This is the preprint of the contribution published as:

Schunck, F., Liess, M. (2023): Ultra-low Esfenvalerate concentrations increase biomass and may reduce competitiveness of *Daphnia magna* populations *Sci. Total Environ.* **886**, art. 163916

The publisher's version is available at:

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2023.163916

1	Ultra-low Esfenvalerate Concentrations Increase
2	Biomass and Reduce Competitiveness of Daphnia magna Populations
3	
4	Florian Schunck †, §, *; Matthias Liess †, §,
5	† Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ), Dept. of System-Ecotoxicology,
6	Permoserstraße 15, 04318 Leipzig, Germany
7	§ Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule (RWTH), Institute of Ecology & Computational
8	Life Science, Templergraben 55, 52056 Aachen, Germany

9 Abstract

10 Aquatic communities are frequently exposed to pesticides at sublethal concentrations, known to affect 11 fitness parameters like feeding, reproduction and population growth. Beside adverse effects, also 12 beneficial responses to toxicants at low concentrations may occur. Such positive effects, however, are assumed to generate trade-offs. To identify such trade-offs, we quantified the population level effects 13 on Daphnia magna during population carrying capacity in laboratory nanocosms after exposure to a 14 single pulse of the pyrethroid insecticide esfenvalerate, including ultra-low concentrations $\leq 1/_{30}$ EC₅₀. 15 16 Population abundance and biomass were monitored 3 times per week for 3 months with a non-invasive image detection technique. High concentrations $\geq 1/10$ EC₅₀ led to reduced fitness endpoints. In 17 18 contrast, ultra-low concentrations in the range of 0.01 μ g/L significantly increased the population 19 abundance and biomass up to 200 % during 2 months after exposure. Already in the first five days 20 after exposure to 0.01 μ g/L and 0.03 μ g/L esfenvalerate, population biomass increased by 0.1 mg/day 21 while staying constant in the controls. We hypothesize that the reduction of individual competitiveness 22 and consequent reduction of *intraspecific* competition is the associated trade-off of the observed 23 hormetic increase of population biomass. 24 Keywords: sublethal population effects, risk assessment, system-stress (SyS), multiple stress, high-25 frequency monitoring, hormesis

26 Abbreviations

- 27 ADaM Aachener Daphnien Medium, DMSO dimethyl sulfoxide, GC-MS/MS gas
- 28 chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry, PDI posterior density interval

29 1. Introduction

30 Current environmental risk assessment (ERA) aims to safeguard species and populations in the

environment by combining exposure and effect assessment. The concentrations at which adverse

32 effects of pesticides occur in toxicity tests are reduced with assessment factors to the extent that

populations in the field should also be protected. Field-studies, however, show that the ecological

34 status of most streams with an agricultural catchment are affected by pesticides also below regulatory

acceptable concentrations (Liess et al. 2021). Similarly, the effects of low-dosed neonicotinoids have

36 been underestimated by the same risk assessment that is based on lethal effects and short-term

observations (Rundlöf et al. 2015; Cressey 2017). Therefore, the identification of truly protective

thresholds for pesticide applications needs to assess the population effect mechanisms of low pesticideconcentrations.

40 With the ban of most neonicotinoids in Europe and decisions pending in the US in 2024, pyrethroid

41 insecticides emerge as the most common alternative in agricultural applications (Jactel et al. 2019). In

42 the aquatic environment, pyrethroids generally occur as short pulses in the water phase. This is due to

43 their fast dissipation from the water column; in stream waters, only 3% of pyrethroids are bioavailable

44 (dissolved in water and bound to dissolved organic matter) while 97% are bound to suspended solids

45 (Lu et al. 2019). Nevertheless, maximum concentrations only 1–2 orders of magnitude below the acute

46 EC_{50} (*D. magna*) were detected in surface waters (Rösch et al. 2019).

47 At such concentrations, stimulatory effects of pyrethroids are reported (Gottardi et al. 2017; Margus et

48 al. 2019; Shang et al. 2021; Wolz et al. 2021) and discussed in the framework of hormesis theory

49 (Townsend and Luckey 1960; Stebbing 1982; Calabrese and Baldwin 2003; Liess et al. 2019;

50 Agathokleous et al. 2022). In contrast to linear no threshold or threshold models, hormesis assumes

51 that dose–effect relationships are bi-phasic. This means that low levels of a toxicant have stimulatory

52 effects and high concentrations have adverse effects. It is hypothesized that positive, hormetic effects

53 have associated negative trade-offs, predicting that net population growth cannot be positive (Forbes

54 2000), because of limitations in available energy (Calow and Sibly 1990). These trade-offs, however,

are poorly understood until today (Agathokleous et al. 2021) and it is yet unknown, which effects

56 hormesis may have on population dynamics.

57 The aim of this work is therefore to investigate the consequences of low-dosed pulsed pyrethroid

58 exposures on the multi-generational development of aquatic populations. For this, we exposed *D*.

59 *magna* populations close to their carrying capacity with the pyrethroid insecticide esfenvalerate. We

60 tested concentrations of $\frac{1}{10}$, $\frac{1}{30}$ and $\frac{1}{100}$ of the EC₅₀, assumed to provoke sublethal and hormetic

61 responses and contrasted them with concentrations provoking lethal population responses. The effects

62 on population biomass and abundance were monitored with a non-invasive image detection technique

63 3 times per week over a total of 89 days.

64 2. Material and Methods:

65 *Experiment Design*

The nanocosm experiment consisted of 40 D. magna populations, which were initialized from 15 66 neonates (age < 24 h) each. After 4 weeks of development, populations were assigned to 8 exposure 67 groups (control, 0.01, 0.032, 0.1, 0.32, 1.0, 3.16, 10.0 µg/L esfenvalerate). This assignment of 68 69 nanocosms to one of the exposure groups was based on the pre-exposure population density to achieve a balanced treatment design. The populations were subsequently exposed to a single pulse of the 70 71 pyrethroid insecticide esfenvalerate at the respective concentration. Following this, the experiment was 72 continuously monitored for another 9 weeks. Throughout the entire duration of the experiment, 73 populations were constantly fed with 10.8 mg carbon per week and monitored with an image 74 analyzing system 3 times per week. In general, the experimental design followed works of Liess et al. 75 (2006) and Foit et al. (2012).

76 Test Systems

Each experimental unit consisted of a 5.5 L glass beaker (Harzkristall, Derenburg, Germany), filled 77 78 with 500 g of washed and aquarium sand of 1–2 mm diameter. The sediment layer served as a habitat 79 for microorganisms to facilitate self-purification of the systems. Aachener Daphnien Medium (ADaM) (Klüttgen et al. 1994) was used as the test medium for the experiment. Throughout the duration of the 80 experiment, the medium was not exchanged and kept at a constant volume of 4.5 L by replenishing the 81 beakers with doubly distilled water on a weekly basis. The amount of water loss from evaporation was 82 kept to a minimum by covering the systems with glass plates. A 2 cm cut at the edge of the glass plates 83 provided access to the nanocosms. Sufficient oxygen saturation was ensured by aerating the test 84 85 systems with glass tubes, which were connected to air pumps Osaga Air Compressor LK-35 (Fish 86 farm Schierhölter, Glandorf, Germany) by silicon tubing. Aeration was turned on 3 times per day for 15 minutes each. The populations were fed three times per week with a diet of ground stinging nettle 87 88 (Folia urticae), ground dog food (Organic dog biscuits, Yarrah Organic Petfood BV, Harderwijk, 89 Netherlands) and batch cultured green algae (Scenedesmus subspicatus). The exact preparation of the feeding suspensions is detailed in SI2. Throughout the experiment, the organisms received 3.6 mg C 90 91 per feeding. Only in the first 10 days, the amount was doubled to promote growth of microbial 92 communities in the system.

93 Environmental Conditions

The experimental units were exposed to a 16–8 h day–night cycle and were positioned with the water

- surface approximately 20 cm below 70 W fluorescent cool-white lighting tubes. Throughout the whole
- 96 duration of the experiment, room temperature was controlled to be 20 ± 1 °C. Due to the heat input
- 97 from the lighting, the temperature of the systems was raised by approximately 1 °C, resulting in

- 98 nanocosms temperatures of 21 ± 1 °C. Acidity of the systems reached a stable pH of 7.9 ± 0.1 within
- 99 the first week. Conductivity was kept constant by replenishing water at a value of approximately 1080
- 100 $\pm 17 \,\mu$ S/cm. In previously conducted experiments of the same type, nutrient levels did not diverge
- 101 between treatments and were in bounds where no effects on aquatic organisms are expected (Liess et
- al. 2006). This was asserted once, 4 weeks after exposure: NO_3^{2-} , $0.3 \pm 0.1 \text{ mg/L}$; NO_2^{-} , 0.02 ± 0.003
- 103 mg/L; $PO_4^{3-} < 0.15$ mg/L.

104 Exposure to Chemicals and Chemical Analysis

- 105 In order to study the effects of pyrethroids on *D. magna*, esfenvalerate (CAS 66230-04-4) was selected
- as a representative for the group of type-II pyrethroid insecticides. Esfenvalerate is approved for use
- 107 on agricultural sites in the EU until 2023 and more type-II pyrethroids continue to be allowed until the
- 108 end of the decade (https://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/pesticides/eu-pesticides-database/active-
- 109 substances/?event=search.as). The hydrophobic insecticide esfenvalerate needed to be dissolved to
- ensure bioavailability in aquatic environments; we used dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) for this purpose
- at concentrations of 0.01% and 0.02% v/v. In order to maximize the number of replicates per
- treatment, no solvent controls were run in this study. However, we assessed the influence of DMSO on
- 113 offspring and survival of *D. magna*, by running chronic exposure tests on a range of DMSO
- 114 concentrations according to OECD (2012). These tests were run at low feeding conditions (0.016 mg
- 115 C/individual/day) and high feeding conditions (0.16 mg C/individual/day) to estimate the effects on
- 116 organisms under food limitation, comparable to conditions in the nanocosms. DMSO concentrations
- below 1% v/v, 2 orders of magnitude higher than employed DMSO concentration in this study, had no
- effect on the survival and the cumulative offspring of *D. magna* until 21 days post exposure (Fig. S1,
- 119 S2), regardless if the organisms were cultured under high or low feeding conditions. The solvent
- 120 concentrations used in this study (Table S1) are 2 orders of magnitude below this effect threshold.
- 121 Also, no effects on the movement of D. were observed below 0.1 % v/v in a different study (Huang et
- al. 2018).
- 123 The stock solutions were prepared by serial dilutions in DMSO at the day of exposure and measured
- 124 once for each test concentration in 1L volumes of ADaM, spiked parallel to the experimental units.
- 125 Individual nanocosms were spiked with corresponding stock solutions, except for control treatments,
- 126 which were not treated with DMSO. Chemical analysis of the test solutions was performed by
- 127 Wessling GmbH, Landsberg OT, Oppin, Germany, using a Thermo Fisher Scientific TSQ 8000 Evo
- 128 Triple Quadrupole GC-MS/MS. Measured concentrations as well as used DMSO concentrations are
- shown in Table S1 for each treatment and are well in line with the nominal concentrations. Therefore,
- 130 we report the results in relation to the nominal concentrations of esfenvalerate.

131 Monitoring, Image Analysis and Calculations

- 132 *D. magna* populations were monitored 3 times per week for a total period of 13 weeks by a non-
- invasive image detection method described in Liess et al. (2006) and improved by Foit et al. (2012). In
- this method a series of three photographs is taken of each system, and in an algorithm the grayscale
- difference of those pictures is taken. Consequently, the resulting images contains only moving objects,
- 136 which in the case of single species systems are exclusively *D. magna*. Pixels are then counted to
- estimate size and biomass of the organisms. From the 3 resulting difference-images, the picture with
- the highest count of *D. magna* is selected. The exact procedure is detailed in Foit et al. (2012). In this
- 139 experiment, we used the camera model Canon PowerShot G12 (Tokyo, Japan) with settings provided
- in Table S2.
- 141 The length L of the organisms was calculated using the formula $L = \sqrt{n_{pixel}/25.5}$, which is
- 142 empirically calibrated to a fixed resolution to which the images are downscaled before calculation.
- 143 From this, organism biomass W was estimated with the empirical relationship $W = 1.5 \times 1e^{-8} \times 1e^{-8}$
- 144 $L^{2.84}$ (Dumont HJ. et al. 1975).
- 145 Population pre-exposure growth rates were calculated by $(BM_{t=0} BM_{t=-5})/\Delta t$, while post-
- 146 exposure biomass growth rates were calculated by $(BM_{t=\pm 5} BM_{t=0})/\Delta t$, with Δt indicating the
- 147 time interval, *BM* indicating the biomass in mg and t = 0 resembling the time point of exposure to
- 148 esfenvalerate. Division by $\Delta t = 5 \, days$, resulted in the biomass growth rates in mg/day. The 5-day
- 149 interval was chosen for calculation of population growth rates, because it represented a long-enough
- time frame to show early effects and was symmetrically available on both sides of the time of
- 151 exposure.
- 152 *Statistics*

During the 4-week pre-exposure period, 9 systems did not successfully develop. Systems were 153 considered unsuccessful, when the average population abundance during the pre-exposure period 154 stagnated and was lower than the initial abundance of 15 neonates. In contrast, populations in valid 155 156 systems grew exponentially with an average of 98 neonates throughout the period of exponential 157 growth; the lowest pre-contamination average of successful systems was 50 neonates. Consequently, 158 we removed unsuccessful systems from further investigations. Because of the prior balancing of the 159 treatment groups according to population density, this change equally reduced the number of replicates 160 per treatment from 5 to 4, except for the highest (10 μ g/L) treatment, for which 3 valid replicates remained. 161

- 162 We used a bayesian model of a random walk to estimate the treatment trend μ_k dominating the
- 163 population time series Y_i of all observations *i* belonging to treatment *k*, which follows a random
- 164 normal distribution around the trend at each time point t with a treatment specific variation of σ_k . The
- 165 trend is estimated by a gaussian random walk *grw* with the size of each step-innovation following a
- half-normal distribution with a standard deviation of 1. It is offset by a treatment specific intercept,

which follows a half-normal distribution with a standard deviation of 2. Before model calculation, theresponse variable was centered and scaled and back transformed afterwards to calculate effect sizes.

169 $Y_{i:i \in k, t} \sim Normal(\mu_{k,t}, \sigma_k)$

170
$$\mu_{k,t} = grw_{k,t} + intercept$$

171
$$grw_{k, t+1} \sim Normal(grw_{k,t}, innovation_k)$$

172
$$innovation_k \sim HalfNormal(sd = 1)$$

173
$$intercept_k \sim HalfNormal(sd = 2)$$

174
$$\sigma_k \sim HalfNormal(sd = 1)$$

We concluded that the trend of a treatments significantly differed from the control treatment, if the
lower bound of the 95% posterior density interval (PDI) of the difference distribution was greater than

177 zero. This method is an application of bayesian null hypothesis testing (Kruschke 2013). The *pymc*

178 package (Salvatier et al. 2016) was used for computation of the bayesian models. Further data analysis

179 was done with *python* and statistical tests were computed with the package *statsmodels* (Seabold and

180 Perktold 2010). Instrumental for the handling of high dimensional datasets was the package *xarray*

181 (Hoyer and Hamman 2017).

182 3. Results

183



184

Figure 1. Time-series of abundance and biomass of *D. magna* populations. Each row corresponds to a tested esfenvalerate concentration with increasing level from top to bottom. Solid lines indicate the Bayesian estimates of the mean trend of the abundance (columns 1–3) and biomass (column 4) of experimental replicates over time. Shaded areas indicate the uncertainty of the trend with 95%-PDI intervals. Stars (*) indicate significant deviations from the control trend (black), which is compared to all treatments. The dashed line indicates the timepoint at which the experimental systems were exposed to esfenvalerate.

192 The results displayed in Fig. 1 show *D. magna* population time-series over the entire three-month193 period of experimentation. We also included the 95%-PDI to indicate trend uncertainty due to

- 194 experimental variation. We revealed that trends were highly similar in the exponential growth phase,
- 195 before the exposure to esfenvalerate, after which time-series of all treatments significantly diverged in
- 196 terms of abundance and biomass from control populations. The contamination occurred approximately
- 197 one week after the initial maximum was reached for the smallest individuals, two weeks before the
- 198 medium sized individuals and about 7 weeks for the large individuals. Related to the population
- biomass, contamination occurred close to the control carrying capacity (Fig. 1).

200 Effects of Low Doses

- 201 In the first week after the contamination, especially the smallest size class of the populations exposed
- to 0.01 μ g/L esfenvalerate ($1/_{100}$ EC₅₀) showed a significantly increased abundance compared to pre-
- 203 contamination values (+ 7%), while exposure to 0.031 μ g/L only led to an insignificantly increased
- abundance of small organisms (+ 5%). At the same time abundance of the smallest size class in control

treatments decreased by 10 %. The increased population growth of the lowest esfenvalerate treatment

- is also reflected in the significantly increased population biomass during this period. In contrast, the
- 207 medium and largest size class was generally not significantly increased by both lowest concentrations
- in the first week after the contamination. In weeks 2–3 after contamination, the population dynamic of
- 209 low-esfenvalerate treatments showed similar trends as the control treatments related to the abundance
- of all size classes and also for the biomass (Fig. 1).
- 211 Beginning with week 3 after contamination, systems exposed to $0.01 \,\mu g/L$ esfenvalerate again
- significantly diverged from control treatments both in terms of abundance and biomass in all size
- classes until the end of week 7 after contamination: small organisms peaked in week 3–7 (+ 160 % of
- control levels), medium-sized organisms peaked in week 3–5 (+ 130 %) and large organisms peaked in
- 215 week 3–4 (+ 370 %). The total biomass was about twice that of the control during weeks 3–7 after
- 216 contamination. Exposure to 0.031 µg/L Esfenvalerate resulted in similar, but milder and later
- 217 divergences from control trajectories: small organisms peaked in weeks 5–6 after contamination (+
- 218 200 % of control levels), medium-sized organisms peaked in weeks 6-8 (+ 80 %), and large organisms
- 219 were not significantly more abundant in this treatment than in the control. The population biomass was
- significantly increased in weeks 5-8 after exposure (+ 60 %).
- Fig. 2 displays the individual biomass trajectories of the various treatments compared to control
- trajectories. The figure indicates that 2 out of 4 control populations went through an episode of low
- 223 population density in weeks 3–7 after exposure. Near the end of the experiment, the onset of a new
- 224 population growth cycle can be observed in these systems. Episodes of low population density before
- the onset of a new population growth cycle were not observed in any of the systems exposed to low
- 226 concentrations of esfenvalerate.



227

- Figure 2. Individual trajectories of population biomass of the control treatment (black) and
- esfenvalerate treatments (colored lines). Trajectories were smoothed with a moving average (10-day
- 230 backwards window) to focus on the trend of the individual timeseries.

231 Effects of Moderate and High Doses

- 232 Concentrations of 0.1 μ g/L ($^{1}/_{10}$ EC₅₀) and above resulted in lethal effects on *D. magna*. In the first
- 233 week after exposure, those concentrations induced a significant decrease of small sized organisms: 0.1
- μ g/L esfenvalerate resulted in significant reduction of 60%, 0.31 μ g/L resulted in 90% decrease and 1
- 235 µg/L and above eliminated all small organisms. Such a concentration response relationship can also be

- observed in the bigger size classes. Concentrations of $1\mu g/L$ esfenvalerate and above eliminated also
- the larger size classes of the populations entirely without any chance of recovery.
- 238 Moderate doses of 0.1 μ g/L (1 order of magnitude below Esfenvalerate EC₅₀ on *D. magna*) appear to
- only slightly affect population trends of the medium and large size classes (Fig. 1). However, closer
- inspection of the individual trajectories (Fig. 2), reveals that contrary to the control populations, 50%
- of *Daphnia* populations exposed to 0.1 µg/L esfenvalerate collapsed entirely, while others recovered
- to control population levels. Such a complete population collapse did not occur in control populations.
- 243 An exposure to 0.316 μ g/L esfenvalerate resulted in stronger responses compared to 0.1 μ g/L
- treatments only one population recovered from the pesticide effects (Fig. 2). This is also reflected in
- significant decreases of abundance and biomass trends from the control treatment in all size classes.
- Fig. 1 shows that the size classes of this treatment recover one after the other and have still lasting
- effects at the end of the experiment.

248 Short-Term Effects Relates to Esfenvalerate Toxicity and Population Density



249

250 Figure 3. Post-exposure biomass growth rate related to the pre-exposure biomass growth rate and 251 esfenvalerate effects. a) Relationship between 5-day pre-exposure and 5-day post-exposure growth 252 rates of population biomass. The colored lines represent the regression line, offset by the respective 253 effects of esfenvalerate exposure. The diagonal thin line indicates the 1:1 relation. b) Esfenvalerate 254 effect on 5-day *post*-exposure growth rates, assembled in a dose-response curve. The line through the 255 points is based on a cubic spline calculation. The dashed-extension of the spline indicates that the maximum effect was reached and a sensible fit of the cubic spline was no longer possible at these 256 concentrations. The results of the linear regression model are presented in Table S3. 257

- 258 Figure 3 shows that population biomass growth after the contamination is strongly dependent on
- biomass growth before contamination (slope = -1.1, p < 0.001). This suggests that the population was
- 260 approaching carrying capacity, regulated by density dependent processes. However, in the treatments
- 261 exposed to 0.01 μg/L and 0.0316 μg/L esfenvalerate, we observe a slightly increased population
- growth by +0.12 mg/day and +0.08 mg/day, respectively, although not significant (Fig. 3a, b). On the
- contrary, control populations did not diverge from the effect of pre-exposure growth rates (+0.005
- 264 mg/day post-exposure growth rate) and concentrations of 0.316 µg/L esfenvalerate and above lead to
- significantly decreased post exposure growth rates (avg. = -0.29 mg/day, p < 0.02). In fact, the
- comparison to a model without the effects of the concentration (Table S4) shows that the
- 267 concentration explains an additional 24% of the variation in post-exposure growth rates. The resulting
- 268 hormetic response (Fig. 3b) was also present in the long-term increase of abundance and biomass
- increase of the two lowest concentrations and decrease in the higher concentrations (Fig. 1).

270 4. Discussion

- 271 We observe significantly increased population abundance and biomass in *D. magna* populations
- exposed to concentrations of 0.01 and 0.031 μ g/L esfenvalerate until 7 weeks after pulse-exposure.
- 273 Stimulating effects of low toxicant concentrations have been reported for the first time by Schulz
- (1888) related to increased CO₂ production of yeast populations exposed to various toxicants. Similar,
- positive effects of toxicants well below acute mortality have been observed in a variety of other
- studies (Stebbing 1998; Christopher Cutler et al. 2009; Calabrese 2010; Cutler 2013; Carvalho et al.
- 2020; Wang et al. 2021). Also, for pyrethroids, positive effects of low concentrations on various
- endpoints have been observed (Liess 2002; Beketov and Liess 2005; Bjergager et al. 2012; Gottardi et
- al. 2017; Shang et al. 2021; Wolz et al. 2021).
- Stimulating effects are assumed to come at price of energetic trade-offs, which would lead to net 280 neutral population growth rates (Calow and Sibly 1990; Forbes 2000). We show that, contrary to this 281 282 assumption, the resulting net population growth was positive, suggesting that hormetic trade-offs may not be detectable in conventional population responses such as density and biomass. Accordingly, 283 284 Liess et al. (2019) hypothesized that in the absence of external pesticide stress, an internal stress 285 within the individual occurs - the "system stress". This concept can be translated to intraspecific 286 competition at the population level. The presence of low toxicant stress reduces the "system stress". With this approach the positive effect of low toxicant concentrations was successfully modelled (Liess 287 et al. 2020). Here we hypothesize that, on the population level, intraspecific competition is reduced by 288 289 pesticide contamination level at low, sublethal concentrations.
- 290 Under conditions of *intra*specific competition, exposure to esfenvalerate also induced a short-term
- 291 hormetic response in biomass growth rates of *D. magna* populations (Fig. 3b), which corresponded to
- the long-term hormetic responses observed in terms of population abundance and biomass at the 2

lowest concentrations for as long as 7 weeks after contamination (Fig. 1). This duration coincides with 293 a full life-span of *D. magna* suggesting a long-term reduction of competition by the pyrethroid during 294 295 a whole generation. For control populations, in contrast, the high *intraspecific competition during this* 296 period led to strong intrinsic stress, which was reflected in the low population density in 2 out of 4 297 populations. Such an oscillating population dynamic of non-contaminated populations based on 298 intraspecific competition has been observed since long in laboratory populations after reaching a peak-299 density (Halbach 1970; Preuss et al. 2009). In this study, none of the populations exposed to low concentrations of esfenvalerate (0.01, 0.03 μ g/L esfenvalerate) went through such a low-density period 300 301 (Fig. 2). This indicates that exposure to low concentrations of esfenvalerate persistently reduced 302 intraspecific competition, which allowed the short-term increase of population growth to take hold and 303 resulted in an increased population biomass during most of the life span of D. magna. Only 8 weeks after contamination – at the end of the life span of D. magna – population density and biomass 304 approached control levels again. Therefore, we conclude that the reduction of individual 305 306 competitiveness is the likely trade-off of hormesis in population growth rates of D. magna exposed to

- 307 sublethal concentrations of pyrethroids.
- 308 Our study also shows that single pulses of pyrethroids are a relevant threat to aquatic organisms even 309 far below acute concentrations. This is extending the assumption of Yang et al. (2006) and Lu et al. (2019), who argued that the toxicity of pyrethroids is overestimated when using total chemical 310 311 concentration, due to high sorption to sediments and low bioavailability as a consequence. Despite 312 quick dissipation of esfenvalerate, initial pulses occur and result in long-term detrimental effects in 313 populations as shown in this work. In this work's experimental setup – which mimicked a natural system with sediments and suspended organic material – a single pulse of 1/10 of the esfenvalerate 314 315 EC_{50} , resulted in the collapse of 50% of the population; and, as argued before, even much lower concentrations affected the population dynamic of D. magna. While we acknowledge the low 316 bioavailability of pyrethroids after reaching chemical equilibrium, effects on the level of individual 317 occur after ultra-low pulses (Liess 2002; Beketov and Liess 2005), and our study demonstrates that 318 319 pyrethroid pulses even have long-term effects on the population level. Considering the demonstrated occurrence of such pyrethroid pulses (Rösch et al. 2019) and the likely increase of pyrethroid-usage in 320 321 the future (Jactel et al. 2019), we argue that effects of transient pyrethroid pulses should be taken into account in aquatic risk assessment. 322
- Finally, it could be argued that low concentrations of pyrethroid insecticides are acceptable as they
- 324 lead to increased stability of the exposed systems. However, we do not see this as a valid argument, as
- 325 the presumed long-term reduction in competitive strength under the condition of *interspecific*
- 326 competition with another species could have a negative effect on population development.
- 327 Conclusion

- 328 Concentrations below $\frac{1}{30}$ of the acute EC₅₀ significantly increased the population abundance and
- 329 biomass over several weeks after exposure to the pyrethroid insecticide esfenvalerate. This provides
- evidence that responses to low-dosed toxicants may reduce long-term intraspecific competition due to
- a reduced competitive strength of individuals. We, therefore, suggest to apply long-term non-invasive
- 332 population monitoring to reveal subtle but relevant effects on the performance of individuals within
- 333 populations. Further, we suggest to perform multi-species experiments to assess population
- 334 performance under the influence of *interspecific competition* and ultra-low exposure to pesticides.
- 335

336 Supplementary information

337 The supplementary data to this article is available online at [doi].

338 Acknowledgements

- 339 The authors thank Kasthuri Gudaniya from the university Offenburg and Maren Lück from the
- 340 Department of System-Ecotoxicology for their support during the conduction of experiments. The
- 341 authors also thank Franz Dussl from the Department of System Ecotoxicology for valuable assistance
- in the laboratory. This work was supported by the German Helmholtz long-range strategic research
- 343 funding and the European partnership for the assessment of risks from chemicals (PARC).

344 CRediT author statement

- 345 Florian Schunck: Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing Original
- 346 draft. Matthias Liess: Conceptualization, Investigation Guiding analytical cognition process,
- 347 Writing.
- 348 Data Availability
- 349 Data will be made available on request.

350 Declaration of competing interest

351 The authors declare no competing financial interest.

352 References

- 353 Agathokleous E, Barceló D, Aschner M, Azevedo RA, Bhattacharya P, Costantini D, Cutler GC,
- 354 Marco A de, Docea AO, Dórea JG, Duke SO, Efferth T, Fatta-Kassinos D, Fotopoulos V,
- 355 Ginebreda A, Guedes RNC, Hayes AW, Iavicoli I, Kalantzi O-I, Koike T, Kouretas D, Kumar M,
- 356 Manautou JE, Moore MN, Paoletti E, Peñuelas J, Picó Y, Reiter RJ, Rezaee R, Rinklebe J, Rocha-
- 357 Santos T, Sicard P, Sonne C, Teaf C, Tsatsakis A, Vardavas AI, Wang W, Zeng EY, Calabrese EJ.
- 358 2022. Rethinking Subthreshold Effects in Regulatory Chemical Risk Assessments. Environ Sci
- 359 Technol. 56(16):11095–11099. doi:10.1021/acs.est.2c02896.

- Agathokleous E, Iavicoli I, Barceló D, Calabrese EJ. 2021. Micro/nanoplastics effects on organisms:
 A review focusing on 'dose'. J Hazard Mater. 417:126084. doi:10.1016/j.jhazmat.2021.126084.
- 362 Beketov MA, Liess M. 2005. Acute contamination with esfenvalerate and food limitation: chronic

effects on the mayfly, Cloeon dipterum. Environ Toxicol Chem. 24(5):1281–1286.
doi:10.1897/04-256R1.1.

- 365 Bjergager M-BA, Hanson ML, Solomon KR, Cedergreen N. 2012. Synergy between prochloraz and
- esfenvalerate in Daphnia magna from acute and subchronic exposures in the laboratory and
 microcosms. Aquat Toxicol. 110-111:17–24. doi:10.1016/j.aquatox.2011.12.001.
- Calabrese EJ. 2010. Hormesis is central to toxicology, pharmacology and risk assessment. Hum Exp
 Toxicol. 29(4):249–261. doi:10.1177/0960327109363973.
- Calabrese EJ, Baldwin LA. 2003. Toxicology rethinks its central belief. Nature. 421(6924):691–692.
 doi:10.1038/421691a.
- Calow P, Sibly RM. 1990. A Physiological Basis of Population Processes: Ecotoxicological
 Implications. Funct Ecol. 4(3):283. doi:10.2307/2389587.
- Carvalho MEA, Castro PRC, Azevedo RA. 2020. Hormesis in plants under Cd exposure: From toxic
 to beneficial element? J Hazard Mater. 384:121434. doi:10.1016/j.jhazmat.2019.121434.
- 376 Christopher Cutler G, Ramanaidu K, Astatkie T, Isman MB. 2009. Green peach aphid, Myzus persicae
 377 (Hemiptera: Aphididae), reproduction during exposure to sublethal concentrations of imidacloprid
 378 and azadirachtin. Pest Manag Sci. 65(2):205–209. doi:10.1002/ps.1669.
- 379 Cressey D. 2017. The bitter battle over the world's most popular insecticides. Nature. 551(7679):156–
 380 158. doi:10.1038/551156a.
- Cutler GC. 2013. Insects, insecticides and hormesis: evidence and considerations for study. Dose
 Response. 11(2):154–177. doi:10.2203/dose-response.12-008.Cutler.
- 383 Dumont HJ, van de Velde I, Dumont S. 1975. The dry weight estimate of biomass in a selection of
- Cladocera, Copepoda and Rotifera from the plankton, periphyton and benthos of continental
 waters. Oecologia. 19(1):75–97. doi:10.1007/BF00377592.
- Foit K, Kaske O, Wahrendorf D-S, Duquesne S, Liess M. 2012. Automated Nanocosm test system to
 assess the effects of stressors on two interacting populations. Aquat Toxicol. 109:243–249.
 doi:10.1016/j.aquatox.2011.09.013.
- Forbes VE. 2000. Is hormesis an evolutionary expectation? Functional Ecology. 14(1):12–24.

doi:10.1046/j.1365-2435.2000.00392.x.

- 391 Gottardi M, Birch MR, Dalhoff K, Cedergreen N. 2017. The effects of epoxiconazole and α-
- 392 cypermethrin on Daphnia magna growth, reproduction, and offspring size. Environ Toxicol Chem.
 393 36(8):2155–2166. doi:10.1002/etc.3752.
- Halbach U. 1970. Einfluß der Temperatur auf die Populationsdynamik des planktischen Rädertieres
- 395 Brachionus calyciflorus Pallas [Influence of temperature on the population dynamics of the rotifer
- 396 Brachionus calyciflorus pallas]. Oecologia. 4(2):176–207. doi:10.1007/BF00377100.

- Hoyer S, Hamman J. 2017. xarray: N-D labeled Arrays and Datasets in Python. JORS. 5(1):10.
 doi:10.5334/jors.148.
- Huang Y, Cartlidge R, Walpitagama M, Kaslin J, Campana O, Wlodkowic D. 2018. Unsuitable use of
 DMSO for assessing behavioral endpoints in aquatic model species. Sci Total Environ. 615:107–
 114. doi:10.1016/j.scitotenv.2017.09.260.
- 402 Jactel H, Verheggen F, Thiéry D, Escobar-Gutiérrez AJ, Gachet E, Desneux N. 2019. Alternatives to
- 403 neonicotinoids. Environ Int. 129:423–429. doi:10.1016/j.envint.2019.04.045.
- Klüttgen B, Dülmer U, Engels M, Ratte HT. 1994. ADaM, an artificial freshwater for the culture of
 zooplankton. Water Research. 28(3):743–746. doi:10.1016/0043-1354(94)90157-0.
- 406 Kruschke JK. 2013. Bayesian estimation supersedes the t test. J Exp Psychol Gen. 142(2):573–603.
 407 doi:10.1037/a0029146.
- Liess M. 2002. Population response to toxicants is altered by intraspecific interaction. Environ Toxicol
 Chem. 21(1):138–142. doi:10.1002/etc.5620210120.
- 410 Liess M, Henz S, Knillmann S. 2019. Predicting low-concentration effects of pesticides. Sci Rep.
- 411 9(1):15248. doi:10.1038/s41598-019-51645-4.
- Liess M, Henz S, Shahid N. 2020. Modeling the synergistic effects of toxicant mixtures. Environ Sci
 Eur. 32(1). doi:10.1186/s12302-020-00394-7.
- 414 Liess M, Liebmann L, Vormeier P, Weisner O, Altenburger R, Borchardt D, Brack W, Chatzinotas A,
- 415 Escher B, Foit K, Gunold R, Henz S, Hitzfeld KL, Schmitt-Jansen M, Kamjunke N, Kaske O,
- 416 Knillmann S, Krauss M, Küster E, Link M, Lück M, Möder M, Müller A, Paschke A, Schäfer RB,
- 417 Schneeweiss A, Schreiner VC, Schulze T, Schüürmann G, Tümpling W von, Weitere M, Wogram
- 418 J, Reemtsma T. 2021. Pesticides are the dominant stressors for vulnerable insects in lowland
- 419 streams. Water Research. 201:117262. doi:10.1016/j.watres.2021.117262.
- 420 Liess M, Pieters BJ, Duquesne S. 2006. Long-term signal of population disturbance after pulse
- 421 exposure to an insecticide: rapid recovery of abundance, persistent alteration of structure. Environ
 422 Toxicol Chem. 25(5):1326–1331. doi:10.1897/05-466R.1.
- 423 Lu Z, Gan J, Cui X, Delgado-Moreno L, Lin K. 2019. Understanding the bioavailability of pyrethroids
- 424 in the aquatic environment using chemical approaches. Environ Int. 129:194–207.
 425 doi:10.1016/j.envint.2019.05.035.
- 426 Margus A, Piiroinen S, Lehmann P, Tikka S, Karvanen J, Lindström L. 2019. Sublethal Pyrethroid
- 427 Insecticide Exposure Carries Positive Fitness Effects Over Generations in a Pest Insect. Sci Rep.
 428 9(1):11320. doi:10.1038/s41598-019-47473-1.
- 429 OECD. 2012. Test No. 211: Daphnia magna Reproduction Test. [place unknown]. 25 p. OECD
 430 guideline for the testing of chemicals Report No.: 211.
- 431 Preuss TG, Hammers-Wirtz M, Hommen U, Rubach MN, Ratte HT. 2009. Development and
- 432 validation of an individual based Daphnia magna population model: The influence of crowding on

- 433 population dynamics. Ecological Modelling. 220(3):310–329.
- 434 doi:10.1016/j.ecolmodel.2008.09.018.
- Rösch A, Beck B, Hollender J, Stamm C, Singer H. 2019. Geringe Konzentration mit Großer
 Wirkung: Nachweis von Pyrethroid- und Organophosphat- Insektiziden in Schweizer Bächen im

437 pg l-1 Bereich. Aqua & Gas. 11:54–66.

- 438 Rundlöf M, Andersson GKS, Bommarco R, Fries I, Hederström V, Herbertsson L, Jonsson O, Klatt
- BK, Pedersen TR, Yourstone J, Smith HG. 2015. Seed coating with a neonicotinoid insecticide
 negatively affects wild bees. Nature. 521(7550):77–80. doi:10.1038/nature14420.
- 441 Salvatier J, Wiecki TV, Fonnesbeck C. 2016. Probabilistic programming in Python using PyMC3.
 442 PeerJ Computer Science. 2:e55. doi:10.7717/peerj-cs.55.
- 443 Schulz H. 1888. Ueber Hefegifte. Pflüger, Arch. 42(1):517–541. doi:10.1007/BF01669373.
- 444 Seabold S, Perktold J. 2010. Statsmodels: Econometric and Statistical Modeling with Python. In: van
- der Walt S, Millman J, editors. Proceedings of the 9th Python in Science Conference. Austin,
 Texas: [publisher unknown].
- 447 Shang J, Yao Y-S, Chen L-L, Zhu X-Z, Niu L, Gao X-K, Luo J-Y, Ji J-C, Cui J-J. 2021. Sublethal
- Exposure to Deltamethrin Stimulates Reproduction and Alters Symbiotic Bacteria in Aphis
 gossypii. J Agric Food Chem. 69(50):15097–15107. doi:10.1021/acs.jafc.1c05070.
- 450 Stebbing A. 1982. Hormesis The stimulation of growth by low levels of inhibitors. Science of The
 451 Total Environment. 22(3):213–234. doi:10.1016/0048-9697(82)90066-3.
- 452 Stebbing A. 1998. A theory for growth hormesis. Mutation Research/Fundamental and Molecular
 453 Mechanisms of Mutagenesis. 403(1-2):249–258. doi:10.1016/S0027-5107(98)00014-1.
- 454 Townsend JF, Luckey TD. 1960. Hormoligosis in pharmacology. J Am Med Assoc. 173:44–48.
- 455 doi:10.1001/jama.1960.73020190007010.
- Wang S, Huang B, Fan D, Agathokleous E, Guo Y, Zhu Y, Han J. 2021. Hormetic responses of soil
 microbiota to exogenous Cd: A step toward linking community-level hormesis to ecological risk
 assessment. J Hazard Mater. 416:125760. doi:10.1016/j.jhazmat.2021.125760.
- 459 Wolz M, Schrader A, Müller C. 2021. Direct and delayed effects of exposure to a sublethal
- 460 concentration of the insecticide λ-cyhalothrin on food consumption and reproduction of a leaf
 461 beetle. Sci Total Environ. 760:143381. doi:10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.143381.
- 462 Yang W, Spurlock F, Liu W, Gan J. 2006. Inhibition of aquatic toxicity of pyrethroid insecticides by
- 463 suspended sediment. Environ Toxicol Chem. 25(7):1913–1919. doi:10.1897/05-616r.1.
- 464