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Comments of the Chief Wildlife Warden Kerala on the Proposal for Diversion of 57.02 hectares of Forest land forming part of Kottoor Reserve Forest for the Establishment of Elephant Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre at Kottoor.

Setting up of Elephant Rescue and Rehabilitation Center is a programme advocated by the Central Government in the management of wild and captive elephants in India. In this regard, detailed guidelines have been issued by the Project Elephant Division of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The most ideal place for establishing such Center is forest area forming part of natural habitat of elephant with availability of adequate source of water. The proposed forest area admeasuring 57.02 hectares at Kappukad near Kottoor is an elongated stretch of forest lying along the reserve forest boundary. Kottoor reserve Forest lying in ABP Territorial Range is having large tract of elephant habitat in Neyyar and Peppara Wildlife Sanctuaries in the backdrop. Neyyar Reservoir provides perennial source of water for the Center. Wild elephant captured as part of mitigating human-elephant conflict, captive elephants seized from owners for violating the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, calf elephant rescued from the wild etc are proposed to be housed in the Center. State-of-the-art Veterinary Hospital, special facilities for elephants in *Musth*, crematorium facilities etc are also included in the Project. The elephant enclosures are designed in such a way that adequate social interaction is ensured for inmates in captivity by housing them in compatible groups. Constructions activities will be confined to about 15 percent of the are proposed for diversion.

Establishing the Elephant Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre has been considered by the State Board for Wildlife as a strategy to address human-elephant

conflict and welfare of captive elephants in the State and approval for the same given. Central Zoo Authority also has given in-principle approval for establishing the Center under section 48(H1) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act.

The proposed area does not fall in any Protected area. The draft notification of Eco-Sensitive Zone of Neyyar-Peppara Wildlife Sanctuaries has been published by the Ministry. As per this notification, about 47 percent area falls in Eco-Sensitive Zone. However activities prohibited in ESZ are not included in the Project. The area does not form part of elephant corridor. The proposed area falls in Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve. Setting up of Elephant Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre is an activity in tandem with the objectives of Biosphere Reserves, especially that relating to mitigating human-wildlife conflict.

Taking in to account the facts mentioned above, the Proposal is recommended.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests &
Chief Wildlife warden, Kerala