

Report on	Update on Ammonia and Ulster Farmer's Union
Date of Meeting	3rd December 2019
Reporting Officer	Planning manager
Contact Officer	Planning manager

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	x

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	For information
2.0	Background
2.1	Members will recall that a letter from the The Farmers Union was presented to the planning committee on 1 st October. The Farmers Union was concerned that a change in the trigger point for ammonia emissions from 1% as per NIEA guidance in the loading rate to 0.1% as proposed in guidance by the Shared Environment Service would have an impact on the industry. The Committee resolved that the Planning Manager should set up a meeting between the farmers union, members, NIEA and parties to discuss the matter.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	As instructed the Planning Manager approached SES and NIEA to organise a meeting. However, NIEA indicated that they were currently considering the issue and it was likely that within the next couple of months they would have established their position and are likely to issue new draft guidance. Therefore, a meeting would not be appropriate until they had completed their deliberations. Whilst the Shared Environment Service had no objection to a meeting when muted, I understand that they are now under threat of legal challenge and are also considering their position on the matter.
3.2	Given I have been unsuccessful in organising the proposed meeting I wrote to the Farmers union on 19 th November advising them that the Council recognised their concerns and had unsuccessfully tried to organise a meeting, because NIEA were currently reconsidering the need for new guidance. I have also advised the farmers union that the Council will continue to assess each application on its merits based on the established guidance of NIEA, unless it is demonstrated that the risk is so great on the site in question and in relation to intensity of the use of the farm building a different approach is needed (Appendix 1) .

3.3	In drafting this response I am mindful that most farm buildings such as cattle sheds are unlikely to have a significant impacts, however large intensive pig and chicken sheds close to a European designation represent a much greater of resulting in significant. Obviously I will need to reconsider our approach to assessing applications in light of any changes to guidance as issued by NIEA.
3.4	In order to assist members understand the adverse impacts of ammonia emissions on habitats, particularly bogland I have attached a DAERA presentation on air pollution in the UK. This shows that in terms of critical levels nearly all of Northern Ireland exceeds recommended levels and Mid Ulster and the areas around southern Lough Neagh is the largest concentration within the UK.
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: N/A
	Human: N/A
	Risk Management: N/A
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/A
	Rural Needs Implications: N/A
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	To note the report and documents attached
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Letter from Planning Manager to Ulster Farmers Union dated 19 th November 2019 Presentation on Air Pollution in the UK 2018



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

Ivor Ferguson
Ulster Farmer's Union
475 Antrim Road
Belfast

Your Ref LPY/AI

19th November 2019

Dear Mr Ferguson

CHANGES TO PLANNING RULES FOR FARMS AND SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

In response to your letter received on 12th September 2019 to our Chief Executive, I am able to advise that your concerns were reported to the Planning Committee on 1st October 2019. The Council is also concerned that the draft practice guidance for assessing the impact of ammonia from agricultural developments on some designated habitats (Shared Environmental Service SES, 30 July 2019) would place an increased burden on farmers and could hamper investment in the industry. As I am sure you will appreciate, both agriculture and food processing are central industries to the wellbeing of Mid Ulster and therefore any changes to future practice need to be managed wisely.

The Council equally shares your view that Ammonia emissions from agriculture is an issue needing action to address it and we welcome that the Farmers Union have been engaging with DAERA over the past couple of years in order to develop an Ammonia Action Plan for NI.

In relation to your specific point on the more stringent trigger point being introduced by SES in comparison to the guidance offered by NIEA/ DEARA this is an issue which also concerns the Council. In order to help address this Members had asked if I could facilitate a liaison between the SES, DAERA, Members and the farmers union. However, NIEA/DAERA have advised that such a meeting would best left until after they have had opportunity to consider the matter further and they have indicated is anticipated that they will be issuing their own guidance on the matter in the coming months.

In the meantime, Mid Ulster Council will continue to assess each application on its merits based on the established guidance of NIEA, unless it is demonstrated to us

that the risk is so great on the site in question and in relation to the intensity of the use that a different approach is needed.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Boomer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Chris Boomer

Planning Manager Mid Ulster District Council



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

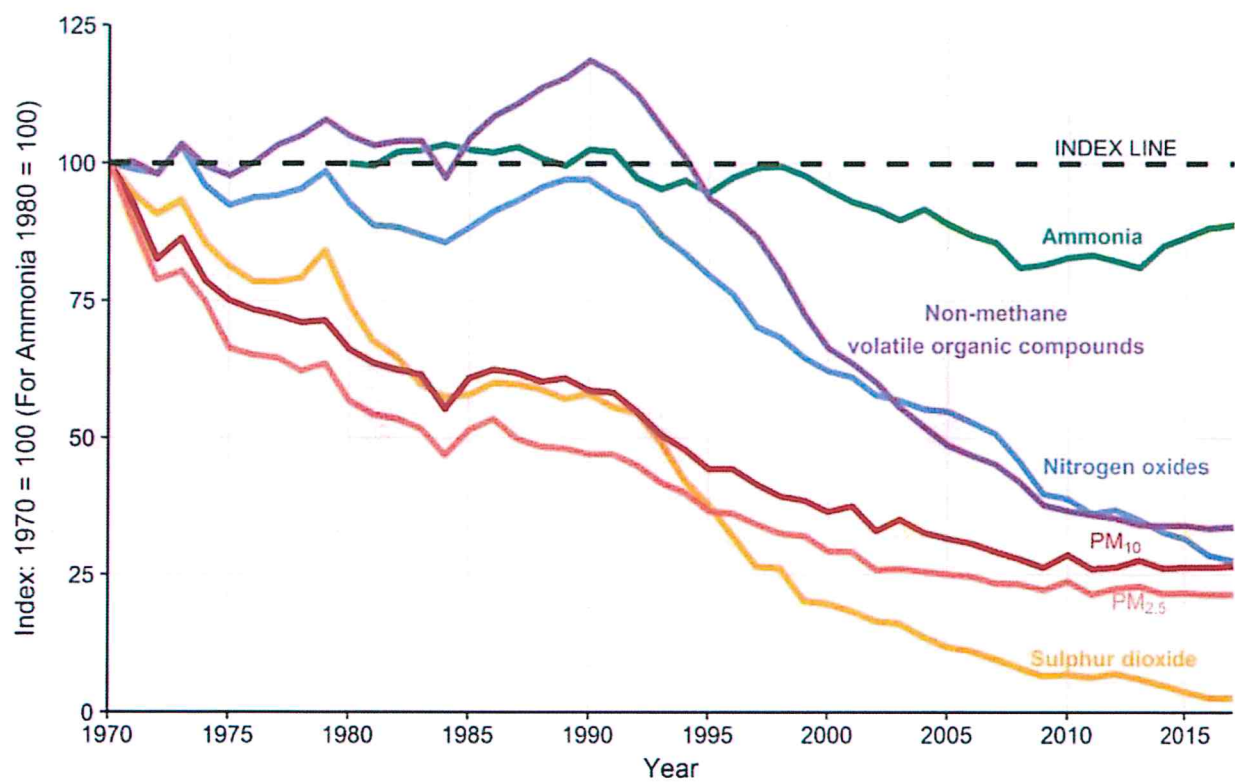
Air Pollution in the UK 2018

September 2019



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Borough Council

Figure 1: Trends in annual emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, non-methane volatile organic compounds, ammonia and particulate matter (PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}) in the UK: 1970 – 2017



Source: Ricardo Energy & Environment

Trends Report 2019: Trends in critical load and critical level exceedances in the UK

**Ed Rowe¹, Kasia Sawicka¹, Zak Mitchell¹, Ron Smith², Tony Dore²,
Lindsay F. Banin² & Peter Levy²**

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²CEH, Bush Estate, Penicuik, Midlothian, EH26 0QB



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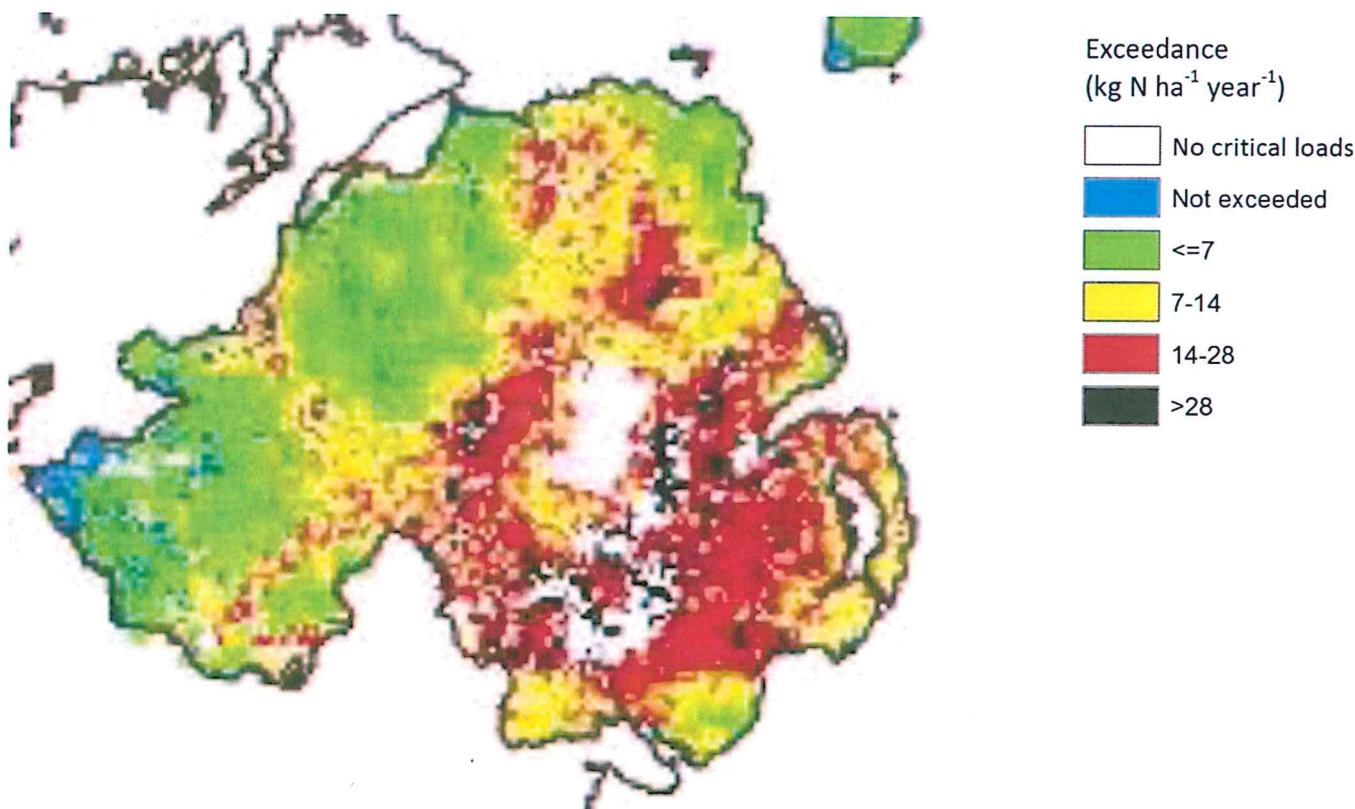


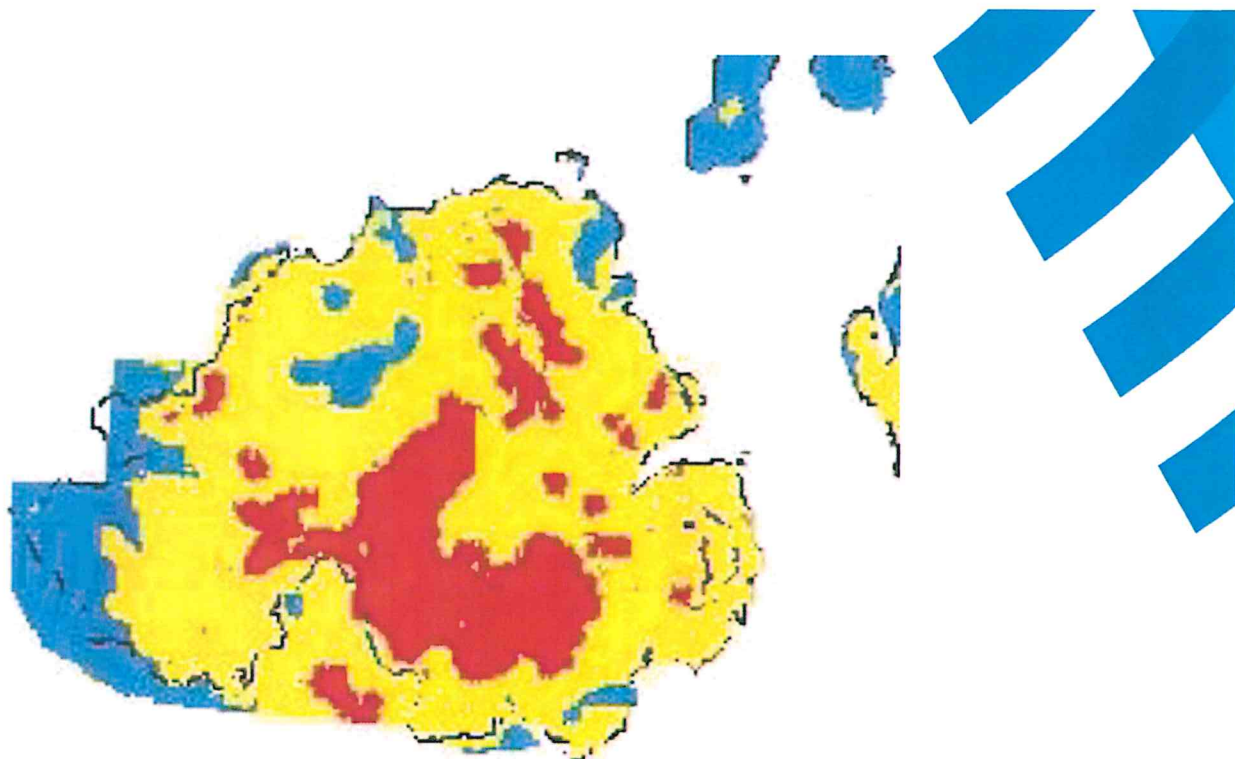
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Average Accumulated Exceedance of nutrient critical loads 2015-17

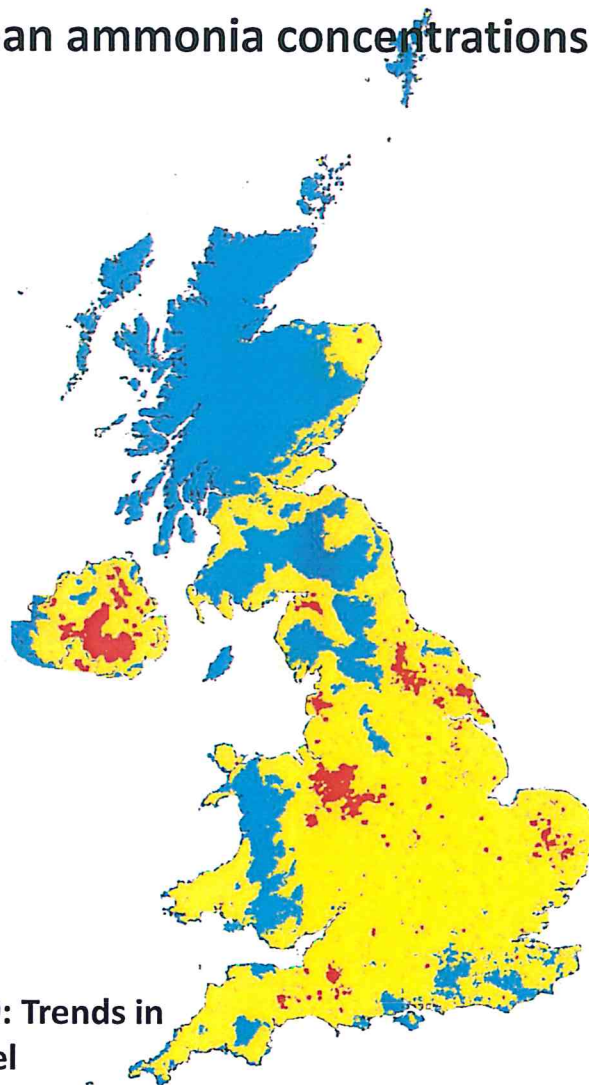




Ammonia concentrations ($\mu\text{g m}^{-3}$)

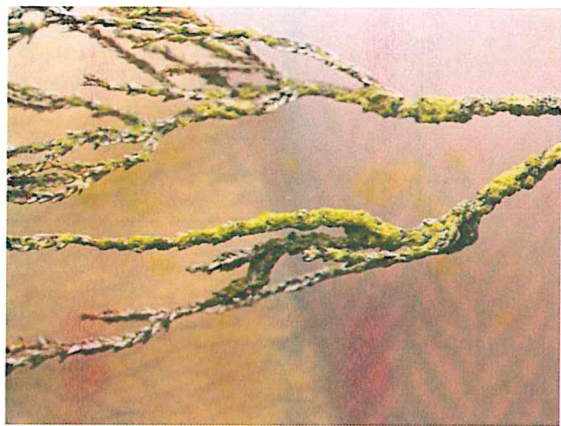
-  ≤ 1 (Critical levels not exceeded)
-  1 - 3 (Critical level for lichens and bryophytes exceeded)
-  > 3 (Critical levels for lichens and bryophytes, and higher plants exceeded)

FRAME 1x1 km mean ammonia concentrations for 2014-16



Source: Trends Report 2019: Trends in
critical load and critical level
exceedances in the UK

Northern Ireland NH₃ Emissions

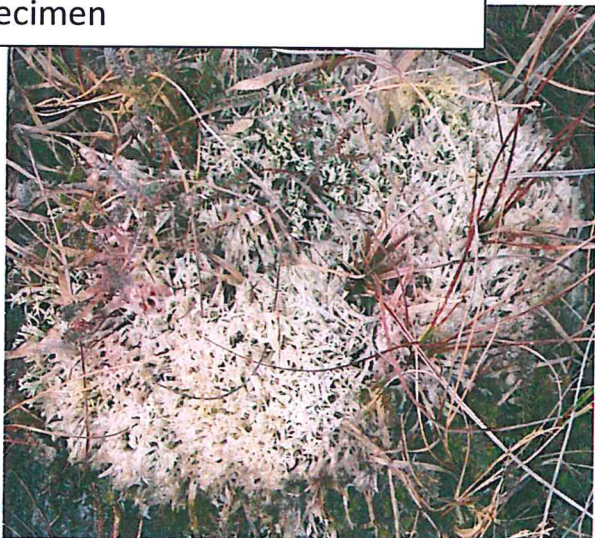


A recent study predicts that plant species richness of five widespread semi-natural habitats in the UK is approximately one-third less than it would be without nitrogen deposition (Payne et al, 2017)

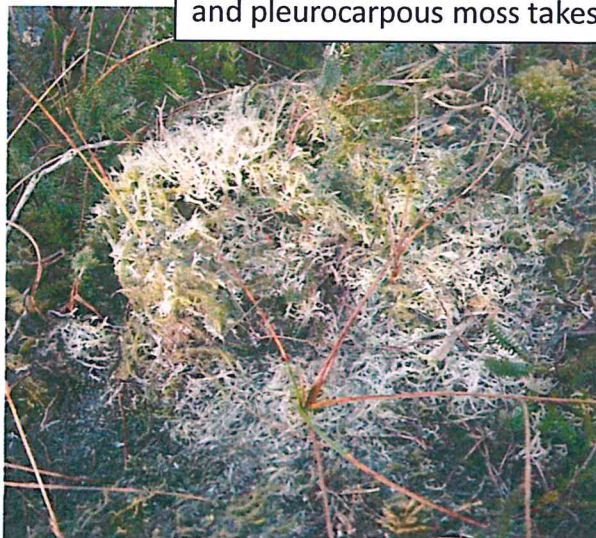
What actually happens to protected habitats?

Damage to lower plants – *Cladonia* lichen

Usually blueish – bleaching of specimen



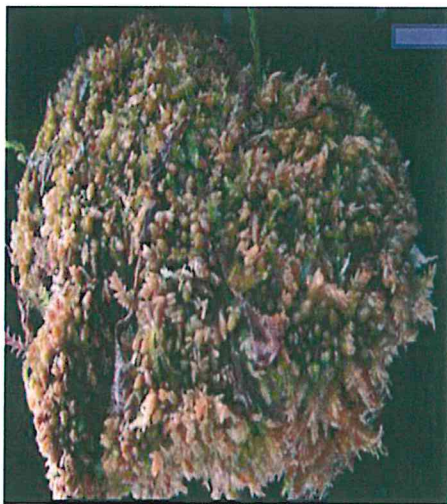
Eventual fate – Hummock falls apart and pleurocarpous moss takes over



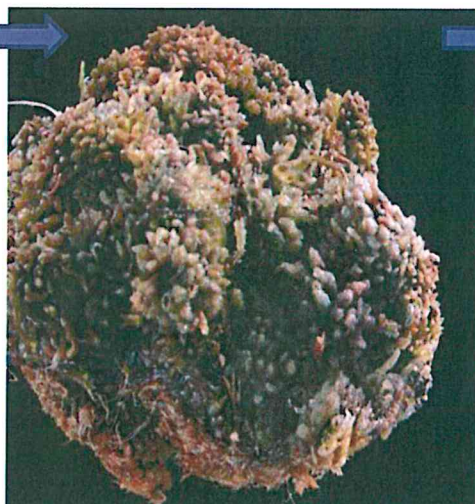
Progressive deterioration as a result of ammonia damage as shown at Moninea Bog SAC

What actually happens? Algal Invasion

Example of progressive damage in the bog moss *Sphagnum imbricatum*, as observed at Moninea Bog.



Healthy specimen



Algal invasion over the
leaves



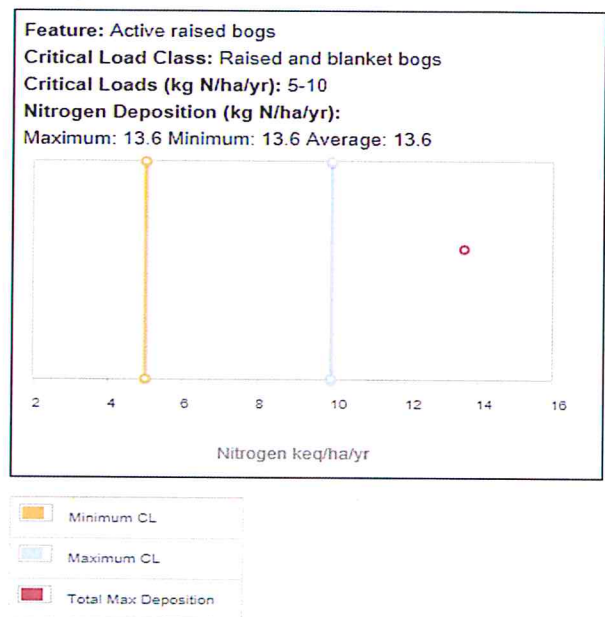
Severe algal invasion &
complete loss of specimen
integrity

DAERA Operational Policy

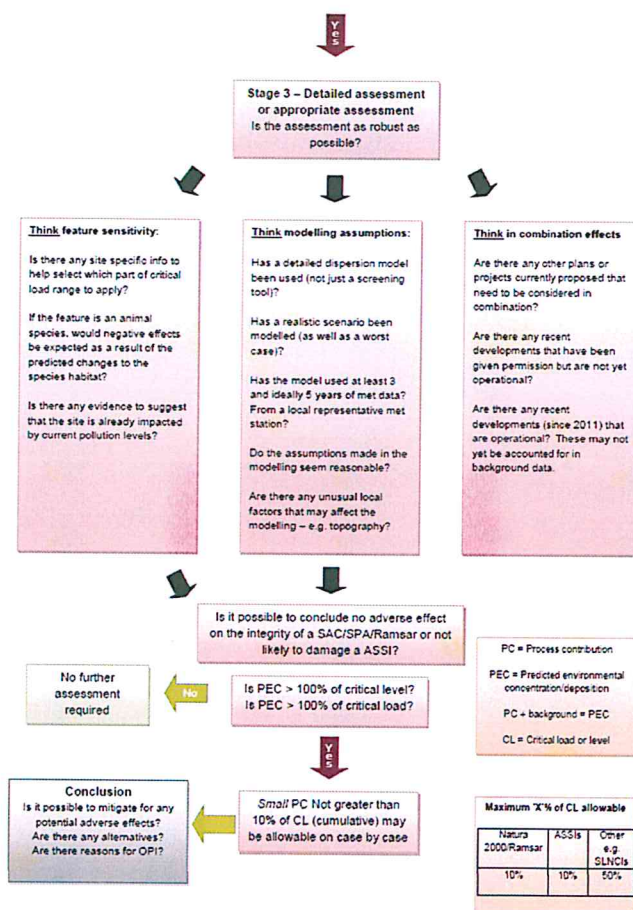
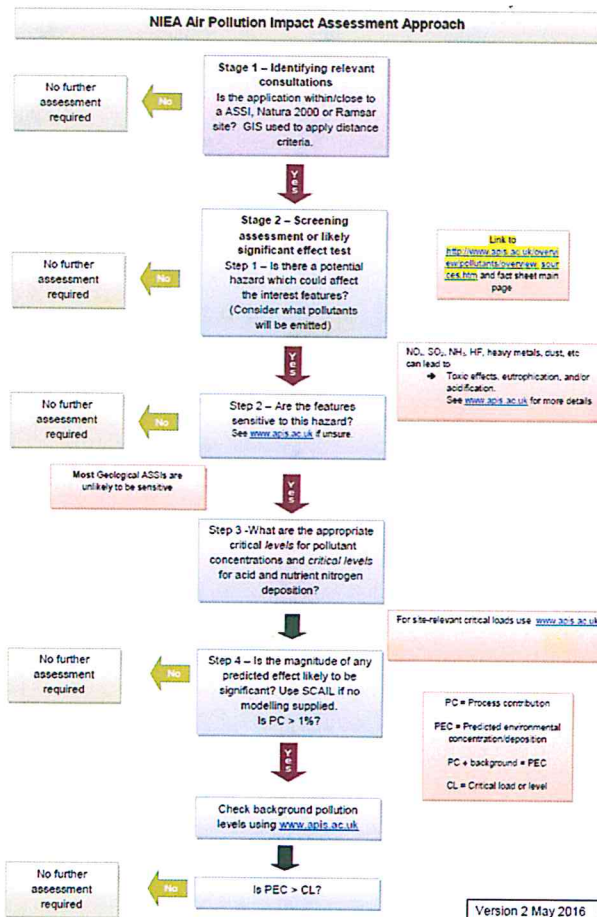
Policy in Summary;

- <1% of Critical Level (CL) - insignificant, no assessment required.
- Where CL of site is not exceeded; the Process Contribution and background should not exceed 70% of CL (rarely applies)
- Where background is exceeding, an additional 10% loading, in combination with other facilities subject to DAERA policy, is accepted

Nitrogen Critical Loads



Moninea Bog SAC – Site specific info can be found on <http://www.apis.ac.uk/>



SES Internal Guidance

SES

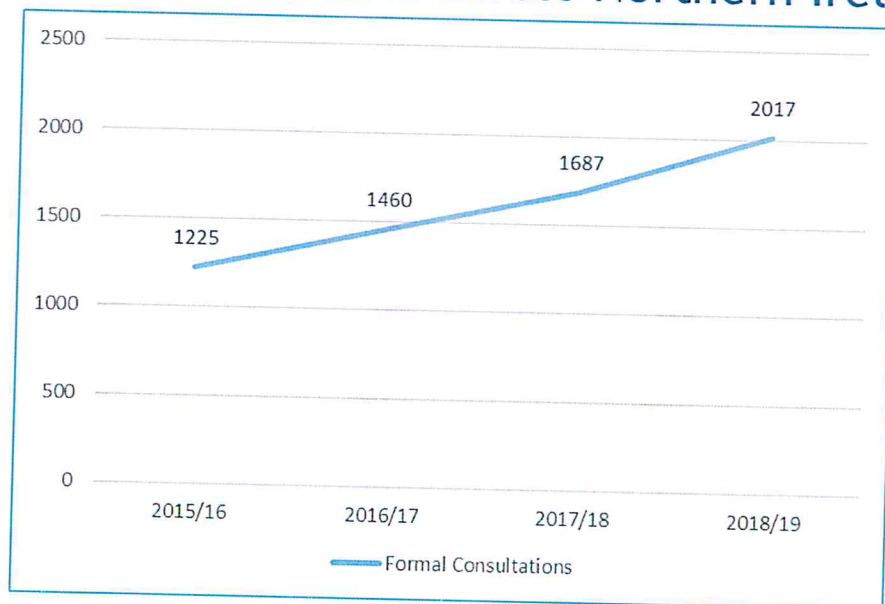
- $\leq 0.1\%$ of Critical Level (CL) - insignificant, no assessment required.
- $> 0.1\%$ Assess in-combination
- Where background is exceeded, case by case assessment

NIEA

- $< 1\%$ of Critical Level (CL) - insignificant, no assessment required.
- Where background is exceeding, an additional 10% loading, in combination with other facilities subject to DAERA policy, is accepted

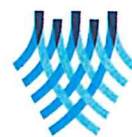
Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRA) for Planning Applications

Over 9300 cases to date across Northern Ireland



Thank You

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