

## E-bulletin March 2015

Welcome to Link's March 2015 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 [Maria](#).



### **Rural Development Programme for England Programme Monitoring Committee meeting**

On Friday 13 March, Link attended the Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) for the 2015-2020 Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). This was the first PMC meeting since the RDPE was formally approved by the European Commission on 13 February 2015. Link used the opportunity to raise our concerns over the scoring criteria for Countryside Stewardship, in particular the Woodland Grant Scheme and whether the criteria would really deliver for biodiversity.

Although individual PMC members do not have powers to block PMC endorsement or DEFRA decisions (indeed nor does the PMC as a whole), they can oppose DEFRA proposals/decisions and request that this opposition be formally noted in the minutes. Link, along with the RSPB who also have a seat on the PMC, formally opposed the Forestry Commission-proposed interim scoring criteria for woodland grants for the next year.

DEFRA assured Link that the situation will be monitored in order to identify any problems, and Link will endeavour to ensure that this time next year there is a much improved set of criteria which will govern woodland grant decision-making over the remaining 6 years of the programme

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### **REFIT Consultation response**

On 25 March, the Joint Links responded to the European Commission's REFIT consultation. The evidence based submission was supported by 93 UK NGOs. The Joint Links look forward to working with Commission on the next phase of the REFIT process.

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### **Letter to Elizabeth Truss MP on Conservation Covenants**

On the 17 March, Link's Legal Strategy Group wrote to Elizabeth Truss MP, Secretary for State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Defra, seeking information on the status of Conservation Covenants. In June 2014 the Law Commission published a report on Conservation Covenants which included a draft Bill. A Government response to the report and an indication of Defra's intention with regard to the proposed legislative changes is still awaited. Link's submission to the previous Law Commission Wildlife Law consultation can be found [here](#).

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### **Letter to UK political parties on Link's planning aspirations**

On the 24 March, Link's Land Use Planning Working Group sent a letter setting out Link's aspirations for the future of planning to representatives of UK political parties. Among these aspirations are: true sustainable development at the heart of all planning decisions, sound national guidance and, above all, a plan-led system. These aspirations will form the framework for the group's work in 2015 and will provide a benchmark against which the future government can be assessed against.

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### **Meeting with the Environment Agency on the state of our rivers**

On the 6 March, the Environment Agency presented Link with their findings on the current results of the Good Ecological Status (GES) of our rivers. It was reported that there have been large investments in catchment restoration and bathing waters in the past few years. However, despite reduced levels of pollution found in these targeted areas, the GES of England's rivers has decreased to 17% in the last few years. The Blueprint for Water coalition circulated a [press release](#) expressing their concern regarding this latest news.



### **Meeting with Tesco**

On Thursday 5 May, Link held a meeting with Charlotte Williams, Group Sustainability Manager for Tesco. Link was presented with Tesco's progress to date regarding their new sustainability in agriculture strategy. Link members provided Tesco with constructive feedback and the Agriculture Working Group look forward to continuing to help Tesco with the development of their new strategy.

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### **Environment Food and Rural Affairs inquiry**

On Friday 27 March, the Environment Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee published their report on CAP payments to farmers. The report calls for Defra to learn from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) IT failure incident and to provide full information on the costs of updating the system. This publication follows the announcement by the Environment Secretary, Elizabeth Truss MP, and the RPA that online applications for the Basic Payments Scheme have been scrapped and that farmers have been sent paper applications due to failings with the IT system. The Committee also took evidence from the Minister and the Chief Executive of the RPA at a Committee hearing on 25 March 2015.



## Animal Welfare

### **Animal Welfare Strategy Group meeting with Defra**

On the 23 March, the Chair and Vice Chair, Alyx Elliot (World Animal Protection) and Claire Bass (HSI), for Link's Animal Welfare Strategy Group, met with the Defra Animal Welfare Team. The meeting provided an opportunity to outline the aims and objectives of the Animal Welfare Strategy Group and discuss areas of potential collaboration with Defra regarding the welfare of wildlife. Link's welfare group will meet with Defra's Animal Welfare team on a quarterly basis.



## Habitats and Birds

### **REFIT Consultation response**

On 25 March, the Joint Links responded to the European Commission's REFIT consultation. The evidence based submission was supported by 93 UK NGOs. The Joint Links look forward to working with Commission on the next phase of the REFIT process.

### **Habitats and Birds Task and Finish group meetings**

The Habitats and Birds Task and Finish group held two Joint Link group meetings this month on the 3 and 26 March. These meetings provided an opportunity to discuss the Joint Links submission, engagement with stakeholders and how Link will proceed with the REFIT process. The next key stage in the process will be the public consultation which is expected to open in April.

The group held sub-group meetings to discuss scientific papers which support the benefits of the Directives and future scope for scientific research, as well as communications and public messaging with regards to the public consultation



## Invasive Non-Native Species

### **Support for a new invasive non-native species MSc**

Link's INNS group provided a letter of support for a proposed new invasive non-native species M.Sc. being developed in partnership between Cardiff University and Cornwall College Newquay. The group also offered expertise in supporting the design of the course if the proposal is successful.

### **INNS group meeting with Joint Nature Conservation Committee**

The group attended the second meeting for the JNCC-led Schedule 9 review of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, along with representatives from the pet and horticultural trade sector, Natural England, and the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat. The group helped to define a draft set of criteria for Schedule 9 and produced an amended timetable and outline of activities needed for the review.



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### **Legal Strategy Group Meeting**

The next Legal Strategy Group meeting will take place on the 28 April.



### **Marine Conservation Zones and Marine Strategy Framework Directive consultations**

Link's Marine Working Group is currently working on responses to the [Marine Conservation Zone](#) and [Marine Strategy Framework Directive](#) consultations and will be submitting their responses to Defra before the 24 April.



### **Blueprint for Water meeting**

On 6 March 2015, the Blueprint for Water coalition met to discuss the development of the [Save our Waters](#) coalition “Policy Asks”. This document will be the foundation behind the Blueprint for Water groups work to protect and restore our complex water systems.

### **Meeting with the Environment Agency on the state of our rivers**

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### **Working Group and Defra meetings**

The next Whales Working Group meeting will take place on 29 April. Later that day, the group will also be meeting with the UK Commissioner to the International Whaling Commission, Nigel Gooding, and the Defra Species Protection team.



### **CITES Conservation NGO Liaison Group meeting**

On the 17 March, the group met with the Defra team to discuss the most recent activities on wildlife trade, with particular reference to CITES. One of the main points of discussion was the recent consultation on the Control of Trade in Endangered Species regulation which has been put on hold until after the general election. Nevertheless, Defra will be continuing their engagement with the NGOs to move the consultation process forward for the next Government.

