

E-bulletin June 2014

Welcome to Link's June 2014 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 [Morwenna](#).



Like-minded Countries Reception

Link organised a reception for IWC commissioners and officials from the anti-whaling like-minded countries on 5 June, aboard the Tattershall Castle on Victoria Embankment. The following day, Link's Whales group met with Defra and the like-minded countries to discuss a range of issues related to the governance of the International Whaling Commission and Iceland, Japan and Greenland's whaling programmes.

REFIT meeting

On 26th June members of Link Legal Strategy Group and the Birds and Habitats Directives Task and Finish Group met to discuss the forthcoming 'REFIT' fitness check of the Birds and Habitats Directives. This review, led by the European Commission will assess the performance of the Directives against a number of criteria (e.g. their effectiveness). Evidence clearly demonstrates the valuable role of the Directives as the cornerstone for delivery of UK, EU and international biodiversity targets. It will be essential that Link partners engage to ensure that the value of the Directives is demonstrated and reinforced through the review process. It was agreed that the Task and Finish Group will provide the main forum for ongoing discussion of, and engagement in, this process, which is set to run until early 2016.

Marine and Coastal Policy Forum

The Joint Links Marine groups facilitated a workshop at the [Marine and Coastal Policy Forum](#) on 20 June. The workshop included a presentation from Louise Lieberknecht at Gobe Consultants outlining the findings of a report commissioned by the Joint Links to assess the ecological coherence of the UK's marine protected area network. If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please email: john@wcl.org.uk

Blueprint consultation response to small sewage discharge reform

In early June the Blueprint for Water coalition submitted a response to Defra's small sewage discharges (SSD) reform consultation. The Blueprint highlighted evidence, which suggests that many septic tanks are working sub-optimally and contributing to failure of Water Framework Directive (WFD) water bodies to achieve Good Ecological Status (GES), through diffuse water pollution. The group believes that the proposals to deregulate will make the situation worse. The Government should recognise that poor water quality from SSDs imposes a burden on those affected through damage to the natural environment and by passing on costs of clean up to water companies or the farming sector – undermining the polluter pays principal and effectiveness of measures.

Joint Links update

For a quarterly update from our three sister Links [click here](#).



Agriculture Working Group Workshop

The Agriculture Working Group (AWG) will be meeting at a workshop on the 31 July. The aim of this workshop is to develop a clear vision and strategy for the next 5 years in order to improve the team's campaigning/advocacy work for the countryside. Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will remain a key mechanism and we would need to raise the stakes in our campaigning efforts on CAP. A core group will lead the planning process in preparation for the workshop.

National Pollinators Strategy

Link [submitted a consultation response](#) to the National Pollinators Strategy [consultation](#) on 2 May. This is an important consultation as Defra is seeking views on a proposed national pollinator strategy for bees and other pollinators in England. The strategy sets out proposals to safeguard these important insects, given their role in pollinating many food crops and wild plants, in addition to their contribution to food production and the diversity of our environment.

Agriculture Working Group meeting

A meeting of the AWG on 7 May agreed to hold a workshop later in the summer to develop a Link "blueprint" for agriculture. Work will also commence to strengthen relationships with key MPs and MEPs. Further details of the forthcoming workshop will be made available once confirmed.

EIA (Agriculture) Regulations

Link wrote to Steven Gleave, Head of Defra's Better Regulation team, on 1 May, expressing its view that the EIA (Agriculture) Regulations should be strengthened not weakened. The letter was Link's response to a suggestion in [the Farming Regulation Task Force Implementation Group assessment of progress](#) that the EIA regulations as implemented in England should be reviewed, due to what some perceive as "gold plating". In his reply Steven Gleave stated that Defra has no intention of reviewing the regulations.



Terrestrial Biodiversity Group

Link attended the TBG webinar on 23 April to discuss the regarding the Mosaic Approach, a way of looking at habitats and their management that focuses on the requirements of species. The presentation slides will be available in due course.



GB Strategy briefing paper

Link produced a briefing paper in response to the review of the GB Invasive Non-Native Species Framework Strategy and submitted this to Defra at the end of June. Link commended the strategy for its thoroughness, for highlighting the successes and failures of the strategy, and for making a

number of clear and justified recommendations for the future. However, Link also highlighted several concerns, such as the inefficiency of Schedule 9 and the UK Government's reluctance to ratify the Ballast Water Convention.

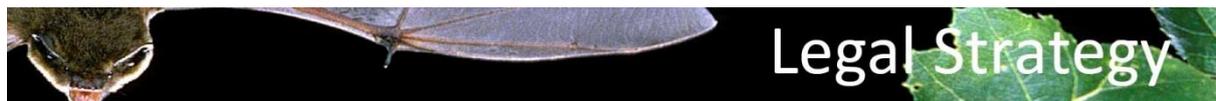


DCLG Select Committee inquiry: Operation of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The Department for Communities and Local Government Select Committee has launched an inquiry into the NPPF, calling for written evidence by 8 May. Link's Land Use Planning Working Group is disappointed that the scope of the inquiry does not include the NPPF's natural environment policies, and has written to the Committee's Chair, Clive Betts MP, to express its concern at the narrow remit of the inquiry.

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) launch

Link's Land Use Planning Working Group has been considering the new NPPG. Broadly, Link welcomes the guidance suite, particularly the emphasis on brownfield first. However, the group has several concerns including the accessibility of the guidance to the public, and that the onshore oil and gas guidance section was not subject to public consultation. The group wrote to the Planning Minister, Nick Boles, on 22 May to express these concerns.



Balance of Competencies Review

In August 2013, Link submitted [evidence](#) on the Environment and Climate Change, as part of the second semester of Defra's Balance of Competencies Review. This month the Legal Strategy Group also submitted [evidence](#) on Subsidiarity and Proportionality as part of the fourth and final semester of the Government's Review. Link's evidence focussed on Access to Environmental Justice, following confirmation in the Government's response to the Environment and Climate Change Report that the UK has formally asked the Commission to withdraw proposals for a draft Directive on Access to Justice on the basis that it would be bad for business. Link's evidence highlighted recent research undertaken by 27 Member States across the EU illustrating that a draft Directive on this issue is urgently needed and that such a Directive would not offend the established EU principles of Subsidiarity and Proportionality.

Criminal Justice and Courts Bill

This month, the Legal Strategy Group prepared a parliamentary briefing for the Commons Stage of the Bill. The briefing focussed on the implications of Part 4, which seeks to make it more difficult and more expensive for civil society to progress a review of the decisions of public bodies by the process of Judicial Review. Link was fortunate in securing Shadow Justice Minister Andy Slaughter MP to table amendments to Part 4. However, the final vote at the end of the third reading was predictably split along Party lines and the Bill progresses to the Lords with Part 4 intact.

Link produced an updated [briefing](#), supported by 13 members, for the second reading in the House of Lords on 30 June. The briefing was circulated to peers and The Committee stage starts in early July.

Conservation Covenants

On 24 June, the Law Commission published its [report](#) on Conservation Covenants. Link engaged with the Commission on this issue and submitted a [response](#) to its consultation, in June 2013.

The Commission makes recommendations for the introduction of a new statutory scheme of conservation covenants in England and Wales, which would create a new legal tool, enabling landowners to protect land in order to conserve and restore our natural and built environment. The scheme would allow landowners to voluntarily create binding obligations on their own land to meet a conservation objective, such as preserving woodland, cultivating a particular species of plant or protecting a habitat for an animal, or farming land in a certain way.

Meeting with representatives of DG Environment

DG Environment regularly meets with Defra to discuss infringement proceedings against the UK. For a number of years, the Commission has met with NGOs the day before, to discuss on-going complaints, potential complaints and other issues around the implementation of EU environmental law. The meeting has always proved to be helpful and informative, involving NGO representation from across the UK.

This year's NGO/Commission meeting will be held on 30th September 2014 at the European Commission's London office. Link members are invited to contact [Carol Day](#) (Vice-Chair of Link's Legal Strategy Group) if they would like to attend and/or would like an item included on the agenda (which can be for either information or discussion).



Marine and Coastal Policy Forum

The Joint Links Marine groups facilitated a workshop at the [Marine and Coastal Policy Forum](#) on 20 June. The workshop included a presentation from Louise Lieberknecht at Gobe Consultants outlining the findings of a report commissioned by the Joint Links to assess the ecological coherence of the UK's marine protected area network. If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please email: john@wcl.org.uk

Marine Charter

Over 100 MPs and peers have now signed [Link's Marine Charter](#). The full list of supporting parliamentarians can be viewed on [Link's website](#).

Environmental Audit Committee report on MPAs

On 21 June the Environmental Audit Committee published its [First Report of Session 2014-15 \(HC 221\) on Marine Protected Areas](#). The committee's report criticises the Government for delays in designating and properly managing MPAs. Link provided written and oral evidence to the committee as part of the enquiry earlier this year.

US Embassy meeting

On 17 June Link attended a meeting at the US Embassy in London to discuss Link's marine work and wider marine conservation issues including the [Our Ocean Conference](#) and the designation of the [world's biggest marine protected area](#) in the Central Pacific Ocean.



Natural Capital Committee second report

The Government's Natural Capital Committee published its second report on 11 March: *The State of Natural Capital: Restoring our Natural Assets*. Link published a [press release](#) welcoming the report and its recommendations. Link's Director, Dr Elaine King, said, "This report highlights the vital importance of bringing our environment to the forefront of decision-making. We welcome the proposed 25-year plan, which will bring a long-term, cross-party approach to restoring and enhancing the natural assets on which we ultimately depend."

Biodiversity Offsetting

Defra has confirmed that it will not make any new announcements on biodiversity offsetting until it has had time to consider the results of the pilot trials, which conclude in April 2014. Link welcomes this development, which is in line with our recommendation to take a step-wise approach to considering biodiversity offsetting.



Meeting with BoldLight, Blueprint web designers

Members of the Blueprint for Water coalition met on the 2 June to discuss with BoldLight (website design agency) the requirements and member's expectations of the new Blueprint website. BoldLight followed this initial engagement with stakeholder interviews with member organisation staff (PR & Comms / website), local groups, civil servants and Water companies. This will enable them to understand better our user audiences. We have organised a subsequent Stakeholder Workshop on the 3 July where their initial findings will be presented before we start generating website structure and contents.

Blueprint Consultation response to small sewage discharges reform

In early June the Blueprint for Water coalition submitted a response to Defra's small sewage discharges (SSD) reform consultation. The BP highlighted evidence, which suggests that many septic tanks are working sub-optimally and contributing to failure of Water Framework Directive (WFD) water bodies to achieve Good Ecological Status (GES), through diffuse water pollution. The group believes that the proposals to deregulate will make the situation worse. The Government should recognise that poor water quality from SSDs imposes a burden on those affected through damage to the natural environment and by passing on costs of clean up to water companies or the farming sector – undermining the polluter pays principal and effectiveness of measures.



Like-minded Countries Reception

Link organised a reception for IWC commissioners and officials from the anti-whaling like-minded countries on 5 June, aboard the Tattershall Castle on Victoria Embankment. The following day, Link's Whales group met with Defra and the like-minded countries to discuss a range of issues related to the governance of the International Whaling Commission and Iceland, Japan and Greenland's whaling programmes.

Meeting with the IWC Commissioner

On 29 April, Link's Whales Group met with the IWC Commissioner, Nigel Gooding to discuss issues arising from the recent meeting with the like-minded countries.

Whales Working Group Meeting

Link's Whales Group met on 5 June to discuss priority work areas and prepare for the meetings with Defra and the like-minded countries.



Wildlife law seminar

On 30 May, a number of the Wildlife Trade Working group attended a roundtable seminar on Wildlife Law Reform and the Future Protection of Wildlife hosted by Middlesex University. The seminar featured a discussion on the Law Commission's current proposals for reform of UK wildlife law which advocate the wider use of civil sanctions and a full range of regulatory options to address wildlife crime problems and achieve better integration with EU law. The Wildlife Trade Working Group's Vice-Chair Mark Jones also presented an NGO perspective on wildlife crime and additional presentations provided a criminology approach and an introduction to the workings of the United Kingdom Environmental Law Association (UKELA).

Wildlife Trade Working Group meeting

On 18 June, the Wildlife Trade Working Group met to discuss UK preparations for Standing Committee 65 (7-11 July, Geneva), the working group's approaches to meetings with the Crown Prosecution Service and the Home Office and the COTES review.

Letter to George Eustice

On 20 June, the working group sent a letter to George Eustice, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for farming, food and the marine environment, to ask whether cybercrime of illegal wildlife trade products could be included as part of the upcoming review of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (COTES) legislation and to ask for extended funding for the cybercrime post at the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU).

