

Sir Brian Bender
Permanent Secretary
Department of Food Environment and Rural Affairs
Nobel House
17 Smith's Square
London SW1P 3JR

Friday 7th May 2004

Dear Sir,

The Integrated Agency: duties, resources and delivery.

Wildlife and Countryside Link's interest in the Government's Review of Modernising Rural Delivery is in the strengthening and renewal of both policy and delivery. This should bring about clear leadership and real improvements in achieving environmental enhancement and public engagement. Together, we have identified key concerns which we believe are critical to creating a successful new integrated agency which delivers lasting benefits for the public, biodiversity and the wider countryside.

We urge the government to give the new agency the duty not only to "promote and enhance" biodiversity, landscape and our seas, but also a specific duty to "protect and conserve" them. Protection, conservation and management of existing areas of high biodiversity and landscape value must go hand in hand with enhancing those areas for biodiversity that are not yet in favourable conservation status and the recovery of species, habitats and landscapes which have declined or been damaged due to human activities. The challenge of climate change and the continued pressure for built development on open land requires that the duty of a new agency should include the prevention of habitat and landscape fragmentation, and the promotion of conservation on a landscape scale. Furthermore, people are inherently connected to biodiversity, landscape conservation and their maritime areas and to the policies and practices that shape them. They understand and cherish best the biodiversity, landscapes and maritime areas to which they have access. The agency must therefore have a duty for the promotion and broadening of access to, and enjoyment and understanding of, natural heritage by all sectors of society.

Our natural heritage is one of our most valuable and widely supported national assets and its conservation is critical to sustainable development. An improved quality of life for all flows from a well-protected, accessible, and appropriately managed natural heritage and the maintenance and recovery of ecosystem integrity: it is our duty to ensure these assets are available to both present and future generations. Public support should be directly and explicitly linked to the delivery of these environmental public goods, however much more needs to be done to achieve the established and emerging goals for our natural assets. Adequate resources, matched to clear and specific tasks, as well as a focus on improved delivery arrangements and a greater



coherence of legislation, policy and practical measures, remain critical. Further resources will be required to achieve the full engagement of key stakeholders and funding for any new arrangements must not detract from delivery already in hand. The ability of a new agency to build its information and knowledge base independently and to have freedom of inquiry will also be crucial.

The national leadership of the new integrated agency must provide direction and focus, including stronger policy direction to involve other Government and public bodies. This will include a responsibility to focus on the UK's maritime environment, in the light of the many Government reviews currently underway on this subject. The agency must also have a central place in new improved regional and local arrangements for the environment and spatial planning and be able to inform policy development within the new regional structures when necessary. The agency needs a strong regional presence, which can be responsive to regional needs within a national framework. The success of the new agency must be evident through better delivery of biodiversity, landscape, public access and protection of our maritime heritage (both natural and cultural) which should be measured against explicit outcome related targets.

We would be happy to meet to discuss these issues further,

Yours



Hilary Allison
Chair, Wildlife and Countryside Link
On behalf of the following organisations:

Bat Conservation Trust
Buglife the Invertebrate Conservation Trust
Campaign to Protect Rural England
Friends of the Earth
National Federation of Badger Groups
Open Spaces Society
Ramblers' Association
Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
Woodland Trust

British Mountaineering Council
Butterfly Conservation
Council for National Parks
Herpetological Conservation Trust
Marine Conservation Society
Plantlife
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
The Wildlife Trusts
WWF-UK



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Chair: Hilary Allison, Director: Pippa Langford

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