

Q1 Report January - March 2009

In this issue....

- Letter from the Chair
- Task Forces
 - Marine
- Working Groups
 - Whales
 - Farming
 - Badgers & Bovine TB
 - Woodland
 - Land Use Planning
 - Water
 - Wildlife & Trade
 - Biodiversity
- Secretariat News
- Joint Links News
 - Northern Ireland Environment Link
 - Wales Environment Link
 - Scottish Environment Link

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



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*Letter from the Chair...*

Friends,

The economic downturn has not seen a let up in Link's activities. You will see from this new look report how, if anything, reaction to recession has intensified the relevance of our work. Link's 10 working groups and task forces have been as busy as ever advancing the interests of Link's diverse membership and keeping our issues on the agenda.

This quarter the [Blueprint for Water](#) coalition launched its latest report '[2009: the time to act](#)' and a poll of public attitudes towards water, pollution and wildlife. 52% of people polled would not swim in their local river believing it to be too polluted and 96% think that the Government should protect endangered water and wetland wildlife.

Link's Biodiversity Working Group made its [third annual progress assessment](#) of the Government's progress - or otherwise - towards 'Halting Biodiversity Loss by 2010'. Three of the group's seven 'traffic light' indicators have fallen since last year's assessment.

In the battle to eradicate bovine TB in English badgers, we welcomed the Government's announcement that the first vaccine will be deployed next year, but were disappointed by the decision in Wales to cull badgers in North Pembrokeshire.

The Whales Working Group met Environment Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies MP to prepare for the 61st Annual International Whaling Commission. And Link's Marine Task Force has been at full tilt influencing the Marine and Coastal Access Bill as it passes through Parliament. 49 briefings have been submitted to Peers containing amendments to be tabled and debated during the House of Lords Committee Stage. We hope to see the full Bill, including strengthened clauses to protect marine biodiversity, receive Royal Assent as soon as possible.

Welcome to our new look report. Please circulate this to your colleagues and send us feedback. If you would like to learn more about Link's work and how to get involved in Link activities, do get it touch.

Best wishes,

Paul de Zylva
Chair

Task Forces

Marine



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*Chair: Joan Edwards, TWT
Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB
Secretary: Joanna Butler*

“To campaign for comprehensive legislation to achieve better protection for marine wildlife and effective management of our seas”

Since the announcement of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill in the Queen’s speech last December, Link’s Marine Task Force (MTF) has been working hard to influence the Bill as it passes through Parliament. Link welcomes many of the provisions in the Bill but believes that it needs to be strengthened to ensure that it is fit for purpose to deliver its aims and objectives. In total Link submitted 49 briefings to Peers containing amendments to be tabled and debated during the House of Lords Committee Stage (all are available on the [MTF Campaign Site](#)).

The MTF has had several meetings with Defra, including with Defra Ministers, Huw Irranca-Davies and Lord Hunt, to discuss Link’s proposed amendments to the Bill and has recently written to Defra, highlighting Link’s priority amendments and seeking further clarification on certain issues.

The Bill is taking longer than expected in the House of Lords Committee stage and Defra have expressed their concerns about this to Link. After giving further consideration to the Committee debates, the Minister’s statements in Hansard, and the discussions with Defra, the MTF de-prioritised a number of amendments in order to focus on priority amendments at Report stage. After the Committee Stage, the Bill will move into Report Stage, followed by its Third Reading in the House of Lords. The Bill will then enter the House of Commons to be debated.

In March MTF members gave presentations on behalf of Link at the UK Environmental Law Association event on the Marine and Coastal Access Bill, and the MTF met with JNCC and Natural England to discuss the regional Marine Protected Area network projects.

The MTF is currently working on a response to Defra’s public consultation on the boundaries of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Districts and will be submitting this by the deadline in April.

Working Groups

Whales



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

“To discuss cetacean issues, exchange information, coordinate strategies for the International Whaling Commission (IWC), develop briefings for the UK Government and liaise with Defra on matters relating to cetaceans”

The Whales Working Group continues working towards the 61st International Whaling Commission (IWC61) meeting in Madeira in June 2009. In February the Group had its first meeting with the Environment Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies MP, who agreed to ensure that the UK continued to take the lead in progressing the conservation and welfare agendas within the IWC. The Minister also confirmed that he would try to attend IWC61 and welcomed another meeting with Link in May.

In March members of the Group attended the IWC Intersessional meeting, held in Rome. On the agenda were issues around the Scientific Committee of the IWC and a report back from the [IWC Small Working Group](#) (SWG), which will continue its work on the future of the IWC. Earlier this quarter, Link was disappointed to learn that proposals put forward by the Chair of the SWG offered considerable concessions to whaling nations. The Group raised its concerns with the Minister and the UK IWC Commissioner, as well as the Australian Special Envoy for Whale Conservation on his recent visit to the UK.

This quarter Link wrote to the European Environment Commissioner, Stavros Dimas to request a meeting to discuss both the interpretation and implementation of the common position on whaling by the EU at IWC61, as well as Iceland’s probable application to join Europe and its continued whaling activities. The Group also wrote to the Icelandic Prime Minister to condemn her Government’s approval of an increased whaling quota for 2009.



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

“To lobby for policies which support and deliver a sustainable, high quality, multi-functional environment in rural areas through reforming the CAP, influencing the development and revision of AES, and implementing the RDPE”

In March Defra launched the [consultation on proposed changes to standards in cross compliance GAEC and related measures in England](#). The Group will be submitting a Link response to this important consultation, which addresses proposed changes to cross compliance and related measures in England, including recapturing the environmental effects of set-aside.

Throughout the quarter the Group has continued to monitor [Environmental Stewardship](#), in relation to Natural England’s new targeting system. In January Link members attended an Agri-environment Stakeholders Group meeting, hosted by Natural England, at which updates on both the new Higher Level Stewardship targeting system and the Uplands Entry Level Scheme were given.

In March Link attended both the CAP Health Check Stakeholder meeting, at which Defra gave updates on the outcomes of the Health Check, and the [Land Use Policy Group’s](#) Seminar, entitled, ‘Agri-environment schemes - learning lessons and preparing for the future’. The Farming and Rural Development Working Group also had their first meeting of 2009 in February where they discussed the CAP Health Check and set aside, Environmental Stewardship, and their workplan for 2009.



Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn

Link was pleased with the announcement made by Hilary Benn MP this quarter that the first vaccine against bovine TB in badgers will be deployed next year in England in six bovine TB hotspot areas. This will be the first time the vaccine has been used outside of research trials. In contrast to this, Link was highly disappointed with the Welsh Assembly Government’s decision in March to undertake a cull of badgers in North Pembrokeshire.

The Group continues to monitor the activities of the [Bovine TB Eradication Group](#), which was formed by Defra and the British cattle industry in November.



Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn

In February Link was invited to sit on the Working Group of the Forestry Commission’s study of the estate the Forestry Commission manages in England. The Study will form part of the work outlined in the [Forestry Commission’s Corporate Plan for 2008 to 2011](#), which was published back in June 2008. A Link Representative attended the first meeting in March, where an introduction to the Forestry Commission’s public estate was given and the intended public consultation on the estate was discussed.

Land use planning

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

“To promote a democratic and transparent planning system which considers environmental limits and provides a key mechanism to deliver sustainable development whilst enabling adaptation to climate change”

Results of a scoping exercise undertaken by the Land Use Planning Working Group (LUPWG) this quarter indicated a high level of member interest in influencing the regulations on the [Environmental Impact Assessment](#) and the Habitats Directive, and they also revealed that Link members intend to input to almost all National Policy Statements. In February, Link attended the first in a series of stakeholder workshops on the implementation of the Infrastructure Planning Commission held by the [Department for Communities and Local Government](#) (CLG), which covered site investigation and the guidance on pre-application and application procedures.

The [Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill](#) entered the House of Lords in January and was in Report Stage at the time of writing, the final session of which will take place in early April. A number of Link's members, both individually and as part of the [How Green is My Region](#) coalition have tabled amendments to the Bill and in March the coalition produced a briefing for Peers for the final session of the Report Stage.

Members of the LUPWG have been continuing their work on the Town and Country Planning Association ([TCPA eco-town worksheets](#)). The Natural England-led draft worksheet on biodiversity was circulated for comment this quarter and members of the LUPWG submitted extensive comments to the TCPA in advance of its presentation to the TCPA Eco Expert Panel, which took place on 26 March. Link members will be attending the next TCPA roundtable event in April to finalise the worksheet.

In March, at the request of CLG as part of their consultation, Link met with Chris Baines, an independent environmental adviser, to discuss ecological issues around eco-towns, especially Link's biodiversity concerns. Link will also be submitting a response to the CLG consultation on the draft [Planning Policy Statement on Ecotowns](#), the deadline for which has been put back again to the end of April.

Water

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Chair: Robert Cunningham, RSPB
Vice Chair: Tom Le Quesne, WWF-UK
Secretary: Kirsten Knap

“To raise awareness of the importance of the public value of water and continue to advocate the 10 steps to sustainable water as set out in the Blueprint for Water”

In March the [Blueprint for Water](#) coalition published their latest report, [2009: the time to act](#), highlighting the Blueprint's priorities for 2009 and urging the Government to turn words into action. The report was presented to the Environment Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies MP and was widely distributed to stakeholders.

96% of people think that the government should aim to "invest in countryside to protect endangered water and wetland wildlife" by 2015

This quarter, the Blueprint for Water Coalition undertook a public opinion poll to determine how people in England value water. The results, which were extremely positive and showed that people really do value water, have provided the Blueprint coalition with important evidence, further strengthening their call to Government. Full results are available at www.blueprintforwater.org.uk.

Link continues to input to the Environment Agency's Pitt Natural Processes Working Group, and a Link representative attended a meeting of the Working Group at the end of March. This quarter Link also met with the Walker Review Team to discuss the Blueprint response to the [Walker Independent Review of Household Charging for Water and Sewerage Services](#), as well as Thames Water to discuss their final Business Plans. Additionally, Link and its members attended the [CIWEM](#) conference on the draft Flooding and Water Bill, where the Chair of the Water Working Group gave a presentation on what the Blueprint coalition would like to see in the draft Bill, due to be published in April.

Working Groups

Wildlife and trade

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

“Working towards improved protection of wild fauna and flora threatened by trade and focused primarily on CITES”

In February the Government of Qatar informed the CITES Secretariat that Qatar is no longer able to host the 15th CITES meeting of the Conference of the Parties ([CoP15](#)), which was scheduled to take place in January 2010. Following this announcement, the timetable for submitting proposals for CoP15 has been put on hold. The CITES Secretariat is now in discussions with the Government of Qatar to reschedule the meeting and revise the deadlines for proposal submissions. Despite this, preparation for CoP15 has continued to be the focus for Link’s Wildlife and Trade Working Group.

This quarter Link members wrote in support of the WDCS proposal to up-list the narwhal from CITES Appendix II to Appendix I and was disappointed with the decision of the Environment Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies MP, not to pursue this proposal at CoP15.

At the beginning of January Link members attended a follow-up seminar on CITES enforcement with members of [Species Survival Network](#), [Animal Health](#) and the [National Wildlife Crime Unit](#) (NWCU) and in March Link met with an Investigative Support Officer from the NWCU to discuss collective action on enforcement issues in the UK. At the meeting it was agreed that Link would host an annual liaison meeting with the NWCU and share information with them throughout the year.

Biodiversity

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

“To work together with the UK Government to halt and reverse the rapid rate of biodiversity loss and continue to influence the UK BAP process at the highest level”

In February the Biodiversity Working Group launched their [third annual progress assessment](#) of the campaign to ‘Halt Biodiversity Loss by 2010’. The report assessed progress during 2008 and overall it was not a good year for the campaign. The only area that showed improvement was the marine assessment due to the announcement of the long awaited Marine and Coastal Access Bill in the Queen’s Speech in December.

In January the Biodiversity Working Group submitted their initial ideas and principles to Defra for a post 2010 target. Defra will now be taking these suggestions to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), prior to the 10th Conference of the Parties to the CBD in 2010.

The Biodiversity Working Group has held two meetings so far this year to discuss Link’s workplan for 2009, the Halting Biodiversity Loss by 2010 campaign, and Link’s work around post 2010 targets. Link representatives also attended the UK Biodiversity and Reporting Information Group meeting, the England Biodiversity Group meeting, and the England Invasives Working Group meeting.

Link News

Link Secretariat

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At Link’s first Management Committee meeting of 2009 on 17 March, we welcomed Link’s two newest trustees to the Board; Victoria Chester (Plantlife International) and Joan Edwards (The Wildlife Trusts). We began the strategic thinking around Link’s 2010-2012 planning cycle and will be encouraging input from members around this over the coming months. Other issues discussed at the meeting included a review of Working Groups and Task Force work plans for 2009, quarterly accounts and the draft end of year accounts for 2008. The next Management Committee meeting will take place on 24 June 2009.



Northern Ireland Environment Link

The work to raise climate change on the public and political agendas continues, with the Environment Minister still being vocal in his opposition. We held a major scientific conference on 20 January with keynote speaker Iain Stewart in a break from his BBC filming; a packed audience heard the latest research on the science and impacts of climate change, and sobering it was. A short summary of the event will soon be circulated to all politicians in NI to provide some data for their thoughts. Elsewhere we held a Transitioning Food conference on the 24 March in partnership with Hollywood Transition Town and the Soil Association; the time seems ripe for this movement to take off. A Fact Sheet on the built heritage is at the printers and a Coordinator for the NI Archaeology Forum has been appointed to drive forward the historic environment agenda. Planning is a major area of interest, with consultations both on our (desperately weakened) Planning Policy Statement on 'sustainable' building in the open countryside and a major review of the system. Our new Communications and Membership Officer has taken up post, and we all held a staff and Executive strategic planning day where we discussed how we can improve our services to members, publications and other aspects of our work.

Wales Environment Link

Wales Environment Link (WEL) submitted responses to three Welsh Assembly Government consultations during February 2009: the Climate Change Strategy High Level Policy Statement Consultation, the 'One Wales: One Planet' consultation on a Sustainable Development Scheme for Wales, and the Strategic Position Statement on Water consultation.

The Marine Working Group met the Minister for Rural Affairs in January to discuss the Marine Bill, the Wales Fisheries Strategy, and the Future Management of Inshore Fisheries. More recently the group has been busy preparing for Party Conference fringe events and is also planning future events and activities such as their second Marine reception at the Senedd.

Regarding the issue of Bovine TB, WEL members were disappointed that on March 24 2009 the Minister for Rural Affairs announced that she still considered a badger cull would be necessary, alongside additional cattle measures within an Intensive Action Pilot Area. The Minister has stated that North Pembrokeshire would be the preferred location for a pilot cull.

On a more positive note, WEL undertook a successful recruitment procedure this quarter. Our new Advocacy Officer and Policy Coordinator (a new post in WEL) will be starting at the beginning of May 2009.

Scottish Environment Link

This has been a busy quarter for Scottish Environment Link (LINK) taskforces and a number of responses and comments have been submitted to the Scottish Government and written and oral evidence given to various Parliamentary Committees on marine, planning, climate change, forestry proposals for climate change, national parks and the SRDP review. LINK's Freshwater Taskforce has been fully involved as the Flood Risk Management Bill passed Stage 1 in January and Stage 2 in March (committee scrutiny) and is now at Stage 3 (parliamentary scrutiny).

Although the budget was smaller than previous years as funding support was difficult to obtain, LINK's Scottish Environment Week in Parliament in February was very successful with a number of MSPs and parliamentarians attending seminars and exhibitions each day on marine, health, SRDP and biodiversity.

A new 'Wildlife and Natural Environment' Bill is being proposed, and is expected to be introduced to Parliament later this year. Many of LINK's taskforces are monitoring this issue closely and in the future, a new LINK subgroup may be set up to co-ordinate members' input. A high level liaison meeting with SNH in January has led to other SNH meetings on policy development and health.

The quarterly ministerial meeting in February discussed planning and the environment and LINK's view is that local authorities need access to expert advice on natural heritage matters especially with regard to the ecosystem approaches and landscape scale developments in the National Planning Framework 2.

In February, LINK members met with the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority to discuss how it could work better with members on land use and biodiversity issues. Members also met with the BEFS (Built Environment Forum Scotland) to consider the National Parks Consultation, which informed members' responses.