Link Biodiversity Task Force
March 2005

Climate Change Programme Review: Response from Wildlife and Countryside Link

Introductory note

This response addresses Section 12 of the consultation document – Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation. This in no way represents the limit of the work of individual members of Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) on climate change, which is wide-ranging. However, it builds on recent work of Link's Biodiversity Task Force, which has been engaging with the England Biodiversity Group specifically on the question of adaptation.

Organisation Wildlife and Countryside Link.

This response is supported by the following Link members:

Bat Conservation Trust
Buglife – the Invertebrate Conservation Trust
Butterfly Conservation
The Herpetological Conservation Trust
Marine Conservation Society
National Federation of Badger Groups
National Federation of Biological Recorders
Plantlife
Pond Conservation Trust
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
The Wildlife Trusts
Woodland Trust

Sector Environmental Voluntary Sector

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Section 12 – Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation

Q48, pg87 What further evidence of the impacts of climate change is needed to enable effective adaptation, in government, at regional and local levels, and in the private sector? Who should be responsible for producing this information?

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) believes that sufficient information exists from both observational studies (e.g. UK Phenology Network) and climatic modelling (e.g. MONARCH and MARCLIM) to give grounds for adaptation action to be taken now. This has been recognised through the commitment of the UK Biodiversity Partnership to take climate change into account in the current UKBAP review. While there is a degree of uncertainty about the precise impacts of climate change upon biodiversity, this should not prevent urgent development and implementation of adaptive strategies. Uncertainty will always be with us and lack of certainty should not be given as a reason for inaction.

Action is needed to make biodiversity more likely to be able to keep pace with environmental changes like geographical shifts in climate envelopes. We need to build the resilience of our biodiversity by an overall strategy of adaptive management, i.e.:

- Protecting and managing existing semi-natural habitat;
- Restoring and creating new habitat;
- Improving the management of the wider countryside to make it more wildlife-friendly and permeable to species movement;
- Allowing the recovery of the marine environment and increasing protection to ensure robust and diverse marine ecosystems.

There is of course a need to continue existing climatic research (including data gathering and analysis and modelling), to improve available information on likely temperature (and other) changes. In addition, there is a need to further improve research, survey and monitoring of biodiversity, and to feed the results into modelling programmes, in order to:

- Gain better information on the extent and condition of biodiversity habitats, the health of species populations and the stability of food webs;
- Understand better how different species, habitats and processes are likely to respond to changes. Key factors to take into account include: susceptibility to extreme weather events; impacts of changed water availability and temperatures; dispersal capability to respond to shifting distribution of bioclimatic zones/areas (climate envelopes); changes in trophic interactions resulting from phenological change and community re-organisation.

This will allow the development of conservation goals and actions for Biodiversity Action Plans that reflect our ambitions for habitats and species given a changed climate regime.

A real gap has been identified between the research community which is involved in building the evidence base on the likely impacts of climate change on biodiversity, and those involved in delivery of biodiversity action. There needs to be clear responsibility not only for producing research, but also for communicating results and iterative discussion between these groups. In England, the England Biodiversity Group (EBG) should take the lead through its newly formed Strategy Implementation

Group (SIG) on climate change. However, this is more than a country issue. We believe that the UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee, through its Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG) and Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (BRAG) needs to take a strong lead on this as a high priority. While the BRIG Climate Change Sub Group is a step forward, this needs to permeate the UK Biodiversity Partnership as a whole. Involvement of NERC, the scientific community, Statutory Nature Conservation Organisations and NGOs working in biodiversity delivery is essential. Defra should ensure information flow between groups within the UK Biodiversity Partnership and fora working specifically on adaptation to climate change such as the Marine Climate Change Impacts Partnership.

In 2004 Link presented a paper to the England Biodiversity Group containing a number of recommendations on action which that group should take with regard to adaptation to climate change. This paper - *Biodiversity in a changing climate* – is supplied with this response.

Q49, pg 87 With regard to the natural environment, how should we develop our approach to evidence gathering, strategic prioritisation and adaptation action?

We referred in our answer to Q48 to the need for action to start now to build up the resilience of the countryside and the marine environment and its associated biodiversity against the impacts of climate change. It is vital that there is a feedback loop between action on the ground, monitoring and research to allow management strategies to be adapted as new information becomes available. To help this iterative process, it will be necessary to develop a workable measure of habitat resilience and adopt it as an indicator for reporting progress.

Through the current review of the UKBAP it is important that the likely impacts of climate change are taken into account in determining what action should be taken for threatened species and habitats.

Landscape-scale action is needed. In England, the England Biodiversity Group should review existing land/sea management mechanisms to establish their role, function and value in delivering landscape scale action for biodiversity. Landscape scale action means action integrated across multiple sectors besides biodiversity conservation – including land and sea -use planning, agriculture, fisheries, flood defence, tourism and recreation, and so on. There is a key role here for the SIGs of the EBG in England.

Also in England, the role of the new Integrated Agency will be absolutely pivotal in taking forward landscape scale action and there are several promising references to this in the policy paper accompanying the NERC Bill's publication. The NERC Bill outlines powers for the new agency to carry out proposals and to take a much more experimental approach to conservation. These powers must be rapidly translated into the vision, values and business plan of the new organisation to avoid a hiatus of inaction during the Agency's early years and the period of confederation which precedes its establishment.

Similar actions are required across the UK and the UK Biodiversity Partnership provides the structure to identify and take forward the necessary measures, provided there is commitment across government in all four countries. There is a role for the UKBP Standing Committee in ensuring sharing of information and best practice, and co-ordination between country biodiversity groups.

Adaptation responses need to be developed and actioned at national scale across all UK countries with two broad themes to direct conservation actions:

- Increasing resilience of habitats and species against the impacts of climate change;
- Accommodating the inevitable changes in species distribution.

Q50, pg 87 How should responsibilities for adaptation be partitioned between the different tiers of government, the wider public and private sectors, and society at large?

Link does not feel that the word partition is a particularly helpful one, implying as it does, silo thinking and no cross-cutting work programmes. Cross-sectoral working of all relevant interests needs to drive and deliver adaptation. This should aim to integrate functions of landscapes, including nature conservation, flood control, farmland, recreation/tourism, and so on.

In England, clear commitment from all government departments to the development and implementation of adaptation strategies is vital if the vision set out in the England Biodiversity Strategy is to be fulfilled. For example, it is essential that the opportunity is taken in the revised Planning Policy Statement 9 (Biodiversity and Geological Conservation) to encourage local authorities to identify and safeguard space for habitat creation in local plans.

The wider public and private sectors should be engaged in adaptation and be involved with local delivery of national strategies. The economic and social costs of adaptation measures need to be understood against the costs of failing to take action, with earlier action resulting in lower longer term costs.

Q51, pg 87 Some stakeholders have suggested that a Government enforcement mechanism is needed if we are to make any real advances in adaptation action. The Government's present thinking is that effective and appropriate adaptation must be thoroughly "stakeholder-led", and is therefore not best served by enforcement. In what ways might legislation and regulation serve either as barriers to, or incentives for, progress in adaptation action?

Link agrees that it is essential to engage public opinion and heighten awareness of the likely effects of climate change, and stakeholder participation will be very important in developing adaptation strategies. However, we are already locked into potentially dangerous climate change and must not delay taking action to develop resilient systems which will both sustain biodiversity and harness socio-economic opportunities. We do not believe that, at present, public awareness is sufficiently developed to rely heavily on stakeholder leadership of adaptation action. Leadership from Government is therefore essential, and we believe that regulation and enforcement have a part to play, through use of existing tools including Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment.

We need to improve the framework for building resilience to the impacts of climate change into the countryside and the marine environment –through, for example, development of agri-environment schemes, adapting fishing practices, delivery of biodiversity through the land-use planning system, the development of a marine spatial planning system and full implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

Adaptation to climate change should be made integral to the allocation of public money in these, and indeed all activities.

Incorporating in the NERC Bill a duty for all public bodies to further the conservation of biodiversity and in particular the conservation of UKBAP priority species and habitats will serve as an appropriate and much needed incentive to progress adaptation action. Commitment to delivering the Government's PSA target for achieving good condition for SSSIs in England will also help to progress adaptation action.