

E-bulletin January 2015

Welcome to Link's January 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](#).



Animal Welfare Strategy Group Meeting

Link's new Animal Welfare Strategy Group held its first meeting on 15 January. The Group's primary aim is add value to members' work in raising the UK Government's commitment to animal welfare. The Group will also provide support and advice to Link's current working groups and facilitate improved collaboration between conservation and animal welfare focused organisations. Alyx Elliott (World Animal Protection) and Claire Bass (Humane Society International) were elected as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Group for 2015.

Criminal Justice and Courts Bill

Link's Legal Strategy Group has been actively involved with the latter stages of the Bill's passage through the Lords, making impact on a number of amendments. However, the Lords have now conceded to the latest government amendments, meaning that NGOs seeking a Judicial Review will now need to demonstrate that either it is "highly likely that the outcome" for the charity would have been "substantially different" if "the conduct complained of had not occurred" or the case is of "exceptional public interest".

In addition, those who apply to the court to intervene in a Judicial Review case will have to pay their own costs and applicants will be forced to give detailed information about their financial resources, which may act as a deterrent to individuals and NGOs seeking to pursue JR.

To view the Lords final debate on the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill, please click [here](#).

New Save our Water infographic

The Blueprint has published a new Save our Water [infographic](#) to flag the worrying state of our waters and highlight the need to work together to restore and safeguard our waters. More information, including a questionnaire which contributes to the Environment Agency's consultation, can be found on the [Save Our Waters web site](#).



Working group meeting

The Agriculture Working Group held its first meeting of the year on 21 January, at which it discussed the key activities planned for 2015. The three main priority areas will be: pushing forward the Group's vision for the future of farming; influencing Countryside Stewardship through the Rural Development Programme for England Programme Monitoring Committee; and deregulation.

Rural Development Programme for England Programme Monitoring Committee

The first Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC) for the 2015-2020 Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) took place on Thursday 29 January. As the RDPE has not yet been formally adopted by the European Commission, this meeting was not a formal session of the PMC, but was used as an opportunity to consult stakeholders on aspects of the next programme before they are asked to sign them off at the first formal meeting, possibly in March. In particular, the selection criteria for the 2015 forestry and water capital grant offers were discussed. Whilst the former was left largely unchanged, the forestry selection criteria are likely to have a more ambitious minimum threshold, along with some other more minor changes. A discussion of the broader Countryside Stewardship selection criteria was postponed.

Defra cross compliance meeting

On 27 January, Link met with Defra, the Rural Payments Agency and the Environment Agency to discuss members' views on agricultural compliance. Discussion focused on Link's submission to Defra's informal consultation and a WWF-UK report, which explores how regulatory requirements on soil and water protection are helping England meet Water Framework Directive requirements.

Defra reported on recent progress made with the Catchment Sensitive Farming approach and plans for implementing the new soil cross compliance rules. It is clear that government remains committed to 'partnership' or industry led approaches rather than stronger regulation. Link made a clear case for the need for strong, transparent regulation to underpin all other approaches.



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Biodiversity

Terrestrial Biodiversity Group Communications subgroup meeting

On 14 January, Link's Director joined a teleconference of the TBG's Communications subgroup. Discussion focused on the subgroup's emerging communications plan, intended to be used by TBG members to explain clearly how Biodiversity 2020 can be delivered. The plan will also support communications around Defra's forthcoming Delivery Review, which assesses progress on delivering elements of Biodiversity 2020 and presents high level actions to ensure objectives are met. For more information contact [Tom Butterworth](#), Principal Advisor at Natural England.



Habitats and Birds

Refit Meeting

The next meeting of the Habitats and Birds Directives Task and Finish Group, addressing the European Commission's REFIT of the Directives will be held on 2nd February



Invasive Non-Native Species

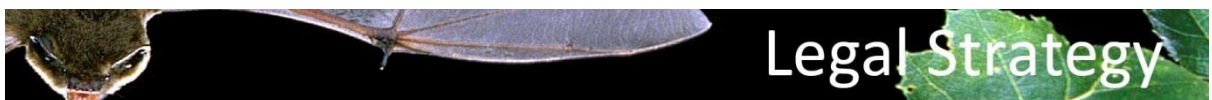
The Link INNS Task and Finish Group came to a close at the end of June. The INNS work will continue but primarily outside Link. For more information about current INNS work please contact Kay Haw at the Woodland Trust: KayHaw@woodlandtrust.org.uk



Land Use Planning

Land Use & Planning Working Group meeting

The team met to discuss 2015 plans and invited Frances Winder, chair of the Natural Values Task and Finish Group, to help us shape the strategy work for biodiversity offsetting. The current Infrastructure Bill was also discussed and the team exchanged thoughts and ideas of how we can contribute as Link in the future.



Legal Strategy

Wildlife Law Reform

The Law Commission is expected to publish its Wildlife Law report and draft Bill during the week of 11 May. The Bill and Link's response will be discussed by the Group at its next meeting in April.

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Marine Charter teleconference

On 7 January Link’s Marine Charter campaign steering group discussed the impact of the campaign to date, particularly the success of November’s parliamentary event, which has received very positive feedback. In addition, more than 170 MPs and Peers have now signed the Charter which calls for the swift designation of a representative and well managed Ecologically Coherent Network of Marine protected Areas in UK seas by 2016.



The 25 Year Plan

Link members met with Nick Barter, Head of the Natural Capital Committee Secretariat, on 16 December to discuss members’ contributions to the Natural Capital Committee’s long term plan (25 years) for maintaining and improving our natural capital. Julian Harlow (Economic Advisor) and Georgina Mace (Professor at University College London) also attended the meeting, representing Defra. Their main interest was to receive well-developed restoration projects and case studies to enable them to improve their portfolio and add further value to their research.



Meeting with Water UK

The Blueprint for Water coalition met with Water UK in December 2014. Amongst some of the issues discussed was a possible collaboration with retailers and manufacturers, which would entail providing advice to members of the public about the impact of “un-flushable” products on our water systems. The group also discussed how to support Ofwat in helping them develop resilience and performance indicators definitions within their current work. In January Ofwat therefore announced the formation of an independent group to help define what water sector resilience means in practice. The ten-strong group is chaired by Blueprint partner organisation, Jacob Tompkins, Managing Director of Waterwise.

Blueprint responds to Ofwat's final determinations for the 2014 price review

In December Ofwat announced the final determinations for the PR14, which mean that average bills for water and wastewater customers in England and Wales will fall by around 5%. Companies have two months to accept Ofwat's final determination before the new charges come into effect in April 2015.

The Blueprint commented: 'The final determination seems to deliver benefits for customers and the environment by changing the incentive structure and encouraging innovative approaches, however it will require a change in mind-set from companies if they are going to deliver these ambitious targets and make a profit, and we would welcome a closer dialogue on partnership working to help deliver these outcomes'.

Blueprint members will meet Ofwat on 11 February to discuss the final determinations for PR14 and Ofwat's current strategy.

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Teleconference with Defra

Link's Whales group attended a teleconference with Nigel Gooding, the UK Commissioner to the International Whaling Commission (IWC), on 27 January to discuss Japanese small type coastal whaling.



Ministerial roundtable on Illegal Wildlife trade

On Thursday 22 January, Lord de Mauley TD, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Science, introduced a round table discussion on progress and challenges since the London Conference on Illegal Wildlife Trade and to look ahead to the second international conference in Kasane, Botswana, and beyond. Several Link members were represented at the event.

