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# Molecular modelling of lanthanide(III) chloride complexes with the nitrogen ligand DPA: AIM/NCI analysis and ligand conformational search

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#### Introduction

Geometry optimizations were performed on the crystal structure asymmetric units as determined for the novel lanthanide coordination compounds:  $LaCl_3(DPA)_2$ ,  $\mu$ -Cl<sub>2</sub>-[PrCl<sub>2</sub>(H<sub>2</sub>O)(DPA)]<sub>2</sub>, [LnCl<sub>2</sub>(DPA)<sub>2</sub>]Cl (Ln = Nd,Dy & Y).

Lanthanide complexes are known to be stereochemically labile, with variable coordination numbers ranging from 2-12. This is due to the localization of f-electrons near the core region of the metal nucleus and the associated ligand-to-metal ionic bonding. The conformation of the ligands would therefore be highly dependent on their respective environment, i.e. on the strength of both intraand intermolecular interactions. [1]

This study will focus mainly on identifying and characterizing intramolecular interactions that contribute to the overall stability of the geometry of the complexes, in the gas-phase (*in vacuo*). Hydrogen bonding being one of the most important examples of stabilizing interactions.

#### **Theoretical methods**

All geometry optimisations were carried out with the Gaussian 09 [2] software package.

The geometry optimisation calculations, of the lanthanide complexes, were performed using density functional theory (DFT) at the M06-D3/aug-cc-pVTZ/RECP level. For each lanthanide metal center the 'core' electrons were represented by a small-core (28 electron) Stuttgart-Dresden (SDD) quasi-relativistic effective core potential (ECP), while the remaining 'valence' electrons (incl. f-electrons) were explicitly modelled using the energy-optimized (14s13p10d8f6g)/ [6s6p5d4f3g] atomic natural orbital (ANO) Gaussian valence basis sets of Cao and Dolg .[3]

Atoms-in-molecules (AIM) electron density topological analysis [4], shown in Fig. 1, and non-covalent interaction (NCI) analysis [5], shown in **Fig. 2**, were performed on the energy minimized structures, using the software package Multiwfn [6].

Initial optimizations on DPA were performed using the M06-D3/6-311++G(d,p) level, followed by the larger aug-cc-pVTZ basis set.

#### Ligand conformational search

The ligand geometry optimizations were successfully performed on 621 initial geometries, which were generated by identifying all unique permutations of four principle dihedral angles, in 60° increments, found in the N-donor ligand *bis*(pyridin-2-ylmethyl)amine (*DPA*). The total number of input geometries were reduced by accounting for the inherent symmetry present in the *DPA* molecule, in order to prevent the redundant optimisation of equivalent initial geometries.

## AIM/ NCI analysis

One of the principle components of the atoms-in-molecules (AIM) approach involves locating stationary points in space where the curvature of electron density are characterised according to the following four categories [10], see **Fig.1**:

- Nuclear critical points [NCPs, (3, -3)]
- Bond critical points [BCPs, (3, -1)]
- Ring critical points [RCPs, (3, +1)]
- Cage critical points [CCPs, (3, +3)]

Non-covalent interaction (NCI) analysis supplements the aforementioned approach, particularly where weak interactions may exist in the absence of BCPs. [5] This approach identifies regions in space where attractive interactions (sign( $\lambda_2$ ) $\rho$ <0) or repulsive interactions (sign( $\lambda_2$ ) $\rho$ >0) dominate, see **Fig. 2**.

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## **HPC content**

All geometry optimisations were carried out with the *Gaussian 09* [2] software package, installed on the Lengau Cluster at the CHPC. The electron density data, used for AIM/NCI analysis, were extracted from the self-consistent field (SCF) output generated by *Gaussian 09*. Isosurfaces were generated using the visualisation server *chpcviz1*, for the visual representation of real space functions (such as electron density).

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