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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...

Dear Members,

Enclosed is the final quarterly update of the year from Link covering the last three months of 2006.

As ever, 2006 has proved to be an eventful year for Link, with many new challenges thrown our way, not least Link's involvement in the potential funding of our collective Marine Bill Campaign work, which continues to challenge Link and its members in new ways. Discussions are ongoing with the potential funders as to the best way forward although as yet no long term funds have been secured.

This quarter has seen the launch of a number of long awaited documents: the England Biodiversity Strategy progress report; the Defra consultation on proposals for the managed coexistence of GM, conventional and organic crops; and the publication of Minerals Planning Statement 1 (MPS1) and associated Planning Guidance by the DCLG.

In addition, the publication in December of the Barker Review of Land Use Planning and the Eddington Transport Study are likely to significantly influence the work and focus of Link's Land Use Planning Working Group over the next year.

Finally, our AGM this year, at which Link's work programme for 2007 was agreed, was enlivened by a presentation by Natural England which provoked some good debate from the floor and from our Vice President, Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer.

Best wishes,



Dr. Hilary Allison

Working Groups



Acting Chair: Nigel Bourn, Butterfly Conservation
Acting Vice Chair: John Everitt, The Wildlife Trusts
Secretary: Annie Smith

Biodiversity

The Biodiversity Task Force met in early October to discuss the progress of the BAP review and advocacy of the 2010 target. Representatives of the group also held a constructive meeting with the Biodiversity Minister, Barry Gardiner MP, during the course of which the minister gave assurance of his personal commitment to BAP targets. Link representatives also attended meetings of the new Priorities Review Group and the UK Biodiversity Standing Committee.

This quarter saw the launch of the England Biodiversity Strategy progress report at which Graham Wynne (RSPB) gave a presentation at the event on behalf of Link, alongside presentations from Defra, DfES and Natural England.

The BAP Review subgroup met in mid November to discuss continued input to the priorities review and delivery mechanisms, and a number of Link members attended a Dialogue Session on the GB Non-Native Species Strategy in October. Link's representative on the Strategy Working Group (Paul Walton of RSPB) attended a steering group meeting to discuss the final draft of the strategy and Link was also represented at a meeting of the NERC Guidance Steering Group.

At the AGM, it was agreed that the Biodiversity Task Force is to be renamed a Working Group to reflect the ongoing nature of the work of this important group. Martin Harper stepped down as Chair and has been temporarily replaced by Nigel Bourn (Butterfly Conservation) as Acting Chair. The role of Acting Vice Chair will be temporarily filled by John Everitt (The Wildlife Trusts). The Biodiversity Working Group (BWG) met in early December, to discuss how best to contribute to a forthcoming workshop to be hosted by Barry Gardiner MP.



Chair: Ian Woodhurst, CPRE
Vice Chair: Nick Collinson, Woodland Trust
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Farming and Rural Development

The Farming and Rural Development (FRD) Group's Bioenergy project steering group met Land Use Consultants (LUC) twice this quarter to discuss progress on the six month investigation into the environmental implications of increased bioenergy production and use in the UK. LUC's draft report, containing results of the literature review and consultation phase, has now been circulated for comment.

In October, the FRD Group submitted a response to Defra's consultation on proposals for the managed coexistence of GM, conventional and organic crops, a copy of which can be downloaded from www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2006/Link_response_GM_Coexistence_20Oct06.pdf. Also this quarter, Link attended a Defra Cross Compliance Working and Stakeholder Group meeting, and the FRD Group met to discuss developments on the delayed start of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), Environmental Stewardship, and recent meetings on cross-compliance and the ACE Observatory. Link also attended a meeting in November, held by Barry Gardiner MP, to discuss the delay on the RDPE.

As agreed at this year's AGM, Ian Woodhurst (CPRE) and Nick Collinson (Woodland Trust) will continue as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the FRD Group.

Bovine TB and Badgers

In early October a major new report was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the United States' premier scientific journal, which revealed that cattle spread bovine TB in badgers. For further information see- 'Culling and cattle controls influence tuberculosis risk for badgers' by Woodroffe *et al* at www.pnas.org/cgi/reprint/0606251103v1

Working Groups



Woodland

Chair: Mike Wood, RSPB
Vice Chair: James Cooper, Woodland Trust
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Link's Woodland group met in October to discuss next steps following the submission of our response to the England Forestry Strategy consultation. The England Forestry Forum (EFF) met in November to discuss the revised draft of the England Forestry Strategy, and Link has set up a series of meetings with the Forestry Commission, Defra and Natural England for early 2007.

At the AGM, the membership voted unanimously for the re-election of Mike Wood (RSPB) as Chair and James Cooper (Woodland Trust) as Vice Chair to serve again for 2007.



Land Use Planning

Chair: Fiona Mahon, The Wildlife Trusts
Acting Co-Chair: Ed Pomfret, Woodland Trust
Secretary: Annie Smith

November saw the long-awaited publication of Minerals Planning Statement 1 (MPS1) and associated Planning Guidance. DCLG wrote to thank Link for contributing to the development of these documents and to give assurance that our concerns had been addressed in the final versions.

Representatives of the Land Use Planning (LUP) Working Group met DCLG in November to discuss, among other things, further reforms to the planning system outlined in the Queen's Speech. Reports by Kate Barker and Sir Rod Eddington, which are expected to be highly influential in shaping the reforms, were released in early December. The Government's proposals, probably in the form of a white paper, are expected next spring. Other issues discussed at the meeting included the anticipated PPS on climate change, the recently published MPS1, and the Code for Sustainable Homes. The LUP Group also held a meeting to consider these matters, and subsequently issued a Press Release - available from www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2006/Link_PR_Barker_II_Report_29Nov06.pdf - outlining its hopes for the Barker report.

At this year's AGM, Ruth Chambers (CNP) and Ed Pomfret (Woodland Trust) stood down as Acting Chairs to this group. The membership elected Fiona Mahon (The Wildlife Trusts) to serve as Chair and Simon Marsh (RSPB) as Vice Chair for 2007.



Water

Chair: Tom Le Quesne, WWF
Vice Chair: Phil Burston, RSPB
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

This quarter the River Basin Planning District Liaison Panels have been busy submitting their respective district's criteria for assessing Significant Water Management Issues. These criteria were discussed and decided upon at a national workshop held in early November, which was attended by a number of NGO representatives.

At the AGM in early December, it was agreed that the Water Task Force is to be renamed a Working Group to reflect the ongoing focus on influencing the implementation of the Water Framework Directive in England. At the AGM, Tom Le Quesne (WWF) was elected Chair of the Water Working Group, replacing Sarah Oppenheimer of the RSPB, who stepped down to go on maternity leave, and Phil Burston (RSPB) was elected Vice Chair.

The newly badged Water Working Group met shortly before Christmas to discuss the group's workplan for the next year and opportunities for joint working with the newly launched Blueprint for Water coalition of environmental, fishery and angling NGOs.

Working Groups



Chair: Rob Atkinson, RSPCA
Vice Chair: Cathy Williamson, Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Wildlife and Trade

The group met in October to discuss issues surrounding the 14th Conference of the Parties (CoP14), including NGO representation on the UK delegation, the outcome of the recent Animals Committee meeting, and possible proposals for CoP14, to be held in June 2007 in the Netherlands. The group has also written to Barry Gardiner MP to request a meeting in the New Year to discuss specific CITES issues in the run up to the Conference. A joint Link/Sustainable Users Network (SUN) meeting was held in late September and a second Link/SUN meeting, which focused on feedback from recent EU meetings, was held in late November.

At the AGM, the membership voted to re-elect Rob Atkinson (RSPCA) as Chair and Cathy Williamson (WDCS) as Vice Chair.



Chair: Jenny Lonsdale, Environmental Investigation Agency
Vice Chair: Claire Bass, WSPA
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Whales

Whaling

Group representatives met Ben Bradshaw MP in November to discuss issues surrounding the next International Whaling Committee (IWC) meeting. The Whale group met later that month and agreed that Link should write to both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary to reiterate its calls for strong diplomatic action. Link representatives will be meeting with the Danish Ambassador early in the New Year to discuss his country's decision to vote against the EU and with pro-whaling nations at 58th IWC meeting last year.

Link has also written to UK seafood retailers, encouraging them not to source their products from countries with whaling programmes. Replies have been received from Tesco, Co-op, Somerfield, Waitrose, Marks & Spencer, and Sainsbury's.

John Frizell (Greenpeace International) stepped down as Chair of this group, as have both the Vice Chairs - Leah Garces (WSPA) and Virag Kaufer (WSPA). At the AGM, the membership elected Jenny Lonsdale (Environmental Investigation Agency) as Chair and Claire Bass (WSPA) as Vice Chair.

Sakhalin II

Last quarter, Russia removed Sakhalin II's environmental permit due to continuing violations, and in October the Natural Resources Minister, Yuri Trutnev, claimed that the project had broken environmental laws on a number of counts. Investigations are ongoing and there are reports that the Russian government is considering prosecuting Sakhalin Energy.

Sonar 2087

At the recent Whale group meeting in November, it was agreed that Link should again write to the Secretaries of State of both the Ministry of Defence and Defra, outlining our continued concerns regarding the potential impacts of the powerful low frequency military sonar system - Sonar 2087 - on cetaceans and other marine wildlife, and about the efficacy of the mitigation measures employed. Trials of Sonar 2087 have been ongoing in the North West Approaches of the UK.



Task Forces



Campaign Chair: Ben Stafford, RSPB
Policy Chair: Joan Edwards, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair (Campaign & Media): Vacant
Vice Chair (Policy): Jan Brown (WWF)
Secretary: Annie Smith

Marine

The quarter began with the Marine Task Force (MTF) submitting its response to the consultation on Several and Regulating Orders, which is available for download from www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2006/Link_response_SROs_consultation_08Sep06.pdf. The MTF also wrote to Ben Bradshaw regarding modernisation of Sea Fisheries Committees (SFCs), welcoming Defra's support for an increased environmental remit for SFCs but expressing concern that this is unachievable without more resources from Government. In October, representatives of MTF met with Dave Bench, Head of Defra's Marine Legislation Division, to discuss responses to the Marine Bill consultation, ensuing processes, and timetables regarding further development of the Bill. MTF members also attended a Marine Biodiversity Stakeholders meeting to discuss nature conservation elements of the Marine Bill following public consultation.

Also this quarter, fifteen Link member Chief Executives and Directors signed Link letters to the Prime Minister and the Environment Secretary calling for renewed commitment to announce a draft Marine Bill in the Queen's Speech. Disappointingly no such announcement was made. However, in November Defra declared its intention to publish a White Paper in March 2007. The MTF subsequently met later in the month to consider the next steps for its policy and campaign work on the Marine Bill, and representatives of the group held constructive meetings with Natural England and Defra's Marine Environment Division. MTF members also met with Environment Agency representatives in December.

The MTF continues to discuss the Charitable Trusts' funding of Link's work on the Marine Bill. The group has worked with the Joint Links to develop a detailed campaign strategy (with associated costs attached) and all proposed projects have been collated by Michael Singh and submitted to the Charitable Trusts for consideration. Alexia and Michael Singh recently met with the Trusts and are now discussing next steps.

At the AGM, the membership re-elected Joan Edwards (The Wildlife Trusts) as Policy Chair of the MTF and Ben Stafford (RSPB) as Campaigns Chair. Melissa Moore (Marine Conservation Society) stepped down as Policy Vice Chair, the membership electing Jan Brown (WWF) as her replacement. The position of Campaigns and Media Vice Chair is currently vacant as Anthony Field (WWF) stepped down and nominations have yet to be received.



Chair: Ali Ross, Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society
Vice Chair: Lissa Goodwin, Marine Connection
Secretary: Annie Smith

Bycatch

The Bycatch group met in October to discuss ASCOBANS (Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans in the Baltic and North Seas), progress with the implementation of the EU Bycatch Regulation, monitoring and mitigation of bycatch by pelagic fisheries, and the progress of Voluntary Codes of Practice to address bycatch in Cornwall. Later in the month, Link members attended the meeting of the Fisheries and Cetaceans Stakeholder Group, where discussions included implementation of the Bycatch Regulation, further research into pinger deployment, and the offshore marine conservation regulations (currently under development).

Link members also met with Defra's Marine Biodiversity Policy Team in November to discuss concerns about the future of ASCOBANS, after a Meeting of the Parties (MoP) earlier this year failed to secure agreement on the budget. At this meeting Defra assured Link that the UK remains committed to the agreement and was confident that a sensible way forward would be agreed at the resumed MoP in December.

At the AGM, the membership re-elected Ali Ross (WDCS) as Chair and Lissa Goodwin (Marine Connection) as Vice Chair of the Bycatch subgroup.

Overarching



Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Natural England

Natural England came into being at the beginning of this quarter, with the official launch taking place on 11th October. Upon its launch, nineteen Chief Executives of Link member organisations signed a Link letter to The Times, welcoming the new organisation and urging adequate funding in order "*to better protect and restore our countryside, urban green spaces and seas for the benefit of both people and wildlife*".

A copy of the letter can be found at

www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2006/NE_Vesting_day_Times_letter_30Sep06.pdf

Sister Links



Scottish Environment LINK (LINK)

Scottish LINK's Annual Members' Congress was held at Birnam on 24th- 25th November. The theme was *Scotland, the best small country in the world?* and the specially commissioned report by journalist Ed Douglas, available at www.scotlink.org, sparked a good debate. Paul McAleavey of the European Environment Agency gave a European perspective and the second day focused on sustainable tourism with group workshops and discussions.

The Scottish Environment LINK 'everyone' campaign was launched on St Andrew's Day on 30th November in preparation for the Scottish Elections in May 2007. Its purpose is to encourage voters to send an election message that the next government must reduce Scotland's environmental 'footprint', by sending in pictures of their own green footprints as a symbol of their vote. Events such as the 'Big Green Debate' and other hustings will be held in April. Work continued on organising events based around the Parliament for Scottish Environment Week 5th - 11th February

SEL was disappointed with the lack of real rights in planning when the third stage of the Scottish Planning Bill in mid-November did not include any form of third party appeal, and Examination in Public has not been made part of the National Planning Framework.

Finally, LINK's Christmas Reception in mid-December in Edinburgh was well attended by members, agencies and government ministers.



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL has had a very busy quarter, with some nine public events and conferences, production of a Fact Sheet on Community Planning and a members meeting at Christmas. The main NIEL policy conference for the year was on Planning and the Future of the Landscape on 28th November, attended by some 100 people and resulting in an 'agenda for action' on planning matters, which will be produced early in 2007. They have also launched the 'Growing For Life' map of places to obtain food with an environmental flair on 21st November, produced jointly with Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, with a conference.

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Sister Links

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There were five major events run by Sustainable NI, three on reuse, one a 'local/good food' banquet in the Belfast City Hall for over 100 people from the Faith Waste Project, and the last, an event on really involving the community in Community Planning. Plus a number of visits to government officials and politicians, and preparing for new political structures (if and when...), continuing to work on promoting the creation of an Environmental Protection Agency and odd work on Task Forces, they've reportedly "kept out of trouble".



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

WEL was pleased to welcome members of the Joint Links to Cardiff for the successful Joint Links Conference in November. Following the event, WEL is setting up a new Biodiversity Working Group to interact with the other Links' on UK issues. Other changes to working groups include the Agriculture group joining with Forestry & Woodlands to form an all encompassing Land Use Working Group. The Energy Group have also decided to widen their remit and become the Energy & Transport Working Group.

In November, WEL organised a seminar on the new Government of Wales Act that is to come into force this May. Speakers included the clerk of the Assembly's Environment Committee, the former legal adviser to the Presiding Office of the National Assembly, and the manager of one of the most experienced Welsh public relations companies. WEL also recently organised an event for Assembly staff from the Environment Committee and the Members Research Service.

A group of WEL members joined the Assembly staff for a tour of BTCV's site near Cardiff site and a presentation on BTCV's work. This was followed by an informal discussion when Assembly staff explained their roles and WEL members had the opportunity to ask questions and express views on the work of the Environment Committee and Research Service.

News from the Secretariat



Management Committee Meeting

The fourth Management Committee meeting of 2006 was held on 14th November at Link's offices. Issues discussed at the meeting included Link's quarterly accounts and projected year-end figures, the budget for 2007, the Forward Planning Framework Document, the Annual Review of Link Working Groups, and Link's workplan for 2007-2009.

On 8th December Link held its Annual General Meeting at the National Trust's London office, which was well attended by a broad spectrum of our members. After the main business of the AGM had been conducted, Andrew Wood, Policy Director at Natural England, addressed the meeting, outlining NE's plans and aspirations for the coming years. One of Link's Vice Presidents, Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer, also spoke in response to NE's comments, with the ensuing debates carrying on into the evening at Link's Christmas drinks at a local pub around the corner.

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News from the Secretariat

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Link is very happy to announce that a new Treasurer was voted in by the membership at our AGM. Helga Edwards, Financial Controller at the Woodland Trust, joins the Committee along with two new Directors - Paul de Zylva from Friends of the Earth and David Bullock from the National Trust.

The next Management Committee meeting is scheduled for March, although a suitable date is yet to be decided upon.



Other Link news

The Forward Planning Review came to an end with the production of a Framework Document setting out the observations, recommendations and suggested points of consideration of the independent consultant who undertook the Review - Doreen MacIntyre. Link will be looking to implement a number of these suggested changes, although it was found that the majority of the membership is content with Link's current structure and services provided to members. There is no planned overhaul of Working Groups remits or management as most have opted for the status quo over reformation.

Link also carried out its annual review of current Working Groups and Task Forces this quarter, and no major changes are expected to take place in 2007. A couple of Task Forces (Biodiversity & Water) have now become Working Groups to reflect the ongoing nature of the policy remits of these groups. In addition, the Whales Group, which used to be a subgroup of the Wildlife and Trade Working Group, has now become its own Working Group.

We are also in the process of reviewing some of our methods of communicating with our membership. The Link quarterly report has been produced by the Secretariat for many years now and has taken on many formats and incarnations. We are always looking to improve our services and are asking quarterly report recipients to give us their feedback over the next couple of editions. If you have any comments on the quarterly report or would like to join the mailing list, please contact Jodie in the Link office.

Alexia continues to co-ordinate the production of a UK strategy for our Marine Campaign, on behalf of the UK Link organisations. Michael Singh submitted the document to a coalition of funders at the end of 2006 and it is hoped that the UK Link organisations and our members will succeed in getting additional funding support for our Marine Campaign work.

With another new academic year starting at the University College London (UCL), a new batch of students has begun the MSc in Conservation. Link has a long standing relationship with UCL, and Alexia recently went to introduce the new Conservation students to Link's work. As a result, we welcome two new regular volunteers at Link - Janine Quast and Sarah Archer. They join James Isherwood, who graduated with Distinction from the MSc course last year, and our volunteer library expert Peter Beckerman.

Wildlife and Countryside Link

