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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 first quarterly report of 2008. As ever, the first quarter of the year has seen the usual high level of activity from Link, combined with an office move across the ground floor of 89 Albert Embankment at the end of quarter. Although we haven't moved far, we hope the new offices provide Link with a little extra, but much needed, extra space - despite the lack of river views!

The Biodiversity Working Group has published its second annual assessment of progress towards the target of Halting Biodiversity Loss by 2010. Unfortunately, the results of this assessment are not too promising, with little progress having been made over the past year. Link will continue to encourage Government to take action on this target, and is hoping to meet with the Minister to discuss the results of this assessment in the second quarter of the year - we will keep you updated.

The Farming and Rural Development Working Group has also been busy this quarter, launching its policy perspective on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), *Beyond the Pillars*. This document has been produced following lengthy discussions by Link over the past couple of years, and launched to coincide with the European Commission's 'Health Check' of the CAP. Link was pleased to receive the Minister's encouraging comments made at the Parliamentary launch of the policy perspective, when he recognised the benefit of Link's contribution to this debate and noted the need for further work in this area.

Finally, this quarter has also seen a change of staff in the Link Secretariat - with Mathew Xerri leaving Link in February and Fiona Llewellyn joining in March as Link's new Information and Office Co-ordinator. I'd like to take this opportunity on behalf of Link to say goodbye and good luck to Mathew, and to welcome Fiona to Link.

Best wishes



Paul de Zylva

Working Groups



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

Biodiversity

This quarter, the Biodiversity Working Group (BWG) published its review of progress towards the Countdown 2010 target and is disappointed to report that there has been little progress towards the target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010. The group also finalised its Lead Partners position papers, submitting them to both the England Biodiversity Group (EBG) and the UK Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG) for their information.

In January, Link submitted its response to the Defra consultation on the Review of Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Ban on Sale of Certain Non-native species and inputted to a number of BRIG documents including a paper on UK Biodiversity Action Plan Success Criteria and Targets. Link submitted members' comments on Natural England's draft England Biodiversity Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) framework document, meeting with NE to discuss concerns in more detail.

Link continues to actively participate in many external groups. BWG members attended the BRIG meeting in January, the UK Biodiversity Indicators Steering Group meeting in February, and the England Biodiversity Group meeting in March. A new biodiversity forum drawn from members of the BRIG and UK Biodiversity Research Advisory Group (BRAG) was convened in March to consider research actions arising out of the UK BAP Species and Habitats Review, at which Link was represented. Link has also joined the Non-Native Species Media and Communications Working Group and a Joint Links representative has been selected from Wales Environment Link to sit on the UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference Steering Group.



Chair: Ian Woodhurst, CPRE
Vice Chair: Gareth Morgan, RSPB
Secretary: Alexia Wellbelove

Farming and Rural Development

On 10th March Link published its policy perspective on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) - '*Beyond the Pillars*' which was launched at a Parliamentary reception in the House of Lords, hosted by Link's Vice-President Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer. The event was attended by a wide range of Peers, MPs and farming stakeholders. CPRE's Chief Executive, Shaun Spiers, spoke on behalf of Link setting out Link's views for the establishment of a single European Sustainable Land Management Policy that would support positive land management activities that deliver sustainable land management and in turn underpin profitable farm businesses and prosperous rural communities. The Minister for Sustainable Food and Farming, the Rt Hon the Lord Rooker, responded welcoming Link's positive contribution to the debate and encouraged Link to do more, noting that there was still much work to be done with many Member States intending to reduce the budget for the CAP. The document launched at the reception can be downloaded from our website at http://www.wcl.org.uk/downloads/2008/Link_Beyond_the_Pillars_11Mar08.pdf

Following the FRD Working Group's meeting in December to discuss the ongoing Environmental Stewardship Review and the CAP Health Check, the Working Group responded to the EU's CAP 'Health Check' consultation on 11th January, and our response is available on our website at. The EU CAP Health Check consultation is the EU's 'blueprint for streamlining and further modernising the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy' and aims to build on the 2003 CAP reforms.

The Working Group last met on 13th February and discussed the EU's CAP Health Check and Budget Review consultations, the ongoing Environmental Stewardship Review and the group's 2008 workplan. In February Gareth Morgan of the RSPB was also confirmed as Vice-Chair of the group.

Working Groups



Badgers

On 27th February the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Committee published its report following its inquiry into the Final Report of the Independent Scientific Review Group on Cattle TB. This stated that the Government's current method of controlling cattle TB, that of surveillance, testing and slaughter, is not working effectively and suggested that a multi-faceted approach to tackling the disease was required. This included culling and Link members now await the Government's decision on culling. Full details of the inquiry can be found at http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/environment_food_and_rural_affairs/efra_bovine_tb_follow_up.cfm

Link members held two conference calls in this quarter to update each other on recent activities and to share thinking about the likely future timetable for any Government announcements. As a result of this call Link also responded to Lord Rooker's recent letter setting out the efforts Link members are making to support farmers in managing the risk of bovine TB.



Woodland

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

On 6th February Link representatives met with Natural England to discuss Natural England's work on woodland policy and particularly the development of the Delivery Plan for England's Trees, Woods and Forests Strategy. The Delivery Plan for this Government strategy will continue to be the focus of the Woodland group members in the coming months, with representatives from Link attending a meeting with the Forestry Commission on developing the Delivery Plan for the Government's strategy - England's Trees Woods and Forests Strategy in March.



Land Use Planning

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

Link continues to monitor the progress of the Planning Bill through Parliament. The Public Bill Committee held oral evidence sessions throughout January to which a number of Link's members gave evidence.

The Land Use Planning Working Group (LUPWG) met in February to discuss the Planning Bill, the Sub National Review, eco-towns and housing policy. The group responded to the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) consultation on Planning Policy Statement 4: Sustainable Economic Development and met with Natural England to discuss progress on the Planning Bill and a spatial strategy for the natural environment in England. LUPWG members also attended the Town and Country Planning Association's roundtable discussion on eco-towns and green infrastructure, and are scheduled to meet CLG in April for Link's regular biannual liaison meeting.

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 Government's long-awaited Water Strategy - Future Water - was published in February and is broadly welcomed by the Blueprint for Water coalition, who collectively submitted detailed briefings to Defra's Water Strategy Team on a number of the Blueprint's key steps to sustainable water use. Although many of the aims and objectives of the Blueprint are recognised in Future Water, members are calling for more action from Government to make the big decisions required to significantly improve our water environment.

The second consultation on the draft River Basin Planning Guidance has also been published this quarter, with views invited on the approach that the Environment Agency should take in carrying out its river basin planning functions, in particular on its development of River Basin Management Plans. Link is currently considering its response to this document and continues to be represented on a number of external forums including the Cabinet Office Flooding Review stakeholder panel (the Pitt Review) and the National Liaison Panel for England.



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

Whales

Over the quarter Link has continued to discuss its vision for the future of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) 'The IWC - modernisation to avoid extinction' which it presented to Defra in November 2007 and the strategy for achieving this. In the vision Link is calling for the IWC to adopt conservation as its primary focus, in order to address the recovery of threatened and endangered populations of cetaceans and ensure that no further populations of cetaceans are put at risk. Link believes that this is particularly important in light of Japan's ongoing 'scientific' whaling programme in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary. The Whale WG believes that instead of developing rules and models for commercial whaling the Commission must now take steps to ensure that existing whaling for commercial purposes is ended and its focus turned to the conservation of cetaceans.

The Whales Working Group met Defra in February to discuss the Pew Whale Symposium, the IWC intersessional meeting and EU Competence. This was followed by a short Link meeting which followed directly from the meeting with Defra, covering the same topics. The group also met in late March when preparations for the forthcoming IWC meeting, IWC60, were discussed.



Working Groups



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

Wildlife and Trade

In February the Wildlife and Trade Working Group met the Minister, Joan Ruddock MP, focussing on the outcomes of the Conference of Parties meeting (CoP14) held in June 2007 and the UK's priorities in the coming months as well as its role in the EU as a member of the Standing Committee. Throughout the quarter Link has been corresponding with the Minister regarding the Bird Registration scheme. This issue was raised again at the meeting with the Minister stating its concerns over the exclusion of non-natives in the scheme, which Link believes must be included given the implications for legal trade.

The Wildlife and Trade WG held a meeting on 18th March at which the recent meeting with the Minister, upcoming meetings of the CITES Animals and Plants Committees and the Bird Registration scheme were all discussed.

Task Forces



Chair: Joan Edwards, The Wildlife Trusts
Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB
Secretary: Joanna Butler

Marine

Link representatives attended Defra's Marine Objectives Stakeholder event on 21st January and provided feedback on the new High Level Marine Objectives. Following the event, Link submitted further written comments. Further consultation on the Objectives is expected later this year and Link will continue to be involved in this process. Link representatives also attended the Coastal Futures conference on 22nd - 24th January.

The Marine Task Force (MTF) met in January to discuss, among other things, Marine Protected Areas (MPA), energy issues in the marine environment and how to respond to the draft Marine Bill.

On 19th February, Link attended a meeting on the future of the England Biodiversity Strategy Coastal and Marine Workstreams, which has now been split in to two separate workstreams. MTF members also attended an All Party Parliamentary Conservation and Wildlife Group meeting on 26th February, at which Jonathan Shaw spoke about the draft Marine Bill and confirmed the publication date as the 3rd April. MTF members met with the Sea Users Development Group on 10th March to discuss the draft Marine Bill and areas of common interest. Members also met with Natural England on 11th March to discuss the North Sea MPA project. On the 14th March, members met with Defra and Natural England to discuss MPAs further.

Link had a stall at Defra's Marine Day, which was held on the 27th March. This was a useful opportunity to interact with and communicate Link's messages about the Marine Bill to Defra staff and other Whitehall officials.



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

This past quarter has been rather busy for NIEL, with the launch of our major policy document: Policy Priorities for NI's Environment - the Way Ahead 2008. This is the first of an annual series of policy papers and was launched at a capacity crowd at the Stormont Assembly building in late February. Since then we have been finalising two of our Fact Sheets, on NI's Historic Environment and Climate Change; the energy issue. Both are now at the printers and will be available before the end of April.

The Climate Change Coalition held a 'Carbon Speed Dating' event at the end of March, also at Stormont. Although only 12 MLAs attended, the event was very well received and provided a useful opportunity for MLAs to meet NGOs from both development and environmental perspectives and to learn about the impacts of climate change and what we should be doing about it locally. Sustainable NI has conducted a major survey of climate change attitudes and behaviour on behalf of the NI Climate Change Impacts Partnership, and with NIEL, held a sustainable development seminar for staff at the Dept of Culture Arts and Leisure which was very popular.

A large number of students have been helping us out, working on publications, future activities and doing background research. We received final awarding of a three year funding package from the Environment and Heritage Service which will allow us to employ an additional full time Policy Officer, hopefully from mid-May.



Scottish Environment LINK (LINK)

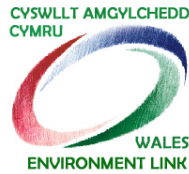
The main focus this quarter was LINK's 4th Scottish Environment Week, held in and around the Parliament during early February. On the theme of Sustainable Livelihoods this year, the week is designed to draw in parliamentarians who are not primarily interested in environmental issues. LINK publications, DVDs, and leaflets showed the work undertaken by LINK, its member organisations and sponsors. It began with a public seminar and debate on sustainable development and education, and during the week there were three seminars on marine, active travel, and rural development funding; a landscape event with MSPs competition and a new DVD; a photographic exhibition staged by the Biodiversity task force; a business breakfast with John Swinney MSP; and visits from about half of all MSPs and their researchers to the LINK Information Desk. The week ended with an evening reception for 170 guests, hosted by the Environment Minister.

LINK members continued to work together on four main areas of the Climate Change Agenda: review of the LINK climate position statement; preparation of good practice guidelines on climate emissions auditing, monitoring and reporting for member bodies to use in their own organisations; response to the consultation on Climate Change Bill; and following the governmental workshop with other networks in December, review of the best next steps with the wider Scottish Government stakeholders.

LINK members and taskforces have continued to be very busy on marine, flooding, water services, national planning framework issues, all currently at consultation stage, with a variety of meetings with MSPs, government officers, and attendance at all the spring party conferences.

The Biodiversity, Landscape, and Woodland Taskforces continue to have concerns about the UKBAP Implementation Plans, the value of landscapes being recognised, and biofuel and Forestry Commission proposals for disposals 'uneconomic woodlands', and they continue to take part in a range of meetings and discussions.

Sister Links



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

A large amount of WEL's time has again been spent responding to Welsh Assembly and Government consultations, such as those on: the reduction of carbon emissions from industry and the public sector, the reduction of carbon emissions from energy generation, the Wales Fisheries Strategy, and the EU Common Agricultural Policy 2008 Health Check.

WEL's Working Groups are also currently working on two more major consultations: the Renewable Energy Route Map for Wales, and the Review of the Wales Spatial Plan.

WEL's Marine Working Group have been preparing for the publication of the draft Marine Bill, and are organising a Marine Bill reception at the Senedd (the Welsh Assembly building) to coincide with this. The reception is intended to inform Assembly Members and external stakeholders about the Bill and its implications for Wales.

In February WEL resurrected the Policy Advocates Liaison Group meetings that it organises and facilitates on behalf of WEL members and Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies. Representatives from each of the environmental ASPBs (CCW, EA and FCW) attended. It was found to be an extremely useful opportunity for information sharing all-round.

WEL and its members have also been involved with the recently formed Climate Change Commission for Wales and its various sub-groups. This work highlighted the need for WEL to undertake some work on its position regarding adaptation to climate change; a Task & Finish Group has therefore been set up.

News from the Secretariat



Management Committee Meeting

The first Management Committee meeting of 2008 was held on 12th March 2008 at Link's offices. Issues discussed at the meeting included: quarterly accounts and draft year end figures for 2007; a review of the work plans of all the Link Working Groups and Task Forces; Review of Link's communications strategy - the Communications and Member Services Plan; review of Link's Risk Register and the upcoming May Policy Directors meeting.

The next Management Committee meeting is scheduled for 24th June 2008 at Link's offices.

News from the Secretariat



Other Link news

Mathew Xerri, Link's Information & Office Co-ordinator left Link in early February to pursue alternative career options. Following a period of recruitment we were pleased to welcome Fiona Llewellyn as Link's new Information & Office Co-ordinator.

Fiona started at Link in March, and shortly after her joining the staff she organised Link's office move across the ground floor of 89 Albert Embankment at the end of March. Link has moved following a wish by our landlords to refurbish the building's reception area later in 2008 / early 2009. Our new office provides us with a little more space, which we hope will mean that we are able to hold meetings for up to 15 people in the future once we are fully established in the new premises.

Wildlife and Countryside Link

