

Q3 Report July - September 2009

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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...

Friends,

This Autumn sees Link's forward planning process pick up pace. Over the summer our members have fed in their thoughts on what and how Link should be working over the next three years. This has included almost 90% of Link's member organisations using our online survey. Thank you for your ideas and enthusiasm.

Link is drawing on all of this to create a new Strategy. This will put Link's 2010 - 2012 work programme on course to put the natural environment high on the political agenda over the next three years.

Members have produced fresh ideas and new actions and ambitions for Link. The final Strategy will be presented for members' approval at Link's AGM on 8 December. Do join us at the Garden Court Chambers in London where our theme will be: *Environmental Law for Environmental Protection*.

We are also closing in on the final stages of The Marine and Coastal Access Bill, expected to become an Act in November. As the Bill enters its Report Stage in the House of Commons Link's Marine Task Force will continue working to influence the nature conservation aspects of the Bill. Link will celebrate the Task Force's epic voyage to secure this long-awaited legislation with a special event at the London Aquarium in December.

Our optimism is offset by the disappointment of the Government's decision in July to adopt the voluntary approach to the replacement of set aside on farmed land. Link had strongly supported a mandatory approach and will be watching carefully to see that the targets the industry has agreed with the Government are met.

This quarter's report covers this and more.

Best wishes,



Paul de Zylva
Chair

Task Forces

Marine



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*Chair: Joan Edwards, TWT
Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB
Secretary: Joanna Butler*

“To campaign for comprehensive legislation to achieve better protection for marine wildlife and effective management of our seas”

Link’s Marine Task Force (MTF) has been busy preparing for the Marine and Coastal Access Bill to enter the House of Commons Report Stage, which is expected soon after Parliament returns from summer recess on 12 October. Link has met with the Environment Minister twice this quarter to discuss the Bill and our proposed amendments. The MTF also held meetings with Defra officials to discuss Link’s outstanding nature conservation amendments and the implementation of the planning aspects of the Bill.

The Bill is expected to become an Act in November and to celebrate the success of our long-running marine campaign, the MTF will be holding a celebration event at the London Aquarium in December.

Link has [responded](#) to two Defra consultations this quarter; the draft Strategy for Marine Protected Areas and MCZ Guidance Note 1 and secondary legislation for England and Wales for the licensing section of the Bill.

This quarter saw the MTF produce its third marine parliamentary calendar, which has been sent to MPs, Peers, and key marine stakeholders. The calendar includes key campaign messages and emphasises the importance of swift and effective implementation of the Marine & Coastal Access Act.

MTF members have attended a number of external meetings and workshops over the summer months, including a Defra workshop on the development of the Marine Protected Area Strategy and on the development of a vision for Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities. Members also attended Natural England’s launch of their report ‘Sustainable fishing in England: Making the most for the economy and the environment’.

Working Groups

Whales



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*Chair: Jenny Lonsdale, EIA
Vice Chair: Claire Bass, WSPA
Secretary: Jodie Bettis*

“To discuss cetacean issues, exchange information, coordinate strategies for the International Whaling Commission (IWC), develop briefings for the UK Government and liaise with Defra on matters relating to cetaceans”

In July, Link wrote to the Environment Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies MP expressing our concern at the absence of the UK IWC Commissioner at the 61st meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC61) in June. Link has since met with the Commissioner and plans to meet with the Minister prior to the next IWC meeting in December to discuss the issues raised at the annual meeting in June.

In early September, Link wrote to the Minister in advance of the ASCOBANS Meeting of the Parties, which took place on 16 - 18 September. The letter called on the UK to restate very clearly, its commitment to the conservation of cetaceans in Europe and to strongly support the conservation initiatives being developed, including the threats posed by disturbance. A number of Link members attended the Meeting of the Parties at which two cornerstones for the future work of ASCOBANS were adopted; a Conservation Plan for the Harbour Porpoise in the North Sea and a Recovery Plan for Baltic Harbour Porpoises.

This month Link, on behalf of its members, released a letter to the media in reaction to Iceland killing 111 endangered fin and 80 Minke whales since May. Members are deeply concern that this expansion in whaling is taking place despite very little demand for whale products in Iceland.

Land use planning

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*Chair: Simon Marsh, RSPB
Vice Chair: Paul Miner, CPRE
Secretary: Fiona Llewellyn*

“To promote a democratic and transparent planning system which considers environmental limits and provides a key mechanism to deliver sustainable development whilst enabling adaptation to climate change”

At the beginning of the quarter, prior to the Housing Minister’s announcement of the first four eco-town sites, the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) published [Planning Policy Statement: Eco-towns - A supplement to Planning Policy Statement 1](#). Link was pleased that this new PPS contains our recommendation that eco-towns should seek to achieve a ‘net-gain’ in biodiversity rather than simply ‘no net-loss’.

In July, Link met with CLG to discuss planning policy for the natural environment. As well as constituting as a regular liaison meeting between CLG and Link’s Land Use Planning Working Group (LUPWG), the meeting gave Link the opportunity to feed back thoughts to CLG on the new Planning Policy Statements and suggest improvements.

This quarter Link was represented at a number of external meetings, including the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) Transition Team workshop, a CLG briefing session on the implementation of the new regime for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) and CLG’s workshop on the examination procedures for NSIPs.

The Land Use Planning Working Group (LUPWG) met at the end of September to discuss current planning-related consultations, the IPC, National Policy Statements and eco-towns, and the reinvigoration of the Better Planning Coalition website, which should be in operation by the end of October.

Water

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*Chair: Robert Cunningham, RSPB
Vice Chair: Tom Le Quesne, WWF-UK
Secretary: Kirsten Knap*

“To raise awareness of the importance of the public value of water and continue to advocate the 10 steps to sustainable water as set out in the Blueprint for Water”

Link was pleased with Ofwat’s announcement in July on water pricing for 2010-2015, which will allow water companies to fund catchment management projects that tackle damage from pollution and abstraction. In response to the announcement the Blueprint for Water Coalition put out a [press release](#) welcoming the decision but making clear that there are still elements missing from the proposals and further steps need to be taken to ensure sustainable water for the future. The Blueprint met with Natural England, the Environment Agency and the National Farmers Union to discuss the Periodic Review 2009 ([PR09](#)) and Ofwat’s draft determinations. Link has since been working on a response to Ofwat’s [draft determinations on price limits for 2010 to 2015](#), which will be submitted in October.

In July the Blueprint [responded](#) to Defra’s consultation on the [Draft Flood and Water Management Bill](#), welcoming the intention of the draft Bill to put in place a new approach to Flood Risk and Coastal Erosion Risk Management but highlighting concerns that the opportunities to integrate these objectives with other legislation was being missed.

The Blueprint also [responded](#) to the interim report of the Walker Review of Charging for Household and Sewerage Services. Members welcomed the importance the report attached to wasting less water and reiterated support for a fair water charging system in homes throughout England and Wales.

Link was delighted with the Secretary of State’s announcement in August that an inquiry will be held on Thames Water’s draft Water Resource Management Plan. The Blueprint had previously called for the Government to be tough on those water companies that did not heed the call for reducing water consumption and managing demand and we look forward to the outcome of this inquiry.

Working Groups



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Farming

Chair: Nicola Hutchinson, Plantlife
Vice Chair: Nigel Bourn, Butterfly Conservation
Secretary: Kirsten Knap

“To lobby for policies which support and deliver a sustainable, high quality, multi-functional environment in rural areas through reforming the CAP, influencing the development and revision of AES, and implementing the RDPE”

In July, the Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP announced his decision that the voluntary measure for the replacement of set-aside, [Campaign for the Farmed Environment](#), would be implemented rather than the mandatory approach that Link was calling for. The Campaign is encouraging the adoption of voluntary measures to replace the environmental benefits of set-aside. Link has been invited by the National Farmers Union (NFU) and the Country Land & Business Association (CLA) to sit on the Evidence and Monitoring Subgroup of the *Campaign for the Farmed Environment*.

Following Hilary Benn’s announcement on set aside, an article appeared in The Telegraph reporting on the decision - [Farmers not forced to help wildlife](#). In response, in a letter to the Telegraph, Link members pledged assistance to the scheme whilst urging Government to fulfil its promises - [Wildlife on Farms](#) - which was signed by 17 Chief Executives of Link member organisations.

In July, Link attended the CAP Health Check Implementation Stakeholder Update meeting at which updates were given on Cereals Intervention measures, Direct Payments including an update on EU legislation and public consultation and also further discussion was had on the set-aside mitigation and cross compliance consultation decision.



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Biodiversity

Chair: Nicola Hutchinson, Plantlife
Vice Chair: Nigel Bourn, Butterfly Conservation
Secretary: Kirsten Knap

“To work together with the UK Government to halt and reverse the rapid rate of biodiversity loss and continue to influence the UK BAP process at the highest level”

The Biodiversity Working Group has been working on a number of consultations this quarter. In August, Link submitted a [response](#) to the Conservative Party’s consultation on ‘*conservation credits*’. Although the scheme does have the potential to yield gains for specific conservation outcomes, it should not replace existing mechanisms or the need for independent, proactive and strategic work by Government, public, private and voluntary sectors to enable wildlife to recover. Link also submitted a [response](#) to IUCN’s *Post 2010 options paper: Options for a new vision for biodiversity*, recommending a combination of the choices put forward by IUCN, rather than any single option.

Link has now joined the [International Year of Biodiversity](#) Partnership. The UN announced 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity to promote the protection of biodiversity and encourage action to reduce global biodiversity loss.

The last liaison meeting between Link, Defra and Natural England (NE) took place in August. During the meeting Defra and NE updated Link on post 2010 targets, the Biodiversity Programme Board and the International Year of Biodiversity. Link has also been represented at a number of external meetings this quarter, including the UK Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group (BRIG) meeting and the UK Biodiversity Indicator Steering Group meeting.

Wildlife and trade

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Chair: Rob Atkinson, RSPCA
Vice Chair: Cathy Williamson, WDCS
Secretary: Jodie Bettis

“Working towards improved protection of wild fauna and flora threatened by trade and focused primarily on CITES”

This quarter, Link received a response from Mr Stavros Dimas, European Commissioner, after calling for greater transparency and public participation in the European Community’s decision-making process. Commissioner Dimas stated that he subscribes to Link’s view on the importance of transparency, assuring Link that the EC is fully committed to implementation of the Aarhus Convention. He also thanked Link for our views on the EC common position on whaling that we gave to Mr Dimas’ representative at our meeting with the EC in May.

It has now been announced that the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties ([CoP15](#)) will be held in Dohar, Qatar, from 13 to 25 March 2010. Therefore, all amendments, draft resolutions and proposals to be considered at CoP15 need to be submitted to the CITES Secretariat by 14 October 2009.

Link News

Link Secretariat

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Forward Planning

This quarter Link has been working with members to devise our future work programme for 2010 to 2012. We were delighted that almost 90% of member organisations and 25% of individual members on Link mailing lists completed our online member survey, letting us know their thoughts on Link’s direction over the next three years.

Using this information, along with the many conversations we have had with members, we are composing a Link Strategy, which we hope will put the 2010 - 2012 work programme on course to help get the natural environment as highly placed on the agenda as climate change over the next three years.

Link’s Management Committee discussed the draft Strategy at its third meeting of the year on 21 September and Link’s Policy Directors will be the next group to review the Strategy at its meeting on 12 October. Following the PD meeting, the final draft of the Strategy will be circulated to the membership in preparation for its presentation and adoption at Link’s AGM in December. The forward planning process has proved a fantastic opportunity to come up with fresh ideas and new actions and ambitions for Link, and we are grateful for all the input received from across Link’s membership.

Environmental Law for Environmental Protection.

Link’s Annual General Meeting will have a distinctly legal theme this year, taking place at Garden Court Chambers on Tuesday 8 December. Following the main business of the AGM at the barristers’ chambers, there will be an informal drinks reception to which all Link Representatives and our invited guests are welcome.

New member!

Following the merger of Froglife and the Herpetological Conservation Trust (HCT) in July, this quarter we welcomed the [Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust](#) (ARC) as our newest full member of Link.

Joint Links Parliamentary Meeting

At the end of September, Wildlife and Countryside Link hosted a meeting of the Joint Links to discuss the run up to, and the potential resulting scenarios of, the forthcoming elections. The timely and useful meeting was attended by Directors, policy co-ordinators and parliamentary officers from each of the UK Links. Also on the agenda for discussion was our collective work in Europe both as individual Links and collectively through our involvement with the UK European Environmental Bureau (EEB-UK).



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL has been very occupied with transport and energy over the past few weeks. Their AGM conference was on Sustainable Transport, for which they produced a Fact Sheet. They are also preparing to testify before the DRD Committee Enquiry in the next few weeks. A new Strategic Energy Framework is currently out to consultation, which should provide an impetus to really address their energy issues within a modern and progressive context. There is also a major review of the Planning System being undertaken with a good deal of work on that front including a couple of seminars promoting NIEL's points of view to decision makers. Back at the office their main work has been involved in developing NIEL's new website which went 'live' in September. Some aspects of the site are still being worked on, but NIEL think it's a great improvement and will enable them to do their newsletter 'direct' from the web content. The Northern Ireland Archaeology Forum is launching on a programme of 'archaeology roadshows' in shopping centres across NI, with the first taking place in Banbridge, launching with many events and a great display in early December.

Wales Environment Link (WEL)

In July WEL members produced a brief response to the Environment Agency's consultation on their 2010 - 2015 Corporate Strategy. Towards the end of the quarter WEL members were working on a response to the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Climate Change Strategy: Programme of Action' consultation and producing a response to a consultation on the National Transport Plan for Wales. Members were also contributing to a paper for the National Assembly for Wales' Sustainability Committee, responding to a request for priorities for the 2010-11 Budget.

The Climate Change and Energy & Transport Working Groups jointly contributed to a 'Tackling Climate Change: Transport & the Economy' paper, which will be presented to the Minister for the Economy and Transport in October.

WEL's Land Use Working Group has been monitoring and contributing to the development of the basic tier of options for Glastir, the new agri-environment scheme for Wales, which will be implemented in 2012.

The Advocacy Working Group is considering preparations for the 2011 Assembly election and working on a document which includes WEL's key policy priorities to be sent to the Welsh political parties. It will be used as a mechanism for influencing manifestos. WEL is also undertaking preparatory meetings with the political parties.

Scottish Environment Link (SCOTLINK)

SCOTLINK's Parliamentary Officer is developing their 'spinal' manifesto document, reflecting the headings political parties work to, and proposing environmental asks within these, in relation to all of the elections ahead. At the end of September SCOTLINK attended a Joint UK Links meeting with England, Northern Ireland and Wales to discuss the forthcoming UK elections.

SCOTLINK held a members' workshop at the end of September, and are now refining their proposals on a sustainable land use strategy. They are planning its publication to coincide with a Scottish Government land use event in early November. SCOTLINK also submitted their response to the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill consultation in early September and are ready to follow legislation.

Continuing its quarterly ministerial meetings, in mid-September, SCOTLINK met with Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Minister for the Environment, and issues discussed included the Marine (Scotland) Bill now at Stage 1 (committee scrutiny) until 30 October 2009, and the proposed Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill.

In September SCOTLINK welcomed new members, Living Streets and are in touch with a couple of other organisations who are considering applying for membership.

SCOTLINK's annual training day, held in Edinburgh at the end of July covered the 'Advocacy Toolkit' and was well-attended by members. The topic suggested for next year is a media training day. Their annual network meeting at the end of November has the theme of 'The Environment and Economics'.

SCOTLINK's paper on key issues and indicators will shortly go to the Improvement Service and other Scottish Government contacts. Revised indicators and issues are expected in October and SCOTLINK will check and refine their paper against this before publishing electronically and circulating to a wider audience.