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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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Q1 Report January- March 2005

Letter from the Chair...

Dear Members

The first quarter of 2005 will be remembered by many of you as one dominated by consultation responses, which included subjects as diverse as Minerals Policy Statement 1, the Wildlife and Countryside Act reviews and Defra's Climate Change Programme Review. For much of the quarter, Link's attention was focussed on the publication of the draft Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill and the subsequent submission of evidence to the EFRA sub-committee convened to consider the draft Bill. We also now know the name of our new integrated agency, Natural England, and Link will continue to follow the formation of this agency closely throughout the year.

One of the many highlights of the first quarter was of course Link's Marine Campaign, which organised a very successful lobby of parliament on 9th March attended by over 300 lobbyists. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those staff involved who spent many hours ensuring that every detail was covered! As a result, we are extremely pleased to see that the three major political parties all carry a commitment to the introduction of a Marine Bill in their manifestos.

The first quarter also saw a new era for farming, with the Single Payment scheme coming into effect as of 1st January and the long-awaited launch of the new Environmental Stewardship scheme in March. Thanks to all those involved in the Link stand at the launch event which provided further information for those interested.

On the staff front, many of you will already be aware that Annie will shortly be leaving Link on secondment to RSPB, for a period of 6 to 9 months. We wish Annie all the best in her secondment and look forward to her return. In Annie's absence Helen will be stepping up to take over her position and Link will be recruiting a new Information and Office Co-ordinator.

Best wishes

Hilary Allison

Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development WG

The Single Payment system came into effect on 1st January 2005, and the new Environmental Stewardship scheme was launched on 3rd March. Link was well represented at the launch, with a Link statement included within all press packs and a Link stand including materials from the Bat Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, Council for British Archaeology, CPRE, the Herpetological Conservation Trust, National Trust & the Wildlife Trusts. Many thanks to all those who represented Link at this successful event. Link continues to contribute to discussions on how these schemes will be implemented.

The Link Farming group also recently met with representatives from EN & CA to discuss priorities for the coming year.

Woodland subgroup

The Woodland group continues to operate virtually.

Land Use Planning WG

The Land Use Planning group is currently working on a spatial planning briefing intended to assist local authorities and others implement the changes brought about by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The group also intends to contribute to the Link response to the EA consultation on River Basin Management Planning.

The group last met on 15th February to discuss the final PPS1 (launched at the Sustainable Communities Summit on 1st February) and also met with Airport Watch to discuss various issues relating to aviation.

Minerals subgroup

The long-awaited consultation on MPS1 was published in November and a Link response was submitted at the end of February following a series of meetings with a number of key stakeholders including representatives from the Countryside Agency, English Nature, DTI, the Planning Officers Society and Yvette Cooper MP. The group now awaits consultation on the proposed annexes to this document.

PPS9 subgroup

The PPS9 group submitted a joint response to the consultation on draft PPS9 and the accompanying legal circular in December with sign-up from 16 organisations. Link will now continue to input comments and case studies to English Nature on the Good Practice Guidance that will accompany the final PPS.

Wildlife and Trade WG

The Wildlife & Trade Working Group prepared to submit a Link response to Defra's consultation on the COTES Regulations (closing in early April), which will implement the increased penalties allowed under the Criminal Justice Act 2004.

The group continues to monitor the EU's implementation of the decisions made at CITES CoP13 in October 2004. The group will also continue to engage closely with the UK CITES authorities on forthcoming issues, including on ways in which to optimise the government delegation/NGO representative relationship for the next CoP.

Whales subgroup

Whale Group members attended the second meeting of the RMS working group in Copenhagen at the end of the quarter, at which little progress was made. Preparations for this year's IWC meeting in Ulsan, Korea will be top of the agenda for quarter 2.

EDM 793, calling for a full and rigorous public review of the environmental impact of Sonar 2087 before further testing and deployment of Sonar 2087 is allowed to commence, was tabled on 28th February by Norman Baker MP & Andrew George MP on behalf of Link, and gathered over 50 signatures before parliament was dissolved. The Whale group wrote to MPs to encourage them to support this motion.

The results of an independent review on the threats to western gray whales posed by the proposed oil development at Sakhalin were published on 16th February. The report stated that given the identified risks to the whale population "the most precautionary approach would be to suspend present operations

Working Groups & Task Forces

and delay further development of the oil and gas reserves in the vicinity of the gray whale feeding grounds". At the end of March Sakhalin Energy responded to the report by undertaking to re-route a pipeline away from the whales' feeding grounds. In spite of this positive step significant concerns still remain, in particular the planned positioning of a new drilling platform adjacent to the feeding grounds. The whale group will feed views into the UK government departments considering whether to lend funds to the project.

Biodiversity TF

The Biodiversity Task Force (BTF) met in February, and heard a presentation from Ian Dickie of RSPB who is a member of the England Biodiversity Strategy Economics and Funding SIG. Subsequently members have provided information, in confidence, to Ian, to inform a Defra-led analysis of the shortfall in funding for the UK BAP.

Link has been offered a speaking slot at the UK Biodiversity Partnership conference to be held in Bristol in June, themed "2010 target and beyond". The BTF is currently developing thoughts on a presentation and possible accompanying document on the 2010 target to halt biodiversity loss. The group also continues to input to the BAP review and the work of the England Biodiversity Group (EBG), including 2 new sub-groups looking at climate change and the BAP review in England.

In March the BTF submitted a response to Defra's Climate Change Programme Review, following on from the paper on Biodiversity conservation in a changing climate which Link presented to the EBG last December. Link responses were also submitted to Defra's consultations on the Review of Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and on the fourth quinquennial review of Schedules 5 and 8 of the Act.

Marine Task Force

Elliot Morley addressed the Coastal Futures Conference on 19th January, and provided some details on the possible content of a Government Marine Bill. Jean-Luc Solandt of the Marine Conservation Society spoke on behalf of Link at the conference on marine biodiversity conservation, urging that new legislation must address current gaps. An All Party Parliamentary Group workshop held on 20th January provided Parliamentarians an opportunity to discuss marine legislation with Link members and others.

The MTF continues to meet with a range of marine stakeholders, with representatives meeting UKOOA (UK Offshore Operators' Association), Defra's Marine & Waterways Division, Associated British Ports, officials from DfT and Energy Minister Mike O'Brien MP (DTI) during the first quarter of 2005.

The MTF held a successful lobby event on 9th March in support of the Link Marine

Campaign. Over 300 lobbyists met their MP to push for comprehensive marine legislation, and the event received a good response from regional and local media. Many thanks to all those who contributed to this great event!

The MTF also met on 18th March consider how to take their policies and campaigns forward after the General Election.

Bycatch subgroup

The UK's ban on pair trawling for sea bass within the UK's 12 nautical mile limit came into effect on 15 January, and in February Greenpeace campaigners boarded the Esperanza to gather evidence of the impacts of pair trawling and take direct action to prevent pair trawl crews from operating in the English Channel. Also in February, Greenpeace launched its legal action against the Government claiming that under the EU Habitats Directive, the Government is obliged to take swift and effective action to protect the dolphin population.

In March Ben Bradshaw was successful in requesting the EU Council of Ministers review data regarding bycatch of common dolphins, thus bringing this process forward at a faster pace than required by the EU Bycatch Regulation.

Water TF

Many members of the Water Task Force attended the World Wetlands Day conference on 1st February entitled "Wetlands – Focus on Delivery".

Task Forces & Sister Links

The last Water Task Force meeting on 9th February included a useful update from English Nature on Water Framework Directive issues, particularly with regard to the inclusion of small water bodies within the River Basin Characterisation process. The group also discussed the current EA consultation on River Basin Management Planning, to which a Link response will be submitted.

Access of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside

Defra published its response to the consultation on motorised access to the countryside on 20th January, with confirmation that inappropriate use of public rights of way by mechanically propelled vehicles will be curtailed via legislation.

The task force met on 24th February to discuss this response and wrote to Alun Michael MP to complain about the limited consultation on the revised "Making the Best of Byways" document. Mr Michael has subsequently replied claiming that formal public consultation was not necessary since the document did not contain policy or legislative proposals. The group will now consider possible next steps on this matter. The group will also comment on relevant clauses within the NERC Bill later in the year.

Integrated Agency/Defra Modernisation Review

A Link meeting was held on 21st January to discuss the purpose and duties of the

proposed new Integrated Agency. The outcomes of this meeting were then fed into the Defra Integrated Agency Stakeholders meeting on 27th January.

Following the publication of the draft Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny, Link submitted written evidence, with sign-up from 18 organisations, to the EFRA Committee inquiry into the draft Bill. The Committee's report was published on 26th March.

On 23rd March, Margaret Beckett announced the name of the new Agency, Natural England, with the strapline "For People, Places and Nature".

Link continues to contribute to the NERC debate via Defra's regular Stakeholder Group meetings.

Sister Links



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL finally received a grant offer from the Environment and Heritage Service in March 2004 which will provide core funding for the next three years. Recruitment for two new members of staff has begun, and NIEL hopes to have them - a Policy Officer and Membership and Information Officer - in post by early summer. In the

meantime NIEL is finalising revised procedures to be included in a Members Manual, preparing new brochures and recruiting the new staff. The new sub-committees have been working very hard, meeting nearly every month to develop procedures and documents.

On policy matters, NIEL is still heavily involved in promoting an Environmental Protection Agency for NI, and is hoping to hear soon (after the election) whether government has decided to hold an official review of the needs for and role of such an Agency. Waste also remains an important area, with evolving strategies for both waste minimisation and agricultural waste being prepared by the EHS. NIEL has produced a Fact Sheet on 'Water' and is working on revising a policy review called 'Worth the Paper?'



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

WEL has spent much of the quarter working on the development of the Environment Strategy for Wales, with Dr Tony Prater (RSPB Cymru) seconded 1 day per week, on behalf of WEL, to assist with the document's design and drafting. A draft strategy has now been agreed and will be released for consultation within the next 2 months.

WEL's new Health and Environment Working Group

Sister Links

held a workshop in February (organised by BTCV Cymru & funded by Health Challenge Wales) to discuss ways of developing best practice in relation to the Mentro Allan initiative. This is a lottery funded initiative aimed at encouraging hard to reach groups to take part in physical activity in their local natural environment (see <http://www.mentroallan.co.uk/> for further details).

WEL's marine working group have met and drafted a briefing on the desirable outcomes for the marine environment in a Welsh context. This briefing was agreed at last month's council meeting and will be sent to interested parties in the coming weeks. WEL members also attended an ICZM conference in early February.

WEL's farming group welcomed the recent launch of the Single Payment and agri-environment schemes. WEL representatives met WAG members in early February to discuss the new agri-environment schemes and raised concerns that they will not be sufficiently useful on the ground. WAG has just commissioned a £700k mapping project which it is hoped will assist habitat monitoring within these schemes. WEL's farming group also continues to contribute to the debate on the Rural Development Regulation.

The Wales Spatial Plan was published at the end of 2004. This has been given more prominence than WEL had anticipated, being used as a significant driver for funding and the delivery of national

objectives within a regional context. WEL's planning group continues to monitor the implementation of this plan.

Looking forward to the second quarter of 2005, WEL intends to develop a "Who's who in the Welsh Environment" database which will be available online. The project is being funded by CCW and the Environment Agency through the Environmental Compact. WEL is also working on revamping its own website, which it hopes to launch within the next few months.

There have also recently been some important political changes within WAG – the standing down of Peter Law as a labour member has resulted in a loss of the labour majority within the Assembly. Depending on the outcome of the imminent General Election this may result in changes to committee structures etc. WEL will monitor such developments with interest.



Scottish Environment Link (SEL)

Scottish Environment Week (7-13 February) in the Scottish Parliament was a LINK initiative and focussed on the diversity and value of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage. It was a celebration of the environment and engaged a wide variety of organisations in and outside of LINK, with events happening in the Parliament and engaging MSPs in their

constituencies, and a reception in the Parliament hosted by the First Minister. Over 80 MSP's signed up to the Holyrood Declaration with their pledges for the environment (see the LINK website www.scotlink.org for more detail). It was a very successful week and there are plans to hold another next February.

The launch of the everyone Climate Campaign for the General Election on 16 February was well-covered in the media. LINK welcomed government recognition that resources are not limitless. Before the election was called action focussed on letters/emails to sitting MPs asking them what they are doing on climate change. Hustings events are planned throughout April. See www.everyonecan.org for further details.

A LINK Climate Workshop was held on 3 February with 40 attending to learn more about the issues affecting various Task Forces – marine, biodiversity, freshwater, peat, transport, & energy efficiency, and the basics for updating the LINK Climate Action Plan were agreed.

LINK also provided input to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Climate Change in February. The LINK display stand visited various party conferences around the country during February and March. A meeting was held with the Environment Minister in January where sustainable development, climate, landscape were discussed.

News from the Link Secretariat

Management Committee Meeting

Link was delighted to welcome Martin Harper (RSPB) and Ruth Chambers (CNP) to WCL's Management Committee following their election at the AGM on 10th December 2004. Elaine King (NFBG) was also elected but was unfortunately unable to take up her post. The Committee have subsequently co-opted Matt Shardlow (Buglife) and Martin Spray (WWT), bringing the number of Committee members back to a healthy total of 7. WCL would like to thank Matt and Martin for agreeing to join the Committee, and looks forward to seeing them at the next meeting in June.

The first Management Committee meeting of 2005 was held on 14th March. Issues discussed included quarterly accounts, risks and reserves policies, the delegation of responsibilities to the Secretariat and the division of Trustee's responsibilities, rules for a new Associate Membership scheme and planning for Link's 25-year anniversary event later in the year.

Other Link news...

As of 3rd May, Annie Smith, WCL's Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator, will be commencing a secondment of 6 months (with a possible extension up to 9 months) at RSPB as their Marine Policy Officer, covering for Sharon Thompson whilst she is seconded to Defra's Marine Bill team. During this period, Helen Meech will be promoted to be Link's Policy and

Campaigns Co-ordinator. As a result, we are currently recruiting 6 months cover for our Information and Office Co-ordinator position, and hope to have somebody in post by the end of May at the latest.

Other Link news is that we are now successfully set up in our new office space (with a meeting room!) on the ground floor here at 89 Albert Embankment. Unfortunately our email went down for a week following our move, so we would be very grateful if you could please resend any important messages sent during the period 23rd - 31st March if you haven't already received a response. Apologies for any inconvenience caused.

WORKING GROUPS

Farming and Rural Development

Chair: John Cousins, The Wildlife Trusts

Vice Chair: Ian Woodhurst, CPRE

Woodland Subgroup: Chair: Nick

Collinson, Woodland Trust

Sec: Alexia Wellbelove

(alexia@wcl.org.uk)

Land Use Planning

Chair: Henry Oliver, CPRE

Sec: Helen Meech

(helen@wcl.org.uk)

Minerals Subgroup: Chair: Ruth

Chambers, Council for National Parks

PPS 9 Subgroup: Chair: Tony Gent,

The Herpetological Conservation

Trust

Sec: Helen Meech

(helen@wcl.org.uk)

Wildlife and Trade

Chair: Jenny Hawley, IFAW

Vice Chair: Cathy Williamson, WDCS

Whales Subgroup: Chair: John

Frizell, Greenpeace International

Vice Chair: Leah Garces, WSPA

Vice Chair: Virag Kaufer, WSPA

Sec: Annie Smith (annie@wcl.org.uk)

TASK FORCES

Access of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside

Chair: Donna O'Brien, Council for National Parks

Sec: Alexia Wellbelove

(alexia@wcl.org.uk)

Biodiversity

Chair: Martin Harper, RSPB

Vice Chair: Nigel Bourn, Butterfly

Conservation

Sec: Annie Smith (annie@wcl.org.uk)

Marine Nature Conservation

Campaign Chair: Ben Stafford, RSPB

Policy Chair: Sharon Thompson,

RSPB

Vice Chair: Melissa Moore, MCS

Bycatch Subgroup:

Chair: Ali Ross, WDCS

Vice Chair: Lissa Goodwin, Marine

Connection

Sec: Annie Smith (annie@wcl.org.uk)

Water Policy and Legislation

Chair: Sarah Oppenheimer, RSPB

Vice Chair: Phil Burston, RSPB

Sec: Helen Meech

(helen@wcl.org.uk)