

In this issue....

- 1 Letter from the Chair
- 2 WORKING GROUPS
 - Biodiversity
 - Farming & Rural Development
- 3 Woodland
 - Land Use Planning
- 4 Water
 - Wildlife & Trade
- 5 Whales
 - TASK FORCES
 - Marine
- 6 Bycatch
 - SISTER LINKS
 - Scotland
- 7 Northern Ireland
 - Wales
- 8 NEWS FROM THE LINK SECRETARIAT

"Bringing together organisations in the UK to protect and enhance wildlife and landscape, and to further the quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the countryside."



Wildlife and Countryside Link
89 Albert Embankment, London
SE1 7TP
T: 020 7820 8600
F: 020 7820 8620
E: enquiry@wcl.org.uk
W: www.wcl.org.uk

Wildlife and Countryside Link is a registered charity (1107460) and a company limited by guarantee (3889519) registered in England and Wales

Letter from the Chair...

Dear Members,

The second quarter of the year has seen the frantic pace of events increasing. From the publication of the Planning White Paper, through to Link's decision to take on the secretariat support role of the *Blueprint for Water* campaign as part of the Water Working Group, the Secretariat has as always been kept busy.

In addition, this quarter has seen the culmination of months of Link members' work towards international meetings, with the International Whaling Commission holding its 59th meeting in Alaska in May, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) holding its 14th Conference of Parties in The Hague in June.

This quarter has also seen the launch of a number of reports, including Defra's strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests, as well as the report from the Independent Scientific Group on recommendations to control bovine TB in cattle.

Following months of hard work and consultation with partners, Link's Marine Task Force submitted a substantive response to the Marine Bill White Paper consultation. Unfortunately, the Marine Bill was not listed in Gordon Brown's Draft Legislative Programme (although it was mentioned as a possible Draft Bill), so it looks as if the MTF still have some work to ensure the Government's commitment to a Marine Act this Parliament is delivered. We will continue to call for the Marine Bill to be included in the Queen's Speech in November.

There have also been some recent staff changes at Link - I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome Mathew Xerri as Link's Information and Office Co-ordinator and to say goodbye to Annie, who after 5 years at Link will be moving on from Link in August to become RSPB-Cymru's Marine Policy Officer. During her time at Link many of you will have worked with Annie and will therefore agree that she will be much missed. We wish Annie the best of luck for her next role and new life in Wales, where we are pleased to hear that she will be continuing to work on the campaign for a Marine Act, albeit from a Welsh perspective!

Best wishes,



Dr. Hilary Allison

Working Groups



Acting Chair: Nigel Bourn, Butterfly Conservation
Acting Vice Chair: John Everitt, The Wildlife Trusts
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

Biodiversity

In April, Link members contributed to developing the report of the successful March workshop hosted by Barry Gardiner MP. Members will continue to engage through the England Biodiversity Group and the Biodiversity Reporting & Information Group (BRIG) to identify and take forward actions arising from the event. Also this month, Link members attended the Ecosystems Approach seminar, hosted by Defra. This was the third in a series of meetings, with the most recent focusing on the economic valuation of ecosystem services.

In May, the Biodiversity Working Groups and Task Forces from across the Links in Scotland, Wales and England submitted a joint response to the GB Non-Natives Species Framework Strategy consultation, which is available for download from our website at www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2007/Joint_Links%20NNS_consultation_response_23May07.pdf.

Members of the Biodiversity Working Group (BWG) contributed to the review of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitats and species. The new priority list was finalised by the Priorities Review Group (PRG), whose final report - the Species and Habitats Review Report 2007 - was published in June. Ministerial sign off is expected in July. Much work remains to be done via a consultative process on the geographical distribution of species on the new priority list and signposting priority action categories to them.

Also this quarter, Defra published a set of Biodiversity Indicators on behalf of the UK BAP partnership, to which members inputted via the Link representative on the UK Biodiversity Indicators Steering Group.



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

Farming and Rural Development

Following the announcement of the budget for the Rural Development Programme for England 2007-2013 in March, Link wrote to the Secretary of State for the Environment, calling on Defra to ensure sufficient funds are allocated to meet the demand to allow farmers to enter the Higher Level Schemes (HLS). David Miliband MP responded to our letter with a commitment that over £600 million will be available for new HLS agreements.

The subgroup of the FRD group currently working on the Link Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Vision met on 16th April.

The Farming and Rural Development (FRD) group met on 20th April to discuss, amongst other things, the consultation on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the Rural Development Programme for England 2007-2013. Link met with the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) team at Defra to further discuss our concerns on 8th May; however, we are not currently proposing to submit a consultation response.

The first meeting of the RDPE's Programme Monitoring Committee was held on 6th June, attended by Link representative Ian Woodhurst. The role of this Committee is to monitor quality in the implementation of the RDPE programme. The RDPE Programme document has now been submitted to the EU for approval, a process that is likely to take six months.

Cont ...

Working Groups

...

Link members met with Natural England on 12th June to discuss the recommendations arising from Link's Bioenergy policy paper. The UK Bioenergy policy paper was being finalised in June and launched at a workshop in London on 18th July.

Badgers

Link members prepared a statement on the Independent Scientific Group's report on recommendations to control bovine TB in cattle, in advance of the report's publication on 18th June. An open meeting of the ISG was held on 19th June which many Link members attended. The report concluded "no practicable method of badger culling can reduce the incidence of cattle TB to any meaningful extent, and several culling approaches may make matters worse". Link still awaits a decision from the Government.



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

Woodland

The Forestry Commission published their Woodfuel Strategy on 28th March. On 20th June, Defra published its revised England Forestry Strategy - A strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests.

The Link Manifesto for Woodlands was finalised in June and can be downloaded from www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2007/Link_Woodland_Manifesto_21Jun07_.pdf.



Chair: Fiona Mahon, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair: Simon Marsh, RSPB
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

Land Use Planning

The Planning White Paper (PWP) 'Planning for a Sustainable Future', was published in May. This quarter, Link members have been busy digesting the documentation in preparation for drafting both their organisational and collective Link responses.

In May, representatives from a broad coalition of organisations that has come together to campaign against damaging reforms to the planning system, which includes many Link members, met the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Ruth Kelly MP; Environment Secretary David Miliband MP and Housing Minister Yvette Cooper MP. Link members had previously met with the CLG Minister to discuss the proposed planning reforms outlined in the PWP and the Land Use Planning Working Group (LUPWG) intends to continue dialogue with officials in the run up to publication of the draft Bill.

Also this quarter, Link met with Lester Hicks at CLG to discuss the PWP and the draft Climate Change Planning Policy Statement (PPS). A LUPWG meeting was also held to discuss initial reactions to the PWP and to consider Link's response. With Lester Hicks now retired, the group intends to meet with Lester's replacements - Su Bonfanti and Steph Coster - prior to the end of the PWP's consultation period.



Working Groups



Strategy Chair: Tom Le Quesne, WWF
Campaigns Chair: Saskia Hervey, WWF
Policy Chair: Phil Burston, RSPB
Vice Chair (Strategy): Helen Meech, National Trust
Vice Chair (Campaigns): Danny Stone, RSPB
Vice Chair (Policy): Michelle Claxton, The Wildlife Trusts
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

Water

In May, Link member Chief Executives and Policy Directors wrote to the Environment Agency (EA) to nominate a Link representative to serve on the Water Framework Directive (WFD) National Panel for England. Link also wrote to Barbara Young to clarify our concerns that the current approach to implementation is failing to harness support from those with the ability to help deliver WFD objectives.

Early this quarter, Link agreed to give secretariat support to the Blueprint for Water Campaign and in June the Water Working Group (WWG) finalised the structure and workplan of the newly expanded group. Representatives have been busy meeting decision makers and deliverers, such as OFWAT, the EA, and parliamentarians, to promote the Blueprint for Water. Members also met the Defra Water Strategy team to discuss water and adaptation.

Link was offered a seat on Defra's preliminary Cost Effectiveness Analysis (pCEA) working group, which convened its first meeting in April. Also, a third roundtable meeting with Defra, most likely on the issue of diffuse pollution, is expected to take place later in the summer. Both the WWG Campaigns Group and the WWG Regional Group are scheduled to meet in August, and the Strategy Group is intending to meet in September.



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

Wildlife and Trade

The Joint Liaison Group met on 3rd May and Link held a pre-meeting of all relevant conservation NGOs in advance of the meeting. The minister attended the latter part of the Joint Liaison Group meeting, to discuss plans and proposals for the upcoming Conference of Parties (CoP14) meeting.

A number of Wildlife and Trade Working Group (WTWG) members attended CITES CoP14, which took place between 3rd and 15th of June in The Hague. Much of the meeting was dominated by ivory proposals put forward by a number of African states. In the end, a compromise was reached to allow four southern African countries a one-off sale of ivory stockpiles, after which there will be a moratorium on sales for nine years. Some of the other species on which agreement was reached at the CoP14 include the slow loris, brazilwood, the sawfish, European eel, and many others.



Working Groups



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

Whales

In April, the Whales Working Group sent a briefing to the UK Government, in advance of the publication of the International Whaling Commission's (IWC) annotated agenda. It set out the key issues and actions Link wanted the UK Government to take up in advance of the forthcoming meeting, IWC59. Link's nominations for NGO representation on the UK delegation to IWC59 for both the Scientific Committee and Plenary meetings were accepted. The group also met with the Minister for Biodiversity, Barry Gardiner MP, at the Defra-Link consultative whale forum meeting to discuss preparations and key issues in advance of IWC59.

Members of the group continued to meet seafood supply managers to discuss Iceland's resumption of commercial whaling and urge retailers not to source products that may have links with Icelandic whaling companies. Meetings have been held with Co-op, Morrisons, Tesco, Somerfield and Waitrose, with other meetings still in the pipeline.

The IWC59 meeting took place in Anchorage, Alaska in the US from 7th - 31st May, with the plenary part of the meeting taking place from 28 - 31st May. The like-minded (or pro-conservation) countries regained majority and therefore succeeded in getting a number of resolutions passed. In effect last year's 'St Kitts and Nevis Declaration' was overturned and consequently the moratorium remains valid. This also included a resolution to the CITES meeting, following directly after IWC59, reaffirming the IWC as the most appropriate forum to discuss these issues whilst the moratorium is in place.

CITES CoP14 also held discussions on cetaceans following the submission of a Japanese proposal for a periodic review of all listed cetaceans. This proposal was rejected and the Animal Committee's proposal to conduct a review of the central stock of the North Atlantic fin whales was rejected. The CoP instructed the Animals Committee that no review of any whale should take place whilst the moratorium is in place.

Sonar 2087

In April, Link wrote again to Ben Bradshaw MP regarding our continuing concerns about the effects of the recently introduced powerful low frequency military sonar system (known as Sonar 2087) on cetaceans and other marine wildlife, and about the efficacy of the mitigation measures employed.

Task Forces



Chair: Joan Edwards, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair (Campaign & Media): Richard Harrington, Marine Conservation Society
Vice Chair (Policy): Jan Brown, WWF
Secretary: Annie Smith

Marine

Following the launch of the Marine Bill White Paper "A Sea Change" in March, Link sent letters to David Miliband MP and Ben Bradshaw MP welcoming their commitment to the Marine Bill. Link also held a parliamentary reception on the Marine Bill on 23rd May, which was attended by front bench representatives from the three main political parties. The reception was hosted by John Randall MP, who spoke along with Stephanie Hilborne (CEO of The Wildlife Trusts) and Minister Ben Bradshaw, on the importance of the Bill. Link provided attendees with a Parliamentary bulletin, which can be viewed at www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2007/Link_Parliamentary_Bulletin_4_21May07.pdf.

Cont ...

Task Forces

...

The MTF held a number of meetings with Defra, Natural England, marine industry representatives and Joint Links colleagues to support development of its response to the Marine Bill White Paper. The response was submitted on 8th June, supported by 13 Link members. It is available to download from www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2007/Link_Response_to_MBWP_8Jun07.pdf.

A number of Marine Task Force (MTF) members attended a Marine Biodiversity Stakeholder meeting on 4th June.



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

Bycatch

In April, Members of the Bycatch group attended the meeting of the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee and the annual conference of the European Cetacean Society.

Members of the Bycatch group also fed into Link's response to the Marine Bill White Paper, in particular those aspects relating to fisheries management and nature conservation.

Sister Links



Scottish Environment LINK (LINK)

In June, following LINK's 'everyone' election campaign, a final petition of 2000 green footprints was handed to Richard Lochhead, the new Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment, as a timely reminder that Scottish people are looking to their politicians to help everyone in Scotland leave a much greener footprint.

LINK's Marine Task Force is increasing advocacy for a Scottish and a UK marine bill and now has a marine bill research officer and campaigns officer in post, based, respectively, at WWFS Dunkeld and RSPB Scotland Edinburgh offices. The posts are line managed by the task force convenor and a management agreement with LINK is in place.

LINK members have recently undertaken a review of its campaigns since 2003 - four Holyrood and European election campaigns and recently two Planning Bill campaigns. The main objective - to raise the environment on the parliamentary agenda - had been achieved; and the overall benefit was a strengthening of trust and relationships between LINK member organisations.

In June, LINK held its AGM at the Festival of Stewardship, Falkland Fife and Fred Edwards stepped down as President, and LINK now have interregnum whilst another president is being sought. Afterwards, a celebratory supper and ceilidh was held in the Big Tent for members and staff, past and present, to mark LINK's 20th anniversary.

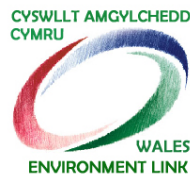




Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

With the Assembly up and running NIEL has been working hard on two submissions - Water and Sewerage Reform and Climate Change. The Review of Environmental Governance finally appeared after 16 months, and it has recommended an independent Environmental Protection Agency for NI. However, the battle is far from over, as there appears to be little political acceptance of this need and the Review lacks costings. NIEL staff will be working hard to ensure it isn't 'kicked into the long grass' and concentrating their efforts on key messages.

Task Forces have been working away - the NI Archaeology Forum is devising a Strategic Plan and a funding bid for a support Officer. NIEL is about to launch 'A Planning Agenda for NI' which has nine key asks for the Assembly, upon which it will be urging action. It held its AGM and Conference to work further on its Policy and advocacy paper which will be developed into a major document for future work around the latter part of the year. Work continues on developing a comprehensive and implemented Sustainable Development Strategy for NI, including helping Sustainable NI produce a series of documents on helping local authorities to implement 'the duty for SD', which came into effect in April.



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

The elections for the National Assembly for Wales were held on the 3rd of May and the results initially led to the formation of a Labour minority government. However, negotiations between the four political parties continued, and at the beginning of July Labour and Plaid Cymru agreed to form a coalition government.

The implications for the Labour Cabinet have not yet been announced but, as things stand, WEL will be meeting with the new Minister for Sustainability and Rural Development, Jane Davidson, at the Royal Welsh Show in mid-July, with another meeting lined up in September.

The Election Campaign Group met in May to evaluate its success in influencing the political parties' manifestos. It has been decided that the Group should now evolve into a Policy Advocacy Group in order to monitor the implementation of environmental commitments, to promote WEL's joint positions and to help WEL members' understanding of the implications of the new Government of Wales Act.

Since the formation of the new Assembly and the introduction of the new Act, WEL has circulated an 'Introduction to WEL and its member organisations' to all Assembly Members. WEL's working groups have also been asked to identify possible proposals for primary legislation.



News from the Secretariat



Management Committee Meeting

The second Management Committee meeting of 2007 was held on 27th June at Link's offices. Issues discussed at the meeting included Link's quarterly accounts, the Annual Report and accounts for 2006, Link's Communication Strategy, Associate Membership, the Blueprint for Water campaign and the relationship between Link and Natural England.

The next Management Committee meeting is scheduled for 25th September 2007 at Link's offices.



Other Link news

Following the successful application for funds for a full time Marine Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator (for 2-3 years) to facilitate Link's Marine Task Force and ensure our campaign for comprehensive legislation is successful; there have been some recent staff changes. In May, Annie Smith - previously Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator - took up the new position of Marine Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator, and is working full time on Link's marine campaign. Jodie Bettis, - previously Link's Information and Office Co-ordinator - was promoted to Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator. Mathew Xerri joined the team on 14th May as the new Information and Office Co-ordinator.

In June, the Salmon & Trout Association (S&TA) joined Link as an Associate Member. The total number of Link members remains at 37 (including three Associate Members) because the Youth Hostel Association has cancelled its membership. The S&TA will be engaging with the Water Working Group, as a result of the Blueprint for Water campaign being brought within Link. The Anglers' Conservation Association also applied for Associate Membership in order to work within Link on the Blueprint Campaign. ACA's membership was due to be decided by other members on 17th July.

Following recipients' feedback, the quarterly report will now be posted on the website and not emailed separately. If you have any further comments on the quarterly report, please contact the Information and Office Co-ordinator in the Link office.

Wildlife and Countryside Link

