

E-bulletin October 2015

Welcome to Link's October 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 [Emma](#).



AGM and Annual Debate

Link's AGM and Annual Debate will be held on 9 December at WWF's Living Planet Centre in Woking.

The debate, which is open to all, will address the question *In or out of the EU: what is best for the natural environment?*

Panel members taking part in the debate are as follows:

- David Baldock, Director at the Institute for European Environmental Policy
- Dame Helen Ghosh, Director General at the National Trust
- Baroness Kate Parminter, Deputy Leader in the Lords and Spokesperson on Environment and Rural Affairs
- Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP, former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
- Laura Sandys, Chair of the European Movement UK and former MP for South Thanet

The debate will be followed by a drinks reception 5.30-7.00pm.

[Reserve your place here.](#)

Petition to the Prime Minister

In October members of the Whales Working Group jointly launched a petition on the Government petition website, calling for the UK Government to take strong diplomatic action against the whaling nations of Iceland, Japan and Norway. The petition is supported by almost 50,000 signatures and the Government has provided a response which can be found on the petition website. [Click here](#) to sign the petition, support the campaign and read the Government's response.

Communications Update

To coincide with Defra's first event regarding development of its 25 year plan for the environment, in mid-October, Link worked with member organisations to produce a social media campaign.

A series of tweets were drafted – using Defra's selected hashtag #openenvironment and Link's own hashtag #planfornature - for members to share on the day of the meeting. The tweets called for a clear vision for the natural environment and contained a document with 11 headlines representing members' views on the essential components of a 25 year plan for the natural environment. Communications colleagues, from many member organisations, collaborated in circulating this message, via social media, and it was shared extensively on the day, reaching a wide range of audiences and stakeholders.

Link's new website has now been designed and is in the final stage of development. The new site is more visually appealing than the current site and has a stronger campaigning voice – something members had asked for. It will also be much easier to share content and link to members' own websites. Link's new site is scheduled to be launched in early December 2015.

Link Staff Updates

Link is pleased to announce that, following a successful recruitment process, we now have a new Link team for 2016. The team has been restructured to enable Link to effectively deliver Link's strategy 2015-19, the primary purpose of which is to enhance our ability to deliver added value to our members by increasing our collective impact and influence, while also ensuring our future financial sustainability.

Raul Matamoros secured the new role of Policy and Campaigns Manager and Emma Pereira secured the new role of Information and Policy Coordinator. Both Raul and Emma are existing members of the Link team: Raul will be known to many members through his work supporting Link's Blueprint for Water and Wildlife Trade Working Groups. Emma joined Link earlier this year as Information and Office Coordinator, after completing her degree in marine biology. Emma will be known to members through her work with the Legal Strategy and Animal Welfare Strategy Groups, and in supporting the Marine and Whales Working Group during the recruitment process.

Link will also be joined by two new members of staff.

Sarah Stuart Smith will be joining Link in the new role of Marine Policy and Campaigns Manager. With degrees in zoology and environmental law, Sarah previously researched and developed environmental policy for the Australian Government on areas including protected sites, marine biodiversity and the International Whaling Commission. Sarah joins the team on 25 November 2015.

Sheila Wren will be joining Link in the new role of Head of Policy and Campaigns. Many members will know Sheila as an active contributor to a number of Link's working groups as part of her role as Advocacy Officer with Link member, the John Muir Trust. Sheila brings to Link a wealth of management experience in the private, charity and public sectors, in addition to expertise across a wide range of environmental areas. Sheila joins the team on 4 January 2016.

From January 2016, the Link team will therefore comprise: Elaine King (Director); Sheila Wren (Head of Policy and Campaigns); Sarah Bernard (Communications Manager); Raul Matamoros (Policy and Campaigns Manager); Sarah Stuart-Smith (Marine Policy and Campaigns Manager); and Emma Pereira (Information and Policy Coordinator). Carmen Naves will continue to provide interim support in her role as Policy and Campaigns Coordinator until the end of 2015.

Link is delighted to have appointed a great team of staff and is looking forward to welcoming and working with our new colleagues in the coming months.



Link members are building on the interest generated by publication of our vision [Farming Fit for the Future](#), launched in Parliament last month alongside Blueprint for Water's [Water Matters](#) (see [September e-bulletin](#)). The Group is now organising conversations with key decision-makers with regards to taking forward our recommendations.

Link's agriculture and water experts are also working together on a joint response to Defra's consultation on '[New basic rules for farmers to tackle diffuse water pollution from agriculture in England](#)' which will be submitted in November.



Animal Welfare

Letter to the Minister

This month the Group received a response from George Eustice MP regarding its letter sent in June and is looking to organise a meeting with him later in the year.

The Animal Welfare Strategy Group will next meet in November, please contact [Emma](#) for more information.



Bovine TB

Group Updates

This month Link [responded](#) to the Government's [consultation](#) on proposed changes to licences issued by Natural England to kill badgers as part of its bovine TB (bTB) control programme. While recognising the positive action that Defra is taking to control bTB in cattle, such as cattle movement restrictions and improved testing regimes, Link expressed concern that the Government continues to show a misplaced emphasis on killing badgers, particularly when independent scientific opinion casts doubt on its effectiveness in controlling bTB in cattle.

Link's response, supported by 15 Link members, urged the Government not to introduce the proposed measures, which it believes relax the criteria required for a culling licence to be issued, with no evidence provided to suggest that the changes will improve the likelihood of disease being prevented.



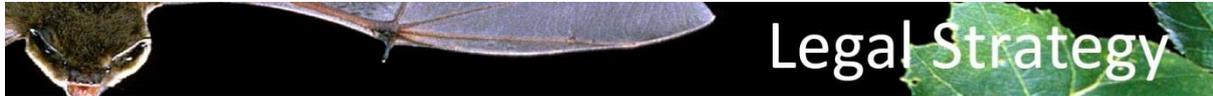
Habitats and Birds

APPG Meeting

The Group is continuing to support the Biodiversity All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) in organising an event on the Fitness Check of the Birds and Habitats Directives, now expected to take place on 17 November. Presentations will be delivered by Stanley Johnson (author and politician) and Kate Jennings (Chair of Link's Habitats and Birds Group) along with other relevant stakeholders. The event hopes to influence the current political environment in the run up to the European Commission conference on 20 November and the Environment Council meeting in the European Parliament on 16 December.

Joint Links Letter to the EC Commissioners

The Joint Links [letter](#), sent in September to the EC President and Commissioners, highlighting the UK's support for the Habitats and Birds Directives, has now been acknowledged by both Minister Rory Stewart MP and Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, the latter promising a response from Environment Commissioner Karmenu Vella.



Group Meeting

The group met on 12 October to discuss ongoing work. The group is preparing for publication of the Wildlife Bill, expected in November, and is also preparing to submit a response to the recent MoJ consultation on Cost Protection in Environmental Claims. The latter proposals would bring certain statutory reviews within the regime of costs protection but, on the whole, they seriously undermine the present system in a number of ways and return the UK to non-compliance with EU law and the Aarhus Convention. Victoria Bankes-Price, Chair of Link's Land Use Planning Group, gave an update to the group on the upcoming Housing Bill and it was agreed that the two groups would liaise on this issue and the Legal Strategy group provide advice when required.

A date will be set for the group's next meeting once Defra publishes the draft Wildlife Bill. The meeting was followed by a presentation from former Defra official Alistair McGlone on the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee. Alistair gave valuable insight into the impact of the Committee's work.

Wildlife Law Reform

The Law Commission has reported that it is not in a position to publish the final report and draft Bill on wildlife law reform until November. The group therefore hopes to report on this activity next month.

Meeting with representatives of DG Environment

DG Environment has an annual package meeting with the UK to discuss on-going infringement proceedings against the UK. For a number of years, the Commission has met with NGOs the day before to discuss on-going complaints, potential complaints and other issues around the implementation of EU environmental law. Over the years, this meeting with NGOs from across the UK has proved to be helpful and informative. The forthcoming NGO/Commission meeting is scheduled for 25 January 2016.

Please contact [Carol Day](#), Vice-Chair of Link's Legal Strategy Group, for further information. **Link members are invited to let Carol know if your organisation would like to attend and would like to propose agenda items.**



Housing Bill

The Land Use Planning Group has been working to develop a briefing on the Housing and Planning Bill, due for its second reading on 3 November. The Group's primary focus is the issue of the permission in principle, which represents a huge change to the English planning system. Please contact [Victoria](#) for more information, including the Link briefing.



The Marine Group is currently preparing for a meeting with the Minister, George Eustice MP, on 10 November, whilst continuing to secure support from MPs for link's [Marine Charter](#).



In October members of Link's BluePrint for Water have engaged with interested stakeholders following the [Water Matters](#) publication launch in September. The Group will continue its engagement with stakeholders in the coming months to ensure that everyone plays their part in halting and reversing the loss of wildlife and improving the sustainable management of our waters. In addition to this, the Group will be finalising its engagement plans for the next two years.

Link's agriculture and water experts are also working together on a joint response to Defra's consultation on '[New basic rules for farmers to tackle diffuse water pollution from agriculture in England](#)' which will be submitted in November.



Working Group Meeting

In October the Whales Working Group held a productive meeting at which a range of issues were discussed including: matters relating to the recently held ASCOBANS Standing Committee meeting; bycatch of cetaceans in European waters; whaling and exports of whale products by Iceland, Norway and Japan; and cetacean issues pertaining to the 2016 Conference of the Parties to CITES.

This month members of the Whales Group also called on the Prime Minister - during his trip to Iceland - to urge the Icelandic Prime Minister to bring an end to whaling, including that of the endangered fin whale.

Petition to the Prime Minister

In October members of the Whales Working Group jointly launched a petition on the Government petition website, calling for the UK Government to take strong diplomatic action against the whaling nations of Iceland, Japan and Norway. The petition is supported by almost 50,000 signatures and the Government has provided a response which can be found on the petition website. [Click here](#) to sign the petition, support the campaign and read the Government's response.



The Group has engaged with Ministers this month, acknowledging efforts made by the UK Government in the fight against the international illegal wildlife trade, such as ongoing commitments to the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund. Nevertheless, the Group is concerned with the outcome of this year's consultation on the Control of Trade in Endangered Species Regulations (COTES), as Defra was unable to lay a new Statutory Instrument before Parliament. The Group is currently

developing its plans and strategies for next year in order to protect wildlife ahead of the Conference of the Parties in Johannesburg in September 2016.



Defra workshop

Link's Director, Elaine King, and a number of Link members, attended a Defra workshop on 14 October, representing the launch of the Government's stakeholder engagement regarding its 25 year plan for the environment. The Secretary of State, the Rt Hon Liz Truss MP, outlined her new 'Open Environment' approach, followed by a series of workshops addressing themes including vision, restoring landscapes, connecting people with nature and natural capital.

Link has welcomed DEFRA's inclusive approach, while recognising the challenges in terms of securing significant, and impactful, measures in the final Plan, and also ensuring that the Plan integrates effectively with Defra's 25 year Food and Farming Plan.

Next steps include Link's Director and members of the Group attending two days of workshops on 3 and 4 November, hosted by the Minister Rory Stewart MP, to develop the key themes identified at the launch event in more detail. A Link delegation will also be meeting Rory Stewart on 9 November to discuss our collective views in more detail.



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