

Wildlife and Countryside Link response to *Preparing Britain for the future - the Government's Draft Legislative Programme 2008/09*, August 2008

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is a coalition of the UK's major voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation, enjoyment and protection of wildlife, the countryside and the marine environment. Taken together, our members have the support of over 8 million people in the UK.

This response is supported by the following Link members:

- Anglers' Conservation Association
- Association of Rivers Trusts
- Bat Conservation Trust
- Buglife - the Invertebrate Conservation Trust
- Campaign for National Parks
- Campaign to Protect Rural England
- Friends of the Earth England
- Froglife
- Grasslands Trust
- Herpetological Conservation Trust
- International Fund for Animal Welfare
- Marine Connection
- Marine Conservation Society
- Pond Conservation
- Ramblers' Association
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Salmon & Trout Association
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
- Woodland Trust
- WWF UK

Link welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Legislative Programme for 2008/09 (DLP). Given our remit, the focus of our response is on a few key Bills and initiatives proposed by the DLP. However in taking forward the programme we would encourage the Government as a whole to ensure that the principle of sustainable development¹ is integrated throughout the proposed legislation. As an indication of Westminster and Whitehall's commitment to sustainable development and to show how the DLP is geared toward this imperative and outcome, we suggest that all relevant Bills are grouped under the heading "Delivery of sustainable development" rather than terming them solely "environmental".

Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill

Link broadly welcomes the aim of giving greater opportunities for community and individual empowerment but is not sure that this will be delivered by the introduction of the Community Empowerment, Housing and Economic Regeneration Bill. Link has responded to the first two consultations on the sub-national review in the lead up to the publication of this Bill and our concerns remain that the proposals will focus too heavily on the economy at the expense of the environment.

¹ 'Sustainable development aims to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life without compromising the quality of life for future generations', UK Sustainable Development Strategy, 2005

Link strongly agrees with the principle that local people should be given a key role to play in both the future development of their local area and the development of regional strategies and the land use planning system, as first outlined in the UK's Sustainable Development Strategy in 2005². To ensure that development is sustainable and that communities feel empowered, engagement must be explicit and meaningful, and future regional strategies created by this Bill must not be seen as simply a tool by which central Government can achieve their predetermined priorities.

Regional Strategies will be critical in delivering the Government's aim of sustainable economic growth and also in meeting its targets on climate change and the natural environment as set out in PSAs 27 and 28. This will help to ensure the natural environment is better able to adapt to the effects of climate change. Link is concerned, however, that if the strategies delivered by the newly empowered Regional Development Agencies focus too narrowly on economic performance they will undermine attempts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, meet targets for biodiversity and to maintain a beautiful, productive and tranquil countryside.

We therefore call on the Government to set out explicitly how sustainable development will be delivered in practice and to seize the opportunity to create Regional Sustainable Development Agencies as a demonstration of its commitment to a more integrated approach to sustainable development in the regions.

Housing policy

The Government has recognised that housing has a considerable environmental footprint and is the single biggest cause of countryside loss to development and generates demand for other development pressures. Link therefore welcomes the aspirations of the eco-towns initiative which aims to contribute to meeting the nation's needs for new housing whilst fulfilling the requirements of sustainable development.

However, given that eco-towns will deliver only a fraction of the Government's target figure of three million homes by 2020, Link would like to see the high standards set by eco-towns translated into other development practice and techniques, leading to dramatic improvements in the entire approach to housing and built development.

Link's vision for eco-towns is for well-located exemplar developments which apply the highest environmental standards and combine the adequate provision of well designed, appropriately timed and sufficiently funded green infrastructure. It is crucial that all proposals seek to protect, restore and maintain all existing designated and undesignated wildlife sites if we are to enable the natural environment to adapt to climate change.

Marine and Coastal Access Bill

Link has for many years been calling for the introduction of comprehensive marine legislation to achieve better protection for marine wildlife and effective management of our seas and we support the Government's vision for improving access around the English coast. Our members are therefore delighted to see the inclusion of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill in the DLP.

Link has been engaging with Government and other stakeholders throughout our campaign and provided detailed responses to the draft Marine Bill and previous consultations. Whilst we are broadly supportive of the proposals outlined in the draft Marine Bill, we believe that it

² 'The planning system provides a framework for managing development and the use of land in ways which take into account the sustainable use of our natural resources, by designing in from the outset measures to tackle issues such as flood risk... It also allows the views of those affected by proposed developments to be taken into account', UK Sustainable Development Strategy 2005

needs to be strengthened to ensure that the final Marine Bill is fit for purpose to deliver its aims and objectives.

In particular, we have significant concerns that parts of the draft Marine Bill, especially section 4 (Marine Conservation Zones), are weak and, if not strengthened, may result in the Government failing to achieve its objectives for marine nature conservation. We urge the Government to ensure that this Bill is included in the forthcoming Queen's Speech and for the earliest possible introduction into Parliament in order that our marine environment can be given the protection it needs.

Draft Floods and Water Bill

We welcome the announcement of a draft Floods and Water Bill in the DLP, which will take forward the recommendations of the Pitt Review and the policies already set out by the Government in the publication of its water strategy *Future Water*. Our vision, as set out in the Blueprint for Water (2004), is to secure water supplies, enhance biodiversity, maximise social and economic benefit, and improve resilience to climate change. We hope that this draft Bill will help us and our partners in Government and its agencies deliver on all our collective ambitions.

Link looks forward to continuing to work with the Government and other stakeholders as all of these Bills and policies develop.

Wildlife and Countryside Link
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