

E-bulletin July 2013

Welcome to Link's July 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](#).



Modulation of CAP funds

In the House of Commons on 4 July, the Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, [repeated his intention](#) to transfer the maximum amount of funding (15%) from Pillar I (direct payments) to Pillar II (Rural Development) in England. However, in subsequent public statements, Mr Paterson made it clear that a formal decision would not be taken until more stakeholder views had been sought. Member State governments have to inform the European Commission of their intention to transfer funds between CAP Pillars by 31 December 2013.

Over the coming months, Link will be working hard to reinforce the message that maximum transfers into Pillar II are a vital lifeline for much of our struggling wildlife and are an opportunity to secure the best value for money for taxpayers' investment in the CAP.

Letter to Owen Paterson on biodiversity offsetting

Link wrote to the Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, on 4 July. The letter expressed our serious concern over the Government's apparent plan to publish a White Paper, rather than the expected Green Paper, on biodiversity offsetting. Signed by 24 Link CEOs, the letter expresses concern that this approach is premature and will provide far less opportunity for stakeholders to contribute effectively to the debate.

The letter also highlights the fact that offsetting could be a useful way of compensating for the rare occasions when damage from necessary and appropriate development is unavoidable, but that it must not be treated as a mechanism to avoid legitimate refusal of planning permission. In addition, for the schemes to be effective local authorities need to be sufficiently resourced and have access to adequate ecological expertise and robust, up-to-date ecological information.

The letter states that government guidance will be required, which must fulfil the following criteria in order for biodiversity offsetting to be successful:

- reiterate a clear commitment to the mitigation hierarchy;
- contain robust metrics for ecological and social considerations;
- contain guidance on long-term financing, regulation and enforcement of offset sites;
- provide clarity on how offsetting policy interacts with other policies such as planning policies, the Community Infrastructure Levy and agri-environment schemes.

Subsequent to the letter, Link held a teleconference with the Secretary of State to discuss our concerns and suggestions in more detail. The Government now plans to publish the green paper in the autumn. In the meantime, Link will be meeting the Secretary of State in the coming weeks for further discussions on the Government's proposals.

Link reaction to the Agri Tech Strategy

Following the launch of the Agri Tech Strategy on 22 July, Link issued a [press release](#), which cautioned that the Strategy should not repeat the mistakes of the past by prioritising increasing food production over environmental sustainability.

The press release highlights Link's [position statement on food security](#), which sets out the 10 steps necessary to deliver sustainable, sufficient and secure supplies of food. Link believes that agri-tech solutions to increasing food production, including genetic modification (GM), should not be promoted at the expense of less risky options that can also help build healthy soils, maintain wildlife habitats and safeguard water resources.

Abi Bunker, Chair of Link's Agriculture Working Group, said, "The UK can be a world leader in developing new agricultural technologies, but our scientific legacy should be helping the world grow the food we actually need whilst restoring a healthy and biodiverse environment."

Dredging proposals

The Blueprint for Water has [published its position](#) on Government proposals to alter the consenting regime for dredging associated with Main River and has shared its views with the Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Blueprint strongly opposes the Regulatory Position Statement (RPS) to de-regulate maintenance of Main River and does not believe there is any evidence that such a mechanism will effectively address the issue. The Blueprint is concerned that such a course of action risks significant and avoidable damage to the environment and to the reputation of the farming sector, as well as falling foul of domestic and European legislation.

Instead, the Blueprint advises working to improve the existing approach through the provision of integrated advice, and pursuing reform through the current Water Bill to introduce risk-based consenting for all activities and for all watercourses.

The Blueprint has subsequently received a letter from Richard Benyon MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Natural Environment, regarding stakeholder engagement on dredging and other watercourse maintenance activities, and on the easing of red tape to be tested in pilot sites.

The Blueprint will be meeting with the Environment Agency on 12 August to discuss the dredging proposals further.

Workshop with Defra's Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) Science Advisory Team

On 22 July Link attended a workshop convened by Defra's bovine TB (bTB) Science Advisory Team. The workshop was a useful opportunity to engage with Defra on this issue and included presentations on Defra's Draft Strategy for Achieving "Officially Bovine Tuberculosis-Free" Status for England, by Nigel Gibbens, Defra's Chief Veterinary Officer, and Michael Seals, Chair of the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England. Prof Angela McLean from the University of Oxford also presented work on an independent project looking at the natural science evidence base relevant to the control of bTB. This was followed by a Q&A session and a facilitated break-out group discussion on the bTB Strategy consultation.



Working Group meeting

On 1 August the Agriculture Working Group will be holding an away day at the Ebworth Centre, a National Trust grasslands site in Gloucestershire. The group will be discussing greening of the CAP, the next RDPE, food security, uplands and Parliamentary activity.



England Biodiversity Stakeholder Group meeting

Miles King represented Link at the England Biodiversity Stakeholder Group meeting held on 8 July at the Bisterne Estate in the New Forest. Richard Benyon MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Natural Environment, attended for part of the meeting and discussions focussed on community engagement, pollinators, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Local Nature Partnerships.

Trilateral meeting

On 9 September, Link will be holding a trilateral meeting with Defra and Natural England to work through the delivery questions about *Biodiversity 2020*, which were identified at a Terrestrial Biodiversity Group meeting.



Meeting with Defra

On 31 July Link members met with Trevor Salmon, Head of Defra's Domestic and Invasive Non-Native Species Conservation team, at the WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre, to discuss the review of the GB Strategy and to reflect on the Stakeholder Forum meeting in Cardiff. The day also included a meeting of the INNS Task and Finish Group which covered the GB strategy, updates on the forthcoming EU legislation and the INNS list which Link is currently developing.

APPG for Biodiversity meeting

In collaboration with the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Biodiversity, Link has organised a visit on 17 October to the London Wildlife Trust site, on the River Crane, and to WWT's London Wetland Centre in Barnes. The visit provides an opportunity for MPs and members of the APPG to observe and discuss the impacts of invasive species.



Meeting on biodiversity offsetting

On 10 July Link held a joint meeting of the Land Use Planning Working Group and the Natural Values Task and Finish Group, to discuss the forthcoming government paper on biodiversity offsetting.

Members discussed their positions on offsetting, the content for a shared Link position, and the need for effective stakeholder engagement in the process.

Letter to DCLG

Link has written to Steve Quartermain, Chief Planner at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), regarding the review of planning practice guidance. The letter reinforces Link's response to the [Taylor Review](#), stating that we support a single, user-friendly guidance website, and seeks clarity on whether the Government will consult on the new guidance. The letter also welcomes the Government's statements that it does not plan to charge for access, notifications or additional services related to the guidance website, and that the current guidance will remain in place until the new guidance suite is ready. Link is currently awaiting a reply to our letter.



EU Balance of Competences

Link is developing its response to the call for evidence on the impact of EU policy and legislation on the environment, as part of the [Government's review](#) of the EU Balance of Competences. The call for evidence was announced on 20 May and will run for 12 weeks, closing on 12 August.



Marine Working Group Meeting

Link's Marine Working Group met on 22 July at the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation offices in London. Discussion focussed largely on Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs), ecological coherence and European Marine Sites. The group also welcomed representatives from MARINELife, The Environmental Investigation Agency and Client Earth to their first working group meeting.

Marine Meeting with Defra

Representatives from Link's Marine Working Group met with Nigel Gooding, Deputy Director of Marine Biodiversity at Defra, on 23 July to discuss the Government's plans for designating MCZs and creating an ecologically coherent network of sites in UK waters. Defra revealed that it would be making an announcement on MCZ designations in the autumn.

APPG Biodiversity Marine Sub-Group meeting

On 16 July Link attended the first meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Biodiversity's Policy sub-Group on Marine Biodiversity. The meeting was chaired by Barry Gardiner MP, chair of the APPG for Biodiversity, and also attended by Matthew Offord MP. During the meeting, Dr Offord stated that his aim was to secure a greater number of MCZs.

Meeting with the Marine Management Organisation (MMO)

On 18 July Link met with Daniel Hallam, Marine Planner at the MMO, to discuss the South Plan Analytical Report (SPAR). Earlier in the month, the Government launched a [consultation](#) on the draft East Inshore and Offshore Marine Plans. Link will be responding by the deadline of 8 October.

Transport Select Committee

Link has [submitted written evidence](#) to the Transport Committee's call for evidence on the Government's strategy for the maritime sector. Link's response focussed on the importance of the Government improving its approach to the prevention of pollution by non-oil substances from ships, such as Polyisobutylene. Link also highlighted the dangers to marine wildlife from invasive species and marine debris from ships.

Science and Technology Select Committee

The Government's [response](#) to the [Science and Technology Committee's report on Marine Science](#) was published in early July. The Government confirmed that it will "say more about future designation of MCZs when announcing its response to the recent consultation". Commenting on the Government response, Andrew Miller MP, Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, said, "Our report called for the Government to set out a clear timetable for the Marine Conservation Zones process and a commitment to an end date by which an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas will be established. This response fails to do so. We await the outcome of the Government's consultation on the first group of possible Marine Conservation Zones with interest and we will be following up this work with the Minister to make sure the process is not delayed any further."

Summary of responses to the MCZ consultation

On 16 July Defra published its [Summary of Responses](#) to the MCZ consultation. Defra received over 40,000 responses including [Link's response](#). Defra described the high number of responses as "exceptional".



Meeting on biodiversity offsetting

On 10 July Link held a joint Land Use Planning Working Group and Natural Values Task and Finish Group meeting to discuss the forthcoming government paper on biodiversity offsetting. There was a discussion of members' positions on offsetting, elements of a shared Link position and the need for formal stakeholder engagement in the process.



Meeting with Defra

On 29 July Link met with Defra to discuss the Blueprint 2015, in particular, how steps will progress in the Blueprint 2015 and what gaps might need to be filled, for example water footprinting. The meeting provided time for a useful and detailed discussion of progress against the Blueprint's 10 steps to sustainable water, and what progress we are likely to see in the near future. The Blueprint will hold another meeting with Defra in early 2014, to discuss the proposals for the Blueprint 2015 in more detail.

Working Group meeting

On 15 July the Blueprint for Water met to discuss: Blueprint 2015; the Price Review of Water 2014; Water Bill advocacy; the Significant Water Management Issues consultation; and the Environmental Improvement Usage Charge consultation.



Meeting with Defra on 15 July

Link's Whales Group met with Nigel Gooding at Defra on 15 July to discuss: whaling in Iceland; the current situation regarding Greenland's catch limits; feedback from the recent International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee meeting; and the on-going case between Australia and Japan at the International Court of Justice.

Iceland Teleconference 12 July

The Whales Group held a teleconference on the 12 July to discuss Iceland's whaling activities. Arni Finsson, Director of the Icelandic Nature Conservation Association, also joined the call and provided an update on the current situation. The group also discussed recent events regarding the attempted transport of whale meat from Iceland to Tokyo, via the port of Hamburg, and the return of the shipment to Iceland following opposition from the ports authorities and Greenpeace activists.



Letter to Defra's CITES and International Species Policy Team

In July Link wrote to Jeremy Eppel, Deputy Director at Defra and Head of the UK delegation at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) CoP16 meeting in Bangkok, in March 2013. The letter thanked the UK delegation for their hard work at the CoP and noted that it was overall a very positive meeting with many new CITES species listings, most notably five shark species and new measures to improve protection for rhinos and elephants. In the letter, Link urges the UK Government to support the proper implementation of the shark listings and the measures to address the illegal trade in rhino horn. The letter also seeks clarification on issues around the national ivory action plans that the eight "primary concern" countries were required to submit to the CITES Secretariat in May 2013.

Link has received a reply from Defra, thanking the NGO community for its constructive engagement at CoP16 and reinforcing the positive outcomes from the meeting. The letter highlights the UK's cross-government work to tackle the illegal wildlife trade, including the Clarence House event in May hosted by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales. The letter also notes the UK's continued commitment to chair the Standing Committee Rhino Working Group, which Link welcomes.

Working Group meeting

Link's Wildlife Trade Working Group met on 23 July in preparation for the Joint NGO Liaison Group (JLG) meeting, which took place on 31 July. The group also discussed wildlife crime enforcement, follow up from CITES CoP16 and CITES communications.

JLG meeting

On 31 July Link attended the JLG meeting which covered follow up from CITES CoP16; recent and future CITES related meetings; the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997 (COTES) review; CITES fees; and the May Clarence House event.

Association of Police and Crime Commissioners conference

On 18 July Tania McCrea-Steele, Senior Campaigns and Prosecutions Officer at IFAW, represented Link at an Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) conference on rural crime, including wildlife crime. The event focused on partnership working and sharing best practice, as well as looking at the costs and impacts of rural crime.



Wildlife and Countryside Link
89 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7TP
W: www.wcl.org.uk

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