

E-bulletin April 2014

Welcome to Link's April 2014 e-bulletin. See below for this month's top stories and updates from each of our working groups. If you would like to subscribe to our e-bulletin or submit news items, please contact [Morwenna](#).



Blueprint for PR14 conference

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Marine Strategy Framework Directive

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National Pollinator Strategy

Link will be submitting a consultation response to the National Pollinators Strategy [consultation](#) which closes on 2 May. This is an important consultation as Defra is seeking views on a proposed national pollinator strategy for bees and other pollinators in England. The strategy sets out proposals to safeguard these important insects, given their role in pollinating many food crops and wild plants, in addition to their contribution to food production and the diversity of our environment.

Cost of INNS management and eradication

Link published a [paper](#) outlining the extent to which Link members contribute to the management and eradication of INNS in Great Britain. The briefing revealed that Link members are spending over £650,000 on 264 management and eradication projects every year.

Conservation and Wildlife All Party Parliamentary Group

The APPG will be hosting a meeting providing an update on the Law Commission review of Wildlife Law on 6 May 5.00 – 6.00pm. The meeting will hear from Nicholas Paines QC, Law Commissioner, with Richard Percival and Nicola Tilche from the Law Commission. Please RSVP to [Morwenna McKenzie](#).

New Policy and Campaigns Coordinator

Following Kate Hand's departure to the RSPB, we are pleased to announce that Raul Matamoros will join the Link team on Monday 12 May. Raul has eight years of campaigning and advocacy experience, having worked as Campaigns Officer for the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). Raul's email address is: raul@wcl.org.uk



GMOs

On 23 April, Link responded to the Science and Technology Select Committee's inquiry into *GM foods and application of the precautionary principle in Europe*. Once the inquiry has concluded, Link's response will be published on our website. Link will also be publishing an updated position statement on GMOs in May.

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Agriculture Working Group meeting

The AWG will be holding its working group meeting on Wed 7 May. Items for discussion include Agriculture Parliamentary profile, advice to farmers and the implementation of CAP in England.



Terrestrial Biodiversity Group

Link attended the TBG webinar on 23 April to discuss the regarding the Mosaic Approach, a way of looking at habitats and their management that focuses on the requirements of species. The presentation slides will be available in due course.



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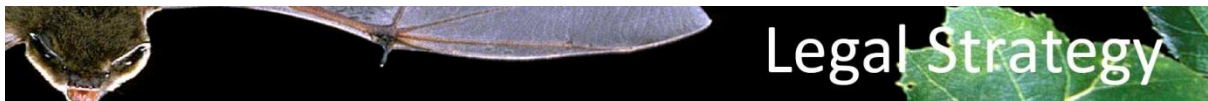


DCLG Select Committee inquiry: Operation of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The Department for Communities and Local Government Select Committee has launched an inquiry into the NPPF, calling for written evidence by Thursday 8 May. Link's Land Use Planning Working Group is disappointed, having recently written to the Committee's Chair, Clive Betts MP, that the scope of the inquiry does include the NPPF's natural environment policies. The Group will be writing to Clive Betts to express our concern at the narrow remit of the inquiry.

Land Use Planning Working Group meeting

The group met on 9 April to discuss the new NPPG and the DCLG Select Committee inquiry into the NPPF, as well as a fracking position statement. A very interesting presentation was given on research into ecological capacity in local authorities from the Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE).



Legal Strategy Group meeting

On 31 March, Link's Legal Strategy Group met to discuss a range of current issues including: Defra's Balance of Competences review; the Ministry of Justice's consultation on Information Rights; the draft UK 2013 Aarhus National Implementation Report; Further reforms to Judicial Review; the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill; the Lobbying Act; and Defra's Smarter Environmental Regulation Review.

Meeting with the Law Commission

Following the Legal Strategy Group meeting on 31 March, Link hosted a meeting for members with the Law Commission. Dr Keith Vincent and Nicola Tilche joined us to discuss specific aspects of the Commission's Wildlife Law Review and its report [Wildlife: Control of Invasive Non-native Species](#). This was Keith's last external meeting before his move to DECC and the group took the opportunity to thank Keith for his positive engagement with Link over the past couple of years. Nicola Tilche will be taking on Keith's role.



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Further Support for Link's Marine Charter

75 MPs have now signed [Link's Marine Charter](#). The full list of supporting MPs can be viewed on the [Marine Charter webpage](#) on Link's website, which also includes [quotes](#) from supporting parliamentarians.

Stakeholder Focus Group Meeting

Link attended a meeting of the Marine Management Organisation's Stakeholder Focus Group on 4 April. The meeting included a discussion about marine planning and licensing and an update from Defra regarding the marine protected area network.



Natural Values

Natural Capital Committee second report

The Government's Natural Capital Committee published its second report on 11 March: *The State of Natural Capital: Restoring our Natural Assets*. Link published a [press release](#) welcoming the report and its recommendations. Link's Director, Dr Elaine King, said, "This report highlights the vital importance of bringing our environment to the forefront of decision-making. We welcome the proposed 25-year plan, which will bring a long-term, cross-party approach to restoring and enhancing the natural assets on which we ultimately depend."

Government response to the Environmental Audit Committee report on biodiversity offsetting

The Environmental Audit Committee has published the [Government's response](#) to their report on biodiversity offsetting. The Government response confirms that no policy decisions will be made on offsetting until the Government has been able to assess the independent evaluation of the offsetting pilots (which finish in March 2014). Link welcomes this development, which is in line with our recommendation to take a step-wise approach to considering biodiversity offsetting.

The response says that 'offsetting would need to take place within the existing planning framework, including strict protection for important natural assets', and the Government 'strongly agrees' with the Committee's recommendation that any offsetting system should emphasise the continued primacy of the mitigation hierarchy. The response also notes that 'offsetting could be a useful tool for ensuring appropriate compensation is secured where development is already permissible.' Finally, the response notes that 'it would continue to be acceptable to refuse planning permission for a development on [the ground of impacts on high-quality green space] even if an offset was provided to compensate for unavoidable losses of biodiversity.'



Water

Abstraction reform consultation

The Blueprint has published a [briefing](#) encouraging people to respond to Defra's consultation on abstraction reform. The consultation aims to address the current significant levels of over-abstraction, which are causing significant ecological problems in over 1,000 water bodies. Blueprint has welcomed the options that the consultation sets out, but stresses that the reform will only be successful if it has firm eco-hydrological foundations and an acceptable method for transitioning existing abstraction rights into the new system.

The Blueprint for Water's own response to the abstraction reform consultation welcomes both the 'Water Shares' and 'Current System Plus' options, and notes that either would link abstraction to water availability, introduce smart abstraction limits and charges related to use and availability, provide greater protection for the environment at low flows and increase transparency. We believe the proposals will encourage flexibility and efficiency, and enable collaboration to maximise the value of water and increase resilience among water abstractors. The Blueprint note, however, that the 'Water Shares' option would be preferable, offering as it does a future where there is stewardship of a shared resource and where water is more highly valued.

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Water Bill

At Report Stage in the House of Lords, the Government responded to pressure from Parliamentarians and Blueprint members by moving an amendment that commits it to reporting in 2019 on progress in reforming the water abstraction regime, as well as the alignment of abstraction reform and upstream competition. The Blueprint coalition welcomed this amendment, which relates to the its long-standing concern about the need for a legislative timetable for abstraction reform.



Meeting with the Minister

On 29 April, Link's Whales Group met with George Eustice MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Farming, Food and Marine Environment, to discuss priorities for this year's IWC meeting and the recent ICJ judgement on Japan's whaling.



Letter to the Director of Public Prosecutions

On 11 March, Link wrote to Alison Saunders, Director of Public Prosecutions, highlighting that prosecutions by informed lawyers generally lead to proportionate and dissuasive sentencing for wildlife crimes. Although some offences are effectively prosecuted, we cited several recent convictions which had not received appropriate sentences. Link has asked for a meeting with Ms Saunders to explore how Link might assist with improving sentencing for wildlife crime.

Wildlife Trade Working Group meeting

Link's Wildlife Trade Working Group met on 20 March to discuss a range of issues including: UK wildlife crime sentencing; recording wildlife crime offences; engaging the UK public and preparations for the forthcoming Conservation NGO Liaison Group meeting with Defra.

Conservation NGO Liaison Group meeting

Link was represented at the Conservation NGO Liaison Group (formerly Joint Liaison Group) meeting at Defra on 27 March, hosted by Michael Sigsworth, Head of Defra's CITES Policy Unit. The meeting included a full debrief from the London Conference on Illegal Wildlife Trade and an update on UK preparations for forthcoming CITES meetings, including the Standing Committee 65 in July.



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