

E-bulletin May 2014

Welcome to Link's May 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](#).



Meeting with No. 10

On 28 May, Link's Director, along with a group of Link members, were invited to a meeting with Tara Singh, special advisor to the Prime Minister. The group briefed Tara on a number of key policy areas, including greening of direct payments to farmers, the forthcoming refit of the Habitats and Birds Directives; fracking; marine conservation; and planning. The group will be meeting Tara every two to three months and subsequent meetings will address sustainable development and levers to recognise the value of nature.

National Pollinators Strategy

Link [submitted a consultation response](#) to the National Pollinators Strategy [consultation](#) on 2 May. This is an important consultation as Defra is seeking views on a proposed national pollinator strategy for bees and other pollinators in England. The strategy sets out proposals to safeguard these important insects, given their role in pollinating many food crops and wild plants, in addition to their contribution to food production and the diversity of our environment.

Meeting with the IWC Commissioner

Link's Whales Working Group met with Nigel Gooding, the UK Commissioner to the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and representatives from Defra's Species Protection team on 1 May to discuss the IWC Scientific committee meeting in Slovenia and the recent International Court of Justice judgement on Japanese whaling.

Blueprint for PR14

The Blueprint for Water coalition successfully hosted a conference to engage further with water companies and other organisations to restore our rivers and wetlands. A total of 91 people attended the conference, which included a wider range of speakers and attendees such as representatives from Thames Water, South West Water, the Environment Agency and different River Trusts and NGOs.

The Blueprint coalition presented the recently launched publication on the price review, *Blueprint for PR14: an environmental assessment of water company plans*. The document reviews water companies' plans for the next period against 10 environmental criteria, assigning traffic light ratings for each. Download a copy [here](#).

DCLG Select Committee inquiry: Operation of the National Planning Policy Framework

The Department for Communities and Local Government Select Committee has launched an inquiry into the NPPF, calling for written evidence by 8 May. Link's Land Use Planning Working Group is

disappointed that the scope of the inquiry does not include the NPPF's natural environment policies, and has written to the Committee's Chair, Clive Betts MP, to express its concern at the narrow remit of the inquiry.

Nature and Wellbeing Bill

On 28 May, Link's Legal Strategy Group held a very productive meeting with the RSPB and Wildlife Trusts regarding their plans for a Nature and Wellbeing Bill. Robin Wynde and Paul Wilkinson outlined the purpose and scope of the proposed Bill and a number of key aspects of the Bill were explored with the group.



GMOs

On 23 April, Link responded to the Science and Technology Select Committee's inquiry into *GM foods and application of the precautionary principle in Europe*. Once the inquiry has concluded, Link's response will be published on our website. Link will also be publishing an updated position statement on GMOs in May. Link believes that there are still many important and unanswered questions with regard to the effects of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) on the environment, biodiversity, animal welfare and consumer choice. Although it is theoretically possible that certain GMOs could have environmental benefits, we have yet to see any evidence of this in reality. We believe that the weight of current evidence is such that GMOs should not be approved for commercial release in England and that further scientific investigation is needed before GMOs are introduced commercially.

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Agriculture Working Group meeting

A meeting of the AWG on 7 May agreed to hold a workshop later in the summer to develop a Link "blueprint" for agriculture. Work will also commence to strengthen relationships with key MPs and MEPs. Further details of the forthcoming workshop will be made available once confirmed.

CAP greening

Link wrote to Secretary of State in April, highlighting our concerns on how the forthcoming decisions on implementation of CAP greening in England will have a long term affect on the future of our wildlife-rich grasslands.

EIA (Agriculture) Regulations

Link wrote to Steven Gleave, Head of Defra's Better Regulation team, on 1 May, expressing its view that the EIA (Agriculture) Regulations should be strengthened not weakened. The letter was our response to a suggestion in [the Farming Regulation Task Force Implementation Group assessment of progress](#) that the EIA regulations as implemented in England should be reviewed, due to what some perceive as "gold plating". In his reply Steven Gleave stated that Defra has no intention of reviewing the regulations.



Terrestrial Biodiversity Group

Link attended the TBG webinar on 23 April to discuss the regarding the Mosaic Approach, a way of looking at habitats and their management that focuses on the requirements of species. The presentation slides will be available in due course.



Costs of INNS management and eradication

Link has published a paper outlining the extent to which Link members contribute to the management and eradication of INNS in Great Britain. The briefing revealed that Link members are spending over £650,000 on 264 management and eradication projects every year.

INNS Task and Finish Group meeting

On 21May, Link hosted a meeting of the Task and Finish Group. Discussion included feedback on the costs to members' paper and the EAC inquiry report.



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National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) launch

Link's Land Use Planning Working Group has been considering the new NPPG. Broadly, Link welcomes the guidance suite, particularly the emphasis on brownfield first. However, the group has several concerns including the accessibility of the guidance to the public, and that the onshore oil and gas guidance section was not subject to public consultation. The group wrote to the Planning Minister, Nick Boles, on 22 May to express these concerns.



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Criminal Justice and Courts Bill

This Bill has potentially severe implications for NGOs and will compound recent changes to the procedure for Judicial Review that undermine access to justice. For example, if an NGO chooses to take a Judicial Review, the Bill, as currently worded, requires NGOs to provide information about third parties (e.g. trustees, members and donors) who pledged financial support for legal action and gives the court the discretion to make a costs order against them. The Bill also seeks to impose costs on individuals and NGOs intervening in cases.

Link's Legal Strategy Group is just finalising a parliamentary briefing note which will be sent to MPs and Peers in the coming weeks. The Bill is about to receive third reading in the Commons before moving to the Lords. The group has also produced a briefing note on the Bill for Link members. Please contact [Elaine](#) for more information.



Mobile Species Sub Group teleconference

Representatives from Link's Marine and Whales working groups attended a Mobile Species sub group teleconference on 8 May to discuss marine mobile species and the impact of bycatch, noise and offshore renewable development. The group also explored how best to address these issues through Link representation on external stakeholder groups.

Meeting with Natural England

Link's Marine Working Group met with Natural England's marine team on 7 May in Bristol to discuss the designation and management of Marine Conservation Zones.

SUDG Meeting

Representatives from Link's Marine Group met with members of the Seabed User & Developer Group (SUDG) on the 14 May to explore a range of marine conservation issues and highlight Link's Marine Charter campaign.

Joint Links ECN presentation

The Joint Links will be presenting some of the findings from their Ecological Coherence Assessment at the Marine and Coastal Policy Forum in Plymouth on 18-20 June. Representatives from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee will also be attending and delivering a separate presentation on ecological coherence.



Natural Capital Committee second report

The Government's Natural Capital Committee published its second report on 11 March: *The State of Natural Capital: Restoring our Natural Assets*. Link published a [press release](#) welcoming the report and its recommendations. Link's Director, Dr Elaine King, said, *"This report highlights the vital importance of bringing our environment to the forefront of decision-making. We welcome the proposed 25-year plan, which will bring a long-term, cross-party approach to restoring and enhancing the natural assets on which we ultimately depend."*

Government response to the Environmental Audit Committee report on biodiversity offsetting

The Environmental Audit Committee has published the [Government's response](#) to their report on biodiversity offsetting. The Government response confirms that no policy decisions will be made on offsetting until the Government has been able to assess the independent evaluation of the offsetting pilots (which finish in March 2014). Link welcomes this development, which is in line with our recommendation to take a step-wise approach to considering biodiversity offsetting.

The response says that 'offsetting would need to take place within the existing planning framework, including strict protection for important natural assets', and the Government 'strongly agrees' with the Committee's recommendation that any offsetting system should emphasise the continued primacy of the mitigation hierarchy. The response also notes that 'offsetting could be a useful tool for ensuring appropriate compensation is secured where development is already permissible.' Finally, the response notes that 'it would continue to be acceptable to refuse planning permission for a development on [the ground of impacts on high-quality green space] even if an offset was provided to compensate for unavoidable losses of biodiversity.'



Water Working Group meeting

The group met on 19 May to discuss the narrative and headings for the Blueprint, moving from the "10 steps to sustainable water" to a group of five "headings". These will sit under an overarching vision with clear details of our policy asks. The group has also commissioned a web design company to create a refreshed website aligned with the new narrative concept while creating greater interaction with our target audiences.

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Water companies

The group has initiated engagement with water companies and is in the process of meeting several of them in June to discuss improved collaboration and how we might support them to improve efficiency for future reviews.



Meeting with the IWC Commissioner

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discuss the IWC Scientific committee meeting in Slovenia and the recent International Court of Justice judgement on Japanese whaling.

Likeminded Countries reception

Link will be holding a reception for IWC commissioners from the anti-whaling nations (the likeminded countries) on 5 June, before meeting with them and the UK commissioner the following day at Defra's offices.



Meeting with the League Against Cruel Sports

On 1 May, a subgroup from the Wildlife Trade Working Group met with Rachel Newman, Director of Operations at the League Against Cruel Sports. Together, the group shared experiences of dealing with the Crown Prosecution Service and the two interlinked issues; making wildlife crime recordable and harsher punishments for wildlife crimes.

Reply from the Director of Public Prosecutions

In March, Link wrote to Alison Saunders, Director of Public Prosecutions, highlighting that prosecutions by informed lawyers generally lead to proportionate and dissuasive sentencing for wildlife crimes. On 23 May, the group received an encouraging response to its letter and will be discussing the way forward at the next working group meeting.

Wildlife Trade Working Group meeting

The next Wildlife Trade Working Group meeting is scheduled for 18 June. Part of the meeting will involve preparations for the Standing Committee 65 on 7-11 July, in Geneva.

Meeting with the Home Office

On 2 July, the Wildlife Trade Working Group will be meeting with Mike Warren (Head of the Home Office Crime Reduction Hub), and Nick Hunt and Tony O'Donnell (Home Office Tackling Crime Unit). The group hopes to learn more about the Home Office's role in the Cross-Departmental Task Force and to discuss wildlife crime within UK borders.

