

E-bulletin April 2013

Welcome to Link's April 2013 e-bulletin. See below for this month's top stories and updates from each of our working groups. If you would like to subscribe to our e-bulletin or submit news items, please contact [Louise](#).



Triennial Review of JNCC

Link took the lead in coordinating a [Joint Links response](#) to the [Joint Nature Conservation Committee \(JNCC\) Triennial Review consultation](#). The response concluded that JNCC should be retained and allowed to continue its crucial UK-wide coordinating and overarching scientific advisory role, as well as its current structure, functions and responsibilities. However, the response also stated that JNCC must do more to demonstrate its independence from Government and needs to focus more effectively on its core priority of conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

The response went on to highlight the fact that JNCC is critically understaffed and under-resourced. Its potential value to UK conservation justifies increased funding from Government to ensure that it functions optimally. Finally, the response pointed out that although JNCC has developed a number of effective partnerships with environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), it still needs to improve its joint working, particularly its engagement with NGOs. The joint response was supported by all four Links and 28 Link member organisations from across the UK.

Meeting with Defra's Chief Scientist

On 22 April Elaine King (Link's Director), Victoria Chester (Link's Chair) and Paul de Zylva (Link's former Chair) met with Professor Ian Boyd, Chief Scientific Adviser at Defra. The meeting largely focussed on improvements to Defra's structure, especially with regards to the commissioning and delivery of high quality science to support effective decision-making. Link also outlined its unique position in representing a large number of environmental NGOs and discussion included agreeing how Link and its members can effectively engage with Ian and his team over the coming months.

Natural Values Task and Finish Group

On 29 April Link held the inaugural meeting of its Natural Values Task and Finish Group. Discussions focused on the groups Terms of Reference and key areas of work, which will include engaging with: the Natural Capital Committee; the report of the Ecosystem Markets Task Force; biodiversity offsetting; the second phase of the National Ecosystem Assessment; the Treasury and the APPG Biodiversity's group on natural capital.

Letter to the Secretary of State

In March Link wrote to the Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, ahead of the Council of Ministers discussion in Brussels on reform of the CAP. In his response to the letter, Owen Paterson re-stated his intention to continue to push hard for a reform

of the CAP ‘that delivers a good outcome on the CAP for farmers, consumers, taxpayers and the environment’.

At the end of April Link replied to the Secretary of State’s letter, encouraging him to stand firm on three key issues:

- Transfer of funding from Pillar I to Pillar II in order to support Rural Development Programme funds;
- Ensuring that greening of Pillar I payments delivers high quality environmental outcomes;
- Prioritising agri-environment schemes within the next Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE).

Meeting with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

Link met with the DCLG on 23 April to discuss guidance, particularly around local plans, sustainability appraisal and the Duty to Cooperate. The meeting covered the need for coherence across the guidance suite so that different policies are linked together to enable planning for an ecological coherent network. Link also highlighted the fact that valuable existing guidance should be retained, and that the new website for guidance - which Link welcomes - should make links to all appropriate sector guidance. DCLG noted that the Government will only be providing planning practice guidance where it is best placed to do so and that best practice guidance should be provided by the sector.

Joint Links Training

On 16 – 17 April members of the Joint Links met to discuss parliamentary advocacy. This very useful two day skillshare included discussions of our varying approaches to advocacy, the tools that we use and the external contexts in the different devolved nations. Attendees also visited the Scottish parliament to see how it functions in practice and what that means for interest groups in Scotland. The group also met with members of the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe).

Link Secretariat update

As reported last month, we welcomed back Kirsten Loveday in April as a part time Policy and Campaigns Coordinator (PCC), a year after commencing maternity leave following the birth of her daughter, Ivy. This month we also welcomed Jenny Legg as Link’s new Invasive Non-Native Species intern. For details of which secretariat member is looking after which working groups and task and finish groups, please see Link’s [website](#).



Working Group meeting

On 11 April the Agriculture Working Group held a meeting to discuss priority work areas for the next quarter. Key areas of activity will include influencing the design of the next RDPE, continued work on CAP advocacy at the EU level and communication of the Link position statement on food security.



Biodiversity

IPENS launch

On 24 April Nicola Hutchinson (Plantlife) represented Link at the launch of the Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 Sites (IPENS) initiative. This two year project will focus on the intractable issues for Natura 2000 sites across England, for example diffuse water pollution.

Trilateral meeting

On 16 May Link will be holding a trilateral meeting with Defra and Natural England to work through the delivery questions on *Biodiversity 2020*, which were identified at the last Terrestrial Biodiversity Group meeting.

Habitats Directive

Several Link members will be responding to the JNCC consultation on [the implementation of the Habitats Directive](#) (Article 17), which closes on 10 May.



Invasive Non-Native Species

Task and Finish Group intern

We would like to welcome Jenny Legg as Link's new Invasive Non-Native Species intern. Jenny has recently completed a degree in Ecology and Conservation at Sussex University and will be providing secretariat support to the INNS Task and Finish Group for the next three months.

Task and Finish Group meeting

The INNS Task and Finish Group met on 18 April to discuss the group's workplan. The group has three key streams of work: the review of the INNS GB Strategy; the EU Invasive Alien Species (IAS) legislation (working closely with the European Environmental Bureau); and raising the profile of invasives. Link will be raising the issue of profile with MPs directly at the INNS Policy Group, which sits within the APPG Biodiversity group. Link members will also be working to build the profile of invasives through the media.

Meeting with Defra

On 22 April Link met with Defra officials to discuss invasive species. It was a productive and useful meeting focusing on the review of the INNS GB Framework Strategy that will be taking place towards the end of 2013, with a view to reporting to Ministers in spring 2014. The recommendations in Link's analysis of the GB strategy, which were originally presented to Richard Benyon MP at a roundtable in January, were discussed. Defra were positive about many of Link's recommendations but noted that there is some work going on that Link wasn't aware of. Defra will be providing more information on those areas of work and a short paper on their reaction to Link's analysis. The meeting also covered the forthcoming EU legislation on IAS.



Land Use Planning

New Chair

Paul Miner will be stepping down as Chair of the Land Use Planning Working Group, we would like to thank Paul for all his hard work and commitment to the group. We are very pleased to welcome Victoria Banks Price from the Woodland Trust as the new acting Chair of the group.



Legal Strategy

Meeting with the Law Commission

On 29 April Link met with Keith Vincent and Stephanie Hack from the Law Commission for an update on the Law Commission's review of wildlife law and the [consultation on conservation covenants](#) which closes on the 21 June. The meeting was very informative and Link will continue to engage with the Law Commission on these issues.

Group meeting

The Legal Strategy Group will be holding a meeting in May, primarily to discuss the EU's competences review, which the Foreign Secretary launched in July 2012. The environment section of the review is expected to be made public around 13 May. The group will also be discussing the conservation covenants consultation.



Marine

Marine Science Report

The Science and Technology Committee published its [report on Marine Science](#) on 11 April. The report concludes that the creation of new Marine Conservation Zones is vital to protect biodiversity in UK waters and should not be stalled by Government. Link members, including RSPB, Marine Conservation Society and The Wildlife Trusts gave evidence to the Committee as part of the inquiry in November 2012.

Meeting with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and Natural England (NE)

On 30 April Link met with the MMO's Marine Planning Development Manager, Paul Gilliland, MMO Senior Marine Planner, Joanna Redhead and Ginny Swaile, Senior Specialist in Marine Planning Advice for NE to discuss Link's recent letter regarding the ecosystem approach to marine planning.



Water

Blueprint 2015

Blueprint for Water members held a teleconference on 17 April to discuss the new Blueprint, which will replace the Blueprint 2010. It was agreed that the Blueprint 2015 will be published in November 2014, and that the coalition will seek to engage a wide range of stakeholders in its development,

including government, statutory agencies, water companies, the farming sector, local catchment level initiatives, professional institutes, customers' representatives and businesses. In preparing the Blueprint 2015, the coalition will look at whether it is necessary to change or refresh the 10 steps themselves, as well as the asks under each step.

Thames Water dinner

On 9 April members of the Blueprint for Water coalition attended a dinner hosted by Thames Water Chief Executive Martin Baggs. The focus of discussions during the evening were on Thames Waters' new 25-year water resource plan, due to be published in May, as well as the draft Water Bill and progress on the proposed Thames Tideway Tunnel.

Meeting with Gavin Shaker MP

On 24 April members of the Blueprint for Water met with Gavin Shaker MP, Shadow Defra Minister, to discuss the Water Bill. Blueprint members raised concerns around abstraction reform, the need for a sustainability duty for Ofwat and the need to remove the limits on fines so polluters compensate for the real cost of the damage they cause.

Meeting with Yorkshire Water

On 25 April Link members gave a presentation on the Blueprint for Water's 10 steps to sustainable water and advocacy targets for PR14 at Yorkshire Water's Environmental Advisory Panel meeting. There was also a discussion on how well Yorkshire Water is meeting those 10 steps. Link will be separately meeting with Yorkshire Water's strategic business objective leads on 10 May to discuss partnership working going forwards.

Meeting with Defra on the draft Water Bill

On 7 May Link will be meeting with Defra to discuss the draft Water Bill. This will include Defra's proposals for refreshing the draft Bill such as: putting Strategic Policy Statement on the face of the Bill; providing for non-water company storage; clarifying responsibility for Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems; and reforming Ofwat's general duties.

Meeting with Defra, the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England (NE) on PR14

On 13 May the Blueprint for Water will be meeting with the EA, NE, Ofwat and Defra to collectively discuss PR14 as well as Customer Challenge Groups and the Natural Environment Programme.

Restoring Sustainable Abstraction system

The Blueprint has written to Defra supporting their proposal on how to reform the Restoring Sustainable Abstraction (RSA) system. Defra have proposed moving to an approach where water company solutions for RSA are included in the price review process and therefore funded directly through price limits rather than through the Environmental Improvement Unit Charge.

Hydropower consultation

The Blueprint for Water has [submitted a response](#) to the supplementary consultation on revisions to river flow and water abstraction standards for hydropower. The coalition believes that uptake of renewables is important, including run-of-the-river hydropower, provided that adverse impacts to the river or associated ecosystem are avoided, and legal requirements under the Water Framework Directive continue to be met. The response recommends that the Environment Agency should use two of its four options for hydropower, depending on whether it is a low head or high head system. In addition, the coalition believes that a mechanism must be put in place to assess, with every individual hydropower application, the cumulative impacts on the catchment.



Whales

Priorities for Defra

Link's Whales Working Group wrote to Defra outlining priority work areas for the next eighteen months. The group called on Defra to: maintain a strong focus on the IWC; strongly oppose Icelandic whaling; continue to address the issue of commercialisation of Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling; and maintain UK involvement in the Western Gray Whale Advisory Panel.

Letter to Danish Ambassador

Link also wrote to the Danish Ambassador, Anne Hedensted Steffensen, to thank her for last month's meeting to discuss Greenland's catch limits and remind her of the issues raised by Link members at the meeting.

Australia v Japan international whaling case

Attorney General Mark Dreyfus QC will appear in Australia's whaling case against Japan which has now been set for a three week hearing in the International Court of Justice at the Hague from 26 June.



Wildlife Trade

Working Group meeting

On 22 April the Wildlife Trade Working Group met to follow up on the Conference of the Parties (CoP) to CITES, particularly focusing on implementation of the outcomes of the meeting. The group also discussed the Government's response to the EAC report on wildlife crime, which rejected the key recommendations made by the Committee, including longer term funding of the National Wildlife Crime Unit. The COTES review timetable and exotic pets were also covered during the meeting.

Police and Crime Commissioners

At the end of March Link wrote to all Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) urging them to work closely with their constabulary's Police Wildlife Crime Officer and ensure that wildlife crime is given sufficient prioritisation and police resources. We have received 12 positive replies from PCCs and an invitation for a Link representative to attend a roundtable on tackling wildlife crime in the coming months.



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