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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 Countryside



Quarterly Report April - June 2003

Letter from the Chair

The reshuffle of ministers received a mixed response from Link. There was disappointment that Michael Meacher, the outspoken Minister for the Environment had left the Government, but this resulted in a welcome promotion for Elliot Morley who has done some excellent work on bycatch and whaling issues. The new minister within Defra is Ben Bradshaw, who was very lucky to announce, almost on his first day, the good results from the IWC in Berlin.

This is the last year of the current workplan, so the Secretariat will be asking for your input for the work plan for the next 3 years 2004-2007. Back in 2000 we conducted a poll to decide upon Link's working groups and task forces. Every year since then we have reviewed the operation of the groups and task forces and made some adjustments to the work programme, for instance this year saw the creation of the Biodiversity Task Force. This year we will again be reviewing the current workplan, but we will also be asking for your suggestions on areas of work for Link for the next 3 years and you will have a chance to indicate your priorities. We will be inviting all members to a meeting in November to discuss the results of the poll and policy topics for Link's work for the next three years. I hope you will find the time to respond to the questionnaires, express your views in the poll and come to the meeting; Link needs your input if it is to meet your needs.

I would like to thank all the members who responded to our questions about funding for Link. There was total support for maintaining the current level of work, and for members providing the majority of funding so that Link keeps its focus on meeting the members' needs. However many of you stated that as the Government benefits from Link by providing a quick, easy and effective way to reach all the Link members, so it should be asked to help fund Link. There was general support too for Link becoming a charity, although there were some reservations, so we will be looking at this in more detail in the next three months and will report to the AGM.

Best wishes,

Tony Burton

Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development WG

The Mid Term Review of the CAP dominated the second quarter of 2003. Link wrote to Margaret Beckett and then met with Lord Whitty, just before the Agriculture Minister's Council meeting, to re-iterate our support for the reform of the CAP. There were concerns that objections from some EU members states might derail the whole MTR, however, despite tortuous negotiations continuing late into the small hours, the result was better than many in the UK had feared. Link members were kept up-to-date with frequent communications from Defra during the MTR; this was very useful and much appreciated by the members. The review of Agri-Environment Schemes has continued. Link members have made extensive contributions to the consultations on the Entry Level scheme and the Higher Tier Scheme.

The Entry Level Scheme pilot was launched. Link members have been helping by supporting activities in the pilot areas, supplying information to farmers and by giving some feedback on how the information was being received by farmers. Uptake within the pilot area was good and will be further reviewed at a Steering group meeting in September.

A workshop on the Higher Tier scheme was well attended by Link members. Link members will be participating on all the workstreams Historic and Landscape, Resource Protection, Woodlands, Species, Arable and margins, Access, Grasslands and Uplands. Defra have been notified of all the individual's contact details and members should receive information about the workshops in mid July.

Link responded to the Hedgerow regulations consultation. We had concerns about the reference to hedgerows being defined using the Oxford English Dictionary rather than a more encompassing definition that

includes traditional field boundary features. Nine members with a wide range of interests supported the response.

Defra's Food Industry Sustainability Strategy (FISS) group met in April and again in June. Link has consistently insisted on keeping environmental concerns within the strategy despite lobbying from some within the food industry that transport and water use impacts were not significant.

Link wrote to Alan Michael outlining our chief concerns regarding the Environmental Liability Directive. Link is concerned that instead of upholding the "polluter pays principle" the Directive would instead create significant exemptions, for example the Directive would create a virtual exemption for biotechnology companies from liability for environmental damage caused by GM crops, as companies operating within their permits, or in accordance with the law, or using state of the art technology would be exempt from liability. We also stated that we thought that the Directive must include a provision requiring high-risk operations to be covered by some form of mandatory financial security, 12 members supported the Link letter to which he responded in late June.

Meetings

1st April and 16th June AES Steering group meeting

4th April 2003 Link working group meeting 7 attended, 7 organisations

28th April Lord Whitty Contact group meeting

6th May and 30th June Food Industry Sustainability Strategy steering group meeting

22nd May Higher Tier Scheme Workshop

26th and 27th May European Agricultural convention – Brussels

28th May Meeting with Defra on Impacts of CAP reform

4th June CAP MTR stakeholder meeting with Defra

5th June Precaution in Practice - the GM Public Debate and the GM Science Review, Green Alliance event

9th June Link met with Lord Whitty

Activity Forecast

Higher Tier Scheme pre-consultation meetings

Joint Links meeting with the Land Use Planning Group

Response to DEFRA consultation on CAP reform

Land Use Planning WG

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill

On the 5th June the third reading of the bill was delayed. Lord Rooker announced that the bill would be amended before resubmission to the House of Commons. The amended bill would end Crown immunity to planning control. The Government will also be considering whether to bring forward some of the further provisions set out in the daughter document to the 18 July statement covering compulsory purchase, which would speed up and simplify the process. Also subject to the response to the recent consultation (Sustainable Communities: An Urban Development Corporation for Thurrock: A Consultation Paper) the government may also use the bill to bring forward the legislative changes proposed.

On 11th June 9 members of the Link Land Use Planning group met with Tony McNulty parliamentary under-secretary at ODPM. The planning and compulsory purchase bill, the

Working Groups

statutory purpose, PPGs (PPSs) and the Egan review were all discussed. Link raised concerns about the loss of planning and related expertise from the county councils and the problems with public involvement particularly at regional level planning. On the statutory purpose McNulty stated he could see no reason not to include the public interest as a core purpose for planning.

Link was encouraged to submit comments about PPGs and PPSs before the statutory consultations, as these comments would be useful to ODPM. McNulty indicated that all three parts of the new PPSs would have equal weight as a material consideration. McNulty indicated that he would welcome ideas on how to engage the public and local communities in planning. Finally McNulty commented that the meeting had been very useful and that he would like to have regular quarterly meetings. Within a few days Tony McNulty was moved to the Department of Transport to be replaced by Yvette Cooper.

Meetings

3rd May 2003 Land Use Planning meeting, 7 attended, 6 organisations

11th June 2003 Link meeting with Tony McNulty, 9 attended, 9 organisations

Activity Forecast

3rd July 2003 Land Use Planning meeting

August/September Mini-conference to review the changes to the planning system

PPS1 - Link pre-consultation statement

Clause 38 - Link amendment

PPS 7 - Link response to consultation draft

PPS 9 - Link response to consultation draft

3rd or 4th September 2003 Land Use Planning meeting

Minerals

Having met with the Defra policy team responsible for the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund in the first quarter, the minerals group met with their colleagues in the Environmental Economics division, responsible for carrying out the mid-term evaluation of the Fund, late in June. The group is pushing for Defra to take a more pro-active role in promoting and administering the Fund, among other things to encourage more proposals for overarching projects which may not fit in with the criteria of the individual distributing bodies.

The group also met with a Senior Policy Advisor from HM Customs and Excise to discuss the Aggregates Levy itself, and any changes it appeared to be eliciting in patterns of aggregate use. There was very little information to share on this particular point so soon into the implementation of the Levy, but the meeting provided a useful opportunity to discuss minerals planning guidance more generally.

The revised aggregates provision guidelines were published in June, and group members issued a press release criticising their application of the 'predict and provide' approach. The group has pressed ODPM to treat these guidelines as temporary, in lieu of reforms to minerals planning policy - which of course remain to be seen. MPS1 is expected imminently (though I think I may have said that last quarter).

Meetings:

7th April - Meeting with HMCE

30th June - Meeting with Defra's Environmental Economics Division on the mid-term evaluation of the ALSF

Activity Forecast

7th July - Environment Council Workshop on Developing Good Practice Guidelines for Community Engagement in the Aggregates Sector

23rd September - Free Seminar by Centre for Sustainability - Effective Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for Minerals Local Plans

13th October - meeting with ODPM on MPS1

Wildlife and Trade WG

The group submitted its response to the COTES consultation in April. In spite of a brief wobble (rectified, we understand, by some very effective lobbying by WWF's online supporters) the Government stuck to its word and tabled an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill to enable certain offences to carry a minimum sentence of 5 years. Fuller details on the outcomes of the COTES review are still awaited.

Following the letter to Mr Morley on grizzly bear trophies from British Colombia, the Minister offered to circulate some information on our behalf ahead of the May meeting of the European Scientific Review Group. Such information was supplied in the form of a report by British Colombian scientists. Although the meeting did not agree to implement a ban, it did threaten a ban on failure to implement the advice of the Panel - which, if implemented, will make a difference on the ground for the grizzlies.

The group plans to team up with other European NGOs to express dissatisfaction with decision making by the EU in the lead up to international meetings such as CITES. The lack of transparency and accountability in these meetings is a common concern amongst NGOs.

Working Groups and Task Forces

Many members attended the CITES Standing Committee meeting in April, and are currently preparing for the Animals Committee meeting in August.

Meetings:

15th May - Wildlife and Trade working group

23rd June - Wildlife and Trade working group

Activity Forecast

6th August - pre - Animals Committee meeting with Defra and JNCC

18th - 22nd August - Animals Committee, Geneva

1st September - meeting with UK CITES Authorities, Defra, Bristol

7th October - Wildlife and Trade working group

Whale Group

June saw the 55th annual meeting of the International Whaling Committee, and Link's briefing was duly supplied to the UK team. In contrast to last year's meeting IWC55 had some exciting outcomes.

The so-called Berlin Initiative, a proposal to create a Conservation committee within the IWC and greatly widen its conservation remit, was passed on the first day of the plenary session, by a majority of 25 to 20, to the fury of the whalers and the delight of the NGO community. Immediately there were hints that the whaling nations may abandon the IWC altogether, but a recent statement by the Japanese Prime Minister suggests that Japan at least will stick with it.

Other important outcomes included the passing of resolutions calling on Japan not to continue its scientific whaling programme, and on Iceland not to start such a program. Unfortunately, proposals for sanctuaries in the South Pacific and South Atlantic failed to secure the necessary ¾ majority.

Meetings:

29th April - Whale Group meeting

6th May - Whaling Forum

26th May - 6th June - IWC Scientific Committee, Berlin

16th - 21st June - IWC 55th Annual meeting, Berlin

Bycatch Sub - Group

The Bycatch sub-group responded to the long-awaited UK Small Cetacean Bycatch Response Strategy in June. The strategy was welcomed, but concerns were expressed regarding a number of points, including the adequacy of bycatch reduction targets and the timescales set to achieve them. The group was also disappointed that its persistent calls for a framework for the ongoing monitoring and adjustment needed to address bycatch were ignored, with the strategy instead presenting a one-off suite of measures.

Members of the Bycatch group were among observers at the meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee in April, where they called for the Jastarnia Plan for the conservation of Harbour porpoises in the Baltic to be formally adopted at August's Meeting of Parties, and contributed to the development of a proposed Bycatch Resolution also to be considered by the MOP.

Meetings

9th - 11th April - ASCOBANS Advisory Committee

1st May - Bycatch sub-group

Activity Forecast

10th July - Cetaceans and turtles SAP steering group meeting

Response to the consultation on the EC's proposal for a Bycatch Regulation

Marine Nature Conservation Task Force

The marine task force has kept up regular meetings and a high level of motivation to further the campaign for comprehensive legislation. We continue to work on the basis that a legislative opportunity may be announced in the 2004 Queen's Speech, and plan to begin to 'go public' this autumn. The outcomes of other initiatives which may help to guide certain aspects of this area of work are awaited - e.g. Inter-departmental Regulatory Review of Developments in Coastal and Marine Waters and the consultation on implementation of Natura2000 offshore.

A number of members have been engaging with the Offshore Wind SEA (including through Link representation on the Steering Group), produced by consultants on behalf of the DTI. The final report was released in June. NGOs were constantly frustrated by the process - notably the very short time allowed for consultation on drafts of the SEA - and had some misgivings about the product. It has been suggested that the next SEA

Task Forces

for offshore wind will be combined with that for oil and gas.

The MTF met with John Roberts and Robert Canning (of Defra's Marine and Waterways Division) late in May, ahead of the week-long Oskar meeting in June which included a joint Ministerial meeting with HELCOM. A number of members attended the meeting in Bremen, and had the opportunity of a brief meeting with Elliot Morley. Highlights from the OSPAR meeting included: a Recommendation for a coherent network of marine protected areas throughout the OSPAR area (including the high seas) to be proposed by 2006 and finalised by 2010; the adoption of lists of species and habitats which require action for protection, including some commercial species; the adoption of guidance on a common approach for dealing with the construction and operation of offshore wind farms.

Members continue to work with the RMNC and its sub-groups as the dates for final reporting draw near. Both the legislative sub-group and the Irish Sea Pilot project are due to report before Christmas, with the full report of the RMNC expected early next year.

Activity Forecast

3rd July - Marine Task Force

28th July - Marine Task Force

29th September - Marine Task Force

1st October - TWT-led Breakfast at Labour Party Conference

1st October - CoastNET conference - Spatial Planning in the Marine Environment

Meetings:

3rd April - Marine Task Force meeting

28th April - Marine Task Force (Campaign planning)

29th May - Marine Task Force including meeting with Defra

3rd June - CoastNET conference on Conserving Biodiversity in the Marine Environment

23rd - 27th June - OSPAR

Water Task Force

Water Framework Directive

The third consultation on the water framework directive is due to be published in July. This will include the regulations which will later be laid before the House. Before this members were asked to review the 2nd consultation on the WFD and identify key issues on which they can lead.

Water Bill

The Water group produced a set of briefings on the bill which were widely circulated to peers. Both Peers and MPs were invited to briefings on the bill by Link members through the All party parliamentary group on Wildlife and Conservation. The Bill was debated at length in the House of Lords; many amendments were tabled, including several which sought to question the government's position on the WFD. Link successfully lobbied for an amendment to create a new duty for public bodies to have responsibility for water conservation. The Bill will enter the House of Commons after the summer recess.

Periodic review 04

For the survey this summer 4000 people will be interviewed about water

company proposals to 2010 which will include willingness to pay for environmental improvements, The results in November will to help DEFRA make decisions on the environmental schemes which will be approved.

Ribble Valley pilot scheme

The pilot scheme was launched, members agreed to hold a meeting within the pilot scheme area to which Link members and their local representatives would be invited so discussed at length.

Diffuse pollution

It was agreed that Link should produce a statement on diffuse pollution for publication in August. Several draft statements were circulated and discussed at length.

Meetings

3rd April Link Water Task force meeting 3 attended, 3 organisations

3rd June Link Water Task force meeting 13 attended, 7 organisations

Activity Forecast

July - Link meeting in the Ribble Valley Pilot

15th August - SUDS consultation closes - Link statement submitted

August - Finalise Link statement on diffuse pollution

W/c 4th August Link Water Task Force meeting, London

Link response to third consultation on WFD

Task Forces

Biodiversity Task Force

The new Biodiversity Task Force continues to gather momentum. The group agreed key messages for members to take to the meeting of the UK Biodiversity Partnership in Battleby, and went on to develop its first paper - Reflections on the UK Biodiversity Partnership. It was something of a surprise when this paper, signed up to by 13 Member organisations, was not accepted by Biodiversity News (which was not considered by Defra to be an appropriate forum to initiate debate). Defra has offered to include the paper on the agenda for the next Standing Committee meeting, though, which at least will ensure it is discussed, and we remain determined to distribute the paper more widely to the Biodiversity network.

The group is compiling a useful list of organisations and individuals involved in the various working groups which contribute to the UK Biodiversity Partnership, and has nominated representatives for new groups including the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG) and the Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (BRAG). The BTF is planning a workshop in August where we plan to brainstorm a manifesto for our work towards the 2005 BAP review. We hope this will be attended by representatives from the sister Links, as well as from the country agencies.

Meetings:

2nd May - Biodiversity Task Force

9th May - England Biodiversity Group meeting

Activity Forecast

28th July - first BRIG meeting

8th August - Biodiversity Workshop

September - UK Biodiversity Standing Committee meeting

18th-19th September - BRAG meeting

October - BRIG meeting

Sister Links

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL received a positive indication from EHS about future funding, but details are likely to emerge only in August. Once these are finalised, NIEL will proceed to finish and implement its Strategic Planning exercise for the coming years, and further membership drive. There has been an exciting development for NIEL's Environmental Education Forum, as a grant by the EHS will allow employment of a dedicated part time Forum Officer.

NIEL's Rural Community Project organised a "Forging Links" conference in May, aimed at promoting links between rural communities and the environmental sector. It was well received, with 70 people attending, and overall positive feedback. Several follow-up meetings have already resulted from contacts made on the day, and NIEL will develop the ideas and lessons of the conference further.

Moree Community Association has been making impressive progress with their initiative to tackle fly-tipping on Crossdermot Bog. They are now seeking input from NIEL members on how to improve the bog further as an environmental and public asset by planting native flowers, providing raised walkways, etc. NIEL's "Cultivating Creativity" project is also progressing, with the selection of the five community groups nearly finished and contacts to professional artists established. The project will run from Oct 2003 to Apr 2004.

Wales Environment Link (WEL)

WEL like many other NGOs in Wales is just completing a process of adjustment to Ministerial, portfolio and civil service changes following the National Assembly elections on May 1st. The Assembly has been slow to resume normal business following the election but WEL and its members are currently preparing an

'Environmental Work Programme', which we intend to launch during the Autumn term. These will take the form of briefing sheets on a wide range of policy areas relevant to our membership. It is envisaged they will serve the dual purpose of uniting WEL members on common policy aspirations and provide handy advocacy tools for individual members when dealing with the Assembly.

In recent months WEL has hosted the bi-annual Joint Links Meeting Cycle, elected a new Chairperson and taken on a new Administration Officer. Over the summer WEL has participated in our annual stand at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show which featured a visit and informal meet and discussion between Carwyn Jones, Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside and the WEL Members present. Before Christmas WEL will be seeking to meet the Minister formally, both through the Voluntary Sector Ministerial Meeting Cycle and alone as Wales Environment Link. Implementation of the CAP reforms and the review of the National Assembly's Sustainable Development Scheme are likely to be high on the agenda.

Scottish Environment Link (SEL)

The "everyone" campaign, coordinated by SEL, with a lot of input from SEL members, was launched in February 2003 in the run up to the elections, and is widely acknowledged to have had a greening influence on Parliament (see www.everyonecan.org).

Following the elections on 1st May, SEL Vice-Chair Lloyd Austin and heads of SEL member organisations met with Ross Finnie, Minister for Environment and Rural Development, Allan Wilson, his deputy, and other officials from the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) in June. The meeting was very positive and it was

Sister Links

agreed that working relationships would improve via more regular strategic level meetings. Furthermore, three events have so far been held for SEL members to meet the new MSPs and researchers. These have been with Labour, the Lib Dems and the Greens, while meetings with the other party groups are planned for the autumn term. The Parliamentary Forum members plan two Parliamentary Training Days for SEL bodies for the autumn.

SEL as an organisation has transferred from unincorporated association to company limited by guarantee as of 1 August 2003. SEL is following legal advice that this is now recommended as best practice, particularly for organisations which employ staff and enter into contracts with third parties. SEL will remain a charity with the same Scottish Charity number as before.

News from the Link Secretariat

Management Committee Meeting

The Management Committee meeting for the second quarter of 2003 took place on 2 July. Issues discussed included subscriptions and other sources of funding, quarterly accounts, development of the new website, the possibility of adopting charitable status for Link, and the planning process and review of work areas for 2004-2007 (see Letter from the Chair, p.1).

Other Link News

There has been good progress with the design of the new website, large parts of which have already been created and staff training carried out. We will aim to go live with the new website during the next three months.

Concerning Link staff, there have been several developments in the post of Office and Information Coordinator, as many of you will know. Jen Bolton, who was Link's OIC, has decided to extend her maternity leave and not to take up the job again. We thank her for all her contributions to Link and wish her and her family all the best! Anna Rackett, who was covering the post during Jen's absence, left at the end of June to take up a job nearer to home as

marketing manager. However, she says she is already missing Link and will look for a way back into the NGO sector soon! We wish her the best of luck in her further career. Björn Beckmann, a Link volunteer, was "in the right place at the right time" and has taken over from Anna on a temporary basis until the new permanent Information and Office Coordinator is in place. Recruitment has recently been completed, and we are looking forward to Helen Meech starting as the new IOC on 8th of September!



Link Staff ??

Catherine Hoy returned to America after volunteering for Link and left us this card. She assures us that nothing was implied by it, however!

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One-off Initiatives

**Access to the Countryside
Future of Commonland in England
and Wales**

Brownfield Sites
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