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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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Wildlife and
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LINK



Q3/4 Report July - December 2003

Letter from the Chair...

It is my pleasure as the new Chair of Link to welcome you to the last report of 2003. On your behalf I'd like to thank Tony Burton who did such a good job over the previous years both as Chair and in other capacities for Link. Those of you who came to the AGM in December will have heard Tony reflect on Link's history: it was inspiring to hear what had been achieved through working together as Link members – long may it continue! We continued after the formal meeting with the Annual Link party which proved to be a great time to meet a lot of people. I do recommend you put next year's party in your diary - Friday 10th December 2004! Everyone is welcome.

The new year has already proved that there is much work for Link to do in the future – we may be making progress in the reform of the CAP, but on so many other issues progress seems to be still very slow. DEFRA's modernisation review is proving to be an interesting process – stimulating thought both in DEFRA and Link members. Link's paper on the modernisation review will outline the outcomes we believe Government should be achieving and some of the processes through which these outcomes can be achieved.

Overall it looks as if this will be another busy year for Link. I'm looking forward to working with all the Link members especially those with links to water and marine issues since my own background is firmly terrestrial. I'd also like to extend a welcome to Marine Connection who have recently joined Link. I hope you all find working with Link a useful, productive and enjoyable experience.

Yours,

Hilary Allison

Link Chair

Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development WG

The ink had not dried on the announcement of the CAP MTR when the debate started on the form of Single Farm Payment (SFP). In August the Link members met with the statutory agencies' Land Use Policy group to exchange information and views on the CAP reform.

Many farming groups argued in favour of historic-based payment: a method of calculating the SFP based on previously received levels of subsidy. Others, including Link members and some in the horticultural industry, argued in favour of an area based, regional average, payment: a method of calculating the SFP on the basis of farmed area.

Link supported the area based payment option as this has administrative and strategic advantages and significant environmental advantages. Area payments would enable the delivery of major environmental benefits by facilitating a shift to public payments for public goods. Anomalies in production-linked support would impede the efficient implementation of cross-compliance requirements and agri-environment schemes – which is a further reason we believed that the area based payment system is the best longer term solution.

In the short term, the adoption of regional average payments would extend cross compliance to previously unsupported land, this is a small proportion of land but it is often under intensive management. A system of regional average payments would encourage farmers to register previously unregistered grassland which will then be subject to Environmental Impact Assessment regulations and other protection. Regional average payments would also deliver further benefits indirectly, by providing more support to extensive farmers, those farmers who in the past have received least subsidy. Furthermore the use of

regional average payments will enable the use of the proposed National Envelope for other uses such as preparing farms for the demands of the Water Framework Directive.

The decision on the SFP was still awaited in February 2004.

Link members worked together on the consultations on the Entry Level Scheme (or Environmental Stewardship) and the Higher Tier Scheme (ES plus). Defra undertook extensive consultation and it was possible for Link members to jointly meet these demands through working together and sharing information. Overall the AE steering group has maintained a clear overview and has proved to be a useful forum for raising Link members' concerns. In addition to the informal consultation Link responded to the 3rd Defra consultation on the review of the Agri environment schemes, on the detail within the HTS.

The Food Industry Sustainability Strategy or FISS was drafted and redrafted (and is still in draft form). Link members input comments to the section on water.

Meetings

14th August - Higher Tier Scheme Stakeholder Workshop

15th August - Link working group LUPG meeting

9th September - Link working group 4 attended, 4 organisations

10th September - Agri Environment Scheme Steering Group meeting

12th September - Lord Whitty contact group CAP reform

17th October - David Hunter CAP reform meeting

21st November - Cross compliance meeting

24th November - Agri-Environment Steering group meeting

26th November - Link working group meeting

Activity Forecast

Working group meeting on Thursday 19th February 2004

Consultation on Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition

Possible Consultation on National Envelopes

Further work on Agri-Environment Schemes

Food Industry Sustainability Strategy – further drafts

Land Use Planning WG

Following months of scheduling and rescheduling, Link met the Planning Minister Tony McNulty MP in June for a constructive exchange of views on the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill and planning guidance. The meeting ended with the Minister making the suggestion that he should hold quarterly meetings with Link, which was of course warmly welcomed. He was promptly moved on in the cabinet reshuffle.

In October, the group combined a useful meeting with an opportunity to see a little wildlife at the RSPB's headquarters in Sandy. RSPB and FoE gave presentations on the implications of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill and the group's forthcoming work in relation to the Bill and the numerous PPSs due for consultation was discussed.

It was agreed that Link should continue to push its proposed amendment to Clause 38, which would strengthen the currently very weak sustainable development duty in the Bill. Link's briefing on Clause 38 was sent to a number of peers with planning interests in late December, ahead of the Bill entering the House of Lords in the first week after Christmas. A number of

Working Groups

members signed onto some or all of CPRE's proposed amendments which were also distributed to peers.

In December Link submitted a strongly worded response to ODPM's consultation on PPS7, to replace PPG7: *The Countryside-Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development*. There was great concern that the aspirations of the PPS were unclear and open to interpretation, and that there was weakening of some of the policy contained in PPG7. A wider concern regarding the slimming down of the guidance was borne out – for example, the draft PPS12 (on which the consultation opened in October) had lost the list of Environmental Considerations for Development Plans, which were contained within PPG12, and those relevant to the countryside were not mentioned in PPS7. Link responses to the consultations on PPSs 11 and 12, respectively on Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks, were planned for the new year.

A small number of members had been involved by ODPM in the drafting of PPS1, and shared their concern with the group over the near absence from drafts of any reference to biodiversity or cultural heritage. It will be crucial for Link to ensure that PPS1 includes a definition of sustainable development which adequately reflects the importance of biodiversity and heritage protection, due to the reference to sustainable development in the Planning Bill (and particularly if attempts to strengthen the proposed duty are successful). The consultation on PPS1 is expected early in the new year.

At the end of the year, the group was sad to lose its long serving Chair, Mark Southgate who was to move from the RSPB to the Environment Agency. The group looks forward to working with Mark in his new role, and is pleased to welcome Henry Oliver of CPRE as the new Chair.

Meetings

3rd July – LUP WG meeting (London CPRE)

October – Better Building Summit

29th October – LUP WG meeting (Sandy RSPB)

Activity Forecast

9th February – LUP WG meeting (London Ramblers' Association)

28th April - LUP WG meeting (London Ramblers' Association)

21st July - LUP WG meeting (London Ramblers' Association)

PPS9 subgroup

PPS9 is now expected to be released for consultation early in 2004. Early in October, Link's PPS9 group held an encouraging meeting with one of the consultants contracted by EN to produce the good practice guidance which will accompany the new PPS. The group also met with ODPM in December to discuss the Link Scoping paper on PPS9 and exchange views and information.

Meetings

8th October - Meeting with drafter of Good Practice Guidance

11th December - Meeting with Joanna Key at ODPM

Activity Forecast

Liaison with government departments, agencies and allies on the forthcoming revised PPG9 draft and associated good practice guidance

Response to PPS9 consultation

Minerals subgroup

The Minerals Working Group met the POS Minerals Topic Group during September, in the unfortunate knowledge that there had been no real developments in minerals planning since the last meeting of the two groups.

Members await news in the pre-budget report about whether the Sustainability Fund is to be continued beyond its initial two year term, having held a number of meetings to feed into the review of the Aggregates Levy and Sustainability Fund earlier in the year. Widespread support for the ALSF was demonstrated at a celebration event led by English Nature, English Heritage and the Countryside Agency in October.

MPS1 is expected to be released for consultation shortly after the release of the PPS1 consultation, which we now hope will take place in mid-February.

Meetings

16th September - Meeting with POS Minerals topic group

13th October - Meeting with ODPM Minerals Department

Activity Forecast

Production of a set of key principles for minerals planning

Response to MPS1 consultation

Continued monitoring and influence of uses of the Sustainability Fund

ALSF funded project to demonstrate policy and practice changes needed to result in more sustainable life cycle of aggregates.

Working Groups

Wildlife & Trade WG

The Wildlife and Trade working group met with UK CITES Authorities (Defra and JNCC) both ahead of the Animals Committee meeting in August, and after it, in September. Information was shared on priorities for the Animals Committee meeting, and possible proposals for CoP13 which is to be held in Thailand in November 2004.

Key issues for the UK at the Animals Committee included the review of species listing criteria (and establishment of which species would be used to test the revised criteria) and the review of significant trade (the UK anticipated an issue relating to trade in queen conch in some of the overseas territories). The group plans to monitor progress with these initiatives in 2004, and will request that the UK ensures the significant trade review looks at the narwhal, an exploited species on which very little data is available.

The CITES Secretariat has announced that it intends to extend the CITES National Legislation Project (the process through which Parties' national legislation to implement CITES is evaluated) to Parties' dependent territories. Link plans to urge the UK to offer its own overseas territories for review, and to push for the extended process to look initially at those of Denmark: The Faroe Islands, which were included in Denmark's ratification of CITES, have never enacted domestic legislation to implement CITES although they trade in CITES-listed species.

Listing proposals have been slow to emerge, and it seems that many Parties feel CoP13 has come around too soon. Germany is expected to propose Appendix II listing for two shark species - the spiny dogfish and the porbeagle (though it is not clear how the EU will react). The group is keen to push CITES listing, where appropriate, for commercially exploited species following successes last year with species like the basking shark. Since CoP12 there has been debate within both CITES and the FAO regarding whether CITES has a role with

respect to such species, Japan being among the countries saying that it should not. The CITES Secretariat is in the process of trying to finalise a memorandum of understanding between CITES and the FAO, and it will be a priority for the group to ensure that this does not diminish CITES's role.

Zimbabwe and Zambia are likely to resubmit their proposals for one-off sales of ivory stock-piles, and it is rumoured that Tanzania will seek a downlisting of elephants to Appendix II. Happily Cuba has informed the IUCN Marine Turtles Specialist Group that it will not seek to downlist hawksbill turtles. As time passes it also seems more and more unlikely that the Cayman Turtle Farm proposal will resurface.

The UK is unlikely to put forward any listing proposals to CoP13, but has invited ideas for resolutions, and particularly for assistance in drafting a resolution on bushmeat. The future of the CITES bushmeat working group appears to be in question, and Link members are keen that it should continue. A resolution may identify the need for bushmeat to be considered jointly by a number of international agreements, including CITES and, for example, the Convention on Biological Diversity. Wildlife and Trade Working Group members plan to explore the possibilities for Link to engage with the issue of bushmeat (including outwith the context of CITES) early in 2004.

The group will continue to push for greater transparency in EU decision making at CITES. Link teamed up with SSN to write to the Environment Commissioner on this matter in September, and depending on the response may take further action at the EU level.

At the end of the year Rob Atkinson (RSPCA) handed over the chairship of the group to Jenny Hawley of IFAW.

Meetings

5th August – Link:UK CITES Authorities meeting (Defra, Bristol)

1st September – Link:UK CITES Authorities meeting (Defra, Bristol)

7th October – W&T WG meeting

25th November – W&T WG meeting

Activity Forecast

2nd February – W&T WG meeting (London IFAW)

27th February - Link: UK CITES Authorities meeting (Defra, Bristol)

18th March - W&T WG meeting

Whales subgroup

Iceland stole the show in the third quarter, by commencing a 'scientific' whale hunt for 38 minke whales in August – the first stage in its 'research' programme which proposes to kill 500 minke, sei and fin whales over two years. 36 whales were killed before the hunt closed at the start of October.

The Whale Group issued a joint statement to the press to coincide with the beginning of the hunt, and wrote to the new Fisheries Minister Ban Bradshaw. Mr Bradshaw later led a demarche of 23 countries calling for Iceland to abandon its whaling plans. The group continues to coordinate action to bring evidence of widespread public sentiment against whaling to Iceland, and to raise awareness of the commercial, rather than scientific, motivation for the whale hunt.

A number of UK and European tour operators have responded to requests by WDCS and Link to sign up to a statement expressing concern over the impact Iceland's whaling programme may have on tourism and urging the Icelandic Government to reconsider. The response has been encouraging, and the statement will be delivered to the Icelandic Government in due course.

Working Groups & Task Forces

In August, a federal US court placed legal restrictions on the use of Low Frequency Active Sonar by the military, due to the likelihood of the sonar system causing irreparable harm to marine life. Link wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence in November, calling for activities involving military use of a similar sonar system by the UK to be audited in the interest of effective protection of cetaceans and the marine environment, and for a public inquiry to examine and resolve this issue before further deployment of military sonars. A reply was received not from the MOD but from a company contracted by the Ministry to develop the system which was considered unsatisfactory. The group will pursue this further in 2004.

Members were saddened in September by the murder of friend and colleague Jane Tipson in St Lucia. The group has encouraged the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to offer assistance with the investigation into Jane Tipson's murder, in the light of suggestions that it may have been linked to her animal welfare work including opposition to the development of a 'swim with dolphins' facility.

After four years as Chair of the Whale Working Group, Mark Simmonds hands over to John Frizell of Greenpeace International in 2004.

Meetings

14th August – Whales WG meeting (London IFAW)

7th October – Whales WG meeting (London WSPA)

17th November – Whales WG meeting (London IFAW)

Activity Forecast

30th January – Whales WG meeting (London)

25th – 27th February – Like-minded meeting (South Africa)

18th March – Whales WG meeting (London)

Biodiversity TF

The Biodiversity group held a very productive workshop in August, at which members' demands for the improvement of the BAP were discussed. The group plans to use the 2005 BAP review as an opportunity to call for improvements, and work has commenced on a manifesto to feed into the review, which will be adapted for a number of audiences.

Link members continue to participate in the working groups which feed into and oversee the BAP process: the UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee (UKBPSC), the England Biodiversity Group, the Biodiversity Research and Advisory Group (BRAG) and the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG). Over the summer BRIG established a sub-group (including two Link representatives) which will look at the BAP priority lists in the context of the 2005 review. Link members have also begun to push for a BRIG to convene another sub-group to look at BAP targets in relation to the review.

We were encouraged by the news in the third quarter that the England Biodiversity Strategy has been elevated to the status of a Mission Critical Programme for Defra. The implementation of the strategy is overseen by the EBG, and delivered through a number of Sectoral Implementation Groups, most of which include NGO representatives. These groups offer key opportunities to ensure cross-cutting recognition of biodiversity in government policy.

A Link paper - Reflections on the UK Biodiversity Partnership (which can be accessed at www.wcl.org.uk) – was unfortunately not accepted by Defra for the publication Biodiversity News. The paper has been distributed by other means, and has benefited from consideration by the UKBPSC who were led to question the failings of the BAP in the marine environment. A paper has now been requested from Link on the marine BAPs, for the UKBPSC to review at its next meeting in March 2004.

Meetings

8th August – BTF workshop

4th September – England Biodiversity group

19th September - BRAG

29th September – UKBP Standing Committee

27th October – BRIG

30th October – Meeting with EN on SSSI report and Haskins review

11th November – BTF meeting (London ZSL)

11th December – EN reception and launch of SSSI report

12th December – England Biodiversity Group meeting

Activity Forecast

13th January – EBS Marine SIG

27th January - BRIG

29th January – BTF meeting (London CPRE)

9th – 20th February – CBD CoP7 Kuala Lumpur

Marine TF

Members welcomed the long-awaited news that the EC proposed to implement emergency measures to protect the Darwin Mounds from bottom trawling, and the subsequent consideration of a permanent regulation to achieve this. The Government issued its consultation on the Offshore Conservation Regulations in July, and in September began consultation on the designation of the Darwin Mounds as the first offshore SAC. Link wrote to Defra to welcome the both designation and the EC Regulation to protect the Darwin Mounds, and urged the department to move swiftly to fully implement the Habitats Directive throughout the UK's territorial waters.

Task Forces

Members continued to represent Link on the RMNC Working Group and its sub-groups, and the Irish Sea Pilot Steering Group. Numerous draft papers have been released for consultation over the last six months, as the sub-groups worked up their final reports for submission to the Working Group. The RMNC timetable has been revised so that it is now expected to issue its report to Government on 1st June 2004.

The Link campaign for comprehensive legislation for improved protection of marine wildlife and effective management of our seas, was discussed with MPs for the first time at the main party conferences. The working papers on marine legislation which have been developed over the last few months were used to prepare parliamentary briefings, distributed at small, informal events. In general, Link's ideas were well received, and it was clear that support from MPs could be gained for parliamentary initiatives. Link members drafted an Early Day Motion which was put down by John Randall MP in December with cross-party support, and which by the end of the year was gathering signatures at a terrific rate. The group's target is to persuade 340 MPs to sign the EDM – a majority in the House of Commons.

The WCL marine group continues to engage with sister Links on the issue of marine legislation, particularly SEL which is running a parallel campaign for improved management of Scotland's waters.

An EFRA committee inquiry into the marine environment was announced in July. Link members submitted individual evidence to the inquiry covering a range of issues, supported by a letter from Link highlighting the joint campaign for comprehensive legislation for improved protection of marine wildlife and effective management of our seas. Link was called to give verbal evidence to the Committee, and fielded a panel of five members for the Committee's opening evidence session in November. Supplementary written evidence was later supplied to provide the committee with fuller information

about Link's call for comprehensive legislation and specific case studies to illustrate inadequacies in marine conservation and management. The committee also took evidence from the statutory nature conservation agencies, the ports, the Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee (which includes Link member CBA) and the British Geological Survey, as well as squeezing in an emergency session to consider the case of the toxic ghost ships in December. It was to conclude with evidence from Elliot Morley MP on 7th January, and its progress will be closely followed.

Sam Fanshawe who has chaired Link's policy work for a number of years stepped down as Chair at the end of 2003. Stuart Singleton-White, who led Link's campaign sub-group in 2003, will take over as Chair of the full Marine Task Force in 2004.

Meetings

3rd July – MTF meeting (Chippenham WDCS)

28th July – MTF meeting (London WWF)

4th August – MTF campaign meeting (London WWF)

27th August – Joint Links marine meeting (Cardiff WWF)

9th September – MTF campaign meeting (London WCL)

24th September – Marine dinner Lib Dem PC Brighton

30th September – MTF campaign meeting (Labour PC, Bournemouth)

1st October – Marine breakfast event, LPC Bournemouth

7th October – Marine lunch event, Con PC, Blackpool

21st October – MTF meeting (Chippenham WDCS)

22nd-23rd October – WWF Oceans Recovery Seminar, Edinburgh

12th November – Link MTF evidence to EFRA committee

18th November – MTF campaign meeting (London WWF)

17th December – MTF meeting (London WWF)

Activity Forecast

20th January – Joint Links marine meeting (London WCL)

4th February – MTF meeting (London WWF)

1st March – MTF:EN meeting (London)

2nd March – MTF meeting (London WWF)

Bycatch subgroup

Defra sought views on the EC's proposed regulation in August, ahead of the initial consideration of the proposed regulation by the Council Working Group. The proposal should be debated in the Fisheries Committee during November and voted on in early December, with a chance of being debated in plenary in February 2004.

The 10th ASCOBANS Meeting of Parties was held in August. The Jastarnia Plan to protect harbour porpoises in the Baltic Sea was supported by Parties, but a resolution calling for its implementation was impeded by the EU, which raised issues of competency near the close of the meeting. A resolution on noise, proposed by WDCS, was passed, but otherwise the meeting was felt to be relatively stagnant.

An EFRA sub-committee inquiry into cetacean bycatches was announced in July. WDCS and The Wildlife Trusts, along with fisheries representatives and others were called to give evidence. The inquiry concluded with evidence from Fisheries Minister Ben Bradshaw in early December.

Task Forces

Meetings

10th November – TWTs and WDCCS evidence to EFRA sub-committee on bycatch

11th November – Bycatch SG meeting (London WCL)

Activity Forecast

10th Feb – EP Fisheries Committee vote on EU bycatch regulation

Water Task Force

The Water Task Force had a very busy and productive second half of 2003, with a lot of work culminating in consultation responses and favourable Bill amendments.

Water Framework Directive

Link responded to the DEFRA third consultation Paper, on the Implementation of the EC Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC). Defra proposals for regulations had been minimalist, and in the opinion of the Task Force members, insufficient to meet Defra's aspirations as set out in the government's earlier paper "Directing the Flow". These points were made strongly, however there was little to celebrate when the regulations were tabled in the house shortly before the Christmas recess.

Water Bill – Water Act 2003

On a much more positive side the Water task force has considerable success in amending the Water Bill, now the Water Act 2003. Thanks to a great effort from the members of the Task Force we succeeded in getting 3 very good amendments on the face of the bill: the sustainability duty for WaterVoice; the water conservation duty for all public bodies and; a duty for the EA to ensure abstractors use water efficiently. This was far more than any other lobbyists achieved - and helped to defend the bill from strong industry pressure groups that would have diluted it.

Freshwater Fish Directive

Link also responded to the consultation on the implementation of the Freshwater Fish Directive and supported the Government's plan to create over 2,500 additional designations under the Directive, encompassing over 11,000km of rivers and canals, and 90 still waters. We welcome the improvements in water quality that will result.

SUDS

Link responded to the consultation on the SUDS framework. We believe that the widespread use of constructed ponds and wetlands could provide significant biodiversity benefits, pleasing landscape features and improved amenity for people and we fully endorsed an approach to managing surface water that maximises these benefits and provides an opportunity for communities to learn about, and interact with, wildlife. However we were disappointed by the uninspiring tone of the document which could give the impression that using SUDS is far more contentious and onerous than conventional systems.

PR04

Link met with EN to discuss AMP4. This discussion included the method by which the water company plans are evaluated and the system for producing preferred plans for investment. Water companies should place all schemes for which there is a statutory duty within plan A however some have not and only included these within plan B. There are very few optional schemes being proposed.

There is a real need to water companies to fulfil their duties under CROW in order to address impacts on designated sites. If this action is not taken it is likely that Defra will fail to meet its PSA targets.

Meetings:

7th August - Link Task Force (7 members, 7 organisations)

3rd October - Link Task Force meeting with English Nature (4 members, representing 4 organisations plus 2 from English Nature)

23rd October - Waterwiser

Activity Forecast

Task Force meeting February 26th

Link Diffuse pollution statement

Overarching issues

Defra's modernisation review

Margaret Beckett responded to Haskin's report by announcing a further review of modernising Defra's rural delivery. A Link group was convened to discuss issues of common interest and a possible Link response. This group met in the new year 2004.

Ragwort

Several Link members have been working together to ameliorate the possible damaging effects of the ragwort control bill. This involved lobbying several members of the Lords, and Defra ministers. The bill was passed, however Link's concerns are partly being addressed through the redrafting of the Code of Practice. Members are concerned that attempts by some to eradicate ragwort may have damaging effects on other biodiversity.

Sister Links



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL spent much of the third quarter of 2003 preparing for a series of events held in the final quarter of the year. It held an Environmental Education Forum Conference about the importance of field experience for youngsters on 9th October 2003, at which a website and posters on "Understanding Sustainability", a project promoting education for sustainable development in a fun and interesting way aimed at young people, was launched. NIEL also held a conference on Climate Change on 16th October 2003.

The "Cultivating Creativity" project is now a year into its 18 month time-span, and four of the five community groups have started their projects. All five groups have been selected from communities with 'weak community infrastructure', which is defined as; "A community in which there is little or no activity, or in which there is a danger of existing activity not being sustained". The fifth group currently has no infrastructure to enable activity to take place, but NIEL hasn't given up on the group and is continuing to try to get the textile project started. The other four groups are at different stages of activity, with three working on public art pieces relevant to their areas and the fourth on a photographic project based on local farms and their families. It is hoped that all five groups will showcase their finished pieces at an event in May 2004.

NIEL has also been granted funding to employ a Co-ordinator for the Environmental Education Forum (EEF), who started work on 15 Jan for one year. He will be able to implement a number of areas of the EEF, including revising the website, overseeing a 'mapping' exercise for the Environmental Education and Environmental Sustainable Development sectors in NI, and organising events and activities, including revising the EEF Newsletter.

NIEL itself is still in the midst of the years-long review by the EHS, with final consultant's report due in May 2004 following a winter and spring full of planning meetings.



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

It has now been agreed to set up four formal supported working groups in Wales. The Agriculture Working Group will address CAP reform and entry-level Agri-environment schemes, and the Planning Working Group will look at the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill, the revision of the suite of TANs in Wales and the Wales Spatial Plan. The Energy Working Group was set up in response to the publication of TAN8 (Renewables). The establishment of a Sustainable Development Working Group is an attempt to pre-empt a fairly substantive work area for WEL members over coming year, namely the revision of the Assembly's Sustainable Development Scheme.

The last quarter of 2003 was even more busy than usual for Welsh NGO's. There were numerous government consultations including the Wales Spatial Plan, the revised Sustainable Development Scheme, CAP Reform and the Entry Level Agri-Environment Scheme. WEL have also had meetings with the Minister for the Environment who has stated he intends to produce an Environmental Strategy for Wales.

On top of the above WEL had recently completed a major piece of work over the last few weeks. Firstly, a series of "environmental briefing sheets" covering 14 different policy areas, setting out the main environmental priorities (from waste to woodlands) the Assembly Government should be acting upon, and agreed by the broad membership of WEL, have been completed, published and circulated.

It is hoped these will also provide a framework to inform a more proactive approach by WEL itself and representatives. Secondly, an advocacy skills training day for WEL members was held, which was well attended and appreciated. Thirdly, the skills gained from this training day have been used in a project to meet with every single Assembly Member in Wales; introduce them to the Environment NGO's working in Wales, introduce them to WEL, and highlight how and why the environment should feature more prominently in the priorities of the Assembly. At time of press WEL have met with 57 out of the 60 Assembly Members in Wales. Reports from the frontline suggest this has been an extremely effective and successful exercise.

If any English, Scottish or Northern Irish organisations would like to find out more about any of the above or obtain copies of WEL's responses to government papers please contact the WEL office.



Scottish Environment Link (SEL)

SEL's **everyone** campaign is widely acknowledged to have had a greening influence on the Scottish Parliament, with a thorough assessment of the effectiveness of the campaign for all 26 supporting organisations produced by the **everyone** Steering Group. The next phases of the campaign have now been scoped and will have a green watchdog element. Scotland's Partnership Agreement has over 80 environment-related commitments, for which the Parliamentary officer and Task Force Convenors have spelt out what the government needs to do to deliver these (on the www.everyonecan.org website), and will be keeping these up to date.

Sister Links

With regard to task forces, the most active areas have been the Special Areas, Agriculture and Marine groups. The Special Areas Task Force was set up in light of the forthcoming Nature Conservation (Scotland) Bill and has been coordinating LINK amendments to Stage 1 of the Bill. The Agriculture Task Force has been discussing the mid-term review of CAP, a parliamentary campaign, Rural Development Plan, land management contracts, the biodiversity strategy, GM and organics. The Marine Task Force has been producing a strategy paper and working with WCL to campaign for new, coherent, comprehensive and fit-for-purpose legislation governing Scottish and UK seas. SEL's own marine campaign is due to be launched in the Spring. In addition, the LINK Access Network has been coordinating LINK input to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code,

the Outdoor Recreation and Landscape Task Force planned a conference around the current SNH consultation on landscape, and the Climate & Energy Task Force have been preparing for a Parliamentary Inquiry into Renewables. The Climate & Energy Task Force has also been working towards a Renewables conference in February which LINK is co-hosting.

One of the highlights of the period was the members' annual Congress which was held over 2 days on 14/15 November, with over 60 people attending. Events included a debate with a panel of journalists, an MSP and the Chair of SNH on the environment and the media and how to get better representation and coverage of environmental issues. There were also showcases of Task Force work including Strategic Environment Assessment, Marine and Outdoor Recreation and Landscape work.

Wide discussion was also held on options for the next phases of **everyone**, taking us up to the next Holyrood elections with the EU and Westminster election on the way. There was a great wish from members to develop it as far as possible.

Internally, SEL recruited a new member, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society. Link staff also participated in review of the Scottish Compact between the Government and Voluntary Sector, with a discussion of plans to merge lottery funds and implications for the sector. Three Link staff received professional coaching in management of staff and the organisation leading to the development of a new performance management system for LINK. In addition the funding bid to SNH for 2004-07 was 95% successful.

News from the Link Secretariat

Management Committee Meetings

The Management Committee meeting for the third quarter of 2003 took place on 25th September. Issues discussed included quarterly accounts, the budget forecast for 2004-09, the planning process for 2004-07, proposals for new work areas, the annual report for 2002, the possibility of adopting Charitable Status for Link and Management Committee Nominations for 2004. The Q4 meeting was held on 24th November and further considered 2004's budget, fundraising and charitable status, the workplan for 2004, the AGM agenda and an IT upgrade proposal. The committee approved the proposal to upgrade Link's troublesome old IT system, and a new server and system upgrades were installed over the Christmas break.

AGM

WCL's Annual General Meeting was held at the National Trust's London offices on 12th December. At this meeting the Management Committee and Group Chairs for 2004 were agreed, the workplan was approved and the annual report and accounts for 2002 adopted by the membership. Furthermore, a resolution was passed to increase membership subscription rates by 3% for 2004 and further each year in line with inflation. It was also agreed that legal advice should be sought on WCL becoming a charity.

Chairman's Report

To mark the end of his term as Chair, during his Chairman's Report at the AGM Tony Burton reviewed Link's activities and achievements from 1996 to 2003, with thanks expressed to all who had contributed to Link during this period.

"I have been involved with WCL as Chair or Deputy Chair since 1996, a time I believe to have been a pinnacle of activity for the environmental movement, with responses to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit being developed, debate over the challenge of devolution, and preparation for the wildlife charter. 1996 was also a pivotal year for WCL, with the organisation reviewing its role and holding a meeting of members CEO's to discuss its future. In 1997 and 1998 Link increasingly recognised the need to focus and prioritise its work. Members were asked which subjects they wished to work on in a process which continues to the current day. There is indeed a strong continuity between the priorities identified then and those of today. The period was also one of review for Government Agencies and legislation leading to the passage of the CROW Act, for which WCL received the Green Ribbon award for the most effective environmental campaign in 1999.

Chairman's Report (cont.)

I believe there are 3 key characteristics of WCL which have contributed to its success: 1) The sum of the whole is greater than that of its parts; 2) Its diversity, which gives authority and flexibility; and 3) The patience and commitment of the secretariat staff.

Link faces several challenges for the future. The first is financial – the Management Committee has budgeted for a £9000 deficit for 2004. There is a need to look for further external funding and to renegotiate with Government, all in an environment where there is pressure from different organisations to compete. The second challenge is that environmental issues seem to have gone “off the boil” in recent time, not least in light of the redefinition of sustainable development. There is a need for WCL and its members to try to re-energise the environmental debate. Thirdly, we are moving to a position where environmental challenges have moved beyond defining solutions, let alone the problems. Environmental organisations may need to change the way they get their message across and begin to appeal direct to consumers and citizens. Link also needs to review its campaign techniques in light of the cultural and institutional challenges which frequently disrupt progress. Finally, a debate is needed on whether Wildlife & Countryside Link is still a suitable name for the organisation – would “Environment Link” more adequately define the range of topics Link engages with? Wildlife and Countryside Link is a true reflection of where the organisation has come from, but will it remain so for the future?”

Membership subscriptions and donations

All Link members should have received an invoice for their membership subscriptions for 2004. Many members make an additional donation alongside their subscription each year - you have not been invoiced for these amounts to avoid WCL reaching the VAT threshold. However, as I'm sure you are aware, we are highly reliant upon our members' subscriptions and donations for our financial wellbeing, and all donations are gratefully received. If you are unsure how much you have donated in the past please contact Helen Meech on 020 7820 8600 or helen@wcl.org.uk.

WCL's email policy

Since we are so dependent on email here at Link, we decided it was time to update our email policy. We hope you will find it useful too.

Email best practice

Put aside time to deal with email: deal with email at set times of the day (no more than 5x a day), don't just dip in and out of your inbox; handle each email only once & don't feel the need to respond to each email immediately.

Place emails into folders – organise your inbox and sent items.

Post back unwanted emails and ask why you've been sent them BUT never reply to spam.

Pick the right communication medium. Email is good for communications which are short, clear, unequivocal, unemotional and non-contentious.

Pen your message in plain English and do not put anything you would not put on paper/say.

Point out the purpose of your email: what is the message about? Include action needed and deadline for action. What part of any attachment does the recipient need? Give an accurate subject title. Use agreed address protocols (e.g. some people ignore emails that are cc-ed).

Provide time for the recipient: Consider other people's schedules and ways of working and tell them the schedule you are working to.

Patrol your use of attachments – are they really needed?

Protect yourself from viruses: Be alert and don't open unexpected and unusual attachments.

Based on notes taken at a seminar given by Monica Seeley at Microsoft's "Taming the email" event. December 2003.

Staff News

After covering the role of Information and Office Co-ordinator on temporary basis, Björn Beckmann left Link on 10th September, and is now working for an environmental consultancy in Vienna. Helen Meech, a recent graduate from UCL's MSc in Conservation, started as the new IOC on 8th September.

Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development

Chair: John Cousins, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair: Ian Woodhurst, CPRE

Woodland Subgroup: Nick Collinson, Woodland Trust

Sec: Pippa Langford (pippa@wcl.org.uk)

Land Use Planning

Chair: Henry Oliver, CPRE

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

Minerals Subgroup: Jill Hatcher, CPRE

PPS 9 Subgroup: Tony Gent, The Herpetological Conservation Trust

Sec: Helen Meech (helen@wcl.org.uk)

Wildlife and Trade

Chair: Jenny Hawley, IFAW

Whales Subgroup: Chair: John Frizell, Greenpeace International; Vice-Chair: Laila Sadler, RSPCA

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

Task Forces

Access of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside

Chair: Donna O'Brien, Rambler's Association

Sec: Pippa Langford (pippa@wcl.org.uk)

Biodiversity

Chair: Martin Harper, Plantlife

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

Marine Nature Conservation

Chair: Stuart Singleton-White, WWF
Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB

Bycatch Subgroup: Ali Ross, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society

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

Water Policy and Legislation

Chair: Sarah Oppenheimer, RSPB
Vice Chair: Phil Burston, RSPB

Sec: Pippa Langford (pippa@wcl.org.uk)

One-off Initiatives/Overarching

Defra Modernisation Review

Sec: Pippa Langford (pippa@wcl.org.uk)