

Q2 Report April - June 2009

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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."



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Letter from the Chair...

Friends,

Link's second new look quarterly report for 2009 covers a busy period tinged with signs that policy, politics and public discourse is now geared to a UK General Election. It's time, then, to complete key work and make clear our expectations of our future political masters.

Link is preparing for 2010 and beyond by kicking off its Forward Planning Review and getting your views on what you think should be Link's priorities for the next three years. This will result in a new strategic plan for 2010-12. Many members have already given their ideas to help devise a collectively agreed plan. You can do the same using this [short online survey](#) or you can speak with Jodie, Link's Director, and her staff at any time.

Marine law and whaling

Robust law to protect our marine environment has moved a step closer. This quarter our parliamentary work focused on the committee stages of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill with all of Link's amendments debated in the House of Lords. The Government continues to oppose some of our proposals but the Minister has made positive statements indicating support for highly protected marine sites. Meanwhile at the International Whaling Committee's 61st meeting attention was diverted away from efforts to conserve cetaceans by continued wrangling over the opening up of coastal whaling.

Farming and wildlife

Conservation has, however, been a hot topic for the farming community here in England. In our response to the Government's consultation on standards for good agriculture environment condition, Link called for a mandatory replacement for set-aside to safeguard the environmental benefits gained in advance of its abolition. The debate around the mandatory versus the voluntary approach played out in the pages the UK's broadsheets with 17 CEO's of Link member organisations expressing disappointment that the Government opted for the environmentally uncertain voluntary approach. We will monitor how well the Campaign for the Farmed Environment delivers for our wildlife.

Planning reform

Intensive agriculture is not alone in influencing the nation's species and habitats – planning policy is notoriously unreliable in delivering net gains for biodiversity and the Planning Act 2008 has to prove that it will be better than its predecessors. We continue to work to influence the Act's implementation and are calling for the planning procedures for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects to focus on ensuring that applications are subject to Environmental Impact Assessment.

Best wishes - do let us know what you think about Link's future work and also how Link can help you.

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”

The Marine Task Force (MTF) continues to work hard to influence the Marine & Coastal Access Bill as it progresses through Parliament. Link’s House of Lords [Report Stage briefings](#) were successful in encouraging Peers to support Link’s amendments, nearly all of which were tabled for debate. Link was pleased that a number of positive changes were made to the Bill following debate in the Lords, including the inclusion of ‘reckless’ as well as ‘intentional’ damage in the MCZ general offence.

Prior to the Bill reaching the Commons in June, the MTF distributed an overarching [Second Reading Briefing](#) and held several meetings with MPs to encourage support for Link’s priority amendments. As a result, all of our priority issues were raised several times during the Second Reading debate. The MTF also distributed several [Committee Stage briefings](#) containing amendments ahead of the start of Committee Stage in late June. All of Link’s amendments were tabled and debated by the Committee. Link was disappointed that the Government continued to oppose a number of our amendments but welcomed the Minister making several positive statements in Hansard, including assurances that highly protected sites will be included as part of the network of marine protected areas. We were also pleased that the Government agreed to consider one of our priority amendments (sea fishing loophole in the general offence) and come back with a way forward at Report Stage. Committee Stage ended on 14 July and Report Stage and Third Reading will now take place after summer recess. The MTF met with the Minister in July to discuss Link’s amendments and followed this up with a letter, clarifying which issues remain priorities for Report Stage.

Link [responded](#) to two Defra consultations this quarter on [Inshore Fisheries and Conservation District Boundaries](#) and the [draft Strategy for Marine Protected Areas](#). We were also pleased to learn that Defra and the Devolved Administration’s final version of their joint High Level Objectives for the UK marine area - [Our seas - a shared resource: High Level Marine Objectives](#), published in April, contains a number of Link’s recommendations.

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 focus for the Whales Working Group has been the 61st meeting of the International Whaling Commission, which took place in June in Madeira. In response to the release of the annotated agenda for IWC61 at the end of April, the group produced a [Briefing on Key Issues for IWC61](#) for the UK Government.

Prior to IWC61, Link travelled to Brussels to meet Mr Papaconstantinou, Member of Cabinet for Environment & Trade at the EU Commission, to discuss Europe’s common position on whaling at IWC61. Link highlighted the persistent focus by the IWC on brokering a deal which would effectively introduce legitimate coastal whaling in exchange for cessation of whaling in the Southern Ocean. Link stressed that debate on ‘the deal’ is undermining pro-conservation action that the IWC and EU member countries should be focused on. Link also presented a copy of a letter of concern which had been sent to Commissioner Stavros Dimas, in partnership with the Species Survival Network, regarding the lack of transparency around EU decision-making at IWC.

Two Link representatives attended IWC61 on the UK delegation. Link was pleased to have the Minister at IWC but was deeply disappointed that the UK’s IWC Commissioner did not attend. On the agenda for discussion was special (scientific) permit whaling, whale watching, human health, and Greenland’s request for a quota to hunt humpbacks, which was postponed to a future intessessional plenary meeting.



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”

This quarter ‘set-aside’ has been the focus for the Farming and Rural Development Group. Link submitted a response to Defra’s *Consultation on proposed changes to standards in cross compliance Good Agriculture Environmental Condition and related measures in England*, including the replacement for set-aside. The group called for the introduction of the mandatory option over concerns that the voluntary option will not meet the challenges posed by the loss of set-aside. The Farming Group also wrote to the Secretary of State, the Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP, outlining Link’s concerns with the voluntary approach, to which Hilary Benn MP responded that he would welcome a voluntary approach, “if we can be sure that it will deliver.” Additionally 17 Link member Chief Executives signed a letter which was published in The Guardian in May, ‘[Farmers fail to set aside wildlife fears.](#)’

During the quarter Link representatives attended the Agri-environment Stakeholder Group meetings and the Defra stakeholder workshop on set-aside proposals. Link also travelled to [Carlshead Farms](#) in York for a bioenergy meeting with Natural England and the Forestry Commission.



Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn

In April, the Welsh Assembly Government launched a *consultation on the Tuberculosis Eradication (Wales) Order 2009 under the Animal Health Act 1981* following the Welsh Assembly Government’s decision in March to undertake a cull of badgers in North Pembrokeshire. While Link is not submitting a response, a number of Link members will be. The group has maintained a watching brief on Defra’s Bovine TB Eradication Group and will continue to do so over the coming months.



Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn

Members of the Woodland Virtual Sub-group and the Biodiversity Working Group have published a Link position statement on the Forestry Commission’s *Woodfuel Strategy for England*. The statement broadly supports the *Woodfuel Strategy* but urges the Government to ensure that it is delivered in a sustainable way that benefits wildlife.

The group continues to participate in the Forestry Commission’s study of the public forest estate and is planning to respond to the public consultation on the study due out later this year.

Land use planning

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Chair: Simon Marsh, RSPB
Vice Chair: Paul Miner, CPRE
Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn

“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”

This quarter Link responded to the Department for Communities and Local Government’s (CLG) [Consultation on the Pre-Application Consultation and Application Procedures for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects](#), welcoming the guidance on pre-application consultation but calling for the role of local planning authorities in the application process to be made explicit and for all NSIP applications to be subject to Environmental Impact Assessment. Link also responded to the CLG consultation on the draft [Planning Policy Statement on Ecotowns](#), highlighting our concerns that a number of the standards set out in the consultation document are not sufficiently aspirational and that the biodiversity standard should be seeking a ‘net gain’ instead of ‘no net loss’.

Link continues to monitor the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill as it progresses through Parliament. Link members have been working through the *How Green is My Region* coalition to improve the Bill, calling for meaningful commitments on economic development which advance genuine sustainable development and engagement of civil society in decisions on regional planning, economic, transport and other crucial decisions.

Members of the LUPWG have been continuing their work on the Town and Country Planning Association ([TCPA eco-town worksheets](#)) and look forward to seeing the final Biodiversity Worksheet, which is due out imminently.

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 April the Blueprint for Water coalition held a successful Ministerial Roundtable event to discuss their latest report, [2009: the time to act](#). The Environment Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies MP attended, along with representatives from Defra, the Environment Agency and major water industry stakeholders, including Ofwat and the Consumer Council for Water. Numerous issues were discussed during the course of the event, including the draft River Basin Management Plans (particularly the level of ambition), the recently published draft Flood and Water Management Bill, Water Resource Management Plans, and Water Company Business Plans. MP’s praised Link and the Blueprint Coalition for their lobbying and encouraged us to continue.

In June the Blueprint for Water responded to the Environment Agency’s consultation on their draft River Basin Management Plans. The response had the support of 20 Link member organisations and partners and called for the Environment Agency to raise the level of ambition within the plans.

The Blueprint for Water is currently working on a response to the Defra consultation on the [draft Flood and Water Management Bill](#), and has had meetings with Defra, Natural England, the Environment Agency, and Water UK to discuss the Bill. The Blueprint’s key asks include placing greater emphasis on working with nature to manage flood risk and giving the Environment Agency new powers to restore rivers to manage floods, increase resilience and improve ecology.

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”

The Wildlife and Trade Working Group has been continuing preparations for the 15th Conference of the Parties ([CoP15](#)). In May, it was announced that the host country Qatar and the CITES Secretariat had agreed in principle that the meeting should be held in Doha from 13 to 25 March 2010. However, a formal announcement from the CITES Secretariat to confirm these dates is still being awaited.

In June, Link attended the Defra / NGO Joint Liaison Group (JLG) meeting, wherein updates from recent and forthcoming CITES related meetings, enforcement issues, and CITES publicity were all discussed. The Wildlife and Trade Group also met in June in preparation for the JLG meeting and to discuss the future work of the group as part of Link's 2010-2012 forward planning process.

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 May the Biodiversity Working Group met the Environment Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies MP to discuss Link's third annual progress assessment of the campaign to 'Halt Biodiversity Loss by 2010' and post 2010 targets. In June Link members attended a seminar on conservation credits, hosted by Shadow Environment Minister, Nick Herbert MP, to which Link will be submitting a response.

Link is continuing to engage with the Biodiversity Integration Groups (BIGs), which were formed by Natural England to help the implementation of the new England Biodiversity Strategy framework. Link has been represented at a number of external meetings this quarter, including the first Woodland BIG meeting, the first UK Standing Committee of 2009 and the England Biodiversity Group meeting. Link was also present at the Institute for European Environmental Policy workshop on economic and social benefits associated with the Natura 2000 network in June.

Link News

Link Secretariat

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Work has now begun in earnest on Link's Forward Planning process for 2010-2012. In advance of the end the year, members are being brought together to review existing work areas and help Link devise a collectively agreed plan for our next three year planning period, 2010 to 2012.

In May eighteen Policy Directors from across Link's membership came together to find out how Link's landscape scale conservation project is progressing and to workshop ideas around Link's future work programme. Following on from this, Link's Chairs and Vice Chairs attended a workshop to discuss and explore the future of their respective Working Groups and Task Forces.

Link's second Management Committee meeting of 2009 took place in June and Link's future workplan was again discussed in depth. In light of input received so far, we are asking all individual staff, CEOs and Trustees of Link member organisations that use Link's services to take part in an online survey. The 10-minute questionnaire aims to capture members' thoughts on what and how they would like Link to work in the next three years (2010 to 2012).

[Click here to take part in the survey](#)



Northern Ireland Environment Link

NIEL began the quarter with a 'May Day' summit event for business to encourage looking at joint environmental and economic ways to tackle the recession. This became part of a more general 'Green New Deal' exercise which has gained a great deal of cross-sectoral support from business and government. The SDC visited and hosted a discussion group, a paper has been submitted and a meeting held with Assembly members on energy efficiency in housing, transport and renewables, with proposals similar to the SDC Sustainable New Deal.

The Annual Conference on Sustainable Transport, along with our AGM, was held on 24 June and was accompanied by a major Report including papers presented at the conference. Transport will be a big theme this year as the Regional Development and Regional Transport Strategies are being reviewed, plus an Assembly inquiry.

NI has a new Minister for the Environment who does agree that climate change is human induced, but has some other unusual ideas which may impact his work. The Environment Committee continues its inquiry into Climate Change, with recommendations due out in the autumn. Planning reform is apparently progressing, and NIEL held a joint workshop with Community Places and RTPi exploring the ways forward. The Review of Public Administration slowly advances, and Sustainable NI is working with Councils to promote sustainable development as an integrating 'framework' for new structures. The employment of a NI Archaeology Forum Co-ordinator in March has greatly increased archaeological action and our Fact Sheet on the Built Heritage was recently produced.

Wales Environment Link

WEL was very pleased to welcome two new members of staff at the beginning of May. Laura Wilkinson is their Advocacy Officer, while Karen Higgins has started in the new WEL post of Policy Coordinator. Karen will directly support the work of WEL's Working Groups and will coordinate production of WEL consultation responses and statements. Another important role of the Policy Coordinator will be to collate information from the members on work they are undertaking towards achievement of the Wales Environment Strategy Action Plan.

Written evidence was provided to the National Assembly for Wales Sustainability Committee's inquiry into the Draft Flood and Water Management Bill and WEL responded to the Environment Agency's River Basin Planning consultation in June 2009. WEL also produced and widely distributed a new paper called 'Tackling the Causes of Climate Change'.

In June WEL met both the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing to discuss the Programme of Action on Climate Change, the Energy Strategy, the Sustainable Development Strategy and the Marine Bill and the Minister for Rural Affairs to discuss the new agri-environment scheme, Glastir, Bovine TB and fisheries. WEL also held a joint meeting between members and the Chief Executive Officers of Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales and Forestry Commission Wales.

Scottish Environment Link

Scottish Environment Link (LINK) taskforces and members have been busy with legislation progressing through Scottish Parliament. The Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Bill was passed in May, the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill was passed in June, and the Marine (Scotland) Bill was introduced at the end of April (stage 1 (committee scrutiny) will end in October 2009). Whilst LINK's taskforce work is focused on pre-legislation, it is now considering the best ways it can hold to account, and monitor and influence implementation. LINK has continued to submit a range of responses to consultations and briefing papers, which are all available on our website (see [Current Actions](#)).

LINK members have been having discussion workshops on the proposed 'Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill', access to justice, local authority Single Outcome Agreements and health and well-being issues. Members are also currently considering whether to form a new cross-cutting taskforce, 'Sustainable Land Use', to deal with issues common to the agriculture, biodiversity, freshwater, landscape and woodlands taskforces.

LINK staff are currently preparing internal documents on the national conversation for the future constitution and UK elections and LINK now has a 'Political Strategy Report' which is revised every six months.

In April, the LINK Board decided to freeze members' subscription rates for 2009-10. In early May, LINK met with Roseanna Cunningham MSP and discussed marine and biodiversity issues, national parks and carbon and peat. LINK held its AGM in Perth at the end of June and Ian McCall was appointed as the new LINK Chair.