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"Bringing together organisations in the UK to protect and enhance wildlife and landscape, and to further the quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the countryside."



Wildlife and Countryside Link
89 Albert Embankment, London
SE1 7TP
T: 020 7820 8600
F: 020 7820 8620
E: enquiry@wcl.org.uk
W: www.wcl.org.uk

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Letter from the Chair...

Dear Link members

It was good to see so many of you in December at The Royal Society for Link's AGM. Alongside formal AGM business the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Link's Working Groups and Task Forces shared views on Link's 2009 workplan. A common remark from group members was their interest in closer working between groups. This is gratifying given the past year's efforts to integrate our activities across Link's varied work programmes.

Our guest speakers, Stephen Hale of the Green Alliance, and my predecessor as Chair, Hilary Allison of the Woodland Trust, challenged us on what is needed to make Link's issues appeal to wider audiences and how China is investing in its natural environment. The ideas expressed by our speakers and our Vice President David Kidney MP parallel work started by the Management Committee last summer to put Link on a more strategic footing. We will develop and discuss our views with you in 2009 as Link develops its longer term plans.

This quarterly report is the last of the year and covers the busy period of activity between October and December. The highlight of the quarter (and the year) was the introduction of the long awaited Marine and Coastal Access Bill in to Parliament. Link welcomes many of the provisions in the Bill and is working through the Marine Task Force to improve the Bill and ensure that it is fit for purpose.

The low point was, perhaps, the introduction into law of the Planning Act. The Government could not be swayed on its removal of community voices from the planning process but key amendments were secured including a clause requiring the Secretary of State to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and have regard to climate change. The quarter also saw another new set of environment Ministers and a new Department for Energy and Climate Change.

Closing on a high, Link hosted the biennial two-day Joint Links Devolution Seminar. This brought together members from across the four country Links to share insights on the developing political cultures in the four countries and the impact of devolution to date on the environmental agenda and NGOs.

I enjoyed chairing the event, learnt a lot and was struck by the strength in depth and commitment to joint working which is Link's lifeblood.

Best wishes



Paul de Zylva

Working Groups



Chair: Nicola Hutchinson, Plantlife
Vice Chair: Nigel Bourn, Butterfly Conservation
Secretary: Kirsten Knap

Biodiversity

In November Natural England (NE) launched a new framework for delivering priority habitats and species in England; '[Securing biodiversity](#)' and held a workshop where members of the Biodiversity Working Group (BWG) attended. The publication was produced by the England Biodiversity Group (EBG) and Natural England, with input from Link and is described by Natural England as '*the starting point for a more integrated approach to biodiversity conservation in England*'.

December was a particularly busy month for the BWG, with Link members attending numerous meetings, including the EBG meeting where habitat restoration and work-stream progress were discussed, the IUCN meeting to review the 4th World Conservation Congress meeting, and the first in a series of Defra, NE, and Link liaison meetings. Link also attended a meeting of the UK Biodiversity Partnership Annual Conference Steering Group in December where suggested agenda items for the UK BAP meeting in 2009 were discussed.

At the end of the quarter Wildlife and Countryside Link and Wales Environment Link submitted a [joint response](#) to a consultation on plans to undertake a National Ecosystems Assessment following Hilary Benn's announcement that Defra would commit £500,000 over two years to fund an ecosystems assessment for England.

At Link's AGM on 2 December Nicola Hutchinson (PL) and Nigel Bourn (BC) were appointed as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the BWG in 2009.



Chair: Ian Woodhurst, CPRE
Vice Chair: Gareth Morgan, RSPB
Secretary: Kirsten Knap

Farming and Rural Development

During the quarter the Farming and Rural Development (FRD) Group wrote two letters to the European Commissioner, Mariann Fischer Boel. They set out concerns on the key issues that were being addressed by the CAP Health Check and highlighted Link's position on cross compliance and set aside.

In October Link met with Natural England (NE) to discuss their bioenergy policy and the recommendations made by the European Parliament to drop the mandatory 10% target for fuels from renewables. A Link representative also attended the Rural Development Conference in Cyprus entitled '*Europe's rural areas in action: Facing the challenges of tomorrow.*'

In November, Link attended the Defra Cross Compliance Stakeholder meeting where options for the replacement of set aside were discussed. This meeting followed the completion of the CAP Health Check on 19 November across the EU, where set aside was officially abolished. The FRD Group also met to discuss the CAP Health Check, along with the EU budget review, and the Group's 2009 work programme. A subgroup meeting on Environmental Stewardship was also held on the same day.

Link attended a number of other external farming and rural development forums during the quarter, including the Agricultural Change and Environment Observatory Stakeholder Seminar, the CAP Health Check Stakeholder meeting, and the [Rural Development Programme for England](#) (RDPE) Monitoring meeting.

At Link's AGM on 2 December Ian Woodhurst (CPRE) and Gareth Morgan (RSPB) were reappointed as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the Farming and Rural Development (FRD) Working Group in 2009.

Working Groups



Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn

Badgers Virtual Sub-group

In November the EFRA Committee held an oral evidence session on 'Badgers and Cattle TB'. During the session Hilary Benn defended his decision not to cull Badgers in England, which he announced in July.

Following the Government's publication [Badgers and Bovine TB: the Government response to the EFRA Select Committee's Tenth Report of Session 2007 - 081](#), the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, announced in November that Defra and the British Cattle Industry had formed a [Bovine TB Eradication Group](#). The membership of the Bovine TB Eradication Group includes representatives from the veterinary profession, the farming industry, and Defra, but no representatives from the NGO community. The Eradication Group, who met twice during the quarter, are tasked with making recommendations to the Secretary of State on the policy of TB in England. During the second meeting a number of priorities were decided upon for the Group's Work Programme. Highlights of these meetings and the full membership list of the Group can be found on [Defra's website](#). Link will be monitoring the outcomes of these meetings over the coming months.



Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn

Woodland Virtual Sub-group

Following approval of the workplan at Link's AGM on 2 December, this group has now been converted into a virtual group and will act as a communications mechanism for Link members to communicate on woodland issues. In 2009 opportunities to discuss woodland issues at face-to-face meetings, such as the delivery plan for England's Trees, Woods, and Forests Strategy, will be provided through both the Biodiversity and the Farming and Rural Development Working Groups.



Chair: Simon Marsh, RSPB
Vice Chair: Marina Pacheco (CPRE)
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

Land Use Planning

During the quarter the Land Use Planning Working Group (LUPWG) wrote to the Minister for Housing - Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP - to highlight Link's concerns around the Government's housing agenda. Link met with the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) Housing & Growth Programmes Team in October to discuss eco-towns and specifically the Planning Policy Statement (PPS) on Eco-towns, which is now out for consultation. Link also met with CLG and representatives of the Department for Business, Enterprise, and Regulatory Reform (BERR) in November for our semi-annual liaison meeting.

The LUPWG has continued to input to the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) eco-town worksheets. Link members met with the TCPA in October and December to discuss details of the forthcoming Natural England-led worksheet on biodiversity, which is expected to be finalised in time for a meeting of the Eco Expert Group planned for February 2009.

Following the Report Stage in the House of Lords in November, the Planning Bill received Royal Assent on 27 November. A number of welcome amendments were secured in the Bill including a clause that states that the Secretary of State must, in exercising their functions, contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and in doing so must have regard for the desirability of mitigating or adapting to climate change.

At Link's AGM on 2 December Simon Marsh (RSPB) and Marina Pacheco (CPRE) were appointed as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the LUPWG in 2009.

Working Groups



Water

Chair: Rob Cunningham (RSPB)
Vice Chair: Tom Le Quesne, WWF
Secretary: Kirsten Knap

Although not mentioned in the Queen's speech on 3 December, Link was pleased to learn that the draft Floods and Water Bill will be brought forward for pre-legislative scrutiny in the 2008-2009 session.

The Water Working Group (WWG) met in October and discussed Catchment Flood Management Plans and Shoreline Management Plans, as well as plans for the second year review of the [Blueprint for Water](#). Also in October, Link met with the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England (NE) to discuss progress on the Periodic Review 2009 (PR09). This was followed-up with another progress meeting in early December. Link also continued to input into the EA's Pitt Natural Processes Working Group.

During the quarter the WWG wrote to the new Minister for Water, Huw Irranca-Davies MP, to welcome him to the position and introduce the Blueprint for Water. The group also wrote to Anna Walker at Defra to request a meeting to discuss the Independent Review of Household Charging for Water and Sewerage Services.

In November Link members attended the CIWEM Ofwat conference on water company investment plans at which Philip Burston (RSPB) gave a presentation on the Blueprint for Water's priorities for PR09.

In December Link submitted a [response](#) to a consultation on Directions to the Environment Agency for the Classification of Water Bodies. Following the publication of the draft River Basin Management Plans, a six month public consultation was launched by Defra in December to which a number of Link's members are intending to respond.

At Link's AGM on 2 December Rob Cunningham (RSPB) and Tom Le Quesne (WWF) were elected to the positions of Chair and Vice Chair respectively for the WWG in 2009.



Whales

Chair: Jennifer Lonsdale, EIA
Vice Chair: Claire Bass, WSPA
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

The Whales Working Group met in October to discuss Link actions for the coming year in the run up to the 61st International Whaling Commission (IWC61) meeting, which will take place in Madeira in June 2009. Members also discussed the whaling activities of Iceland and Greenland, and developments on the Sakhalin II project.

Link met with the UK Commissioner to the IWC in late November to discuss, amongst other things, recruitment to the IWC, EU competency on whaling, and the opening of this year's Japanese whaling season.

Link members continue to monitor discussions around the future of the IWC, which take place through closed meetings of the Small Working Group (SWG). The last SWG meeting took place from 8 - 10 December in Cambridge at which the UK reportedly voiced its opposition to Japanese "scientific" whaling.

At Link's AGM on 2 December Jennifer Lonsdale (EIA) and Claire Bass (WSPA) were reappointed as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the Whales Working Group in 2009.

Working Groups



Chair: Rob Atkinson, RSPCA
Vice Chair: Cathy Williamson, WDCS
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

Wildlife and Trade

In October, Link met with Defra's Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) & International Species Policy Team in advance of the CITES Joint NGO Liaison Group (JLG) meeting, which took place in November. The JLG meeting was held to discuss the timetable for submissions of proposals to the 15th Conference of Parties (CoP15), the latest meeting of the EU Management Committee on Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora, and ongoing enforcement issues.

With CoP15 set for January 2010 in Doha (Qatar), the timetable for preparation of proposals has become the primary focus for the members of the Wildlife and Trade Working Group. However, Link continues to liaise with the Head of the National Wildlife Crime Unit regarding convening a meeting in the Spring to discuss collective action on enforcement issues in the UK.

At Link AGM on 2 December Rob Atkinson (RSPCA) and Cathy Williamson (WDCS) were appointed as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the Wildlife and Trade Working Group in 2009.

Task Forces



Chair: Joan Edwards, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB
Secretary: Joanna Butler

Marine

Link was delighted at the inclusion of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill in the Queen's Speech on 3 December and the subsequent introduction of the Bill to Parliament on 4 December. Link welcomed many of the provisions contained in the Bill, including a number of positive changes resulting from evidence provided by Link (and sister Links) to the pre-legislative scrutiny and consultation processes on the draft Bill. However, Link believes that a number of improvements still need to be made to ensure that the Bill is fit for purpose to deliver its aims and objectives. In the run-up to the Queen's speech, Link members arranged for Early Day Motion (EDM) [2189](#) to be laid in Parliament, which gained the support of over 100 MPs.

In October a Joint Links marine parliamentary calendar was sent to parliamentarians, highlighting the need for 'Marine Acts Now'. The Marine Task Force (MTF) also wrote to the new Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies, welcoming him to his new post and suggesting a meeting.

During the quarter Link members attended a Natural England (NE) and JNCC conference; 'Participation and Decision Making - MPA Networks and Wider Implications', as well as a CMS conference; 'Marine Policy: How the Marine Bill will interact with wider policy developments'. Link members also attended the launch of the Crown Estate's Report 'Socio-economic indicators of marine-related activities in the UK economy', which took place on 5 November.

Prior to the second reading of the Bill, which took place in the House of Lords on 15 December, the MTF sent a [Parliamentary Briefing](#) to Peers outlining our priority asks. The MTF also sent its sixth [Parliamentary Bulletin](#) to MPs and Peers at the end of November, calling for the inclusion of the Bill in the Queen's Speech and again outlining our key asks for the Bill.

The MTF met in December to discuss the various sections of the Bill and agree priority amendments. MTF members also attended a NE workshop in December to discuss common issues and priorities for the Bill as well as ways of working together as the Bill passes through Parliament. Following these meetings, the MTF submitted a number of amendments to Peers to be tabled for the House of Lords Committee Stage debates in January.

At Link's AGM on 2 December Joan Edwards (TWT) and Sharon Thompson (RSPB) were elected to the position of Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the MTF for 2009.



Scottish Environment LINK (LINK)

Agriculture: LINK's Agriculture Taskforce continues its active involvement in the SRDP implementation and wrote to the Cabinet Secretary with its concerns, and submitted a response to the Scottish Government consultation calling for urgent reform of the Less Favoured Areas Scheme.

Biodiversity: LINK's Biodiversity Taskforce case study report on NGO action to conserve biodiversity was launched by Helen Zealley at LINK's Festive Reception in December. The BTF have been involved in clarifying Biodiversity Indicators in the Scottish Local Authority Single Outcome Agreements and has been giving input to the re-structuring of the Scottish Biodiversity Committee and subgroups.

Climate: The Scottish Climate Change Bill was introduced in early December 2008 and the Woodlands Taskforce has raised its concerns about the proposal in the Bill to lease 25% of the forest estate for climate adaptation projects.

Freshwater: The Freshwater Taskforce provided written and oral evidence to the Environment and Rural Affairs Committee at Stage 1 of the Bill, and the Stage 2 process is due to start in March 2009. As members of the National Advisory Group (NAG) of the Water Framework Directive, the FTF have engaged in the drafting of River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs), now released for consultation.

Marine: The Marine Taskforce continued to be heavily involved in the Scottish Marine Bill including preparing Written Evidence to the Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs and Environment Committee and a response to consultation on RIA and SEA; and also a response to the Marine Ecosystems Objectives scoping report, all submitted at the end of January 2009.

Natural Heritage Bill: LINK's Biodiversity, Deer and Landscape Taskforces have been involved with the proposed Natural Heritage Bill announced in November 2008.

Planning: LINK's Planning and Landscape Taskforces have been involved with responses to the consultations on the National Planning Framework 2 - recent inquiry decisions such as that in favour of the Meanie Estate development and windfarm consents such as at Lochluichart, continue to emphasise the weakness of landscape protection outwith National Parks and National Scenic Areas - and the proposed new single Scottish Planning Policy document which may not give sufficient protection to the landscape and environment.

Scottish Environment Week 23-27 February 2009, Parliament: The themes being covered by members and taskforces at seminars and exhibitions in the Scottish Parliament this year are agriculture (SRDP), climate, marine, health and fundraising for biodiversity.

LINK's new Parliamentary Officer, Andy Myles who has extensive experience in environmental policy and liaison joined the team in December.

Sister Links



Wales Environment LINK (WEL)

WEL's Climate Change Working Group continues to support the work of our Climate Change Commissioner. In November the group produced a paper on Adaptation to Climate Change at the request of the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing. They are now planning further work on mitigation and behaviour change. The Group will also soon be drafting a response to the Welsh Assembly Government's Climate Change Strategy consultation.

A Sustainable Development Task & Finish Group was set up to produce a response to the 'One Wales: One Planet' consultation on a Sustainable Development Scheme for Wales which closes in February.

WEL's Land Use Group has been busy, producing responses to the Woodlands for Wales Strategy consultation (October) and the Review of land management actions under Axis 2 of the Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013 (December).

As in all the Links, one of our most active work areas continues to be on marine issues. After commissioning research into 'Protecting nationally important marine biodiversity in Wales' our Marine Working Group produced a briefing paper in December. Both documents can be found on our website.

In November WEL was invited to provide written evidence for the Enterprise and Learning Committee regarding the National Assembly for Wales Proposed Legislative Competence Order on Traffic Free Routes. This evidence, along with all the documents mentioned above, can be downloaded at www.waleslink.org/what-we-do/documents-publications-1

WEL members attended two Ministerial meetings in December. We met the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing to discuss issues related to climate change and sustainability and we also met the Minister for Rural Affairs to discuss the Axis 2 review.

Unfortunately Michele Aitchison, our current Advocacy Officer will be leaving WEL in the next few months. We will therefore be recruiting another Advocacy Officer, as well recruiting for our new post of Policy Coordinator. Please see our website for further details: www.waleslink.org.



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

In the last quarter of 2008 NIEL ran six major conferences and planned for a very important international conference in January on climate change, which was highly successful. We also produced a Fact Sheet on Food, Farming and the Environment which is available on [NIEL's website](#), participated in a number of conferences and events and began the work on our major policy document for 2009. We continue to comment on roughly three government consultations per month and are developing detailed plans for work through all task forces. Funding was secured for the Northern Ireland Archaeology Forum from the NIEA, Heritage Council and CBA, and for Sustainable NI through Esmee Fairbairn Trust. We have begun a liaison with trades unions, offering environmental training to members.

News from the Secretariat

At the end of September Link said goodbye to Alexia Wellbelove, Link's Director of four years, and welcomed Jodie Bettis as Link's new Director. Subsequently we were very pleased to welcome Kirsten Knap as our new Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator.

In October Link met with Wales Environment Link (WEL), Scottish Environment Link (SEL), and Northern Environment Link (NIEL) for our biennial Devolution Seminar. The event was held over two days in Birmingham and was hosted by Wildlife and Countryside Link. Feedback suggests that it was a great success in providing the members of the Joint Links with the opportunity to share intelligence about the developing political cultures in the four countries and the impact of devolution to date on the environmental agenda and NGOs.

There was an excellent turn-out to Link's AGM, which was held on 2 December at The Royal Society, London. The AGM was prefaced with a meeting of the incoming and outgoing Chairs and Vice Chairs of Link's Working Groups and Task Forces who met to share their successes of the year and their plans for the next 6 months. The official business of the AGM was followed by speeches from Stephen Hale (Green Alliance), Hilary Allison (Woodland Trust), and Link's Vice President David Kidney MP, who all gave interesting insights to the challenges we face in 2009.

Link is pleased to announce that following elections at the AGM, we have two new Management Committee members; Joan Edwards (The Wildlife Trusts) and Victoria Chester (Plantlife International), as well as a new Deputy Chair, Martin Harper (RSPB), who has been on Link's Board of Trustees for four years. We would also like to formally welcome Jeremy Biggs (Pond Conservation) who was co-opted onto the Management Committee in January 2008.

Chris Butler Stroud (WDCS) and Ruth Chambers (CNP) have now stepped down from Link's Board of Trustees. We would like to say a huge thank you to both Ruth and Chris for all their hard work and good guidance during their time on the Management Committee.

Wildlife and Countryside Link

