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**Citation for published version:**

Meier, T, Laniel, D, Pena-Alvarez, M, Trybel, F, Khandarkhaeva, S, Krupp, A, Jacobs, J, Dubrovinskaia, N & Dubrovinsky, L 2020, 'Nuclear Spin Crossover in Dense Molecular Hydrogen', *Nature Communications*, vol. 11, no. 1, 6334, pp. 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-19927-y>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1038/s41467-020-19927-y](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-19927-y)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Nature Communications

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# Nuclear Spin Coupling Crossover in Dense Molecular Hydrogen

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## **Abstract**

One of the most striking properties of molecular hydrogen is the coupling between molecular rotational properties and nuclear spin orientations, giving rise to the spin isomers ortho- and para-hydrogen. At high pressure, as intermolecular interactions increase significantly, the free rotation of H<sub>2</sub> molecules is increasingly hindered, and consequently a modification of the coupling between molecular rotational properties and the nuclear spin system can be anticipated. To date, high-pressure experimental methods have not been able to observe nuclear spin states at pressures approaching 100 GPa<sup>1,2</sup> and consequently the effect of high pressure on the nuclear spin statistics could not be directly measured. Here, we present in-situ high-pressure nuclear magnetic resonance data on molecular hydrogen in its hexagonal phase I up to 123 GPa at room temperature. While our measurements confirm the presence of ortho-hydrogen at low pressures, above 70 GPa, we observe a crossover in the nuclear spin statistics from a spin-1 quadrupolar to a spin-1/2 dipolar system, evidencing the loss of spin isomer distinction. These observations represent a unique case of a nuclear spin crossover phenomenon in quantum solids.

## **Introduction**

Changes in electronic spin statistics under changing thermodynamic conditions are an established physical crossover phenomenon<sup>3</sup>. It has direct applications for spintronics<sup>4</sup> and enables the understanding of the stabilization of magnetospheres of rocky (Earth-like) planets<sup>5</sup> as well as gas- and ice-giants<sup>6</sup>. The degrees of freedom of the nuclei spins, however, are widely approximated as fixed within the analysis of experiments, due to large shielding by core electrons and the extremely short atomic distances necessary to induce such fundamental changes.

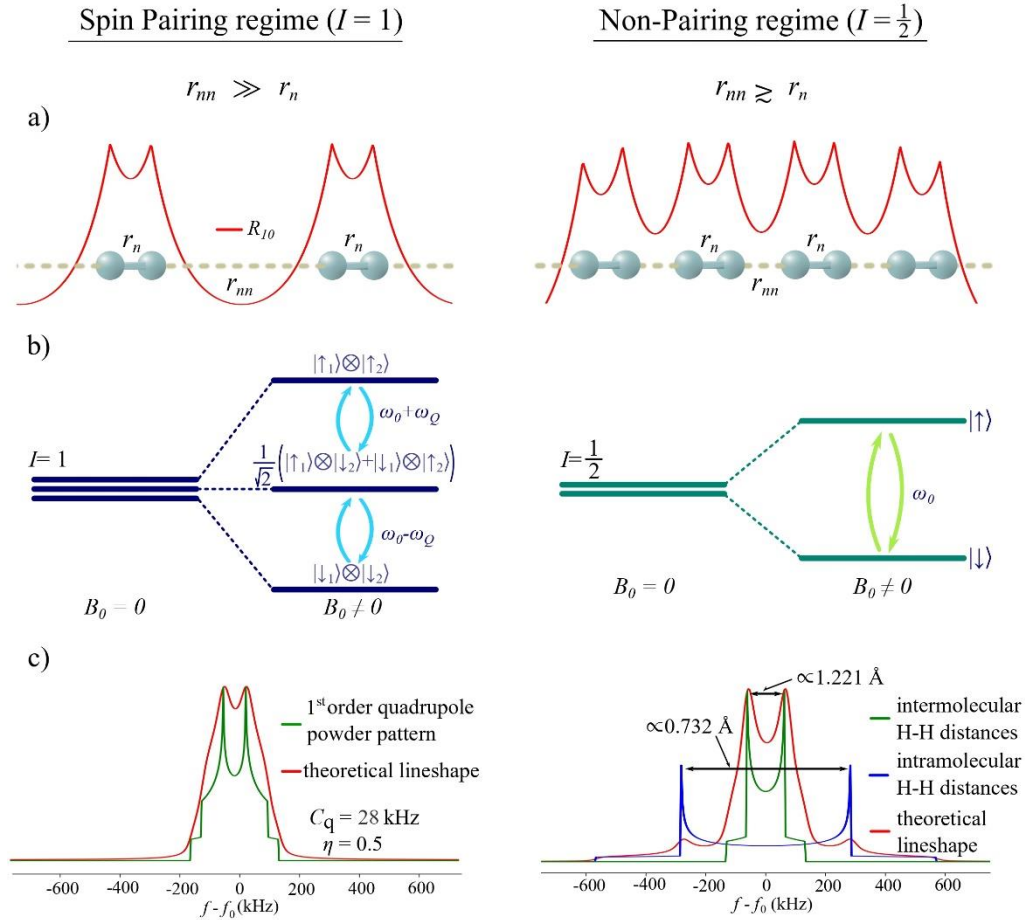


Figure 1: **Overview of both spin-pairing and non-pairing regimes.** **a)** Schematic representation of the wave function overlap (red lines) of H<sub>2</sub> molecules. **b)** Schematic representation of the nuclear spin energy levels under the influence of an external magnetic field  $B_0$  for the pairing (i.e. quadrupole interaction) and non-pairing (dipole-dipole interaction) regimes. **c)** Theoretical line shapes in the pairing and non-pairing regime.  $\omega_0 = 2\pi f_0$  denotes the Larmor frequency of the hydrogen nuclei,  $\omega_Q$ ,  $\eta$  and  $C_q$  are the quadrupole frequency, the asymmetry parameter and the quadrupole coupling constant respectively.

36 Hydrogen, on the other hand, exhibits no core electrons and when bound contributes its  
 37 electron to the molecular bond. Furthermore, due to the low mass of the hydrogen nuclei,  
 38 quantum nuclear effects are considered to be significantly more pronounced compared to all  
 39 other elements. The combination of both effects results in a number of fascinating physical  
 40 phenomena in molecular H<sub>2</sub><sup>7-9</sup>.

41 One property intrigued physicists in particular: the nature of the nuclear spin of the H<sub>2</sub>  
 42 molecule and the resulting coexistence of the spin isomers ortho- (ortho-H<sub>2</sub>) and para-hydrogen  
 43 (para-H<sub>2</sub>). Following Pauli's exclusion principle, in order for the total H<sub>2</sub> molecular wave  
 44 function to be antisymmetric under exchange of atomic positions, demands for the rotational  
 45 ground state  $J=0$ , that the corresponding total nuclear wave function is antisymmetric (singlet  
 46 state of  $I=0$ , i.e. para-H<sub>2</sub>). Analogously, for the  $J=1$  rotational state, the total nuclear wave

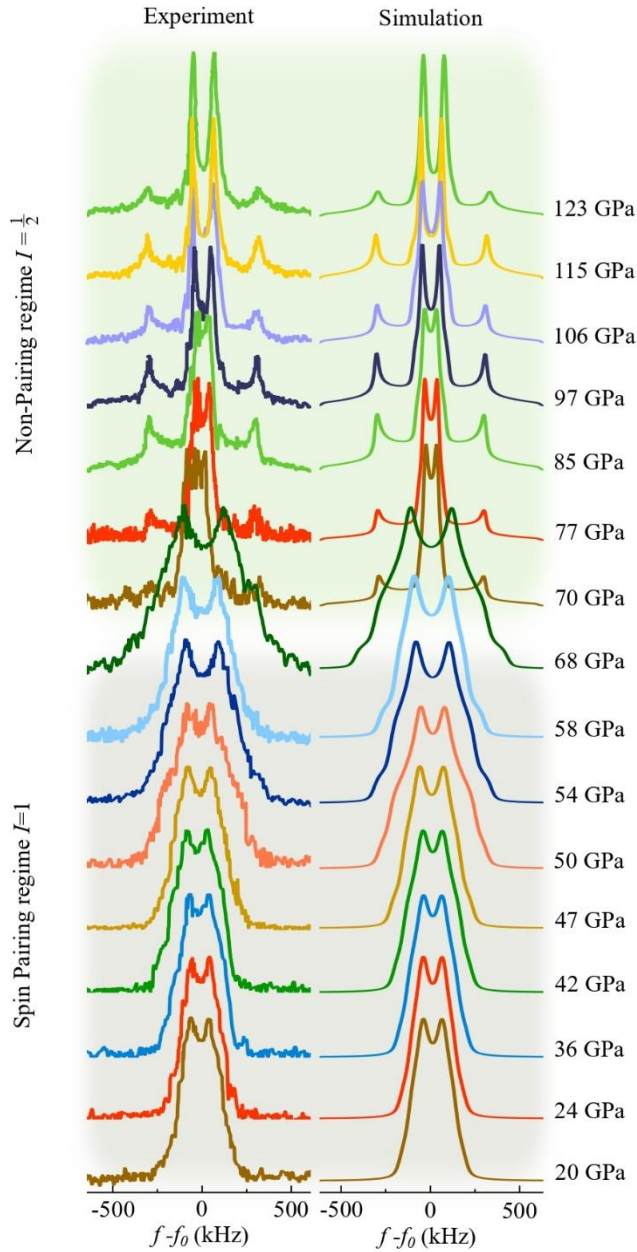


Figure 2: *Experimental and calculated  $^1\text{H-NMR}$  spectra of molecular  $\text{H}_2$  up to 123 GPa at room temperature. Between 20 and 68 GPa, first order quadrupole interactions describe the experimental data reasonably well. At  $P > 68$  GPa, spectra were found to be broadened by dipole-dipole interaction resulting in a superposition of two Pake doublets corresponding to nearest and next-nearest hydrogen distances.*

47 function is required to be symmetric (triplet state of  $I=1$ , i.e. ortho- $\text{H}_2$ ). Therefore, the spin  
 48 allotropic isomerism of the  $\text{H}_2$  molecule originates in the coupling of both rotational state and  
 49 nuclear spin. It has been argued<sup>10,11</sup> that at high pressure ( $P$ ) ortho- and para-hydrogen spin  
 50 isomers remain stable up to the dissociative Wigner-Huntington transition at  $P > 400$  GPa<sup>12,13</sup>.  
 51 This can only be assumed for weak or moderate intermolecular interactions, i.e. when nearest  
 52 neighbour distances ( $r_n$ ) are much shorter ( $\approx 0.7$  Å at ambient conditions) than next-nearest  
 53 neighbour distances ( $r_{nn} \approx 3$  Å at ambient conditions), allowing for sufficient intramolecular  
 54 wave function overlap (left side of Fig. 1a).

55 Under high enough densities, however, intermolecular interactions increase  
 56 significantly as  $r_{nn}$  decreases by  $\sim 70\%$  within 100 GPa<sup>14,15</sup>. At these pressures,  $r_{nn}$  approaches  
 57  $r_n$  and collective nuclear quantum fluctuations increase rapidly<sup>16</sup>. For decades, theoretical<sup>8,17,18</sup>

58 and experimental<sup>9</sup> studies indicated that under such extreme pressures odd values of  $J$  become  
59 unstable, rapidly decaying into even states, which leads to a potential indistinguishability of the  
60 hydrogen spin isomers on experimental timescales.”

61 The only experimental technique in high-pressure research to directly study the H<sub>2</sub>  
62 nuclear spin states is nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) spectroscopy, detecting the linear  
63 response of the nuclear spin system upon radio frequency excitation in a magnetic field  $B_0$ . The  
64 spin singlet state of para-hydrogen is NMR silent, whereas application of  $B_0$  lifts the three-fold  
65 degeneracy of the ortho states and allows for an excitation of nuclear spin transitions (Fig. 1b).  
66 Nuclear spin pairing in ortho-hydrogen leads, furthermore, to a finite electric quadrupole  
67 moment,  $eQ$ , interacting with the local charge distribution defined by the structural arrangement  
68 of hydrogen molecules. Thus, quadrupolar coupling can be considered the dominant spin  
69 interaction, resulting in characteristic NMR line shapes<sup>19</sup> (Fig. 1c).

70 Here, we present <sup>1</sup>H-NMR data of dense molecular hydrogen up to 123 GPa at room  
71 temperature and found a distinct crossover in the nuclear spin statistics of molecular hydrogen  
72 indicating a loss of ortho-para spin isomer distinction. Details on experimental conditions,  
73 spectral simulations as well as data analysis are provided in the Methods Section.

74

## 75 **Results**

76 Two NMR-DACs equipped with diamond anvils of 250  $\mu\text{m}$  and 100  $\mu\text{m}$  culets were  
77 loaded with molecular H<sub>2</sub>. At low pressure (below 60 GPa), intense <sup>1</sup>H resonances of roughly  
78 500 kHz width were detected. With increasing  $P$ , the resonance signals broadened significantly  
79 approaching 750 kHz at 68 GPa (Fig. 2). Above 68 GPa, we observed a resonance narrowing  
80 accompanied by the emergence of two Pake doublets<sup>20</sup> with increasing splitting upon  
81 compression.

82 For the quadrupolar nature expected for ortho-H<sub>2</sub> ( $I=1$ ), the electric field  $V(\mathbf{r})$ , defined  
83 by the local charge distribution based on the crystal structure of phase I, should influence the  
84 shape of the observed resonance lines. Calculated line shapes for a  $I=1$  spin system are shown  
85 in Figure 2 at pressures of up to 68 GPa. The order of magnitude of the quadrupolar interaction  
86 energy was considered small relative to the nuclear Zeeman energy<sup>19</sup> and consequently treated  
87 as a first order perturbation (see Methods and Materials Section for computational details). Up  
88 to 68 GPa, the measured <sup>1</sup>H-NMR spectra are well described by calculated line shapes  
89 broadened by first order quadrupole interaction. The line shape is mainly controlled by two  
90 parameters: (i) the quadrupole coupling constant  $C_q$  describing the coupling between  $eQ$  and

91  $V(\mathbf{r})$  as well as (ii) the electric field gradient asymmetry parameter  $\eta$  accounting for the  
 92 geometry of  $V(\mathbf{r})$ .

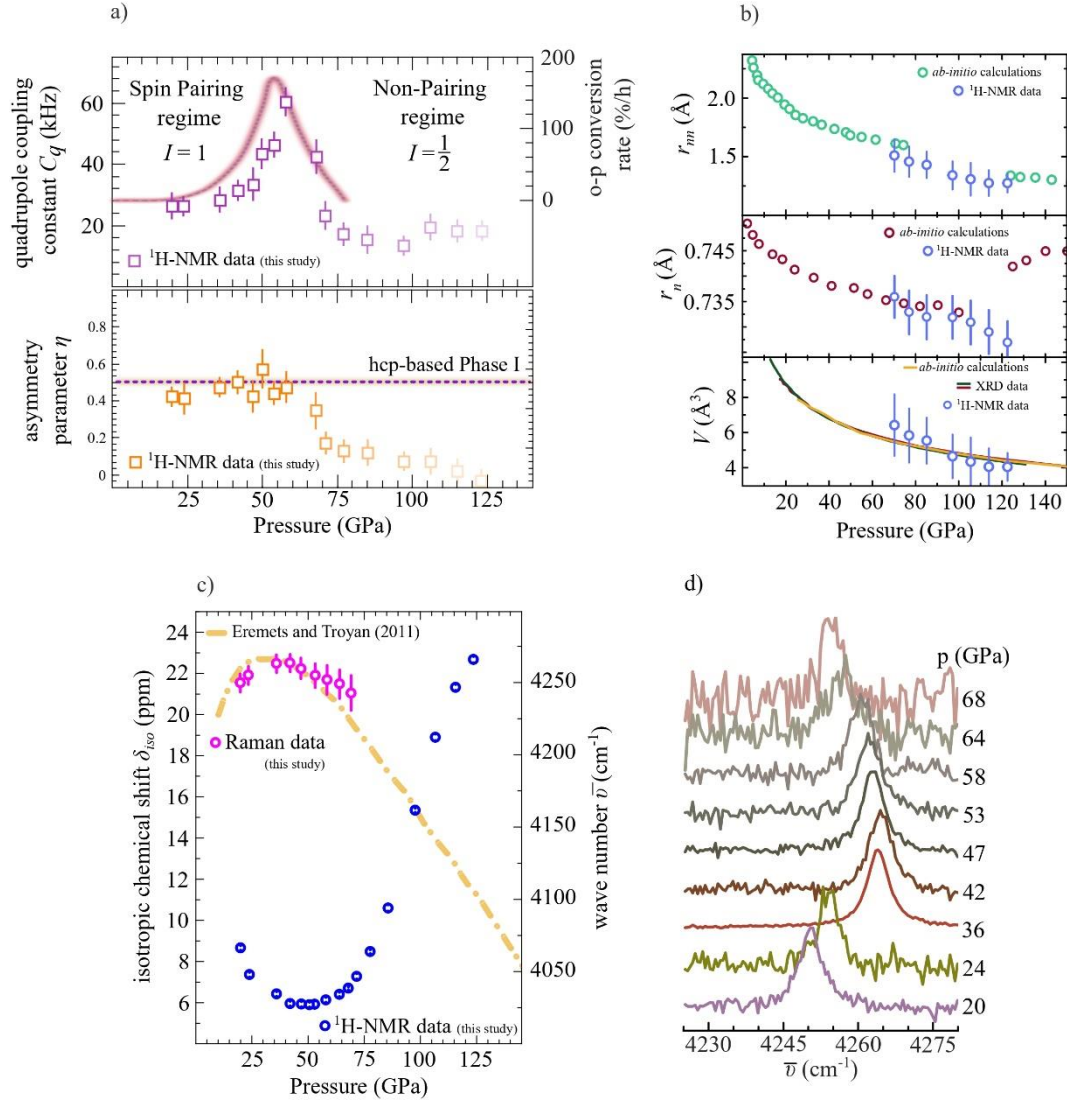


Figure 3: **Extracted <sup>1</sup>H-NMR data of molecular H<sub>2</sub> at pressures up to 123 GPa at room temperature.** **a)** Top panel: quadrupole coupling constant  $C_q$  determined from NMR data (squares). The rose line denotes theoretical ortho-para conversion rates from electric quadrupole interaction<sup>28</sup>. Bottom panel: asymmetry parameter  $\eta$  in the spin pairing regime ( $P < 60$  GPa). The dashed line represents the inferred  $\eta$  based on the hcp structure of Phase I from diffraction experiments. The shading of the squares at  $P > 60$  GPa highlights the crossover to the non-pairing  $I=1/2$  regime. **b)** Top panel: next nearest neighbour distances  $r_{nn}$ . Green circles are based on DFT computations<sup>15</sup>. Blue circles are extracted values of  $r_n$  and  $r_{nn}$  from the NMR spectra in the non-pairing  $I=1/2$  regime. Middle panel: nearest neighbour distances  $r_n$  (blue circles) and DFT calculations<sup>15</sup> (red circles). The discontinuity at  $P > 125$  GPa in the DFT calculations indicates a transition from the hcp based to a monoclinic structure. Bottom panel: comparison between the equations of state derived from ab-initio computations<sup>24</sup> (yellow line) and diffraction data<sup>14,21</sup> along with the unit cell volumes (blue dots) derived from  $r_{nn}$  and  $r_n$  extracted from the NMR experiments. **c)** Extracted isotropic chemical shift values  $\delta_{iso}$  after homo-nuclear Lee-Goldberg decoupling. Error bars are within the symbol size. The orange dotted line shows the room temperature Raman shift of the H<sub>2</sub> vibron<sup>26</sup>. **d)** Selected Raman spectra of the H<sub>2</sub> vibron at increasing pressure. Spectra taken from [25] Error bars in a) and b) were taken from spectral simulation and comparison with experimental data. Error bars in c) are taken from Voigtian spectral line shape fitting to the experimental data. Error bars of the NMR data after Lee-Goldberg decoupling (blue points in c) were within the symbol size.

93 Figure 3a (top panel) shows estimated values of  $C_q$  which increase from 28.1(6) kHz at  
 94 20 GPa to 61.9(7) kHz at 58 GPa. This increase is likely originated in the high compressibility  
 95 and rapidly reducing next-nearest neighbour distances between molecular H<sub>2</sub> units, enhancing

96 quadrupolar coupling. The asymmetry parameter  $\eta$  (Fig. 3a, bottom panel) was found to be  
97 almost constant within experimental errors varying between 0.44(6) at 20 GPa and 0.49(9) at  
98 58 GPa. Based on the hexagonal crystal structure of phase I<sup>14,21</sup>,  $\eta$  can be expected to be close  
99 to 0.5, which is in excellent agreement with values derived from the analysis of our NMR  
100 measurements.

101 Above  $P \approx 68$  GPa, however, we observed a sudden decrease in both  $C_q$  and  $\eta$   
102 coinciding with a resonance peak splitting. Since no structural rearrangement of H<sub>2</sub> molecules  
103 is reported by diffraction methods<sup>21</sup> or Raman spectroscopy<sup>22</sup> at room temperature in this  $P$ -  
104 range, effects based on a modification of the H<sub>2</sub> nuclear spin system should be considered.

105 This pressure indicates a turning point in the behaviour of the <sup>1</sup>H spin system, as the  
106 observed peak splitting devolves from having dominantly quadrupolar characteristics towards  
107 a system controlled by nuclear dipole-dipole coupling, resulting in pronounced  $I=1/2$  line  
108 shapes<sup>23</sup> with a frequency difference between spectral density function singularities directly  
109 correlated to the distances between hydrogen atoms. Considering that in this case both, the  
110 interaction with the nearest and next nearest neighbours will result in a dipolar NMR pattern,  
111 respectively, a superposition of signals as shown in Figure 1c can be expected. Computationally  
112 obtained values of nearest and next-nearest neighbour distances<sup>15</sup> are  $r_n \approx 0.731$  Å and  $r_{nn} \approx$   
113  $1.342$  Å at 120 GPa. Calculating the distances from the parameter-set obtained through analysis  
114 of the NMR spectra for such a mixed scenario resulted in:  $r_n \approx 0.727$  Å and  $r_{nn} \approx 1.27(8)$  Å  
115 at 123 GPa, in excellent agreement with the computational estimates by Labet et al.<sup>15</sup>. Figure  
116 2 shows the comparison between experimental spectra and calculated  $I=1/2$  line shapes between  
117 71 GPa and 123 GPa. The respective values derived for both nearest (top panel) and next-  
118 nearest (middle panel) neighbour distances can be found in Figure 3b. Additionally, the  
119 comparison between the equation of state derived from *ab-initio* computations<sup>24</sup> and diffraction  
120 data<sup>14,21</sup>, along with the unit cell volumes (blue dots) derived from  $r_n$  and  $r_{nn}$  extracted from the  
121 analysis of the NMR spectra are shown in the bottom panel of Figure 3b.

122 Homonuclear Lee-Goldburg decoupling sequences<sup>25</sup> have been used to suppress  
123 quadrupolar and dipolar line broadening in order to resolve isotropic chemical shifts,  $\delta_{iso}$ .  
124 Figure 3c shows the evolution of  $\delta_{iso}$ : initially decreasing from 8.6 to 5.9 ppm between 20 and  
125 59 GPa,  $\delta_{iso}$  has an inflection point at  $\sim 60$  GPa and raises under further compression to 22.7  
126 ppm at 123 GPa. Comparison with Raman data<sup>26</sup> suggests that the minimum in  $\delta_{iso}$  coincides  
127 with the well-known turn-over in the Raman shift of the H<sub>2</sub> vibron caused by a weakening of  
128 intramolecular and increased intermolecular interactions<sup>27</sup>.

129



130

131

132 **Discussion:**

133 The presented data analysis leads to the following interpretation of the observed effects:

134 At  $P < 60$  GPa,  $^1\text{H}$ -NMR data is characteristic for an  $I=1$  quadrupolar spin system as expected  
135 for ortho- $\text{H}_2$ . In this regime, individual nuclear spin angular momenta couple with their nearest  
136 neighbours (separated on average by  $r_n$ ), leading to a significant wave function overlap within  
137 the molecular units and a stabilisation of the spin isomers. The excellent agreement between  
138 NMR derived values for the electric field gradient asymmetry parameter  $\eta$  and values inferred  
139 from X-ray diffraction data<sup>14,21</sup> strengthens this assessment. Following the theoretical study of  
140 Strzheimchny et al.<sup>28</sup>, this compression driven enhancement of the quadrupolar coupling  
141 constant  $C_q$  in this  $P$ -regime may be interpreted as an experimental evidence for the mechanism  
142 of ortho-para conversion through electric quadrupole interaction.

143 At  $P > 60$  GPa, quadrupolar coupling rapidly diminishes despite the absence of a structural  
144 rearrangement of the molecular  $\text{H}_2$  units. Starting from about 70 GPa, spectral features  
145 characteristic of homonuclear dipole-dipole coupling between nearest and next-nearest  
146 neighbours become apparent. Provided the good agreement between NMR data with DFT<sup>15</sup>  
147 and experimentally<sup>14,21</sup> derived intermolecular and interatomic distances, this shift in behaviour  
148 implies intramolecular coupling of nuclear spins to become increasingly perturbed. The  
149 inflection-point in the isotropic chemical shift  $\delta_{\text{iso}}$  strengthens this hypothesis as the increasing  
150 nuclear de-shielding above 60 GPa indicates a shift of electron density away from individual  
151 molecular centres towards intermolecular regions.

152  $^{14}\text{N}$ -NMR on molecular nitrogen at  $P = 3$  GPa (see Methods and Materials Section)  
153 supports this argument, as the nitrogen spin system shows clear characteristics of a nuclear spin  
154 triplet state anticipated within the non-pairing regime contrary to the quintuplet state stabilised  
155 in the molecular spin pairing regime.

156 In this work, in-situ High-Pressure Nuclear Magnetic Resonance was used to investigate  
157 the nature of the nuclear spin statistics of molecular hydrogen up to 123 GPa in Phase I at room  
158 temperature. It was found that even at moderately high pressures ( $< 100$  GPa) intramolecular  
159 nuclear spin coupling broke down and the hydrogen spin system adopted an average dipolar  
160  $I=1/2$  value. Crossovers of the nuclear spin statistics of a quantum solid such as hydrogen have  
161 so far not been observed and given the large compressibility of hydrogen in conjunction with  
162 strong nuclear quantum effects, this crossover phenomenon might only be experimentally  
163 observable in molecular  $\text{H}_2$ . Nuclear spin statistics of similar diatomic molecules (e.g.  $\text{N}_2$ ) are



164 likely to be best described as non-pairing nuclear spins due to enhanced atomic masses as well  
165 as reduced compressibilities due to the presence of core electrons.

166 This nuclear spin crossover may have far reaching consequences for understanding  
167 different phenomena such as the stabilisation of magnetospheres of gas and ice giant planets  
168 containing large quantities of molecular H<sub>2</sub>.

169

## 170 **Methods**

### 171 *Diamond Anvil Cell Preparation*

172 Two diamond anvil cells, equipped with pairs of diamond anvils with a culets size of 250  $\mu\text{m}$   
173 and 100  $\mu\text{m}$ , were prepared. Rhenium gaskets were pre-indented to 25  $\mu\text{m}$  and 10  $\mu\text{m}$   
174 respectively, and 80  $\mu\text{m}$  and 40  $\mu\text{m}$  diameter holes were laser drilled in the centre of the  
175 indentation to form the sample cavities, resulting in sample volumes of about 125  $\mu\text{l}$  and 13  $\mu\text{l}$   
176 respectively.

177 The diamond anvils were coated with a 1  $\mu\text{m}$  thick layer of copper using physical vapour  
178 deposition<sup>29</sup>. Double<sup>30</sup> (in the case of the 250  $\mu\text{m}$  diamonds) and triple<sup>31</sup> (for the 100  $\mu\text{m}$   
179 diamonds) stage Lenz-lens radio-frequency resonators were produced by using focused ion  
180 beam milling. To ensure electrical insulation and avoid hydrogen diffusion into the rhenium,  
181 the gaskets were coated by 500 nm thick layers of Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>. Radio-frequency excitation coils were  
182 made from 100  $\mu\text{m}$  thick, teflon insulated, copper wire and arranged such that a Helmholtz coil  
183 pair is formed.

184 Hydrogen loading was conducted at the ESRF at and pressure was increased at  
185 cryogenic temperatures to avoid rapid hydrogen diffusion into the diamond anvils. Pressure was  
186 calibrated by means of the diamond edge Raman scale<sup>32,33</sup>. Comparison of the vibron  
187 frequencies of the H<sub>2</sub> samples at elevated pressures shows a slight systematic offset of less than  
188 5 GPa at the highest pressures where Raman data was collected<sup>34</sup>.

189

### 190 *NMR Experiments*

191 All NMR experiments were conducted using a solid-state NMR spectrometer from *Tecmag Inc.*  
192 (Redstone) equipped with a 100 W pulse amplifier. To polarize the nuclear spin system, we  
193 used a sweepable electromagnet with an average magnetic field of 1 T and sufficiently high  
194 homogeneity. Intense <sup>1</sup>H-NMR signals were recorded at frequencies of 45.26 MHz,  
195 corresponding to an external magnetic field strength of about 1063 mT. Using nutation  
196 experiments, we found optimal excitation pulses between 1 - 1.2  $\mu\text{s}$  for both cells, in reasonable  
197 agreement with earlier experiments<sup>29-31,35</sup>.

198 Free induction decays were excited using a single pulse of 833 kHz to 1 MHz bandwidth.  
 199 The spectrometer was blanked off for 1  $\mu$ s to avoid damage to the pre-amplifier. Supplementary  
 200 Figures S2 and S3 show all  $^1\text{H}$ -NMR spectra recorded by this method. 25000 scans were  
 201 accumulated for each spectrum (Figure 2).

202 In order to resolve isotropic chemical shifts,  $\delta_{iso}$ , a Lee-Goldburg pulse for homonuclear  
 203 decoupling was used<sup>25</sup>. The resulting narrowed NMR spectra had a FWHM line width of about  
 204 3 ppm, thus the resolution accuracy of  $\delta_{iso}$  was found to be in the order of 0.1 ppm (Figure S4).  
 205 Resonance frequencies were referenced towards an aqueous solution of tetramethylsilane in a  
 206 similar DAC at ambient pressure conditions.

207

### 208 Computation of NMR Lineshapes and Asymmetry Parameters of the Electric Field Gradient

209 Calculation of the NMR line shapes was carried out following the analytical method outlined  
 210 by Bloembergen and Rowland<sup>36</sup>, Pake<sup>20</sup> and Hughes and Harris<sup>37</sup>:

211 Using the standard expressions for the resonance frequency distribution  $\omega$  for both first order  
 212 quadrupole interaction as well as homonuclear dipole-dipole interaction:

$$213 \quad \omega(\alpha, \beta, m) = \omega_Q \cdot (m + 1/2) \cdot \left( \frac{3\cos^2\beta - 1}{2} - \frac{\eta}{2} \sin^2\beta \cos(2\alpha) \right), \quad (1)$$

$$214 \quad \omega_i(\alpha) = d_i \cdot \left( \frac{3\cos^2\beta - 1}{2} \right), \quad (2)$$

215

216 with

217

$$218 \quad \omega_Q = \frac{6\pi}{2I(2I+1)} \cdot C_q, \quad (3)$$

$$219 \quad C_q = \frac{e^2 q Q}{h}, \quad (4)$$

$$220 \quad d_i = \frac{\mu_0 \gamma_n^2 \hbar}{8\pi^2 r_i^3}, \quad (5)$$

221

222 where the Euler angles  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  describe the orientation of the crystallites with respect to the  
 223 external magnetic field.  $\gamma_n$  is the gyromagnetic ratio of the hydrogen nuclei,  $m$  the nuclear spin  
 224 quantum number ( $m = 1, 0, -1$ ) and  $r_i$  the average distance between interacting hydrogen nuclei,  
 225  $r_n$  or  $r_{nn}$ , respectively.  $\eta$  describes the asymmetry of the electric field gradient tensor ( $V_{ij}$ ) in the  
 226 principal axis system as:

$$227 \quad \eta = \frac{V_{yy} - V_{xx}}{V_{zz}}, |V_{zz}| > |V_{xx}| > |V_{yy}|. \quad (6)$$

228

229 The line shape function,  $P(\omega)$ , for quadrupolar spin interactions, is given by:

230

$$P(\omega) = \sum_m \int_{-1}^1 \frac{\mu}{4\pi} \sin(\beta(\omega, \alpha, m)) \cdot \left( \left\| \frac{\partial \beta(\omega, \alpha, m)}{\partial \omega} \right\| \right) d(\cos(2\alpha)), \quad (7)$$

232

233 where  $\beta(\omega, \alpha, m)$  denotes the inverse function of eq. (1) with respect to  $\beta$ , and  $\mu$  accounts for  
 234 the multiplicity of spectral functions. For the dipolar interaction  $P(\omega)$ , is given by

235

$$P(\omega) = \sum_i \int_{-1}^1 \frac{\mu}{4\pi} \sin(\beta(\omega_i, \alpha)) \cdot \left( \left\| \frac{\partial \beta(\omega_i, \alpha)}{\partial \omega_i} \right\| \right) d(\cos(2\alpha)), \quad (8)$$

237

238 where  $\beta(\omega_i, \alpha)$  denotes the inverse function of eq. (2) with respect to  $\beta$ , and  $\mu$  accounts for the  
 239 multiplicity of spectral functions.

240

241 Cut-off frequencies of the resulting spectral line functions were chosen according to the  
 242 Heaberlein convention for NMR shift tensors<sup>38</sup>. Spectral line broadening was accounted for by  
 243 convolution of the total line shape function with a Voigtian line of defined Lorentzian and  
 244 Gaussian widths. In order to fit the experimental data, the respective line shape function  $P(\omega)$  is  
 245 optimized by varying  $C_q$  and  $\eta$  for quadrupolar coupling and  $r_n$  and  $r_m$  for dipolar coupling.  
 246 The corresponding Python scripts are available from the authors upon request. Table S1  
 247 summarises all fit parameters.

247

248 In order to calculate the asymmetry parameter  $\eta$  of the electric field gradient tensor in  
 249 the spin-pairing regime, we used the second derivative of the electric potential,  $V(\mathbf{r})$ , defined by  
 250 the molecular center of gravity positions from diffraction measurements<sup>14</sup>:

$$V(\mathbf{r}) = \frac{e}{4\pi\epsilon_0} \sum_i \frac{1}{\sqrt{(x-x_i)^2 + (y-y_i)^2 + (z-z_i)^2}}, \quad (9)$$

$$V_{ij} = \frac{\partial V(\mathbf{r})}{\partial x_i \partial y_j}. \quad (10)$$

252

253 Using eq. (6) under consideration of the ordering of the components of  $V_{ij}$  in the principal axis  
 254 system allows computation of  $\eta$  from crystallographic data.

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Table 1: Fitting parameters of  $^1\text{H}$ -NMR spectra.  $C_q$  is the quadrupole coupling constant,  $\eta$  the asymmetry parameter of the electric field gradient tensor in the principle axis system,  $r_n$  and  $r_{nn}$  are the nearest and second nearest neighbour distances, respectively. The isotropic chemical shift,  $\delta_{iso}$ , was derived after homonuclear Lee-Goldburg decoupling.

$P$ in GPa	1st Order Quadrupole Interaction		Dipole-Dipole Interaction		Lee-Goldburg Decoupling
	$C_q$ in kHz	$\eta$	$r_n$ in Å	$r_{nn}$ in Å	$\delta_{iso}$ in ppm
20	28.1(6)	0.44(6)	--	--	8.665(112)
24	27.9(8)	0.43(4)	--	--	7.363(112)
36	30.0(7)	0.50(7)	--	--	6.429(112)
42	32.7(5)	0.52(4)	--	--	5.951(112)
47	35.2(6)	0.44(6)	--	--	5.928(125)
50	44.8(4)	0.59(3)	--	--	5.905(114)
54	48.0(3)	0.46(7)	--	--	5.924(150)
58	61.9(7)	0.49(8)	--	--	6.139(120)
68	43.9(9)	0.37(9)	--	--	6.670(173)
71	24.5(8)	0.20(9)	0.736(5)	1.509(14)	7.280(127)
77	18.6(7)	0.15(7)	0.733(5)	1.457(13)	8.479(195)
85	16.6(3)	0.14(6)	0.732(5)	1.430(11)	10.612(149)
97	15.0(4)	0.10(5)	0.732(5)	1.340(12)	15.351(100)
106	20.9(6)	0.04(1)	0.731(5)	1.307(14)	18.895(153)
115	19.2(9)	0.05(7)	0.729(5)	1.270(11)	21.323(147)
123	19.5(9)	0.02(7)	0.727(5)	1.270(18)	22.673(154)

268

269  $^{14}\text{N}$ -NMR of Molecular Nitrogen at 3 GPa

270 Molecular nitrogen was measured using natural isotopic composition, where the majority of  
271 molecules can be expected to be pairs of  $^{14}\text{N}$  nuclei. As  $^{14}\text{N}$  nuclei have a nuclear spin of  $I=1$ ,  
272 one can expect a spin pairing scenario similar to molecular  $\text{D}_2$ : the para- $\text{N}_2$  states consist of a  
273 quintuplet subsystem with  $I=2$  whereas the ortho- $\text{N}_2$  states are a triplet subsystem.

274 The electric field gradient asymmetry parameter  $\eta$  was estimated according to  
275 diffraction data<sup>14</sup> to be around 0.23. Recorded  $^{14}\text{N}$ -NMR spectra (Figure S2; right panel) do  
276 not show pronounced shoulder, expected for a  $I=2$  quadrupolar powder pattern in absence of  
277  $m_{-2 \rightarrow -1}$  and  $m_{1 \rightarrow 2}$  transitions. In fact, the spin system is well described by a  $I=1$  spin system  
278 using the estimated value for  $\eta$  (Figure S2; left panel).

279 According to structural data<sup>39</sup>,  $r_n$  can be estimated to be around 1.2 Å at this pressure;  
280 four times longer than the thermal de-Broglie wavelength of a single  $^{14}\text{N}$  atom. Therefore, the

281 wave function overlap should be negligible in molecular nitrogen at these pressures and nuclear  
282 spins considered unpaired.

283

#### 284 **Data availability**

285 The data supporting the findings of this study are publicly available from the corresponding  
286 author upon request.

287

#### 288 **Code availability**

289 The custom Python code for simulating the NMR spectra is available from the  
290 corresponding author upon request

291

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293

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378

### 379 **Acknowledgements**

380 We thank Nobuyoshi Miyajima for help with the FIB milling. We are very thankful to Graeme  
381 Ackland and Gerd Steinle-Neumann for fruitful discussions.

382



383 **Funding**

384 The authors thank the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG,  
385 Project Nos. DU 954/11-1, DU 393/13-1, DU 393/9-2, STE 1105/13-1 and ME 5206/3-1) and  
386 the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany (BMBF, Grant No. 05K19WC1) for  
387 financial support. D.L. thanks the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for financial support.  
388 M. P. A. would like to acknowledge the support of the European Research Council (ERC) Grant  
389 "Hecate" reference No. 695527 secured by Graeme Ackland. N.D. thanks the Swedish  
390 Government Strategic Research Area in Materials Science on Functional Materials at  
391 Linköping University (Faculty Grant SFO-Mat-LiU No. 2009 00971).

392

393 **Author Contributions**

394 T.M. and L.D. designed the experiment. T.M., S.K., A.K. and J.J. prepared the DACs and  
395 NMR resonators. T.M., D.L., M.P.A., F.T. and A.K. performed and analysed the experiments.  
396 T.M., M.P.A., D.L., F.T., N.D. and L.D. analysed the results and wrote the manuscript.

397

398 **Competing Interests**

399 The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

400