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# A novel hydrogenic spectroscopic technique for inferring the role of plasma-molecule interaction on power and particle balance during detached conditions

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**Abstract.** Detachment, an important mechanism for reducing target heat deposition, is achieved through reductions in power, particle and momentum; which are induced through plasma-atom and plasma-molecule interactions. Experimental research in how those reactions precisely contribute to detachment is limited.

Both plasma-atom as well as plasma-molecule interactions can result in excited hydrogen atoms which emit atomic line emission. In this work, we investigate a new Balmer Spectroscopy technique for Plasma-Molecule Interaction - BaSPMI. This first disentangles the Balmer line emission from the various plasma-atom and plasma-molecule interactions and secondly quantifies their contributions to particle (ionisation and recombination) and power balance (radiative power losses). Its performance is verified using synthetic diagnostic techniques of both attached and detached TCV and MAST-U SOLPS-ITER simulations.

We find that  $H_2$  plasma chemistry involving  $H_2^+$  and/or  $H^-$  can substantially elevate the  $H\alpha$  emission during detachment, which we show is an important precursor for Molecular Activated Recombination (MAR). An example illustration analysis of the full BaSPMI technique shows that the hydrogenic line series, even  $Ly\alpha$  as well as the medium-n Balmer lines, can be significantly influenced by plasma-molecule interactions by tens of percent. That has important implications for using atomic hydrogen spectroscopy for diagnosing divertor plasmas.

*Keywords:* Tokamak divertor; Molecules; plasma; SOLPS-ITER; Plasma spectroscopy; Power/particle balances; Detachment

## 1. Introduction

Divertor detachment is predicted to be crucial for handling the power exhaust of future fusion devices, such as ITER [1, 2, 3]. Divertor detachment implies a simultaneous reduction of the target plasma temperature, target ion flux and the target pressure. This is achieved through atomic and molecular processes driving power losses, momentum losses and particle losses (through a reduction of ion sources and/or increases of ion sinks). All three losses play an important role in the detached state and require detailed characterisation [4, 5, 6].

The hydrogenic line series (such as the Balmer line series) has been routinely monitored in tokamaks using both line of sight spectroscopy as well as filtered camera imaging systems. Those measurements can be used to study some of the plasma-atom interactions involved in detachment. First, this involved studying the increase of the Electron-Ion Recombination (EIR) ion sink during detachment [7, 8, 9]. Later studies involved estimating ion sources [5, 10, 11], as well as the power lost due to ionisation [10].

Plasma-molecule interactions involve both *collisions* and *reactions* which impact power, particle and momentum balance.  $H_2$  becomes rovibronically (e.g. rotationally, vibrationally and electronically) excited through *collisions* between the electrons and  $H_2$  [12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19]. De-excitation of electronically excited molecules can result in  $H_2$  Fulcher band emission. Vibrationally excited molecules strongly promote the creation of  $H^-$  and  $H_2^+$  (for  $T_e$  between 1-4 eV).  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  can undergo *reactions* with the plasma resulting in Molecular Activated Recombination (MAR) and Molecular Activated Ionisation (MAI) ion sinks/sources [15, 18, 6, 20, 21].

Experimental investigations on plasma-molecule interactions in tokamak divertors are, in general, few and are typically based on measuring the  $H_2$  Fulcher band spectra [13, 14, 16, 17]. Such measurements provide useful information on the rovibrational structure of  $H_2$  [13] and thus provide *direct* evidence of plasma-molecule *collisions* as the molecules get rovibronically excited by the plasma. It can also provide  $H_2$  dissociation estimates [16]. Models can be used to *extrapolate* those Fulcher band measurements (from plasma-molecule *collisions* resulting in excited molecules) to MAR/MAI plasma-molecule *reaction* estimates [13], on which the Fulcher band provides no *direct* information. The  $H_2$  Fulcher band is however complicated to diagnose given its limited brightness and that measuring it fully requires a relative wide wavelength (590-640 nm) range as well as a relatively high spectral resolution [13] to resolve its band structure.

$H^-$  and  $H_2^+$  undergo reactions with the plasma leading to MAR or MAI, which can also lead to *excited atoms* modifying the hydrogenic line series emission [13, 14, 22, 15, 21], particularly  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$ . Such molecule-derived modifications to the Balmer line series and their associated radiative losses have not yet been studied experimentally before in tokamak divertors and provide an alternative way of estimating MAR/MAI as well as atomic line radiation related to  $H_2$  plasma chemistry.

### 1.1. This work and its outline

In this work, we describe an analysis technique which can quantify the contributions of plasma-molecule interactions to the Balmer line emission and use that to estimate the role plasma-molecule interactions play on particle and power balance during detachment. Our technique - Balmer Spectroscopy Plasma-Molecule Interaction

(BaSPMI) is explained in section 2. BaSPMI first executes the technique previously developed by the authors [10, 9] to separate the *atomic* process contributions (electron-impact excitation and electron-ion recombination) from the analysis of medium- $n$  ( $n = 5, 6, 7$ ) Balmer lines (section 2.1).  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  emission is generally more sensitive to plasma-molecule interactions than the medium- $n$  Balmer lines. We extrapolate the *atomic process information* from the *medium- $n$  Balmer lines* to  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$ . We compare this to the measured  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  to estimate the contribution of excited atoms related to  $H_2$  plasma chemistry to  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  (section 2.2). Using collisional-radiative model results from Yacora (on the Web) [22, 23], Balmer line emission attributed to  $H_2$  plasma chemistry involving  $H_2^+$ ,  $H^-$  is quantitatively separated using the ratio of the sum of the molecular process contributions of  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  (section 2.3). Those contributions are then used individually to:

- Estimate Molecular Activated ion sinks (Recombination) /sources (Ionisation) - MAR/MAI for each emission channel (section 2.5.2).
- Estimate the contribution of plasma-molecule interactions to:
  - the entire hydrogenic spectra providing radiative loss estimates for excited atoms arising from plasma interactions with  $H_2$ ,  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  (section 2.5.1).
  - the medium- $n$  Balmer lines, which is accounted for self-consistently (section 2.4).

The applicability of this technique is verified using synthetic diagnostic data from TCV and MAST-U SOLPS simulations in section 3. Here the analysis estimates, based on a synthetic spectrometer signal analysed through BaSPMI, are compared against the values directly obtained from the simulation. The performance of the technique is further tested by artificially removing emission process contributions from the synthetic spectrometer signals and checking the analysis response (section 3.3). We find that the analysis behaves as expected: the synthetic diagnostic analysis estimates are in quantitative agreement (within uncertainty) with the direct values obtained from the simulation.

BaSPMI has been applied to a set of TCV experimental data and appears in [24]. For a complete picture of BaSPMI we have also included a brief example of the TCV experimental data analysis in this paper in section 4. This shows the capabilities of BaSPMI to separate various hydrogen emission lines in its different emission pathways (e.g. electron-ion recombination (of  $H^+$ ), electron-impact excitation (of  $H$ ) and related to  $H_2$  plasma chemistry (involving  $H_2$ ,  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ ).

We further discuss the Balmer line emission associated with  $H_2$  (as opposed to  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ ) in section 5.1, which we show is expected to be negligible in the discussed detached divertor conditions. As the analysis relies on the fact that  $H_2$  plasma chemistry results in additional  $H\alpha$  emission, other processes which could result in additional  $H\alpha$  emission may interfere with this analysis. These other contributions are discussed and estimated in section 5.2. We discuss how using this analysis for MAR/MAI estimates compares against using model extrapolations from the  $H_2$  Fulcher band measurements in section 5.4. The dependence of this analysis chain on molecular data is further discussed in section 5.5. The application of BaSPMI to more reactor-like tokamak environments is discussed in section 5.6, together with analysis enhancement suggestions.

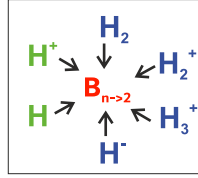
The development of BaSPMI was motivated by observing that the 'atomic extrapolated  $H\alpha$ ' bifurcates from the measured  $H\alpha$  at the detachment onset [25]. Our theoretical analysis indicates that this bifurcation is a particularly powerful

indicator for plasma-molecule interactions. This is in agreement with the application of the *full BaSPMI analysis* on experimental TCV data in [24], where this bifurcation is shown to correspond to the onset of MAR as well as Balmer line emission related to  $H_2^+$  chemistry. In this work we show that this bifurcation can be used for *quantitative* MAR estimates, which are in agreement with those from the full BaSPMI analysis (section 5.3). The full self-consistent analysis chain BaSPMI is, however, required for estimating the impact of  $H_2$  plasma chemistry on the total hydrogenic spectra which can be important for ionisation source estimates as highlighted in [24].

$H_2$  plasma chemistry involves reactions which can result in excited atoms and thus atomic line emission. It is important to account for this when analysing the hydrogenic Balmer line series. This work provides an analysis technique - BaSPMI to dissect the hydrogen Balmer line emission into its various components and use this to perform a power and particle balance analysis accounting for both plasma-atom interactions as well as plasma-molecule interactions.

## 2. Spectral analysis techniques of inferring information on plasma-molecule interaction from the Balmer spectra

The goal of our analysis technique BaSPMI is to quantify the contribution of plasma-molecule interactions to  $H\alpha$  ‡ and use this to provide quantitative estimates on the influence of molecules on power losses; particle (ion) sources/sinks and Balmer line emission. A schematic overview of the contribution of the various plasma-atom and plasma-molecule interactions to excited hydrogen neutrals (which emit hydrogenic line emission) are shown in 1.

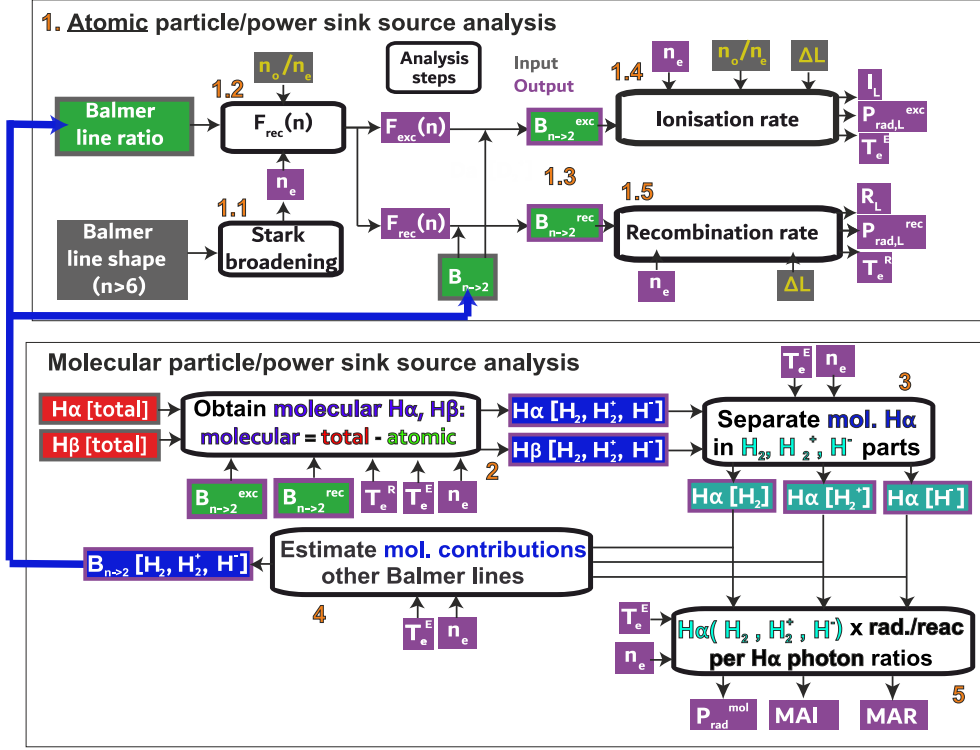


**Figure 1.** Schematic overview of the various reaction channels resulting in hydrogenic atomic Balmer line emission, adopted from [22]. Blue indicates contributions related to  $H_2$  plasma chemistry, green indicates purely "atomic" interactions and red indicates the total emission.

The analysis developed in this work builds upon the Balmer line analysis techniques developed previously by the authors in [10], of which we provide a summary in section 2.1. For the analysis we utilise the measurements of  $H\alpha$ ,  $H\beta$  in addition to two medium-n Balmer lines ( $n=5,6,7$ ) [10]. The analysis works on the basis of assigning all *measured* Balmer line emission to the sum of 1) the *expected* Balmer line emission from plasma-atom interactions (involving  $H$ ,  $H^+$ ) and 2)  $H_2$  plasma chemistry related contributions (involving  $H_2$ ,  $H_2^+$ ,  $H^-$ ). Contributions from  $H_3^+$  are ignored (see section 2.3). A flowchart of the analysis scheme is provided in figure 2 and consists of several steps.

‡ In this work we denote  $H$  as hydrogen since most of the atomic/molecular data is available for hydrogen. In experiments, however, generally deuterium is used - more information can be found in section 5.5

1. We apply the analysis technique from [10] on the medium-n Balmer lines, *which considers only atomic processes* (e.g. electron-impact excitation of  $H$  and electron-ion recombination of  $H^+$ ). Initially we attribute all medium-n Balmer line emission to only atomic processes. The analysis from [10] consists of several sub-steps and more information can be found in section 2.1:
  - 1.1. We infer the electron density from the Balmer line shape through Stark broadening [10, 25].
  - 1.2. The fraction of the medium-n Balmer line ratio due to electron-impact excitation  $F_{exc}(n)$  and electron-ion recombination  $F_{rec}(n) = 1 - F_{exc}(n)$  is determined from the ratio of two medium-n Balmer lines. This uses an assumed possible range of neutral fractions  $n_o/n_e$ .
  - 1.3. These fractions are multiplied with the measured medium-n Balmer line brightness to obtain the Balmer line brightnesses due to electron-impact excitation ( $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{exc}$ ) and electron-ion recombination ( $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{rec}$ ).
  - 1.4. The (line-integrated) ionisation rate  $I_L$ , radiative power loss due to electron-impact excitation  $P_{rad,L}^{exc}$  and respective excitation region temperature  $T_e^E$  is estimated from  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{exc}$  using an assumed range of possible neutral fractions  $n_o/n_e$  and pathlengths  $\Delta L$ .
  - 1.5. The (line-integrated) recombination rate  $R_L$ , radiative power loss due to electron-ion recombination  $P_{rad,L}^{rec}$  and respective recombination region temperature  $T_e^R$  is estimated from  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{rec}$  using an assumed range of possible pathlengths  $\Delta L$ .
2. The *sum of the contributions* of  $H_2$  plasma chemistry (involving  $H_2, H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ ) to  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  are estimated using the measured  $H\alpha, H\beta$  brightnesses and outputs from the "atomic particle/power sink/source analysis" as will be explained in section 2.2.
3. The *individual contributions* ( $H_2, H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ ) of plasma-chemistry to  $H\alpha$  are *separated* using the ratio between the sum of those contributions to  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  as will be explained in section 2.3.
4. The individual contributions of  $H_2$  plasma-chemistry to  $H\alpha$  are used to estimate the individual contributions of  $H_2$  plasma-chemistry to the medium-n Balmer line as will be explained in section 2.4. This information is used to modify the atomic process contributions to the medium-n Balmer line brightnesses in step 1, which is then iterated up until step 4 until a converged result is obtained.
5. After a converged result is obtained, the individual contributions of  $H\alpha$  associated with  $H_2$  plasma-chemistry are used to estimate (line-integrated) MAI ion sources, MAR ion sinks as well as the (line-integrated) radiated power due to excited atoms after plasma-molecule reactions involving  $H_2, H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  -  $P_{rad,L}^{mol}$ . This will be explained in sections 2.5.2 and 2.5.1.



**Figure 2.** Schematic overview of the full analysis routine. The atomic analysis part has been adopted from [10]. The orange numbers indicate the sequence of the various steps. The nomenclature used is adopted from [10]:  $n_o/n_e$  - neutral fraction;  $\Delta L$  - emission pathlength;  $n_e$  - electron density (from Stark broadening [10]);  $T_e^E$  - estimated electron temperature in the excitation region;  $T_e^R$  - estimated electron temperature in the recombination region;  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{exc}$  - atomic Balmer line emission due to excitation;  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{rec}$  - atomic Balmer line emission due to recombination. The steps within the blocks 'Obtain molecular  $H\alpha$ ', 'Separate mol.  $H\alpha$ ', 'Estimate mol. contributions', ' $H\alpha(H_2, H_2^+, H^-)$  x rad./reac per  $H\alpha$  photon ratios' are shown in more detailed in figures 3, 4, 6, 7 respectively.

There are two different versions of the analysis we can apply, ranging in complexity: 1) a 'simple' version: include only 'atomic' emission channels for the medium- $n$  Balmer lines (e.g. no iteration applied) and optionally estimate the molecular component of  $H\alpha$  and assume this is purely due to  $H_2^+$  to obtain MAR/MAI/radiative loss rates (see section 5.3); 2) the complex 'full' version, which does apply the iterative technique and separates  $H\alpha$  into its  $H_2, H_2^+, H^-$  contributions. We have applied the 'full' version to the results unless otherwise specified.

We summarise the reactions on which BaSPMI provides estimates, in terms of radiative loss and particle sinks/sources in table 1. Note that this table is not an overview of all the important plasma-molecule interactions. Most notably, the table does not contain the reactions where  $H_2^+$  &  $H^-$  are being 'created' as these do not directly lead to Balmer line emission (but the destruction of these species, as shown in table 1, does).

§ Whether interactions with  $H_2^+$  are part of a MAR, MAD or MAI chain depends on the reaction process which *created*  $H_2^+$  (e.g. whether it is molecular charge exchange  $H^+ + H_2 \rightarrow H_2^+ + H$  or  $H_2$

Reactions	Ion bal.	Emission	Comment
$e^- + H \rightarrow e^- + H$	N/A	✓	Electron impact excitation (of $H$ )
$e^- + H \rightarrow 2e^- + H^+$	✓	N/A	Ionisation
$e^- + H^+ \rightarrow H$	✓	✓	(Radiative) Electron-Ion Recombination (of $H^+$ ) - EIR
$2e^- + H^+ \rightarrow e^- + H$	✓	✓	(Three body) Electron-Ion Recombination (of $H^+$ ) - EIR
$e^- + H_2 \rightarrow e^- + H + H$	N/A	✓	Dissociation
$e^- + H_2 \rightarrow 2e^- + H + H^+$	✓	✓	Electron impact dissociative ionisation (part of MAI chain)
$e^- + H_2^+ \rightarrow 2e^- + H^+ + H^+$	✓	N/A	Electron impact dissociative ionisation (MAI)
$e^- + H_2^+ \rightarrow H + H^+ + e^-$	N/A	✓	Dissociation (part of MAD (or MAI§) chain)
$e^- + H_2^+ \rightarrow H + H$	✓	✓	Dissociative recombination (part of MAR (or MAD§) chain)
$H^+ + H^- \rightarrow H + H^+ + e^-$	N/A	✓	Proton impact ionisation (part of MAD chain)
$H^+ + H^- \rightarrow H + H$	✓	✓	Mutual neutralisation (part of MAR chain)

**Table 1.** Overview of the various reactions on which the analysis provides information in terms of particle ( $H^+$  ion) balance (bal.) and radiative power loss (radiation). If the analysis provides information on it, it is denoted with a '✓' (whereas N/A implies not applicable). MAR/MAI/MAD mean Molecular Activated Recombination/Ionisation/Dissociation

### 2.1. Atomic Balmer line analysis and analysis framework

The basic steps of the the atomic Balmer line analysis technique of the upper block of figure 2 were discussed above and some important additional details are discussed below here. More information can be found in [10].

In this analysis the emission is modelled using a collisional-radiative model by a 0D 'semi slab-like' plasma model. Here the emission region has a pathlength (e.g. width)  $\Delta L$ , and an electron density  $n_e$ , while a different temperature is ascribed to the electron-impact excitation (of  $H$ ) -  $T_e^E$  and electron-ion recombination (of  $H^+$ ) -  $T_e^R$  regions (essentially a 'dual slab' model). For simplicity, this model assumes that the  $H^+$  density equals the electron density ( $n_{H^+} = n_e$ , ignoring impurities); which is expected to have a negligible impact [9, 25, 10] on this analysis. The emission for the excitation/recombination region is determined using results from collisional radiative modelling from ADAS [26, 27] in the form of Photon Emission Coefficients (PECs - photons  $m^3s^{-1}$ ). The PEC is defined as the population coefficient ( $\frac{n_p}{n_e n_0}$  where  $n_p$  is the population density of the  $p$  state and  $n_0 = \sum_p n_p$  is the total density of the emitter (sum of the population densities)) multiplied with the respective Einstein coefficient  $A_{pq}$  for a  $p \rightarrow q$  transition:  $PEC(p, q) = A_{pq} \frac{n_p}{n_e n_{ground}}$  [26, 27].

All the analysis shown in this work is done in a 'probabilistic' manner, which is also employed for all plasma-molecule interaction related estimates [10]. For *each* input parameter in figure 2, depending on their uncertainty, a 'Probability Density Function' (PDF) is ascribed. The peak of this parameter corresponds to the measured input parameter, whereas its width and shape corresponds to the expected uncertainty of

ionisation  $e^- + H_2 \rightarrow 2e^- + H_2$ ). This is explained in section 2.5.2

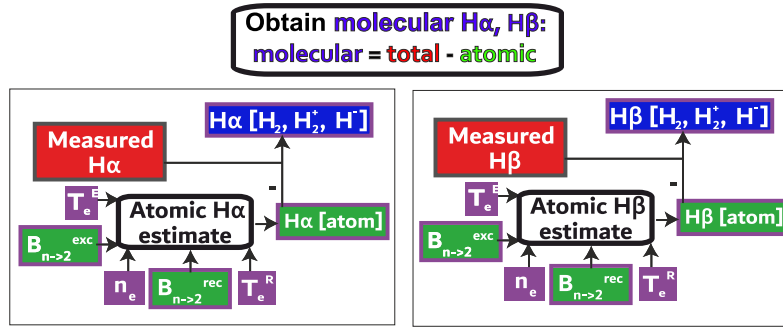


this parameter. According to those PDFs, samples of input values for each parameter in figure 2 are obtained through Monte Carlo sampling. These are then propagated to the output parameters, yielding a PDF for the output parameters from which the estimates and their uncertainties are obtained.

The full atomic & molecular analysis requires implementing  $H\alpha$  &  $H\beta$  brightnesses in addition to the two medium-n Balmer lines used in the atomic analysis in [10]. This required modification to the PDF description of the relative brightnesses with respect to [10], which has to be similar for all possible line ratios. This was achieved using multivariate normal distributions with a set correlation strength according to [28]; which leads to normal distributions for all the various line ratios ( $\sigma = 0.075$ ) as well as the line intensities ( $\sigma = 0.15$ ) [28]. In addition to [10], we have also included random, uncorrelated, uncertainties in both the atomic and molecular collisional radiative model coefficients (e.g. PECs and reaction rates from ADAS [26, 27], Yacora [22, 23] and AMJUEL [29, 30, 31]); which are parameterised by uniform probability density functions. For the atomic rates/emission coefficients an uncertainty of 12.5% is assumed; while this is assumed to be 25% for the molecular related coefficients.

## 2.2. Inferring molecular contributions to $H\alpha$ emission

After the medium-n Balmer lines are analysed from the viewpoint of "atomic" interactions, those results are used with measured  $H\alpha$ ,  $H\beta$  brightnesses to estimate the contribution of  $H_2$  plasma chemistry to  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$ , which is illustrated in figure 3, which is step 2 in figure 2.



**Figure 3.** Schematic analysis flow chart for separating the atomic and molecular contributions from the  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  emission. This represents step 2 'Obtain molecular  $H\alpha$ ,  $H\beta$ ' in figure 2.

This is achieved by assuming that the *total measured*  $H\alpha$ ,  $H\beta$  ( $B_{3,4\rightarrow2}^{total}$ ) equals its *atomic* part ( $B_{3,4\rightarrow2}^{atom}$ ) plus its *molecular* part ( $B_{3,4\rightarrow2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-}$ ) - as shown in equation 1. That assumption is further discussed for TCV in section 5.2.

$$B_{3,4\rightarrow2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-} = B_{3,4\rightarrow2}^{total, measured} - B_{3,4\rightarrow2}^{atom} \quad (1)$$

The output information from the *atomic* analysis of the medium-n Balmer lines (figure 2) is utilised to *extrapolate* the *atomic parts* of the medium-n Balmer line brightnesses of a Balmer line (typically  $n = 5, 6, 7$ ) to  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$ , yielding the *atomic parts* of the  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  brightnesses. Utilising the recombination/excitation inferred temperatures ( $T_e^E$ ,  $T_e^R$ ) and the Stark inferred density ( $n_e$ ), the individual excitation

( $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{exc}$ ) and recombination ( $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{rec}$ ) medium-n Balmer line brightnesses are extrapolated to  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  ( $B_{3,4 \rightarrow 2}^{atom, extrapolated}$ ) as shown in equation 2 and schematically in figure 3, [10].

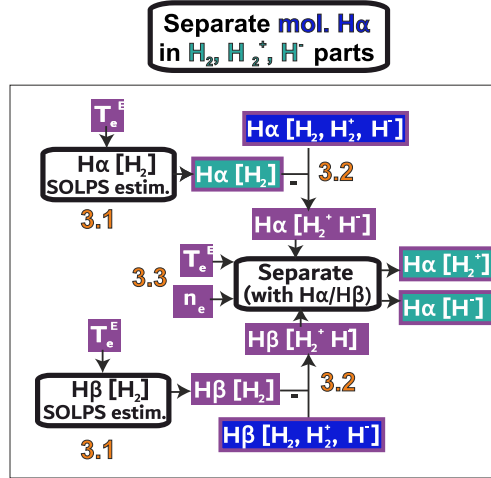
$$B_{3,4 \rightarrow 2}^{atom, extrapolated} = B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{exc} \frac{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{exc}(n_e, T_e^E)}{PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{exc}(n_e, T_e^E)} + B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{rec} \frac{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{rec}(n_e, T_e^R)}{PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{rec}(n_e, T_e^R)} \quad (2)$$

The extrapolated 'atomic' contribution to  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  is then subtracted from the total measured  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  brightnesses (equation 1, figure 3) to estimate the  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  brightnesses associated with  $H_2$  plasma.

### 2.3. Separating multiple molecular contributions to $H\alpha$ emission

Now that we obtained an estimate for  $B_{3,4 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-}$ , we will separate the various contributions using the Balmer line emission model for  $B_{3,4 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-}$  highlighted in section Appendix A. The steps for this are highlighted in figure 4 (which is step 3 in figure 2) and use the electron density and electron temperature obtained from Stark broadening and the atomic analysis:

- 3.1. The  $H_2$  contribution of  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  are estimated using an assumed relation between the  $H_2$  density and the electron temperature, which is obtained from SOLPS simulations (more information is provided below and in section 5.1).
- 3.2. This  $H_2$  contribution is subtracted from the total  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  brightnesses attributed to plasma-molecule interactions to obtain the  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  brightnesses attributed to  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ .
- 3.3. The ratio of those  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  brightnesses are used to separate the  $H\alpha$  emission attributed to  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ .



**Figure 4.** Schematic analysis flow chart for separating the various pathways of the molecular  $H\alpha$  emission. This represents step 3 'Separate mol. $H\alpha$  in  $H_2$ ,  $H_2^+$ ,  $H^-$  parts' in figure 2.

We have used SOLPS-ITER simulation results from TCV and MAST-U to establish a relation between the expected  $H_2$  density times the pathlength  $\Delta L$  and the (excitation) electron temperature [32] -  $g_{H_2}(T_e^E) \approx \Delta L n_{H_2}$ , which is used to estimate the Balmer line brightnesses attributed to  $H_2$  -  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}$  as shown in equation 3. After having estimated  $B_{3,4 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}$ , this is used to estimate the  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  emission attributed to  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ :  $B_{3,4 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+} + B_{3,4 \rightarrow 2}^{H^-} = B_{3,4 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-} - B_{3,4 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}$ .

$$B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2} = g_{H_2}(T_e^E) n_e PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e^E) \quad (3)$$

Plasma-molecule interactions involving  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  lead to different  $H\beta/H\alpha$  ratios as shown in figure 5, which is calculated using data from Yacora (on the Web) [22, 23]. This distinction can be used to quantitatively separate emission contributions from  $H^-$  and  $H_2^+$  using equation 4, which can be readily obtained when the  $B_{3,4 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+, H^-}$  brightnesses are expressed using a plasma-slab model (equation A.2). We use the Stark broadening derived electron temperature  $n_e$  and the electron impact excitation emission derived temperature ( $T_e^E$ ) to interrogate the required PEC coefficients as this is a more reliable overall temperature (with uncertainty) indicator of the plasma - especially for a hotter plasma [10] - which ultimately is important for MAI estimates (section 2.5.2). However, using the electron-ion recombination derived temperature instead for any of the molecular estimates would not change any of the obtained conclusions in the tested conditions, apart from reducing MAI rates.

$$f_{H_2^+, mol. H\alpha} \equiv \frac{B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}}{B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+} + B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H^-}} = \frac{1}{1 + C}$$

$$C = \frac{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H^-}(n_e, T_e^E) \left[ PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}(n_e, T_e^E) (H\beta/H\alpha)|_{H^-, H_2^+} - PEC_{4 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}(n_e, T_e^E) \right]}{PEC_{4 \rightarrow 2}^{H^-}(n_e, T_e^E) - PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H^-}(n_e, T_e^E) (H\beta/H\alpha)|_{H^-, H_2^+}} \quad (4)$$

Now we have all the information required to determine all the emission contributions to  $H\alpha$ , which are summarised in equation 5.

$$B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{atom, extrapolated} = B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{exc} \frac{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{exc}(n_e, T_e^E)}{PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{exc}(n_e, T_e^E)} + B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{rec} \frac{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{rec}(n_e, T_e^R)}{PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{rec}(n_e, T_e^R)}$$

$$B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-} = B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{total, measured} - B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{atom, extrapolated}$$

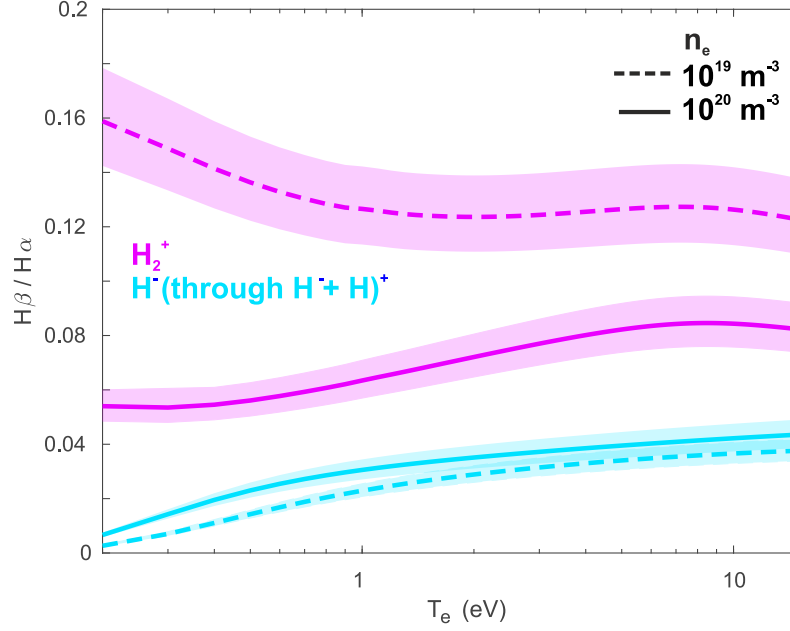
$$B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2} = g_{H_2}(T_e^E) PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e^E)$$

$$B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+} = (B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-} - B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}) \times f_{H_2^+, mol. H\alpha}$$

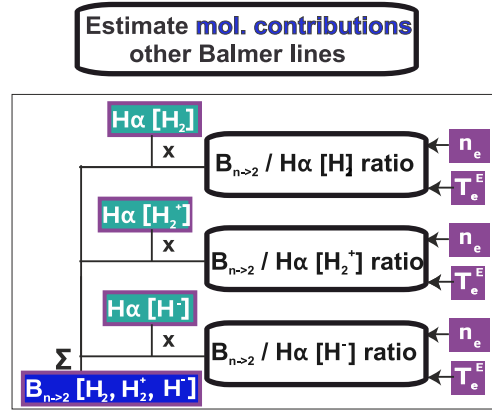
$$B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H^-} = (B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-} - B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}) \times (1 - f_{H_2^+, mol. H\alpha}) \quad (5)$$

#### 2.4. Molecular contributions to $n > 3$ Balmer line emission

The molecular contributions to  $H\alpha$  must be consistent with molecular contributions to all Balmer lines in the analysis, including the medium-n Balmer lines used in the atomic part of the analysis. To achieve this, we use the separation of the molecular



**Figure 5.**  $H\beta/H\alpha$  ratio using YACORA PEC coefficients for  $H_2^+$  and  $H^- + H^+$  for two different electron densities as function of  $T_e$  with shaded uncertainties (based on the assumed 25 % uncertainty for molecular coefficients).



**Figure 6.** Schematic analysis flow chart for estimating the molecular contributions to the other Balmer lines based on the various  $H\alpha$  'molecular' emission channels. This represents step 4 'Separate mol. contributions other Balmer lines' in figure 2.

part of  $H\alpha$  (equation 5) to extrapolate those brightnesses to the medium-n Balmer lines utilized in the atomic part of the analysis (section 2.1) as illustrated in figure 6, which represents step 4 in figure 2. This is achieved by modeling the ratio between the medium-n Balmer line and  $H\alpha$  for each Balmer line emission process attributed to plasma-molecule interactions using  $T_e^E$  and  $n_e$ . Those ratios are multiplied with the separated  $H\alpha$  brightnesses attributed to  $H_2$ ,  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ , which are then summed to obtain the total brightness of the medium-n Balmer lines attributed to plasma-molecule

interactions. This is similar to how the atomic part of  $H\alpha$  was extrapolated using the medium- $n$  Balmer lines in section 2.2.

Molecular contributions to the medium- $n$  Balmer line reduce their atomic estimates as shown in equation 6. This modifies the inferred temperature from the atomic part of the analysis and subsequently all molecular estimates. Therefore, the molecular contributions to the medium- $n$  Balmer lines according to equation 6 are fed back into the atomic analysis (section 2.1) after which the analysis covered in sections 2.1 through 2.4 is repeated iteratively (see appendix Appendix B) as is schematically shown in Fig 2 with the blue arrow. The result is a self-consistent separation of all the used Balmer lines into its atomic (electron-impact excitation (of  $H$ ) and electron-ion recombination (of  $H^+$ )) and plasma-molecule interaction ( $H_2$ ,  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ ) related contributions.

$$\begin{aligned}
 B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{tot, measured} &= B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-} + B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{atom} \\
 B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{atom} &= B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{tot, measured} - B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2} - B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+} - B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H^- + H^+} \\
 B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{atom} &= B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{tot, measured} - B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2} \frac{PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e^E)}{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e^E)} - B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+} \frac{PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}(n_e, T_e^E)}{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}(n_e, T_e^E)} - \\
 &\quad B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H^-} \frac{PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H^- + H^+}(n_e, T_e^E)}{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H^- + H^+}(n_e, T_e^E)}
 \end{aligned} \tag{6}$$

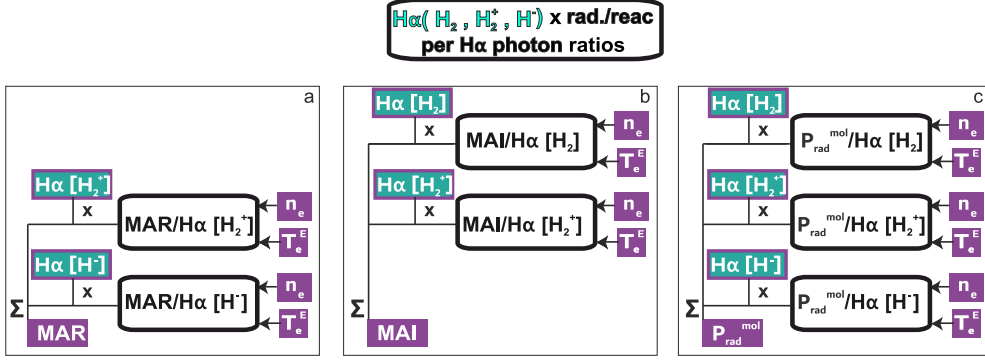
### 2.5. Inferring radiative losses and MAI/MAR from plasma-molecule interactions

The separated brightnesses of  $H\alpha$  are used to determine the various atomic reaction rates/power losses (as is done in [10]), as well as the various MAR/MAI ion sinks/sources and hydrogenic radiative power losses (table 1) related to excited atoms after plasma-molecule interaction. The analysis steps of this approach are shown schematically in figure 7, which is step 5 in figure 2. For all the cases in figure 7, the separated  $H\alpha$  brightnesses are multiplied with the "effective radiative loss (figure 7 c) (or MAI/MAR reaction rate - figure 7 a/b) per emitted  $H\alpha$  photon" using the Stark broadening inferred  $n_e$  and electron-impact excitation derived  $T_e^E$ . This provides radiative losses (or MAI/MAR reaction rates) for each process, which are summed to provide the total hydrogenic radiative power loss estimates and MAR/MAI rates.

#### 2.5.1. Inferring hydrogenic line radiative losses from plasma-molecule interactions

Although  $H\alpha$  emission does not lead to significant radiative losses directly, considering most plasma radiation is in the VUV [33], it can be an indicator for significant radiative losses.  $H\alpha$  emission, corresponding to the  $3 \rightarrow 2$  transition, directly implies also the presence of  $Ly\beta$  ( $3 \rightarrow 1$ ) emission. Utilising the associated Einstein coefficients and photon energies, 6.5 times more radiative loss arises due to  $Ly\beta$  than  $H\alpha$  (e.g.  $\frac{E_{Ly\beta} \times A_{31}/A_{32}}{E_{H\alpha}} \approx 6.5$ ). Since  $H\alpha$  indicates a transition to the  $n = 2$  excited state, the enhancement of  $H\alpha$  should also lead to some enhancement of the  $n = 2$  excited state, which subsequently results in  $Ly\alpha$  emission - which carries 5.8 times more energy than a  $H\alpha$  photon.

It is thus clear that, at a minimum, a power loss of the order of ten more than the power loss of  $H\alpha$  itself is associated with related (V)UV emission. Since this



**Figure 7.** Schematic analysis flow chart for estimating MAR (a), MAI (b) and radiative loss rates (c) from the separated  $H\alpha$  'molecular' emission pathways. This represents step 5 ' $H\alpha(H_2, H_2^+, H^-) \times \text{rad./reac}$  per  $H\alpha$  photon ratios' in figure 2.

only covers the influence of plasma-molecule interactions on the  $n = 3$  populated state, this is a conservative estimate of the radiative losses due to plasma-molecule interactions. For example, plasma-molecule interactions could potentially directly lead to an enhancement of the  $n = 2$  populated state, and thus directly enhance  $Ly\alpha$  radiation losses.

It is important to repeat that the power loss estimated here is *radiation from hydrogenic (atomic) emission lines* arising from *excited atoms* after *plasma-molecule interactions*. This is different from radiative losses associated with molecular band emission which has been the subject of previous research [17, 33], where the brightness of several molecular (Fulcher, Werner (VUV)) bands were measured and its associated radiative power loss was estimated to be negligible. Therefore, the atomic radiative losses from plasma-molecule interactions likely plays a dominant role in the radiative losses attributed to plasma-molecule interactions in detached plasmas.

To estimate radiative power losses due to plasma-molecule interactions, we utilise Yacora (on the Web) [22, 23] to model the most dominant lines ( $n < 7$ ) of the atomic Balmer and Lyman spectra associated with plasma-molecule interactions. These are multiplied with their respective photon energies and summed to estimate the radiated hydrogenic (atomic) power loss due to excited atoms after plasma-molecule interaction. This power is then divided by the  $H\alpha$  emission attributed to those channels, obtaining a ratio representing 'total radiated energy (eV) per  $H\alpha$  photon' for each individual

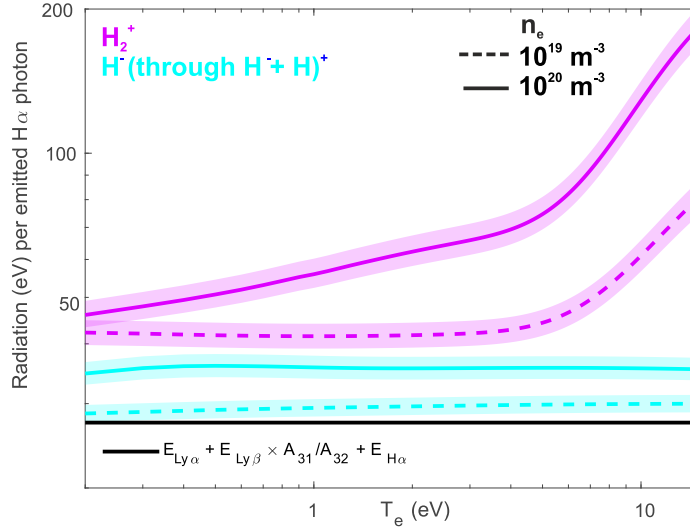
emission channel (equation 7). We represent this as  $\left(\frac{P_{rad,L}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-}}{B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-}}\right)$  where  $P_{rad,L}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-}$  is

a line-integrated radiation rate in  $W/m^2$ , which can be determined by multiplying the respective brightness with the respective 'total radiation per  $H\alpha$  photon' coefficient:

$$P_{rad,L}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-} = B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-} \times \frac{P_{rad,L}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-}}{B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-}}.$$

$$\begin{aligned}
\frac{P_{rad,L}^{H_2}}{B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}} &= \sum_{i=2,3,4,5,6} \sum_{j=1,2;i>j} \frac{PEC_{i \rightarrow j}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e)}{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e)} \\
\frac{P_{rad,L}^{H_2^+}}{B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}} &= \sum_{i=2,3,4,5,6} \sum_{j=1,2;i>j} \frac{PEC_{i \rightarrow j}^{H_2^+}(n_e, T_e)}{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}(n_e, T_e)} \\
\frac{P_{rad,L}^{H^-}}{B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H^-}} &= \sum_{i=2,3,4,5} \sum_{j=1,2;i>j} \frac{PEC_{i \rightarrow j}^{H^-+H^+}(n_e, T_e)}{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H^-+H^+}(n_e, T_e)}
\end{aligned} \tag{7}$$

Examples of these coefficients are shown in figure 8 and are compared to the minimum power loss expected from a  $H\alpha$  photon due to molecular reactions (when also accounting for associated  $Ly\beta$  and  $Ly\alpha$  emission). This indicates roughly 20-100 eV power loss per observed  $H\alpha$  photon that is due to  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  contributions to  $H\alpha$ . This is (especially for  $H_2^+$ ) significantly larger than the minimum expected radiative losses based on  $H\alpha$ , which indicates that  $H_2$  plasma chemistry can also result in  $n = 2$  excited atoms, without having to go through the  $n = 3$  state.



**Figure 8.** Radiative loss (eV) per emitted  $H\alpha$  photon derived from molecular contributions associated with  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  (assuming  $H$  atoms arising from plasma-molecule interactions involve  $H^-$  emission comes from the  $H^- + H^+$  reaction) at different electron densities. The uncertainty margins arise from the assumed 25 % uncertainty in all PECs attributed to  $H_2$  plasma chemistry. The black curve shows the roughly expected power loss directly explainable by the  $H\alpha$  photon (e.g. if one would have the power loss of a  $H\alpha$  photon ( $3 \rightarrow 2$ ) plus associated  $Ly\alpha$  ( $2 \rightarrow 1$ ) and  $Ly\beta$  photons ( $3 \rightarrow 1$ ) per emitted  $H\alpha$  photon).

### 2.5.2. Inferring ion sinks/sources (MAR/MAI) from plasma-molecule interactions

Similarly to how the radiative losses per  $H\alpha$  photon are calculated above, one can also calculate ion sinks/sources (MAR/MAI) per  $H\alpha$  photon - equation 8 for  $H_2$  and  $H^-$ . For the MAR/MAI rates we use AMJUEL [30, 29, 34, 31] rates H4 7.2.3a - MAR  $H^-$ ; H4 2.2.10 - MAI  $H_2$ .

$$\begin{aligned}\left.\frac{MAR}{H_{\alpha}^{mol}}\right|_{H^-} &= \frac{MAR_{H^-}(n_e, T_e)}{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H^-+H^+}(n_e, T_e)} \\ \left.\frac{MAI}{H_{\alpha}^{mol}}\right|_{H_2} &= \frac{MAI_{H_2}(n_e, T_e)}{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e)}\end{aligned}\quad (8)$$

Calculating MAR/MAI ion sinks/sources for  $H_2^+$  requires additional steps as not only the *destruction* of  $H_2^+$  matters, which can result in excited  $H$  atoms thus providing the  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}$  we infer, *but also the creation process of  $H_2^+$* .  $H_2^+$  can be created either through molecular charge exchange (CX) ( $H_2 + H^+ \rightarrow H_2^+ + H$ ), *which turns a plasma ion into a neutral*, or ionisation of  $H_2$  ( $e^- + H_2 \rightarrow 2e^- + H_2^+$ ) *which does not turn a plasma ion into a neutral*. When  $H_2^+$  reactions with an electron, there are  $3 \times 2 = 6$  possible outcomes: 1,2)  $e^- + H_2^+ \rightarrow H + H$  (AMJUEL reaction H4 2.2.14) is MAR for molecular CX and MAD for  $H_2$  ionisation; 3,4)  $e^- + H_2^+ \rightarrow H^+ + H$  (AMJUEL reaction H4 2.2.12) is MAD for molecular CX and MAI for  $H_2$  ionisation; 5,6)  $e^- + H_2^+ \rightarrow H^+ + H^+$  (AMJUEL reaction H4 2.2.14) is MAI for molecular CX and MAI (x2) for  $H_2$  ionisation.

As neither of those  $H_2^+$  creation processes result in excited atoms, we cannot extract information on which process is dominant using only the Balmer line spectra. Instead, we need to model the relative strength of the two  $H_2^+$  creation process based on  $n_e$  and  $T_e^E$  using their reaction rates (equation 9). This assumes the electron density equals the hydrogen ion density and makes assumptions on the distribution of vibrational states (see section 5.5). For  $\langle \sigma v \rangle_{H^++H_2 \rightarrow H+H_2^+}$  we use data from [18] (for deuterium), whereas from  $\langle \sigma v \rangle_{H^++H_2 \rightarrow H+H_2^+}$  we use data from AMJUEL H4 2.2.9.

$$f_{H_2^+ from CX} = \frac{\langle \sigma v \rangle_{H^++H_2 \rightarrow H+H_2^+}}{\langle \sigma v \rangle_{H^++H_2 \rightarrow H+H_2^+} + \langle \sigma v \rangle_{e^-+H_2 \rightarrow 2e^-+H_2^+}} \quad (9)$$

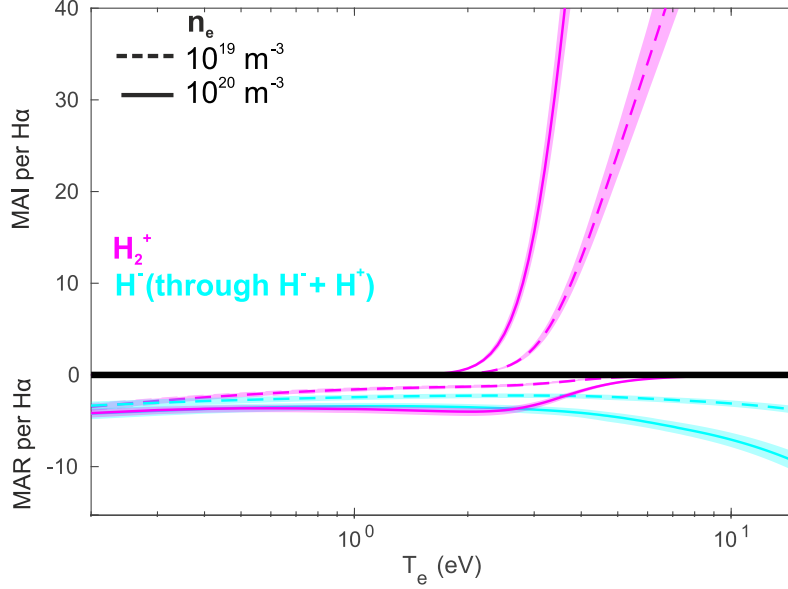
We use this model and combine it with the possible MAI/MAR outcomes to calculate the MAI/MAR to  $H_{\alpha}$  emission ratios for  $H_2^+$  shown in equation 10. The notation MAR/MAI/MAD for the rates of equation 10 refers to what the process would be if  $H_2^+$  is purely created through molecular charge exchange (e.g.  $f_{H_2^+ from CX} = 1$ ). The impact of different reaction rates on  $f_{H_2^+ from CX}$  and subsequently the "MAR and MAI to  $H_{\alpha}$  emission coefficient ratios" are discussed in section 5.5.

$$\begin{aligned}\left.\frac{MAR}{H_{\alpha}^{mol}}\right|_{H_2^+} &= \frac{f_{H_2^+ from CX}(n_e, T_e)MAR(n_e, T_e)}{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}(n_e, T_e)} \\ \left.\frac{MAI}{H_{\alpha}^{mol}}\right|_{H_2^+} &= \frac{(2 - f_{H_2^+ from CX}(n_e, T_e))MAI(n_e, T_e) + (1 - f_{H_2^+ from CX})MAD(n_e, T_e)}{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}(n_e, T_e)}\end{aligned}\quad (10)$$

Figure 9, which shows the calculated MAR/MAI per  $H_{\alpha}$  photon, indicates that at detachment relevant temperatures ( $T_e < 3$  eV)  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  have (within experimental uncertainty) similar MAR per  $H_{\alpha}$  photon ratios (4-7). MAI starts to dominate over MAR for  $H_2^+$  at  $T_e > 3$  eV. The MAI per  $H_{\alpha}$  ratio is particularly sensitive to  $T_e$  for  $T_e > 3$  eV due to the dependence of  $f_{H_2^+ from CX}$  on  $T_e$ . Considering that the



inferred  $T_e$  will have an uncertainty, this likely leads to large uncertainties in the MAI estimations.



**Figure 9.** MAR (negative) and MAI (positive) per emitted  $H\alpha$  photon for  $H_2^+$ ,  $H^-$  at different electron densities. The black curve represents zero. The uncertainties are provided by the default assumption of an uncertainty of 25 % on all used molecular reaction rates and emission coefficient in addition to an assumed  $H_2$  temperature range ([0.37 - 10] eV using a log-uniform distribution) - see section 5.5. The indicated uncertainties are 68% confidence margins

### 3. Verification using synthetic diagnostic techniques

There are numerous ways in which the analysis approach uses a simplified emission model, which may not accurately reflect reality. For instance, the analysis approach simplifies the emission along the line of sight as a dual slab model (Appendix A and section 2.1) with the same electron density and two different electron temperatures. In reality the plasma profiles along the line of sight vary and the various emission processes can occur at different positions along the line of sight [10, 35]. Additionally, the analysis assumes  $Z_{eff} = 1$ , which is not necessarily true. Those limitations are not necessarily problematic as the aim of the analysis is not to retrieve the emission profile along the line of sight but to extract the various line-integrated ion sources/sinks and power losses in the divertor.

The performance of the analysis to extract ion sources/sinks and power losses must be tested. One way of doing this is to verify its outcomes against a 'known' case, which can be achieved by using plasma-edge simulations to simulate the spectra a spectrometer would see synthetically. This can then be analysed in the same way as experimental data and those outputs can be compared 'directly' outputs from the simulations.

In this work we apply this synthetic testing approach to SOLPS-ITER simulations of TCV and MAST-U plasmas. This involves both a  $D_2$  gas puff scan (TCV, MAST-U)

and a  $N_2$  gas puff scan (MAST-U). The methods used for this have been developed in [10, 25] and account accurately for the various spectrometer uncertainties.

To simulate the Balmer line brightnesses attributed to  $H_2$  chemistry involving  $H_2, H_2^+, H^-, H_3^+$ , Yacora (on the Web) collisional radiative modelling results [23, 22] are used in conjunction with the simulated electron temperature, electron density, molecule ( $H_2$ ) density as well as the ion ( $H^+$ ) temperature. The temperature of  $H^-$  is assumed to be equal to the  $H_2$  temperature plus a random number between 0 - 2.2 eV as  $H^-$  arises from reactions between the plasma and  $H_2$  and a part of the Franck-Cordon energy binding  $H_2$  is released to  $H^-$ . ADAS is used for the electron excitation impact (of  $H$ ) and electron-ion recombination (of  $H^+$ ) Balmer line emission contributions [26, 27].

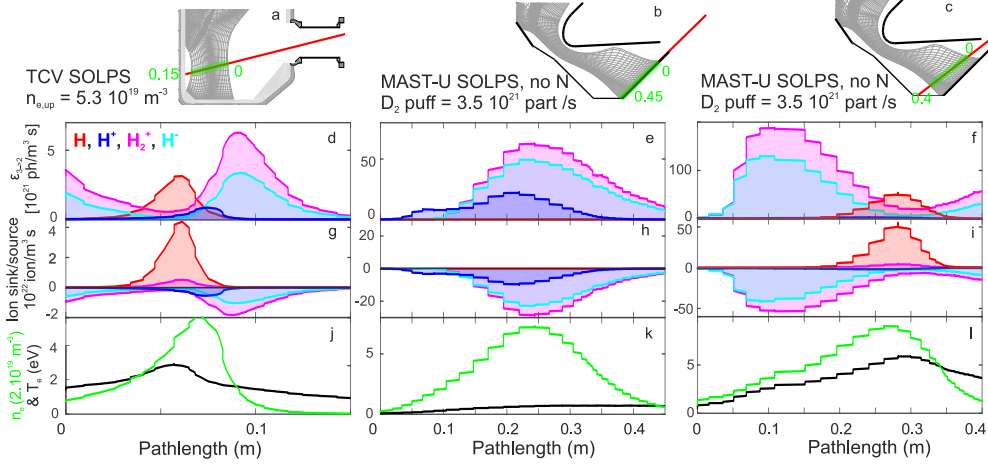
The densities for  $H_2^+, H^-, H_3^+$  must be known to accurately model the Balmer line emission from excited hydrogen atoms after those ions react. Such species are, by default, not ('fully') treated in SOLPS-ITER. Generally, only  $H_2^+$  is included. However, it is designated as a 'test specie' in Eirene where it remains static (e.g. there is no transport) after being created. Additionally, there is some discussion on the isotope dependency of the rates leading to and/or breaking up  $H_2^+, H^-$  [36]; which is further discussed in section 5.5.

We overcome the above limitations of the information from SOLPS-ITER corresponding to  $H_2^+, H_3^+, H^-$  to  $H_2$  by using a balance (which neglects transport) between the creation and destruction rates of these species from  $H_2$  to 'post-process' the  $H_2^+, H_3^+, H^-$  densities after obtaining the SOLPS-ITER results [10]. For the  $H_2^+$  rates we employ the same rates as discussed in section 2.5.2 (using the reported  $H_2$  temperatures from the simulation). It is important to warn the reader that these ratios are still being debated in literature and may have large uncertainties, see section 5.5. Therefore, significant deviations can occur between the post-processed results, the direct SOLPS-ITER outputs and the experimental results when it comes to the  $H_2^+$  (and  $H^-, H_3^+$ ) densities.

### 3.1. Description of results from modeling the Balmer line emission on the SOLPS grid

Now that we have explained how we model the Balmer line emission on the SOLPS grid, we will later use this to perform synthetic testing on the analysis using simulations from both TCV as well as MAST-U. First, however, we show in figure 10 d,e,f three example emission profiles along a line of sight for both a TCV and MAST-U simulation, together with the respective reaction profiles (figure 10 g,h,i), electron temperature and electron density profiles (figure 10 j,k,l). From this we see, indeed, that there is a spatial separation between the various emission profiles in all three cases. Furthermore, in figure 10 we observe that MAI and MAR from  $H_2^+$  occur at different locations spatially. *We can thus conclude that the actual emission and reaction profiles along the line of sight are far more complicated in the test case than is assumed in the analysis chain.*

Secondly, we discuss how the Balmer line emission associated with  $H_2$  plasma chemistry, under the assumptions/limits described, changes the synthetic brightnesses (compared to only accounting for electron-impact excitation and electron-ion recombination) and how this compares to experimental observations. The simulations used [37] have been compared previously against the accompanying experiment in [5] from a view point of atomic interactions. This provides us with *qualitative* arguments as to how representative the analysed synthetic diagnostic results are of the experiment.



**Figure 10.** Profiles along an indicated line of sight of the various emission processes, particle source/sink processes as well as the electron temperature and density. This is shown for one TCV case and for two different line of sights for the same MAST-U case. The used line of sights, as well as the divertor geometry and the region where the lines of sight intersect the SOLPS grids are shown.

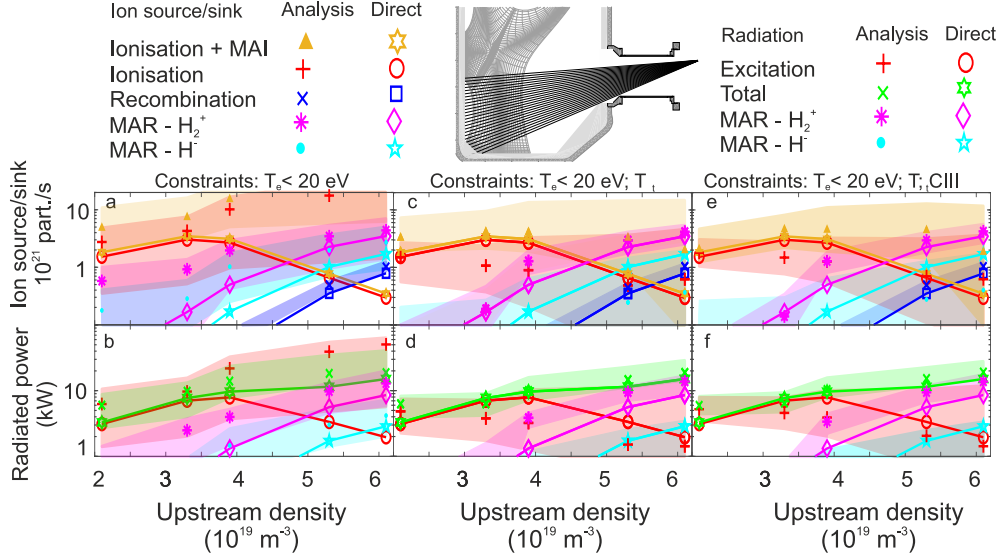
- (i) The synthetic diagnostic brightnesses are in quantitative agreement with the experiment if only electron-ion recombination and electron-impact excitation is considered for the medium-n Balmer lines. The total synthetic  $H\alpha$  brightness (related to atomic interactions and  $H_2$  plasma chemistry) is in rough agreement with the total measured  $H\alpha$  brightness.
- (ii) However, the simulated results indicate a significant fraction of the  $n = 5$  Balmer line emission is due to plasma-molecule interactions (mostly due to  $H_2^+$ ). This lowers the simulated  $n = 6/n = 5$  Balmer line ratio from its atomic estimate ( $\sim 0.5$ ) to  $\sim 0.4$  near the target; while the experimental measurement is closer to 0.5 near the target.

As explained in [10], such changes in the Balmer line ratio are expected to have a relatively strong influence on the inferred excitation Balmer line emission. The larger the modification of the medium-n Balmer line ratio by  $H_2$  plasma-chemistry related processes, the more complex and uncertain it is to fully disentangle the 'atomic only' line ratio required for estimating accurately the excitation emission contribution.

*Therefore, the application of the analysis is more complex (and has higher uncertainties) in the synthetic diagnostic case than in the experiment.*

### 3.2. Synthetic testing on TCV SOLPS simulations

Now that we have discussed some of the results from simulating the Balmer line emission associated with  $H_2$  plasma chemistry as well as plasma-atom interactions, we show the synthetic testing results using SOLPS simulations for TCV. Figure 11 shows a comparison between various processes obtained 'Direct'(ly) from simulations of a TCV density scan and the same quantities evaluated ('Analysis') through synthetic measurements. Each column of plots corresponds to different sets of constraints that



**Figure 11.** Comparisons between 'Direct' output of SOLPS-ITER modelling of TCV density scan to detachment and the same quantities derived ('Analysis' - with uncertainty margins) from synthetic diagnostic measurements of the same SOLPS-ITER cases: a) Inferred particle balance, including atomic ionisation, electron-ion recombination, MAR from  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ . b) Inferred radiative loss channels from atomic (mostly line) emission, including atomic excitation, radiation due to excited atoms from reactions involving  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ . c/d) Power and particle balance comparison between 'Direct' outputs and outputs from the 'Analysis' with the added constraint of target temperature. e/f) Power and particle balance comparison between 'Direct' outputs and outputs from 'Analysis' with an added constraint based on the CIII emission front as well as the target temperature.

are applied. The technicalities of these constraints are described in more detail in appendix Appendix C.

Figure 11 a,b shows that the synthetically inferred MAR/EIR ion sinks as well as the radiative power loss associated with  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  are in quantitative agreement with the direct SOLPS output if no constraints are employed. There is, however, a strong difference in the ionisation source as well as the radiation associated with electron-impact excitation after the detachment onset (around an upstream density of  $3.5 \times 10^{19} m^{-3}$ ). This difference after the detachment onset is caused by an overestimate of the atomic excitation emission caused by underestimating the (atomic only) line ratio  $n = 6/n = 5$  near the end of the discharge ( $\sim 0.45$  instead of  $\sim 0.5$ ). The analysis technique shown can thus be used to obtain adequate estimates on electron-ion recombination, MAR and power losses arising from plasma-molecule interactions. However, during detachment, the ionisation as well as MAI ion source inferences can become unreliable if no constraints are employed.

The periods of poor inference of ion sources can be improved by including additional constraints. As explained in [10], the overestimation of excitation emission is a known complication in cases where the excitation emission is relatively small. Since an overestimation of the excitation emission manifests in an overestimation of the excitation temperature, one can improve the analysis by enforcing temperature constraints [10]. We include two temperature constraints: a) a constraint at the 'target' (lines of sight

near the target) on the electron-impact excitation emission derived target temperature ( $T_e^E$ ) based on other target temperature estimates (for the synthetic case a  $\pm 1$  eV (68 % confidence interval) uncertainty is assumed); b) a temperature constraint based on the observation of the CIII emission front: *below* that front  $T_e^E > 8$  eV is given a lower probability while *above* that front  $T_e^E < 4$  eV is given a lower probability.

Adding only the target temperature constraint (c and d of Figure 11) leads to a strong improvement of the quantitative agreement of the inferred/directly obtained excitation estimates until even in the detached phase. This can be (slightly) further improved by adding the additional constraint based on the CIII front location (figure 11e,f). These additional constraints also reduce the level of uncertainty in the various estimates. The uncertainties would likely improve further with more detailed profile (e.g. along the divertor leg) temperature estimate constraints.

Even with constraints, the MAI estimates have a significant uncertainty during detachment. This is related to the strong  $T_e$  dependence of the MAI/ $H\alpha$  ratio (figure 9), which is related to the change-over from  $H_2^+$  being created from molecular charge exchange to it being created from  $H_2$  ionisation (see section 2.5.2). This implies that the MAI estimates are sensitive to inaccuracies in the  $T_e$  estimate, which also implies that they are relatively more sensitive to chordal integration effects. The uncertainties in MAI and atomic ionisation are however anti-correlated, and the total uncertainty is reduced when MAI and atomic ionisation is summed (as is done in figure 11).

In the remainder of this work, both temperature constraints from the estimated target temperature as well as the CIII front location are employed for the ionisation and (atomic) radiation estimates when the full analysis (figure 2) is applied, unless stated otherwise.

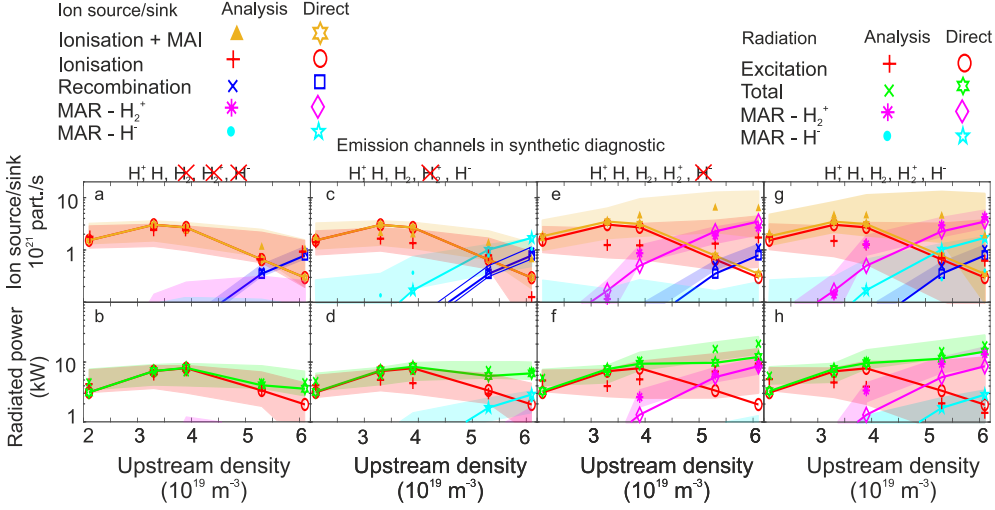
### 3.3. Further synthetic testing through 'code experiments' on TCV SOLPS simulations

We can perform further synthetic testing on the simulations shown in the previous section through 'code experiments' by removing certain emission channels from the input of the synthetic brightnesses, after which the full analysis is used to analyse the 'modified' synthetic brightnesses. This is an important part of testing the robustness of the analysis scheme as it enables us to see how well the analysis copes with excluding processes which are not present. This is investigated by:

- (i) Removing all molecular emission channels (figure 12 a,b).
- (ii) Removing the  $H_2^+$  emission channel (figure 12 c,d).
- (iii) Removing the  $H^-$  emission channel (figure 12 e,f).

These cases are shown in figure 12, together with a copy of the analysis in which all emission channels are included, previously shown in figure 11.

Figure 12 generally shows a quantitative agreement between the various particle sinks/sources and power sinks estimated from the analysis and those obtained directly from the code. One exception to this is the MAI estimate in figure 12e,f, where  $H^-$  was not accounted for. This is related with the large uncertainties of MAI discussed previously. We observe that the upper uncertainty level of MAR from  $H_2^+$  and/or  $H^-$  are negligible (although not zero) when they have been omitted in the synthetic diagnostic brightness during detachment. This test shows the analysis can correctly point out the lack/presence of MAR and separate MAR from  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  - as long as their impacts are 'significant'.



**Figure 12.** Power and particle balance, similar to figure 11, where certain emission channels have been disabled in the synthetic diagnostic to investigate its influence on the analysis outputs

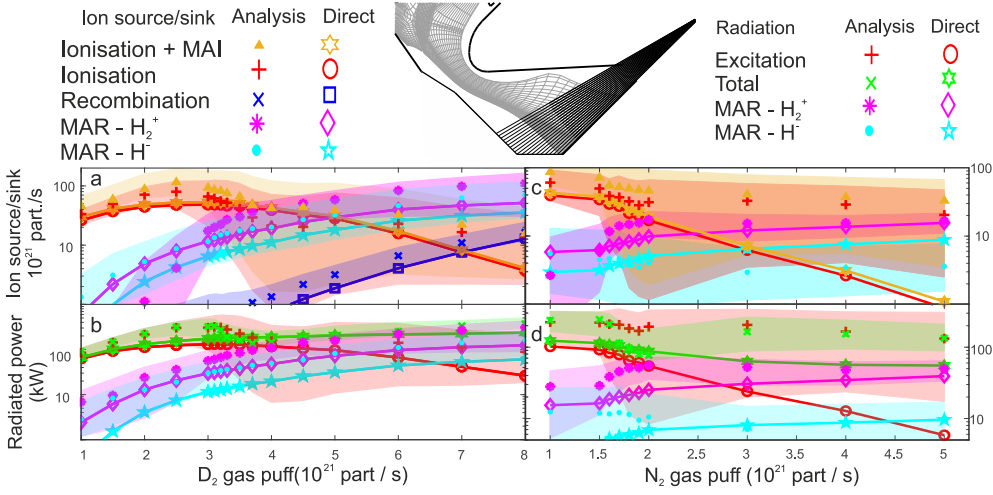
We also observe in figure 12 that the quality of the excitation-dependent inferences as well as MAI deteriorates as more emission channels are present in the input synthetic brightnesses. As the contribution of molecules to the  $n = 5, 6$  Balmer line increases, the quality of the excitation inferences decreases. This illustrates the necessity of including the various temperature constraints introduced in the previous section.

### 3.4. Synthetic testing on MAST-U SOLPS simulations

We have applied the similar synthetic testing procedure shown throughout this section to MAST-U SOLPS simulations [38] as shown in figure 13, which comprises a  $D_2$  fuelling and  $N$  seeding ramp (with intrinsic carbon impurities). In this case, we have not used the temperature exclusion constraint based on the CIII front introduced previously as, given the magnetic geometry of the MAST-U Super-X divertor, the CIII front cannot be comfortably tracked using line integrated spectroscopy and instead requires camera diagnostics, such as [39, 40].

We observe that, generally, there is an agreement within uncertainty between the parameters inferred from the synthetic diagnostic and those obtained directly. One exception to this is excitation related estimates at the highest  $N$  puff rates, where the ion source drops below what can be detected. The lack of electron-ion recombination in these conditions increases the 'detection threshold' for ionisation estimates, explaining the large ionisation estimate uncertainty.

In general we see an improved quantitative agreement (especially for MAI) for the MAST-U synthetic testing than the TCV synthetic testing. This is likely attributed to the closed divertor/higher electron densities in MAST-U, resulting in shorter mean free paths and therefore a stronger spatial separation between the ionising and recombining regions along the divertor leg.



**Figure 13.** Power and particle balance from estimates from synthetic diagnostic analysis and directly obtained from SOLPS MAST-U simulations [38], similar to figure 11. The results of both a density ramp (with intrinsic carbon impurities) and that of a fixed  $D_2$  puff with a  $N$  seeding ramp (with intrinsic carbon impurities) are shown.

### 3.5. Summary of synthetic testing

The analysis chain has been tested synthetically using both TCV and MAST-U SOLPS simulations in both seeded and non-seeded conditions in combination with synthetic spectroscopy diagnostics to simulate what a spectrometer would observe, which is then analysed in an identical way as the experiment. The emission and reaction profiles along the lines of sight in the analysis are significantly more complicated than the simplified dual-slab model assumed in the analysis chain.

Despite this, however, we observe that the analysis generally behaves as intended and obtains similar estimates for particle and power losses as those obtained by directly integrating the profiles along the line of sight. In addition, we observe that if certain emission processes are removed from the *input* of the analysis, the analysis correctly points out that their contribution is negligible.

This testing suggests the analysis is fairly robust for chordal-integration effects. This is particularly true for the estimates on radiative losses related to excited atoms from  $H_2$  plasma chemistry, MAR and electron-ion recombination. Ionisation and MAI estimates require additional temperature constraints for higher accuracy.

## 4. Illustration of the analysis using experimental data from TCV

Although the performance of an analysis can be analysed in detail through synthetic testing, it is beneficial to test an analysis using experimental data. This is particularly true for the analysis used here as there are many uncertainties in simulating the  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  densities required for simulating the Balmer line emissivities associated with  $H_2$  plasma chemistry in SOLPS-ITER simulations, as discussed in section 3.

We illustrate an example of the *self-consistent* results of the full BaSPMI analysis to separate the hydrogen line brightnesses into its various atomic (excitation

/ recombination) and molecular ( $H_2$ ,  $H_2^+$ ,  $H^-$ ) contributions. For this we use a conventional divertor L-mode reversed field (unfavourable for H-mode) density ramp discharge with a plasma current of 340 kA. The divertor physics of this discharge has been discussed previously in [5, 24]. The emission spectra is diagnosed using the the TCV Divertor Spectroscopy System (DSS) diagnostic [9, 10]. The divertor geometry with the lines of sight coverage for this diagnostic can be seen in figure 14, adapted from [5, 10]. Diagnostic repeat discharges are used in order to obtain sufficient diagnostic coverage. The reproducibility of this has been demonstrated in [5]. Three different temperature constraints (for  $T_e^E$ ) have been employed: 1) the upper temperature limit is 25 eV; 2) temperature constraint based on the CIII 465 nm emission line front which is measured throughout the discharge using line-of-sight spectroscopy (see details in Appendix C); 3) a target temperature constraint based on the estimated target temperature by power balance ( $T_t^{PB}$ ), which was shown and compared against various target temperature estimates (measured and modelled) in Figure 10 of [5] yielding a good agreement between the various temperature estimates.

The results of the emission contributions are shown in figure 14 for one line of sight at two different times as a bar-chart. This is shown for a single line of sight for both the measured Balmer lines ( $H\alpha, H\beta, H\gamma, H\delta$ ) used in the analysis as well as an extrapolated analysis estimate of the  $Ly\alpha$  ( $B_{2\rightarrow1}$ ) line, whose totals and individual contributions has been obtained through 'extrapolating' the experimental data of the molecular contributions of  $H\alpha$  and the atomic contributions of the medium-n Balmer line  $n$  using equation 11 based on combining equations 6 and 2.

$$\begin{aligned}
 B_{2\rightarrow1} = & \underbrace{\frac{PEC_{2\rightarrow1}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e^E)}{PEC_{3\rightarrow2}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e^E)} \times B_{3\rightarrow2}^{H_2}}_{B_{2\rightarrow1}^{H_2}} + \underbrace{\frac{PEC_{2\rightarrow1}^{H_2^+}(n_e, T_e^E)}{PEC_{3\rightarrow2}^{H_2^+}(n_e, T_e^E)} \times B_{3\rightarrow2}^{H_2^+}}_{B_{2\rightarrow1}^{H_2^+}} + \underbrace{\frac{PEC_{2\rightarrow1}^{H^-}(n_e, T_e^E)}{PEC_{3\rightarrow2}^{H^-}(n_e, T_e^E)} \times B_{3\rightarrow2}^{H^-}}_{B_{2\rightarrow1}^{H^-}} + \\
 & \underbrace{\frac{PEC_{2\rightarrow1}^{exc}(n_e, T_e^E)}{PEC_{n\rightarrow2}^{exc}(n_e, T_e^E)} \times B_{n\rightarrow2}^{atom,exc}}_{B_{2\rightarrow1}^{exc}} + \underbrace{\frac{PEC_{2\rightarrow1}^{rec}(n_e, T_e^R)}{PEC_{n\rightarrow2}^{rec}(n_e, T_e^R)} \times B_{n\rightarrow2}^{atom,rec}}_{B_{2\rightarrow1}^{rec}}
 \end{aligned} \tag{11}$$

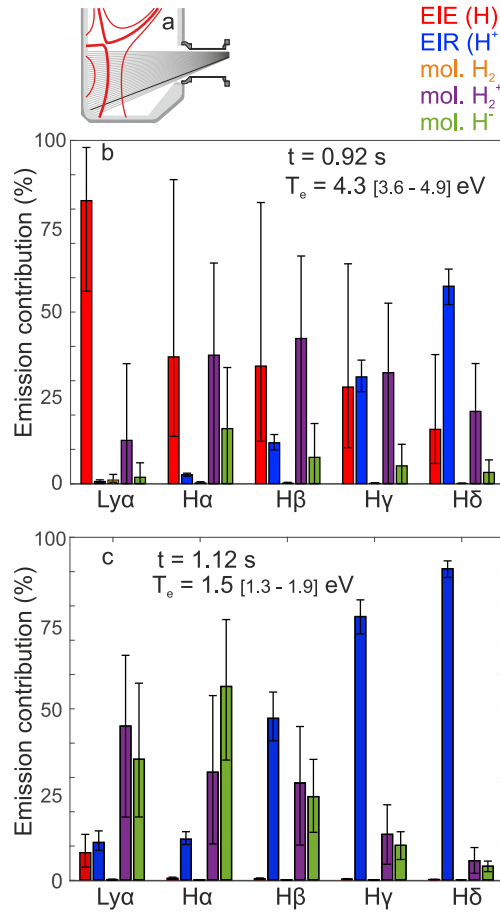
The illustration of the technique in figure 14 indicates that depending on the plasma conditions (in this case dictated by the timestep in the discharge):

- Plasma-molecule interactions can contribute considerably to hydrogenic line emission. It can *dominate the  $H\alpha$ ,  $H\beta$  emission* and it can have a significant impact on  *$Ly\alpha$  emission* as well as *medium-n Balmer line emission* ( $H\gamma, H\delta$ ). This has important implication for hydrogenic radiation losses as well as the interpretation of Balmer line divertor spectroscopy measurements.
- A large range of different emission processes can be significant simultaneously; e.g. both electron-ion recombination, plasma-molecule interactions from  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  appear to be significant for  $H\beta$  at  $t = 1.12$  s. This shows the importance of separating the various emission channels.
- The emission processes can change strongly between each hydrogenic transition. We observe that the sensitivity to plasma-molecule interactions diminishes with increasing  $n$  of the hydrogenic transition while the sensitivity to electron-ion



recombination increases [10]. Plasma-molecule interactions involving  $H^-$  seem to excite the  $n = 3$  populational state (e.g.  $H\alpha$  emission) in particular.

- We observe that the uncertainties in the electron impact excitation (of  $H$ ) (EIE) and the emission contribution from  $H_2^+$  are substantial. A closer inspection shows that these uncertainties are *anti-correlated*: low value estimates of the EIE contributions in the statistical samples correspond to high values of the  $H_2^+$  contributions (and visa versa). The EIE contribution is strongly correlated with the excitation-inferred temperature. This illustrates why the various temperature constraints introduced in Appendix C are important: without such constraints it is uncertain to distinguish, given the measured data and its uncertainties, electron impact excitation (of  $H$ ) and emission from excited atoms after plasma reacts with  $H_2^+$ .



**Figure 14.** Shows a bar-chart of the contributions (%) of various processes (electron-impact excitation 'EIE ( $H$ )', electron-ion recombination 'EIR ( $H^+$ )', plasma-molecule interaction ('mol.') with  $H_2$ ,  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  for various hydrogenic series lines at two different times for a chord close to the target together with indicated estimated electron temperature ranges. A schematic illustration of the divertor geometry and line of sight is shown.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Estimating the Balmer line emission associated with $H_2$

In section 2.3 we discussed methods to separate the Balmer line emission attributed to  $H_2$  chemistry in its various components (related to  $H_2, H_2^+, H^-$ ). We started that procedure with assuming an a priori  $g_{H_2} \approx \Delta L n_{H_2}$  which is a function of  $T_e^E$ . That allows us to estimate the brightness associated with  $H_2$ :  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2} = g_{H_2}(T_e^E) n_e PEC_{H_2}(n_e, T_e^E)$ . In this section we highlight how we obtain this a priori function and we discuss its implications. This shows that the expected  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}$  is insignificant and can be neglected in most divertor conditions.

We obtain this functional form  $g_{H_2}(T_e^E)$  by combining TCV [37] and MAST-U [38] SOLPS-ITER simulations in combination with synthetic spectroscopy diagnostics [10, 25] (see section 3). To obtain an estimate for  $g_{H_2} \approx \Delta L n_{H_2}$  (equation 12) we take the synthetic brightness associated with  $H_2$  -  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}$  (which is obtained by integrating the emissivity associated with  $H_2$  along the line of sight) and divide this by  $PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}$  estimated using the electron-impact excitation-emission weighted electron temperature  $T_e^E$  and the Stark broadening inferred electron density  $n_e$  for that chord using the synthetic diagnostic [10]). We have chosen this formulation because using  $g_{H_2}$  with those same electron densities/temperatures in a plasma-slab model would bring us back to - by definition - the synthetically obtained  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}$ .

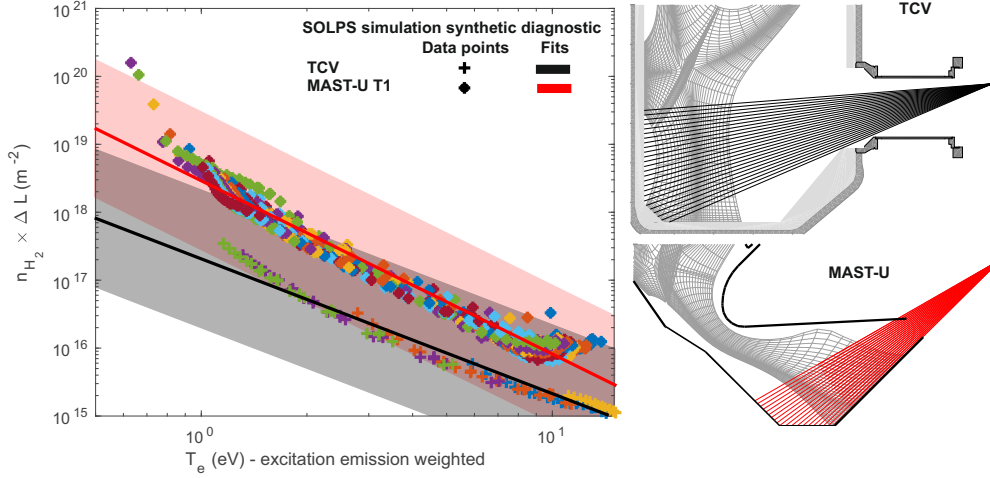
$$g_{H_2} \equiv \frac{B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}}{PEC_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e^E)} \approx \Delta L \times n_{H_2} \quad (12)$$

We then take all the spectroscopy chords in the synthetic diagnostic for all SOLPS simulations and show the obtained  $g_{H_2}$  in figure 15 as function of the estimated  $T_e^E$ . We find there is a strong relation between  $g_{H_2}$  and  $T_e^E$  for both TCV and MAST-U simulations. This is a remarkable result as the points in figure 15 all come from different simulations and different chords (thus different plasma positions) of the synthetic diagnostic. In essence, this indicates that having information about the kind of device (e.g. TCV vs MAST-U), the electron excitation temperature and the electron density is sufficient for providing rough estimates on the Balmer line brightness attributed to  $H_2$ :  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2} = g_{H_2}(T_e^E) n_e PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e^E)$ .

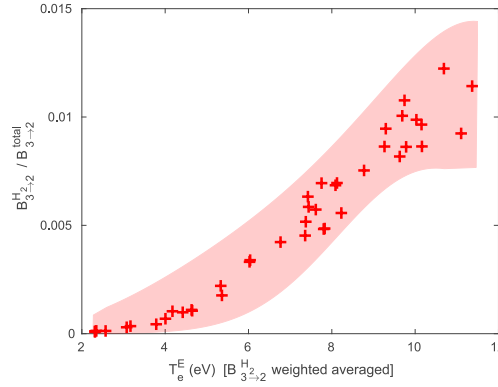
We use the  $g_{H_2}$  values obtained from the simulations to estimate the relation between  $g_{H_2}$  and  $T_e^E$  using a fit (linear in log-log space) to which we ascribe an of a factor 100 uncertainty (from a factor 0.1 to 10 - log-uniformly distributed) when it is used to estimate  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}$ .

The inferred fraction of  $H\alpha$  attributed to  $H_2$  (e.g.  $B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}/B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{total}$  along the total viewing fan) for the experimental discharge analysed in [24] is shown in figure 16 as function of the 'characteristic' excitation electron temperature (weighted (by  $B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}$ ) average  $T_e^E$  along the viewing fan). We observe that the *relative* contribution of  $H_2$  to  $H\alpha$  is highest at high temperatures. At relatively low temperatures (such as the cases shown in section 4) 4),  $\frac{B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}}{B_{n \rightarrow 2}} < 10^{-4}$  (for the result indicated in figure 14). Therefore, even if  $g_{H_2}(T_e^E)$  obtained from SOLPS-ITER is strongly underestimated, it would be unlikely that this would influence the obtained solutions.

This result is somewhat in contrast to results from previous studies in limiter devices [41], which have shown that  $H_2$  dissociation may contribute to  $H\alpha$  emission. In such conditions, there is a relatively higher molecular density at the location of the



**Figure 15.** Relation between the excitation Balmer line emission weighted temperature  $T_e^E$  and  $g_{H_2}(T_e^E) \equiv \frac{B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}}{PEC_{H_2}(n_e, T_e^E)} \approx n_{H_2} \times \Delta L$  (where  $n_e$  is the synthetic Stark density). Each colour corresponds to a different simulation. Fits through each of the data sets are shown. The TCV data set consists out of 5 simulations [37] (density scan) (26 lines of sight) while the MAST-U data set consists out of 35 simulations [38] (density scan and  $N_2$  seeded) with 20 lines of sight. The corresponding SOLPS grid cells and spectroscopy lines of sight for MAST-U and TCV are also shown.



**Figure 16.** Estimated  $H\alpha$  emission fraction attributed to  $H_2$  (summed along the viewing fan) for the experimental discharge analysed in [24] as function of the characteristic  $T_e^E$  for that viewing fan (weighted averaged by  $B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}$ )

hot temperature plasma, whereas in a divertor we see a very strong anti-correlation between  $T_e$  and  $n_{H_2}$  as well as  $B_{3 \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}$  as shown in figures 15 and 16. Furthermore, as was also mentioned in [41], a significant amount of this  $H\alpha$  emission in those limiter devices studies could also have arisen from dissociative recombination of  $H_2^+$ .

### 5.2. Additional $H\alpha$ emission contributions not related to plasma-atom interaction and $H_2$ chemistry

In carbon machines, such as TCV and MAST-U, reactions with hydrocarbons could lead to excited  $n = 3, 4$  atoms leading to additional  $H\alpha$ ,  $H\beta$  emission. Additionally, opacity of  $Ly\beta$  and  $Ly\gamma$  can also lead to additional excited  $n = 3, 4$  atoms (and thus  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$  emission). We discuss these two processes here and estimate their importance for TCV.

To obtain an upper limit estimate for the possible atomic emission of hydrocarbons, we assume that *all* neutral carbon from validated SOLPS simulations for TCV [37, 42] exists in the form of hydrocarbons. || To map these hypothetical hydrocarbon densities to the  $H\alpha$  emission we utilise reaction cross-sections from [43] for  $CH_4$  (the cross-sections for  $H\alpha$  emission from [43] are similar for the full range of hydrocarbons presented:  $CH_4$ ,  $C_2H_2$ ,  $C_2H_6$ ,  $C_2H_4$ ). For this extreme case, the estimated  $H\alpha$  emission from  $n = 3$  excited atoms after hydrocarbon reactions is more than  $10^4$  smaller than the total  $H\alpha$  emission. It is thus unlikely that hydrocarbon chains contribute significantly to the  $H\alpha$  emission.

With respect to the effect of opacity, the neutral density along the spectroscopic line of sight remains smaller than  $10^{18}m^{-2}$  in SOLPS simulations for TCV [37, 10]. At this level, not much opacity is expected [20, 44]. This is indeed confirmed by post-processing the SOLPS simulations using ray-tracing techniques. These indicate very minor modifications to the population escape factors due to opacity, indicating ultimately modifications to the 2D profile of the  $H\alpha$  emissivity of up to 3%. Therefore, opacity is not expected to significantly alter the  $H\alpha$  emission on TCV.

### 5.3. $H\alpha$ as a monitor for MAR and atomic line radiation associated with $H_2$ plasma chemistry

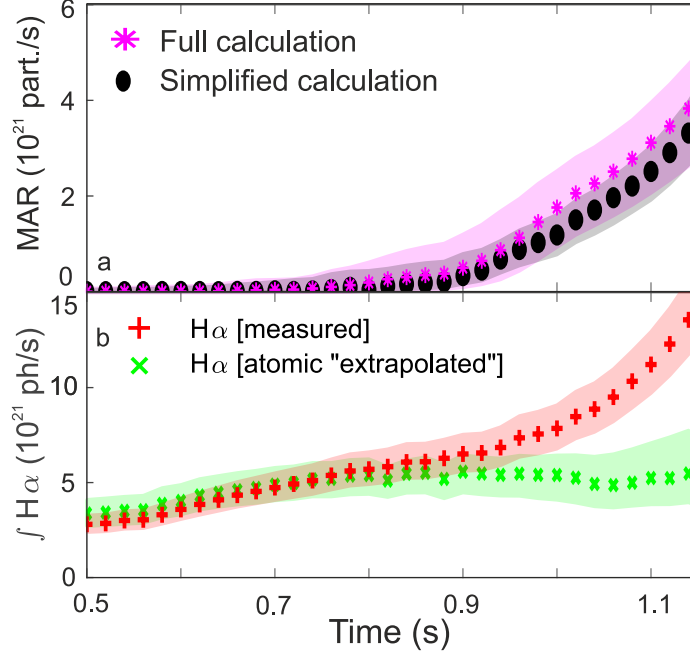
The increase of  $H\alpha$  during detachment, or more specifically the 'anti-correlation between  $H\alpha$  and the ion target current' during detachment is observed on several devices [45, 11, 16]. The results derived and described in this paper were applied to a detachment discharge in TCV [24]. This shows the extrapolated  $H\alpha$  atomic estimate matches the measured  $H\alpha$  until the detachment onset after which the measured  $H\alpha$  keeps on increasing while the atomic estimate of  $H\alpha$  saturates. We can conclude two things from this result, which is repeated in figure 17b.

First, we have shown in [24] that the increase of  $H\alpha$  during detachment cannot be explained through electron-ion recombination on TCV, but is explained through plasma-molecule interactions with  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  (figure 17b). Although electron-ion recombination can be higher on higher divertor density machines, it is likely that the increase of  $H\alpha$  in such machines is also, at least partially, due to plasma-molecule interactions with  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ . In fact, contributions of  $H_2^+$ , and/or  $H^-$  were also suspected in JET [11] and DIII-D [16] based on the experimentally measured trend and magnitude of  $H\alpha$  emission.

Secondly, we have shown in [24] that comparing  $H\alpha$  measurements against its atomic extrapolation based on the medium-n Balmer lines is a quick and useful monitor for plasma-molecule interactions involving  $H_2^+$  and/or  $H^-$  during detachment, which

|| Since neutral carbon recombination has been deactivated for most of these simulations ([37] - the SOLPS-ITER default at the time), the sum of the neutral and  $C^+$  densities is utilised as an upper estimate of the neutral carbon density.

can be achieved with only the atomic part of the BaSPMI technique. This is also illustrated in figure 17 where we observe that the MAR ion sink starts to appear when there is a bifurcation between the atomic extrapolation of  $H\alpha$  and the measured  $H\alpha$ .



**Figure 17.** Comparison of analysis techniques based on TCV experimental results for # 56567 which have been discussed, from a divertor physics point of view, in [24] from which the full BaSPMI MAR result and the measured and extrapolated  $H\alpha$  have been adopted. a) Comparison of the 'simplified' divertor MAR calculation (based on multiplying the difference between the atomic extrapolated  $H\alpha$  and the measured  $H\alpha$  (figure b) with the 'MAR/ $H\alpha$  photon' ratio for  $H_2^+$ ) against the full BaSPMI result.

This quick monitor can also be used as a quantitative estimate for radiative power loss and MAR from plasma-molecule interactions, which we denote as a "simplified MAR calculation". This is done by taking the difference between the measured  $H\alpha$  and the atomic extrapolation for each plasma chord, which is multiplied with the 'MAR per  $H\alpha$  ratio' for  $H_2^+$  (obtained from figure 9), obtained using the inferred  $n_e, T_e^E$  from the atomic analysis. The result is a MAR estimate for each chord (e.g. ions per metre squared per second) which is integrated to provide the total MAR sink in the viewing fan (e.g. ions per second). A similar MAR ion sink is obtained if the divertor-integrated  $H\alpha$  attributed to plasma-molecule interactions is multiplied with the 'MAR per  $H\alpha$  ratio' for  $H_2^+$  using an assumed  $n_e = 10^{20} m^{-3}$  and  $T_e = 1 eV$ .

The above approach only uses the atomic portion of BaSPMI and neglects the impact of  $H_2$  plasma chemistry on the medium-n Balmer lines. Furthermore, this assumes that Balmer line emission attributed to  $H_2$  plasma chemistry arises from interactions of the plasma with  $H_2^+$ . The result of this for the total divertor MAR ion sink is shown in figure 17 a, where it is compared against the full BaSPMI analysis (obtained from [24]). A similar agreement between the simplified and full analysis is obtained for the radiative power loss estimates associated with  $H_2$  plasma chemistry.

These estimates appear to be fairly accurate despite the lack of quantitatively separating  $H\alpha$  emission from plasma-molecule interactions with  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  and despite accounting for the influence of  $H_2$  plasma chemistry on the medium-n Balmer lines. The reason for this is likely that, within experimental uncertainties, the 'MAR per  $H\alpha$  ratios' for  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  are similar (figure 9). This also indicates that, at least for estimating the MAR rate, the calculation is insensitive to chordal integration effects - which is supported with the results from section 3.

However, the full analysis chain would be required to estimate the 'molecular' contributions to the medium-n Balmer line emission, which can be important for ionisation estimates in detached plasmas [24].

Therefore, monitoring  $H\alpha$  and comparing it to its atomic estimate is sufficient to:

- (i) Show that plasma-atom interactions involving  $H_2^+$  (and possibly  $H^-$ ) may occur (in environments with low/negligible  $Ly\beta$  opacity).
- (ii) Estimate what their influence on the plasma is in terms of particle and power losses.

Afterwards, one could consider running the full analysis presented to:

- (i) Propagate this information to all Balmer lines to get a self-consistent picture which separates each hydrogenic line into its individual contributions, similar to figure 14).
- (ii) Delineate the plasma-molecule contributions from  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ .

#### 5.4. Balmer line contributions from plasma-molecule interactions and Fulcher band investigations

Previous research on investigating plasma-molecule interactions in the divertor spectroscopically generally focused on monitoring the molecular band emission, such as the Fulcher band which comes from electronically excited molecules [13, 14, 16] after plasma-molecule *collisions*.

Although plasma-molecule *collisions* are different from plasma-molecule *reactions*, MAR rate estimates from *reactions* with  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  have been estimated previously using measurements of the Fulcher band. Those measurements provide information on  $H_2$  and its vibrational distribution, which is combined with  $n_e, T_e$  estimates and a model or simulations to extrapolate the  $H_2$  density to the  $H_2^+$  density and its resulting MAR rate [13, 14, 16].

This differs from the approach in this work which aims to extract the Balmer line emission arising directly from the excited atoms after plasma-molecule interactions with  $H_2^+, H^-$ . Therefore, it does not require assuming that the location of the  $H_2$  electronic excitation (e.g. Fulcher band emission) is the same as the location of the MAR reactions along the lines of sight. That assumption could be problematic as electronic excitation of  $H_2$  requires fairly high electron temperatures ( $T_e > 3 - 4$  eV), whereas MAR can occur at lower temperatures ( $T_e = [1.5 - 4]$  eV). Our measurements in [24] indicate, for instance, that the peak Balmer line emission from excited atoms after *reactions* between the plasma and  $H_2^+$  (and/or  $H^-$ ) occurs at a different position than the region with the brightest Fulcher band emission [24].

Extrapolating MAR rates out of a Fulcher band analysis requires using a model to predict the creation and destruction rates of  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$ , which may have large uncertainties and isotope dependencies (see section 5.5). The BaSPMI analysis, however,

does not ¶ rely on such assumptions as it monitors *the destruction of  $H_2^+$  and/or  $H^-$  into excited atoms* directly, rather than using rates and models to model the  $H_2^+$  and/or  $H^-$  densities based on estimations of the  $H_2$  density.

BaSPMI can be used as an alternative tool to the Fulcher spectra to investigate more closely how such interactions with  $H_2^+$ ,  $H^-$  influence the plasma and provides an indirect tool to investigate the conditions which promote  $H_2^+$ ,  $H^-$  creation. It could for instance be used to study differences in MAR from  $H_2^+$  and/or  $H^-$  between carbon and metallic walls (which influences the vibrational state of molecules reflected from the wall, influencing the creation/destruction mechanisms behind  $H_2^+$ ,  $H^-$  [46, 19, 47, 48]). As BaSPMI uses Balmer line measurements, it could be a tool which is more straightforward to employ as Balmer line measurements are more routinely employed on tokamaks. They are often easier to diagnose than the Fulcher band, given the high spectral resolution and high sensitivity often required for molecular band studies. Given that BaSPMI uses Balmer line measurements, which can be measured using 2D multi-spectral imaging diagnostics [40], its analysis could in principle be extended to a 2D analysis. For this, however, electron density estimates would be required, which could be obtained using Helium line spectroscopy [49], coherence imaging techniques (for Stark broadening) or Bayesian analysis techniques [50].

BaSPMI is, however, influenced by opacity and requires high quality collisional radiative model results to provide information on how the various  $H_2$  plasma chemistry processes lead to excited hydrogen atoms and resulting atomic line emission [23, 22]. Furthermore, as  $H_2$  ionisation occurs in a similar  $T_e$  window as Fulcher band emission, a Fulcher band analysis may provide more accurate MAI (from  $H_2^+$ ) estimates than BaSPMI.

### 5.5. Reliance on molecular data: isotope effects and impacts from vibrational states

The Yacora (on the Web) [22, 23] collisional radiative model and AMJUEL database [30] does not (yet) provide explicit parallel information for  $H$  and  $D$  or  $T$  related processes. Rather the preponderance of rates for  $H$  and various assumptions must be made in their application to  $D$  (and  $T$ ). This is an important caveat of this analysis. If collisional radiative results become available for  $D$  (and  $T$ ) in the future, they could be used instead in the outlines analysis approach.

In this discussion, it is important to distinguish between two categories of atomic/molecular data. First, there are the actual *creation and destruction rates* of  $H_2^+$  and/or  $H^-$ . Those rates are important for modelling the  $H_2^+$  and/or  $H^-$  densities based on the  $H_2$  density. Secondly, there are the photon emission coefficients which provide estimates on the distribution of the excited states of hydrogen atoms *after  $H_2^+$  and/or  $H^-$  undergoes a reaction resulting in hydrogen neutrals*. Particularly, some of the rates of the first category are discussed in literature to have potentially strong isotope dependencies [36, 51] as well as significant dependencies on the vibrational distribution of  $H_2$ .

Our analysis almost fully depends on only rates from the second category. However, we use rates from the first category for estimating the "MAR/MAI per  $H\alpha$  photon" ratio for  $H_2^+$  (equation 10) as we must distinguish between  $H_2^+$  creation through molecular charge exchange and  $H_2$  ionisation (equation 9). Distinguishing between

¶ There is a very weak dependence on such rates for estimating the "MAR/MAI per  $H\alpha$  photon" ratio as this changes depending on whether  $H_2^+$  was created through molecular charge exchange or  $H_2$  ionisation - see section 5.5

these two different  $H_2^+$  creation mechanisms depends on the  $H_2^+$  molecular charge exchange rate (equation 9), which in particular is expected to be both isotope and  $H_2$  vibrational level dependent [36].

From a detailed analysis we, however, find that using different models for the molecular charge exchange rate only has a negligible impact on the "MAR/MAI per  $H\alpha$  photon" ratio, despite the molecular charge exchange rate itself changing by an order of magnitude in detachment-relevant conditions ( $T_e = [1 - 3]eV$ ) between the different models used. We perform this analysis by calculating the fraction of  $H_2^+$  created by molecular charge exchange  $f_{H_2^+ \text{ from CX}} = \frac{\langle \sigma v \rangle_{H_2+H^+ \rightarrow H_2^++H}}{\langle \sigma v \rangle_{H_2+H^+ \rightarrow H_2^++H} + \langle \sigma v \rangle_{e^-+H_2 \rightarrow 2e^-+H_2^+}}$  - equation 9 (figure 18 b) and its impact on the "MAI/MAR rate per  $H\alpha$  photon ratios" for  $H_2^+$  (equation 10), shown in figure 18 a. The result for three different molecular charge exchange rates are shown: 1 - the default rates from AMJUEL for hydrogen; 2 - the default rates from AMJUEL where the rates are shifted by dividing the electron temperature by two to model the deuterium rate <sup>+</sup>; 3 - an alternative rate for deuterium investigated in [36]. The vibrational distribution is modelled using an assumed  $H_2$  temperature, which has been varied in the Monte Carlo uncertainty processing throughout the entire validity regime [0.37 - 10 eV] of the data. We find in figure 18 that the impact of the various rates on the calculated "MAI/MAR rate per  $H\alpha$  photon ratios" for  $H_2^+$  is small. Therefore, our analysis seems to be robust against these uncertainties.

The reason for this is that our analysis only depends on  $f_{H_2^+ \text{ from CX}}$ . Modelling the  $H_2^+/H_2$  ratio instead based on a no-transport model, however, would depend on the *relative ratio between the sum of the  $H_2^+$  creation and destruction mechanisms* - e.g. proportional to  $\langle \sigma v \rangle_{H_2+H^+ \rightarrow H_2^++H} + \langle \sigma v \rangle_{e^-+H_2 \rightarrow 2e^-+H_2^+}$ . The latter ratio would change by an order of magnitude if the molecular charge exchange rate is dominant and changes by an order of magnitude.  $f_{H_2^+ \text{ from CX}}$ , however would be insensitive to such changes in the molecular charge exchange rate (as long as this rate is significantly larger than the  $H_2$  ionisation rate).

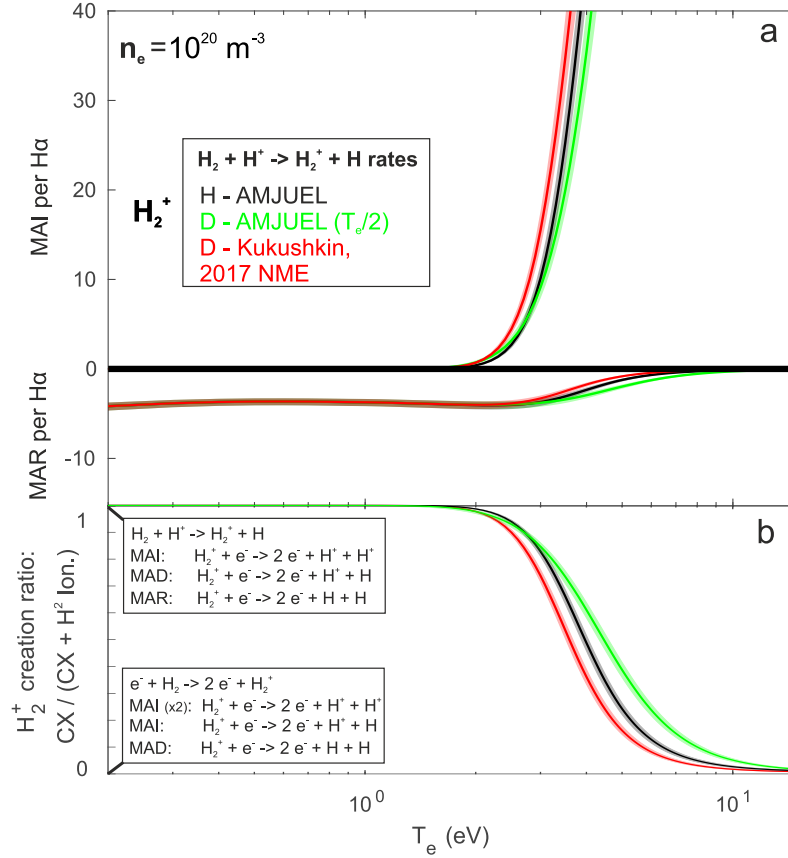
There is not only an expected isotope dependence on the  $H_2^+$  creation rate, but also on the  $H^-$  creation rate. Experimental evidence indicates the cross-sections for creating  $D^-$  at low vibrational levels is much less likely than creating  $H^-$  [51]. However, to allow for the largest degree of flexibility, we have opted to allow for the possibility of reactions with  $H^-$  resulting in Balmer line emission in our analysis. As our analysis does not depend on the reaction rates for creating  $H^-$ , it could potentially provide clarity on the presence of  $H^-$  - but that requires further investigation.

### 5.6. The applicability of these techniques to different devices and its implications

In this work we have applied an analysis technique to separate the Balmer line emission from its various atomic and molecular channels; after which the power losses due to each individual channel as well as the ion sources and sinks can be estimated. Its workings have been demonstrated analysing synthetic diagnostic results obtained from SOLPS simulations of both TCV and MAST-U. Emission characteristics very likely differ, however, between TCV, MAST-U and higher power and/or density tokamaks such as ASDEX-Upgrade and JET. This raises the question how generally applicable our presented analysis techniques are. Below we address this from the point of view of

<sup>+</sup> This is the default in Eirene [30].





**Figure 18.** A more detailed version of figure 9. a) "MAR/MAI per  $H\alpha$ " ratios for various molecular charge exchange reaction rates for the creation of  $H_2^+$  as function of  $T_e$ . These depend on  $f_{H_2^+ \text{ from CX}}$  (e.g. ratio between the CX  $H_2^+$  creation rate and the total  $H_2^+$  creation rate (CX +  $H_2$  ionisation)), which is shown in figure b, through equation 10.

plasma conditions, viewing geometry and diagnostic capabilities.

*Applicability related to plasma conditions* Generally, the applicability of this analysis technique has been discussed in depth in [10] where only atomic processes are considered for the Balmer line emission. It was reasoned that the atomic analysis of the Balmer lines should be generally applicable. We can make various quantitative estimates of the roles of plasma-molecule interactions on MAR and radiative losses, based on comparing the atomic contribution of  $H\alpha$  with the total measured  $H\alpha$ , which only depends on the atomic analysis part of the analysis and should be generally applicable to other devices.

For the most part, based on the synthetic testing result, we would expect also the full analysis chain to be fairly well applicable also to other devices, given some caveats.

Since the total  $H\alpha$  emission in the divertor associated with plasma-molecule interactions (photons/s) is sufficient for quantitatively estimating MAR ion sinks and radiative power losses associated with  $H_2$  chemistry, those two analysis estimates are

robust against chordal integration effects, which is in agreement with the synthetic testing results. The separation between emission from  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  could be more sensitive to chordal integration effects, given its relatively strong dependence on the electron density (figure 5). MAI estimates from the BaSPMI are more sensitive to chordal integral effects, given the strong temperature dependence between the MAI per  $H\alpha$  ratio (figure 18). This is also shown in the synthetic testing results in section 3.

This analysis relies on the lower-n Balmer lines and as such is susceptible to opacity. In devices where  $Ly\beta$  opacity is significant, which can be monitored using VUV spectroscopy based on the measured  $Ly\beta/H\alpha$  ratio, such as JET [11] and C-Mod [20], modifications to this analysis have to be employed to separate the  $H\alpha$  increase due to molecular processes and due to opacity.

*Applicability in terms of viewing geometry* One caveat to the general applicability of the atomic Balmer line analysis (and thus also BaSMPI), is the placement of the lines of sight [5]. If the lines of sight are placed in such a way that they go through both a significant ionisation and bright recombination emission region, the electron-impact excitation contribution to the total Balmer line emission could be lower than a few percent. In that case, there is insufficient information about electron-impact excitation in the signal resulting in large uncertainties in the ionisation estimates. This can occur if there is a large shift between the respective electron densities and electron temperature profiles along the line of sight [52].

It should be noted, however, that a closed and higher density divertor may also facilitate a more natural separation of the various emission regions as the characteristics mean-free-paths become smaller. This, for instance, is why the synthetic testing results are more consistent for MAST-U than TCV (see section 3).

*Applicability in terms of diagnostic capabilities* As illustrated in this work, inferring information from plasma-molecule interactions simultaneously with the ionisation source complicates extracting the ionisation rate in strongly detached conditions unless temperature 'constraints' are employed. Although the temperature constraints employed here may only be applicable to specific situations or specific devices, other constraints could be employed, for instance based on divertor Thomson scattering or impurity line spectroscopy. Essentially, what is required is a way of estimating whether the inferred electron-impact excitation temperature ( $T_e^E$ ) for a single (or multiple) chord(s) is 'likely' or 'unlikely'.  $T_e^E$  will correspond to the characteristic temperature of the high temperature region along the line of sight. Those temperature constraints enable obtaining ionisation estimates even when the electron-impact excitation (of  $H$ ) component of the Balmer line emission is fairly small.

The full BaSPMI analysis puts requirements on the divertor spectroscopy system. It requires inferred electron densities (from Stark broadening for line-of-sight spectroscopy) as well as high quality absolute brightness of two medium-n Balmer lines in addition to  $H\alpha$  and  $H\beta$ . Therefore, BaSPMI requires a flexible divertor spectroscopy system which can be used to measure 4-5 Balmer lines. Given the large differences between the brightnesses of the various Balmer lines, these measurements may likely have to be restricted to measuring 1-2 Balmer lines at the same time. In that case, either repeat discharges or multiple spectrometers would be required to measure the 4-5 required Balmer lines. Neutral density filters may need to be employed to attenuate the emission of the particularly bright Balmer lines ( $H\alpha$ ,  $H\beta$ ).

Ultimately, the entire analysis technique can be improved through the inclusion of multiple diagnostics in a consistent statistical framework such as in [50]. Such a technique would use '2D spectroscopy' using filtered camera imaging [40]. This could be further improved by complementing the Balmer line measurements with impurity lines, such as He-I lines, providing more information on electron temperature and electron density (see discussion in section 5.4. Using toroidally-view filtered camera imaging spectroscopy would also enable a more precise localisation of all the different processes involved both along and across the field lines. This (partially) resolves the difficulty of 'line integration' effects and facilitates the separation of the various processes - since they are already spatially separated [35]. Additionally, such a 2D variety of the analysis could enable estimating 2D maps of the  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  densities, which is not feasible otherwise.

## 6. Summary

Both plasma-atom and  $H_2$  plasma chemistry (involving  $H_2^+$  and/or  $H^-$ ) can result in excited atoms leading to hydrogen atomic line emission. We have developed a new quantitative analysis technique, Balmer Spectroscopy Plasma Molecule Interaction - BaSPMI, to separate the emission of all Balmer lines into their electron-impact excitation (of  $H$ ), electron-ion recombination (of  $H^+$ ) and  $H_2$  plasma chemistry related (involving  $H_2$ ,  $H_2^+$ ,  $H^-$ ) contributions. This is facilitated using the consistency between the medium-n ( $H\gamma$ ,  $H\delta$ ) Balmer lines, which are less sensitive to plasma-molecule interactions, and lower-n Balmer lines ( $H\alpha$ ,  $H\beta$ ). The individual emission contributions are then used to:

- Estimating the particle sources/sinks through plasma-atom (ionisation, recombination) and plasma-molecule (Molecular Activated Recombination / Ionisation - MAR/MAI) interactions.
- Estimating the radiative loss from *excited atoms* arising from plasma-atom and plasma-molecule interactions.

This analysis technique is validated by analysing synthetic spectra obtained from a synthetic divertor spectrometer using SOLPS simulations of both TCV and MAST-U. The Balmer line emissivity profiles along each line of sight showed strong spatial variations depending on the type of plasma-atom/molecule interaction. Despite this, however, the analysis result was in fair agreement (e.g. within uncertainty) with the direct outputs from SOLPS-ITER. The analysis was further tested by artificially removing certain plasma-atom/molecule interaction processes from the synthetic brightness. In this additional testing, the analysis correctly pointed out the lack of the removed processes.

The analysis makes several assumptions which have been discussed in detail. It has been shown that these have only minor impacts on the analysis result. In particular, we have shown that the MAR ion sink in the plasma can be readily estimated by comparing the expected atomic contribution of  $H\alpha$  (based on only the analysis of a medium-n ( $n = 5, 6, 7$ ) Balmer line pair) to the measured  $H\alpha$ . Those simplified MAR estimates are in quantitative agreement to the MAR estimates of the full BaSPMI result. The full BaSPMI analysis is, however, required to separate the contributions of  $H_2^+$  and  $H^-$  to the Balmer line emission as well as to estimate the impact of  $H_2$  plasma chemistry on the medium-n Balmer lines.

An experimental illustration of the analysis on TCV has been presented, indicating that plasma-molecule interactions can significantly contribute to the Balmer line emission. This has important implications for the diagnosis of tokamak divertors using hydrogen atomic line spectroscopy. We believe that this analysis technique should be generally applicable (in conditions where there is no significant photon opacity) to other tokamak devices to address those implications.

## 7. Acknowledgements

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## Appendix A. Balmer line emission model description for plasma-molecule interactions

Balmer line emission attributed to  $H_2$  plasma chemistry can arise from interactions with  $H_2, H_2^+, H_3^+$  and  $H^-$  (figure 1). In addition, Balmer line emission associated with  $H^-$  can arise from either reactions starting with  $H^- + H_2^+$  or  $H^- + H^+$ . Using a slab model for the plasma, we can describe the Balmer line brightness associated with  $H_2$  chemistry ( $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-}$  - photons/ $m^2 s$ ) using equation A.1. Such plasma-slab models assume that all processes occur at the same location physically and implications of this have been discussed in detail for atomic reactions in literature [5, 10, 25, 9].

The PEC coefficients in equation A.1, obtained through Yacora (on the Web) [22, 23], are functions of the electron density, electron temperature, as well as the temperatures of the molecular species ( $H_2, H_2^+, H_3^+, H^-$ ). Those latter temperature dependencies have, however, been found to be insignificant ( $\ll 1\%$ ) for most pathways (except  $H^-$  \*) and thus a 1 eV temperature for  $H_2, H_2^+, H_3^+$  has been assumed.

$$\begin{aligned}
 B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-} = & \Delta L n_e n_{H_2} PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e) + \\
 & \Delta L n_e n_{H_2^+} PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}(n_e, T_e) + \\
 & \Delta L n_e n_{H_3^+} PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_3^+}(n_e, T_e) + \\
 & \Delta L n_{H^+} n_{H^-} PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H^- + H^+}(n_e, T_e, T_{H^+}, T_{H^-}) + \\
 & \Delta L n_{H_2^+} n_{H^-} PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H^- + H_2^+}(n_e, T_e, T_{H_2^+}, T_{H^-})
 \end{aligned} \tag{A.1}$$

\* The additional temperature dependencies for  $H^-$  are similar for all transitions:  $PEC_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H^- + H^+} \approx f(T_{H^+}, T_{H^-}) \times g(n_e, T_e)$  and therefore only impact the "MAR/ $H\alpha$  emission coefficient" ratios employed in section 2.5.2 in the analysis. A random temperature between 0.5-3 eV is assumed for the  $H^-$  temperature as it can get some of the Franck-Condon energy of the  $H_2$  bond (2.2 eV) when  $H_2$  dissociatively attaches with an electron to form  $H^-$  ( $e^- + H_2 \rightarrow H^- + H$ ). A random value between 0.8 to 1.5 times  $T_e^E$  is assumed for the  $H^+$  temperature, as estimated from SOLPS-ITER simulations [37, 42, 53].

To further simplify equation A.1, we ignore the emission contribution from  $H_3^+$  (which we estimate to be negligible based on post-processing of SOLPS simulations - section 3) and we assume that all emission from  $H^-$  occurs from  $H^-$  interacting with  $H^+$  (rather than  $H_2^+$ ) as the  $H^+$  density is far larger than the  $H_2^+$  density while their PECs are similar at the region where we would expect emission from such processes to occur. With those simplifications, we now obtain equation A.2 for  $B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-}$ .

$$B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2, H_2^+, H^-} \approx \underbrace{\Delta L n_e n_{H_2} \text{PEC}_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}(n_e, T_e)}_{B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2}} + \underbrace{\Delta L n_e n_{H_2^+} \text{PEC}_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}(n_e, T_e)}_{B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H_2^+}} + \underbrace{\Delta L n_e n_{H^-} \text{PEC}_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H^- + H^+}(n_e, T_e)}_{B_{n \rightarrow 2}^{H^-}} \quad (\text{A.2})$$

## Appendix B. Detailed information on the iterative scheme and convergence

The analysis scheme uses an Euler iterative scheme in order to obtain self-consistent results between the various atomic and molecular contributions of the Balmer lines. The convergence of this *relative change* in the estimated molecular contribution to the medium-n Balmer line is tracked per each iteration until it is 'converged'. The convergence criteria for this are listed below and are applied to the *statistical output sample* (which is determined from all the various input distributions) for this relative change:

- (i) At least 16 % of the output sample should have a *negative* change in the estimated molecular contribution (to make sure the analysis result is not 'drifting' towards a positive change).
- (ii) At least 16 % of the output sample should have a *positive* change in the estimated molecular contribution (to make sure the analysis result is not 'drifting' towards a positive change).
- (iii) The median of the change of the output sample should be between -0.2 and +0.2 % (assuming the median is a proxy for the maximum likelihood, this makes sure that the analysis estimates are converged).
- (iv) 68 % of the output sample should have a relative absolute change below 2 % (assuming the equal-tailed 68 % quantile [54] is a proxy for the highest density interval [54] confidence intervals, this makes sure that the estimated uncertainties are converged).

These convergence criteria have to be obeyed for at least 4 iterations simultaneously. These settings have been made after verifying that the results and their uncertainty have converged before reaching these criteria while keeping the number of iterations required acceptable (usually between 7-20).

## Appendix C. Improving the analysis through temperature constraints

We introduce here two possible temperature constraints which can improve the analysis output estimates: one based on the excitation temperature near the target and one

based on the observation of the CHII front. The goal of these 'constraints' is to provide some 'probability' for having a certain temperature at a certain location of the divertor. Other temperature constraints could be employed in a similar fashion. Before introducing our constraints, first we will explain how they are employed in the analysis technically.

Each Monte Carlo output sample point contains an estimate for the excitation-derived temperature  $T_t^E$ . Given these constraints, we can compute the probability of that sample point being true (for this we assume an asymmetric Gaussian probability distribution for  $T_t^E$ ). The samples and their probabilities are then mapped to a probability density functions (PDFs) using a *weighted* Gaussian Kernel density estimator (as opposed to an adaptive *non-weighted* one when no constraints are employed [55]). From the PDF estimates, the maximum likelihood and shortest interval corresponding to 68 % uncertainty can be extracted, representing the estimated outputs and its uncertainty in a similar way as done in [10].

This way of implementing constraints also changes how the integrated values should be obtained. Since the uncertainties are assumed to be systematic, the uncertainties applied to each chord per sample are the same - there is thus a correlation between the uncertainties of different chords when calculating integrated values (such as the total ionisation source). This could interfere with the way the constraints are built up. For instance, if all the analysis outputs would, hypothetically, be isothermal, then the maximum likelihood values of the temperature profile along the divertor leg would, after applying the constraints, not be isothermal (since a probability per point on the poloidal profile is ascribed). However, the integrated ionisation values would be determined all from isothermal solutions (since in this case a probability per poloidal profile is ascribed rather than a probability per point on the poloidal profile). Given these technicalities, we therefore determine the maximum likelihood of the poloidal profiles with their 68 % confidence intervals of ionisation, recombination, etc. and integrate these profiles (and their upper/lower estimates) to get the estimates for the integrated (ionisation source, recombination sink, etc. parameters); which is more consistent with applying the constraints per point on the poloidal profile.

One drawback of employed constraints is that it strongly reduces the 'effective' Monte Carlo sample size of the simulation (since many sample points are given low probabilities and are thus 'effectively excluded'). Therefore, the analysis would require a larger number of Monte Carlo samples and thus more computational time when such constraints are employed. Furthermore, the requirement of using a weighted Kernel density estimator makes the choice for a suitable Kernel density estimator more restricted.

Employing temperature constraints in the analysis is only necessary for electron-impact excitation (of  $H$ ) derived quantities in detached conditions. Adding the constraints to the other quantities, however, changes the maximum likelihoods insignificantly, although it does reduce their uncertainties.

### Appendix C.1. Target temperature constraint

Assuming that we have an estimate for a range of possible target temperatures, we can use this to constrain the analysis. In this, we assume that this target temperature estimate is similar to the excitation emission weighted temperature of the nearest chord at the target ( $T_t^E$ ). For synthetic testing we obtain this estimate directly from the SOLPS output (assuming an uncertainty of  $\pm 1$  eV), while for the experimental

analysis the target temperature has been estimated using power balance using the result from [5].

### Appendix C.2. CIII temperature 'exclusion' constraints

An additional temperature constraint can be employed along the viewing chord fan; rather than a single point at the target. The front of the CIII (465 nm) emission line is an emission line frequently used in the qualitative characterisation of edge physics experiments in carbon devices, especially at TCV [56, 39, 57] where it is used as a 'proxy' for the 'cold front' taking off the target [57] during detachment experiments. Depending on transport, the expected temperature of such a 'front (1/e fall-off point)' (assuming the carbon concentration does not change dramatically over the field line) is 4-8 eV. Below the CIII front the electron temperature will likely not be hotter than 8 eV. Likewise, above the front, the temperature will likely not be colder than 4 eV: the CIII emission front thus provides us with information to spatially 'exclude' (e.g. lower the likeliness of) certain temperatures. We can thus constrain the temperature samples further by adding a probability function which represents this argument - equation C.1.

In here  $z$  represents the  $z$  position of the line of sight intersecting the divertor leg,  $z_f$  represents the CIII front location estimate and  $T_{f,l}, T_{f,h}$  corresponds to the lowest/highest-temperature estimate of the front respectively. In this case,  $z_f$  is determined analogously to [56, 57] as the 1/e fall-off-length of the CIII emission profile, which is determined by line of sight spectroscopy. The probability used for each line of sight shown in equation C.1 represents an analytical depiction of the multiplication of two block-functions making two clauses likely: below CIII front  $z_f$  and below temperature  $T_{f,h} = 8$  eV & above CIII front  $z_f$  and above temperature  $T_{f,l} = 4$  eV. The fall-off length of the functions are set to  $kz = 2$  cm and  $kT = 1.5$  eV respectively. The solutions are largely insensitive to relatively modest changes of these fall-off parameters and temperature points.

$$P(T_e) = \frac{1}{1 + \exp - \left( \frac{z - z_f}{kz} \right)} \frac{1}{1 + \exp - \left( \frac{T_e - T_{f,l}}{kT} \right)} + \left[ 1 - \frac{1}{1 + \exp - \left( \frac{z - z_f}{kz} \right)} \right] \left[ 1 - \frac{1}{1 + \exp - \left( \frac{T_e - T_{f,h}}{kT} \right)} \right] \quad (\text{C.1})$$

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