

Adran yr Amgylchedd a Datblygu Cynaliadwy
Department for Environment and Sustainable Development



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Darren Millar AM
Chair
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
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1 February, 2016

Dear Mr Millar,

I am writing in response your letter of 5 November to James Price in which you requested further detail on the actions Natural Resources Wales are taking to tackle Water Framework Directive failures attributable to them. The committee also requested sight of the River Basin Management Plans once they have been published.

The Western Wales River Basin Management plan was published on the 22 December 2015 and is available through the following link.

<http://www.naturalresources.wales/water/quality/western-wales-river-basin-management-plan-published/?lang=en>

The River Basin Management Plans for the Dee and Severn which cover parts of both England and Wales have not yet been published. These require sign off from both the Welsh Ministers and the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs and whilst the Minister for Natural Resources has approved these, the Secretary of State has not. I do not have details of a proposed publication date yet but I will ensure you are updated once they are published.

One of the pressures recorded for the EU Water Framework Directive is acidification. Acidification is recognised as a forestry related issue because more atmospheric pollutants, sulphur & nitrogen compounds derived principally from the combustion of fossil fuels, are captured by trees than by shorter vegetation.

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This exacerbates (though does not cause) acidification of surface waters, particularly in areas with base poor geology, where the soils have little buffering capacity. The primary solution to the acidification problem remains the reduction in emissions of atmospheric pollutants but forestry management actions can mitigate impacts.

Where a Water Body is failing due to acidification, forestry is identified as having the potential to contribute to the status of that Water Body where there is more than 30% closed canopy cover within a catchment.

The Water Bodies where forestry is recorded as potentially contributing to the reason for not achieving good status do not represent a record of breaches caused by forestry, but represents risk of potential damage to the water course rather than there having actually been an incident.

Across Wales at present, there are 12 Water Bodies failing to meet WFD due to acidification that have above 30% closed canopy cover at a whole Water Body scale (out of 942 Water Bodies across Wales in the 2nd Cycle of WFD). The forestry in these Water Bodies has 3,117 ha in private ownership and 8,960 ha which are on the Welsh Government Woodland Estate (WGWE) (of which 8,519 ha are coniferous or mixed predominantly coniferous).

NRW is currently working to identify priority areas for action within the WGWE. The actions/measures for priority areas which form part of the River Basin Management Plans are to:

- Review the forest riparian management and drainage systems and ensure they meet the [UKFS Forest and Water Guidelines](#) standards by 2021
- Prepare forest resource plans and identify potential risks, such as civil engineering, clear-felling and restocking and implement ways to mitigate them, considering Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS) where applicable.
- Take all steps to mitigate water quality impact as a result of unavoidable forest operations, such as felling to comply with a plant health order.
- NRW's policy on restoring areas of afforested deep peat will also reduce the impact the forest has on acidification, by reducing closed canopy cover and holding back water in hydrological source areas.

Such actions not only reduce the potential negative impact of forestry on watercourses in terms of acidification, but also minimise the risk of sediment delivery and will deliver attenuation of water flows which should benefit communities at risk of flooding downstream.

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In addition to the work to address acidification, NRW has responded to the risk of sedimentation from forest operations by implementing mandatory Water Management Plans for all operations on the WGWE. These require an environmental risk assessment, regular water monitoring and details of mitigation in place to prevent sediment reaching watercourses.

Yours sincerely,



Matthew Quinn,
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