

Q3 Report July - September 2010

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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,

The frost is here, the clocks are going back and it seems only yesterday that members marked Link's 30th year at the height of summer. Along with the rest of big society we now face dark nights absorbing spending cuts and pondering the devil in the detail still to come. But let's go back to the sun. Link's anniversary Parliamentary reception was a fantastic opportunity to reflect with colleagues on Link's multitude of achievements since 1980. And it was the ideal event to re-launch *Making the Link*, a brand new version of our popular publication.

Thanks to everyone who celebrated this momentous occasion with us, and to Agriculture and Food Minister, Jim Paice MP, for his time and frankness on the challenges faced by the sector as a whole.

Since then Link members and staff have worked full tilt to help the Government's thinking on its spending cuts and to ensure our natural environment is afforded adequate weight in its review. Link's *statement* on Defra's spending decisions was widely circulated and was the basis for good contact with Defra.

Link rarely seeks media attention. But we are used to more words than deeds on Link's issues, and so it was legitimate for us to go public with our concerns for the spending review, and to represent our members interests by making sure that welcome aspirations to be the 'greenest Government ever' really do mean something. We were encouraged by the level of national and local press interest.

At the same time Link's Management Committee made engagement in Defra's consultation on the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) a priority for the quarter. The White Paper's significance cannot be over-stated, being a rare opportunity to ensure that the Government commits to the necessary policies and tools to achieve both its and our ambitions. Link's NEWP steering group has worked hard and fast on our response, with input from across Link's working groups, and drawing on the wealth of ideas generated by two members' workshops we held in September. The steering group will now liaise with Defra's White Paper Team into 2011 as the policy process unfolds.

As you can tell it has been exceptionally busy for Link's working groups and staff as they juggle their involvement on the NEWP and spending review with their ongoing work such as on planning reform, issues for cetaceans in UK waters and implementation of the Marine and Coastal Access Act.

For good measure, the quarter also saw us join colleagues from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland at the biennial Joint Links seminar, kindly hosted by Scottish Environment Link. A timely and fun event sharing ideas on common devolved, national and European concerns.

Thanks for a great summer. Best wishes for autumn,

Paul de Zylva
Chair



Agriculture

Chair: Gareth Morgan, 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”

CAP reform continues to be the focus for Link’s Agriculture Working Group. In July a Link representative travelled to Brussels to attend the European Commission’s conference on the [public debate](#) on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The aim of the conference was to bring together the various contributions presented during the public debate period and to provide the opportunity for further discussion. A number of Link members also attended, including the RSPB and the RSPCA. Link issued its [response](#) to the public debate in June. The Agriculture Working Group is now gearing up to respond to the European Commission’s communication on the CAP, which is expected to be published in mid November.

Link has also been considering how to take forward Environmental Stewardship, with particular emphasis on the protection of Higher Level Stewardship (HLS). Link attended two agri-environment meetings in July, where the European Commission Audit and agri-environment cuts were discussed, with particular emphasis on how best to achieve improved agri-environment scheme outcomes. Link attended a number of other external meetings during this period, including the Campaign for the Farmed Environment Evidence and Monitoring Group meetings in July and September.



Biodiversity

Chair: Nicola Hutchinson, Plantlife
Vice Chair: Nigel Boum, Butterfly Conservation
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 met with Natural England and Defra in July, as part of our regular biodiversity liaison meeting series. Attendees discussed the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP) and whether it was likely to include a new England Biodiversity Strategy. Link also briefed Defra on our [spending cuts statement](#) and reiterated our main areas of concern around cuts to the natural environment. Defra reported that the Secretary of State, Caroline Spelman MP, will be attending both the Convention on Biological Diversity 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP10) in Nagoya in October, and the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Cancun later this year.

It’s been a meeting-packed quarter for the Biodiversity Working Group. Link attended the England Biodiversity Group meetings in July and September, and continues to engage with the UK Biodiversity Action Plan’s [Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group](#) (BRIG). The UK Stakeholder Meeting in September, ahead of CoP10, afforded Link the opportunity to share its views on the global 2020 biodiversity targets to be adopted in Nagoya. Link also attended Natural England’s *transforming biodiversity delivery* meeting in September, during which Natural England outlined their review of biodiversity delivery in light of new opportunities post-2010 as part of the government’s work to reduce the fiscal deficit.

In addition Link’s Biodiversity Working Group met twice this quarter to discuss their input to Link’s overarching response to Defra’s [Discussion Document](#) on the NEWP. Work on the NEWP is set to continue into the next quarter.

Land use planning

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Chair: Simon Marsh, RSPB
Vice Chair: Paul Miner, CPRE
Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn

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

This quarter, the Land Use Planning Working Group has been working towards completion of our *Vision for the Future of Planning*. Finalised in September, the Vision received broad support from members and gained the backing of 19 Link members and three external organisations (the Campaign for Better Transport, the Town and Country Planning Association and the Environmental Law Foundation).

The Vision will be presented to Government officials and key stakeholders at a briefing meeting in October, at which John Howell MP will be delivering a speech and taking part in a question and answer session. Following the meeting, the Vision will be widely distributed to key MPs and stakeholders and will be published on our website in November.

In conjunction with this work, Link has been leading the formation of a new planning coalition. This began with a Link/coalition meeting in July to discuss planning reform and ways of working, and has continued through joint work on the Vision document. The coalition is now picking up momentum and is due to be officially launched in November, alongside the Vision.

Marine

© Sally Sharrock

Chair: Joan Edwards, TWT
Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB
Secretary: Joanna Fisher

“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”

This quarter the Marine Legislation Working Group (MLWG) has been working on the publication of a new series of Marine Act Bulletins, both policy and parliamentary. The first parliamentary bulletin, '[Making the Marine Acts Work: the path to effective implementation](#)', was sent to nearly 600 MPs to gain and maintain their support for the Act. The covering letter also encouraged MPs to sign [EDM 592 UK Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#), calling on the Government to implement the Act effectively.

The first policy bulletin, '[Marine Conservation Zones](#)', was aimed at a wide range of marine stakeholders and outlines Link's thoughts on how work to identify potential MCZs, needs to be adapted in the future. It covers Link's views on the inclusion of socio-economic factors, the feedback from the Science Advisory Panel, additional guidance on the co-location of sites, the Impact Assessment process and the setting of conservation objectives for sites.

As part of Link's Marine Planning work, we attended the [CMS Marine Planning Conference](#), and have been distributing our publication, [Marine Planning Principles](#). The MLWG has also been working on a Joint Links response to the consultation on the [draft Marine Policy Statement](#), as well as a Link response to the [new marine planning system in England](#). Link and Link members also attended a number of Defra Stakeholder Focus Groups to discuss the consultation documents.

A Link [briefing](#) to the Minister ahead of the [OSPAR](#) Ministerial Meeting in September saw success with our ask of a new 2012 OSPAR target for the designation of an ecologically coherent network, being agreed upon by Ministers.

Link continues to raise concerns regarding the exclusion of mobile species as features for which MCZs should be selected and will be discussing this further with Defra, JNCC and Natural England at a workshop in December.

The MLWG had a useful meeting with the Minister for Environment, Richard Benyon MP, in September, where we were able to discuss the MCZ projects, our concerns regarding the consideration of socioeconomic factors and the timescales for the delivery of the network of sites. Link was very pleased to hear the Minister confirm that he would be standing firm on the 2012 deadline for the designation of MCZs.

Natural Environment White Paper

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Chair: Paul Wilkinson, TWT
Secretary: Kirsten Loveday

On 26 July 2010, Defra launched its invitation to [shape the Nature of England](#) with a [discussion document](#) designed to “kick-start the debate about how we can all contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural environment”. The wide ranging discussion document sets out the opportunities for change and the challenges we face, highlighting the need to tackle the erosion of our natural assets - biodiversity, the marine environment, rivers and waterbodies, the air and soil. England’s footprint overseas is recognised in the document, with a call to reduce our impacts from imports of natural resources. Also included is a section on building and enhancing our natural value through encouraging a greater role for the “big society”.

The Management Committee agreed that Link should undertake collective work on the NEWP and provide Secretariat support to a new NEWP Steering Group. This Steering Group, whose aim was to focus on the ideas and principles of what should be included in the Link White Paper response, was to be chaired by Paul Wilkinson, Head of Living Landscapes at The Wildlife Trusts, with Kirsten Loveday as Secretary.

In order to ensure maximum input to the NEWP work from across the Link membership, two workshops were facilitated in September, giving members the opportunity to discuss in depth Link’s response to Defra’s discussion document. The first focussed on what we wanted to achieve through the White Paper, out of which five high-level measurable ambitions for nature conservation, recreation and landscapes were agreed. The second examined the local and national delivery mechanisms required to achieve the five ambitions.

Following the workshops, the Link NEWP Steering Group met with the Defra White Paper Team for the first in a series of ‘keeping in touch’ meetings, which will be ongoing until the publication of the White Paper in spring 2011. Defra made it clear that the NEWP gave our sector “the space to highlight the opportunities for the creation of a step change in environmental delivery”. Defra is also holding a number of general and policy-specific workshops on the White Paper in early November. Finalising Link’s response to Defra’s discussion document is currently a top priority for Link and the full response will be available on our website following its submission at the end of October.

Spending Cuts

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Chair: Martin Harper (RSPB)
Secretary: Joanna Fisher

Another priority for Link this quarter has been work in the lead up to the Government’s Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). In July Link published a [statement](#), outlining our thoughts on how Defra might be able to reduce its budget whilst supporting key aims outlined in the coalition agreement. The statement had the support of 28 of Link’s members and was submitted to the Secretary of State, Caroline Spelman MP, and widely distributed to key stakeholders including Defra, CLG and Natural England.

On the day of Link’s 30th anniversary event, we issued a [press release](#) on the statement and were very pleased at the level of media coverage this received, including pieces in [The Independent](#), [BBC news online](#) and on the front page of [The Guardian](#).

During the quarter Link had two positive meetings with Peter Unwin, Director General for Defra’s Environment and Rural Group to discuss implications of the spending cuts and Defra’s post-CSR workplan. In advance of the CSR announcement, with the support of 21 Chief Executives, Link wrote to the Prime Minister, highlighting the benefits of Higher Level Stewardship and urging him to back the scheme. Link also wrote to Caroline Spelman ahead of the Conservative Party conference in early October suggesting areas to consider including in her and her team’s conference speeches and fringe meeting discussions.

Water

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*Chair: Robert Cunningham, RSPB
Vice Chair: Carrie Hume, WWT
Secretary: Kirsten Loveday*

“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”

This quarter, members have been working on an update of the Blueprint for Water’s [10 Steps to Sustainable Water](#), which was originally published in 2006. The document, which includes brand new case studies, is now being finalised, and will be launched at a Parliamentary reception, hosted by Martin Horwood MP in the House of Commons on 9 November.

We are delighted to report that the Environment Minister, Richard Benyon MP, has confirmed his attendance at the publication’s launch event and will deliver the keynote speech.

Whales

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*Acting Chair: Mark Simmonds, WDCS
Secretary: Joanna Fisher*

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

This quarter, Link’s Whales Working Group has expanded its work to address issues relating to cetaceans in UK waters. The first meeting was held in September and was attended by a range of key players, including a number of Link members as well as ORCA, the Sea Watch Foundation and WSPA. A range of issues were discussed, including the present status of UK cetaceans in law (international, EU and UK), the designation of Special Areas of Conservation for cetaceans, chemical pollution, oil and gas developments, bycatch and marine renewables. It was concluded that the overall picture for cetaceans in UK waters was not very positive and a number of actions were considered for addressing this. It was agreed that the group should meet again in the coming months to discuss ways forward in further detail.

Also of concern this quarter is the IWC’s decision to allow Greenland to hunt nine humpback whales per year before the agreed start date. This is in violation of IWC rules.

Working Groups

Wildlife trade

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Chair: Rob Atkinson, RSPCA
Vice Chair: Cathy Williamson, WDCS
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”

This quarter John Scanlon, the new Secretary-General of the CITES Secretariat, visited the UK to attend a short series of meetings with officials, the Department for International Development, conservation NGOs and traders. Many members of Link's Wildlife Trade Working Group attended the conservation NGOs meeting, where Mr Scanlon welcomed NGO support for CITES budget requests and pressed the NGOs to highlight the importance of wildlife crime enforcement to the UK Government.

Positive action was also taken as the European Parliament voted to ban the import and sale of timber obtained through illegal logging. MEPs voted 644-25 in favour of the ban, which will now go before the European Council of member states for approval (click [here](#) for more information).

Finally, congratulations to Rob Atkinson, Chair of the Wildlife Trade Working Group, who is moving to the US to take on the role of Chief Executive of the Tennessee Elephant Sanctuary. We will be sad to Rob leave Link, but wish him all the very best for the future.

Link News

Link Secretariat

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It has been an incredibly busy quarter for Link's Secretariat. We were delighted with the turn-out to our 30th anniversary event and received great feedback on the re-launch of [Making the Link](#). Link continues to work towards the implementation of our 2010 - 2012 strategy through its working groups and the additional activities around the Comprehensive Spending Review and the Natural Environment White Paper.

A packed agenda for Link's Management Committee warranted an extended meeting on 17 September, with Trustees discussing work prioritisation, new Link Vice Presidents, and a review of Link's subscription fees, to name but a few items.

Link is currently seeking two new Trustees to be put forward for election at our AGM on 7 December, as at the end of the year we will be saying goodbye to Martin Harper (RSPB) and Rob Atkinson (RSPCA). Martin will have completed his full term of service as a Link Trustee and Rob is moving to the US, following his appointment as Chief Executive of the Tennessee Elephant Sanctuary.

We were delighted to welcome a new volunteer to Link in September, Vicky Taylor. Vicky has been assisting us with work on the Natural Environment White Paper and joins Lizzie and Jackie on the Link volunteer team.

Finally, a big congratulations to Kirsten, our Policy and Campaigns Coordinator, who got married to Matthew on 11 September, and is now Kirsten Loveday. We wish Kirsten and Matthew every happiness for the future!



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL is working flat out on the Northern Ireland chapter of the National Ecosystem Assessment. NIEL is also very busy on funding issues, preparing for a cut of 50% in staff in April and planning a major programme to help the sector as a whole adapt to new funding situations. NIEL has received a major consultation report on the eNGO sector in Northern Ireland and will be building on that for future work.

Scottish Environment Link (SEL)

In September a small SEL delegation met with the Minister for Environment to discuss SEL's paper on the Scottish Government's Independent Budget Review, opening discussions with the Government on budget cuts and the environment. SEL's Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill Taskforce submitted written oral and written evidence to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee on Stage 1 of the WANE Bill at the beginning of September. SEL's new Climate Adaptation Taskforce met with the Scottish Government's Head of Climate Change Adaptation Team in September, to discuss progress on the development of Action Plans within the Government's Adaptation Implementation Framework.

In August the Planning Taskforce submitted its response to the Environmental Impact Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 2010, broadly welcoming proposed changes. SEL's Freshwater Taskforce is conducting a review of River Basin Management Planning, one year on from the production of the plans, which should be published in early 2011. The Sustainable Land Use Strategy Taskforce has published ten case studies, providing concrete examples of multifunctional land use, which will be presented at the Taskforce's Living with the Land Conference in November.

Following a meeting with the Scottish Environmental Funders Forum to discuss the Scottish Rural Development Programme and its Mid Term Evaluation, SEL produced a position statement on the MTE and a plan for joint work by SEL Taskforces on the SDRP. SEL's Marine Taskforce's current priority is the exclusion of Natura species from SNH's 'priority marine features' list. Lobbying by the Taskforce has resulted in progress on the issue and SEL is currently awaiting the final versions of the Marine Nature Conservation Strategy and MPA selection guidelines.

SEL hosted the Joint Links seminar at the University of Chester in September, where discussions focused on the new Coalition Government, changing political landscapes, ongoing effects of recession, and EU level work.

Wales Environment Link (WEL)

The [*WEL Manifesto: Policy Priorities for Wales 2011 – 2015*](#) was launched in September and representatives from each Working Group have been meeting with Assembly Members and party officials to discuss development of the parties' manifestos in advance of the 2011 Assembly Election.

The Climate Change Working Group has been inputting, via WEL's Climate Change Commissioner, to the final stages of the WAG Climate Change Strategy, to be launched on 7 October. The Land Use and Biodiversity Working Groups met Forestry Commission Wales in August to discuss the ambitious woodland creation programme that they will be delivering for WAG. The Biodiversity Working Group responded to the Sustainability Committee's Biodiversity Inquiry in September, and will be providing oral evidence in quarter four.

[*Investing in Nature's Capital: WEL Biodiversity Priorities*](#) was produced by the Biodiversity Campaign Task & Finish Group in August and circulated to all AMs and key contacts. The paper outlines 10 priority actions which WEL members feel would help to halt and reverse the decline of biodiversity, under an overall message of "*Budget for biodiversity: invest in all our futures*".

The Marine Working Group has been developing a new Marine Campaign Strategy and Action Plan, and contributed to the Joint Links response to the Marine Policy Statement consultation. The Energy & Transport Working Group produced a [*Policy Update on Options for Tidal Power in the Severn Estuary*](#). The Access & Recreation, Heritage and Rural Development e-groups responded to the Rural Development Sub-Committee's Rural Tourism Inquiry in September, and will be providing oral evidence in quarter four. Members of the different Working Groups have jointly produced a [*WEL position on the development of the Natural Environment Framework*](#), and an e-group has been set up to tackle ongoing work relating to the new framework.