

E-bulletin September 2013

Welcome to Link's September 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 [Louise](#).



Wildlife guidance

In early September with the support of 16 member organisations, Link wrote to Robin Mortimer, Director of Wildlife, Landscapes and Rural Affairs at Defra, to express concern over the process and content of Defra's [consultation](#) on proposed new wildlife protection guidance. The consultation is being conducted in response to the Habitats Directive Implementation Review and as part of the Smarter Guidance project. Link's primary concerns are that: the length of the consultation period is inadequate and is therefore at risk of undermining democratic decision-making; the new online response facility is difficult to use; and guidance being consulted on includes material on which Defra has previously consulted.

Link welcomes Robin Mortimer's subsequent confirmation that the consultation deadline has now been extended to 1 November. However, significant concerns remain and these will be discussed with Defra's consultation team in the coming weeks.

New Public Forest Estate management organisation

Link has developed a set of [key recommendations for Government](#) on the current proposals for the new Public Forest Estate management organisation (PFE MO). As they stand, Link is not able to support the Government proposals, since they do not meet all of the recommendations and principles set out by the Independent Panel on Forestry (IPF). In its recommendations, Link points out that the Government must ensure that the overriding mission for the new body is to realise the estate's full potential value to people and nature. It is important that the PFE MO is directly accountable to the public for its management decisions and continues to be part funded by central government. Link also recommends that there is a legislative safeguarding duty to ensure sustainable management of the estate and prevent commercialisation damaging the current and potential wildlife and public value.

Defra's draft bovine tuberculosis (bTB) Strategy consultation

This month Link [responded](#) to Defra's consultation on the Draft Strategy for Achieving "Officially Bovine Tuberculosis-Free" (OTF) Status for England.

In its response, Link welcomed the Government's long-term aim of achieving OTF status for England through a staged, risk-area-based approach. In particular, Link agrees with measures including: development of risk-based approaches to cattle trading and movement; focus on effective application of disease control measures in cattle; best practice in livestock farming achieved through advice and appropriate use of rewards and penalties; development of improved testing techniques; and research into new disease control tools, particularly relating to vaccination.

However, Link has significant concerns that the draft Strategy shows a misplaced focus on tackling the perceived reservoir of bTB in badgers through culling, when scientific research is at best highly sceptical about the likely impact of widespread badger culling on the incidence and prevalence of bTB in cattle. The Strategy also makes no reference to the potential use of the injectable badger vaccine within the High Risk Area, even though this is an effective, more humane and publically acceptable approach to tackling the disease in wildlife.

Link will continue to push for a long-term bTB Strategy that is effective, cost effective, based on sound science, humane and publicly acceptable.

Nature Check 2013

The launch of Link's Nature Check 2013 report will take place on Tuesday 19 November at a parliamentary reception hosted by Zac Goldsmith MP. Lord de Mauley, Minister for Resource Management, the Local Environment and Environmental Science, will be giving the keynote speech and staying for a Q&A session with our invited guests.

Board of Trustees update

We are sad to announce that Victoria Chester, Link's Chair of Trustees, and CEO at Plantlife, has stepped down to pursue a new career. During her tenure Victoria made a huge impact on the organisation, bringing about significant change and inspiring all those around her. We thank Victoria for all she has done and wish her good luck in her future career.

Looking to the future, we are delighted to announce that, earlier this month, Link's Board of Trustees appointed Amy Coyte as Acting Chair of Trustees. Already a Link Trustee, Amy is also Director of Communications at the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and her connection with Link goes back many years. She has extensive experience across the charitable sector working for wildlife and communicating the value of our natural heritage to wide audiences. She has a degree in Environmental Studies and an MBA. Amy's previous roles include CEO of the Bat Conservation Trust and Director of the BBC Wildlife Fund. Amy is already working with Link's Trustees and staff to ensure a smooth transition and the development of our new strategy.

We are also pleased to report that Link's Trustees have co-opted Nicola Hutchinson to join the Board. Nicola is Head of Conservation Programmes for England and Wales at Plantlife and has overall responsibility for the vision and management of Plantlife's conservation programmes, which include species recovery, Important Plant Areas, nature reserves and environmental policy. Nicola brings considerable expertise and enthusiasm to Link, representing Link on the Terrestrial Biodiversity Group and Chairing the Biodiversity Working Group.

Annual General Meeting and Annual Debate

Link's 2013 AGM and Annual Debate will take place on Wednesday 4 December at the Zoological Society of London. The AGM is open only to Link member organisations.

The Annual Debate, open to both Link members and other interested individuals and organisations, will address the often complex relationship between policy formulation and science and evidence.

An invited panel of speakers will join our audience in discussing this topical issue. For further information, please contact [Louise Hartley](#).

Link meetings

At the end of September Link held two productive meetings for the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Link's Working Groups and for Policy Directors from our member organisations. Both meetings discussed Link's future work and Nature Check 2013.

Joint Links update

For a quarterly update from our three sister Links [click here](#).



CAP stakeholder event

On 24 September Abi Bunker, Chair of Link's Agriculture Working Group, attended a Ministerial stakeholder event, on implementing the CAP, with the Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The meeting provided an opportunity for the Secretary of State and Defra officials to update stakeholders on the new Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and followed a similar Ministerial meeting held on 12 August, which was attended by Link's Director. The Secretary of State confirmed at the meeting that Defra's CAP consultation will be launched in early October.

EFRA Committee inquiry on CAP implementation

In early October Link will be submitting written evidence to the EFRA Select Committee [inquiry on CAP implementation 2014-2020](#). Link's response will answer the questions set out by the Committee, including what steps the Government needs to take to ensure the reformed CAP will be less bureaucratic than its predecessor and what might prevent this ambition from being achieved.



Trilateral meeting

Link attended a trilateral meeting with Defra and Natural England on 9 September to work through the delivery questions about *Biodiversity 2020*, which were identified at a Terrestrial Biodiversity Group (TBG) meeting. The meeting included a detailed discussion on the operation of the TBG and how improvements could be made, such as developing better communications across the network.

TBG meeting

On 18 September Nicola Hutchinson, Chair of Link's Biodiversity Working Group, represented Link at a TBG meeting. The meeting included updates from Defra's Biodiversity Programme Board, the People Engagement Group and Local Delivery Task and Finish Group. The meeting also covered TBG implementation progress, species implementation and habitats and species monitoring.



Invasive Non-Native Species

INNS EU Regulation

On 9 September the European Commission published its draft Regulation on the control of INNS. Link published a [press release](#) welcoming the Regulation, which will introduce measures to prevent the spread of invasive species. However, Link has expressed concern over the proposal to cap the number of species to which the Regulation can apply to 50, which would significantly undermine its effectiveness. Carrie Hume, Chair of the INNS Task and Finish Group, said:

“This Regulation is great news because it highlights the need for countries to work together to prevent the spread of invaders. If accepted across Europe, it would mean countries working together to identify how and where species cross borders, assessing the risks and taking action to prevent expensive damage before it happens.”

Before the Regulation comes into force, it will be subject to co-decision between the European Council, the Parliament and the Commission. To assist with this, Defra has developed a Stakeholder Consultative Group and a Link representative will be attending the group’s inaugural meeting on 15 October.

Strategy Review Workshops

In October and November Link representatives will be attending Defra’s Strategy Review Workshops which have been set up to support the review of the INNS GB Strategy. The aims of the workshops are to: review progress against each theme; consider what changes could be made to improve the delivery of the Strategy’s objectives; and consider the relevance of the Strategy’s current objectives, to help inform future priorities. The first two workshops are due to take place on 28 October.

Task and Finish Group meeting

On 23 September Link members held a productive meeting to discuss: the GB Strategy review; the recently published EU Regulation; and raising the profile of INNS in the UK.

All Party Parliamentary Group for Biodiversity meeting

In collaboration with the APPG for Biodiversity, Link has organised a visit on 17 October to the London Wildlife Trust site on the River Crane, and to WWT’s London Wetland Centre in Barnes. The visit will provide an opportunity for MPs and other members of the APPG to observe the impacts of invasive species, and discuss what can be done to tackle them.

Future of the group

Jenny Legg, Link’s intern working on INNS, completed her six month internship in September. We would like to extend a huge thank you to Jenny for all her hard work; she has been a valuable member of the team and an excellent Secretary to the INNS Task and Finish Group. Link is currently in the process of recruiting a new INNS intern for the next three to six months.



Land Use Planning

National Planning Practice Guidance

The Department for Communities and Local Government has published a beta version of their new [National Planning Practice Guidance website](#). The Land Use Planning Working Group will be submitting comments on the useability of the website, and also the content of the guidance, in mid-October.

Working Group meeting

The Land Use Planning Working Group met on 25 September to discuss: the newly published national planning practice guidance; fracking; and Nature Check.



Legal Strategy

Conservation covenants

As reported in previous bulletins, Link submitted [evidence](#) to the Law Commission in June, in response to its consultation on conservation covenants. The Commission has advised that it is now developing policy conclusions with a view to instructing Parliamentary Counsel to prepare a draft Bill. At the same time, they will be preparing a final Report and an Impact Assessment.

In the meantime, the Commission has reported that consultees are in favour of introducing conservation covenants, with a strong majority in favour of a new statutory scheme. A wide range of potential uses have been suggested, including:

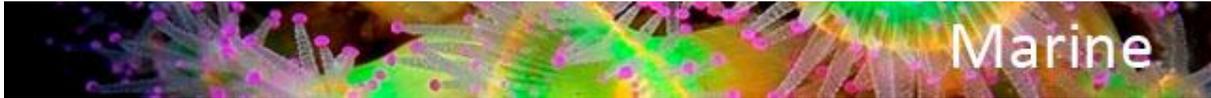
- providing security for the creation and management of a biodiversity offset site;
- providing assurance that conservation activity will be undertaken in return for payments for ecosystem services;
- dedication of sites for recreational purposes such as access for climbing and hiking;
- allowing landowners to put in place long term land management strategies;
- providing a way for conservation groups to work with landowners to achieve conservation aims.

Aarhus Convention National Implementation Report

Link has been invited to respond to [Defra's consultation](#) on the draft text of the Government's Aarhus Convention National Implementation Report. The Aarhus Convention, to which the UK Government is a party, is the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. The deadline for responses is 25 October.

Ministry of Justice consultation on further Judicial Review reforms

The MoJ is [consulting](#) on measures aimed at tackling the burden that judicial reviews are placing on public services, whilst protecting access to justice and the rule of law and is inviting views on potential measures for the further reform of judicial review. Linked to this, is a [consultation](#) on a new "planning chamber" to boost UK business. The deadline for responses is 1 November.



Joint Links marine seminar

On 16/17 September, Link convened a Joint Links marine seminar at Avon Wildlife Trust's Folly Farm, near Bristol. 25 delegates from Link member organisations, plus those from our sister Links in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, came together to discuss UK marine issues such as the development of a UK Ecological Coherent Network (ECN) of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. An ECN work programme was also agreed for Wildlife and Countryside Link to coordinate on behalf of the Joint Links over the next 18 months.

Delegates heard from a number of expert speakers, including Professor Callum Roberts, a marine conservation biologist from the University of York, and presentations on issues such as the changing management of European Marine Sites.

Letter to Stephen Hammond

On 13 September Link wrote to Stephen Hammond, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, to express disappointment that no one will be brought to justice for releasing polyisobutylene (PIB) into the marine environment. The PIB pollution incident earlier this year led to the deaths of thousands of seabirds.

Marine planning

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) has launched a consultation on the South Plan Analytical Report (SPAR) for the South Inshore and South Offshore marine plans. The SPAR summarises the evidence and issues for the South Inshore and South Offshore marine plan areas. The information in the draft report has been drawn together with input from Link, and sets out the evidence and identifies the issues relevant to these marine plans and to inform the next.

MMO Triennial Review

The Government has launched a [triennial review](#) of the MMO. The review will examine the MMO's functions, its governance arrangements and whether other delivery models would be more appropriate and in keeping with the Government's reform commitments. Link will be submitting a response to the review and held a Link teleconference to discuss the review on 30 September.



Lords Deregulation Bill Committee submission

Link has [responded](#) to the Call for Written Evidence from the House of Lords Joint Committee on the Draft Deregulation Bill. Link highlights the essential role of regulations in meeting the UK's legal obligations to the natural environment, and evidence which shows that environmental regulation is good for growth. Link opposes the introduction of the proposed 'growth duty', as it is not evidence-based and gives scant regard to the possible conflict with the primary duties of environmental regulators. If there is to be a duty, Link suggests that as a minimum it must reflect - and not contradict - the guidance of the Government's Natural Capital Committee. In addition, regulators must be provided with maximum flexibility with regard to its implementation.

Biodiversity offsetting meetings

Link will be holding a joint Land Use Planning Working Group and Natural Values Task and Finish Group meeting to discuss Link's response to the Government's green paper on biodiversity offsetting. Link will also be meeting with Defra and attending Defra stakeholder workshops to discuss the green paper in more detail on 1 October.



Challenges and Choices consultation

The Blueprint for Water coalition has submitted a [response](#) to the Environment Agency's consultation on River Basin Management Plans (RBMP) in 2015, 'England's waters: Challenges and Choices'. The response expresses concern about the likely impact of Environment Agency budget cuts on the Agency's ability to deliver an elevated RBMP programme. It also points out that the consultation does not cover a number of important aspects of Water Framework Directive delivery.

Abstraction reform

On 2 September the Blueprint for Water met with Defra to discuss abstraction reform. Defra gave an update on their current position and this was followed by discussions on the obstacles to reform and how NGOs can support a progressive outcome.

Water Bill

The Blueprint for Water met with Defra to discuss the Water Bill on 6 September. Discussions focussed on the resilience duty and the interaction between abstraction reform and upstream competition. In October Link will be meeting with Roger Williams MP to discuss the Bill in advance of the second reading.

Meeting with Ofwat

Link will be meeting with Ofwat in October to discuss the Price Review 2014 and the Water Bill.

Blueprint meeting

The Blueprint for Water will be holding a Working Group meeting on 29 October, primarily to discuss the *Blueprint for Water 2015*.



Meeting with Defra

Link will be meeting with Nigel Gooding, Deputy Director of Marine, on 8 October, to discuss current whaling issues in the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland.

Working Group meeting

The Whales Working Group will also be meeting on 8 October before its meeting with Defra. The group will be discussing the whaling situation in the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland, as well as UK cetacean issues.



Working Group meeting

On 30 October Link's Wildlife Trade Working Group will be meeting to discuss developments with the UK Cross-Departmental Task Force to combat illegal wildlife trafficking, CITES communications and enforcement. Following the meeting, a discussion will be held to specifically address how Link and its members can best work towards ensuring that wildlife crimes are adequately prosecuted.

Letter to the Home Office

This month Link wrote to Jeremy Browne MP, Minister of State for Crime Prevention, to welcome the Government's intention to be a global leader in tackling the illegal wildlife trade, along with its commitment to host a Heads of State meeting on this issue in February next year. The letter also highlights the need to ensure that wildlife crime is tackled effectively within our own borders and urges the Government to implement the recommendations set out in the Environmental Audit Committee's [report into Wildlife Crime](#).



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