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Ein cyf/Our ref:
Eich cyf/Your ref:

Welsh Government Building
Rhodfa Padarn
Llanbadarn Fawr
ABERYSTWYTH
Ceredigion SY23 3UR

Ebost/Email:
strategic.assessment@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk
Ffôn/Phone: 0300 065 4687

Mansel Jones
Planning Forester
Natural Resources Wales

18 January 2016

Dear Mansel

Habitats Regulations Assessment for the Gethin and Merthyr Forest Resource Plan

Thank you for giving the Strategic Assessment Team (SAT), Natural Resources Wales, the opportunity to comment on the Gethin and Merthyr Forest Resource Plan (FRP) Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA). Our comments are made in the context of our roles under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended), and as advisers to the Welsh Government on matters pertaining to the natural heritage of Wales and its coastal waters.

Please note that these comments relate only to the HRA aspect of the FRP, and the proposals therein. They do not relate to the appropriateness of any other aspects of the FRP or the proposals it contains.

Please also note that this response, and all of SAT's formal responses will from now on be published on the Natural Resources Wales external website.

Our overarching comment is that we welcome and support the FRP process, together with your commitment to HRA.

In relation to this specific HRA, we agree with the conclusion that there will be no impacts on any European sites. This is because we accept that in relation to the Severn Estuary SAC/SPA/Ramsar, whilst there is a hypothetical pathway via the River Taff, which flows in to the Severn estuary, the distance between the nearest part of the forest and the nearest part of the European site is significant, 14.5 miles in total, and in addition, the Cardiff Bay Barrage acts as an effective block in the pathway. We agree that these factors are key to the conclusion that HRA is not required in relation to this European site in this instance. We also agree that in relation to all other European sites, no pathways exist between them and the Gethin and Merthyr FRP area.

We therefore agree that HRA is not required in this instance.

We hope that you find these comments useful, but if you would like to discuss any of these points further please do not hesitate to contact Roger Matthews via Natural Resources Wales' Strategic Assessment Mailbox at strategic.assessment@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk



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Yours sincerely,

Howard Davies

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Head of Corporate Planning & Performance