

Nitrogen study not reliable but plausible

The new method used by WUR researchers to measure the effect of nitrogen deposits on nature will not yet lead to amendments to government policy, writes Carola Schouten, Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV).

Her statement is in reply to critical questions from the green party Groen Links and the labour party PvdA. The minister feels the method has not matured sufficiently.

The questions were prompted by an article on the *Resource* website in which lead researcher Wieger Wamelink explains the

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study. The new method shows that a lot of nature has already been affected by the time the critical threshold adhered to in the policy is reached. This

applies to half of the habitats found in the Netherlands.

The researchers say the new method provides reliable data on 37 of the 60 habitat types. This conclusion, however, was not included in the excerpt. The minister says the key issue is the word 'reliable'. This has been replaced by the word 'plausible' in the report.

Reality

According to the minister, no errors were found in the method, and the dose-effect relationship that was revealed is 'clear enough'. 'However, that does not mean that the results reflect reality with complete certainty. There is still a lot of doubt about that.' This doubt is not shared by lead author Wamelink in the article, however. Whether the new method will result in adjustments to the critical threshold for nitrogen remains to be seen. Nitrogen experts are discussing this at the European level. According to the minister, sections of the report will be tabled in that discussion. RK