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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 Link members

Welcome to the final quarterly report for 2007 and my first as Chair of Wildlife and Countryside Link. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Hilary Allison for all her work in her four years as Chair of Link, as I step forward to take on this important role.

2007 was as ever a year of many achievements for Link and many long-awaited events took place in the run up to Christmas, not least the publication of the Planning Bill in November which Link believes threatens to result in England's planning laws taking a backwards step.

November was a particularly busy month for all of Link's policy areas, with confirmation being received in the Queen's Speech that we have one more hurdle for the Marine Bill, with the inclusion of a draft Marine Bill in the legislative programme for 2007-08. Link continues to express its disappointment over the lack of a full Marine Bill, calling on the Government for its introduction at the earliest opportunity. November also saw the long-awaited publication of the European Commission's Common Agricultural Policy 'Health Check', which will be the focus of Link's Farming and Rural Development Working Group in 2008.

This quarter also saw the launch of the Blueprint for Water campaign's first annual report, which assessed this year's progress towards the ten steps to sustainable water use by 2015. The event was marked by a high level round table event hosted by Martin Salter MP and attended by the Minister for Water, Phil Woolas MP. Whilst it's not all bad news, the report gave the Government an overall 'D' grade, explaining that they must try harder to tackle problems such as pollution, flooding and waste. The report also looks forward to 2008 as a year of opportunity to change the way we value, manage and invest in water.

I look forward to working with you all throughout 2008 and look forward to meeting many of you soon in my new role as Chair of Link.

Best wishes



Paul de Zylva

Working Groups



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

Biodiversity

During the quarter Biodiversity Working Group (BWG) members met with Natural England to discuss the Section 41 list of species and habitats of principle importance in England under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. A meeting was also held with Natural England in late December to discuss issues surrounding delivery of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

Work on the UK BAP forward process continues, with Link attending the Annual Biodiversity Partnership Conference in Aviemore in October, the UK Standing Committee meeting in November and the England Biodiversity Group meeting in December. Link also attended the Natura 2000 Ramsar Forum meeting in October.

The BWG held a number of teleconference calls during the quarter and held a meeting in November to discuss its workplan for 2008 and the role of NGO Lead Partners in the UK BAP process.

At Link's AGM on 5th December, Nigel Bourn (Butterfly Conservation) and John Everitt (The Wildlife Trusts) were reappointed to serve as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, of the BWG in 2008.



Chair: Ian Woodhurst, CPRE
Vice Chair: Vacant
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Farming and Rural Development

The Farming and Rural Development (FRD) Working Group met twice during the quarter in October and December to discuss the ongoing Environmental Stewardship Review and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Health Check.

On the 19th November, Link published its policy perspective on the future of the CAP - '*Beyond the Pillars*'. This document will be formally launched at a parliamentary reception in March 2008 and can also be downloaded from our website, www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2007/BeyondthePillars_LinksperspectiveonfutureofCAP_18Nov07.pdf.

Link hopes to use this document to influence the EU's CAP 'Health Check', which was launched on the 20th November. The 'Health Check' is the Commission's 'blueprint for streamlining and further modernising the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy'. The FRD Working Group will be responding to this and the EU budget consultation in 2008.

At Link's AGM on 5th December, Ian Woodhurst (CPRE) was reappointed as Chair of the FRD Working Group for 2008. The Vice Chair position for the group is currently vacant.



Working Groups



Badgers

This quarter the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee held a number of oral evidence sessions, examining the final report of the Independent Scientific Group (ISG). It is expected that the EFRA Committee will publish their report in early 2008.

On 22nd October Defra published a report from its Chief Scientist, Sir David King, responding to the ISG's final report, which advised Ministers that culling badgers could be effective at controlling bovine TB in contained areas. This advice contradicted the findings of the ISG Report which found that badger culling was not cost effective. In response to the publication of this report, Link sent a letter to the Secretary of State Hilary Benn, outlining its concerns. Subsequently, the ISG and Professor Mollison (the former statistical advisor to the RBCT) have published responses to David King's report. Lord Rooker responded to Link's letter stating that the Government would be taking its time to consider all of the available evidence in coming to a decision, including that from the EFRA Committee as a result of their current inquiry.



Woodland

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

During the quarter Alexia and other Link representatives attended a Forestry Commission conference on climate change.

At Link's AGM on 5th December, Mike Wood (RSPB) and James Cooper (the Woodland Trust) were reappointed as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, of the Woodland sub-group for 2008.



Land Use Planning

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

Members of the Land Use Planning Working Group (LUPWG) attended a Green Roundtable meeting in October with the Secretaries of State Hilary Benn MP and Hazel Blears MP, and Minister for Local Government, John Healy MP, at which the proposed reform of the current planning system and other related environmental issues were discussed.

Following the conclusion of the White Paper process, the Planning Bill received its first reading in the House of Commons on 27th November and its second reading on 10th December.

The LUPWG met in November to discuss the Sub-National Review, the Housing Green Paper and the Planning Bill. After the meeting, Link sent a letter supported by 19 member organisations, to Secretary of State Hilary Benn, outlining its concerns that the implementation of the Sub-National Review will be at the expense of climate change and the natural environment.

At Link's AGM on 5th December, Fiona Mahon (The Wildlife Trusts) and Simon Marsh (RSPB) were reappointed to serve as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, of the LUPWG in 2008.

Working Groups



Strategy Chair: Tom Le Quesne, WWF
Campaigns Chair: Danny Stone, RSPB
Policy Chair: Sarah Oppenheimer, RSPB
Vice Chair (Strategy): Helen Meech, National Trust
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

Water

The Water Working Group (Policy) met early in the quarter to discuss the three interlinked Defra consultations on pollution from agricultural sources, as well as the EA Water Resources Strategy consultation. Link submitted responses to the Defra consultations on diffuse sources of pollution from agriculture, and on the implementation of the Nitrates Directive, both of which can be downloaded from our website at <http://www.wcl.org.uk/work%20areas/water.htm>

Later in the quarter, Link attended the UKTAG workshop on Defining Good Ecological Potential for Artificial/Heavily Modified Water Bodies, and was also represented on the Cabinet Office Flooding Review stakeholder panel.

As part of the preparations for the Blueprint for Water's one-year review, Water Working Group (WWG) meetings and teleconferences were held throughout October and November. Blueprint representatives met with Defra's Minister for Water Phil Woolas MP in October and with the Environment Agency (EA) Heads of Division later that same month. A meeting was also held with Natural England's Evidence Team in November, to discuss the upcoming Price Review in 2009 (PR09).

The Blueprint for Water celebrated its one year anniversary on 28th November with the publication of an annual report and a high level round table meeting, hosted by Martin Salter MP and attended by Phil Woolas MP. The Minister welcomed the report, which is available to download from www.blueprintforwater.org.uk

At Link's AGM on 5th December, the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the WWG were appointed to serve in 2008. Tom Le Quesne (WWF) and Helen Meech (National Trust) were reappointed to serve as Chair and Vice Chair of the Strategy group respectively; Sarah Oppenheimer (RSPB) was appointed as the Chair of the Policy group and Danny Stone became the new Chair of the Campaigns group. Paul Learoyd (The Wildlife Trusts) was also reappointed Chair to the Regional group, however, the secretariat support to this group passed to the new RSPB River Basin Support Officer.



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

Whales

The Whales Working Group met regularly throughout the quarter. These meetings focussed on the development of a Link vision for the future of the IWC. During the quarter Link members also met with the recently appointed Minister, Jonathan Shaw MP to discuss the UK's activities in advance of the next IWC meeting. The group also met with Defra officials twice during the quarter to discuss their views on the future of the IWC.

In November, the group received a long-awaited response to its letter to the Ministry of Defence on Sonar which it will be examining further in 2008.

At Link's AGM on 5th December, Jennifer Lonsdale (Environmental Investigation Agency) and Claire Bass (World Society for the Protection of Animals) were reappointed as Chair and Vice Chair, respectively, of the Whales Working Group for 2008.

Working Groups



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

Wildlife and Trade

In October, the Wildlife and Trade Working Group responded to the Defra Consultation on the review and update of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Designation of Ports of Entry) Regulations 1985. You can download the response on our website at www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2007/Link_response_to_Defra_Consultation_on_COTES_Ports_of_Entry_11Oct07.pdf

The Group met with Defra in November to discuss outcomes from the COP14, and upcoming CITES meetings, and a Link representative also attended a meeting in December convened by the Minister, Joan Ruddock MP, on bird registration.

At Link's AGM on 5th December, Rob Atkinson and Cathy Williamson were reappointed as Chair and Vice Chair respectively, of the Wildlife and Trade Working Group in 2008.

Task Forces



Chair (Policy): Joan Edwards, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB
Secretary: Joanna Crouch

Marine

Members of the Marine Task Force (MTF) attended Natural England's Marine Protected Areas Conference in October at which Kate Tanner (RSPB) gave a presentation on behalf of the MTF outlining the group's perspectives on the MPA provisions in the Marine Bill White Paper.

The Government announced its commitment to a draft Marine Bill in the Queen's Speech on 6th November. The MTF expressed its disappointment that a full Marine Bill had not been included in the legislative programme in a letter to The Times, which was printed on 9th November. The letter is available on our website at: www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2007/Letter_to_times_Where_has_the_Marine_Bill_gone_09Nov07.pdf

The MTF also submitted a more detailed letter expressing its disappointment to The House Magazine, which was published on 12th November. The MTF organised the laying down of an Early Day Motion (no. 145) in the House of Commons on 7th November calling for a Marine Bill to be introduced at the earliest opportunity in the current Parliament. To see the EDM, go to: www.parliament.the-stationery-office.com/pa/cm/cmmedm/71107e01.htm

MTF members attended the Natura 2000 Ramsar Forum meeting at Defra in October. In November, MTF members met with Diana Linskey and other Government officials at Defra as well as the Minister, Jonathan Shaw MP, to discuss progress with the Marine Bill. There was also a MTF meeting in November to discuss priorities for the group over the next few months.

MTF members met with Natural England in December to discuss progress with the Marine Bill, Natural England's position on MPAs/MCZs, coastal access and Lyme Bay. A joint Links Marine meeting was also held in Edinburgh to discuss campaign strategies, communication between the joint Links, policy issues and opportunities for joined up action.

In December, the MTF submitted its response in December to the Defra consultation on measures to protect biodiversity interests in Lyme Bay. The response is available from our website at: http://www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2007/Link_response_to_Lyme_Bay_consultation.pdf

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Task Forces

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At Link's AGM on 5th December, Joan Edwards (The Wildlife Trusts) was reappointed as Chair and Sharon Thompson (RSPB) was newly appointed as Vice Chair of the MTF for 2008.

Sister Links



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

The recent quarter was, as always it seems, rather busy for NIEL. It had two big events in October - the launch of the NI Archaeology Forum with Time Team and the launch of the Climate Change Coalition NI. Both were popular with politicians and public, and NIEL will be carrying out further action in both areas (two new 'task forces') over the coming months.

The draft Programme for Government for NI for the next three years was out for consultation and NIEL made strong points on the need for sustainable development to realise its potential as an acknowledged main theme; the time is now for action, not just words. NIEL has put the finishing touches to its big policy document to be launched in late February with a number of action points under the main themes of sustainable development, climate change, planning and environmental governance.

In their spare time amongst this NIEL staff have commented on a number of government consultations, held meetings with politicians and supported Sustainable NI in its work with local authorities. The Environmental Education Forum produced a copy of its newsletter targeted at the 'early years' and held a number of Education for Sustainable Development Days for trainee teachers throughout NI.



Scottish Environment LINK (LINK)

This has been a busy period of important meetings, notably: representatives met in October with the two environment Ministers to discuss LINK's Vision document; members met to review the LINK climate position as a whole to ensure it remains relevant, and briefings on various aspects such as energy and biodiversity are planned; task force convenors took part in their twice-yearly Forward Planning and Networking meeting in Edinburgh; LINK trustees and staff met with SNH twice; and members of the Marine Task Force met with other UK Links in Edinburgh to review their marine work. Some members and parliamentary staff attended the three autumn party conferences (SLP, SNP and Lab).

In November, together with the Scottish Government, LINK co-hosted a workshop meeting with 40 members from other Scottish networks as a first step to agreeing a coherent, structured approach to communications about climate and behaviour change.

LINK's Annual Members' Congress held over two days at Dunkeld with the theme of behaviour change drew up priority actions for members and the LINK team to pursue including carbon auditing of our own activities. Members are enthusiastic and with on-going meetings and conference calls progress will continue in the next year.

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Sister Links

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In November, an evening reception, hosted by Richard Lochhead MSP, was held at Edinburgh Castle and LINK's report, *A Strong, Coherent Voice*, reviewing LINK's history and looking forward to the future, was published.



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

WEL representatives met the new Minister for Rural Affairs for the first time in November, and discussed her responsibilities in relation to the Environment Strategy for Wales; biodiversity; ancient woodlands; bioenergy crops; agri-environment schemes; and fisheries.

Members of WEL's Marine Working Group have been invited to meet the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing at the end of January 2008 to discuss the Marine Bill and WEL's campaign.

In October, three WEL representatives gave oral evidence to the Committee scrutinising the proposed Environmental Protection and Waste Management Legislative Competence Order, one of the first pieces of primary legislation proposed under the new Government of Wales Act.

WEL also provided evidence to the Sustainability Committee on their inquiries into the reduction of carbon emissions from households and transport in Wales. Further consultations WEL has responded to recently have been on domestic microgeneration Permitted Development Rights and voluntary sector funding in Wales.

WEL is in the process of compiling a written submission to contribute to the Assembly's independent effectiveness review of its Sustainable Development Scheme. This will be presented by three representatives who will attend an interview with the consultants on behalf of the WEL network in December.

News from the Secretariat



Management Committee Meeting

The fourth Management Committee meeting of 2007 was held on 13th November at Link's offices. Issues discussed at the meeting included: Link's quarterly accounts and draft end of year accounts, Link membership, the 2008 Workplan, and the development of Link's Communication Strategy.

Link held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 5th December at the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) Offices in London. The meeting was well attended by members. At this meeting Hilary Allison (Woodland Trust) stood down as Chair and Paul de Zylva from Friends of the Earth was appointed as Chair of Link. In addition Matt Shardlow (Buglife) also stood down as a Trustee and we welcomed Robert Atkinson from RSPCA as a new Trustee. After the main business of the AGM, Link's Vice President Peter Ainsworth MP gave an interesting talk on the politics of wildlife and environmental policy in the UK, followed by a lively debate with members.

The next Management Committee meeting is scheduled for 12th March 2008 at Link's offices.

News from the Secretariat



Other Link news

Link carried out its annual review of current Working Groups and Task Forces this quarter to feed into the 2008 workplan approved at the AGM. The only significant change to our working groups as a result of this review is with the Bycatch sub-group which has now become a virtual sub-group in order to facilitate information sharing with no regular meetings being held.

Link has a long standing relationship with University College London (UCL) and Alexia recently gave this year's MSc Conservation students our annual presentation on Link's work. As a result, we have welcomed two new regular volunteers at Link - Will Vincent and Damian Fleming, with more volunteers looking to start soon.

Throughout 2007 we have also been trying to improve communications with our members and in December we launched a new style e-bulletin. We are also planning to redesign our website in the near future. If you have any comments or suggestions on the Quarterly Report, e-bulletin or our website, please contact the Information & Office Co-ordinator, Mathew Xerri, in the Link office.

Wildlife and Countryside Link

