

E-bulletin February 2014

Welcome to Link's February 2014 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](#).



Floods and Dredging - a reality check

The Blueprint for Water coalition has recently supported the publication, by the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Managers (CIWEM), of *Floods and Dredging – a reality check*. This very timely report examines the recent flooding, the role of dredging and its unintended consequences, and alternative options for flood risk management. It concludes that dredging is not a universal solution to flooding, and indeed that it can actually increase flood risk to downstream communities.

EFRA Select Committee inquiry into winter flooding

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Environmental Audit Committee inquiry on MPAs

On 5 February Link provided oral evidence to the Environmental Audit Select Committee, as part of its inquiry into Marine Protected Areas. Link answered a range of questions regarding MCZ designations, management measures and ecological coherence.

Meeting with George Eustice

Link representatives met with George Eustice MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for farming, food and marine environment and senior Defra marine civil servants on the 12 February. During the meeting, Link emphasised the importance of implementing proper management measures for all MCZs and the need for further designations to achieve an ecologically coherent network of sites in UK seas.

London Conference on Illegal Wildlife Trade

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The **Declaration** published as a result of the conference contains several of the points that Link made in our earlier letter to Michael Sigsworth, Head of CITES Policy Unit, Defra. The group will now be writing to Defra and the rest of the UK delegation in recognition of their positive participation and commitment to action in the run up to the London Conference.

Review of Wildlife Guidance

Link met with Defra's Better Regulation Team on 10 February to discuss progress on Defra's Smarter Environmental Regulation Review. The meeting was convened following a Link letter to Defra, expressing concerns around the approach to consultation on the amended guidance. This work has developed from the Red Tape Challenge process – under which stakeholders have been consulted on 'good' and 'bad' regulations.

Ministers want to make it 'easier' to comply with environmental legislation, and have asked officials to look first at guidance and data requirements, followed by legislation. The meeting was useful and a follow up session is planned for the autumn.



Regulation Task Force meeting

The Farming Regulation Task Force Implementation Group, chaired by Richard Macdonald, is concluding its work in March and will be publishing its final assessment in the same month.

On 17 February Link attended a meeting with Defra's Better Regulation Team. Defra updated Link on progress made on areas including earned recognition, nitrates and water quality, Relationship with Red Tape Challenge, Environmentally valuable grassland/EIA regulations and animal welfare.

Joint meeting of Water Working Group and Agriculture Working Group

Link's Water Working Group and Agriculture Working Group held a joint meeting on Thursday 20 February. The groups discussed the big overarching issues which affect both their work areas, particularly around the new agri-environment schemes, flooding, and the Water Framework Directive. The groups developed a process for working together more closely on issues of common interest and concern. The two groups will meet at least once a year.

Cross compliance workshops

Defra has scheduled two stakeholder workshops in relation to its review on cross compliance. The first was on 26 February (York) and the next is 5 March (London). A number of Link members are attending.



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Challenge process – under which stakeholders have been consulted on ‘good’ and ‘bad’ regulations. Ministers want to make it ‘easier’ to comply with environmental legislation, and asked officials to look first at guidance and data requirements, and then at legislation. The meeting was useful and a follow up session is planned for the autumn.

Terrestrial Biodiversity Group

Link will be attending the next TBG meeting on 5 March. Items on the agenda include SSSIs and priority habitats (outcome 1A & 1B), species (outcome 3) and members’ contributions.

Local Nature Partnerships workshop

Defra is hosting a Ministerial event for Local Nature Partnerships on 12 March, which Link will be attending. The aim of the day is for LNPs to share their achievements, ideas, opportunities and challenges and to foster links between partnerships, to understand national priorities more clearly and to work out practically how we might work more effectively together in the future.

Monitoring and Surveillance Strategy for Terrestrial Biodiversity in England workshop

Link will be represented at the Monitoring and Surveillance Strategy for Terrestrial Biodiversity in England workshop on 4 March. The workshop, led by Defra and Natural England, will aim to:

- examine the evidence needs and drivers of organisations involved in collecting and managing species and habitat data in England;
- review the extent to which current monitoring and surveillance of species and habitats in England addresses current and future needs and priorities;
- identify gaps and opportunities for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of monitoring for current and future needs.



EU Invasive Alien Species Regulation

The group continues its work to ensure that the EU IAS Regulation is fit for purpose. The group submitted a series of papers to Defra outlining its initial thoughts on the Regulation, and continues to meet with Defra to discuss developments around the Regulation and to lobby for necessary changes. The group wrote to Secretary of State, Owen Paterson MP, expressing concerns over amendments which will allow derogations and urging him to oppose them.

APPG Biodiversity Invasive Non-Native Species sub-group

The group continues to have a significant impact on the APPG INNS sub-group, attending all meetings and contributing to its work. At present, the group is supporting the development of a briefing to MPs outlining the effects of INNS on their constituents.

GB Invasive Non-Native Species Strategy review

The group continues to meet regularly with Defra in order to: discuss the development of the revised GB strategy; continue providing recommendations; and discuss the details of the review as it takes shape. Further meetings with Defra will be arranged in the run up to the strategy’s publication and the group will be attending the annual stakeholder forum in May.

Roundtable meeting with Lord de Mauley

The group is preparing for a roundtable meeting with Lord de Mauley (Under Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Science) in April to discuss progress with the GB review and the EU

Invasive Alien Species Regulation, along with the issues of plant health and bio-control. The group is producing a briefing on the costs of INNS to Link's member organisations to present to the Minister.

Invasive Non Native Species

The Law Commission has brought forward publication of its Report *Wildlife Law: Control of Invasive Non-native Species*. This is the first item to be delivered from the Law Commission's Wildlife project, which is due to be completed in the autumn of 2014. This element of the project was brought forward at the request of Defra and the Welsh Government to enable them to consider whether to introduce early legislation.

The Law Commission has published a **proposal** for a new law involving Species Control Orders, which will allow authorities to enter private land for species control if necessary. The proposal is designed to provide a timely and effective method of controlling or eradicating invasive non-native species.



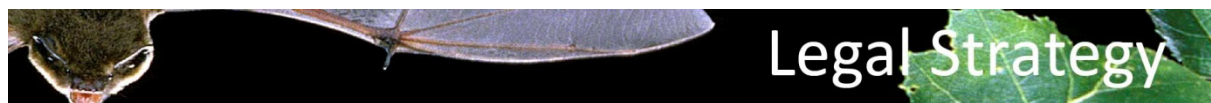
Biodiversity Offsetting

The Land Use Planning and the Natural Values groups met with Natural England on 10 February, to discuss how the proposed system of biodiversity offsetting and how it could best deliver for biodiversity, including how it could support national biodiversity priorities identified in *Biodiversity 2020*.

The two groups have also met to discuss biodiversity offsetting, and what might be expected from the government's response. It was agreed that Link members will find it difficult to support a system that is not mandatory.

APPG Biodiversity: planning sub-group meeting

Members of the Land Use Planning group attended the recent meeting of the planning sub-group of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Biodiversity, on 18 February. The sub-group discussed its work plan, including actions around biodiversity offsetting, ecological expertise within local authorities and data.



Balance of Competences

Defra published its *Balance of Competences Report and evidence* on 13 February. The Report addresses how EU law affects how the UK manages the environment and defines our response to climate change. The Joint Links submitted **evidence** to the review.

Conservation Covenants

The Law Commission has refined and developed the scheme of conservation covenants, as proposed in its *Consultation Paper*. Link **responded** in June 2013 to the consultation. The Commission has confirmed that it is ready to move into the final stage of the project and plans to publish a Report, impact assessment and draft Bill in early summer.

Wildlife Law Review

The Law Commission has confirmed that it expects to publish its Wildlife Law Review in autumn 2014. In the meantime, the Commission is still drafting its Report and Link has arranged a meeting

for members with Dr Keith Vincent, Lawyer at the Commission, to discuss specific aspects of the review. The session will follow the Legal Strategy Group meeting on 31 March.

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Ministers want to make it 'easier' to comply with environmental legislation, and have asked officials to look first at guidance and data requirements, followed by legislation. The meeting was useful and a follow up session is planned for the autumn.

Access to Environmental Justice (Aarhus Convention and EU law)

On 13 February, the European Court of Justice [ruled](#) that the UK Government has failed in its obligation under the EC Public Participation Directive that access to justice should not be "prohibitively expensive" for claimants. This will hopefully ensure the Aarhus costs regime for environmental cases introduced on 1 April 2013 is protected. In October 2013, Link [responded](#) to Defra's consultation on the Government's draft Aarhus National Implementation Report.

Further reforms to Judicial Review

The Government's [response](#) to the most recent consultation on further reforms to Judicial Review was published on 4 February 2014, alongside the [Criminal Justice and Courts Bill](#) to give effect to its proposals.

The Government decided not to pursue amendments to standing, but is proposing a basket of financial disincentives to restrict civil society's ability to pursue Judicial Review (JR). These include requiring claimants to disclose information about how a case is funded at the outset (so that non-parties can potentially be exposed to costs orders) and abolishing existing principles limiting the financial liability of claimants during the early stages of JR. It is not yet clear whether these proposals will apply to environmental cases. Link submitted [evidence](#) to the [Ministry of Justice's consultation](#) in October 2013.

Legal Strategy Group meeting

The next meeting of the group is scheduled for 31 March and will include discussion of issues including conservation covenants, the wildlife law review and the Aarhus Convention.



MCZs Second Tranche

On 24 February, Link attended a Defra stakeholder event at which George Eustice MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for farming, food and marine environment, announced that the Government is considering designating 37 more Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) in the second tranche. However, official consultation on the second tranche of MCZs will not begin until early 2015.

Marine Working Group meeting

Link's Marine Working Group met on the 12 February to discuss a range of issues including MCZs, Ecological coherence, parliamentary work and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

Meeting with George Eustice

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Vice Chair

Sharon Thompson has stepped down from her role as Vice Chair of the Marine Working Group following her appointment as the new Head of Conservation at RSPB Cymru. Melissa Moore (Marine Conservation Society) has kindly agreed to take on the role of Acting Vice Chair of the group for the rest of the year.



Natural Capital Committee second report

The Government's Natural Capital Committee will be publishing its second report on 11 March. In advance of that launch, Link members will be meeting with the Committee secretariat, on 5 March, to discuss the report and its key messages.

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Parliamentary briefing on flood risk

The Blueprint coalition and CIWEM are also pleased to be speaking at a parliamentary briefing on flood risk, chaired by Richard Benyon MP, on 3 March. The briefing is in advance of the parliamentary debate on flood risk on the same day. It will be an opportunity to hear from key independent experts on the causes of the recent flooding, the impacts of dredging and alternative solutions to flood risk management.

Blueprint for PR14 conference

The Blueprint coalition will be hosting a conference on the Blueprint for PR14 (the 2014 review of water pricing) on 14 May, at WWF's Living Planet Centre in Woking. The aim of the conference is to maximise the environmental and biodiversity benefit of water company projects by understanding the potential for collaboration and learning lessons from NGOs in their role as 'delivery partners'. The conference is open to NGOs and other groups working in catchments, water companies, Ofwat, and staff from the Environment Agency and Natural England. Please contact [Kate Hand](#) for more information or to book your place.

Meeting with the Environment Agency on abstraction and WFD

On 24 February, members of the Blueprint coalition met with Environment Agency staff to discuss abstraction in the context of national challenges and choices around the Water Framework Directive second cycle River Basin Management Plans. Discussion included the Environmental Flow Indicator, addressing unsustainable abstraction, opportunities to use the catchment based approach to mitigate water resource pressures and working together.

Meeting with the Institute of Fisheries Management

Members of the Blueprint coalition met this month with the Institute of Fisheries Management, to discuss overlap with the work of the Blueprint coalition and scope for future collaboration.

Meeting of the Blueprint for Water

The Blueprint held an internal meeting on Monday 4 February, to discuss its work going forward over 2014/15. Excitingly, the group has agreed that it will be launching a new website later this year, and also a refreshed *Blueprint for Water 2015* in 2015. As part of the Blueprint development, the group will be refreshing its policy asks and engaging with a range of stakeholders.

Meetings of the Catchment Based Approach national support group

The Blueprint secretariat attended meetings of the Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) national support group on 6 February, and the group's governance task and finish group on 7 February. Link will now have a standing invite to the CaBA national support group, although it is not formally a member of the group.

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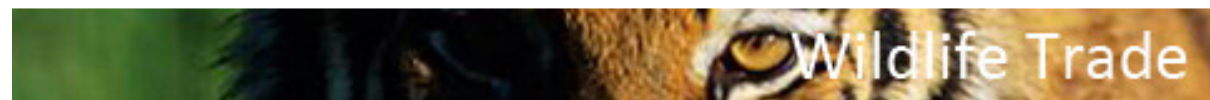


Letter to the Minister

Link wrote to George Eustice MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for farming, food and marine environment, on 10 February to highlight a number of threats facing cetaceans in UK waters, such as bycatch and noise. The letter was supported by 15 Link members from both the Whales and Marine Groups.

Working Group Meeting

Link's Whales Working Group met on 10 February to discuss a number of international and domestic cetacean issues. The group also exchanged intelligence on the International Whaling Commission and discussed the upcoming review of the southern ocean whale sanctuary.



International Wildlife Trafficking Symposium

Link was represented at a two day symposium on [International Wildlife Trafficking](#) at the Zoological Society of London, hosted by the [United for Wildlife](#) coalition. The symposium brought together the world's leading conservationists who addressed each of the three actions points for tackling illegal wildlife trade; demand reduction, improving legislation and supporting sustainable livelihoods. In a speech made by United for Wildlife's President, the Duke of Cambridge, he reminded us that "the forces that are destroying some of the world's endangered species are sophisticated and powerful, but this week we are seeing the creation of an equally powerful alliance coming together to help fight them".

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