

E-bulletin April 2015

Welcome to Link's April 2015 e-bulletin. See below for this month's top stories and updates from each of our working groups. If you would like to subscribe to our e-bulletin or submit news items, please contact [Maria](#).



UK NGOs submit evidence to the Commission

On 29 April, the Joint Links resubmitted its response to the European Commission's consultation on the REFIT. Having responded initially to the Commission on 25 March 2015, the group took the opportunity to strengthen its response by providing additional evidence.

The level of support for protecting the Directives is huge, with a large number of NGOs from across the UK supporting the Joint Links response to the Commission.

Joint Links meeting

The Joint Links REFIT group, comprising Northern Ireland Environment Link, Scottish Environment Link, Wales Environment Link and Wildlife and Countryside Link, met on 28 April to discuss the current state of play with the European Commission's fitness check of the Habitats and Birds Directives. Items discussed included timetables, advocacy plans and the Joint Links submission to the EC's consultation.

A subgroup of communications colleagues from Link members also held a teleconference to discuss communications activities around the public consultation.

Marine Conservation Zone consultation

On 24 April the Marine Working Group submitted its [response](#) to the [Defra consultation](#) on its second tranche of Marine Conservation Zones. The group welcomed the consultation as another step in the process to deliver an effective and ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas in UK seas. However, the group expressed disappointment at the continued lack of acknowledgement as to the important role these protected areas play in the sustainable management of our seas and the multiple benefits arising from them. The response was supported by 17 Link members.

Marine Strategy Framework Directive consultation

On 24 April, the Joint Links (Northern Ireland Marine Task Force, Scottish Environment Link, Wales Environment Link and Wildlife and Countryside Link) submitted its [response](#) to the [Defra consultation](#) on the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) Proposals for a Programme of Measures. The group pointed out that, in order to achieve Good Environmental Status, and therefore meet its statutory obligations, the UK Government must fully implement existing measures outlined in the consultation and introduce a series of additional measures.

Blueprint and public respond to Environment Agency consultation

On 10 April, the Blueprint for Water group submitted its [response](#) to the Environment Agency's River Basin Management Plans [consultation](#). The consultation sought views on how our rivers will be managed in the next 6 years.

The Blueprint's [Save our Waters](#) campaign encouraged the public to respond to the consultation and, as a result, 900 completed questionnaires were received by the Environment Agency. The Blueprint for Water group is now urging the Environment Agency to integrate these submissions into the final report, which is due to be published in December 2015.



Rural Development Programme away day

On 20 April, Link attended the Rural Development Programme for England Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) away day. The main purpose of the workshop was for members to meet each other, understand what the new programme delivers, and discuss the role of the PMC. Link will continue to contribute to the programme through the Agriculture Working Group.



Supporting Link's groups

The Animal Welfare Strategy Group (AWSG) continued to engage with Link's other groups, encouraging debate on welfare issues and promoting cross working. During April, representatives from the AWSG attended meetings with Link's Wildlife Trade and Whales groups to offer support and advice on welfare issues within each group's working area.



Link seeks to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity by working with Government to ensure Biodiversity 2020 is fully implemented. Specifically, we engage with Defra and Natural England on governance issues, communications and the Biodiversity 2020 delivery plan. Please contact [Elaine King](#) for more information.



Habitats and Birds

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Invasive Non-Native Species

INNS Working Group Meeting

Link's Invasive Non Native Species Group (INNS) convened on 10 April. The group discussed the new EU Invasive Alien Species (IAS) regulation and the potential for the INNS group to provide stakeholder input to an EU IAS group. The group also discussed the Infrastructure Bill review of schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the consultation due to be published later this year. Other items discussed included: creating a post-election briefing for MPs on a number of key INNS asks and developing Link's official INNS principles.

The INNS Group will be convening again on 26 May.

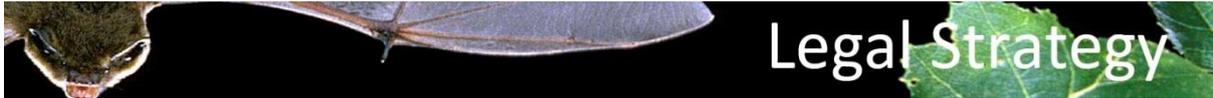


Land Use Planning

Legal Strategy Group Meeting

Link's Legal Strategy Group met on 28 April. Items discussed included Access to Justice, [Nature and Wellbeing Act](#), a draft [Wildlife Bill](#), [Conservation Covenants](#) and the [Smarter Environmental Regulation Review](#). The group also discussed means by which it can better engage with and support Link's other groups, especially the Animal Welfare Strategy Group.

The Group will meet again in early July.



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Forthcoming meetings

The group will be meeting with Natural England on 11 May to discuss Marine Protected Area (MPA) designations, MPA management and mobile species.

The group will also be meeting on 21 May to discuss and progress activities planned for the year.



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Meeting with the Environment Agency

The Group met with the Environment Agency on 13 April to discuss the preliminary findings of the Agency's River Basin Management Plans report and to review progress on its abstraction reform policy. The Group expressed concern with the latest results of [the shocking state of our rivers](#), which found that the Good Ecological Status of England's rivers has decreased to 17% in the last few years. The Group also felt that the structure and the types of questions included in the questionnaire may have reduced the number of responses submitted to the consultation.



Whales Working Group meeting

Link's Whales Working Group met on 29 April. Items of discussion included: the group's meeting with the independent Whaling Commission, held in February; drafting a letter to the new Prime Minister and whales Minister; and cross-working with other Link groups.

Whales Working Group meeting with Nigel Gooding, UK Commissioner to the International Whaling Commission (IWC)

On 29 April the Whales Working Group met with Nigel Gooding, the UK Commissioner to the IWC, to discuss: scientific permit whaling; welfare issues relating to the Scientific Committee and Conservation Committee; and scientific committee issues relating to the Small type coastal whaling questionnaire and proposal.



Wildlife Trade Working Group meeting

The Wildlife Trade Group met on 1 April to discuss proposals for the next CITES Conference of the Parties and the International Wildlife Trade Conference in Kasane, Botswana. There have not been new proposals to include or remove any animal species in the protective list. The UK government released a [report](#) shortly after the IWTC Kasane conference which details its progress to halt wildlife trade activities.

