



Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-654  
Ein cyf/Our ref LG/05766/16

Mike Hedges AM  
Chair - Petitions Committee  
Ty Hywel  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

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18 August 2016

Dear Mike

Thank you for your letter of 27 July regarding the petition you have received from Stephen De Waine objecting to the proposed Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for harbour porpoise.

The EU Habitats Directive requires Member States to identify and designate SACs for certain habitats and species to help restore or maintain them at favourable conservation status. Harbour porpoise is one such species and with almost half of the European population of harbour porpoise being found in UK waters there is a clear role for the UK in its conservation. Whilst the UK remains a member of the EU we continue to work towards meeting our obligations.

The UK has undertaken a number of assessments to try to identify areas suitable for consideration as harbour porpoise SACs. The earlier assessments did not provide adequate evidence to determine clearly identifiable areas. However, in June last year, Natural Resources Wales submitted advice to the Welsh Government setting out the results of the most recent analysis by the UK statutory nature conservation bodies. The results, which have been peer reviewed, identified areas within UK waters of persistent high densities of harbour porpoise that are suitable for designation as SACs, including 3 areas partly within Welsh waters. The data used for this process is the most up to date and extensive data sets available in Europe. The multiple sources of data were collated by the Joint Cetacean Protocol, an international cooperative approach for long term monitoring of cetaceans.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Earlier this year on behalf of the Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales consulted on the SAC proposals for harbour porpoise as they relate to Wales. A similar exercise was held at the same time in England and Northern Ireland just prior to a similar consultation in Scotland. The consultation provided an opportunity for all to consider and comment on the evidence and methodology used for identifying the proposed areas for harbour porpoise. Natural Resources Wales is working through the large number of consultation responses ahead of preparing its final advice to government. No decisions have been made yet. I expect to receive Natural Resources Wales's final recommendations for the protection of harbour porpoise in Welsh waters later this year.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 recognises the importance we place on our nature and its biodiversity through the resilient Wales goal. SACs, alongside our other marine protected areas, play a key role in protecting and enhancing the marine environment to support the sustainable use of our natural resources. Coastal and marine activities can and must coexist with the conservation of habitats and species, in fact Wales' existing suite of SACs are functioning marine areas that support a variety of different uses, including fishing.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Regards Lesley". The word "Regards" is written in a cursive style on the top line, and "Lesley" is written below it, also in cursive. A long, sweeping underline extends from the end of "Lesley" across the width of the signature.

**Lesley Griffiths AC/AM**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig  
Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs