

E-bulletin December 2013

Welcome to Link's December 2013 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 [Morwenna](#).



Annual General Meeting and Annual Debate

Link's 2013 AGM and Annual Debate took place on Wednesday 4 December at the Zoological Society of London.

This year, our expert panel addressed the question: *UK natural environment: evidence-based policy or policy-based evidence?* The debate involved a thought-provoking and wide-ranging discussion around the factors influencing policy development, including the ethical, social, political and scientific considerations. The British Ecological Society kindly sponsored the drinks reception that followed the debate.

Working Group Chairs and Vice Chairs

The Chairs and Vice Chairs of Link's Working Groups and Task and Finish Groups for next year are as follows;

Agriculture:

Chair: Abi Bunker (RSPB)

Vice Chair: Helen Perkins (TWT)

Biodiversity: now a virtual group

Invasive Non Native Species TAFG:

Chair: Carrie Hume (WWT)

Vice Chair: Kay Haw (WT)

Land Use Planning:

Chair: Victoria Bankes Price, (Woodland Trust)

Vice Chair: Brendan Costelloe (RSPB)

Legal Strategy:

Chair: Matt Shardlow (BL)

Vice Chair: Carol Day

Marine:

Chair: Joan Edwards (TWT)

Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson (RSPB)

Natural Values Task and Finish Group

Chair: Frances Winder (WT)

Paul Wilkinson (TWT)

Water:

Chair: Janina Gray (STA)

Vice Chair: Carrie Hume (WWT)

Whales:

Chair: Mark Simmonds (HSI)

Vice Chair: John Frizell (Greenpeace)

Wildlife Trade:

Chair: Heather Sohl (WWF-UK)

Vice Chair: Mark Jones (HSI)

Water Bill Committee stage

The Blueprint for Water coalition was invited to give evidence to the Public Bill Committee, which is currently undertaking a line by line scrutiny of the Bill. Following our evidence session, the Blueprint wrote to Committee members to reiterate our key points and to provide them with detailed briefings on the specific amendments we are seeking. The Blueprint's evidence, and that given by others, can be viewed on [Parliament TV](#).

Inquiry on food security

On 10 December, Link submitted its response to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee's [inquiry](#) on food security. Link's response focused on the links between a healthy sustainable natural environment and the production of good quality food. For more information regarding Link's work on Food Security, see our report [Sustainable and Secure](#).

Link Office Christmas closures

The Link office will be closed from Monday 23 December to Thursday 2 January 2014, inclusive. We wish you a very Merry Christmas and look forward to working with you in the New Year!

Joint Links update

Quarterly updates from our sister links are available on our website [here](#).



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Agriculture Working Group meeting

The Agriculture Working Group will be holding its first meeting of 2014 on Friday 10 January. This will be an opportunity for the group to reflect on its achievements and plan its future work.



Terrestrial Biodiversity Group (TBG)

Frances Winder (Woodland Trust) attended Defra's Terrestrial Biodiversity Group meeting on the 11 December on behalf of Link. Discussions focussed on contributions from TBG members and Biodiversity 2020 Governance matters.

Heritage Lottery Fund meeting

On 25 November Link held a productive meeting with Drew Bennelick, Head of Landscape and Natural Heritage at the Heritage Lottery Fund. Discussion focussed on identifying and funding *Biodiversity 2020* priorities. A number of actions are currently being progressed and we will report further in the New Year.

Virtual Group

From 2014, the Biodiversity Working Group will become a 'virtual group', meaning that it will continue to exist but will function without a Chair or Vice Chair. Link would like to say a big thank you to Nicola Hutchinson who has chaired the group for the last five years. The group will continue to engage with external groups where appropriate, and will look to embed much of its work within Link's other working groups.



Letter to Owen Paterson

Link members have invited Owen Paterson MP, Secretary of State at Defra, to a roundtable meeting in January 2014 to discuss invasive non-native species, and how they can be incorporated into his work on plant health.

Task and Finish Group meeting

Link hosted a meeting with the Invasive Non-Native Species Task and Finish Group on Thursday 12 December, to discuss progress with the GB Strategy Review and the EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species, as well as the connection between the plant health and invasive species strategies in the UK.

APPG Biodiversity

Link attended a teleconference with the APPG Biodiversity's INNS sub-group, to discuss the group's priorities and proposed actions.

Meeting with Defra

On 16 December Link members met with Defra officials in Bristol to discuss progress against the GB Strategy Review, and to reflect on the GB Strategy Review workshops.

Cost of dealing with INNS

Link is collating information on members' annual expenditure on the prevention, eradication and management of INNS. We will be sharing this information with parliamentarians and officials in 2014.

Joint Links

Link will be liaising with [Scottish Environment Link](#) and [Wales Environment Link](#) in order to establish a clear picture of action being carried out on INNS across the UK.



APPG Biodiversity Planning meeting

Members of the Land Use Planning Working Group joined a meeting of the APPG Biodiversity sub-group to discuss its next steps. The group's aim is to keep parliamentarians abreast of current issues. Discussion included potential work on biodiversity offsetting, and the role of the National Planning Policy Framework.

APPG Biodiversity Natural Capital meeting

Members of the group joined a meeting of the APPG Biodiversity Natural Capital sub-group, to discuss next steps and the group's priorities. Link members noted the publication of the next Natural Capital Committee report as a key milestone in 2014, and stressed the need to engage with HM Treasury. Members also urged that the group gives a balanced presentation of offsetting in any briefings to parliamentarians.



Judicial Review - Proposals for Further Reform

Link has submitted evidence to the [Ministry of Justice's consultation](#) on further reform to Judicial Review (JR). JR provides an effective mechanism for challenging the decisions, acts or omissions of public bodies to ensure that they are lawful.

In its response Link expresses concern that the Government's proposals represent a mistaken belief that JR is nothing more than an irritant to economic growth and recovery and asserts that they are a disproportionate response to perceived problems. Link also points out that the proposals will prevent compliance with EU and international environmental law and warns that it is only a matter of time before the UK will again find itself before the Aarhus Compliance Committee and the Court of Justice of the European Union.

Draft Aarhus National Implementation Report

Link has [responded](#) to Defra's [consultation](#) on its Draft Aarhus National Implementation Report (NIR). The Aarhus Convention is a United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) treaty which provides access to information, public participation in decision making and access to justice in environmental matters. The UK is required to produce a NIR every three years, outlining the procedures and mechanisms facilitating the implementation of the Aarhus Convention, and providing examples of the practical steps being taken to implement the requirements of the Convention in the UK.

Link's response, supported by 14 members, points out that the NIR fails to provide an accurate reflection of the implementation of the Aarhus Convention in the UK, and urges the Government to amend the NIR accordingly.

Link's overarching concern is the unprecedented scale and pace of legislative and policy change in the UK and the fact that the NIR fails to reflect concerns raised by individuals and organisations struggling to keep abreast of the proposed changes or to submit properly considered responses to them. Link also points out that the NIR fails to refer to a number of both actual and proposed changes, many of which will undermine the UK's ability to comply with the Aarhus Convention. Such changes include: developments in the field of access to information; changes to public engagement in the planning regime; and proposals to reform Judicial Review.

Balance of Competences Review

In August Link coordinated a Joint Link's [response](#) to Defra's [consultation](#) on the Environment and Climate Change part of the Balance of Competences Review. The subsequent report will be published in December 2013.

Defra is also leading on Balance of Competences reports on [Agriculture](#) and [Fisheries](#). The consultation period for these reports closes on 13 January 2014.



Environmental Audit Committee inquiry

Following Defra's [announcement](#) of the designation of 27 Marine Conservation Zones, in November, the Environmental Audit Committee has announced an [inquiry](#) on Marine Protected Areas. Link will be submitting evidence to the inquiry. The deadline for written submissions is 27 January 2014 and evidence sessions will take place in February/March 2014.

Joint Links Marine teleconference

On 6 December, marine representatives from the Joint Links held a teleconference to discuss a number of action points from the Joint Links Seminar in September, relating to the development of a UK ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas.

Stakeholder Focus Group meeting

A Link representative attended a meeting of the Marine Management Organisation's Stakeholder Focus Group on 4 December. The meeting included an update on the progress of marine planning and a discussion of the MMO's corporate plan.

APPG Biodiversity Marine Sub Group teleconference

On 2 December, Link attended an APPG Biodiversity Marine Sub-Group teleconference to discuss priority issues for the group to address in 2014.



APPG Biodiversity Natural Capital meeting

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Amendments to Bill

The Government has tabled a number of [amendments](#) to the Bill, including one that requires applicants for new Water Supply Licences to consult with the Environment Agency, and one which requires the Environment Agency to give their opinion when the decisions on whether to allow a bulk transfer of water between suppliers is referred to Ofwat.

Blueprint for Water teleconference

On 10 December, the group met to continue its discussions around the future of the Blueprint, both in terms of public-facing work and the new Blueprint document. The group will meet again in early 2014.

Cathryn Ross meeting

On 13 December, the group met with Cathryn Ross, the new Chief Executive of Ofwat, the water industry regulator. At the meeting, Blueprint members raised the 2014 review of water pricing and Ofwat's new strategy. The meeting was extremely positive and we expect a follow up meeting in January to discuss the development of Ofwat's strategy in more detail.



Election for Chair

Mark Simmonds has been voted in as Chair of the Whales Group for 2014. John Frizell was successfully nominated as Vice Chair. Congratulations to both of them and many thanks to Vassili Papastavrou who has been a fantastic Chair for the group this year.



International Wildlife Trade Stakeholder meeting

On 18 December, Link attended the IWT stakeholder meeting at Defra. The main focus of the meeting was to build momentum for the London high level Conference on International Wildlife Trade in February.

Wildlife Crime in London exhibition

On 9 December, Link attended the World Society for the Protection of Animals' **wildlife crime exhibition** in London. The exhibition provided an opportunity to meet Police Officers who dedicate much of their time to fighting Wildlife Crime in London, and we look forward to continuing to work with them in the future.

