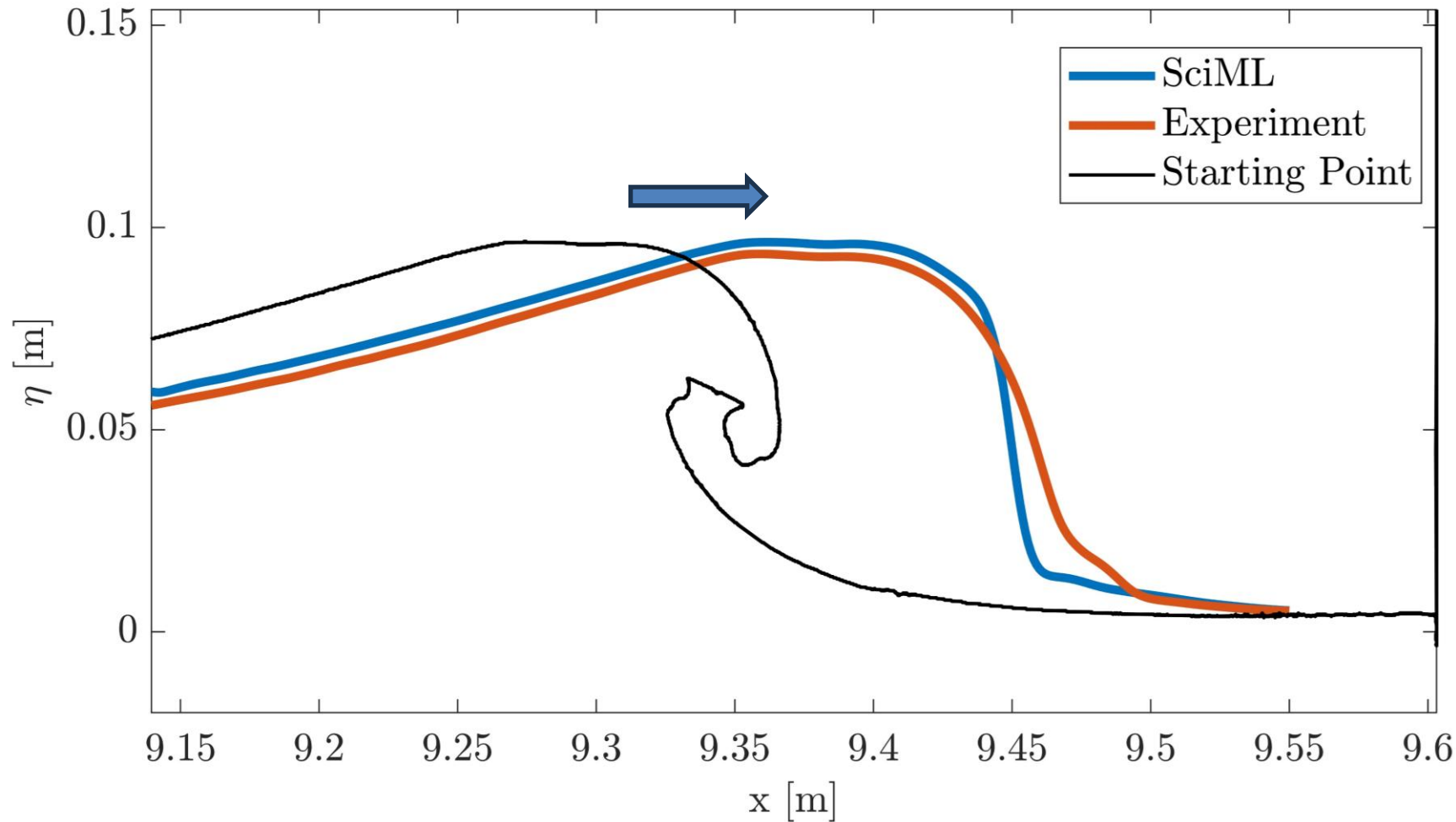


Preliminary Results



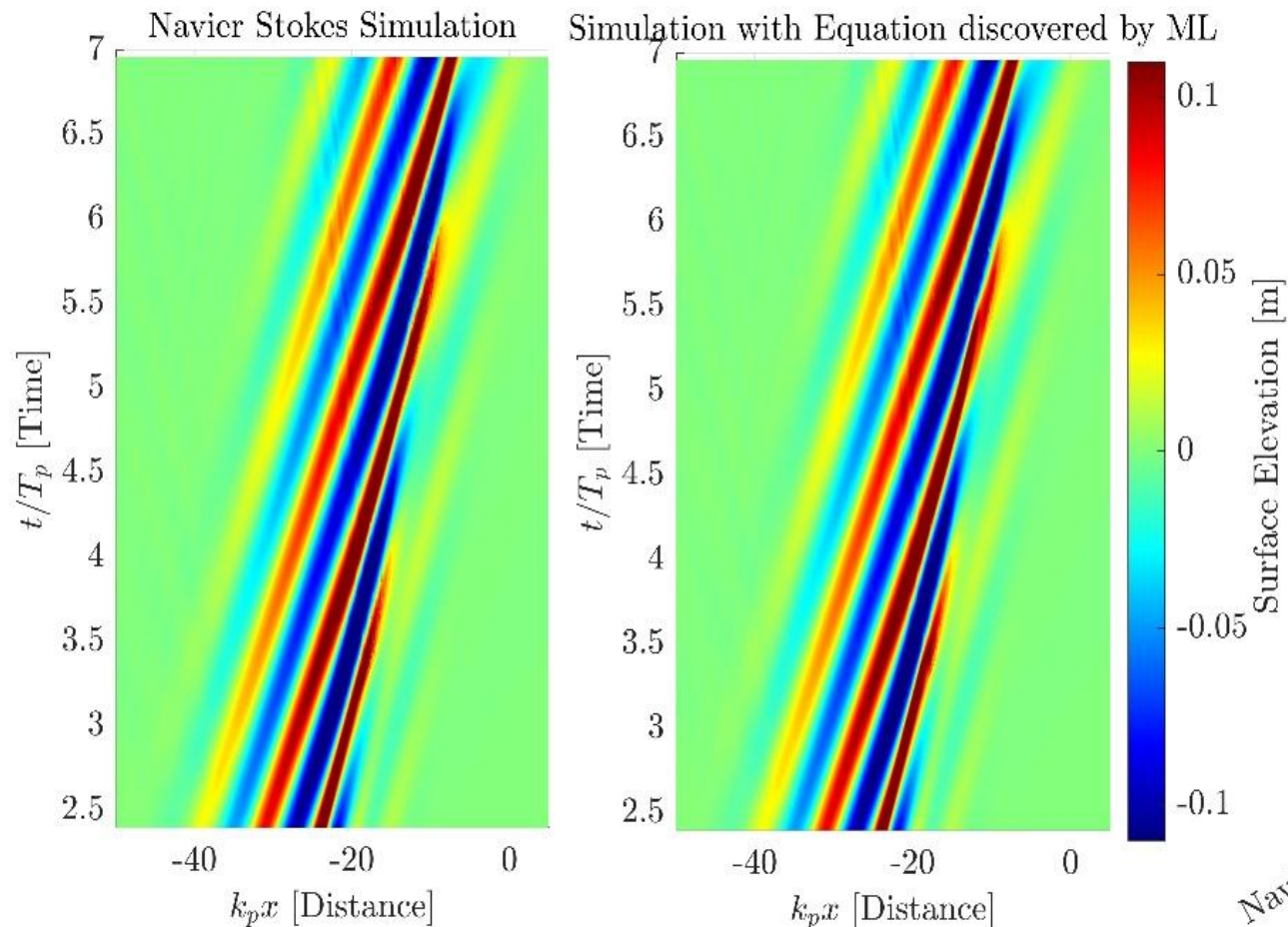
Machine
Learning
Discovered
Equation

Preliminary Results

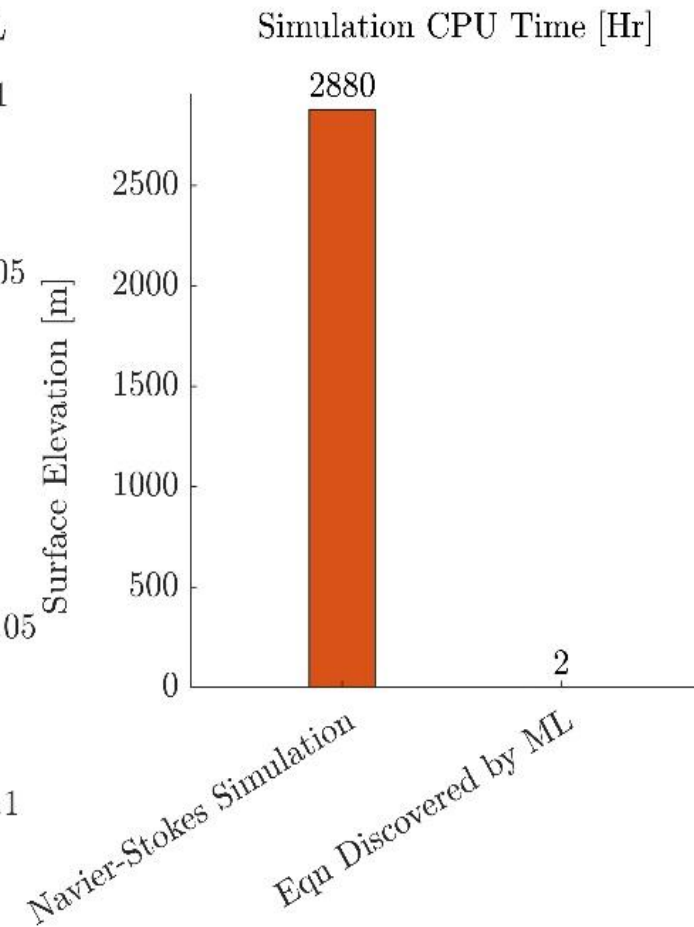


Conclusion

- **Accurate** approximation of breaking wave with Equation discovered by SciML



- **Significant** reduction in modelling time



- **New physical insights**

Breaking evolution



Misalignment of η and u



Thank you!

Tianning Tang (Tim);
Email: tianning.tang@eng.ox.ac.uk

What makes a wave break?

How machine learning can shed light on the underlying physics of breaking waves

Tianning Tang (Tim); Schmidt AI in Science Fellow

28/11/2023

Supervisors and Collaborators



Prof. Thomas Adcock



Prof. Paul Taylor



Prof. Yuntian Chen



Prof. Steve Roberts



Dr. Ben Lambert



Dr. Martin Robinson

Discovering Physics from Data



Planetary system



$$mr\omega^2 = G \frac{mM}{r^2}$$

**Newton's law of
gravitation (published 1687)**



**Johannes Kepler
(1571 - 1630)**

Data used by Kepler (1618)

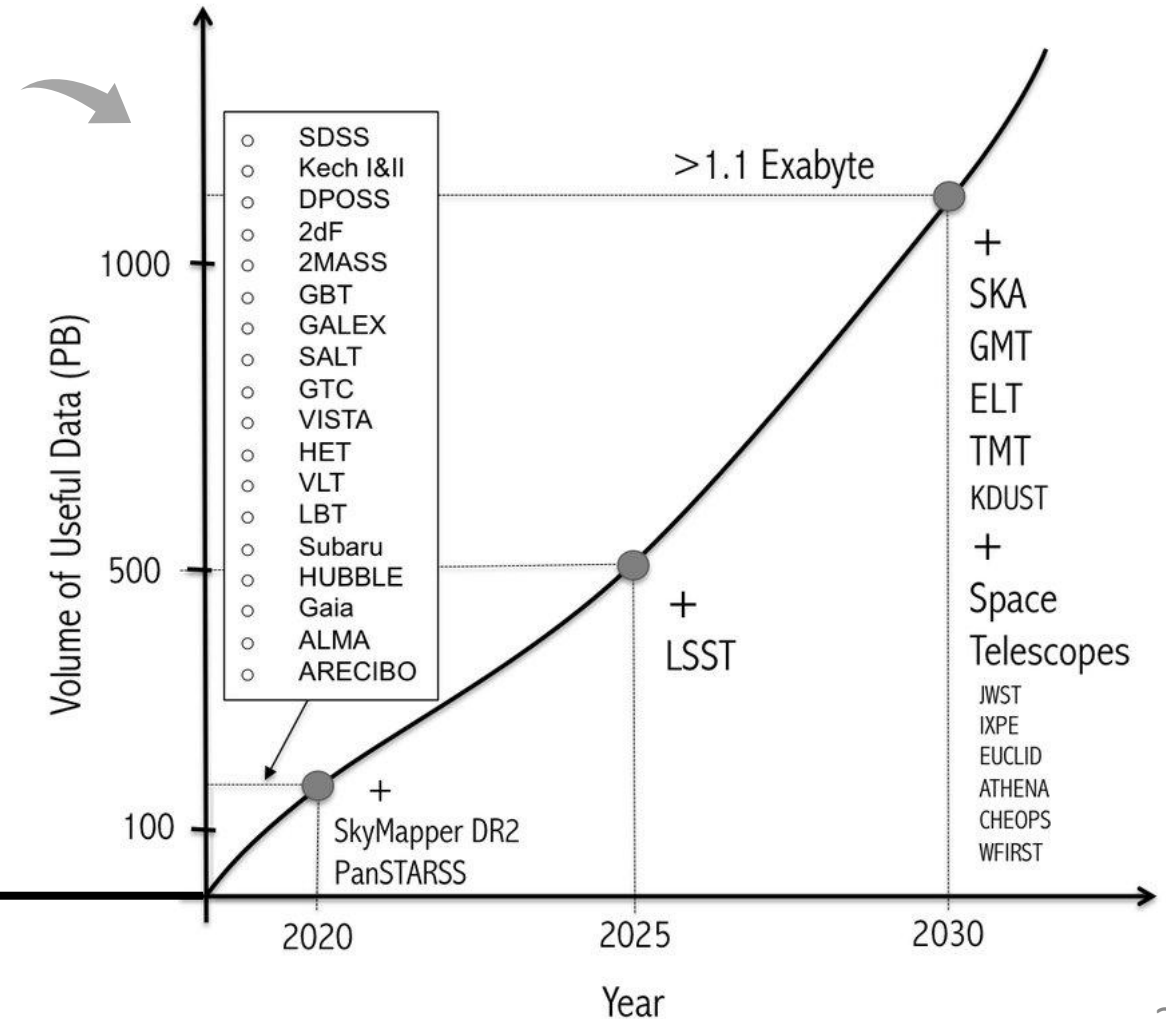
Planet	Mean distance to sun (AU)	Period (days)	$\frac{R^3}{T^2}$ (10^{-6} AU ³ /day ²)
Mercury	0.389	87.77	7.64
Venus	0.724	224.70	7.52
Earth	1	365.25	7.50
Mars	1.524	686.95	7.50
Jupiter	5.20	4332.62	7.49
Saturn	9.510	10759.2	7.43

Constant

The Astrophysics Data

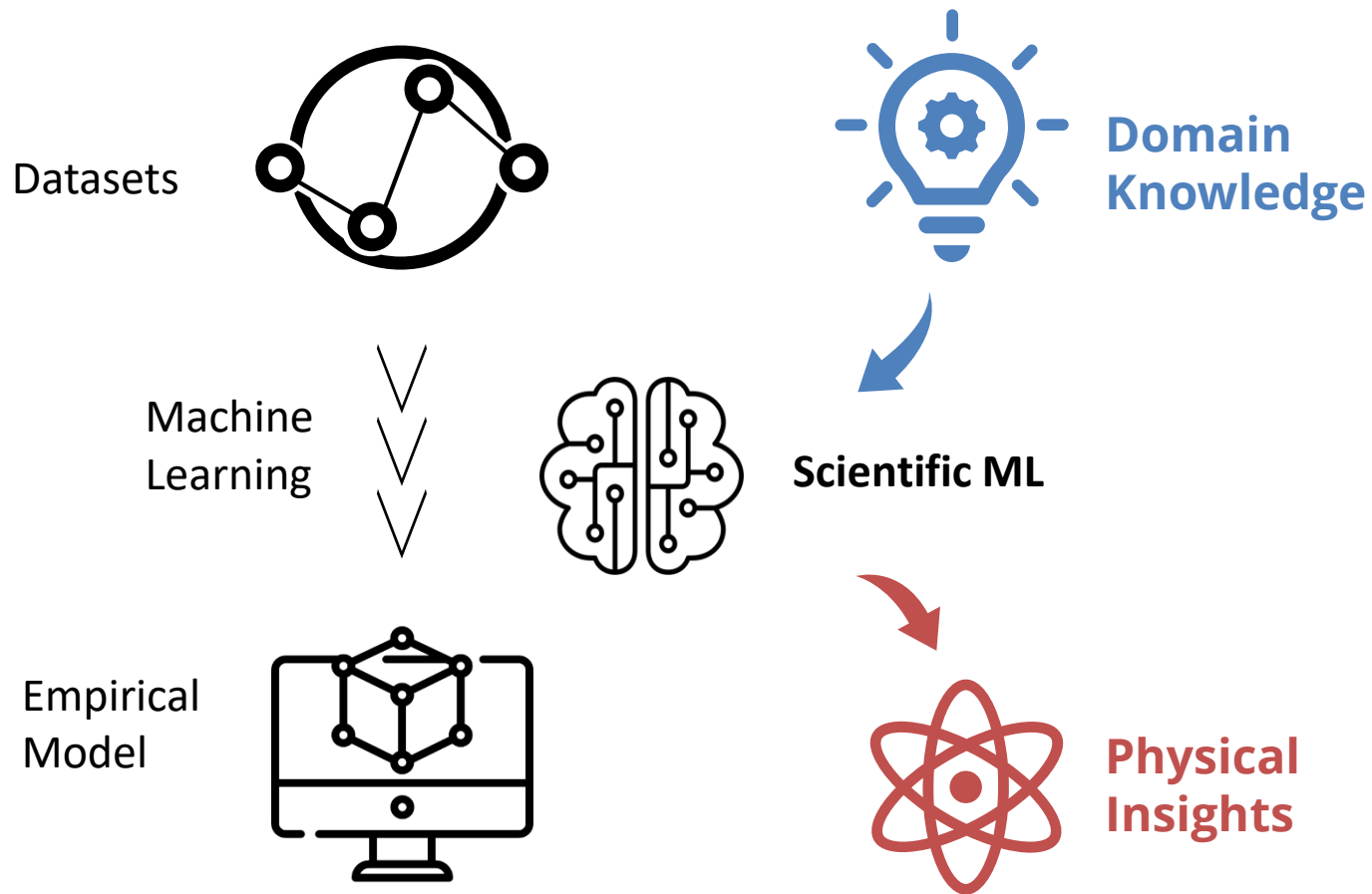


**Johannes Kepler
(1571 - 1630)**



Can we do better in obtaining physical insights from data after 400 years?

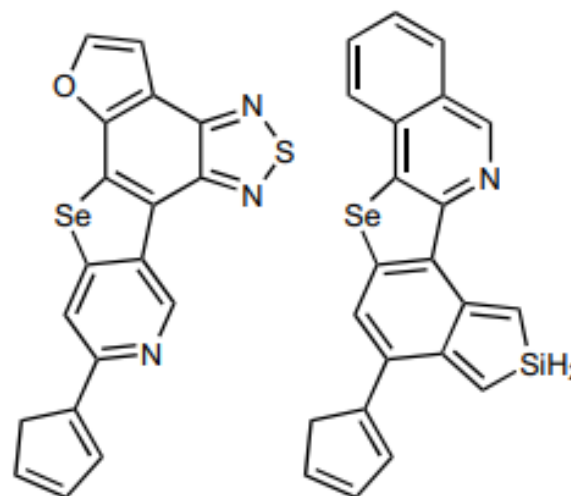
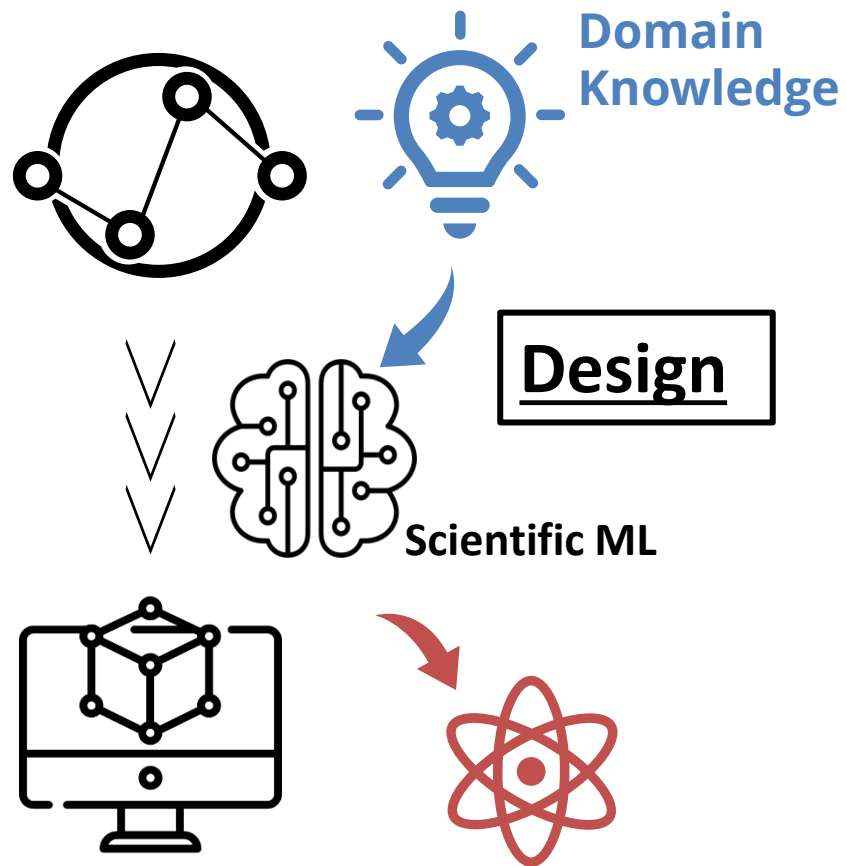
Scientific Machine Learning



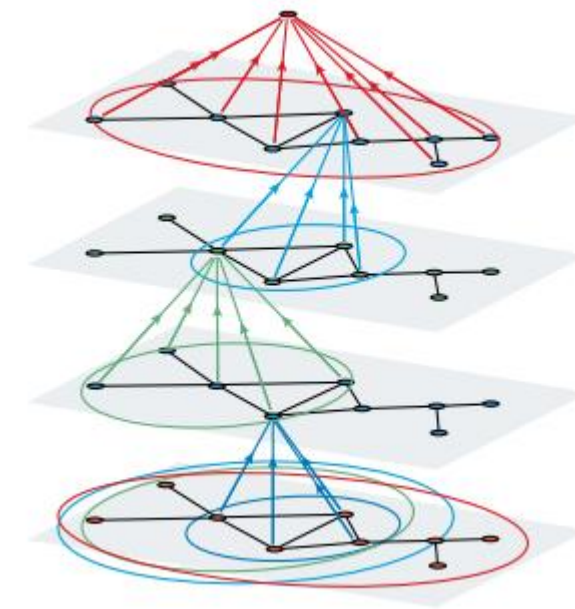
SciML seeks to address **domain-specific** data challenges and extract **insights** from scientific datasets through innovative methodological solutions.

- Brown University

Scientific Machine Learning



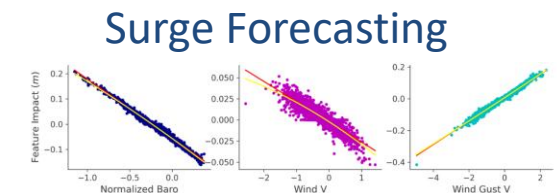
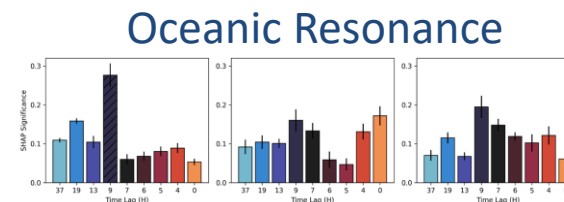
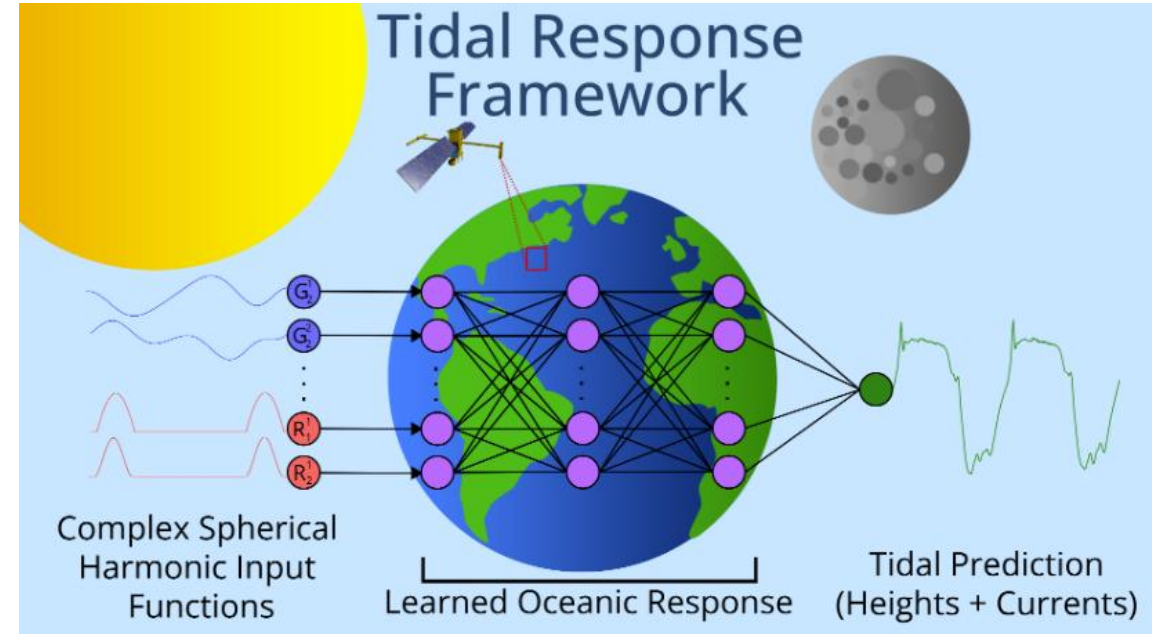
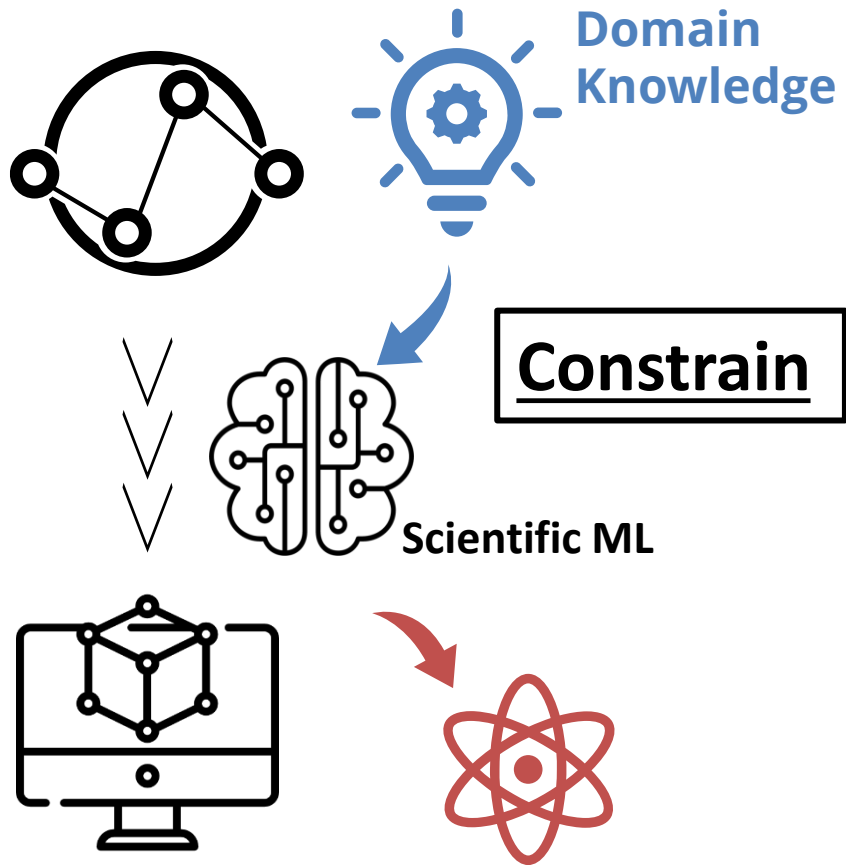
Molecular Graphs



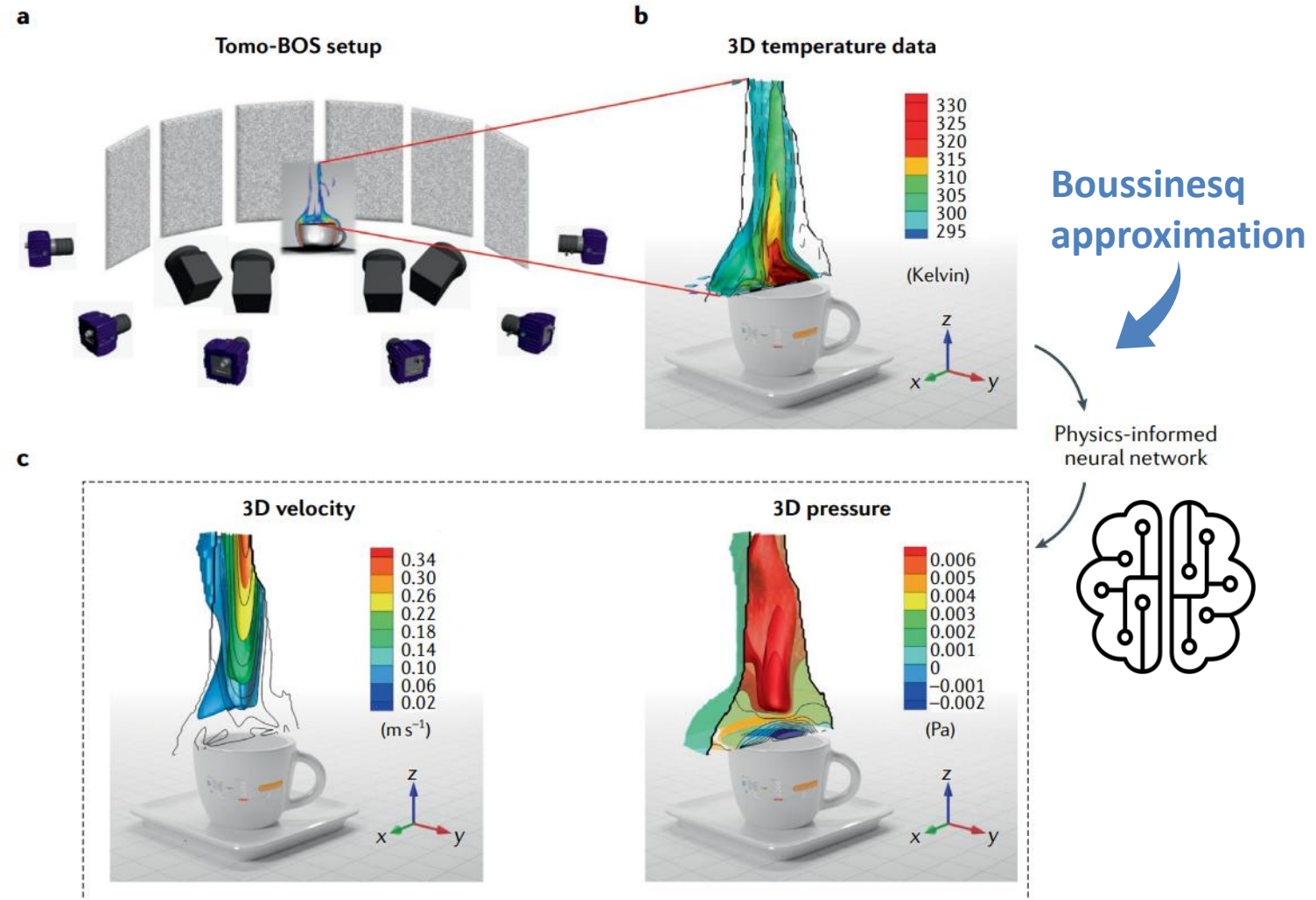
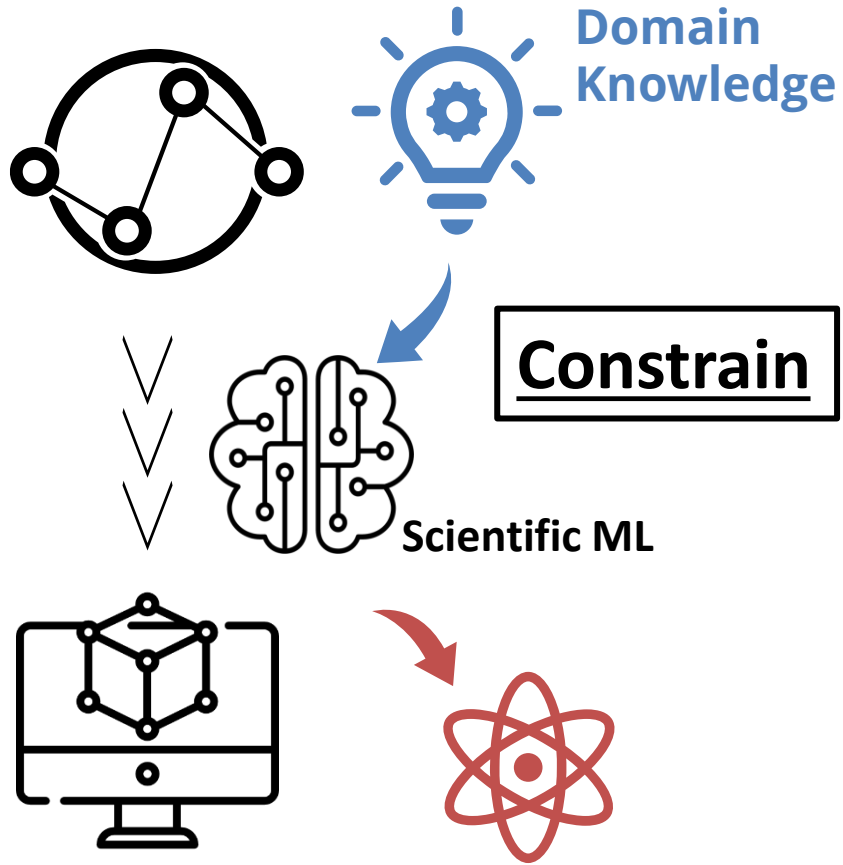
New **architecture** based
on graph neural networks

Objective: Predicting chemical properties

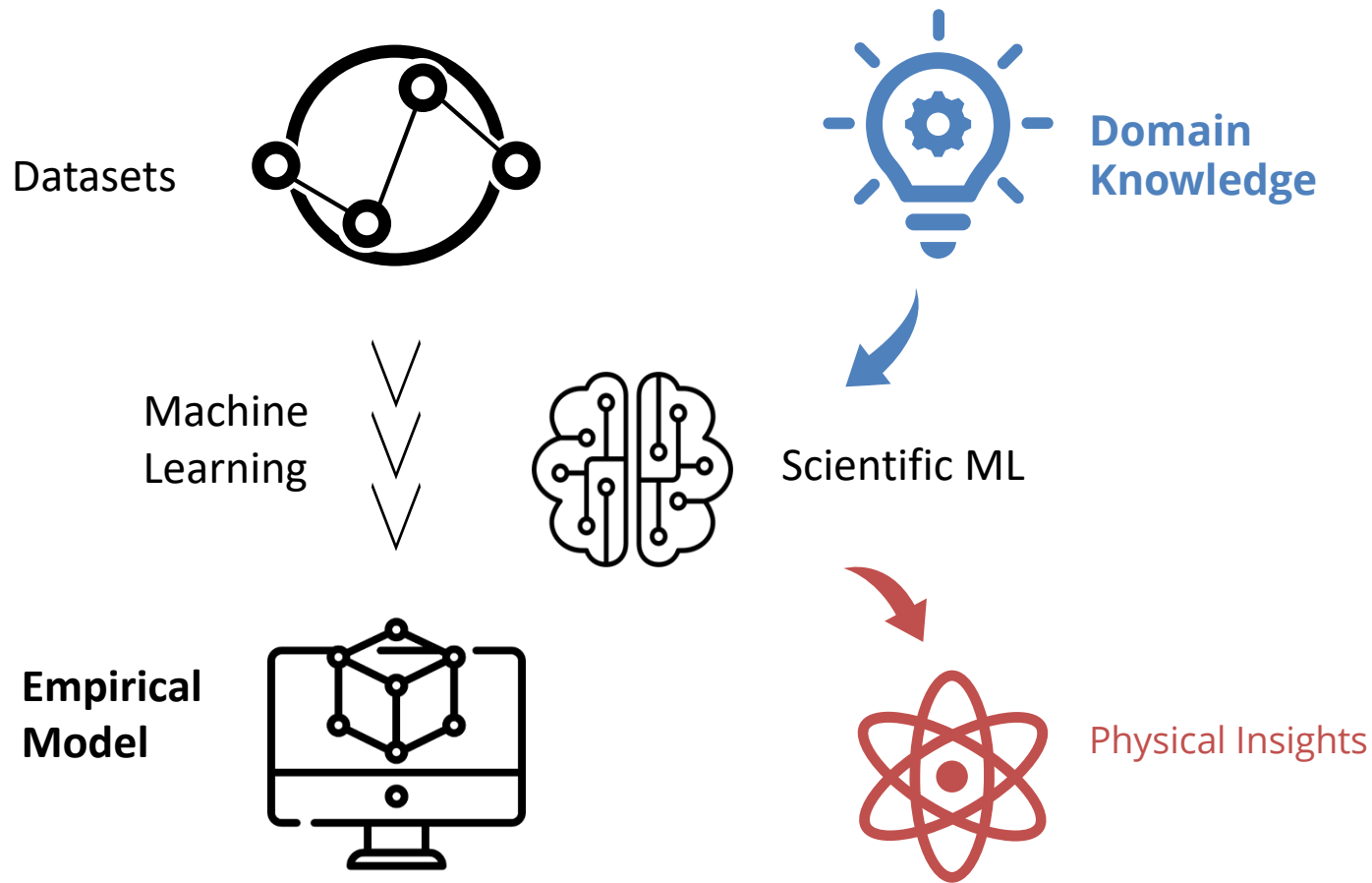
Scientific Machine Learning



Scientific Machine Learning



Scientific Machine Learning

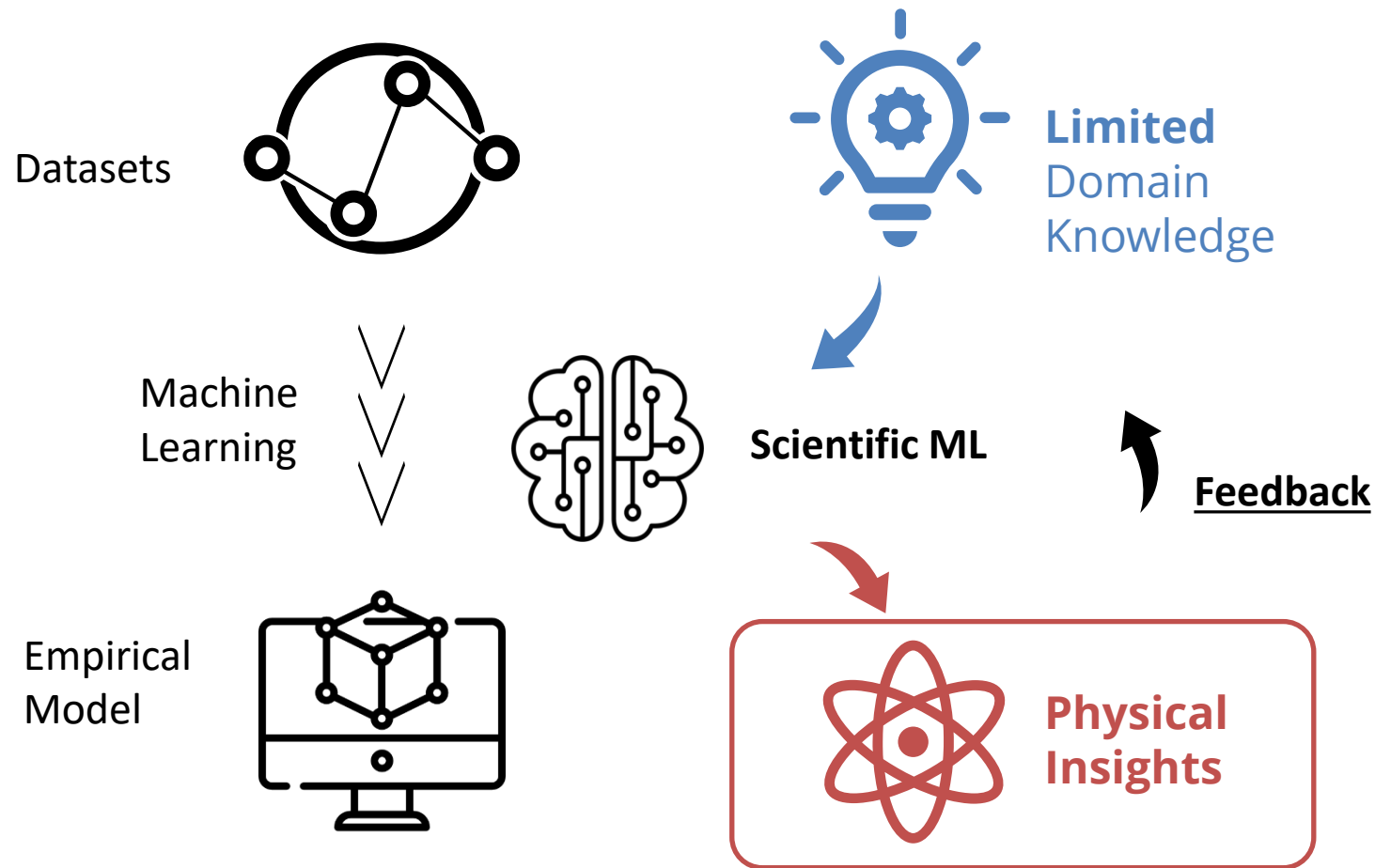


Assumption:

The **Domain Knowledge** is (close to) sufficient for the underlying system to guide the Empirical Model.

What if the domain knowledge is
insufficient?

"Knowledge Discovery"



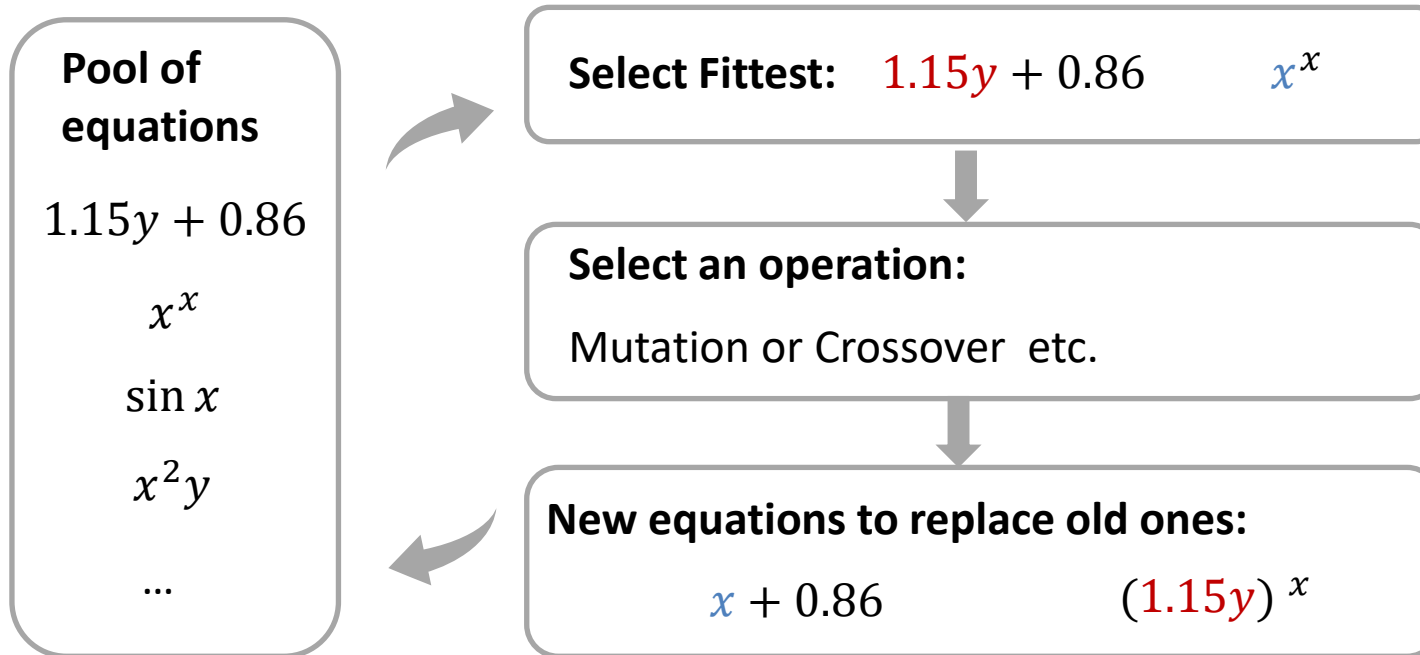
Knowledge discovery is the process of directly mining **important internal principles** (i.e., governing equations) from observations and experimental data through machine learning.

"Knowledge Discovery"

Symbolic Regression

Trying to find ***analytical expressions*** of the dataset.

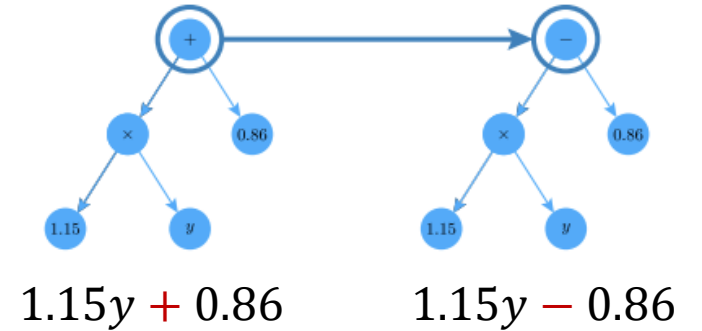
Prior works include Langley et al., 1980s; Koza et al., 1990s; Lipson et al., 2000s etc.



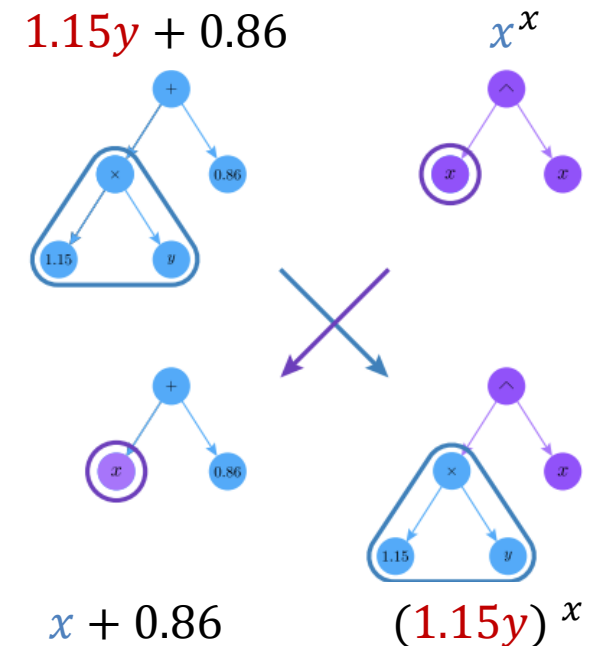
DEPARTMENT OF
**ENGINEERING
SCIENCE**



Mutation:



Crossover:

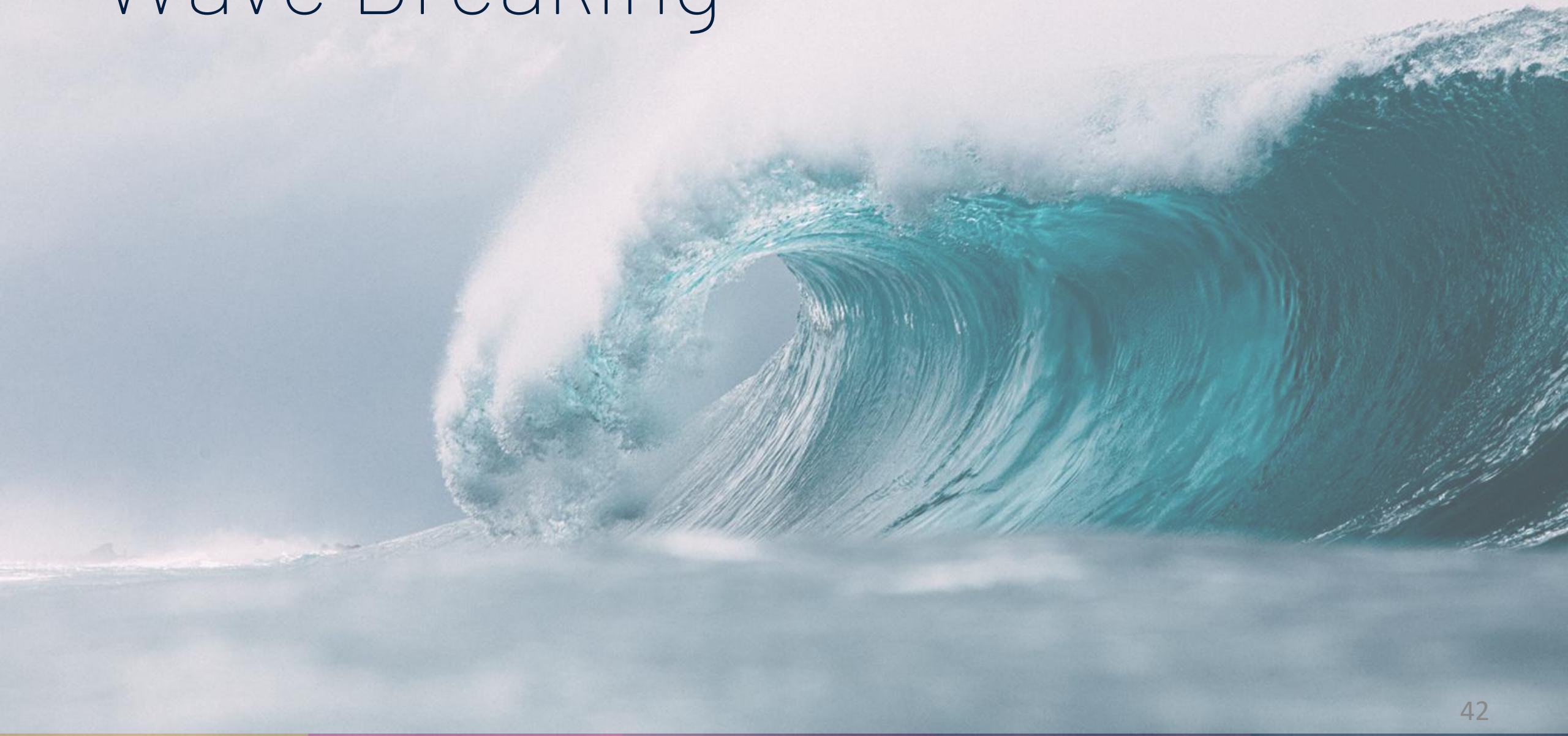


Symbolic Regression

PySR and **SymbolicRegression.jl**

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Wave Breaking

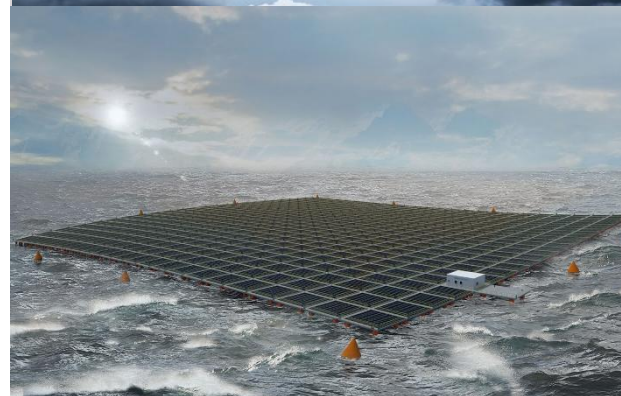


Wave Breaking

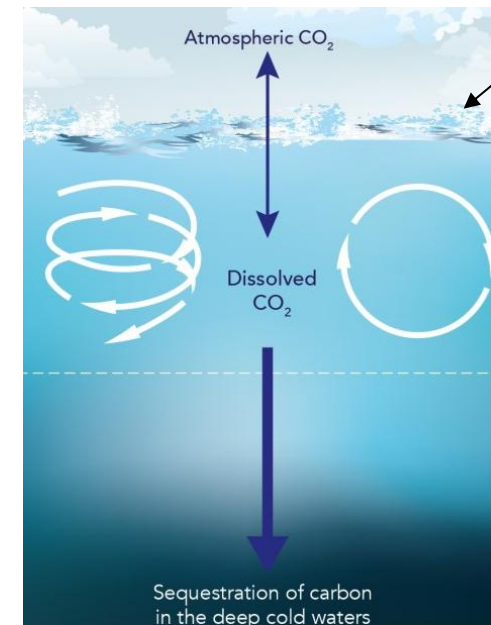
Wave breaking occurs where the wave amplitude reaches the critical point that the crest self-disassembles



- **Renewable Energy**
- Offshore wind
- Wave energy converter
- Offshore floating solar etc.



- **Carbon cycle**



Wave breaking

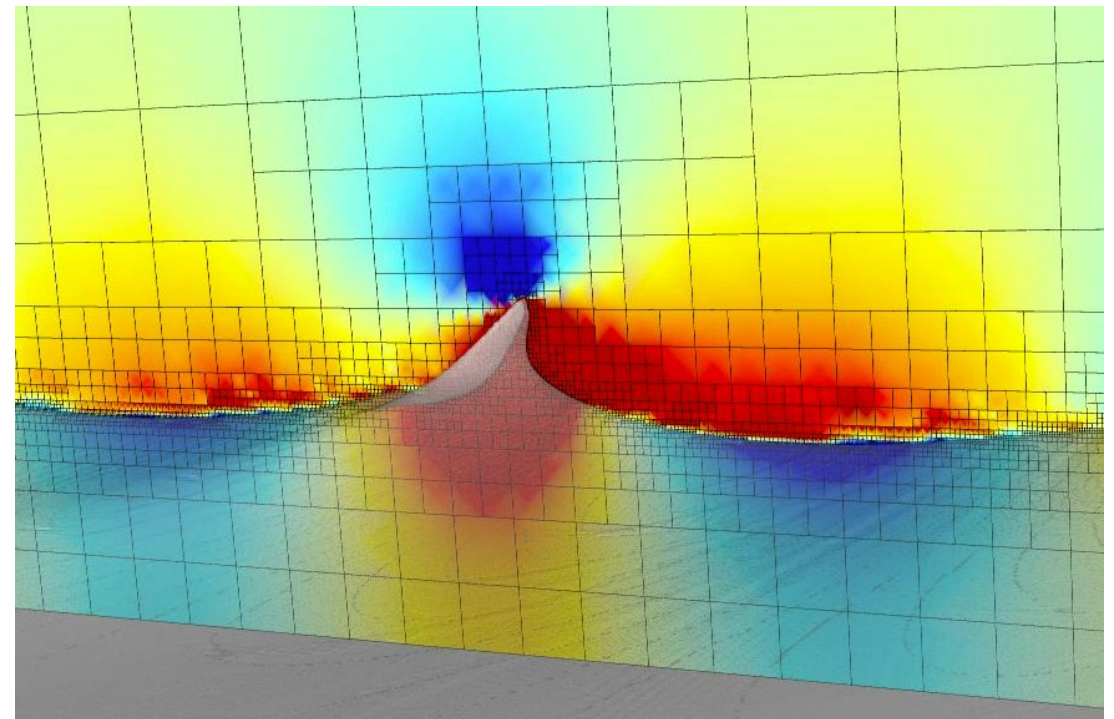
Water movement enhancing gas exchanges

Background

However, modelling these breaking waves requires DNS solving the **Navier-Stokes equation** and are very **computational heavy**.



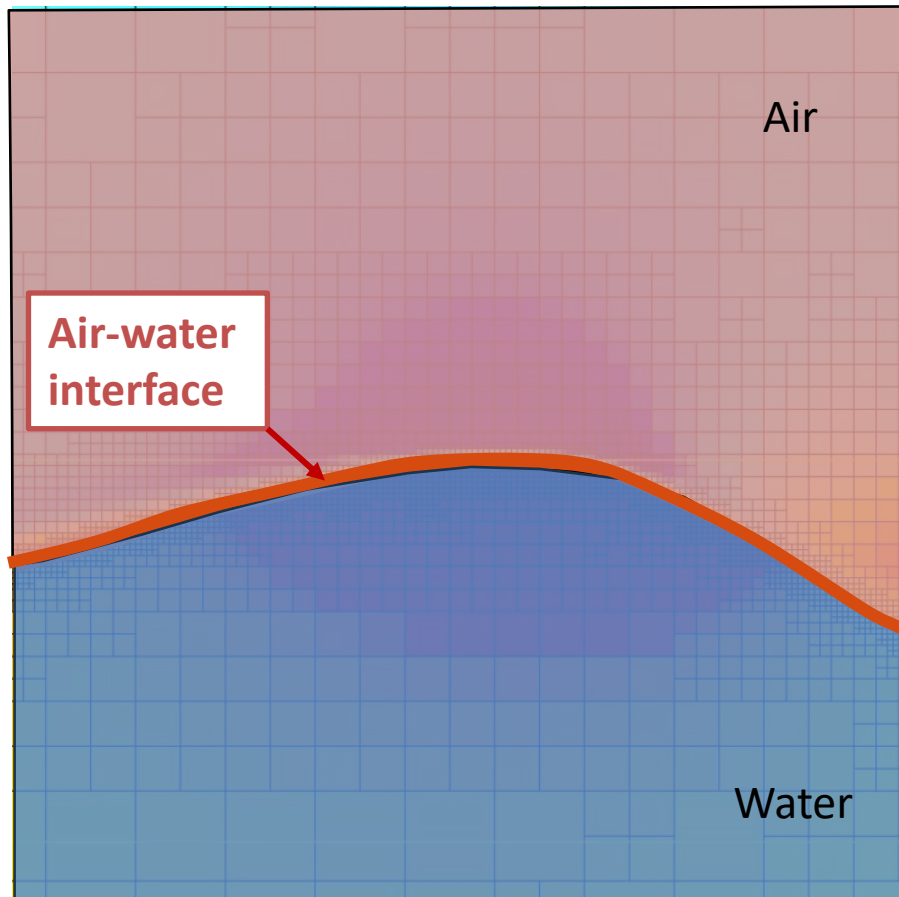
2D breaking wave with Navier Stokes Equations – **3 days on Cluster**



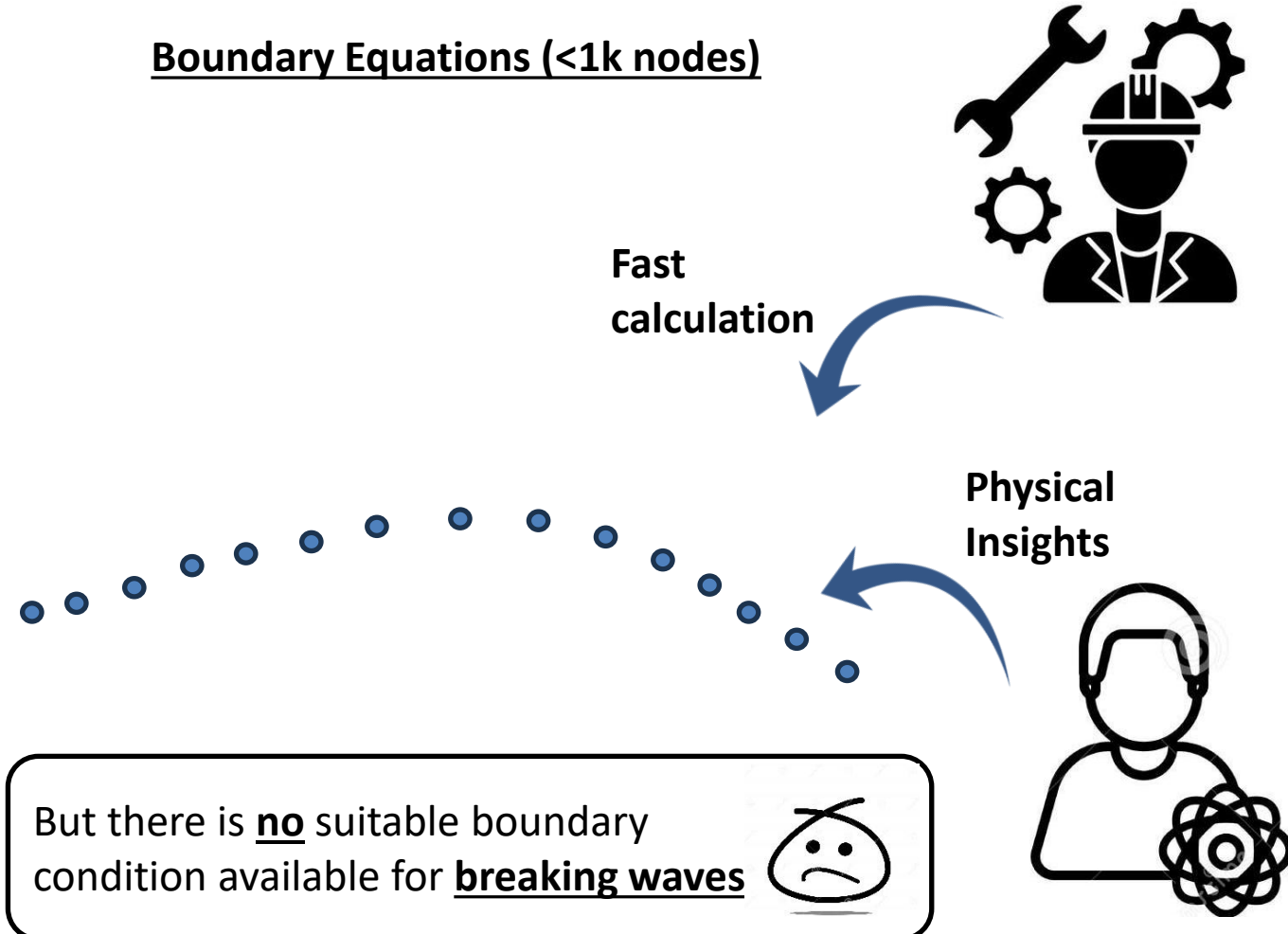
3D breaking wave with Navier Stokes Equations – **3 weeks on Cluster**

Why solving Navier Stokes Equations so slow?

Navier Stokes Equations (500k nodes)

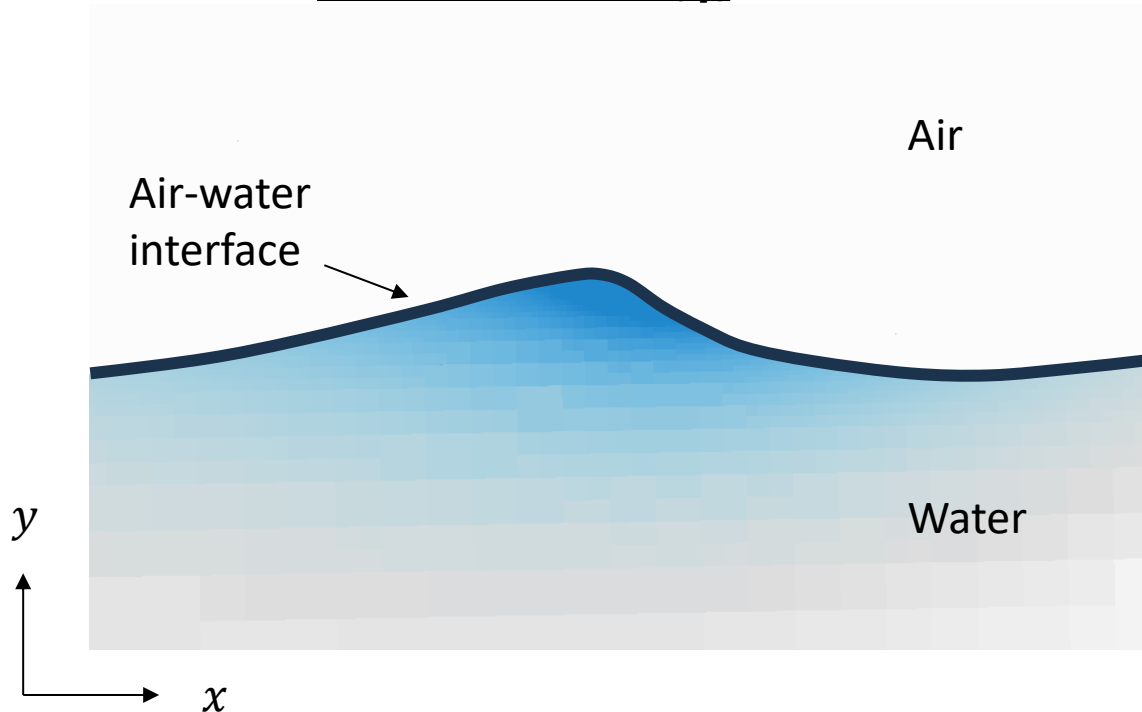


Boundary Equations (<1k nodes)

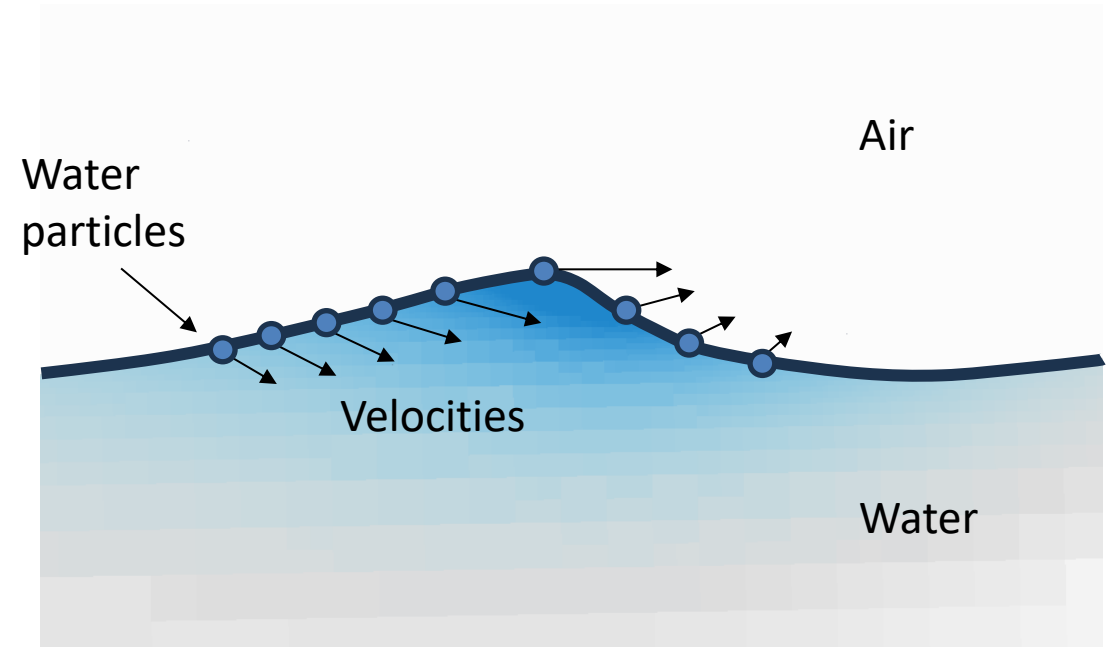


Describe a Wave with Boundary Conditions

Surface Elevation (η)

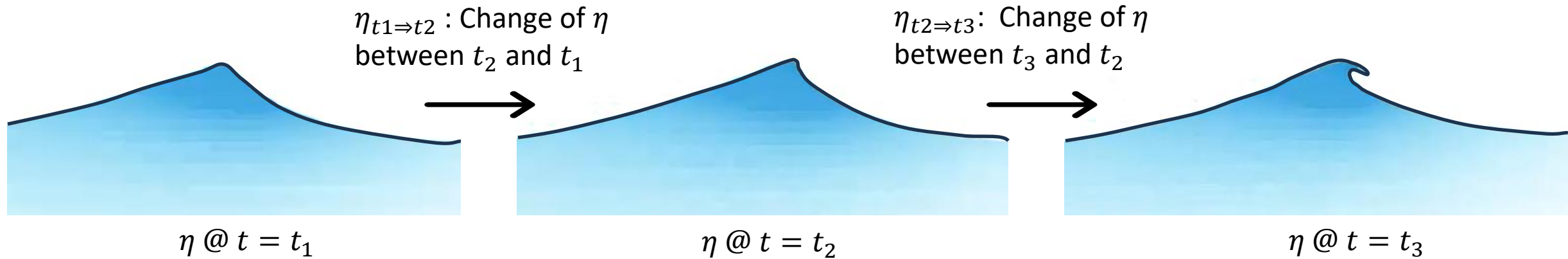


Velocity in x and y direction (u, w)



Objective

Simulate wave in time



Governing Boundary Equation for Breaking Waves

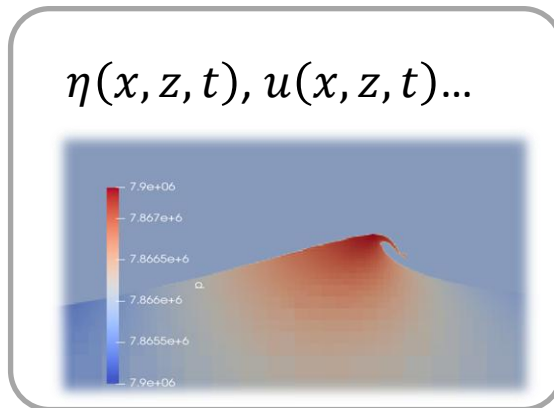
$$\eta_t = N(\eta, \eta_x, \eta_{xx}, u, u_x, w \dots, \mu)$$

Time derivatives of
surface elevation $\eta(x, t)$

Unknown right-hand side (RHS):
generally, some spatial derivatives η_x
etc, and parameters μ

Machine Learning Approach

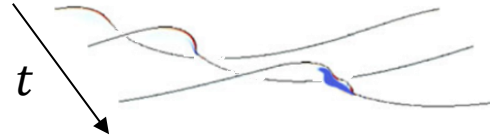
Database Simulation with DNS



Ray
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Effective Description

$$\eta(x, t)|_{z=\eta^*}, u(x, t)|_{z=\eta^*} \dots$$



PySR

New Equation Describing Data

**Breaking Wave
Evolution Equation**

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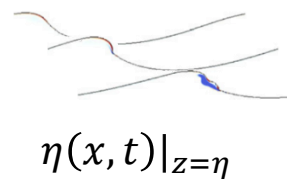
Domain Knowledge

Fully nonlinear boundary conditions :

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Scientific ML with PySR

Data Collection



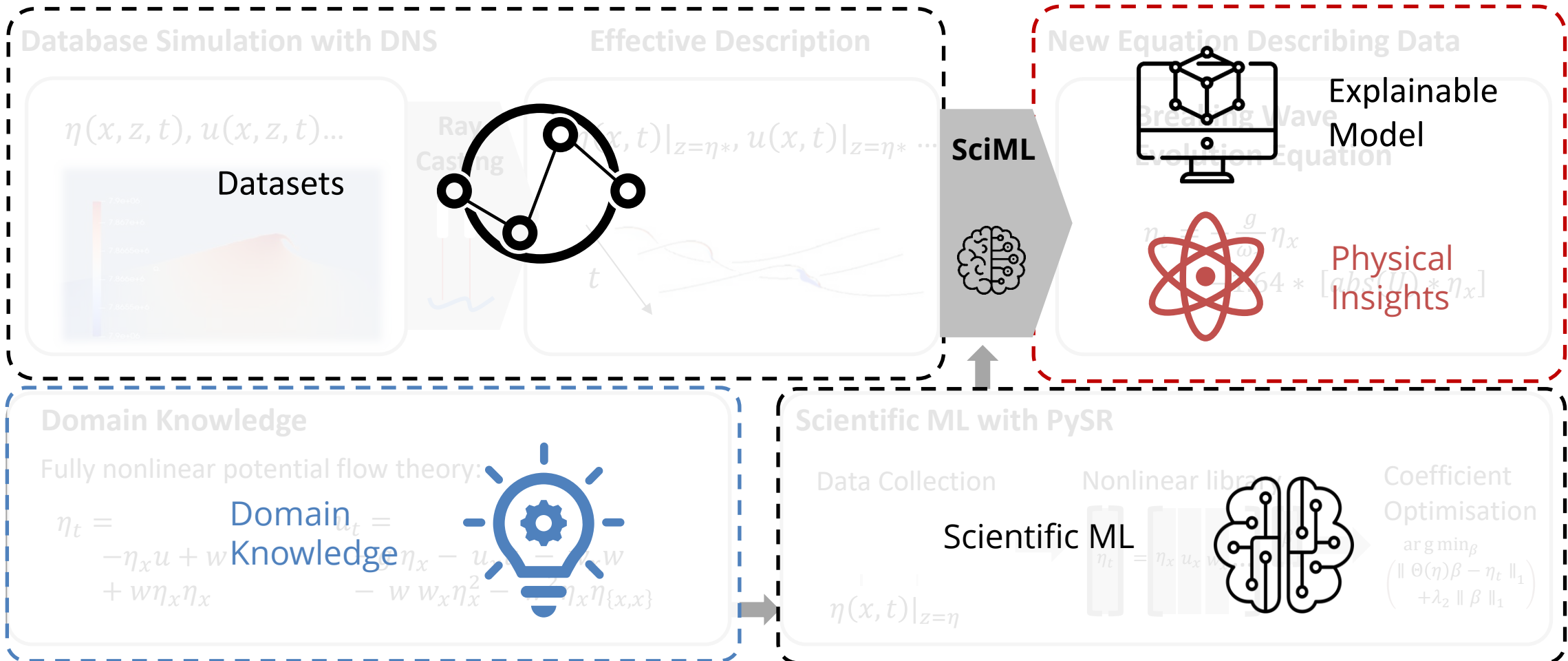
Nonlinear library

$$\eta_t = \begin{bmatrix} \eta_x & u_x & w_x & \dots \end{bmatrix} \beta$$

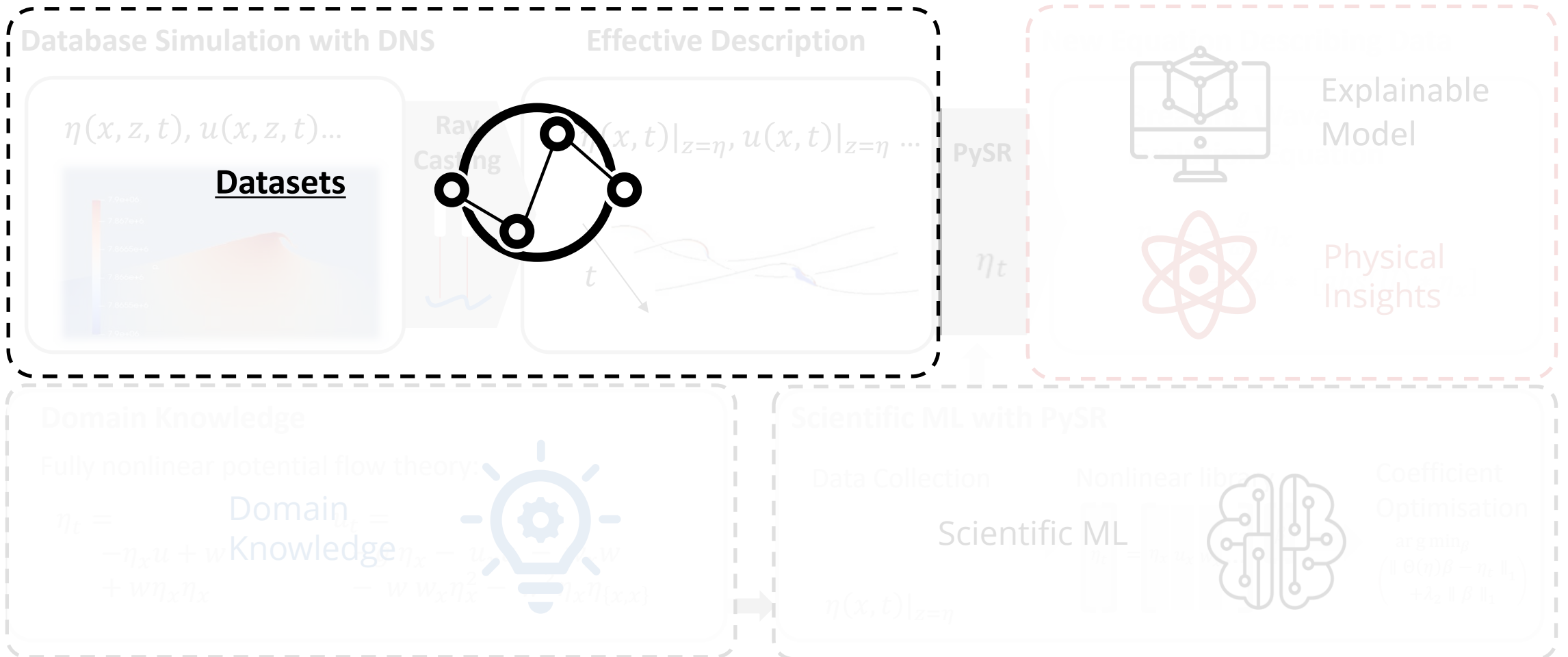
Coefficient
Optimisation

$$\arg \min_{\beta} \left(\|\Theta(\eta)\beta - \eta_t\|_1 + \lambda_2 \|\beta\|_1 \right)$$

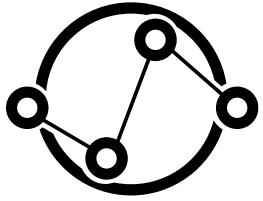
Machine Learning Approach



Machine Learning Approach



Datasets



Datasets

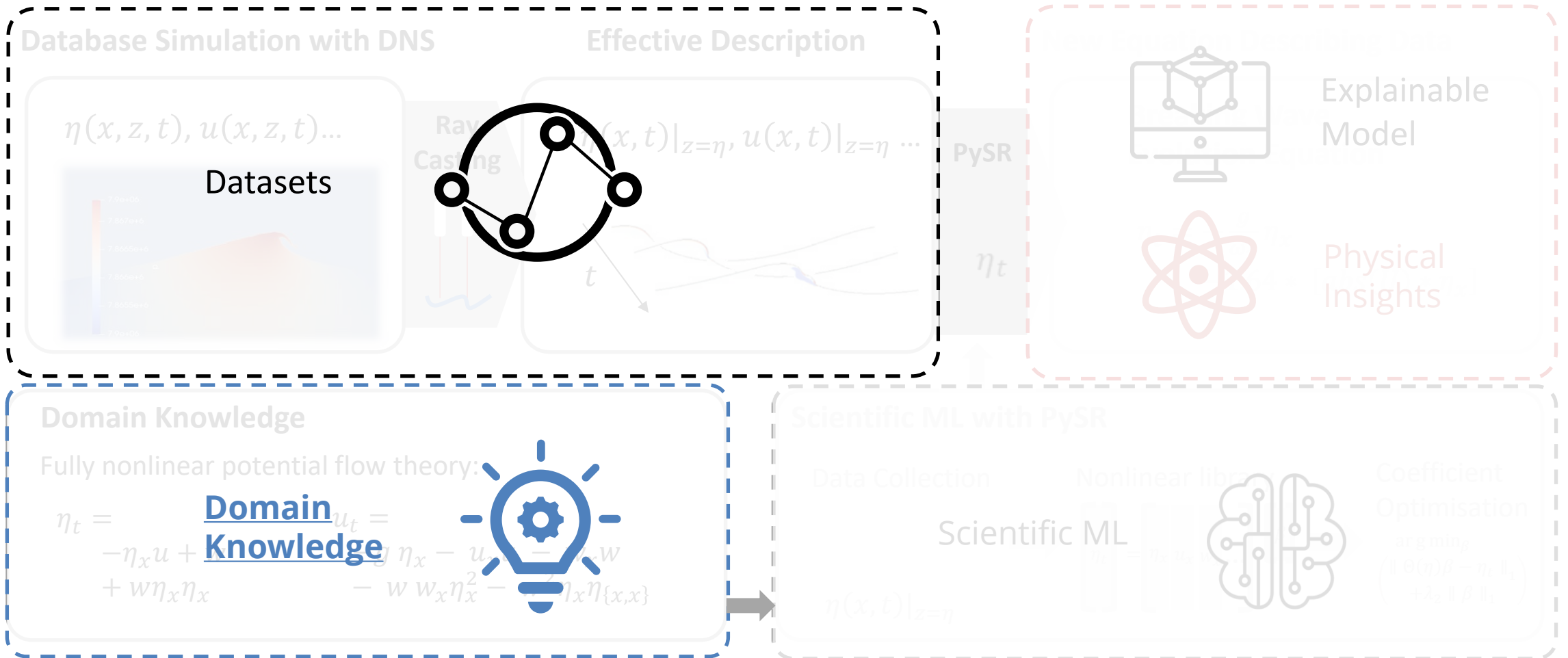
Over 75 2D breaking wave cases with over 1 million data points

A single case



TO BE CONTINUED...

Machine Learning Approach



Domain Knowledge

Non-breaking evolution



Fully Nonlinear Boundary Conditions (FNBC)

Time derivatives of
surface elevation

Spatial derivatives of
surface elevation and
velocities



$$\eta_t = -\eta_x u + w + w \eta_x \eta_x$$

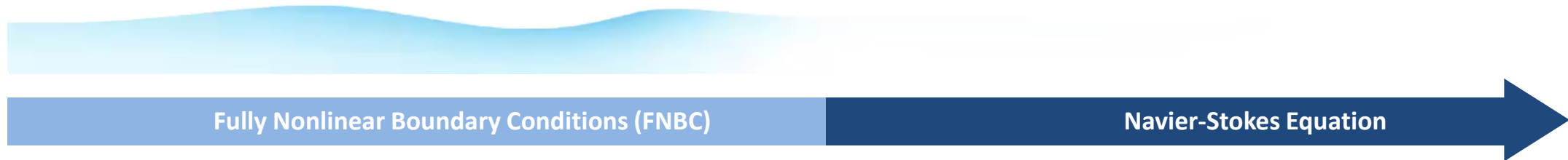
η and u are *coupled* in FNBC framework

*Subscripts denote
partial differentiation

Domain Knowledge

Non-breaking evolution

Wave breaking in progress



Time derivatives of
surface elevation

Spatial derivatives of
surface elevation and
velocities

$$\eta_t = -\eta_x u + w + w \eta_x \eta_x$$



$$\eta_t = \text{FNBC}$$

Apply FNBC to
breaking waves?



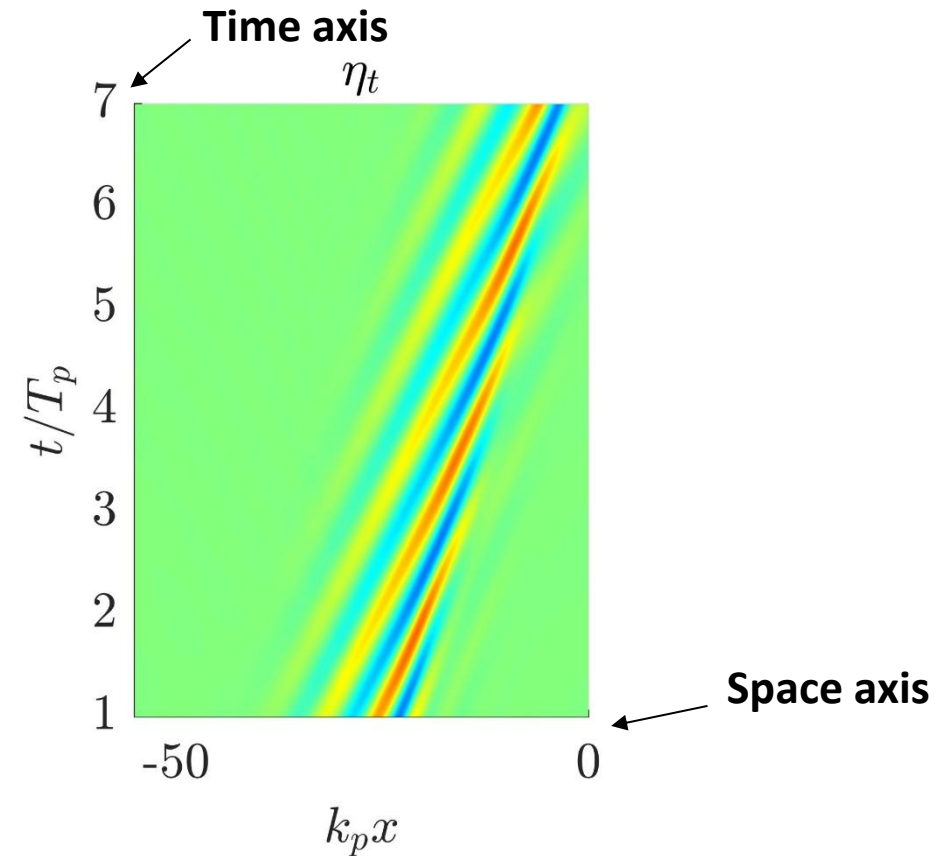
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Domain Knowledge

Breaking evolution

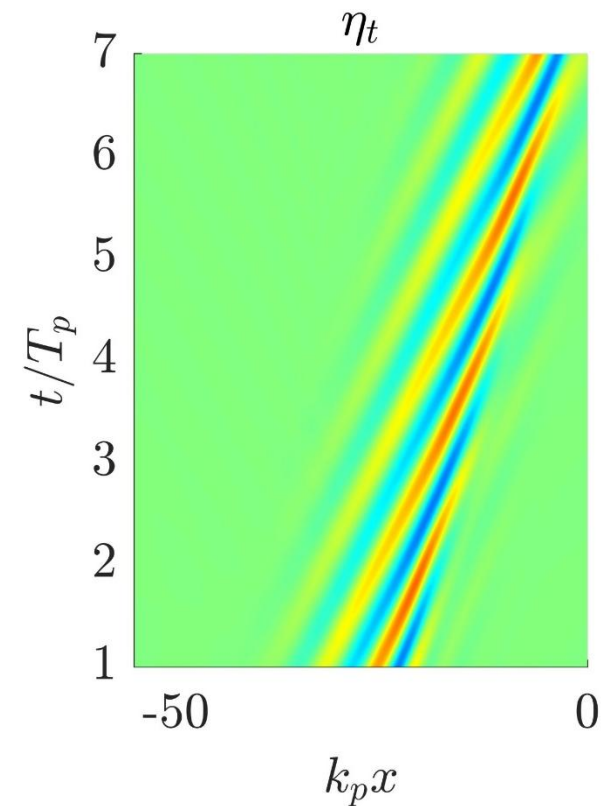
LHS:



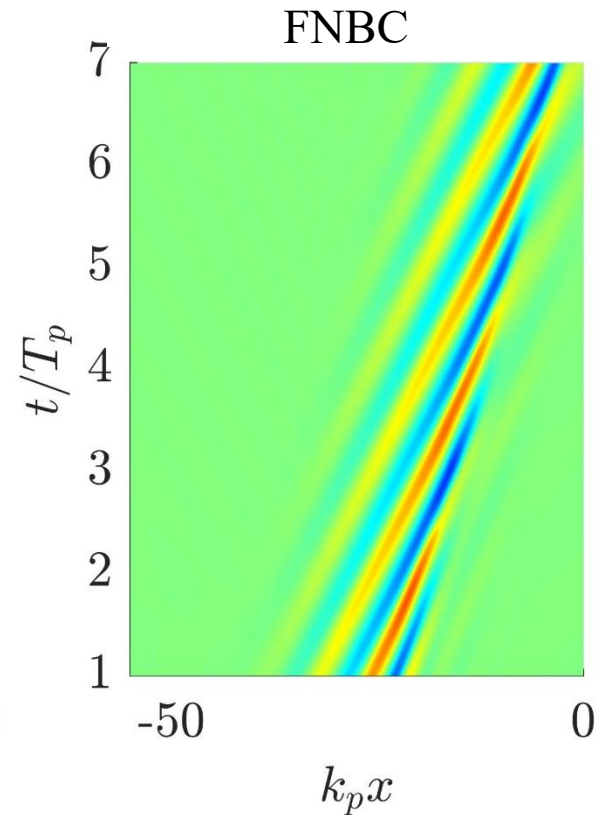
Domain Knowledge

Breaking evolution

LHS:



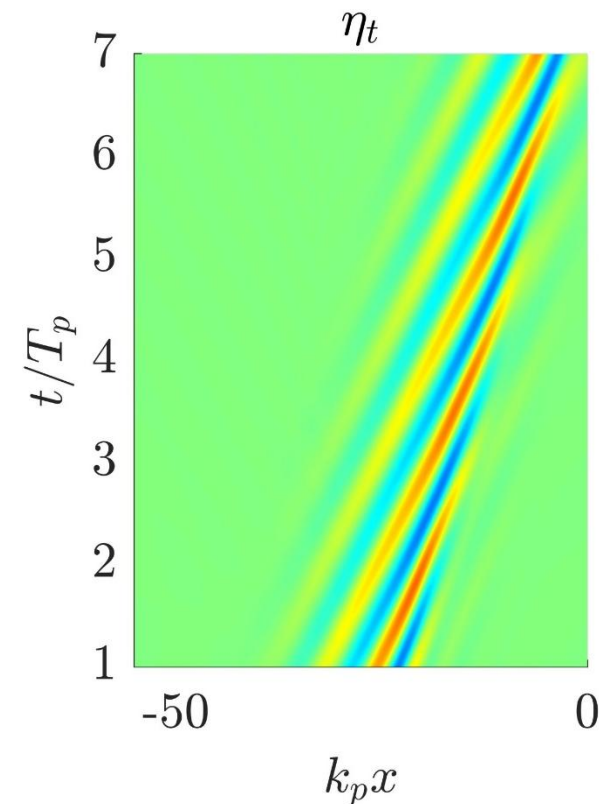
RHS:



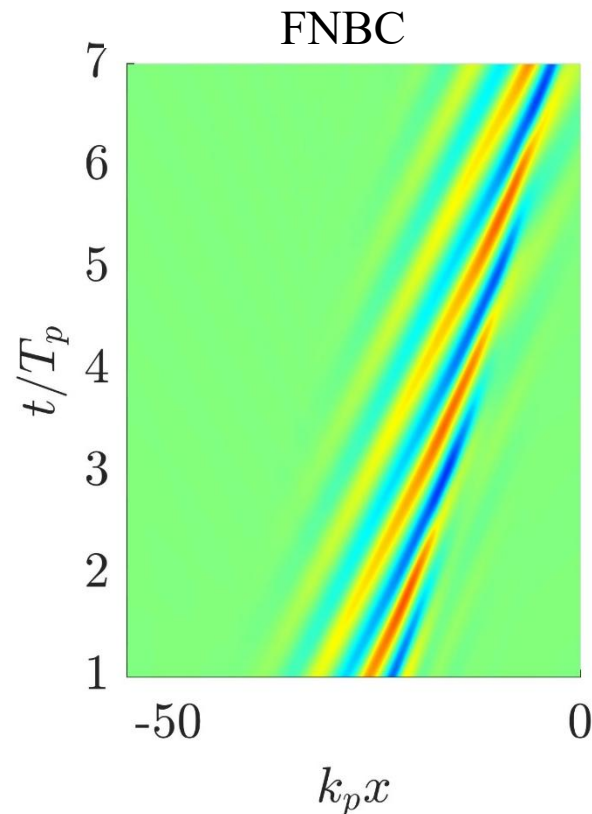
Domain Knowledge

Breaking evolution

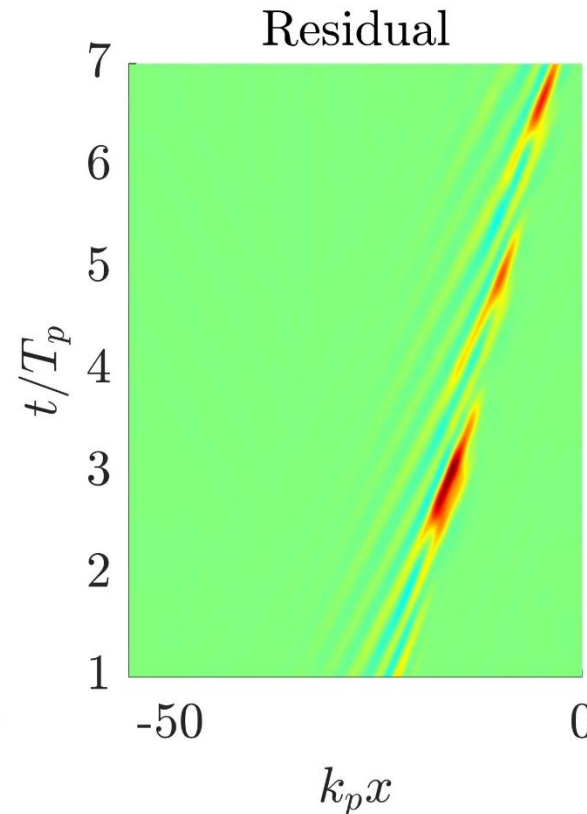
LHS:



RHS:



Residual = LHS - RHS

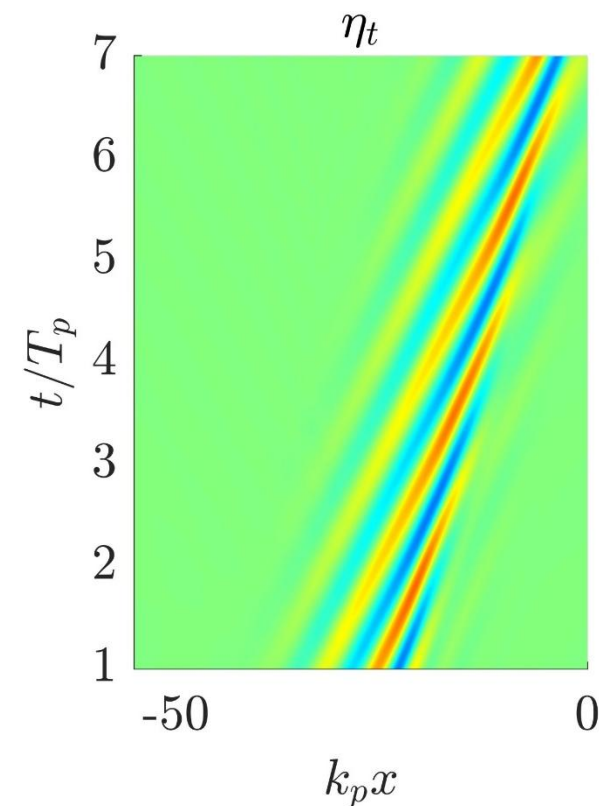


Residual: Difference between
two sides of the equation

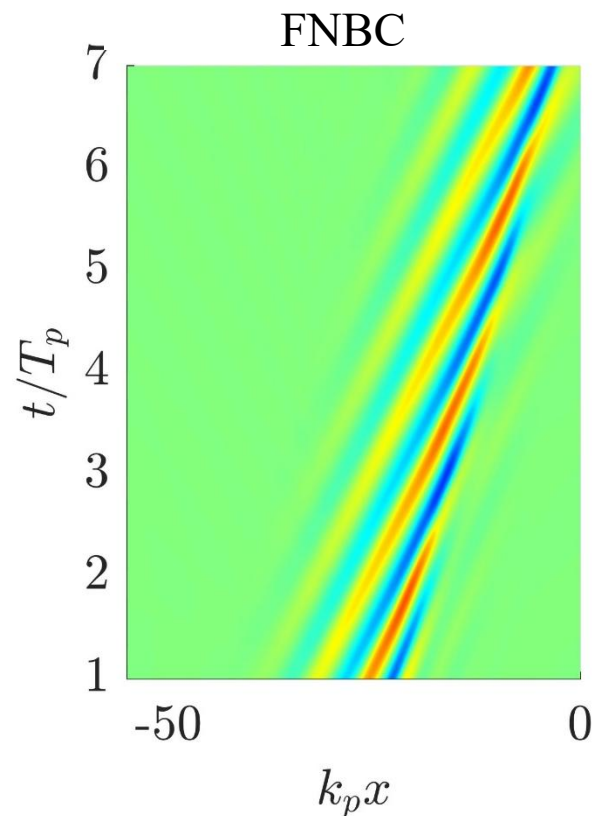
Domain Knowledge

Breaking evolution

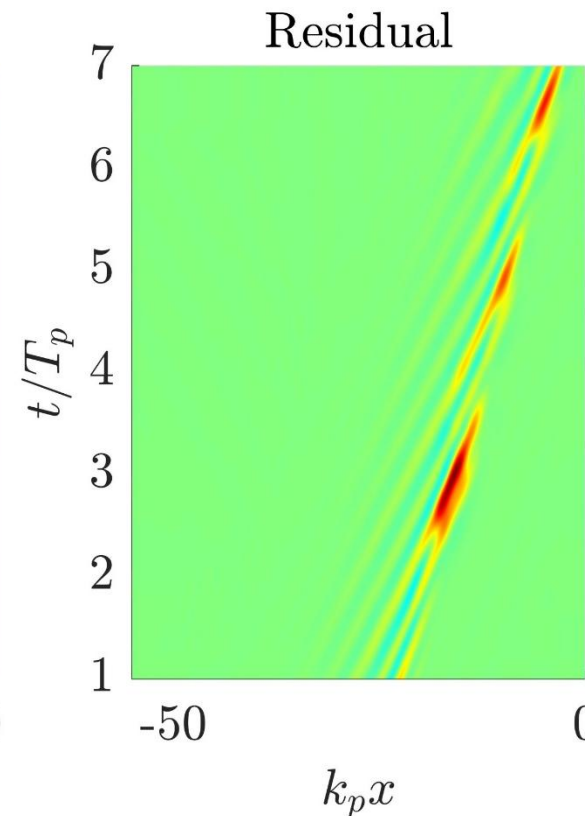
LHS:



RHS:

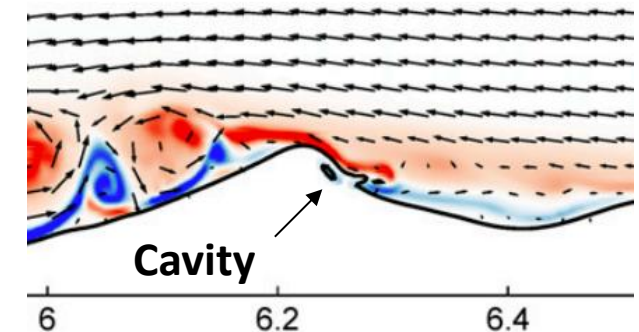


Residual = LHS - RHS

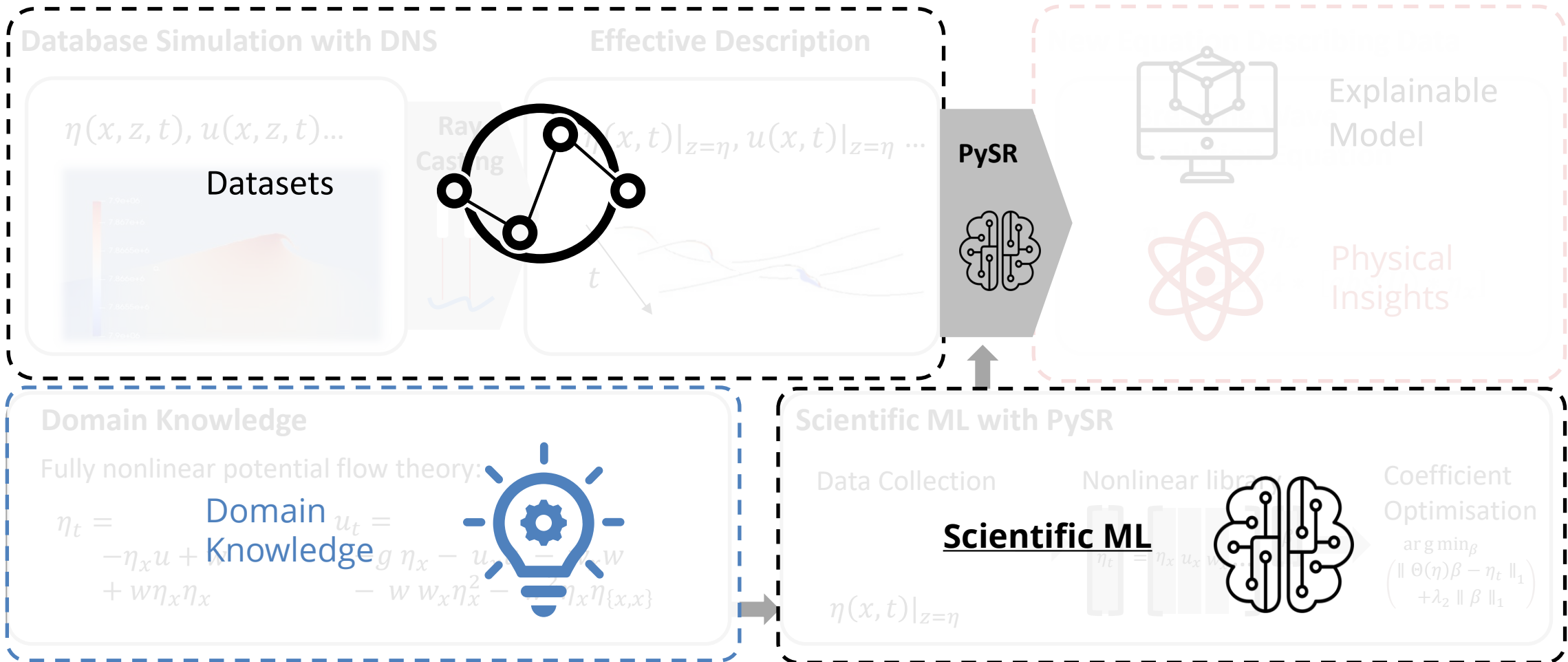


Residual: Difference between two sides of the equation

For breaking evolution, we observe **some deviation** from the FNBC framework at the breaking region.



Machine Learning Approach



Scientific ML

Non-breaking evolution

Wave breaking in progress

Non-breaking evolution



$$\eta_t = \text{FNBC}$$

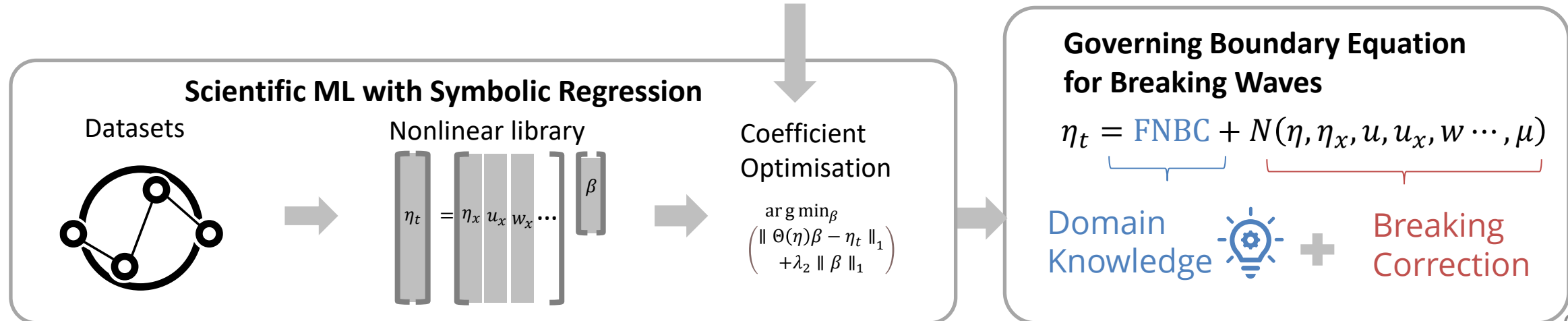


$$\eta_t = N(\eta, \eta_x, u, u_x, w \dots, \mu)$$

$$\eta_t = \text{FNBC}$$

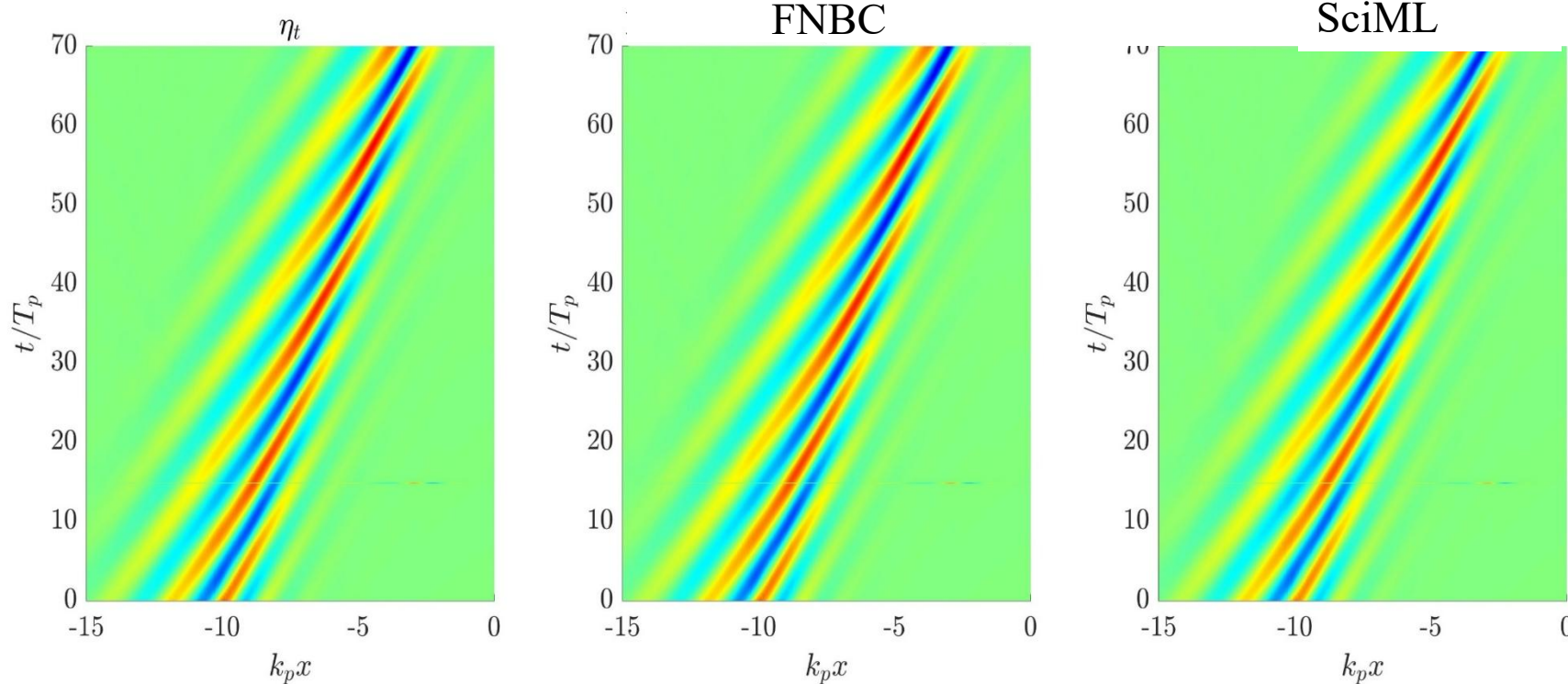
The deviation from
FNBC should be small

$$\eta_t = \text{FNBC} + N(\eta, \eta_x, u, u_x, w \dots, \mu)$$



Results

Non-breaking evolution



Domain Knowledge
from math derivation

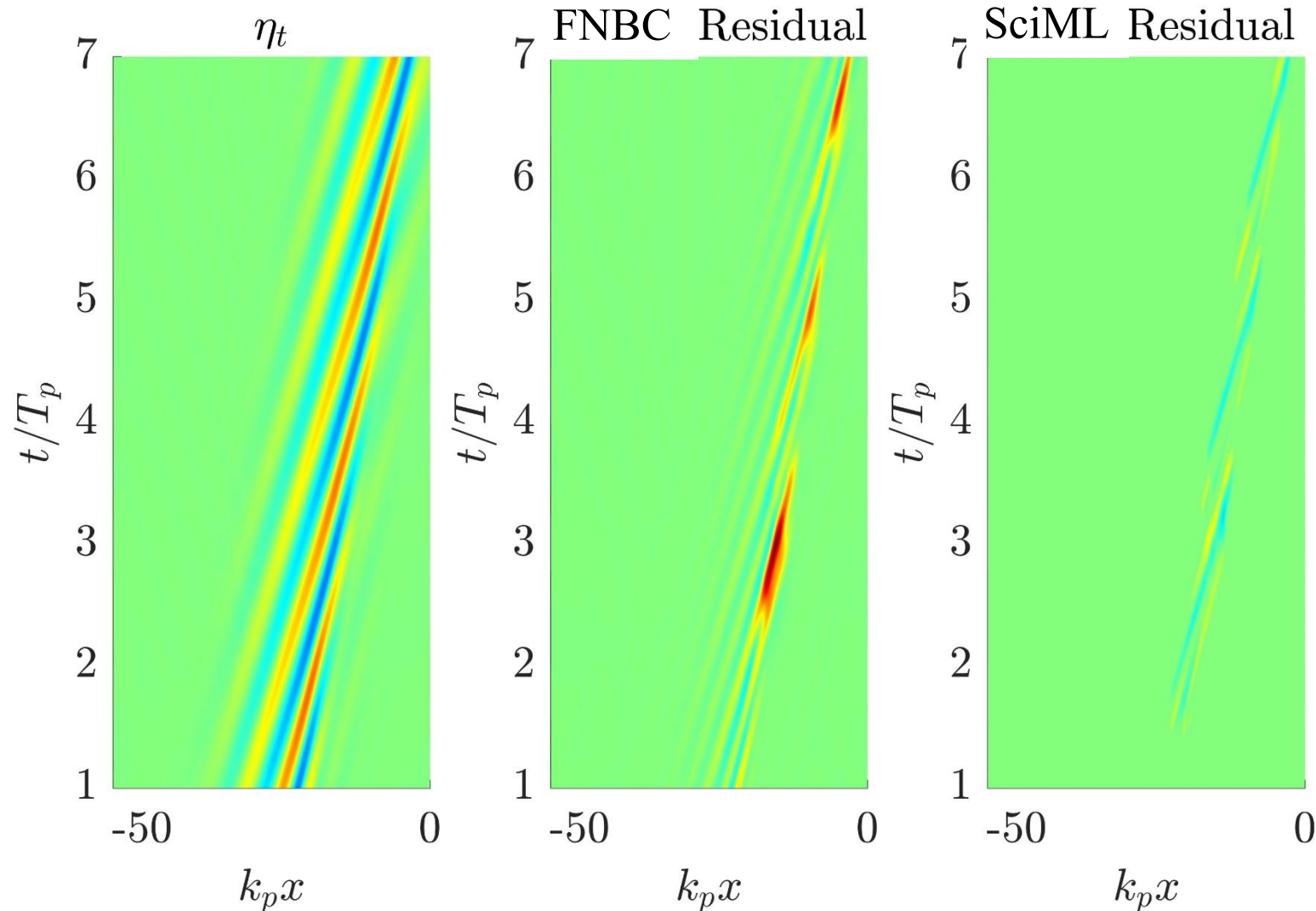
$$-1\eta_x u + 1w + O(3)$$

SciML

$$-1.058\eta_x u + 0.98w + O(3)$$

Scientific ML
discovered equations
from data

Results

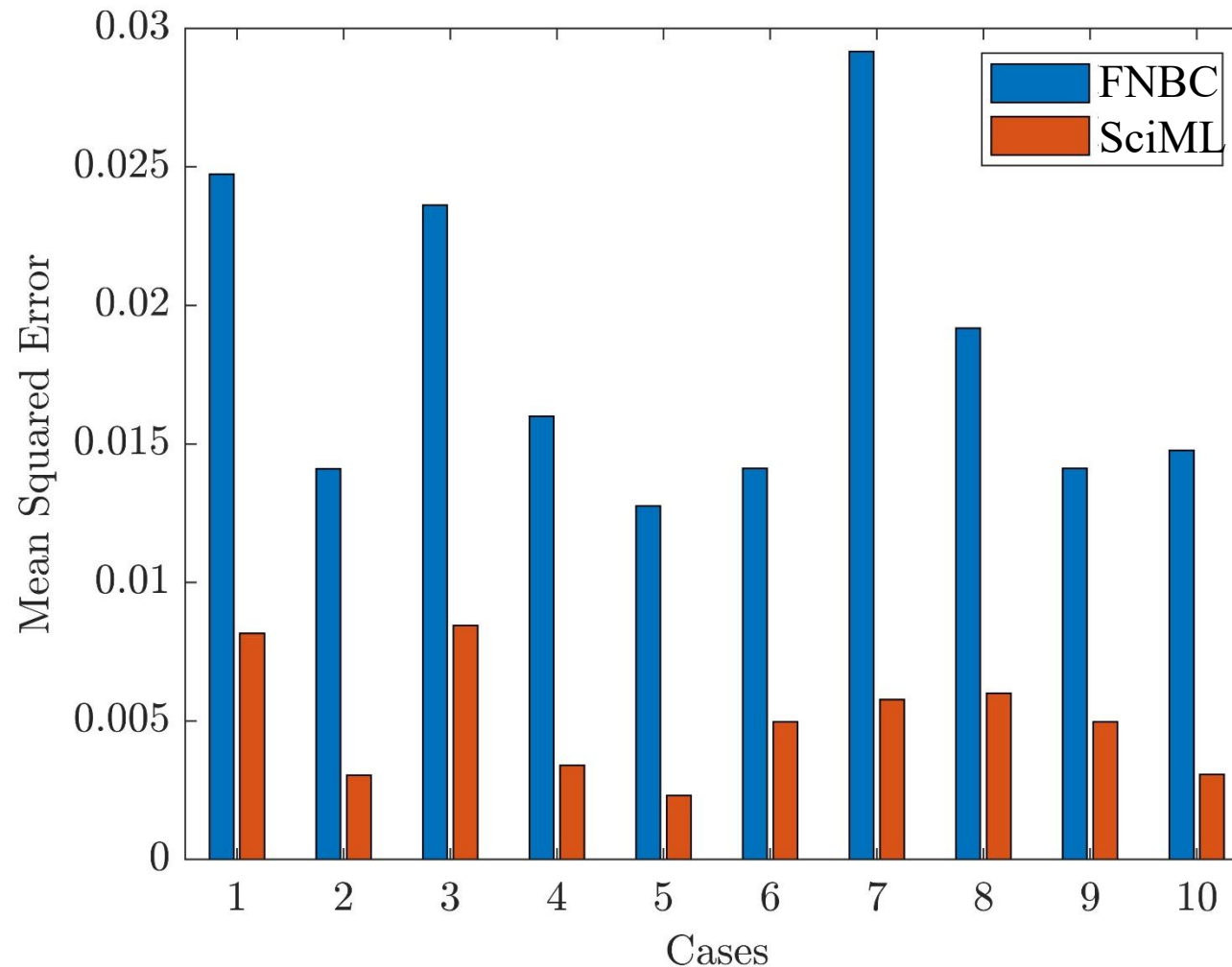


Breaking evolution



Based on the MSE error calculation, the new SciML discovered formulation can reduce over 91% of the residual!

Results – Test dataset



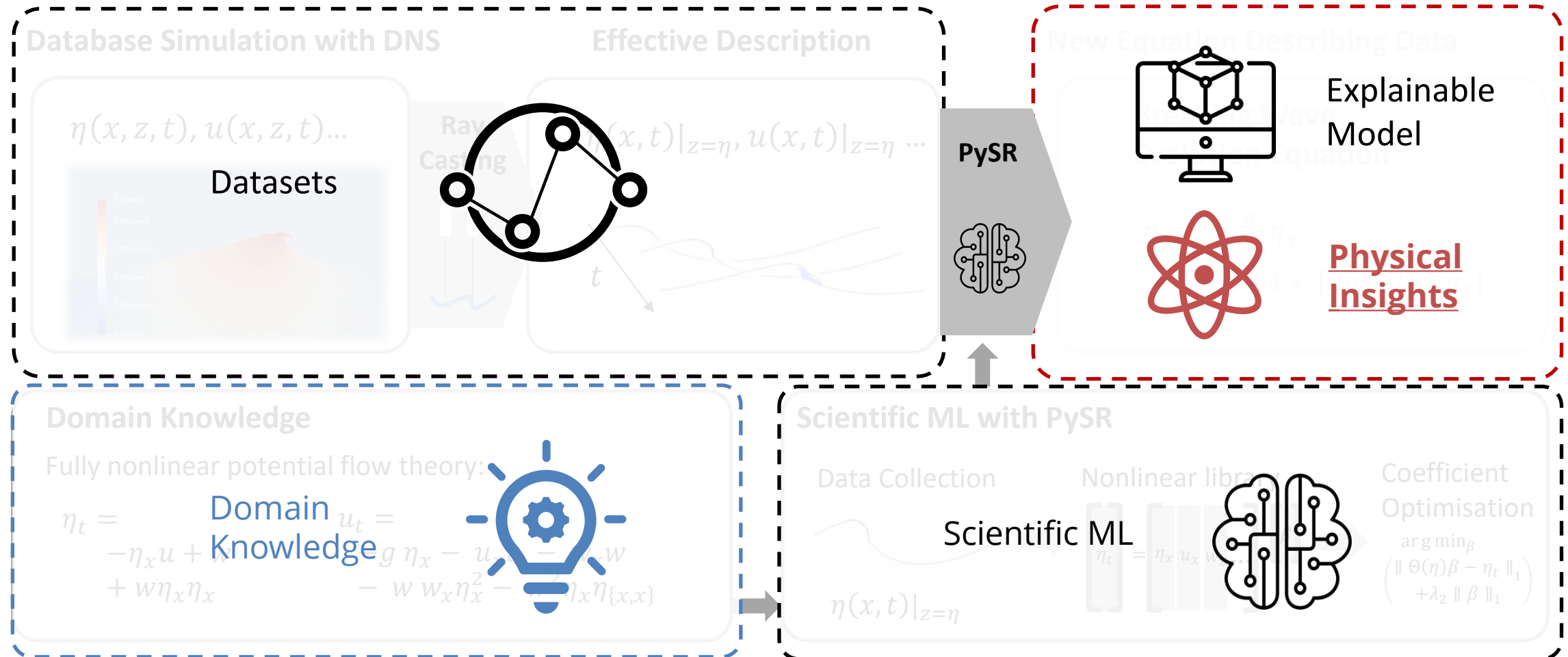
$$\text{MSE} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n (Y_i - \hat{Y}_i)^2.$$

DNS observed
value

SciML/FNBC
predicted value

The test dataset also shows
significant reduction in the MSE.

Machine Learning Approach



Why the SciML Discovered Equation Works?

Physical insights

Non-breaking evolution

FNBC framework:

$$\eta_t = -1\eta_x u + 1w + O(3)$$

SciML discovered equation:

$$\eta_t = -1.058\eta_x u + 0.98w + O(3)$$

Breaking evolution

FNBC framework:

$$\eta_t = -1\eta_x u + 1w + O(3)$$

SciML discovered equation:

$$\eta_t = -\frac{g}{\omega_p}\eta_x + 1.6 \text{abs}(U)\eta_x + O(3)$$

Residual is
reduced
significantly

Physical insights

Non-breaking evolution



FNBC framework:

$$\eta_t = -1\eta_x u + 1w + O(3)$$

SciML discovered equation:

$$\eta_t = -1.058\eta_x u + 0.98w + O(3)$$

Terms with surface
elevation

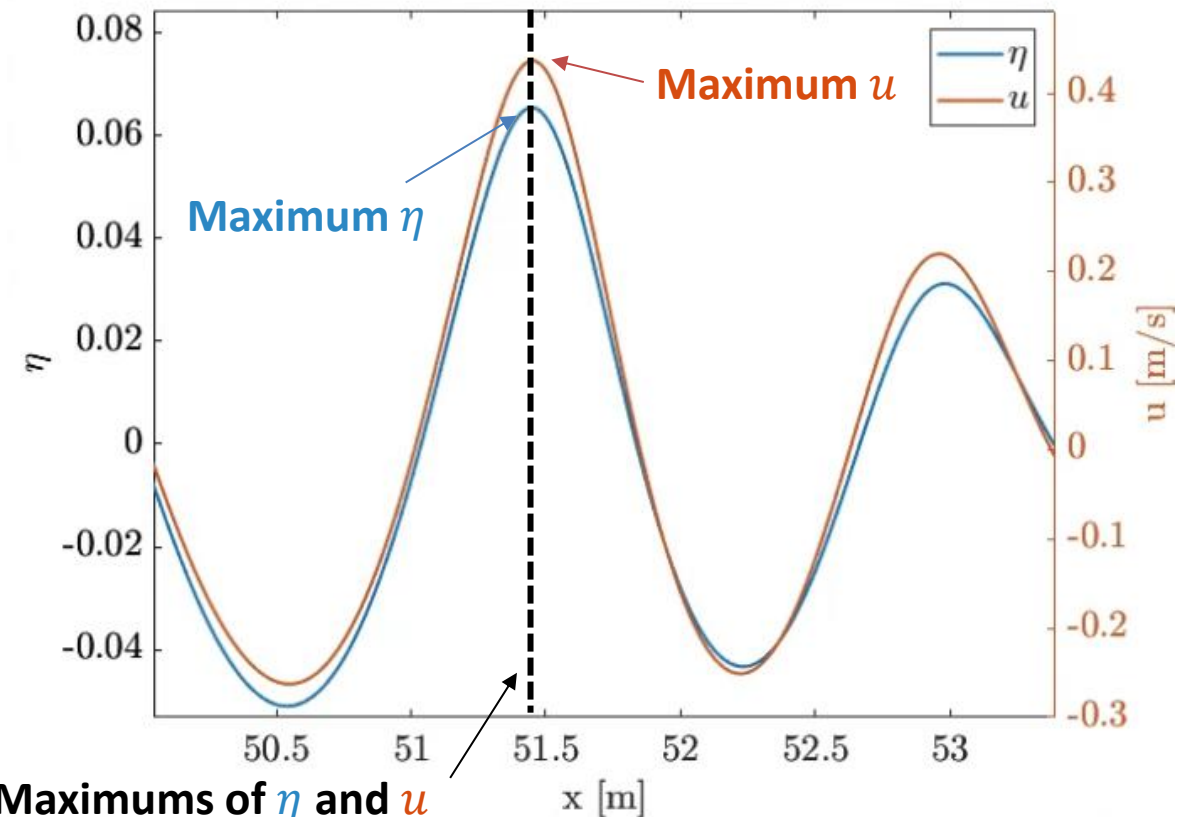
Terms with velocities

FNBC & SciML:



η_t

u terms & η terms



**Maximums of η and u
are aligned**

Physical insights



DEPARTMENT OF
ENGINEERING
SCIENCE



Breaking evolution



FNBC framework:

$$\eta_t = 1w - 1\eta_x u + O(3)$$



FNBC:

η_t



u terms & η terms

SciML discovered equation:

$$\eta_t = -\frac{g}{\omega_p} \eta_x + 1.6 \text{abs}(U) \eta_x + O(3)$$

Terms with surface
elevation (η) only



SciML :

η_t

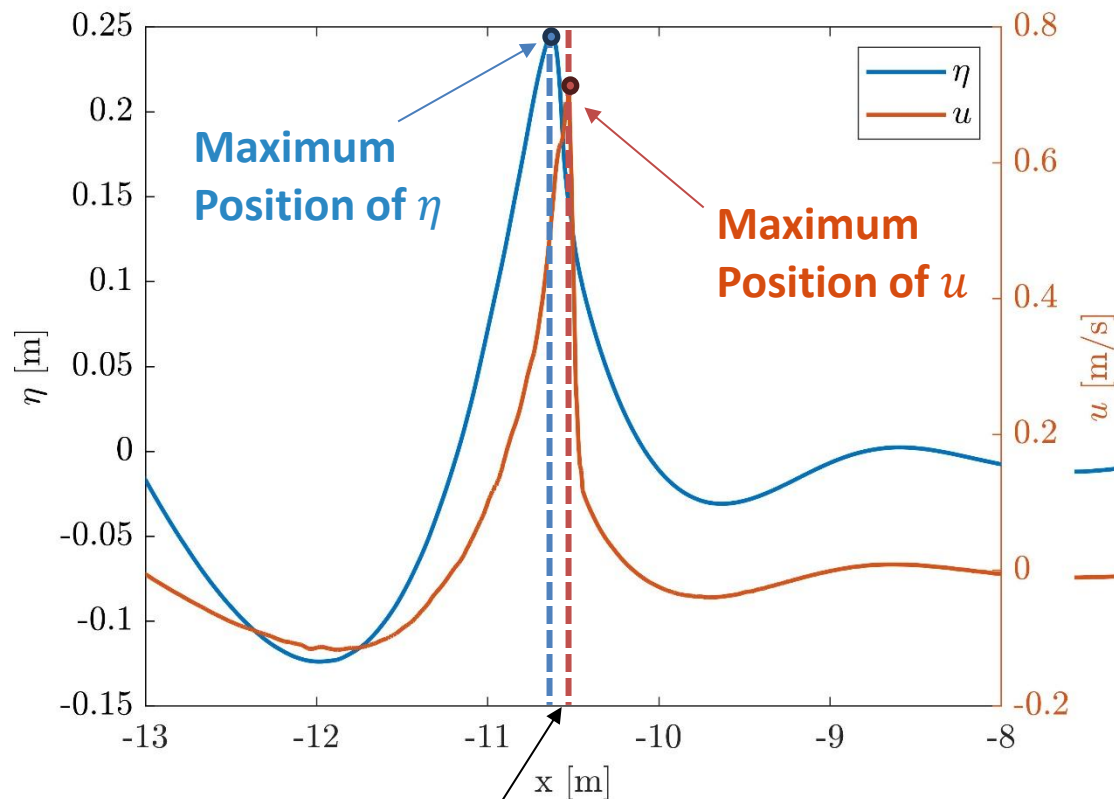


η terms



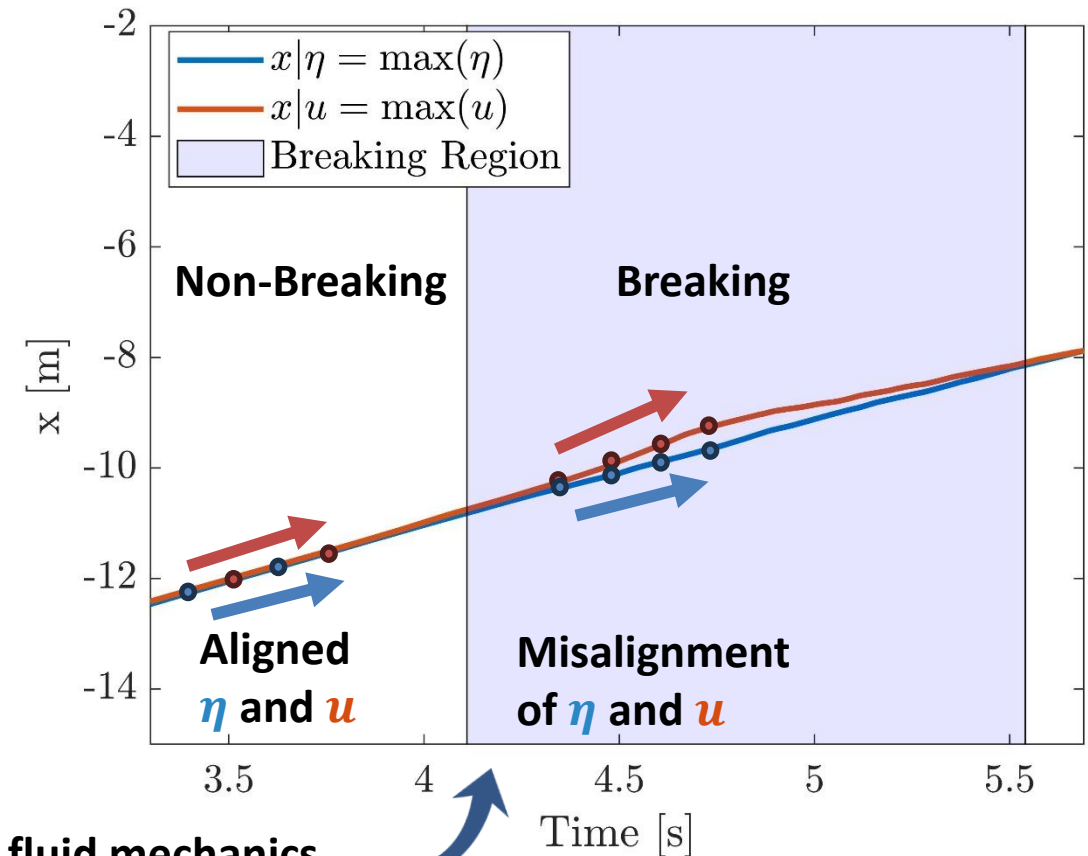
Physical insights

Maximum η and u



Maximums of η and u
are NOT aligned

Evolution of the maximum position η and u



New findings in fluid mechanics

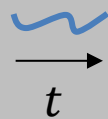
Simulation – in progress

New Equation Describing Data

Breaking Wave Evolution Equation

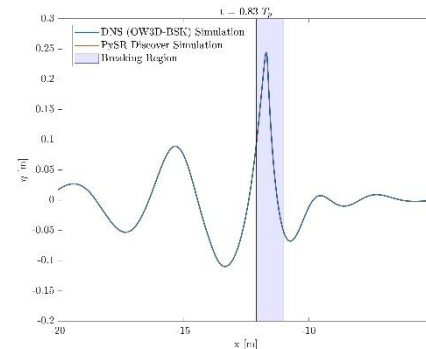
$$\eta_t = -\frac{g}{\omega_p} \eta_x - 3.64 * [abs(B) * \eta_x]$$

RK-4
Integra
tion

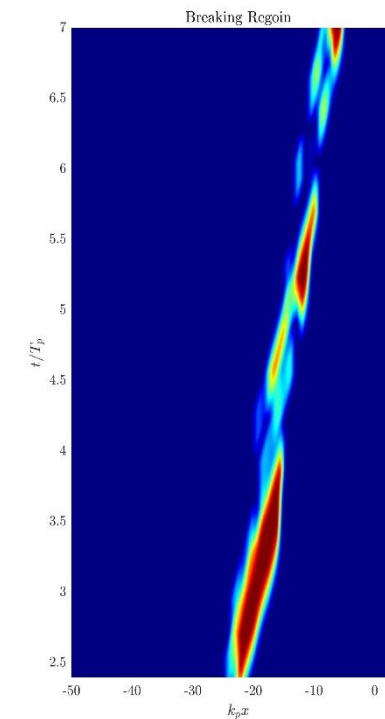


t

Reduce-order Simulation for breaking region



Space-time Breaking Region Map



Model

$$\eta_{t+\Delta t}$$

$$\eta_{t+2\Delta t}$$

$$\eta_{t+3\Delta t}$$

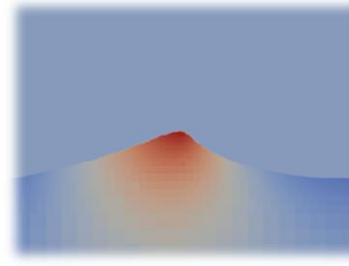
$$\eta_{t+\dots}$$

Domain Knowledge

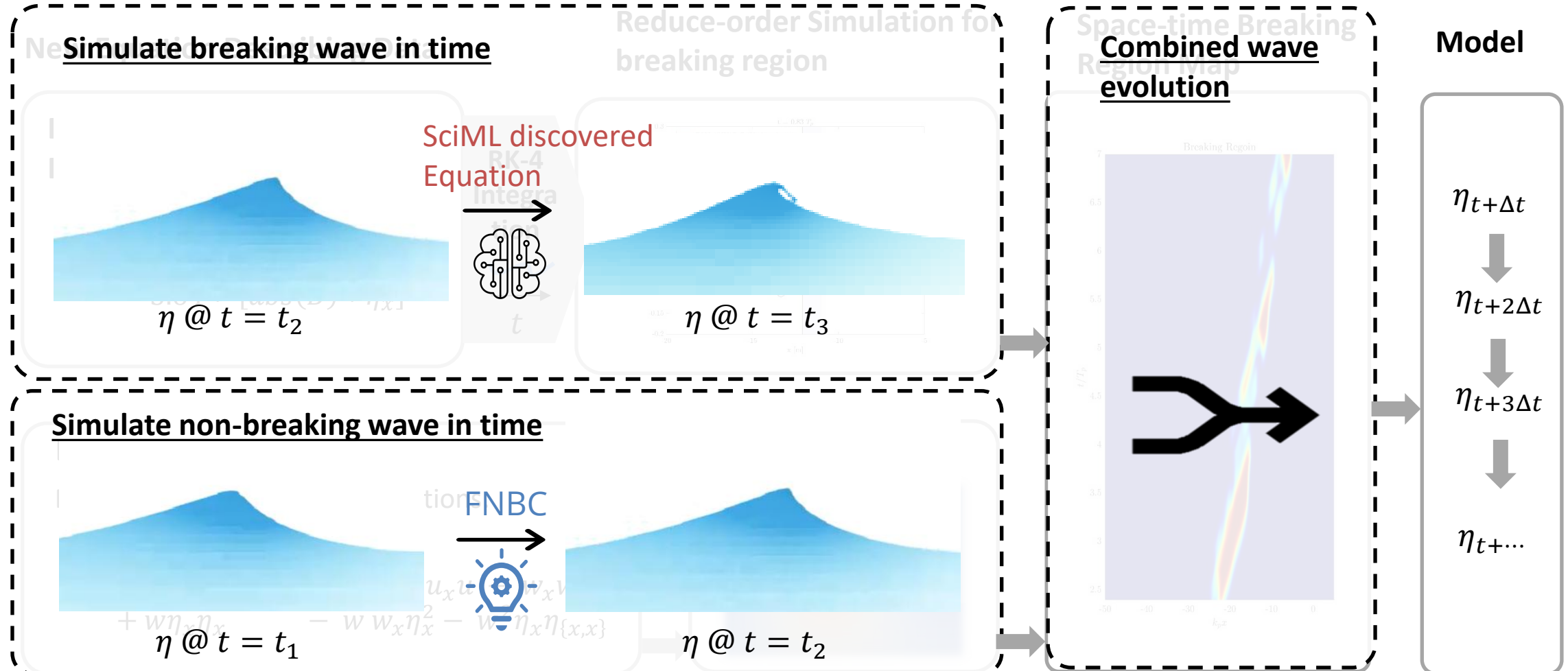
Fully nonlinear boundary conditions:

$$\begin{aligned} \eta_t = & -\eta_x u + w + w \eta_x \eta_x \\ u_t = & -g \eta_x - u_x u - w_x w - w w_x \eta_x^2 - w^2 \eta_x \eta_{\{x,x\}} \end{aligned}$$

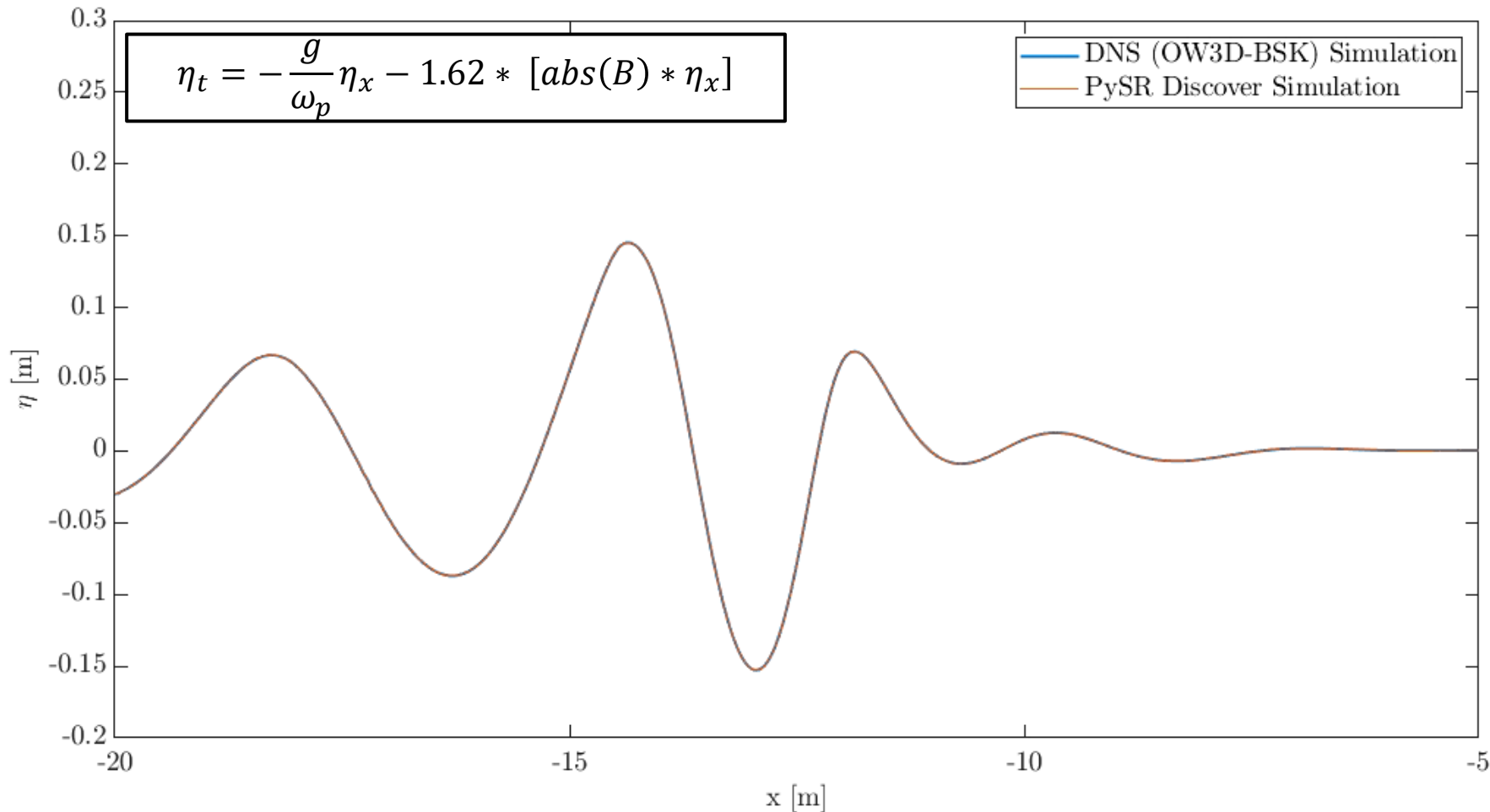
Non-Breaking



Simulation – in progress



Preliminary Results



We aim to develop a new model discovered by ML (in-progress) that:

- Overlooks bubbles and white cap details
- Equation based **numerical simulation** (*white box*)
- Very **Fast** (*2 minutes* on desktop vs *3250 of core hours* on supercomputer)
- Mathematically interpretable
- Directly applicable to various scales of the wave

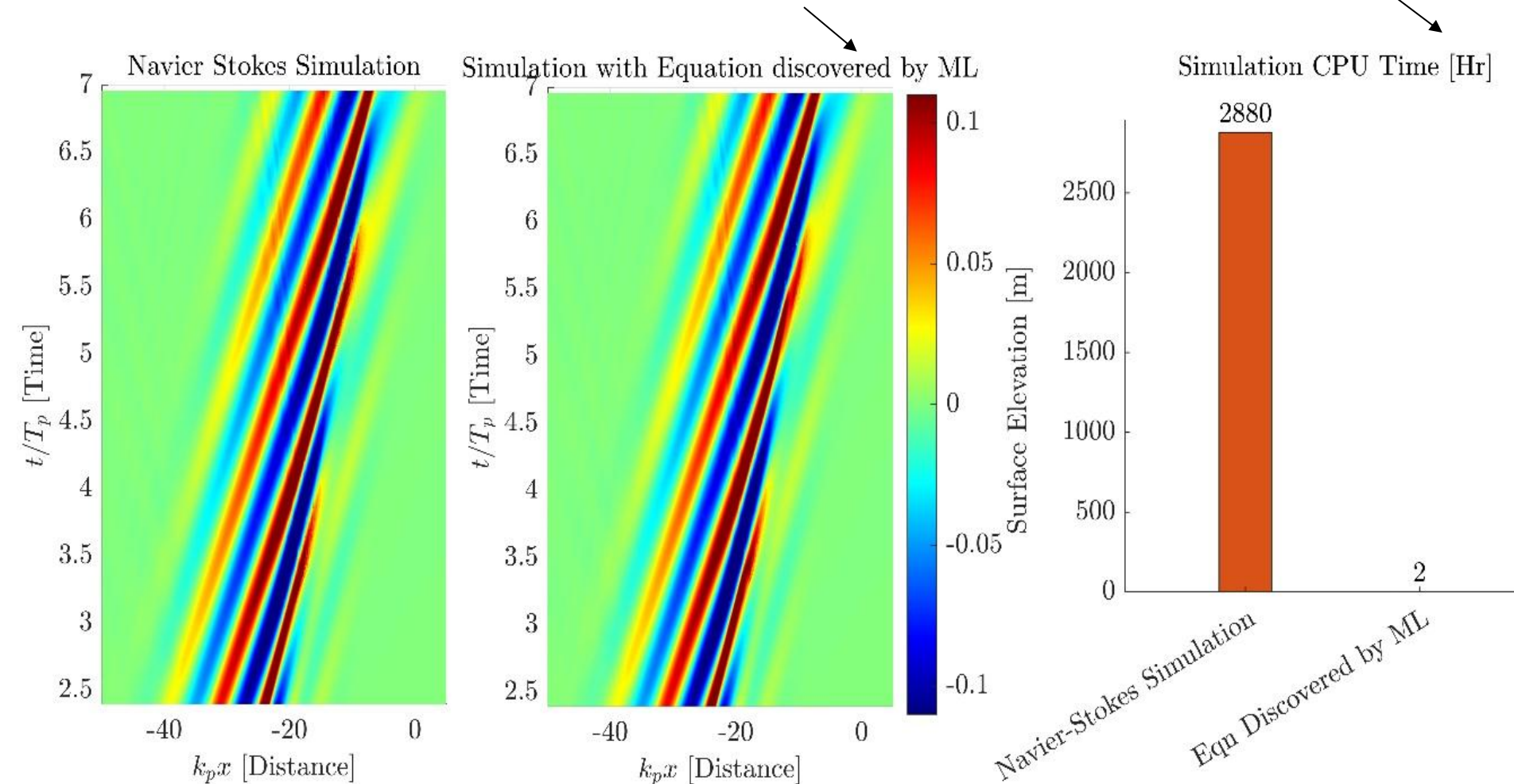
** Only for 2d deep water spilling breakers so far*

Conclusion

Accurate approximation of breaking wave
with Equation discovered by SciML

Significant reduction
in modelling time

New physical insights



Breaking evolution



**Misalignment of η
and u**





Thank you!

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