



Decision-Making Threshold Publication Summary

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This document has been peer reviewed and accepted by the Air Quality Technical Advisory Group, Interagency Air Pollution Group and Natural England.

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Background

Two reports have been produced and used to inform decision-making where a proposal gives rise to the potential for air pollution impacts on designated nature conservation sites. These reports are:

- Chapman, C. & Kite, B. 2021. Guidance on Decision-Making Thresholds for Air Pollution: **Main Report**. *JNCC Report No. 696*, JNCC, Peterborough, and
- Air Quality Consultants Ltd. 2021. Decision-Making Thresholds for Air Pollution: **Technical Report**. *JNCC Report No. 696*, JNCC, Peterborough.

The reports are published on the JNCC Resource Hub at

<https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/6cce4f2e-e481-4ec2-b369-2b4026c88447>.

These reports were commissioned by JNCC (Joint Nature Conservation Committee) on behalf of the Inter-agency Air Pollution Group and Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs).

The work was peer reviewed by scientific advisers from the UK's Air Quality Technical Advisory Group (AQTAG) and Inter-Agency Air Pollution Group (IAPG). The contractors made changes accordingly.

Key findings

The following points summarise the key findings from the reports:

- The work provides an evidentiary basis for decision-making thresholds to inform the assessment of air quality impacts on designated sites. The work focuses on the large number of very small emission sources that currently require significant assessment effort to account for combined (in-combination) effects (Figure 1) but have no likelihood to adversely affect the designated sites.
- The work explicitly accounts for the Dutch Nitrogen Ruling and the Wealden Judgment (see Section 2.3 of the main report <https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/6cce4f2e-e481-4ec2-b369-2b4026c88447#JNCC-Report-696-Main-FINAL-WEB.pdf>).
- The Decision-Making Thresholds are not screening thresholds though they can be used at the screening stage of a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). They provide a national evidence base that can be applied in cases where modelling assumptions (outlined in the reports) are met.

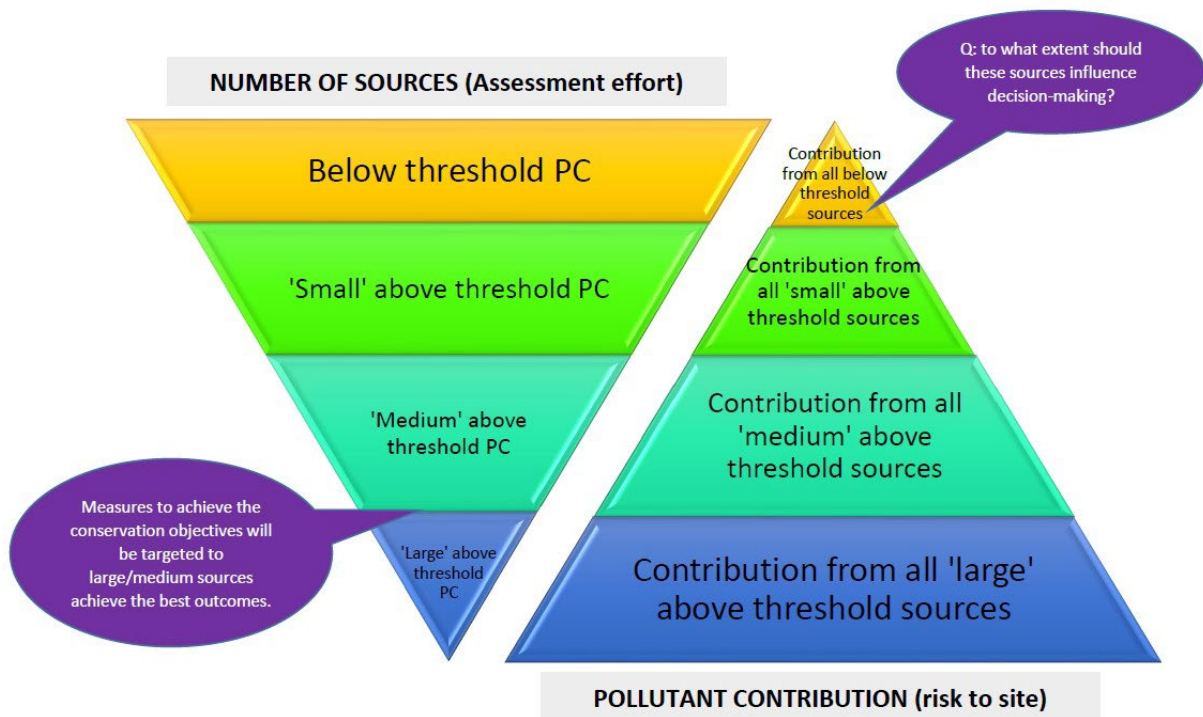


Figure 1. Under current practices more assessment effort is spent on many proposals which fall below the Thresholds (image reproduced with permission from DTA Ecology).

- The Thresholds identify a process contribution (at a particular designated site or assessment point) below which a plan or project would not require a bespoke in-combination assessment in order to ensure the conservation objectives of the site would not be undermined, and therefore that an adverse effect on its integrity can be excluded. That is, a plan or project can be excluded from further consideration based on its impact both alone and “in-combination” as the in-combination assessment has been carried out in advance by the application of the Decision-Making Thresholds.
- The Decision-Making Thresholds are derived on the basis of modelling for cumulative (in-combination) effects of plans and projects with a very small emission contribution. This “assessment in advance” is based on an objective change in air quality (concentration and deposition) that over a period of time, will not undermine the achievement of the conservation objectives for any designated site (See Section 3.3 of the main report noting exceptions outlined in Section 3.2. Appendix 1 describes the process for determining the ecologically relevant change that underpins the development of the thresholds).
- These Decision-Making Thresholds can be applied to individual proposals to determine whether further assessment in-combination with other plans and projects is required, OR, whether the risk from air pollution related impacts is sufficiently small that no further assessment effort is necessary.

- These Thresholds could enable decision makers to have greater confidence in focusing their assessment efforts on those proposals that require greater scrutiny and not undermine conservation objectives (Figure 2).

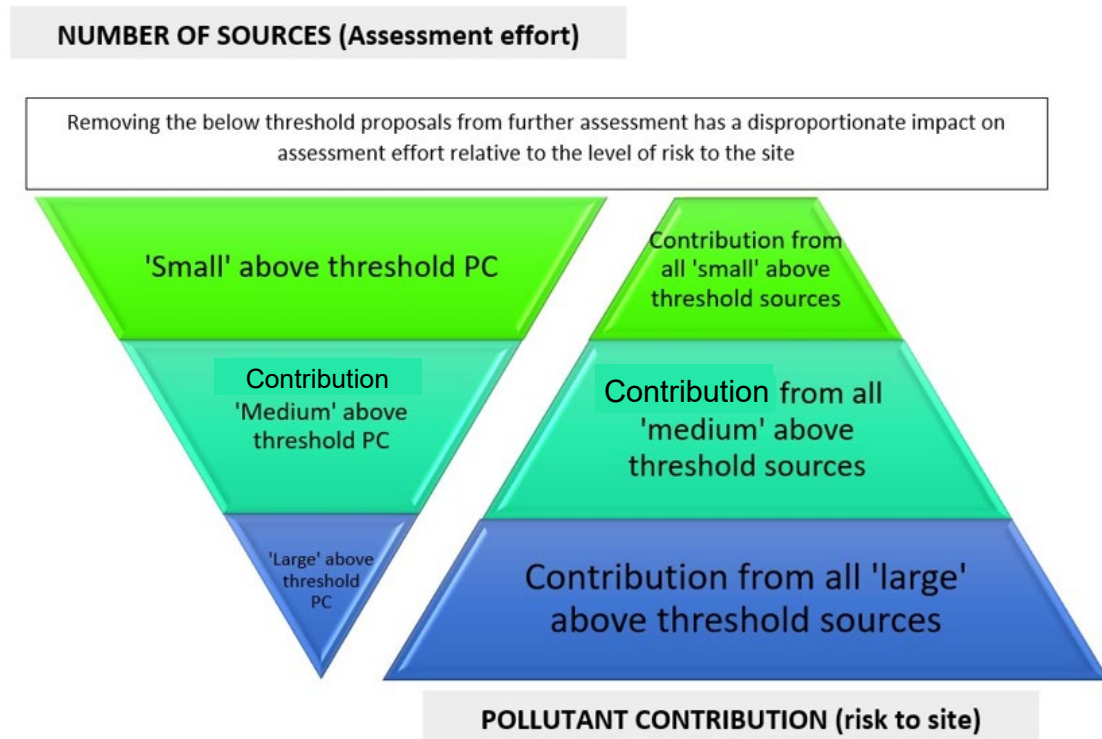


Figure 2. Removing those proposals that are below the Thresholds allows assessment effort to be directed at those that require extra scrutiny (image reproduced with permission from DTA Ecology).

Application of the evidence

The Country Nature Conservation Bodies and Regulators within AQTAG and IAPG are now investigating the application and implications of this new evidence and, with the exception of DAERA (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Northern Ireland), are not yet applying the approach to their advice or decisions.

For case-specific advice please contact your Country Nature Conservation Body or Regulator.