

Q1 Report January - March 2011

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"Bringing together organisations in the UK to protect and enhance wildlife and landscape, and to further the quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the countryside."



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*Letter from the Chair...*

Friends,

Welcome to Link's first quarterly report of 2011, a time of great activity across almost all policy areas.

The Biodiversity Working Group published its fifth and final annual assessment for [Halting Biodiversity Loss by 2010](#). Highlighting progress on government targets set in 2006 against eight key performance indicators the report notes areas of success but, above all, the collective failure to meet the target by 2010, the International Year of Biodiversity. This not unexpected finding is both a salutary reflection and an opportunity for the Coalition Government given the imminent arrival of its Natural Environment White Paper which Link members have put a lot of effort with good cooperation across working groups. However, this quarter has also seen increased opportunity for Link to challenge this further with the group setting their contribution to the review of England Biodiversity Strategy as a main concern.

The Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) Steering Group has been 'upgraded' to a Task Force and immediately wrote to all Secretaries of State about their respective departmental responsibilities for a credible White Paper now expected in early summer. Positive responses from Foreign Secretary, William Hague MP, and others were followed by the group's many meetings with Defra officials and ministers to discuss top priorities as set out in our key tests for a successful White Paper.

The mammoth Localism Bill landed just before Christmas and has kept the [Greenest Planning Ever Coalition](#), formed in October 2010 of 22 Link members and partners, working overtime all quarter, first reacting to the Bill and then shaping its amendments. Successfully tabling five amendments at Committee Stage, the Coalition has honed its focus on a practical and comprehensive definition for sustainable development and protecting local community planning with inclusion of robust third party rights of appeal. Ahead of the forthcoming Report Stage, the Coalition will meet Localism minister Greg Clark MP to discuss amendments and overarching planning issues within the NEWP and the all important National Planning Policy Framework due out in the summer.

The quarter has also seen changes for the Link Secretariat. With one Link coordinator (Joanna) now on maternity leave, another partnership project in the pipeline, and new members joining we have reconfigured portfolios and slightly increased Link capacity - welcome to Kate and Samantha. We are now at full strength and looking to build on the Link strategy by putting Link issues on the 'greenest government's' agenda.

Thank you for your continuing work and support and best wishes,

Paul de Zylva
Chair



Agriculture

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*Chair: Abi Bunker, RSPB
Vice Chair: Ian Woodhurst, CPRE
Secretary: Kirsten Loveday*

“Works to support and deliver a sustainable high quality, multi-functional rural environment through influencing and monitoring policy on rural development, agri-environment, bioenergy, and animal welfare standards”

In February, Link attended the Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE) Evidence and Monitoring subgroup. The CFE was invigorated by positive backing from Minister of State for Agriculture and Food, Jim Paice MP, in an [open letter](#) urging farmers to choose Environmental Stewardship options that best promoted wildlife and resource protection.

Whilst the implementation plans for the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms are still anticipated, Link was pleased to learn that agri-environmental schemes would remain fundamental to the policy.

In March, Link attended the Rural Development Programme for England’s (RDPE) Programme Committee meeting where implementation progress and the transition into the next programme period for agricultural stewardship was discussed.



Biodiversity

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*Chair: Nicola Hutchinson, Plantlife
Vice Chair: Miles King, The Grasslands Trust
Secretary: Kirsten Loveday*

“Works to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity by working to improve the UK BAP process and seeks to ensure that the England Biodiversity Strategy is fully implemented”

Link’s final biodiversity assessment measuring overall progress of the 2010 biodiversity commitment to halt biodiversity loss was released to key stakeholders, MPs and peers at the beginning of the year. The assessment also considered progress with reference to the eight key areas highlighted in [Our Challenge to Government](#) at the beginning of 2010.

Link was represented at the UK Biodiversity Indicator Steering Group meeting in March. At the meeting attendees evaluated [the set of 18 UK indicators](#), produced for measure against 2010 goals, to discuss whether they were fit for purpose in light of the new EU and global 2020 biodiversity targets.

This quarter, the new England Biodiversity Strategy (EBS) (due to be published in June) has been a key focus and the group has been developing its position. Link believes the EBS should be given political commitment at the highest level and is calling for a new high-level group of Government and civil-society representatives, chaired by the Minister for Environment, to oversee implementation of the EBS and improve transparency and accountability. Our position statement has been shared with Defra officials and is available [on our website](#).

Land use planning

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*Chair: Simon Marsh, RSPB
Vice Chair: Paul Miner, CPRE
Secretary: Kate Hand*

“Works to conserve the natural and historic environment by working to improve the national planning system for the benefit of biodiversity and landscape”

The Greenest Planning Ever (GPE) coalition successfully tabled five amendments to the Localism Bill at committee stage, covering sustainable development, neighbourhood planning, third party rights of appeal, a statutory basis for the National Planning Policy Framework, strategic planning and the duty to cooperate. The GPE coalition will continue to pursue these issues during report stage and in the Lords.

In particular, we are pursuing an amendment that puts sustainable development on the face of the bill, recognising sustainable development as the purpose of planning. We will be producing a new briefing on all our amendments for report stage, as well as targeted briefings on sustainable development and community rights of appeal.

This quarter, Link also submitted initial comments on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). Following this, Link and several Link members were invited to a NPPF roundtable event on environment, climate change and mitigation issues, hosted by CLG. This provided an opportunity to reiterate some of our priorities for the NPPF, including a common overarching definition of sustainable development. The Minister for Decentralisation, Greg Clark MP was also in attendance, and Link will be meeting with him in early May.

Marine

*Chair: Joan Edwards, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB
Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn*

“Works to ensure better protection of marine wildlife and effective management of our seas by seeking the full implementation of the Marine and Coastal Access Act”

The group continues to closely monitor the progress of England’s [Marine Conservation Zone \(MCZ\) Project](#). In January, Link met with Natural England (NE) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) to discuss the MCZ Regional Projects’ Second Progress Reports. The Third Progress Reports were published by the Regional Projects in March and Link members will be reviewing and discussing these with NE and JNCC in April.

At the beginning of the year, the Marine Working Group met to agree its work programme for the year and in February, Link was represented at a workshop on the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, where developments at the UK and OSPAR/EU level were reviewed.

Link continues to take part in the Marine Management Organisation’s (MMO) Stakeholder Focus Group and attended two meetings of the group this quarter during which updates were given on the new marine licensing system and the [UK Marine Policy Statement](#), which was published on 18 March. The Stakeholder Focus Group brings together MMO staff, Defra and marine-users, including NGO and industry representatives, and provides a forum for stakeholders to share their knowledge and understanding of marine planning licensing.

In February Link submitted a [response](#) to the MMO’s consultation on the East Inshore and East Offshore marine plan areas draft Statement of Public Participation, highlighting the importance of environmental consideration and the need for sustainable development.

Natural Environment White Paper

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*Chair: Paul Wilkinson, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair: Alice Hardiman, RSPB
Secretary: Kirsten Loveday*

“The Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) Task Force seeks to influence the White Paper and its outcomes to empower the recovery of England’s natural environment”

The newly formed NEWP Task Force began the year by writing to Secretaries of State across all Government departments. Link, with the support of 20 member organisations, highlighted the potential for the NEWP to promote the importance of a healthy natural environment for all sectors and we have now received responses from almost all of the departments.

In March, Link submitted a set of ‘key tests’ to Defra that outline the critical points that we believe should be in the final White Paper. Supported by 32 Link members, the tests were designed as a helpful checklist for officials as they produce the final drafts of the NEWP. The final version is now expected to be published in May.

As well as continuing our dialogue with Defra officials, this quarter Link met with several MPs, including Liberal Democrat Andrew George MP, Shadow Environment Secretary Mary Creagh MP, and the Minister for the Environment Richard Benyon MP. Our most recent meeting with Government on the White Paper was with the Minister of State and Government policy advisor, Oliver Letwin MP, at which Link members, Chief Executives from the RSPB and The Wildlife Trusts highlighted why the NEWP should be of high importance across the whole of Government, not just for ‘environment’ departments.

Water

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*Chair: Robert Cunningham, RSPB
Vice Chair: Janina Gray, Salmon & Trout Association
Secretary: Kate Hand*

“Works to restore the ecology of the UK’s rivers, lakes and wetlands by working to ensure the delivery of the objectives of the Water Framework Directive”

The Blueprint for Water coalition continues to advocate its new [10 Steps to Sustainable Water](#) submitted in [response](#) to Defra’s online survey of the Water White Paper. The White Paper, according to Defra, will address a number of issues including securing sustainable water supplies, fair affordable water charges and modernising the current water regulation system. It is expected to be published in June 2011, after the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP).

The Water Working Group is now planning its annual review of Blueprint progress and is also working to recruit Parliamentary Champions to promote the Blueprint in the House of Commons. In March the group met to discuss ongoing Blueprint business as well as catchment management approaches, SSSI diffuse pollution plans, the Nitrates Directive, and hydropower. On the latter issue, the group is currently considering the development of a position statement on hydropower based on its earlier [submission](#) to the Government’s consultation in 2010 on streamlining permitting of hydropower projects in England and Wales.

Whales

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*Chair: Mark Simmonds, WDCS
Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn*

“Works to ensure better protection of cetaceans including through the reform of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) into a conservation body”

In February Link hosted a NGO workshop to discuss taking forward collective work to address international commercial whaling. The group has since written to the Environment Minister, Richard Benyon MP, regarding Iceland’s cessation of whaling as a condition to its accession to the EU. This, and a number of other issues, including the conservation agenda of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), will be raised with the Minister and Defra’s IWC team when we meet with them in May.

Link will be continuing its work on the issues facing cetaceans (i.e. whales and dolphins) in UK waters, beginning with a meeting of concerned NGOs in April. Cetaceans throughout the seas around the UK are increasingly facing huge pressures from overfishing and bycatch, pollution, offshore developments and climate change. We will be reviewing the current situation during our meeting in April and considering what action can be taken to improve their conservation status.

Wildlife trade

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*Chair: Cathy Williamson, WDCS
Vice Chair: Matt Collis, IFAW
Secretary: Jodie Bettis*

“Works to improve the conservation of wild flora and fauna threatened by international trade by seeking to ensure the proper implementation of CITES”

In February, Link responded to the European Commission’s consultation discussing the amendment of the Council Regulation regarding the removal of shark fins on board vessels. The response, supported by 11 Link member organisations, called for an amendment to require that all sharks are landed with their fins naturally attached. This amendment would reduce the current enforcement burden allowing the collection of species-specific landings data required for shark population monitoring and assessment.

The Link Trade group had been monitoring the funding situation for the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU). The NWCU, set up in 2006, is primarily funded by the Home Office and the Defra but both departments were holding back on decisions to grant £150,000 towards the costs of the unit. The wildlife crime unit was under financial pressure from the start of the year and so Link was pleased when the Defra Minister, Richard Benyon MP, confirmed that funding had been guaranteed from central Government in February.



Update from: Kate MacColl

Scottish Environment LINK (SEL)

The new Climate Adaptation taskforce coordinated [SEL's response](#) to the Scottish Government's consultation and submitted comment on nearly all of the 12 sector action plans within Government's Adaptation Framework. SEL's Agriculture Taskforce has continued to produce monthly [File Notes](#) on CAP reform, aimed primarily at the Scottish Government and some target EU decisions. The Sustainable Land Use Taskforce has sent letters to rural affairs leaders of all main parties asking how they will take forward Land Use Strategy after the May election. In March SEL's Planning Taskforce met with Scottish Government's Built Environment Directorate to discuss the new development planning system, in particular the process of identifying and designating NPF National Developments, Green Infrastructure, Wild Land Mapping and Land Use Strategy.

SEL's Freshwater Taskforce submitted a response to SEPA's Better Environmental Regulation in February raising concerns about proposals to reduce monitoring and inspections of activities that are potentially damaging to the environment. The taskforce also responded to the Scottish Government's Building a Hydro Nation consultation in March setting out concerns that the proposals were lacking in reference to the environment and sustainability.

Members of the SEL Marine Taskforce met with Marine Scotland to provide comments on a draft of the pre-consultation National Marine Plan achieving several changes to the draft. The taskforce also commissioned a [report](#) recommending management measures for Marine Protected Areas, which is key to supporting LINK's objective of ensuring suitable measures are put in place once the sites have been designated. The report was launched in Parliament with an accompanying [briefing](#) circulated to various agencies and industry bodies.

Through its place on the Offshore Wind Plan Habitats Regulation Appraisal Steering Group, the Marine Taskforce gained additions to the offshore wind plan in terms of mitigation measures, which will help to balance the desire to move urgently to a low carbon economy with the need to do so with minimal environmental impact.

And finally, SEL have also published their [Rolling Manifesto](#) in advance of the Scottish May elections.

Update from: Sue Christie

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

The NI Assembly concentrated its work over the past quarter after having a measured few years where the number of legislative hearings, briefings and consultations has been very high. NIEL prepared an Environmental Manifesto which was presented to and discussed with each political party and held a hustings event at which all parties commented on their environmental views and priorities. In early March, the Building Change Trust Project had the first two conferences on environmental messaging and partnership promotion and work is continuing. Funding was agreed with both Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for the coming three years and a new Policy and Projects Officer will join the Secretariat in April.

Update from: Susan Evans

Wales Environment Link (WEL)

Members of the Marine Working Group attended the Coastal Futures conference in January and will attend a number of summer events to promote their marine campaign. They have developed several products as well as a website which will host a marine photography competition. Research has also been commissioned into voluntary management of Marine Protected Areas.

WEL held its first 'Question Time' style event recently. A panel of representatives from the political parties responded to a range of questions from WEL members covering Marine Act implementation and funding for biodiversity to new ideas for Bills following the March referendum. WEL had a place on the recent Glastir (agri-environment scheme) Review Panel, which was heavily biased towards farming interests. Some of the recommendations produced were felt to be detrimental to biodiversity or have no environmental value so WEL did not sign up but instead provided a minority report to the Minister for Rural Affairs. Members were pleased that the Minister took WEL's advice into account and rejected the most damaging recommendations.

In March Wales voted in a referendum on law-making powers. The Assembly will now be able to make laws for Wales on subjects for which the Assembly and the Welsh Assembly Government are already responsible, without needing permission from the UK Parliament first. This represents a significant development of Welsh devolution. WEL also held an environment policy 'drop-in' event in the Assembly, where specialists from WEL member organisations were available to meet candidates, AMs and Assembly staff. Network representatives met the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing in March to discuss marine issues, Biodiversity, the Natural Environment Framework and Glastir.

Link Secretariat



Update from: Sam Bickerstaff

The first quarter of 2011 has welcomed additional faces to the Link Secretariat. Policy and Campaigns Coordinator Kate Hand is looking after the Greenest Government Ever Coalition and the Land Use Planning Working Group, and will be temporarily be taking up coordination of the Water Working Group whilst Kirsten concentrates on production of two new agriculture and water publications. Sam Bickerstaff has joined as Information and Office Coordinator, with Fiona Llewellyn seconded to the role of Marine Policy and Campaign Coordinator whilst Joanna Fisher is on maternity leave. The additional capacity of the team is being put to good use in strengthening the foundations of our current campaigns, work groups and task forces.

We are delighted to welcome our newest full member, the British Ecological Society. BES joined us in February and make a valued contribution to our Biodiversity and NEWP Working Groups. Link now has 35 members and 5 partners, and has recently received an application for membership from ClientEarth.

Link's Management Committee gathered together on 21st March for its first quarterly meeting of the year and we were pleased to welcome Lucy Cooper, Chief Executive of The Grasslands Trust, our newest Trustee, to her first meeting. Discussions included strategic planning, the Natural Environment White Paper, and the Management Committee vacancy. Trustees also signed off our independently examined Annual Report and Financial Statements for 2010, which is available to view on the [Charity Commission](#) website. If you would like a hard copy of the document, please contact [Sam](#).

We continue to receive support from our four volunteers, Vicki Taylor, Elly Warren-Thomas, Sabrina Hearn and Lucy Llewellyn, who offer an invaluable service to our small office producing consistently fantastic work.